
EU Foreign Policy Overview

February 2017



EU Foreign Policy
Research Group

Dear Readers,

The world is still coming to terms with a situation where Donald Trump is the US President. International events in February were closely linked to his actions, for example, the executive order banning immigrants from seven Muslim majority countries, which had come under heavy criticism. However, Mr. Trump in his first month in office, focused rather on internal affairs, signing a number of executive orders, preparing the repeal of the Obamacare programme and introducing a tax reform as he announced during his first speech in the Congress.

In the meantime, some interesting developments have been observed in Eastern Europe. Belarus has seen the first significant civil society protests since 2010, while its relations with Russia deteriorated. Ukraine continues to be concerned with the commercial blockade of occupied territories (Donbass and Luhansk regions) conducted by former military volunteers. This situation puts into question the ability of the Ukrainian government to enforce control over its territory and over some branches of its military.

The European Union has also recently focused on internal issues, including the presentation of the “Five scenarios for the future of Europe” by the European Commission. Moreover, an inward-looking approach can increasingly be observed in its foreign policy, for example, by an agreement with Libya to tackle the flow of migrants that has been prioritised. This can be treated as a sign that the EU is retreating from its active, global role, concentrating on the internal issues and the neighbourhood.

In our third overview, we would like to invite you to follow the situation in each of the described regions. As we attempt to demonstrate, despite the globalisation, regional dynamics still form the foundation of countries’ foreign policy strategies.

Kinga Jaromin
Head of EU Foreign Policy
Research Group



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Email: research@eu-foreignpolicy.com

Web: <https://www.eu-foreignpolicy.com/>

Twitter: @EUFP_RG

Facebook: EU Foreign Policy Research Group

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Balázs Kele

It's been a couple of months since the EU terminated its last mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (EUSEC RD Congo) and we can observe how this country has escaped from the EU's sphere of interests and influence. The EU had organised several missions to the war torn Sub-Saharan state, but finally it appeared that the priorities changed entirely. Firstly, the EU has been forced to react appropriately to other, more pressing, challenges. In addition, the attitude of the Congolese ruling elite towards democratic values and corruption was clearly unacceptable to the EU. In exchange for technical and financial assistance, the EU requires improvement of human rights and transparency. However, the subsidised republic was unwilling to fulfil these requirements. This trend is likely to continue. For example, the Congolese Budget Minister declared this month that the DRC could not afford to organise presidential elections (Burke, Jason, 2017). With this obvious power game, the incumbent President, Joseph Kabila tried to prolong his leadership. As Kabila has already held the position for the constitutional maximum of two years, he cannot take part in the context. Such undemocratic steps are clearly incompatible with the values of the EU. Democratic Republic of Congo is an example of a setback for the EU's development policy in the region. In addition, by pulling out of the country the EU stands to lose its influence and position in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, president Buhari extended his annual holidays indefinitely, which caused a public panic as rumours spread about his poor health status and even his death (Inyang, Ifreke, 2017). In the country, tensions between different tribal groups are still high and the current, relatively peaceful situation appears to be volatile. The most turbulent regions are Borno state in the North and Biafra in the South East.

In Somalia, the African Union peacekeeping mission (AMISOM), reached a considerable success in the fight against jihadist group Al-Shabaab, as soldiers killed at least 57 members of the terrorist organisation (Al Jazeera, 2017a). Al-Shabaab is continuously losing ground, but is still well-entrenched in different ranks of Somali society. Moreover, the World Health Organisation warned the Somali government on a drought, which could potentially evolve into a famine, (Al Jazeera, 2017b).

The drought seriously hit the whole East-African region. After a long-standing civil war, the people of South Sudan face starvation due to arid weather conditions (Leithead, Alastair, 2017). It confirms what experts have been arguing for a long time: the main loser of climate change is the African region, especially the Sahel area.

In February, essentially the whole Sub-Saharan Africa was devastated by different natural disasters. Next to the drought, flood and an invasion of insects hit the region. Since December, 246 people have died in Zimbabwe due to floods. Those also endanger livestock and destroyed crops as well as roads in the south part of the country (BBC News, 2017). Serious floods hit also Botswana and South Africa as river Limpopo burst out its bank.

The South African region has also been affected by the march of the invasive armyworm and its destruction of crops. Before the devastating floods, the region was exposed to drought – these consecutive disasters are bad news for farmers in the region. Their annual yield will be surely less than expected, which also has serious effects on the agricultural sector as it causes a loss of income for many agriculturally strong countries in the region.

Australia and Oceania



**Jakob
McKernan**

The European Union and its supporters have every reason to be concerned. Over the last number of months, the apparent certainties that have shaped its international relationships appear to be crumbling. To the East, the EU is being confronted with a Russia not only hesitant to become absorbed in the liberal world order but also committed to undermining the foundations of the EU itself. Meanwhile, its relationship with the United States, once the backbone of the post-war global order, has become ambiguous at best as the Trump administration sends contradicting signals regarding its intentions. Accordingly, the EU could be forgiven for viewing the wider Oceania region as an island of stability in an ocean of chaos.

This is particularly true in the area of trade. In a month when the Trump administration has accused Germany of being a ‘currency manipulator’, ramped up its protectionist talk and has suggested that it would seek to include a 30 – day termination clause in any trade deal it signs, Julie Bishop’s signalling that the Australian government views an EU FTA as a priority, will be warmly welcomed. Ms. Bishop made her government’s intentions know whilst discussing post-Brexit Europe with Irish Foreign Minister Charlie Flanagan. Singing from the same hymn sheet as her EU counterparts, Foreign Minister Bishop also noted the Australian government’s concern over rising economic nationalism.

The EU can also be reassured of New Zealand’s status as a strong supporter of open and free international trade. Following the withdrawal of the United States from TPP, New Zealand has not been reluctant in voicing its support of the agreement and the benefits of large-scale multi-lateral trade deals. In February, New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay backed up the rhetoric by visiting Singapore, Japan, Australia and Mexico in order to gauge support for TPP without the US. A meeting to discuss the future of TPP is expected to be hosted by Chile in March. If and how the deal can proceed without the US will be of great interest to the EU.

While some progress on the EU’s proposed trade deals with Australia and New Zealand has been made over the last month, negotiations remain in the scoping stage. An exact date on the launching of full-fledged negotiations remains uncertain. That being said, the EU’s objective to seal high-quality FTA’s with both countries in as short a time as possible still pertains. Not only would these agreements open lucrative markets for EU businesses and exporters but also reinforce the European Union’s status as a trade super power.

February also saw developments in the area of the Cotonou Agreement, which frames the EU's relationship between the ACP countries. That includes the small island nations which make up the rest of the Oceania region. Speaking in Belgium, ACP Secretary – General Secretary, Patrick Gomes, stated that the ACP would like to continue its strong relationship with the United Kingdom after it leaves the European Union but questioned if the remaining EU 27 would be willing to meet the financial obligations the UK had committed itself to under the current EU – ACP agreement. Mr Gomes speculated that 'any dilution of the benefits the ACP enjoys would significantly tilt the balance of rights and obligations under the Cotonou Agreement and could seriously hamper future relations between the ACP and the European Union'. This view is a stark reminder that while it is natural for the EU to be primarily concerned with the effect of Brexit on the EU itself, it should not neglect the effect it has on its foreign relations.

In more positive news for the European Union's relationship with the 15 small island nations, an agreement to support the Marshall Island's Energy Policy and Action to the tune of 9.1 million USD, signalled the EU's commitment to support development in the region. Under the agreement, the EU will help civil society, organisations and young people, to be involved in sustainable energy development at the grass roots level.

China and East Asia



**Evelyn
Shi**

Although disparate, events in Asia over the last month have a common denominator: the United States.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid two state visits to President Trump in order to discuss economic and political relations between the two states. However, the meetings were overshadowed by rising tensions between Japan and other countries in the region, in particular, North Korea and China. Moreover, President Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership is aggravating the situation, since the agreement was supposed to include the majority of East Asian countries (excluding China). In the meantime, the international media has been analysing and ridiculing the 19-second-handshake between Abe and Trump that ended with Trump mouthing the words 'strong hands' to Prime Minister Abe. Regardless of the excitement, this situation has created internationally, it confirmed the power that Trump has over countries like Japan, who rely on the US military strength. At the same time, the significance of this meeting cannot be underestimated, as Japan, holding the first state meeting since Trump's inauguration, cements its position as an important US ally.

Meanwhile, the assassination of North Korea's dictator Kim-Jong Un's brother has also generated much speculation. Rumours surrounding the motives behind the plot are controversial. What is certain, however, is that the assassination attempt shows the decreasing influence of China in North Korea, since the victim had been protected by China and lived in Macau. At the same time, this situation demonstrates the increasing power of Kim-Jong Un, who has also launched an unknown ballistic missile from North Korea's western coast on the day Prime Minister Abe and President Trump met. Although South Korea worries about developments in Pyongyang's missile and nuclear capabilities, the message was clearly directed towards Japan. The significance of this launch was more political than operational – as it is the first one since Trump took office, and ten days after Gen. Mattis, US Secretary of Defence, promised the support for Japanese and the South Koreans against the North Korean nuclear threat.

However, the relation between Japan and South Korea also seem to be worsening. Japan made known its disapproval of South Korea's construction of a statue commemorating a long-standing point of tension between Japan and Korea – the so-called comfort women of Korea, who were trafficked into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during World War II.

This is despite Japan and Korea concluding a historic agreement at the end of 2015 that led the two governments to declare that, if the agreement was fully implemented, it would be considered a “final and irreversible” resolution to the comfort women issue.

The relationship between China and the US remains uncertain, but Trump’s recent decision to deploy marines in Taiwan seems to assure his negligence of the “One-China-Policy” (that he actually acknowledged in a letter to China’s president). As a matter of protocol, only nations with formal ties allow military personnel to be stationed at diplomatic missions, meaning that such a development in Taiwan would significantly raise its status on the global arena. The development suggests that Trump is determined to renegotiate the fundamental principle that has guided bilateral US – China relations for decades. On the other hand, it could have also been an act relevant to further missions about the disputed islands in the South China Sea that China claims.

To conclude, East Asian countries are trying to secure their global position right now, and Europe should follow suit. Many future relations will depend on the actions of the US and the EU should monitor those carefully. President Xi Jinping’s words about the importance of globalisation at the Davos Summit in December have not been followed by any relevant actions yet. Questions are arising on how much say he has in the government in reality and how the change of regime this year will impact China’s international relations.

Finally, the Belt and Road Initiative seems to be going forward, since there is a big conference going to be held in Beijing upcoming May, and it’s potential of creating economic ties should not be underestimated.



Middle East and North Africa

**Stefan
Pfalzer**

Of all the events in the MENA region, the EU's summit in Malta deserves the most attention. At the summit, EU's leaders agreed on a plan to tackle the flow of migrants to Europe through three main pillars: Firstly, the Libyan government, that is to say, the UN-backed Government of National Accord, will receive 200 million EUR to stop migrant boats. Secondly, the GNA will allow NATO and EU ships to patrol Libya's waters and conduct operations in order to support the Libyan navy and prevent human trafficking and smuggling. Thirdly, safe refugee camps are to be set up in Libya for the purpose of voluntary repatriation (Aljazeera 2017, Wintour 2017).

However, there are some questions regarding the efficacy of the measures taken under the framework of the agreement. Primarily, it is worth mentioning that the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister Al-Sarraj, only has limited control over the Libyan territory. The rest of it is controlled by the Government of National Salvation (GNS) — partly dependent on assistance from Turkey and Qatar — and by the Tobruk House of Representatives in the east of the country. The latter is backed by the commander of the Libyan National Army — which is not recognized by the GNA or international community — General Haftar and supported by Egypt, which is interested in leading an anti-Islamist military campaign and trying to buffer its borders to Libya against the Islamic State (ECFR 2016). Moreover, there are some tribal militias joining the fight to fill the void that was left by the overthrow of long-time dictator Al-Qaddafi. In light of this fragmentation of power, is the EU's allocation of money a sensible measure?

A closer look at the institutions in charge of Libyan border control suggests otherwise, as an EEAS report reveals. According to the document, the Ministry of Defence is not in control of the Libyan armed forces which to large parts are commanded by Haftar. The Ministry of the Interior's department for border security headquarters is currently occupied by a militia and the ministry itself suffers deep ideological divisions. The document further states that the Ministry of the Interior's work is characterised by delays, a lack of effectiveness as well as financial management problems. Of the around 50.000 public servants working for the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Finance, only about a third have had professional training (EEAS(2017) 0109).

Moreover, there is doubt whether the agreement between the EU and Libya will alleviate the situations of migrants who are suffering inhumane conditions in refugee camps or arrest and abuse by Libyan authorities. In the agreement of 6th February 2017, the EU affirmed its commitment to the protection of human rights and named the UNHCR, IOM and EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa as institutions with whom it seeks to collaborate – the former two have recently declared that their effort to do so was severely obstructed by security restraints (Reliefweb 2017, General Secretariat of the Council 2017).

Taking these circumstances into account, the EU's most recent action plan for Libya seems to be little more than a tribute paid to dysfunctional institutions in a deeply divided state with little realistic prospect of effectively improving the situation of migrants. In light of the Libyan state of affairs, plans of repatriation agreements with Libya have evoked sceptical responses from top European diplomats, as recently voiced by German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel.

The annual Munich Security Conference saw indications of new dynamics emerging in the Middle East: Israel and Saudi Arabia criticised Iran for sparking unrest in the region. Israel's Minister of Defense Liberman accused Iran of doing so by means of its nuclear programme, proxy wars and intentional destabilisation, while the Saudi Foreign Minister al-Jubeir called Iran "the biggest state sponsor of terrorism" (Sanders 2017). Their common enemy could incentivise rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Israel, both US allies.

However, the EU will be presented with the challenge to balance its relations in the Middle East. While it does not regard Iran's latest activities as a violation of the JCPOA agreement or an attempt to attain nuclear weapons — Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif has reiterated in Munich that Iran would not attempt to do so — the EU finds itself in an uncomfortable situation. It supports the reintegration of Iran into the international community after sanctions have been lifted and seeks to deepen trade ties, an effort that is being facilitated by the fact that the UK, a fervent opponent of such Iranian reintegration, is set to leave the EU.

Having so far sought to follow a middle course between its loyal obligations and its interests, it looks as though the EU will soon find itself at a crossroad.

Russia and Eastern Europe



Kinga Jaromin

After the presidential inauguration of Donald Trump in January 2017, some questions about his approach to Russia have already been answered. Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the United Nations in her first appearance in the UN, condemned Russia for the occupation of Crimea and stated that “the sanctions will remain in place until Russia returns control over the peninsula to Ukraine” (Gaouette, Roth, 2017). This very clear reassurance of continuing policy towards Russia calmed European allies and demonstrated Trump's limited potential to entirely shift the direction of the US foreign policy. In the meantime, Vladimir Putin was occupied with his visit to his close ally within the European Union, Hungary, where he assured Victor Orbán about Russian supplies of gas and oil and offered the country to join North Stream or Turkish Stream projects, a move which would strengthen Russian presence on the European energy market.

Moreover, the Russian president announced an official recognition of documents (including passports, birth and marriage certificates, etc.) issued by Donbass and Luhansk People's Republics. The Russian government explained the decision as based on humanitarian reasons, which was met with a strong opposition from the EU. The spokesperson for EU Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Maja Kocijancic referred to it as “not in keeping with the spirit of the Minsk agreements” (Unian, 2017). The decision does not have any practical implications, as the documents have been commonly accepted in Russia even before, but it can be interpreted as a signal to the West and an attempt to increase the credibility of the republics.

Topics that attracted more attention within Russia concerned domestic matters. Fiscal reforms, including, raising the income tax from 13 to 17 percent, have been at the centre of discussions in the government this February which places into question the state of the Russian budget. It is also worth noting that there have been changes in the regions with the resignation of five governors who have been replaced with so-called technocrats. The changes are promoted as desired reforms that will add effectiveness to the management of the region. In reality, they probably are intended to prepare the ground for presidential elections in 2018, which Vladimir Putin supported by his ‘renewed’ circles is hoping to win.

Interesting events, which signify a deteriorating relationship with Russia, also occurred in Belarus this month. After Russia's closest ally Aleksandr Lukashenko introduced a visa-free regime for a number of countries last month, Russia decided to bring back controls on the common border. In an emotional speech, the Belarusian leader attacked Russia for this move

At the same time disputes about a gas agreement and import of some Belarusian products to Russia escalated, confirming a number of disagreements in mutual relations. Aforementioned developments can be also interpreted as a decline of support for Lukashenka in Moscow, which would ultimately weaken his position in Belarus.

This situation has already been taken advantage of by Belarusian opposition who organised protests named “the march of angry Belarusians” in numerous cities. They protested against some policies enforced by Lukashenka in the past years, including the “social parasite law” which subjected unemployed people to financial penalties. The protesters sought the abolition of this provision setting a deadline for 25 of March after which they will take up continuous protests demanding the resignation of the president. Lukashenka at first did not react or comment on the situation, which may be viewed as a good sign for protesters as he previously has been prone to lashing out violently against any sign of opposition. Later on, he decided to suspend the controversial provision which is definitely the first victory of protesters. These actions confirm that his position is weakened and that he does not have the same range of possibilities to act in the event of such developments. It might also suggest that he is willing to act more openly to the opposition. Before the protests erupted, Lukashenka held a meeting with an opposition journalist Iosif Seredich and allegedly discussed with him the proposal of Belarusian “round table” talks between the administration and the opposition. Such a move could strengthen the position of Belarusian president in his confrontation with Moscow but is also extremely risky in terms of maintaining his power over the country.

In Ukraine, February was the month of the 3rd anniversary of the victory of the “Revolution of Dignity”. The celebrations held in Kiev ended up in a brawl of radical nationalist forces with the police. At the same time, the issue of the blockade of occupied territories has become growingly problematic. The blockade, which started at the end of January is being conducted by the veterans of the volunteer battalions who fought in the ATO (anti-terrorist operation) zone and activists with the purpose to cut the possibility for the rebels to gain profit from selling products to Ukraine. However, at the same time, the blockade resulted in the shortages of supply of coal and in introducing a state of emergency in the Ukrainian energy sector. Moreover, the Ukrainian government does not officially support the blockade but is not in the position to influence its organisers or even to suppress it by force. This has led to a dangerous situation where the blockade is either a tool in a political game quietly supported by the Ukrainian government or it proves that the latter is too weak to enforce its power over the volunteer military groups. Indeed, President Poroshenko and others might have become a hostage of their own electorate and powerful groups that emerged during the conflict and gained a wide public support thanks to their involvement in the fight against aggressors. All of that must be placed in the context of the power game between Ukraine’s most powerful oligarchs with significant loss of Rinat Achmetov whose companies in Donbas region were ‘arrested’ by the separatists.

Turkey and Caucasus



**Federico
Salvati**

Important events brought the attention of the international press to the Caucasus more than once this month.

On 21 February, the President of Azerbaijan nominated Mehriban Aliyeva, his wife, to the position of the vice-president. The new appointment had been created through a constitutional referendum held in September last year. It is difficult to judge, however, the credibility of the process in a country that receives constant criticism for irregularity in election processes. Moreover, an investigation into allegations of corruption in the Council of Europe, aired by the Italian television during November last year, has finally been started this February. Two former senior members: Luca Volontè and Petro Agramunt, were paid 2.39 million EUR to engineer votes inside the Council to protect the kleptocratic regime of Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev. This is just the last and maybe so far the most controversial episode of the Azerbaijani spin doctor strategy, designed to win the international support.

In February, the anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide was commemorated. Baku ran a worldwide advocacy campaign about the events which have been used by the government to politicise the peace process and to conduct an anti-Armenian campaign in the mainstream media. This comes as a surprise as the renewed negotiations between the country and the EU take place. However, seeing the direction the country has taken, it is difficult to assess how Azerbaijan could play any role in the future of the EU, other than as an energy supplier. Meanwhile, in the Nagorno-Karabakh, a constitution has been approved with a turnout of 87.6% of the votes in favour for the constitutional draft. The news drew an angry response from the Azerbaijani public who organised massive protests in response.

While Azerbaijan is in a free fall towards authoritarianism, in Tbilisi people celebrated the long-awaited visa liberalisation with the EU. The measure as part of the Eastern Partnership programme had been denied last summer, leaving the Georgian public extremely disappointed. It is fair to recognise that Georgia has achieved success in its reform efforts over the last years. It is, however, still affected by a high level of informality both in the economy and the political life. Human rights and good governance are still under scrutiny in a nation that is probably on the right path to be a fully-fledged democracy in the near future.

Positive developments were also registered in Armenia. The country reached a new political agreement with Brussels for future cooperation. The partnership between the EU and Yerevan stalled in 2013 when Yerevan opted for the membership of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. The new agreement will be more modest than the previous one, in order to reassure Yerevan of its strategic partnership with Moscow. Armenia still depends heavily on Moscow in terms of both economics and security. Further, the recent rekindling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will only serve to push Yerevan more and more towards Russia.

Finally, in Turkey, the referendum campaign took off this month, with both the YES and NO campaigns beginning their campaigns. President Erdoğan has urged to support the proposed constitutional reform as a tool for bringing peace and stability to the country. He said that the victory of the NO would shed chaos while concentrating power in one person will “avoid strife”. Nevertheless, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) launched their NO campaign on 18 February. It has received consistent support from the Turkish opposition but it has yet to be seen if the party will be successful in the polls. Interestingly, instead of insisting on democratic values and the threats that a personalised regime could bring to the rule of law and the democratic balance in Turkey, the campaign opened with attacks on Erdoğan and the AKP. The election will be free almost for sure; if they will be fair it is another story. Many people in Turkey are risking their career and their personal security by campaigning against the reform. Over the last months, the Turkish political environment has been characterised by palpable tension. Perhaps this is not surprising as the outcome of the vote will define the country's path over the coming years.

United States of America



Jakub Zientala

With new President Trump in the spotlight, February has been an eventful month in American politics. One month into his presidency, there is now more clarity with regard to Mr. Trump's policy setting style. After one month in office, the administration highlighted its alleged successes. President Trump mentioned on multiple occasions that the unemployment rate is the lowest in a long time, that inflation is stable, that the stock market is growing, and that the public debt decreased by 200 billion USD. However, most of these successes are results of the work of the previous administration (Durden, 2017; Jones, 2017).

The following summary will skip the numerous twitter meltdowns that Mr. Trump has had over the last month because they don't serve any other purpose than to strengthen his connection with his base. Instead, this piece will focus on events that are meaningful for American politics and may influence its relations with the EU.

During February, President Trump hosted two important guests – Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Shinzo Abe and Prime Minister of Canada, Mr. Justin Trudeau. During the meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan, North Korea launched a successful test of nuclear missiles, which triggered an emergency meeting between Abe and Trump, during which both world leaders discussed strategies how to counter North Korea's future acts of aggression and develop mutual defence mechanisms. Discussion took place out in the open space at Mar-a Largo resort (which was an unheard of breach of security). Usually, such meetings take place in situation rooms, which are built on site and are secure enough to prevent any chance of sensitive data and information being intercepted.

The meeting of Mr. Trudeau with Mr. Trump was less dramatic and more practical. The visit of the Canadian Prime Minister resulted in a joint press statement of the two leaders in which both pledged to closer cooperation and confirmed that both countries share a unique relationship. It was also reported that Ivanka Trump was highly involved in the creation of the fund for women entrepreneurs and further elimination of the barriers for women in trade.

For Mr. Trudeau the visit to the White House was a way to secure Canadian interests in the USA, with two billion USD flowing over the border of both countries daily.

Mr. Trump is known for his sceptical stance towards migration, refugees and immigrants. Among his numerous executive orders, he has tried to limit travel to the USA from seven Muslim majority countries. This resulted in a court battle, which was ultimately lost by the White House. A court ruled the order to be unconstitutional and travel-ban has been lifted. Mr. Trump also ordered Immigration and Customs Enforcement to tighten their controls and searches for illegal immigrants, which resulted in arrests on an unprecedented scale (Kulish, Dickerson and Nixon, 2017).

Mr. Trump in his interview with Reuters on 23 February stated, that he is fond of the European Union and is looking forward to tighter cooperation with Europe in terms of security within NATO framework. In doing so he made a significant U-turn on the European Union, saying: “I think it's wonderful. If they're happy, I'm in favour of it” (Reuters, 2017). In the same interview, he pledged to increase American nuclear arsenal to 7000 active warheads. In the following days he increased the military budget and scrapped money from other agencies like the EPA (Environment Protection Agency), which is a clear signal that the EU cannot rely on US support in combating the climate change. These moves come in spite of Mr. Trump's promise of “clean water and clean air” in his address to joint session of the Congress (CNN, 2017). Another important but expected shift in American policy was announced in that address to the Congress, as Mr. Trump declared his intention to pursue sanctions against Iran. This is a direct contradiction of the EU's current political line on that matter.

Finally, the US Vice President Mike Pence during his visit to Europe stated that the USA is committed to NATO. However, it “expects our allies to keep their word” when it comes to contributing to NATO funding, which currently is funded to 70% by the US budget (Bacon, Onyanga-Omara, 2017). During the Munich Security Conference, Pence reassured the participants that despite isolationist tendencies in Mr. Trump's policy, USA will “hold Russia accountable” and said the US would demand that Russia honours a 2015 peace deal agreed upon in Minsk, Belarus, aimed at ending violence in Eastern Ukraine.

Western Balkans



**Aleksandra
Stankovic**

The heated discussions about the upcoming presidential elections announced on 2 April 2017 marked the month of February in Republic of Serbia. The most significant battle took place between the current President Tomislav Nikolic and the Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic and disagreements over the possible re-election of Vucic continued to sour the relationship. After all, he decided not to run, despite having a good chance of being re-elected to a second term. At this very moment, potential candidates are the current Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic, Vuk Jeremic and Sasa Jankovic, the two candidates of the opposition parties, as well as Vojislav Seselj. At the same time, there are speculations that early parliamentary elections could be held alongside the presidential vote.

The possible candidacy of Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic would be decisive for the outcome of the elections as he is a very popular political figure. During his term as the Prime Minister, Vucic gained huge influence in the country as well as a wide support of the Serbian population. It is thought that about two million of Serbian voters would support Vucic, ensuring his swift victory.

A further reason why Aleksandar Vucic has a good chance to become the next Serbian president is that he has been involved the most in negotiations with the European Union concerning potential Serbian membership. Aleksandar Vucic has contributed a lot to the reforms deemed necessary for the entrance to the European Union and is globally considered the most important and influential representative of Serbia.

Meanwhile, another reason for tensions had been observed between the Federation of Bosnia and Hercegovina and the Republic of Serbia. On 23 February, BiH formally asked the United Nations' top court to review its 2007 ruling that cleared Serbia of charges it committed genocide during the 1990s civil war. This development may also produce tensions inside Bosnia and spark a new political crisis in the ethnically divided country where Serbs make up a significant proportion of the population (approx. 30%).

The intention of Federation of BiH in this case is unknown, but it is a signal to the European Union that the deep ethnic divisions still can fuel a major political tensions in the Western Balkans. This cannot be ignored and the EU should invest more time and energy in helping to build connections and understanding among the Balkan countries.

On the opposite side, a delegation of BiH met with a delegation of Montenegro in order to promote bilateral cooperation. The meeting was led by Chairman of the Council of Ministers of BiH, Dr Denis Zvizdic and Prime Minister of Montenegro, Dusan Markovic. The discussions included topics such as infrastructure project and the improvement of mutual cooperation in relevant sectors, for example, the extension of trade and economic cooperation. Both countries have similar political aims, which are related to the European integration. Montenegro is looking forward to intensifying the integration process and is willing to support the Federation of BiH on its way to European Union membership. The meeting represents a step forward for Western Balkans on its European way. It facilitates the negotiations with the European Union and shows the will of Western Balkans to not only geographically, but also politically be a part of Europe.

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Contact via:

Email: research@eu-foreignpolicy.com

Web: <https://www.eu-foreignpolicy.com/>