
EU Foreign Policy Overview

April 2017



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EU Foreign Policy
Research Group

Dear Readers,

In April, we witnessed a number of important developments, especially in US foreign policy. Donald Trump's active but controversial decision to launch a missile attack on a Syrian government airbase stirred up both positive and negative reactions around the world. While some welcomed the US 'come back' to the role of 'the world's policeman', others expressed concern over Trump's unpredictability.

The US president's decision was especially concerning in the context of the heated situation in East Asia, following the threat of North Korea's nuclear tests. A preventive US attack was on the table and although it was not carried out, the tensions remain and will likely influence relations in the region in the upcoming time.

Along with the worrying developments in Turkey and Russia, as well as natural disasters affecting Africa, the global security situation remains tense. How is the EU reacting to these challenges? You can find the answer in the April's EU Foreign Policy Overview.

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The background of the page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the European Union flag, showing the blue field with the twelve yellow stars arranged in a circle. The flag is draped and has some folds and shadows, giving it a three-dimensional appearance. The stars are bright yellow and stand out against the deep blue background.

Contents

- 5** Africa
- 7** Australia and Oceania
- 9** China and East Asia
- 11** Middle East and North Africa
- 13** Russia and Eastern Europe
- 15** Turkey and Caucasus
- 17** Western Balkans
- 19** References

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Balázs Kele

2017 has already brought a wide range of different hurdles for African states, from natural disasters to insurgencies, civil wars, coups and economic hardships. From that point of view, April did not bring any changes.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo 17 mass graves were discovered by UN investigators. Due to the chaotic situation in the country and the weakness of the government, chances are high that the local government does not have the resources to investigate the issue, therefore UN will probably turn to the International Criminal Court to probe the mass graves (Caldwell, 2017). Also in the DRC 16 UN staff members were held hostage, at a refugee camp in North Kivu, by South Sudanese refugees. However, following successful negotiations they were released unharmed (Al Jazeera, 2017a). Similar issues occur in the DRC every few weeks, which speaks to the chaotic situation in the country. Since its independence, the DRC have been struggling with instability, which is unlikely to change in the short to medium term. Insurgencies in the central regions of country are ongoing, the mineral rich Eastern Congo have been unstable for decades and the date of the upcoming presidential elections is still unclear, even though the last term of Joseph Kabila, the current president expired in November last year.

Droughts cause serious damages in crop yields and threaten almost the whole East African region, including Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Uganda. As mentioned in last month's overview, the risk of famine is quite high in these states. The forthcoming rainy season seems to be a promising and encouraging sign for the whole region. Although rain cannot solve all the problems of these countries, it could ease the famine and provide some improvement to the crop yields. However, many experts warn that last year the rainy season was deficient in the region and a consecutive failure of the rainy season will have presumably bad consequences regarding food insecurity in the Horn of Africa (Al Jazeera, 2017b).

Somalia is still struggling, as the federal government is unable to stop the radical Islamic organisation al-Shabaab. In April, the organisation launched several attacks against the Somali army, amongst other actions, they tried to assassinate the new chief of the army in a suicide ambush (The New York Times, 2017). The US deployed a dozen soldiers to Somalia, their mission is to train and equip the Somali army in order to increase the efficiency of the local troops in guerrilla warfare against al-Shabaab (Al Jazeera, 2017c).

By comparison, neighbouring Ethiopia seems a beacon of stability in the East Africa. However, tensions are currently high in Ethiopia due to anti-governmental protests mainly in the Amhara and Oromia regions. In October last year, the government declared emergency rule for six months, which was later extended by four months due to new waves of violence. According to human rights reports, around 700 people were killed in the brutal reaction of the security forces and many others detained illegally (Al Jazeera, 2017d). In South Sudan atrocities against aid workers and low-intensity clashes between governmental and rebel forces continued this month (Boston Herald, 2017).

Nigeria is still struggling with Boko Haram and corruption. In April, several government officials were suspended due to the misuse of public funds (Deutsche Welle, 2017). On the Corruption Perceptions Index issued by the Transparency International, Nigeria is still placed on 136th out of the 176 examined countries (Transparency International, 2016). Although year by year small progress is made, the result is still poor. The country draws significant income from its oil deposits, but the economic benefits derived from this valuable resource have not trickled down to the lower layers of society. For instance, the Northern regions are threatened by both Boko Haram's insurgency and famine. Famine is mainly caused by Boko Haram, which recently took the crops of local farmers and the cattle of herdsmen (Al Jazeera, 2017e).

Similarly to the aforementioned countries, South Africa also has had to face political tensions in April. Protesters all around South Africa demanded the resignation of the incumbent President Jacob Zuma after he had sacked his finance minister (BBC News, 2017). The sacking led to the country's credit rating dropping to 'junk status'. Demonstrators also protested against the alleged corruption of the president and many experts warned of the effect they will have on the ANC's claim to be sitting on the moral high ground (Suttner, 2017).

Australia and Oceania



**Jakob
McKernan**

Until now, the political establishment in Oceania has been largely successful at holding off the local populist wave (a problem that is currently threatening Europe), but it now appears that even mainstream Australian and New Zealand political parties can't resist the urge to pander to their electorate's baser instincts. Although Australian PM Turnbull has never been shy of extolling Australia as the 'world's most successful multi-cultural society', he felt no compunction in echoing Donald Trump while announcing the scrapping of Australia's skilled work visa programme. The visa will be replaced with a policy, which will prioritise 'Australian workers for Australian jobs'. Across the Tasman Sea, New Zealand Immigration Minister Michael Woodhouse announced similar changes. Aimed at targeting both the quantity and 'quality' of migrants, the government implemented a number of alterations to its skilled work visa programme. With an eye on September's elections, leader of the New Zealand Labour Party, Andrew Little, took it a step further saying he would look to cut immigration numbers by the 'tens of thousands'.

While the opportunities for European citizens in Australia and New Zealand are likely to be scaled back, the prospects for EU capital, investment and market access is heading in the opposite direction. The trip of New Zealand Minister for Primary Industries, Nathan Guy, to Europe again underlined New Zealand's commitment to opening up trade. Following on from the conclusion on EU – NZ scoping rounds last month, EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström and Australian Trade Minister Steven Ciobo completed the scoping round of the trade talks on April 6. The EU must now receive a mandate from Member States so that it could enter full-fledged negotiations.

However, as noted in last month's overview, concerns over Australia's procurement legislation remain. Indeed, on April 3 the EU took the unusual step of publicly criticising Australia's public procurement guidelines. In a submission to a joint select committee on the issue, the EU Delegation in Canberra called for the rules to be 're-examined'. The submission stated that a provision requiring Commonwealth officials to consider the national economic benefit of contracts above \$4 million appeared to breach Australia's international treaty obligations. Additionally, it notes that government procurement is a 'core area' of EU - Australian trade and 'vital to future bilateral relations'. The select committee is due to report on 31 May.

Along with developments in trade talks, April also saw progress in the EU's effort to work towards a new partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries. During his visit to Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Australia and New Zealand, the Director General of DEVCO, Stefano Manservigi, emphasised the EU's intention to 'imbed a specific Pacific Pillar in the new agreement'. As well as stating the need for increased cooperation between the EU, New Zealand and Australia in Pacific development assistance, Manservigi noted that the EU wanted to consolidate and develop its presence in the region.

China and East Asia



**Evelyn
Shi**

The month of April was marked by increasing tensions between the US and North Korea. The US administration's warning that it may seek to address the ending of North Korea's nuclear crisis through means beyond diplomatic relations proved to be particularly contentious.

Rumours about the US planning a pre-emptive strike on North Korea have been spreading, as reports emerged that an American flotilla had been ordered to sail north from Singapore. Trump and his Secretary of Defence James Mattis confirmed the mission. However, they were later criticised for sharing wrong information, since the flotillas were, in fact, heading to Australia. Ignoring these developments North Korea was not deterred from demonstrating its power, including by launching another missile-test at the end of the month. Even though it failed, the launch affirmed North Korea's scant regard for international regulations and relations. The country has been warned several times by the international community to abstain from continuing its nuclear programme.

The wider East Asian region has been affected by these developments. Japan and South Korea dread a nuclear attack and therefore seek assistance from the United States, which has started moving parts of the controversial THAAD anti-missile defence system into South Korea in response to the threat of missile launches by its northern neighbour. China, however, disapproves of this move and perceives the system as a risk to the regional security balance.

Acknowledging the dangerousness of the current situation, the US awaits China's support in this matter and has abandoned further public disputes regarding trade policies with China, since it seems more important now to ally with them against North Korea. This surely was also discussed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's state visit to the US and the meeting with Trump. In contrast to their relationship during the US elections, the summit showed no signs of discontent between the two countries.

During the summit, Trump authorised the missile strike against a Syrian Government Airbase in response to the chemical attack (which Syria's military denies to have initiated) that killed scores of civilians. This did not just further deteriorate relations with Russia, but was, in fact, a signal to China. As a military ally of North Korea, they are obliged to defend them in case of any attack. With the US government declaring the aim of finding different means to sanction North Korea's nuclear advance, this event was perhaps planned to demonstrate the power of the US military and its willingness to act unilaterally.

However, Trump and Xi Jinping did not hold a joint press conference and details of the summit are still unclear. Beijing's role in the US-NK matter seems particularly vague. While the US welcomes China's support in putting pressure on North Korea, the Chinese administration avoided official statements on further proceedings. The reason for that could lie in China's uncertainty regarding its allegiances. But the relationship with the US seems to have improved a lot this month, and China should bear in mind that, however they react to this situation, it is crucial to the world's view on them. Having advocated the idea of a globalised world that works together, at the Davos Summit in January, President Xi Jinping could use this situation to secure or even improve China's position in the world.

During all these events, the EU has not stated its position (but it did impose further economic sanctions on North Korea). Taking sides would not be the best strategy now with the world order being so uncertain. Respectively, the EU should rather try to mediate between the disputing countries and stress China's ability to keep North Korea in check.

Middle East and North Africa



**Stefan
Pfalzer**

In early April, Ministers from Cyprus, Italy and Greece as well as the EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy signed a preliminary agreement with the Israeli Energy Minister paving the way for the longest and deepest natural gas pipeline. The pipeline is to be completed by 2025. The project will cost around \$6 - \$7 billion and is an attempt to decrease the EU's dependence on Russian energy imports amid decreasing North Sea reserves (Reed 2017). Furthermore, once Israel launches the first phase of their Leviathan gas field project in 2019, it could become the region's leading gas exporter, having formerly been dependent on energy imports. However, some criticism of this agreement has been voiced with regard to the energy crises experienced by inhabitants of the Gaza strip. Palestinian activists have accused the EU of a clandestine approval of the Israeli sea blockade off Palestine's coast (Gostoli 2017).

While preparations for the EU's conference on *Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region* were underway in Brussels, the north-western Syrian town Khan Sheikhoun was hit by a chemical attack that is suspected to have been an operation by the Syrian government. Two days later, US president Trump took the occasion of a dinner with the Chinese president Xi Jinping to launch almost 60 Tomahawk missiles, however, not before warning Russian units in the area. During these two events, the EU as the largest donor of humanitarian aid, reiterated its commitment to the Geneva peace talks, the vision of a democratic future for Syria as well as its financial and humanitarian support for Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (EEAS 2017).

The benevolent actions undertaken by the EU are an important part of disaster relief for the millions of people displaced in their own country. However, the events of early April have demonstrated, once again, that the EU is relegated to a secondary role in the Syrian civil war, which continues to remain the playing field of the US and Russia.

Later in April, the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to discuss the strained relationship amid conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. Mogherini noted that EU and Russia's interests in the region are very much aligned, namely ending the war, stabilising the region, defeating ISIS and guaranteeing a democratic, inclusive, secular, united future for Syria (EEAS 2017).

However, tensions between the EU and Russia continue to block cooperation, let alone partnership for the conflict in Syria and although the High Representative may suggest otherwise, the two actors' interests in Syria differ quite significantly, especially with regard to the legitimacy of President Assad whose removal from power seemed to be the EU's prerequisite for stability, political reconciliation and a democratic future for the Syrian people. Russia, on the other hand, seems to be willing to defend the government of Bashar al-Assad even amid mounting evidence of the usage of chemical weapons against civilians. When in 2013, Syria was accused of having used chemical weapons, Moscow pushed Damascus into signing the Chemical Weapons Convention in order to acquiesce the outraged international community (Weitz 2014). This time, however, Russia denied that the chemical attack was purposively carried out by the government and claimed that a rebel ordnance depot stockpiling chemical weapons was hit by Assad's air force and that the attack was a false flag operation by Syrian rebel fighters (Wintour 2017). Furthermore, Russia questioned the validity and independence of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons amid accusations leveled against the Syrian regime.

The Syrian civil war will need an agreement between the US and Russia over the future of President Assad as well as to resolute action against terror militias in order to restore stability and security in Syria. The EU could play an important role in brokering such an agreement, but has recently been sidelined by the inception of the Astana Process, headed by Russia, Iran and Turkey, which rivals the Geneva talks for being the primary forum for a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. It might be possible, however, that the EU will change its position on Bashar al-Assad and eventually become willing to include him in the political future it seeks to help shape. Such a change of position would facilitate cooperation with Russia and might be accepted by the US government, which seems reluctant to take decisive measures in Syria besides its show off force after the Khan Sheikhoun attacks, which had little or no strategic impact on the outcome of the civil war.

Russia and Eastern Europe



Kinga Jaromin

The beginning of April in Russia was marred by tragedy as 15 people died in a suicide attack carried out in Sankt Petersburg's metro. The perpetrator was identified as Akbarjon Djalilov from Kyrgyzstan. A number of people originating from Central Asia have been arrested, with some of them admitting their part in the attack. However, the issue is still being investigated. The FSB has indicated that the perpetrator had a connection with the so-called Islamic State although it is too early for final conclusions.

At the same time, on 4 April a chemical attack was launched in rebel-held town of Khan Sheikhoun in north-western Syria. The Western allies concluded President Assad's regime was guilty of launching the strike that killed over 80 civilians, however, the regime with the support of Russia, denied these accusations, blaming the attack on Syrian rebels. Consequently, the Trump administration accused Russia of trying to shield Syria's government from blame for the deadly gas attack. The situation further escalated after the USA launched a missile strike on the Syrian Shayrat Airbase, which was welcomed by the American allies, including the EU. The move was heavily condemned by Russia. Following the strike, a heated debate took place in the UN Security Council. As parties could not agree on the fundamentals, no conclusion or course of action was agreed upon. This heated period was followed by the earlier planned visit of Secretary of State Tillerson to Moscow, where he met with President Putin.

The domestic situation in Russia is also complicated with signs that Putin's regime is turning even more authoritarian. For the whole month, reports about abuses of the gay community in Chechenia appeared in the international media, however, the Russian government remained irresponsive, while the local authorities in the republic have since denied any accusations. On 21 April, Russia's Supreme Court banned the Jehovah's Witnesses, declaring it an "extremist organisation" and ordering it to hand over its property to the state. Furthermore, on 26 April, Russian authorities banned the British-based organisation Open Russia, initiated by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, former political prisoner and Kremlin's critic.

It has emerged that the Russian parliament also plans to increase the control over the sale of SIM cards, which indicates that Putin is seeking to further tighten his grip on Russian people, which is most likely the precaution taken before the upcoming presidential elections and high risk of anti-governmental protests. The first manifestations were inspired by Alexei Navalny and his anti-corruption agenda, however the following major protests that took place on 28 April had purely political purpose, with slogan "We're fed up!" vowing for Putin not to run in 2018 elections.

In this context, on 24 April, HRVP Federica Mogherini paid her first official visit to Russia. In her meeting with Minister Sergei Lavrov she reaffirmed EU's strong stance on sanctions deployed against Russia over the annexation of Crimea and the commitment of EU member states to the Minsk peace process.

After a few months of unusual developments in Belarus, with protests and tensions in relations with Russia, the situation seems to be normalising. Specifically, President Lukashenka took measures to prevent the escalation of protests. Before another organised action, some leaders of the opposition were detained for a few days in order to avoid them using the political momentum. Lukashenka's relationship with Russia also improved, at least in some areas. On 3 April, it was announced that the dispute in the oil and gas sector had been settled. According to the agreement, Belarus will repay the debt to Gazprom in the amount of approx. \$700 million. In response Russia will increase duty-free oil supplies to Belarus from 18 million to 24 million tonnes and will provide a discount starting from 2018. The price for the 2017 remained on the level of \$130 per 1,000 cubic meters. President Lukashenka announced the deal as a success for Belarus, however it is unclear what Russia will get in return for bringing back the favourable treatment. Belarusian concessions in the field of security and foreign policy are likely to follow.

In Ukraine, Valeria Hontareva, resigned from the position as the President of National Bank of Ukraine. The decision sparked concerns over the continuation of necessary economic reforms in the country. She is expected to leave the post on 10 May. It is important to point out also that the request by Kyiv for emergency measures against pro-Russia rebels in Eastern Ukraine has been rejected by the International Court of Justice in its ruling on 19 April. The court decided that Kyiv did not provide enough evidence to support its claim that Russia is funnelling money and arms to groups in eastern Ukraine. The court did, however, warn Moscow to protect ethnic rights in Crimea.

Interesting developments also took place in Moldova. As the result of the efforts of Moldova's President Igor Dodon, the country received the observer's status in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). However, the country's political debate is focused on the domestic situation as the Democratic Party has proposed to introduce the majoritarian electoral system, a move considered as political meddling aimed for ensuring the victory of the ruling 'pro-European coalition' in the parliamentary elections of 2018. The proposal incited staunch objections from the majority of the Moldovan opposition, however, the Socialist Party of President Dodon proposed the mixed electoral system which is perceived by many as an attempt to reach a deal with the Democratic Party. The situation is currently in development and it is difficult to forecast if any of the mentioned proposals will be accepted. If so, it will be one more proof of Moldova's further departure from democratic standards.

Turkey and Caucasus



**Federico
Salvati**

On 16 April, Turkish voters were called to the polls for the long-awaited referendum on the 18 proposed amendments to the national constitution. Although the YES side won, the close nature of the victory (51.4%) reflects the strong divisions in the nation. Notably, President Erdogan, who promoted the reform in the first place, lost the three major economic centres of the country. Istanbul and Ankara reported a narrow majority of 51% for the NO. Izmir, on the other hand, voted overwhelmingly (68%) for the NO. With 70% voting NO, the Kurdish provinces also strongly rejected the amendment. In contrast, the Turkish population abroad voted strongly for YES in all the EU countries where during the last month an EU/Turkey diplomatic crisis had developed. The vote of Turks in EU countries demonstrates how President Erdogan has been able to capitalise on far-right sentiment by preaching xenophobia and appealing to the national pride. The strategy evidently played off in the turnouts.

What is the meaning of this vote for Turkey and what is the meaning for its relations with the EU? Ibrahim Kalin from *The Guardian*, argues that the reform will not necessarily mean a setback for Turkish democracy. On the other hand, the author stresses how for the first time in national history it has been the people and not the army to determine a big regime change in the country. The new figure of the president (around which the whole system will spin from now on) will represent a new safety guarantee for all system preventing future coup attempts. The president will still have to seek the majority of votes to be elected while the parliament will have the possibility to investigate the actions of the president and to hold him politically accountable in front of the Assembly. Other commentators are not so satisfied with the referendum results. Stratford Intelligence Agency points out how multiple reports from international observers confirmed irregularities and procedural problems both in the campaign and in the voting procedures. Ali Bayramoglu, a former supporter of Erdogan, stressed how the “disproportionate powers given by the new constitution to the President will result in a personalistic regime and ultimately in the death of the democratic process in Turkey” (*Guardian*, 2017).

In the former editions of our review, we have drawn parallels between Putin's Russia and Erdogan's Turkey and the current situation goes some way to reinforcing this notion. In 2008, Putin's constitutional reform was implemented under similar circumstances, with Putin arguing similarly that concentrating powers in the hands of the president would empower the electorate and stabilise the system.

In the wake of the referendum, the government extended the emergency status until 19 June. As an immediate consequence, there has been a new wave of preventive arrests of thousands of activists, exponents of opposition movements and journalists. On 29 April, Ankara even came so far to censoring Wikipedia because it was deemed a criminal exploited by the opposition.

Brussels stated that even without supporting the results of the referendum, it nonetheless will respect them. Although the demonisation of the EU by Erdogan is likely to decrease now, even in that case a normalisation of the relations is out of question. A warning for Erdogan to “choose his next moves carefully” came also from the Council of Europe during the last week. Surprisingly, the US President Donald Trump congratulated Erdogan on the results of the referendum sparking criticism among both EU leaders and the OSCE for making remarks that sounded way out of touch with the geopolitical reality.

Important developments could arise from the Turkish referendum results in the Caucasus. The outcome of the referendum in Turkey will affect political processes in Azerbaijan “because of close relations between the peoples of the two countries,” said Gyultekin Gadjibeili, member of the Coordinating Centre of the National Council of Democratic Forces (NCDF) in Azerbaijan. “The referendum outcomes will not contribute to the development of democracy both in this country and in Azerbaijan,” she said. The referendum “has split the Turkish society,” said Natig Djafarli, the executive secretary of the Movement “Republican Alternative” (ReAl). He believes that “the anti-Western rhetoric in Turkey may spread to Azerbaijan and still further impede the country’s advance to Western values.” At the same time, in his opinion, the referendum will not affect the development of interstate relations in the Caucasus (Caucasian Knot, 2017).

A similarly discouraging result came as well from the recent Armenian parliamentary elections that took place in early April. The result has been tainted with multiple infractions, personal assaults to journalists covering the process and various kinds of irregularities. The EU allocated €7 million for the election, of which €4 million was spent on voter identification technologies and €2 million was passed to the government to install video cameras to provide live streams from polling stations. The rest of the funds were used by civil society programs including election observation initiatives. Both the EU and the OSCE, however, welcomed the clear improvement in comparison with the last election rounds, stating their intention to keep up the cooperation with the country to achieve even higher results. The ruling Republican Party (RPA) has been the clear winner of the elections, winning 49.8% of the seats in the house. In regard to foreign policy, the results will not have a noticeable effect on Armenian politics, which remains mostly pro-Russian, with possible openings for EU cooperation.

Western Balkans



**Aleksandra
Stankovic**

Over the last month, tensions in Macedonia escalated further and reached their peak when a crowd of protesters holding a rally against the election of Talat Xhaferi as Speaker of Parliament, broke into a governmental building. The situation turned very violent and many people were injured, including police officers, a number of representatives and the Social Democrat leader, Zoran Zaev.

In Macedonia, the two biggest political parties – the National Party with its leader Nikola Gruevski and the Social Democrat Party with the already mentioned leader Zoran Zaev – have been aiming to establish a Government following unclear election results. Although Nikola Gruevski marginally won the elections, he is unable to form a coalition and therefore a government. On the other hand, Zoran Zaev assembled enough mandates to build a government together with the Albanian minority parties (one quarter of Macedonian population are Albanians), but their leaders have their own conditions, which sparked the opposition of ethnic Macedonians (one of the conditions is recognising Albanian as one of the official languages). At the same time, the President of Macedonia opposes giving the mandate to Zoran Zaev, which has led him and his followers to declare Talat Xhaferi the Speaker of the Parliament without the acceptance of the President. The decision led to the violent actions on Thursday.

It is likely that the Western countries or better said the European Union, would accept Zoran Zaev because his policy is pro-European, unlike Nikola Gruevski who has strong ties to Russia. Now, everything depends on the president because he has to decide if he will accept the new coalition. If not, the political situation in Macedonia is likely to deteriorate.

In contrast to the turmoil of Macedonian politics, Montenegro noted a success on its path to the Western structures. The Parliament of Montenegro has ratified the country's accession to NATO, despite strong domestic opposition and Russian disapproval. Montenegro will most likely join NATO late next month. The membership has been approved by 26 of 28 NATO member states. At the same time, Russia demonstrated its disapproval of Montenegro's NATO membership by taking some active measures like introducing restrictions on the import of Montenegro's wine. This will have a significant impact on sales because a fifth of all wine exports are sold to the Russian market.

On 2 April, the Prime Minister of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic won Serbia's presidential election. He obtained 55 % of votes in the first round of elections, which confirmed his domination of Serbia's political scene. With 55 % of votes he took control over the entire legislative and governing process. Besides the confirmation of his political power in Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic also confirmed the willingness of Serbia to continue negotiations with the European Union. He further announced that by June a new Prime Minister should be elected. There is some speculation that the future Prime Minister will be someone close to Aleksandar Vucic, since they will cooperate in the future.

The opposition was unsatisfied with presidential elections, which was somewhat expected, but at the same time a certain part of the Serbian population expressed significant disapproval of the outcomes through numerous protests. As national and international media reported, the protestors banged pots and blasted whistles in front of the governmental building in central Belgrade. The protestors hold the opinion that Aleksandar Vucic, together with his Serbian Progressive Party, are corrupt and have rigged the elections. Some went as far as to warn the win of Aleksandar Vucic could lead Serbia back into the autocracy.

In April, presidential elections also should have taken place in Albania, as the Albanian parliament was supposed to vote on this issue on 19 April. However, the elections were unsuccessful because the Prime Minister of Albania, Edi Rama, together with the governing Socialists decided not to nominate a candidate in the first round. The main point of this decision was to demonstrate the need for a dialogue with the opposition so the voting could take place in a more unified atmosphere.

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