
EU Foreign Policy Overview

New challenges 2017



Dear Readers,

After the inauguration of Donald Trump as the US president, it seemed that 2017 will be the year of populism, also in Europe, with the upcoming elections in the Netherlands in France. However, it did not happen and populists and anti-EU forces were defeated. This and the 60th anniversary of the Rome treaties celebrated in March gave the European leaders a chance to renew the commitment to the EU project. However, although the immediate threat to the EU has been temporarily resolved, the union still struggles with many challenges, including those concerning its foreign policy. Growing challenges in relations with very important EU partners, including the changing approach of the US to international engagement, growing authoritarianism in Turkey or conflict in Ukraine demand actions and even are an “incentive” to subject the topic of the EU foreign policy to closer scrutiny.

The EU is interested in being a global power as demonstrated by the in 2016 adopted EU Global Strategy. We can even say it already takes that role, being the largest humanitarian aid donor and having a transformative power over its neighbourhood as proven in a number of countries adopting EU-like democratic reforms. Such an approach earned the EU a title of a 'normative power', that is one being led by principles. However, as we clearly see in several examples, the EU policies in foreign states were not always led by the EU values but rather by a geopolitical calculation or current interest. In the 'difficult times', like during the conflict in Ukraine or a migration crisis, which resulted in the infamous migrant deal with Turkey, the incentive to use such approach is even stronger, especially in the moment of the crisis of the EU itself. Such a 'hybrid' policy often draws criticism to the EU but might also be a way to wait out the difficult times.

This is only one of the problems that we have identified in our monitoring of the EU foreign policy in the first half of 2017. During this time, we have seen many challenges and new patterns in the various regions that may have a significant impact on the EU. We also attempted to answer what challenges these situations pose and what is the right approach to address them.

We hope that this publication will be a source of concise information on the most important developments in the world and their influence on the EU and will be an incentive to further study the EU foreign policy on your own.

Kinga Jaromin
Head of EU Foreign Policy
Research Group

The background of the page is a close-up, slightly blurred image of the European Union flag, featuring a blue field with twelve yellow five-pointed stars arranged in a circle. A thin white vertical line is positioned on the left side of the page, separating the text from the rest of the image.

Contents

- 5** China and East Asia
- 8** Middle East and North Africa
- 15** Russia and Eastern Europe
- 19** Turkey and Caucasus
- 24** Western Balkans

DISCLAIMER:

EU Foreign Policy Research Group cannot be held responsible for errors in information contained in this publication or any consequences arising from the use of it; the views and opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the group.

Proofreading&Editing: Nora Kürzdörfer

Photo cover: ©European Union

Other photos: ©Wikimedia commons, Freepik, Pexels.

Email: research@eu-foreignpolicy.com

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

Twitter: @EUFP_RG

Facebook: EU Foreign Policy Research Group

©EU Foreign Policy Research Group, September 2017

Reproduction is authorised, provided the source is acknowledged.



China and East Asia

AUTHOR: EVELYN SHI

The relations between the EU and East Asian countries have been marked by the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th President of the United States of America in January 2017. The US, formerly unquestionably considered the most powerful country in the world, has lost credibility to its allies due to the unpredictable behaviour of President Trump. The global order is starting to be rearranged, as the inauguration of the populist president has led to the rise of China, eager to ascend to a global power. Nonetheless, the rising nuclear threat caused by North Korea has put a halt to the rivalry between the US and China, as both countries are crucial to deal with this dispute. Meanwhile, the European Union has had to deal with their own populist movements, but the change of power might have opened a door to find an ally that could benefit them for the long term.

Even though Donald Trump has made quite questionable comments and decisions since the elections, the rest of the world seemed not to believe in a change of the global order. Many countries continuously enjoy the protection and assistance of the US government, and the US military. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid the first official state visit to President Trump, which ended in a rather awkward handshake. German chancellor Angela Merkel paid a visit to Trump, and she did not only not get a handshake, but was instead confronted with the supposed Germany's debts. A similar dependency is concerning South Korea, where the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence-system (THAAD) – an anti-ballistic missile defence system that is supposed to shoot down ballistic missiles – was established by the US. Although halted for a short period of time due to the investigation on the environmental issues, the systems were successfully tested in July. However, the interruption of the instalments of the system incited rumours about the political motives of this decision. It was ordered by the newly elected President Moon Jae-in after the infringement of the former president due to the corruption scandal that has gathered international attention. President Moon is considered to be willing to strengthen the relationship with its Asian neighbours rather than only with the USA. Both China and North Korea did not approve the instalments.

Enhanced cooperation with Japan and caution towards China

A change of direction seemed to be approaching at the Davos Summit last December when Chinese President Xi Jinping praised the importance of globalisation. But instead, Merkel and Abe appeared together after their state visits to the US, and held a joint press conference on the further cooperation between the two countries, especially by condemning populism. Now, European media refer to Japan as "the best alternative to China". At the moment, the EU is in fact in preparation to work on a trade agreement with Japan (and it is to be noted, that China is the biggest trading partner of the EU in Asia, whereas Japan is the second biggest one), after they have successfully negotiated one with Canada. In July, the EU Trade commissioner Cecilia Malmström and the Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida announced that they had achieved consensus on a Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (JEEPA).

The EU chose Japan as a strategic partner, as it finds China untrustworthy. China has been struggling in its desire to establish an acknowledged position as a global power. With the emerging Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), an organisation led by China with players in Latin America, and the Belt and Road Initiative, which is supposed to reach from China to the other parts of Asia and also Europe, China is however on a good track. It is also a big contributor to the UN Peacekeeping troops (the motives might be of political nature, though). The UN Peacekeeping troops, supposedly to support and promote human rights and democracy and to maintain law and order, actually consists of a lot of Chinese troops. Beijing does try to demonstrate their ability as a responsible stakeholder in order to enhance its status as a global player. But more pragmatically, these developments are the result of the implementation of national interests, especially to gain the knowledge in the field of military. For example, in supporting stability in Africa, where the bulk of UN 'blue helmets' are deployed, China is also helping to protect its growing trade and investment on the continent. National interests seem to outweigh aspects that the Western World emphasizes (such as human rights, e.g. the Liu Xiaobo case) and therefore, the West does not seem eager for cooperation.

Problems with North Korea and the role of China

China is also still allied to North Korea, a country posing a significant security threat due to its nuclear programme and ballistic missiles tests. Notwithstanding several warnings of the international community, NK leader Kim Jong-Un has attempted several missile tests, most of them taking place during important international summits, such as the meeting between Trump and Abe, or Trump and Xi, or even the G7 summit in Italy. The nuclear advance threatens not just the neighbouring countries, but also the US, as the scope of the missiles is growing and could already reach the US territory (the last launch exploded after 900 km in Japanese territory, and Kim has threatened to attack the US island Guam). Regardless of the unclear motives of Kim Jong-Un, whether this is supposed to be a threat to the neighbouring countries and the US a threat to the inhabitants of North Korea to demonstrate his power, the threat definitely exists and is to be taken seriously. The US administration vowed to stop the so-called "era of strategic patience", which was exercised during the Obama administration and before, and to start a more pragmatic way of sanctioning the infringements of international law.

China finds itself in between the two positions. On the one hand, as a long-term ally of North Korea, China expressed this alliance in a mutual defence treaty. On the other hand, this alliance will not improve the opinion of the international community towards China, meaning that it would not enhance their position in obtaining global leadership. It is a difficult position as China craves not just for geographical stability, but also a stability with China as a global power. President Xi Jinping has at first been trying to mediate between the two countries by encouraging them to solve their dispute in a more diplomatic way. But just recently, the Chinese government has followed the sanctions of the Security Council and imposed a ban on imports of North Korea. Economic sanctions seem more efficient in this scenario, as a pre-emptive strike on NK would lead to unforeseen consequences on the whole peninsula, including that many Korean inhabitants would want to migrate to China, which is not in their interests.

China's place in the world and the EU

The current rivalry for the world hegemony between the US and China is an interesting phenomenon. On the one side the powerful nation of the United States – the leader of the liberal world - now led by someone who is against globalisation and prefers to strengthen the economy of his country only. And on the other side is China, that is torn in between the wish to become acknowledged as a global power within the international community, and the unwillingness to compromise on issues regarding their internal order, especially the One-China-Policy or human rights. China seems eager to discuss investments in foreign markets, but not the imprisonment of activists and pro-democracy bloggers, as the case of Liu Xiaobo has shown. It is also interesting to note that the EU has been allied to the US for a long time, but the current world order might open a new door to the EU, towards China. With the abandonment of the Trans-Pacific-Partnership (which China was not part of) and the shelving of the TTIP (which was supposedly to regulate Free Trade between the US and the EU), China is eager to promote the Belt-and-Road Initiative to Europe. The project would in fact be beneficial to both China's and the EU's interests, since it will flourish the infrastructure and, therefore, the economy of all

participating countries. Especially with the interim suspension of negotiation talks on TTIP, there is space for initiating new trade deals.

But the EU is still observing China's rise to power to determine if they are to be trusted. In order to obtain the position the Chinese government is seeking for, it is essential to play by the rules of the international community, meaning to back away from the alliance with regimes like North Korea and to respect international law, especially when it comes to issues regarding human rights, trade practices, etc.

SOURCES:

R. Carlin, (2017). North Korea Said It's Willing to Talk Denuclearization (But No One Noticed). The Diplomat. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/07/north-korea-said-its-willing-to-talk-denuclearization-but-no-one-noticed/> [Accessed 31st July].

S. Daekwon, (2017). What Does North Korea think of China's 'Dual Freeze' Proposal?. The Diplomat. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/what-does-north-korea-think-of-chinas-dual-freeze-proposal/> [Accessed 31st July].

The Economist, (2017). China makes Pakistan an offer it cannot refuse. [online] Available at <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21725101-leg-up-all-weather-friend-china-makes-pakistan-offer-it-cannot-refuse> [Accessed 25th July].

E. Gyoza, (2017). What Does China Care about? The Diplomat. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/what-does-china-care-about/> [Accessed 31st July].

L. Lau, (2017). How Should the US and China Approach the Next Economic Dialogue? The Diplomat. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/how-should-the-us-and-china-approach-the-next-economic-dialogue/> [Accessed 31st July].

A. Panda, (2017). THAAD System Successfully Completes Intercept of MRBM-Class Target. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/thaad-system-successfully-completes-intercept-of-mrbm-class-target/> [Accessed 31st July].

L. Patey, A. Day, S. von Einsiedel. (2017). China, Japan, and the Future of UN Peacekeeping. The Diplomat. [online] Available at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/china-japan-and-the-future-of-un-peacekeeping/> [Accessed 25th July].



Middle East and North Africa

AUTHOR: STEFAN PFALZER

This overview seeks to provide an insight into recurring patterns of the MENA region — a geopolitical playing field, which has been shaken up by the election of Donald Trump as US president, by the creation of a political alternative to the Geneva Peace Talks of the United Nations, by the new French President Emmanuel Macron and a growing focus of the EU's policies on Libya.

Firstly, the elephant in the room needs to be addressed: The Trump effect has encouraged a coalition of Arab countries in its opposition against Iran as well as it has provided tail wind for a diplomatic and economic isolation of Qatar. Furthermore, Trump's words have emboldened Israel to continue its settlement policy in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, making a two-state solution ever more unlikely. The emergence of another series of Syria summits, the Astana Process, seems to have relegated the influence of both the UN-led talks in Geneva as well as the EU's political sway over the Syrian Civil War. Moreover, even if a divided union sounds like an oxymoron, there is need of consensus among the EU Member States and a lack thereof characterises some of the EU's policies towards the MENA region. For example, French President Emmanuel Macron's statements indicating that Syrian President Assad could remain in power has weakened the EU's authority by displaying the divide of opinions formerly also widened by remarks of the UK's Foreign Minister Boris Johnson. Lastly, an increasing shift of the EU's foreign policy has seen many efforts made in order to stabilise and strengthen the state of affairs in Libya.

The following pages will present an identification of the major events and patterns in the MENA region in 2017, provide an analysis of their ramifications and offer recommendations for the EU's future foreign policy.

The Emergence of the Astana Process and the Divided Union

Entering its sixth year, the Syrian Civil War continued to divide the international community. Parallel to the UN-led peace process directed by UN Special Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, a new group consisting of Russia, Turkey and Iran asserted its authority and launched the Astana Process in January 2017, followed by four other meetings in the Kazakh capital. These summits saw a Joint Monitoring Group created, which would supervise violations of the December 2016 ceasefire agreement. Furthermore, the Astana Group established the creation of de-escalation zones in Idlib, Eastern Ghouta, Homs, Deraa and Al-Quneitra. The three guarantor states reiterated their commitment to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Syria. Lastly, Russian President Putin said that Russian troops could be deployed to guarantee the safety of the de-escalation zones. Syrian opposition forces

had previously stressed that they would not accept Iranian troops tasked with the policing of the de-escalation zones (RFERL 2017, MFA 2017).

The emergence of the Astana Process certainly challenges the UN peace talks — held for the fourth and fifth time during March 2017. But while the progress of the Geneva talks IV and V and their 3+1 pillars of transitional governance, elections, constitutional process as well as counter-terrorism have stalled, the Astana Process seemed to have invigorated the dialogue on the future of Syria. However, the ceasefire agreements were repeatedly violated, Joint Monitoring Group notwithstanding, and the way in which Russia, Iran and Turkey set up the Astana Process left Western peace brokers disconcerted by the single-handed attempt which saw them relegated to an observer position. The EU, the biggest contributor of humanitarian assistance in the Syrian Civil War, remains committed to the Geneva peace talks (EEAS 2017a) and maintains strained relations with two of three guarantor states of the Astana Process.

The positions and interests of the initiators of the Astana Process do not seem to be entirely homogeneous: While Iran and Russia are strong supporters of Syrian President Assad, Turkey's President Erdogan repeatedly voiced fierce opposition to Assad. Turkey has backed Syrian rebels against Assad, while Iran and Russia have assisted the armed forces of Assad with strategic strikes against rebel strongholds. In mid-July, US President Trump ended the CIA's training and armament program for Syrian rebels fighting against the Assad regime (Jaffe, Entous 2017). The move will likely ease tensions with Russia. But what does the situation in Syria mean for the EU? Has its approach of soft power proven to be ineffective?

The EU's strong stance against Syrian President Assad began to be undermined when in January, UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson stated that Assad should be allowed to run for re-election once the conflict in Syria is resolved (Wintour 2017). Then in April, as international delegations entered preparations for the EU's conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the north-western town of Khan Sheikhoun was attacked with chemical weapons. The operation was suspected to have been carried out by the Syrian government and provoked the US to launch roughly 60 Tomahawk missiles on a Syrian airbase after having informed Russian troops in the area. The HRVP Federica Mogherini reiterated the EU's commitment to the Geneva talks and stressed that the EU's and Russia's interests were the same regarding the establishment of a unified, democratic and inclusive future for Syria (EEAS 2017b).

In June, French President Macron expressed that as long as there was no legitimate successor to Syrian President Assad, he would not treat his departure as a *conditio sine qua non* for a resolution of the conflict and wanted to focus on the fight against terrorist groups instead (Reuters 2017). Macron's statement dealt a blow to the EU and its normative belief that reconciliation cannot be possible in Syria if Assad were to stay. This new stance illustrates the EU's core problem: its failure to speak with one voice and act with one agenda. Macron described Assad as an enemy of the Syrian people, but not of France. From the perspective of top EU diplomats, this justification undermines their moral imperative and plea against a President which uses excessive military force against his own people.

The ceasefire and de-escalation agreement agreed between the United States, Russia and Jordan after the Trump-Putin meeting at the G20 summit adds to the impression that the EU has lost considerable sway in the international mediation effort in the Syrian Civil War.

To more effectively deal with this situation, the EU should extend its sanctions regime against Syrian regime. In line with the EU's rejection of the atrocities committed by the Assad government against its own people, the EU should impose further sanctions against government officials and the Syrian oil industry in response to the use of chemical weapons.

At the same time, the EU needs to impose arms embargoes on Syrian opposition forces. The recent termination of the CIA program providing training and arms to Syrian rebels offers the political

momentum to enforce such a measure. Arms embargoes would help diminish the dynamics of the proxy war fought on Syrian territory and would facilitate the post-war reconstruction of the country. Continuous training and arms deliveries on the other hand would make further deepen the tribal and sectarian divide in Syria. Member States, which would breach such embargoes, should be sanctioned by virtue of Article 7 TEU. In order to halt the prolonging dynamics of the proxy war, all measures taken by Member States to strengthen warring parties in Syria must cease.

Given the continuously dire situation of the Syrian population, the EU should keep its humanitarian assistance in place. Although the emergence of the Astana Process and the Trump Presidency have diminished the EU's influence on the peace brokering, the EU remains the most important donor of humanitarian aid and needs to extend this assistance in order to ensure the operation of refugee camps in and close to Syria.

Numerous Efforts to Cooperate with Libya

In February 2017, the EU made an agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord that granted an allocation of €200 million. In exchange, Libya agreed to set up safe refugee camps and allow NATO and EU ships to patrol its waters (Aljazeera 2017a). There has been great scepticism regarding the efficacy of the deal as the three main institutions tasked with Libya's border security and financial administration — the Ministries of Defence, the Interior and Finance — have been found utterly unfit for their task by an EEAS working document (EEAS 2017c). Moreover, Libya remains divided between three centres of power: UN-backed Government of National Accord led by Prime Minister Al-Sarraj, the Government of National Salvation, headed by Khalifa Al-Ghweil and the House of Representatives in Tobruk, which is backed by General Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the Russia- and Egypt-backed Libyan National Army in the eastern part of the country. No group controls a majority of Libya's territory which is otherwise divided in influence spheres of local tribes. The power vacuum following the 2011 NATO bombing has given rise to terrorist groups such as Da'esh.

Moreover, the fragmentation of Libya's territory has attracted smugglers and migrants. The EU has urged Libya to ensure safe conditions for migrants arriving on its coastline. However, reports have shown numerous cases of abuse, starvation, forced labour and rape of migrants by Libyan militias running these internment camps for profit (McVeigh 2017). The EU remains divided with regard to the establishment of registration centres on the Libyan coastline in order to stem the arrival of migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

When it comes to institution building, the EU operates a Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Libya, a civilian mission, under the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), which includes the advisory and training of Libyan authorities in protecting the country's borders. EUBAM has been in place since May 2013 and has operated with an annual budget of €17 million during the last year. However, due to the political instability, EUBAM has been forced to operate from Tunisia (EEAS 2017d). The EU's capacity building efforts in Libya are contentious, mainly because they do not bring significant short-term operational success and therefore do not enjoy great political support, which in case of the CSDP is crucial since these missions largely depend on personnel delegated by Member States.

The Libyan case illustrates the controversy of some EU foreign policy instruments quite well as the allocation of large amounts of financial aid does not translate automatically into a melioration of circumstances and even though the EU's institutions seem to be aware of this problem, they continue to devote money to institutions which are not fit to use it efficiently.

In order to ensure the safety of migrants along the Libyan coast, the EU should assume the responsibility for Libyan migrant centres. Amid the trouble of Libyan authorities to efficiently administer their territory, the EU is called upon to alleviate the suffering of migrants in internment camps at the hands of militias. Therefore, if the EU seeks to create hotspots in which asylum to Member States can be

sought as was proposed in multiple European capitals, these hotspots need to ensure that all arriving migrants are sheltered under conditions fit for human habitation. The operation of such facilities cannot be done as a solo effort of individual Member States, but has to be administered and carried out as a concerted action by the EU as a whole with the support of specialised IGOs such as the UNHCR, the IOM and the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. However, they can only operate once the security on the ground is ensured.

Given that the current state of affairs in Libya does not provide an environment conducive to closing the divisions of the country, the EU should make efforts to create a more inclusive political environment. The EU, along with the UN, should consider a renegotiation of the hitherto contentious Libya Political Agreement. So far, due to a lack of recognition, Prime Minister Al-Sarraj, General Haftar and Khalifa Al-Ghweil all compete for influence and entertain ties to different external allies. A renegotiated agreement would need to include representatives of all dominant political forces and get the legitimisation that the GNA has been lacking.

Libya constitutes one of the most important partners within the EU's immediate neighbourhood due to its key role as a departure location for migrants on course to Europe. However, the financial aid and capacity building the EU provides threatens to be futile if the overall political situation continues to be unstable.

Increasing Shia-Sunni Rivalry

While the beginning of the Trump Presidency has brought an end to multilateralism that gave rise to the JCPOA, commonly referred to as the Iran Nuclear Deal, the EU refuses to embark on the US policy of isolationism.

A sign of this policy was the announcement of the travel ban on citizens from seven Muslim majority countries, including Iran, by President Trump at the end of January. Three days later, Iran launched a medium-range ballistic missile, which caused outrage in the US security establishment. For the US, the Iranian test constituted a breach of the JCPOA and UN Security Council resolution 2231. In contrast, former French Foreign Minister Ayrault stated that the test would not violate the Agreement. EU foreign policy spokeswoman Nabila Massrali called the test inconsistent with the UNSC Resolution (Aljazeera 2017b). Yet, the EU remains committed to reintegrating Iran into the international community and to deepening cooperation in the energy sector. This stance will be given a boost by the UK's exit of the EU, as London has been an outspoken opponent of an Iranian reintegration.

The month of May then saw Donald Trump visit Saudi Arabia where he joined a summit of Arab leaders in Riyadh. There, an arms deal worth \$110 billion was agreed between the US and Saudi Arabia and Trump called Iran a major sponsor of terrorism in the region. During this summit, the incumbent Hassan Rouhani was re-elected as President of Iran. The EU's HRVP congratulated Rouhani and interpreted the result as an approval of his reformist course, campaign against corruption and first and foremost, the JCPOA Agreement.

Roughly two weeks later, empowered by the support expressed by US President Trump, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Bahrain announced the imposition of economic sanctions against Qatar and the withdrawal of their ambassadors. Qatar was accused of sponsoring terrorism and faced a list of 13 demands, including one to sever its ties to Iran, which was later reduced to six demands (BBC 2017). Qatar and Iran share the world's largest natural gas field and, therefore, maintain good relations. The HRVP Federica Mogherini met with the Emir of Kuwait, the country which assumed the position of mediator in the diplomatic row, and called for direct talks between the conflicting parties. However, the crisis showed that the EU's foreign policy in this region was constrained by its broad range of economic interests and ties.

Comparatively, little attention has been devoted to the dramatic humanitarian situation in Yemen, a proxy war arena of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Shiite militias, where roughly 17 million people suffer from food insecurity and seven million are at risk of famine (Council 2017).

The EU should lobby the international community and first and foremost the United States to end financial sanctions against Iran, in exchange for Iran's compliance with the JCPOA. A sanctions relief would facilitate Iran's reintegration into the international community and strengthen the status of multilateral negotiations and agreements. Furthermore, it would benefit European investors and companies eager to enter into business on the Iranian market.

Regarding the issue of international terrorism, the EU should work with Gulf States on the creation of an effective authority against the funding of terrorism. Such an authority could investigate the funding of terrorist groups, provide reports and thereby both ease tensions between Gulf States and establish an index of countries with whom Member States should not maintain economic ties. Moreover, the EU should forbid arms deals of Member States to countries of the Persian Gulf in order to prevent tendencies of an arms race between the GCC and Iran. There should be an EU memorandum to renounce from arms deliveries to any party.

The Trump Effect Undermines Two-State Solution

Ever since Donald Trump took office, Israel has been empowered to approve more settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The settlements disregard the UNSC resolution 2334 of December 2016, which calls for an end of Israeli settlements in occupied territories and stresses the importance of a two-state solution.

Paris hosted the Conference for Peace in the Middle East in January. While this can be seen as the EU's endeavour to restart the political process of talks and negotiations, the success must be called into question as neither Israel nor the Palestinian Authority attended. The EU's soft power on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still far inferior in comparison to the influence the US has as the key intermediary. However, as the Trump administration has spoken of the possibility to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which would significantly hamper the prospect of a two-state solution due to the importance of Jerusalem to both Israelis and Palestinians, the EU could assume a stronger role by neutrally positioning itself between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

In April, the EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, along with ministers from Cyprus, Italy and Greece signed a preliminary agreement with Israel's Energy Minister which foresees the construction of the longest and deepest natural gas pipeline, to be completed by 2025. The project aims at reducing the EU's dependence on energy imports from Russia and will cost around \$7 billion (Reed 2017). Regardless of the EU's plan to import gas from Israel's large Leviathan gas field, the deal has caused criticism by Palestinian activists accusing the EU of a clandestine approval of the Israeli sea blockade off Palestine's coast and its indifference towards the energy crisis in the Gaza strip (Gostoli 2017).

The EU has repeatedly reiterated that settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law. However, the iterations fail to impact the Israel's continuous policy of building settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

In order to reiterate its support for a two-state solution, the EU should link trade agreements with Israel to provisions. In response to violations of international law by the Israeli settlements in occupied territories, the EU could consider demanding that Israel cease the construction of illegal settlements.

Furthermore, the EU should make an effort to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process amid the US' uncertain stance on how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Assuming a more decisive role could

mean regular peace talks held by the EU and a more decisive role in the mediation process between the conflicting parties.

Moreover, the EU should consider offering post-conflict assistance to the conflicting parties. Such assistance could include viable solutions that would eliminate existing concerns and could propose post-conflict security agreements for areas such as the Jordan valley, where Member States could join an international force to monitor any illegal military or terrorist activity. Furthermore, the EU could offer its custodianship over soft water sources in the West Bank in order to ensure fair access regardless of nationality.

SOURCES:

Aljazeera (2017). EU leaders ink deal to stem refugee flow from Libya. [online] Available at: <http://http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/02/eu-leaders-ink-deal-stem-refugee-flow-libya-170203151643286.html> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Aljazeera (2017). Iran: Missile tests not in violation of nuclear deal. [online] Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/iran-missile-tests-violation-nuclear-deal-170131103418904.html> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

BBC (2017). Saudi-led bloc modifies demands to end Qatar crisis. [online] Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40654023> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Beaumont, P. (2017) Emboldened by Trump, Israel pushes on with East Jerusalem settlement plans. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/03/israel-plans-new-settlement-east-jerusalem> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Council of the EU (2017) Council adopts conclusion on Yemen. [online] Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/de/press/press-releases/2017/04/03-fac-conclusions-yemen/> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

European External Action Service (2017). Extract of the remarks by HR/VP Federica Mogherini on the EU Strategy on Syria at the European Parliament [online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/26257/%20Extract%20of%20the%20remarks%20by%20HR/VP%20Federica%20Mogherini%20on%20the%20EU%20Strategy%20on%20Syria%20at%20the%20European%20Parliament Accessed on 29 July 2017.

European External Action Service (2017) Mogherini in Russia for 'open and frank' dialogue with Minister Lavrov. [online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/25091/mogherini-russia-%E2%80%98open-and-frank%E2%80%99-dialogue-minister-lavrov_en

Accessed on 26 July 2017.

European External Action Service (2017). EUBAM Libya Initial Mapping Report Executive Summary. Working document of the European External Action Service of 24/01/2017.

European External Action Service (2016) About EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM) [online] Available at: https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eubam-libya/3859/about-eu-border-assistance-mission-libya-eubam_en Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Gostoli, Y. (2017) Israel-Europe gas deal sparks criticism. Aljazeera. [online] Available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/israel-europe-gas-deal-sparks-criticism-170411073907336.html> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Jaffe, G. / Entous A. (2017) Trump ends covert CIA program to arm anti-Assad rebels in Syria, a move sought by Moscow. Washington Post [online] Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-ends-covert-cia-program-to-arm-anti-assad-rebels-in-syria-a-move-sought-by-moscow/2017/07/19/b6821a62-6beb-11e7-96ab-5f38140b38cc_story.html?utm_term=.1c06cd3dbdae Accessed on 29 July 2017.

McVeigh, K. (2017) [online] Refugee women and children 'beaten, raped and starved in Libyan hellholes'. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/28/refugee-women-and-children-beaten-raped-and-starved-in-libyan-hellholes> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kazakhstan (2017). Factsheet on on the Astana Process. [online] Available at: <http://www.mfa.kz/en/content-view/kratkaa-spravka-po-astaninskomu-processu> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty (2017). Fifth Round Of Syria Peace Talks Under Way In Astana.[online] Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/syria-astana-talks-continue-sdf-breaches-raqqa-wall/28595257.html> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Reed, J. (2017) Israel signs pipeline deal in push to export gas to Europe. Financial Times. [online] Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/78ff60ca-184c-11e7-a53d-df09f373be87> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Reuters (2017). France's Macron says sees no legitimate successor to Syria's Assad. [online] Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-france-idUSKBN19C2E7> Accessed on 29 July 2017.

Wintour, P. (2017). Boris Johnson signals shift in UK policy on Syria's Assad. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/26/boris-johnson-signals-shift-in-uk-policy-on-syria-bashar-al-assad> Accessed on 29 July 2017.



Russia and Eastern Europe

AUTHOR: KINGA JAROMIN

With the rise of Donald Trump as a president of the United States, many were expecting a shift in the US – Russia relations, which would have an enormous impact on the EU relations with Russia and Eastern Europe. However, even if desired by the new US administration, a more open policy towards Russia has not been feasible due to a number of reasons, including alleged Russian meddling in US elections and possible knowledge about it of the Trump's aides. While investigation in this regard has been undertaken, the US relations with Russia, in fact, deteriorated, resulting in ceasing some of the Russian diplomatic missions in the US, expelling American diplomats from Russia and in new US sanctions against Russia.

The situation on the EU's eastern flank remained difficult and was mainly determined by the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis with keeping Russia and Belarus on distance and struggling for introducing reforms in Ukraine and Moldova. Although some interesting abnormalities were observable in Russia and Belarus relations and domestic situation (democratic protests) of these countries, with time they disappeared and status quo has prevailed. In Russia, which has been preparing the ground for the presidential elections in 2018, even more freedom-restricting tendencies have been observed, slowly pushing the country into a more and more authoritarian regime. At the same time, in Ukraine the reforms are being slowly undertaken, combined with a number of decisions that aim to limit the presence of Russian interests in the country. In the Republic of Moldova, such a presence has been emphasised by the election of a new president, who presents very pro-Russian and anti-EU views.

No shift in relations with Russia

The first appearance of the US ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, in February 2017 was a strong stand on the situation in Ukraine, as she excluded the possibility of lifting the sanctions towards Russia until it withdraws from the annexed Crimean peninsula. It was to the relief of many European allies, who were afraid of a changing US stand on this issue that could result in destroying also the united European approach to sanctions. However, with the clear direction presented by the US, Europeans managed to regularly prolong the sanctions, despite the repeated voices indicating the necessity of lifting them from a number of public figures or national politicians. The European leaders, despite not always agreeing in the field of foreign policy, seems to realise that the unity in case of Ukraine is necessary and is a demonstration that aggressive measures of foreign policy cannot be accepted. Even Prime Minister Orban from Hungary, whose ties with Putin flourish, did not decide to block the renewal of the sanctions at any point.

Other than that, the EU-Russia relations or the situation in Russia did not change significantly, although some interesting developments could have been observed in the country. Slowly, during a couple of months, the Russian legislators introduced a number of policies, reducing the citizens' freedoms, which included banning the Jehovah Witnesses Church and Open Russia organisation, adopting a law establishing a registration of all the mobile SIM cards and banning the anonymity of the messenger accounts and the anonymizers in the internet. This increased grasp on the people's privacy and freedoms

is likely to be a preparation for the upcoming presidential elections planned for 18 March 2018, the national holiday, the Day of the Reunification of Crimea with Russia. It is a very powerful signal to Russian people and it indicates that Vladimir Putin attempts to make out of these elections his great success.

One of the factors that may hamper this plan is Alexei Navalny who is running a peculiar presidential campaign. Although ruled out from the elections in a result of a suspended five-year jail sentence he received in a fraud case (that he claims to be politically motivated), he continues campaigning focusing mostly on investigating cases of high-level corruption. One of such investigations, concerning Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, resulted in protests against corruption on 26 March 2017, which were held in more than 80 cities in Russia. The second wave of the protests, held on 12 June 2017, had much more political character and was organised under the slogan “We are fed up!” and vowed for the resignation of Putin. On each occasion, hundreds of people have been detained, including the organiser of the protests, Alexei Navalny. These developments deserve attention not only because they were the biggest civil unrest since the 2011 elections protests but also because they attracted an unusually high number of young and very young people (teenagers), the generation that does not remember any other than Putin's rule. Another interesting feature was that the protests were held in a high number of cities all over Russia, which demonstrates that Navalny's work in the regions may bring some results. Besides the political protests, a number of other manifestations took place in Russia, concerning for example, the truck drivers' opposition to a new road tax or local authorities' plan to demolish a great number of Soviet-era buildings in Moscow. The civil unrest, especially the politically motivated one is treated seriously by the authorities, which could have been observed by the measures taken by police investigators or even schools to deal with the youth joining the protests.

The protests and the activity of Navalny present an interesting phenomenon, which can have important results in the future but most likely will not be able to shake Putin's power until the next presidential elections. Despite Western sanctions and low energy prices, the Russian political system functions well and is still able to suppress the signs of protest from the society. Therefore, given that Vladimir Putin will be elected for another presidential term, the EU should expect rocky relations with Russia in the years to come. Especially the limited economic relations may be a problem for a number of European exporters who perceive Russia as a natural destination for their products. In order for the EU to contain their dissatisfaction, it may seek to open other trading possibilities and therefore to re-orientate the EU away from Russia in search for other partners in the long-term. However, as Russia is and will stay the biggest neighbour of the EU, the communication channels should remain open, especially in fields of youth, education, science and other less conflicting issues in order to re-establish the mutual good relations at any favourable moment.

East-West fight in Eastern Europe

Belarus is the country with the least EU influence and very strong presence of Russia. For a couple of weeks in the first half of the year, it seemed that some new opportunities are opening for the EU due to the civil society protests and the country's conflict with Russia, which broke out after Belarus introduced a five-days visa-free regime for a dozens of countries and Russia decided to introduce checks on the common border. At the same time, the civil society undertook protests against the so-called social parasite task, which required an additional tax payment from people who did not manage to work for an indicated period of time in a year. It was a very unusual development for Belarus, especially that at first President Lukashenka acted rather amicably and decided to suspend the payment of the tax. However, the continuing protests with increased demands, also political ones, were finally suppressed. The conflict over the border with Russia and another one regarding the oil and gas prices has also been resolved, for now, confirming the status quo, that is the Belarussian dependency on Russia.

In the meantime, Ukraine kept very good relations with the EU and moved forward on the path of reforms, gaining the visa-free regime that was granted on 11 May 2017 and the final approval of the Association Agreement exactly two months later. The situation, however, is far from perfect and

oligarchic and political conflicts, demonstrated lately by the Poroshenko – Saakashvili battle over the Ukrainian passport of the latter, remain a ‘normality’. Moreover, a trend of limiting Russian influence in the country was observable. The authorities took a number of measures, including banning from Ukraine Russian Internet giants such as Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki, Mail.ru and Yandex and introducing sanctions on Russian banks operating in Ukraine. Such measures aim to increase the national security of Ukraine but the critics claim they were introduced very late and their timing suggests they are used to divert attention from the low corruption fighting record.

Moreover, we should not forget that the Ukraine still deals with the war in the eastern part of the country and is in a dispute with Russia over the annexation of Crimea. In the last three years, not much has been achieved in regard to change of this state of affairs and it is likely that the Ukraine will be engaged in such a protracted conflict for the years to come. In theory, it does not hinder the reformative progress, which can even be a way of a peaceful resolution of this issue in case the quality of life in Ukraine will improve dramatically in comparison to separatist regions. However, taking other examples from the post-soviet region, such a scenario is not very likely. The actions taken by the Ukrainians authorities aiming at separating the conflicting regions, like introducing the trade blockade of the separatist territories amid the growing political pressure can lose the Ukraine's connection with the regions and impede the possible future reintegration. The official position of the EU is that the conflict should be solved based on the Minsk Agreement, which comes not without a pressure from Germany and France, who were behind negotiating this accord. The Minsk Agreement, however, is ineffective and other ways are needed if we want to hope for any resolution of this dispute.

Moldova, after Ukraine, is another example where the EU and Russia compete for influence. It has become even more obvious with the presidential elections of 2016 and the victory of Igor Dodon, a highly pro-Russian candidate. At the same time, the government of Moldova is officially pro-European, which produced a number of clashes, especially in the attitude towards the EU and to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). During his first visit to Moscow, President Dodon made some controversial promises, including withdrawing from the Association Agreement with the EU or recognising the Transnistrian gas debt, which was then quickly denied by the government. Although in the Moldovan system the role of a president is not very strong and he does not have many prerogatives, Dodon's claims alone are enough to bring the Russian perspective to the Moldovan political agenda with great strength. His actions strengthen the old 'West or East' conflict, for new bringing the issue of geopolitics into the Moldovan public opinion while distracting it from the real problems like low quality of life, massive emigration and corruption. What is interesting, in other cases, like introducing the majority voting system, which is a direct threat to the democratic parliamentary elections in 2018, the 'pro-European' Democratic Party that is leading the government and Socialist Party of President Dodon were voting alike, prompting some experts to point out that the 'West or East' narrative is used to sway attention away from the state capture carried out by oligarch Vlad Plahotniuc, chairman of the Democratic Party. In such a situation and without a strong reaction of the EU, which is in fact supporting the current government, the situation in Moldova is likely to remain the same: with a high level of emigration and corruption.

Flaws and hopes in relations with Eastern Europe

It is important to note that the EU's bad relationship with Russia in the upcoming time that we have mentioned earlier will have a great impact on the EU's engagement in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Western Balkans, which Russia deems as its regions of influence to some degree. Firstly, Russia will fight to limit EU influence in these regions with even more force in order to disrupt the EU reforms and grow the anti-EU sentiment, using, for example, propaganda measures, both through Russian speaking media with big influence and through the networks of diaspora, associations and foundations established in such countries. Another tool is Russian economic influence manifested in the ownership of companies of strategic importance, which can be used for a direct influence on the authorities of some countries.

Such 'partisan' methods reflect the Russian foreign policy's strength in engaging all the possible measures that are useful to reach the ending goal. They also are an example of the Russian 'soft' power in some countries based on cultural ties and common history and are very difficult for the EU to neutralise. They demand much stronger engagement in the region of influence, the investment in strong local speaking pro-European media that can combat the anti-EU propaganda, and investment in networks of people, who will carry on the EU message. We cannot forget that in the region of Eastern Europe the EU is something new, an unusual player, which does not possess enough recognition, background and networks comparing to Russians after years of functioning of the Soviet Union. The EU must only create those, which it does for example by investing in local youth, which however is a long-term process. More can be done. The EU funds directed to Eastern European countries should be invested more directly in people, in their education, especially about the opportunities and their rights, improvement of the quality of life, more tangible and visible help that is able to shift the public opinion in favour of the EU. It should also stronger invest in the civil society in order to build powerful support for ideas of democracy, freedom, transparency, etc. Instead, for now, a great deal of the EU funds that reach the government budgets and is administered by local politicians faces embezzlement due to high levels of corruption. In the result, the 'EU money' contribute to a bad situation in the country, which makes the EU and 'accomplice' of corrupted politicians in the eyes of the population, as we can see on the example of the Republic of Moldova, where the support for the EU decreases together with the new corruption scandals and protests against them.

The proper engagement that would be able to seriously limit the Russian influence in the region would come with very high costs and require a significant shift in the approach to the EU assistance. Therefore, it is not feasible in the near future. However, even within the limited budget, the EU can change its approach and direct the funds only to areas where they have the highest impact and have more control over the funds allocated to countries' budgets. Another important step would be to strengthen the rule of conditionality, which guarantees further assistance only in case the previous targets have been truly reached. Currently, especially in the Moldovan example, we can see that this rule does not work properly, resulting in the EU supporting the corrupted government and even partially funding a state capture.

Lastly, we cannot forget that in case of Russia – EU competition in the region, the EU is in the worse position. For Russians the key to influence in the region is to give elites what they want, that is money and power, which is a fairly easy task. The EU's task is much more difficult because it encompasses the empowerment of the usual citizen, who was never fully empowered in this region. Without investing a great deal of money and high-quality expertise the EU will never be able to reach this goal. In fact, it does not even attempt now. It rather concentrates on keeping the countries in the EU orbit artificially, not functionally taking over the Russian approach to the region and pleasing the elites. Such policy not only can be treated as a breach of the EU values but, most probably, is counter-effective to the EU's goals.

The challenging situation in the region demands from the EU officials more creative thinking and more flexible approach if we hope to improve the situation. The so-far engagement with Russia and with the Eastern Partnership countries should be carefully evaluated in order to identify the new challenges that appeared after 2014 (like increased Russian propaganda directed to EU and its members) and the errors committed in the previous years of the Eastern Partnership programme (that contribute to the local pathologies instead of combating them). Such a scenario is however hardly likely, as the EU for now is focusing on resolving its internal problems pushing away the consideration of its foreign policy for a more favourable moment.

SOURCES:

Text based on the sources from the EU Foreign Policy Monthly Overviews: <https://www.eu-foreignpolicy.com/monthly-overviews/>



Turkey and Caucasus

AUTHOR: FEDERICO SALVATI

Since the end of the last year a great number of events shook the status quo on the international scene. The Trump administration, the activation of the art. 50 of the Lisbon Treaty by the UK, the French election and many other events appeared as game changers in a world (especially in the West) that seems more and more fragmented. The last months, anyway forced us to face a discourse on the condition and the directions of the EU model (and the Western liberal model in general) that has been postponed for far too long now. While the end of the cold war represented the triumph of the post-war American liberalism on Soviet socialism as an organisational paradigm, it is not a secret today that this victory did not lead to the unification of the international system under the banner of democracy and free market just like Fukuyama and his followers had foreseen.

While this is today an established point in any international relations scholarly debate, it is more arduous to understand what instead the future has in stock for the international liberal order. From the concept of multiple modernities to the one of zero-polarity, up to the idea of multipolarity, a great number of scholars seem to identify, however, under different circumstances and under different conditions, fragmentation and regionalisation trend in the international system. This phenomenon is not new and it has its origins in the cold war itself and long could be debated on its historical origins as well. Only lately though we started fully comprehending at what extent the development of parallel structures and alternative models to the Western one can actually claim their independence in operating and existing outside the liberal international system. More simply put, while we naively thought our model was a necessary condition for the international system to survive and to function properly, now we have to admit that we were far too optimistic on this point and the liberal model starts to look more and more just like another actor in the collective arena.

Turkish drift towards autocracy

We can understand this idea if we analyse Europe's eastern flank situation. Russia and Turkey being more and more assertive towards the EU in their relations have started to undermine the EU regional power and the results obtained in many years of external policies. President Erdogan, in particular, demonstrated a rapid drift towards a more dictatorial model of ruling based on conservative Turkish cultural values and a personalistic leadership. It is very clear by now that the Ankara political representatives have adopted a hostile rhetoric and provocative terms towards some European countries. This couples with a foreign agenda presented by Turkey that tries to exploit that EU connection without complying with any of the standards. The situation influenced to a certain extent also the Caucasus region even if as we are going to see this region is following more a slow paced political trend that has been on this track for a long time now. The situation anyway remains incredibly complex, uncertain and in need for close scrutiny in order to understand the actual direction that the theatre is taking.

As the summer holidays have come to an end there is no better moment to analyse the Turkish situation. Basically, the Turkish failed coup took place little more than a year ago now. In consequence of the coup, the country plunged into a scenario of repression and unjustifiable state violence. Because of this,

the relations between Ankara and Brussels took a quick downturn that brought them in a few months to an all-time-low level.

The democratic situation in the country was already compromised by the time of the coup. After that, establishing of special powers for the government and the state of emergency dragged the nation into an illiberal spiral that is still unfolding. The state acts without substantial accountability. The wave of preventive and punitive arrests continues and those opposing Erdogan's regime have to face either jail or unemployment. As a culmination point of this process, this year saw the approval of a constitutional reform that meant to centre the power in the hands of the president, de facto undermining the checks and balances of the Turkish institutional system. At first, the stark opposition of Erdogan against the military powers was welcomed among some commentators in the EU. It seemed that concentrating the power in the hands of the civic institutions could have brought forward the democratisation process. Instead, it seems that Turkey transformed into a hybrid-regime just like Russia, with a strong man at its lead and an opposition that is incapable to produce a credible alternative because it is internally divided and externally persecuted.

Shift in Turkey relations with the EU and other partners

The above-mentioned events resulted in a massive shift in the EU - Turkish relations, which produced a realignment of the international order and it is likely to have extended consequences in the long run that might change the power balance in more than one region.

What is happening in Turkey in this moment, however, goes beyond a friend of foe logic in regard to the EU. At the same time, it is true that we might have to accept that the Turkish position is now of a competitive nature in relation to the EU liberal model.

Nowadays, Turkey together with countries like Azerbaijan, Hungary, Russia and China remains a subject that is actively rejecting and antagonising the political bases of the European model. The principles of rule of law and political responsibility that are at the base of our European democracy are not a main concern of the Turkish government, which keeps claiming an alleged legitimacy for its actions based on identity politics, cultural relativity arguments and a distorted understanding of the Western principles. As a corollary to this internal attitude, during the last months, we have assisted to a progressive radicalisation of the rhetoric used by Erdogan and its government in the diplomatic relations with the EU. In a matter of a few weeks, over the clashes and the disagreement on Turkey constitutional referendum, Ankara has spoiled its relations with first Germany and then with Austria and the Netherlands. We all remember the unqualified comments released by president Erdogan on the Germans being Nazis and the similar tones used to refer to the Dutch and Austrian political leadership. To this must be added a new hostility towards Greece, as a consequence of new failures in the solution of the Cyprus question. Seen the situation, the halt of the negotiation process was inevitable. The accusation in conjunction with the illiberal push could not have any other result but a rupture between Ankara and Brussels. Although serious, this situation is not the definite end of the EU negotiation process for Turkey but the negotiations are not likely to resume anytime soon either.

The same key can be used reading the relations with NATO. First, the reckless confrontation with the Russians and then the awkward closeness with the Kremlin have demonstrated the opportunistic character of Turkey's foreign policy. The Turkish presence in NATO has been characterised by an awkward coexistence with the other allies that has the potential to paralyse the action of the alliance.

If we look back, however, we realise that such a turn was not unexpected. We can remember for instance the 2012 veto of Turkey on the EU participation to NATO summits or the 2014 decision of Ankara to not participate in the Russian sanctions, signalling of what is the culmination of Ankara's strategy today. Despite these differences, Turkey is not likely to be excluded from NATO, however, the lack of democracy in Turkey could lead to a suspension in the NATO bodies. The strategic implications, instead,

sound more worrisome. The enmity between Turkey and the allies might come to mean a political realignment in the Middle East quadrant, in central Asia and in the relations with Russia.

New realities in EU – Turkey relations

The EU, in all of this, appears in a very weak position. A strong response against the dictatorial drift that Turkey has taken would estrange a potential ally that will probably not go down the same path forever. At the same time, a weak response highlights the progressive loss of power of the EU normative model. It is a conundrum from which is difficult to escape. This comes in a moment when the EU itself is facing an internal crisis of legitimacy attacked by the Brexit, the (failing) Polish judiciary reform and the Hungarian illiberal policies.

During the last months, on the contrary we have seen unfolding pretty clearly Erdogan's agenda towards the EU. These could be reassumed in:

1. Revision of the custom union relations

Turkey has a customs union that needs to be modernised. Both the EU and Ankara agree on this but the increasingly difficult political situation makes the revision impossible.

2. Relief for the internal labour market stressed by the immigrant crisis through visa liberalisation

This relates to the negotiation process and the migration agreement. Turkey is seeking a greater economic advantage from the relation with the EU.

3. Integration of the energy cooperation

Finally, the energy integration and the role of Turkey as an energy hub. This is the one thing that would allow Turkey to have more power leverage and to achieve a matching role in the relations with the EU.

Now it is time for the EU to take into consideration a new attitude towards Ankara. The crisis should demonstrate to the entire world that the EU has still political power and “denial capabilities”. The relations with Turkey should roll out of the table the negotiation process for the moment until a new course is established in Turkish relations. At the same time, the EU should keep working on bilateral partnership on the grounds of the main Turkish political interests just mentioned above. This will demonstrate that it is possible to have a functional cooperation with the EU without membership aspiration. At the same time, it must be clear that an ad hoc cooperation does not imply access to the privileges that other countries have on the basis of a full cooperation based on shared values and common political visions (mobility agreements on top of it).

At the same time, we must not underestimate the capacity of Turkey to affect the EU. Turkey funds political parties and religious movements in Germany, Bulgaria, the Netherlands and other countries. This alleged fifth column, united with the Turkish minorities that have overwhelmingly supported Erdogan constitutional reform, is likely to demonstrate some kind of influence in the future in the internal political debate and decision making of the single Union countries.

To speak the truth, it is worth noticing that today the ordinary Turkish man does not seem to have any vision of the EU. This represents the deep root cause to the rupture that we see today between Ankara and Brussels. Such circumstance might have a two-fold explanation. On the one hand, it may stem from governmental policies targeted to enhance nationalistic sentiments. On the other hand, it results from the way the membership negotiations have been conducted so far, making the EU membership a topic only for the political elite. Turkey keeps saying that is tired of bending backward for joining the Union

but at this point, we do not see the opportunity for an expansion anyway since the EU is too weak for dealing with it.

Turkey pivoting away from the transatlantic world is a new reality that the EU has to address. The country started buying its defence mechanisms from China and Russia. So far, the NATO and the EU have considered this behaviour to be just a bargaining chip Ankara wanted to develop in order to negotiate better commercial conditions and a move-on in the membership process. Today instead, scholars and commentators, like the German expert Constanze Stelzenmueller, start to fear that this might symbolise a switch in the strategic alignment of Ankara.

If Turkey will not be a European state it should at least stay an EU buffer zone. The Turkish society has still secular EU friendly component and the EU should keep supporting it as much as needed both economically and politically. The EU should help the opposition in generating a credible opposition. The largest opposition parties of the national scene are still consistently pro EU and they may represent the last hope for the resumption for the resumption of the country democratisation process.

EU and the Caucasus

The Caucasus, being formed by three squabbling minor powers, is unlikely to change its major long-term courses abruptly. This does not mean that the last months were bereft of any political significance for the region. On the contrary, 2017 has been the year that saw the completion of alignment processes that have started as far as 2013. We have now a region that is inherently divided under different patronages and external influences, in a situation highly volatile because of its protracted conflict situations and mounting militarisation.

The big break through this year has been definitively the obtainment by the Georgians of the visa free regime. Unlike the Turks, the Georgians have demonstrated eagerness to participate to the European process. Their enthusiasm holds us all accountable for improving and moving further our European project. Still, the Georgian society needs to demonstrate to deserve this concession in time. Despite that Georgia remains definitely the most politically progressive country in the region, Georgian society is still far from European standards of human rights and rule of law. Shadows of instability as well appeared in this country. The situation with the modernisation of the South Ossetia conflict proceeds slowly but surely without any possible means for to limit the phenomenon. The issue is highly sensitive for the Georgian government which keeps bringing it up in the international arena. An overstretch of this issue though is producing an effect of the “boy crying wolf” which delegitimises the reliability of Georgian claims in the Russian invasion.

Another development worth noticing is the growing nationalist resentment in the society. It could be that the pace the Georgian society is changing with might be a bit too quick for a part of the population. There has been a recent rally of nationalist groups that vaguely resembled the situation in Ukraine. It should be carefully observed how the situation is going to evolve because this could turn out to be a minor internal temporary disorder or a social factor to reckon with.

As for Armenia, the new government elected this year do not prospect any major changing in the foreign policy. In March, chief negotiators and lead trade negotiators for the European Union and Armenia have initialled the text of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. This was the milestone for starting the Armenia EU rapprochement we have waited for. New channels for Armenia and the EU will be created to cooperate in a number of fields from energy to trade to social development. The country needs mobility and diversification and the EU channel will be able to offer both. It seems clear by now that the huge dependency on Russia does not curb the exodus of the young generation, does not make up for the huge unemployment rates of the country and does not create the necessary development for Yerevan to stand on its feet as a nation. The dependency from the Armenian diaspora remains very high and not always the policy lines of the government phase with the position of the diaspora.

A structural problem persists in Armenian politics. This is the fact that very few items make it to the political agenda of the country if they are not connected with security issues. The situation in the Nagorno-Karabakh remains steadily unstable. It does not seem to get any better while the government of Armenia and Azerbaijan keep exchanging accusation about the contact line incident almost daily. The situation for the Karabakh is unlikely to change in the future and even if the tension is palpable and the volatility is higher than it was a few years ago.

Azerbaijan on its hand demonstrated a reinforcement of its isolation condition. The country has abandoned the perspective of democratisation. Baku is pursuing a strong policy of country promotion abroad through well-paid spin-doctors and lobbyists without considering that the higher level of attention in the nation could backfire in case of its situation with human rights and rule of law. The steady revenue coming from the oil and gas exportation and the future perspective of the new TAP pipeline have made this country more and more estranged from Europe. The little nation resembles more a central Asian country than a European one, with the nomination of the president wife for a governmental role created on purpose for her and the corruption level at all-time high.

A systemic incarceration of opposition, critics, and journalists could have been observed lately. The situation has worsened after the Turkish dictatorial shift. Civil society and the international community have denounced the scenario but this did not bring any effect since the country has severed most of the political connections with the western powers, leaving the EU with very little leverage.

The EU should be reasonable at this point about the possible achievements of its foreign policy in the region. Georgia is clearly a success story at this point and the weak relations with Armenia still allow the promotion of a multivectoral geopolitical order in the region in order to prevent Russia's hegemony. The EU should concentrate on the consolidation of the EU values (especially rule of law and human rights) and the stabilization of the regional conflicts.

The negotiation platform used for this purpose has proven in all cases to be extremely ineffective. The Nagorno conflict does not even have a crisis prevention mechanism and that could actually make the difference in the escalation that we are seeing unfolding. As much as a reform is needed any possible action has been delayed so far single member states looks unwilling to yield their primary role in the negotiation process.

Azerbaijan wants to maintain its relations exclusively economics and in this case, just like in the Turkish one the EU should keep up a cooperation on the matters of interest closing the chapters for everything else, preventing so the country from any further benefit. It is likely that Azerbaijan will opt for a greater isolation condition in order to enhance more and more the personalistic dictatorship of the president. As harsh that it seems might be a waste of resources trying to engage further in the country when the oil revenues give to the regime total autonomy on its foreign policy.

SOURCES:

EU External Service, "Important step forward in EU-Armenia relations as bilateral agreement is initialled" https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/23150/Important%20step%20forward%20in%20EU-Armenia%20relations%20as%20bilateral%20agreement%20is%20initialled Last access 31/07/2017

Eliamep: "EU-Turkey relations from a Greek perspective" <https://goo.gl/DDmpr4> Last access 31/07/2017

Kuneralp, S. "Turkey-EU Relations: Past, Present – and Future?" <https://eu.boell.org/en/2017/05/02/turkey-eu-relations-past-present-and-future> Last access 31/07/2017

RFERL, Anti-Immigration Protest Held In Tbilisi <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-tbilisi-rally/28618102.html> Last access 31/07/2017



Western Balkans

AUTHOR: ALEKSANDRA STANKOVIC

As we could have seen in the first half of 2017, except the common history, mentality and the same or similar language, the countries of the Western Balkans have much more in common. That is the critical economic situation, dissatisfaction with the political system, low incomes, poor living standards, ethnicity problems, which lead to disorder, tensions within the population and the political and geographical domestic divisions. Due to close historical ties and the same religion, Russia has its influence in the Balkans and it takes advantage of it when confronting the West. There is a pro-European and pro-Russian division in the region, that leads to growing political tensions. In the meantime, Balkan countries are dealing with a disappointment with the EU caused by the lack of perspectives for the EU membership in the foreseeable future.

Tensions in the Balkans

In the last months, we observed a number of tensions and problems in the domestic politics of Balkan countries, including the recent presidential elections in the Republic of Serbia, the unsuccessful start of the presidential elections in Albania and demonstrations in the Republic of Macedonia concerning the formation of the new government. Each of the three mentioned countries had to deal with the dissatisfaction of their people, political division and demonstrations.

For the Republic of Macedonia forming a new government was a major difficulty. The division between a pro-European fraction of the country led by Zoran Zaev's and Nikola Gruevski's supporters oriented on Russia was clearly visible as these forces were battling for many months for the power over the country. Making the decision on its own, without the acceptance of the President and declaring the Speaker of Parliament led Zoran Zaev's action to violent demonstrations in the country. Moreover, the question of Albanian minority and its representation by political parties has appeared on the agenda as they were a necessary component of the future government.

In the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vucic won the presidential elections with a majority above 50% of votes. The dissatisfaction of the opposition as well as of the voters who voted differently have led to protests, which lasted a couple of days. What the protesters still fear is the Aleksandar Vucic's potential grip on power which can lead to a more authoritarian state. During the presidential elections, he received a wide coverage in the media, just like the members of his party do on a usual basis together with other benefits. That is why a growing number of people with difficult living conditions decide to join his party, in the hope of improving their quality of life. On the other hand, he stands for the EU membership, reforms, further developments, investments, good relations, more jobs and better incomes and his authority is strongly reflected in Serbian politics and in the everyday life.

As well as Republics of Serbia and Macedonia, Albania also had some problems in announcing the date of presidential elections. The Prime Minister of Albania did not nominate a candidate in the first round. This action was his way of demonstration to show that a dialogue with the opposition is necessary.

Besides all these recent issues that may prove the weaknesses of the political system and civil society, we cannot forget that the countries of the region are also dealing with some ethnic differences, which are known through the years. The Republic of Macedonia is dealing with Albanian minorities. Between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic Srpska, there are long-standing animosities and through decades Serbia is in a conflict with Albanians in Kosovo.

Current problems – consequences of historical ones

What is the main reason for the very similar problems in each country of the region is their similar history. Throughout history, countries of the Western Balkans were united. During the period and existence of Yugoslavia, they were a part of an important international actor. But after the perpetual president Josip Broz Tito passed away, contretemps between the nations started and were followed by the breakup of Yugoslavia. A significant power, which Yugoslavia indeed was, left behind only a few small, economically poor and politically unstable countries troubled by ethnic and religious animosities and misunderstandings. Some countries of Western Balkans experienced the war and after almost 20 years the consequences and losses are still perceptible.

The history is essential for the current condition of the Balkans and its remarkable consequences are still present today. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the war brought many losses. The economy broke up and is unstable until today. The war took away many lives and destroyed many towns and villages, with some buildings and houses still not reconstructed. The living conditions are difficult as the prices are high and incomes low and the societies face unemployment and low wages. This leads to an increased migration, which deprives Balkan countries from talented and mostly young people. We can also observe political divisions, dissatisfaction, thirst for a change, already mentioned problems with ethnicities and bad relationships with neighbouring states. Each country of the Western Balkans desperately needs to improve its standards and living conditions and the EU membership represents for them an excellent option to resolve all the mentioned problems and is an important goal to accomplish. Serbia and Montenegro are two countries that are already engaged in membership negotiations. Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina are registered as potential applicants, and the European Council approved Albania's application - which makes Albania a "candidate country". To be a member of the EU each country should follow the reform path towards the EU so the conditions for an EU-entry would be fulfilled..

What has to be done in respect to the reform path toward the EU? First of all, it is necessary for the inter-state border to be defined. Only in that way the neighbourly relationships could be clarified and improved. Having good relationships with neighbourhood states could also mean reducing the ethnic divisions. Here it would be important to build more connections and to have more understanding. This could bring us to the next step, namely the preservation of peace and stability in the region. Some long-standing issues could be resolved through the development of economic relations, more economic, bilateral and educational cooperation in the region. Here is where the idea of the common market in the Western Balkans comes up, which – as the EU officials hope – could be established by mid-2018. It is not only the first step to an increased integration of the region and the 'preparation' for functioning in the EU single market in the future but also a tool aiming at reducing the dissatisfaction with the low possibility of the EU integration in the close future. The unwelcome atmosphere for the EU enlargement, caused by the number of internal problems the EU struggles with is a clear sign for the whole neighbourhood that the EU membership is not a short-term perspective. The EU clearly sees it as a problem and the possibility of reducing its transformative power over the neighbourhood and in case of the Balkans, it puts a lot of effort to prevent such a scenario. The Balkan common market could be a project that will keep the countries engaged in the EU-style reforms until the enlargement will be

possible again. However, some fear that the common market can be a replacement of the actual EU membership.

The EU officials claim that such fears are unfounded and that the EU membership doors keep being open for the Balkan countries. And that is the right approach. As a European crossroad, the Western Balkans have an important geopolitical impact and could make a great contribution to the EU in the fields of trade, transport, agriculture and tourism. As a very specific and unique ethnicity, the Western Balkans could contribute to the European multicultural diversity with an extraordinary tradition and culture. At the same time, the Balkan countries' mutual relations could improve, which represents one of the important policies of the EU. Through the Western Balkans countries membership, the EU would reconfirm its strength, stability and the meaning of its existence.

SOURCES:

Text based on the sources from the EU Foreign Policy Monthly Overviews: <https://www.eu-foreignpolicy.com/monthly-overviews/>

Contact via:

Email: research@eu-foreignpolicy.com

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

