

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory" I.L. Caragiale

Professor Ioan Mircea Pascu: "The strength of the US system doesn't necessarily lie with making as few mistakes as possible, but more with its ability to correct itself"

His Excellency Dr. Ion Jinga, the Romanian Ambassador to the United Nations: "The speed with which the pandemic spread tested the resilience of both the UN and individual countries"

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Professor Adrian Pop: "The EU has a long way to go in order to capitalize on the vast opportunities provided by the coronavirus pandemic for strengthening its position as a global player"

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Constantin IACOBIȚĂ

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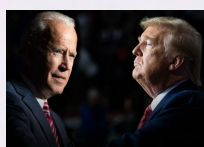
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EDITORIAL

From the Editor

Constantin IACOBÎȚĂ



Having the USA back on the international stage and re-assuming its role as a global leader once the Biden administration comes to the White House is as much expected as it looks difficult.

The survival of the nuclear agreement with Iran probably constitutes the most important stake and immediate goal for the international community, with regard to stability and security in the Middle East, as well as on a global level. It is not by chance that the signatories of the nuclear agreement with Iran met on the 21st of December 2020, to express their concern regarding Iran moving away from the commitments it had pledged to under the accord (lately, the Iranians have installed three new uranium-enriching centrifuges at its Natanz facility, and the Iranian parliament adopted a law asking the government to enhance the nuclear programme and to forbid further inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, as set by the Vienna Agreement in 2015), and to express their hope that the USA will return to the negotiating table.

The USA is also expected to quickly re-join the Paris Agreement on Climate Change signed in 2015 and take over the lead of global efforts to prevent climate changes, as it is absolutely essential to the management of crises and conflicts in various areas of the world, as well as to fending off the continuous assault led by revisionist powers on the international principles and institutions. This implies a new strategic partnership between the USA and Europeans, a partnership for which each side should be fully prepared and completely engaged in.

Nonetheless, while the Europeans are facing deepening splits – inside their societies and at the level of the Union, the USA is also going through a rough period.

The leadership of the United States is to be taken over by an administration whose legitimacy (of the future president and of the American institutions) is being weakened from the start – on one hand by the unprecedented campaign of an acting president, who has not been re-elected, to undermines and eventually turn in his favour the result of a democratic electoral process, and on the other hand by the delay of the losing party in formally acknowledging the victory of the winner of the popular and electoral votes.

The future president inherits a socially divided country that is facing a pandemic whose effects are worsening by the minute and an economy in swift decline.

Which is why the first four priorities made public recently by the transition team of the future US president are: the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery, racial equality and climate change.

Such an agenda entails and foretells that the future administration will focus on domestic issues, meaning, *America First*.

As for the USA returning to the leadership of international affairs and taking over the initiative, the agenda made public by the transition team lets us know, just as Joe Biden announced during the electoral process, that the USA would re-join the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The extent to which the Biden Administration will re-engage internationally sooner or later could be indicated by the stated willingness and in particular by the political will to return to the negotiating table on the Iranian nuclear programme. As it could be indicated by major changes in the current policies on the USA's main competitors and adversaries – China and Russia.

When it comes to Russia, which strengthens – with the help of some European countries members to both NATO and EU – its ability to leverage the Europeans through their dependency on Russian energy resources, the situation is increasingly worrisome, given the recent revelations about cyber-attacks on a number of governmental agencies and private US companies. Publicly attributed to Russia by the secretary of state and by the US attorney general, the actions have successfully targeted the Department of Energy, the State Department and at the Department of Homeland Security.

While imperative, a response from the USA will be very difficult to calibrate, taking into account the lack of a clear, unanimously accepted definition of *cyber-warfare*, as well as the need to ensure a balance between restoring the credibility of the USA and preventing escalation.

INTERNATIONAL SITUATION

Professor Ioan Mircea Pașcu: "The strength of the US system doesn't necessarily lie with making as few mistakes as possible, but more with its ability to correct itself"

The US presidential election continues to be the most important indicator of the trajectory of international relations for a period that depends on both the political colour of the winner and on his personality, as proven by Donald Trump's mandate. One of the questions that observers, analysts, experts and leaders in various domains – including political decision-makers from several countries around the globe – have tried to answer, before learning the name of the future president of the USA, was to what extent a reset of the geopolitical hour would take place, and if this is the case, what will it imply?

The meaning and implications of Joe Biden's victory in the light of the current international order, dominated by the great power competition, and especially from the perspective of the transatlantic relationships were pondered by Professor Ioan Mircea Pașcu, politician and academic with an exceptional career, in the interview offered to *Geostrategic Pulse* Magazine.



Geostrategic Pulse: Professor, you have been familiar with the United States of America and the transatlantic relationship for many years and in various capacities – at national level you have contributed to the process of institutional reform necessary for Romania's Euro-Atlantic integration (as presidential advisor, secretary of

state for defence policy, minister of defence, president of the Committee for Defence in the Chamber of Deputies etc.), while at European level you have represented the European Parliament – including as vice-president – in its relations with the USA and NATO.

From this perspective, but also from an academic perspective, we would very much appreciate your insight on the unexpected level of popular support for Donald Trump and what he represents for the Americans that have voted for him in spite of his behaviour and leadership style as president. It seems that the number of votes in favour of Trump cannot be explained only by the ongoing partisan and ideological war in the USA.

Is the level of discontent and distrust of Americans in institutions, policies and elites so high to justify the decisions – absolutely free and democratic if we may say so – to vote for a personality like Trump's?

Ioan Mircea Pașcu: It is true that in 2016 Trump won on an anti-system platform, but I do not believe we can extrapolate by saying that everyone who voted for him – both in 2016 and in 2020 – were against the system. Many related to his style and/or felt they were ignored, many had economic grievances and so on and so forth.

However, it is true that the prestige of the American institutions has been damaged during Trump's presidency. That made the president elect Joe Biden prioritize the restoration of authority and credibility of the US democracy and its institutions, by announcing important steps in that direction from the first days of his mandate.

What "lessons" should be learned by the Europeans in general and Romanians in particular, from the US presidential elections?

I think the most important "lesson" is the ability of the system to work under pandemic and while contested (even by one of the candidates). After all, this system has been working for more than two

centuries and has made America the leader of the democratic world. The strength of the US system doesn't necessarily lie with making as few mistakes as possible, but more with its ability to correct itself, in case such mistakes are made (see *Watergate*). I am confident that this will also happen now.

Joe Biden's victory comes at a time when the USA is divided and unstable, as well as economically weakened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To what extent will the new president succeed to overcome the domestic difficulties (especially bringing the Americans together) and reposition the USA as a global leader able to decisively and positively influence international stability and security, given the above as well as the complexity of the current and foreseeable challenges?

In a programmatic article published by *Foreign Affairs* in spring, Joe Biden, then a candidate, expressly underlined that America should lead again under his presidency ("Why America Must Lead Again"), starting from the premises that the United States are the anchor of the international system mostly built by them, following World War II. The fact that this mission was abandoned under Trump's presidency has brought us all today in an unpredictable world, marked by greater or smaller dangers that may become increasingly difficult to master; hence, the United States should take over once more and restore the balance in the system, based on a newly regained authority and credibility, and together with the other democratic countries. In order to achieve this, the Biden administration intends that their domestic list of priorities include, among other, rebuilding democratic institutions and the US power base, investing in education and in the health system, as well as maintaining military advances.

The transatlantic link has been subjected to a series of challenges in the four years of Republican administration, and the European capitals have long hoped for a return of Democrats to the White House. At the same time, the crisis caused by COVID-19 has come at a time of intense debate on the relevance and future of NATO, as well as on the transatlantic relationship.

On these grounds, what can you tell us about the way Washington will see and approach the transatlantic relationship during the years of Democratic administration, compared to how

the Trump administration has dealt with the EU and NATO?

As far as the transatlantic relationship is concerned, I expect the new administration will return to better feelings towards Europeans and institutions on the continent – NATO and the EU. Mr. Biden has already stated that NATO was the bedrock of the US national security and that an alliance represented more than "dollars-and-cents", opening the long awaited prospect for the USA to abandon its current point of view that the Europeans are more trade competitors than allies. Therefore, I expect the good transatlantic relations before 2016 to be restored, and closer cooperation in solving the big issues of the continent and the world.

How do you assess the impact of the implementation of EU strategic autonomy concept over the transatlantic relations?

While in the European Parliament – and I have been there enough time – I was simply overwhelmed by this "strategic autonomy" concept, while its most fervent supporters actually failed to define it at all, advancing generalities such as: "Europe must be capable of defending alone its own interests as much as it can, and, in this context, it must be capable of taking actions on its own etc. etc. etc." Recently, however, the matter became clearer when the French President Emmanuel Macron delivered a speech in front university students in a Baltic country, and solved the "mystery", claiming that the Europeans should stop buying weapons from the USA and start buying more European weapons (France's share in the European defence industry being well known...). This is what the so frequently claimed European "strategic autonomy" seems to be about...

Can we expect to see major changes in NATO's mission? What about the concept of security (on a European, allied and international level)?

With the US presidential election won by Mr. Biden, I do not believe we should expect changes in the missions of the Alliance, or even its disappearance, highly plausible should the Donald Trump have continued in the White House. His administration view started from the premise – still valid – that China has become the USA's main competitor; and NATO, created solely to counter the threat posed by the USSR/Russia, risked to become irrelevant to the interests of the US, unless it performed a tight turn from Russia to China - as main adversary. Now, things became clearer and

our expectation is to get back to the times before 2016, when the political-military cooperation between allies prevailed, not the economic confrontation. Of course, as I was saying, China will remain the USA's prime competitor, but the new administration aims for a more sophisticated approach towards this country, combining determination and cooperation and giving up the permanent confrontation on all levels promoted by the previous administration.

What could be the role of the countries on NATO's Eastern flank in this equation?

The role of the allies on NATO's Eastern flank will not change: we will face the same threats, perhaps exacerbated by the energy dimension (the large natural gas deposits recently discovered in the Black Sea and in Eastern Mediterranean), the same problems caused by Russian activism, or the dormant conflicts that can break out at any moment (see Nagorno Karabakh). In other words, *business as usual!*

Russia's annexation of Crimea, the complex situation in Ukraine, the frozen conflicts in the extended Black Sea region, the tensions between countries that have major interests in the area, they all make us look with even more concern at the regional security environment.

How does the USA perceive the continuous Russian development of offensive military capabilities in Romania's proximity (the Crimean Peninsula)?

I believe that the new American administration knows very well what happens in our region. Let's not forget that key people – such as Mr. Jim Townsend for example – who were responsible for the region before 2016 will take over as they go along, as they were the ones dealing for two years with the consequences of Russia's actions in the Black Sea and in the Eastern Mediterranean between 2014-2016.

Can the development process of the Romanian Armed Forces, to which the USA has a significant contribution, lead to a more aggressive attitude by Russia?

I do not expect that by developing the Romanian armed forces and thus enhancing Romania's defence capabilities we will make Russia feel more "deterred" than it has already been. After all, our decision to join the Alliance was based on the realisation that we could not defend ourselves against Russia's might, should it decide to take

military actions against us (of course not without military costs even for Russia). However, together with the other allies supporting us without hesitation we hope to reach a balance that would make such actions against us less and less likely.

Under these circumstances and given the fact that key segments of the Romanian borders also represent the Eastern frontier of NATO and EU, do you believe that extra measures should be taken besides the present commitments, to enhance our security and stability?

When I was asked, during the negotiations for NATO integration, what can Romania contribute with to the defence of the Alliance, I gave the same answer: firstly, it must be capable to defend itself as long and as well as possible, to diminish the costs of NATO's assistance for us. I am giving you the same answer... With one amendment: we should be more active diplomatically, including in the extended area of the Western Mediterranean where we still have contacts and open doors, in order to enhance our profile and become more visible, which would also benefit our security.

Could Washington's decisions to reduce the number of US troops deployed in Germany and to operate some redeployments on the European territory, including in our region, be part of a set of enhanced American security approaches and commitments to countries on the Eastern flank in general, and our country in particular?

When I was minister of defence, I remember that the secretary of defence Donald Rumsfeld generated a lot of "waves" when he spoke of dividing the continent between the "old" and the "new" Europe... And more recently, we all know that Trump administration decided to reduce the number of American troops deployed in Germany and redeploy some of them to a more threatened area – that is our own. Personally, I believe that this "division" is a reality; however, it is not only a political issue, as it was in the beginning of the 21st century, instead it became a military and strategic reality - the Eastern flank is more threatened than the "centre" of the Alliance. Other than that, I am waiting to see whether the new administration will stick or not to the decision to reduce the number of troops deployed in Germany taken by the previous administration, and if yes, what will be the actual numbers after all.

During his intervention – via videoconference – at the final plenary session of the 17th annual meeting of the Valdai International Discussion

Club that took place on October 20-22, 2020 in Moscow, president Vladimir Putin asserted that the time of American-Russian bipolarity was long over, and players such as China and Germany were now heading for superpower status.

In your opinion, what is the future of the current world order? Is the time of the American unipolarity after the Cold War over? How could the multipolar international order anticipated by Vladimir Putin look like?

Once communism fell, the USSR dissolved and the Cold War ended, the international system moved from a “bipolar order” to a moment of American “unipolar order” (if we may say so) setting the course for a multiplication of the centres of power, and thus heading towards a “multipolar order”. Such a transition – triggered by the unavoidable exit from stage of the USSR – should have been, preferably, controlled to prevent the occurrence of imbalances. This only happened occasionally (the United States got “caught” in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and more recently have willingly given up honouring their commitments – see the swift withdrawal from Syria for example). These actions have fueled confusion and caused all kinds of anti-system forces to take over in various regions, contributing to the general disorder. That we are inevitably heading towards a multipolar order is an undeniable fact, the matter is that we must regain control over the current chaotic developments in certain areas, so that we can attempt a somewhat controlled transition. And to that end, the new American administration can have a substantial contribution, alongside the US traditional allies.

During the four years of Trump’s administration the competition between the USA and China resumed and intensified, involving Europe and with global effects.

What can you tell us about the future of this competition, taking into account that the course it has been set on in the past few years by the USA, but especially the complexity and depth of its engagement will make change very difficult?

China and the USA will continue to be strategic competitors for a long time to come. What will probably change is the way the two superpowers will “manage” the competition. As I was saying, Joe Biden promised that he will continue to be firm on China with regard to its commercial practices and human rights record, however, he will be open for cooperation in fields such as climate change,

non-proliferation and health security.

The future president of the USA has already announced that on his first day of his mandate he will have his country re-join the 2015 Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

What other steps to reset the political hour can we expect from Washington during Joe Biden’s mandate?

I find it difficult to come up with an answer at this time. The Biden administration already has its “hands full” as the Americans say, to have time to plan for other strategic actions. However, I expect that once it gets things started, opportunities hard to anticipate at this time will come up, as I expect some changes that took place after 2016 will not be reversed...

His Excellency Dr. Ion Jinga, the Romanian Ambassador to the United Nations: "The speed with which the pandemic spread tested the resilience of both the UN and individual countries"

Adjusting the response to the new challenges and threats within a permanent global dynamic in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and coordinating and supporting member states' efforts to understand the dimension of the ensuing economic, social and political crisis are top priorities for the United Nations.

Ion Jinga, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, the Permanent Representative of Romania to the United Nations, has offered his views on the process of strengthening, protecting and capitalizing on the resilience of the United Nations Organization to the challenges brought forth by the COVID-19 pandemic.



Geostrategic Pulse: Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed the public agenda of the countries affected. Issues such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, the management of migration and threats to security and territorial integrity have become of secondary importance (at least apparently), as attention is focused on managing and countering the pandemic.

Based on the current situation in the countries affected by the pandemic, do you see a major paradigm shift in dealing with the current medical/sanitary threats and challenges, or do we continue to deal with challenges sequentially and in the short term?

Ion Jinga: Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic could be conceptualized as a *black swan* – a rare event with a major impact which, in hindsight, could have been foreseen. Yet, its nature and

manifestations are not completely novel in their nature, as this is neither the first *black swan* nor the first pandemic the world has ever seen.

The current crisis has, however, two specific features. The first is that its effects cannot be countered through the individual actions of a single country. Being the result of global interconnectivity, the consequences of the pandemic can only be managed by taking advantage of this global interconnectivity: coordinating response policies, maximizing the benefits of membership in various international groups and organizations, technological cooperation, exchanging information and good practices, distributing, on large scale, vaccines and treatments, strengthening the global production and supply chains etc. The second is that the consequences of the pandemic and the measures needed to return to normal – a normal that, personally, I envision as different from that we knew before this crisis – seem to take a relatively long time.

However, I do not believe that the pandemic will cause a major paradigm shift in international relations, despite the initial difficulty in anticipating and managing all its consequences. At the same time, its seriousness dictated the priorities set by individual countries. To put it differently, the idea that certain issues, such as the ones you mentioned (terrorism, nuclear proliferation, the management of the flow of migration, threats to national security and territorial integrity) have taken on a secondary importance may be deceptive, and could be attributed to the feeling that, compared to the pandemic, these issues do not seem to have, presently, the same serious and immediate consequences.

If we were to look, for example, at the issue of migration, we could understand even better why it cannot come in second. Migration has become a global problem directly related to the proliferation of conflicts, terrorism, poverty, climate change, serious violations of human rights; and the list could go on and on. According to International Organization for Migration data, one billion people

(out of the planet's 7.8 billion) migrated from their places of origin. Almost a quarter of a billion presently live in a different country than the one they were born in. Although the movement of population has been affected by the closure of borders, the vulnerability of displaced persons, migrants and refugees to the COVID-19 pandemic has heightened the humanitarian aspects of the crisis. In mid-2020, almost 80 million people were forced to leave their places of residence, with 21 million of these being refugees. These people must be included in national and global plans created in response to the pandemic – in public information campaigns, in measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and in vaccination. The request for UN aid this year amounts to \$40 billion.

On the other hand, many refugees who were working in the informal economy lost their jobs and income, and this impacted their families back home as well, since they no longer receive remittances. Finally, those forced to return to their places of origin without having access to health services and without having the possibility of undergoing medical tests may contribute to the spread of the virus. All these problems have made their way onto the UN list of priorities.

At the same time, the pandemic has highlighted how valuable the refugees' labor is; until now, they were often “invisible”, even though many were essential workers or on the front line of efforts to combat COVID-19.

The changes the current pandemic will impose on the actions taken by states will probably follow the pattern of previous *black swans*. States will likely aim to prevent the recurrence of similar situations by strengthening the sectors involved in crisis management and by reducing vulnerabilities – including those that certain players have taken advantage of in order to promote their own interests. As a result, we will likely witness the implementation of more rigorous medical standards, the inclusion of the medical field in the national security frameworks, the strengthening of international cooperation in the area, as well as attempts to find solutions to related problems, which came to light due to the current pandemic, such as countering cyber propaganda.

The urgent need to maintain domestic security has made it imperative to observe a more rigorous management of the resources allocated to involvement in international conflicts, whose intensity and territorial range have decreased with time.

Under these circumstances the efforts and endeavors of the countries affected are not part of

an integrated and coordinated global approach; solidarity and cohesion depend on the commitments taken through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

How do you explain the low level of connectivity concerning these approaches? At the same time, do see the possibility of competition in finding and distributing the vaccine against COVID-19, which could strengthen or alter the balance of power on a global scale?

Indeed, the pandemic brought to light, at least in the beginning, a series of shortcomings within international cooperation. At the same time, it revealed the essential need for such cooperation. Bilateral and regional cooperation proved useful, but are also limited, and these limitations can only be compensated through global international cooperation.

The efforts to make the vaccine against COVID-19 accessible to all are more and more significant, and at the UN countries advance ever so often the notion that the vaccine is a “*global public good*”, an issue on the agenda of the UN General Assembly Special Session on how to respond to the pandemic, which took place in New York on December 3-4, 2020. On this occasion, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres asked that the COVID-19 vaccines be made available to all, and that developed countries help developing countries overcome this crisis. However, he warned that “*when countries go in their own direction, the virus goes in every direction. [...] It is time to reset the approach. As we build a strong recovery, we must seize the opportunity for change. [...] In a global crisis, we must meet the expectations of those we serve with unity, solidarity and coordinated global action.*”

The model adopted by the European Union, to enter prior commitments to acquire vaccines for its European citizens, is an example of collective action in support of the common good. However, there is a need for more efforts at global level. According to the EU and the UN, in 2020, the programme aimed at guaranteeing fair access to vaccines, which represents a crucial part of the international response to the pandemic, witnesses a \$4.5 billion financial deficit. Such a response must be multidimensional. The UN has managed to mobilize a collective approach that deals with both sanitary issues and with those pertaining to human rights and humanitarian assistance.

Not least, I would mention the UN Secretary General's appeal for a ceasefire in international

conflict arenas, issued in March 2020, so that mankind can focus on fighting COVID-19; as well as Resolution 2532, adopted by the UN Security Council on July 1, 2020, which urges all parties to end hostilities for at least 90 consecutive days in order to facilitate access of humanitarian aid.

In this context, what are the tools at the UN's disposal to get actively involved in supporting and coordinating member states' efforts, and, at the same time, prevent escalation of tensions in the context of deepening economic, social and political crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This is a complex question. I would begin by saying that the UN has adapted its functions in order to swiftly and effectively respond to the crisis. Secretary General Antonio Guterres proved to be an exemplary leader who mobilized the material and human resources of the system, talked to world leaders and launched new initiatives aimed at limiting the pandemic, which affects 218 countries and territories.

In March, the UN launched the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 to raise \$2 billion, money destined to combat the virus, having created the COVID-19 Recovery and Response Fund. In May, the UN organized a donor videoconference, during which \$7.4 billion was dedicated to financing the creation of a vaccine and treatments. The Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 was then updated in order to secure \$6.7 billion – up from the two billion estimated at the beginning – and humanitarian aid was given to 63 countries affected by the pandemic.

Furthermore, the UN was able to provide water and soap for refugee camps (I would like to mention here that around the world there are three billion people that have no access to running water), assisted hospitals and clinics, organized information campaigns targeting millions of people, and facilitated the transport of medical equipment to 120 countries, at a rate of 700 flights a month.

The speed with which the pandemic spread tested the resilience of both UN and individual countries. If at the beginning of May there were four million cases around the world, in mid-December, at the time of this interview, there are 69 million infected persons, of which 48 million were cured, but over 1.5 million died due to COVID-19. Data provided by the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme shows that, if before the pandemic started 135 million people were on the brink of poverty, today this number doubled. The

economic impact of the pandemic generated a 40% increase in the number of persons requiring humanitarian aid; 30 million people receive food only through the UN, and if this supply chain gets broken, we will be dealing with a humanitarian catastrophe, "*a famine of biblical proportions*", as the programme director said at one of the UN Security Council meetings.

The UN response was conceived according to the "*peace-security-development*" nexus (each of these dimensions being interdependent and interconnected with the others) and is based on three pillars. The first pillar envisages a large-scale, comprehensive and coordinated response within the health sector, led by the WHO and strengthened by global, regional and national operational support, to consolidate the response capacity (Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan). The second pertains to the efforts of finding a solution to all humanitarian and human rights aspects – access to vital services, aid to homeless families, economic recovery, the proper functioning of supply chains, strengthening institutions, securing public services, respect for human rights (Global Humanitarian Response Plan). This includes the Secretary General's appeal for a stimulus package equal to at least 10% of global GDP, massive support for developing countries, debt exemption, debt restructuring, increased aid provided through international financial institutions, preventing and responding to acts of violence against women and girls.

Finally, the third pillar is represented by the UN framework for immediate socio-economic response and redress, launched to support countries with low and medium incomes, based on which most sustainable development programmes have been adjusted to counter the pandemic. Coming out of this crisis should be seen as an opportunity to find solutions to climate issues, inequalities, exclusion, lack of social protection networks and injustice, which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Such response should include the transition to renewable energy, sustainable food systems, gender equality, stronger social security networks, universal health coverage and an international system in line with the objective included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The current crisis is expected to lead to permanent changes in the international economic landscape, in ways that cannot be fully predicted. COVID-19 is a stress test for globalization and imposes the need for a major re-evaluation of the interconnected economy. Global production and distribution chains

are affected, and developing countries can be expected to suffer socially and economically, which, in turn, may impact the global recovery process that the IMF estimates should start in 2021, while JP Morgan Bank anticipates a recovery to pre-crisis level in 2023.

The current global economy is built on supply and production chains relying on the cheapest suppliers; these are usually located far away and work according to the *just-in-time* system (to avoid storage expenses), which makes the system vulnerable to interruptions when crises occur, including due to the fact that excessive specialization has produced exclusive suppliers. Economic globalization grew faster than political globalization, and the world economy will have to be more resilient after the pandemic. Since the pandemic showed us the frailty of long supply chains, we are likely to witness a relocation of certain companies to their countries of origin or to closer geographic areas. This is why, when I answered your first question, I said that normalcy after the crisis will be different from the normal we knew before the outbreak of the pandemic.

Still, as the English say (John Milton, 1634), "*every cloud has a silver lining*" -- an opportunity can be found in every difficult situation. We live in the *Google Age*, where two complementary worlds coexist and overlap: the real, physical world and the virtual world that we see through our computer. Experts believe that the pandemic speeds up the process of replacing human workforce with automation and increases the number of those working from home -- *teleworking*. Mankind finds itself in a development stage characterized by large-scale use of artificial intelligence, interconnectivity, nanotechnology, synthetic biology, quantum computing and autonomous vehicles. When we exit this crisis, we might find ourselves in the middle of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. If we know how to adapt to this new world, we will have a better, cleaner life, since environmental protection and countering climate change are part of our planet's security and, as there is no *Plan B* to stop global warming, there is no *Planet B* for us to move to.

In the current context, do you consider as timely a restructuring of the UN that expands its powers and capabilities to help member states cope with the challenges they are facing? Should a potential reform process aim at redefining the concept of diplomacy?

Throughout its 75 years of existence, the UN has witnessed a series of reforms, deemed necessary in

order to permanently adapt to new international challenges. These changes were not always spectacular because member states' positions needed to be synchronized, and a prospective change of the UN Charter needs the vote of two thirds of the 193 member states, which the five permanent members of the Security Council can veto. Lately, progress has been registered in reviving the activity of the UN General Assembly, through the adoption of some successive resolutions concerning it. A code of ethics has been issued for the President of the UN General Assembly, strict rules for preserving institutional memory have been adopted, and a transparent procedure to elect the Secretary General has been introduced. Furthermore, the working methods of the six main commissions of the General Assembly, of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and of its functional commissions are periodically revised.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted once more that the process of adjustment to the global realities and priorities is essential to ensuring the efficiency, credibility and relevance of the organization, and to coordinating an international response.

The most recent UN reform was launched in 2017 at the initiative of the current Secretary General; it is three pronged, covering: *peace and security* – to ensure the coherence of all activities in this field, prioritize conflict-prevention measures, and enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the peacekeeping operations and of the special political missions; *development* – through the creation of UN *country teams* that coordinate the efforts of all UN agencies which operate in a country and are led by *resident coordinators* who have power of decision, as well as a strategic Development Assistance Framework; *management* – at the level of the Office of the UN Secretariat and of the UN in general – to ensure the accountability of managers and personnel, more transparency and better working conditions for the teams to carry out their mandate.

As far as managing human resources is concerned, the current reform led to faster recruitment procedures, the establishment of a single point of contact for specialized consulting services, the development of procedural guidelines for the movement of personnel, the launch of a new strategy in favor of geographical diversity etc. At the same time, a new UN acquisitions handbook was published, as well as a simplified procedure for suppliers. All these reduced the impact of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on

the activity of the organization; the UN continued its online activity almost uninterrupted, with personnel either working from home or being physically present in smaller numbers, all while respecting the sanitary norms and the physical distancing imposed by the pandemic.

Regarding the last part of your question concerning a possible redefinition of the concept of diplomacy, I wrote in an article the *Geostrategic Pulse* Magazine, published on July 8, 2020, that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic abruptly changed the diplomatic lifestyle of the past decades. At the UN, and everywhere else in the world, diplomacy takes place mostly over the phone, e-mail and online meetings. Conference calls and secure videoconferences have become a daily activity, making it more difficult, however, to hold negotiations or confidential discussions.

Digital diplomacy has become a certainty, and in a competition with traditional diplomacy, it has every chance to win. The downside is the risk of losing some of the discretion that makes diplomacy what it is. The chemistry between people and the ability to nurture relations with politicians, diplomats, businesspersons or mass-media in a host country or in the organization where one works are crucial to being successful in this profession. A one-to-one discussion can influence the result of a negotiation, of a cooperation agreement, of mutual support during international elections, or of preparations for a high-level visit.

But, as US President John F. Kennedy once said: *"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."* A future that will belong to connectivity, flexible networks and cooperation, and where the understanding of how to improve human relations will be increasingly more important for countries, international organizations or companies.

Bill Gates recently made some predictions as to how life will look like after the pandemic: online meetings will become standard; software will register spectacular progress; working online from home will curtail demand for office space; people would rather live outside expensive cities, choosing bigger houses in smaller communities, in the countryside; and because we will have fewer occasions to socialize at the workplace, we will socialize more within the communities in which we live. Going back to the life we were used to will only be possible when the COVID-19 pandemic is under control in the entire world because, as Mr. Antonio Guterres said, *"we are as strong as the weakest link in the world health system"*.

We can predict that future pandemics will be less destructive because humankind will have learnt from the difficult experience it is going through now. I like to believe that in this new reality diplomacy will remain a key tool to understanding the position of different parties, a tool that cannot be replaced by technology or by the *Twitter* or *Facebook* revolutions.

Recently, President of the UN General Assembly Volkan Bozkir denounced the inefficiency of the Security Council (at the opening of a debate regarding the reform of this body), criticizing the "competing interests" of its members. The criticism of this former Turkish minister was added to that expressed by French President Emmanuel Macron, who stated that the institution seems incapable of coming up with useful solutions even in the most urgent humanitarian crises.

What are the main expectations, currents of opinion and courses of action regarding the reform of the UN in general and of the UN Security Council in particular, but especially what are the real prospects of relevant progress in the view of an experienced, expert career diplomat like yourself?

As I mentioned before, reforming the UN is one of the priorities of the current Secretary General, and it has as pillars *peace and security, development and institutional management*, all aiming to strengthen the performance and transparency of the organization.

Aside from these priorities, but reflecting the wish of a large majority of member states, another issue of interest is the reform of the UN Security Council. It is ultimately a political process that, when finalized, will have geopolitical consequences, which makes imperative for any solution to enjoy the widest possible political acceptance. If it entails changing the UN Charter, such reform will have to be ratified by at least two thirds of the UN member states, including the five permanent members.

In 1945, when the United Nations was established, all 51 founding states agreed that five of them (the United States of America, France, Great Britain, the Russian Federation and China) will have a permanent mandate in the Security Council, and six other members will be elected on rotating basis for periods limited to two years.

The reform of the Security Council has been on the agenda of the member states ever since the establishment of the UN. As the number of UN members grew, many voices stressed the need to

reform the Security Council so that it reflects better the new geopolitical realities and the configuration of regional groups. Divergent country interests and major geopolitical reasons are responsible for the few substantial changes to the structure of the Security Council. The most important change took place in 1965, when the number of non-permanent members was raised from six to ten, chosen from the five regional groups and having two-year mandates. The current configuration of the UN Security Council is 55 years old.

In 1992, at the initiative of Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the General Assembly established the *Open-Ended Working Group* to reform the Security Council, and in 1993 the resolution on “*equitable representation and an increase in the number of members in the Security Council*” was adopted. In 2005, Secretary General Kofi Anan put forward a Council reform plan, but it has not been implemented.

Interest in this process grew after the General Assembly adopted, in 2008, Decision 62/557 “*initiating intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) in the form of an informal plenary meeting of the General Assembly*”. Decision 62/557 identified five priority issues that have to be dealt with in case of reform of the UN Security Council: categories of membership (permanent/non-permanent), right to veto, regional representation, the size of an extended Security Council and the relation between the Security Council and the General Assembly. Since then, the General Assembly extends annually the mandate of the Intergovernmental Group for the Negotiations of the Council Reform.

I am familiar with this file because during the 71st session of the General Assembly, I was appointed, together with my Tunisian colleague, as co-chair of the intergovernmental negotiating process on Security Council reform, which is considered the most complex element of the general reform framework of the United Nations system.

I was the first ambassador from a Central and Eastern European country to be given this responsibility. The document drafted at the end of my mandate, and which was accepted by all UN member states – “*Elements of Commonality and Issues for Further Consideration on the question of equitable representation and increase in the membership in Security Council and related matters*” – is still the basis for further negotiations.

The most intense discussions regarding the UN Security Council reform concern the expansion of the Security Council and the right to veto. Members' accountability, the reform of the working

methods, including in the context of accelerated digitalization of the UN activity, or the implementation / non-implementation of the UN SC resolutions are also issues on the member states' agenda.

Any progress depends, however, on the degree of support from the member states, and any basic change must “*seek a solution that can enjoy the widest possible political acceptance by member states*” (according to Decision 62/557). The world of today is more complex than that of 75 years ago, the challenges are more sophisticated. Globalization makes it impossible to solve them other than through a holistic approach in a multilateral framework. Any reform of the UN system, and even more so of the Security Council, must take this reality into account.

In his intervention – via videoconference – in the final plenary of the 17th annual meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, which was held between October 20 and October 22, 2020, President Vladimir Putin stressed that multilateralism should not be seen as absolute inclusiveness, but rather as the need to involve stakeholders in solving a problem. He gave as example the Shanghai Cooperation Organization – which has been contributing for over 20 years to finding solutions to territorial disputes and to strengthening the stability of Central Eurasia, the Astana format – that had a crucial role in breaking the deadlock of the political and diplomatic processes, or OPEC Plus – which is an effective, if very complex, instrument of stabilizing the global oil markets. The Russian leader also stressed that there are challenges that need more than the combined powers of some countries, even if very influential, to overcome; problems of such magnitude require global collaboration; among them, I would count international stability, security, counterterrorism, regional conflicts in need of urgent resolution, promotion of global economic development, combating poverty, expanding cooperation in the field of health.

Would you consider all of the above as a call for UN reform or, rather, as a justification for the unilateralism of some of the great powers (it is no coincidence that V. Putin highlighted the Astana format, where Russia imposed the layout and terms of discussion on the future of Syria, just as it was no coincidence that, more recently, Russia, dictated the terms of the truce between Armenia and Azerbaijan – among other things, Azerbaijan authorized the long-term stationing

of the Russian “peacekeeping forces”)?

Multilateralism is a rational option whose goals are stability, predictability and security of the general international relations system. Multilateralism sets norms both in terms of behavior of state actors in the relations with each other, and in terms of their approach vis-à-vis the peoples they represent. The set of multilaterally agreed-upon norms objectively reveals the existence of standards on human dignity and the political and social rights of the individuals, and these standards must be respected by all international actors.

As I already mentioned, solving global challenges entails a global response, because we live in a highly interconnected world where a local problem can soon become one with global impact, and that also requires local and regional ability to respond, as the importance of finding local solutions to local problems is incontrovertible.

In this respect, I would remind that the first resolution adopted by the Security Council on the cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, UN Resolution 1631 of October 17, 2005, was a Romanian initiative. Today, the role of regional organizations and the importance of their cooperation with the UN are unanimously accepted as a way to ensure the coherence of endeavors to promote peace, security and global development. Recently, Romania, as president of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization, promoted a resolution regarding the cooperation of this regional organization with the UN; the resolution was unanimously adopted by the General Assembly on November 23, 2020.

History shows that in international relations there are no long-lasting solutions imposed by force. Any solution must be based on dialogue and engagement in good faith in discussions and negotiations, by all parties involved in a conflict, or in situations with the potential of escalating into conflict. A key role is played by conflict-prevention activities and the proper management of developments in the fragile post-conflict stage, in preventing the resumption of hostilities, in building trust and in enabling the start of an inclusive process of political, institutional and economic reconstruction.

Last but not least, what would be the main challenges for a UN ambassador, generally, and from your perspective, in particular?

The UN is the only truly global international organization, and the best argument in favor of its relevance is the constant increase in the number of

member states – from 51, in 1945, to 193, presently. The competition among countries for occupying important positions in the UN is also edifying. For instance, for the ten non-permanent seats in the Security Council, candidacies have been announced until 2047, and for the position of president of the General Assembly, until 2077. The explanation for this undiminished interest lies in the trust countries around the world have in the principles and values promoted by the UN. Membership to the UN offers international recognition, legitimacy and prestige, and the intelligent use of this forum can increase the influence of a country beyond its borders, military capacity or economic strength.

This reality is presently marked by multiple major challenges, some recurrent, others new. Some of them I mentioned earlier: the proliferation of armed conflicts, the resurgence of terrorism, poverty, hunger, deepening inequality, the COVID-19 pandemic (besides the major impact it had on the health and function of medical systems, it has also caused the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of 1929-1933), the alarming increase of the number of refugees, global warming, the large-scale destruction of our biodiversity, massive pollution of seas and oceans, deforestations of unprecedented size (every year the forest area that disappears all over the planet is the size of Denmark). The answers to these problems will define the role of the UN in the 21st century and will pose as many challenges to the organization and its member states, and they are reflected in the objectives the latter have set at the UN.

The objectives of the Permanent Mission of Romania to the UN correspond to the mandate set every year by the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and approved by the President of Romania for the respective session of the UN General Assembly. As we represent Romania's diplomatic voice at the United Nations, our role is, foremost, to present Romania's position within the UN structures in New York. The wide range of foreign policy issues we deal with, as well as the growing responsibilities assumed by Romania internationally are reflected in our set priorities, which include increasing the UN's efficiency in addressing threats to international peace and security, maintaining the Security Council as the main forum for international peacekeeping cooperation, using preventive diplomacy and finding peaceful solutions to disputes, continuing the UN reform process, implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting

closer dialogue and cooperation between the UN and regional organizations – bearing in mind Romania's experience and prestige as a regional and sub-regional promoter of security and stability.

Being Romania's voice at the UN is an honor and obliges to the highest degree. It is an honor because it places you in a long line of Romanian diplomats who served their country with professionalism, loyalty and commitment in the most important international organization, the UN being the keystone of multilateralism and international cooperation. It obliges because promoting national interests at the UN contributes to the prestige and respect that Romania enjoys in the world. Through the strength of its ideas, its intelligence, its commitment and efforts in the service of the country, the Romanian diplomacy succeeded many times in this endeavor. It is first and foremost the result of a team effort, and I believe that the diplomats' profession of faith must be to serve their country, honoring their status and national identity. As an ambassador, you feel this responsibility almost physically on your shoulders; it motivates you in everything you do.

In the last more than five years as Permanent Representative of Romania to the UN, I have had the privilege of chairing eight UN commissions and formats of international cooperation, most of them a first for our country, and some for several years. I am referring to the Security Council reform process (mentioned earlier), the Peacebuilding Commission (key to internal reconciliation, post-conflict reconstruction and peacekeeping; from this position, I had the opportunity to see and understand on the ground African realities, the problems but also the huge potential this continent has and which, in my opinion, will greatly influence the future of our planet), the Commission for Disarmament and International Security (often a high-stakes confrontation ground), the Commission for Social Development, the Commission for Population and Development, the UN Group of Governmental Experts on the Transparency of Military Expenditure, the Group of Francophone Ambassadors to the UN, and the Committee on the UN Population Award (this award is given to personalities and organizations with major contributions to population and development issues; on December 10, 2020, I presided over the award ceremony for 2020, this year's laureates being the Queen Mother of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the *HelpAge* organization from India; previous laureates included Indira Gandhi, Bill and Melinda Gates, heads of state, ministers etc.).

An essential catalyst for the performance of the Mission in recent years was the participation of the President of Romania, H.E. Mr. Klaus Werner Iohannis, to the High-Level Segment of the annual sessions of the UN General Assembly. The presence of our Head of State, the messages sent from the UN rostrum and the meetings he had in New York with other prominent leaders, strengthened and amplified Romania's profile within the Organization – a strong and prosperous Romania which asserts itself in the world and whose place among democratic nations is acknowledged.

Note: The opinions expressed in this interview do not bind the official position of the author.

American Dilemmas in a Post-Trump World: Old and New

Political Identities in the Turmoil of the Culture Wars



Source: <https://corat.mx/>

Alexis CHAPELAN

Is America's Future (still) the World's?

If anyone needed remembering that the US is still the world's leading superpower, Election Night proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt. Not because it constituted a grand, majestic projection of power and international aplomb. On the contrary, the 3rd of November and its aftermath does not appear to be a high-water mark for American democracy: the long, drawn-out counting resulted in a confusing battle of words and victory proclamations which saw the incumbent president – the man still embodying America on the international stage – claim total victory in a race that was still undecided, then proceed to launch baseless fraud claims and demand that the counting process is halted. Twitter and Facebook took steps to limit a series of false claims emanating from the Trump's campaign,¹ and, in an unprecedented gesture of defiance, broadcasters cut away from Donald Trump's live speech to check-fact his declarations.² Much more worryingly, the FBI arrested two heavily armed men in Pennsylvania, having been tipped off they were planning a violent action against a ballot-counting site.³ In the meanwhile, crowds gathered outside ballot-counting facilities in many of the most contested states, to protest alleged – and until now baseless – fraud accusations. The Trump campaign amplified the accusations and

fueled conspiracy theories of forged ballots and faulty bleed-through pens given to Republican voters by malignant Deep State officials.⁴ The situation on the ground was tense enough for the police to grant election workers an escort at the end of the night.⁵ Election Night was thought to be the political Oscar of the nation, its Thanksgiving Parade, an exercise which, regardless of whether red or blue wins out in the end, served to renew (at least for a while) the democratic pact between American citizens. But this time, there was no spectacle of triumphant democracy, but rather one of a nation bitterly polarized and divided, searching for its ontological core beneath all the noise.

But this is not the most important. The greatest powers are not necessarily the healthiest powers. For almost one week, the world was holding its breath to find out who will be “the most powerful person on the planet”.⁶ Few other political events have such an iconic resonance, transcending national boundaries. An international audience watched with the same mixture of apprehension, hope and frustration as American voters the election gridlock, split alongside partisan fault lines that mirror closely those in America itself. Liberal-leaning leaders and organizations expressed shock at Donald Trump's premature victory cry,⁷ while populists rallied around the incumbent hoping for a “Trump miracle”.⁸ The US' heated internet battles echoed and were intensely experienced – thanks to the near instantaneous interactivity and virality provided by the new social media – everywhere in the world; from Eastern Europe to Iran and China,⁹ a flurry of gleeful memes have brought Nevada's protracted ballot-counting, the intricacies of the US electoral system or Donald Trump's “stop-the-count” temper tantrums into the new global pop vernacular: this is a powerful testimony not only to the political significance of the America election, but to its immense cultural reach as well. But behind the irreverent playfulness, there was a genuine anxiety, an inescapable sense that the future of America is – still – the future of the world. From a geopolitical standpoint, a Biden-Harris administration will undoubtedly mean more than a shift in the general symbolic decorum of the American foreign policy approach. While the

“America First” narrative is set to be quite drastically repudiated, it is however unclear what will replace it. “The power of America’s example”, the motto featuring on the Foreign Policy section of the Biden campaign official webpage,¹⁰ seems to be a strong contender. Joe Biden has heavily invested into the idea of American moral leadership, writing in an op-ed piece in *Foreign Affairs* that “as a nation, we have to prove to the world that the United States is prepared to lead again – not just with the example of our power but also with the power of our example.”¹¹ But such an agenda – grounded mostly in a desire to break with Trump’s unapologetically transactional and disruptive approach – is deliberately vague. The fuzzy contours of the actual policies of a Biden-Harris administration (fuzziness which echoes the equally inchoated populism of the “America First” formula in 2016) leave room for ample questioning. Certain issues – such as the Euro-Atlantic relationship, the Paris Agreement commitments of the USA or the WHO membership – constitute clear campaign promises, embedded into Biden’s central pledge to “heal” the multilateral liberal paradigm roughed up by Trump’s heterodox views. But other aspects of the previous administration’s legacy are much thornier. Three of them, in particular, stand out. Iran, weakened by an economic downturn exacerbated by a particularly virulent coronavirus outbreak, was quick to express a desire to rebuild a relationship with the USA on condition that international sanctions are lifted.¹² Israel, still buoyant after the normalization of relations with the UAE and Bahrain, will accept with difficulty the loss of their best ally in decades and the abrupt demotion that is probably looming.¹³ It’s not just Israel which was a winner of Trump’s approach to the Middle East: the Gulf states had built a strong relationship with the Trump administration, grounded in a common hostility to Iran. In the last years of the Obama administration, the US-Saudi relationships, for example, saw a dramatic cooling, so it should come as no surprise that some of the US’s most trusted allies in the region can hardly mask a bitter disappointment with Biden’s victory.¹⁴ But if the Middle East quagmire is concerning, the most pressing issue, with the most global ramifications, remains the future of the relationship with China. Trump’s fraught record created a series of constraints that limit – both materially and symbolically, both externally and internally – Biden’s leeway. The president slash-and-burn rhetoric have done little to thwart China’s rising assertiveness, but succeeded beyond all

expectations in one crucial way: being seen as “soft on China” is now a mortal sin in US politics, and no administration will risk paying the electoral price of a conciliatory stance that might appear timorous. Joe Biden – who was repeatedly attacked during the campaign as being unassertive, hesitant or downright servile towards China¹⁵ – will probably don, too, the Nessus tunic that Trump created and maintain a hard line on issues like technology, trade and geopolitics. There is indeed a wide bipartisan consensus that China is a growing menace, for reasons that range from human rights violations and authoritarianism to unfair trade practices and economic espionage.¹⁶ In his piece in *Foreign Affairs*, Biden expressed a desire to continue to combatively engage China on fronts like trade, democracy and intellectual property: “The United States does need to get tough with China.”¹⁷ The difference is that the new administration seems more keen on building an “united front” against such foe, bringing in European and Asian allies (the latter being threatened not only economically but also politically by the Chinese behemoth).

Beyond the realm of geopolitics and trade, the United States also have an unrivalled symbolic clout; it continues to set the tone for the narrative around the globe. Trump’s victory propelled to a large extent the illiberal narrative, electrifying a form of political contestation that was long brewing around the world. Much more so than Brexit (a diffuse outburst which was only partly “populist” in nature and ironically ended up devouring its own populist champions, by effectively allowing Conservatives to absorb the thorn on their side that was the UKIP and then the Brexit Party), Donald Trump unleashed the pent-up energies of a certain type of liberal disillusionment. Trump moreover has a face, a face so internationally and instantly recognizable that all around the world mini-Trumpes started popping up: Bolsonaro is a “Trump of the Tropics”,¹⁸ Modi an “Indian Trump”,¹⁹ Duterte a “Philippine Trump”,²⁰ Salvini an “Italian Trump”.²¹ Trump became a shorthand for the populist backlash worldwide. His defeat might likewise signal that the engines of illiberalism are running out of gas. Can populism keep his momentum? And if not, what will replace it?

But it would be naïve to consider such questions settled by the victory of Joe Biden, belatedly announced on the 8th of November. To paraphrase one illustrious Churchill quote, this is only the end of the beginning. The true answers are not going to be provided by who sits in the Oval Office, but by

what he does and by who he is surrounded, in his administration but also in other decisional forums such as the Chamber of Representatives or the Senate. It is therefore important to look beyond the name of the victor of the melee, to the larger political and ideological dynamics that produced this result – and can shed light on future developments on the medium term.



Source: <http://moronmajority.com/>

An Unstoppable Force Meets an (almost) Unmovable Object

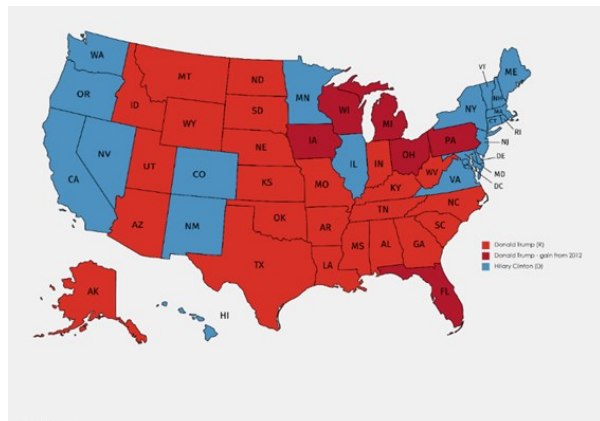
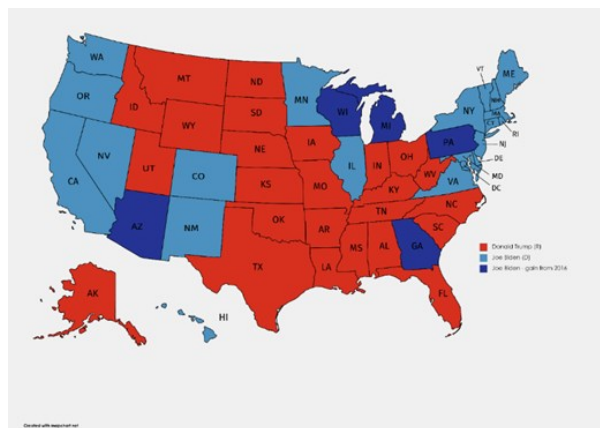
While it is undoubtedly of significance that Joe Biden won, *how he won* is even more important. The first key parameter is electoral turnout rate. The 2020 election is set to achieve the highest turnout since at least 1908 (when the population was much smaller and women – and most African-Americans – didn't benefited from the franchise).²² Compared to turnout rates hovering around 55-60% of voting-eligible population (VEP) between 2000 and 2016,²³ the 2020 race witness particularly high turnout rates. While the final numbers won't be official until each state has certified all ballots and sorted out disputes (probably by early December), the count now stands at over 66% of VEP.²⁴ In absolute volume, the projected number of voters is set to reach 160 million,²⁵ up from 138 in 2016.²⁶

Biden will most likely reach the 80 million votes high-water mark, becoming the presidential candidate with the most votes in US history. Donald Trump, on the other hand, received roughly 74 million votes, the highest total for a losing candidate. Both the Democratic and the Republican candidates dramatically increased their vote volume since the previous elections. This is particularly remarkable for an incumbent president, and showcases the resilience of the Trump vote despite the mismanagement of the pandemic and the abrupt economic downturn. Barack Obama lost more than 3 million voters between 2008 and 2012, while

Trump added an astonishing 10 million votes to his tally.²⁷ He is the Republican candidate with the most votes in history, and second only to Joe Biden as the candidate (irrespective of party affiliation) with most votes. He thus improved significantly on the scores of unsuccessful candidates such as Mitt Romney or John McCain, but also of successful Republicans such as George Bush (see figure below).

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020
Republican candidate	50,456,002	62,040,610	59,948,323	60,933,504	62,984,828	≥73,668,449
Democratic candidate	50,999,897	59,028,444	69,498,516	65,915,795	65,853,514	≥79,633,744

The political geography of the vote remained relatively stable, with a few surprises. The hinterland – the so-called “fly-over America” – confirmed its robust preference for Republicans, but Biden rebuilt the “blue wall” of West-coast and North-East states. In 2016, Trump had been able to shatter the blue wall of states that had voted democratic since at least 1992, taking Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania; Iowa, which was integrated into the blue wall by Obama in 2008, switched back to Republicans too.²⁸ Biden owes his victory to his capacity to reclaim these 3 states, and



chip away at Republican bastions in Arizona and Georgia.

In terms of race breakdowns, there seems to be no dramatic shifts, but rather marginal adjustments. Latinos, who constitute the largest ethnic minority in the electorate (roughly 32 million eligible voters), received heightened media attention. Surveys consistently showcased that a robust majority (70%) of Latinos favor Biden over Trump, irrespective of age, gender or socio-economic characteristics – with one notable exception: Cuban-Americans are much more evenly split than any other Latino group, with 52% supporting Trump.²⁹ There is no systematic survey of voting preference of Venezuelan-born Americans, but anecdotal evidence points to the existence of a robust Trump preference.³⁰ The move away from Democrats of swaths of the Latino electorate, steeped in anti-communism and Catholic dogma, is an interesting story that is been unfolding since the late 1990s and loomed large in states like Florida, which Trump retained in 2020. Another key demographic, whose overwhelming support already played a pivotal role in Biden's victory over Bernie Sanders in the primaries, is African-Americans. According to The American Election Eve Poll, Biden is credited with almost 90% of the "Black vote". These numbers are, however, not a novelty: the democratic candidate over the last five presidential elections has averaged 91% of the Black vote, with 8% going to the Republicans.³¹ The Trump-Biden contest has not upset this asymmetric distribution, but neither did Trump's radicalism erode the (modest) base of Black Republican supporters. While Black turnout data is still unavailable, in key battleground states like Georgia signs point to a dramatic improvement from 2016, when 60% of the Black eligible population cast a ballot.³² This might mean that the Black vote might rebound to the high watermarks of 2008 and 2012 (65% and 67% respectively³³), an increase which undoubtedly gave a new impetus to the Biden vote. Unsurprisingly, the white vote leaned towards Trump (56%,³⁴ down from 57% in 2016³⁵); rural whites were the most likely to back the republican candidate (64%), while women (53%) and college educated (53%) are slightly less inclined to cast a ballot for Donald Trump. Biden over-performed Clinton among white men, both college-educated and non, but overall, the white vote remained also stable, much like all other ethnic votes.

This deconstruction of the Biden and Trump vote yields two main political lessons. First of all, that there was little variation from historical patterns:

blue wall against red wall, two familiar voting blocs aggregated around a political geography strongly shaped by both ethnic factors and the rural/urban divide. The "referendum on Trump" didn't have the expected disruptive effect on the US voter demographic, which remains split along traditional fault lines that precede and are likely to survive Trump's rambunctious brand of populism because they are embedded into relatively stable political cultures. Secondly, the "blue wave" polls predicted never fully got to crest; it submerged Donald Trump, but failed to produce a clear Democratic victory in the Senate (a race set to be resolved in run-off elections in December) and barely retained a weakened majority in the House of Representative.³⁶ Biden, riding the wave of an exceptional turnout (especially among minorities and young voters), was indeed an unstoppable force; but Trump nonetheless sturdily hold onto his base, and added millions of voters to his tally despite a lackluster record and a catastrophic last year marred by scandals and the worst health crisis in recent American history. In the wake of this fraught, impassioned and puzzling election, both parties are set to engage in a soul-searching exercise for which there will be no easy answers.

The Feet of Clay of the Biden Big-Tent Coalition

The Republican resilience should not obscure the momentum of the Biden campaign; few now question his personal efficiency as an "anti-Trump". Joe Biden is a staunch moderate: a calm, soothing figure, conveying, in these distressing times, a reassuring sense of stability and empathy. His own grief-stricken personal story, marked by the loss of a spouse and two children, molded his public persona. The president-elect appears almost tailor-made for a political moment dominated first and foremost by a desire to heal trauma. But the "mourner-in-chief" persona of Biden contributed in no small measure to the loss of his political edge. His unofficial campaign slogan – "Make America kind again" – was a stinging jab at Trump's offensive political style, but was devoid of a precise political content. Kindness and civility are moral values, not political projects. Biden himself is an almost apolitical candidate, chosen as an antidote to an increasingly tribal brand of politics. Biden is a consensus-builder, chameleonic and slow-moving, which translated into exceptional coalition-building capacities. Benefiting from a lassitude with Trump's polarizing, hyper-energetic style, his own deliberate "depolarization" counter-strategy has

been effective but risky. The president-elect will now have to navigating the perils and pitfalls not only of a country still bitterly divided, but also of his own patchwork coalition.

The Democratic party has been, historically, a party at odds with itself. Its multiple ideological realignments – on the role of the State or on the Civil Rights agenda – only deepened the rifts and accentuated the soul-searching. Now it is split between a centrist wing and a progressive wing, both embodying two distinct political philosophies and two incompatible narratives on *what is America about*. The centrist wing aggregated around the heritage of the New Deal, updated by Bill Clinton's market- and globalization-friendly corpus of doctrine. The socio-liberal synthesis (known in the Anglo-Saxon world under the label "Third Way") formed the basis of the Clinton and Obama presidencies; sociologically, it veered the Democratic party away from its workers electoral base towards a resolutely middle-class, college-educated constituency.³⁷ Although arguably more liberal than Clinton, Barak Obama was happy to continue the legacy of Clintonism, despite using his identity as an African-American to propel his campaign on a promise of change. In a very similar way, Hilary Clinton tried to frame her candidacy less as a continuation of the Third Way social-liberal politics but rather as a new hope for American politics. Both Obama and Clinton stood for a certain centrist vision of the American Dream – an open, meritocratic society in which formerly disenfranchised groups like ethnic minorities or women could at last shatter the glass ceiling and ascend to the highest responsibilities. Obama in particular was a congenial figure who could drape itself in one of the most powerful political myths of the American Left: the Civil Rights combat. Started outside the Democratic party (and against a fraction of it, the Southern Democrats known as Dixiecrats³⁸), the fight for racial justice was progressively weaved into the Democratic ethos, and Obama was then seen as the crowning achievement of a truly dramatic political redemption arc: from the party of slavery and Jim Crow to the party of the first Black president. This powerful narrative often obscured the real contours of the Obama presidency: it was in fact Clintonism-with-a-twist (or Clintonism-with-a-human-face), pragmatically and prudently charting a path between neoliberal orthodoxy and social-democracy. On foreign policy, the Obama administration was moderately offensive, continuing about 80% of the policies of the second

Bush term,³⁹ but has grown less and less "hawkish" with time. The radical progressive wing was born of the left-wing critique of the American model. In the cusp of the growing counter-cultural malaise of the Sixties, academics such as Noam Chomsky articulated a radical rebuttal of the capitalist development model and of the American party system – arguing for example that the US is a *de facto* one-party state, with the Republican Party and Democratic Party as manifestations of a single all-powerful "Business Party".⁴⁰ Chomsky's line of thought was echoed by other hyper-critical voices. The director Michael Moore became quickly the mediatic face of a new brand of left-wing political activism which almost completely skirted the institutional partisan circuits of the Democratic Party. Occupy Wall Street was the uncontested high-water mark of this nebulous and inchoate demand, and its failure probably played a role for the eventual "homecoming" of far-left activism within the Democratic big-tent. This transition was nevertheless far from smooth. Many radical progressives (Moore included⁴¹) had endorsed Obama with cautious enthusiasm, only to later express bitter disappointment.⁴² But most threw their weight behind Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders. Sanders is a formally independent who has close ties to the Democratic Party, having caucused with House and Senate Democrats for most of his congressional career. The Democratic Party was taken almost by storm by a crop of new progressive figures who drove the "blue wave" of the 2018 mid-term elections which allowed Democrats to regain a majority in the House of Representatives.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (14th congressional district of New York), Ilhan Omar (Minneapolis), Ayanna Pressley (Massachusetts) and Rashida Tlaib (Michigan) – all women of color under 50 – embody not only the demographic diversity of a younger generation of Democratic voters, but also its robustly left-leaning penchant. Once a buzz at the distant periphery of the Democratic Party, what has been dubbed "left-wing populism"⁴³ is now a fully constituted faction inside the party and a force to be reckoned with.

Biden is not a mere continuator of the Obama legacy. Biden *is* the Obama legacy: as a vice-president for eight years, he helped shape the political line of the Obama administration to a large extent. This veteran of American politics embodies perfectly the post-Clinton Democratic establishment, and his past record sometimes brings back memories of the worst features of Clintonism (such as the draconic anti-crime legislation which

disproportionately impacted Black Americans)⁴⁴. After a quasi-collapse during the primaries, Joe Biden's nomination was received coldly by the progressive wing of the party. Their champion Bernie Sanders gracefully accepted the democratic game, but some supporters nurtured, in their bitterness, accusations of unfair bias or even conspiracy theories that Donald Trump was only too happy to circulate.⁴⁵ By leaning into unproven ideas of a corporate conspiracy to stymie the progressive élan, many Sanders supporters deepened already profound rifts and delegitimized the Democratic candidate. In 2016, some of Sanders' supporters went on to back Trump in the general elections, creating the proletarian coalition which was instrumental to the Republican victory.⁴⁶

In this light, Biden's success in maintaining the unity of the party during the campaign was a *tour de force*. He made a series of concessions to progressives. His agenda is surprisingly left-leaning, and he used the Covid-19 crisis and America's newfound tolerance for governmental intervention to push for a more active role of the State, especially though the expansion of the Welfare State. The overhaul of the healthcare system, in particular, has been ambitiously drafted by a joint Biden-Sanders task force.⁴⁷ A former "tough on crime" hawk, Biden also favorably views police immunity reform (but stops short of any "defund the police" initiative) and the decriminalization of certain drug offenses. Another success of the joint Biden-Sanders task force was its climate action package, who draws on many of the measures of the progressives' flagship Green New Deal pitch.⁴⁸ Biden is a realistic and a consensus-builder at heart, who willingly compromised on issues where he observed a clear popular dynamic in favor of progressives (healthcare, police reform, climate change) while de-emphasizing issues on which radicals are at odds with the public opinion (such as defunding the police). The president-elect is stepping into the sweet spot of the Overton window, keeping both factions relatively satisfied. His choice of a younger, combative running mate from a minority group is also a strategic move. Kamala Harris is everything Biden is not: her biracial (Black and Indian) roots mean she can symbolically engage with America's melting pot of overlapping identities; her upbringing steeped in activism reenergizes an Obama-style uplifting narrative which Biden needs in order to win the battle over hearts and minds. Harris is far from a radical progressive, but has all the assets to make

progressive forget (or at least forgive) it.

However, keeping this temporary unity will be a battle that the Biden-Harris duo will have to fight anew every day. Distrust with the Democratic establishment runs deep. *Jacobin Magazine* had an anti-Biden outburst in a piece transparently titled "The Third Way Is the Past. Socialism Is the Future": "Meanwhile, Joe Biden, the heir apparent of the US Third Way, is running a campaign based solely on restoring Obama's *ancien régime*, a pitch not one whit less backward-looking and nostalgic than Trump's atavistic appeal to "Make America Great Again."⁴⁹ Once the honeymoon is over, the only thing that might save this convenience, loveless marriage is the promise it will be a short one: ironically, Biden's age is his secret weapon for keeping his coalition alive. Left-wing progressives need a respite to gather strength after the probable departure from the political scene of their champion Bernie Sanders; they are willing to sit out four years of a Biden presidency because they know there won't be eight. Biden openly views himself as a transitional candidate acting as a "bridge" towards a new generation of Democratic candidates.⁵⁰ Whether this new generation will be Pete Buttigieg and Kamala Harris' or Alexandria Osario-Cortez or Ilham Omar's remains to be seen. A progressive DemExit⁵¹ (exit from the Democratic Party) seems implausible...for now.



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The Ghost of Trumpism and the Future of the Grand Old Party

Just like the Democrats have been durably shaped by the "Clinton consensus", the Republicans' body of doctrine was bearing until 2016 the imprint of the "Reagan consensus". Reaganism was a complex blend of neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and interventionism; it was economically liberal,

socially conservative but politically rather enamored with the Western liberal-democratic model of development. The old-school Cold War conservatism was sincere in its adherence to the minimal axiological core of political liberalism.⁵² Indeed, few contested human rights, checks-and-balances or the independence of the judiciary. Even fewer would have disagreed with Adam Przeworski's famous aphorism that "democracy is a system in which parties lose elections": when the Conservative Revolution ebbed, it did so silently and resignedly. This is not what can be said of today's nationalist populism.

Trump is, at first sight, less the receptacle of the intellectual tradition of the Reaganian Grand Old Party and more the *enfant terrible* of an altogether more chaotic political mythology. From Andrew Jackson to Father Coughlin and George Wallace, America's social conditions and sense of exceptionalism offered fertile soil for populism. The actual political content of this populism is less important than its style. Populism is essentially a discursively strident strategy of construction of the political frontier between the people below and the people above, which can be grafted to a large variety of ideologies or regimes.⁵³ Trump excels in the critique of the American establishment, and his rhetoric against the post-Cold War neoliberal consensus was a potent, effective mixture of right-wing and left-wing ideas. This allowed the maverick businessman to tap into a large well of disillusionment, alienation and anger. His electorate was largely white (88%), rural (35%) or suburban (53%); roughly 71% were non-college graduates.⁵⁴ A study of the Brookings Institute called attention to the fact that the 2497 counties who voted for Trump make up only 29% of the economy: he thrived in the struggling pockets of poverty and deindustrialization of America's heartland.⁵⁵ However, if Trump was the ideal champion of the people, running on a radical anti-establishment demand, how comes the Republican Party became the sole vehicle of Trumpism? First and foremost, there was an almost perfect overlap between Trump support and Republican affiliation: in 2016, 98% of voters who identified as "consistently conservatives" (and 87% of those "mostly conservative") voted for Trump.⁵⁶ In 2018, support for the impeachment of Donald Trump also split predictably along party fault lines, with over 90% of Republicans opposed and 90% of Democrats in favor.⁵⁷ The last pre-election Gallup poll showed that over 90% of Republicans approve of Donald Trump, as opposed to 3% of Democrats.⁵⁸ To put

these numbers into perspective, George W. Bush – the quintessential "establishment" Republican hailing from a Republican dynasty – only had 75% approval rating **among** Republicans (6% among Democrats) by the end of his second term.⁵⁹ To some extent, this is also true about minority voters: over 65% of Trump's Black voters⁶⁰ and 85% of Latino voters⁶¹ identify as Republicans. Policy-wise, Trump has pursued consistently some of the main objectives of his party: he waged war on "Big Government socialism" through tax cuts and deregulations. On foreign policy, he treaded a somewhat unpredictable middle lane between neoconservatism and non-interventionism, but his tough stance on Iran, Israel, Venezuela, Cuba or China granted robust satisfactions to the Republican establishment. Above all, he was a prominent fighter on the barricades of the Culture Wars in which Republicans have invested so much in the last three decades. His appearances at pro-life events, his anti-political correctness rhetoric, his offensive against Antifa and his staunch pro-Second Amendment oaths of fealty have made him an icon. The conservative pop culture (and the extreme right counter-culture) has seized his colorful persona and made him a war machine against "libtards" ("liberal retards"), "feminazi", "snowflakes" and everything that is wrong about today's "leftist" America. Trump embodies the rugged, alpha Americanness of the "good side" of the Culture War: no wonder the gaudy unofficial slogan of the Trump campaign was "Make liberals cry again" (a reference to the popular "liberal tears" meme)⁶².

This is why Trumpism is so perfectly soluble into republicanism, and vice-versa. However, now that Donald Trump leaves the Oval Office, the Republicans are a ship without a captain. The resilience of the Trump electoral base means a brutal execution of Trumpism is unthinkable on the short term. Trump remains a wildly popular figure who energizes the electorate in ways other hard-right figures such as Tom Cotton, Ted Cruz, Lindsay Graham or Mitch McConnell can only dream of. Yet the support he garnered from establishment figures has always been tinged with pragmatism. To understand the dynamics of the post-Trump Republican party, we must cast our eyes on the reasons it so readily embraced Trump. We can identify three "pathways" to Trumpism. The first path is that of "ideological Trumpism". Some, like Patrick Buchanan, Julius Krein, Alex Jones or Steve Bannon, articulated a much more cohesive and coherent form of Trumpism than

Trump himself, projecting upon him their own aspirations. If many among the initial cohorts were disappointed (see the case of Julius Krein⁶³), a new crop of conservatives – many of them young – adhered unconditionally to Trump's palingenetic narrative of American decay and ultimate redemption under his presidency. The second pathway is the one of "anti-anti-Trumpism": many supported other candidates to the Republican primary in 2016, but were radicalized by the backlash against Trump in liberal circles. A prime example of this is conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro, an initial Trump skeptic who declared that he will be voting this time around because "Democrats have lost their fucking minds".⁶⁴ The Republicans stoked this sensibility by peddling the idea that Biden is a mere trojan horse for socialism and is a hostage of the radical wing of his party.⁶⁵ The third pathway is, unsurprisingly, cold pragmatism and a realization that Donald Trump is *effective*. The future of the Republican party is in the hands of the latter. They could either side with ideological trumpists or with a fourth faction of the Republicans, the so-called "Never-Trumpers". They "anti-Left" faction will follow, as they have a vested interest in not dividing the conservative bloc and creating a bulwark against progressives.

The strong showing of Republican candidates in congressional elections proved Trumpism is not an automatically losing ticket. The party still holds, thanks to Trump, institutional bridgeheads around which it can gather: the Supreme Court who now has a conservative-leaning majority,⁶⁶ and possibly the Senate. In the vacuum left by the presidential defeat, however, a national figure on par with Trump has yet to emerge. As an alternative to Donald Trump, the Lincoln Project (a resolutely anti-Trump conservative organization) suggested the name of Fox News anchor Tucker Carlson.⁶⁷ Carlson, known for his diatribes against political correctness, sits squarely in "anti-anti-Trumpism" territory. He is the beneficiary of a growing consensus both among Trump supporters (such as Sam Nunberg) and Trump-skeptics. The 51-year-old Carlson brings to the table a massive media audience (his show is currently the most watched cable news program in history, no less) and an image of intellectual gravity that Trump lacked. Other names from the conservative media sphere, such as Ben Shapiro, might be considered. Ron de Santis, governor of Florida, has also been boosted by Trump's success in his state and his popularity with Latino voters (62%)⁶⁸, who can be a crucial

demographic for Republicans in the future. Among high profile Republicans, Texas senator Ted Cruz might also be benefiting from the Trump-induced swerve to the right of the party. On the other hand, Nikki Haley, a woman of color, would anchor the party back to the political center, an arguably better strategic move. But it is impossible to ignore the elephant in the room: a return of Donald Trump or of his family in 2024. His two very political children, Donald Jr. and Ivanka, represent two very different faces of Trumpism. Donald Trump Jr embodies the abrasive, macho edge of the MAGA ideology: he has invested everything in his father's bellicose narrative of "owning the libs" and is a natural heir to Trumpland. Ivanka and her husband Jared, on the other hand, are a vague promise that Trumpism can swerve towards a more orthodox brand of conservatism. Her gentler, more "maternal" presence may be soothing enough to allow conservatives of different sensibilities to coalesce around her: some attracted to her suave idealization of family values, some to her identity as a successful businesswoman, some others to her name.

But beyond questions of who will be the torchbearer of the Republicans into the near future, one thing is certain: Trump won't be the last American populist. The conditions that produced him are still here. The variegated Trump coalition has still at its core downward mobile white voters. Economic inequality was heightened by a sense of cultural malaise, and Trump weaved both economic and cultural insecurities into a new nativist synthesis. He was particularly apt at exploiting the deepening suspicion of technocratic politics and stoking resentment of experts of all kinds – something his feud with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the leading epidemiologist in charge with the country's Covid-19 response, showcased only too clearly. As a direct result, some of the more radical sprouts of Trumpism are taking roots and growing: in Georgia, Marjorie Taylor Greene has become the first supporter of the far-right QAnon conspiracy theory to win a US House seat.⁶⁹ It is not an aberration: 27 Q-Anon supporters were on the ballot for the 2020 Congressional elections, according to a study by MediaMatters.⁷⁰ The so-called QAnon conspiracy believes that a Satan-worshipping cabal of Democrats, Hollywood celebrities and billionaires run the world through a corrupt administrative apparatus (the "Deep State"), engaging in pedophilia, human organ trafficking and cannibalism. That this gory imagery, reminiscent of the turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic

blood libels, has managed to break out of the ghettos of the Internet far-right and somehow spill over in the political mainstream is a testament to the political volatility of our times.

A fraught period of soul-searching lies ahead for the United States. Joe Biden clearly expressed a desire for it to be a period of healing and rebuilding, but for that the country will need a new social pact that has been upended by the resentment on both sides following the 2016 shock. Draining the toxicity of populism while heeding to what Trump got right during his presidency will be a difficult balancing act. But the fate of the country and of liberal democracy hangs in balance.

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A Multilateral World?

Ambassador Professor Dumitru CHICAN

On the 26th of June, while participating in the ministerial reunion of the Alliance for Multilateralism that took place in the context of the 75th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs announced Romania's decision to join the Declaration of Principles of the Alliance for Multilateralism, initiated and established by France and Germany. The concept was to propose a counterbalance to the contemporary attempts to weaken and even challenge the basis of the international order that governed the world after World War II, so that the foundations of international law could ensure global peace and sustainable development for the international community.

This article deals with the concept of multilateralism, its basic meaning, coordinates and constructive functions, but also its limitations and constraints that – both theoretically and pragmatically – the idea of multilateralism faces in its attempt to pose the question to which there is not a consensual answer so far: does multilateralism provide the ideal paradigm for the construct, security and functioning of the future world order?

There are many common-sense analytic opinions that claim multilateralism is in crisis, has lost its usefulness and foretells what Francis Fukuyama once saw as “the end of history”, as the ongoing peace of our humanity has become a self-attaining objective thanks to the multiplication and globalization of the material and spiritual exchange, to the widespread of democracy and to the institutionalization of international relations and cohesiveness.

Simply put, multilateralism is considered – according to the Encyclopedia Britannica – as the “process of organizing relations between groups of three or more states” in order to mutually achieve universally agreed common goals. From this point of view, the discussions and controversies regarding the concept of multilateralism do not focus on certain objectives, but on the principles, values, instruments and institutions engaged in the effort to reach the respective objective and positive purposes.

The institutional beginnings of the multilateralism movement have materialised after World War II,

when the United Nations was established or other pluralist, multilateral arrangements took shape, such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the instrument of the Most-Favoured-Nation Clause - which had pre-set applicability on all GATT members, once activated. Progressively, the applicability and interpretation of multilateralism go beyond technicalities, in order to define as multilateral any system of multistate association whose cohesion was assured by the equality of obligations and rights among the associated states, that act according to rules and regulations unanimously agreed. Logically, such an approach opened the door for the entire corpus of the United Nations and its agencies to be placed under the sign and functions of multilateralism.



(Source: <https://cei.org/>)

Multilateralism – Defining Elements

The history and the previous experiences of multilateralism offer the grounds on which we can identify at least four elements that articulate the concept, and allow us a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The first comes from the undeniable finding that any construct with a multilateral vocation and dimension is the result and embodiment of a *social pact or contract* codified and enshrined in writing. The written contract and the adhesion of all signatories to the norms it stipulates provide the key transition from the natural, instinctual and chaotic law where the community is divided between leaders and followers, to an order among equals, that works based on the unanimously accepted and codified in writing pact.

This finding highlights another facet of multilateralism that is, at the same time, an aspiration proclaimed by the ethics of the United

Nations: the one that wants multilateralism to be an *inclusive process*, not an exclusive and exclusivist one. As long as the edifice that claims to be multilateral will not manage to include and affirm its universality, those who are left behind, excluded, that is, will perceive this multilateralism as an unjust, mercantile construct, consequently useless and unacceptable.

And this clarification leads to a third defining element of multilateralism – its *egalitarian and comprehensive vocation*. The ideal equality between the structural entities of the system, between their duties and rights gives all approaches on multilateralism a *democratic dimension*. On the other hand, the concept of multilateralism, as it has been advertised throughout the decades after World War II, has undoubtedly highlighted the fact that multilateralism was compromised frequently by a certain amount of inequality generated by the objective differences between the multi-state and state entities involved in this phenomenon. This can be seen very well in the case of some multilateral acts or instruments, such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, or to an equal extent, the UN Security Council. In both cases, a limited number of countries are “more equal” than the rest, either due to the number of nuclear weapons they possess, or because they were winners in World War II.

Finally, we need to mention that the existence of a legal, written agreement does not guarantee the impeccable functioning of multilateralism. Because of circumstances or future reasons, one of the participants in multilateral process can invoke rights, or have claims in contradiction with the fundamental principles and norms of the multilateral pact. To prevent or find solutions to such conflictual situations, the multilateral process must have at its disposal, outside its physical borders, independent mechanisms to correct the functional balance of the multilateral pact. A good example in this case is the European Court of Human Rights or the European Court of Justice.

Multilateralism or Multipolarity?

Literature frequently approaches multilateralism and multipolarity as similar concepts, hence the conclusion that the two can be substituted one with the other according to the logic of narratives. In other words, the two can substitute each other without altering the interpretation of reality. Still, such a rhetoric ignores the natural discrepancies between the complex realities of state and national actors on one hand, and the egalitarian, inclusive

and universal logic of multilateralism, on the other.

This forced synonymy cannot survive a thorough analysis that shows each of the two systems is born from different and particular judgements and philosophies regarding the concept of global order as defined by politology.

Multipolarity is a possible and variable concept with regard to maintaining some sort of functional balance between countries and stopping the slip to anarchy of relations in the global order. From this point of view, can be considered multipolar a specific order among countries that relies itself on the existence and action of several power centers in a more or less relative balance. A classic example of operation of such a multipolar world was offered by the relations between the great monarchies of the European Classicism. When any of the crowned heads on the continent visibly intended to dominate and exert their power over the others, the latter formed coalitions and alliances to stop the hegemonic tendencies of the former. Equally, the bipolar order West-East (the USA and the Soviet Union), or later the tri-polar order (the USA, Soviet Russia and China) provides us with another example of the relationship among the main power centres. No matter the numeric dimension of the multipolar order, it is – unlike multilateralism – characterized by lack of a pact, a permanent “codified contract” between the power centers. They can coexist or ignore each other when their relationship does not become competitive and conflictual, through the game of balance among them. While multilateralism is a constructed, inclusive and cooperative reality, multipolarity is characterized by exclusivity and elitism, based on power. Multipolarity is the order of aristocracy, while multilateralism proposes an order of democracy.

The Need for Reform. The Case of the United Nations

This fall’s plenary of the United Nations General Assembly celebrated the diamond jubilee – the 75th anniversary of the creation of the universal organization (following the end of World War II). The festivities, clearly affected by the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19, took place at a time when the narrative regarding a new world order gains more and more ground. An order that reflects highly and more accurately the new balances of a humanity witnessing the emergence of new powers – India or Brazil, or the assault on the balance among the “old permanent members” of the UN Security Council, pressured more and more by

other power centres – Japan, South Africa or Indonesia, that aim at being part of the “permanents” club claiming the management of the global order.

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations brought back into the spotlight long forgotten criticism that is still topical and important. The organization is being accused more or less overtly of being obsolete, incapable or lacking the will to update and adjust to the deep changes, balances and aspirations of the three quarters of a century since the UN Charter was adopted. In unison with the above, the current Secretary General of the Organization, Antonio Guterres, as well as many of the leaders of nations and countries who delivered speeches during the plenary, have eagerly issued appeals for boosting pluralism and multilateralism so that tomorrow’s humanity, acting as a whole, can bequeath its future generation an order more reconciled with itself, more focused on equality, solidarity and morality.

In our world that has just entered the 21st century there is, no matter how much we would like to deny, a “clash” or a shock between multilateralism and multipolarity. And in this case we are referring to the opposition between the aspirations of one of the visions regarding the egalitarian and inclusive governance of the world, on one hand, and the attempts – obsolete by time – to maintain an exclusive and elitist governance of a world where everybody is equal on paper, while in reality some are more equal than others.

Multilateralism: A Panacea?

Multilateralist thinking is, essentially, one of the many Western concepts built on the idea of universal equality. Equality between state actors and non-state organizations, codifying such concepts in mandatory and unanimously accepted treaties, finding peaceful solutions to conflicts are just a few of these principles. However, we cannot deny the fact that despite the ethical and egalitarian dimension of multilateralism, there are many voices and writers that accuse some actors – state and non-state institutions – of promoting a shallow solidarity behind which they act in favour of the great powers and traditional power blocs. Thus, within the UN General Assembly, multilateral by definition, the decisions taken are mere recommendations, while the Security Council represents the almighty body that has the full legal power. Equally, the “universal” principles that the International Monetary Fund is based and works on, are – pragmatically speaking – just the representation of

a mercantile financial-monetary rigour that varies from one country to the other. And last but not least, the functioning of World Trade Organization – proclaimed a universal body, is based on compelling countries to completely obey a regulatory package ignoring the differences between developed and developing countries. The equality between the rich and the poor claimed by the Organization is a mere veil that hides the pre-eminence that the Western and developed countries benefit from. In all these cases, as well as in others, we are referring, at the same time, to bureaucratic entities that claim to speak for the general interests of humanity, while, in fact, they speak and act for their own interests.

Under such circumstances, one can say that talking about multilateralism still means talking about a process in the making and expansion. And this is why multilateralism should be seen not as a therapeutic panacea for all the problems and illnesses of the international community, but more as an instrument meant to contribute to strengthening what could be considered an interstate society, defended from the threat of conflict and freed from the atavistic violence of the war. However, as long as multilateral countries and instruments will keep on being affected by inequalities, underdevelopment, the logic of the strong and by financial and identity crises, multilateralism will remain a mere instrument to remove obstacles and create a world friendlier and more responsible with itself. And one cannot ask of an instrument more than it can give.

EUROPEAN UNION

Peter Stano, the European Commission's Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: "The global pandemic requires global and regional solutions, and in this context, the cooperation under the Black Sea Synergy is more important than ever."

In an unstable geopolitical context, with increasingly strong and visible tensions on the international arena, the European Union's reform process places particular emphasis on the Black Sea area.

Peter Stano, the European Commission's Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, offered an insight into the prospects of Black Sea Synergy in relation to the challenges in front of regional cooperation, in the interview he gave to *Geostrategic Pulse Magazine*.



Geostrategic Pulse: Once Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU, the expansion of the EU's maritime borders increased the strategic relevance of cooperation in the Black Sea area, a strategic region connecting Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. Do you see a shift in paradigm when it comes to utilising the potential of the Black Sea Synergy initiative, the main regional cooperation programme in the Black Sea area?

Peter Stano: The EU reached the Black Sea shores with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, calling for a reinforced cooperation policy for the region. This is when the Black Sea Synergy was established as the EU's key regional policy

framework for enhanced practical cooperation among Black Sea states to address common challenges for the benefit of the citizens and communities in the region.

Since then, Black Sea regional cooperation has further developed to maximise its potential. In 2019, thanks to intense work and enormous efforts of the region's actors, with the EU guidance, all Black Sea bordering countries adopted two milestone agendas: The Common Maritime Agenda and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for the Black Sea. These propose goals for the next decade, regarding blue maritime growth and sustainable blue economy, research and innovation as well as protection of the marine and coastal ecosystems. The implementation of the agendas has already started for example with the establishment of a Virtual Knowledge Centre – a one-stop online platform on the blue economy helping stakeholders in the region to be better and more easily informed about the network and cooperation opportunities in the blue economy sectors.

The policy goals are underpinned by concrete actions. Since 2015, the EU has provided over €100 million from different instruments to support Black Sea cooperation in the following areas:

- €54 million to finance more than 56 cross-border projects helping business development, environmental protection, action against climate change, and encouraging contacts between people;
- €36 million for research and innovation from Horizon 2020, focusing on the support for the science community on marine research and innovation;
- €11 million to support maritime policy objectives in the Black Sea basin, including the blue economy. Activities encompass the development of studies and scientific advice on marine and maritime related topics, the technical assistance for implementing the

ecosystem approach, the analysis of the functioning of maritime zones, of promoting innovation and knowledge management of the blue economy, the Assistance Mechanism to support the implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea and the Virtual Knowledge Centre;

- €4.9 million to support the fisheries sector, focussing on the implementation of the 10-year joint roadmap, a new fisheries governance established in the Black Sea with the Sofia Ministerial Declaration, with the establishment of multiannual management plans; fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; the improvement of data collection and scientific advice, with regional surveys at the sea.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has badly hit the Black Sea countries. The global pandemic requires global and regional solutions, and in this context, the cooperation under the Black Sea Synergy is more important than ever. The Black Sea region has encountered severe economic damage and decrease in incomes up to 60-90% in some sectors, and thus joint actions to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus in maritime transport, tourism, fisheries and aquaculture will be required. On the other hand, the pandemic has also opened up some opportunities. A sustainable and resilient recovery model with the green agenda and increased digitalisation at its core, gains particular importance not only for the Black Sea but also for the EU.

The Black Sea Synergy is fully in line with – and indeed supports – the European Green Deal and the EU's Digital Agenda. In both cases, we see a huge importance in implementing these priorities together with our partner countries, and encouraging our partners to be equally ambitious. Only through close cooperation can we tackle global challenges such climate change and digital transformation.

In this respect, the European External Action Service, together with the European Commission are organising a high-level Green Diplomacy Virtual Event on 16 November on *Advancing the Black Sea Synergy and the European Green Deal*. This interactive event will bring together high-level panellists, academics, practitioners, journalists and the public to present and discuss the current environmental challenges and sustainable green development in the Black Sea region and the European Union's role in responding to these challenges and opportunities. You and your readers are invited to connect and register here. All relevant

information and documentation about the event and its goals are on the website.

How do the countries with direct access to the Black Sea relate today to the concept of regional cooperation?

You only need to look at the European Union itself to see the benefits of regional cooperation and effective multilateralism. It is the same in the Black Sea region. Challenges are better tackled, and opportunities better grasped, when working together. The role of multilateralism in the region is simple: to establish a level playing field between states regardless of their position in the international system, to set up stable norms and standards, applicable to all actors. The current pandemic again confirms the need for such an approach: the virus knows no borders.

Black Sea regional cooperation has been developed on a voluntary basis and at different levels of engagement, for example between local authorities, civil society, and government administrations. The countries share common objectives - the prosperity, resilience and stability of the region – as well as challenges - environmental challenges, need for better interconnectivity, climate change, even migration. The implementation of all initiatives and activities in the region cannot be achieved without the effective cooperation of all countries concerned.

As an example, let me mention the *EU Black Sea Cross-Border Cooperation Programme*, which has significantly supported the local economies and the development of communities along the Black Sea. Also with the EU support, regional actors further engaged in the *Improving Environmental Monitoring in the Black Sea* project, which resulted for example in the setup of an online Black Sea water quality database providing detailed information about the state of the sea. This work is essential, as the Black Sea remains one of the most polluted basins in the world due to human activities. Regional cooperation is critical to address this properly.

Moreover, civil society, through the EU supported *Black Sea NGO Forum*, remains an important stakeholder and continues to provide essential contributions to regional cooperation.

To what extent do you see possible cooperation between the EU, the Russian Federation and Turkey in the region?

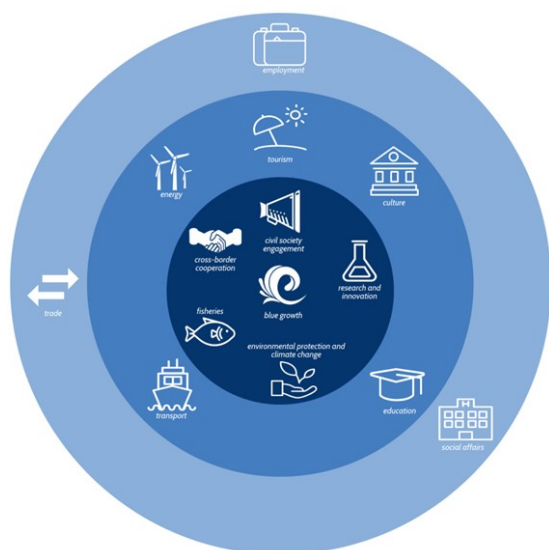
The Black Sea Synergy is primarily focused on thematic and pragmatic cooperation aimed at

identifying common solutions for regional challenges and to seize regional opportunities. It is open to all countries of the region. The constructive engagement of all six riparian countries in creating the *Common Maritime Agenda* and the *Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda* for the Black Sea are good examples of the positive collaboration, which contributes to confidence building. The active participation, in particular projects such as environmental monitoring or cross-border cooperation also has a positive impact on the well-being of communities across the Black Sea region.

The European Union encourages good neighbourly relations both for its Member States and for non-EU member states. We do not impose binary choices when it comes to cooperation. Therefore, if we can engage countries such as Russia and Turkey in specific projects and cooperation activities, that is clearly positive. At the same time, our engagement in the Black Sea is clearly based on respect for international law, including the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, including freedom of navigation, as well as the EU non-recognition policy on the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. This was reaffirmed by EU Foreign Ministers back in June 2019.

Taking into account the complex geopolitical context of the Black Sea region, what are the main elements and initiatives that constitute the foundation of the Black Sea Synergy initiative?

The structure of the Black Sea Synergy has been adapted to the changing needs over the years, currently concentrating on 10 sectoral and thematic fields of cooperation. These areas of cooperation are structured around three concentric circles:



I. The inner circle includes fields of cooperation under the Black Sea Synergy initiative that resulted in key achievements in: blue growth, with particular focus on the integrated maritime policy, marine research and innovation; fisheries and aquaculture; environmental protection and climate change; cross-border cooperation; and civil society engagement.

II. The middle circle reflects the fields of cooperation under the Synergy that made progress over the years and include education, science and innovation (beyond marine), culture and tourism; and energy and transport of different forms.

III. The outer circle refers to fields of cooperation of the Synergy with little progress in recent years, such as social affairs and employment. These areas were identified by the EU and some of the Black Sea riparian states as priorities moving forward, also in dealing with the consequences of the coronavirus.

Across all areas of cooperation, engagement with the civil society as well as with local communities, academic and business representatives in the Black Sea region is fundamental.

Furthermore, stronger links between the Black Sea Synergy and other EU initiatives, policies and strategies are key. This is in particular important with regard to the *EU Strategy for the Danube Region* due to the geographical and natural river-sea connection, and to joint actions in environment, transport and energy areas.

Due to its geographical location, as well as geopolitical considerations, the region has clear potential for interconnectivity, crucial for the prosperity and resilience of the region. For example, the Black Sea basin should play an enhanced bridging role connecting between major EU transport routes East-West (with the possibility to use the Danube River too), North-South (from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea) and further East with Central Asia. Connectivity, including maritime transport, is pivotal for deepening the EU's cooperation with the three partners in the Black Sea with whom the EU has Association Agreements - Georgia, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

Finally, the EU maintains close ties with other regional and international organisations active in the Black Sea. The EU is a permanent observer of the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation, takes active role in the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean, which contributes to achieving sustainability of fisheries and development of aquaculture, and actively cooperates with the Commission on the Protection

of the Black Sea against Pollution.

What can you tell us about the main obstacles that hinder cooperation in the Black Sea region, and what steps could be taken in order to maximize the potential of the Black Sea?

Clearly, the most important thing for regional cooperation to be successful is for the countries to engage. The EU can facilitate, can provide finance, expertise, platforms, but without the political will and effective cooperation of the countries involved, it cannot bring the desired results. Fortunately, we see a great will and desire for cooperation, stemming directly from the positive outcomes that such regional cooperation brings.

Another major obstacle concerns security-related aspects. We know that the region has witnessed, over the years, various geopolitical tensions, destabilisation efforts, even violations of International Law. The Black Sea Synergy, which is based on respect for international law, remains a framework for concrete and pragmatic cooperation, of creative thinking and developing of broad, deep and sustainable actions to address the transnational challenges of today and to use the potential of the Black Sea.

Finally, the current COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges to the region. Looking for a sustainable and resilient recovery model is needed and regional cooperation activities with green agenda and increased digitalisation should be at its core.

To what extent do you see achievable the objective of establishing a common space of security and prosperity by strengthening regional cooperation?

As the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, has often said, the EU is multilateral by essence. Multilateralism is the only effective way to face threats with which no country can cope on its own and it is definitely the only path forward considering the current pandemic context.

Actions and projects that address the common needs and interests, use the untapped potential and propose concrete solutions for common regional challenges should be valued and nurtured. In our view, regional cooperation is an optimal way to achieve prosperity, stability and peace. This clearly applies to the Black Sea region.

Peter Stano is the Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European External Action Service (EEAS), former Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia. Peter Stano also worked as Spokesperson in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy portfolio, which was then led by the former Czech EU Commissioner Štefan Füle. He worked for Slovak public media, in the British BBC World Service and German Deutsche Welle. Leading media work and communication on: Transatlantic relations (US, Canada), Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Europe (non-EU) including Western Europe, Western Balkans, and Turkey, Middle East and North Africa (including Iran/JCPOA, MEPP), External aspects of migration, Hybrid threats and disinformation, Global strategy, Multilateral: G7, OSCE.

Professor Adrian Pop: "The EU has a long way to go in order to capitalize on the vast opportunities provided by the coronavirus pandemic for strengthening its position as a global player"

In an unstable geopolitical environment, with the international landscape marked by growing tensions, the reformation process of the European Union after Brexit cannot ignore the way the Member States seek to relate themselves to the security and defence dimension. While confronted with multiple threats and crises, the EU has managed to come in support of the member states that were significantly affected and confronted with domestic tensions and turmoil.

Adrian Pop, Professor of International Relations with the Faculty of Political Sciences at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration, offered an insight into the prospects of crises management in relation to the challenges to EU Security and Defence, in the interview he gave to *Geostrategic Pulse Magazine*.



Geostrategic Pulse: Professor Adrian Pop, crises management is crucial to ensuring the resilience of the EU. The ability to respond to domestic and foreign threats and challenges represents a major dimension of the EU's strive to play a significant global role. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you assess the EU's preparedness and readiness to respond to new challenges and threats?

Adrian Pop: The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has confirmed the need for policies which are centred on strengthening EU resilience. Cultivating a

forward-looking approach, capable of anticipating threats and challenges is in tune with the current European Commission focus on facilitating the green, digital, and fair transitions, as evinced by the setting up of four tightly inter-connected Vice-Presidencies: one for the European Green Deal; one for a Europe fit to the Digital Age; one for an Economy that Works for the People; and another one for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight. Strategic foresight is expected to help us better understand these transitions and actively shape the world we want to leave in. The underlying logic of these EU institutional novelties is based on the need to develop a sustainable strategy as a tool to address not only the unresolved problems accumulated over the previous decades, but above all as a condition to face the arising new problems, related to the many unfolding and inter-related crises ahead of us. One may consider demographic changes (linked both to the aging of population, the birth rate drops of several European countries and the subsequent shortage of workforce), social changes (including the many transformations requiring a new understanding of the welfare state), geopolitical changes (which point to the redistribution of global power relations and the role played by Europe), technological changes, climatic and environmental crises, changes in the labor and energy markets. Each of these changes represents an important challenge and none of them can be dismissed as secondary. The problem behind the aforementioned changes (and many others that could not be mentioned) is that they are all maturing at the same time. That is why, a comprehensive long-term strategy is badly needed. The *2020 Strategic Foresight Report*, the first annual Strategic Foresight Report of the European Commission, is the initial step in the right direction, providing a structural analysis of the EU's resilience along four dimensions: (i) social and economic; (ii) geopolitical; (iii) green; and (iv) digital. Building on in-house resources (especially the Joint Research Centre, the European Commission's science and knowledge service), external expertise and cooperation with Member States, other key stakeholders and citizens, the current Commission

is intent to expand its strategic foresight capacities to assess risks and opportunities and to promote early warning and situational awareness.

To what extent have the current European mechanisms enabled cooperation, coordination and a rapid response? Have the actions taken by the EU contributed to reducing the consequences of the economic and social crises in the Member States?

After an uneasy start, the EU and its Member States pulled together to deal with the crisis. Initial competition for scarce medical resources and unilateral actions by Member States in the single market and Schengen Area quickly evolved into improved cooperation and coordination, facilitated by the European Commission. The EU devised innovative solutions and demonstrated its resilience capacities. EU manufacturers and 3D printing companies swiftly adapted their production lines to produce facemasks, ventilators and hand sanitizers. The Commission established the first-ever common strategic reserve of medical equipment as part of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (rescEU) and helped facilitate more than 350 flights to bring stranded EU citizens back home. After initial border restrictions resulting in supply bottlenecks, the Commission implemented and coordinated the green lanes allowing freight transport to move unhindered. Distance learning was established to compensate for closed schools and universities. Companies and administrations shifted to teleworking where possible. Consumers turned to e-commerce and home deliveries. Member States put in place safety nets to protect firms and workers during the confinement measures. Between April and May 2020, the Commission adopted a safety net package and issued country-specific recommendations under the European Semester that applied maximum flexibility to accommodate this extraordinary situation. It also put forward a coordinated strategy to lift confinement measures and a comprehensive recovery plan. Therefore, the pandemic has also underlined Europe's capacity to act in the face of adversity.

Faced with an unprecedented health crisis and as a consequence of their unpreparedness, several governments in the Northern hemisphere in particular have implemented exceptional crisis management measures. More than 3 billion people have been subjected to partial or total lockdown. The sudden, rapid slowdown of the global economy, disruption of production and supply chains, political turmoil, unemployment, job

insecurity and eruptive social climate leading to violent protests are just some of the repercussions of the exceptional crisis measures taken in the previous months, which we are currently experiencing. Mass lockdown is a strategy that will probably not be repeated; health strategies that will range from localized lockdowns to a "live and let die" approach will be promoted instead. National crisis management units should therefore integrate wider economic and social measures into their action plans.

On a global level, what measures has the EU adopted to help vulnerable regions and communities?

The EU has launched its "Team Europe" package to support partner countries in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences. **Combining financial resources** of almost **36 billion euros** from the EU, its Member States, and financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the package has been primarily directed towards those regions and communities which were affected by the pandemic the most.

What can you tell us about the EU's Security Strategy (2020-2025)? What is its main paradigm, and how does it ensure the cohesion of the new security ecosystem?

The distinctiveness of the EU Security Union Strategy, covering the period 2020-2025, is its comprehensive approach to security as well as its focus on the EU added value in this sector. It defines strategic priorities and the corresponding actions to address security risks in both the physical and digital domains in an integrated manner, concentrating on where the EU can make the difference. It underlines the need for an EU with a critical mass of industry, technology production and supply chain resilience. Conceiving security as a shared responsibility, it lays the foundations for a security ecosystem that covers the whole European society. It is at the same time an early detection, prevention and rapid response to crises strategy, a performance-driven strategy, targeting concrete results, and a whole-of-society strategy, linking key players in both the public and private sectors in a common endeavour.

To what extent has the EU succeeded to strengthen, during this period, its position as a global player? On a medium and long term, can the humanitarian aid provided by the EU create

the necessary premises for an increase in the diplomatic and economic relations with countries in Africa and Asia?

Humanitarian crises have steadily increased in complexity and severity in recent years. Conflict remained the main driver of humanitarian needs, while natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated emergency aid. A significant proportion of this went on supporting conflict-affected populations inside Syria and refugees in neighbouring countries and regions. The EU has also continued to be a leading donor in other parts of the world, with Africa continuing to account for a large share of funding. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism (rescEU) for international assistance was activated several times. However, the EU has a long way to go in order to capitalize on the vast opportunities provided by the coronavirus pandemic for strengthening its position as a global player.

Prevention, preparedness and global response to crises, especially on a regional and global level, require close coordination with United Nations and World Bank, among other relevant bodies. What can you tell us in this respect?

Large-scale humanitarian crises are very likely in Africa, India and neighbouring countries, as well as in South America. The danger of additional (climate, agricultural, political or military) crises in certain states or regions is also high. Global solidarity is likely to be a challenge due to the perceived need to dedicate resources to rebuild at home and deal with the consequences of these crises. Therefore, the EU should lead the way in promoting multilateralism within relevant organizations in the UN system, building on success stories of the past, such as the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were tangible manifestations of the capacity of the international community to formulate visions of a brighter future.

The EU is facing complex and, to some extent unprecedented, challenges. That given, to what extent is and will the Union be able to focus on its neighbourhood and enlargement priorities/objectives?

The effort put on tackling these challenges in order for the EU to emerge stronger and more resilient from the current coronavirus crisis will likely divert some energy required for implementing both its neighbourhood and

enlargement priorities. However, as it is testified by the recent Communication on the EU Enlargement Policy and the 2020 Enlargement Package, the Commission is intent to continue keeping the enlargement objectives on its agenda.

The increased use of online instruments to ensure the continuation of activities during the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the pressing issue of internet security. How is this challenge tackled by the new European security strategy?

Digital infrastructures are an increasingly crucial segment of critical infrastructures, on the protection of which our way of life depends. The EU Security Union Strategy provides a thorough framework for reflection on how our digital dependency and the increased exposure to cyber-attacks and cybercrime activities are affecting our world. The Network and Information Systems Directive, which is the main European cybersecurity legislation, is currently under review. Making sure that the existing EU rules against cybercrime are thoroughly implemented, the European Commission has also put forward a strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse online, and is intent to explore measures meant to counter identity theft and to enhance law enforcement capacity in digital investigations. Moreover, the Commission has also identified the need for a Joint Cyber Unit as a platform for structured and coordinated cooperation.

Professor Dr. Christian Kaunert: "The EU will have opportunities from Brexit. Without Britain, the EU will be able to define more easily what kind of diplomatic and military actor it wants to be"

UK leaving the European Union takes place in an increasingly complex and challenging international context, and to make things even more complicated the bilateral negotiations meant to deliver an agreement by the end of this year are stalling. The good news is that the outcome of the presidential elections in the USA promises to be beneficial to the transatlantic relationship on the whole and to (eventually) contribute to the UK-EU relationship being repaired.

Professor Dr. Christian Kaunert of University of South Wales has offered his views on Brexit, its ramifications and implications from a transatlantic perspective in the interview given to *Geostrategic Pulse* Magazine.

Geostrategic Pulse: The US presidential election proved to be, in terms of direction of the American foreign policy over the coming years, about choosing between Joe Biden's Restoring American Leadership and Donald Trump's America First.

Restoring American Leadership entails a complex foreign and security agenda to deal with the pressing challenges posed by China, Russia, Iran or the instability in the Middle East at large, not to mention the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and climate. Nevertheless, president Biden's priorities are expected to be mainly domestic – social, economic, response to COVID-19 crisis.

That given, and with the EU and UK caught in a separation battle with no clear consensus in sight, to what extent – In your opinion – will, or should fixing the Brussels-London relationship become priority for the new American administration?

The anti-Democratic (anti-Barack Obama, to be more precise) rhetoric component of the Donald Trump-Boris Johnson relationship aside, what should we expect from the president elect Joe Biden (whom Boris Johnson congratulated on winning the elections, though) in terms of Washington's approach and policy on UK when it comes to Brexit?

What about the way Washington will see and approach the overall transatlantic relationship during Joe Biden's mandate, in the light of Brexit and of Europeans promoting the concept of strategic autonomy?

Professor Dr. Christian Kaunert: Many thanks for the interview. These are indeed extremely important questions. Let us take the issues one by one.

Firstly, it is very clear that the new Biden administration will have a very significant impact on the transatlantic relationship between the EU and the US. There will be a very different tone in the relationship between the two sides. While President Trump, on occasion, gave the impression that the EU was perceived as a competitor, if not an antagonist in the international system, this will be a very different relationship under the Biden Administration. President-elect Biden is a veteran of foreign policy with a long history of positive relations with the EU, and, thus, will quickly improve the tone of the relationship. This does not mean that there are no differences of opinion between Biden and the EU, which, of course, there are. There are also significant differences in interests on both sides. But, a change of tone will have a significant impact on the mood music.

Secondly, the Biden administration will be instinctively closer to the position of Ireland inside the EU. This is an important difference to the Trump administration because it will have a very significant impact on the Good Friday agreement. Coming from a line of Democratic administrations, such as the Bill Clinton administration, which had a very significant impact on the Good Friday peace process, the Biden administration is very likely to keep the agreement as an ultimate objective to preserve. This will automatically put the Biden administration somewhat at odds with the current UK government, which has prioritised Brexit over the Good Friday agreement. Of course, PM Johnson will make significant efforts to come closer to the Biden administration, but, in general structural terms, his interests are not very well aligned with President-elect Biden, who is more likely to support

the Irish position inside the EU. As a result of that, Biden will aim to bring London closer to Brussels in order for frictions to exacerbate, but this will be a difficult task, especially when it comes to the Good Friday agreement.

Finally, Biden will be much closer to Brussels than the Trump administration on many issues, from trade to security. Notwithstanding this, this closer alignment will also have a price. President-elect Biden will have significantly higher expectation of the EU than President Trump. He will want stronger support in confronting China, in confronting Russia, and more generally in terms of peace and stability in the world, as well as within the United Nations system. This has the potential to cause frictions with European countries. I believe, nonetheless, that the EU will welcome him with open arms and will be as helpful as it can.

UK and EU are first trade partner of choice for each other (EU accounted for 43% of UK exports in 2019 and 51% of UK imports, according to official data), but the ongoing negotiations are more than just about trade.

What are, in fact, the main lines of disagreement between London and Brussels and where do the two sides stand?

In addition, since reaching an agreement with the EU proves to be so difficult, what are the chances for Boris Johnson's government to reach a speedy trade agreement with Joe Biden's administration?

This is a very important, but very difficult topic.

On the face of it, one might suspect that a trade deal between the EU and the UK should be easy. Economically speaking, the UK is very closely linked to the EU and, thus, should not have too many difficulties to agree a close relationship. Yet, it is important to remember that Brexit is not an economically driven process, but one that is built on an emotionally charged relationship that deteriorated over the last years, starting with PM Gordon Brown, who did not want to sign the Lisbon Treaty in the same room as all the other member states, to PM Cameron, who, firstly, withdrew the Tories from the EPP in the European Parliament, and, then subsequently, offered an in or out referendum to the British public. We all know the results of that, which ultimately, resulted in the departure of the UK from the EU. More than even emotionally driven, this has been an identity driven process, whereby the UK has never truly felt comfortable in the EU structures, even during the times of PM Tony Blair. By history, geography and

political experience, the UK has always felt a different identity to continental EU member states. As such, it was perhaps not too surprising that the British public voted to leave the EU.

What does this mean for the relationship between London and Brussels? Very clearly, the relationship has deteriorated to the point where it has become somewhat antagonistic. On the one hand, the UK has often felt misunderstood by continental Europe. It did not feel acknowledged as a major global power with many global trading and security links. It felt pigeonholed into a continental role where it did not feel comfortable. It aimed to achieve a special role inside the EU, which many EU countries thought had been achieved. Notably, the UK has had opt-outs from the Euro, from Schengen, and major parts of the Justice and Home Affairs acquis. Thus, continental EU countries believed due attention had been given to the UK's special status and role in the world. Yet, this was not perceived in the same way in the UK, and the aforementioned examples, such as PMs Brown, Cameron and May are a testimony to that. With the first Brexiteer PM Johnson, the political mood in the UK changed significantly whereby many pro-EU politicians were dispatched from the Tory party and the wider Whitehall machinery. As a result, there has been a significant change in the UK's self-perception of its role in the world as a global power, more closely linked to the US and to the Anglosphere. This implies less close relations with Brussels, whether that be on trade or security matters. These ideational obstacles cannot be easily overcome through economic considerations.

With regard to a US-UK trade agreement, the chances have significantly decreased with the arrival of the Biden administration. While it might have been difficult to get a trade deal through Congress under a second term Trump administration, the negotiations of such an agreement might have gone relatively speedier. The UK is now faced with a Biden administration that, for geopolitical reasons, will prioritize the EU if it believes a deal can be done with the EU. As a result of these new priorities, the UK will likely have to wait behind the EU in terms of trade agreement, unless Biden believes that a deal cannot be done with the EU. However, having said this, once an agreement between the US and the UK is reached, it is likely to be ratified more speedily by Congress under a Biden administration.

Although UK remains one of the European pillars of NATO, Brexit will undoubtedly produce changes in the way EU approaches European security and

defence, and will also have an impact on EU within the unfolding great power competition.

What can you tell us about the way Brexit will influence the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?

Indeed, Brexit will have a very significant effect on the EU's CFSP. Firstly, the most important military power in Europe will be outside the structures of the EU. While France is clearly a crucial military player on the continent, the loss of the UK will deprive the EU of its strongest military assets, capabilities and intelligence information, alongside diplomatic muscle. The EU as a whole is significantly weaker without the UK.

At the same time, the EU will have opportunities from Brexit as well. The EU structures need significant reform, most notably the question whether national vetoes can be sustained in CFSP, in the long run. Without the UK, perhaps, the EU will be finding the institutional challenges easier to resolve. The UK will not be able to block moves towards some kind of majority voting, some kind of European defence structures and stronger EU foreign policy initiatives. At the same time, the UK will be able to cooperate on all of these developments on an ad hoc basis, and perhaps provide its expertise and capabilities where it deems them to be in its interest.

What are, in your opinion, the most significant effects of Brexit on the EU's "Strategic Compass" (one of the most discussed initiatives related to EU security and defence during Germany's ongoing Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020 and that will continue to be in 2021)?

The most significant change will be my last point – the EU will have opportunities from Brexit. Without Britain, the EU will be able to define more easily, what kind of diplomatic and military actors it wants to be. Most 27-Member States share a continental identity that involves similar interests of some kind. Without the UK, perhaps, the EU will be finding such challenges easier to resolve. The UK will not be able to fudge a European with an Atlantic identity, thus allowing a more clearly defined European policy. At the same time, the UK will not be able to provide its 'geopolitical muscle' to this initiative. That might reduce the effectiveness in the long run.

As for the EU defence industry, to what extent will its capacity be affected by Brexit given, inter alia, the fact that major projects like

EUROFIGHTER have been benefitting from significant British contribution (through BAE Systems)?

Indeed, Brexit will have a very significant effect on defence capabilities. Firstly, the most important military power in Europe will no longer have its capabilities inside the EU. Major projects may continue for now, but, in the long run, it will be more difficult to continue such projects without a shared vision where they should go. While UK capabilities will still make a difference inside Europe, the EU as a whole is significantly weaker without the UK.

Since Brexit will have an impact on the British-French military partnership, do you see France finding a viable alternative?

No, simply put, France has no viable alternative to the UK. France will aim to move closer to Germany, but the German defence outlook is very different from France's, as the latest discussion between President Macron and German Defence Secretary Kramp-Kahrenbauer demonstrates. Therefore, France will try to continue some kind of close military partnership with the UK, albeit at a lower efficiency level.

Could all the above (Brexit and its effects) have an impact on NATO as well?

Indeed, Brexit will have a very significant effect on NATO. Firstly, the most important military power in Europe will no longer have its capabilities inside the EU, but outside. This means NATO will no longer be as EU-centric. Combined with the disagreements with Turkey, this has the potential to unbalance NATO in the long run.

Finally, being aware of Great Britain's military and economic power, as well as its internationally recognised influence, how do you think the European Union, in the post-Brexit context, will be perceived – and dealt with – on the international stage by relevant actors like China, Russia, Iran, Turkey?

Simply put, the EU will be perceived as much weaker without the UK. France will aim to move closer to Germany, but this development will provide opportunities for Russia, China and other actors to put pressure on the EU like never before. We have just seen the rhetorical arguments between Germany, on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other hand, in the UN Security Council. We will see much more of this in the future whereby it may become a distant possibility that Russian relations with Europe will become closer as a result

of combined pressure of Russia and China on the EU. This could, in the long run, create a split between the Atlantic partners, USA, UK and Canada, and the continental European partners. Therefore, the EU's role will be diminished.

Along with Trump's defeat in the US presidential election, Brexit could help redefine and improve the transatlantic partnership.

Do you see that happening within NATO (especially in cybersecurity where the UK is a world leader) or in the common management of tensions and crises at global level by NATO and EU?

Yes, this is a possibility, but I think in the long run I would be less optimistic. It is more likely that Russian relations with Europe will become closer as a result of Brexit tensions, combined with pressure by Russia and China on the EU. We could, in the long run, observe a split between the Atlantic partners, USA, UK and Canada, and the continental European partners. This is, in fact, the geopolitical objective of Russia in its strong support for Brexit – get the UK out of Europe, and, by so doing, get the Americans out of Europe, providing much more geopolitical space for Russia and China. The EU will be diminished as a result.



Romania's National Day: The Legacy of History

Dr. Ion I. Jinga

Each year since the fall of the Communist regime, on December 1st Romanians celebrate their National Day. On December 1st, 1918, at the end of the First World War, Romanians in Transylvania - representing the absolute majority of population in this province - decided to unite with Romania. This was the completion of *The Great Union*, as previously, on March 27 and November 15, 1918, the National Assemblies of Bessarabia and Bukovina – both ethnically and historically Romanian – had also decided the union with their motherland. Earlier that year, on February 11, the US President Woodrow Wilson had proclaimed the principle of self-determination of nations: *“National aspirations must be respected; people may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent.”*

17 million soldiers and civilians were killed in the First World War, between July 28, 1914 and November 11, 1918. Initially neutral, in the spring of 1916 Romania was insistently asked by France and Great Britain to enter the war in order to relieve the huge German pressure on the Western front. Based on the Allied Powers' promise to launch an offensive in Greece, Romania intervened in WWI and in August 1916 entered Transylvania, where its soldiers were received as liberators. As Romanian troops advanced rapidly, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany told to his aides: *“The war is lost”* and field marshal Von Hindenburg wrote: *“It is certain that so relatively small a state as Romania had never before been given a role so important and, indeed, so decisive for the history of the world at so favorable a moment. Judging by the military situation, it was to be expected that Romania had only to advance where she wished to decide the world war...”*

But there was no Allied offensive in Greece and the German High Command decided that all other campaigns in the West and in the East would be put on hold while Germany threw her main weight against Romania. Meanwhile, Bulgarian and Turkish armies joined the German forces and Romania found itself simultaneously attacked from three sides. The Government was forced to withdraw from Bucharest to Iași, in Moldova.

To protect the retreat, a fierce resistance was organized on the peaks of the Carpathian

Mountains, near my native town Câmpulung Mușcel. In order to make the defense impenetrable, the Romanian High Command brought in the 70th Infantry Regiment from Câmpulung, formed by inhabitants of the region, whose families were living in villages just behind the front line. They successfully stopped the advance of the more numerous and better equipped German Alpine Corps. A reminder of the epic battles that took place there in the autumn of 1916 – a Romanian Thermopylae – are the relics of over 2300 soldiers who rest for eternity in the Mausoleum on the Mateiaș Mountain.

In July 1917, the Romanian Army broke the Austro-Hungarian front in the Battle of Mărăști. German general Von Mackensen promptly launched a counterattack at Mărășești, announcing his superiors *“Gentlemen, I will see you in two weeks in Iași!”*, while the Austro-Hungarian army attacked on the Oituz Valley. However, both offensives were repelled by the Romanians, who in some occasions fought only with their bayonets.

On the Eastern front in Europe, 800,000 Romanian soldiers fought on the Entente side and more than 335,000 of them made the ultimate sacrifice, representing 6% of all military deaths in the First World War. The Great Union and modern Romania were built on their bones.

The Great Union of 1918 was the accomplishment of the centuries-old national dream of bringing all Romanians around the Carpathian Mountains together in a unitary state. Back in history, the first union of the three Romanian principalities – Walachia, Transylvania and Moldova - had first been achieved in 1600 by Prince Michael the Brave, Ruler of Wallachia. The union was short-lived, as Michael was assassinated on August 9, 1601, but he remained in the minds of Romanians as the first legendary unifier, and his vision became the goal of subsequent generations. Then, on January 24, 1859, Walachia and Moldova united into a single state, *The United Romanian Principalities*, that in 1866 took the name of *Romania*.

After The Great Union, Romania became one of the most important actors in Central and Eastern Europe, a country defined by diversity, multiculturalism and democratic values, a regional power with a convertible national currency fully covered in gold deposits, and with a ruling elite educated in London, Paris and Berlin. Had

Romania not experienced the Second World War and 42 years of Communism, today it would probably have had a level of development comparable to the United States, United Kingdom, France or Germany.

In more than 100 years since the historical moments of 1918, Romania has experienced democracy, dictatorship and again democracy, and had different forms of government and different levels of socio-economic development. Today, it is the sixth largest EU member state in terms of size and population, a valuable NATO member, a strategic partner of the United States, a gateway of Europe to the Black Sea and a security provider in the region. Romania has now a vibrant economy and a remarkable human potential. It is also the land of priceless natural treasures, a paradise of classical architecture and of fabulous traditions. Much still remains to be done, but during all these transformations one thing has always stayed unwavering: Romanians' love for their realm.

In the evolution of each nation there are “*astral moments*” of change, accomplishment, despair or triumph. The Union of 1600 was a moment of glory, followed by bitter failure. December 1st, 1918 is a chapter of triumph. The History Book of Romanians has its first lines carved in stone 1900 years ago, on Trajan's Column in Rome, commemorating the Dacian Wars. Since then, Romanians have remained within the same geographical space without interruption, “*With the sword in hand, guarding all the horizons. And behold, we are still at home!*”, as so eloquently noted the great historian Nicolae Iorga (In Memoriam: on November 27, 2020, we commemorate 80 years since his tragic passing away).

History never steps back, but its legacy may be inspirational in shaping the future.

Note: *Opinions expressed in this article do not bind the official position of the author.*

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How EU Sanctions on Turkey Reveal a Divided Europe

Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS



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After the European Council meeting last week, which resulted in the imposition of limited economic sanctions on Ankara following Greek, Cypriot and French pressure, it could be said that the European Union (EU) is going through a difficult period.

The course of Brexit is indefinite and the rise of France through attempts by its president to lead the European scene confirm that the union is shaken, with the coming year decisive for its future.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently celebrated Azerbaijan's victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a win with significant geopolitical benefits for Ankara. At the same time, however, Turkey's domestic economic conditions continue to deteriorate and Erdogan must now face a US administration that is sceptical of him and what he represents for the new Turkey that is emerging regionally and internationally.

The decision by EU leaders to impose limited, and likely ineffective, sanctions on Turkey sends a negative message to Ankara by pushing it to pursue divergent paths: either diversify its policy in the Eastern Mediterranean to a more diplomatic one - or become more aggressive.

In the days leading up to the EU summit the Greek government pursued two tracks. The first was exercising immense diplomatic and public relations pressure on the EU by raising its demands and stressing the urgency of stopping European arms sales to Ankara and even curtailing trade ties.

The second was to hold Berlin fully responsible for Turkish measures concerning the Mediterranean and Cyprus by warning that not imposing sanctions could lead to a rupture within the European family.

In this context, Athens believes that the EU under its current German leadership is no longer a source

of confidence for the Greek government, which sees its recent alliances with Paris and other neighbouring countries - Egypt, Israel and the United Arab Emirates - as an alternative to dealing with Ankara, either in the Aegean or on the issue of Cyprus. This strategy, however, was not "made in Athens", but rather a French plan conceived by French President Emmanuel Macron.

In November 2018, Macron said it was necessary to create what he called a "true European army" to defend the old continent from three world powers, namely China, Russia and the United States.



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At the time, this was perceived as a reaction to the provocative statements of US President Donald Trump against his European allies. However, observing the details of Macron's statements since then, it's clear that it was part of a grander French strategy.

The French president is trying to present France as a global power again, a goal that cannot be achieved within NATO with the presence of the US and Turkey, which are more powerful militarily. Nor can it be implemented within the EU, which Paris cannot lead in the presence of the economically stronger Germany. So, the solution is to form a new alliance which Macron will personally lead to present France as a new superpower.

Along these lines, Paris seeks to lead the so-called EuroMed7, an alliance of seven Southern European Union member states, and create a rift within the body of the European Union, making it seem insufficient enough to be supplanted by a new alliance. This is exactly the role of Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' government. His

recent actions are aimed at showing that Berlin's role in the EU is negative, and to create divisions.



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In the Eastern Mediterranean, the question now is how Ankara could respond to EU sanctions. Erdogan knows with certainty that any retreat at this time or self-restraint would limit Ankara and Northern Cyprus from benefitting from emerging energy developments in the region, as other countries led by Egypt and Israel also compete to succeed.

In this sense, economic sanctions, regardless of their intensity or extent, will not force Turkey to retreat, but rather will push it to further escalation. With the new sanctions, it is likely that Ankara will maintain the same policy in the Aegean Sea, confirming its presence and rejecting any maps or agreements that do not fit with its position on maritime zones.

The attempt by some to link EU measures and the atmosphere in the Eastern Mediterranean to recent US sanctions is unrealistic. US sanctions are part of another issue completely unrelated to the Eastern Mediterranean, as discussions between Ankara and Washington over S-400s continue and are likely to go on during the Biden era.

Erdogan's statement that the "EU summit did not meet the expectations of some countries because their demands were not rightful, while some reasonable EU countries thwarted this game against Turkey by showing a positive attitude", accurately reflects Turkey's current relations with the EU, which have changed dramatically in the last five years.

In fact, Ankara's relations with some European countries, such as Spain, Italy and Malta, have been extended to strategic, economic, military and geopolitical cooperation, which makes Turkey important to them, far removed from the position of

other countries such as Greece and France, who see Turkey as a strategic threat to their influence. As long as trade between Turkey and EU countries makes it an important market, economic sanctions will not have a significant impact on Euro-Turkish relations.

Middle East

On both shores of the Aegean, the atmosphere of anticipation and tension will not diminish with these latest EU measures. Keeping all options open has become a necessity for the Greek side. Athens, which has built its international strategy on the basis of hostility with Ankara, will not accept a political solution or negotiations that will end the conflict because it will make it less important to its new allies in Abu Dhabi and Paris.

On the Turkish coast, on the other hand, an agreement with Athens is not possible without a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus issue that will protect the rights of Turkish Cypriots in energy revenues. In the midst of all this, events on both sides of the Aegean are increasingly becoming a German matter, but the European ground is gradually turning into a quagmire of obstacles.

Will Berlin, and in particular Chancellor Angela Merkel, be able to keep the EU together on the one hand and Euro-Turkish relations within acceptable limits on the other, or will these cracks further widen? The coming months will be important not only for the European Union's relations with Turkey, but for the future of the EU itself.

Note: This article was initially published in *The New Arab*, available at: <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2020/12/15/How-EU-sanctions-on-Turkey-reveal-a-divided-Europe>

Our Neighbour, Hungary

Dr. Alexandru GHIȘA

More than 100 years since the Great War (1914-1918) and 75 years since World War II (1939-1945), the traumas that the Romanians and the Hungarians alike have been through during this period are still present in the collective mindset of both nations. Even if 102 years have passed since Transylvania united with Romania (01.12.1918) and it's been a century since the decision made in Alba Iulia through the Treaty of Trianon (04.06.1920) received international recognition, we should get better acquainted with our Western neighbour for at least two reasons.

1. Hungary is a country next to ours, a country close not only from a geographical point of view, but also from an economic and cultural one. We are connected due to the presence of a significant Hungarian community, but also due to the presence of a Romanian community in Hungary which, even if smaller in number, is equally significant.
2. On the other hand, a longing for Transylvania still persists among the Hungarian public opinion and at the level of the political and cultural elites. Recovering lost territories was and still is the Red Thread of the political and diplomatic endeavours that Budapest initiated and coordinated, especially with direct regard to Romania.

During the Great War (1914-1918), Romanians and Hungarians were adversaries, and the Treaty of Trianon was signed by Hungary as a losing state, while Romania signed it alongside the Entente Powers, the winning side. During the period immediately following the Treaty of Trianon, the head of the Hungarian state, admiral Miklos Horthy, self-proclaimed regent, declared Romania "enemy number one", because Hungary raised the largest territorial claims against it and because it was the most powerful country neighbouring Hungary. To the Admiral Regent, a soldier by trade, the most important Hungarian policy regarding Romania was "armed war". In 1921 he stated that until the right moment to attack emerged, it seems the two countries should have peaceful relations, however, Hungary had to seize every opportunity in order to continue its irredentist planning. Consequently, revising the system of the Versailles peace treaties became a constant

objective of the Hungarian foreign policy.

After World War I, Romania's position and status changed considerably – as a result of the great union of 1918 it became a middle-sized country in Europe. At the same time, Romania changed its neighbours; three of them – Hungary, Soviet Russia and Bulgaria – had territorial claims and presented themselves as enemies. As a consequence, the Kingdom of Romania, ruled by King Ferdinand, acted to defend the status quo of the territories, established in Paris, and would build a system of alliances that would serve that exact purpose – an alliance with Poland (1921) to defend itself from the USSR, and the Little Entente – with Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (1920-1921), to protect itself in case of an unprovoked attack from Hungary.



The Map of Europe and the national borders established by the system of treaties of Versailles (1919-1920), (<https://www.ncpedia.org/media/map/europe-after-treaty>)

In order to accomplish its revisionist objectives, Hungary needed a powerful ally, which would concur with its own objectives – and was found in Nazi Germany. The Horthy-Nazi alliance was established during the first arbitration in Vienna, on the 3rd of November 1938, that had as a result the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Hungary receives from Hitler southern Slovakia and then Ruthenia. In the summer of 1940, Romania was subjected to extraordinary pressure from two emerging military and political powers – Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union. Both countries were

against the Peace Treaty in Versailles, and in both capitals – Berlin and Moscow – Hungary was encouraged in its revisionist policy against Romania. Following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and France's surrender, Romania, isolated militarily and politically, sides with Germany.

Hence, 80 years ago, Hungary and Romania were allies, along with Nazi Germany. Even under these circumstances, Miklos Horthy kept to his policies, even partially reaching his objective – he got Northern Transylvania through the second arbitrage in Vienna, on the 30th of August 1940. The massacres in Ip and Trăsenea, and others, are very relevant to the traumas he inflicted on the Romanian people. Because of these massacres, caused by the military leadership instated by Horthy's regime in Northern Transylvania, neither King Michael, nor Marshal Ion Antonescu, as the leader of the country, recognised the arbitrages signed in Vienna on the 30th of August 1940. Moreover, by means of King Michael's coup d'état on the 23rd of August 1944, joining the allies, declaring war against Germany and the Romanian Armed Forces contributing to the liberation of Northern Transylvania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Romania recovered Northern Transylvania during the peace following the war (February 10th 1947), however with great effort and sacrifice.

Thirty years ago, Romania and Hungary were allies once again, as part of the Soviet socialist system, and members of the Warsaw Pact. In December 1989 they united in taking down communism and Ceaușescu's regime. Since a civil war did not take place in Romania, Hungary focused on an interethnic war in Transylvania. Taking advantage of the fact that one year before, in 1988, interethnic conflicts broke out in Kosovo – Yugoslavia and Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Budapest introduced Transylvania into this equation, motivated by the fact that the Hungarian community in Romania had been deprived of its rights. On the 20th of December 1989, the President of the Parliament and the interim President of Hungary, Matyas Szűrös, stated in an interview to Radio Budapest that his country supported Transylvania's "autonomy" and even "independence" (translation by Col. (ret) Ioan Todericiu, former Military Attaché of Romania to Budapest, 1979-1990). Relevant to this is the plea that the acting Hungarian head of state, the same Matyas Szűrös, addressed to Hungarians in Romania. During the interview he gave on 15th of March 1990 to the Hungarian newspaper "Româniul Magyar Szó" (published in issues no. 69 and 70 on 15th and 16th of March 1990 respectively, translated by Zeno Millea) he urged Hungarians to take advantage of the new opportunities offered by Romania to mobilise and organise, while he provided moral and political support, as well as that of another nature (?), highlighting that "the most important thing is that Hungarians in Transylvania make their own destiny". Matyas Szűrös stated in his interview that "this can be supported from the outside, however, it must start from the inside", i.e. Romania. If the "motherland" tells you, from the highest level, to get out in the street and state your claims over Transylvania, you proceed accordingly. After only five days, on the 20th of March 1990, Hungarians stormed the streets of Târgu Mureș. The reaction of the Romanians was not what they had hoped for, and the ethnic war never took place in Transylvania.

Nowadays, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán practically follows in the footsteps of his predecessors Horthy and Szűrös. On this year's anniversary of the treaty of Trianon in Hungary, during the speech delivered in Satoraljaujhely (06.06.2020) Viktor Orbán accused the West – that is France, England, the USA and Italy - of violating the borders of Central Europe and squeezing Hungary inside borders that cannot be defended. During this speech, the Hungarian Prime Minister



The Map of Europe following World War II (1949), (<http://www.diercke.com/kartenansicht.>)

announced that his country was building a common future alongside Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. At the same time, he expressed his joy that Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia no longer exist. Of course, for Hungary it is easier to discuss with Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia or directly with Slovakia. The Prime Minister's speech makes no reference to Romania. Why this omission? Could he be regretting the fact that Transylvania is still intact and still belongs to our country? In his speech Mr. Orbán makes another statement – that “only countries have borders, nations do not”. This can be considered correct, but then where does all this opposition against the Treaty of Trianon come from? First of all, this treaty represents the basis of existence of modern, independent and sovereign Hungary. Secondly, the treaty establishes Hungary's state borders in its ethnic area, wherein lies the majority of the Hungarian nation. The Hungarian communities that are outside these borders live in countries where the majorities are represented by Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Slovenians and Romanians.

It is worth mentioning that the one-hundred-year anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon was celebrated on the 4th of June 2020 in one hundred Romanian cities. In Cluj-Napoca, at about 17.30 (16.30 Paris time, when the treaty was signed in the Grand Trianon), members of the Hungarian National Council of Transylvania, of the Hungarian People's Party of Transylvania, the Hungarian Civic Party and the Szekler National Council laid wreaths on the statue representing Matthias I (Corvinus) King of Hungary, as a “homage to those who during the past one hundred years have fought for the reunification of the Hungarian nation” (according to the local daily newspaper “Făclia”, the 05.06.2020 issue). A commemoration like the one in Romania is impossible to organise in Slovakia, Serbia, Croatia, or Slovenia. And yet, Romania is left out of Budapest's political-diplomatic construct. Relevant to this is the Visegrád Group, composed of Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland, that Romania was never invited to take part in. This attitude is in accordance with the Red Thread of Hungarian foreign policy – starting with Miklos Horthy, up to Matyas Szürös, and Jozsef Antall, and continuing with Viktor Orbán – diplomatic isolation of Romania.

It is the same today, when Hungary and Romania are once again part of the same alliances/organizations – NATO and the European Union. Paraphrasing the old Latin saying “Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes” – “Beware of the Greeks bearing

gifts”, I urge my readers to replace Greeks with Hungarians, for extra precautions as to what the future may bring.



The Map of Europe 2020 (<https://mapofeurope.com/europe/>)

Note: The article was first published in the daily newspaper “Făclia de Cluj”, issue 9030/29 on 30th of August 2020.

THE BLACK SEA

Moldova's Presidential Election: The Russians Were Not Coming (This Time)

Vladimir Socor

Moldova's recent presidential election has been widely stereotyped by international media as a geopolitical contest between a democratic West and Vladimir Putin's Russia. But in fact, that presumption has been disproved by all players, internal and external, in their respective messages about the just-concluded electoral race.



Presidents Putin and Dodon meet in 2017. Dodon recently lost the second round of Moldova's presidential elections.
(Source: Moldova.org)

Moldova's recent presidential election (first round held on November 1, second round on November 15) has been widely stereotyped by international media as a geopolitical contest between a democratic West and Vladimir Putin's Russia. But in fact, that presumption has been disproved by all players, internal and external, in their respective messages about the just-concluded electoral race. Avoidance of geopolitical competition, if nothing else, was their common underlying approach (see EDM, October 28, November 17). Although not declaratively proclaimed as such during the campaign, this approach took official form in response to the outcome.

Putin, who had practically abandoned incumbent President Igor Dodon ahead of the election (see below), became one of the first international leaders to congratulate Maia Sandu on her victory: "I count on your presidency to make possible a constructive development of our countries' relations" (Kremlin.ru, November 16). In turn, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov credited the president-elect with the awareness that economic

relations with Russia are in Moldova's interest (RIA Novosti, November 16), alluding to the dialogue initiated during Sandu's brief prime-ministership in 2019. The Kremlin's move is only the latest sign of disowning Dodon—and all the more stinging as he contests the election's outcome in Moldovan courts.

President-elect Sandu met individually with the ambassadors of the European Union, United States, Romania and Russia on an ex aequo basis on the first day after the election. The readouts from these meetings were convergent, focusing on Moldova's needs for its internal development. A stellar gallery of Western leaders sent congratulations, while Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy became the first foreign leader to invite Sandu for a visit. A visit to Brussels, however, may well occur first (Moldpres, Unimedia, November 16).

In her first post-election briefing, Sandu announced a policy of "authentic balance" through dialogues with Europe, the United States, Russia, as well as the neighbors Romania and Ukraine, proceeding from the interests of "Moldova's citizens" (i.e., its internal development) (Unimedia, TASS, November 16). The "authentic balance" is meant as a corrective to Dodon's own mantra of a "balanced foreign policy," which was in fact one-sidedly Russophile (see EDM, February 13, 20) but turned out to be cruelly unrequited by Russia in the final year of Dodon's presidency (see below).

Meanwhile, Sandu confirmed to Russian Ambassador Oleg Vasnetsov and for Russian media that she would consider visiting Moscow at some point. Such a visit was being prepared in the autumn of 2019, during Sandu's short-lived role as prime minister. Her agenda now, as president, remains the same, she said: re-opening Russia's market for Moldovan agricultural products, finalizing agreements on the legal status and pension rights for Moldovan workers in Russia, and establishing overall a "mutually respectful relationship" as with any other country. "Transnistria is, of course, the most serious problem. [...] We are seeking and will keep seeking a political solution" (TASS, RIA Novosti, BBC News—Russian service, NewsMaker, November 16, 17).

Putin's Russia does, indeed, "meddle in foreign elections" and otherwise "spreads malign

influence”; but it does not do this all the time against all countries to the same degree. It has various priorities at various times, and Moldova has not been among Russia’s top agenda items in recent years. Following the Russophile Dodon’s election as president, Moscow has moved from a symbolic embrace of Dodon to benign neglect of him, then neglect pure and simple, and finally outright abandonment.

In the presidential election just held (as well as in 2019), Russia failed to deliver on Dodon’s repeated requests to have Putin visit Moldova, have Patriarch Kirill visit Moldova, hold a Russian business and investment forum in Chisinau, lend €200 million (\$237 million) to Moldova (as a first tranche of a €500 million, or \$593 million, loan). Moscow has even stopped receiving Dodon for bilateral meetings with Putin some months ago. The Kremlin did nothing to mobilize Moldovan workers in Russia to vote for Dodon, nor did Moscow urge Tiraspol to mobilize Transnistrian voters for the incumbent Moldovan president (a mere 31,000 crossed over to vote, which was less than the 37,000 that former ruler Vladimir Plahotniuc had obtained from Tiraspol in 2019 to help Dodon’s Socialist Party). Nor did the Kremlin support Dodon’s re-election campaign through Russian television channels. All that Moscow gave Dodon this time was 20,000 tons of diesel fuel for Moldovan farmers and five snow-clearing machines for Chisinau’s Socialist-led mayoralty (see EDM, October 28).

Sandu and her team are entirely pro-Western by the current Moldovan definition of this orientation: namely, adopting Western models and standards of governance, public administration, education and cultural development, with guidance from the European Union and economic assistance from the EU conditioned on Moldovan performance. No explicitly “geopolitical” dimension exists in Moldova’s Western orientation in this sense. Implicitly and ultimately, it does amount to bringing Europe into Moldova while keeping noxious Russian influence out. However, a large part of Moldova’s voters are not yet prepared to understand the second part—about Russia—of this equation; and they are even less prepared to “geopoliticize” their country’s choice of orientation. Moldova’s situation differs greatly from that of Ukraine or Georgia in this respect. Aspirations to move “away from Russia,” abandon neutrality, join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), or at least stand up to Russia in the ongoing “frozen conflict” in Transnistria are

confined to a political minority in Moldova.

This is why Sandu’s presidential campaign (just like her previous electoral campaigns) avoided “geopolitical” and national-identity themes. She and her political team did not speak about choosing the West against Russia nor about Moldova’s “integration” with the EU, let alone NATO; and they did not raise the issue of Transnistria nor criticize Russia in any way. Sandu’s campaign never mentioned the problem of the Moldovan versus Romanian identity, let alone a hypothetical unification of the two countries. Finally, it avoided any discussion of thorny problems in Moldova’s historical memory—to this day distorted by Russian and Soviet legacies.

Instead of such “geopolitics,” the Sandu campaign focused on combatting corruption, cleaning up the justice and law enforcement systems, and promises to bring (if elected) Western funding for reforms of the education and medical systems. Notwithstanding Sandu’s reputation as an adherent of economic liberalism, her ten-point electoral program adumbrates social-protection measures in seven of its ten points. This is hardly surprising, considering Moldova’s basket-case economy. Even before the COVID-19 coronavirus hit, Sandu’s government had adopted a social protection-oriented budget while in power in 2019.

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CRISIS AND CONFLICT ZONES

Karabakh Armistice: Azerbaijani National Triumph, Russian Geopolitical Victory

Vladimir SOCOR

Part One



Azerbaijanis celebrate victory (Source: Daily Sabah)



Karabakh peace deal map (Source: BBC)

Russian President Vladimir Putin, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian signed, over a video conference, on November 9, an armistice agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Mediated by Russia between the two belligerents, this armistice dramatically changes the situation on the ground, establishing "new realities" for many years to come.

Azerbaijan's recovery of Armenian - occupied territories crowns a 44-day military operation featuring sophisticated equipment and tactics, amid a groundswell of domestic popular support. The campaign's success transcends the battlefield. It signifies another stage in Azerbaijan's maturation from a nation - and state - building project (as it was barely 30 years ago) to a fully consolidated nation-state.

Released in the form of a tripartite declaration (Kremlin.ru, November 10), the armistice agreement: a) restores Azerbaijan's sovereign control over seven districts that Armenian forces had occupied since the early 1990s and emptied of their Azerbaijani population; b) it divides the Armenian-populated Upper ("Nagorno") Karabakh into two parts, under Armenian and under Azerbaijani control, respectively; and c) it authorizes the long-term stationing of Russian "peacekeeping" troops, a goal that had eluded Russia from the 1990s to date.

A full ceasefire went into effect at 00:00 hours, Moscow time, on November 10, along the then-existing contact lines between Azerbaijani and Armenian forces. The armistice agreement brings the following changes and new realities on the ground:

In terms of territory, the November 10 contact line allows Azerbaijan to retain the districts of Fizuli, Gubatly, Zangilan, and Jabrail, all which Azerbaijan's forces regained in the campaign just concluded. In addition, the Kelbajar and Aghdam districts shall be returned (by Armenia) to Azerbaijan until November 15 and November 20, respectively; and the Lachin district will be returned by December 1. This will complete Azerbaijan's recovery of the seven districts adjacent to Upper Karabakh.

Furthermore, the November 10 contact line allows Azerbaijan to retain the southern part of Upper Karabakh itself. This amounts to partitioning Upper Karabakh, militarily and administratively. The city of Shusha comes under Azerbaijan's control while Upper Karabakh's administrative center of Stepanakert/Khankendi remains under Armenian control.

Within the next three years, Azerbaijan and Armenia shall jointly develop a plan to build a new road connecting Armenia with Upper Karabakh via

Azerbaijan's Lachin district (Lachin corridor). Azerbaijan pledges not to interfere with traffic through the Lachin corridor. The corridor's width is set at five kilometers. The document's wording does not clarify whether the proposed new road would replace the existing road or run parallel to it, in parts or in toto. Stepanakert/Khankendi is the terminus of the existing Lachin road, and it will undoubtedly remain the terminus of a new road. The proposed new road seems intended to bypass the Azerbaijani-controlled Shusha (see above and below).

A Russian "peacekeeping" contingent shall be stationed within the Armenian-controlled rump of Upper Karabakh along the Armenian-Azerbaijani contact lines. Its deployment to the area began on November 10 and shall be synchronized with the withdrawal of Armenian forces from Upper Karabakh. The Russian contingent's size is set at 1,960 infantry (motor-rifle) troops with light weapons, 90 armored personnel carriers, and 380 motor vehicles (no mention of helicopters). The command headquarters will be located "in the Stepanakert area" (TASS, November 10). The mission's duration is set at five years initially, to be prolonged automatically at five-year intervals, unless one of the "sides" (Armenia or Azerbaijan) declares its refusal with six months advance notice.

Russian "peacekeepers" shall guard the Lachin corridor's existing and future road. This will be the sole Russian military presence in Azerbaijan's sovereign and effectively controlled territory. The Armenian *de facto* controlled rump of Upper Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and shall henceforth host Russian "peacekeepers" with Azerbaijan's consent under this agreement. Although Shusha's location could be construed as a part of the Lachin corridor, the armistice agreement excludes Shusha both from the notion of the Lachin corridor and from the Russian "peacekeepers' " area of responsibility (which partly explains the intention to build a new Lachin road).

The armistice agreement creates a "peacekeeping center for ceasefire monitoring" on the ground, without elaborating any further. This is meant to accommodate a minimal Turkish presence in the armistice-implementation system. Moscow and Ankara were still negotiating about this center after the November 10 armistice declaration had been made public. It will be a bilateral Russian-Turkish military observer mission, with its own technical equipment, to be located in Azerbaijani territory, thus to monitor the ceasefire at a certain distance

from the Upper Karabakh contact lines. This Russo-Turkish center does not bring Turkey into Russia's "peacekeeping" operation and does not change the latter's mono-national character (TASS, Interfax, November 10–12).

The armistice agreement stipulates the "reopening of all economic and transportation links in the region." As part of the general reopening, Armenia pledges not to interfere with traffic via the Armenian territory that separates the western part of Azerbaijan from Azerbaijan's exclave of Nakhchivan, which has been isolated since the early 1990s. Russian border troops shall control the traffic of goods and passengers via that corridor. Additional transportation links (meaning motorways) could be built, subject to mutual consent of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The agreement fails to specify the number of Russian border troops that will be part of that mission; what forms that control would take; and whether it would apply to the highway, the railroad or both. The railroad in this corridor belongs (as do all Armenian railroads) to Russia's state railways corporation. Russian border troops have long been stationed in that part of Armenia guarding the border with Iran. Presumably, additional Russian border troops would be deployed for the transportation-control mission.

Displaced persons and refugees may return to their places of origin in Upper Karabakh and the seven adjacent districts, with assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Azerbaijani population of expellees - technically, displaced persons and refugees - from these areas in the early 1990s numbered some 800,000 by generally accepted estimates, almost all of whom fled to Azerbaijan's interior. The seven adjacent districts had no Armenian population. They have remained uninhabited and been systematically made uninhabitable since then.

The armistice agreement stops short of addressing the ultimate core issue of this conflict - that of the legal-political status of Upper Karabakh. That status was to have applied to the territory of the former "Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region" (abbreviated NKAO in the negotiators' parlance over the last three decades) - i.e. Upper Karabakh - the Armenian-majority enclave within Azerbaijan. The armistice agreement, however, not only omits this issue but divides that territory between an Azerbaijani-controlled part and a locally Armenian-administrated part (see above), the former being free from Russian troops, the latter guarded by Russian troops with Azerbaijan's

consent, even as both parts are Azerbaijani territory under international law.

Nor does the armistice agreement reference the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group, whose three co-chairing countries (Russia, the United States, France) had, during almost three decades, developed a framework for the settlement of this conflict. Often cited as the Madrid Principles, this framework inspires the November 10 armistice agreement in many ways, with one major exception: Russia's "peacekeeping" operation. The Minsk Group never agreed on it. This operation gives Russia significant leverage to manipulate and pressure the other parties for a long time to come, pending a definitive solution. Azerbaijan has won the campaign, Russia has won the "peacekeeping."

Part Two



Checkpoint outside Shusha, in Karabakh (Source: Reuters)

Azerbaijan's army has won the second Karabakh war, regaining about one half of the territory seized from it by Armenian forces in the early 1990s. However, Russia has won the "peacekeeping" after this war - a goal that had eluded Russia after the first war and one it had pursued ever since (see Part One in EDM, November 12).

The armistice agreement, signed on November 9, brings Russian "peacekeeping" troops into Upper ("Nagorno") Karabakh and the Lachin corridor. The agreement also assigns Russian border troops to control transportation routes due to reopen between Azerbaijan and its exclave of Nakhchivan, across Armenian territory. The deployment of Russian "peacekeepers" to Azerbaijan began within hours of the armistice agreement's signing (TASS, November 10-12).

This move in Azerbaijan holds not only local but also international significance. It confirms and

reinforces Russia's self-arrogated monopoly on "peacekeeping" in former Soviet-ruled territories. Russia's method is to impose a unilateral peacekeeping operation without an international mandate in a given conflict theater and then reject any proposals to internationalize the operation. Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria became case studies in this regard (as did the now-forgotten operation in Tajikistan in the 1990s). By the same token, Moscow rules out an internationally mandated peacekeeping mission in Ukraine's Donbas.

The Kremlin has, from time to time, sought Western recognition or express acceptance of a special prerogative for "peacekeeping in the post-Soviet space." Although such recognition never materialized, Western tacit acceptance became a reality over time. Russia's "peacekeeping" monopoly is an element of sphere-of-influence rebuilding or maintenance.

Russia's "peacekeeping" operation in Upper Karabakh is the latest case study. Its initial stage conforms to the pattern of the earlier operations (see above) in several respects. It lacks the mandate of an international organization. It is purely Russian in the composition of its personnel. It contravenes the norm that bars a country from peacekeeping in a neighboring country. It is being undertaken in a territory not controlled by the government (Azerbaijan's in this case) that holds the internationally recognized title to sovereignty in that territory (the Armenian-controlled rump of Upper Karabakh). It has obtained Azerbaijan's indispensable but reluctant consent in a swift, opaque negotiation. And by stipulating prolongation at regular five-year intervals, it sets the stage for a long-term, potentially open-ended Russian military presence in this territory and thus another "frozen" conflict.

A number of differences from the familiar pattern also stand out. When Georgia and Moldova accepted Russia as "peacekeeper," they were incompletely formed, dysfunctional states, devoid of allies, and had suffered defeats at the hands of Russian-backed secessionist forces. Azerbaijan, by contrast, is a successful nation-state that has just demonstrated a newly acquired skillset in conducting a modern military campaign thanks to its partnership with the regional power Turkey. Wisely, Azerbaijan has settled for a limited victory over Armenian forces. A further advance into Upper Karabakh - even by 10 kilometers, to the administrative center Stepanakert/Khankendi - would have risked the intervention of Russian

forces based in Armenia and international complications for Azerbaijan. Instead, Baku has chosen a more manageable risk - that of a bargain with Russia.

This apparent bargain allows Azerbaijan to regain and securely keep a portion of Upper Karabakh, additional to the seven adjacent districts. In return, Baku has given its consent to Russia's long-term military presence in the remainder of Upper Karabakh. The local Armenian population certainly welcomes this protection: it looks genuinely peacekeeping from its perspective (Arminfo, November 10–12). Russia, however, will be able to use this enclave as it has used Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Transnistria over the years to manipulate the security situation. Russia's "peacekeeping" presence there was subject to prolongation at regular intervals by agreement with the titular sovereign state - Georgia and Moldova, respectively - just as in the case of Upper Karabakh under Azerbaijan's legal sovereignty. Yet Russian troops never left those enclaves. After some years, Western powers discouraged Georgia and Moldova from demanding the removal of Russian "peacekeepers"; such demands came to be viewed as destabilizing. Similarly, Russian "peacekeepers" might remain in Upper Karabakh for many years to come.

Russian troops will also be stationed in the Lachin corridor to guarantee the unimpeded overland traffic between Armenia and the rump Upper Karabakh. The Lachin corridor is due to be placed under Azerbaijan's civilian administration, while the reduced Upper Karabakh remains Azerbaijani *de jure* but out of bounds to it *de facto*. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan has raised its flag and is installing its administration in the regained portion of Upper Karabakh around Shusha (Azertag, November 12).

With Russian troops controlling Lachin and Russian border guards controlling Azerbaijan's overland connections with the Nakhchivan exclave, Russia will hold pressure levers that can be activated or held in reserve as the situation might warrant.

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THE MIDDLE EAST

Trump or Biden? The Impact of US Election Results on the Middle East

Eva J. KOULOURIOTIS

Ever since Franklin Roosevelt became President of the United States, the Middle East has always been an important station in the visits, but also in the policymaking of any president who arrives at the White House. In this politically sensitive, economically important, strategically energy-critical and security-threatening region, there is a need for any new US administration to be vigilant in dealing with it and in drawing up specific plans. In some cases, in fact, these plans are at the heart of Washington's international policy. Between wars, balances, interests, sieges and peace agreements, we can say that the influence of each American president may be the most decisive in the situation in the Middle East in general.

So, while we are just a few hours before the final results of the US presidential election between Democratic nominee Joe Biden and Republican nominee Donald Trump, we as observers can state our views on the implications of the election of each of the candidates in the Middle East and which of its countries will be happy and which will be in trouble.



Source: cnbc.com

nuclear deal and thus lift the financial sanctions, freeing Iranian funds in US and European banks that can reach one hundred billion dollars, so the Iranian regime will be able to rearrange its house on the one hand and its points of influence in the region on the other. Also, the steadfastness that this regime has shown in the four years of tension against Trump will give Tehran an extra point against Biden, which it will use to reduce pressure on its militias in Lebanon, Yemen, Syria and Iraq.

Biden will try to normalise the climate with the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, allow it to be part of the Lebanese political system and lift economic sanctions against it. In Syria, the scenario may be different. Biden will return to supporting his loyal allies, the Kurdish militias, in eastern Syria, while sanctions on the Assad regime will not be reduced but may be increased to pressure Assad to join a political process with the Syrian opposition. Biden will almost certainly work to end the war in Yemen by pushing Riyadh to accept a political solution that will give the Iranian Houthi militia significant political power.



Source: counterfire.org. Photos: Gage Skidmore / edited by Shabbir Lakha / CC BY-SA 2.

In my personal opinion, there are four countries most affected in the Middle East, the first of which is Iran and its allies in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen, the second is Israel, Washington's most important strategic ally in the region, the third is Turkey, the recently emerging power internationally and regionally, and the fourth, Saudi Arabia, the kingdom of the crown and oil.

Iran and its Tools

In Tehran, the atmosphere is as clear as the sky on a sunny day. The Iranian regime is certain that Biden will return the water to the ditch in the

This happy atmosphere in Tehran could become a dark nightmare if Trump wins this election, as he will further increase pressure against the Iranian regime, which will face two options. The first will be to comply with Trump's demands, namely to abandon its secret military nuclear program and open its military factories to inspectors. This will also mean abandoning much of its ballistic missiles programme. As for its regional influence, pressure on Hezbollah's militia in Lebanon will increase

over time. The second option for Tehran would be to move to a military escalation in order to impose its terms on Trump, but with dire consequences. In the meantime, Assad could be the winner if Trump stays in the White House, as he will return to the option of withdrawing completely from Eastern Syria and thus Assad will fill the gap there by forcing the Kurdish militias to comply with the humiliating conditions that he will impose on them. In Yemen, the scenario will remain as complicated as it is today.

Well-informed diplomatic sources assured me of the indirect understandings that have already begun in the Lebanon file between Iran and Israel. One of the most important points is the demarcation of the sea and land borders. I believe that this could be the beginning of a greater understanding that will include the future of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the expansion of direct Iran-Israel relations.

Israel

For Israel, as it is Washington's most important strategic ally in the Middle East, White House fluctuations always have a less negative effect on the atmosphere there. Whether Trump stays in the White House or Biden is the winner, the Israeli government will be able to adjust to reality. However, this does not mean that Netanyahu will not be happier if Trump stays in power. The gifts offered by Trump to maintain the economic and political support of the Israeli lobby in Washington are important gifts and achievements for the Middle East in general, from the relocation of the US embassy in Jerusalem to the recognition of the Golan Heights as part of Israel and then the recent normalization agreements along with assurances of new similar agreements that could be reached if Trump wins this election round.



Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump (source: MICHAEL REYNOLDS/EPA-EFE/REX)

With Biden's presence in the White House, the atmosphere may be a bit tense with some Gulf administrations, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which may make the normalization environment less enthusiastic in light of possible political fluctuations, which I will discuss in detail below. Also, the lifting of sanctions against Tehran will mean that Israel will have two paths ahead. The first is to secretly move against Tehran and crack down on its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, as it did in the covert operation in recent months. The second way is to escalate according to the "Operation Opera" scenario, i.e. through direct air or missile attacks against Iran's nuclear program. In any case, Biden will face a major challenge in trying to appease Israel and convince it of its policy toward Tehran.

Turkey

The situation in Ankara is generally not good, either with Trump remaining in the White House or with his departure and the victory of the Democratic candidate Biden. But the level of evil in the view of the current Turkish government may be different between the two American candidates. Trump, despite his recent escalation over the Russian S400s bought by Ankara and threats of harsh financial sanctions that may involve the defence industry and Turkish banks, is debatable on many issues. For example, if Trump opts for a full withdrawal from Syria, Iraq, or Somalia, then Washington will have to work with Ankara to fill the gap there. In addition, Washington's energy investment plans in the eastern Mediterranean will not go without an understanding with Ankara. These mutual interests mean give and take, and so the Turkish government can finally reduce the level of American pressure with Trump's presence in the White House.



Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Donald Trump (source: <https://www.alexstefanopoulos.gr/>)

With Biden, the prospects will be bleak for Ankara, as statements and leaks by the Democratic nominee leave no doubt that he will return to the Obama policy that has been hostile to the current Turkish government. Biden publicly confirmed his intention to support the Turkish opposition to change the Turkish regime and impose harsh financial sanctions on the S400. And its Kurdish policy in Syria, which could be extended to include the Kurdish element throughout Iraq, from Turkey to Iran, would pose a threat to Turkey's national security. When Biden will restrict Turkish movements in the eastern Mediterranean, this escalation will be met with escalation by the Turkish government, which will not give in to these pressures, but will rather choose to move eastward towards stronger relations with China and Russia, which may be the beginning of a Turkish withdrawal from NATO.

Saudi Arabia

Many may disagree with what I will quote, but in politics we need to go further than what seems clear and unambiguous. In the summer of 2016, during Obama's presence in the White House, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, then Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, paid a visit to the United States, which lasted several days. During the visit, he met with several US officials, led by Obama. Publicly, the reason for the visit was the increase in the level of military and economic cooperation between the two countries.

Several sources, however, assured me that this visit had an undisclosed reason. According to them, Mohammed bin Salman asked the Obama administration to give him the green light to turn against Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, who was then the Crown Prince, in exchange for huge financial and defence contracts to support the Obama administration. This request met the strong refusal of the American government, of which Biden was vice-president.

Democrats know the importance of Prince Mohammed bin Nayef as he worked closely with the US National Security Council and the CIA, playing a key role in fighting al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia during his tenure as Secretary of the Interior. This introduction is essential to understanding Biden's vision for Saudi Arabia and Prince Mohammed bin Salman, especially if he is in the White House.

Biden's victory will probably bring significant tensions to US-Saudi relations, which could include

US pressure on the assassination of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi and a ban on arms sales to Riyadh. On the other hand, Bin Salman can try to woo Biden by agreeing to normalise with Israel as a gift of consolation. In general, however, Saudi Arabia, led by bin Salman, will not be happy with Biden's arrival at the White House.



Joe Biden, Mohammed bin Salman, Donald Trump
(source: ft.com)

As for Trump's stay in the White House, the normalisation between Saudi Arabia and Israel will be the first reward for his satisfaction for the sake of strengthening his relations with Bin Salman. The level of cooperation between the two countries will increase in the military and energy sectors. The Emirates' feelings for the two candidates should be considered identical to those of the Saudis.

Ultimately, Trump's stay in the White House may satisfy some parties and disrupt the convenience of others, and the same is true of Biden's arrival in the White House. This negative and positive reflection in the Middle East will not stop at its borders. Europe is on the lookout for the results of this election, which is also being watched by Moscow and Beijing with concern about who will be the next White House resident. This fact confirms once again that Washington plays the most important role in many international files and still has a huge influence on the balance of the entire world.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

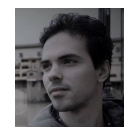


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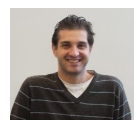
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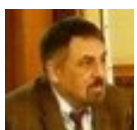


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Full biographies of the authors can be found on the Geostrategic Pulse site.

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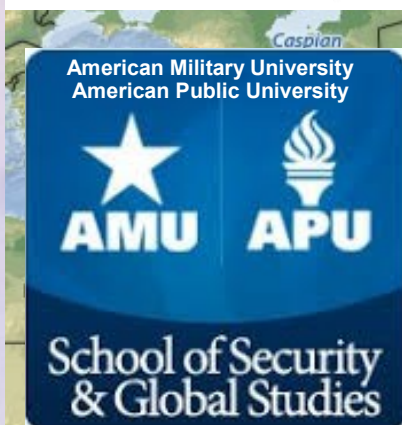
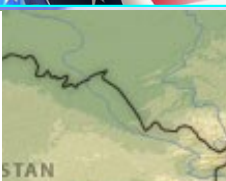
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