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10.00

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ANTONIA COLIBĂȘANU, PhD, analyst, Geopolitical Futures, Austin, Texas, SUA

ANIS H. BAJREKTAREVIC, PhD, professor, Institute for Modern Political History Analyses, Viena

18.00

OFFICIAL DINNER

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8.00

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- A) SECURITY, STRATEGY, GEOPOLITICS & CYBERDEFENCE
- B) ENGINEERING SCIENCES
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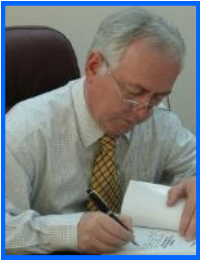


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Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory"—I.L.Caragiale

EDITORIAL



The nuclear threat and Putin's "new" arms

„In the end, peace can be obtained either through hegemony or through balance of forces”

Henry A. Kissinger

Corneliu PIVARIU

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a race of nuclear weaponization after the USA made the first nuclear test on July 16th, 1945 at Alamogordo - New Mexico. Presently, there are eight sovereign states which successfully detonated nuclear warheads. Five of them are considered states possessing nuclear weapons, according to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT): the United States, Russia (as successor to the USSR), Great Britain, France and China. India, Pakistan and North Korea declared they possess nuclear weapons and it is believed that Israel is also among the possessors. Nuclear weapons were possessed in the past by South Africa and some of the former Soviet republics (Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan).

The risk of triggering a world or local nuclear conflict faded out gradually during the Cold War, when the USA built around 70,000 warheads, while Russia (USSR) built around 55,000. There were around 68,000 active warheads in 1985 and in 2016 there were around 10,100. Among them, around 1,800 are displaced by the USA (out of a total of 6,800), 1,950 by Russia (out of a total of 7,000) followed by Great Britain (150/215) and France (280/300), while China has 270 nuclear warheads (the number of those displaced is not announced).

The Russian Federation's ambitions under president Vladimir Putin of becoming again a world superpower were stressed as well in his annual speech on the state of the nation on March 1st, 2018 when he said: *“the (military) operation in Syria proved the increased capacities of Russia's Armed Forces. Huge efforts have been exerted during the last years for strengthening the ground forces and the navy. Providing the armed forces with modern equipment increased 3.7 times. More than 300 new models of military equipment entered into service. The nuclear strategic forces received 80 new ICBMs, 102 ballistic missiles for submarines and three Borey type strategic submarines and 12 missile regiments were endowed with the new Yars missile system. The number of vectors carrying high-precision and long- distance weapons increased more than 12 times and that of high-precision cruise missiles increased more than 30 times”*... Most probably, this speech was a trial balloon for part of foreign media and to titillate the vanity of his own people as it is already very clear that Vladimir Putin will win the fourth six-year mandate as Russia's president at the March 18th elections making him the longest-serving Russian leader after Stalin.

The American Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis declared a few days ago for the media: *“I didn't notice any change in the Russian military capacity and none of the systems (Putin) was speaking about, that are years away from being completed, can modify the military forces balance... At the end of the day they can bury all their money in that. It does not change at all my strategic calculations. I assumed that all these will occur with huge costs for the Russian people”* - the American official added. In this regard we add the fact that Russia's military expenditures are just below \$70 bill. a year while the USA spends currently more than \$600 bill. a year.

In his turn, the CIA director Mike Pompeo stated: *“we are closely following and monitoring all the aspects... The Americans should rest assured that we have a very good understanding of the Russian program”*, he added.

The international experts are still divided on how real are the announcements the Russian head of state made. A recent research of RAND Corporation emphasizes that during the last decade Russia succeeded in reducing the qualitative and technological gap as against NATO while Russia continues to expand its forces towards the West where it keeps an important combat-ready troops and gained valuable fighting experience in Ukraine and Syria.

By intensifying its nuclear armament program, Russia tries to close as much as possible the gap as against NATO and increases the risk of triggering, by miscalculation, a nuclear conflict. Yet Russia adds to its nuclear force other new elements of asymmetric and cyber war and, not the least, the ever assertive activity of its intelligence services which sometimes was not sufficiently counteracted.

The Current Geostrategic World-wide Outlook



THE IMPREVIABLE GLOBAL ELECTORAL MARATHON AND THE WORLD POWER HIERARCHY IN "THE TRUMP ERA"

Mihaiu MĂRGĂRIȚ

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"

(Edmund Burke, 1729-1797, England - a prominent representative of conservatism)

Legislative and presidential elections, determining the configuration of national foreign policy strategies

The current world order is undergoing important changes. We could even say that mankind is in a continuous global political war, in which the conservative camp opposes the progressive one. Directly or indirectly, the struggle is for affirmation of the state political players and the identification of those charismatic leaders able to put the country they represent in a comfortable place in another hierarchy of an international multipolar power system.

A significant part of today's changes are a result of the national elections that took place in the last two years, continuing into the first part of this one so far. Certainly, the other choices that will follow will be mainly influenced by the results in the highly developed economic, military and high-profiled countries in the international geopolitics. Eventually, the entire global election marathon, which has also begun in the Euro-Atlantic countries, will have to put strong political leaders into the fight. They must be able to face a new geopolitical and geo-economic context in a "stadium of continuous competition"¹⁾ to protect the national interests in accordance with the European and Euro-Atlantic values, and to discourage and respond appropriately and effectively accordingly to the severity of the most

unexpected types and forms of challenges, risks and threats.

In the context of the world order debates, I appreciate that the result of the US presidential election that brought the Republican billionaire Donald Trump to the White House signaled the beginning of the first major changes in the world of geopolitics, foreign policy and bilateral relations, through a process of selection, reconfirmation of some old political leaders, and identification of new ones.

From the perspective of Donald Trump's internal and external image after a year of government, I appreciate that we are not wrong if we talked about a new era in the international relations - *the Trump era*. I am thinking of his atypical personality that does not yet realize the specific difference between the successful businessman and the current political leader. He has an original perception about politics, about relations with close political and business partners and presumptive adversaries, showing frankness in declarations of intentions and courage in adopting big decisions, and so on. However, he invites us to become aware of the need for a major change in the political thinking, culture, practice and management, in the social and economic organization of the society, in the establishment of bilateral relations. This need arises from the fact that, after the end of the Cold War, the party ideologies were incapable of adapting to the new realities of time, some even disappeared. Sometimes democracy has been and is being invoked only in the battle for power, and once won, aggressed with nonchalance or seized by mafia groups of interests.

In a controversial political context in his country, and a chaotic and predominantly extremist

1. The phrase is extracted from the new US National Security Strategy, launched by President Donald Trump, commented on in the *Geostrategic Pulse*, no. 251, 252 of January 20, 2018.

populism in Europe, Donald Trump's election as president was challenged in the US, regarded with ostentation, but with some cautiousness, too, in Europe, and subtly blackmailed by Moscow, very close to the limit of triggering the "infringement" procedure. Still, despite these perceptions, and in the absence of any other bold offer that comes out of the routine of the obsolete and cosmetic hierarchies of power, his policy at the White House follows the model of competitiveness with the business tools. It launches the "America First" concept, which, externally, can be said to be imposed as a benchmark in determining the algorithm and arithmetic of the elaboration of all national political strategies included in the electoral programs. I am particularly mindful of those of the EU member states, and those of possible powers in the Eurasian space. In these countries, there were political forces who, in their governmental proposals, want to convince the electorate that they are stronger than the populism of the extremist parties. Their success is subject to another separate and comprehensively analysis. Here, however, the main short- and medium-term problem remains *to choose between inclusion, tolerance and more democracy* - on the one hand - and *xenophobia, extremism and orientation towards an authoritarian regime* - on the other.

Of the total electoral exams conducted so far in the world, I draw attention to the results of choosing the right leaders to enter the struggle of placing their countries to the top of the hierarchy of a new configuration of the multipolar world power system. An eventual balance sheet of the elections that has taken place so far could warn us that populism has begun to grow in Europe. Thus, at the end of 2017, several key votes were marked by scores favorable to the extremist parties, achieving their highest record over the last decades.

As a consequence, we like it or not, we have to accept that what happened in the presidential elections, especially in the US, France, Germany, Russia, China (single party elections), in my opinion, created the premises for the emergence of protagonists who will enter the inevitable "continuous competition arena", defined by Don-

ald Trump. At the same time, other countries aspiring to the position of regional political leader, and why not, in a more or less distant future, may even be considered, perhaps even ascending to the medals. However, it will be time that would make the selection to determine the future hierarchy in another possible configuration of the world order.

A new, novel tandem - Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron - a byproduct of the electoral marathon to enter the "continuous competition arena"

The 2017 presidential elections in France have been considered as the most unpredictable and surprising in recent decades. Out of the 11 enrolled candidates, representing almost the entire French political spectrum, initially independent Emmanuel Macron was elected president. Just a year before, he built a political movement, *En Marche*, pro-European, but totally different from the traditional ones. In fact, the leader of this movement won the competition with *En Marche*, a progressive political group, uniting both the left and the right of the political squad. Then the electorate compared him to his predecessor, Francois Hollande. During his term in office, in the EU affairs the latter was permanently the follower of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and being aware of his unfavorable public image, refused to join the list of candidates for the Élysée Palace. According to the reports from an important segment of the French press, he left the Palace with a harsh label: "*he was the most unpopular president in the recent history of France.*" But we have to admit that, unfortunately, without his will, Hollande's France was a country in a state of emergency. As a result, it must not be forgotten that besides his great struggle with the economy, nothing has marked more than the bloody terrorist attacks that have targeted the country in the last two years of his mandate.

Surprisingly ranked at the top of the list after the first round, Emmanuel Macron, who became the candidate of his *En Marche* party, entered the second round against Marine Le Pen from the *National Front* who had no real chances of

winning the election. This front was far too well known in the political life of France, with an extreme right-wing political and public manifestation of the "*anti-system, nationalist, anti-Semitic, and racist parties.*" In addition, Emmanuel Macron was also favored by the fact that Marine Le Pen suffered public scandals during the electoral campaign, with former candidate Francois Fillon, who, although initially was accredited by the polls with the best chance of winning, was eliminated in the first round.

On the occasion of the announcement of the final outcome of the second round, Emmanuel Macron had his first speech in the winning position which, in my opinion, essentially bears a message similar to Donald Trump's, in the same hypostasis: "*I'll defend France, its vital interests, its image and its message: I make that commitment to you. I'll defend Europe, the common destiny the peoples of our continent have given themselves. Our civilization is at stake. Let's love France. From this evening*"

In many aspects of his personality, Emmanuel Macron being atypical, too, his resemblance to his American counterpart is surely given by his firm and explicit commitment to the national interests, with one but very important distinction: *the current French president is expressing firmly to also defend the common destiny of the European peoples*; Donald Trump, however, won the election and began his mandate promoting *US isolation policy*. In the meantime, he has made some corrections, as he did recently in Davos. Nearly a year after his installation at the Élysée Palace, compared to the last two presidents before him, there is a much greater constructive involvement of Macron in the EU affairs. He insists on the reconsideration of the spirit of community solidarity to increase confidence in the Union as well as to reduce the number of euro-sceptics, and to mitigate the anti-EU attitudes which, after Brexit, have generated manifestations from other member states that they want to remain in the EU but with radical changes in the principles of its operation.

In the context, from the French President's statements and attitudes we can also see some

discrete temptation to assume the informal leadership of the Union in competition with Angela Merkel. Personally, I appreciate it as a positive competition. Without arguing here for the need of it, I just mention that the current state of the EU is precarious, even if the responsible factors do not recognize it, which urgently calls for a new informal leader until it is not too late. I am convinced that such a change, through fair competition, would only benefit the EU.

But for this, President Macron has to affirm himself in the European Council with an innovative and trusting spirit to change the perception of the so-called Brussels-based technocrats of the *enlarged European Union*. A new perception is necessary because the enlargement has generated arrogance towards newcomers, discrimination, mistrust generating Euroscepticism, tendencies to leave the Union, and serious deviations from the principles established by its founding members.

Then, President Macron has to provide the guarantee of a united Europe, acting as a credible and far-reaching political leader, in a future configuration of the world order, favorable to all EU member states.

The assuming the kick-off of competition, I do not think it could be perceived as affecting the overall relationship of France with Germany, regardless of the person who occupies or will occupy the chancellery seat in Berlin. The historical reconciliation between the two countries has been successful. And as far as Angela Merkel is concerned, she still behaved right to Macron's success, being the first Western political leader to congratulate him. I say in the end, because at first, she had been lobbying for her closest EU partner, Francois Hollande, until his refusal to bid. It is true that Angela Merkel's gesture, in the political diplomacy, has a formal significance for states in an amicable relationship. But in the present case, the gesture goes beyond this protocol formalism and the German proverbial rigor, which eliminates from the beginning any personal prejudice, be it only pride.

In France's relations with the US, I believe that the first meeting between the leaders of the two

countries, which took place in the margins of the NATO summit in Brussels in May 2017, signaled a new approach for the benefit of both sides. Probably personal chemistry has brought the two leaders together, too. A first argument is that, just two months after this first meeting, President Donald Trump accepted the invitation to visit Paris on the occasion of the French National Day, during which he showed that he felt good with his younger counterpart, beyond the intentions and interests already existing in the diversity of areas of bilateral relations. This visit was also commented favorably by the European press. For example, Deutsche Welle's references appeared under the title "*In Visit to a Friend: President Trump in Paris*". And about Donald Trump it was mentioned that during the visit he was looking for big words, calling France "*the first and oldest ally of America*."

In spite of his youth, Emmanuel Macron has, over the short period of time since assuming the prerogatives of the presidency, displayed full self-confidence in the position of the highest dignity of the state, the traditional and natural French elegance that emanates from the Élysée Palace - the residences of the most powerful people on the planet - which makes me say that he should be given the chance and be supported to prove he can be an authentic leader, not just for Europe.

Therefore, in relation to the above, we could say that in the international geopolitics two important political leaders emerged on the stage of global geopolitics (Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron), a byproduct of the electoral marathon, conceptually different, both in the exercise of internal and external management of the countries, but seems they can be complementary in reconsidering the Euro-Atlantic values that are today in distress.

Germany, a prosperous country, remains in the "*continuous competition arena*" with the same leader in an inconvenient position of image

Undoubtedly, Germany has the largest national economy in Europe, the world's fourth largest as

the Nominal GDP, and the fifth as GDP per capita at purchasing power parity (PPP). The prosperity of the German people is real and evident in everyday life and is also confirmed by official statistics in the field.

As for the political leadership of the unified Germany since the end of the Cold War, Angela Merkel has been one of the successful chancellors since her entry into politics, having the great architect of reunification - Helmut Kohl - as a spiritual mentor. Angela Merkel's success is materialized in the three consecutive mandates in the highest power position in the state, which assured her externally affirmation, too. Benefiting from a favorable political context determined by the options and emulation of integration into the Euro-Atlantic and European structures that embraced the peoples who have escaped from communism, she has gradually assumed the role of the informal EU leader, a reflex likely wandering in history.

As a result, after driving the country's destinies, and informal those of the EU, too, over a period of 12 years, her political image began to erode. As a result, after much hesitation, Angela Merkel nevertheless decided to take part in the September 2017 parliamentary elections for her fourth Chancellery mandate. But she got it not easily. In fact, the opinion polls indicated a sometimes dramatic decrease in the electorate preferences. This was mainly determined by the controversial solutions adopted in the issue of migrants considered by the civil society and her opponents in the internal and external political environment to be inadequate, the consequences of which caused dissatisfaction among large parts of the electorate.

At the same time, Angela Merkel had to face other accusations, too, such as being "*arrogant*" and undergoing an "*attack on democracy*". They came from her political opponents and even from the Social Democrats (SPD) partners, with which the Conservatives (CDU) had previously formed a large coalition in 2013.

Regarding Angela Merkel's personality, I reiterate on this occasion my vision that, in the EU's informal leadership position she assumed, to-

gether with the dictatorial and defective leadership style and behavior of some of her politically affiliated personalities in the Brussels staff, led by Jean Claude Juncker, and also with the former French president, they have destabilized the Union. This management team, in my view, is solely responsible for the current situation of the EU, registering a *de jure* and open centrifugal manifestations from some member states. I do not repeat the arguments in support of this statement, being detailed in a previous issue of our magazine. I only summarize the fact that this managerial team, to which former French President Francois Hollande was co-opted, also practiced a duplicitous policy in relation with the Russian leader Vladimir Putin on the issue of Ukraine by favoring him. It has consistently pursued a policy against the US and by indifference has undermined the security situation of the member states located at the EU's Eastern border.

On the other hand, Brexit seems to be a problem to which we might sometime find out that Germany is not a stranger. It is a post factum impression that Britain's exit from the EU has been allowed to materialize in the propaganda and manipulation of the British Euro-sceptics which the above-mentioned managerial team has not tried to counteract. And now, with similar attempts from Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, we see feeble warnings that do not seem to be able to make a return to normality. Putting all of these attitudes in a single, anti-EU phrase, and correlating them, they seem to be in line with the strategic objectives of the current Kremlin leadership to destabilize the EU and NATO.

The thoughts given above are just a facet of the German Chancellor's political leadership, quite obvious, but less commented in the public space. They, however, were perceived as such by the electorate who, at the right time, sanctioned the CDU and Angela Merkel by giving them the lowest score in the last 68 years. But although the party ranks first in the September 2017 elections, the votes were insufficient to form the government. For this reason, the German press considered that "*the CDU/CSU victory is a bitter one*," because of the conservative group score,

the worst result of the last 70 years.

Faced with the existing situation, the CDU had to start negotiations to form a coalition government. But after the failure in the lengthy negotiations and in various formulas, that extended for about four months, eventually on 9 January, the conservatives, the CDU, agreed with the Social Democrats, the SPD, to conclude a "*principle agreement*". The conditions, the timing and the manner of conducting negotiations in the process of forming the "*big coalition*" government were established. It is mentioned that this agreement would put an end to a long period of political uncertainty in Germany. But the end is not here. In order to eventually get to the governance with this coalition, in addition to the negotiations, each party had to go through certain stages related to the provisions of the Constitution of the country, to the obligation to observe the procedures of their own party statutes, as well as other electoral laws which, in their entirety, also consume time. According to the Deutsche Welle editor Katharina Kroll, this procedure means another four months. I also do not take into account the time given by law to the President of the Republic to validate the new Chancellor and cabinet, resulting from negotiations. Then, theoretically, the situation of a possible total failure of all the possible bargaining options should not be ruled out, a failure that would also call into question the solution of early elections.

But in the Germany's current political situation, the governance resulting from endless negotiations and procedures within the coalition, which I have called "*of big compromises*," I do not think Angela Merkel will manage to get her mandate all the way. Without early elections, Germany remains at a critical moment of internal political instability. It is sustained by discontent and dissatisfaction within all political groups, including those of "*the big coalition*." The Social Democratic Party also has the worst result of all time - 20.8%. And for the extreme-right side, we see the growth of the Neo-Nazi party, *Afd*, which has over 13% of the votes and entered the Bundestag for the first time since World War II.

To conclude, I appreciate that Germany is facing a major domestic political crisis, generated by a series of issues that concern only the domestic political management as well as the EU, and not the country's concrete economic situation. In this situation, a simple question arises: If Angela Merkel, in the position of Chancellor resulting from endless elections and negotiations, fails to harmonize the general interests of her own country for the formation of the new government until about eight months after the parliamentary elections, is she in the state to once again assume the role of an informal EU leader, and decide the fates of 27 member states?

As for Germany, as I said above, it is a prosperous country, it has a huge potential that can ensure a prosperous future for its people. As a result, I am convinced that Europe, the EU member states and beyond, are waiting more from Germany, and deserve another political management, correct and harmonized with the Community's interest, while respecting the genuine Euro-Atlantic values.

China, a "socialist superpower" in the making

Over time, China has been noticed not only in its demographic characteristics and the ingenuity of its people, but also in the ideology of its leaders, in the reasoning leadership and modeling of society, on the historic stages. So, the personalities, prominent or less prominent, have strongly preserved their national identity. In such a context we identify the current president, Xi Jinping, who since his first term in office has undergone a process of powerful state consolidation as a great world power. He has adopted modern and efficient policies of economic development and guaranteeing, using without prejudice and with great skill all the advantages offered by a wide openness towards everything new in relation with the outside world in all fields.

Today, China is appreciated by most analysts as a socialist world power, and can become a "socialist superpower" with a real global influence. It launched a master plan called "*Made in*

China 2025", becoming the world's largest producer of cheap consumer goods. This plan is based on an industrial banking model inspired by the *0.6 type* industry in Germany and the *US Industrial Internet of Things*. China's economic policy is type "*Planned economy 0.6*." Theoretically, the "*economy 0.6*" is an initiative aimed at enhancing digitization, networking, developing computer networks in all areas, and increasing the present business potential to ensure future long-term development.

China is also investing heavily in its military modernization program, given its intention to expand its power, not only in the region but also internationally. This is addressed as a matter of major concern in the context of the global changes in a new configuration of the world order. In this regard, *RAND Corporation* for East Asia experts Jeffrey Engstrom and Michael Chase in 2015 referring to the modernization of the Chinese Army specified that the missions of its operational capabilities are designed to "*discourage or, if necessary, counteract the US military intervention in the Asia-Pacific region*." But, just after two years, in the summer of 2017, according to Reuters, China has begun installing its first military base abroad in Djibouti - the Horn of Africa, following amicable settlements with the authorities of that state. It is noteworthy and significant that this country, being of strategic interest to the West, already hosts military bases of the United States, Japan and France, following similar agreements. Then a Chinese aircraft carrier made her first visit to the Mediterranean. And the president, personally, has prompted the deployment of Chinese facilities in the South China Sea.

China's global ambitions also aim at providing escort ships to the commercial ships and escorting future carriers with a new type of PLAN warships. This is a *Type 611* destroyer that will most likely also have the role of commander of the escort forces on the commercial shipping routes to the areas of interest, particularly towards Africa. A first ship was launched into the water on June 28, 2017, and four more similar will be delivered by 2020. Their total number would reach some 22-26 units.

In the overall changes in China, the country can be seen as moving from a "*centrally planned economy*" to a "*market-based economy*", but the Chinese form of capitalism did not materialize with similar Western political and social structures. The country remained an authoritarian state that continues to be led by a single system - the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), while its Secretary General is also the President of the Republic.

As a result, Xi Jinping's exposition at the 19th Communist Party Congress in 2017, in dual quality, both as Party and State leader, China's economy occupied a distinctly important place. In the same framework, leader Xi was appointed for a second term in the position of General Secretary of the party and as president of the state. With this Congress, Xi's position and power reach its maximum. The delegates voted unanimously to attach to the Party's Statute the chapter "*Xi Jinping's Thinking of Socialism, China's Characteristics for a New Era.*" The media strategy for this era is given by "*party domination, innovative propaganda, cultural influence and the globalization of its governance model.*" In fact, this means that Xi's vision for China is officially part of the state doctrine. Through these procedures, the Congress places Xi Jinping in the same pantheon with the Communist Party legends, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

Xi Jinping, therefore, holds today's absolute power in China. In connection with this, Jeffrey Wasserstrom, a historian of China at the University of California Irvine, quoted by the *Los Angeles Times*, believes that "*it's premature to say whether Xi's level of power should be compared directly to Mao or Deng.*" Other experts say that attaching Xi's thinking into the Statute as a consecrated ideology gives him a vast political mandate and means he may be in power more than most of Chinese Communist leaders. Others say this mandate would be granted "*indefinitely*". From this position, I understand that his ideology would remain attached to the Party Statute, even though, for various reasons beyond his control, he would no longer be president. So he would remain in the Party Statute a great ideologist in life, similar to that of Deng Xiaoping.

As far as China's foreign relations are concerned, those with the US are retaining attention. They were tense and seemed to amplify immediately after Donald Trump won the presidential election. In December 2016 (before being sworn in as the new president), he had a telephone conversation with Taiwan's President Tsai Ingwen, defying a nearly 40 years diplomatic pattern. China, dissatisfied, reacted immediately. As a result, after setting in in the White House, probably advised by his counselors, the US president changed his tone and, during a telephone conversation with his counterpart, Xi Jinping, agreed to stick to "*one China*" policy. With a diplomatic response to these Trump's last "reparatory" remarks, President Xi explicitly and firmly conveyed China's strategy in relation with the US: "*I think the United States and China are co-operating partners and, through joint efforts, we can lead the bilateral relations to a new historical high.*"

In Europe, China has much more developed economic relations with Switzerland and has intensified its efforts to strengthen bilateral relations with the European Union. To reflect the depth and breadth of the strategic partnership, the EU and China decided in 2010 to strengthen such relations in the field of foreign affairs, security issues and global challenges such as climate change and the recovery of the global economy.

In recent years, China has placed a special focus on areas at the periphery of the EU, such as Poland, Hungary. The finding of these actions has alarmed the European External Relations Council, accusing it of practicing "*pick and choose*" in its relations with the European Union, focusing on its direct interests, and often ignoring EU norms in its proposals".

With Russia, China's relations at this date are very good. The assertion is also confirmed by the statement made by Chinese President Xi in his interview before his visit to Moscow in 2017: "*China-Russia relations are at their "best time in history"*" adding that "*countries are strategic partners of trust, which is the basis all collaborative actions in all fields*".

Putin's Russia enters the "continuous competition arena" and remains with the same prefabricated product in an electoral marathon that began several previous mandates

Putin's Russia is the Russia resulting from the implosion of the former USSR, taken over from the first Russian President Boris Yeltsin after a confusing fast-coagulating process as a state entity, of confrontation, both in terms of borders to be drawn between the former Soviet republics, and the previously centralized economic potential and mechanisms in Moscow, which should also have been shared. "The hand mill of the Prime Ministers" adopted by Yeltsin until Vladimir Putin was brought to Kremlin, did not work. We must admit that Putin was the only one who had the strength and ability to turn "Mother Russia" into a regional power. He started putting order in the country, then by military force at its borders and in other areas of strategic interest. The goal of his policy, obvious unclear, has been and remains to regain the position of the former USSR at the table of the big decisions on the international geopolitics, penetrating lately in the proximity of the great powers that aspire to a comfortable place in the hierarchy of a new configuration of the world order.

But a state cannot be considered a great global power if its military potential is not supported by a strong, productive and performing economic potential. From this perspective, at this time, I appreciate that "Putin's New Russia" is not a great world power. The military capabilities inherited from the former USSR, nuclear and conventional weapons, cannot be maintained and developed with the current economy sustained with great efforts and frustrations by the population. Economically it relies heavily on the export of its strategic natural resources used as the spearhead of diplomacy and a blackmail weapon in its foreign policy.

Putin's electoral success has always been based on the fact that, economically and socially, especially in terms of living standards, the Russian people have traditionally been very pleased. And on the domestic political plane, he was careful to

force out his main opponents. And the mass of the other counter-candidates on the official list were enrolled only for *electoral decoration, allegedly democratic*.

In summary, however, Putin has successfully accomplished almost everything he has proposed on the political, diplomatic and military level, proving charismatic skills of an authentic leader. Grave for the political and international security balance is that he managed to destabilize the EU, using its vulnerabilities and created real prerequisites to destabilize NATO, too, in the context of the authoritarian Islamist policy of Turkish President Erdogan.

As a result, Vladimir Putin, confident of his success for the fourth presidency mandate, without real competition, accredited in the polls with an average of 75% of the voting intentions, has allowed himself to stand as an independent candidate. This is, perhaps, to avoid a possible monopoly feeling among the party from which he originated, too. In fact, the pro-Putin political parties, and a part of the civil society represented by NGOs have secured his success. In order to assert his position as an independent, with his known ability, Putin used informal meetings with young people and representatives of various professional categories at their work, having discussions of a strong social and working character, amiable, without banners, slogans or directed ovations.

Regarding the pro-Putin NGOs, it stands out the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), one of the public diplomatic tools, an academic and diplomatic *think tank* that contributes to Russia's soft power efforts. The Report of its *Working Group for Forecasting*, entitled *Russia's Foreign Policy: Towards 2018*²⁾, published in no. 36 on the *RIAC site* even during the presidential campaign cannot be an editorial event. Undoubtedly, the scientific research character of the report remains. But in terms of structure and content, as well as the bringing to public discussion of a topic of great interest for the moment, in my opinion the report seems to have a precise destination, assuming its role as a document of the

2. russiancouncil.ru/papers/Russia2018ReportEn.pdf

Vladimir Putin's electoral program,. Here is its structure, which fully covers the requirements of the foreign policy chapter of an electoral program: *A New Cycle of Russian Foreign Policy; The Foreign policy threats and risks; Key foreign policy opportunities; Russia and the West; Russia and the Middle East; Russia and Asia-Pacific; Russia and the post-soviet states.*

As a matter of fact, the authors have, from the outset, been careful to say that *"the ideas and conclusions provided in this report will be useful to the Russian authorities when making foreign policy decisions."* At the time of the report's appearance, the presidential election captured public attention, and the political decision was taken by only one person - the president in office Vladimir Putin. And the option of running as an independent keeps him away from the so-called electoral struggle in Russia.

In addition, the authors further state that the report is *"A systemic approach [that] has been taken to identify the most important areas of Russia's foreign policy for 2018, as well as the key threats and opportunities for the country on the global arena."* It is sufficiently obvious that the report does not present a broad-based analytical approach with a strong scientific character but rather a synthesis of the recommended guidelines underpinning foreign policy, thus betraying the programmatic nature in the short and medium term, and the addressability towards the great electoral mass.

From our point of view, the authors acknowledge that the Russian presidential elections of 2018 have been planned to coincide with the political cycles in many countries, including China, the United States and several EU and Middle East countries. And the assertion that they *"mark the beginning of a new cycle of foreign policy for the Russian Federation"* is a similar apprehension to that of the American president who under the same circumstances foresaw a *"new era in international relations"*, above labeled by us as *"the Trump era"*.

From the content of the report, we also find that it is the first time the Russian specialists openly state that the *"Economic backwardness is*

a growing threat to Russia's sovereignty, narrowing the window of opportunity in foreign policy." So Russia's economic backwardness is perceived only as a threat. But it avoids referring to the fact that the state of the Russian economy, as it characterizes it in the text, does not correlate with the military potential to give it the status of power it aspires to acquire, and cannot even endorse it indefinitely. However, the Russian military potential represents a considerable arsenal of nuclear and conventional armaments. As a result, in my opinion, the phrase in the text on the *"narrowing the window of opportunity in foreign policy"* is elusive, an *"umbrella"* to escalate the aggressive character of Russia's foreign policy in the context of its aspirations for global power.

The analysis of the most important specialists in the field, gathered at the RIAC, with great influence on the construction of Russia's foreign policy issued by Kremlin, starts from the appreciation that the Western dimension of Russia's foreign policy was the most problematic in 2017, as a result of the allegations which were made to it mainly about:

- *The increased pressure of the sanctions against Russia.*
- *"The Interference" (the accusation of Russia involvement - o.n) in the general elections in the Western countries.*

As for designing the relations with the West, the report estimates a set of challenges and threats to Russia that need to be taken into account in the future, of which I mention:

- *An anti-Russia press campaign in the run-up of the presidential election, and a campaign to diminish the legitimacy of the Russian political system.*
- *The situation in Ukraine*
- *The proliferation of the regime of sanctions against Russia.*
- *Setting up a "multi-speed" sanction regime.*
- *Deterioration of the relations with the EU and NATO.*

Faced with the Western dimension of the chal-

lenges and threats that it faced in 2017, it is considered that Russia's foreign policy for 2018 should provide for appropriate punctual tasks on:

- *Developing a dialogue with the EU as part of "selective cooperation".*
- *Stabilization of the relations with the US ("confrontation management").*
- *Gradual restoration of dialogue at different levels and in various formats;*
- *"Defrosting" the cooperation and seeking alternative forms of interaction.*
- *Prevent the escalation tensions and working together to reduce "rhetorical hostility."*
- *Maintaining and developing the deterrent and threat potential in relation with the Middle East Islamization hotbed, etc.*

At the same time, the authors of the report believe that Russia needs to strengthen its role as responsible global power, helping to solve common security issues. In this sense, in 2018 there is a need for an urgent approach to a series of challenges and threats, such as:

- *Perturbation or stagnation of the peace process in Syria, as a result of contradictions between the external players involved. (Russia, US and Turkey with its Kurdish issue, and Iran's influence in the region).*
- *The return of the Islamic State fighters to Russia and the post-Soviet states.*
- *The situation in Afghanistan worsening due to the strengthening of the situation of the Islamic State.*
- *The deterioration of the situation in Yemen.*
- *Military attempts to solve the crisis in Libya.*
- *The US threats to with-*

draw from the nuclear agreement with Iran.

In connection with what has happened in Russia so far, to which I have made brief references above, no one could say that the country is headed on a road that would lead to democracy. Putin's idea that "Power Vertical must be supreme, the government having to function as a Swiss watch, and that all must live under the rule of law, is merely a quick outline. All depends on who will handle the details".³⁾ Up to now, we find that Putin remains the tsar desired by the "crowd" will continue to deal by himself with the details, too, and he will not come out of his personal way in which he understands the true values of democracy.

In conclusion, the electoral marathon, invoked in the title of this material, as it emerges from its approach, remains unpredictable, with new and old political leaders being in a personalized way of affirmation, both through political thinking, attitude, and through pragmatism and dynamism in action, too. All will enter that "continuous competition arena", a concept sketched out and launched by Donald Trump, so far very little unraveled by its specialists and less publicly commented. This concept could be the great stakes of the struggle in the arena, with connotations in the configuration of the world order.



3. *Putin and the new Russia*, Michael STURMER, "International Letter" Publishing House Bucharest.



Giles Merritt is Founder and Chairman of Friends of Europe

Brussels must bite the bullet on a common EU migration policy

The EU Commission is soon to re-enter the fray over immigration. Whether it will do so timidly or in a blaze of political courage remains to be seen. In the coming weeks it is due to unveil its ideas for a 'European Labour Authority', a powerful new instrument that isn't specifically about migrant labour although its goals clearly include speeding the resettlement of immigrants and helping to find them jobs.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the Commission's President, signalled this initiative almost in an aside when delivering his annual State of the Union speech last September. No details have since emerged to adorn the few bland words that spoke of "better managing cross-border situations" and "promoting the opportunities offered by the European labour market both for businesses and workers alike".

We will have to wait and see what mandate the Commission proposes giving this new body, and what the reactions from EU member states will be.

The idea of a new 'authority' could either pour fresh oil on the flames of Brussels' unresolved refugee burden-sharing scheme, or if handled adroitly it could help create a new framework for addressing Europe's looming migration problem.

Slowly, and often reluctantly, policy planners across Europe are waking to the fact that the rising retirement trend coupled with low fertility means the EU's active workforce of 240 million people will within 25 years be about 30 million fewer. That's a huge chunk of missing tax revenues and consumption, as well as an additional healthcare and pensions burden. Increased productivity and more efficient labour markets will help, but the most obvious solution is more

immigration.

Increased productivity and more efficient labour markets will help, but the most obvious solution is more immigration.

The commission has for some time been quietly forecasting all this, but has refrained from headlining it for fear of exacerbating Europe's refugee row. It is nevertheless groping its way toward a common migration policy, with officials looking at ways to back away from the deadlock between EU governments over its refugee burden-sharing plan. This was proposed by Brussels in the wake of the 2015-16 'migrant crisis', but torpedoed by the Visegrad bloc of central and eastern Europeans.

Instead the Commission should focus on a more constructive and voluntary approach that goes a good deal further than resettlement quotas. Member states should be asked to agree on what are, and are not, national responsibilities and prerogatives on immigration. That would do much to define the parameters for collective EU-level actions.

Built into the new framework should be an agreement on more flexible policy responses so that member states could decide which problems to handle themselves. An emphasis on voluntary actions would reassure governments that Brussels has abandoned rigid burden-sharing.

On the financial side, the Commission is considering some sort of 'European Solidarity Mechanism' to spread the costs of investing in resettlement, housing and training of migrants. This would help to cover ancillary costs like stepped-up development policies for Africa. Brussels' thinking is that the EU's poorer members - notably the Visegrad refuseniks - might prefer to contribute 'in kind' to the new migration strategy by supplying equipment and personnel to relevant initiatives.

The Commission is likely to have a tough fight ahead as, so far, the populists have won all the battles over immigration. Playing on fears that

Europe will be 'swamped' by unregulated boat people, some of whom might even be jihadists, opponents of immigration have successfully championed the need for walls rather than the integration of newcomers.

Playing on fears that Europe will be 'swamped' by unregulated boat people, some of whom might even be jihadists, opponents of immigration have successfully championed the need for walls rather than the integration of newcomers.

But that won't resolve Europe's manpower needs, or the irresistible pressure being exerted by population explosions both in Africa and the Arab world. The case for a measured, long-term pan-European migration strategy is irrefutable, and needs to be argued by the commission more loudly and with far greater conviction than to date.

Meanwhile, an interesting footnote is that commission policymaking on migration is now to be largely in Greek hands. In an unusual anomaly, the promotion of Ms. Paraskevi Michou as the incoming Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs means that both she and her Commissioner, Dimitris Avramopoulos, are of the same nationality. It's to be hoped that this departure from normal practice won't in any way weaken the commission's hand when it urges a new EU approach to thorny immigration issues.

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FAKE NEWS or FAKE CONCEPT?



Vasile Sebastian DÂNCU

The falsehood of fake news

Sometimes, watching the contemporary society increasingly detached from books and written culture, I have the acute feeling we exist in a society without memory. A candid society which each day seems to be astonished, enjoying itself or being horrified by things that date back hundreds, if not thousands of years. Roughly we could say that we are dealing with "fake news", that means ordinary lies, fabrications of our mind which mass media use to intoxicate the public opinion from its beginnings. However, the great theorists of fake news warn us, through dozens of recent academic studies, more or less superficial, that is a pretty complicated concept with many facets. We understand that it appeared in the American election campaign, so it will certainly have ideological or even propaganda uses.

Accepting the convention, fake news is not false news **is a kind of a complex deception (hoax in English), a false setting of high public dispersion, in order to mislead, to deceive people about the actions, intentions or political programs.** Politicians have created a new word to define lie against them, but they did not define with any new word the fake news, the manipulation industries or lying factories poured on people directly from government institutions, from politicians' offices or media concerns close to them.

Fake news arise amid the great crisis of the media in recent years, as most voices say, referring primarily to the economic crisis and the hundreds of thousands of jobs which have disappeared from the media industry. Certainly, it not only that. This is a **technical change** in the first place. Generalizing the possibility to insert any citizen in the virtual space, journalist or not, gave rise to the emer-

gence of user-generated content (UGC), considered as a great democratization or media revolution. These kind of contents (blogs, wikis, discussion forums, messaging, chats, tweets, podcasts, digital images, video, audio, advertising media) that were created by users of a system or online service have been since 2005 regarded as an opening on behalf of mass media, a censorship disappearance and the onset of a golden age for independent opinion and free expression. Many were overjoyed at first those who wanted to get rid of advertising fees and who have generated marketing strategies of great subtlety using this freedom to enter the system.

The big issue which kneaded the mainstream media after Brexit and Trump's victory was that it lost the battle with social networks which are now accused of what is worse. It is clear that politicians, together with media satellites, lost the battle of public confidence in recent decades, not now, with the hypothetical occurrence of FN (fake news). The codes of conduct have been considered irrelevant by the media in recent years, which rejected even the talks about self-regulation, despite the insistence of non-governmental organizations, which had no impact and insisted mainly on deontological resignations. I heard also in Romania, in recent decades, about media owners threatening candidates for president or for other governmental positions: be careful we are the presidents' enterprise.

It is true, it's not enough to be honest because you have people who listen to you, or just extremely competent in what you are doing, as it has been strongly stated in the last two decades. **You have to make up stories, to give thrills, regardless of truth or fairness.** Audience has become the most important thing. The big media trusts have seen, certainly, as confidence in the media decreases, but nothing mattered in the face of growing the audience, even without credibility. If someone criticized a journalist for lying or betraying ethical principles, all media trusts rushed to eliminate from the start any dispute,

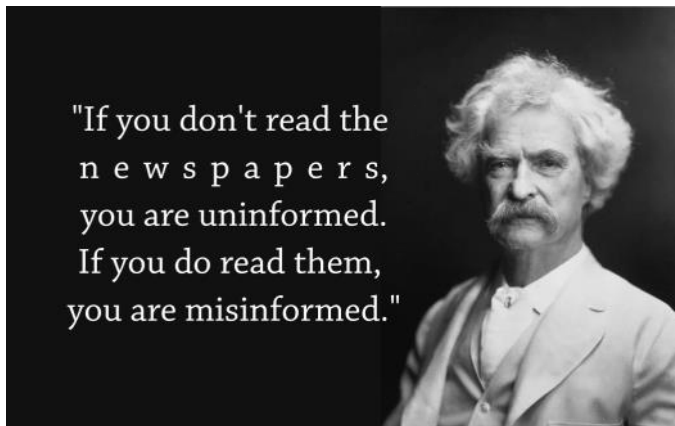


the media lynching being a method often used against those who had the courage to challenge a journalist. Anyone entering politics was warned that he should not fight with someone who buys ink in tanks and paper in wagons, or more popular was an ironic conclusion saying that no one won the war with the press.

Populism has become a rule to produce content across social space. Studies of social psychology about the way people perceive information showed that people want to validate their opinions and beliefs and this led to the great hypocrisy: there is no way to argue our audience, even if it feeds on illusions or is violent or has irrational impulses. In a time of harsh market journalism, many of my former students who studied journalism left the media sending me messages saying that they cannot stand anymore "the prostitution of this profession".

I would not neglect one important aspect: **by strengthening the neoliberal ideology in all social areas, the media is no longer burdened with any system of social responsibility.** In a society of free trade and stringent market competition, of subordination of press activity to profits, the major moral exigencies of the modern media are starting to fade. A moral resignation which leaves serious traces that can be seen right at this moment. Conscience clauses of the professional contract of journalists are trampled by the need for profit or by the battle with time or the battle for sensational news. Even the courses on ethics and deontology from the faculties of journalism are becoming thinner or "increasingly anachronistic" as a distinguished professor once told me.

Only Brexit and Trump's election made us realize that we have a problem with the media? And, ironically, the concept of fake news has been revived with reference to some guys who built up sites with fake news in Macedonia and Romania and who defeated the big corporations, news plants such as CNN or BBC. **FN and Post-Truth are just fake concepts.** FN invention is an invention of editorial thought that, to be justified,



or even censorship. The post-truth era is, in fact, an ideological construct, a concentration camp for ideas about the future, for example. Suggesting ways to reduce reality only to quantifiable data or figures it has been suggested in fact a truncation of the possible world, the suggestion of fact-checking, stigmatization and stamping the news, it kills the exact essential element of politics: creating a difference by including a vision of the future, a wish for change in the name of some humanist values.

it has been brought up to public attention a false and ideological concept: **the post-truth concept**. The great editorial minds justified the defeats of the media system by inventing a new historical era and the birth of a new reality, a reality of lies and politics based on anything other than the truth.

American or British journalists have lost the battle of political influence not because they weren't credible, they said, but because of a global historical mutation where truth is no longer a criterion or a value respected by the public and citizens. But they spoke nothing about the data connected with the lies that the major media groups have orchestrated against Trump, or against those who preached Brexit.

In this way, the columnists, the inventors of the post-truth era covered-up the possibility that the reaction of the voters could have been generated by the disgust or saturation towards the intrigues and manipulations of the mediatic-political complex which lied to them constantly in the last decades. The great post-truth era ideologues have found **the perfect scapegoat**: the social networks are to blame, they have a captive audience and they can filter information, and through this they have brought great manipulation in the public sphere.

Beyond that, however, all these attempts are deeply ideological, they seek to hide and cover a reality of the operation of the media market by the very fact that they have proclaimed insistently "the end of ideology" or "the refusal of ideologies", but they militate, as we'll see a bit later, to reduce the media to a life voided of factuality

False concepts, false threats, false remedies

The columnists 'thinking also known as ideologues of the unchanged world resulted in a miracle solution, and many people (credulous) are enthusiastic about it: **FN hunting**. In fact, as early as 2000 a new practice of journalism is born in the US, then a journalistic genre and even a profession: fact-checking. **Fact-checking is a practice of verifying the authenticity of political speeches, but also a way to check other contents, especially those on social networks**. Some of the largest media companies have created dedicated departments and they even specialized fact-checkers. In France, Le Monde and Libération have their first fact-checking platform entitled "Desintox" and "Les Décodeurs".

The denunciation of fake news is an illusion and can be used even against the ethical purpose for which this process was invented. FN hunting can become a kind of Pokémon hunt, where the hunter is "driven" on a route that the manipulator wants and which is full of pitfalls. The results of the first platforms were used in political propaganda in France and made the parties to turn against each other, selecting only the arguments that weighed down the opponent.

A big issue concerns the practical possibilities of checking. True, you can check the figures, some events or documents, but most of the time, the manipulation is done through framing, through interpretation and commentary. The facts and the data that receive interpretation are already receiving another life, they relate to other measures of truthfulness.

More recently, starting from these experiments the concept of “datajournalism” has been launched as another way to make investigations: mainly the journalists are not questioning the subjects anymore, but they are questioning the facts, the databases, the statistics and documents.

Impact assessments for these fact-checking experiments have shown a limited impact regarding the audience: politicians continue to lie, and voters continue to elect the liars even when they caught them in a lie. Hence it has been stated that fast-checking could be a solution, which means a **fact-checking in real time**, and the Washington Post even built a device for that (Truth Teller), a kind of automatic lies detector.

The intellectual degradation of journalism in the last decades cannot be hidden anymore, especially considering that it has been proven that people no longer “listen” the voice of the large corporations. Inventing the post-truth era to justify the lack of impact of the media on the electorate is a weak explanation, as long as the loss of confidence in politicians and in the mediatic and political complex, with oligarchic structure, is quite old and took place gradually. How can we be sure that the FN hunting is made with fairness, given that the election campaigns are true informational wars where everything is allowed and which already permitted unethical practices like the negative campaigning or “black” storytelling, the one that produces fear and angst towards one candidate or another. If two fact-checkers are indexing an information as false, why should we believe them, knowing that the parties are making them write those posts and make all sorts of dirty things in cyberspace. **So, who's checking the checkers?**

The recommendations of the fact-checkers may become unreliable and may even be subject of corruption. The alternative which involves action is even more absurd. In fact, what we are facing with in the post-truth era is a discrete re-introduction of censorship. Undoubtedly, censorship is not an option especially since we have the following logic dead end: **we want the censorship of the social media, and the expected**



effect is the increase of confidence in the mainstream media.

Solutions? Reconnecting to reality and expulsion of false concepts.

Suppose we accept to live in the post-truth era, and the truth is not a benchmark, but we accept passively that in the public debate the emotion or human predisposition to believe any nonsense has won? I don't think this is normal.

First, we need to see what journalists should do in this new era, which is their task, or does this task is reduced to FN hunting?

I cannot believe people have given up the value of truth in news or information, even if they have the best tools to distinguish truth from falsehood. **If people have lost confidence in the mainstream media, I don't think the solution is to walk brainless after facts or data, drawing a lifeless reality, but to seek to regain people's trust.**

If we don't fight for the achievement of certain values, no one will believe the journalist's neutrality bugaboo. **Journalists should ask themselves how they got here, perhaps by long strings of ethical resignations? If people no longer “listen” to them and vote as they wish, it means that they also have a contribution to it. Some would say categorically: but why should we listen the journalists, as long as with their own words say that the truth does not matter and that we live in an era of emotion.**

How to restore confidence in the media and journalists, this should be the most important

question we must ask ourselves, not to invent labels for the age in which we live. Regaining people's confidence can become an important project, even if it is not simple to achieve in an era of what we can call market journalism. We may need to label fake news and denounce hoax. But is that enough?

Shouldn't we denounce also what is behind this business of lying? The famous FN is not some bloggers' bastard, I rather think that it is an organized enterprise, it often has structures of power at its back, it is not just a game made by amateurs on social networks. However, we must not forget that checking the accuracy of news is an old task, we don't have to reinvent it now, even if we now rather check the emotional or viral potential of the news.

Restoring confidence in the media must begin by reconnecting journalism to the real world (not just to the one defined or definable by facts and figures), the one that contains also subjective "information", namely people's dreams and hopes, their sufferings, disappointments and their rebellions. Just mimicking the detachment and realism makes it hard for journalists to get close, again, to people. Let's not forget that values like truth, good, justice and beauty, solidarity or compassion are values with great emotional capacity, with infinite potentialities for an emotional storytelling if we cannot get rid of the dazzling sun of the post-truth world.



Is Armenia Testing a New Foreign Policy Concept?

Eduard ABRAHAMYAN

The Armenian government expects that the long-renegotiated Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between Armenia and the European Union, which was signed on November 24, 2017, will be ratified by the European Parliament by May 2019, at the latest (Armenpress.am, January 31). Meanwhile, Armenia itself is undergoing a constitutional shift from a presidential to a full parliamentary system of government (see EDM, January 29). And in the midst of this dynamically changing political environment, Yerevan has apparently begun to reconceptualize the core principles of its foreign and security policy. Until recently, Armenia's diplomatic modus operandi had been shaped by an underlying concept of so-called "Complementarity," which was originally elucidated in two key strategy documents, both dating back to 2007: the National Security Strategy (Mfa.am, January 26, 2007) and its Military Doctrine (Mil.am, February 7, 2007). Briefly, a "Complementarian" foreign policy entails pursuing multi-vector, equilibrium-seeking diplomacy, prioritizing the simultaneous balanced development of collaborative ties with all of Armenia's regional and international stakeholders. But these foreign policy-making mechanisms and priorities became ill-adapted to the wide spectrum of challenges facing the country—namely, a fundamentally evolved European security paradigm (particularly post-Crimea annexation) in conjunction with the reemergence of a competitive multipolar world order. At least at the declaratory level, "Complementarity" (sometimes referred to as "and-and" theory) still exists in Armenia's foreign policy lexicon. However, more recently, this foreign policy principle has become effectively irrelevant and inapplicable in its original form. Both politicians and observers admit that the country's foreign policy has undergone a perceptible evolution in the post-Ukraine crisis period, requiring its reappraisal

(Aravot.am, December 15, 2017). President Sargsyan echoed this perspective at a recent foreign ministry conference, recognizing the need to revise the country's strategy documents (Armenpress.am, January 30). Russia's conflict with the West over Ukraine and, more broadly, the resurgence of Moscow's overtly coercive and manipulative pattern of regional policy, combined with the changing nature of the world order, have had a serious effect on Armenia's foreign policy philosophy. Likewise, Yerevan's withdrawal from its long-standing Euro-Atlantic integration path—having derailed its Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU in 2013—as well as renewed large-scale ceasefire violations in Karabakh, have given rise to a new foreign policy that can be defined as “Neo-Complementarianism.” Illustratively, Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan stressed recently that, although Armenians consider themselves a European nation, the inherent incompatibilities of integrating equally into the EU as well as the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), has meant that “we have been forced to [solely] join” the Russia-promoted bloc (1in.am, January 24). In examining the term “Neo-Complementarianism,” an important nuance should be taken into account. Specifically, while Yerevan still genuinely prioritizes sustained and extensive dialogue with all regional powers and supra-national institutions, security matters have been wholly relegated to relations with Armenia's main ally. Hence, Armenia's transformed foreign policy is not Pseudo-Complementarian but rather Neo-Complementarian—emphasizing its partnerships with the West, Iran and Asian powers, while simultaneously profoundly relying on Russia and Russia-related obligations in the defense and security spheres. Due to this adjusted approach, Yerevan has become fully co-opted into a Russia-backed security architecture—notably, as a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the EEU, as well as by the creation of an integrated air-defense system with Russia in 2015, and a joint Armenian-Russian ground task force in 2016, not to mention by the continued presence of the Russian 102nd Military Base in Gyumri. And amidst the mounting Russia-West standoff, Armenia has become a significant strategic pillar for Russia in the contested Black Sea-Caucasus region. Yerevan gradually assumed this role based on perceptions regarding the simmering confrontation with Azerbaijan over the status of the breakaway Karabakh region, combined with the hypothetical threat stemming from Turkey (News.am, January 2). Armenia's practical fulfillment of its new foreign policy outlook is torn between zero-sum logic and a more tailored strategy. The ultimate trajectory heavily depends on the levels of Russia's asserted revisionism and political influence over Armenia. One way or another, Yerevan will lean heavily on its strategic alliance with Moscow; whereas, the area of potential variance in the coming years will presumably come from the potential scope, depth and intensity of Armenia's relations with third external actors. This framework helps explain Armenia's predominantly pro-Russia votes at the United Nations, while it continues to push for more economic and investment cooperation with the West and Western-oriented post-Soviet republics (RusArminfo.ru, November 15). Yet, so far, the inherent foreign policy contradictions of this approach have elicited mainly ambivalent thinking within the Armenian political elite. Yerevan's foreign policy establishment has yet to properly assess to what extent Russia's regional policy is at odds with that of Armenia's. The common response has been denial: for instance, despite Moscow's consistent arms sales to Baku, various Armenian officials have contended that deepening the Russian-Azerbaijani strategic partnership by no means harms Armenian security interests (Tert.am, January 21). Thus, Yerevan's pursuit of “Neo-Complementarity” presently seems to translate into avoiding threatening Russian interests at all costs and under no circumstances questioning Russia's politico-economic and military domination of Armenia. This is why Armenia actively participated in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-sponsored Noble Partner 2017 multinational peacekeeping exercises in Georgia (see EDM, February 7, 2017), but firmly declined its attendance in the Agile Spirit drills later that year, which focused more on deterrence of Russia

(see EDM, September 8, 2017). Consequently, Armenia's new international affairs concept yields no tangible option for foreign policy and defense strategy diversification; it hampers prospects for fostering strategic-level ties with other powers, like Iran, India or China. In other words, Armenian authorities are likely to take Moscow's interference/meddling potential for granted in domestic affairs as well as in Armenia's bilateral interactions with other countries. Nevertheless, in the medium term, Armenia's evolving "NeoComplementarity" could allow for more actual flexibility if international pressure on Russia grows further. Assuming such increased pressure actually forces Moscow to reduce its regional and international ambitions as well as diminish its zero-sum attitude toward Armenia and the entire region, Yerevan could be freed somewhat to pursue a more tailored diplomatic strategy. In such a changed environment, Russia would still remain Armenia's predominant partner in the security sphere; however, it would open up the possibility for a more "independent" foreign policy, permitting Yerevan to reinvigorate strategic-level ties with outside players beyond Russia. It stands to reason that, at least for now—based on the downgraded association agreement reached with Yerevan last year (i.e., CEPA)—the EU has tacitly recognized Armenia as a somewhat indisputable part of Russia's asserted sphere of exclusive influence. How soon that changes, may be up to Moscow and Yerevan.



ASEAN Shared - the EU twin from Asia: New memories, old wounds

Rattana LAO



Bangkok – Imagining peace is a noble concept but what does it take to achieve it?

Where does peace begin?

In modern day Southeast Asia, this can trace back to the 8th of August, 1967 where five foreign ministers of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand joined hands to create the Association of Southeast Asian Nations or what became known as ASEAN.

Diverse in nature and disperse in geography, ASEAN has achieved much within the course of fifty years. The Association has grown in size of its membership and expanded to reach ambitious mandates. In 2015, ASEAN Economic Community was created to promote free movement of people, goods and ideas.

Economic integration was just the beginning.

Coated in a long and wordy text and signed on 17th November 2011, the Declaration on ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity strived toward achieving "people centred and socially responsible integration," a socio-cultural integration in short.

Inspired by the European Union, creating one market was not enough for ASEAN. The Association is driven to "forging a common identity". It is hoped that through such effort, peace, mutual understanding and harmony will be fostered in Southeast Asia.

A common identity for more than 600 million people?

A little lofty.

Perhaps.

To achieve this aspiration, the Shared History Project in Southeast Asia was launched by UNESCO-Bangkok Office with funding from the

Republic of Korea in 2013 to create a new history curricular to be taught and learned across ASEAN by 2018.

The project brought together historians, educators and researchers across the region to search for common grounds of what aspect of history to teach and how to teach it.

It is all for a higher purpose and a better future.

As the late Secretary General of ASEAN, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, persuasively said: "it is a better history education that will produce and provide a strong foundation for understanding where we have come from and to guide us into the future where we are going, as individuals, as local communities, as nation states, as a greater sub-regional grouping".

Ideally speaking, a Shared History should be welcomed with an open arm. A project so inspiring that it aims to mitigate nationalism and bridge differences across the nations.

In an interview with Dr. William Brehm of Waseda University, he offered insight into this new architecture to build peace in ASEAN. There are many challenges to translate a Shared ASEAN.

Firstly, who will write these new memories? How can a consensus be built amongst people with diverse cultural heritage, background and social memories?

If history is written by the winners – who are the winners in ASEAN?

In ASEAN, disputes and conflicts amongst nations are not memories of things past, rather they are confounding issues aggravating daily hatred across countries within the region. Border dispute amongst nations is the case in point. As professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic already warned in his luminary policy paper 'No Asian centr... "any absolute or relative shift in economic and demographic strength of one subject of international relations will inevitably put additional stress on the existing power equilibriums and constellations that support this balance in the particular theater of implicit or explicit structure." Therefore, funded by the Thailand

Research Fund, Akkaraphong Khamkhun of Thammasat University counted as many as 20 ongoing territorial disputes in ASEAN. These conflicts are between Malaysia and Brunei, Laos and Cambodia, Indonesia and the Philippines.

This is not to mention the infamous Preah Vihear dispute that cuts deep wounds between Thailand and Cambodia.

While the wounds are still fresh, how would these stories be told? Whose stories, precisely?

Secondly, how can a Shared ASEAN formed when countries are deeply founded with nationalistic sentiment, where overt nationalism is propagated in and outside of classrooms, where the sense of hatred to "the other" is instilled for students.

The villain of one country, is the hero of the other. Myanmar – Thai historical text books are the prime examples on this. Thai kings are always the heroes for Thailand, while Myanmar kings are presented often and always as the villains.

Vice versa.

This is what a well-known Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul called "negative identification."

For centuries, each country in ASEAN, is guilty for inflicting negative identification for others to elevate a sense of pride for themselves. It is easier to teach who is "us", when you know who is "them".

ASEAN is not alone in striving to form a new memory of themselves. In the case of Africa, Dr. Brehm argued that the Shared History project took as long as 35 years to be successful.

"Dated back to UNESCO's 1964 General History of Africa project. That project created a set of eight volumes articulating a shared history of Africa. Huge disagreements among the various national historians prolonged the project; it took 35 years before all eight volumes were published."

If a country is an imagined community, said Benedict Anderson in his polemic book the Im-

aged Community, by schools, common language and mass media, is it possible, Dr. Brehm asked, for the UNESCO and ASEAN enthusiastic idealists to dream of a new common identity for 600 million people who speak more than hundreds of languages and dialects?

Is it possible that a common understanding can be reached and harmony can be fostered through a new kind of text book, new knowledge and new understanding to promote something as elusive as a regional identity?

Dr. Brehm is a little sceptical: "So long as education is organized by nation-states, history and historical memory will always promote nationalism and national identity. Everything else will be secondary or retro-fitted for the main purpose."

Difficult but does that mean impossible?

Surely a Shared textbook is useful and much needed intervention to cement a mutual understanding amongst ASEAN students. For political, historical and educational reasons, however, this project requires careful consideration, time and resources to ensure that a new generation of ASEAN will be peace loving rather than nationalistic hawkish. Having a multilateral organization like UNESCO to promote history lesson offers a humble step toward regional peace.

Where does peace begin?

It begins with mutual understanding.

More importantly, it has to begin now.



Let's end our pygmy politics so we can have a proper EU foreign policy



Giles Merritt is Founder and Chairman of Friends of Europe

Prematurely or not, speculation is becoming rife about the likely successor to Jean-Claude Juncker as head of the European Commission. That's important, but arguably no more important than the identity of the EU's next foreign policy chief.

The European Union doesn't really have a foreign policy, and it needs somebody who will create one. Correction; it has many foreign policies, but they are un-connected and ill-defined.

Europe's inability to "speak with one voice" is ancient history. It's why the EU created its own diplomatic arm - the European External Action Service - almost a decade ago. Its early years were marred by teething troubles and bureaucratic turf wars when Commission officials tried to strangle it at birth.

The EEAS has now firmly established itself on the international scene, yet still the EU lacks a recognisable foreign policy. Federica Mogherini, the present High Representative for foreign and security policy, could more accurately be described as the 'Co-ordinator' of EU member states' competing foreign policies.

Europe's pygmy politics are a high barrier to progress

"Untrue and unfair," would cry the Eurocrats, pointing as they do to the huge body of EU policies that have done much to shape global economic governance. And no one would deny that in terms of norms and standards, climate change diplomacy and worldwide trading conditions, the EU's voice has been hugely influential. But that's not foreign policy that tells the world where Europe stands.

Foreign policy should be taken to mean defin-



ing clear-cut positions on the conflicts within the Arab world and the Middle East; on Africa and rising migration from Africa; and on Russia and its unsettling assertiveness. Then there's the geopolitical future of China and more immediately how to respond to Trump's "America First". All of these are vitally important questions that European countries often disagree on, but on which they refuse to allow the EU to broker a common position.

This is why the identity of the next EU "foreign minister" is so vital. The scale of the problem doesn't belie the importance of finding a solution.

Europe cannot continue to be adrift on the perilous waters of a world in turmoil without agreeing its stance on how to handle the most dangerous threats. Federica Mogherini's successor must be of at least the same stature as whoever follows Juncker, and must be willing and able to knock heads together in EU capitals.

The perpetual snag is Europe's pygmy politics. Premiers and presidents across the EU are wary of heavyweights going to Brussels. The larger member states have never wanted to see a high-profile figure from a country of similar size take the helm at the commission, or latterly the EEAS. That's why Luxembourg has punched so ludicrously far above its weight as the birthplace of so many commission presidents.

The EU's diplomatic arm was launched by Javier Solana, formerly NATO's secretary-general and before that a highly-regarded

Spanish foreign minister. Without his clout, and some considerable cunning, it would probably have been stillborn. His successors, Catherine Ashton and Federica Mogherini, wouldn't claim the same stature, but have ably nursed the EEAS's development into a credible EU institution.

Does a candidate necessarily need the endorsement of his or her government?

But now the moment has come for a political heavyweight. The next High Representative must have the authority and the courage to challenge EU governments' jealous independence on the main international policy issues of our time, especially those touching on security and defence.

The Brussels game of 'spot the next commission chief' is a lottery of names and political affiliations. The three frontrunners in the Juncker succession stakes - Michel Barnier, Margrethe Vestager and Frans Timmermans - are all handicapped by waning electoral support for their own party.

What this tells us is that EU governments must agree on a much more intelligent and transparent method of finding and selecting candidates. Does a candidate necessarily need the endorsement of his or her government?

The list of potential EU heavy-hitters would be far longer if governments' ability to veto their domestic political rivals were removed. Europe's pygmy politics are a high barrier to progress.





The European Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans Bureaucrats' Crusade

Zlatko HADŽIDEDIĆ

The European Commission set a target date of 2025 for some of the Balkan countries to join. However, Brussels sees only Serbia and Montenegro as actual candidates. The door formally remains open to Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia, but these countries have been put into a grey zone with no time frames and road maps. They have been put on hold with no tangible prospects for membership, left without any explanation of what makes them less valid candidates than Serbia and Montenegro, with these two being as poor, illiberal and undemocratic as the remaining four.

With a dose of instant cynicism, one might conclude that Serbia and Montenegro have been rewarded for their military aggressions on Bosnia and Kosovo, and Serbia's permanent pressures on Macedonia, whereas the latter ones have been punished for being the former's victims. However, a more careful look at the population structure of the four non-rewarded countries reveals that these, unlike Serbia and Montenegro, have a relative excess of Muslim population. So far, there have been dilemmas whether the European Union is to be regarded as an exclusive Christian club, bearing in mind the prolonged discriminatory treatment of Turkey as an unwanted candidate. After the European Com-



mission's new strategy for the Balkans, there can be no such dilemmas: the countries perceived by Brussels bureaucrats as Muslim ones – regardless of the actual percentage of their Muslim population – are not to be treated as European.

The resurrection of this logic, now embodied in the actual strategy, takes Europe back to its pre-Westphalian roots, to the faraway times of the Crusades or the times of the Siege of Vienna. It also signals the ultimate triumph of the most reactionary populist ideologies in the contemporary Europe, based on exclusion of all who are perceived as „others“. It signals the ultimate triumph of the European ineradicable xenophobia. Or – to put it in terms more familiar to the likely author of the strategy, the European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn – the triumph of *Ausländerfeindlichkeit*.

Now, what options are left to the practically excluded Balkan countries, after so many efforts to present themselves as valid candidates for EU membership? There is a point in claims that some of their oligarchies, particularly the tripartite one in Bosnia-Herzegovina, have never actually wanted to join the EU, because their arbitrary rule would be significantly undermined by the EU's rule of law. It is logical, then, that the tripartite oligarchy welcomes the strategy that keeps the country away from the EU membership, while at the same time deceiving the popu-



lation that the strategy is a certain path to the EU. Yet, what about these people, separated into three ethnic quarantines, who believe that joining the EU would simply solve all their political and economic problems, and who refuse to accept the idea that the EU might be an exclusive club, not open to them? What are the remaining options for them?



sented EU strategy has clearly demonstrated the futility of such a no-alternative approach: regardless of how many times you repeat your devotion to the EU values, principles and integrations, the EU bureaucrats can simply tell you that you will never play in the same team with

They cannot launch a comprehensive revolution and completely replace the tripartite oligarchy by their democratic representatives. Still, they can press it to adopt and conduct a multi-optional foreign policy, oriented towards several geopolitical centers: one of them may remain Brussels, but Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Ankara, Tehran, and others, should also be taken into account. For, a no-alternative policy, as the one which only repeats its devotion to the EU integrations without any other geopolitical options, is no policy at all. In this sense, the pre-

them. However, such an arbitrary but definite rejection logically pushes the country to look for geopolitical alternatives. And it is high time for Bosnia-Herzegovina's people and intellectual and political elites to understand that Brussels is not the only option on the table, and that there are other geopolitical centers whose interests might be identified as convergent with the interests of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Still, all of them should first demonstrate the ability to identify the interests of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which means that they should first recognize it as a sovereign state with its own interests, rather than someone else's proxy.



CONSIDERATION

Turkey – expressing ever vocally yhe Ottoman dream

"Those who think that we have erased from our hearts the lands from which we withdrew in tears a hundred years ago are wrong."

Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Corneliu PIVARIU

The above declaration made publicly by the president Erdogan at the middle of February, 2018, is probably the most telling for depicting the political vision of the current leader in Ankara with regard to Turkey's foreign and military policy for the next years. Recently, the Greek minister of Defense said that in one day only, Turkey violated his country's air space 128 times, stressing that... *"during one year only the number of violations of the Greek territorial waters perpetrated by Turks increased by 450%"* . The tense relation between the two countries existed already and had tragic accents even after Turkey's joining NATO in 1952 (we refer to the anti-Greek pogrom in Istanbul in 1955 and later in 1964, to the forced expulsion of the Greeks still remaining in Turkey) so both countries' joining NATO was considered an ultimate guarantee for finding a common denominator and avoiding a tragedy.

Other Turkish leaders, too, add to president Erdogan's neo-Ottoman ideas although the electoral campaign for presidential elections will take place in the second half of 2019. So, Kemal Kiriçdaroğlu, the leader of the Republican Party (CHP) said that *"we will invade and reoccupy the 74 Greek islands in the Aegean the way the former prime minister Bulent Ecevit invaded Cyprus in 1974"*, and added that there is *"no document"* attesting that these islands belong to Greece. The chairman of the new party İyi (Good Party) set up in October 2017, Meral Akşener demanded, on January 13th, 2018, the invasion and the conquest of the islands. İyi Party has 5 parliamentarians and Meral Akşener was for a short period (2006-2007) minister of the Interior and deputy speaker of the Parliament (2007-2015). The party declares itself a follower of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principles and is nationalistic, conservative and secular. It seems that on this issue, there are no differences of positions within the Turkish political class.

Moreover, president Erdogan added *"... we are struggling that no foreign flag brandishes where adhan (the call to pray in the mosques o.n.) is intoned"*. This assertion evinces intentions outreaching by far the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. And that means that no matter where there are Muslims in Europe and elsewhere it is a call for establishing the Caliphate which, according to Sunni Islamic theology, is the only legitimate ruling government for Muslims on Earth and to whom all Muslims have to obey.

A research of US German Marshall Fund of February, 2018 underlines that Turkey has internally a great political polarisation residing in the great social distance among different supporters of political parties (78% would not agree upon his daughter marry the follower of another party), moral superiority (91% consider the members of the political party they belong to are *reputable* and 83% appreciate that the members of the other party are *arrogant*, and 37% say they are against another party's members participating in the elections). The motives of this divide are multiple, from the political culture based on tensions between the centre and the outskirts, between religious and secular, the disputes between the Tuks and the Kurds, something intensified by political polarisation and lack of party's internal democracy.

Unsurprisingly, when one talks of foreign policy, the majority of the political spectrum agrees upon that the West (the EU and the US) are against Turkey and want to divide it, there is a consensus that Azerbaijan and Russia are the closest allies and that the USA and Israel are the greatest threats.

President Erdogan is not as sure of himself as he wishes others to believe and this is why in Bolu, on March 12th, he flared up: *Hello NATO! With everything that is going on in Syria when are you coming beside us?...*, and resumed, after a few hours in another locality at a popular rally: *Is this what you call friendship? Is this the meaning of NATO's unity... Aren't we really a NATO member state?*

What will happen in a case with regional implications, what will be Turkey's attitude? To the neo-Ottomanism and religious policy, the much more pragmatic economic interests for the energy resources in Eastern Mediterranean and of the transport pipelines which configuration is quite ready, the lack of security spilling from the Middle East have to be added. The complexity of the situation is peculiar.

The Main Factors of the Middle East Situation

SEVEN YEARS OF "ARAB SPRING": WHAT DID CHANGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Dinu COSTESCU

Since seven years, March is not any longer for the Arab world of the Middle East just the transition from the end of winter to the beginning of the astronomical season of spring but also an opportunity for analyses, questions and commemoration of a critical moment of the contemporary history of region. Is it any change in this part of the world? And if yes, what this change consisted of and what results did it produce? The conclusion reached most of the time is synthesised in a very short sentence: the Arab spring was a failure that left behind a big and general disappointment.

We will not go back here to details. Complete volumes have been written about them from which glimpses of a defiant reality emerges emphasizing that after a long and cold "Islamic winter", after more or less brutal change of some political regimes or, rather than otherwise of some political despots, after the other winter of the jihadist terrorism and of conflicts and civil or sectarian wars, the results are disheartening. One may answer to such a fact-finding question that the "Arab revolutions" and transition to a new paradigm of democracy and prosperity is still on-going without knowing precisely enough the direction this process is moving to.

The recent evolutions and those on-going allow the assertion that the Middle East and the Arab north-African Maghreb go through what could be called a "spring of the generals". Egypt is ruled by marshal Abdel Fattah El-Sissi for whom next March will mean facing the second electoral exam for a second presidential mandate; Syria is further ruled by Bashar Al-Assad who – let us not forget – bears the epaulets of general which, by all appearances will remain in their places from now on supported by the Russian and Iranian allies and with the unformalized agreement

of the other regional and international players among which Donald Trump's America and Recep Teyyip Erdogan's Turkey. In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, King Abdallah II, himself a Brigadier-General, succeeded, for better or for worse, to protect his kingdom from the turbulences of the "Arab spring" yet there are signals there he is not any longer in the good graces of his great American protector and, in agreement with the latter, of the Gulf Arab monarchies for whom the rebellion of Hussein bin Tallal's offspring is repugnant due to the non-alignment to the Israeli's policies and due to moving the "Jerusalem pawn" towards transforming it into Israel's eternal and unified capital and to his refusal of engaging his bedouin army in the Operation Decisive Storm launched by the Saudi monarchy in Yemen. Speaking of Lebanon where, to a lesser extent, we find in Baabda palace the venerable Christian general Michel Aoun who is confronted, in his turn, with the thorny problems raised by a divided Lebanon, with a Lebanese political class eroded by adversities and corruption and by all interferences in its domestic policy (whatever Lebanese domestic policy still really exist). In the African Lybian north, marshal Khalifa Khaftar, actively backed by the Russian Federation presents enough arguments for strengthening his image as successor of brother Moammer at Libya's helm. The Palestinian body is in the same circle: the former head of Fatah's intelligence services nicknamed "Mister security", Mahmud Dahlan, residing on the United Arab Emirates' exotic shores and backed by the Egyptians, the Saudis and, discretely ("noblesse oblige"), by the Americans goes full speed to replacing president Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) with... Mahmud Dahlan. There are enough signals that starting from Abdelaziz Bouteflika's difficult to bear medical condition (he is wheelchair-bound), the venerable Algerian president is to leave his place to a military most probably or, at any rate, to someone ema-

nated from the Algerian military cast circles. Neither Tunisia is safe from sliding to a military leadership that, one believes, brings to an end the domestic troubles generated by authorities' inability of implementing viable economic reforms and frontally tackling the rising corruption. Lotfi Brahem's name, a colonel and former interior minister, is uttered in this respect. Such a return to the symbolic of a powerful figure, be it called president (*rais*), leader (*za'im*) or ruler (*al-qa'id*), is not surprising at all for the Arab-Islamic society, especially in the south-Mediterranean region where the paradigm of "protector" represent an identitarianism coordinate: from the family to "pater familiae", to the tribe, to the ideological and political leader, to the retreat into Allah's supreme transcendency that offered the individual and society a point of reference and support which the euphoria of the analysts of the beginning period of the great Arab popular upheavals ignored and replaced it by fabricated interpretative paradigms valid for the western world only yet necessarily and always dysfunctional in the Arab-Islamic world of the Middle East. The reality that in this post-spring area the aspiration towards borrowed democracy and liberalism is today much shyer than one may believe is to be added to the abovementioned remarks. Having in their mind the dramatic examples offered during the last seven years by what is going on in Syria, Iraq, Libya or Yemen, the resentfuls of 2011 and their successors are dreaming rather than otherwise not of the slogans which proved mere rhetorics as they are now predominantly concerned of coming out of the constructive anarchy and the chaos left behind by the "Arab springs". In doing that, they risk living once more in a dictatorial regime yet capable of securing agora a minimum of everyday life safety. Such an approach is, no matter how paradoxical may seem, more clearly visible in case of sectarian minorities – the Eastern Christians in particular for whom the former secular regimes offered protection and a certainty which the post-spring regimes could not offer against the epidemics of Islamist radical terrorism and the devastating effects of the social, institutional and even state dissolution. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the Arab "street" wants

any longer an emotional return to history's "Eastern despots". One may rather talk of an orientation more or less acknowledged towards another era, that of the "enlightened despot" type practicing an authoritarianism mixed with practices suggesting concern for progress and equality. The Egyptian marshal Abdel Fattah El-Sissi or the future Saudi monarch Mohammed Ibn Salman could offer a glimpse in defining such a prototype of the new despot.

We may ascertain and argue that in the Middle East and its Arab and religious world, seven years into the Arab spring democracy will not impose itself conceptually and pragmatically either due to social media – which had had a not negligible at all role during the time the Arab popular upheavals coagulated - or imposed by the action of an outside power.

Presently, the Arab Middle East is confronted with two major challenges succeeding the first failure witnessed by the reclaiming and reformist movements. Firstly, it is about the individual's and the Arab society's post-terrorist positioning towards the Islamic identity, dramatically tested by the four-year Islamic "neo-caliphate" which generated not only deep psychic and social traumas but also a deep fracture in the Arab-Islamic body that is now still under the impulse of the traditional vendetta after the tragedies perpetrated by the militants fighting under the black banner of the so-called "Islamic State". Secondly, it is about the fact that the Arab-Islamic nation, "*umma*", itself was depreciated and fragmented by the radical-jihadist seism. At the same time, the secular Arab nation is in the same situation of losing its cohesion to such an extent that some analysts, even Arab speaking ones, did not hesitate to speak of a "death of the Arab-Islamic Middle East". Civil wars, sectarian driven conflicts yet with political, expansionist goals, outside interferences and the Arab states' contradictory alignments to the great powers' policies and offers in accordance with more or less conjectural interests are as many factors making the general landscape of the Arab Middle East still in the midst of a too unpromising winter as far as the layout of the future is concerned.

ISLAM AND ARABDOM



**Ambassador prof. Dumitru
CHICAN**

At the beginning of the present century, described as "it will be either religious or it will not be", the Arab world (from an ethnical and socio-historical perspective) and Muslim world (in what relates to its prevailing sectarian identity) attract particular attention and interest from the theoretical research circles as well as from political, strategical, geopolitical and military perspectives. This is undoubtedly due to some not negligible causes among which, not the least, mention should be made to the fact that this area was, in the historical context, a fracture line between the Eastern Muslim civilization and the Western Judeo-Christian civilization and, at the same time, the space witnessing and supporting, consciously or not, the emergence of one of the most extreme historical forms of displaying the radicalism of religious origin, then the fact, with a strong emotional charge, that the Arab Middle East is the cradle of one of the three great monotheistic religions known in the world's history. Then, its place in the global geography at the crossroads of the great direction lines of the power and conflicts balances, not to speak of the assets of huge deposits of conventional energy which, since its discovery were the permanent target of the great international monopolies. But, from the outlook of chronological history and before any other political, military and strategic considerations, the Arab world was looked at as a religious space whose dividing lines were charted by conflicts, conquest wars under the sign of Cross and Qur'an and, closer to our contemporaneity, as part of the confrontation and "clash" of civilizations and religious identity affiliations. The objective fact that Islam imposed itself in the global concert as a result of ample military expansions had and continues to have a crucial importance for the orientation the non-Arab world looks at and resents, at the same

time, both Arabdom and Islam which gave consistency and cohesion to the former.

Islam entered once in Europe by occupying the islands south of the Italian "boot" and the Iberic Peninsula where it stayed for seven centuries. The morphology of the modern world would have been quite different without the reluctance of Charles Martel's Franks in preventing the march of the Muslim armies that would have reached Thames Estuary and then would have crossed the River Rhine, a crossing probably easier than those of the Nile and the Euphrates. Today, Islam turns once more towards the West and proposes to subject it, peacefully this time.

The Arab man – who may be one of the Omayyad general Tariq's time, who lended his name to the rock of Gibraltar (*Jabal Tariq* – Tariq's Mountain), or one from nowadays' Mashreq, does not undertake any act – of conscience or of everyday's life or of peace and war without returning, before making any decision, to the eminently religious reference. In both cases we will encounter the action and influence of two identity hypostasis – that of *homo arabicus* and that of *homo islamicus*, which does not mean that Arabdom must be understood in this way (and not a few Eastern studies advise us) as a product and consequence of the religious identity as it does not mean accepting the factual labelling of Arabdom as an absolute synonym with Islamic religious identity.

It is accepted with good reason that the emergence of Islam in the VIIth century meant the coagulation and the awareness within the former tribal, polytheistic and animistic society generally called "*Al-Jahilyya*" (the state of ignorance in pre-Islamic times) of two new identity coordinates: the Arab affiliation from ethnical perspective, a feature the Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldun (1333 – 1406), considered the father of historical sociology calls '*asabiya*, or team spirit, of belonging to one and the same social community and, secondly, the consciousness of belonging to a single *umma*, understood as "nation". Yet, it is not about the contemporary acception of the term to the extent this *umma* has an eminently religious content and foundation and identifies

the "Muslim community" regardless what their temporal and spacial position are. Thus, when some modern doctrines such as Baathism speak of "*umma arabiya*", the syntagm refers first and foremost to a "Islamic community" which, from an ethnical perspective, is Arab. A Muslim Pakistani is not an Arab yet that does not affect its status of a "*umma*"s member, as the Arab Eastern Christians and those affiliated to other sects within the Islamic world are not Muslims, and this does not deprive them of their Arab social and ethnical identity. Arabdom and all their subsequent offshoots codified politically and ideologically such as pan-Arabism, Gamal Abdel Nasser's Arab unionism or the Arab socialism are, in fact, a social product of Islam. If we insist on this differentiation too quickly and which was not a few times ignored, this is due to the necessity of analitically considering the role of the religious sphere in the sociological space of the Middle East.

First, we would say and openly assume and welcome possible critical reactions that, in spite of the exegetical traditionalism, which is offensive and even aggressive, Islam, as an universal religion, is the product of the myths of a well determined cultural space, a mythical space dominated by women-goddesses repudiated by Muhammad who made of his religion first and foremost a total act of existence and social manifestation of the individual and community. The fact that in this century's contemporaneity everywhere in the Arab states, so different and even conflictual from ideological and governance perspectives, the Islamic canonic law itself - *Shari'a* - has a multitude of implementation forms in the public field which is, in our opinion, a residual reminiscence of the reality that between the religious "*umma*", as it was substantiated, and the contemporary "nation" (Arab or not) there are differentiations which have to be considered when we speak of the false similarity which would inevitably exist between "being an

Arab" and "being Muslim". And this reality can be easily noticed when we speak of the fact that all Arab countries are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation alongside secularist nation states, and mention should be made that the helplessness and the figurative character of this "League of the Islamic world" as well as the discords undermining it reflects the fact that each member state defends and promotes first of all its own national secular interests on behalf of the Islamic community - *umma*.

From a historical perspective, Islam's political force during its rise and expansion was not the result of a mystic cohesion of Arab tribes but rather the result of the social cohesion the new religion provided them. And if from a racial, sociological and psychologic perspective Islam and Arabdom are in an indestructible relationship, the transcendence and the outbidded sacrality the Muslim religion assumes can easily dispose of a spacial and temporal limited Arabdom. The nation-state as an expression of the Arab identity affiliation prevented, when the last Turkish Ottoman caliphate was abolished, the creation and the imposition of an *umma*, as an expression of the Islamic religious identity while the latter finally led to the downfall of an Arab nationalism which, in the end proved to be nothing more than an efficient discourse meant to protect and promote anything but certain as mercantile as possible interests.

The Western European colonization of the Islamic area in the XIX-th century and the disintegration in the third decade of the last century of the Ottoman Empire meant the end of the traditional paradygm of the caliphate as a political expression of the "Islamic nation" (*umma*). Divided in nation-states (*qutr*), *umma*, as a religious community organisation was replaced with community formulas built on secularism whereby the reference to a trans-national religious authority was not attractive any longer not so much due to its traditionalist and conservative character po-



litically but rather first of all due to its incapacity of unifying and offering alternatives for the future in a world of industrialisation, technology and information. The Arabdom of the Arab modern and contemporary states was practically built and made aware in the XX-th century upon the emergence of the modern states of Western inspiration on the land of Islam. And it was not strengthened through Islamic religious references but during the nationalistic movements for independence and de-colonisation. On this background, speaking of the role of political Islam means advocating a rhetorics trying to upgrade the religion to the statute of unique supremacy able to provide solutions to all problems resulting from the confrontation with the imperatives of contemporary times. It is no less true that the religiosity sphere had its role in spreading Arab nationalism and identity. If the Muslim Brotherhood movement emerged initially as a tool meant to restore in modern times the caliphate Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) abolished in 1923, it militated at the same time in favor of emancipation and abrogation of the colonial trusteeship on the "Arab-Islamic" world. The decline of such a political Islam begun when it entered the competition for state power and outbid the role of the religious factor it tried to impose, including through violent means, to a secular Arabdom built on the European model.

In the context of a world in the middle of globalisation and dramatically affected by the religiously inspired phenomenon of violent radicalism and under the circumstances in which the Arab secular ideologies – from the pan-Arabism devised by Gamal Abdul Nasser to the Arab socialism and Baathism as an attempt of reconciling materialism with religiosity, neither Islam, nor the collective Arabdom provide the necessary arguments for self-assertion in the concert of the world's nations. Islamic affiliation continues to be a reference hallmark of the collective mind but it does not have a significant role of self-assertiveness in a global context. At the same time, Arabdom as repository for the entire "Arab" world lost some of its sonority, restricting itself rather than otherwise within the borders of each of the states and societies of this ar-

ea. An Arab is and is proclaims himself firstly as Egyptian, Lebanese, Iraqi and just after that as an Arab and even less as a Muslim as reference point in the collective and national life.

And, in both hypostasis of the individual –Arab and Muslim- the need for reform and adaptation is more and more resented. Something neither the Arab, nor the Muslim seem to be open to, let alone prepared.

THE ARAB WORLD:

BETWEEN THE CONFLICT STATE AND COEXISTENCE

Dinu COSTESCU

Two big seisms occurred during the last decade – the Arab spring and the brutal revivalism of the Islamist ultra-radical terrorism – and both charted the coordinates the Arab world is evolving into and give it the easily noticeable characteristic nowadays, namely its endeavour to survive between a generalised conflictual state and recovering the consensus as a prerequisite of coexistence, of edification and development in peace and stability.

The raw reality shows that due to a complex of endogenous and exogenous causalities this huge area covering a geography spread "from the Ocean to the Gulf" whose physical and demographic geography includes 25 states and territories inhabited statistically by almost 400 million people is now in a state of conflicts and violences that seems without a foreseeable end.

The civil war in Syria that resulted in a carnage estimated at almost half a million people to whom other millions should be added as refugees or displaced, a severe destruction of the economic, housing, services and social infrastructure turned, during the seven years since its triggering, into an obsessive component of day-to-day life. Over 70,000 people, according to some rather indicative statistics, died due to the tribal and sectarian war ravaging Libya while other thousands of Libyans fleeing violences in the country perished in the sea beyond which, as wanderers they were, hoped to stay at least alive in an "Europe of all possibilities".

The Arab African Maghreb is troubled by the dramatic transition from a temporary Islamist governance to a secularism which cannot cope with the requirements imposed by contemporaneity and which are perceived rather as reverberations of the colonial French and British cultures and not as necessities closely and causally



linked to the specificity and the dimension of the indigenous societies of this area.

As the same time, Turkey which intends to become a player of decisive importance on the game board of the Middle East is confronted not only with the challenges of terrorism but also with the dramatic consequences of the misunderstanding of the "Turkish model" that Erdogan government wanted to be a combination among the Islamist aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood, the paradigm of a revived Ottoman caliphate and the insertion into the dynamics of the non-Muslim world.

On the one hand, a series of Arab states such as Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan have stable political regimes that succeeded in implementing certain reforms with positive effects on consolidating domestic security and economic and social development after the great protest and demanding upheavals which led in 2011 to deep political changes. At the same time, there is another category of Arab countries – Syria, Libya, Yemen – that the developments after the so-called "Arab spring" did not allow experimenting and implementing a new state, institutional and social identity and were kept rather than otherwise at the "failed state" level on the brink of collapse. Other Arab states – Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon – that will have in 2018 presidential or legislative elections are on a twisted path with hindrances

towards the implementation of mechanisms and tools of building a democratic state and society – voting, political pluralism etc.

Yet even there where decisive steps towards democracy and the rule of law were made, the prevailing general impression is that of a resilience of a violence climate which is not the result of an insufficient and correct external perception yet it is maintained by the effect of fundamental transformations the Arab world witnessed, for the first time, at social, institutional and collective mind levels. The experience of the two world wars was not enough for the world, the world of the Middle East included, for becoming aware of the dynamics and motives of violence so that, speaking in terms of political philosophy, the violence phenomenon imposed itself as an universal category marking the conception of an entire generation of thinkers. The Western paradigms of judging violence that were imposed in the entire sphere of the political science and historical philosophy in the Western area do not have, however, an universality character making them applicable as benchmarks of the development or the involution of a state, irrespective of the geographical and geopolitical coordinates it is in.

The societies and thinkers of the Middle East did not approach the violence concept as a category participating in the identity configuration but rather as an anthropological "datum" or, more conveniently, as a result of outside conspirations. In the Arab modern world especially, whole libraries treating issues such as nation and Arab nationalism, the relationship between sacred and profane in the life of state and society, democracy and civil and human rights were written yet the authors are too few or too little known who acerbically and continuously dealt with the violence phenomenon and concept.

The two Gulf wars have resulted in a number of victims double or triple as compared to the victims of the Syrian civil war. No one knows exactly the number of fatalities as a result of the violence practiced by the totalitarian regimes of a Saddam Hussein or a Moammer El-Ghaddafi. No one is in a position to specify how many inno-

cent citizens were the victims of the programmatic violence practiced in the prisons of police regimes, in torture chambers or following summary executions which, most of the times, can be categorized as mass murder and crimes against humanity.

And, speaking of the "fatalist" or "conspirational" violence practiced in the Arab world of the Middle East, one can not overlook the violence acts justified by Islamic religious or ethnical arguments. From the historical Sunni-Shia sectarian conflict to the thousands of Palestinians killed by the Lebanese Christian Forces in the refugees camps in Beirut, to the countless victims fallen in Yemen by the "war by proxies" between the Saudi Sunni Wahhabism and the Iranian Twelver Shia to the carnages perpetrated in Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Libya by the terrorist hoardes of the "Muslim neo-caliphate", the path to modernity of the Arab world is full of corpses and mutilated persons by the unleashed violence. Indeed, all these determined condemnation and protest declarations in the international community, half-voiced most of the time, and there are very few or not at all cases in which from the very inside of the victimised societies a de-legitimation or penalising the governing regimes or of the violence "professional incitators" have been requested, regardless if the latter were clerics, politicians or media preachers of the hatred.

Under such circumstances, the following question is not only natural but inevitable and mandatory: is it possible that any change of what exists takes place in order to pass from violence to conciliation and cohabitation?

As long as the violence phenomenon in the Arab society is on the rise, as level of amplitude and intensity, an ever rising orientation of civil society toward self-assuming the responsibilities deriving from the very concept of a strong, dynamic and listened to "civil society" is noticed to the same extent, and that is a signal to be backed and encouraged.

In some Arab states, this "social awakening" is the result of reforms implemented by the new governments faced with coping with the chal-

lenges generated by the very social revolts thanks to which the respective authorities are ruling now the state.

Since 2011, the number of entities representing civil society (non-government organisations) doubled in Tunisia and increased 2.5 times in Morocco, where it was insignificant before, while in Jordan increased 1.5 times. Yet, it is easily noticeable that the emergence on the public scene of civil society had a much more intense pace in those Arab states that witnessed the broadest popular movements followed by armed violence. In Syria, for instance, the development of civil society is closely connected to the organisations operating in fields related to refugees and displaced persons issues. Such organisations have connections as well with civil structures working both in the territories controlled by the central government and in districts and enclaves "liberated" from the presence and the control of the central government where administrative structures and local management were set up. In Libya, such civil presence is manifest in areas under the authority of tribes or tribal associations arranged according to criteria pertaining to territorial layout. Irrespective of the geographical space, the idea of the action of implementing and developing the secular concept of a civil and national consensus (*tawāfiq*) and also of the religious concept of *ijmā'* – consensual opinion and action resulted from the unanimity of the community on a social position and attitude is backed in a most favorable manner by the assembly of traditions, beliefs and behavioral patterns inherited from the wisdom and anthropological richness specific to a certain area of customary development. Such a "conciliation" between secular and religious may encourage the advancement towards the emergence of a rudimentary democracy that can lead to a harmonisation and a modus vivendi among political formations and to the emergence of a "culture of democracy" which, on the basis of local tradition, will not be rejected as an alien, deforming element and toxic "invention" of the Western Christian modernity. And that might secure viability to the concept and make it acceptable even to the Islamic conservative political formations and

ideologies for which the “democracy” means only reading and literally observing the Qur’anic law.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE: THE PALESTINIAN “BIG DEAL”

Dr. Munir SALAMEH, Ramallah

The meeting of the Central Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation which was intensely publicised, took place at the middle of January having only one topic on the agenda: discussing the Palestinian – declarative and factual – position on the December 6th, 2017 American declaration by which Trump Administration recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and the decision of transferring the American embassy in Israel to the holy city (before the end of 2019 according to the declarations made by vice-president Mike Spence). The fact that such an important meeting could have been achieved almost six weeks after “Trump’s Declaration” was interpreted by Palestinian observers and analysts, and not only, as an expression of either the confusion the Palestinian leadership and political class are in, or of their lack of resolve and political capacity of adopting committed and explicit resolutions on this thorny issue that president Donald Trump added to the bulky Palestinian file. In spite of heated debates (president Mahmud Abbas’ speech only lasted almost three hours) threats and warnings addressed to the American Administration and to the government in Tel Aviv, the final communique adopted at the end of the two-day meeting did not get out of the usual paradigms of the Palestinian discourse as the Central Committee was confined to adopting a series of “reccomandations” among which:

- Suspending the recognition of Israel and submitting this measure to the approval of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. Being of a consultative and non-binding nature, the recommendation loses its sense and content due to its nature;



- Ceasing security coordination and cooperation with the Israeli side. A similar recommendation was adopted in 2015 as well by the same Central Committee but never considered at the decision-making level by the Liberation Organisation;

- Declared that Oslo Agreements and other understandings reached with the Jewish state became obsolete, without specifying whether the Palestinian side denounces these agreements or withdraws as their co-signatory.

No resolution was adopted and no future action plan was announced leaving thus the impression, which is not baseless, that the talkative session of the Palestinian forum had no other purpose except of calming down the spirits of its public opinion and to mimic a highfaluting political “intifada” against Donald Trump’s decision.

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After the visit the American vice-president Mike Spence paid to Jerusalem at the end of January and after the White House unequivocally announced that the Palestinians should opt between resuming negotiations or, failing that, financial assistance granted by the USA will be suspended whereas the discussions about that “big deal” mentioned by the Oval Office tennant on solving the Palestinian-Israeli dispute were taken over more intensely, even if the Administration in Washington did not announce at the time these lines were written, either a vision or a “road map” or an action plan for unlocking the road to the much proclaimed “two-state solution” as a formula of a “just and durable” solu-

tion of the Palestinian claims.

Whatever steps the players directly involved in this initiative will make, the prevailing opinion on the "Palestinian street" and at the level of the Palestinian organisations – be them members or not of the Liberation Organisation – is that the "big deal" proclaimed by Donald Trump, far from being conceived as a historical crossroad must not be looked at as more than what it is, namely a new attempt of weakening and devaluating the Palestinian issue.

Few are those who know or still remember that the expression "big deal" is not at all new. It was launched and circulated in 2006 when the offer the Israeli prime minister of the time made to president Mahmud Abbas was discussed, an offer that was based on choosing between two solutions submitted for solving the Palestinian file:

Firstly, it is about setting up a Jordanian-Palestinian federation by reconfiguring the Jordanian state in three "Vilayets", namely Transjordan, or the present Hashemite Kingdom, the West Bank of the Jordan River and Gaza Strip, bound together by a confederal formula.

Secondly, one spoke of the idea of "exchange of territories" that provided for Egypt giving up a territory of 720 sq. km. in Sinai Peninsula, another perimeter 24 km. wide and 30 km. long contiguous with Gaza Strip for achieving the future Palestinian state and to another perimeter, 24 km. wide and 30 km. long, between the towns of Rafah and Arish to be annexed to the Israeli territory. In exchange, Egypt was to receive an equivalent area in the Negev Desert accompanied by the possibility of building a 10 km. long tunnel connecting Egypt to Jordan by a rail road, by a high-way and by an oil pipeline while the revenues accruing from the exploitation taxes are to be cashed in by the Egyptian side which, additionally, was to receive international assistance as well for the development of the economic sector. On February, 21st, 2016 in the Jordanian port of Aqaba, a confidential meeting of Benjamin Netanyahu, the Jordanian King Abdallah II, the then Secretary of State John Kerry and the Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-

Sissi took place, a meeting one year later the Israeli daily Haarez wrote it was dedicated to discussing the improvement of the project of solving the Palestinian issue through "exchange of territories". It was a meeting where, one of the vitally interested players, the Palestinian side, was not present.

On September 20th, 2017, after the meeting with Donald Trump, the Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas declared that the Palestinian-Israeli peace the Administration is preparing through the "advisors" Jared Kushner (president Trump's son-in-law) and Jason Greenblatt will be for the Palestinian cause and for the Middle East region the "deal of the century"! After the two paid several visits to the area (the West Bank, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and the Arab Gulf states), on January 9th, 2018, Ahmed Magdalani, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation declared to mass-media that this "deal of the century" aims at "wiping out the Palestinian cause" and, in the alternative, making some arrangements for normalising the relations between the Jewish states and the Arab monarchies in the Gulf (particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kingdom of Bahrain).

The project promoted by the envoys Kushner – Greenblatt, provides for, in a chronological order, normalising the relations with the abovementioned Arab countries, including in the field of security) followed by measures of disarming and de-militarisation of the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza Strip, then entering negotiations – with a duration of up to ten years – for setting up the "Palestinian state" in accordance with the idea of "exchange of territories". During that period, the Palestinian side should give up around 12% of the autonomous territories (covered by the Jewish settlements which would pass under Israeli sovereignty) as well as in the Jordan Valley where Israel will insist on maintaining its troops with security and anti-terrorist missions.

Given that the launching of the American "big deal" takes place on the background where, on the one hand, the Palestinian elites and leader-

ship go through one of the most difficult periods characterised by division, lack of convincing assets for imposing themselves from strong positions in future negotiations with Israel and when the Arab and Western international communities are too little concerned for the fate of the Palestinian file (mainly when the Palestinians do not meet unconditionally Trump's Administration and Israel's positions and projects) what action options are left to the National Authority to resist the enforcement of a solution profoundly harming and prejudicing its interests? The inventory of these options is quite limited and was synthesised since 2010 by Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian chief negotiator at the peace talks with Israel:

- Coming back to the negotiations table with the minimal condition that the Jewish state cease the settlements policy in the Palestinian autonomous territories;

- Obtaining, from the international community and from the American side of the acceptance of the claim of recognising the Palestinian state within the borders existing on June 4th, 1967;

- Resorting to the UN Security Council for recognising the Palestinian state within the same pre-June 1967 war borders and submitting to the UN General Assembly of the said claim based on the provisions of Art. "The Alliance for Peace";

- Undertaking the demarches for placing the Palestinian territories under the UN international trusteeship;

- Freeing the implementation of the agreements and understandings reached by PLO/National Authority with Israel;

- Dissolving the National Authority and placing Israel in the position of assuming the responsibilities of an occupation power.

These are all conditions which acceptance and implementation are difficult to consider in today's political and geopolitical context whereas the very philosophy on which the Palestinian authority turned from a leading forum of the liberation struggle into an entity of administering and managing a transition peace that is neither



valid, nor efficient.

At the beginning of February, the American envoy for the Middle East peace process, Jasson Greenblatt, was in Israel where, inter alia, had a meeting with the European consuls accredited to Jerusalem. Asked about the stage of drawing up the "deal of the century" between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the American official made a statement making difficult any comment as far as the "Trump's Administration Palestinian strategy" is concerned. The "big deal", Greenblatt said trying to speak in a colloquial language, is on the front burner and boils. All that remains is to add some salt and spices. "What will the Palestinians do if they dislike the broth on the burner" was the question addressed to the envoy Jasson Greenblatt and he replied as clear as possible: "The Palestinians are not part of the decision-making process in this deal. The solution we are readying is a regional one in which the Palestinians are not part of the decision-making but the regional whole of which the Palestinians are just a part".

Between "to be" and "not to be at all", the big "deal of the Palestinian century" is an uncertainty within which the Palestinians' margin and freedom of action remain limited and meaningless. With all the consequences arising from it.

SYRIA AFTER SOCHI: AMERICA COMES BACK



**Ambassador prof. Dumitru
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In the framework of the developments on the Syrian civil war scene, two high-profile events captured in the second half of February mass-media interest and attention which made a third event, a more discrete yet no less important one be practically overlooked. The high-profile events we are speaking about were the "Syrian National Dialogue Congress" that took place on 29-30th of January in the luxurious spa and entertainment resort Sochi on the Russian Black Sea coast, an event Geostrategic Pulse presented at length in its issue of February, 20th, and in parallel the triggering, on January 20th, by the Turkish army and forces of the Syrian opposition backed by Turkey of the Operation Olive Branch – an ample offensive against the Afrin Kurdish enclave north-west of Syria equally covered by an analysis and prognosis study of Geostrategic Pulse.

As far as the third event is concerned, although it was consumed discretely and far from media, it has, we believe, a special importance for the acerbic "struggle for Syria" where the big regional and international players act for imposing their supremacy and for the United States' new approach of its action strategy on the Syrian and regional scene after the modest results of the "Sochi round" of negotiations and dialogue aimed at ending the crisis and defining Syria's post-conflict political and social configuration.

In the heat of the preparations Moscow undertook for the Sochi meeting and on the eve of its launching, the American Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met in Paris with his counterparts of France, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan presented his interlocutors an unofficial document (non-paper) which set in fact the foundation stone of what was later

called by the syntagm the "Select group for Syria" or the "Group of 5 for Syria" and summed up a set of post-Sochi collective action directions and objectives whereas the document was handed over to the international special envoy Staffan de Mistura for being used as guidebook and action guide in order to re-dynamise the "Geneva Process" of peace negotiations in Syria. At the same time, the non-paper drawn up by the State Department marks a new re-set of the Syrian policy promoted by Trump Administration consecrating, in particular, the American side's renouncing to the so-far relatively defensive character and implementing in Syria a permanent military presence circumscribed to a wider strategy that includes Iraq and Afghanistan.

The scorecard Rex Tillerson presented sets as well another objective of the American future policy on a medium run, namely "readying the road which will finally lead to Bashar Al-Assad's leaving power", an objective which, in the first year of Donald Trump's mandate with the White House was undermined by indecision and lack of clarity.

From this perspective, the document is seen as Donald Trump's pragmatic passage from implementing in the American Syrian policy a series of changes imposed by the advisors and the generals in the presidential staff and which embodies one of the components of the American strategic approaches alongside important and priority files such as the relations with the Russian Federation, the ever increasing tension in the positioning towards the Iranian theocratic regime, the civil war in Yemen and, on this background, strengthening the relations with the Arab monarchies in the Gulf.

"The Group of Five" document is entitled "Non-paper on speeding up the Geneva political process concerning the crisis in Syria" and, in its introductory part addresses the conception and the programme based on which the negotiations in Geneva will unfold starting with the provisions of Resolution No. 2254 of the Security Council, an immediate and absolute priority to this purpose is to be given to the constitutional

reform and to organising free and non-rigged elections.

The document, in its integrality, leaves place for interrogations which do not offer answers – a surprising fact to the extent an "action programme" drawn up as an unofficial document is presented to first class officials of the five states and handed over to Staffan de Mistura in his *official* quality of incumbent special envoy for Syria of the United Nations and directly subordinated to the General Secretary, the Portuguese Antonio Manuel de Oliveira Guterres. No less surprising is the fact that even from its first paragraph, the document formulates, without nominating, serious criticism to Staffan de Mistura, when it asserts that "since its resuming, in 2017, the negotiations process under the leadership and auspices of the United Nations Organisation did not achieve any worth mentioning progress", and that "created the impression that only in the framework only of the other contexts (Astana, o.n.) palpable advancements can be obtained on the way of solving the crisis in Syria".

Mention should be made to the fact that circulating the "Group of Five" document was simultaneous with the unfolding of the ninth "Astana round", which failed in its turn, as it was the case with its precedents – and which, due to the cocomitent unfolding of Davos Economic Forum, yet another event took place in the Austrian capital Vienna, - coincidentally? – exactly on the eve of the "National Syrian Dialogue" in Sochi, initiated by the Russian Federation in coordination with Turkey and Iran. The commentators interpreted as an expression of the intention of preventing a possible success of the Russian diplomacy and of reconfiguring the general process of negotiations including in assigning the international special envoy for Syria de Mistura some "absolute and immediate" priorities.

In the same context of the sudden increase of the American interest for "Syria file", the American, British and French mass-media as well as high political and military officials in Washington, London and Paris brought again into discussion lately the "worry" concerning the use, by

the Syrian army, of nerve gas in the on-going military operations on the civil war front. By asserting its decision of resorting to military reactions if the involvement of the Syrian army would "be proven" in such attacks with chemical weapons, the president Trump is reiterating the intention of repeating other previous similar situations whereby under the pretext that the Syrians used Sarin gas, the American warships launched cruise missiles against airports and military targets of Bashar Al-Assads' army without the attackers bringing to date any undeniable evidence that the users of such chemical weapons were the Syrian military or – as the Americans themselves hinted – the formations of the jihadist rebels perpetrated such attacks. Or, this American desire of "staying in Syria" recalls quite transparently the diversion tactic used by George W. Bush's Administration for invading Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of Saddam Hussein's possessing WMD which have never been found.

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The issuance by the five of the "non-paper" on the background of the Syrian dialogue in Sochi had immediate consequences among which, on the one hand, the last-hour declaration of the Syrian political and military opposition whereby they hastily announced their non attendance of the "Sochi dialogue" and, on the other hand and on the same background, France's and Great Britain's decision equally sudden of following the example set by the Syrian opposition.

However, beyond these "pragmatic" aspects, the informal document adopted by the "Select Group of 5" was intended to be at the same time a message not only to Vladimir Putin but, to the same extent, to his allies in Damascus, Ankara, Tehran and to the Syrians who attended the national dialogue congress. And the essence of this message can be summarized in a few sentences: the reconstruction process in Syria will be launched only after a global political transition will take place in Syria through negotiations based on the resolution 2254 and conditional on observing in its spirit and letter the 2012 Geneva Declaration on Bashar Al-Assad's leaving,

sooner or later, the political and public stage of a future Syria.

This way, the “group of 5” undermines not only the Russian vision presented in the “Final Declaration” of the “Sochi Dialogue”, but also the “Sochi Appeal” , drawn up under the Russian auspices as well calling on the international community to concerted efforts and contributions – the only ones able to make the reconstruction process possible.

On the other hand, Turkey’s exclusion from the the “selected group” formula and, from a particular perspective, of the Syrian opposition will negatively influence by all appearances the position and the approaches of the regime in Ankara towards the whole political and diplomatic process of solving the Syrian file will determine president Recep Teyyip Erdogan to act even more dynamically for a coming closer to the Russian Federation and for finding a more flexible modus operandi in the relations with Iran.

Yet, more important than the procedural details or the good will declarations the question if the implementation of the provisions of the “road map” adopted as a programmatic working instrument by the “American and international wing” has genuine chances of turning into reality without benefitting from the Russian Federation’s and its allies’ agreement remains. An agreement which, if it will ever exist, will inevitably be the result of long lasting negotiations and bargainings without the guarantee that, in a foreseeable future, it will be completed with a favourable outcome for the peace-building and reconstruction process.

BETWEEN THE OLD AND THE NEW GUARD: WHO RULES SYRIA?

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

Preamble

Built on political and military prerequisites following the coup organised by general Hafez Al-Assad in 1970 – a putsch that was to be known in the vocabulary of the ruling class in Damascus

as the “Correctionist Movement” (*Al-Haraka Al-Tashihiya*)- and that was followed by Hafez Al-Assad’s taking over the leadership of the state and of the Baath Arab Socialist Party, in 1971, the long reign of 47 years of Al-Assad family continued as a “family business” whereby the main decision-making leverages were entrusted to some of their sect people and, after Hafez Al-Assad demise, on July 10th, 2000 continued further through establishing the first “hereditary republic” of the Arab world ruled by Bashar Al-Assad, the first of Hafez and Anisa Al-Assad’s five children (four boys and a girl). The ideological army, the intelligence services (no less than 17), the Alawi minority and the Baath party apparatus were the main pillars on which the Assadism based and consolidated its power of ruling the state and, at the same time, all these offered the referential centers around which the ruling elites, the business circles and the entire social dynamics materialized. What characterised particularly Hafez Al-Assad’s Alawite governance was, on the one hand, setting up a pyramidal system of decision-making power whereas the “close circle” around the “top” included notably the leader’s closest relatives, former fellows of the times of the struggle for power and supremacy and, generally, elements coming either from the family space or from privileged Alawi circles and, on the other, the recourse to brutal repressive force against any germs of insubordination. A revolt initiated and animated by the Islamist movement of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in Hama town in January-February 1982 was drowned in blood by the aerial and artillery bombardments ordered by Hafez Al-Assad and that left behind (according to sources) between 25,000 and 40,000 dead and a town turned totally into rubble. In spite of the official rhetorics, one could not speak with thorough arguments of the legendary “monolithic unity” around the supreme leader and the party self-entitled the “defence fortress of the Arab nation” so that the stray power and influence impulses, the corruption, the rush for enrichment and the impulse of escalating as quick as possible the stairs towards the top of the power pyramid created not a few breaches in the scaffolding of the “old guard” that led to either

marginalising of some of the exponents of this “close circle”, or to the liquidation of others under different pretexts when the most vainglorious elements threatened to become unsafe for the absolute supremacy of the privileged who reached already the top and even for the “sole leader”.

The first cracks

So it was that even before Hafez Al-Assad’s biological disappearance, the existing frictions and adversities within the “proximity circle” led to the elimination without hesitation of those targeted. And a first example in this respect was offered by two of the main “supporting pillars of the regime”. Firstly, it is about **Rifaat Al-Assad**,

the brother of the former president and commander of the assault units (*Saraya Al-Difa’*) he commanded



during the 1982 reprisal actions against Hama revolts, appointed vice president and suspected of orchestrating in 1983 an attempt to overthrow president Hafez Al-Assad and replacing him at the helm of the party and the state. He was “pardoned” and allowed to remain in the country until 1992 when he was “suggested” to go into exile and he did that taking refuge in Spain and then to France where he lives today dealing in real-estate business.

Secondly, it is about **Abdel Halim Khaddam** who was for a long time foreign minister and the vice-president of the state. The struggle for power inside the party’s top structures and the disagreement between the former and the new president, Bashar Al-Assad, forced him to announce his resignation from all party and state positions and to choose in 2005 the self-exile in France where he had several attempts to organise an opposition against the new regime in Damascus and even announced the formation of an ephem-

eral “Syrian government in exile”. He lives presently isolated in France, without any further public appearances.

The 2011 breaking out of the Syrian civil war was leaving its footprint on the “nervous centers” of the decision-making hierarchy in Damascus and practically produced a dramatic tore down of what represented until then the regime’s “old guard” and the emergence of a new cast, constituted more selectively and more adapted to the domestic conditions of coming to power of the ophthalmologist Bashar Al-Assad, who was projected ex-abrupto to the top of the military hierarchy and to the power institutions. Among those who were removed or chose to distance themselves from the new regime was **Farouk Al-Sharaa**, former chief of the Syrian diplomacy and vice-president of the state. The reluctance manifested towards Bashar Al-Assad’s approaches and positions in what concern foreign policy



led to a progressive isolation and marginalisation including in his political and ideological responsibilities and the evolution ended in placing him under house arrest especially after his name was mentioned by Western and Syrian opposition circles as Bashar Al-Assad’s possible acceptable and moderate successor. On July 1st, 2015, military loyal to the president stormed the residence of the prisoner in a failed attempt of physical liquidation. Badly wounded, Faruq Al-Sharaa isolated himself and disappeared completely from public life.

Finally, one of the last “heavy figures” of the Baathist regime who chose the divorce from the “hereditary presidential republic” was the influential and long-living politician, dignitary and general **Mustafa Tlass**, minister of Defense between 1972 -2004, one of the closest and most loyal col-



laborators of the former president Hafez Al-Assad and supporter of Bashar Al-Assad's succession for ruling the country. Under the general's leadership and shelter, the Tlass clan – of Circasian ethnicity and belonging to the Sunni sect – imposed themselves as the most powerful and influential family after the president's Alawi one and in direct competition with the Al-Makhlouf clan from where Hafez Al-Assad's wife and mother of the current president, Anisa Makhlouf / Al-Assad came. Mustafa Tlass' eldest son, Firas, was rated the "biggest magnate" and the richest Syrian after Bashar Al-Assad's controversial cousin, Rami Makhlouf. A second son of the former dignitary, Munaf Tlass, a Brigadier-General and commander of a great combat unit of the Republican Guard was an open opponent of the brutal offensives launched by the loyalist army against the military opposition in Rastan area – the place of origin of the Tlass clan. Later he renounced the military dignity and took refuge in Jordan where he had several failed attempts of establishing a "Syrian parallel army" opposed to Bashar Al-Assad's regime. In 2011, general Mustafa Tlass took refuge in France under the pretext of medical treatment. His son Firas got an Egyptian residence and continued to expand his private business and, one year later, the other son, Munaf, took refuge in Turkey on his way to France where he settled. The general Mustafa Tlass died on June, 27th 2017 in Paris aged 85. Mention should be made as well that soon after the Tlass family's "defection", another last representative of the power circle in Damascus choosed dissent. He is the Alawi general **Ali Habib Mahmud** who was minister of Defense between 2009-2011 and whose "guilt" was he showed "understanding" if not even sympathy for the Syrian revolts. He was criticised for "defeatist attitude" and left the country and established connections with Bashar Al-Assad's opponents in diaspora.



In the case of the last two mentioned generals as well as in the case of other officials who

distanced themselves from the regime once the "Syrian spring" was triggered one must say that their dissent was not so due to their sympathies for the opposition or to their aversion for Bashar Al-Assad's person or his way of thinking but rather to an unfavourable for them "resettlement" of the alliances of positions and power within the close entourage of the top of the pyramid of power among Bashar's relatives who were concerned of foreign competition for partitioning the power and privileges, a fact that determined the latter to resort even to false accusations of sympathising with the opposition in order to annihilate and exclude them. Or, placed in the stocks following obscure backstage games and threatened with losing their freedom or even their lives, they did not have other option but to choose between exile or to directly align themselves with the opposition.

"Collateral" damages

Another event that occurred under Bashar Al-Assad's regime as the internal violences escalated and the radical Islamist groups started participating to the Syrian internal war and that strongly shocked the cohesion and functionality of the "close gang" of the Syrian ruling system took place on July 12th, 2012 when a terrorist attack was aimed at the headquarters of the Damascus National Security. The attack was claimed by the radical Islamist group "*Liwa Al-Islam*" (The Islamic Brigade) later renamed "*Jaysh Al-Islam*" (The Army of Islam). The attack resulted in an important number of fatalities among whom a series of influential and close members to president Bashar Al-Assad either by family ties or by the weight and importance of the positions held within the system. From this perspective, the most important loss for the regime was the death in the attack of general **Assef Shawkat**, the young "hawk" of the post Hafez Al-Assad genera-



tion considered a kind of “pearl” of the crown both due family connections, through his marriage with Bushra, Bashar Al-Assad’s sister and to the responsibilities he was invested with: deputy of Defence minister and head of military intelligence in the national network of security and intelligence, deputy and later commander of the general staff. Recent historiography revealed “the other side of the coin”, namely the acerbic hostility Maher Al-Assad, the president’s brother, manifested towards his brother-in-law-cum-cousin Assef, due to the same competition for the pyramidal ascension, an enmity that reached the peak when Maher attempted to kill Chawkat with revolver gunshots. The victim was treated in a French hospital and the incident was discretely covered up.

Besides general Assef Chawkat, other high officials, confidants and close to the president people perished in the attack of July 18th, 2012, among whom general **Daoud Rajiha**, the minister of Defense and general Hassan Turkumani, head of the General Directorate of the National Security and coordinator of the crisis cell for counteracting the mass protest movements.



From the old to the new guard: Maher, Rami and the others

Too few of the members of the new “elite club” from the entourage close to the top of the power in Damascus survived the time and events and among those who proved not only long-living and fidelity towards the regime and president Bashar Al-Assad mention should be made of:

Walid Al- Moallem, diplomat and member of the central leadership of Baath Party with diplomatic missions either on different stages of the professional hierarchy (in Tanzania, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Great Britain), or as ambassador to Romania (1975-1980) and the United States of America (between 1990-2000). As of 2006 he is



minister of Foreign Affairs (a position in which he succeeded Farouk Al-Sharaa who became vice-president).

Bouthayna Shaaban (born 1953), an old friend of Hafez Al-Assad’s family, former minister for the Syrians in diaspora, political and press counsellor of president Bashar Al-Assad.



The new generation of potentates of the day involved in the higher decision-making circles in Syria emerged, one may say, once the former president Hafez Al-Assad died in 2000 and Bashar Al-Assad’s taking over the presidential chair and consolidated his position politically, militarily and economically as well as in the private business sphere on the background of the internal crisis in the country triggered in March 2011.

From this point of view, an outstanding ascension the members of the intimate core of Al-Assad family had a more or less open ascension among whom the president’s brother **Maher Al-Assad** (born on December 8th, 1967) is the



most outstanding. A Syrian army officer with the rank of Brigadier General, commander of the Republican Guard, an elite army corps that, alongside the paramilitary forces of the political security represents the pillar of the Syrian system of national security and defense. General Maher Al-Assad is also the commander of the IV-th Armored Division that gained a

controversial fame following the involvement in reprisal operations of the popular protests and during the civil war against the armed formations of the Syrian opposition. Maher Al-Assad participated with the troops under his command to the most important events on the domestic front beginning with the siege of Deraa town, south of the country, to the campaign in Damascus rural zones, the siege of Homs, the battle for Aleppo city, reconquered from the opposition forces to the battles west of Damascus on the course of the Barada River that were under the control of jihadist-Islamist troops of Djabhat Al-Nusra (the Syrian offshoot of Al-Qaida) or to the anti-Islamist campaigns in Idlib and Deir Ezzor and the seaside region Lattakia-Tartous-Banias. Maher Al-Assad's crucial role in the context of the Syrian internal war surfaced particularly after Assef Shawqat was assassinated in July 2012. On April 27th 2011, namely a little more than one month after the insurgency was launched, he was placed, together with other Syrian officials, on the sanction list imposed by the USA and, at the beginning of May that year, on the list of similar sanctions imposed by the European Union. Besides his military obligations, Maher Al-Assad is known as a big and potent businessman. He controls the electronic media site "Sham Press" and, according to media sources, he benefitted from incomes amounting to more than \$1 billion as a result of bankrupting the Lebanese bank "Al-Madina" used as money-laundering tool. He is the owner or part-owner in several media, press and TV or commercial businesses, a statute that brought him the nickname of "tycoon" in an quasi-inexistent Syrian economy. According to some close circles, Maher



has a manifestly ascendancy on his brother Bashar and on the political and military decisions the latter takes.

Another name appears also in press comments when referring to the "proximity circle" of the president. It is **Rami Makhoulouf's** (born in

1969), cousin on the president's mother lineage, considered the richest Syrian businessman controlling the quasi-totality of the country's economic sector so that there are not a few analysts of the Syrian domestic situation saying that practically no foreign company can initiate or conduct economic and commercial activities in the country without Rami Makhoulouf's agreement and "partnership". In the business field, he is known especially as main owner of "Syriatel", one of the two telecom companies licensed in Syria. He is also involved in several other fields: constructions, finance and banks, free-zone activities at the Lebanese border, duty-free commerce, trade in luxury goods etc. According to The Financial Times, the business system managed by Rami Makhoulouf controls presently more than 60% of Syria's economic sector. He is also a majority shareholder of "Sham Holding" group dealing in tourism and hotel business and controls "Syrian Pearl Airlines", the first - and only - private operator in air transport authorised in Syria. He is shareholder with several private banks on the Syrian market (Islamic Bank of Syria, International Bank of Qatar, Bank of Jordan etc.), deals in the oil field through Gulfsands Petroleum (incorporated in the UK), in mass-media as holder of the TV channel "Al-Watan" (Homeland) and the satellite TV channel "Dunya TV", has real-estate properties in the British Virgin Islands, holds the monopoly on the tobacco imports in Syria and carries out other activities in partnership with his cousin Maher Al-Assad. Under different charges (corruption, money-laundering, using to his benefit the intelligence services etc.), the United States and the European Union apply sanctions against him and some of his companies.

Outside the family's confines, another representative of the Syrian "tycoons" who prospered on the background of the infighting and whose position is able to influence the regime policies is the businessman **Ayman Jaber**, known as having a de facto monopoly on the oil and gas fields in areas under the control of the loyalist army and, therefore, the sole supplier of energy products to the Syrian state. He is, at the same time, chairman of the Supreme Council for matalurgi-

cal products and carries out other businesses in partnership with Rami Makhlouf and other Syrian potentates. As it is the case with other “native tycoons”, Ayman Jaber is financing the official propaganda and, at the same time, of paramilitary formations meant to ensure the security of his properties and businesses. Yet during the years of conflict, some of these “private militias” turned into real elite combat units financed by the businessman and involved in the war alongside the national army formations. Formations such as “Desert Hawks Brigade” (*Liwa’ Suqur Al-Sahra’*) and “Syrian Marines” are quite known. “Desert Hawks Brigade”, for instance, was set up in Homs district having as action area the desert regions at the borders with Iraq and Jordan with the task of cutting the resupply means and preventing the influx of anti-government armed formations, of taking hostages among the enemy and securing the supply chains of the loyalist army. In a critical period for the government army, the formations financed by Ayman Jaber were actively involved, with the authorities’ blessing, on the battlefronts in the seashore areas and they identified the pilot of the Russian jet shot down in 2015 by the Turkish army also. The brigade took an active part in liberating Palmyra area from the jihadists of Islamic State control as well as in other offensive actions such as liberating Aleppo city and all these contributed to improving the situation the Syrian army was confronted with. In 2017, as a result of an error, the “hawks” prevented formations of the army to enter the territory controlled by Ayman Jaber and he was temporarily arrested and the brigade’s fighters were enrolled either in the volunteers corps of assault or in the army’s guerrilla formations, both copiously financed by Ayman Jaber. One may easily understand that the benefits the “tycoon” enjoys from the government, including the “adaptation” of the legislative system, are, in their turn, substantial.

Finally, a survivor of the old guard who succeeded in keeping the trust and his positions in the “closed circle” of the high power hierarchy is the Lieutenant General **Ali Mamluk** (born in 1946), one of the main co-founders of the Syrian intelligence services where he held important

decision-making positions even as director of the National Security. Enjoying Bashar Al-Assad’s trust, he was assigned in 2005 the command of State Security General Directorate. He is one of the many high officials of the Syrian state subjected to the regime of international sanctions under the allegation of complicity and participating to the violently repressing of the public demonstrations. On August 11th, 2012, the Lebanese authorities indicted him in absentia, together with the Lebanese minister of Interior, Michel Samaha, on grounds of planning and supplying the necessary logistics for organising attacks against Lebanese civilian and military officials. In 2015, Ali Mamluk, as personal envoy of president Bashar Al-Assad visited Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman in a failed attempt of ending the civil war. Today, the Syrian opposition accuses him of complicity in setting up in Syria of the Iraqi group “Islamic State”.

A new architecture of the power pyramid? Questions, questions...

It is a reality the fact that after the “Arab spring” and the developments registered during the last years of war, the architecture of the Syrian pyramid of power as well as the entire society and the very concept of unified, integral and sovereign nation-state witnessed fundamental transformations that inevitably left its footprint on the power edifice in Syria, too, including in, or in the first place, at the level of pillars and concepts the power and the resilience of Bashar Al-Assad’s Baathist regime are based. If traditionally the sources of power the four-decade



rule of the Al-Assad clan enjoyed were, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, tribal identity, represented by the Shiite Allawi minority, the military and security institution and, not the least, the strong indoctrination of the society in the ideological spirit and letter of the (sole) Baath and Socialist Party, today even these institutions and entities are either exhausted by the long ordeal of war sacrifices or overused by the social distancing from an ideology and a rhetoric whose main domination tool was the resort to violence, the forced enrollment and the aggressive supervision of the community and individual life to the last insignificant day-to-day aspects. Today, one may say that the power architecture in Syria is not based as much on state institutions but rather on personal relations networks encouraged and supported by the representatives of the ruling clan headed by the president and those who, making up a privileged cast, are the most loyal to him. And this fidelity is motivated not only by the benefits the "intimate circle" offers but also by the lack of an alternative guaranteeing the continuity and durability of these advantages and benefits: in case Bashar Al-Assad will be compelled to leave power, what perspectives could be expected in a post-conflict Syria and which, in all likelihood, will endanger not only the privileges of those in the court clique but probably their freedom and even lives? On the other hand, at the time when the political arrangements among the main foreign players have a volatile and uncertain nature, the regime and its leader are aware that any crack within the interests and connections network making up the pyramid of power could jeopardize their survival. Consequently, it is to be assumed that even in case Moscow would agree with the United States and Turkey a certain form of diminishing the regime's power and control over the entire national territory, Bashar Al-Assad and his pillars will fiercely resist such a perspective. Bashar Al-Assad cannot forget that after Russia's military intervention on the scene of the Syrian war, Russian officials and president Vladimir Putin himself stated

several times that "the Russian Federation is not interested in Bashar Al-Assad's person but in Syria's sovereignty and territorial unity".

The Syrian conflict is in a stage where, from an immediate perspective, the following question arises: "with or without Bashar Al-Assad?". After seven years of war, the head of the Damascus regime still remains at the top of the power pyramid while the opposition slipped in a deep mess. The population, the urban bourgeoisie and the army of the government bureaucracy are divided between Al-Assad's clan opponents and supporters. The Syrian refugees in the regional proximity or in other world's geographical coordinates will want, sooner or later, to return to their country. With what feelings? The regime controls around 60% of the national territory that means an important victory but not winning the war and peace for Bashar Al-Assad. Syria's map continues to look like a mosaic of fronts continually on the move and the horizon of the reconstruction process makes the eventual investors in this huge and long-lasting effort shiver. Under such circumstances, a second yet no less important question arises: Will Bashar Al-Assad be able to further rule? His regime was saved not by the great warlords and by the self-interested loyalty of those within the "inner circle" but by the Russian Federation, by Iran and by Lebanese Hezbollah's militias. For that, Bashar Al-Assad made a swap: part of the national territorial sovereignty against his regime's survival. Syria's true "patrons" are its foreign "allies".

And, for the time being, no one may know whether resorting to the old adage "After me, may the Deluge come!" and remembering the sentence "it will be either Bashar, or Syria scorched" –sentences uttered even from the beginning of the insurrection – the "rais" in Damascus will choose to continue the war until 2021, when his mandate of president comes to an end in juridical terms, for giving up the avatars of power in the spirit of the same adage: "After me, may the Deluge come!"



SYRIA'S CHESSBOARD: ALL PLAYERS MAKE MISTAKES

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

Since the beginning of this year, the Syrian front witnesses a particular liveliness manifested, at the same time, both on the geography of the front, which experiences an intensification of conflicts, of terrestrial and air offensives and counter-offensives with important loss of life and devastation, and on the political and diplomatic segment of the demarches in search of a political solution to this long-lasting war triggered seven years ago. And, appearing to confirm the old Romanian adage according to which "only he who doesn't work (or who doesn't fight, in this case) he does not make mistakes", almost all the players involved in this blood-tainted conflict seem to prove they "work" by exponentially committing errors which, as any error, are but damaging and generating other errors. We mention below some of them.

1. The Russian Federation erred when the president Vladimir Putin, at Hmeimim air base in Syria, rushed to announce prematurely and unilaterally the "military" victory over the terrorist group Islamic State (Da'ish) and ordered, in a hurry as well, a "partial" withdrawal of the military troops engaged in this war ever since the end of September, 2015. That facilitated, on the one hand, the other Islamist formations' strengthening their positions and potential and, first and foremost, former Djabhat Al-Nussra (Al-Qaida's Syrian offshoot) renamed "*Ha'yat Tahrir Al-Sham*" (the Group for Liberating Syria) that only in Idleb has now troops numbering around 5,000 fighters and turned the town and the district into practically what Rakka town was for the "caliph" Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi's jihadists. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin's decision had a direct impact on the Syrian opposition that, from a reasonable attitude towards the political process sponsored by Moscow, had renounced to a great extent to the "Syrian National

Dialogue", radicalised its approaches and changed its strategic direction towards the offer presented in Paris by the "document of the five" (the United States, France, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia and Jordan) which consecrated the de facto failure of the dialogue in Sochi and the Syrian political process' re-entering in a new phase of procrastinations, contests and bargainings. Consequently, Russia is now in a situation of making new costly investments on the front and of accepting compromises and acknowledging the reality that no individual peace, be it military or political, can be gained without having in mind the complex of interests of the other influential players involved in the Syrian war file.

2. The United States of America under Donald Trump's Administration brought to an end the "Obama era" and inaugurated a new Syrian strategy characterised first and foremost by assertiveness and by the explicit intention of securing on an unlimited term its armed presence on the Syrian front. On the other hand, Donald Trump could be ascribed with the manner he addressed and treated Turkey and its regional security interests. By maintaining and encouraging a close collaboration with the ethnic Syrian Kurds who are considered by Ankara a direct threat to its security concerns, Donald Trump brought about a committed reorientation of its old ally on the Bosphorus and Regep Tayyip Erdogan's acceptance of a modus vivendi with Iran whose strategic and political interests in Syria are equally important as Erdogan's even if the motives are different and pertain less to fighting "terrorism" and the Kurdish separatism and more to the theocratic regime's policy of regional expansion of its influence. Under such circumstances, there is nothing that might deny the assessment that the Washington Administration's outbidding its "Kurdish option" will contribute to strengthening Moscow-Ankara-Tehran troika and offer Vladimir Putin an extra argument for acting towards deepening the cleavage that already exists between Washington and Ankara and to making the distance between the Turks and the Americans and even between the Turks and the North Atlantic Alliance even bigger and, at the same time, to Tur-

key's closer adherence to Astana process and, implicitly, to the Russian vision of achieving peace in Syria.

3. Neither Turkey's strategic vision was circumvented by miscalculations and one of the most recent was the intempestive launch of the war against the Kurds in the northern region of the Syrian national territory (Operation Olive Branch) for conquering the Afrin-Manbij strategic line with the stated intention of expanding the offensive towards the east of the "autonomous region" (Kurdish rojava) to the border between Syria and Iraq and a first consequence of this decision was manifest on two coordinates: on the one hand, the steep deterioration of the relationship with the United States and, on the other hand, an equally steep coming closer of the ethnic Kurds and Bashar Al-Assad's regime from who they expect support and protection against the Turkish "occupier". For the time being, the Syrian president did not follow up the Kurdish request either motivated by the precaution of not affecting in any way the relations with the Russian Federation – promoting itself a good relationship with the Kurdish minority – or in order to not deteriorate further the relations with Turkey whose role during the war and in the stage of post-conflict reconstruction and of refugees' return to their homes cannot be avoided or underestimated. In exchange, the Syrian regime accepted, confidentially and indirectly, to grant Kurds the support by allowing their troops and logistic-military equipment towards the Afrin-Manbij front the transit through the territory controlled by Bashar Al-Assad's national Syrian army. The price of this Syrian government's "goodwill" is not negligible and is particularly materialised in Kurds' securing the Syrian access to the oilfields and military installations equipment – air and terrestrial – in the Qamishli region, north-east of the country controlled by the Kurdish minority.

4. In case of Israel, that is since 45 years in technically a "neither peace, nor war" state with Syria, the security threat, especially in the current phase of Syria's civil war, doesn't come from the power in Damascus but from Iran that has in mind the same old objective of "wiping

the Jewish state" from the regional map which is looked at as a serious existential threat – a threat to be considered so much as Iran succeeded to assure a solid military, logistic, demographic and socio-economic presence in Syria. Nothing has fundamentally changed in the Iranian classical slogan of the "export of revolution" and achieving the "great Shiite crescent" securing the theocratic regime both the access to Mediterranean's "warm waters" and a connecting corridor with the militias either created, financed and directed in the Levant area – the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamist Hamas. Yet the Israeli decision-makers and planners are miscalculating and continue to indulge in a comfortable routine which, under the umbrella assured by the understandings between the USA and Russia, are sending their bombardment jets for devastating "cruises" in the airspace of the neighbouring country ignoring the fact that the dynamics and morphology of the front and the war witnessed, in the meantime, changes that place Bashar Al-Assad's regime in a much better position than the one before Russian Federation's direct military involvement on the Syrian front and that Bashar Al-Assad himself, backed by his Iranian ally, is obstinate enough to not follow always the advices he receives from the "Russian" counsellors concerned with avoiding in Syria any act that might prejudice Israel's security interests, not to speak of the extremely obstinate Guardians of the Islamic Revolution in Iran who have an obvious Israeli-connected presence in Syria.

Indeed, the list of shortcomings and miscalculations is unfortunately much longer. Neither Bashar Al-Assad's regime, nor the political and military opposition are missing from the list and each of the camps committed such errors starting with the regime's resorting to suppressing by force the first contestant manifestations in the name of democracy and reform, to the opposition's short-sightedness in demanding Bashar Al-Assad's leaving power as unique program of building the "future Syria" and the servitude manifested towards the foreign powers from whom it expected to be raised to power either by the West, the Russian Federation or by the

regional powers. And the maturity date of the errors is visible now, no matter how much those involved would endeavour to hide their responsibility under the mask of the hypocrisy called “diplomacy” and “principles of international law”.

THE SYRIAN PEACE SEEN THROUGH ERDOGAN'S EYEGLASSES

Maher NABOULSI, Damasc

The throng of players involved in the interests game on the chessboard of the Syrian political and military crisis, the complexity and the very competitive nature of this complex of interests, the fluidity and mobility of the armed confrontations front and the diluted and confused evolution of the initiatives aimed at solving through dialogue this conflict – from Geneva to Astana, Paris, Vienna and to the summer and winter resort Sochi – are as many elements to be considered in any analysis attempting to unravel and quantify the amplitude, weight and impact of the role each of the competitors have or wish to have within this blood-tainted chess game.

Even from the beginning, seven years ago, of the Syrian revolts, Turkey built its position and policy towards this complex file starting from three factors considered of major importance: the developments on the battlefield, the approaches and positionings of the international community, notably of the great players involved, towards this crisis and the possible reac-

tions of the domestic situation vis-a-vis the policies of the regime in Ankara.

Turkey is, indeed, falling within the regional group of influential states, particularly on the background of its territorial and geographical proximity to Syria, that confers it a sum of favourable leverages in approaching the Syrian file, then the presence on its territory of around three million Syrian refugees and, not the least, its good relations with the political and military forces of the Syrian opposition and the influence it has on them. Turkey's advantage through its military presence on Syria's national territory, firstly the Operation Desert Shield, and later the Operation Olive Branch launched on January 20th, 2018 against the Syrian Kurds should not be omitted either.

As it is known, the events in Syria broke out in March 2011 as popular protest movements that turned quickly into a popular revolution and later into an armed insurgency and this ascending trajectory towards violence triggered by Bashar Al-Assad's brutal reaction led to the start, multiplication and diversification of foreign interferences that, in a first stage, manifested as “proxy wars” and became gradually an bitter competition among global and regional powers. All these created in the end a complex situation whereby the “Syrian file” slipped out of Syrians' control and was practically monopolised by global states, international foras and soldiers of fortune of most diverse identities, interests and affiliations.

In such an evolutive context, to which numerous other factors, all too well known to be mentioned here are to be added, Turkey's policy and position evolved as well from urging and calling Bashar Al-Assad in the first stage of the crisis for reforms aimed at addressing social demands to “adopting” the block of Syrian resistance at the beginning of 2012 up to the explicit demand formulated officially by Ankara in 2015 of Bashar Al-Assad's



and his regime's leaving power, the next move of Ankara's relating to the situation was the acceptance of its involvement in the "Geneva process" as a mechanism of politically solving the crisis in Syria and of the negotiations rounds in the "Astana process" which supposed giving up the famous formula "Assad must leave" and accepting his remaining in power yet only during the transition period on condition that the current regime and leader be excluded from the future post-conflict Syrian state and society.

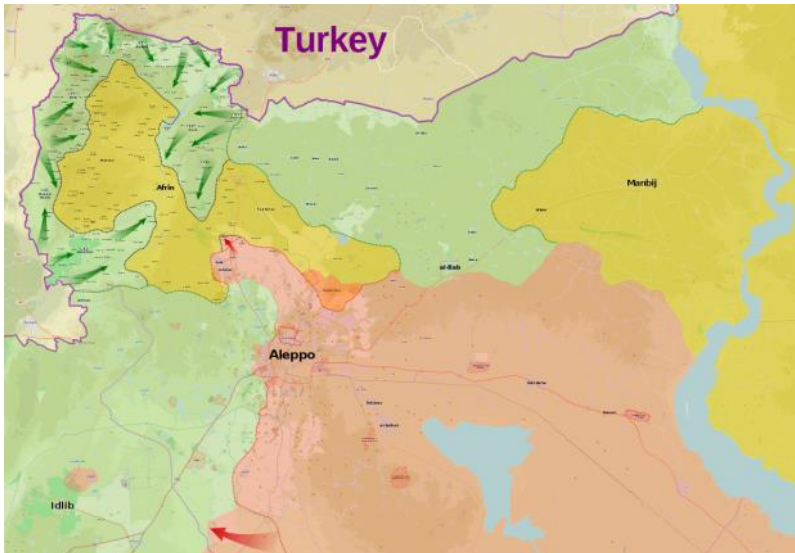


In drawing up its policy in what concern the crisis in Syria and the ways of solving it, Ankara starts from three determinant prerequisites. Firstly, it is about achieving a ceasefire on the entire Syrian territory, as a necessary premise for accomplishing a political solution and facilitating, at the same time, the return to their homes of the Syrian refugees currently sheltered in Turkey and securing the appropriate conditions for launching the reconstruction process. A second priority is maintaining Syria's territorial unity and preventing the implementation of various scenarios aimed at partitioning this country either on ethnical and sectarian criteria or in accordance with the interests of the other players involved with shares corresponding to the Syrian political geography imposed by the fluctuation of the battlefield. Thirdly, it is about preventing by all means the establishment of a Kurdish mini-state entity on the territory presently held by the Kurdish separatists. For Ankara, the achievement of the Kurdish state project is tantamount to a direct threat to its own national security not only because such an entity would become a dividing and separating wall between Turkey and Syria, on the one hand, but also for separating Turkey of its vicinity with the Arab world of the Middle East, on the other hand, and, to an equal extent, by the risk that such an entity would offer the Kurdish separatists a platform in order for Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) launch terrorist operations against the Turkish territory. From the perspective of this perception, the Kurdish issue repre-

sents for the rulers in Ankara a true compass when drawing up Turkey's Syrian policy and the strategy and tactics devolving from it.

The options Turkey has with respect to the Syrian game board are as limited as they are complex and difficult. Firstly, for Ankara is confronted with the complex of suspicions in connection with the "loyalty" of its American ally particularly under Donald Trump's Administration and, secondly, for it is compelled to have open relations of co-operation with its traditional contender that is Russia, not to speak of the necessity that, depending on the developments on the political and military front, to collaborate, awoved or not, with the regime in Damascus in order to curb the secessionist ambitions of the Kurdish minority while endeavouring to keep a balance between its commitment to the Syrian opposition on the one hand, and its Russian ally, on the other.

The complexity and the contradictory nature of the Syrian political and military landscape result from the reality that, discursively, all the players involved in the Syrian crisis state their acceptance and support for an unitary and coherent political solution, whereas all of them and each one of them in his turn acts in such a manner that secures a maximum of political gains and advantages and military advancements on the front, the latter being of a nature to assure as solid as possible powerful positions in the negotiations process, be within the "Geneva process", the "Astana Rounds" or the presumed re-



under UN's auspices yet, at the same time, such a solution must exclude completely the Kurdish factor.

In Recep Teyyip Erdogan's vision, the future Syria must be a pluralistic and unified state ruled by a regime able to ensure the security and inviolability of the national borders. Waiting for that moment, the regime in Ankara understands to strengthen itself by its own means and to solve its problems by the same means exploiting to this purpose, the bitter competition existing between Russia and America.

sults of the "Syrian national dialogue" in Sochi.

The congress organised by Moscow between 29th and 30th of January in Sochi on the Black Sea shore offered a telling example of the extremely prudent manner in which Turkey acted leaving the impression of a lonely fighter moving on an mined field and vacillating between the wish that the "dialogue" succeeds yet consecrating the Russian control over the peace process, on the one hand, and the undeclared temptation that the Sochi dialogue fails, something that could have ignited the irritation and the "punitive" reactions of the Russian partner. Yet the relations between Turkey and the Russian Federation are, one may say, flawed by the different manners of addressing the political peace process in Syria given that beyond the convergence of the positions concerning the idea that a military solution of the crisis has no real perspective, Ankara supports the UN's international "umbrella" conferred by the "Geneva process", while the Russian Federation wants a solution in Sochi context which would secure Moscow a separate and individual control over the process, something president Erdogan does not agree.

Ankara wants a political solution to the Syrian conflict and sees it possible only in the international framework of the "Geneva process" and

According to Erdogan, "he who holds more territory he enjoys more power". From this perspective, it is difficult to suppose that Operation Olive Branch will end soon. And, at the same time, one must not exclude the possibility that an extension of the intervention and its territorial expansion would put Ankara in an awkward position of not controlling any longer what happens on the territory where its armies are deployed. As it is not out of the question that the Kurds, confronted with an impending defeat following the Turkish offensive, to extend their anti-Turkish operations on other geographical coordinates in Turkey and its proximity. The targets set on the map by Tyrkish strategists and by politicians in press statements seem to move further away from the "bliz-Krieg" Recep Teyyip Erdogan devised and are folding on the general pace of the Syrian internal conflict. With all the big question marks such a trend presumes.



THE RELATIONS BETWEEN TURKEY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: BETWEEN ECONOMY AND "ALLAH EKBER"

Reza SHAHRESTANI

After several years of negotiations on Turkey's joining the European Union, the prospect of the country's becoming a member of the unified European community was postponed sine die as the result of Brussel's decision, in december 2016, of "freezing" the negotiations, a decision consolidated in April 2017 by the Council of Europe's resolution which determined that Turkey registered a visible regress in what concern fulfilling the necessary criteria for a new state's joining the European community. After the end of the 13 year period of negotiations, Turkey set a precedent, falling back to its observer statute in its relationship with Europe.

Yet all these involutions do not outshine the reality that, for the European community, Turkey represents an important commercial and economic cooperation partner, a fact reflected in the flexibility Brussels manifested not a few times in its relationship with Ankara, as for instance in cases of renewing and completing the former accepted in case of the Customs Agreement concluded in 1995. As president Recep Teyyip Erdogan used the relations with the European Union – both in its positive aspects and in its less positive aspects – exclusively for electoral purposes as he is doing, by the way, in the offing of the next presidential elections set out for 2019, the European Union did not hide its discontent and irritation in what concern Recep Tayyip Erdogan's permanent quite open radical orientations especially in the field pertaining to the Islamic religious sphere. The more or less discernible apprehension manifest both at the level of decision-making process and at the level of the collective mind within the European Union is resented in what regard the risk that the plague of the Turkish religious radicalism spread and infiltrate into the European societies first and foremost (for the time being) by means of the squads of imams whom the regime in Ankara



pours forth on the continent for the fundamental mission of the Islamic work (al-dawa) under the cover of granting assistance and religious and cult services to Turkish (and other nationalities) Muslim communities residing in the European states. It is not difficult to find out that from Berlin to France and Belgium and, to different degrees, in quite the entire European Union, it is not any longer a matter of modesty to close the eyes in front of a pervasive reality of the policy promoted by the regime and by the Justice and Development Party ever more engaged in reconstituting and the revival of a new Ottoman spirit with neo-imperialist features: if the Shiite regime in the Islamic Republic of Iran inaugurated ever since 1979 following the victory of the revolution led by imam Khomeyni the disputable concept of the "export of Islamic revolution", Recep Teyyip Erdogan's neo-Ottoman doctrine makes a priority of exporting to the close vicinity and to the Western European space the Sunni fundamentalist discourse to serve the regime in Ankara and the leadership's "close circle" headed by the spiritual father of the doctrine – president Erdogan.

The issue of exporting clerics-missionaries would not be dangerous in itself – after all, from this point of view the Saudi Wahabi monarchy ranks first by far and since a long time – yet it gains other dimensions and meanings when, independently one from the another, the intelligence and security services in the European states uncover that the imams-preachers sent to Wester Europe from around the Golden Horn have as mission, covered by the cult and rituals garbs, spying on the Turkish residents and detecting those more sympathetic to Fethullah

Gullen than to Recep Teyyip Erdogan. Officially, such manifestations were detected especially in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands and France and the latter announced, on January 18th, 2018, the decision of expelling or forbidding the entry into the country of the imams coming from Turkey together with a follow-up program for training French moderate theologians for rendering the Islamic religious services.

On this background, there is no exaggeration in the claim that the Turkish theologians and clerics sent for granting religious assistance in the European space mirror the hidden face of the spiritual life of the Turks residing in the European Union's states, namely that face disguised by religious garb and from the height of the pulpit which carries out an intense and subtle political activity.

An intense informative campaign of backing Erdogan's regime in the West is conducted by the "Turkish Islamic Union for Religious Affairs" (*Diyanet İşleri Türk-Islam Birliği - DITIB*) headquartered in Cologne-Ehrenfeld, Germany. Set up in 1984, as a branch of the Presidential Department for Religious Affairs in Ankara, the organisation is considered an instrument of the Turkish state for promoting and defending Turkey's and Recep Teyyip Erdogan's interests in Europe. In 2016, DITIB has already set up and administered 900 mosques in Germany only, and the preaching clerics were provided and paid for by the Turkish government. Besides the concerns strictly related to Islamic mission work and in addition to the informative tasks it conducts, DITIB is actively spreading and promoting the Ottoman traditions, heritage and spirit starting from the referential ideas of Recep Teyyip Erdogan's neo-Ottoman doctrine, according to which a number of European states are an extension, over time, of the centuries-old presence of the Muslim Ottoman caliphate on the lands of the old continent which offers, therefore, a propitious environment and ground for disseminating and resurrecting the greatness of Ottomanism and of Turkey's as heir and depositor of the values and symbols of the former Turk-Ottoman empire.

Under such circumstances, the decision made by France at the beginning of this year under the leadership of president Emmanuel Macron is seen as an act of opposition and refusal of Erdogan's regime leaning towards the Islamisation at an accelerated rate of the Turkish society and, at a wider level, of disseminating into the European societies of the Islamic spirit and of the imperial inheritance of the Ottoman caliphate. To an equal extent, the French decision is circumscribed to the general European climate dominated by an ever increasing alarm towards the direct support the regime in Ankara grants to numerous conservative and radical Islamic entities that proliferated and continue to multiply within the European space. This support is materialised in multiple forms and manners, from financial and material backing to providing the necessary means and infrastructure for a dynamic media and editorial propagandistic activity.

France's decision is not the first of this nature reflecting the European states' alarm and concern against the Islamisation campaign conducted by Ankara. In February 2015, the Austrian Parliament adopted a law providing for expelling all imams and clerics belonging to DITIB's Austrian branch as well as the prohibition to accept on the country's territory of new clerics coming from Turkey. The Austrian justice is working on a file submitted by the Green Party through the deputy Peter Bielz which, supported by material evidence, accusing DITIB of spying on behalf of the Turkish intelligence services and of tracing and intimidating Kurds residents and Turkish opposition journalists settled in Austria.

In 2017, the German authorities ordered the arrest of imams who support the Justice and Development Party and who have been found possessing lists with persons supposed of being supporters or activists of the network led by the dissident Fethullah Güllen. The lists were to be conveyed to the Turkish authorities. On that occasion, "Der Spiegel" published the findings of its own investigation that emphasized that president Recep Teyyip Erdogan uses DITIB as an active control instrument of Turkish diaspora in Europe.

The European Union's states go currently through a process of reevaluating and reproblematising their positioning towards their bilateral or collective relations with Turkey and the decision of sine die freezing the accession negotiations and restricting the Islamic presence and activities of the clerics coming from Turkey are circumscribed to this pan-European reorientation. Indeed, the European community cannot neglect the economic and commercial interests in its relations with the



government in Ankara yet this is not an argument for ignoring the Islamization tendencies of president Erdogan, his warlike adventures, his ostensible preoccupation for reviving and disseminating the Ottoman imperial spirit as well as the shortcomings the regime in Ankara registers in what concern observing the citizens' freedoms and rights that are considered in the European capitals as many possible prospective threats for their own secular identities and their own Western values of civilization and culture.

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SPLASH OF COLOR



The Logic of Our Lord's resurrection

Nothing of what exists, material realities – physical, spiritual – extrasensorial realities, notions or concepts – do not exist outside God. **He is the only existential support.** There is nothing outside Him and there is nothing without Him. The fundamental attribute of divinity is infinity and God's infinity has endless possibilities of expression and does not leave any place to another reality to limit it in any way. Outside God there is nothing – for simply there isn't an "outside Him". This is why He is God!

Creation is not detached from God – simply because nothing could be detached from infinity. **Creation is, in its own, God's expression.** That is why creation is infinite as it itself is the expression of the infinite God. The Holy Scripture tells us "through him, all things were made", that "He gave Himself" and that "He said and it was so, He ordered and they were built" yet the Scripture tells us "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and Word was God".

It is normal, logical and rational to be so since any existing reality should have an existential support and the **existential support of any reality is in itself.**

It is the Holy Scripture that revealed the essence of God's being. This is the greatest revelation. Not only God's work was revealed to man; what He works, how He works, where and with who, how much He works... but God's very being was revealed.

God means Love. Love is the only reality that charges itself by giving.

Love is the only reality expressing itself through sacrifice only and the highest form of expressing sacrifice is death.

In this way we understand that the expression of God's being is in infinite sacrifice and the role of the expression is the Creation. In this way we understand that **everything is the fruit of God's deep love.** His deep and infinite love has no shade of selfishness and, therefore, the existential support of all resides always in sacrifice so that the realities born from sacrifice exist. David says in his Psalms that "if you turn Your face everything return to dust"... meaning everything would lose the existential support and cease to exist. The word "if" David used expresses a hypothetical reality because in fact God cannot withdraw from the essence of the existential realities as that would mean He Himself ceases to exist. He would cease to be within sacrifice and implicitly would cease to mean Love – yes, He really gives up His being

– from love, He gives up Love – yet not due to one of His interests but because some other realities exist – namely the realities resulted from His uttering – and this existential deed makes Him “be more God” especially because Love charges itself through giving.

So the logic of resurrection is revealed to us.

Sacrificing Himself, giving Himself, Giving in to death - without seeking a selfish reward – found Himself rewarded with resurrection, “as it was not possible to keep the Life Initiator deteriorating...” enriching his being by giving and not by amassing. So we understand the Resurrection is the fruit of crucifixion – and that not only for, as it is logical, resurrection may exist only after death but simply because Love never perishes and that Love recharges itself through giving. **God exists in a perpetual death and in a perpetual resurrection.** In such a way, the enigmatic biblical saying that he who amasses he loses and the prodigal one wins is solved.

On the other hand, coming back to the fundamental idea that the Infinite God has infinite possibilities of expression and that all the existential realities – material, spiritual or conceptual express God Himself – and that all combined at a time express He and the consummate Himself. Since each reality has its sort, its might, its charismas and its sense. He is perfectly expressed in life yet in death, too, in light and in darkness, in smile and in tear, in happiness and in sorrow, in tangible and in illusion, in matter and in spirit, in ascent and in descent... as nothing exists per se without having Him as an existential support. The infinite diversity gives beauty and existential sense to creation.

The infinite work motivates the existential dynamics and eternity. God’s being perfection is “so perfect” as it does not even lack imperfection.

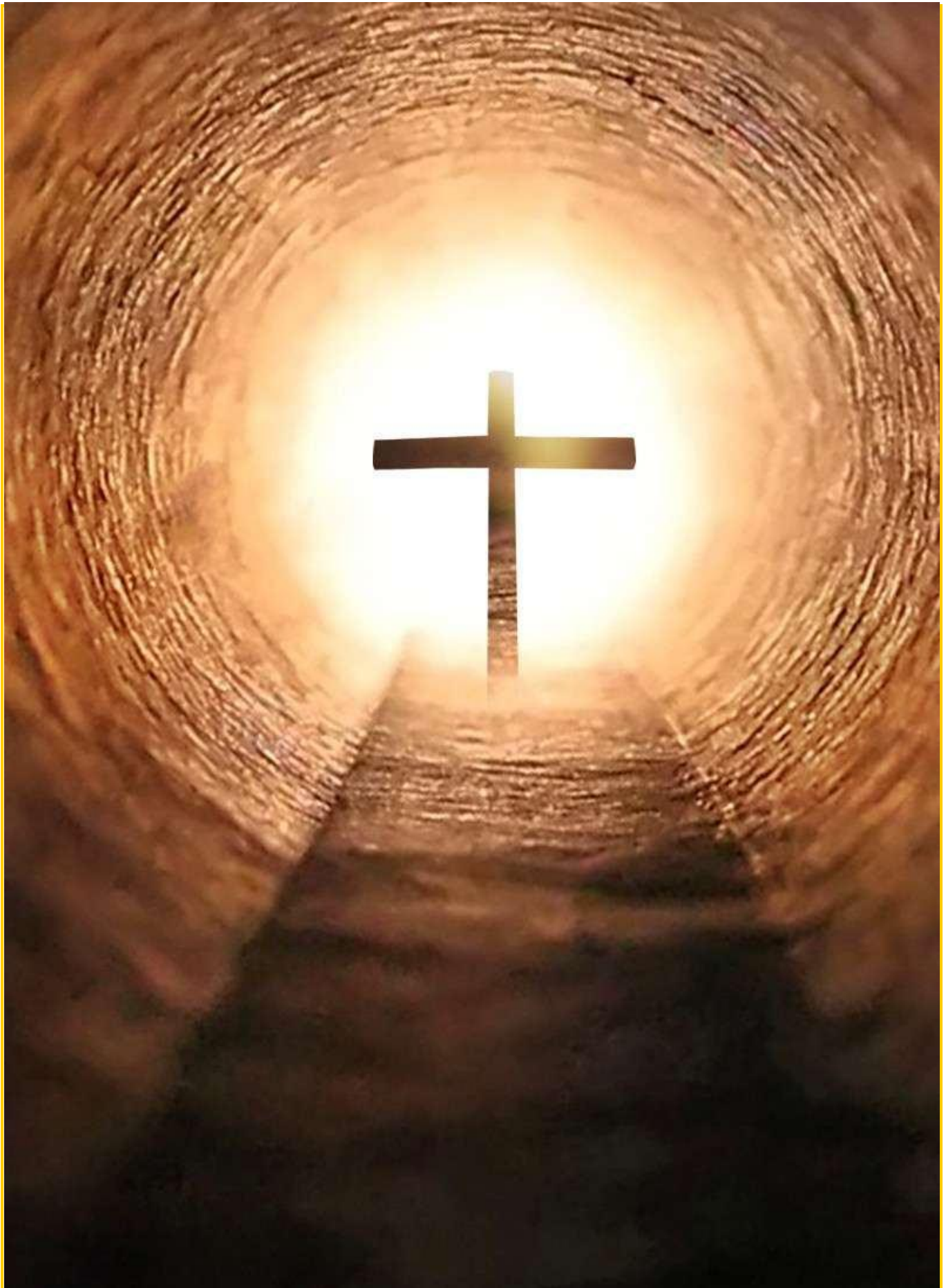
This is why He has in Himself the key of the existential motivation and of infinity. God’s state, as the creation state in fact, is not a work, it is simply existential state, yet a state expressing itself through work. The illusion itself – related to its existential support - is tangible reality.

We find thus the logic of Resurrection.

He is the Resurrection! “You are the Resurrection, life and rest” ... goes the theological thinking. As such, even as conceptual reality but also as tangible reality – physical or spiritual – Resurrection is, in its turn, in itself, the consummate expression of the Perfect One. There is no reality outside Infinite. **The Infinite God, in the infinite possibilities of expression, expressed Himself in Resurrection as well as in any existential reality.** Christ is God yet Resurrection, too, is God. Full stop!!!

Christ rose!

Priest Gheorghe Colțea – Archpriest of Bran-Zărnești



The Secret Services of the 21st Century and Security Issues

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION CONTINUES THE ARMS RACE IN THE BLACK SEA



Dr. Octavian DUMITRESCU

Vladimir Putin, the current and most likely the future President of the Russian Federation,

continues to support a high level of combat readiness of his country's Armed Forces, even if this means higher costs to the defense budget. When he was asked at the annual press conference on 14 December 2017 if the defense spending will reduce the social spending, he said that "our military spending (Russia's military spending - our note) is established as a result of some principles", namely the provision of security and the avoidance of economic collapse. It must be said that the defense budget of the Russian Federation in 2017 was reduced by \$ 2 billion as compared to the previous year, i.e. from 46.6 billion USD to 44.6 billion USD, according to the data published by the Global Fire Power (GFP), a fact that Vladimir Putin also confirmed at the conference.

If we start our analysis from the current situation of the Russian Federation, we notice that the most significant security problems of this country are in its European part, at the border with the eastern part of the European Union and NATO, two international organizations with security responsibilities in Europe and worldwide. In most of the other regions - Asia, the Middle East and the northern Arctic - the Russian Federation has provided good conditions with the countries that matter in its security equation. In such circumstances, it was expected that Russia's efforts in the field of defense and security would focus on its western regions. This is where it needs to defend its most valuable conquest - the Crimean Peninsula - this is where it needs to secure a high level of combat capability of the forces in the Black Sea region and of those involved in the conflict in Ukraine, to support its forces in Transnistria and effectively monitor the Caucasus and Baltic regions, while strength-



ening ties with Turkey.

In this respect, we mention that Russia's forces and military resources in the Black Sea region have been augmented, with particular emphasis

Arms and equipment's of the Russian Armed Forces (total)			
Categories	2016	2017	+/-
Land Forces			
• Tanks	15 398	20 216	+ 4 818
• Armoured vehicles	31 298	31 298	
• Self-propelled artillery	5 972	5 972	
• Artillery	4 625	4 625	
• Rockets launchers	3 793	3 793	
Aerian Forces			
• Aircrafts (total)	3 574	3 794	+ 220
• Bombing aircrafts	751	806	+ 55
• Fighting aircrafts	1 438	1 438	
• Transport aircrafts	1 124	1 124	
• Training jets	370	387	+ 17
• Helicopters (total)	1 237	1 389	
• Fighting helicopters	478	490	
Naval Forces			
• Navies (total)	352	352	
• Carriers	1	1	
• Frigates	4	6	+ 2
• Destroyers	15	15	
• Corvettes	81	81	
• Submarine	60	63	+ 3
• Surveillance aircrafts	14		

Forces and equipment of the Russian Federation deployed in CRIMEEA (Wikipedia, 2017)		
Units	Equipment	2017
30 Division surface ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided missile cruiser • Guided missile destroyer • Guided missile frigates 	1 1 5
4 Independent Submarine Brigade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diesel submarine 	7
197 Brigade Attack ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large attack ships 	7
68 Brigade Coastal Defence Ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antisubmarine corvette • marine minelayer 	3 3
41 Brigade missiles shipt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guided missile corvette • Small ship with rockets 	6 5
184 Brigade Navy Coast Guard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antisubmarine small ships • Marine minelayer • base mines 	3 3 2
Marine infantry - rockets and coastal artillery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 Indep. Artillery Brigaded Artillery and Missiles • 810 Marine Infantry Brigade • 382 Battalion Infantry Brigade 	1 Bg.
Naval Air Forces of the Russian Black Sea Fleet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 Regiment Ind. antisubmarine Helicopters • 917 Regiment Ind. Mixt • Squadron 43 Ind. Assaults aircrafts 	

sis of the security problems, mostly military. Firstly, *we observe a high concentration of armed forces in Crimea and around it.* After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to the Russian Federation, the factors guiding the Kremlin have given special attention to increasing the forces and military assets in the peninsula and the districts neighboring the areas of conflict in eastern Ukraine. In fact, after the annexation of Crimea to the Russian Federation, an extensive process of reorganization of the armed forces in this territory has begun, including, on the one hand, the modernization of the Russian forces in this territory and the integration of the Ukrainian forces remaining in the facilities on the territory of Crimea, and, on the other hand, bringing other forces from Russia and equipping them with more effective means.

If before the annexation, the Russian Federation had five ship brigades deployed in Crimea and two air bases in the composition of the Russian Fleet in the Black Sea, the Russian Black Sea Fleet now has one surface ship division, one submarine brigade, four warship brigades and one

on Crimea. The general weaponry and equipment of the Russian Armed Forces has been improved, measures to increase the capacity production of the components of the Russian military industrial complex have been created, involving also the private industrial enterprises of the Russian economy. According to Global Fire Power, the active manpower of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation has increased by 32,000 people from 766,055 in 2016 to 798,527 in 2017 and there are significant increases in some categories of weapons. For example, as compared to 2016, the Russian army has, in 2017, 4,818 more battle tanks, 220 more planes of which 55 more attack aircraft and 3 more submarines. Further details are to be found in the table below.

The extended complexity of the geopolitical and strategic interests of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea region obliges to a partial analy-

battalion of various types (see table below). In this situation, there is a big question about the 7 submarines currently existing in the Russian Black Sea Fleet, about which nothing has been known either immediately after the annexation of Crimea or later. The conclusion is that these submarines were brought later.

Apart from the forces in Crimea, the Russian Black Sea Fleet has forces in port Novorossiysk (in Russia), of which the most important is Brigade 184 Coastal Defense, composed of Division 181 Anti-Submarine Ships (three small anti-submarine ships) and Division 170 Minelayer (3 marine minelayer and 2 base minelayer).

Quantitatively comparing the forces at the two moments, we undoubtedly conclude that the Russian Federation has deployed forces from other military districts in the region and has focused much of its budgetary efforts to equip and

prepare the forces in the Black Sea. The Geostrategic Pulse has analyzed this problem and more details on the situation at the time have been presented in issue 216 of 20 June 2016.

An analysis carried out by the **Center for International Maritime Security - CIMSEC** - entitled "*Russia's Black Sea Fleet Build-up and Modernization*" (Alex Schneider, 28 March 2017) on the current situation of the Russian military forces in the Black Sea region reveals the following:

- With the annexation of Crimea, the Russian Federation has provided increased security capabilities and a greater freedom of maneuver in the Black Sea region and the adjacent areas;

- The Forces of the Russian Black Sea Fleet stand, in 2017, for 21 percent of all the Russian ships and 10 percent of the Russian submarines;

- 90 percent of the Russian Black Sea Fleet forces are deployed in Crimea, while the strategic port of Sevastopol is home of 80 percent of the forces and the port of Feodosia is home of 9 percent of the total tonnage of the fleet;

- At the time of the publication, the Russian Black Sea Fleet included 45 war ships and seven submarines, which represent a consistent fighting force, sustained by numerous aviation, missile, marine and artillery coastal forces and an adequate logistics.

We must emphasize, however, that much of the existing ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet are of a considerable age, some being built in the years 1985-1990 or even earlier, with the exception of six submarines (of the seven), 3 frigates and two corvettes with missiles that were built between 2014-2016. Under these circumstances, it is expected that the modernization of the Russian Federation's Black Sea Fleet would continue with more force, which will require the special attention of the Kremlin decision makers and substantial economic and budgetary efforts.

This is clear in view of all the above, as well as from the perspective of the recent visits made by



Vladimir Putin semnează o fotografie a bombardierului nuclear TU - 160 M, pe timpul vizitei la fabrica constructoare (Reuters)

Russian President Vladimir Putin at various industrial and military institutions and of the measures ordered by him in the autumn of 2017. *The State Program (SAP) for Russia's Procurement of Arms in 2011-2020* earmarks that the Russian Black Sea Fleet has a budget of over 112 billion Euros for the purchase of 18 new fighters to upgrade facilities in Sevastopol and Novorossiysk naval bases, thus increasing the operational capacity of the Russian fleet. The program will be continued with another similar one for 2018-2025.

In this context, some current information refers to **building Russia's most powerful nuclear ballistic missile submarine; class Borei II, named Knyaz Vladimir**, which would be introduced into the Russian Navy in 2018. As compared to the submarines in this class, the new submarine will be equipped with four more rocket launchers; it will have improved acoustic means and a lower noise level along with other technical improvements. The submarine will be equipped with intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) *Bulava*, being able to have up to 20 such missiles. The Borei improved version will be able to launch 96-200 independent hypersonic combat warheads, each of 100-150 kilotons. The newest Russian class nuclear submarines Borei - A and Yasen - I will soon be "*invisible*" to NATO



signed for the landing of troops and weapons or for the transport and landing of logistic elements required in operations. According to a material signed by Alex Gorka - *More Military More Sanctions Please*, 5^o December 2017 - this ship has already sailed in the Baltic Sea on 30 November 2017. The ship has a displacement of 6,600 tons, it can carry up to 13 heavy battle tanks or 36 armored personnel carriers and 300 marines and it can navigate up to 4,000 km. Instead of forces and means, the ship can carry 1,500

sonar submarines, anti-submarine ships and aircraft, shows Mikhail Klikushin (observer.com, 9 June 2017), citing the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*. This feature of the future submarine is based on the new systems and equipment and, most importantly, on the new pumps with extremely low noise used for circulating the liquid cooling the reactor systems and the submarine equipment used to fill with water the launching tubes of the missiles before launching.

Also, **the Russian Federation plans to produce a new supersonic strategic bomber aircraft** to be used by the Russian nuclear forces. According to Reuters (25 January 2018), it is the TU-160M, whose contract was signed in January 2018, including 10 nuclear bombers TU-160M (NATO code - Blackjacks), worth 15 billion rubles (269 million dollars) to be delivered by 2027. This aircraft can be equipped with 12 cruise missiles or 12 short range nuclear missiles, but the bomber has a range of 12,000 km (7,500 mile) without any air fueling. It is possible that the existing version of the TU - 160 bomber has already flown from the Russian bases to Syria for the bombing of the forces opposing the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, apparently without having the flight detected by the means of research of the other countries.

Another ambition of the Russian Federation refers to increasing the transport and assault capacity by sea, by introducing **high capacity, multi-purpose ships** into its fleet. Specifically, it is about *Ivan Gren ship (Project 11711) de-*

tons of cargo. The original plan provided for the creation of six such ships, but it was dropped in favor of the construction of two new ships. A new version of this ship, with a total displacement of 14,000-16,000 tons, which could carry 500-600 marines, could be built in 2018. Both variants are equipped with different defense weapons: portable land-to-air missile systems (SAM), multiple rocket systems, a naval gun of 76 mm (AK-176), two 14.5 mm heavy machine guns. The ship has a helicopter deck-arrestor capacity and a hangar for two transport and assault helicopters. Given the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Black Sea, it is possible that one of these multifunctional vessels would be assigned to the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Of course there are many aspects that support the trend of increasing the fighting capacity and modernizing the combat capabilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. On the medium and long term, the missions of this fleet will probably not change drastically and they will be supported by the completion of the *State Program (SAP) for Russia's Procurement of Arms in 2011-2020* (SAP-2020) and its sequel SAP - 2025, which provides for the continuous growth and modernization trend of the combat capabilities of the fleet.

The main efforts of the Russian Federation will continue to focus, probably on the Black Sea region, which includes key geopolitical and geostrategic interests. The study of the *Center for International Maritime Security – CIMSEC*, men-

tioned above, shows that **the main missions of the Russian Black Sea Fleet** consist of "protecting Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Black Sea, the security of shipping and maritime communications, the military and political control in the region, the promotion and protection of economic and security interests of Russia in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and in the adjacent zones, the support of other Russian fleet operating in the Mediterranean Sea and the continuance of military domination in view of the threat coming from the US and NATO in the Black Sea". This position of the Russian Federation reveals Russia's intention to be more active internationally, anywhere on the seas and oceans of the globe, which will be a new challenge for the US and its NATO allies and may create potential animosity between Russia and them. At the same time, it is more and more likely that the Russian Federation would

act as a security partner of the Alliance in operations against regional and trans-regional threats such as terrorism, trafficking or any kind or piracy.



The Russian Federation has certainly become a significant player in the global security equation, especially in the Black Sea region. The opinions issued after the disappearance of the Soviet empire by the Western governments concerning Russia's fall from the forefront of international relations have not become true, although there has been a significant rebound immediately after the events of 1990-1991. Russia continuously strives to regain the role previously played and, as it seems, is about to see its plan realized. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation is a global security player that can influence the balance of international security at the expense of world and regional peace, the interests of neighboring countries, especially in the Black Sea region and of the US, NATO and the EU as global security players.

Munich Security Conference - 2018



Paul SĂNDULESCU

Munich Security Conference (MSC) just ended.

It is promoted with a lot of pumps every year, just like the Davos Economic Forum - yet the Munich Conference is really the largest international conference on security issues, gathering about 600 political, diplomatic, military, scientific, business and social VIPs from 70 countries - but does it justify the expectations and even its existence? Let's make a brief presentation and draw the conclusions at the end. Or let them draw themselves.

The MSC origins are in Germany in 1963, when the world was polarized by the two military blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Treaty, and a new, devastating global conflict - because it would certainly had been nuclear - was looming. The MSC initiator was Ewald-Heinrich von Kleist-Schmenzin (publisher, former officer in the Wehrmacht but actively involved in the resistance against Adolf Hitler), and the stated purpose of organizing the conference was to prevent another such conflict. That has been transposed into the highly devoid of substance, but preserved to this day, motto: "Peace through Dialog". The first conference was named Internationale Wehrkundebegegnung/Münchener Wehrkundetagung and attended by about 60 people.

In the beginning and during the first decade, the participation was limited to representatives of the defense ministries of the NATO member countries. That is why it was often dubbed the "transatlantic family meeting". The then debates focused on common Western geopolitics during the Cold War, but they were often heated. Just like now.

With the end of the Cold War - but I think the



opponent, the conflict perpetuates indefinitely, with massive losses on all levels and for all the parties involved, and there is also the prospect of escalation by attracting other actors. See Syria. So, the way to prevent and especially to resolve any conflict is just the dialogue that allows negotiation. The existence of communication channels is imperative. If for

Cold War did never stop, but came into a state of latency, which put aside the vigilance of the Western liberal post-modernists, allowing them to focus on completely different agendas; but because it is "trendy" to be "politically correct", and to simplify things, let's use this term - so with the end of the Cold War both Ewald von Kleist (founder of the conference) and Horst Teltschik (his successor at the presidency) decided to invite representatives of countries that had not previously been part of the Western camp, namely Central and Eastern Europe, and even the Russian Federation. Perhaps that was in the idea of the EU and NATO enlargements. Over the years, the MSC was opened even more to representatives and personalities of significant countries in the world arena.

In the illusory hope that bringing opponents to the same table will lead them to a common denominator that would eliminate the insecurity - a desideratum that has never been accomplished, mainly because the interests of the great powers do not coincide, certain moments of calm just masking the latency of tensions - so, with the widening of the circle the Western common front of coincidence of the primary objectives was lost. Today, at the Conference, Russia, China, Brazil, India and the Middle East countries also participate beside the NATO and EU member countries.

Let it be very clear: conflicting objectives exist and will continue to exist. When these become acute and the negotiation paths are exhausted, if there is no strong external deterrent, it leads invariably to conflict. But there must always be ways of communication, both in the latency phase and during the open conflict. In the absence of these and of the pressures, provided one of the parties does not radically defeat the

some political reasons they are not maintained between the conflicting parties, they are searched for and reopened if necessary through the established institutional paths. So, in my opinion, the Munich Security Conference is a big political bubble, quite similar to a financial bubble: too much trust in its possibilities can lead to disastrous results.

For a very long time, the post-modernist Western intelligentsia is self-inducing, not taking things as they are (so not working with reality), but thinking that they are and evolve as it want them to be. Some of its current direct consequences? The lack of EU significance in the region's policy, the loss of confidence by its own populations, the creation of the Islamic Caliphate, the invasion of the Muslim migrants over Europe, Brexit, Russia's aggression on Europe and its advance in the Middle East.

The constant growth of the world's population is a certain and palpable fact. But the post-modernist ideal of "unity in diversity" in the perspective of a centralized world governance is utopia. Or to say it more frankly, but less "politically correct," it's a historically big stupid thing. Perhaps under certain ideal conditions, or even less than ideal, in a longer term, this desideratum could have been achieved and people could have been living in mutual tolerance. Maybe... But the existence of Islam makes this impossible. Because of the religious-ideological doctrine of this radical belief, the universal peace and "unity in diversity" can be achieved only after the whole world is Muslim. So, in perspective, only this "unity in diversity" can be possible.

All countries - and here I am thinking in particular of the great powers - have their objectives

clearly defined, and they pursue with great perseverance their fulfillment. The plans are made for long periods of time, and benefits of immense resources. They dispose of diplomatic channels for negotiation and a whole international institutional structure, headed by the United Nations. To believe that the states goals can be changed following a simple meeting at a private / independent conference is a huge naivety. Besides, none of the Munich Security Conferences have had a concrete outcome. And this year's even less than that.

The motto of the MSC 2018 Preliminary Report was *"To the Brink - and Back?"* because the organizers correctly identified the main threats to the international security: the tensions between the US and North Korea, those between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the instability in the Middle East, the tensions between NATO and Russia, the conflict in Ukraine, the Chinese expansion in the South China Sea, the risk of unraveling the INF Treaty and other arms control treaties, the risk of cyber war, the continuing threat coming from the jihadist Islamists. The answer to the question came from the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle at the end of the conference, also in the form of a question: *"Munich Security Conference – the end of diplomacy?"* Starting from the idea that the MSC traditionally reflects the current state of the world and the finding that this year's event has been marked by reciprocal recriminations, that is the exact opposite of collaboration or at least the freezing of disputes, can we conclude that we might be one step away from a major conflict? Certainly, we are in complete uncertainty.

Deutsche Welle unreservedly concluded that after three days of contradictory, isolated and irreconcilable statements, one thing seems very clear: all clues converge to a controversial sequel, and that diplomacy has come to an end. This was most apparent on the final day of the MSC, when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and Saudi Foreign Minister Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir exchanged reciprocal recriminations. And as Wolfgang Ischinger, the MSC president, said that the official conference is just the "tip of an iceberg", one can realize what lies in the deep!

More than 30 heads of the states and governments and more than 100 foreign and defense ministers attended this year's Munich Security Conference. Particularly, Jean Claude Juncker - President of the European Commission, Antonio Guterres - Secretary-General of the United Nations, Theresa May - British Prime Minister, Sebastian Kurz - Chancellor of Austria, Benjamin Netanyahu - Israeli Prime Minister, Petro Poroshenko - Ukrainian President, Mark Rutte - Dutch Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki - Polish Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi - Iraqi Prime Minister.

Ministerial level was attended by James Mattis - US Secretary of Defense, Herbert McMaster - National Security Advisor, John Sullivan - US Deputy Secretary of State, Dan Coats - Director of National Intelligence, Jens Stoltenberg - NATO Secretary General, Federica Mogherini - High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security, Sergei Lavrov - the Russian Foreign Minister. The Russian delegation was



the largest this year.

There were more than 30 panels and over 1,000 bilateral discussions. The focus was on the future of the EU's foreign and defense policy, the state of transatlantic relations, the threats to the international (post-modernist) liberal order, the political situation in the Middle East, the threat of Islamic jihadism, and the arms control.

So, serious participation and serious concerns!

The conclusion

Tangible Results of the Munich Security Conference? Zero.

Will the great powers and the regional powers change their geo-strategic goals as a result of the talks there? Not.

Will the world be more secure this year? Not.

As a result, the Munich Security Conference is rather a posh platform for mutual recriminations and statements. More interesting and especially significant, was that of Angela Merkel's deputy, Sigmar Gabriel, revealing that Germany will refuse to increase its defense spending to the 2% of its GDP, NATO's defence spending target, relying instead on the EU's common defense. Hmmmmm ... What common defense? Which European Union?

And that is while the uncertainties and risks are growing in the immediate vicinity of the European Union, and Russia is rising its military spending.

We are waiting for the final report of the Munich Security Conference in 2018, too. I do not think it will be necessary to change anything written above.



Did the Kremlin's trolls vanish?

**Nicolae ȚIBRIGAN*

A few days ago, on the site of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a think-tank, an analysis was published under the signature of Corina Rebegea (fellow-in-residence) on the evanescence of the pro-Kremlin trolls from Romanian language Facebook and their migration to alternative social media – VK (VKontakte). "That seems to be part of a wider migration from Facebook to VK at the global scale by different extreme-right, nationalist and anti-Western groups", the analysis mentions and that made me wonder "Did the pro-Kremlin trolls vanish from Facebook?", paraphrasing the well-known Romanian historian. And if yes, since when did they start to vanish? Why? What happened with them after emigrating on VK? etc. These are but a few questions I try to find plausible answers to.

The favourite troll

I don't know if you did, but I did find the favourite troll. He is one of the multitude of anonymous self-intoxicated fellows on Facebook and

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Alexe Fedot shared his post to the group: NU VREM SA LUPTAM IMPOTRIVA RUSILOR!
August 5, 2017 · [icon]

CITESTE CU ATENTIE PANA LA CAPAT. SUA si NATO provoacă deliberat Rusia pentru a declanşa Al III-lea Război Mondial care in anumite linii deja a inceput

AKTUALNEWS.RO

Este dincolo de orice indoială că, **RUSIA VREA RĂZBOI !**



Uite ce aproape și-au pus țara lor, de bazele militare americane

Alexe Fedot's post on WE DO NOT WANT TO FIGHT AGAINST THE RUSSIANS

Source: Facebook

... along with the aggressive language, with xenophobic and anti-Semitic narratives had thrown Fedot to the garbage can of Facebook. For avoiding numerous locks offs he received from other users, our troll begun to use "print screen technique". More precisely, any of his posting reported and locked by Facebook was replicated in print screen and posted again as image accompanied this time by links to other posts and articles on Sputnik.md, RT, ActiveNews.ro, Nationalisti.ro etc.

If, at the beginning, Fedot's new tactics was paying off, everything ended when the algorithm combatting hate speech was set on Facebook. Practically, the algorithm identified key-words that "do not observe the community standard" applied by Facebook and the posting/account was to be locked until further checks.

The new algorithm blew the pro-Kremlin's trolls and posters in Romania off, especially Alexe Fedot who was complaining on his page he was locked off for using opprobrious terms against Jews.

calls himself Alexe Fedot (sometimes also Алексей Федотов). We can't know too much of him except he is residing near Moscow (he would be delighted) and uses the account alexe.fedot@yandex.ru to log in and roll his lies, disinformation and ridiculous memes on social media.

What did Fedot do? He "emigrated" on VK network under the same name – Alexe Fedot. Even if he has there a smaller number of friends (around 120) as compared to 1278 on Facebook, Fedot is free there to wage insulting campaigns against Jews, masons and the "New World Order" because he can do this and VK is a kind of

His favourite topics gravitate around some "made-up fake truths": the European states are controlled by international Zionism, WWII is inevitable, Russia will be invaded by the "lords of the world", Putin does nothing but defends himself, Russia – a barrier against the American expansionism and globalism etc.

All this simplistic and lapsed logic: "The evil empire" (USA) vs. "The anti-masonic Russia" (personified by Putin),



Alexe Fedot's vision on the USA (Barack Obama) and Russia (Putin)

Source: Facebook



Alex Balan

Unii stau blocati 30 de zile la Fb dar nu vor sa faca cont la Vk din cauza ca-i rusesesc, ce debili, prefera cenzura jidoveasca decat libertatea oferita de aceasta retea



Mihai Fandel

In ultima vreme FB parca este facut special pentru a-ti toca nervii si rabdarea. S-a instituit un nou nivel de cenzura, cu mult mai parsiv decat tot ce fusese pana acum.

Examples of comments on VK encouraged by the promoters of the pro-Kremlin disinformation
 Source: VK

"Wild East" of social media platforms. The issue is that his postings have now an insignificant impact.

There Fedot complains whenever he is reported and "feeds" his Facebook account with different memes created by his "peers" or even directly by the Kremlin's propaganda labs.

VK - the "container" where trolls and information garbage are kept alive

The "pro-Kremlin trolls' revolt" was announced in October 2017 on the very Sputnik.md propaganda site, when more and more users locked on Facebook could discharge freely on VK any type of frustrations, some of them defying even common sense and elementary logic. Everything on behalf of "freedom of expression" and against the "open society" (although I doubt any of them ever read even a page of "The Open Society and its Enemies" by Karl Popper).

They are complaining Facebook would be under CIA's and the Romanian Intelligence Service's control and that the only solution would be a "mass-migration" of all users who want to "chat" freely on VK without ever mentioning the

possible control of this network by Russian intelligence services.

"Welcome on our street" seem to say Putin's little green men interested to monitor the Romanian "rebels" and their chat groups on VK. The latter are so naive they seem to neglect all controversial reports on this social platform: from the non-observance of property rights (hacked films, documentaries and music), coordinating DDoS cyber attacks to offering the Russian government direct control. VK past is as controversial as the founder's, Pavel Durov - FSB man.

According to a new decree, the Kremlin forbids VK to reveal any collaboration with the secret services and obliges the social platforms (Telegram, VK and other) to offer distance access. The decree forbids as well, in the framework of such operations, using software and programs that are nor found on the territory of the Russian Federation.

What you should know when opening an account on VK is that you are exposing yourself to unimaginable hazards. All your personal data will be stored in the servers accessible directly by Putin's men. Then, you should not complain that your computer or your smartphone were hacked.

The Kremlin's tactics

What have the pro-Kremlin's trolls yeasted in VK's "containers" propose themselves? Nothing but to "charge their batteries" and to "feed" their recently unlocked FB accounts with disinformation content according to rules learned on VK. The advantage for trolls is that the new platform connects them directly with the "Kremlin's mechanisms" and learn thus directly from the source new techniques and propaganda narratives. Some of them may be "recruited" online from there also in order to launch support, diss-



information or propaganda campaigns in Romanian language for the public in Romania and/or Republic of Moldova.

For the time being, we cannot specify an approximate number of VK Romanian-speaking users. Even if data on Alexa suggest that VK is the most accessed social platform in Russia (it outclasses Odnoklassniki) and ranks 14th globally in terms of traffic (of Top 500 sites) with 460 million accounts, the computation algorithms are different and they are, under the circumstances, irrelevant.

In the Black Sea region, VK lost popularity mostly in Ukraine (after the Russian social media were banned in the framework of economic sanctions), in R. of Moldova and Estonia, where VK is ranked 4th, in Romania and Latvia - 5th and Lithuania - 7th. In Germany and the United States, VK is ranked 9th and, respectively, 96th.

The users in Romania would represent approximately 1.4% of the total, meaning nominally 6.4 million accounts - a controversial figure considering that on a simple search on VK one can't identify more than 2,500 - 3,000 accounts in Romania and many of their owners are not Russian-speaking persons. Moreover, the existence in Romania of millions of accounts is quite impossible as this site is not ranked among top 50 most visited sites of the Romanian internauts.

Instead of conclusions...

The pro-Kremlin trolls in Romania and the so-

called "convinced users" (or the "useful idiots") are not vanishing as a result of repeated locks off on Facebook. They are cloning their accounts on alternative networks such as VK. If you have a preferred troll who became rather "inactive" lately, do not get desperate. Most probably you'll find him angered on VK. That's how I discovered Alexe Fedot, Beatrice McCartney and others. I do not believe they all gathered in an "center of excellence" in trolling or that they are preparing a special „vendetta” of the Kremlin and of the angry trolls. Things are much simpler than that.

If we read between the lines all the reasons for which the trolls and the convinced "migrated" temporarily on VK, we will find out regrets and resentments only. Their "revolt" looks rather a self-isolation from an "ocean" (FB) with practically inexhaustible resources to a "Russian fish bowl" with small fish inside which offers you the possibility to either cast the fishing line whenever you want or to use the dynamite. The result will be bellow any expectations: up to 10 likes and around 100 friends who share the same ideas anyway. "On VKontakte I met people who still want to think with the heads they have and who still rise the flag of COMMON SENSE and NORMALITY! WHAT COULD BE MORE WONDERFUL?", posted the troll Cristy Mc in a propagandistic material on Sputnik. Let's not forget that their "normality" on FB was to instigate hatred, to send xenophobic, anti-Semitic and even racist memes or to roll propagandistic materials. Now



they have this right on VK yet they lost their fans. What will they choose in the end?

For each of them the accounts on FB remained a "paradise" they were expelled from, but this does not mean they will not come back.

It is not their "conservation" on VK we should be worried about but about their capacity of

coming back on FB under new nicknames with new pro-Kremlin propagandistic materials and disinformation coming directly "from the source". We should be worried about Deepfake and not of pro-Kremlin trolls' vanishing. It is for us to see.

Untill then, wait for them, for serial killers will always return to the scene of the crime.





Military Technology and Equipments, New Weapon Devices

The French Scorpion Project



The basic individual weapon was the assault rifle of Saint-Etienne Arms Manufacturer (FAMAS - Fusil d'Assault de la Manufacture d'Armes de Saint-Etienne), GIAT F-1 model, caliber 5.56 mm, or GIAT F2 caliber 7.62 mm. Saint-Etienne Arms Manufacturer closed in 2002 after having manufactured more than 400,000 weapons, that are now in stock or used by the National Guard and police units.

In 2014, the French Defense Ministry organised a tendering for 90,000 shotguns and rifles for equipping the French Army and, in August 2016, it announced that HK416F rifle was selected and that 16,000 of them will be bought every year to replace FAMAS and that the total number of Koch HK416F rifles (F - the French version) to be bought will be between 90,000 and 102,000.

The French Scorpion Project began even earlier than the other Scorpion projects in the USA, Germany and the United Kingdom, namely in 1996 when a contract between the Directorate General for Armaments (DGA) and Thomson Company (presently Thales) for a new equipment called, at the time, fighting and landing equipment which "will offer the military an improved fighting capacity, was concluded.

The weapons have day and night vision devices with the digital capacity of transmitting in real time the visualised targets by means of the communications network. The video system allows the military to see and shoot "round the corner".

The system was tested during two years and after that, in 2001, DGA invited Sage, GIAT and Thales companies to take part in this project and, in 2004, Sagem, the selected company, was awarded the contract for the system called feline 1, weighting 24 kilos and including individual weaponry, ammunitions, energy source for 24 hours, foodstuff, water and other supplies. Every soldier would be equipped with radio (voice and data)/GPS while the feline system includes also a portable computer, fighting attire, ballistic helmet with two sighting eyepieces, optronic system with light enhancing device, camera and two LED screens of 3 cm² each and the supporting strap is equipped with osteophone (an electro-acoustical system transmitting the external sounds to the inner ear through the head's osseous system).

The Scorpion Project includes as well developing and manufacturing armoured transport vehicles and armoured cars for reconnaissance and infantry, such as:

- Griffon VBMR (Multi-Role Armoured Cars);
- Jaguar EBRC, vehicle for reconnaissance and search.

In the framework of the Scorpion project, the French Army will receive, during 2018-2025, 1,722 Griffon carriers and 248 fighting vehicles Jaguar EBRC, the first one in 2020 and another 125 vehicles until 2025.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA

The German Scorpion Project



Even since the end of the Cold War, the tasks of the German Army (Bundeswehr) changed from mere defending the state territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and of the allied states to international missions, with or without a UN mandate.

The German Scorpion Project, called *Infanterist der Zukunft- IDZ* (The Foot Soldier of the Future), is the German modernisation programme for infantry and is meant to improve the individual fighting equipment of the Bundeswehr's infantry. Rheinmetall Bremen, a defense manufacturer, is in charge with the overall system of the producers of equipment for the project of the future infantry and, since 2012, the system, known under the name "Gladius" (sword, in Latin), aims at military operations, peace-keeping and humanitarian operations, irrespective of the ground and zone conditions. With this system, the German infantry is able to successfully resist the threats presented by symmetric or asymmetric warfare and to confront the challenges when it operates in rough or urban terrain, darkness, poor visibility or unusual climatic conditions.

The system is a modular one and its individual components are devised so that the infantry team (group) be equipped to reach performance

standards when achieving different operational tasks, to have a reduced volume and weight, with a small energy consumption and be flexible and adaptable to mission's situations and demands.

The equipment is brown-coloured and offers level 1 ballistic protection which can be upgraded to level 4, the military has a Zeiss Zo 4x30 binocular with optical vision, Zeiss 600 with thermal vision, fire control unit while other systems relate to the possibility of receiving information about the individual task of the team's members, exchange of data within the basic structure and with the next level of command while "Artificial Intelligence" is made up of: Squad

radio (simultaneous data and voice system), computer, two Li-ion batteries (able to carry on 24 hours, i.e. a fighting day), GPS receiver, digital magnetic compass, monocular Vision 2ST headset, communication headsets with noise protection functions, enhanced night vision goggles and a module for thermal image and positioning display. The soldier's individual radio station has a three-faced communication processor so that the voice is relayed in duplex and the members of the team can speak and listen simultaneously. On the 800x600 pixels OLED display, information on the situation is received through tactical symbols on maps, sketches, aerial or photo images. The team's members are permanently marked on a map.

The team's or group's head has a VHF radio and a portable computer. The team's vehicle permits them the integration in network operations through the vehicle's link.

The individual's weapon is the assault rifle AG 36 A2 caliber 5.56 mm and a team (group) made up of ten military has a machine-gun MG4, caliber 5.56 mm, a Geanina 12.7 mm handgun and a Panzerfaust 3 weapon.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA

Leading Articles, Studies and New Analyses

Romania –

A Subject or an Object of Geopolitics?**“Severin’s List” for Everyone****Author: Adrian SEVERIN****Publisher: Compania**

Referring to this book, the author wrote in the “Foreword”. *“By re-reading what I have written along the years, I have selected a total of sixty-seven texts and tried to arrange them by topic in a unitary body. On this occasion I noticed that some analyses required further explanation. Also, certain theses, that have been exposed briefly at the time of writing, needed development, additions required by the course of events, adding notes on complementary themes, further events, the continuity of already confirmed and finally exhausted forecasts. I started working beyond the concrete happenings, looking for the constants of historical significance and the development of original texts by glosses or additional writing. Suddenly, in front of me there was an image that I was not initially aware of – I may have vaguely guessed it. It was the perfectly articulated program of the destruction of a nation – the Romanian nation. A nation too big in a world so “small”. Intentionally or not, the West and the East had in fact joined hands to transform Romania from a subject of geopolitics into an object and, consequently, from a subject into an object of history”.*

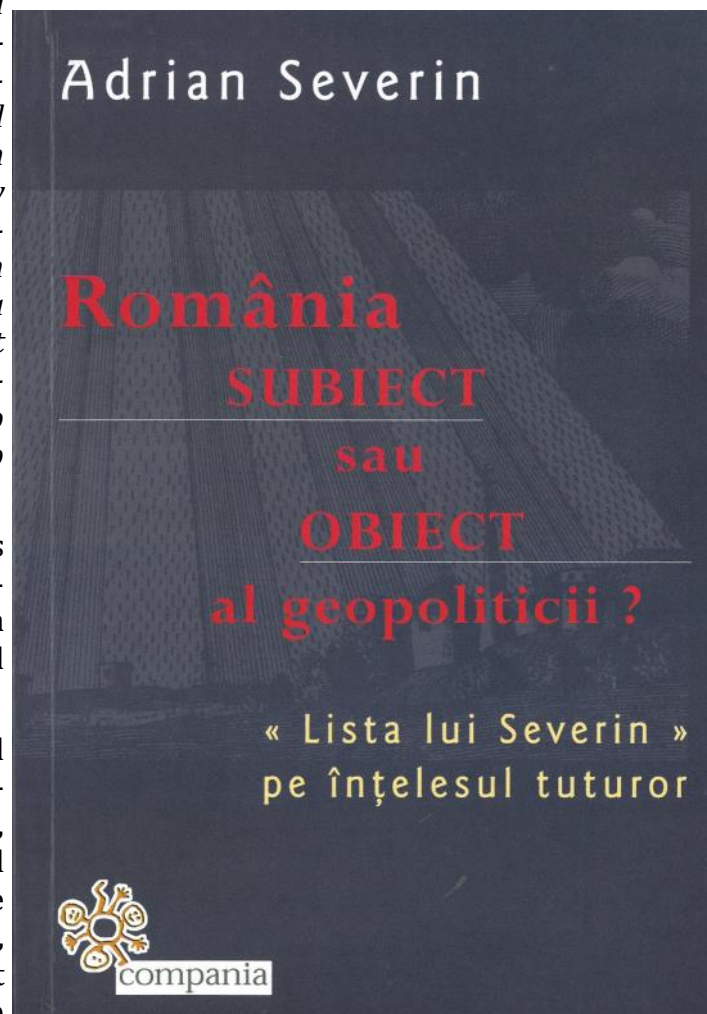
With persuasive examples, the book illustrates how the West has transformed Romania by using a mechanism in which hegemony imposes a political plan by means of Romanian political top structures and NGOs.

“Romania today is not (anymore) a national democracy, but a neo-feudal order, which divided the country between a number of barons, oligarchs or groups of local interests and turned citizens into serfs, the subjects of some powerful rulers. The powerful rulers, in turn, have accepted or even sought for the corrupt arbitration and corrupt central leadership

formed by the “kings without a country”. With regard to the latter, in order to maintain status and perpetuate the system of privileges guaranteed by it, they “have given away” the territory over which they rule (but which they do not govern) to the foreigners, namely the new European and Euro-Atlantic empires. The foreign protection (obviously generously compensated by giving statehood attributes, but also directly affect the strategic control of assets resources) is designed to deter or counteract the internal appeals.

In such a context and in such circumstances, the nation has become a territory, the people - a population, the state - a colony, the citizen - a serf and democracy - an impostor” - says the author!

Presented by Cornel VAIDA



The 2017 SIPRI YEARBOOK

Armament, disarmament and international security

The SIPRI Yearbook analyzes developments in the fields of armaments, disarmament and international security in 2016, while the Annexes contain issues relating to the implementation of agreements on the verification of armaments, disarmament and a timeline of events during 2016 in security and control of arms, expenditure, international arms transfers, arms production, nuclear forces and armed conflict.

The SIPRI Yearbook was first issued in 1969 and it got to its 48th edition.

2016 is considered a breakthrough year, which could make a significant change in the nuclear deterrence and nuclear disarmament negotiations. A major achievement is considered to be the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a resolution leading to the elimination of nuclear weapons, a resolution based on a report put together by a working group created for this purpose, which recommended convening an international conference to which all countries could participate, in order to begin negotiations on the mandatory legal banning of nuclear weapons, which could ultimately lead to their elimination.

The General Assembly also voted for the establishment of a high level group to meet in Geneva for two sessions, each of two weeks, the first in 2017 and the second in 2018, debating and making recommendations on key elements of the future nondiscriminatory, multilateral, internationally efficient treaty banning the production of fissile material for weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

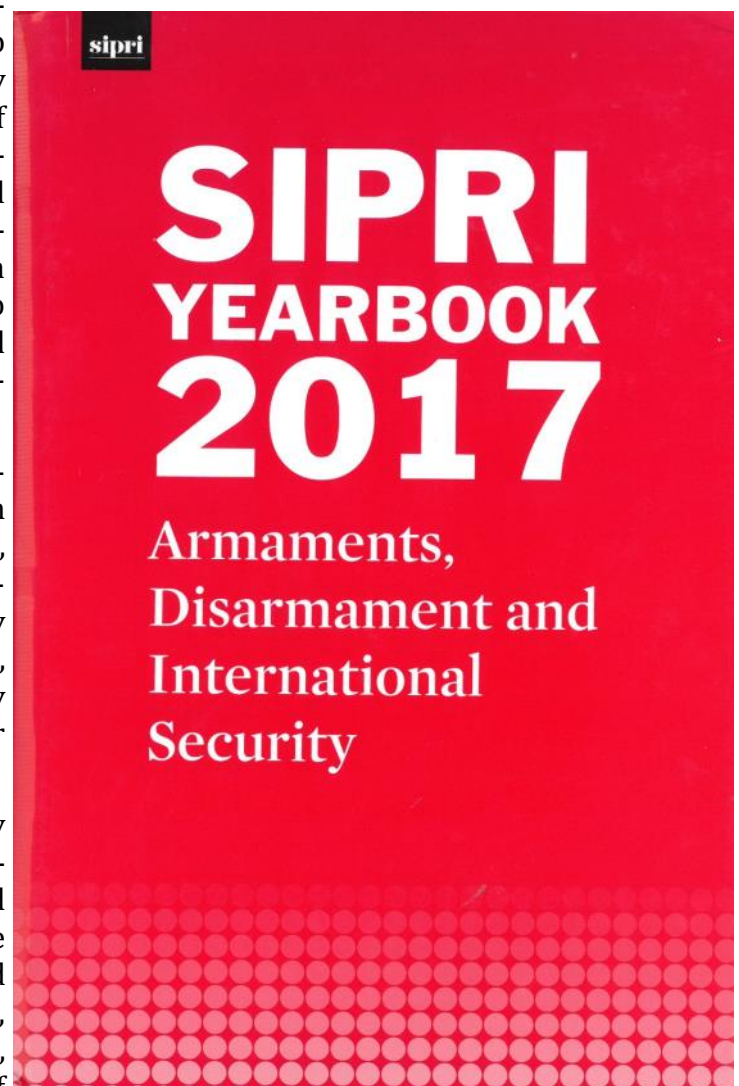
Another important issue considered by SIPRI 2017 refers to the international security, seen from the perspective of the forced displacement of the population. In 2016, the forced displacement of population continued to be a major challenge for human security, especially in Africa and the Middle East, which together host more than two thirds of

the world displaced population, so that in recent years the number of people forcibly displaced has reached over 60 million, the main reason for this crisis in displacement being the armed conflicts.

The SIPRI Yearbook also refers to the new framework for sustainable development and peacekeeping and the authors consider that although the concept of conflict prevention remains an aspiration, several developments in 2016 can be seen as safe investments to support efforts for peace and to implement ways for peace.

SIPRI 2017 analyzes also some of the emerging issues of global security, such as the role of women in peace and security and the links between climate change and violent conflict.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA





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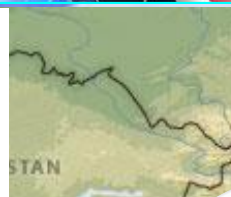
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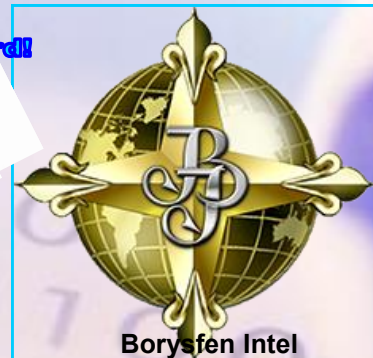
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