

GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

BILINGUAL PUBLICATION OF GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS

Motto: "OPINIONS ARE FREE, BUT NOT MANDATORY" I. L. CARAGIALE

The Transatlantic Link - Current and Future Significance

Asymmetric Responses to Russian Hybrid Threats

The Black Sea: An Essential Geostrategic Chessboard

The "Serbia" Case and Its Influence on the Security Paradigm in the South-East of Europe

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

EDITORIAL

The Eastern Partnership, Ten Years Later

Constantin IACOBITĂ



On the 14th of May 2019 the European Parliament hosted a high level conference dedicated to the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

The hosts (European Commission) aimed for a very diverse participation so they invited high officials, experts, and representatives of the civil society from both the European Union (EU) and the six countries in the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

Relevant speeches were delivered as follows:

- from the European Union: Jean Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission (EC); Teodor Melescanu, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs (as Romania holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union); Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission; Johannes Hahn, European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations; Cecilia Malmstrom, European Commissioner for Trade; and the ministers of foreign affairs from Poland, Sweden, Lithuania, and Finland;

- from the Eastern Partnership: Petro Poroshenko, the former Ukrainian President; Elmar Mammadyarov, Azerbaijan's Minister of Foreign Affairs; Vladimir Makei, Belarus' Minister of Foreign Affairs; Mamuka Bakhtadze, the Georgian Prime Minister; Pavel Filip, the Moldovan Prime Minister; and Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs;

- from the European business community and from the Eastern Partnership countries' civil society: Maurice Beckhand Verwee (founder of Crossspring B.V.) and Hennadiy Mas-kak, the "National Platform Civil Society Forum of Ukraine".

Some of the persons mentioned above answered questions asked by the two mediators – a representative of the EC in the first panel, dedicated to Partnership achievements and challenges, and a representative of the European Parliament in the second panel, dedicated to the EaP's future - and the audience.

The official speeches, both from EU and represented nations, followed the event's general framework – celebrating 10 years of partnership between the EU and the six countries by emphasizing achievements and successes. They also included references to some of the major challenges from each of the two side's perspective, as well as to the main expectations – European and national.

The discussions that followed proved to be more candid, probably - among other - due to the fact that the (foreign affairs) Ministerial taking place the day before at the EC headquarters had successfully "covered a lot of ground".

Relevant aspects of the event:

1. The speeches and discussions revealed significant consensus, and the following were

emphasized: the importance of the EPa – from the beginning to date; the effort that involved bringing the EaP countries closer to the EU and the other way around; the achievements and successes as far as economic and social development of the countries in the Partnership (trade, infrastructure, small and medium sized enterprises, education, free movement etc.) are concerned; the EU's commitment to continue the current assistance programmes, as well as to identify new programmes dedicated to the Partnership countries' development (infrastructure, including railroads, diversification of energy sources, energy independence, interconnection to the European area, national resilience etc.); the need to continue reforms at national level (governance, rule of law, democratic structures, business environment etc.).

2. Different opinions, views and expectations were also evident:

- While the EU sees the Partnership as ongoing, dedicated to development and to citizens (as underlined by Jean Claude-Junker), the EaP countries believe that one significant stage has successfully been accomplished and more is needed. Most national officials underlined the progresses achieved in the development and modernization of their countries, as well as their citizens' pro-EU views. More in detail:

➤ Ukraine is pushing for an "Association Agreement +" which involves the introduction of new principles and the establishment of four unions – energetic, digital, Schengen, and custom;

➤ Azerbaijan wants the process (of getting closer to the EU) to be irreversible, and to that end the country will focus on the free visa regime and on supplying natural gas to the European market (to Italy and Greece starting from 2020, then to the Balkans);

➤ Georgia promotes a new "grand idea" after 10 years of Partnership. EU's popularity among citizens (80% according to the Prime Minister), and the national contribution to the European security are being used as strong arguments in this regard. While the PM did not elaborate on the new "grand idea", representatives of the Georgian civil society later indicated that he was making reference to European integration;

➤ Moldova, considering itself on an intermediary stage on its way towards the EU and aware of the need to continue reforms, wishes the EaP to remain attractive. This involves, among other: moving forward from cooperation to cohesion, in the next five or six years; finding new development opportunities (with the support and cooperation of the EU); making security and resilience a priority (the Prime Minister welcomed the positive message given in this regard at the recent EU summit in Sibiu);

- Views and opinions based on geographical, geopolitical, regional and national contexts:

➤ Belarus wishes to stop being regarded as "buffer zone" between the Russian Federation and the EU, but as a "zone of stability and prosperity" and perceives difficulties in the process of negotiation of the Association Agreement (with the EU), as well as the free visa regime. While the minister of foreign affairs Vladimir Makei avoided to be more specific on the matter, latter discussions with one of Belarus' participants revealed that he was referring to Lithuania opposing these negotiations. The Lithuanian opposition was based on the decision of Belarus' authorities to build a nuclear power plant, viewed by the neighbouring country – an EU member – as a hazard.

➤ Armenia and Azerbaijan avoid to be open about the difficult problem in their bilateral relationship and keep on redirecting attention to collateral issues – the Azerbaijan’s minister of foreign affairs underlined the need for regional cooperation, while Armenia’s went a little further by admitting that there were different views on security (he was keen, though, to underline that these differences should not fuel divergence, but be approached based on commonalities).

- National officials agreed on the need to inform and educate the citizens from the EaP countries on the EU. Yet, this need was perceived differently by speakers and the most relevant insights were offered by the Moldovans and the Belarusians. On one hand, the Moldovan prime minister was explicit in expressing the need to educate the public (on EU); the Belarusian minister of foreign affairs, on the other hand only mentioned that the EU was becoming more and more popular in his country. A private conversation with a Belarus participant made it clear that Vladimir Makei was the only significant pro-European politician in Minsk and public references to EU on the national political stage were unusual;

- Lack of coordination between the six EaP countries and a desire to be treated separately also came up during the event. The Georgian prime minister favoured a “healthy competition” based on achievements/merits and the former Ukrainian president explicitly promoted an “Association Agreement +”.

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The recent elections for the European Parliament brought new reasons for optimism as far as the future of the Eastern Partnership is concerned. However, the elections also maintained and perhaps amplified some concerns.

Participation in the European elections was high, which proved the citizens’ attachment to the EU. The Union’s popularity was also reconfirmed by the elections results, which did not bring Euro-sceptics a significant increase in number of seats (in the European Parliament).

On the other hand, the pro-European parties were not able to strengthen their position enough to guarantee the stability of their current majority either (the “great coalition” comprising the two biggest parties in the European Parliament). That given, decisions regarding the future of the EU will be subject to negotiations and compromise between the two leading parties and others, such as the one led by the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orban.

To this increased division and fracturing one can add issues such as immigration and the so called national sovereignty, successfully exploited again by Nigel Farage in the UK – where his party won one third of the British seats in the European Parliament.

And all the above could reflect on the way the “European identity” is viewed – more integration within EU (especially if Brexit takes place), or more integration by enlargement?

EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY



The Transatlantic Link - Current and Future Significance

*Associate Prof. CEng PhD.
Gheorghe SAVU¹*

Part 1 – Challenges and Opportunities

The transatlantic link is a complex and dynamic concept that covers all aspects of the relations between North America and Europe: military, security, political, economic, social etc. Practically, every component of what we call international relations finds itself in the transatlantic link. This is the reason why this concept can only be understood if analyzed thoroughly, while focusing on all aspects involving the security and defence of the Euro-Atlantic area (often called the transatlantic region), as well as on the contribution of the transatlantic community to international peace and security.

Starting from his experience as a defence intelligence officer, to his five year service in Brussels as the Romanian Military Representative to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) and ending with his recent years' activity as an associate professor to several universities in Bucharest, the author intends to offer to readers of the Geostrategic Pulse a thorough approach of the current and future significance of the transatlantic link. The transatlantic link will be analysed from a defence and security perspective and taking into account the interests of North America, NATO, the EU and their Member States and partners, in a time when the Euro-Atlantic community must face the challenges of the new geostrategic context. The author proposes a series of four articles

that contain the following: 1) the transatlantic link – challenges and opportunities; 2) the significance of the transatlantic link to the European defence, especially as far as NATO is concerned; 3) the importance of the transatlantic link to ensuring European security, especially from the European Union standpoint; 4) the contribution of the US bilateral relationships with some NATO member states from Eastern European (Poland and Romania in particular) to reinforcing the relevance of the transatlantic link.

There are various interpretations of the domains and geographical coverage of the transatlantic link – from approaches limited to the US military contribution to NATO and size of American troops deployed in Europe, to approaches taking into consideration all forms of cooperation between the USA on one hand and NATO, the EU, and other states from the Euro-Atlantic community on the other hand. As far as this article is concerned, the transatlantic link is strictly limited to the Euro-Atlantic community comprising NATO and/or EU Member States, as well as European partner states (to the two organizations) - Switzerland and the Western Balkans (Picture 1). When referring to the transatlantic link's domains, the author will analyze the transatlantic defence and security and emphasize the importance of the political, defence and security evolutions on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

The author believes that, despite the many challenges it has to face, including the occasional rhetoric of some politicians from the Euro-Atlantic community, the transatlantic link has become more important than ever and its future should not be jeopardised neither from within,

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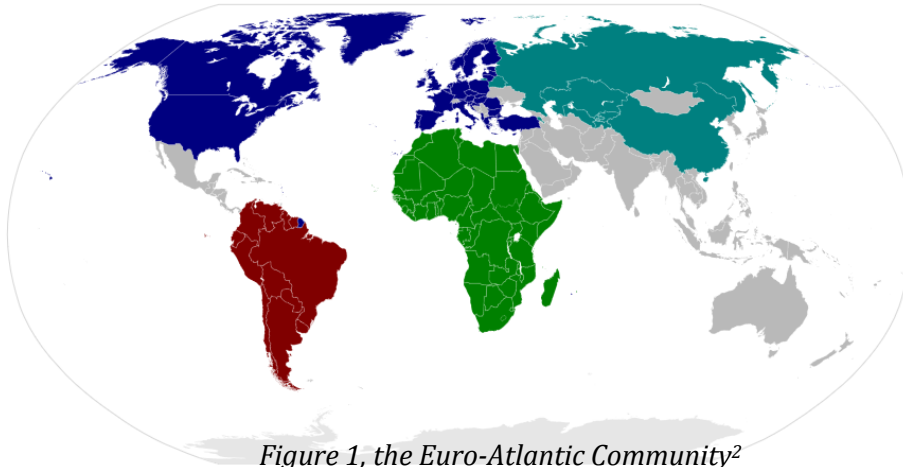


Figure 1, the Euro-Atlantic Community²

nor from the outside. In line with this, the latest documents adopted by both NATO and the EU demonstrate the lasting relevance of the transatlantic link and the good understanding of its role by the political leadership of states and institutions in the transatlantic area:

- **Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity**³, whose foreword states that “NATO guarantees the security of our territory and populations, our freedom, and the values we share – including democracy, individual liberties, human rights, and the rule of law. **Our Alliance embodies the enduring and unbreakable transatlantic link between Europe and North America to stand together against threats and challenges from any direction. This includes the bedrock commitment to collective defence set forth by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. NATO will continue to strive for peace, security and stability in the whole of the Euro-Atlantic area, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.**”;

- **The NATO-EU Joint Declaration**⁴ signed by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization following the NATO Summit in July 2016 clearly underlines the importance of the transatlantic link to the Euro-Atlantic security:

because together we can mobilize a broad range of tools to respond to the challenges we face; and because we have to make the most efficient use of resources. A stronger NATO and a stronger EU are mutually reinforcing. Together they can better provide security in Europe and beyond.” This declaration has been reinforced two years later by the **Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation**⁵ that states: *“Our respective efforts are mutually reinforcing, have improved the security of our citizens and strengthened our transatlantic bond. Our longstanding cooperation has developed substantially, and is now unprecedented in its quality, scope and vigour. We share the same values and resolve to address, hand-in-hand, the common challenges we face.”*

Consequently, one can talk about consensus between NATO, the EU and their Member States regarding the necessity to strengthen their transatlantic link in order to ensure that peace and stability are maintained in the transatlantic area, and that the Euro-Atlantic community is a major contributor to international peace and security. There is still an adequate amount of cooperation and understanding between NATO and the EU, and all the relevant factors support it while unanimously recognizing that both organizations maintain full decisional autonomy on security and defence. These aspects will be con-

2. Reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euro-Atlantic_Partnership_Council

3. **Brussels Declaration on Transatlantic Security and Solidarity**, 18th of July 2018, Brussels, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156620.htm

4. **Joint Declaration**, 08th of July 2016, Warsaw, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

5. **Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation**, 10th of July 2018, Brussels, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm



The signing of the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation/10th of July 2018, Brussels⁶

firmed in the following. It is obvious that **Europe needs North America as much as North America needs Europe** and this isn't possible without the improvement of the transatlantic link in areas such as defence, security, politics, and economy. Besides, bilateral relationships between the USA and Canada on one hand, and the EU and other European states on the other hand are crucial to the importance of the transatlantic link, especially as far as defence and security are concerned.

The transatlantic link isn't a given of the transatlantic community; its preservation and consolidation demand efforts from all parties so it can face the permanent challenges it is subject to. The international security situation from the last two decades and the political events on both sides of the Atlantic represent both challenges and opportunities for the transatlantic link. These challenges and opportunities are many and diverse as far as their manifestations, and often interconnected. The challenges to the transatlantic link come from both inside and outside the transatlantic community, and all those responsible must detect and manage them accordingly in order to ensure peace and stability in the transatlantic region and, at least, in its

close neighbourhoods, South and East of Europe. This is the topic presented in the first of the four articles that are dedicated to the transatlantic link as far as its importance to the peace and security of the Euro-Atlantic area is concerned.

The transatlantic link is in a fragile balance and must be managed accordingly through cooperation between NATO and the EU, as stated in the declarations revealed in the beginning of this article. NATO-EU cooperation is imperative especially if we consider that 22 European states are members to both NATO and EU. The recent measures gener-

ated by the adoption of the **Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy** in June 2016 have put these states in a position to allocate financial resources for the EU's defence efforts as well. Although the adoption of the Global Strategy will strengthen NATO's European pillar and balance defence efforts between North America and Europe, one cannot ignore the risk posed to the transatlantic link and that it may lead to a duplication of NATO capabilities. Moreover, frictions between Allies could be generated by the fact that NATO states that are not EU members as well may feel discriminated, as they are not involved in the EU decision-making on European defence issues. Even more so, if Great Britain leaves the EU, almost 80% of NATO defence expenses will be covered by non-EU Member States. And this is a real risk since the EU cannot defend Europe without the USA. In short, there is a dire need of close cooperation between NATO and the EU, which will significantly contribute to European security and the consolidation of the transatlantic link.

The transatlantic link is often seen from a defence and security perspective only. It is frequently analyzed in the larger context of US-

6. Reference: https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pictures/stock_2018/20180710_180710-nato-eu-sign_rdax_775x440.jpg



From left to right: the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, the US president, Donald Trump and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk/Brussels, 25th of May 2017⁷

European relations that very often face major difficulties such as: climate changes, the Iranian nuclear programme, the war in Iraq, commercial exchanges and many other issues related to foreign policy and trade. The transatlantic link has been subjected to a lot of pressure during its 70 years existence. However, it has never been so damaged by the pressure of the political and economic rifts between the transatlantic partners – especially between the USA and the EU. No matter the problem, the transatlantic partners have always found common solutions and have never questioned their shared values or NATO and EU's credibility and strength.

The situation started to change considerably in 2018 because of Donald Trump's defiant attitude towards USA's conventional foreign policy in several domains: withdrawal from the Agreement on the Iranian Nuclear Program (signed on 14th of July 2015 by Iran with USA, Great Britain, France, Russian Federation, China, and Germany) and from the Paris Agreement (the global response to climate changes); US policy on the Middle East (including relocating the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem); tariffs on steel and aluminium imports from the EU; the call for

Russian Federation to re-join G7 etc. Due to the fact that some European leaders have failed in their efforts to build an open and impartial relationship with the US President, important European states such as France and Germany have started to realize that they need a new strategy towards the USA, with a view to prevent severe damage to the transatlantic link as well.

If at some point the transatlantic link was in real danger of losing importance, starting with the events in 2014 – the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Fed-

eration and the start of the separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine – it becomes meaningful once again, given the increase of both American military presence on NATO's Eastern flank and large European states' contribution to European security. Thus, the deterioration of the security situation generated by the immoral and illegal actions of the Russian Federation has led to the revival of the transatlantic link, notably by increasing US military personnel in Europe as part of USA's contribution to assurance and deterrent measures against a possible act of Russian military aggression on the European NATO Member States. The USA increased the deployments of troops in Europe, as a contribution to the reassurance of European Allies and deterrence of any military aggression against them. The American contribution to the forward presence in Poland, the Baltic States, Romania, and Bulgaria included: increased deployments of troops and military equipment; prepositioning of resources for logistic support; intensified air policing and surveillance missions as well as joint training programs with troops from the states on the Eastern flank. The USA is the most important contributor to the implementation of the **NATO Readiness Action Plan** adopted in Wales in

7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Brussels_summit#/media/File:President_Trump%27s_Trip_Abroad_\(34502607780\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Brussels_summit#/media/File:President_Trump%27s_Trip_Abroad_(34502607780).jpg)

September 2014. Moreover, after 2014, the transatlantic link becomes even more relevant given Canada's contribution to the implementation of the Action Plan by sending troops to Latvia and by participating in air policing and maritime security missions in the Baltic and Black Seas. On the other hand, the European Allies are assuming more security responsibilities in Europe and have joined the USA in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria.

Starting with 2016, when Donald Trump was elected president of the USA, the transatlantic security link has been under a lot of pressure due to both internal and external challenges. On one hand president Trump sees US traditional alliances differently from his predecessors. On the other hand the EU Member States have launched initiatives to increase the European defence cooperation and strengthen Europe's credibility as important player in the field of European and international security. Even if launched with great efforts by states such as Germany and France, these initiatives are far from being unanimously accepted by all EU Member States; these states believe strongly that NATO is the only organization capable to defend Europe and to promote the transatlantic security interests, European included. This is the reason we can state that Europe isn't yet able to be a united and coherent security player.

Recent evolutions in the USA-EU relations prove that the **transatlantic partnership is clearly under question** and the transatlantic link is about to lose momentum. On one hand there are more European states complaining that the USA are diminishing their contribution to the collective defence (Article 5 of the Washington Treaty) and paying less attention to European security than before. On the other hand US officials are more and more vocal expressing their frustration about the fact that European Allies do not allocate enough resources to defence in order to reach a fair share of the burden as far as European security is concerned, despite the commitment of all NATO member states to increase their defence expenditures to at least 2% of GDP by 2024 (decision of the NATO Summit in Wales, September 2014)

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It is obvious that the most important factors that influence the future of the transatlantic link are the evolution of the EU defence and security policies, on one hand, and Trump Administration's policy, meant to shape the current transatlantic relationship according to the current values and interests of the US in Europe, on the other hand. However, it isn't hard to see that neither Europeans nor Americans have clear strategies or policies towards each other. On one hand, the EU cannot agree on a coherent policy towards the USA if it could jeopardise the transatlantic link. On the other hand, there are some differences of opinion between Trump Administration and the US Congress and even within the Administration that generate uncertainty on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. It is a fact that future tensions between transatlantic partners will keep on going and will be influenced by the nature of the US relationships with the Russian Federation and China, among other.

As far as the transatlantic link is concerned, history has often proven that Europe and the USA are stronger and more effective when working together to maintain transatlantic and international peace and security. Although the political interests of the major countries in the transatlantic region have sometimes put the relevance of the transatlantic link at significant risks, the states and institutions within the Euro-Atlantic community have always been able to find the necessary resources to solve their divergences and cooperate for the ensuring of their own security.

The current European security challenges are more dynamic, diverse, and difficult to predict than any time in history and can only be countered by reinforcing the relevance of the transatlantic link, by cooperating and coordinating the actions of NATO, EU, their Member States and partners. Despite many differences in opinion, both Washington and Brussels have so far shown maturity and realism, turning challenges into opportunities and increasing the relevance of the transatlantic link.

THE BLACK SEA: AN ESSENTIAL GEOSTRATEGIC CHESSBOARD

Dinu COSTESCU

The Greeks called it *Pontos Eoxenios*, „the Friendly Sea”. Named *Pontus Euxinos* or the Scythian Sea by the Romans, it was a source of inspiration for Ovid’s “Tristia” (Sorrows). Called *Karadeniz* or the Black Sea, as opposed to *Akdeniz*, the Middle White Sea as they named the Mediterranean, it became a „Turkish lake” after the fall of Christian Constantinople in 1453. Connected to the Mediterranean, it links the Christian East to the Islamic West. Situated between at least two dormant or active conflict zones – the Middle East and the Balkans – the Black Sea has been growing, especially after the two World Wars and the end of the Cold War, in into one of the most sought after chess boards in the world. It has become a part of the geopolitical and geostrategic games of the modern world.

The growing importance of the Black Sea, as far as regional security and stability are concerned, has become a reality and a point of reference to today’s political actors and decision makers throughout the world, which is also an alarming matter of fact. This newly found importance can be seen as a paradigm in all kinds of analyses – a paradigm according to which whoever controls the region’s security, or becomes its „master” will be able to exert control over a larger geostrategic area – more specifically the Central Europe and the Balkans, the unstable and rebellious Middle East that is adjacent to half of the area of the Mediterranean Sea, and its extension all the way to Southern Caucasus.

More facts, no less important, come to support the reason why the Black Sea basin is and should become a priority, as far as its impact on global security is concerned.

First of all it represents the south-eastern border of the European Union and, on a larger scale,



of NATO.

Secondly, the area comprises three NATO member states – Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey as well as two of its partners – Ukraine and Moldova (both aspiring members).

Thirdly, the region is home to the Ukrainian conflict and its strategic component, the Crimean Peninsula.

Fourthly but not lastly, one must pay attention to the intense security competition and campaigns conducted by the Russian Federation and the West, primarily NATO.

The fall of the former Soviet Union has left behind a series of dormant or frozen conflicts that, one way or another, and with different degrees of intensity are connected to the Black Sea area and can be future causes of destabilization. Suffice to say that some of these causes can be ethnic or religion based radicalisation, organised crime, threats to the maritime transportation of energy resources – mostly natural gas – as the Black Sea represents a vital transit corridor.

Part of a Competition

Situated between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the Black Sea has a number of distinctive features which differentiate it from the Mediterranean. For those reasons, and not only, it hasn't been viewed as a „strategic area” as important as the Mediterranean, the Persian Gulf or the Red Sea. The Black Sea is highly dependent on the only important points of access and/or exit represented by the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits. Moreover, its adjacent states are not members of a large oil and gas producers' „club”, like those in the Arabic/Persian Gulf area.

Nevertheless, it is part of the fossil fuels transit from the shores of the Caspian Sea to Europe. And, as far as security is concerned, the strategic importance of the Black Sea is not diminished; on the contrary, it is home to an increasing competition between the most important players on this chessboard, where security, military, economy, energy related and commercial strategies influence the modern day relationships between states.

The Black Sea area today is no longer the Medi-

terranean's „back yard” as Fernand Braudel used to call it. It has become and tends to develop into one of the most important variables in the global equation, a balance between peace and security on one hand, and war and instability on the other hand. At the same time, the area is integral part of the relationship between Europe and the Balkans to the west, the Middle East to the south-east and the Caspian Sea to the east. And such a geopolitical layout significantly influences both the countries in the area and the interests and strategies of world players.

One must consider the fact that the Black Sea area has become a part of the larger rivalries and competitions between world powers and thus, of two opposite visions and philosophies about present and future – those of the United States and those of the Russian Federation.

Threats and Challenges

The reality and analysis of the security risks in the Black Sea area request a thorough approach that stretches beyond its adjacent countries. If we are to talk about the well known concept of „extended security”, we should cover an area including the Balkans, the Middle East with its *Maghrib* (west) and *Mashriq* (east), all the way to the Caucasus. And, in an area characterized by such social, political, security related, economic, cultural, confessional and ethnic diversity, the amplitude and variety of tensions and collision factors are equally diverse and active.

We will be speaking briefly about some of the factors challenging this configuration of „extended security”.

In the Balkans: the instability, inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions in Bosnia and Kosovo continue to represent a challenge to the security of the region. They are usually accompanied by conflict stirring activism, radical Muslim resilience and ethnic nationalism.

The entire region of former Yugoslavia is still suffering from post war damages, one of which is the lack of a real solution to the issue of refugees and displaced persons.

The situation in the Caucasus continues to be unstable and difficult to predict due to conflicts

that are either active or likely to break out. These conflicts are accompanied by political confrontations - more or less transparent – over the control of energy resources in the area.

In Moldova, on the other side of the Dniester River persists an uncertain security situation that has no prospects of being stabilized. The status of the Russian 14th Army is still unclear and Transnistria is affected by separatist movements.

Not less worrisome is the offensive and challenging policy of the Russian Federation. This policy is influenced by a military thinking that can be found both on a practical level as well as at the level of psychological-propaganda.

The difficulties created by Russia's annexation of Crimea and the open support of Ukrainian separatist movements are caught in the same slipstream of instability and tensions generating suspicions.

The Middle East, especially following the events in September 2011 and the Arab Spring, goes thorough a major social and institutional identity crisis affecting the normalcy and internal stability of Middle Eastern states and the Arabic unity and coexistence, as well as the regional security paradigms and alliances.

All of the above, along with institutional and state bankruptcy, the chaotic and anarchical downfall of democracy, reform, and connections to the realities of the modern world have had major security consequences. It is the case of: the four civil wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Iraq; the chaos in the Maghreb – Tunisia and Libya; the new burst of the Arab Spring in Algeria and Sudan that led to the toppling of the these countries' dictatorial regimes – Abdel Aziz Bouteflika and Omar Bashir.

Terrorist threats, the growth of migration, uncertainties surrounding the security of international maritime transportation and conventional energy resources transit routes, the concealed support of cross-border organized crime, human and drug trafficking and weapons smuggling are only some of the security challenges to the Black Sea area. These issues cannot be covered in a comprehensive manner in the limited space of

an article such as the present one.

„Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum 2019” – A Welcomed Event

Truth be known, the states in the Black Sea area bear the responsibility of continuously providing, maintaining and strengthening their own security, and that of Europe's and NATO's south eastern borders as well.

It is a fact that states that wish for peace should not only benefit from security services but provide them as well.

This conceptual approach lays at the basis of the „Black Sea and Balkans Security Forum” (3rd edition) hosted in Mamaia/Constanta between June 12-14, 2019.

The event will take place under the high patronage of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence and NATO's National Public Diplomacy Division. Benefitting from the participation of Romanian and foreign political personalities, political analysts, and experts in the field, the Forum will most certainly provide an opportunity for open dialogue. Participants will be able to discuss a wide array of topics, draw conclusions, and come up with ideas that will become a source of inspiration and support to those responsible for the future of national and collective security.

The “Serbia” Case and Its Influence on the Security Paradigm in the South-East of Europe

Alexandru PETRESCU

1. Serbia, as a Part of All Puzzles in the South-East of Europe

Serbia is a common subject in all the analyses regarding: risks and security challenges in the South East of Europe (including the extended Black Sea region and Western Balkans); strengthening the collective security in the region through joining and/or cooperating with NATO; the role of religion in the process of reconciliation, or stimulation of divergences between different religious communities in the region; and even the “digitalisation” of the cities to increase the safety of their citizens. However, it „stands alone”, which means it follows a different path and takes different actions from the other states in the region.

Serbia follows a different European road. It did not choose to take a Euro-Atlantic path opting instead for “military neutrality”, does not see the Russian influence in the region as “malign” and patiently negotiates with its European partners and the USA over Kosovo sovereignty. While favouring the “West” through its strong option to join the European Union, Serbia is strengthening its energy independence by building a pipeline supplying Russian natural gas and is attracting Chinese investments. And, with a view to improve Belgrade’s securi-

ty, the Serbian authorities have partnered up with the Chinese company Huawei.

While some Western parties criticize Hungarian leadership, accusing it of authoritarianism, the Hungarian and Serbian leaders advertise their bilateral relationship as being at its highest.

Not in the least, Serbia smartly plays its bilateral relationship with one of the powers in the region as well - Turkey, leaving differences aside and focusing on commonalities.

The biggest obstacle in the relationship between Serbia and the West is the lack of trust, especially given the evolutions in the “Kosovo Dossier”.

2. Serbia’s European Integration and the „Kosovo Dossier”

Serbia’s road to European integration shares both common and distinctive features with countries in the region.

Some of the common features are: the starting point –we are dealing with a former communist



Eu member states (blue) EU candidates (dark grey)

Reference: <https://www.dw.com/hr/koliko-je-2025-realna-za-zapadni-balkan/a-43115954>

state on one hand and with a former Yugoslavian state on the other hand. This where the specificity of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union lies – the states from former Yugoslavia had to sign the SAA, under the argument that they needed stabilisation after the dissolution of this country (F.S.R. Yugoslavia), other states only signed Association Agreements with the EU.

If the SAA is common to all countries from former Yugoslavia (Albania included), Serbia's is different as it has an additional chapter – Chapter 35 – that refers to „normalization of relations with Kosovo”. Serbia's EU integration process has been somehow „doubled” by a similar integration process for Kosovo. Moreover, all reports on Serbia have been issued without taking Kosovo into account, due to the fact that Serbia has limited control over the province and the EU support Kosovo authorities to build a solid and democratic state, with solid and democratic institutions.

Serbia and Kosovo's road to European integration has seen a frequent use of the „carrot and stick” tactics used by the EU – progresses were rewarded and delays were sanctioned. And this was the part played by the start of the negotiations to join the EU, the opening of some negotiation chapters or by the visa liberalization regime. The conclusion of the Brussels Agreement in April 2013 led to the decrease of tensions in Kosovo and prompted a more consistent dialogue between Serbia and the province, which contributed to improvements in the life of the citizens (increased freedom of movement, less inter-ethnic internal disputes, integration of the police and justice systems, improvement of customs control at the administrative border between Central Serbia and Kosovo, ending of inter-ethnic murders etc.).

Nevertheless, the integration process seems to be (too) long and difficult for both countries, under a lot of pressure and subject to many conditions, so the population in both Serbia and Kosovo is disappointed and discontent, and the level of popular support for EU integration has decreased.

The year 2019 represents a turning point as in November 2018 Priština overtaxed by 100% imports from Central Serbia (and from Bosnia and Herzegovina as well). Serbia has refused to take part in any dialogue with Kosovo, including those mediated by the EU, and Kosovo has refused to restart talks with Serbia if it doesn't recognise its independence, so the dialogue between the two is at a standstill.

This standstill and the lack of any perspective give room for unilateral manoeuvres and manipulation, so any action coming from either side is seen as a provocation.

On one hand Belgrade accuses Priština of ceasing the implementation of one of the most important obligation deriving from the “Brussels Agreement” – the creation of the Association of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo, while Belgrade has fulfilled all the obligations in the Agreement. On the other hand Priština accuses Belgrade of hindering its steps to join a series of international organizations such as Interpol or UNESCO, which it sees as a serious violation of the Agreement. The same goes for Serbia's lobby meant to convince a number of states to rescind their decisions to recognize Kosovo's independence.

The lack of dialogue leads to tensions and encourages unilateral actions. Belgrade believes that the incursions of the Kosovo police in Northern Kosovo to arrest suspects involved in the murder of the Serbian politician Oliver Ivanović, or to fight corruption, contraband and organized crime are in fact a provocation meant to intimidate and cause a violent and uncontrolled reaction from Serbian population and authorities.

The violent incidents in three of the Serbian municipalities in North Kosovo (Leposavić, North Mitrovica and Zubin Potok) occasioned by the arrest – on the 28th of May 2019 – of several policemen belonging to the Serbian, Albanian and Bosniak ethnic groups caused the Serbian population and authorities to dramatically lose their trust in both the EU and NATO (KFOR) and created conditions for a erratic dialogue between the two international organizations and the Belgrade authorities.

Given the above, it is highly unlikely that Serbia and Kosovo will make real progress any time soon on their road to European integration.

3. The Security of Serbia's Energy Resources

By signing the cooperation agreement in the field of energy with the Russian Federation, in 2008, the Republic of Serbia had in mind the security of its resources on one hand and Moscow's political support in the "Kosovo Dossier" on the other hand (more precisely, for keeping intact the wording of the UN Security Council Resolution 1244/1999 and for denying Kosovo membership to the UN). It is worth mentioning that the Serbian authorities have never admitted to this second objective, regarding Russian involvement in the Kosovo issue.

The agreement facilitated the direct sale of the majority of shares owned by the Serbian National Oil and Gas Company (Naftna industrija Srbije/NIS) to Gazprom and involved Russian support for the expansion of a natural gas storage facility in Vojvodina (Banatski Dvor close to the border with Romania) and the construction of

the „South Stream” pipeline in Serbia. South Stream was supposed to enter Serbia (from Bulgaria) near Zaječar and then exit to Hungary, close to Sombor. It was supposed to have a ramification in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska) and eventually be connected to Croatia, Montenegro and the Republic of North Macedonia.

The opponents of the Agreement criticized its exemption from the legislation on public auctioning, the small price obtained on the 51% of NIS shares (400 million Euro, plus Russian promises to continue investments in the company), and the lack of guarantees as far as the construction of the “South Stream” pipeline.

In 2014, following the deterioration of the relationship between the EU and the Russian Federation due to the annexation of Crimea and involvement in Eastern Ukraine, and given the violation of the competition principle set forth in the third “Energy Package”, the EU pressured Bulgaria to stop the construction of the “South Stream” pipeline, which led to Russia abandoning it (decision made public in December 2014).

Thus, Belgrade's most important objective in the field of energy security failed to materialize.

While continuing its lobbying for the materialization of the “South Stream” project, Serbia ended by supporting and joining the new Russian-Turkish project – “TurkStream” that was launched in 2014.

To avoid being thwarted by the EU as it was the case with the “South Stream”, the Serbian authorities maintained a permanent dialogue with officials in Brussels. Nevertheless, in 2019 Serbia disregarded the European Energy Community



Irinej the Serbian Patriarch, A.Vučić, V.Putin, Belgrade, 17.01.2019

Reference: <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/info/uzivo-pratite-iz-minuta-uz-minut-posetu-ruskog-predsednik-vladimira-putinaa-2019-01-16>

recommendations and approved the construction of the “TurkStream” on its territory, even if it doesn’t abide by the competition principle stipulated in the third “Energy Package”.

In order to reach the desired goals as far as energy security is concerned, Serbia chose to continue the projects covered by its agreement with The Russian Federation - the expansion of the Banatski Dvor gas depot and the progressive construction of other depots (Itebej and outside Pančevo, in Vojvodina), the development and upgrade of NIS facilities (including expansion of the fuel distribution network and modernization of refineries) and the construction of a new pipeline (“South Stream” being replaced by “TurkStream”). The company contracted for the construction of the first pipeline was renamed and is now responsible for the construction of the “TurkStream”. The construction of the new pipeline started in spring 2019 and its itinerary is identical to the old one.

4. Serbia’s Military Neutrality

In December 2007, the Serbian Parliament passed a resolution stating that “Serbia is to maintain military neutrality towards all existent military blocks” and promotes cooperation with NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)/Community of the Independent States. Following the same principle, Serbia will develop a military cooperation with all partner states that have high standards in the field and are interested in cooperation.

The Serbian-NATO partnership was formalised in December 2006 (when the country joined the Partnership for Peace) and progressed to the level of Intensified Individual Partnership, but there was no manifestation of interest in getting to the level of Membership Action Plan.

Serbia also promotes its CSTO partnership, without any intention to join this organization either.

Serbia’s cooperation with each of the two organizations implies bilateral cooperation with most of their member states. It is worth mentioning its cooperation with the US in several

programmes, the most important being the State Partnership Programme with the Ohio National Guard. As far as Serbia’s cooperation “on the other side of the barricade” it is worth mentioning the intensification of collaboration with the Russian Federation, which has lately taken the form of a trilateral including Belarus. These partnerships also imply acquisitions of equipment and weapons to modernize the Serbian military.

The defence cooperation with other states focuses on domains such as technical and economic and includes: acquisitions of weapons systems, military technology and equipment for the Serbian defence and security systems (China is one of the telling examples in this regard); joint development of armament systems and military equipment destined to both internal and external markets (the case of Serbia’s defence cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, which facilitated cooperation in different other fields – agriculture, urban development, constructions, and air transportation).

Except for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Serbia is the only country in South-East Europe that did not choose to join NATO, although BiH has expressed such an option when it joined the Partnership for Peace programme in 2006. BiH also requested the launch of the Membership Activation Plan in 2009, but the terms have changed considerably since then and this country joining NATO in the near future is not a viable option. Moreover, BiH’s Euro-Atlantic path is directly under Serbian influence through its ethnic groups (more precise the current leaders of Serbian ethnicity in the Republic of Srpska and the current representative in the BiH Presidency, Milorad Dodik).

5. The Consolidation of the Serbian Defence System

The Serbian authorities are working on the consolidation of the national defence and security systems starting from the principles of “military neutrality” and partnership and considering the security environment (regional, continental and global) as well as the challenges, risks and threats to the security of their country.

One must note that Kosovo's declaration of independence (February 2008) and its international recognition by more than 100 countries around the world (most of them NATO and EU members¹) are considered the main threats to the interests of the Serbian nation. Taking this into account Serbia envisages the implementation of high standards regarding this system (most of which borrowed from the militaries of NATO member states) as well as providing a high level of training and technological modernization to both its Armed Forces (AF) and Ministry of Interior Intervention Forces (MIIF).

Until 2018, the Serbian Armed Forces focused on the training, endowment and (individual) equipment of the Rapid Reaction Forces and is now proceeding to the consolidation of its main armed forces. It was the same with the Ministry of the Interior.

Relevant measures taken by the Serbian authorities after 2012 to modernize the AF and the MIIF: acquisition of new military equipment (the armoured multirole vehicle "Lazar 3"); contracting "Airbus" H145M helicopters; 1500 troops with rifles and individual protection (the same for the Ministry for the Interior); development of new weapons systems, military technology and equipment by the Serbian defence industry, whose main companies are included in a holding supported by J.P. Jugoimport-SDPR, a state-owned company specialized in manufacturing and trade of dual-use products. Efforts are being made for the consolidation and enlargement of this holding, and one must note the direct investments and financial support coming from the Serbian Government for the revival, modernization and expansion of the holding. The measures that have been taken led to the successful completion of various projects and the implementation of new ones (including the construction of new units/facilities and even factories specialized in military equipment or ammunitions).

The steps that have been taken towards the modernization of the Serbian Armed Forces (SAF) are more significant than those taken towards the modernization of the MIIF and in-

clude: modernization and operationalization of the MiG-29 jets donated by the Russian Federation (in December 2016) so now the SAF can use eight or nine fighters; the start, in 2019 of the modernization and operationalization of four MiG-29 jets donated by Belarus; acquisition of new "Lasta" V-53 advanced trainer aircraft (produced in Pančevo); contracting four MI-24VM (Mi-35M) and three Mi-17 helicopters from the Russian Federation; new uniforms with new features – a modern, contemporary camouflage ("digital/pixel pattern" called "M10"); military technology development projects (digitalization of the "Oganj" self-propelled multiple rocket launcher; development of the „Šumadija" long range rocket launcher; development of the Advanced Light Attack System/ALAS, in cooperation with the UAE; development of the artillery/anti-air missile system PASARS; development of transport and armoured vehicles; prioritising the upgrade of the "Orao" subsonic ground-attack and reconnaissance aircraft programme (IAR-93 – joint Yugoslav-Romanian project), while not giving up the upgrade of the Soko G-4 "Super Galeb" single-engine advanced training and light attack aircraft either.

The consolidations of the national defence and security systems means increasing the mobility of the reaction force so it can intervene across Serbia and contain any potential threat until the arrival of the SAF main forces. On the other hand one must take into consideration the deterrence role of this system, especially in the light of recent events in and concerning Kosovo: in 2019 – the full halt of the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo; in 2018 – Kosovo starts creating its own army (the current civil protection forces – the Kosovo Security Forces are to be turned into a national force); Kosovo introduces fully fledged tariffs (100%) on imports from Central Serbia; Priština accuses Belgrade of committing genocide in Kosovo between 1998-1999 and establishes the Kosovo Prosecutorial Council for the prosecution of war crimes committed by the Serbians twenty years ago; and last but not least, Kosovo special security/police forces increase their operations in North Kosovo, within

1. Din rândul statelor membre ale UE nu au recunoscut independența Kosovo: Cipru, Grecia, România, Slovacia, Spania.

“Serbian municipalities” (Leposavić, North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Zvečan).

6. Instead of Conclusions

Serbia exists in the South-East of Europe and is connected to a series of regional, continental and transcontinental organizations and structures of cooperation. One cannot cast this aside, although Serbia is in many ways “a singularity”. A simple reminder of Serbia’s “stand outs” can take one page of analysis.

Without claiming to have exhausted all these “stand outs” and that they have been sorted by their importance, I believe it is worth mentioning: the desire to join the EU without having complete authority over its territory; the “normalization” of its relationship with Kosovo under EU mediation; autonomy and even secession tendencies in some of its inner circles (the Raška/Sandžak area, Vojvodina and “Preševo Valley” respectively); the decision not to join NATO and the concept of “military neutrality” (it hasn’t been officially acknowledged by any international document or organization); the refusal to align to the EU’s foreign policy and that of other candidates to European integration (Serbia didn’t give in to pressures and did not impose sanctions on the Russian Federation); disregarding recommendations to abide by the stipulations of the “third energy package” (regarding the construction of the “TurkStream” gas pipeline); the lack of cross border agreements with some of the states emerging from the former Yugoslavia (no border agreements with Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; while the agreement with North Macedonia was invalidated after the latter recognized the self-proclaimed Kosovo

independence).

All this while Serbia has been part of several regional and continental initiatives meant to facilitate regional cooperation and reconciliation between populaces and countries involved in armed conflicts following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as a prelude to the European integration of the whole Western Balkans. The issues mentioned above hinder Serbia’s European integration and determine the EU and its foreign partners to keep a close eye on the country with a view to see a negotiated peaceful solution. In the field, this also means maintaining a peace-keeping military missions not for intervention but for discouraging violent options. And that requires expenses and significant commitment of human and material resources (from the UN, the EU, NATO and other states involved).

These issues need to be singled out one by one and a compromise solution is needed too, in order to diminish tensions and potential conflicts. One of these solutions could be focusing on the things the parties agree on, solving smaller issues, step by step, promising to refrain from taking extreme or violent actions and solving larger apparently irreconcilable issues later on, if there aren’t any violent incidents in the process.



*Aleksandar Vučić, Hashim Thaçi, Alpbach (Austria), August 2018
Reference: <https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000086383840/grenzverschiebungen-auf-dem-balkan-rechts-nicht-gesichtswahrung>*

The issue is that the parties involved in solving those problems feel differently about the starting point or the continuation of the negotiations and there are two of these dilemmas:

In a “minor” file/ dossier, concerning the cross border cooperation with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia offers an initial solution for four border sectors, while the authorities in Sarajevo want the agreement to be signed for the existing borders and then the two states to address the issue of the four sectors. A compromise is possible in this situation, but it requires a more active involvement of the European and Euro-Atlantic partners of the two states.

In the other, “major” file/dossier, Belgrade asks for elimination of the custom tariffs in order to resume dialogue with Pristina, while Pristina is determined to keep them up until Serbia recognizes Kosovo’s independence and signs an agreement on the matter. In this case it is difficult to compromise, so it is vital that both parties abstain from provocations and unilateral actions. Otherwise the situation could deteriorate and the conflict could re-ignite, involving other parties and with unpredictable consequences to the regional and even European security.

Even if no major violent evolutions occur on the short term, Serbia and Kosovo are far from joining EU and Belgrade’s trust in the EU and NATO (KFOR) decreases directly proportional with these organizations’ degree of failure to meet the expectations of the Serbian side regarding the “Kosovo dossier”. Moreover, Serbia risks being seen as a problem or even as a “bridgehead” of Russian expansionism. On the other hand, the derailment of Kosovo’s European path could (re) open the problem of this region reunification with Albania and give birth to the so called “Natural Albania” or “Greater Albania”.

Compared to the above, the lack of acceptance from the Serbian Orthodox Church to invite the Pope to Serbia looks like a minor thing.....

Asymmetric Responses to Russian Hybrid Threats



Volodymyr HAVRYLOV

“Major General (ret), former Defense Attache of Ukraine to the United States, United Kingdom and Romania”

Russia continues to react aggressively to any attempt by Western countries to force her to stop hybrid aggression in Ukraine and return the Crimea.

At the same time, in contrast to the approaches of the Soviet Union to confronting the West during the Cold War, Moscow today uses methods that are more typical of the Soviet KGB (now the FSB):

1. **Blackmail:** the threat of the use of military force or nuclear weapons, conducting military exercises without warning (‘snap exercises’), gas and oil pressure;

2. **Subversive activity:** interference in domestic political processes in Europe and the USA, stimulation of corruption, physical elimination of opponents;

3. **Provocation:** the involvement of the United States and Europe in regional conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the escalation of the same migration problems in Europe;

4. **Disinformation and propaganda.**

Russian special services exploit the traditionally weaknesses of open democratic societies while at the same time limiting the access of foreigners to information, activities and facilities on their territory. The totalitarian nature of the Putin regime contributes to this.

In turn, the West reacts to the Russian threat by old classic methods:

1. **Military deterrence:** NATO's reinforce-

ment, the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), the Black Sea Rotational Force, a package of measures to improve NATO's situational awareness in the Black Sea region etc.;

2. **Sanctions:** economic, financial, individual;

3. **Reducing the dependence on Russian energy resources:** diversification of gas supply, EU energy strategy etc.;

4. **Countermeasures in information sphere.**

Paradoxically, this strategy of the EU and NATO suits Moscow.

Russia has historically become accustomed to live in a confrontation with the West. Moreover, modern Russian leadership needs an external threat in order to intimidate its population and thus avoid the escalation of internal social and political tension. "When the enemy is at the door, the Russian people are ready to endure their miserable life forever."

In this scenario, the time is on Moscow side, which hopes that sooner or later the West will get tired of confrontation and will compromise on the Ukrainian issue.

But a prerequisite for this, from the point of view of Russia, should be an economically weak, politically volatile and corrupt Ukraine. It is against the background of problems in Ukraine that Russian society will be ready to endure its limitations.

And here is the very weak point of Putin's strategy.

As soon as reforms in Ukraine yield a result, ordinary Russians will start asking the most unpleasant question for Moscow-"Why?" "Why did they succeed, and we did not?"

The reason for the threat of such a question for the Putin regime is in the common history of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples.

The main mistake of the countries of Europe and the USA lies in the fact that they consider Russia a modern analogue of the USSR with all the features of the Soviet Union inherent in power: economy, armed forces, nuclear weapons, world influence and allies in the regions.

But that's not the case.

First, Russia is no longer on the list of advanced economies in the world, and because of the lack of an ideological lever, it has lost its influence in the traditional regions of the world for the Soviet Union-Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America.

Secondly, the basis of the strength and power of the USSR was the triumvirate of the republics of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. So it happened historically. These three nations originate from one cradle of the Eastern Slavic civilization, Kievan Rus, and have much in common in language, culture, traditions and habits.

It is no coincidence that not only the Soviet Union, but Ukraine and Belarus as well have been the members of the United Nations since 1945.

Any crack in the relations of these republics inevitably led to systemic shocks.

Moscow's attempt to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence in 2014 was Putin's major strategic mistake. Thus, he signed the verdict to his regime and created risks for the integrity of Russia itself.

If the confrontation with the West is a natural state for Russia, then the confrontation with Ukraine, and especially the direct military aggression against it, is not comfortable for Moscow.

In spite of the temptation of a quick military blitzkrieg in Ukraine, Moscow is afraid of unpredictable consequences of such a scenario, including the reaction of its own population. At the same time, Russia cannot forever remain in a state of tense relations with Ukraine without an answer to the above mentioned question of its population-"Why?"

It is not surprising that ordinary citizens and the Russian political elite closely monitor developments in Ukraine and draw their conclusions. As some Russian experts say: "When you watch and listen to Russian information channels, it seems that Russia is surrounded by Ukraine on all sides."

The organization, course and outcomes of re-

cent presidential elections in Ukraine created a sense of cognitive dissonance among many Russians (the mismatch of propaganda stamps in the real situation) and actualized the question "Why they could, and we cannot?"

It is from this paradigm that we must proceed in determining the priorities of the strategy of counteracting the external hybrid aggression of Russia.

This strategy should include:

1. Stimulating and supporting deep structural reforms in Ukraine. The success of these reforms is key to the success of the entire strategy;

2. Economic pressure on Russia, preservation and extension of sanctions. Moscow must constantly feel the unbearable burden of spending on the continuation or escalation of its hybrid aggression in Ukraine;

3. Deterrence measures to avoid the scenario of Russia's open military aggression against Ukraine (albeit unlikely). In addition to strengthening NATO's defensive capabilities in the eastern direction, joint training and training with the participation of the European and US armed forces should be continuously conducted on the territory of Ukraine;

4. International information campaign. We must constantly remind Russia of its violation of international law, the annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war on the Donbass.

With such an approach, time will already be playing against Moscow, which sooner or later will be interested in the fastest normalization of the situation around Ukraine in order to avoid a collapse of its own state.

Imperial expansion of Russia began after the "union" with Ukraine in 1654. The end of the Russian imperial history began after the breakup of this "union" in 2014.

As Zbigniew Brzezinski once said - "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an Eurasian Empire."

These words can be continued today - "With a successful and democratic Ukraine in background, Russia is doomed to reform and gradual deprivation of imperial phantoms."

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INTERNATIONAL SITUATION



THE THIRD GULF WAR WILL NOT TAKE PLACE YET

**Ambassador prof.
Dumitru CHICAN**

The second half of May brought forth a scenario that, if staged, could lead to a new and worse conflict in the Middle East and its Arabic/Persian Gulf. Following the two wars that damaged the region – between Iran and Iraq, and between the USA and Iraq respectively (the liberation of Kuwait from Saddam Hussein’s occupation) – a third military confrontation within this geopolitical dormant volcano could have serious consequences. These consequences go beyond borders, endangering the world’s future stability, security and peace.

The same second half of May has raised new concerns for the public opinion, for the ultimate information consumers and for the political, military and strategic players, regarding the possibility of a new military conflict in the heart of the world’s energy resources. The drums of war roll – whether sounded by directly involved parties or by hidden players – and keep on getting louder and stronger. This prelude has had its share of less than peaceful moments.

Tehran, the most powerful player in a potential war between the Arabic Peninsula and the eastern bank of the Persian Gulf “has had its fair share of conversation with Ares”, the God of War. The attack on four commercial ships in the Gulf – within the UEA territorial waters (two of them under Saudi flag) and the drone attack against the Saudi oil pipeline that streams crude oil from the west of the Peninsula to worldwide consumers – the “jugular”, if we may say so – have been but a rehearsal. And the players were Yemeni Houthi rebels involved in a so called “proxy war” between the Sunni Saudi monarchy and the Shiite theocratic Iranian regime. It has

been an absurd and expensive endeavour for expansion and power over land and faith.

In order to support his foreign policies, the US president Donald Trump has sent an aircraft carrier in the Gulf waters and spoke of deploying 120,000 US troops against Iran, as well as about increasing deployment of Patriot batteries on the territory of Arab allies. With a finger on the trigger, Donald Trump has proposed the Iranians to start negotiating a new nuclear agreement. Taking into consideration the American sanctions against Iran and starting from the 12 difficult conditions stated, the new agreement would be known in history as the “Trump Agreement”.

The reaction of Iran’s clergy, Guardians of the Islamic Revolution, president (Hassan Rouhani) and its Supreme Leader (Ayatollah Ali Khamenei) was no less aggressive. They refused to give in to USA’s demands and negotiate with them. Moreover, the Iranians would back away from the terms of the nuclear deal and start ballistic missile mass production and continue enriching uranium up to nuclear weapons-grade levels.

When speaking about a sensitive matter such as a possible war between the USA (initially) and Iran, it is really hard to find an answer, which brings us, closer to a new, incisive question – how impending is a new Gulf war? Being cautious doesn’t necessarily mean forgetting or dismissing the seriousness of the following question – will there be a third large scale war in the Middle East and its far east?

Rumours of a war against Iran are hardly fresh. On the contrary, the subject has been under debate for long, in the context of the perennial conflict opposing USA and Israel to Iran’s plans of expansion and territorial ambitions. However, and despite aggressive media campaigns it is very difficult to foresee whether a new military



President Donald Trump and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

advocated moderation and good judgement and let the Americans understand that “Russia did not want another war that would inflame the Middle East again”. The Russian leader stated that “the Russian Federation cannot be the firefighter of the region”.

Wishing to avoid another war, Mike Pompeo also sought the good offices of Oman’s Sultan Qaboos bin Said, whose country is on good terms with the Iranian regime.

conflict is shaping up. When saying this I am thinking of the near future and the upcoming US presidential campaign.

On the other hand, neither Washington nor Tehran is speaking explicitly about a conflict that cannot be solved. It is true that – as an Arabic journalist working for the English “Al-Hayat” once said – in order for Donald Trump to be able to remodel and reshape the Iranian regime, he is in need of an Iranian Lech Walesa. But the latter doesn’t exist and there aren’t any signs of one being born any time soon. Donald Trump and his administration deny the fact that they are planning to start a war against Iran, stating loud and clear that they only wish to ensure Iran’s transition from a “rebel state” to an “ordinary state”, at least an “ordinary” that meets US standards. In fact, the current American sanctions against Iran are, at least so far, a harsher re-enactment of a series of retaliations that started with the “Iran hostage crisis” in 1997.

This hot background has prompted the US state secretary, Mike Pompeo to go to Sochi for meetings with the Russian president Vladimir Putin and the minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov, with whom he spoke for three hours. The US-Iranian relations were high on the very tight agenda discussed in Sochi and the American secretary of state tried to convince the Russians to go to Iran to seek the good offices of the Tehran regime, in order to avoid a new regional conflict. Without making any promises, Vladimir Putin

One must not overlook the fact that the US sanctions on Iran are neither multinational, nor approved by the UN Security Council. These are individual sanctions that a UN member state imposes on another, based on the policies and interests of the state issuing the sanctions. Iran is massively involved in regional conflicts and by that I mean Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen, which puts under question the self-image sold by the Iranian leaders. The US have announced – through president Donald Trump - the withdrawal of their troops from the fight against terrorism, following the defeat of ISIL’s last stronghold, and are now holding peace negotiations with the Taliban in Doha. On the Iranian camp, and despite Tehran publicly parading its muscles, statements from president Hassan Rouhani and the minister of foreign affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif follow the same line towards peace.

Donald Trump wishes – and it is his constitutional right – to run in the next US presidential elections for a second mandate in the Oval Office. And the defeat of Iran in a blitzkrieg would bring him great leverage in the competition.

Putting aside the calculations and the moral impulses of leaders and their advisors on both sides, each camp should think more carefully and understand that the last thing the world needs is another catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

The Jihadist Movement – Founding Myths

Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

Founding texts, jurisprudence schools and the Islamic law have laid down, in the early Middle Ages, five fundamental principles that define, construct and make Islam a religion and spiritual Muslim identity. The five cornerstones are named, in the theological and ritual discourse, “the five pillars” (arkan) of faith. They represent, at the same time, both the cornerstones of Islam and the duties which, if not rigorously fulfilled, make the individual and communal Muslim identity lose its “raison d’être”.

These canonical references are generally known as:

1. The confession of faith (shahāda), through which, recognizing the unity and uniqueness of God and the fact that the Prophet Muhammad is the messenger (rasūl) of Divinity who brings to man the word of this Transcendence, *homo islamicus* professes his adherence to divine monotheism and, by that, his Muslim identity and his total and unconditional obedience to Muslim theosophy and ritual;

2. The five daily compulsory prayers (salāt) as a reaffirmation of Islamic identity through the sacred dialogue with the Divinity;

3. Taking, at least once during one's earthly life, the initiatory journey, in the form of pilgrimage, to Islam's holy sites in Mecca and Medina, the birthplace of Islam;

4. Rigorous fasting (sawm) in the holy month of Ramadan, the chronological interval in which the Prophet Muhammad's Messianic mission began;

5. Payment of alms (zakāt), a charity tithing for underprivileged fellow Muslims and the management of community affairs.

Following the terrorist attacks in September and the capture of the Saudi Osama Bin Laden, on the 2nd of May 2011, in his place of refuge in the Pakistani city of Abbotabad, many analysts,

politicians, military and security experts declared the Salafist-jihadist terrorist network of Al-Qaida destroyed. It did not take long for the initial optimism to wear out and for later events to allow pessimism to set in. Al-Qaida was to be reborn in Iraq, under the leadership of Jordanian Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi and his successor Ibrahim Al-Samarrai, then in Syria, under the name of “Jabhat Al-Nusra”. In 2014, the Iraqi imam Al-Samarrai turned the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) into the monstrous and idealized “Islamic Caliphate”, a brutal and irrational monstrosity whose elimination required a multi-national global mobilization and five years of fierce fighting. This spring, it was announced (after similar unconfirmed previous statements) that the last Syrian ISIS stronghold had fallen. Once again the overwhelming, justified, enthusiasm could be sensed in the official and media statements that were finally able to announce the death of the “caliphate” and the victory over the extremist jihadist “tumour”. But this time, the enthusiasm was tempered. In 2014 the “caliph” Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi publicly announced from the occupied city of Mosul the birth of his caliphate. In April 2019, the terrorist leader appeared for the second time to urge his followers to continue the “holy jihad”. His public appearance and the many terrorist attacks that have been claimed by the Islamic State in the Middle East and other areas where active jihadist cells that conform to Al-Baghdadi's creed and ideology are located brought fourth again the legitimate and valid question: is the terrorist Islamic nightmare truly over?

Loss of ground control, the elimination of a considerable number of commanders and fighters, chaotic leadership and logistics, loss of resources and financial support undoubtedly represent the many arguments that prove that the virulence, endurance and danger of this brutal organization have become a reality. The question is: can we really believe in the disappearance of the profound causes that lead to the pos-

sibility that, sooner or later, the phenomenon could identify new resources, could readjust and reinforce itself and resurface under different names, structures and ideologies? Many various answers have been given to this question, most of which have in common the fact that they refer to



Al-Baghdadi, 2014



Al-Baghdadi 2019

social, propagandistic, political, military, financial etc., extrinsic factors that support the revival of the Salafist-jihadist phenomenon. The intrinsic, endogenous elements that do not favour the reappearance of the Salafist-jihadist phenomenon have been less, or superficially, taken into consideration. Being more difficult to detect and counter through security and informational means, these elements are bound to continue and should be a matter of collective and national concern.

At the conceptual and identity level of the jihadist way of thinking are other beliefs and tabooed reflexes that almost assume sacredness and have become fundamental paradigms that represent – some may say – the mythological and structural resilience that characterise the individual and collective profile of Islamic fanaticism. These are the morphological components of the philosophy and beliefs of the jihadist that “follows God’s path” that we will be referring to in the lines below.

First, we are referring to the concept known in jihadist speech as “Canonical caliphate” (understood as deriving from the absolute power of Islamic law - sharia) which stipulates that Islam cannot exist and function outside the institutional framework provided by the religious state. Starting from the fact that the first Islamic state known in history was the

“caliphate”, that is, the one led by God’s messenger on earth, any state of the Muslim nation can only be a Muslim state administered in strict accordance with Islamic jurisprudence. Hence, the Jihadist doctrine – every good Muslim has the obligation to watch over the creation, functioning and endless domination of the “sharia-based state”, that is, of the Muslim religious caliphate. Considered as an expression of the religious concept of absolute power, of “God’s reign on earth, the universal caliphate is the primordial purpose of religion, and the neglect of this purpose is perceived as a denial of this imperative in favour of man’s absolute power on earth”, which, according to Salafist logic, is equivalent with the unacceptable abdication from the Muslim identity and divine command. It is implicitly understood that, by having universal aspirations and dimensions, such concept also means the denial of the nation-state idea.

Second, we are referring to the concept known as “closed identity”, no less rooted in the mind of the jihadist – a concept that is used for the indoctrination of future combatants. According to this “closed identity”, the purity of the Islamic doctrine and faith lies in the ability to defend and preserve the identity of the Muslim civilization. In other words, it means that any contact between the Arab-Islamic civilization and other cultures and civilizations is a distortion factor

that alters the Arab civilization, since the only perfect civilization is the one created by God and ruled according to Islamic law. This myth is not new. It was developed by the first founding ideologists of political Islam, Hassan Al-Banna and Sayyid Qotb and later by Al-Qaida and ISIS ideologists, only to be exclusively rephrased to encourage isolation, chauvinism and hatred towards non-Muslim civilizations, especially western.

Third and directly connected to the above, we will be referring to the myth of “western conspiracy” (al-mu’amara al-gharbiyya) against Islam’s religious integrity, against Muslim civilization, culture and custom. This conspiracy has nothing to do with Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations”, but is explicitly included in Islam’s sacred texts – the Qur’an and the Hadith. This concept can be considered the first and last pillar of Jihad. Because starting with Osama Bin Laden’s famous “Basis (Al Qaida) of global Jihad against Crusaders and Jews” and up to Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s theory on “barbaric management”, the essence justifying the modern jihadist phenomenon is found in the Muslim scripture, no matter how Islamic law sees it. It proclaims the elimination of the “People of the Book” (Jews and Christians) from the face of the earth and the spread of the colour green of the Islamic crescent over the entire planet.

In the end I will talk about death, martyrdom (shahāda) and how to “follow God’s path”. In the tormented mind of the Salafist-jihadist combatant, this is the only significant way to mark man’s passage through his ephemeral existence. To sacrifice oneself for the cause of Islam means not only to purge the world and go, thus, to the Promised Paradise, but also to achieve something as an individual who was denied by the community, for one reason or another, the right to choose.

Real victory over the concept of radical jihad can be claimed only when the societies that are a fertile ground for the appearance and growth of radicalism are reformed. But for this to happen, weapons alone are not enough.

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