

## South Eastern Europe and Turkey

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Normally US presidential election don't produce direct and significant effects on the region of Balkans and South Eastern Europe, as it is unlikely that this part of Europe is targeted in the main strategic actions of US presidency. After 1995 the region remained substantially peripheral for the American US policy, after the big engagement during the nineties that saw military interventions in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 and Kosovo in 1999. After that, US presidents tended to neglected the area, after having contributed to shape its geopolitical evolution post 1989. These characters are identifiable not only through military interventions and the creation of a system of alliance, with Croatia, Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo, but also with the enlargement strategy of NATO, and in particular the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria, pushing the boundaries of the Alliance to the Black Sea. Behind these strategic decisions, the post-conflict management and the economic interconnection of the region with the western economic sphere, was left by the US to the European Union that managed the main dossiers of post conflict stabilisation through the EU enlargement.

The presidential election of 2016 in America that saw Donald Trump victory over Hillary Clinton, however, is likely to partially change the relationship between the US and the Balkans. Not so much from an American perspective - as a geopolitical issues of the region and its stability didn't enter the electoral debate - but for the point of view of the expectations of local countries. For the first time in several years, countries essentially characterized by a structural anti-Americanism, like Serbia, have been found to support one of the presidential candidates and to develop a positive opinion for what is called the "end of the Clinton era", that is, end of the historical period that began with the military intervention of Bill Clinton in the Balkans and that would be terminated with the Trump presidency. The Clinton era for the Balkans has seen continued geopolitical polarization between American and Balkan Muslims on one side and Serbs - Orthodox supported by Russia on the other. It is clear that much of the rhetoric and arguments used by Donald Trump during the electoral campaign is heavily critical of the Muslim countries and with political Islam, while conciliatory towards Moscow and the strategic interests of Russia. It should therefore not surprise that the Serbian Prime Minister Vucic was one of the first politician to congratulate Donald Trump for its surprise victory in the American presidential elections. It is clear that Belgrade will become a net winner from a possible détente/power sharing agreement between USA and Russia, since the political and diplomatic position of the Serbs in the region is still suffering from the ultra-nationalism and from the military defeats of the nineties. Belgrade will see its positions strengthened but, mostly, it won't be forced to build its ties with Moscow at the expense of those with Europe or with the US.

However, the future of Trump presidency is still uncertain and it is not sure if South Eastern Europe political balance will be reshaped by a new pro-Serbian stance of the new US administration. In fact, we should not forget that another relevant posture of the Trump presidential campaign line was a tendency toward isolationism and a strong American disengagement from many areas and world regions where it lacked vital interests. Since not only the Balkans, but the whole of Europe, are likely to be included in US non-strategic area, it is clear that any redistribution of geopolitical dividends in the region that could be beneficial to the Serbs, it could take place only if the US will pursue a new political engagement in the region, shifting their support from certain countries to others. On the other side, if the new US administration will decide to further disengage from Europe and South Eastern, it does not mean it will be possible to rewind the tape of history or change the geopolitical balance that was created. We think that, considering the point of geopolitical development that the region has reached, an eventual disengagement of US will not produce a roll back of the situation at the beginning of the nineties, but mostly it will create a

dangerous vacuum that would trigger the revisionist and divisive forces still present in the area, and will open a new geopolitical competition among extra-regional powers. Among them Russia, Turkey and Europe (or possibly Germany) but also other actors far less interested or active in the region, as might be China or Iran.

In order to assess what will be the regional geopolitical consequences of the new political- and strategic visions of the new presidency Trump, we must rather go on to consider whether the change in relations between America and Russia will be in the light of an American disengagement from Europe or rather a new engagement between Washington and Moscow that will produce a redefinition of spheres of influence. In the latter case, indeed, the Balkans would definitely be affected by this process and they may regain a new centrality in this geopolitical game due to the abundance of the unresolved situations typical of this region.