



**CENTRO ALTI STUDI
PER LA DIFESA**

**CENTRE FOR HIGH
DEFENCE STUDIES**



**CENTRO MILITARE
DI STUDI STRATEGICI**

**MILITARY CENTRE
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES**

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The Military Center for Strategic Studies (Ce.Mi.S.S.) is an Italian Ministry of Defence (MoD) Institute founded in 1987 that carries out strategic researches for the Italian Chief of Defence.

This activity allows the access to knowledge tools and analytical methods that help in tackling current and future scenarios in support of the security and defence needs of the Italian Defence Services and of the national community in general.

Its mission comes up from the imperative necessity of the MoD to play effectively an active cultural and scientific role, interacting with the relevant communities in order to shape a positive social environment vis-à-vis with opinion leaders and the public opinion.

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- promotes the specialization of young people in its research areas;
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The opinions and conclusions expressed in the articles are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Italian Ministry of Defence.

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In order to positively answer a wide request, by international readers, to share the content of the Italian Language version of the OSSERVATORIO STRATEGICO book. CeMiSS is now enriching the Italian book with an exhaustive

“Executive Summary” in English

(<http://www.difesa.it/SMD/CASD/IM/CeMiSS/Pubblicazioni/OsservatorioStrategico/Pagine/default.aspx>)

Hoping this new approach will better satisfy our “international readers” wish for a more frequent updating opportunities, CeMiSS is anyway continuing to produce this *QUARTERLY* English version of the Strategic Monitoring, mainly collecting the most relevant results already anticipated in the Executive Summary of the Italian version, as well as some additional analyses in the meanwhile conducted.

Any comment or proposal to improve the book structure would be highly appreciated and can be sent to:

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South Eastern Europe and Turkey

Paolo Quercia (*)

The consequences of Turkish general elections and of the Greek financial crisis

Turkish general elections have produced a great earthquake in the country's political spectrum. Two are the major novelty factors: 1) the entrance in the parliament for the first time of a Kurd-dominated party (HDP) and the fall of the AK Party below 276 seats, the threshold required in order to have a simple majority. The post electoral situation may bring two likely scenarios: anticipated elections or a reset of some of the main AKP's narrative in order to include a junior partner in the government. The decision on which way to follow and which field could be reset to compromise with the opposition, remains in the hands of president Erdogan, who will have almost three months in order to appoint a prime minister able to obtain a confidence vote or to dissolve the parliament and call for new elections. The key question is what are Erdogan's red lines in the political negotiations that will be held in the coming weeks, starting with the process for electing the speaker of the parliament. In our opinion there will be three red lines that can hardly be compromised and that Erdogan will prefer to safeguard in any case, even if doing so will imply to risk new political elections. a) maintaining complete control over foreign policy and on the security apparatus of the State; b) resuming the peace process with the Kurds and finalising a political compromise in the short term; c) continuing the struggle against the so-called "parallel state", that is against those powers financed from abroad that Erdogan believes are his personal and AKP's enemies and that are working to remove him and his party from the power. Apart from these three priorities, there is a fourth more personal and less political element that needs to be addressed in order to create the conditions for a political coalition between AKP and one of the opposition parties: the reduction of intrusive actions from the president into the domain of the government and of Erdogan's role into its constitutional limits. We believe most likely scenarios are the formation of an Islamist – nationalist government, AKP + MHP (50%) or of an AKP minority government (20%). If none of these options will be pos-

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sible, we assume that Turkish president Erdogan will call for new elections in autumn, while very little chances remain for an AKP – HDP government.

Finally, we believe that a MHP + CHP + HDP government that excludes AKP is not a realistic option, taking also into consideration the role of president Erdogan in designating the prime minister.

The 2015 general election will substantially change Turkish political life but also the Turkish main party's political posture. From this point of view, AKP pro Kurd policy can be considered the main victim of last election, suffering not only from the impasse of the peace – dialogue but also from government's lack of support to the Kurd fighters in Syria and its ambiguous relation toward ISIS. The entrance, for the first time in Turkish history, of a pro Kurd party in the parliament could substantially change in the medium term the political dynamics in the country. It will have also an effect on Turkish foreign and security policy in Syria, but it is still too early to assess how much it could bring a revision of AKP posture in Syria's conflict.

The Turkish political situation after the general elections evolves very slowly and is still marked by post-election bargaining between the four political forces that have entered the parliament passing the 10% threshold: AKP (Islamists) CHP (Kemalist) MHP (nationalists) and HDP (Kurds). One month after the vote, the parliament managed to elect its speaker, choosing for the role AKP candidate Ismet Yilmaz, the outgoing Minister of Defence.

With the election of the speaker of the parliament the real negotiations for the creation of a new government will start as soon as president Erdogan appoints the outgoing Prime Minister Davutoglu with the task of creating a new coalition government or a minority one capable of winning a confidence vote.

Anyway, Yilmaz's election as speaker of the parliament may be an event that could set the political tone of the incoming negotiations, and it seems to rule out the possibility of a great-coalition between AKP and CHP, the second party of the parliament. Preparing such a great-coalition would have required a compromise between the two parties for the election of the speaker. On the contrary, the new speaker of the parliament appears to be closer to the nationalist MHP, whose MPs opted for a vote of abstention instead of voting for the candidate of the opposition. It is a gesture with a political meaning that could pave the way for a political cooperation between Erdogan's party and the nationalists. However, the creation of a new Turkish government is not only shaped by in-

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ternal power politics among the four parties represented in the Turkish parliament, but it is also deeply influenced from the events that are taking place in Syria, and especially from the new strategic momentum of the Syrian conflict, with the Kurds playing a new protagonist role. This new phase of the Syrian conflict started after ISIS defeat in Kobane and has reached its climax with the military offensive on Tell Abyad, a Syrian border town that had been held by ISIS for more than a year. The relevance of the fall of Tell Abyad (15 June) remains in the fact that it is not a Kurd majority town but mostly an Arab dominated settlement of the Raqqa governorate. It holds a special significance because the Arab strip stretching from the Canton of Kobane to the Canton of Cizire has been the main lifeline from Turkey to the “capital” of the Caliphate ar-Raqqa, where weapons, fighters, oil and humanitarian aids used to be smuggled to ISIS held territories. The control of this land strip is of particular relevance since it divides Eastern Syrian Kurds from those living on the Western side of the country.

After the successful resistance in Kobane, the fall of Tell Abyad and the military advance in the governorate of Hasakah (with the capture of Tal Hamis, Tel Brak and the conquest of Mount Aziz, 75 km from the Turkish border) the Syrian territories under Kurdish military control increased of a third, encompassing wide areas of non-Kurdish populations, assuming the shape of a 400 kilometres long military frontier between Turkey and the Islamic State, almost uninterruptedly controlled by PYD/YPG and its Arab allies.

It is in this context that Turkey has been arranging, in past weeks, a series of preventive military measures, beefing up its security apparatus along the Syrian border, including the deployment of extra tanks. At the same time, the old Turkish plan for creating a buffer zone inside Syrian territory has been updated and discussed again in the main strategic institutional forums of the country. Such a plan, opposed by US and other Turkish allies, contemplates a long-term deployment of Turkish armed forces inside Syria in order to create a 30 km deep safe-haven for handling the flow of new refugees and – likely – resettling the ones already living in Turkey. Of course, such neutralised zone controlled by Turkish armed forces will be a great obstacle for the Syrian Kurds to create corridors among the different Kurds territories and, above all, it will dissolve the possibility to unifying eastern and western Syrian Kurds.

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It seems anyway, that the decision of an invasion of Syria by Turkish armed forces has not been taken yet and, anyway, it won't be automatic but it will eventually happen as reaction to an attempt by Kurds militias to take over the last border stripe held by ISIS. This may happen if YPG will start the operations to take the city of Jarablus, moving its troops westward across the Euphrates River. Any territorial unification of all the areas inhabited by Kurds and the construction of an East - West Kurd corridor along the Turkish border, will be considered in Turkey a major threat to Turkish national security, and the first concrete step for the establishment of a Kurdish state. To prevent such a scenario Ankara will resort to the use of force in Syria, covering it with humanitarian reasons (that are dramatically real, anyway). Finally, the slow pace of the formation of the new government in Turkey seems connected to the evolving strategic situation in Syria and to the preparation of military operative plans for the creation of an eventual military controlled buffer zone inside Syria.

The Greek crisis, the role of China and Russia and the decaying concept of a South Eastern Europe Region

The bailout of Greece by the international financial institutions and EU creditor countries has, for the time being, avoided the risk of a sudden and traumatic exit of Athens from the Eurozone. However, the declining role of Greece in the European Union and the geopolitical consequences of the obliteration of its sovereignty will produce important consequences in the region of South Eastern Europe (SEE) and Eastern Mediterranean (MO). The financial failure of the Greek state is, of course, a result of the inability of Athens to pay off a debt of about 250 billion euro, which represents 175% of GDP of the country, but that becomes untenable in the face of an economy and a public administration that are largely dysfunctional that was possible in the context of EU and NATO membership only due to the peculiar geopolitical and strategic regional security inherited by the Cold War.

Obviously, the major faults and the specific failure of Greece can only be attributed to the Greek governments, in particular with the adoption of a failed policy of public spending undertaken by the socialist governments in the eighties and continued for the next decade. A policy that began with Athens entry into the EU (1981), a process that led to the explosion of the country's public debt, quadrupled in just ten years. This growing public debt has been mostly

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funded through the purchase of bonds by non-residents, mostly EU private banks, German and French in particular. The financial implosion of Greece is in fact an additional - and possibly fatal - blow to the plan to build a sustainable Euro-Atlantic arch of integration that could be capable of embracing all the countries stretching from the Gulf of Fiume, in the northern Adriatic, to the Gulf of Alexandretta in the Eastern Mediterranean. The creation of such a region would have integrated the Mediterranean and Southern dimension of Eastern Europe, “closing” it to alternative or antagonist Eurasian geopolitical projections.

The Greek financial failure that is happening in the very heart of the Balkans can be summed with two other processes equally disruptive of the South Eastern Europe region: the precarious and unsafe situation of the Western Balkans, an area mostly abandoned at itself and that to many EU countries is mainly a source of problems to watch from rather than an asset to increase EU security and common wealth; and the centrifugal geopolitical path taken by Islamist Turkey political Turkish, that since a decade has been actively operating in its external action in the direction of watering down the difficult path of convergence with the West, replacing it assertively with a more popular but smoky, dangerous and expensive but political posture towards the Middle East and the Gulf.

In this context, and despite the dramatic economic and financial situation in Greece, the country has continued and will persevere to maintain a significant level of military spending, whose value gradually declined from the record level of 2009 (when it reached 7.6 billion euro i.e. 3.2% of GDP) but it remains one of the highest in Europe as a percentage of GDP even after cuts of more than 30% that have been implemented after 2010. The level of defence spending now appears to have been consolidated at around 2% of GDP; a level that seems to be the lowest that Greek politics could reach. A minimum level that apparently has a consensus also from some of Greek creditor countries and from the Atlantic Alliance as well. Even the current far-left government of Tsipras appears to be incapable to make further reductions to the military spending, as it was clearly stated by the Greek Prime Minister at the beginning of July 2015, who was quoted by Reuters declaring that "There is not, there was not and there will never be a proposal by the Greek government to cut defence spending".

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The financial rescue of Greece, closely linked to the maintenance of its military role in NATO, is now the last attempt to avoid the final collapse of the geopolitical region of South Eastern Europe, curbing the centrifugal tendencies and the resurgence of unresolved mini - nationalism and the process of fragmentation already underway that, in the medium - long term, could fuel the creation of new spheres of influence in the area by extra-European countries such as Russia and China.

However, it should be considered that at the moment both Russia and China do not have the strength to engage themselves in costly actions of political and economic penetration openly disruptive of EU integration plans, but their strategy aims more to build gradually and over time their sphere of influence to the neglected and troubled outskirts of the Western-European political region of influence. For this reason a fragmentation and break up of South Eastern Europe that will lead its countries outside the Union is not in the interests of either China or Russia because neither country has the financial strength, military capabilities and political leverage to take charge of the reconstruction of a new geopolitical alternative in the Eastern Mediterranean / South Eastern Europe, and therefore to benefit from it. We can say that both Russia and China pursue a functional approach to South Eastern Europe prioritising mostly one strategic dimension of their presence in the region (energy for Russia, goods logistics and transportation for China) leaving to EU the burden of state building, conflict resolution and – also – financially saving the bankrupted countries of the region.

In conclusion we can say that in South Eastern Europe the 1) difficulties of regional integration, 2) the permanence of internal factors of instability and crisis, 3) the difficulties and political resistances in the financial rescue of Greece by the EU, 4) the substantial lack of Russian or Chinese interests alternative to design euro-Atlantic and 5) the disengagement of Turkey from the region, are the main hallmarks of the *Zeitgeist* of South Eastern Europe in the middle of 2015. These factors do not contradict each other, but rather are all signs of the progressive decline of the global geopolitical value of South Eastern Europe as a region. This decline must be understood not in the sense of a progressive marginalization or irrelevance of the area, but rather as a progressive weakening of the regionalist approach to the growing security and financial problems of the region.

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The lack of a viable regional solution to the region's problems and the need to solve one-by-one the full spectrum of all the intermingled stability problems of South Eastern Europe increase, of course, the nature of the problems and threats that may arise from - or through - the region of South Eastern Europe.

Nicola Pedde (*)

Political evolution in Libya, Tunisia and Iran

The Middle East is growingly interested by a series of crises still fed by the three main area of conflict in the wider region: Libya, Syria and Iraq.

Each of this countries is progressively draining the capacity of assuring stability in the neighbouring areas, provoking side-effects and spill-overs of increasing intensity and violence.

Tunisia and Egypt are the countries which are paying more than others the effect of the Libyan crisis, while Syrian is having a regional booming effect in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, from where most of the fighters are coming and where ISIS is born and settled in the Anbar region.

If we include the enduring Israelo-Palestinian conflict, the Yemen crisis and the Saudi intervention and the Bahraini fragile instability, it could be easily calculated as more than the half of the entire wider Middle East is already in a critical situation or fighting a conflict.

The picture of the region is increasingly critical, leaving space for further pessimism in the years to come, given the deterioration of most of the actually present crises.

The international community, however, still lacks the capacity of understanding both the roots and the dynamics of these crises, misinterpreting the core phenomenon, being trapped in its traditional Islamophobic attitude and, more in particular, still tempted to favour the revenge of authoritarian political solutions to restore order and stability. A strategy which already failed in the past, and which is risking to trap Europe and the West in even bigger problems in the near future.

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The crisis in Libya and the June 17th deadline for a final agreement between Tripoli and Tobruk

June 17th will be the final deadline proposed by the UN to the two main political factions fighting for political predominance in Libya.

Bernardino Leòn, the UN special envoy for Libya, sent on June 1st a fourth and final draft for an agreement between the two entities of Tripoli and Tobruk, adding that this is not only the last offer but also a take-it-or-leave-it proposal. There are few chances that this last proposal could sort any positive affect, transforming the actual militarily confrontation into a political agreement. For several reasons.

First of all, the UN systematically lacked in the capacity of being perceived in Libya as a *super partes* entity, offering on the Tripoli side the impression of being biased and one sided in its support for the Parliament in Tobruk. Most of the UN proposals were clearly drafted in a way to please the internationally recognized Parliament of Tobruk, and consciously knowing that Tripoli would have rejected them.

In addition, the international community and the UN in particular have done virtually nothing to stop general Haftar systematic attempts to sabotage negotiations and dialogue, not even denouncing the continuous military operations carried out by Haftar forces against their own enemies around Tripoli. This combination of factors have progressively undermined UN's credibility in Tripoli, and as well that of its envoy Bernardino Leòn, who had been able for a long period of time of maintaining his own impartial credibility.

It is thus highly improbable that on June 17th there will be any concrete results around the last UN proposal for agreement, given the growing complaints coming from Tripoli and the accusations toward general Haftar's personal political and military ambitions.

The narrative of the Libyan crisis I thus still dominated by several stereotypes which have been intentionally crafted within the Tobruk's administration, and in particular by the ambiguous figure of general Khalifa Haftar.

The idea of a dualism between the "secular and democratic forces of Tobruk" against the "jihadists and the Islamic terrorists of Tripoli" is clearly not credible and sustainable, but nevertheless still the base for most of the international support to Tobruk.

If it is certainly true that in Tripoli the political environment is dominate by Is-

lamists and that among them there are also radical and extremist factions, it is as well true that these groups are minoritarian and not representing any major social position.

General Haftar's attempt to present Tripoli as an ISIS linked political faction is blatantly denied by the evidence of the fighting between Tripoli and the – still small – ISIS military forces in Northern Libya. And again it is Haftar that is visibly trying to convince the international community of the risk connected with the possibility of infiltration of ISIS fighters within the huge numbers of migrants leaving from Libya toward southern Europe, and Italy in particular. Although no European military and intelligence apparatus is concretely sharing this fears, the political debate has been deeply influenced by Haftar's pretentious speculations, feeding a growingly intense and animated debate. When it came to a greater intra European cooperation against the this possible threat, however, the entire debate has been characterized by the evidence of a concrete lack of interest, financial support and general political interest.

A small, but quite positive effect generated by the on-going crisis, is that both in Tripoli and Bengasi there are political factions – mostly supported by the economic and business community – willing to identify another possible solution, by marginalizing both radical Islamists on one side, and general Haftar on the other side.

Despite good intentions, however, these groups are constantly and directly challenged not only by their own adversaries on the ground (radical Islamists and Haftar), but also by those who are heavily investing in this crisis in the region, and in particular Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

For that reason, several Arab media are growingly spreading the voice that, in case of failure of the June 17th deadline, the US are ready to work toward an "Al Sisi solution" in Libya, being ready to put general Haftar in power in order to re-establish a centralized order and stability through a strong military role. This vision, although probably shared by some in Europe and the US, is however colliding with the overall general strategy of both the Europeans and American in the Middle East and North Africa in particular, which is still much

more confused and in continuous evolution.

Terrorism in Tunisia and the aftermath of the Libyan crisis

The terrorist's attack in Tunisia of June 26th, in the resort of Sousse, demonstrated how vulnerable and exposed Tunisia is to the threat posed by *ihadists*. A small commando of – presumably – two entered the resort eventually firing at the tourists with assault rifles and killing almost 38. After the intervention of the police forces, one of the attackers has been killed, demonstrating that the new generations of fighters are often unknown to the authorities, socially invisible and coming from traditional and normal cultural environments.

This further proves how Tunisia's security problem is today connected more and more with the endemic structural factors of the local economic system and political structure, still unable of delivering credible and concrete solutions to the Tunisians.

Poverty, unemployment and scarce economic redistribution were the most relevant factors behind the revolution of 2010/11, and the same factors are behind the growth of terrorism in today's Tunisia.

The political debate is still trapped after almost five years within the framework of the Islamist-secular confrontation, through a narrative made of slogans and reciprocal accusations. The goal of each political group is that of delegitimizing the opponents, restoring the zero-sum-game logic of power of the old days of the authoritarian regimes.

Doing so, the institutional apparatus totally failed in providing long term credible solutions to the most urgent needs of the country, especially within the economic context.

Tunisia's economy is structurally affected by the longstanding lack of diversification and investments, isolated within a regional context where barriers are preferred to cooperation and free exchange, and where tourism has been taken as the *panacea* of all local problems, gradually demolishing the sectors of agriculture and livestock, draining water from the countryside to the coast to feed tourism's infrastructure and eventually reshaping Tunisian economy into a largely seasonal and mono-sectorial scheme.

The effect of this transformation led to an unprecedented rise of unemployment, lack of economic redistribution and rigidity of the infrastructural system, whose combination with authoritarianism and arrogance of the local regime

led to a revolt in 2010.

The failure of the 1995 Barcelona process, combined with lack of long term economic planning and the incapacity of the west of providing credible and sustainable solutions, eventually led almost the entire region to collapse. Favouring the rise of the radical Islamic forces and providing fertile ground to the *jihadist's* cells in the region.

What's happening today in Tunisia is the outcome of that process, with the additional factor represented by the access on the ground of exogenous forces coming from the Gulf and from the nearby regional conflicts, which are not only able to provide new young fighting forces, but also an incredibly wealthy economic system based on smuggling and illegal traffics.

Tunisia has been gradually transformed into the backstage of the Libyan's conflict, providing not only a safe place for fighters and businessmen, but also an almost secure and uncontrolled door from where fighters and weapons can easily flow.

The growing number of young Tunisians fighters adhering to the *jihadist's* cells of Daesh and al Qaeda in the region could be easily explained not through a resurrection of the religious sentiments within the local society, but as a consequence of the growing poverty and social inequalities. The systematic failures of the political system and the continuous lack in providing long term solutions for the economic and social stability, especially in the largely underdeveloped rural areas of the centre and the south, is feeding a large popular resentment, often translated into adherence to *jihadism* and the values of the most radical Salafist groups.

A growing numbers of logistic and training facilities run by the Islamic State and al Qaeda – even if the two groups are opposed to each other – has been set up in the area of Kasserine and the mountains of Chaambi, and the Tunisian armed and police forces are not equipped and properly instructed to fight and contain this phenomenon. The lack of a political will and capacity is also affecting intelligence capabilities, with the result of a growing influence of the

jihadist's forces all over the region.

Iran, Libya and Egypt are the hotspots in July

Three main events characterized the month of July in the region of the Middle East: the agreement in Vienna over the Iranian nuclear programme, the UN action in Libya in order to define a new political phase, and the escalation of terror in Egypt.

On July 14th the P5+1 countries agreed with Iran in Vienna over the text of the document which will regulate the Iranian nuclear program development, granting on the other side the cancellation of the sanctions imposed over the suspect of its military evolution.

The agreement is a diplomatic masterpiece, bringing together several extremely conflicting elements of the two side's positions, and resulting into a win-win solution potentially paving the road for further political developments.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's nuclear project will be overall reduced of two third, granting the international community from the possibility of its military evolution.

At the same time, the right to enrichment will be guaranteed with no more than 5060 first generation centrifuges, operating for the next fifteen years up to the limit of 3,67%.

The stockpile of enriched uranium will be reduced to 300 kg, and the excess quantities transferred abroad or down blended to natural uranium level.

The tricky element of the international inspections has been solved with a 15 years permit to the IAEA for continuous monitoring and high technology surveillance, in addition to inspection capacity also within military compounds. The facility of Fordow will be converted into a research centre and its centrifuges used only for the production of active isotopes.

Ninety days will be necessary to start the implementation of the agreement, after the review of the institutional framework and following the definition of a new UN Security Council resolution, which have been already issued on July 20th.

By mid December there will be hopefully the possibility of seeing the agreement delivering its fruits, with a gradual removal of the sanctions and an easy mechanism of re-imposition if Iran will be found violating the agreement.

On another front, in Libya, the UN envoy Bernardino Leon submitted a text for a new political proposal, binding the parties to cooperate to establish a cen-

tral recognised government and new Constitutional chart.

The document has been signed by the Tobruk Parliament and by some elements of the Tripoli based government, but not by the most radical Islamic movements and some of the militias.

The partial success is still conditioned by several political aspects, and in particular the request from the Tripoli side to remove the discussed figure of the Tobruk's Minister of Defence, gen. Khalifa Haftar, before entering into a more serious debate for the future political national system.

The new proposal from the UN is certainly a positive signal for both parties, although the problem is today mostly connected with the capacity of disarming militias and imposing the rule of law in vast areas of the country which have been occupied by jihadists and the local self-proclaimed affiliate of the Islamic State.

Egypt is registering a continuous deterioration of its security, as demonstrated by two significant episodes in Cairo and Sinai in the month of July.

A rocket fired from the coast near the strip of Gaza hit an Egyptian's Navy vessel provoking the death of some personnel and the loss of the ship. The attack is to be inserted into a major massive offensive in the Sinai area by elements of the local self-proclaimed ISIS affiliate, which have conducted several attacks in vast portion of the northern part of the Sinai peninsula.

In the same days, in Cairo, a car bomb exploded just outside the Italian consulate, provoking a casualty and several wounded. It is not yet clear if the objective was the Italian diplomatic building (as Egypt is trying to sustain, in an attempt of binding Italy more and more in the support to Cairo), or, as it seems more probable from the first investigative actions, an attack to the car of a lawyer working on the delicate dossier of the Muslim Brotherhood condemnation in Cairo.

Marco Massoni (*)

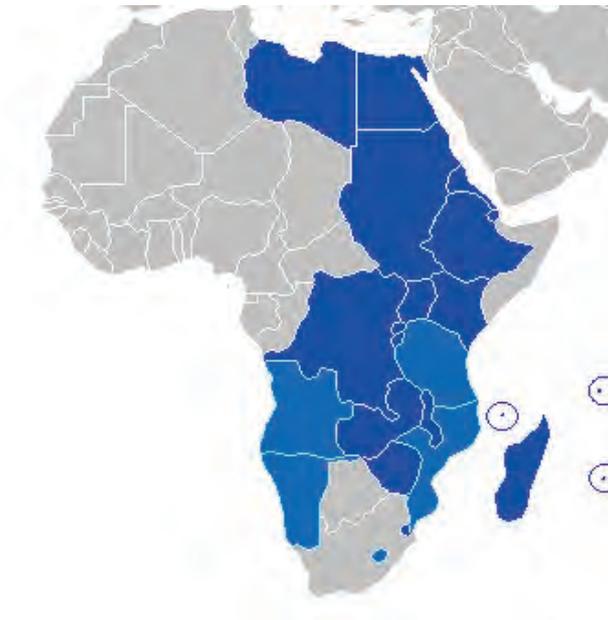
COMESA, Sahel, Political Evolution in Central Africa and the Italian Development Finance Institution (DFI)

1. The 18th COMESA Summit

The *Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa* (COMESA) is one of eight Regional Economic Communities (i.e. RECs) recognized by the African Union (AU). The RECs, which collect individual Member States into sub-regions, for a better and greater economic integration, are the so-called building-blocks of the AU, being at the basis of the development programme's strategy of the Union, that is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). COMESA was established in 1981 under the name of the *Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA)*, only to be revisited in 1994 as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. COMESA's current Chairman is the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, *Hailemariam Desalegn*, whereas since 2008 the Secretary General is the Zimbabwean *Sindiso Ndema Ngwenya* since 2008, having then replaced the Kenyan Erastus Mwencha, current Vice-President of the African Union Commission (AUC). Besides, the President of Madagascar, *Hery Rajaonariamampianina*, was elected Vice-President, while the Congolese President, *Joseph Kabila* is the new Rapporteur. The HQ's Secretariat is in Lusaka (Zambia), while the official languages of the Organization are English, French and Arabic. Covering diverse regions of Africa, COMESA's member states are *Burundi, Comoros, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe*. Few other countries used to be part of it, such as Angola, Lesotho (left in 1997), Mozambique (left in 1997), Tanzania (left in 2000) and Namibia (left in 2004).

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COMESA Member States



The 18th Summit of Heads of State and Government of COMESA (Addis Ababa, 30th to 31st March)¹ was dedicated to the theme of inclusive and sustainable industrialization process, emphasizing the need for Africa to grow at least by 7% on average, instead of ‘only’ 5.5%. In point of fact, the high level meeting remarked that so far one of the major problems preventing any African development has always been the lack of integration of regional markets. The domestic trade between 2013 and 2014 though has increased from 19,2 to 22 billion dollars with forecasts for 2016 to easily reach 25 billion dollars. In addition, the development of the *COMESA-EAC-SADC Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA)*, namely the initiative of these three RECs to harmonize and standardize the procedures inherent in their economic and trade integration and industrialization processes, has become an example to follow in some other

¹ See: <http://www.comesa.int/summit2015/> (last retrieved: 10.04.2015)

similar African contexts. Therefore, soon products shall be given the label of goods *Made in COMESA*. As mentioned before, the Treaty establishing COMESA was signed in November 1993 in Kampala (Uganda) and ratified the following year (1994) in Lilongwe (Malawi). The COMESA replaced the PTA preferential trade area, meant to promote cooperation and development in the fields of trade, customs and monetary affairs, agriculture and communications within the Eastern and the Southern African countries. As a matter of fact, the member countries of COMESA altogether correspond to a market of some 400 million inhabitants, with a range of activities extending for more than twelve million square kilometres. On this basis, COMESA develops its actions, giving priority to infrastructure, telecommunications, financial services, agribusiness, tourism, and river transport. Particularly, the following lines are pivotal: the realization of sustainable growth to be attained through both the market economy and an area of joint investment, as well as the promotion of foreign investment, especially in some key areas such as infrastructure and transport, telecommunications, financial services and agribusiness), including through the creation of a special agency. Another objective is the attainment of peace and security across the entire region in terms of cooperation between Government, harmonization of the police force and integration of development programmes; the principle of non-aggression; the rule of law; the promotion and support of democracy of member states; peaceful resolution of conflicts among states and peace building as a prerequisite of any single Nation economic development. Mostly, COMESA is willing to lead to the strengthening of relations among member states of the region through initiatives that take into account the equality and the interdependence of each one of them, so as to ensure mutual trust, thanks to the maintenance of international peace and stability through the strengthening of good neighbourly relations, according to some fundamental principles such as accountability, justice and international solidarity; for instance, COMESA has deployed its own election observation mission during the Sudanese elections of last April. In this regard, emphasis is given to the promotion of the respect for human rights with the recognition and promotion of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the principles enshrined in the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights*.

With regard to the obstacles to economic and commercial mutual integration, it is urgent to give a substantial boost to the improvement of infrastructures,

and the elimination of non-tariff barriers and also to the free movement of persons. In 2000, upon the achievement of the *COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA)*, customs barriers among nine countries were eliminated (Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe). However, cornerstone of this operation will be switching from a free trade area to a true customs union by means of the establishment of a *Common External Tariff (CET)* and the creation of a common Monetary Institute by 2018. Anyhow, many factors are into play in this challenge, such as the increase in industrial productivity, manufacturing and agro-industrial processes for greater food security and for the increase of the workforce; the establishment of adequate technical facilities to ensure a better exploitation of the waters of lakes and rivers; the improvement of infrastructure and of the transport system, especially in rural areas; the creation of a modern sanitation system, which addresses the problem of pollution of the sea and its food contamination along with new programmes to facilitate trade relations with foreign countries, through, above all, the privatization of the productive sector; Last but not least there is the modernization of agriculture that in the majority of the member countries equals to almost the totality of their economic output. The structure of COMESA, albeit undersized in terms of human resources made so far available, is divided according to a modern and functional organizational architecture. At the top of it there is the *Authority of Heads of State and Government*, acting as the supreme political body, in charge of COMESA's general guidelines, as well as of its management and control, performance and executive functions, plus the realization of operative targets. In addition there is the *Council of Ministers* with the task of taking decisions relating to the programmes and activities of the organizations, including the administrative and financial management's control. The *Secretariat* provides technical and advisory support to Member States in accordance with the Treaty, whereas the *Advisory Committee of the Business Community and Other Groups of Interest* is the body that facilitates dialogue between the business community and other advocacy entities. Next, we have the *Central Bank Committee of Governors*, controlling body and clearing house of the main official documents, which ensures the execution of monetary and financial cooperation programmes; the *Intergovernmental Committee* is composed of multidisciplinary permanent secretaries from all the Member States, being responsible for the development and administration of pro-

grammes and action plans in all areas of mutual cooperation; the *Technical Committees* are responsible for the economic sector and the administrative and financial matters reported by the aforementioned Intergovernmental Committee. Among the Sector-Based Institutions, it is necessary to mention at least the following ones: *COMESA Trade and Development Bank*, based in Nairobi; *COMESA Clearing House*; *COMESA Association of Commercial Banks* in Harare; *COMESA Leather Institute* in Addis Ababa; and *COMESA Re-Insurance Company (ZEP-RE)* in Nairobi. The European Union plays an important role as a trading partner of COMESA, contributing through the European Development Fund (EDF), fostering regional economic integration, to be achieved through the liberalization of trade and infrastructure development, so as to facilitate the movement of goods, services and people within the region. As for the long standing problem concerning the several overlapping memberships of quite a number of COMESA member states to some other RECs, it is to be observed that the following COMESA countries also belong to the Southern African Development Communities (SADC): Malawi, Mauritius, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The question relating to their double membership to both organizations has been resolved in December 2005 within the COMESA Ministerial Council, so, even though it is prohibited for Member States to belong to more than a customs union, they are however allowed to take part to commercial preferential agreements with other partners and with international organizations as well. In conclusion, COMESA is insufficiently known to Italian entrepreneurs interested in investing in Africa, providing an excellent opportunity for rapid expansion due to the overall exponential growth of the Sub-Saharan African economies. Indeed, it is a cross-market reality particularly attractive, since it brings together the largest, the most harmonized and most competitive market of all Africa, with particular emphasis on agricultural production, food security, monetary and financial policies as well as to infrastructure. Italy, could therefore facilitate joint initiatives dedicated to SMEs, wishing to operate in this challenging environment.

2. The EU Sahel Action Plan

April the 20th, with the slogan ‘Think and Act Regionally’, the Council of Foreign Affairs of the European Union endorsed the *Sahel Action Plan (2015-*

2020), aimed at five Sahelian States (i.e. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Mauritania). The Action Plan focuses its attention on four key priorities for the next five years, namely: preventing and combating radicalization; creation of appropriate conditions for young people; migration and mobility; border management and the fight against illicit trafficking and transnational organized crime. Since March 2011, the EU has adopted a comprehensive approach to the region, launching the *EU Security Strategy in the Sahel*, which includes the following four lines of action: *development, good governance and internal conflict resolution; political and diplomatic measures; security and the rule of law; contrast of violent extremism and radicalization*. Actually, the security situation in the Sahel region remains very uncertain, with a particularly precarious situation in northern *Mali* and around Lake Chad with relapses in southern *Libya* and northern *Nigeria*, while *Niger* is a major traffic junction and countries migratory movements through the Sahel. For that reason, the European Union granted the already operating civilian mission EUCAP Sahel Niger to integrate into the wider action on combating irregular immigration coming from Sub-Saharan Africa through the establishment of an outpost based in Agadez that is the main hub of migration routes from there leading to neighbouring *Libya* till the shores of the Mediterranean, as 90% of the West African migratory traffic passes by. The *EU Regional Action Plan (RAP)* aims to stem the *Libyan* crisis spillover effects together with the growing Sahel destabilization attempts by the more and more *Daesh* oriented salafist groups, most of them formerly known as *Al Qaeda Associated Movements (AQAM)*. The rapid evolution of the security framework across the Sahel requires to be addressed regionally, in order to take any possible repercussion on the security of Europe under control, especially with regard to its south shore, *Italy*. Regarding the five Sahelian countries recipients of bilateral and multi-bilateral actions by the EU member states under the RIP, *Italy* contributes on the one hand with €5 million through some already existing regional actions for the Sahelian band as a whole, and on the other hand, except for Chad, through programmes in favour of *Burkina Faso* with approximately €8 million, *Mali* with €15 million (plus 6 people for the EUCAP Sahel Mali and 10 people for the EUTM Mali), *Mauritania* with nearly €10 million, and *Niger* with €30 million (plus 3 people for the EUCAP Sahel Niger). The implementation of the *Sahel Action Plan 2015-2020* it is not only up to the head of the European diplomacy, *Federica*

Mogherini, but also to individual EU Member States, so as to allow *Italy* to also express its addressing capacities in a highly sensitive and volatile area to its south of the Mediterranean projection that has become both a border and transit place for south of the world migrations, which are of so much concern in the public opinion in the north of the Mediterranean. In fact, given the proximity of the Sahel for the Europe and for Italy there is a growing need to better address cross-border issues and explore a common space for dialogue and cooperation between the *Sahel*, the *Maghreb* and *Europe* as to security and migration within the broader framework of already existing mechanisms such as the *Rabat Process* and the alias *EU-Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (HoAMRI)*, otherwise known as *Khartoum Process* on migration and development. The framework sketched by the EU Sahel Action Plan (2015–2020) is to no longer consider any discontinuity of vision nor measures, along the north-south axis, rather it is a question on how developing a common euro-African strategic approach, summarized as follows: *Europe-Mediterranean-Maghreb-Sahel*.

3. Political Evolution in Central Africa: the Escalation of Violence in Burundi and The Reshuffle of Power in Gabon

Burundi, whose ethnic composition is 60% Hutu and 40% Tutsi, is getting more and more on the brink of civil war. After the failed coup on 13 May by a military junta, the President of Burundi, *Pierre Nkurunziza*, has returned to the capital Bujumbura and is again firmly in power, repudiating the so-called ‘Committee for National Salvation’, led by coup leader General *Godefroid Niyombareh*. On May 31, the final Communiqué of the *Extraordinary Summit of the East African Community (EAC)*, convened in *Dar Es Salaam* by the Tanzanian President, *Jakaya Kikwete*, required the postponement of the elections of no less than a month and a half, so as to ensure the recovery of the conditions for a dialogue between government and opposition. Even the *United States*, the *European Union* and the *African Union*, after condemning the subversion of the constitutional order, have demanded the postponement of the elections. In addition, the *European Union Election Observation Mission (EU-EOM)* deployed in Burundi has been suspended for reasons of security and political expediency, since the confusion reigning in the country does not allow performing according to international standards. The failed coup is justified by the obsti-

nacy of the incumbent President to remain in power and stand again for the third time, in contravention of international agreements and jeopardizing the domestic reconciliation of a connection Nation of the fragile *Great Lakes Region*. Even though the whole international community had discouraged Burundian authorities to carry out the complex electoral process, given the critical overall situation, the incumbent President and leader of the *National Council for Defence of Democracy-Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)*, refused any form of conciliation, having moved forward regardless of the risk of the total collapse of the society of Burundi, which could soon occur on the basis of the following factors: in spite of the fact that the UN led election observation mission (i.e. MENU) remains on the ground, the EU has been complaining about the rapid deterioration of the security situation across the country; the opposition parties boycotted the entire electoral process, depicting it as a farce; the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, *Said Djinnit*, has formally renounced the role of mediator between the government and opposition and was replaced in this task by the UN Representative in Central Africa, *Abdoulaye Bathily*; a significant wave of unrests and public protests against the government is taking place, feeding a climate of fear and intimidation otherwise known as a strategy of tension, especially in the capital, Bujumbura, where some students have taken refuge in the US Embassy; there are already thousands of IDPs and at least one hundred thousand refugees across the border, particularly in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Tanzania; Paris has suspended any military cooperation with Bujumbura; the Joint International Facilitation Team (JIFT) composed of the East African Community (EAC) and the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) has not mentioned the incongruity of the constitutional modification that allows the President in office to be able to run for a third term. The Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) delayed by a few days the calendar as follows: June the 29th municipal and legislative terms, while July the 15th the presidential elections. The African Union in place of election observers did deploy some fifty military observers, to monitor the very much alike disarmament of the many militias active in Burundi, including a particularly concerning one, the *Imbonerakure*, that is the ruling party's youth wing, which in Kirundi language means 'those who see far away', accused of using violence against political adversaries. Besides, the second Vice-President

of Burundi, Gervais Rufyikiri, as well as the President of the Parliament, Pie Ntavyohanyuma, have fled the country for Belgium. Therefore, the situation looks patently critical and volatile with all options opened. Actually, few days after President Nkurunziza took office once again, a number of excellent assassinations have been taking place, revealing the acute state of tension in the country. At the same time, in *Gabon*, in view of the general elections of August 2016, an inner reconfiguration within domestic policy is taking place, up to the idea to foresee the loss of so far untarnished Bongo's family dynasty that has been continuously in power since independence from France, namely since 1960. Indeed a growing number of escapees from the rank of the ruling party, the *Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG)* led by the President of the Republic, *Ali Bongo*. Among them we find the former Foreign Minister and former President of the African Union Commission (AUC), the powerful *Jean Ping*, the former Premier *Jean Eyegbé Ndong*, and *René Ndemezo'o Obiang*, who approached a relevant opposition party, the National Union of *Zacharie Myboto*. At the same time, Ping is also among the inspirers of a newly created political party, that is the *Opposition United Front for Democracy and Alternation*, and has announced to run for presidency on its behalf. Conceivably, the readjustment of the interests of Paris in the area, more and more involved to get rid of excessively long course heads of state in its former colonies, will make a difference as to discredit the Bongo's candidacy next year, by indirectly supporting any stronger and more credible political alternatives.

4. The New Italian Development Finance Institution (DFI)

The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing Development took place July 13 to 16 in Ethiopia, right ahead of the UN Summit in September dedicated to the adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The conference was an opportunity to take stock of the tools and objectives that the international community summons, to end poverty and hunger in the broader part of efforts to ensure sustainable development in accordance with the *Sustainable development Goals (SDGs)*. To this end, a new cornerstone seems more and more appropriate such as any innovative and hybrid forms between the public and the private sectors, capable of unlocking the financial potential, so far expressed only marginally, that it is necessary to revitalize the Official Development Assistance (ODA), especially in terms of

new international aid instruments, to mitigate the vulnerability of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as the Middle-Income Countries (MICs). Among the countermeasures essential to bridge the infrastructural gap in developing countries in general and in African ones in particular, at least \$ 1.5 trillion a year should be made available. Besides, it is necessary to reduce illicit capital at international level by 2030 according to the guidelines of both the UN Convention against Corruption and the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows (IFFS) for Africa. It goes without saying that all this can never be realized in the absence of the stated goal, after all rarely achieved, of 0.7 per cent destined to Official Development Assistance (ODA) of donors' national GDP, parameter that Italy have not met for the last fifteen years, as it amounts on average to a mere 0.16 per cent. The aim to be met by 2020 ought to be 0.30 per cent, which is in any case well below the benchmark required by the United Nations. Yet, Trade not Aid, or Aid for Trade is the motto of Addis Ababa's meeting, in order to improve financing for development projects in the southern hemisphere, so it is for the international trade of becoming the driving force for development for decades to come. During the conference the Italian Prime Minister, *Matteo Renzi*, announced an important innovation: the creation of the *New Italian Development Finance Institution (DFI)* within the *Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP)*. The reason for the birth of an Italian Export Bank is twofold: on the one hand on the occasion of international tenders Italian applications need to be strengthened by virtue of more robust guarantees and funding coming directly from the Italian Government, so as to truly show attractive competitiveness on a global level compared to competitors of other countries, including European ones, and on the other hand it is urgent to actually pump finances in make development cooperation projects more sustainable, by means of to a more appropriate blending between public and private resources, including the mobilization of EU ones. According to the United Nations guidelines, therefore CDP will begin working not only through all the institutional actors of the Italian Cooperation, with the goal of providing financing on favourable terms to the public and private sectors of partner countries, but also with the direct financing of development projects, to foster local entrepreneurship and the establishment of joint ventures, providing the public and private sector a variety of financial instruments

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as well as risk-sharing and risk capital. Like all emerging markets also Sub-Saharan Africa is at risk. Nonetheless, companies seeking to invest there must be prepared to manage the volatility, without losing sight of the strategic objectives that make Africa one of the most attractive markets ever. The lesson learned from Addis Ababa is that it takes innovative financial instruments, to support businesses in those promising markets such as Africa. *Could the Italian Exim Bank become the keystone of Rome's economic diplomacy towards Africa, shuffling its assets of around 250 billion euros? Furthermore, it is worth noting that such assets are made of national postal savings, the majority of which applying to regular migrants resident in Italy, and that at present Italian Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) are almost entirely run by immigrants. As a consequence, through this new Government initiative, Italy will be able to manage to finance its economic growth, hooking it to the rapid development of Africa, precisely thanks to the presence and dynamism of African migrants, whose depreciated image in the public opinion it is paradoxically neither in line with facts nor with reality.*

Lorena Di Placido (*)

A mid-year assessment for the post-Soviet space

Lukashenko, the winner of the Ukrainian crisis

It is quite evident that the crisis that has been affecting Ukraine for more than one year is in many ways involving different countries, as well as supranational institutions like the European Union and NATO.

In sum:

- the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia has deeply outraged many international observers, leading to the imposition of cross-sanctions between the European Union and Russia, and a realignment of European and extra regional strategic partnerships (strengthening of Russian-Chinese cooperation; reassessment of the role of Turkey as an energy hub ...);
- Moscow's (more or less latent) support to the Donbass region deepens the gap with Kiev and its Western allies, highlighting the political, rather than military, motive of the conflict underway;
- the resoluteness of Russian positions continues to alarm the northern European countries, which join forces within NATO with increasing conviction to find a common response to the threat posed by Moscow to regional security, especially following repeated violations of national airspace and territorial waters of the Baltic and Nordic countries;
- the pro-European political choice of Kiev has brought the Ukrainian crisis directly before the institutions in Brussels, called to support and guide the integration of a problematic partner, without having uniform views among its members (some of them – Hungary, Czech Republic, Serbia – have an interest in maintaining good relations with Russia and do not agree with EU decisions);
- the perception of a looming threat to regional security posed by Russia has influenced the choice of the Polish electorate to elect conservative-nationalist Andrzej Duda as President of the Republic, in May.

However, in this delicate regional context which is struggling to find a composition and, in fact, is having its internal positions more and more radicalized,

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Belarus stands out for having taken substantial benefits, as well as prestige, from its balanced/equidistant role of mediator between the parties in conflict, that its president Alexander Lukashenko has managed to carve out for the country.

In office since 1994, Lukashenko has addressed the Belarusian politics since independence from the Soviet Union. Throughout the post-Soviet period, relations with Moscow have always been very close, to the point that the two countries signed in 1996 an agreement for the establishment of a supranational and intergovernmental union, which in 1999 evolved into a Union State with its own institutions, laws, representative and military bodies, while maintaining the national sovereignty and foreign policy of the two countries.

The initial enthusiasm explained by the need of Belarus to seek strong support from Russia in the early years of independence, has later been replaced by the increasingly tepid fulfillment of institutional, monetary and military unification. As for citizenship, however, the citizens of the two countries have been allowed to live and work in the other without a visa.

While this integration model almost envisaging the revival of the USSR was not initially successful, Russia and Belarus (along with Kazakhstan, Armenia and, starting from May, Kyrgyzstan) created the Eurasian Union, an economic integration organization fully active as of January 2015, after a gestation period started in 2011. As for relations with the European Union, after a good start in the early 90s and the recognition of a number of assistance and economic cooperation plans in favor of Minsk, there was a progressive cooling, as the Lukashenko government was becoming more and more authoritarian. In 2011, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU decided to impose an embargo on arms and other materials which may be used for the suppression of human rights and freeze the assets of three companies close to the regime.

There is still room for dialogue, though, so much so that, in parallel with the support of civil society through the Dialogue on Modernization (2012-13), Belarus has been included in the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. Although there have been no substantive results in the adoption of these cooperation plans within the EU, Belarus annually receives €30 million in financial support from the Brussels institutions.

The Ukrainian crisis has put ties and partnerships at stake. Russia has lost its ability to financially support Belarus as it did in the years following independ-

ence, losing the most effective motive to keep extremely close ties. In this renewed context, the West, represented primarily by the EU, is gaining a new space as an economic partner and a potentially brighter political interlocutor capable of redeeming the image of Lukashenko and the country as a whole. As summarized on the website of the EU Delegation to Belarus: "The EU stands ready to improve and deepen its relations with Belarus. For the EU, Belarus is important as a neighbor. It is an integral part of the European heritage and the European community of nations. For Belarus, the Union is a principal partner in trade and important partner in regional and sectoral development.

The EU remains prepared to assist Belarus in Democratization and modernization". Capitalizing on good relations with Russia, Belarus has therefore committed to mediating between a traditional ally (from which to gain more independence) and a possible new ally (the West) to seduce by performing good third-party mediation in the delicate Ukrainian crisis. The diplomatic and image operation is having the expected success, considering the two ceasefire agreements signed in Minsk in September 2014 and February 2015. As Lukashenko said in his 29th April speech to parliament: "(with Russia) ... we are brothers ... We have always been together and we will always be. But please, allow us to have our view, our own opinion of the world".

This idea is confirmed by Lukashenko's visit to Georgia (returning from the 9th May celebrations for the Victory Day over Nazism in Moscow), where he expressed support for the territorial integrity of the country in opposition to Moscow's support to the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. More importantly, Belarus has not recognized the annexation of Crimea.

Analysis/Assessment/Outlook

The success of Russia-led organizations depends on Moscow's ability to be economically and politically attractive and influential. When the magnet is in hard times, as is currently the case of the Ukrainian crisis and the economic difficulties faced by Russia, satellite entities have to choose how strong their interest is in gravitating towards it. Hence, as in the case of Belarus, the possible realignment of positions and the start of renewed relationships with partners once being far away.

In parallel, the EU justifies the recent past of the Belarusian politics, the repression of the opposition that followed the protests against the 2010 election

results and the sanctions, with the need to find every potentially feasible way to overcome the Ukrainian crisis, which is seen as the real threat to European security.

What has been taking place for over a year in the eastern border of Europe is, therefore, leading to a gradual realignment of certain positions and the consolidation of the regional role of some stakeholders. Among them, Belarus is certainly a new unexpected candidate, and yet capable of producing short- and medium-term interesting effects, given the ability to perform a significant mediating role between opposing political contexts.

Extremism in Central Asia and the Northern Caucasus

The extremist preaching in the former Soviet space continues to keep vigilant the regional authorities in Central Asia and the North Caucasus.

With regard to Central Asia, the situation is particularly serious in Tajikistan. In mid-June, the Tajik authorities have decided to ban access to social networks (Facebook and Odnoklassiki, the network used by the Russian-speaking users to keep in touch with classmates) and You Tube, following the spread of a video of threats to Russia and the United States by Gulmurod Halimov, the former commander of the special forces of the Interior Ministry (the OMON) currently engaged in the Islamic State. In the video, Halimov claims to have joined the Islamic State to contest the repressive religious policies of the Tajik government, such as the limitation in prayer and the restrictions on dress code. Former lawyer, father of eight children and officer of the Interior Ministry since 1990, Halimov has been placed in charge of OMON in 2012, after having gained considerable experience in counter-terrorism, also attending courses in Russia and the United States. Last April he had gone missing. The suspicion that he had gone to Syria to execute a Tajik national chief militiaman of the IS widespread. The Tajik authorities have issued an international arrest warrant for Halimov with several counts, including treason and illegal participation in military operations abroad.

The case of Halimov has created a situation of even more serious alarm in Tajikistan, which is affected by infiltration of extremists from the porous border with Afghanistan.

In mid-June, Tajik media have also spread the news that four soldiers captured by the Taliban in December 2014 had been released. Taliban sources have con-

firmed the release of the four soldiers, stating interest in strengthening future relations with Tajikistan. Apparently, the release took place through the mediation of Qatar.

Tajikistan appears to be the most vulnerable country to infiltration and extremist preaching in the Central Asian region, partly because of its recent history (the Civil War in the years following independence had strong religious connotations) partly because of the geographical contiguity with Afghanistan and the difficulties in preventing the influx of extremists, criminals and illegal trafficking. Given the criticalities of the security situation in Tajikistan, which may infect the entire regional framework, the neighboring countries take high level of attention, in order to facilitate checking on the extremist phenomenon within national borders.

According to several experts, the spread of extremism in Central Asia appears to be certainly worthy of attention, although it cannot be the beginning of a large-scale terror campaign.

The situation in the North Caucasus - namely in the southern republics of the Russian Federation involved in the secessionist wars of the 90s - is quite different.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Chechnya declared its independence in 1991. At that time, the Salafi preaching was widely promoted in the break-away republic by emissaries from the Middle East, promoting radicalism. After the first Chechen war (1994-96), Chechnya itself became a focal point for the spread of extremism also among Chechens abroad, particularly in Turkey.

Chechen extremists have maintained the myth of secession until 2007, when they embraced the broader goal of setting up an Emirate in North Caucasus. The weakening of the secessionist goal has been the first step towards an Islamic State extremist project. Progressively, in the last years many groups belonging to the Emirate of the North Caucasus are gradually adhering to IS.

The reason for the success of the Caliphate is attributed by some analysts to the fact that several thousand extremists from all over the Caucasus region in recent years have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq, returning later in their lands of origin with the idea of evolving the original plan of establishment of the Caucasus Emirate with the proposal of the Islamic State.

Given the reports of hundreds of extremists from North Caucasus, the Volga region and other places in the Russian Federation, including Moscow, fighting

in the Middle East crisis areas, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called for an anti Caliphate coalition that could be established by Russia and Western states. According to estimates by the FSB, 1,400 volunteers have been recruited in the whole Russian Federation by the followers of IS.

Analysis/Assessment/Outlook

At the moment, the scenario proposed by Lavrov seems to be quite hard to implement.

The non-implementation of the agreements signed in Minsk for the settling of the Ukraine crisis is bringing the relations between the West and Russia to levels increasingly difficult to manage.

The fighting in the breakaway regions of eastern Ukraine continued with even accentuated intensity in June; the total number of casualties since the conflict reached 6400, while there are at least one million displaced people, internal and cross-border (mainly found in Russia).

Although the parliament of the European Union has defined in the 11th June resolution the necessity to continue the dialogue with Russia, the same document also says that without full compliance with the Minsk agreements and the return of the Crimea to Ukraine there are no margins to return to cooperative relationships between Russia and the rest of the world.

During the summer, the crystallization of the Ukrainian crisis and, indeed, the military escalation in place suggested scenarios of confrontation rather than dialogue between Russia and the West.

SCO and the BRICS: the multilateralism according to Putin

On July 8-10, Ufa (capital city of Bashkortostan, Republic of Bashkiria - southern Russia) hosted the fifteenth summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organization – SCO - and the sixth summit of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). The coincidence of the two events is given by the presidency assumption of both organizations by Russia, that is leading a major evolutionary phase of contemporary multilateralism.

At the summit held in Ufa sixteen among statements, decisions and agreements have been signed by SCO member States and three other documents have been adopted, i.e. two statements (on the 70th anniversary of the victory over fascism in World War II and on cooperation against drug trafficking) and an in-

formation note (on the meeting of the Council of Heads of State). After 2001, the six SCO founder members (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) were joined by Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia, Pakistan and India as observers and Belarus, Turkey and Sri Lanka as dialogue partners. At Ufa summit, SCO admitted Belarus as new observer and Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia and Nepal as dialogue partners.

The articulation of the three different status in SCO participation (member – observer - partner of dialogue) identify the level of commitment in the organization, the possibility to influence the decision process of the organization and the degree of closeness to the regional powers, Russia and China. Although SCO claims to be an open organization made by equal members, it is clear that the two regional powers play a special role especially in the definition of address policies and in attracting the interest of new partners.

The BRICS countries are an informal group of economically emerging countries, looking for a proactive role, in a context dominated by similar Euro-Atlantic structures. Therefore, the new group clearly represents an alternative to existing organizations and it is progressively becoming the emblem of Russian multilateralism against US unipolarity.

Actually, the evolution of the BRICS is taking advantage of the considerable efforts made by Russia, inclined to reaffirm its primary role in the international arena.

Originally, the group consisted of four countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China - and it was characterized as being a multilateral and dynamic organization, oriented to the economic and financial development – prior to the political and human one - of its members. The acronym BRIC was coined by Jim O'Neill, analyst at Goldman Sachs (one of the leading investment banks in the world) and author of a paper entitled Building Better Global Economic BRICs. This paper established the birth of a new cluster of economic and financial interests, emerged outside the G7 group.

In September 2006, the first informal meeting in New York among the heads of government of Brazil, Russia, India and China started the political dialogue that led, after four more meetings, to a new important event in Yekaterinburg (Russia), on 16th May 2008.

Yekaterinburg has also hosted the first official summit of the BRIC, held on 16th June 2009, in the presence of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Dmitry Medvedev,

Manmohan Singh, Hu Jintao, such as the heads of government of Brazil, Russia, India and China, respectively. Even at that time, as it would happen in 2015 in Ufa, the BRIC summit was held together with the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) one.

The participants focused their attention on the following issues: the improvement of the economic situation; the better way to set the future cooperation among the four partners; the reform of the international financial institutions; the further involvement of the BRIC countries in the global dynamics.

Furthermore, after the first summit, it had emerged the possibility to adopt a new currency for business, in order to oppose the dominance of the dollar in the world economy.

In December 2010, South Africa joined the group and the acronym changed in BRICS.

Analysis/Assessment/Outlook

At Ufa Putin revived Russia's role as a leader of multilateral organizations conceived as productive and competitive alternative to the Western world, being able to support and manage developments and dynamism in economy and finance at world level.

Being the host country, Russia gained the most important results from the Ufa summits in terms of image and took the credit for the new level of cooperation reached. The Putin's multilateral approach is the full development of the Eurasian cooperation through the sum of the SCO, Eurasian Union and Silk Road Economic Belt systems combined with BRICS integration model.

Due to its informal and dynamic nature, the BRICS has set up no official structure or physical locations, rather, a virtual Web secretariat. From a pragmatic point of view, however, having to cope with possible economic and financial problems among its partners, the BRICS countries adopted a new Development Bank (based in Shanghai) and an emergency fund with a liquidity of 150 billion dollars. Leading this new multilateral approach Russia:

- will find a way out of the isolation in which it is confined by Western countries, following the occupation of Crimea and its active role in the Ukrainian crisis;

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- can exceed its role of regional power becoming the leading country of the most dynamic international organizations in the economic and financial fields. Therefore, on the Eurasian side the consolidation of common interests is steadily developing, making easier to Russia overcoming the isolation imposed by the West.

Nunziante Mastrolia ()*

China's Turmoil

The false news of a postponement

On the 11th of May the *South China Morning Post* reported that the trial date for China's former security tsar Zhou Yongkang had been indefinitely delayed. Zhou has been charged with “bribery, abuse of power and intentional disclosure of state secrets”.

The indefinite postponement of the trial could be a signal that those who oppose the leadership of Xi Jinping have begun to react. This is the reason why this indefinite delay is an important element that it is necessary to take into account, since that trial had to be the celebration of the Xi Jinping victory on his opponents and at the same time it would have had to anticipate other political successes, notably the indictment of former president Jiang Zemin, who has continued to run the country from behind the scenes even in the years of Hu Jintao. If the trial against Zhou is not held at short, then all the opponents of the current leadership will know that Xi Jinping is beatable, and this could represent the beginning of his end.

From the Xi Jinping perspective, the anti-corruption campaign has a twofold purpose: on the one hand, it is a necessary tool to wipe out the opposition inside the CCP, the State-owned enterprises and the public administration (incidentally, it is possible to say that these oppositions to Xi Jinping are under the guidance of Jiang Zemin); on the other, the anti-corruption campaign has the aim of giving a new image of the Communist Party and strengthening its legitimacy to rule China in the eyes of public opinion.

However, because of its vastness and depth the anti-corruption campaign is turning against those who have created it. In a country where corruption is the norm, everyone has something to fear if suddenly what was previously allowed becomes a crime. This means that, potentially, the number of those who might oppose Xi Jinping, as they have something to fear, is immense.

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On the other hand the huge number of officials under investigation is the proof - in the eyes of the Chinese public opinion - that there is something rotten in the CCP.

To sum up, Xi Jinping would have wanted to strengthen its position inside the Communist Party and the State, but he is weakening his power; he would have wanted to give a new image and a stronger legitimacy to the CCP, but he is getting the opposite effect.

In addition, the more time passes without the trial is held, the more it becomes evident that Xi Jinping is weak. Furthermore, the more everyone becomes aware of the Xi Jinping weakness, the larger becomes the front of those who reject his leadership and the more will increase the number of those who want to put an end to the anti-corruption campaign and hinder the reforms program of the Xi administration.

Moreover, domestic opponents could return to use the same tools they used in the last two years in order to further weaken the leadership of Xi Jinping, that is to say blowing on the internal and regional tension outbreaks.

Finally, if Xi Jinping fails to have the upper hand on domestic opponents, he will not be able to implement the program of reforms, which the country needs, correctly identified by the 2013 Third Plenum and the 2014 Fourth Plenum. In fact, if the Chinese Government does not make such reforms, economic growth will continue to slow and China will have no hope to latch on the new industrial revolution which is now emerging in the United States.

Therefore, the dreams of glory and redemption, the aspiration to make China a global superpower, a Chinese dream nurtured for more than a generation, could suddenly disappear.

What is there to expect for the future? If the judicial authorities do not publicly condemn Zhou Yongkang as soon as possible, in order to demonstrate that Xi Jinping has really got the better of the internal opposition, then anything, at least in principle, could happen: it could even happen that the current leadership may be overthrown.

If it were to develop a real war among factions in Beijing, then the future of the country could be really compromised: not just the CCP authorities will see their dreams of glory fading away, but China itself could turn in a short amount of time into a country grappling with enormous economic difficulties, with a

heightened sense of frustration and the belief that its troubles are the product of a Western conspiracy. Then Beijing would become a highly destabilizing actor at both regional and global level.

Zhou Yongkang sentenced to life imprisonment

On June 11, Xinhua, the official press agency of the People's Republic of China, took everyone by surprise by reporting that Zhou Yongkang had received a life sentence for directly accepting bribes worth 731,000 yuan (\$117,000), seven years for abuse of power and four years for “deliberately releasing state secrets”. His family was said to have received bribes of 129 million yuan

In addition, Zhou, 73, was stripped of his political rights for life and had his personal assets confiscated, according to the verdict of Tianjin Municipal No. 1 People's Intermediate Court.

The Xinhua press release was followed an hour later by a broadcast on CCTV evening newscast, China's main evening news program, which showed the first images of a now white-haired figure who was last seen in public in 2013. Tianjin Municipal No. 1 Intermediate People's Court verdict was delivered on May 22 at the conclusion of a trial that, unlike what international observers expected, was held behind closed doors.

In the way the verdict was made public, there might be items useful to understand the future development of the political situation in China. In particular, there may be elements necessary to foresee whether the anti-corruption campaign will continue or will end.

Indeed, reading the Xinhua press release it seems that the Tianjin Court has deliberately toned down the faults of Zhou. The Court, in fact, has condemned Zhou Yongkang for accepting bribes (a crime for which in China there is the death penalty), but, in the meantime, the court has stressed that who has stolen the biggest amount of public money were Zhou's wife and his son. Moreover, the Xinhua press release informs us that Zhou Yongkang has collaborated with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) to recover the stolen money.

In addition, the Court sentenced Zhou for deliberately disclosing State secrets to an unauthorized person. However, the dissemination of this information, as Xinhua underlines, has not caused damage to national security. Finally, Zhou

Yongkang has publicly acknowledged his faults and recognized the rightness of the anti-corruption campaign led by X Jinping and Wang Qishan.

All these elements have led the Court to be particularly lenient, condemning Zhou Yongkang to life imprisonment rather than to the death penalty.

To sum up, it is possible to say that the Xinhua press release reveals what might be called the “Rational Face” of the anti-corruption campaign that is a “simple” power struggle between two different factions. Now, after the sentencing of Zhou Yongkang, this power struggle could cease.

However, as said before, Party authorities have also used another channel to spread the news of the sentencing of Zhou Yongkang, who appeared during the evening news broadcast of CCTV.

Those images produced a real shock in China's public opinion. Zhou, in fact, appeared with white hair. A quite normal thing for a 73-year-old man, but not in China where the political and economic elite consider a sign of sloppiness (and weakness) publicly showing the signs of the passage of time, hence their custom of dyeing their hair.

The message, that those images convey, is quite clear: who is condemned for accepting bribes, as Zhou Yongkang, loses not only his power but also his dignity. There is also another message: in order to restore dignity to the Chinese Communist Party every wrongdoer must be delivered to justice.

This is what we might call “the Manichean Face” of the anti-corruption campaign. A face that could be very dangerous for the future of China. The reason is simple: in a country where power is absolute, whoever is in possession of a minimum of that power tends to abuse it. This means, essentially, that no party leader or public servant can sleep peacefully in China.

Which of this two “faces” will prevail is impossible to say at this time. However, it is possible to foresee what could be the consequences if either the Rational or Manichean Face will prevail.

With the Third Plenum (November 2013) and the Fourth Plenum (November 2014), Xi Jinping and his men worked out a program of reforms which the country urgently needs. Without those reforms, the Chinese miracle might soon be interrupted.

So far, however, most of those reforms have not seen the light. The cause of this impasse is the power of those who are strongly opposing Xi Jinping’s reform plan within the Party and the public administration.

Now, the anti-corruption campaign seems to have achieved the goal of eliminating the internal opposition or, at least, of reducing its political influence. Consequently, if "the Rational Face" were to prevail, the anti-corruption campaign may soon cease; this would mean that Jiang Zemin and Zeng Qinghong would not be indicted. At that point, Xi Jinping would be free to give full application to his political and economic reforms.

On the contrary, should "the Manichean Face" prevail, the anti-corruption campaign could continue; in this case the stability of the country could be at risk and the economy could continue to slow down.

Financial Bubbles and Structural Nodes

Although the authorities have gradually loosened the regulations since 2010, capital markets in China are still heavily regulated. Moreover, China's stock market isn't as big, relative to the Chinese economy, as in developed countries. For these reasons the Chinese authorities have been able to prevent a full-blown stock market collapse rolling out an unprecedented series of steps.

For now, then, the Chinese authorities have managed to avoid the worst. However dangers may not be over. Financial crises are, in fact, often the product of a more complex set of structural problems, able to distort the economic development of a country. Indeed, in China, under the stock markets booms and bursts there are a series of structural nodes that may strangle the Chinese economic growth.

The first is a "demographic node", a true "time bomb" for the OECD that can be summed up with the phrase "getting old before getting rich" invented in the early 1980s by Wu Cangping.

The country's one-child policy has been successful in limiting population growth, but it has caused a rapidly aging society. According to the United Nations, "China has also had a declining number of births since the 1990s, which will make its population age faster than in many other developing countries. (...) In the next 30-year period, from 2010 to 2040, fast population aging will take place mainly in the less developed regions. In particular, China will see an increase of 15.7 percentage points in the proportion aged 60 years or over, from 12.4 per cent to 28.1 per cent. This increase will be the fastest in the world". Moreover, the collapsing fertility rate has led to the infamous "1-2-4" problem in which a single working-age adult will eventually have to help support two parents and four grandparents.

The “demographic node” has contributed to create a “social node”. Chinese government is committed to rebalancing its economic model, moving from an export-led model to an internal consumption-driven model. To date, private consumption in China languishes at around 35% of GDP - roughly half the level in the United States. To this very low rates of consumption/GDP in China correspond high levels of saving and investment, which has been estimated to be as much as 40 percent.

Many experts believe that one of the main causes of this astonishingly high savings rate is the lack of a social safety net for older citizens and the absence of a public health-care system.

Therefore, if the Chinese Government wants to achieve the goal of rebalancing the economic structure of the country, by increasing consumption, they need to build a real and effective Welfare State system. However it is necessary to underline that the establishment of a Welfare State system in China requires the recognition of new rights to Chinese citizens, social rights. But recognizing and guaranteeing new rights means reducing the absolute power of the Communist Party and expanding that of the Chinese civil society.

Moreover, there is a “trade-union node”. An increase in wages, in fact, is another essential element to boost domestic consumption. In order to achieve this goal, independent trade-unions and free professional associations are a very effective tool.

But rising wages and independent trade-unions and professional organizations may cause two different kinds of problems. The first is an economic problem: an increase of wages will undermine Chinese competitiveness in labour-intensive productions. The second is a political problem, if the Chinese Communist Party allows the establishment of independent trade-unions; it will create intermediate bodies that may restrain the arbitrariness of the absolute ruler.

Furthermore, there is a “technological node”. Rising labour costs may either force companies to look for better conditions outside China or to replace unskilled workers with robots. According to the International Federation of Robotics, China bought approximately 56,000 of the 227,000 industrial robots purchased worldwide in 2014 - a 54 percent increase on 2013. In June 2011, Foxconn CEO Terry Gou announced plans to deploy one million robots across factory assembly lines and in 2014 the company signed a letter of intent “to invest \$1 billion in new manufacturing plants in Indonesia to diversify its production away from China”.

A possible solution to solve this set of problems is to change China's comparative advantage and move its economy from labour-intensive, low-end product into high value added products, boosting scientific research and technological innovation.

Nevertheless, here we find the biggest node that - if nothing changes - may strangle China's economic growth: the "political node". As Mario Coccia writes: "There is higher technological innovation when the countries have more democratization. Democracy is the best environment and political regime under which technology can originate, develop and diffuse, generating benefits for firms, institutions and people". In other words, "democracy-intensive countries generate a higher rate of technological innovation, since democratization is an antecedent process (cause) to technological innovation (effect), which is also a major well-known determinant of economic growth".

In conclusion, in July the Chinese authorities have successfully prevented a financial catastrophe, but China cannot continue to grow economically if the political and institutional node are not solved.

India and the Indian Ocean

Claudia Astarita ()*

Analysing India foreign policy through continuity and change. The challenges of China and Afghanistan.

This report is an attempt to connect the changes India recently experienced in term of internal politics to the way in which the current Prime Minister Narendra Modi has planned to face two major foreign policy challenges: China's rivalry and Afghanistan's stability.

During the last few months, Indian internal politics went through many changes. These involved the current premier Narendra Modi and his government; the leader of the Congress Party Rahul Gandhi; the Aap leader Arvind Kejriwal; as well as a group of ambitious regional politicians.

India's main opposition Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi eventually returned to Delhi after a leave of absence of nearly two months. The first thing he did was getting in touch with the farmers' movement and joining it for the April 19th protest. One of the reasons why Rahul has decided to associate his party to the farmers' protest is linked to the urgency Prime Minister Narendra Modi has associated to the approval of a new land acquisition law. The reform aims at making it easier for business people to buy and invest on land, and consequently stimulate industrialization, infrastructures building and employment in Indian rural areas. It seems that Gandhi used his absence to focus on where to identify areas of discontent towards Modi's pro-reforms approach and consequently start rebuilding the support for his party from these areas. His return seems also proving that, within the Congress, the group opting for the emergence of Rahul Gandhi as its new leader has prevailed over the one supporting his younger sister Priyanka, who actually disappeared after joining her mum and brother during the 2012 electoral campaign. However, it is contended that a leader that in February suddenly disappeared leaving his party the arduous task to explain the reasons of his "meditation retreat" will be able to restructure and relaunch an already weak Congress Party.

Regarding farmers, data show that most of their problems are not related to land acquisition, rather to the poorly mechanized Indian agriculture system.

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It is realistic to state that farmers' consent will be gained by the politicians that will be able to push them for an improvement in productivity rate, as this will certainly generate a significant boost in terms of profits. However, at the moment no party has listed agricultural mechanization among its priorities.

It is interesting to highlight that Indian regional leaders have tried once again to create a coalition to challenge Modi's leadership. They tried to do this in 2012, to shape a new party to compete in national elections, but they failed because they proved unable to identify a leader and a joint program. Samajwadi Party, Indian National Lok Dal, Janata Dal United, Rashtriya Janata Dal, and Janata Dal have eventually decided to join their hands again, but it is too early to anticipate if they will succeed where their predecessors failed.

Arvind Kejriwal's second term as New Delhi Chief Minister is also quite disappointing. His decision to expel four of the party founders for "anti-party activities" has been interpreted as a proof of a slightly authoritarian evolution of the party's leadership. Considering that the Aam Aadmi Party movement has gained support because of its choice to fight for transparency and good-governance, it is contented whether Kejriwal will be able to continue to be perceived as a trustable anti-corruption leader, and with his delusive performance, it will be hard for him to emerge as a credible alternative to Modi.

Finally, the Bjp leader Narendra Modi has proved that his strategy to strengthen his leadership, the image of India abroad and national economy is undoubtedly successful. Once accused of neglecting Europe, after prioritizing Indian engagement with the United States and Asian countries, Modi eventually decided to strengthen his European connections starting with France and Germany. In France in particular, Modi ended a deadlock on an important deal on Dassault Rafale jets, which had remained frozen for more than five years.

Modi's latest foreign trip covered also Canada, where the Indian Prime Minister secured another important success: after nearly forty years of embargo, Ottawa decided to start exporting uranium and nuclear technologies to India again. This agreement carries important economic and strategic implications, and it confirms one more time the emergence of India as a both interesting and reliable political and commercial partner.

While internal political evolutions cannot be portrayed as challenging for Narendra Modi's leadership, economic data are unequivocally on his side: inflation rate, foreign direct investment trends, growth rate estimates, interna-

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tional agencies' rating, it seems that everyone is keen to offer Mr Modi a chance to succeed. It remains to be seen whether he will be able to satisfy these very high expectations or not, but it is a matter of fact that at the moment he is not able to concentrate uniquely on economy and finance as he has to face two serious challenges coming from abroad. The first is related to China's rivalry, although Mr Modi seems interested in promoting a new strategic engagement between the two countries, and the second to the maintenance of stability in Afghanistan.

It would be unfair to deny that Indian foreign policy has never been clearer and more straightforward than it is now. Once he came into office a bit more than one year ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi started engaging Asian countries aiming at changing the image of India from the one of a problematic and unreliable country to the one of a powerful nation that deserves to be trusted. He continued engaging the United States, therefore abandoning the country's traditional non-alignment vision and approach to embrace a more flexible attitude towards foreign alliances, although avoiding remaining embedded in new ambiguous and counter-productive line-ups. He eventually tried to get closer to Europe as well, although in this case it is more for the sake of strengthening economic rather than political and strategic links.

That being said, when we talk about China, all this straightforwardness seems vanishing. Some analysts believe that the fact that India is building a stronger partnership with the United States implies that its relation with China will not be able to improve. However, India seems having no qualms about accepting China's help in reviving its manufacturing sector or to gradually participate in China's Silk Road network by linking with it India's Spice Route and Project Mausam.

In mid-May Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping met in China, and this was the second time they were involved in an official visit (the first was organized in India in September 2014). Together, they signed dozens of agreements whose value has been estimated in 22 billion dollars, emphasizing cooperation for manufacturing, education, climate change and environment, infrastructure and scientific research. The two leaders also talked about Tibet, bilateral trade deficit, territorial disputes and economic growth in a very constructive way. The success of this meeting requires a deeper analysis if we want to use it to try to figure out how the relations between the two countries are going to evolve.

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To do that, as Professor Swaran Singh from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi brilliantly highlighted in a seminar recently hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the United States, we need to stress first of all that Premier Narendra Modi has actually become a phenomenon of his own kind. His very direct and informal attitude to approach issues, his energy, and his ability to embrace new technologies to strengthen his support has created a base of consensus and high hopes and expectations that is unprecedented in India. Second, it is important to remind that Modi is deeply committed to fulfil all these expectations, and this is exactly what he proved when he visited in China in May.

It has been very impressive to notice that when Modi was in China, he did not feel the need to justify or explain to his interlocutor the reason behind his re-engagement with the United States, neither he showed to be upset or annoyed by what the Chinese are currently doing with Pakistan.

Modi also stressed the importance of seeing the relationship between India and China as framed in a concept of “developmental partnership”, removing all references to China’s rise from the bilateral discourse. Most analysts were surprised by the pragmatic approach the leader took while discussing four extremely sensitive topics: border disputes; trade deficit; economic partnership; and Tibet.

What the bilateral meeting between China and India showed is that India is eventually emerging as a robust state and society, acquiring the maturity to make several steps forward in its relations not only with Beijing but with all other countries in the world. India has always been accused of lacking a leadership with clear long-term vision. Modi’s trip to China is showing that this is changing as well. Even though the two countries will continue to compete for regional influence, it is now clear that they will never engage in a military conflict. There are analysts claiming that this is happening because at the moment they share the priority of re-launching Asian economic growth, which is true, but it is also significant to notice that China and India have given up the traditional “leader-follower” approach to consolidate a more equal partnership in which they are both aware of their reciprocal interests, priorities and limits, therefore keen to cooperate when circumstances create room for collaboration. Last but not least, Modi has succeeded in detaching himself from the “expansionist China” rhetoric to embrace the idea that China has the “right to seek to influence” global political, economic and strategic dynamics.

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In doing so, he is not only pleasing China. He is also throwing the seeds to help the world recognize Indian ambitions in the long term, which is when India will also be strong enough to have the “right to influence” the global arena. This is definitely a long-term vision, and also a very ambitious one.

In order to succeed, Prime Minister Modi needs to add another card to the table, the one of South Asian stability. Everybody knows that one of the most significant challenges for South Asian stability is linked to the way in which regional powers will be able to deal with Afghanistan. At the end of the drawdown of international forces, concerns are mounting about its capacity to prevent the region from hosting another war. Iran, China, Russia and the United States are not the only countries who have an interest in maintaining Afghanistan stable. India and Pakistan share this burden as well, and they are actually even more entangled in an area where for more than 30 years they have projected their fierce rivalry. As a study published by Frédéric Grare, William Maley and Amitabh Mattoo clearly highlights, “the nature of these rivalries is essentially political and geostrategic. India and Pakistan are not competing in Afghanistan over the country’s resources, but to prevent each other from using Afghanistan as a tool in their respective grand strategies”¹.

It is argued that neither bilateral negotiations, nor economic cooperation or the engagement in any regional cooperation mechanism can make Afghanistan stable. On the contrary, it is claimed that “political consolidation of Afghanistan is the only way to avoid a return to the proxy wars of the 1990s and to preserve regional stability”.

A recent article published by *Foreign Policy* titled “The Saffron Revolution of 2018; without political reform, a never-ending war, and a declining economy, this is how everyone could lose in Afghanistan”, bravely emphasizes what may happen in the region should Afghanistan remain for long without a guide: an escalation of violence, poverty, crisis and war².

1 Frédéric Grare, William Maley, and Amitabh Mattoo, “Beyond the Great Game: Towards a National Political Process in Afghanistan Post-2014”, *Chanakya Paper*, 12 May 2014, Australia India Institute, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.

2 Christopher Kolenda, “The Saffron Revolution of 2018; Without political reform, a never-ending war, and a declining economy, this is how everyone could lose in Afghanistan”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 June 2015 (<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/23/the-saffron-revolution-of-2018/>).

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In order to understand if other regional powers are in the position to avoid this dangerous scenario from materializing, the analysis continues introducing Pakistani and Indian priorities in the region. Pakistan is one of the most active regional players in Afghanistan, a country that is still “trying to prevent the involvement of Afghan refugees in Pakistani politics and to promote a friendly government in Kabul to diminish Indian influence” there. That being said, it is recognised that Islamabad has endorsed a significant strategic shift as far as its relations with Kabul are concerned. In particular, the country has become more and more active in preventing any form of collusion among Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. This strategy is crucial to maintain stability in Pakistan but is also risky as the country has to balance between considering Afghan Taliban a threat and supporting them to secure Pakistani interests in Kabul.

India’s main fears, instead, are linked to “the prospect of a return of the Taliban and its likely impact on militant Islamic fundamentalism in the region in general and in Pakistan in particular”. To avoid this, New Delhi has supported the military intervention in Afghanistan; it has welcomed external actors such as Iran, Central Asia and China in the region to limit the expansion of Pakistan’s influence in the region; it has committed more than \$2 billion in development aid to Afghanistan. Finally, it has signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement to contribute with specific training and equipment to the strengthening of Afghan security forces. However, the Indian strategy towards Afghanistan is not less ambiguous than the Pakistani one. In this case, the risk is overstressing military support towards Afghanistan to a limit that may push or even force Pakistan to intervene.

Foreign policy mentions as a possible solution to this dangerous stalemate a further re-involvement of the United States in the region aimed at promoting political reforms, assuring diplomatic neutrality for Afghanistan, backing a new peace process, and fostering greater economic self-reliance in the country. This is certainly one option, but this paper is keener to support another approach. In particular, it is claimed that Pakistan and India should work together to face the ambiguities of Afghanistan new regional approach. In this way, they will not only contribute to regional stability and relaunch bilateral confidence-building, but they will also transform the zero-sum games that have been embedding their strategic choices for so long in a positive-sum game that is even

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offering the same gains to both players. It is undeniable that India in general and Mr. Modi in particular will have a lot to gain from that.

Stefano Felician Beccari ()*

The new relations between Manila and Tokyo, North Korea and the difficult modernization of the Philippines' defence

The Tokyo-Manila connection: an unlikely alliance (?)

At the beginning of June, during an official visit in Tokyo, the President of the Philippines and the Prime Minister of Japan have inked a “*Strengthened strategic partnership*”, a document that enhances the political and security cooperation between the two countries. This agreement has generated different feelings across Pacific Asia. Chinese mass media are protesting against the rising “militarism” of Japan, which still recalls painful memories in the Chinese society; other sources point at the rising assertiveness of China, blaming Beijing to exert pressure on some contested areas in the Pacific Ocean. It is no secret that some countries, as the Philippines or Japan, have some open issues with China, like the Paracels or the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. In both cases, Manila and Tokyo feel that the Chinese pressure on “their” territories (China considers them both as its own territory) is increasing; the current options to react against this pressure are mainly two. The first could be to ask a stronger presence and posture of the United States. Washington already deploys in the area several thousand troops, and still has some bases in South Korea and Japan. But in the past years the US Government has given a restrictive interpretation of its role in the Pacific: the US does not want to be entangled in a local war due to some rocky islands. Therefore, the various states should look for another option; this is to exploit “local synergies” between likeminded countries in order to exert more pressure on China's ambitions. Despite many differences and the bitter legacy of the Second World War, Japan and the Philippines since 1956 share a history of positive diplomatic relations. This positive cooperation, mainly based on economics, is now evolving in something deeper and more strategic.

In 2011 the two countries already signed a “strategic partnership” that now has evolved in a “strengthened strategic partnership”. Is it the beginning of a new alliance? The reality of the situation is different.

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Japan has a powerful military but subject to strict limits; the Philippines have a weak Navy and Air Force and are eager to enlarge their strategic relations with other partners to counter China's actions in the South China sea. Therefore, both the countries can have significant gains from their new interaction(s). Aside from the Partnership, Japan wants also to provide Manila's defence with some surveillance assets (especially the P3C "Orion" aircraft, or some radars) and 10 patrol boats for the Philippines Coast Guard. The Philippines urgently need new military technology, especially in the maritime environment; Japan, with its state-of-the-art industry can finally export some military technologies. Until a few years ago this possibility was precluded to the country, but a recent decision of the Japanese Government has authorised even this kind of export. The renewed partnership between the two countries, according to the document recently signed, focuses on security cooperation, through, among others:

- 1) the enhancement of security dialogues as contained in the "Action Plan for Strengthening of the Strategic Partnership" annexed to this Declaration;
- 2) the initiation of negotiations to conclude an agreement on the transfer of defense equipment and technology;
- 3) the strengthening of cooperation between relevant authorities of both countries on the participation of Japan Self-Defense Forces in disaster relief activities in the Philippines;
- 4) the expansion of bilateral and multilateral trainings and exercises for capacity building in areas including those covered by the Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges between the Department of National Defense and Ministry of Defense. The article analyses the origins, the reasons and the implications of this new agreement, in the broader framework of the Philipino-Japanese relations.

Pyongyang is not Teheran. The unlikely denuclearization of North Korea

When the Iranian government agreed on a deal on its nuclear capabilities, many analysts and politicians have immediately seen the deal as a good precedent also for North Korea or DPRK. North Korea is the smallest of the de facto nuclear states, but it is increasingly relying on its (small) nuclear arsenal. Since the beginning of the 21st century DPRK carried out three nuclear tests (2006, 2009 and 2013) and some rumors are suggesting that soon a fourth could be made.

Does DPRK really need nuclear weapons? North Korea's nuclear history is quite complicated, and it is influenced by different elements. Usually States develop a nuclear program as an “extreme” way to defend their existence. This could be the case of Israel, India or Pakistan. A nuclear arsenal gives a boost to the military of a country, indeed. Is this motivation suitable also for DPRK? The answer is mixed, and involves two levels. On the military level, it is clear that the small North Korean arsenal (20 nukes or less) is not as powerful as the Russian or the Chinese. Today DPRK can only use fission weapons, such as the bombs exploded on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; Pyongyang relies on its nuclear arsenal mainly to compensate the weakness of its conventional forces. Despite a huge amount of troops (nearly 1.200.000 soldier on active duty) DPRK's armed forces use obsolete technologies, such as T34, T54 and T55 tanks or airplanes like MiG 21 and MiG 23. The only way for Pyongyang to defend its national sovereignty is to rely on the nuclear deterrent; this can balance a conventional force that is considered weak and obsolete.

On the political level, the exploitation of nuclear weapons is even more interesting. For many centuries the Korean peninsula had resisted against different invaders; the 20th century and the Japanese colonization is still a bitter legacy for the whole Korea. Therefore, to divert the attention from the dire internal situation, the Northern regime has developed a solid rhetoric focused on the possible “invasion” of the United States or their “Korean puppets”, the South. As an “extreme” asset to defend the country, nuclear weapons are usually portrayed in the regime propaganda as the pride of the nation and as a clever achievement of the leadership to protect the ordinary lives of North Koreans from any external threat. Under this perspective, the nuclear arsenal is an important asset used by the regime to strengthen its internal support and its legitimacy. Therefore when we analyze the role of the nuclear weapons in North Korea, it is essential to consider their impact on the internal level.

Today the denuclearization of DPRK seems very unlikely. The only “wild card” that Pyongyang has (both on the internal and the external level) is its nuclear arsenal. In the past years of negotiations, the Northern authorities has repeatedly promised to dismantle its arsenal, but then they have refused to implement such a decision. Therefore, a spontaneous denuclearization by DPRK does not seem as a viable option. On the other side, it is quite difficult to identify which countries have the leverage to influence DPRK.

China, the strongest partner of North Korea, has strongly condemned the “nuclear” approach of its small neighbor, and now their bilateral relations are quite cold. Russia is increasing its economic cooperation with DPRK, but it does not have such a strong political leverage on Pyongyang. Japan, South Korea and the US cannot be seen as main partners in this negotiation. Therefore, despite the optimistic expectations, it seems very unlikely that the recent Iran deal will influence DPRK's behavior. Teheran and Pyongyang are too different to be compared. As it happened 70 years ago in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the dark shadows of nuclear weapons are still moving over East Asia, even if nobody hopes to see them again.

The modernization of the Philippines' defence: a hard challenge?

Whenever the internal analysts or foreign observers debate about Philipino security there are always many different feelings. The Philippines do not have such a wide area (300.000 sq. Km, roughly as Italy) but due to their archipelagic shape they present nearly 36.000 km of coastline. Their position is also strategic, because the Philippines nearly “close” the South China Sea, currently one of the hottest areas in Asia. Despite such an important position, since its independence (4th July 1946) the Philippines had to face many internal security challenges, especially different kind of terrorist groups active in several areas of the country. During the years these threats have shaped the structure of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP): as the last IISS Military Balance 2015 recalls, <<the Philippines' armed forces, particularly the army and marines, are deployed extensively in an internal-security role in the face of continuing challenges from the Abu Sayyaf Group and other Muslim insurgents in the country's south, and across the country in a continuing, if low-key, counter-insurgency campaign against the communist New People's Army>>. But during the years the contrast of the internal threats, the focus on internal stability and a low budget for the armed forces have weakened the AFP's capabilities to operate in South East Asia. Moreover, since 1951 Manila has heavily relied on the the United States for its national security: a US-Philippines treaty (formally Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of the Philippines) signed in 1951 has always been the most effective “insurance policy” for the Philipino independence; until 1992 US troops were also permanently stationed in the archipelago.

The withdrawal of the US forces in the 90s and the growing challenge of the South China Sea have pointed out some shortcomings in the country's military planning. Today some of these defects are evident, especially in the maritime field; the Philippines control some contested islands in the South China Sea, and they are particularly concerned by the growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China (PRC) which is strengthening its presence and its control on some key points of the South China Sea. Therefore, the traditionally army-oriented AFP have to quickly adapt to the new current scenario and rethink their priorities, balancing national and regional threats. The key document about this “new trend” of the Services is the AFP Modernization Act (also known as “Republic Act n. 7898, an act providing for the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and for other purposes”) adopted in 1995. Its aim was to boost the modernization of the different Services with a 15 years perspective. But the economic crisis of the 90s and some other political setbacks derailed these ambitious plans. In 2012 the Republic Act 10349 updated the previous AFP Modernization Act, aiming at implementing some reforms that now cannot be postponed anymore; this has always been an important target for the current President of the Philippines, Benigno Aquino. “Since he assumed the presidency in mid-2010, Aquino vowed to pursue an AFP modernization program that would transform the Philippine military from an army-centered counter-insurgency-oriented organization to a modern armed force capable of overseeing territorial defense and maritime security¹”, remembers a Philipino scholar: but what is the current status of the AFP modernization? Despite many ambitious political intentions and such long-term programs, there are many problems that still hamper a full evolution of the AFP.

The IISS notes that “while the government has promised, since 2011, that it will defend its South China Sea claims more strongly in the face of Chinese pressure, military-modernisation budgets have consistently failed to provide the resources needed to fulfil procurement plans or to refurbish second-hand equipment, such as the F-16 combat aircraft that the air force has sought to procure.

1 <http://thediplomat.com/2015/07/is-the-philippines-military-modernization-dead-in-the-water/>

Though the armed forces have benefited from minor purchases of new equipment such as advanced jet trainers, as well as the transfer of surplus US helicopters and coastguard cutters, it remains unlikely that the Philippines will be able to provide more than a token national capability to defend its maritime claims”. Right now the AFP have 125.000 troops on active duty, divided in 86.000 (Army) 24.000 (Navy) and 15.000 (Air Force), but the only developed service is the Army. The Navy (which includes 8.300 marines) still relies on aged technologies: its flagship, for instance, is the frigate Rajah Humabon, former USS Atherton, an US destroyer escort built in 1943 which fought in the Second World War; the navy already uses two former US cutters (former USS Hamilton-class cutters of the US Coast Guard) but is waiting for some new units. A future project could also be to establish a submarine force, but right now there are no concrete plans. The situation of the Air Force is even worse, because it operates only small aircrafts, as the SIAI Marchetti/Aermacchi S-211 (a small airplane designed to be a trainer aircraft) or the OV-10A/C Bronco, an US airplane used for Forward Air Control or in counter insurgency operations. Both are quite old and their capabilities cannot be compared with the Chinese rivals or with other airplanes of the neighbour countries (as the F-15 or the F-16 of the Indonesian Air Force, for instance). The difficult for the AFP is not only limited to their ageing equipments; as the Philipino Secretary of Defence Voltaire Gazmin has recently declared, “the goal of upgrading and modernizing our Armed Forces is a long and painstaking process. This is so, because the acquisition cost of our minimum requirements on materials and equipment for operational readiness are constrained by our financial capability. We have to be frugal and acquire reliable platforms at very reasonable costs possible as allowed by our meager financial resources”. In 2016 the budget of the Department of National Defence (the local MOD) will increase, and the new funds “will be used to purchase two frigates, two twin-engine long range patrol aircraft, three aerial surveillance radars, and the first two out of a total of 12 FA50 light fighter jets ordered from South Korea²”. But even these new units will not solve the serious problems that AFP are facing, and that are usually discussed on the national media.

2 <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/philippines-push-for-military-modernization-in-new-budget-proposal/>

AFP modernization it is not anymore a matter of capabilities, ships, airplanes or single units; the Philipino Government needs to address its national security in a more comprehensive way, balancing the different Services, insisting on innovation and training and especially being able to rely on its own forces to address its national problems. The US does not want to be entangled in the different disputes in the South China Sea: if the Philippines want to confirm their sovereignty there, they urgently need a Navy and a Coast Guard able to project its power even in the vast spaces of the South China Sea. Further delays in the modernization of the AFP, and especially in the maritime filed, could imply a serious political cost for Manila.

Alessandro Politi (*)

The Vatican soft power, Mexican cartels and Venezuela's plight

This Quarterly is the collection of the executive summaries in English of the three past CeMiSS “Strategic Monitoring” Italian issues, in reverse order. It shows quite clearly the great diversity of security and strategic issues that affect the continent both hard and soft ones. Differently from other continents, Latin America has long avoided international conflicts with the brief exceptions of the invasions of Granada and Panama and the Falkland-Malvinas war, all taking place during the past century.

But LatAm is very interesting also for decision makers and practitioners of other geographic areas because it shows with great clarity the level of threat that can be reached by non-terrorist and non-state actors in the form of more or less structured organized criminal groups or by the decay of good governance. Mexico is a stark reminder of how organized crime can become an existential threat, much more than any spectacular terrorist act and much in line with other civil wars where terrorism is an operational tactic more than a political tool. Venezuela, on the other hand, is the parable of a left-wing progressive government mired in bad governance and lax public finances.

In this context the soft power wielded by Pope Francis is an interesting alternative to the classic US soft power embodied by president Obama or to the still fledgling one in the Popular Republic of China. Surely it is a strong alternative to the current Realpolitik practices and theories or to the turbo-capitalist discourse.

The Vatican and its soft power

The encyclical “Praised be” has stimulated a rather acrimonious debate, especially in the US among the conservatives, about the competence of pope Francis I regarding ecological and economic issues, assorted by more or less evident hints to his populist or communist tendencies. Pope Bergoglio on the one hand intends through this encyclical to shape the debate on big socio-political issues, where religion and ethics necessarily interact.

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On the other hand, he intends to recover in a decisive way the relationship with the last ones and the marginalized strata of society, not only because he has an evangelisation duty to carry out but also because statistically the poor sectors of the society are the centre of gravity for the growth of new and old religions and spirituality.

The first point worth noting about this grand strategy document is the rejection of the notion of interest, usually at the centre of the economic-political practice of nation-states since at least half a millennium. In fact the ecology issue can be clearly considered according to the concept of general interest (*intérêt general*) that can be defined as the goal of actions or institutions that follows the interest of a population as a whole, therefore transcending mere individual interests. Even if one adopts the Anglo-American concept of general interest, considered as the sum of individual interests, ecology could easily fit in this framework, because the survival and balanced prosperity of the human race on planet Earth are, in both cases, the general interest of a planner. The encyclical clearly prefers the notion of the common good, i.e. a good shared between all or most members of a community.

From the rejection of interest follows the second main argument, that is the opposition to the technocratic paradigm that dominates economy and politics and that directs at economic level every technological development to achieve a profit, without paying attention to possibly negative consequences for human beings. Hence the opposition to the domination of economics over politics and a position against the superiority of finance on wider economy. To the claim that the market will magically solve every problem through technology is given short shrift.

The third main point made by the document regards positive proposals around the common good: intergenerational justice (that is, respect for the environmental legacy for the benefit of future generations); integral ecology, cultural ecology and daily life ecology; subsidiarity of politics; preferential option for the poor and the marginalised.

The scope of the encyclical has to be evaluated according to different levels. At a global level it is unlikely that, by itself, it will produce significant and visible effects. It is clear that the pope's moral suasion becomes weaker in direct proportion to the cultural diversity of the community that receives this eco-political message, more often than not through superficial media coverage.

Moreover the notion and practice of national interest is still very much alive in several states and political communities. That said, a millenary political-religious community like the Catholic Church surely cares about her reputation, but not about monthly opinion polls and is accustomed to work in the long run. The other element that needs to be monitored is the potential for creating consensus among different religions: so far the traditional alliances were on usual themes like the role of women, abortion, divorce and homosexuality, but now interreligious ecological fronts could be set up (and the inter-Christian co-operation is quite obvious and visible) with significant effects not only within the NGOs community, but in the foreign policy of nation states and regional entities.

However, again at a global level, it would be unwise to underestimate the reputational effect of this encyclical on all big companies and multinationals operating in countries of Christian faith and especially in Latin America. Demonstrations and protests that fuse ecological, indigenous, political and religious elements can have a great media impact and raise serious PR problems even for companies based in notoriously atheistic countries. This is particularly true for companies in the agro-food business and in the sectors of water, mining, energy, infrastructure and banking.

Finally, the encyclical may have an impact in the short to medium term also on the socio-political climate, and therefore on future election results in several Latin American countries, among which Argentina and Venezuela.

Venezuela: internecine power struggle

Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro Moro, has to face two serious problems: a national economy heading towards a default and a strong loss of consensus, largely due to economic woes.

The country depends by 95% of its budget on oil exports, while extraction steeply declined in less than two decades from 3,7 mbd (1997) to 2,2 (2013). The breakeven fiscal price should be around \$162-117 when the market price instead is at \$62.01 (Brent quotation, 30th of June) and the prospects for a rise are dim at least until May 2016. Even worse, according to some projections a price slump could last until mid-2017. The deficit is around 13-14% of the GDP, while inflation is esteemed at 179% with Bank of America forecasting a 200% level by 2015.

Also exchange rates show negative signs: the official dollar/bolivar rate is 1:6.3, but black market rates are 1:429.

Since it is unrealistic to think that the Bolivarian establishment will seriously question its political and ideological tenets, the simplest choice is to change president before the expiration of his mandate. Governmental information about an alleged coup that was nipped in the bud (20 February) might be exaggerated, but it is an indicator of one modality of political turnover, e.g. a leftist coup.

In addition to what the Caracas-Washington negotiations, started by the Parliament's speaker Diosdado Cabello since March 2014, might produce, four main power centres can seriously influence the issue before and after the December elections:

I. **President Maduro** itself, who has bolstered his position with a raft of military advancements that should ensure the loyalty of a Defence minister that remains also Defence Chief, a she-admiral nominated Interior minister, the Army Chief, a sizeable number of high level parliamentarians and a couple of colectivo groupings;

II. **The Parliament's speaker Cabello**, who controls the intelligence service SEBIN (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional), part of the Interior ministry through the former minister Rodriguez Torres, Army elite units and several hardened colectivos;

III. **The formal and informal cliques within the armed services**, who have their power base not only in the military structure, but in different national and local government posts and within the legal mixed-economy system. This means that any effort to curb corruption, gasoline or electricity subsidies or to cut social expenditure, not only will increase popular discontent, but will harm powerful networked lobbies. If one then takes into account that some generals are involved in the profitable cocaine trafficking circuits (Cartel de los Soles, The Suns Cartel), one can easily understand how strongly any type of change will be resisted;

IV. **The circles connected to the PDVSA**, the state-owned oil company. Corruption is deeply entrenched and the connections with the military allow oil smuggling to other countries. The initiative of Maduro to rekindle a long standing territorial dispute with neighbouring Guyana in order to reclaim half of the country (the so called Guyana Esquiba), is not only an expedient to distract

public opinion, but to engage militaries and oil men in a new and potentially lucrative adventure. Moreover the same oil slump that dents the budget is also a good argument to convince Washington of the crucial role of traditional suppliers in the hemisphere, when shale companies experience increasing difficulties.

This foursquare power structure has to cope with the fact that the political clout of president Maduro is not only in decline, but probably exhausted. Its dynamics during the next six months can have six different outcomes:

- * Maduro's "voluntary" exit from political life, having negotiated with Cabello, the opposition and the USA a graceful retreat in order to avoid Venezuela's descent into chaos;
- * The attempt to win elections by any legal or illegal means, reasserting his indispensable role until the end of the mandate, postponing a final showdown with his adversaries and possibly eliminating Cabello via a US drug trafficking indictment;
- * A soft coup d'état engineered by Cabello before the elections forcing the president to resign. This operation could be indirectly supported by the USA in exchange of a "Cuban thaw" and under the threat of a collapse of oil exports to the USA due to instability, putting at risk the security of supply in the hemisphere;
- * A soft power transition in the hands of Cabello after an unsatisfactory victory in the elections;
- * A left-wing military coup;
- * An "Arab Revolution" due to a loss of control over public order by the government and the present opposition forces and to the emerging of a leadership capable to rally the discontent of different social strata.

US-Mexico: the infernal rant of the narco-cartels

The power and sophistication of Mexican cartels has few rivals in the world. Suffice it to recall that, in addition to having extended the recruitment of killers to women, some cartels have been able to install networks of hidden cameras for the surveillance of strategic crossings in the city of Reynosa and that los Zetas systematically lay out ghost mobile networks for their cell phones.

In terms of weaponry they can employ: M72 LAW, AT-4 and RPG-7 anti-tank rockets, 37-40 mm grenade launchers, military hand grenades, Barrett 12,7mm heavy sniper rifles and advanced submachine guns.

Compared to all this, the government deploys forces that are already numerically insufficient to meet the threat. On paper there are 430.000 policemen, but most of them belong to local police forces, per se structurally inefficient against organized crime (as the experience of other countries regularly shows) and often poorly paid, poorly trained and ill-equipped. Yearly desertions are around 27.000 persons in the police forces and 160 highly trained individuals in the special forces. The federal police actually fighting the cartels are just 35.550, to which 60.000 militaries are added. This means a total of 95.550 law enforcers, against approximately 100.000 narco-criminals. Tactics show that, in conditions of technological parity, a 1: 1 ratio allows limited offensives in some areas, but in general counterinsurgency manuals suggest a ratio 10: 1 to preserve the victories and effectively control the territory.

In terms of human losses, since 2006 the war cost to Mexico a number of deaths ranging from 80 to 136.000 (meaning 10-17000 deaths/year, plus to 4.000 deaths for drug abuse), while in the US to a low homicide rate corresponded in 2013 a total of 37.500 overdose deaths, all categories of drugs included.

Also recently carried out reforms have a small impact if their implementation is less than robust. The new body of the National Gendarmerie (10.000 nominal strength, 5.000 actual strengths) suffered a 33% reduction on its budget, cancelling the following programmes: mobile headquarters; horses, vehicles and special vehicles for patrolling duties; fast naval vessels and a mobile intelligence and operational command and control unit. Meanwhile, the constitutional reform of the unified police command (the so called “mando unico”), which involves the direct subordination of the local police to federal state organs in order to strengthen the line of command and the coordination at federal level and to reduce corruption, was not yet approved.

In the short term an increase in violence to control zones of influence and the main distribution nodes is expected. At the same time the fragmentation of groups will increase: a regional trend favoured by enlargement and diversification of regional markets in addition to the main and traditional US market (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru). It is still not discernible what kind of interaction will happen between the powerful Mexican

narcocartels and the new alliance between drug traffickers of the Southern Cone (Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Paraguay) promptly christened “Narcosur / Narcosul” and apparently 30.000 criminals strong. It is conceivable that negotiations have begun and it is reasonable to think that they will be successful. As soon as Mexican drug traffickers, under pressure by the police in Portugal and Spain, moved some of their operations to the UK port of Liverpool, the cocaine routes into European markets have diversified. A considerable shift from West Africa to Liverpool and to less controlled routes of the Balkans and Eastern Europe is expected. This implies the development of transit routes in the Black and the Baltic Sea (especially Latvia). The presence of Mexican cartels in South East and East Europe will also facilitate the diversification of arms trafficking routes towards Mexico, adding to the existing US and Chinese suppliers as well as the Russians and Albanians.

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Claudio Catalano ()*

Conservatives win an outright majority in the general elections in the UK

In May-June 2015, the major events for the European defence initiatives include:

- for the EU Member States the majority won by British Conservatives in the UK general elections, with the reappointment of David Cameron as British Prime Minister;
- for the EU, the adoption of a report on a EU Security strategy and on the world scenario with the aim to adopt a European Global Strategy by June 2016.
- The authorization to launch the EUNVAFOR mission to cope with the illegal immigration and the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea.

On 7th May 2015, the Conservative party won a slender majority in the UK general elections. Notwithstanding polls and commentators predicted a hung parliament, Tories won 331 seats out of 650 seats in the UK Parliament. Labour Party won 232 seats suffering their worst result since 1987. Surprising performances were those of the Scottish National Party, which won 56 seats, and it is now the third largest party, by surpassing the LibDem which fell from 57 seats to only 8 seats in the new Parliament. Turnout was 66%, marginally up on 2010 and the highest since 1997. Jihadi John and terrorism did not really play a role in the turnout.

On the other hand, interestingly, one million black, Asian and minority ethnic voters helped the Conservative Party to win majority.

Tories have won more than the 326 seats needed to form a majority; Mr Cameron is able to govern without the need for a coalition or formal agreement with other parties. David Cameron would return to Downing Street as Prime Minister. Ed Miliband of Labour, Nick Clegg of LibDem and Nigel Farage of UKIP would stand down. Farage resignation was rejected by the UKIP.

In the new Cameron's cabinet many ministers will be reappointed in the positions they held: George Osborne as First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer; Philip Hammond as Foreign Secretary; Michael Fallon as De-

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fence Secretary. Sajid Javid will take up his new role as Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary, who supervises British industry and trade support, including Aerospace and Defence sector.

In his victory speech, Mr Cameron stated he would press ahead with a referendum by the end of 2017 on Britain's membership of the European Union (Brexit) and that he intends to complete the Conservatives' economic plan. According to a report of the German think tank Bertelsmann Stiftung a potential Brexit in 2018 could reduce British GDP by up to 14% in 2030.

The Brexit would be a major challenge for European Defence, and would probably harm NATO defence capabilities, thus alarming Washington. On the other hand, a few commentators think that a referendum on Brexit is not a credible option for Conservatives.

There are no big surprises expected for British defence policy as all parties forecast a cut in defence expenditure for budgetary reasons. According to a RUSI report, MoD shall cut its budget by £35 Billion in the next ten years. In 2014, the UK defence budget fell under the NATO threshold of 2% of GDP.

Moreover, the new cabinet shall draft respectively: the next National Security Strategy, the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), and the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). Conservative manifesto named as foreign policy threats: Islamist extremism, an aggressive Russia, economic uncertainty in the Eurozone, nuclear proliferation and infectious diseases. The 2010 SDSR was particularly influenced by operations in Afghanistan, thus focusing on land based operations, by cutting the air naval aviation (HMS Ark Royal Carrier and Joint Force Harrier). Also the Royal Air Force (RAF) is now operating at full stretch keeping both the transport and fast jet fleets busy. Moreover, the RAF Tornado fleet is going to be retired by 2019. The Royal Navy needs more officers in the naval engineers corps, the Navy fleet is operating at full stretch and it will receive four frigates Type 26 less than expected. The new SDSR shall be completed in the next three months and it will address a post-Afghanistan scenario, and will probably take into account a reduced manpower, the F-35 programme, and fluid international situation with the hybrid war in Ukraine. On Defence, Conservative manifesto stated that there will be an end to cuts in the size of the regular Army, and equipment spending to rise by 1 per cent a year in real terms. Nuclear deterrent seems to be now in good hands, the Tories will build all four Vanguard-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile

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submarines (SSBNs) to be replaced under the Trident renewal programme and to maintain continuous at-sea deterrence (CASD). The LibDems had asked only a few Vanguard-class SSBNs to be built and the boats should not practise CASD. The Scottish National Party campaigned a nuclear-free (free from submarines) Scotland. Eventually, the CSR which will set spending levels across all government departments.

EU operation Eunavfor MED has been launched

The European Council on 23 April 2015 took into consideration a set of comprehensive measures to cope with humanitarian emergency situations in the Mediterranean sea, such as responding to the immediate need to save lives, address emergency situations but also to tackle the root causes of irregular migration. The Council adopted on 18 May 2015, the Council Decision 2015/778. This decision, which is one element of the comprehensive EU response to the migration challenge, established the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean “EUNAVFOR Med” and it approved a crisis management concept to enable the formal start of the operational planning for the naval operation to disrupt the business model of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean.

EUNAVFOR Med shall be conducted in sequential phases and in accordance with the requirements of international law: The first phase concerns the operation planning and the initial phase of surveillance and assessment of human smuggling and trafficking networks in the Southern Central Mediterranean. The second phase will entail the search and seizure of suspicious vessels, with the third focused on disposal of the vessels and related assets and the arrest of traffickers and smugglers. Each phase will be approved by the 28 EU nations, in conformity with the international law and in partnership with Libyan authorities.

The Foreign Affairs Council on 22 June 2015 launched the first phase of EUNAVFOR Med to undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers.

Therefore, EUNAVFOR Med mission is to pinpoint, capture, and destroy the smugglers’ vessels and their “enabling assets”.

The EUNAVFOR Med will also include intelligence tasks to cover information gathering and patrolling on the high seas in the Mediterranean.

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The operational headquarters of EUNAVFOR Med is in Rome and Italian Navy Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino has been appointed as Operation Commander. Deputy Operation Commander is French Navy Rear Admiral Hervé Bléjean, and force commander is Italian Navy Rear Admiral Andrea Gueglio. The flagship is the Italian Aircraft carrier Cavour, and the force also includes 8 surface and subsurface naval units and 12 Air Assets to be deployed during the first phase of the operation. The 14 participating Member States to the first phase include: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

The Council has authorized by means of the Athena Mechanism, €1.82 million for the common costs of the operation, including the two months first phase plus an initial mandate of 12 months.

EUNAVFOR Med operation will also take advantage of the lessons learned of EUNAVFOR Atlanta anti-piracy operation in the Horn of Africa. Rear Admiral Credendino has also been in charge of commanding EUNAVFOR Atalanta in 2012.

EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy.

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini presented to the European Council on 25 and 26 June 2015 the paper “The European Union in a changing global environment. A more connected, contested and complex world”. This paper will be the backbone of an EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy expected by June 2016. In this paper, by assessing the current global environment, the High Representative made the case for a strategy to steer the Union’s global action and set priorities in a rapidly changing environment.

The 2016 EU global strategy would be the second EU strategic document after Javier Solana’s EU Security Strategy, which was published in December 2003, followed by a revision in 2008.

The current paper is just an assessment of current global events, because it was drafted by Mogherini’s advisor in just three months to meet the deadline of the June 2015 European Council, and there was no room to set up a democratic process by involving the EU Member States and internal public opinions.

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The new paper shall be a common, comprehensive and consistent EU global strategy. Therefore, to set the priorities for the new EU global strategy the High Representative launched a reflection process that will bring together EU institutions, Member States and Civil Society.

The document is divided into three parts: the first part is an analysis of the current global scenario: the keywords of the new strategy are “a more complex, more connected, but also more contested world. “The complexity regards the multipolarity and the fluid international system. Contested regards the crisis scenarios, which include the actual crises such as Ukraine and the Mediterranean immigrants emergency, or macro-trends such as demography, the rise of middle class, climate change, ideology and terrorism, and technological progress which is also changing the nature of conflict. Connected means of course the connections made possible by the new technologies, in particular in Information and Communication Technologies.

The High Representative stressed that current global trends make it necessary for the EU to adapt and set out its course ahead: “The world is more connected than at any point in the past, the same is true for the European Union. An effective response hinges on the European Union's ability to make choices and prioritise areas where it can and wants to make a difference.”

The second part analyses the challenges and opportunities for the EU of regional areas: including the European neighbourhood, North Africa and the Middle East (MENA), Africa, Asia and Transatlantic relations

The third part is an analysis of EU instruments for external action. In this sense, a new principle: “the joined up approach” will replace the “comprehensive approach” not only for the EU missions abroad but for every single aspect of EU diplomacy, by coordinating the specific EU policy areas and departments (environment, trade, development, energy, justice and home affairs, transport, culture, science and research), which are all developing their own strands of diplomacy.

“The European Union does not have the luxury to turn inwards. We have a responsibility to protect our citizens while promoting our interests and universal values.” Mogherini argues in the report.

To do this, it will be essential to work even more closely together at European level and with partners around the globe: “The European Union has all the means to be an influential global player in future – if it acts together.

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In a world of incalculable risk and opportunity, crafting effective responses will hinge on the Union's ability to adjust, react and innovate in partnership with others. We need a common, comprehensive and consistent EU global strategy.” Mogherini underlined when presenting her report in Brussels.

Transatlantic relations and Nato

Lucio Martino (*)

How the United States looks at China, the Arctic and Russia

***The Department of Defense and the Chinese military:** In accordance with the provisions of the Law, each year the Department of Defense is required to submit to the Congress a report drawn up in two versions, classified and unclassified, in which it analyzes the strategic approach of the People's Republic of China and describes the progress on security and defense. As with previous editions, this year's report seems very cautious and balanced. The Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015 (MS-DIPRC 2015) paints the portrait of a People's Republic of China engaged in the replacement of the old liquid fuel ballistic missiles with new solid-propellant ones, in the design of modern hypersonic gliders speed, and in the development of new technologies to reduce the effectiveness of current and future anti-ballistic missile systems. It follows that, in the coming years, the Chinese ICBM should be characterized by a larger range and still greater survivability. Meanwhile, the number of Chinese ICBM seems about in no more than sixty units and includes missiles capable of carrying multiple reentry vehicles (MIRV), as the DF-5 and, perhaps, as the new mobile ICBM, the long awaited DF-41. Overall, the MSDIPRC 2015 confirms, once again, a certain uncertainty in the assessments of the Federal Government on the most important Chinese ballistic capabilities. The Intelligence has always regarded the Chinese ICBM as single-warhead. Since more than a decade, the Department of Defense believes instead that the People's Republic of China has developed all the skills necessary to equip at least some ICBMs with multiple reentry vehicles (MIRV). The reasons behind the development of the Chinese version of the DF-5 MIRV are not all the way clear, but it is probably in reaction to the development and the deployment by the United States of some anti-missile capabilities affecting the credibility of a relatively modest Chinese nuclear deterrent.*

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However, the Chinese nuclear arsenal does not seem to particularly worry the authors of MSDIPRC 2015. Neither the modernization of the Chinese army seems to worry the Department of Defense.

The focus of this year's report is on the evolution of a fleet which, as a whole, seems a long way off from only approximating the capabilities of the U.S. Navy. Moreover, the 2015 MSDIPRC shows how the navies of these two countries are designed and organized to perform very different missions. The U.S. Navy is supposed to ensure a fraction of the nuclear deterrent, some control of international maritime spaces and, as far as possible, is expected to assist other services through a whole series of operations. The Chinese navy is basically focused on the preparation of a conventional conflict to be fought in the seas facing the Chinese landmass and it is assisted in this mission by other services. Ultimately, the MSDIPRC 2015 seems built around the idea that, despite the maritime disputes of the latter times, the Republic of China cannot refrain from judging as essential for its stability and its development a set of stable relations with its neighbors and with the United States, the only power capable of supporting as much to hinder its rise.

Barring a huge and extended slowdown of the Chinese economy or some other kind of disaster, the process of upgrading and modernization of the Chinese military is likely to continue for much longer. In the years to come, in parallel to its growing economic and political power, the People's Republic of China will persist to increase its military power, and will seek to fulfill the range of missions pushed by its evolving security strategy. Despite the awesome superiority of the United States, the People's Republic of China aims to exploit vulnerabilities in key strategic capabilities using counter warfare of many different kinds to prevent the United States from achieving an easy victory in any confrontation. In this framework, the United States seems to have no better choice than to follow a quite complex strategy toward the People's Republic of China, requiring from one hand to engage the People's Republic of China to encourage it to become a conscientious stakeholder in the international community, and from the other to engage in prudent hedging against antagonistic behavior by the People's Republic of China. At the same time, some larger, modern and effective Chinese military forces could prove increasingly useful to thwart small and large instability of the present and foreseeable future alongside those of other great powers.

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Recognizing the growing relative importance of China, and that it would be impossible in the long term for the United States to exercise the degree of regional influence it had inherited from Cold War era, the Obama Administration has so far facilitated the process that has made China a responsible player of the liberal international order, one that accepts the basic objectives of the system and its main rules, and which contributes to its overall success.

The US presidency of the Arctic Council: *The participation of the secretaries of State Clinton and Kerry at the last two summits of the Arctic Council has indicated the priority given by the Obama administration to the Arctic. The United States has also recently updated the policy and strategic documents related to this region. The strategic interests of the United States in this region include a wide range of issues such as antiballistic defense, early warning, air traffic control, strategic transport systems, strategic deterrence, maritime security and, of course, freedom of navigation.*

The decrease of Arctic sea ice has led to increased human activities in the Arctic, and has heightened attention to, and concerns about, the future of this region. Issues such as commercial shipping, sovereignty claims, endangered species, mineral exploration, and increased military operations could change the region into an arena of international cooperation or competition. In the near term, the difficulties recently occurred in relations between the United States and the Russian Federation could end up damaging the high level of regional cooperation.

Old and new challenges, such as the ability to search and rescue, and the containment of major ecological catastrophes, are concrete issues that require the commitment and cooperation not only of all the Arctic nations but also of all the other regional players. In these circumstances, the development of a vision that transcends the management of each two-year presidency seems quite a must to avoid a progressive functional emptying of the Arctic Council.

The next two years may well take on a great importance in the short history of the Arctic Council. To date, the Arctic States invariably continue to place emphasis on maintaining, and possibly increasing, their high level of cooperation, but many of them have recently indicated their readiness to defend their interests unilaterally, should ever become a necessity.

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The initiatives taken, and statements recently made, by both permanent and observer members, are stressing the growing strategic and economic interest with which all these countries look to the Arctic. On the other hand, all the countries involved in the Arctic seem to share a strategy in which peaceful cooperation, and military readiness, coexists in parallel. In this framework, competition could become the rule rather than the exception if the existing mechanisms of interaction were to prove inadequate.

In various ways and to varying degrees, all coastal states have for some time engaged in strengthening their military capacities. Of particular importance is the recent extension of the responsibility area of the United States Northern Command, which now embraces a large part of the Arctic region. Other decisions, if only for symbolic reasons, are no less important, as in the case of the repositioning of the Norwegian Operational Command within the Arctic Circle, the planning by the Russian authorities of a brigade optimized for combat operation into really harsh weather conditions, the establishing by the Danish Government of a new Arctic Command, and the planned boost of the Royal Canadian Navy. The Russian Federation has, in turn, intensified the activities of its submarine, icebreakers, and strategic bombers fleets.

As a result, the overtime persistence of peace and security will be directly proportional to the adoption of policies, and to the establishment of institutions, flexible enough to quickly adapt to the many and important changes taking place in the region. In the short term, the Arctic states seem to have no better choice to review the agreements and institutions that bind them one to one another, possibly enhancing aspects concerning the specific military dimension. The US Department of Defense, for example, has repeatedly stressed the importance for the United States of an accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, because it provides an important framework within which resolving most of the typical disputes of the Arctic region, to start with the delimitation of the continental shelf. In addition, the Arctic Council should review its ban on military and security issues. Otherwise, it may end up promoting the development of alternative forums, such as the group "Arctic Five" (Canada, Denmark, Norway, the Russian Federation, and the United States), which met first in Ilulissat, Greenland, in May 2008 and then in Quebec, Canada, in March 2010. Strong is the notion that the challenges facing the Arctic in the coming years are likely to require a strategy multilateral and bi-

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lateral at the same time, as witnessed by the recent Russian-Norwegian maritime agreement. In any case, the idea that climate change will take effect gradually over the course of this century, allowing a high degree of adaptation, is challenged by the rapid pace at which the Arctic region is changing. The rapidity of these changes seems to threaten the ability of local governments to anticipate and solve diplomatically their disputes within the region.

United States and the Russian Federation after a year of sanctions: *Early in June, in Stuttgart, the Secretary of Defense Carter met with US military and diplomatic representatives in Europe to review the strategy followed by the United States after the Russian annexation of Crimea. A few weeks earlier, Secretary of State Kerry met with Russian President Putin, signaling the renewed emphasis given by the Obama administration to the relations with the Russian Federation. With each passing week it seems increasingly clear that the main objective of the recent increased bilateral diplomatic activity was to establish whether the truce would hold up in Ukraine or whether it would be interrupted by a new summer offensive. The trip by Secretary of State Kerry seems to respond then to yet another important need, namely to establish if the Obama administration can trust President Putin at a time when there are many who believe that a new Cold War is not only something natural but also desirable, in accordance with the idea that the more Russia is isolated, the safer it is anyone else. So far, the Obama administration does not seem to share this view. At the same time, the Obama administration is not willing to run the risk of appearing weak in the eyes of the American electorate and of the rest of the world. Within a few months the logic of campaigning will weigh on the US foreign policy. With major economic indicators aligned on good values, it is very likely that foreign policy issues, such as the flexing of muscles by the Russian Federation, will impact on the outcome of the next general election.*

2014 has been a very frustrating year regarding the relations between the United States and the Russian Federation. Lately, these relations have assumed often surprising characteristics, alternating moments of clash to others of collaboration. More than a year after the Russian annexation of Ukraine, four main questions remain unanswered.

The first is the extent to which Ukraine is important for President Putin and, therefore, how much he may actually be contained in its ambitions for regional supremacy.

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The second is the effect of the sanctions. Many people believe that they are useless, if not counterproductive, because they increase the popular support enjoyed by the political leaders.

The third is the opportunity to arm the Ukrainians. In this case, the risk is to legitimize Russian anti-Western rhetoric claims.

The fourth is the direction that will take the quarrel, which is to say if the Ukrainian crisis is the beginning of a strategic approach designed to reach other countries, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, or will remain an isolated case. The problem is to develop a strategy that would not overestimate or underestimate the goals of the Russian authorities.

There is still no consensus on what is the real scope of the sanctions. For some it is already relevant for other almost marginal, but nobody denies a serious deterioration of the Russian economy. In any case, how the present regime of sanctions actually affects the choices of the Russian political authorities is something quite difficult to tell. In the present circumstances, an escalation of the crisis in Ukraine does not seem in the interest of the Russian Federation, because it could extend the sanctions ordered by the United States as much as the European Union. No less difficult is to assess if an even greater availability of weapons would lead the Ukraine crisis to a turning point. Finally, on one hand the Ukrainian crisis is definitely a threat to security and stability in Europe, but it is also true that as long as it continues, it is very unlikely that the Russian Federation can effectively exercise elsewhere serious political, economic and military pressures.

Finally, the speculations on the effects and the implications that sanctions and counter-sanctions have had on the economies of the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States are inconsistent. The debate on the renewal of the sanctions in the European Union is the best evidence. Some observers argue that the sanctions are responsible for the collapse of both imports and exports from the Russian Federation. Others argue that precisely because of the sanctions, the United States exports to the Russian Federation have increased at the expense of European and other economies. Yet, given the relatively modest exposure of the European Union to the Russian economy, the entire set of sanctions and counter-sanctions does not seem to impact the European trade balance. It seems that sanctions imposed after July 2014 are having an effect on Russian financial flows.

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Nevertheless it is an exaggeration to say that the sanctions, rather than the fall of world oil prices and the lack of structural reforms, are the direct responsibility of nowadays Russian unsatisfactory macroeconomic performance. In the long run, if the sanctions remain in force, they may have larger effects, especially if oil production were to slow down due to lack of new exploration and obsolescence of facilities.

Claudio Bertolotti (*)

Al-Qaeda vs ISIS & Co. and the dream of a political solution. A new critical phase for Afghanistan. Hypotheses of future scenarios.

The double operational front in Afghanistan. ‘Azm’: the new Taliban spring offensive and the competition between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.

Afghan Armed opposition groups (AOGs) are conducting a growing military offensive and are moving to a possible and profitable political negotiation process which could impose, on the one hand, a significant new equilibrium on national and regional dynamics. On the other hand, the political process could open to new intra-insurgency conflicts because of the risk of a fragmentation of the AOGs; a fragmentation that could be facilitated by the ISIS & Co. attempt to destabilize the region.

Between the two groups, the Afghan government, the US, and the regional powers are trying to convince the Taliban about the advantages and the benefits deriving from a political agreement. Meetings and talks are ongoing at present and in agenda for the future, involving governmental representatives, AOGs members, civil society, NGOs, and countries, as demonstrated by Qatar, China, Norway, United Arab Emirates (meetings in May-June 2015).

But the security situation remains volatile, in particular in the southeastern areas.

As reported by the United Nations, civilian casualties in consequence of military operations are on the rise; 8 per cent more civilian casualties in the first quarter of 2015 than in the same period in 2014.

On the military front, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have suffered record casualties this year as they combat Taliban largely without the support of US and Nato (in particular the air power). Statistically, the number of Afghan military and policemen killed or wounded has increased 70% in the first quarter of 2015, compared to the same period last year (casualties have averaged about 330 a week). This result is a direct consequence of the reduced number of airstrikes and cutbacks in surveillance and support by US-led military coalition

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that has given the Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) more freedom to move on the battlefield.

On the other hand, the newcomer Foreign Fighters in Afghanistan claim allegiance to Islamic State (ISIS) recruiting militants. In fact, the consequence of the successful operations in Syria and the efficacious ‘Web offensive’ – thanks to the effective capacity to penetrate the social level overtaking physical borders and political countermeasures – is the capability to attract young militants intended to fight against foreigners and Afghan government labeled by insurgents as ‘illegitimate’.

In addition, a further new actor emerged in the regional competition: ‘Qaedat al-Jihad in the Indian Subcontinent’ (AQIS, al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent), led by the al-Qaeda ‘Emir’ Ayman al-Zawahiri, with the purpose of waging jihad in India (including Kashmir, Gujarat and Assam). From Pakistan and with its close links to Lashkar-e-Taiba and other terrorist organizations, Al-Qaeda represents a perilous menace to India. The move was part of al-Qaeda's plan to take advantage of the partial withdrawal of US led forces from Afghanistan, and boost its influence in the ‘Af-Pak-Ind’ region.

At present, the most dangerous consequences of the newcomers’ presence are the indirect dynamics influencing the security as well as the political agenda (with explicit reference to the peace talks attempts in progress).

Despite the new impulse to this phase of the Afghan war represented by the ISIS attempt to be a ‘first-line’ actor (competing with al-Qaeda), and considering the Islamic State a direct threat to the Afghan stability and security, what is important to emphasize is the fact that the main security threats still remain the regional AOGs; in particular the Taliban and other experienced insurgent entities, especially the Haqqani Network, the Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan militants (TTP – split into two sub-groups, one supporting Al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, the other supporting ISIS) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (particularly in the east of the country). The competitive approach to the local battlefield adopted by the new actors – especially in southern Helmand, and Ghazni and Farah provinces – stimulates all the other ‘old’ actors in competing for success on the battlefield, as well as on the social field; these aggressive dynamics representing one more negative factor for the unstable security situation which is boosted by the ongoing new Taliban spring offensive called ‘Operation Azm’.

Qatar's 'new' role: a facilitator through global jihadism, insurgency and realpolitik

On 2-3 May 2015, Afghan government officials, Taliban militants, members of the civil society and United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) met for a meeting in Doha, Qatar, supported by the Canadian-based Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (a -winning science group dedicated to promoting peace).

The reunion was a non-official meeting, not supposed to be any sort of negotiation, where all participants were free to express their personal opinions on a non-attributive basis. Both sides, on the one hand, confirmed with official statements the participation to the meeting and, on the other hand, clarified that the participants were attending the meetings in their personal capacities. Afghan government called the meetings a 'scientific discussions', the Taliban used the definition 'research conference'; both sides underlined that the meeting should not be misconstrued as peace or negotiation talks. Still, after years of efforts to get a concrete peace process going, expectations were relatively high for the meeting. The focus of the discussion was a possible cease-fire, but depending from the total withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. A joint final statement based on fifteen main points was released by the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. In brief:

1. General appreciation of the positive value of the meeting, and gratitude towards the State of Qatar.
2. Common will to work for peace in Afghanistan ending the conflict.
3. Protection of civilians as a priority.
4. Common opinion on the fact that foreign forces have to leave Afghanistan soon.
5. Remove the Taliban from the black-lists.
6. Contrast to corruption and the production/selling of drugs.
7. The value of education for both men and women was underlined by everybody.
8. Discussion on the political system and constitution of Afghanistan.
9. The model for government is the Islamic one.
10. The so-called Islamic State (Daesh) is alien.
11. Amicable and cooperative relations with neighboring countries and no interference with Afghan internal affairs.

12. The meeting of 2-3 May 2015 should be followed up by other meetings.
13. The Taliban's office in Doha should be opened to facilitate meetings and talks.
14. Qatar, UN and non-governmental international organizations should support the peace process.
15. Public interest and well-being of the Afghan people are the main issue. The most sensitive point still remains the question of the withdrawal of foreign troops: both sides agreed on the principle that foreign forces leave the country soon. It is an important step forward to an acceptable exit-strategy in spite of the necessity of the US to maintain the strategic military bases on the Afghan soil.

The Taliban reported that the eight elements of their delegation were all attending in their personal capacities, and that the meeting "should not be misconstrued as peace or negotiation talks." It is important to underline that the Taliban issued a statement about the event confirming, on the one hand, that they were taking place and, on the other hand, who was attending (within the Taliban group there were the significant figures of Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai – former top Taliban official and head of the delegation – and Sohail Shaheen – spokesman for the Taliban's Qatar office). On the other side, the Afghan government group included an assorted range of representatives, among them reconciled Taliban; Tajik, Pashtun and Uzbek leaders; and President Ashraf Ghani's uncle, Abdul Qayoum Kochai. It is a clear sign of the Afghan government commitment to follow the strategy of dialogue and compromise in order to establish a sort of agreement aimed to the power-sharing and a calculated balance of power. Furthermore, one of the most important factors is represented by the location of the meeting; this is a clear indicator of the willingness of the Qataris to play a key role as intermediaries in the Afghan peace talks. Finally, considering the Pakistani interest in the Taliban dynamics, the Qatar conference could represent an effort by the Afghan Taliban to strike out independently of the Pakistanis.

The double-track of the Afghan strategies: the Taliban political office and the military confrontation.

On the one hand, Pakistan urges Afghanistan's Taliban to join in peace talks. It is a clear indicator of the Pakistani concern to maintain a primary role in the

influence-process of the Afghan dynamics. For the first time, Islamabad has denounced the 'spike in violence' stemming from the Taliban new spring offensive, declaring peace, dialogue and reconciliation is the only solution to end war. This could open to a new relationship between Kabul and Islamabad. On the other hand, more U.S. troops will remain in Afghanistan. The Obama administration decided to maintain more troops in Afghanistan next year than it had intended, effectively upending its drawdown plans in response to roiling violence in the country and in support to the Afghan government which had requested flexibility on the pace of the drawdown. It is a consequence of the recent events in Syraq, where Iraqi military forces collapsed in the face of an offensive by the Islamic State (ISIS). In synthesis, US forces will provide combat support to Afghan troops in order to prevent detrimental strategic effects.

Brief analysis, assessments, forecasts

In the short term, a significant augment in AOGs activity is assessed, both external and domestic. In line with the last years' trend, we can consider as probable an increase in number and intensity of the offensive actions against the ANSF

Besides, Afghan AOGs are contrasting the centripetal dynamics moving part of the younger generations from Taliban to ISIS affiliates groups (a specific example of this evolution is the aforementioned splitting process of the Pakistani TTP).

As a consequence, the Afghan government will face difficulties on the peace-process in agenda which would involve directly the Afghan AOGs. On the one hand, the unstable diarchy Ghani-Abdullah would involve Pakistan as facilitator in the dialogue with the Taliban; on the other hand, this peace-process based on dialogue is uneasy because of the internal dynamics of the Taliban which could lead to

- a dangerous splitting-process of the movement in favor of ISIS or
- the most dangerous scenario characterized by an increase of conflicts (involving the galaxy of the regional and transnational AOGs).

In addition, from a geo-political perspective, Iran's regional ambitions are growing, on the one hand as consequence of the nuclear dialogues involving Teheran and Washington and, on the other hand, as result of Iran's role in contrasting ISIS in Syraq.

Moreover, Iran stated the intention to take part to counter-terrorism initiatives involving Pakistan and Afghanistan: this could open a new political season of Iran's role at regional level.

Concluding, regarding the threat of ISIS, from a double 'time' and 'space' perspective what appears as necessary is a defined political intent based on a holistic and non-classical approach: the first fundamental step of a strategy intended to contrast and defeat ISIS must consider it as a transnational and 'glocal' threat.

Furthermore, it is necessary to avoid considering conflictual episodes and terror attacks in the MENA area as separated: because each single event, even if not coordinated, is part of a wide political plan based on ideological, revolutionary and destabilizing principles and intents.

Afghan four main short term scenarios.

1. First scenario. The dynamic nature of ISIS could lead the Taliban to a political solution with the Afghan government opening to a substantial power-sharing process; this could facilitate a substantial disengagement of the US-led foreign combat troops. Possible, unlikely.

2. Second scenario. Competition with ISIS could drive to a new phase of civil war characterized by augmented violence as consequence of the conduct of 'spectacular actions' finalized to obtain media-attention effects (in order to impose the 'ISIS premium brand'). As consequence, Taliban could concentrate their effort on ISIS's affiliate groups. This process could involve marginal actors, local groups, power groups, local and transnational crime. Probable.

3. Third scenario: mujahidin alliance. In case of a long-period conflict among AOGs and ISIS affiliate groups, we cannot exclude a possible 'insurgency' collaboration involving the main actors of the conflict: Isis, Taliban and Hig (Hezb-e-islami Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). Possible, improbable in the short-period.

4. Fourth scenario. In line with the dynamics involving the Teherik-e Taliban-e Pakistan, the Afghan Taliban could be characterized by a splintering process where the hard-core (oriented to a power-sharing process based on compromise) could face the younger and more radical faction not willing to stop the fight and induced to join the ISIS & Co. groups. Hypothesis assessed as very likely.

Paolo Quercia

The Balkans corridor and the migratory flows to the Schengen area (part I) (*)

Situation and characteristics of the demographic flows through South Eastern Europe

South Eastern Europe is the core of a much diversified and apparently uncontrollable flow of transcontinental migrations, heading to Northern and Central Europe and coming from at least three continents: the Middle East, Africa, Asia. Dimensions and frequency of the phenomenon are unprecedented. South Eastern European Countries – both EU member States and the so-called Western Balkan States (WB) – are the obliged land transit route to complete the journey from the countries of origin to the European Union. If compared to the sea route, pivoting on Italy, this route is less risky as regards crossing and ending up hostages of criminal groups, but above all, the transit countries in South Eastern Europe play the role of a temporary logistic platform where one plans and funds the final part of the trip. Thanks to the extension of the Schengen borders and to easier circulation agreements in force with non-EU countries in the region, there are also good opportunities to cross numerous regional borders where controls are lacking or mild. Even the small transboundary criminals and the existing smuggling routes – in the absence of big criminal organizations – help cross the borders. Figures provided by regional countries and by the organizations involved describe this phenomenon but do not always coincide in details, although they do agree on dimensions and the exceptional character of such demographic flows. According to *Frontex* data, over 100.000 asylum-seekers took to the EU Schengen area from the Balkans route, the number tripled since 2014. Illegal transits occur in both directions, from WB to EU countries, from EU States surrounding the Balkans, through the WB and to other EU countries. In the first case, the main illegal exit flow from the WB is through Albania heading for Macedonia and Greece, while a small number uses the Serbian– Hungarian route. But most flows go through the Turkey – Bulgaria – Serbia – Hungary corridor, that is basically the main EU collector of most displaced people crossing the region, while relatively less crossed are

(*) see *Osservatorio Strategico* num. 8 - 2015 for part two.

the Croatian and Rumanian borders, because these countries belong to the EU but not to the Schengen area, thus border controls with other EU countries are still in force. As a matter of fact, Hungary is the only country in South Eastern Europe belonging to the Schengen area that can be reached and abandoned overland (which is different from the other Schengen country of the region, namely Greece, while other Schengen countries are only to be reached by air or sea). This explains the enormous pressure existing on the Hungarian borders, pivot country of the entire Balkans land route, like the central Mediterranean sea routes pivot on Italy. The land route through the Western Balkans is also characterized by a different composition of the flow compared to the maritime route. In 2015, the South East route saw a dramatic increase of migrants from Syria and Asian countries, mainly Pakistan and Afghanistan, while departures from Kosovo stopped suddenly, after Germany and other North European countries adopted measures against the misuse of political asylum. In any case, also in 2015, the first three nationalities to illegally cross European borders are – almost equally distributed – Syrian, Afghan and Kosovar, totalling about three quarters of all accesses in the Schengen area. But if we take a wider look at the first ten nationalities using the Balkans route to enter Europe illegally, the picture appears very complex and we do not find a strict relationship between the violence of conflict – quantitatively measurable by the annual number of casualties – and the number of asylum-seekers heading towards Europe

Table 1. Profile of the refugees' crisis in the first semester 2015

Asylum seekers coming to Europe (January – July 2015)		
Nationality	Number of illegal transits in the Schengen area	Main entry countries
Afghan	61K	Hungary, Greece
Syrian	106K	Hungary, Greece
Eritrean	23K	Italy
Kosovar	23K	Hungary
Pakistani	6K	Greece
Nigerian	10K	Italy
Other Sub Saharan Africa	9K	Italy
Total	250K	

Source: Author's elaboration of Frontex data

Table 2. Death rate trend per 1.000 population for the main emigration countries towards Europe

Country	1989	1999	2009	2011	2013
Afghanistan	17	13	9	8	8
Syria	5	4	4	4	4
Eritrea	16	10	8	7	7
Kosovo	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Pakistan	10	8	7	7	7
Nigeria	18	18	14	14	13

Source: World Bank

If we look at Syria, we can see that - in spite of the adjustment of casualty levels above 50.000 since 2012 – the number of people seeking refuge in Europe is hardly relatable to the trend and proportion of violence in this conflict, that is the annual casualties' rate. The first explanation is that, like in many other conflicts, one often flees the direct violence of war by relocating in one's own country and, if it is not possible, by settling in refugees camps in neighbouring countries. Emigration in faraway rich countries, such as European countries, is less a consequence of the need to flee from direct violence and more linked to the necessity to rebuild an economic wealth that was destroyed by war and cannot be recreated in the first entry countries. These are often not willing to host migrants– like Turkey – and so set up huge refugees' camps for millions of people but refuse to grant asylum to the masses flown into Turkish territory, de facto forcing them to choose: either go back to their home country or go on in their migration. This is what is happening in 2015 and what boosted the volume of migratory flows through the Balkans to Europe.

One more contrasting element speaking against a strict and direct relation of migration towards Europe to the only option to flee war is the comparison between the Syrian and Afghan situation. The two civil wars have fed almost to the same extent the Balkans route to Europe in the first semester 2015, although the Afghan civil war was, in 2014, way less violent than the Syrian and that country is more geographically distant from the Balkans.

Let's also add the examples of Kosovo and Albania, producing a very high number of migrants even in the absence of a conflict, and the migrants from African and Asian countries only partly affected by local civil wars, like Nigeria, where the solutions could be found in an inner relocation. Clearly, in these cases, the choice to emigrate to Europe rather than become an *Internally Displaced Person* depends on economic reasons and hopes for a better future, so not necessarily on the need to flee unjust violence.

It appears clear that the main driver of the migratory flows to Europe registered since 2011 and grown to important dimensions between 2014 – 2015 is not war and its direct violence, hence the necessity to flee its devastating effects. Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 show a comparison of data indicating a reduced or at least disputable direct relationship between conflicts and migration to Europe.

Table 3. First ten nationalities transiting through the Western Balkans to the Schengen area and number of war related casualties in the countries of origin

Country	Total refugees 1st semester 2015 2nd Quarter 2015	2 nd Quarter 2015	1 st Quarter 2015	Total 2014	Number of war related casualties in 2014
Syria	25.569	20.010	5.559	12.536	76.000
Afghanistan	25.287	18.848	6.439	17.402	14.600
Kosovo	25.205	588	24.617	23.521	0
Albania	6.401	3.691	2.710	11.662	0
Iraq	4.470	3.414	1.056	542	21.000
Pakistan	4.105	3.325	780	563	5.500
Bangladesh	1.161	811	350	311	76
Somalia	1.039	619	420	435	4.000
Congo	907	817	90	190	1.200
Palestine	893	617	276	998	2.300

Source: Author's elaboration of Frontex data

Table 4. War mortality rate in the Syrian conflict and number of refugees

Year	Number of war related casualties in the Syrian civil war	Number of Syrian refugees transiting through the Western Balkans to the Schengen area
2012	50.000	1.646
2013	73.000	2.706
2014	76.000	12.536
1° e 2° trim. 2015	30.000	25.569

Source: Author's elaboration of Frontex data

Second level post-conflict migration

It is therefore important to consider that, in many cases the migrants heading to Europe through the Balkans route are not coming directly from their countries of origin and are not fleeing an incumbent, immediate danger. Rather, they are coming from safe third countries where they have been temporarily hosted and protected, being granted opportunities to stay and work, yet not the refugee status. The origin of this explosion of migratory flows is often to be traced in a change of reception policies and forms of temporary protection granted by neighbouring host countries. It is then very often a form of second migration that produces and feeds such flows that are only indirectly attributable to a further decline of the security and stability conditions in the countries of origin. This explains in part the apparently atypical relationship between war trends and escape to Europe. Well-known are the cases of countries like Greece, Turkey, Iran or Saudi Arabia that, after receiving hordes of displaced people from warring countries of a wide area of the Middle East and Asia, modified their temporary reception policies - due to a change in the economic situation, to politico-strategic or social evaluations - and did not renew visa, tightened measures against undeclared work or became tolerant with human trafficking activities. This is what happened in Turkey with the Syrian displaced people and in Iran with the Afghans.

Both cases, responsible for most of the increase in migratory flows to Europe in 2015, prompt reflection on the role of intermediate countries, located midway between the conflict areas and supportive *welfare* Europe, and on the second level *post conflict emigration* from initial reception countries to richer countries.

There is so a first line of countries neighbouring with the conflict areas, where huge masses of displaced people are first hosted, but the option of their integration or of granting refugees status is barred a priori. This is a well-known model throughout the Middle East, as shows the Jordanian case, where half of the population is made up of Palestinian nationals hosted for decades but never offered the benefits of citizenship, so living in a condition of second class citizens, though most are settled and integrated. Masses handled this way become, in the medium term very effective tools of demographic pressure, not only for interfering in the conflict but also in relation to European countries, thanks to asylum and reception mechanisms and humanitarian Treaties signed decades ago, when the world had not yet experienced the current dynamics.

Receiving huge masses of displaced people fleeing a civil war in numerous countries of the world has a decreasing value over time, often related to the opportunity to use them for ethnic policy purposes or for interfering in the conflict areas. When such value decreases, they are reused as a tool to condition decisions in European countries. This has become suddenly clear in the current asylum-seekers crisis in Europe. Although it is not an exclusively Syrian phenomenon (Syrian nationals make up for less than a quarter of entries), the emergency has been brought back to the Syrian conflict by the media, to the point that Europe reopened a dialogue on possible military air strikes and the creation of a *free zone* in Syria, which is actually the Turkish position NATO allies did not want to endorse yet.

We must then recognize that there is a spontaneous phenomenon of people fleeing conflicts and, in parallel, there is an inter-States problem of managing big stocks of migrants, whose flows in or out can be exploited with unscrupulous policies of assembling/expelling big masses of migrants. This allows the creation of critical masses that, if directed to another State, cannot be confronted via ordinary borders control measures, especially in a European context where internal borders were abolished and only the EU external borders are in force, beyond which there is also an integrated free circulation zone. In some circumstances, some EU countries (France, Austria and Denmark) already re-established obstacles to the freedom of circulation of people to face uncontrolled accesses to the Schengen area. Clearly, should the flows continue with this magnitude, structured forms of internal borders protection and control will be re-established, to the point that indiscriminate migratory pressure both on maritime and land EU borders must be considered as the main threat to the freedom of circulation in Europe.

Against such background, buffer States situated between conflict areas and Europe with refugees' reception capacity can use the demographic tool and the European reception and asylum mechanisms to exert political pressure on European countries. The practice of packing up stocks of people and release them to Europe with the aim of creating – through the related social, economic and public order problems and costs – atypical tools for exerting pressure and conditioning the Western States, that was once typical of some *rogue states* such as Libya, seems to become an increasingly common practice in the actual context, not only as a form of asymmetrical warfare, but even as a simple politico-diplomatic tool in international relations among States.

We should not forget that the current migratory crisis affecting Europe follows on from the key role played by two important Middle East powers like Turkey and Iran. The former, which is the focus of the second part of this paper, is mainly responsible for the boost in the flow of Syrian asylum-seekers to Europe, while the latter contributed to the significant increase of Afghan migrants going to the EU. Actually, about half a million Afghans were living in Iran with visa expiring in 2015 and Teheran decided not to renew them. Many then decided to go on to Europe illegally, through the Balkans route. Yet to complete the picture we must not forget - and the current migrants' crisis proves it - that also the intentional *open doors* and indiscriminate reception policies existing only in some Western countries represent the other focal point of the phenomenon - in addition to the unavailability of first reception states to stabilize the refugees. These two extreme and opposite models produce the migratory flows to Europe. As long as such "delta" between first reception and final immigration countries survives, the number of asylum-seekers will grow, producing a wide range of political, diplomatic and security problems for all transit countries, especially if small and with limited resources (such as the majority of South East European and Balkans countries crushed between Germany and Turkey). This has occurred repeatedly in the cases of Greece, Macedonia and Serbia. The Greek-Macedonian borders were closed many times, to prevent transits (up to 3,000 daily) and stop the migrants' attempts to force closed borders, resulting in the use of force by Macedonian police that proved ineffective and inappropriate to stop the transit of thousands of people. The borders were hence reopened to transit for all people, whatever was their origin and situation, whether they came from warring countries or not, whether they could apply for refugee status or were simple economic migrants. This happened because it was clear that the migrants were soon to abandon the country through the Northern border with Serbia. The same was done, in the South, by Greece and will be done by Serbia to the North. Actually, the most *cost-efficient* technique to manage the humanitarian emergency for transit states non belonging to the Schengen area is not to close borders but rather to transfer migrants close to the other border and let them continue their trip to the EU.

The different roles played by states in the migration corridors

Observing carefully routes and dynamics of the migratory flows to Europe we can identify a sort of *pipeline* with a progressive “division of labour” among countries and regions “playing” different roles and with different if not contrasting interests in the migratory flows. Their conflicting interactions produce and feed the current migratory flows.

Conflict countries

Neighbouring first reception countries

Transit countries

Entry countries

Final destination countries

Conflict countries are the States of the world where important, non-occasional armed conflicts are ongoing, with an average of over 1,000 casualties per year. Without going into details as to the different kinds of ongoing conflicts, we can currently identify at least 13 countries affected by armed conflicts: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, South Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Central African Republic, and Ukraine. With the exception of Ukraine, none of these States shares land borders with the EU, and only some of the armed conflicts (Syria, Iraq and probably Yemen) can be considered civil wars of national scope, that is affecting sizeable parts of the inhabited territory (and over 50% of the population); the other cases should be considered as States affected by localized civil wars, affecting only one portion/region of the national territory, while the State’s capacity still exists along the conflict. The *neighbouring first reception countries* are countries neighbouring the conflict area, often having strong geographical, but also religious, historical cultural and political bonds that cannot – for a complex mix of reasons – close their borders to the displaced people fleeing from war. Moreover, as neighbouring countries, they often reserve the right to take the side of one warring party, after identifying their own strategic interests with the victory of one of the opposing fronts. The necessary appendix of this will of exerting an external influence, often based on the support of other *proxy* actors in the conflict (among the countless examples there are Pakistan/Afghanistan or Ethiopia/Somalia) is the reception of displaced people and the management of temporary reception camps.

The strategic value of the masses of displaced people concentrated in neighbouring countries decreases as the conflict continues or the supported warring party fails the military victory. This can imply dramatic changes in the reception policies for migrants, who are rarely ready to go back to the home country, even in the case of an improvement of the security situation (i.e. the displaced Somali people in Kenya). The truth is that people do not only flee war but more often also the consequences of war after its end. *Post-conflict* poverty and anarchy are two main drivers for population to seek not just immediate relief from destruction but the more craved improvement of living conditions. It appears actually impossible to separate economic from security drivers of migrations, being the two almost always related. One does not flee bombs to then go back to a destroyed country lacking serious reconstruction perspectives. One flees the medium/long term consequences of conflicts the same way, or even more than one flees war itself. *Post-conflict* failure and the inability to restart States and societies after a violent conflict are among the main reasons for abandoning one's country. In this sense, applying for refugee status is trying to get a new less precarious life, rather than escaping direct immediate violence.

Transit countries, among which we consider almost all the countries in the Balkans, are essentially unrelated to the political and demographic dynamics of a conflict, but they are along the geographic route from first reception states (not the conflict states!) to the regions of the world characterized by high levels of welfare and socio-economic security. One or more transit states, characterized by the same neutral position as regards the demographic aspects of the conflict form a transit corridor. These countries sometimes play a merely neutral role of a territory to be crossed, and implement a posture of non-resistance to transit, with the idea that exit flows will be basically equivalent to entry flows; this can happen with the direct intervention of the State that transfers migrants from one border to the other, or letting the organized crime and smugglers operate in the area – without contrast. In this way, the transit countries soon become a logistic base for business criminal organizations – operating to ease and ensure transit in the corridor and to the final destination countries, also making an economic return for the transit country.

Entry countries differ from transit countries in that, even if not the final destination for most migrants, they cannot implement a *laissez faire* policy typical

of some purely transit countries, because as entry countries for the Schengen area, they are obliged to comply with the Dublin regulation, that is record and manage asylum applications. In other words, they have the burden of a first selection of admissions. If the entry country to the Schengen area is not a final destination country – as it is the case for the 3 main entry countries to the free circulation area, Italy, Greece and Hungary – this management and selection work, also including the burdens of temporary admission, administrative disputes and repatriations of the non-eligible, is done to the benefit of the destination countries, which is often a reason for recrimination and controversy among EU states.

Final destination countries are the countries that decided to admit, for many different reasons, an important number of refugees even if they are not legally obliged to manage their flows because they are neither close to the conflict zones nor to the EU external borders. We are talking about EU countries that decided to implement an open immigration policy, like Germany. Since 2005, it modified its residence laws declaring itself an immigration country and implementing migration policies substantially more open than those of the other European countries and counting, at the same time, on a structured and effective welfare-state and a brilliant labour market.

Over the period 2011 – 2015 South Eastern Europe saw the emergence of a migratory corridor going from the Middle East straight to the heart of Europe, where Syria and Iraq are the two main conflict areas, Turkey is a first temporary reception bridge country, the Western Balkans are transit countries, Hungary is the main entry point to the Schengen area and Germany is the main final destination country. (Needless to say that the migration process does not necessarily end with the arrival in Germany, because every admission and legalization of third country nationals in the Schengen area results in their possible dispersion over the entire free exchange area).

The Balkans route consolidated during 2015, in the end produced a highly conflictual situation not only between the migrants wishing to reach their destination and countries willing to protect their borders and immigration laws, but also among European countries, every one playing a different role in the migratory pipeline that *de facto* stretches uninterruptedly between Turkey and Germany, embracing the Balkans peninsula and causing big distress to the already weak forms of cooperation in the region.

Here are some brief profiles of the main state actors and their roles in the Balkan migratory corridor, starting from Germany, main final destination of the migratory flows and first European country to implement a generous reception policy in favour of migrants from Middle Eastern countries.

Germany as main drive of the process and its complex role with reference to the Balkans

Germany remains the main attractor of the refugees' flows to Europe. Without its leading economy and its will to assert its position as a human rights and solidarity superpower, the Balkans migratory channel would be way less congested. The will to appear as a welcoming country, respectful of human rights and dignity led, at the beginning of September 2015, to the unpredictable German decision to suspend – or better said overturn - the Dublin reception mechanisms, the 1990 agreement stating that asylum-seekers are obliged to apply for asylum and hospitality in the first European entry country. Berlin's decision, only reserved for the Syrian, to examine directly on the German territory the applications for asylum, independently of the route and lawfulness of their access to Germany, represents a decisive step forward, and above all it marks Berlin's decision to play an increasing role in the Syrian conflict. Yet such decision will finally boost the flow of Syrian migrants along the Balkans transit route, causing potential conflicts of interest with the transit States. In this regard, Germany will be called in a *soft power* confrontation with Russia, a country with a different and opposite approach to the refugees issue in the Balkans countries. The downside is the fact that adopting a generous asylum policy for Syria also implied a crackdown on economic migrants from the Balkans trying to obtain refugee status. Tens of thousands of expulsions are to be expected, after Berlin declared the entire Balkans a politically safe zone. In parallel, also policies will be implemented to force the repatriation of Balkans nationals who tried in the past years to access the German asylum system. Expulsions will be accompanied by a prohibition to go back to Germany for a five years period. The German policy of attracting new refugees is supported by the country's industrial system for the opportunity it foresees of increasing competitiveness by letting in cheaper labour force.

Hungary, the doorway to the Schengen area

In the first months of 2015 between Serbia and Hungary there were some 90% of all illegal accesses to the EU, marking a 1000% increase compared to 2014. Hungarian data give a total number, in the first semester 2015, of over 100.000 irregular migrants going through the country. To respond to this sizeable flow, Hungary reinforced its migration laws, tightening sanctions for irregularities, accelerating the administrative procedures for *screening* the asylum applications and declaring Serbia, Kosovo and Macedonia safe countries of origin, as to allow repatriation of their citizens. Moreover, the Hungarian authorities started the construction of a permanent wood and barbed wire barrier along its 175 km long border to Serbia. The barrier, not yet completed at the date of September 10, is supposed to reduce the number of illegal crossings especially mass crossings, like those taking place between Greece and Serbia. The effectiveness of such barrier - bitterly criticized from a humanitarian point of view and similar to the one built along the borders between Bulgaria and Turkey that actually cut irregular crossings from 11.000 in 2013 to 4.000 in 2014 – will be assessed in early 2016. Yet, from its value as a physical obstacle to illegal entries one must deduct the political costs of the operation with regard to their neighbouring countries to the North and South. Not much because “wrapping up” the borders could affect relations and regular exchanges between Hungary and its neighbours, but also because its construction will prevent Serbia from implementing the typical *sliding-doors* policy that transit countries – after an initial resistance – finally adopt. Should the barrier work as foreseen, Serbia will have to manage the bulk of migrants coming from Turkey and unable to leave its territory, or to adopt, in turn, the policy of sealing its borders with Macedonia. Serbia will have to choose between becoming the last link in the chain - and in this sense there will be pressures from Germany and Austria - or lining up with Hungary and try and set up a front to interrupt the flow. In this sense, both Hungary and Serbia – in particular – are supported by Russia, due to its position regarding Syria, and its concern for a possible constant flow of Syrians going to the Balkans and Europe.

List of acronyms

AT: Anti-Tank
CASD: Continuous At-Sea Deterrence
CCDI: Central Commission for Discipline Inspection
CCP: Chinese Communist Party
CCTV: China Central Television
CSR: Comprehensive Spending Review
EU: European Union
EUNAVFOR: European Union's Naval Force
GDP Gross Domestic Product
GDP: Gross Domestic Product
HMS: Her Majesty Ship
LAW Light Anti-Tank Weapon
LibDem: Liberal Democrats Party of the UK
mbd million barrels day
MENA: Middle East and North Africa
OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PDVSA Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (Venezuela Petrols, Limited Company)
RAF: Royal Air Force
RPG Rocket Propelled Grenade
RUSI: Royal United Service Institute
SDSR: Strategic Defence and Security Review
SEBIN Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional
SSBN: nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines
UKIP: United Kingdom Independentist party
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
EU: European Union
WB: Western Balkans



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