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# **OSSERVATORIO STRATEGICO**

## **2021**

### **Issue 4**



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DEFENSE ANALYSIS AND  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# **Osservatorio Strategico 2021 Issue 4**

# Osservatorio Strategico

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## Osservatorio Strategico 2021

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# **Osservatorio Strategico**

## **Part One**

## **Ukraine: tensions over elections in Crimea**

Ukrainian officials criticized Russia for holding parliamentary elections in Crimea, annexed by Moscow in 2014. Pro-Russian separatists in the territory were able to participate in polling stations and in the vote held in mid-September.

Moscow, which considers Crimea to be part of its territory, has also distributed more than 600,000 passports in eastern Ukraine, where citizens can vote electronically or in the Russian border region of Rostov. Kiev also accused Moscow of speeding up the issuance of passports in separatist territories to increase participation in elections. The Ukrainian parliament also declared Russia's elections in Crimea "illegal" and urged the international community not to recognize the result.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Russia has committed a "flagrant violation" of international law and called on the United Nations to help "restore the territorial integrity of our state", adding that "the Russian occupation will end"<sup>1</sup>.

For the US State Department, "the Duma elections of 17-19 September in the Russian Federation were held in conditions that were not in keeping with free and fair procedures. The Russian government's use of laws on "extremist organizations", "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" has severely limited political pluralism and prevented the Russian people from exercising their civil and political rights. The Russian government's restrictions, which were preceded by extensive efforts to marginalize independent political figures, also prevented the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and its Assembly MP to monitor elections, limiting transparency which is essential for fair elections. These actions contradict Russia's obligations, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as its commitments to the OSCE and other international and regional bodies. We call on Russia to honor its international obligations of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and to end its campaign of pressure on civil society, political opposition and independent media. Furthermore, we do not recognize the holding of elections for the Russian Duma on Ukrainian sovereign territory and reaffirm our unwavering support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine"<sup>2</sup>.

The European Union has also expressed concerns about what happened in the electoral round, regretting Russia's decision to severely limit the size and format of the OSCE / ODIHR international election observation mission and prevented its deployment.

The EU takes note of the independent and reliable sources reporting serious violations.

In the run-up to the elections, there was increased repression against opposition politicians, civil society organizations and independent media, as well as journalists. This has resulted in the restriction of choice for Russian voters and their ability to obtain complete and accurate information on candidates.

The EU reiterated its deep concern at the continued narrowing of space for the opposition, civil society and independent voices across Russia and called on the Russian leadership to reverse these negative developments.

The Russian Federation should respect the commitments undertaken within the UN, the OSCE and the Council of Europe regarding the protection of human rights and democratic values.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ukraine says Russia is violating international law by holding elections in Crimea*, Euronews 16/09/2021 <https://www.euronews.com/2021/09/16/ukraine-says-russia-is-violating-international-law-by-holding-elections-in-crimea>

<sup>2</sup> *The Russian Federation's Duma Elections*, US Department of State 20/09/ 2021 <https://www.state.gov/the-russian-federations-duma-elections/>

The EU does not recognize and will not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol by the Russian Federation, and therefore does not recognize the so-called elections held on the occupied Crimean peninsula.

The decision of the Russian Federation to involve residents of non-government-controlled territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in the State Duma, regional and local elections is contrary to the spirit and objectives of the Minsk agreements. The EU remains steadfast in its support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine<sup>3</sup>.

### **Ukraine's participation in the NATO Rapid Trident exercise and assistance from the European Union**

On September 20, Ukraine conducted joint military exercises with the United States and other NATO troops, at the same time that Russia and Belarus held large-scale exercises that alarmed the West, mobilizing some 200,000 troops<sup>4</sup>. About 300 US military personnel have been employed alongside 6,000 men and women from Atlantic Alliance countries as part of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. The nations involved in the exercise are: Ukraine, USA, Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Pakistan, Republic of Poland, Romania, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The U.S. participation involves the 81st Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the Washington Army National Guard, which has deployed in support of the Joint Multinational Training Group Ukraine since April 2021.

Rapid Trident 21 has continued the partnership between the United States and Ukraine for over 25 years. Through efforts such as Rapid Trident 21 and the Joint Multinational Training Group Ukraine, the US military supports Ukraine's continuing education efforts and defensive capabilities. According to US Army Colonel Michael Hanson, "Rapid Trident's primary task is to provide the methods and tools to enable the Ukrainian President's National Security Strategy and the Defense Minister's Security Strategy to build partnerships and interoperability between partner nations, which will provide the basis for deterrence against any further aggression". For General Vladyslav Klochkov, co-director of Rapid Trident 21 for the Ukrainian side, "the exercise represents not only a phase of improving military capacity but also an important step towards the European integration of Ukraine. It will strengthen the operational capabilities of our troops, improve the level of interoperability between the units and the headquarters of the armed forces of Ukraine, the United States and NATO partners"<sup>5</sup>. With a view to European integration, a working document of the European Union cited last October 3 by the German newspaper Welt am Sonntag, referring to a training program called EU Military Advisory and Training Mission Ukraine (EUATM), is considered relevant. Such a military mission would represent "a sign of solidarity with Ukraine in the light of Russia's ongoing military activities on the border with Ukraine and in the illegally annexed Crimea". The push for the mission comes after several member states have repeatedly voiced concern about Russian military exercises near their borders and the EU, including Zapad-2021 held from 10 to 16

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<sup>3</sup> *Russia: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union on the State Duma, regional and local elections*, European Council of the European Union 20/09/2021 [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/09/20/russia-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-state-duma-regional-and-local-elections/?utm\\_source=dsms-auto&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Russia%3a+Declaration+by+the+High+Representative+on+behalf+of+the+European+Union+on+the+State+Duma%2c+regional+and+local+elections](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/09/20/russia-declaration-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-the-state-duma-regional-and-local-elections/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Russia%3a+Declaration+by+the+High+Representative+on+behalf+of+the+European+Union+on+the+State+Duma%2c+regional+and+local+elections)

<sup>4</sup> *Ukraine holds military drills with U.S. forces, NATO allies*, Reuters 20/09/2021 <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/ukraine-holds-military-drills-with-us-forces-nato-allies-2021-09-20/>

<sup>5</sup> Menegay C. and Valles A., *US, NATO, Ukraine enhance interoperability with Rapid Trident exercise*, U.S. Army 21/09/2021 [https://www.army.mil/article/250444/us\\_nato\\_ukraine\\_enhance\\_interoperability\\_with\\_rapid\\_trident\\_exercise](https://www.army.mil/article/250444/us_nato_ukraine_enhance_interoperability_with_rapid_trident_exercise)

September and the massive build-up of Russian troops near the Ukraine last April. According to the reconstructions, the need for a military training mission is particularly felt among the countries of Eastern Europe, but also by the Nordic states such as Sweden and Finland, which have expressed their support.

On the contrary, according to the reconstructions, Italy, Greece and Cyprus have spoken out against "useless provocations" against Moscow. The legitimacy of EU missions and operations currently derives from unanimity, which means that all Member States should agree to support the launch of a new operation.

Kiev hopes that the next German government can actively support this historic initiative and contribute significantly to building consensus within the EU, "said Ukrainian Ambassador to Germany, Andrij Melnyk.

Ukraine, which applied to join NATO in 2008, had repeatedly asked the alliance to speed up the country's membership, saying it was the only way to end fighting with pro-Russian separatists.

However, influential NATO members remain reluctant to welcome Ukraine for fear of escalating tensions with Moscow<sup>6</sup>.

### **Ukraine towards the production of Turkish drones**

Ukraine has announced that it will build a factory to produce Turkish armed drones that Kiev had previously purchased for use against pro-Russian separatists in the east. At the end of September, Ukrainian Defense Minister Andriy Taran and Haluk Bayraktar, CEO of the Turkish company Baykar, which produces Bayraktar armed drones, signed a memorandum to establish a joint training and maintenance center for drones in Ukraine. Baykar will build this center on land belonging to the defense ministry of Ukraine near the city of Vasylkiv, located approximately 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Kiev.

Ukraine previously purchased Bayraktar TB2 drones, Baykar's flagship model that was used in conflicts in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>7</sup>.

### **Evaluation and forecast analysis**

The context in which the Russian elections were held in Crimea was preceded, immediately after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, by an action by the Russian media which substantially warned Ukraine and other former Soviet republics of possible US disengagement towards other allies and collaborators. The parallelism with Afghanistan was therefore used as a warning above all to those rulers who are *de facto* dependent on Washington, whose fate has been likened to Afghans seeking escape on flights departing from Kabul.

This narrative was then added to the elections of last September 17 - 19 which, according to the deputy of the European Solidarity party Oleksiy Goncharenko, removed any persistent doubt on the fact that "Russia has ceased to be a democracy and highlighted the true authoritarian face of the Putin regime ". According to the Ukrainian security services, in the eastern part of the country, occupied by the Russians, an increasing number of passports have been issued, so as to create a justification for maintaining the Russian presence in eastern Ukraine<sup>8</sup>. Russian President Vladimir Putin seems sincerely convinced that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people", as perfectly highlighted in his long essay of July 2021 "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians". Putin

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<sup>6</sup> Brzozowski A., *EU might consider military training mission for Ukraine*, Euractiv 4/10/2021 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/eu-might-consider-military-training-mission-for-ukraine/>

<sup>7</sup> *Ukraine to produce Turkish armed drones: Minister*, Al Jazeera 7/10/2021 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/7/ukraine-to-produce-turkish-armed-drones-minister>

<sup>8</sup> Goncharenko O., *Why we must not recognize Russia's fraudulent election*, Atlantic Council 20/09/2021 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-we-must-not-recognize-russias-fraudulent-election/>

believes that the two countries are inextricably linked by a common past and sees their current state of separation as a temporary and artificial aberration. The growing gap between the two countries has actually emerged in recent days on the occasion of the parliamentary elections in Russia. From the exclusion of opposition candidates to the silence of the last remaining independent media to the fraud in polling stations across the country, the picture that emerged from the electoral round has registered a feeling of grim resignation.

Such a sequence of events would be absolutely unthinkable in today's Ukraine. The last Ukrainian elections, which remotely resemble the recent ones in Russia, took place seventeen years ago, in November 2004. On that occasion, the Ukrainian authorities used many of the same tactics recently adopted by the Kremlin in an attempt to secure victory in that one which was a disputed election.

The response of the Ukrainian electorate to the election fraud was both unambiguous and overwhelming. Faced with the prospect of stolen elections, millions of people poured into central Kiev to defend their democratic rights, fueling the popular protest movement that has become known as the Orange Revolution. The Orange Revolution was to prove to be a watershed moment in post-Soviet history. More importantly, the revolt of popular power in Ukraine marked a civilizational shift for the country that took it away from Kremlin-style authoritarianism and towards European democracy. It was the moment when Ukraine finally separated from Russia and took a completely different trajectory.

Since the Orange Revolution, Ukraine has held eight separate presidential and parliamentary elections. All have been internationally recognized as free and fair. The nascent Ukrainian democracy is far from perfect, of course. The country's political system has long been hostage to excessive oligarchic influence, with a handful of billionaire kings controlling entire parties and owning virtually every notable Ukrainian media.

Since the outbreak of war with Russia in 2014, national security concerns in wartime have also necessitated a number of restrictions, including a ban on Russian television broadcasts and a shutdown of Ukrainian media linked to the Kremlin. At the same time, it is important to note that despite the ongoing hostilities, openly pro-Russian political parties continue to participate in Ukrainian elections and hold positions both locally and nationally. While Ukraine has consolidated its nascent democracy, Russia has increasingly retreated into authoritarianism. While Putin continues to insist that Russians and Ukrainians are both members of the same indivisible whole, the reality is that Ukraine's democratic political culture virtually excludes the prospect of any future voluntary meeting. A majority of Ukrainians would never willingly vote for an authoritarian throwback, nor would they be willing to accept the kind of mass election fraud that has been normalized in today's Russia<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Dickinson P., *Rigged vote highlights growing gulf between Putin's Russia and democratic Ukraine*, Atlantic Council 21/09/2021  
<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/rigged-vote-highlights-growing-gulf-between-putins-russia-and-democratic-ukraine/>

## **The Iraqi Political Situation**

The previous *Osservatorio Strategico* has taken into account the security situation in Iraq; in the current issue the aim is to analyze the political situation of the country.

It is fair to say that Iraq will witness at least three important events that can have an impact on its situation. First, Iraqis head to vote on October 10<sup>1</sup>. As a consequence, the government has taken a series of actions to limit election fraud and increase voter security. Moreover, the government has closed its border for security reasons and special forces will be in charge of the security during the elections, since the risk of terrorist attacks in the country remains very high. The populist Shia Muslim scholar, Moqtada al-Sadr will take part in Iraq's general election, after having said that he would stay out. Al-Sadr's bloc is part of a coalition that holds the most seats in parliament now and he urged supporters to go to the polls. Second, in April American President Joe Biden approved the withdraw of US combat troops from Iraq. This does not mean a completely withdraw or political disengagement from the country by the U.S., as it happened in Afghanistan for example, but a re-balanced kind of operations in which the combat element is not part of the mission. American troops will remain in Iraq but in a very limited number and with different goals. This will give more responsibilities to the NATO Mission Iraq (NMI) a non-combat advisory, training and capacity-building mission, conducted in full respect of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Established in Baghdad in October 2018, it currently involves several hundred trainers, advisors and supporting personnel from Allied and partner countries. In February 2021, NATO defence ministers agreed to expand NMI, as requested by the Iraqi government. NATO does not deploy its personnel alongside Iraqi forces during combat operations and it only trains members of the Iraqi security forces under direct and effective control of the government of Iraq. In 2022, Italy will take the command of NATO Mission Iraq from Denmark.

In order to better understand the current political situation in Iraq we divide this analysis into two sections: the first one is focused on internal problems, while the second one takes into account the role Baghdad is playing at the regional level.

The internal situation is very complex and volatile due also to the division between the three main Iraqi sectarian groups: Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds.

Another problem is related to the dissatisfaction toward the government or at least part of the ruling class. For example, at the beginning of October, hundreds of Iraqis have taken to the streets in Baghdad to mark two years since fierce protests organized in the Iraqi capital, fueled by anger over corruption and unemployment. About 1,000 protesters marched to Tahrir Square, carrying photos of friends and relatives killed by security forces during the uprising, which began in October 2019 and fizzled out after a bloody crackdown resulted in the death of over 600 people. Demonstrators also decried a string of targeted assassinations against civil society groups since the protests began. Nobody has claimed responsibility for the targeted killings, but protesters point the finger at powerful pro-Iranian militias<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, the main problem remains the presence of militias linked to Iran and not to the central government. The PMUs, Popular Mobilization Forces, are semi-independent units that, after having fought against ISIS supporting the regular Iraqi Security Forces, are controlling part of the country. Moreover, they have semi-conventional military capabilities since they are armed by Iran and can use modern military drones for their operations. In the last months has been common that military bases hosting U.S. personnel had been attacked or bombed by drones or artillery fire. Moreover, among the candidates running in Iraq's general elections there is the leader of one of the most hard-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://warontherocks.com/2021/09/tribes-political-parties-and-the-iraqi-elections-a-shifting-dynamic/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/1/iraqis-march-in-baghdad-to-mark-protests-anniversary>.



line and powerful militias with close ties to Iran, Hussein Muanis. He joined a long list of candidates from among Iran-backed Shia factions, but the worrying element is that he is the first to be openly affiliated with Kataib Hezbollah, signaling the militant group's formal entry into politics.

Another internal problem that highlights the instability of the country and the presence of different actors is related to the fact that Iraq is the battle-space of different region conflicts. For instance, Turkey continues to operate inside Iraq in order to fight Kurd militias and in particular the PKK. On September 17, Turkish military gunned down Yasin Bulut in Sulaimaniyah, the second-largest city in the Iraqi Kurdish enclave. In recent months, Turkish drones have picked off a string of mid-level commanders in Iraqi Kurdistan and northeast Syria who were slated to form the next generation of rebel leaders<sup>3</sup>.

At the same time, in the recent months Iraq has played an international important role trying to resolve important regional issues. At the end of August, the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership took place and was attended by French President Emmanuel Macron, Jordanian King Abdullah, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emirati Vice President and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Rashid, and Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Sabah. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran were represented by their foreign ministers. The final statement stressed the necessity of regional cooperation in dealing with the common challenges. The attendees also agreed to "form a follow-up committee comprised of foreign ministers of participating countries, to prepare for periodic future conference sessions"<sup>4</sup>.

The conference came as part of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's efforts to extricate his country from being the front line of rivalry and wrangling between various powers. His road map involves efforts to end US-Iranian score-settling via Iraq, but also an offer for good neighborly relations with Turkey, whose military operations on Iraqi territory have significantly expanded. Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu represented Turkey at the conference and his main proposals, to build a motorway and a railroad from Fish Khabur, the border crossing linking Iraq and northeast Syria, to Baghdad and an industrial zone in Mosul, are both underlain by political motives that outweigh economic considerations. The proposed road bypasses Iraqi Kurdistan and creates a *de facto* security belt impeding the movement of PKK militants. Moreover, the road can facilitate access to Mosul, which neo-Ottomans still mourn as a lost land. It is no secret that Ankara's dreams is the construction of an industrial zone or an airport in Mosul. Speaking at the Baghdad conference, Cavusoglu described IS, the PKK and the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units as "terrorist organizations threatening regional stability" meaning that Turkey is going to fight such groups regardless where they are located<sup>5</sup>.

The presence of the French President at the conference was also no coincidence, because same days later French energy giant Total signed mega contracts with Iraq worth \$27 billion to develop oil fields, natural gas and a water project. Total will develop the Ratawi oil field in southern Iraq, a gas processing hub to capture natural gas from five southern oil fields, and a much-needed project to treat Gulf seawater and inject it into reservoirs to maintain oil production levels.

Iraq is also trying to collaborate with Iran and improve their relationship without risking escalation with other regional players. For instance, on 13 September Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Khadimi became the first foreign leader to visit Iran under the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi. Khadimi's mediation efforts between Iran and Saudi Arabia and between Iran and the United States are two of the most important issues that the prime minister could discuss<sup>6</sup>. Another consequence of the meeting was that Iraq and Iran both agreed to cancel visa requirements. The

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/turkeys-latest-attack-pkk-militant-iraqi-kurdistan-meant-show-strength>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/08/baghdad-conference-establish-cooperation-partnership-region>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/what-erdogan-missed-skipping-baghdad-conference>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/iraqs-kadhimi-meets-iranian-president>.

meeting was also important for two other reasons. First, it fits with Iraq's diplomatic focus on keeping positive relations with neighbors and the region. Baghdad at the time hosted three rounds of negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia during last few months, and a new one followed at the end of September<sup>7</sup>. Second, during his visit to Iran Kadhimi discussed the challenges in Iraq's import of gas and electricity from Iran, including recent reduction of Iranian exports to Iraq, and the difficulties of Iraqi payments to Iran, despite a waiver from US sanctions. The two countries also wanted to increase their annual trade to \$20 billion<sup>8</sup>.

## **Main Events in the Maghreb and Mashreq Area**

### **Morocco**

Morocco's King Mohammed VI named a new government after last month's election, keeping the foreign and interior ministers in place but appointing Nadia Fettah Alaoui as finance minister. The new government will be led by billionaire tycoon Aziz Akhannouch whose liberal National Rally of Independents (RNI) came first in the election.

At the beginning of September, Morocco took delivery of Turkish combat drones. Moroccan military personnel have trained in Turkey in recent weeks to be able to operate the drones. It has been said that Morocco signed a \$70m contract with the private Turkish company Baykar<sup>9</sup>. While it is not a novelty that Rabat uses drones for intelligence and surveillance operations along its borders, this new acquisition may represent an important improvement for Morocco security and its military capabilities mainly in light of the Western Sahara crisis that continues to represent a huge political issue. In fact, a European Union court at the end of September annulled EU-Morocco agriculture and fishing trade deals, saying that they were agreed to without the consent of the people of Western Sahara. As a consequence, Morocco will lose 52 million euros annually, for four years.

### **Algeria**

Algeria is in the middle of a complex diplomatic crisis on two different fronts. The crisis between Morocco and Algeria mainly over Western Sahara has recently worsened and on September 23 Algiers announced the closure of the country's airspace to all Moroccan planes.

On 30 September, the government said it summoned the French ambassador to Algiers after Paris decided to slash the number of visas it issues to nationals of Algeria and other countries in North Africa's Maghreb region. The number of visas issued for Algeria and Morocco will be reduced by 50 percent, while visas granted for Tunisian nationals will be reduced by two-thirds<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, Algeria accused its former colonial ruler France of genocide. This followed a very critic remarks of President Macron during a meeting with French Algerian descendants who fought on the French side during Algeria's war of independence. According to *Le Monde*, Macron said Algeria was ruled by a political-military system<sup>11</sup>. As a consequence, the Algerian government also banned French military planes from its airspace on Sunday 03 October creating some logistical problems to French military operations in the Sahel region.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/3/saudi-arabia-confirms-recent-talks-with-iran>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/iraqs-kadhimi-had-full-agenda-meetings-iran>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/morocco-receives-turkey-armed-drones-report>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/2/algeria-recalls-ambassador-to-france-for>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/3/algeria-blasts-french-leader-recalls-ambassador-from-france>.

## **Tunisia**

The political crisis in Tunisia continues, however, in the last weeks new steps and possible solutions have been proposed. For instance, four political parties have announced a coalition to oppose President Kais Saied's move to seize governing powers. The objective of the coalition is to express the refusal of the monopolization of power. However, Ennahdha, the biggest party in parliament, has not joined this coalition. At the same time, President Kais Saied named Najla Bouden Romdhane, a little-known university engineer who worked with the World Bank, as the country's first female prime minister. She was asked to form a new government as quickly as possible in order to tackle economic and health problems in the country. As a consequence, on October 11, Prime Minister Najla Bouden said the government's top priorities would be to tackle corruption. Among her new appointments include Samir Saïd, a banker, as economy and planning minister, and Taoufik Charfeddine as interior minister with strong links to Saied.

At the beginning of October, thousands of supporters of Tunisian President Kais Saied have rallied in the capital to show their backing for his suspension of parliament and promises to change the political system. The demonstration was a response to protests against Saied's actions and highlighted the deep division in Tunisian society.

## **Libya**

During the last weeks the security situation in Libya has remained stable, but the political one has been very confused and complex. On September 21, the upper house of Libya's parliament called for presidential elections set for December to be postponed for a year following a controversy over an electoral law. In fact, Libya's eastern-based parliament passed a no-confidence vote in the country's unity government. The escalation came amid growing tensions between Dbeibah's Tripoli-based administration and the House of Representatives in the east because previously they ratified an electoral law seen as favoring Khalifa Haftar, who stepped down from his military role for three months. Then the High Council of State (HCS) in Tripoli rejected that legislation<sup>12</sup>.

In light of this situation on 30 September, a new round, the fifth one, of talks began in the Moroccan capital Rabat between Libya's rival HCS and the House of Representatives (HOR). The HCS was demanding that candidates cannot be members of the armed forces and must have left military service at least two years before. The Haftar-allied HOR says that members of the armed forces should be able to run for the presidency immediately upon resigning their commission<sup>13</sup>. Finally, on 04 October, Libya's eastern-based parliament passed a new elections law bringing the country one step closer to reunification after a decade of intermittent civil war.

On 28 September, ENI CEO Claudio Descalzi met with Abdulhamid Dbeibah and Mustafa Sanalla, chairman of the National Oil Corporation, to discuss ENI investments in the country in the energy sector, including renewable energy, and healthcare<sup>14</sup>.

On the security side, it is fair to mention that Libyan Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush on Sunday 03 October announced a "very modest start" to the withdrawal of foreign fighters operating in the country. It has been estimated that 20,000 mercenaries and foreign fighters are deployed in the country, including Russians from the private security company Wagner, Chadians, Sudanese, and Syrians. Moreover, the French ambassador Beatrice du Hellen launched with Libyan local authorities the Moutaalleg Training Programme for the professional integration of 100 former militias in Zintan<sup>15</sup> showing the continuing and in-depth French influence in the country that is also strengthened by the French announcement of a conference organized by Paris on 12 November<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/21/libya-parliament-withdraws-confidence-from-unity-government>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/libya-rivals-begin-morocco-talks-amid-doubts-over-elections>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://formiche.net/2021/09/descalzi-a-tripoli-cosi-eni-assiste-la-transizione-in-libia/>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.libyaherald.com/2021/09/30/french-ambassador-launches-training-of-100-former-zintan-militias/>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://formiche.net/2021/09/libia-perche-la-francia-vuole-ospitare-una-conferenza-internazionale/>.

## **Egypt**

On September 10, a high-profile Islamic State commander in Sinai has given himself up to a tribal union loyal to the Egyptian military, exposing possible cracks within the organization and potentially putting valuable information at the disposal of Cairo. The Sinai Peninsula is the most volatile Egyptian region and in order to tackle the problem Egypt is working on a plan to attract Egyptians to settle there, by implementing development projects and providing job opportunities. These include road, bridge and tunnel projects that will contribute to the development plan of the Suez Canal axis<sup>17</sup>.

## **Israel**

The Czech Republic would buy four short-range air defence system Spyder (\$631.8m) from Israel by 2026 to replace obsolete Soviet-made weapons.

## **Lebanon**

Lebanon's new government, on September 20, received a vote of confidence from parliament, after vowing to swiftly resume International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout talks and get cracking on a host of reforms to lift the country out of its worsening economic crisis. Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government got the vote of confidence, while 15 members of Parliament voted against it.

Concurrently, Hezbollah is helping to resolve the fuel crisis in the country. The first convoy of Hezbollah-brokered Iranian diesel fuel arrived in Lebanon at the beginning of September and while some feared that the Iran-backed party would use it to further assert its dominance, others welcomed the fuel as a temporary relief in the middle of a crippling energy crisis. The Iranian fuel from Syria's Baniyas Port was taken to the warehouses of the US-sanctioned Hezbollah-affiliated Amana Fuel Company. Hezbollah is offering a month's supply of the fuel for free to some institutions in need, such as public hospitals, the Lebanese Red Cross, Civil Defence forces, and orphanages<sup>18</sup>.

## **Arabian Peninsula**

Abu Dhabi Ports have partnered with the Aqaba Development Corporation (ADC) to establish a new cruise terminal at Marsa Zayed in Jordan, as part of a plan to enhance maritime and tourism sectors in the country. It will be Abu Dhabi Ports' first cruise facility development project outside the UAE. The agreement will facilitate the movement of cruise ships from Europe and the Mediterranean area<sup>19</sup>.

Saudi paratrooper units and special security forces trained for some days in mid September with their Greek counterparts. The exercise was intended to enhance cooperation and exchange experience. It is interesting to note that last December, the UAE and Egypt participated in a military exercise with Greece aimed at deterring Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean.

Qatar's ambassador in Riyadh held a meeting with a top Saudi diplomat on 28 September discussing enhancing cooperation and bilateral ties between their countries. The move is the latest sign in improving Saudi-Qatar relations, after the 2017 crisis.

Qataris on October 2 voted in the country's first legislative elections for two-thirds of the advisory Shura Council. The candidates were mostly men, with only 29 women, no-one elected. Previously, the council mainly acted as a consultative body, but is now expected to enjoy legislative authority and approve general state policies on social issues such as healthcare, education, as well as citizenship rights.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/egypt-allocates-billions-development-sinai>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/28/lebanon-hezbollah-fuel-patronage-energy-crisis>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/news/abu-dhabi-ports-develop-cruise-terminal-jordan>.

## **The centrality of the military deployment abroad in Rwanda's proactive foreign policy**

Despite being one of the smallest states on the African continent, Rwanda gained significant international attention thanks to its proactive foreign policy. Intending to forge a reputation as a regional and continental security provider, Rwanda has increased the deployment of military troops in crisis contexts. For many years Kigali has been providing the expertise and the efficiency of its military force to multilateral missions and peacekeeping operations. However, the Rwandan strategy has shown signs of change in the last two years. The unilateral intervention, first in CAR and then in Mozambique, shows a shift in the Rwandan approach to crises. The Rwandese transformation could have regional implications and, at the same time, become an operative model for other small African powers.

The development path followed by Rwanda after the genocide of 1994 is one of the most controversial and, at the same time, acclaimed ones on the African continent. The country, led since 2000 by President Paul Kagame, leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), has succeeded in generating significant economic growth. In just a few years, economic performance has led to a drastic reduction in poverty (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, Kigali is credited for having implemented order and public safety throughout the country. The results achieved have had a cost in terms of democratization. Rwanda has failed to implement an effective democratic development agenda. Kagame's successes have come with the gradual erosion of the rule of law, the centralization of power, and the crackdown on all forms of dissent. The Rwandan multiparty republic is nowadays a hybrid regime with strong authoritarian tendencies (Rafti, 2008). In the last elections (2017), Kagame obtained the re-election with 98% of the consensus.

The growth of the last two decades needs context. Besides its political and institutional fragility, Rwanda also has structural weaknesses. The country is small, landlocked, and densely populated. Despite its strategic location in the so-called Great Rift Valley, Rwanda, unlike its neighbours, is almost completely lacking in natural resources. Therefore, growth and development trends have been fueled purely by large amounts of foreign aid and investment. As a result, economic dependence on extra-regional powers has been a constraint to the country's political ambitions. At the same time, however, the need to escape from a situation of external dependence has provided further motivation to adopt a pro-active approach in the regional and continental arena. In recent years, the Kigali regime has tried to get out of the situation through new foreign policy agenda aimed at maximizing its resources and abilities.

One of the main strengths of Rwanda is undoubtedly the military efficiency and professionalism of the *Ingabo z'u Rwanda* (Rwanda Defence Force, RDF). Many of the RDF officers fought in the ranks of the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) liberation force. This characteristic implies a wealth of experience in asymmetric warfare tactics. Such know-how is exploited by the RDF, increasing its ability to operate in civil war contexts. For several years now, President Kagame has decided to leverage military diplomacy to promote the country's image in the international arena. Rwanda began to participate in several peacekeeping missions and humanitarian operations under the auspices of the United Nations. Within a short period, Rwandan troops received much praise for the ability they showed in transnational mediations. About six thousand Rwandan soldiers have been involved in multilateral operations including those in Mali, Darfur, and Haiti. Rwanda is currently the fifth-largest contributor to UN missions, the second-largest in Africa behind only Ethiopia.

In the last twelve months, however, the Rwandan approach has changed assuming a more unilateral character. President Kagame has shown a willingness to use military diplomacy outside the UN missions. In November 2020, Rwanda signed bilateral agreements with the Central African Republic (CAR) to dispatch troops. The RDF was already operating on CAR soil since 2014. Rwandan troops constitute the bulk of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (Minusca) contingent effort. The bilateral agreement between Bangui and Kigali has increased the number of Rwandan troops and allowed them to operate outside of MINUSCA's borders and roles of engagement. In a few months, Rwanda has increased its presence in CAR, deploying battalions mainly in the border areas with Cameroon to secure supply lines to Bangui. The RDF's ability to counter-guerrilla warfare and stabilize the areas under its control in CAR prompted Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi to seek Kagame's help in blocking the advance of Islamist group *Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah* (ASWJ) in Cabo Delgado. While Nyusi hesitated in front of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pressure to launch a multinational mission, the President conducted secret negotiations with Kigali to deploy contingents in Cabo Delgado. Between May and June, while the SADC was planning the launch of the operation (SAMIM), several Rwandan officers carried out reconnaissance missions on Mozambican territory. In July, a few days after the launch of the SADC mission, Rwanda sent approximately one thousand soldiers.<sup>1</sup> As it did in the CAR, RDF worked quickly and effectively in Cabo Delgado, thereby helping to reverse the conflict. Future developments in Rwanda's intervention in Mozambique will test the effectiveness of Kigali's proactive and pragmatic strategy.

### **Analisi, valutazioni e previsioni**

Although the two cases, CAR and Mozambique, look very different at first glance, closer scrutiny reveals some similarities. First of all, there is no geographical proximity to either country. The CAR and Mozambique are beyond Rwanda's traditional area of strategic interest, which is the African Great Lakes region. Another common trait of the two cases is the type of intervention. In both cases, Rwanda intervened both to address an imminent crisis and to actively work to assist Bangui and Maputo in dealing with similar situations in the future. In other words, RDF interventions have a dual task: combat and training. The consequence is that the operations' timeline is not limited. On the contrary, much uncertainty remains regarding the length of troop deployments in both the CAR and Mozambique. Another aspect highlighted by the two deployments relates to the ability of Rwandan forces to tailor to different contexts. The RDF has demonstrated a significant ability to coordinate on the ground with local and regional actors involved in crisis scenarios, as evidenced by cooperation with the Mozambique Special Forces (MSF) in Cabo Delgado and the Wagner Group in the CAR.

More importantly, the two interventions in CAR and Mozambique help to analyze and better understand the reasons behind Rwanda's choice to adopt unilateral military deployment as a foreign policy tool. At the root are a variety of factors that can be traced to different interconnected dimensions of Rwandan politics: international, continental, and domestic. At the international level, it is important to consider Rwanda's quest for international legitimacy. Rwandan engagement in international and continental peacekeeping missions is a feature of a broader brand diplomacy initiative. President Kagame wants to project the Rwandan brand throughout the continent and, at the same time, change the perception of global stakeholders who associate the country solely with the Tutsi drama. These considerations, together with the excellent level of expertise of the RDF, have prompted the regime in Kigali to promote actions that foster a new image of the country: a security provider for the continent. The Rwandan president is aware that the role of a continental

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<sup>1</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the Cabo Delgado crisis, see Instant Study – area 5 – no. 5/2021

security provider can allow the country to become a unique partner for many global players. Over the past few months, the relationship with France has seemed to rise. The Rwandan decision to intervene in Mozambique came just days after Macron's visit to Kigali. The French president's visit helped the two countries reconcile after the break due to France's responsibility in not preventing the Tutsi genocide. At the end of the bilateral meeting, Paris officialized a new aid package for the country of about 500 million euros (Smolar, 2021). According to various sources, Rwanda decided to intervene in Cabo Delgado following a French encouragement and a private meeting between Macron, Nyusi, and Kagame on the sidelines of the Paris Summit on Africa (France24, 2021). France has adopted a new strategy of leading from behind in East Africa, as it already does in the Sahel. To reduce the political costs of direct intervention in crises, Paris is using well-trained local armies (Rwanda, Chad) that promote French strategic interests on the ground. In Central and East Africa, the Rwandan army is well suited as a proxy force. The RDF is highly trained, well-armed, and acts outside the bounds of international law. At the same time, the engagement of Rwandan troops in different continental scenarios is a safeguard measure for the regime. Like the Chadian regime of Deby Itno has done for many years (Luntumbue & Massock, 2014), President Kagame uses the deployment of troops in peacekeeping operations to divert international scrutiny from the country's domestic issues. Furthermore, the commitment to stability in crisis areas is used as blackmail leverage against Western foreign donors. Faced with the donors' threat to reduce aid because of the many violations in the field of human rights, the Kigali government threatens to withdraw its troops from multilateral missions. An example of this dynamic is what happened between 2010 and 2012. Some Western donors threatened to reduce aid because of Rwandan support for the March 23 Movement (M23) rebel movement in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Schneider, 2012). Also, UN mapping reports on human rights shown the abuses and massacres by Rwandan troops against Congolese citizens (UNHR, 2010). President Kagame officially rejected the report, describing it as a negationist strategy towards the Rwandan genocide. Unofficially, he threatened the withdrawal of Rwandan troops deployed within the framework of the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). Unilateral deployment, therefore, could further increase the Rwandan bargaining chip.

From the continental perspective, the involvement in the Mozambican crisis allows Rwanda to expand its projection and influence over the continent. For many years, Rwanda's power projection was delimited to the Great Lakes region. Nowadays, the country seeks to increase its regional role and establish new strategic African partnerships in various sectors. The commitment of the Rwandan military has favoured the projection of a new image of the country, changing the African and international perception of Kigali. Rwanda has acquired a reputation as a stable and competent country that supports the other African states facing periods of internal crisis. The prompt response and successes achieved in recent weeks in fighting the Islamist group reinforce the image of the country committed to fighting radical terrorism and willing to operate as a security provider on the continent. The deployment of troops in Mozambique serves to show greater effectiveness than SADC-led operations. Rwanda wants to present itself as a sort of "bobby" or regional policeman, no longer or not only in coordination with other forces, but also willing to intervene unilaterally. In other words, Kagame has the ambition to promote a model of unilateral intervention that is alternative and more efficient than those provided by multilateral bodies. However, there is no shortage of backlash. The presence of Rwandan troops on Mozambican soil has upset the SADC members and especially South Africa, which leads the mission (Nhamirre, 2021). Relations between Kigali and Pretoria are extremely fragile following the murder in Johannesburg of former Rwandan intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya, who was a prominent critic of Kagame. Rwandan activism inevitably generates disappointment both among Rwanda's traditional rivals, such as Uganda and in those countries that, like South Africa, consider certain regions their exclusive area of influence.

At the same time, its leader, President Kagame, has increased his stature as a continental statesman. At the international level, a strong polarization persists around a leader whose methods are increasingly authoritarian. However, throughout the continent, Kagame is considered a very competent and reliable head of state. Beyond political ambitions, there are also pragmatic considerations of a purely economic nature behind Rwandan activism. The unilateral involvement in the CAR was matched by the signature of a series of cooperation agreements in four main fields: economic development plans, CAR security sector reform, mining, and transportation. In the case of Mozambique, in addition to the possible advantages linked to future investments in infrastructure and energy, there is the concern of a spread of instability to neighbouring Tanzania, with which Kigali has strong economic ties. The majority of raw materials and goods destined to the Rwandan market come from the port of Dar es Salaam. Therefore, widespread instability or conflict will further undermine the country's structural fragilities.

The dispatch of troops through bilateral agreements is a choice aimed at supporting Rwandan economic ambitions. From Kigali's viewpoint, the best way to overcome its structural weaknesses is through greater cooperation with other African states. Rwanda pursues a strategy of regional and continental economic integration to mitigate the disadvantages of its geographical position and its dependence on extra-regional donors. A strategy that is part of the *agaciro* project, the Development Fund was established with the aim to increase Rwanda's economic self-sufficiency.

Finally, there are also domestic political considerations behind President Kagame's decision to send troops abroad. For some years now, Mozambique has become a sanctuary for many Rwandese political dissidents, including key opposition figures and their financiers. The improvement in relations between Maputo and Kigali has increased pressure on Kagame's oppositions and allowed greater freedom of action of Rwandan intelligence services within the country (Jalloh, 2021). Then there is the interest of the investment fund Crystal Ventures, the economic arm of the ruling party RPF. The fund aims to extend its investment portfolio into new continental markets, especially in the infrastructure sector. Finally, President Kagame uses Rwandan activism in crises to fuel the rhetoric of the spirit of African solidarity that is part of his political narrative. Kagame has repeatedly stressed that participation in multilateral missions and the deployment of troops on request belong to a peculiar Rwandan conception of the principle of responsibility to protect (R2P). According to Kagame, Rwanda has a moral obligation to intervene in crisis situations given both by the strong pan-African ties and the dramatic historical events experienced by the country.

To increase its economic self-sufficiency, Rwanda has chosen to exploit its resources to the fullest. Among these, one of the most relevant is the competence and efficiency of its security forces. Besides the participation in multilateral missions, Rwanda has opted to launch unilateral interventions in crises following the request of the governments affected. Rwanda's ambition to expand its sphere of action and influence has become clear after the country dispatched its troops in the CAR and Mozambique. This pro-active foreign policy has been perceived as a threat by other regional players, but it has also opened an alternative path to African multilateralism in crisis management and resolution. Rwanda shows how a small country can succeed in achieving regional and global goals through a balanced use of hard and soft power. In other words, Kigali stands as one of the most interesting recent examples of smart power.



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### **The AUKUS partnership and Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines**

#### **Introduction**

On September 15, 2021, President Biden, during a virtual meeting with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced the creation of a new strategic partnership between the three countries, named AUKUS. This agreement led to the creation of new forms of cooperation in the fields of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, long distance strike capabilities, and, especially, nuclear submarines (The White House, 2021).

This agreement, contrary to what has been reported by most media, does not constitute a new alliance. It does not put in place new mutual security clauses, and it does not commit the three countries to new forms of collective defence. The United States remains linked to Australia with the previous ANZUS alliance treaty<sup>1</sup>, just as the security obligations between the United States and Great Britain remain primarily defined by their NATO membership. On the contrary, it represents a new and significant step towards the promotion of a networked security architecture, in which new minilateral partnerships integrate but do not replace existing alliances (Dian e Meijer, 2020a).

#### **The nuclear submarine deal**

The most important and most discussed element of the agreement concerns the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines by Australia. Also on this point, the way in which most of the Italian and foreign media reported the news has generated some confusion (The Guardian, 2021; Franceschini, 2021). The deal will lead Canberra to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), not nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs). The former can be used for intelligence gathering, attack on other submarines and surface ships, and ground attack through cruise missiles. Unlike the latter, they are not equipped with nuclear weapons mounted on ballistic missiles. Therefore, they do not perform a function of nuclear deterrent. Canberra with this agreement does not acquire an autonomous nuclear potential and does not violate the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Public statements by the three governments did not provide precise details on the process of procurement by the Australian Navy. The Morrison government has announced that production will take place, at least in part, in Adelaide. However, three options are possible. The first is the construction of an Australian model, built with technological assistance and components from Great Britain and the United States. The second is the production of a model based on the design of the American Virginia-class, manufactured by General Dynamic. The third involves the construction of submarines based on the British Astute class, manufactured by BAE Systems (Clarke, 2021).

In any case, the production of nuclear-powered submarines will take a very long time, and substantial American and British assistance. Prime Minister Morrison stated that the production phase should begin before the end of the decade (i.e. by 2030) and the first submarines could only be operational by the end of the next (i.e. by 2040). This means the Royal Australian Navy to extend the operational life of current conventional Collins-class submarines, whose decommissioning was scheduled for 2036. According to some analysts, the United States could lease some Virginia-class submarines, as a temporary solution.

Aside from the significant economic costs, military advantages are evident in terms of range, speed, and interoperability with American forces in the region. Nuclear submarines, however, are

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<sup>1</sup> The ANZUS treaty also included New Zealand, which withdrew from the alliance in 1984.

noisier than more modern conventional submarines, such as the French Barracuda, the Japanese Soryū. Many analysts have pointed out that greater strategic and industrial integration in the American network will reduce Canberra's room for manoeuvre, especially in the event of a further escalation of Sino-American competition (Parakilas, 2021).

### **China's reaction**

The partnership between the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia and the acquisition of nuclear submarines are aimed at countering the Chinese naval programme, characterized by both a rapid expansion of power projection capabilities and the consolidation of the anti-access strategy within the First Island Chain. The People's Liberation Army Navy is now equipped with two aircraft carriers (with a third under construction), 60 attack submarines including 6 SSNs, 13 nuclear ballistic submarines, and an expanding fleet of cruisers and destroyers equipped with ballistic and cruise missiles.

China criticized AUKUS and the American and British exports of nuclear technology, defining it as "highly irresponsible acts destined to destabilize the region and intensify military competition, that favour nuclear proliferation". The Chinese government also called AUKUS an example of "Cold War mentality". From this point of view, Washington's promotion of new partnerships is seen as the product of a backward mentality that leads to analyse the region through the lens of military competition and to seek to contain China's rise (Shah, 2021).

On the contrary, Chinese spokesmen stressed, the Asia-Pacific states need policies aimed at promoting cooperation, economic growth, and job creation. For this reason, Beijing has formalized its application for access to the CPTPP.<sup>2</sup> This response on the level of economic diplomacy is to be considered symbolic. The CPTPP is designed to promote a type of economic integration antithetical to China's state capitalism, that is defined by the central role of state owned enterprises and political coordination (Dian, 2017; Leutert, 2018). However, the message, directed primarily to Southeast Asia, is politically important. According to Beijing, China promotes economic opportunities for the region's future, while the United States tries to maintain its hegemonic role, seeking to strengthen its military hegemony.

From the American perspective, AUKUS is an opportunity to underline the solidity of the partnership between Anglo-Saxon states, and the coincidence of strategic values and interests between Washington, London, and Canberra in the Indo-Pacific. From the Chinese perspective, the new partnership is portrayed as an agreement between "white and imperialist" countries, with the aim of dominating the Asian continent (Zhang, 2021). It would be easy to dismiss this as mere propaganda, considering China's own coercive strategy in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, the political effects of this message are significant. Throughout the Indo-Pacific region, and especially in Southeast Asia, the legacy of the colonial past contributes to shape the perception of external actors and foreign policy preferences. Almost all the states in the region express a strong orientation towards non-alignment, associated with the attempt to limit the influence of great powers. This historical and ideological background constitutes a fertile ground for Chinese "anti-imperialist" and anti-Western rhetoric.

Some states in Southeast Asia have reacted positively to AUKUS. Singapore, which has already put in place several forms of security cooperation with Canberra, and the Philippines, have reacted favourably to the agreement. In contrast, Malaysia and Indonesia, two of the states seeking to maintain a position of neutrality between China and the United States, have criticized Australia. Canberra is perceived as contributing to the American attempt to polarize the region. This runs counter Southeast Asian attempts to promote ASEAN centrality and multilateral solutions to security

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<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for a Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP-11, is the agreement promoted former signatories of the Trans-Pacific Partnership after the withdrawal of the US in 2017.

problems. Furthermore, the submarine deal is seen, despite Canberra's reassurances, as a possible step towards a future Australian nuclear programme, which would counter ASEAN's attempts to build a nuclear-weapon-free region.

### **France's criticism**

The launch of the Australian nuclear submarines programme led to the cancellation of the previous agreement between Canberra and the French Naval Group for the procurement of 12 Shortfin Barracuda diesel attack submarines, as part of the "Future Submarine Program". This decision, coupled with the exclusion of France from AUKUS, has generated outspoken French protests. President Macron recalled his ambassadors in the three countries for consultations and presented official complaints. France described these moves as an insult to the country's role in the world, and to its status, as well as a significant breach of trust. The French foreign minister stated that: "The American choice to exclude a European ally and partner such as France from a structuring partnership with Australia, at a time when we are facing unprecedented challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, whether in terms of our values or in terms of respect for multilateralism based on the rule of law, shows a lack of coherence that France can only note and regret" (Staunton, 2021).

The agreement with France was worth 40 billion dollars and had already registered a series of technical problems, delays, and cost increases. In addition to the political costs associated with the deterioration of diplomatic relations with Paris, the Australian government will have to face the economic costs associated with penalties for the non-purchase that could reach 4 billion dollars.

For France, the cancellation of the Future Submarine Program and the exclusion from AUKUS has significant repercussions both on an industrial and political level. Thales group, which controls part of Naval Group, a company that produces the Shortfin Barracuda submarines, has suffered considerable economic damage. The AUKUS is also a diplomatic setback for Paris. In fact, in recent years, Macron has tried to carve out a strategic and diplomatic role in the Indo-Pacific, through a very active role in the defence industry. He has also promoted a more active involvement of the European Union in the region (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The AUKUS and the ways in which it was announced point to the limits of French influence in the region. Furthermore, it emerges how Washington, Canberra, and London consider the promotion of trilateral cooperation between Anglo-Saxon countries and the pursuit of relevant strategic objectives more important than preserving a smooth relationship with Paris.

### **Great Britain's role**

For London, AUKUS can be considered a success. First, it represents an opportunity to promote British status by renewing its great power aspirations. According to the recent document "Global Britain in a Competitive Age", Great Britain defines itself as a "European country with global interests". According to the document, future British prosperity is associated with "the deepening of economic connections with dynamic parts of the world such as the Indo-Pacific, Africa and the Gulf, as well as trade with Europe" and the maintenance of trans-Atlantic security ties (HM Government 2021). For this reason, in the aftermath of Brexit, the Johnson government presented the relaunch of the "special relationship" with the United States and a growing role in the Indo-Pacific as fundamental pillars for the concept of "Global Britain". Consequently, London proposes itself as the ideal partner for the United States and Australia and the most influential European country in the Indo-Pacific. This implies both elements of competition with France, to achieve the status of most influential European country in the region, and a convergence of interests in promoting the US led order based on norms and rules in the Indo-Pacific. The tension with Paris, following the creation of AUKUS, has brought out more the competitive aspects. This in turn might lead London and Paris to promote two distinct agendas. In this sense, Britain could cultivate its role of junior partner of the

United States, while France in cooperation with Germany could try to promote a more independent, even if not autonomous, role for the European Union (Billon Galland and Kudhani, 2021).

Finally, for Great Britain, AUKUS also represents an economic opportunity, given the likely involvement of British companies such as Rolls Royce, BAE systems and Babcock in the production of key components for Australian submarines.

## **Conclusion**

AUKUS is an important development for the Indo-Pacific region. Firstly, it contributes to the transition process between the hub and spoke system and a networked security architecture, in which new bilateral and minilateral partnerships integrate pre-existing alliance ties. The Biden Administration has invested heavily in new partnerships, as evidenced by the growing importance of the Quad.

The Biden administration considers the diplomatic fallout in terms of relations with France, and to a lesser extent with the European Union, as a minor problem, solvable in the medium term. Currently, at least as regards the approach towards China and the Indo Pacific region, coordination with the actors directly present in the region takes precedence over coordination with European partners.

For Britain, AUKUS represents an economic and political success. With AUKUS, London can feed its own rhetoric of "Global Britain" and its quest for visibility and presence in the Indo-Pacific region. In doing this, the traditional alignment with Washington is strengthened, abandoning any option of a partially independent position *vis à vis* China, envisaged by the cabinets led by David Cameron (2010-2016).

A similar conclusion can be drawn for Canberra. In the 1990s and 2000s, Australia had tried to balance its "history" (ie historical, political and cultural ties with the United States and Great Britain) and its "geography" (its location on the fringes of Asia and economic ties with the region). The recent deterioration of relations with Beijing has led to a process of consolidation of the alliance with Washington, already evident with the publication of the Defense Strategic Update 2020 (Dian, 2020b). AUKUS is another significant step in this direction.

For China, AUKUS, is a political and strategic setback, as it leads to the strengthening of a potential coalition aimed at balancing the growing Chinese military power in the region. However, Beijing's attempt to respond by reaffirming its role as the region's economic engine, or the criticism of AUKUS as an alliance between "white and imperialist" countries should not be dismissed as mere propaganda. This message, in fact, enjoys a certain purchase, particularly in Southeast Asia.

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## The Arctic as a new frontier of competition between great powers

For many years the Arctic has not been in the spotlight of the international community, but in the last two decades the situation started to change gradually. It happened mainly due to both the sudden development of technology - which has allowed a cheaper, more efficient and effective than seabed exploration and exploitation - and climate change. In this light, the potential profits from the use of the region's resources are now starting to outweigh the possible expenses. The result is growing attention from many countries - including the United States, the Russian Federation, Canada, Norway, Great Britain and Denmark (Greenland) - which inevitably causes an equally growing conflict of interest in the region. Among these countries, Russia was the first to decide to support the soft power policy on a large scale. Such a choice was - and still is - made through the massive employment of the armed forces - or hard force, expanding the military Arctic component to allow it to gain a decisive position in the region.

Since 2014, the year in which the Arctic was included as an area of Russian interest within the Defense Doctrine of the FR, the region has acquired a growing importance in strategic planning. This is being demonstrated



by the development of the Joint Strategic Command of the Armed Forces Russians in the Arctic (*Объединенное стратегическое командование Север*), which started operating from 1 December 2014<sup>1</sup>. The new command was created on the basis of the Northern Fleet, withdrawn from the Western Military District. All troops stationing in the Arctic, as well as a portion of the Air Force and Air Defense deployed in the north<sup>2</sup>, were subordinated to the Northern Fleet. Russia has the most powerful of its fleets in the Arctic, including strategic submarines. However, in general, in terms of the level of military protection, the region was still significantly lower than other military districts in 2014, due to obvious historical, climatic and geographical reasons.

On January 1, 2021, the organizational structure of the Command underwent a major reorganization. The Northern Fleet, in fact, following the signing of the presidential decree of 5 June 2020<sup>3</sup>, officially received the status of a military district, thus becoming a separate unit with the task of

<sup>1</sup> Previously, Russia had three strategic commands united with the status of military districts, namely: western (*Западный военный округ*), southern (*Южный военный округ*), eastern (*Восточный военный округ*).

<sup>2</sup> In the same year (2014) on the Kotelnny island (in the archipelago of the Novosibirsk Islands) the crews of the Pantsir-S1 missile systems and anti-aircraft guns were put into service.

<sup>3</sup> *Указ президента Российской Федерации от 5 июня 2020 г. № 374 О военно-административном делении Российской Федерации, Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации*. Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of June 5, 2020 No. 374 On the military-administrative division of the Russian Federation, Official Internet portal of legal information: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006050025?index=0&rangeSize=1>



defending Russia's national interests in the Arctic. To fulfill this task, it is equipped, among others, with strategic and multipurpose nuclear submarines and the heavy nuclear missile cruiser Pyotr Velikiy<sup>4</sup>, the Northern Fleet is also testing new weapons, in particular the hypersonic missile Zircon.

What does this change in status imply? First of all, it significantly "expands" the independence of the district, allowing a more efficient use of resources in military operations in the Arctic, simplifying the financing of military units based in this territory, and accelerating and increasing of their combat effectiveness.

Secondly, the creation of a Northern Fleet military district significantly changes the command system in the region. Previously, in fact, the joint strategic command of the northern fleet controlled part of the units deployed there (fleet, aviation, coastal forces and air defense forces) and the rest was subordinated to the command of the western military district. But now, thanks to the formation of a new structure, the level of interaction of the forces deployed in four federal units, within a single military district, is increasing. The new organizational unit geographically covers the Republic of Komi, the regions of Archangelsk and Murmansk, the Nenets Okrug and the islands of the Arctic Ocean.

Thirdly, the creation of a separate military district confirms what has been said above, namely a perception of the Arctic as a strategically important region for Russian security, an area in which intense international competition is developing - and in particular with NATO countries.

Another fundamental aspect is represented by the equipment and the means provided. The Northern Fleet currently comprises around 80 ships and submarines, many of which are currently undergoing modernization. New combat units are also planned in the coming years. Furthermore, the ships of the Northern Fleet also have the greatest potential for nuclear deterrence among all Russian fleets and flotillas. The Northern Fleet comprises two Arctic Mechanized Brigades: the Naval and Coast Guard Brigade and the 45th Air Force and Air Defense Army, it also has an electronic warfare center. Added to this are the systems adopted in recent years, namely: S-350, S-400 and Pantsir-S. In addition, Zircon hypersonic cruise missiles are being tested on ships of the Northern Fleet. Due to the specificity of the district, the most important components in this region will be the fleet, the air defense forces and the early warning systems for attacks. The network of Russian military bases along the Arctic Ocean coast was also expanded.

The creation of a new military district is in line with the Russian strategy for the development of the Arctic with Horizon 2035 (*Энергетическая Стратегия Российской Федерации на период до 2035 года*)<sup>5</sup> in fact the adoption of the document in March 2020 recognized as a priority the need to preserve the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The document clearly identifies three priority and overlapping areas for the Moscow government, namely: the extraction and export of resources through the North Sea route, the construction of infrastructure on the same route (including dual use services) and strengthening the military defense of the Arctic. Thus, contrary to previous documents of this type (2008 and 2015), the Arctic is now perceived as a place of international competition and presupposes the development of Russian defense capabilities in the Arctic Ocean. The aim is therefore to protect the northern borders, including the North Sea Route. Furthermore, the activities of the Atlantic Alliance in the Arctic (including the exercises of NATO forces and the development of their military capabilities) are seen as a serious threat.

Russia has well known how to apply the dual use principle. Announced in April 2021 by the Deputy Minister of Transport, Alexandr Poshivay<sup>6</sup>, the implementation of the "Polar Express"<sup>7</sup> project

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<sup>4</sup> This state-of-the-art cruiser is named after the Emperor of Russia, Peter I the Great (1672-1725).

<sup>5</sup> *Энергетическая стратегия Российской Федерации на период до 2035 года-Energetičeskaja Strategija Rossijskoj Federacii na period do 2035 goda* (Strategy of Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the Provision of National Security for the Period to 2035), text (in russian language) on the official page of the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation <https://minenergo.gov.ru/node/1026>

<sup>6</sup> *Полярный экспресс» из Мурманска во Владивосток* ("Polar Express" from Murmansk to Vladivostok), Sea News, 21.04.2021 <https://seanews.ru/2021/04/21/ru-poljarnyj-jekspress-iz-murmanska-vo-vladivostok/>

<sup>7</sup> *Arctic submarine fiber-optic cable line Polar Express*, Marsat News. [https://www.marsat.ru/en/polarexpress\\_project\\_description](https://www.marsat.ru/en/polarexpress_project_description)

began on 6 August. This is a submarine connection with a length of 12,650km of optical fiber cables that will allow fast connections between the infrastructures located in the various areas, a digital challenge that will be useful both to the civil and military world. The project started from Teriberka (near Murmansk) at the former military base of Amderma (2022) and will pass through Dikson (2025), Tiksi (2025), Pevek (2026), Anadyr' (2026), Petropavlovsk Kamchatskiy (2026), Yuzhno -Sakhalinsk (2026), Nakhodka and Vladivostok (2026)<sup>8</sup>.

The further significant activity, last March, was the UMKA-2021<sup>9</sup> expedition-exercise carried out by civilian and military personnel with the help of related equipment and vehicles including nuclear-powered submarines, MIG-31, and the Admiral Gorshkov regatta, among the Navy's a most advanced warships, which tested the Poliment-Redut surface-to-air missile system in the Barents Sea by hitting two target missiles launched by the Aisberg missile corvette<sup>10</sup>.

In parallel with the creation of a new district and the modernization of weapons systems, Russia is modernizing the military bases on the islands of Kotelny and Wrangel. This militarization, among other things, is associated with the growing importance of maritime transport along the North Sea route, as the Russian armed forces are involved in search and rescue operations. To this end, as declared in February 2020 by the Minister for Emergency Situations, Yevgeny Zinichev, a series of crisis management centers would be set up in the Arctic region in order to "increase the level of security in the North Sea route". This initiative logically derives from the 2035 Strategy and is based on two postulates: the pursuit of the natural resources of the Arctic (secondary role in the light of the current turbulence in oil market prices) and the determination to guarantee unilateral control over the Sea of North and which is a key element of the longer Northeast Passage, promoted in recent years by Beijing as the "Polar Silk Road"<sup>11</sup> (under construction but not a priority for the Chinese authorities). This strategic navigation artery is positioned as the shortest alternative to the sea route through the Suez Canal. To secure the route, Moscow plans to complete six military bases in the far north - on the New Siberian Islands, Aleksander Islands, the Severnaya Zemlya archipelago, Novaya Zemlya (Rogachevo), Mys Shmidta (Cape Schmidt) and Wrangel Island. Thus creating a multi-level defense (the so-called "Arctic Shield"). Popular opinion speculates that military structures on the New Siberia Islands and Alexander Island - often dubbed the "Russian guards" of the Arctic - are the crucial elements of this constellation. Still, the vitality of Wrangel Island should not be understated. Aside from its proximity to the United States, this is the first major island encountered on the Asia-Western Europe sea transit route after the Bering Strait.

The island of Wrangel has played, since 1911, a decisive role in allowing the Russian and then Soviet military rule of the region<sup>12</sup>. However, after 1991, Russia's regional presence (civilian and military) was drastically reduced but, as its Arctic politics began to change starting in the mid-2000s, Moscow has adopted a much more assertive stance. This was mainly reflected in the rapid development of military infrastructure such as the establishment of a military town on the island of Wrangel, through the restoration of Soviet military potential in the area, the deployment of the radio tracking unit, anti-missile - air force formations, and a reserve airport, which was liquidated in 1992.

<sup>8</sup> "Russia Builds Polar Express Subsea Cable along Arctic Coastline." Submarine Cable Networks, 13.08.2021 <https://www.submarinenetworks.com/en/systems/asia-europe-africa/polar-express/russia-builds-polar-express-subsea-cable-along-arctic-coastline>

<sup>9</sup> Arctic Exercise Umka-2021 Shows Russian SSBN Can Deliver Massive Strike, Naval News, 10.04.2021 <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/04/arctic-exercise-umka-2021-shows-russian-ssbn-can-deliver-massive-strike/>

<sup>10</sup> *Фрегат "Адмирал Горшков" произвел успешные противозушные стрельбы в Баренцевом море. Корабль поразил две ракеты-мишени, поставленные малым ракетным кораблем "Айсберг"* (The frigate "Admiral Gorshkov" fired successfully in the Barents Sea. The ship hit two target missiles delivered by the small missile ship "Iceberg") <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/11052841>

<sup>11</sup> As the name implies, it aims to connect Chinese producers with European markets via the Bering Strait. *Планы Китая: построить «Полярный шелковый путь» и заняться освоением Антарктиды* (China's Plans: Build the Polar Silk Road and Explore Antarctica) 06.03.2021 <https://rus.ozodi.org/a/31137254.html>

<sup>12</sup> As early as 1924, the Soviets tested a prototype of a "military icebreaker" there to avoid US claims to this island.

Starting in 2016, Russia has further intensified the militarization of the island by locally deploying the S-Band Sopka-2 Air Route Radar Complex (ARRC). As stated at the time by the head of the press service of the Ortho-environmental district, Aleksander Gordeyev, the deployment of the Sopka-2 was designed to ensure Russia's control over aerial targets moving in the area<sup>13</sup>.

During 2017-2018, the Russian side conducted a series of training courses and exercises on the island, specifically interested in testing the radar's ability to locate simulated enemy aerial objects (of a conditional enemy) and to detect individual objects that occur to move within a larger group.

In 2019, the training intensified (twice that year), during this period, the Sopka-2 complex was mainly used to locate aircraft or aerial objects equipped with stealth technology (low observability). Another important development observed was the emphasis on locating smaller targets, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The beginning of 2020 instead witnessed several new developments, which included exercises involving troops assembled from the eastern district, with specialists from radio-technical troops. During these exercises, the specialists used the Sopka-2 ARRC to simulate the detection of enemy flying objects operating with their transponders turned off. The information acquired by the radar was immediately sent to the command post of the anti-missile / air defense post. To complicate the task, the "enemy" air vehicles constantly changed direction and speed.

In conclusion, the main objective of Russia, also pursued through the strengthening of its military capabilities in the Arctic region, both in terms of firepower and of the creation of a multi-layered defense, is to ensure full control of the sea route. North, seen by the Russian authorities as a source of substantial economic gains, as well as a means for Moscow to promote the concept of "Eurasian Great Power". Developments underway on Wrangel Island attest to the reality of it. For now, Russian actions are primarily concerned with defensive tasks, reflecting the growing unease with other countries (mainly the United States) attempting to increase their presence in the region, which the Kremlin perceives as a direct challenge to Russia's position in the far north region.

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<sup>13</sup> The official web page of the Sopka-2 ARRC manufacturer (<https://lemz.ru/en/main-page/>; <https://lemz.ru/en/sopka-2/>) reports that the radar is primarily designed to detect / control air traffic and to monitor local airspace, more specific functions include the ability to detect various air objects; provide measurements of distance, azimuth and elevation angle (height) of targets; as well as identifying the country of origin of the target. The Sopka-2 consists of three radars: a primary radar using a passive phase array antenna and two secondary radars whose antennas are mounted on the rear of the phase array. It also has Monopulse Secondary Surveillance Radar (MSSR), which significantly increases its operational qualities and capabilities. The radar can detect objects at a distance of up to 450 kilometers, with only one technical operator, who can actually operate the system from a distance. Importantly (particularly in the harsh climatic conditions of the far north), the Sopka-2 can operate in strong winds (up to 40 meters per second) and extreme cold (down to -50 degrees Celsius).

## **The German general elections: the search for something new and the fear of the change. Angela Merkel's heritage and the challenges for the incoming Chancellor**

European governments paid great attention to the results of the German general elections held on September 26, 2021. The end of Angela Merkel's long political experience raised many questions. At the same time, the possible head-to-head competition between the two leading candidates (the Christian-democrat Armin Laschet and the Social-democrat Olaf Scholz) gave the vote a particular taste. The results partially contradicted these expectations. However, their consequences will impact not only Germany's political life, but also the European Union and Berlin's relations with the United States. From some points of view, Scholz's success is a sign of continuity with the experience of the last Merkel cabinet, where Scholz himself was the Minister for Finance. On the other hand, it marks a sharp turn 'to the left' of the country's political axis after sixteen years of supremacy by the 'twin parties' CDU/CSU. The success of Greens, Liberal-democrats and to a lesser extent of the left-wing party 'Die Linke' envisages the possibility to overcome the model of the 'Grand Coalition' that has ruled the country since the end of 2013. It also gives the parliamentary life greater dynamism, with all the consequences that this new state of things can have on coalitions' stability and the coherence of the government's action. The time that forming a new cabinet will take will probably scale back – temporarily – Berlin's international role. This effect's magnitude will depend on many factors; among them, the parties' ability to define the terms of their collaborations in a short period and how the international community (especially Germany's European partners) will react to the situation that the elections produced in a country that is pivotal for its balance.

### **Angela Merkel's sixteen years in power**

Angela Merkel's sixteen years in power were fundamental to shaping Germany's role in Europe and worldwide. Madam Chancellor (*Kanzlerin*) took office for the first time on November 22, 2005; after that, she led four different cabinets, three of them (the first, third, and fourth) resting on a Grand Coalition (*Große Koalition*) among the Christian-Democratic Union (CDU), the Christian-Social Union (CSU), and the Social-Democratic Party (SPD), the other on a centre-right/conservative alliance among CDU, CSU, and the Liberal-democratic Party (FPD). Before 2005, between the end of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the country was led by the Social-democrats, with Gerhard Schröder's two "red & green" cabinets (generally, more on centrist than on left-wing positions), which, in their turn, took the baton from the Christian-democrat Helmut Kohl, ('the Chancellor of the Reunification') in 1998. Despite the formal differences, all these cabinets followed more or less common political lines, especially in foreign affairs, which rest on the two pillars of Europeanism and a robust transatlantic relationship even under the German Federal Republic. The success of the reunification process (which heavily engaged Germany in Helmut Kohl's age) strengthened the country's position in both these fields and – despite the difficulties – only limitedly affected its economic performance. Under Angela Merkel – due to the protracted political stability – Germany's role as the EU's driving force further strengthened. In dealings with the United States, the time of better relations was during the Obama administration (2009-17), although in these years, too, there were disagreements, especially on Berlin's relations with Russia.

Germany's growing importance in the EU dynamics (especially under Merkel's third and fourth cabinet) was not unchallenged. The rise of the Eurosceptic parties made the country a scapegoat for all the Union's limits. The role that Germany played during the Greek debt crisis starting in 2009 was vehemently contested and contributed to making the Chancellor, and the then Minister for

Finance, Wolfgang Schäuble (in office: 2009-17), two of the symbols of an EU presented as a merely technocratic structure subservient to Berlin's economic and financial interests; a vision shared by both right-wing and left-wing forces. The role played in the Ukraine crisis (open to the dialogue with Moscow and favourable to a diplomatic solution but, at the same time, rigid in its support of the EU sanctions) was another source of criticisms, especially from the most pro-Russian governments, which regarded this position as another sign of Berlin's permanent subalternity to the US will. To a certain extent, some of these criticisms are grounded. For instance, the same German authorities recognized the errors of the too rigid position adopted in the Greek crisis, especially in its earlier stages, when a more flexible approach would have limited the worst social consequences. In retrospect, other weaknesses emerged. Among else, a tendency to procrastinate and dither, the slow decisional process, its lack of incisiveness, and the tendency to place Germany's interest above the EU's ones, impacting the Union's cohesion and the effectiveness of its political action (Matthijs and Kelemen, 2021; a more benevolent analysis is in Barkin, 2020).

However, it is difficult not to look at the Merkel chancellorship as a watershed. Her long political experience will be a benchmark for her successor at both domestic and international levels. From a symbolic point of view, being the first woman and – at the same time – the first politician from former East Germany to become Federal Chancellor has had a relevant meaning. From a more material perspective, today's Germany is no longer a weak and battered country as it was at the final months of Gerhard Schröder's second mandate. Since the mid-2000s, it has emerged as one of the driving forces behind the European integration process and has legitimized this status by developing a solid and reliable relationship with France. In the same period, at the transatlantic level, Germany imposed – for good and ill – its role of 'representative' of the European allies in Washington's eyes; a role that on the one hand fuelled the animosity of some European partners, but on the other boosted Berlin international credentials. President Biden himself remarked on the relevance of the US-Germany political bond and praised Angela Merkel's contribution in shaping it during their last meeting at the White House on April 15, 2021<sup>1</sup>. The existence of disagreements between the two allies, even on some relevant points, did not lessen the importance of such a recognition. Indeed, the fear is that – after Merkel's upcoming retirement – her successor will not be able to keep these disagreements under control, especially if the new government's coalition should lean too much on the left and the Green Party should assume too much weight in driving its decisions.

### **A vote with many uncertainties**

The elections' results could lead to any possible scenario. SPD's victory (206 seats in the new Bundestag compared to CDU/CSU's 196) makes the social-democrat leader Olaf Scholz the 'natural' candidate for the chancellorship. However, his possibility of reaching the target rests on his ability to forge a majority coalition with other parliamentary forces. Among them, the Green Party (heir of the 'Alliance90' Party that contributed to the two Schröder cabinets) is the strongest one, with 118 seats. The Liberal-democrats got 92 seats, extreme-right party Alternative für Deutschland 83 and Die Linke 39. The vote's marked territorial character makes things more complex, confirming CDU/CSU's traditional strength in the Southern *lander* and West Germany's rural areas and highlighting AfD's massive presence in the southern portions of the former DDR (especially Saxony and part of Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt). In this perspective, the country emerging from the ballots is a deeply divided one. This picture is confirmed when looking at the results split for age, education level and – to a lesser extent – gender. In this scenario, the negotiations to form the new cabinet risk being long and troublesome. The relatively small gap dividing the two major parties strengthens the

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<sup>1</sup> *Remarks by President Biden and Chancellor Merkel of the Federal Republic of Germany in Press Conference*, Washington, DC, July 15, 2021. Online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/15/remarks-by-president-biden-and-chancellor-merkel-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-in-press-conference> [accessed: October 10, 2021].

other forces (especially Greens and Liberal-democrats), which could assert their role as the real kingmakers, and extract – from the entry into the government's majority – benefits vastly exceeding their actual political weight. Moreover, figures do not rule the possibility of another CDU/CSU government despite the electoral defeat if a red-yellow-green coalition (the so-called 'traffic light coalition') could not emerge among the SPD, Liberal-democrats, and the Greens.

Taking for granted that AfD's will remain at the opposition, currently, almost every outcome is possible, including a (scarcely probably) black-yellow-green coalition ('Jamaica coalition') among CDU/CSU, FDP, and the Greens, leaving the SPD outside the governing majority. Presenting his remarks on the election's results, Armin Laschet announced his willingness to struggle to create a new CDU-led government (Connolly, 2021). Beyond the declaration's tactical value, the possibility that the party of the outgoing Chancellor could remain – in a way or another – into the governing coalition cannot be entirely ruled out. Already in the past, the coexistence between the Greens and the Liberal democrats proved difficult. The diverging positions of the two parties led to the failure of the first 'Jamaica coalition' after the federal elections in 2017, relaunching the *Große Koalition* as the only alternative to having AfD into the government. Today, the situation is partly different due to the weakening of the extreme right forces. However, Greens and Liberals still have contrasting visions on various topics, as Greens' co-leader Robert Habeck explicitly recognized<sup>2</sup>. Worth noting, in the days immediately after the elections, the two lesser parties already started talks to define a common platform before opening the consultations with the other possible partners. The thorniest issue is fiscal policy, on which the two parties' positions are almost at the opposite. On the contrary, some room for an agreement seems to exist on topics like European integration (albeit with some divergencies on finance and debt, development programs, and industrial policy), national security, and the relations with Russia and China (von der Burchard, 2021).

Olaf Scholz – who seems to prefer a 'traffic light coalition' (Chazan, 2021) – already announced his willingness to present the new cabinet before Christmas. It would be in line with the experience of the third Merkel cabinet, formed on December 17, 2013, three months after the elections held on September 22. It would also be far better than the experience of the fourth Merkel cabinet, formed on March 14, 2018, some six months after the elections held on September 24, 2017. However, as already said, Scholz's announcement is mostly a wish. On October 2, the Green Party congress did not bind its representatives to any specific coalition, although the party's members will be asked to ratify any possible decision<sup>3</sup>. The party's leadership (itself divided between a moderate and centrist element and a radical component, more linked to the 'counterculture' values being at the party's roots) already announced its favour for a coalition with SPD. On the other hand, the FDP has announced its favour for an alliance with the CDU/CSU for a long time. In its turn, the CDU/CSU seems increasingly split in its two 'souls', with the Bavarian element (CSU) extremely critical of the party's national direction that – in its opinion – chose a weak candidate (Laschet), paving the way for defeat. Moreover, CSU remarked that the CDU/CSU had lost some fifty seats and some 8.9 per cent of the preferences at the national level. On the contrary, in Bavaria, the Christian-Social Union was able to limit its losses to just -7.1 per cent and to win in almost all the *Land's* electoral districts, with the only exceptions of the 'Munich south' district as far as the first vote was concerned, and the

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<sup>2</sup> Germany's Social Democrats, Greens and Liberals to start coalition talks on Thursday, *Euronews*, October 6, 2021, Online: <https://www.euronews.com/2021/10/06/germany-s-green-party-says-it-wants-to-form-a-coalition-with-social-democrat-and-liberal-p> [accessed: October 10, 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Germany: Green Party members to vote on any coalition deal, *Deutsche Welle*, October 2, 2021. Online: <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-green-party-members-to-vote-on-any-coalition-deal/a-59385137> [accessed: October 10, 2021].

three Munich urban districts as far as the second vote was concerned<sup>4</sup>.

### The potential impact on Europe and the US

It is a complex situation also because the political 'colour' of the coalition that will emerge from the consultation will critically affect Germany's future posture on a long string of international topics. Since the Fifties, no three-parties coalition ever ruled Germany, and a three-parties coalition is – now – the only possible outcome, excluding a *Große Koalition* that ostensibly none of the major parties wants. In this context, the mediations required to keep a multifaceted coalition together risk weakening the country within and outside Europe. In these years, Germany has been one of the pillars of the von der Leyen European Commission. In the same vein, it was Berlin's posture to unlock the stalemate that emerged on the Next Generation EU program. If a strong Germany can be a driving force, a weaker one could weaken the European Commission and strengthen the role of the 'frugal' countries in a moment when the decline of the pandemic emergency and the need to relaunch the different national economies revive some deeply rooted tensions. The end of the Franco-German 'tandem' push in the same direction. Under Angela Merkel's chancellorship, a substantially shared vision emerged between Paris and Berlin (despite ups and downs), which allowed the EU's 'Franco-German engine' to work smoothly quite effectively (Pistorius, 2021). However, the tensions related to the birth of the new German cabinet risk jeopardizing this balance, too, opening a new phase of possible uncertainty, especially considering that, in April 2022, also the French citizens will be called to the polls to elect a new President and a new Parliament.

Something similar can be said about the United States. Although the Trump presidency saw the White House often attacking Germany, the relationship was constructive (and apparently cordial) with both George W. Bush (2001-2009) and Barack Obama (2009-17). Angela Merkel's rise to power played an essential role in ending the "poisonous atmosphere" existing between Washington and Berlin in the final part of Gerhard Schröder's second mandate, after the US-led military intervention in Iraq in 2003 (Schultheis, 2021). For the Obama administration, the German government was an equally important partner and – despite some moments of tension, for instance, during the so-called 'Datagate' scandal (2013) – their relationship has always been a largely positive one. On several occasions, the Merkel cabinet acted as a mediator between Washington's positions and the more 'anti-American' European countries, albeit retaining – on its side – some degrees of ambiguity on topics like military spending (which was a source of repeated clashes with the Trump administration) or Germany's dealings with Russia. In this field, the building of the new *Nord Stream 2* gas pipeline (which the US administration has opposed since the very beginning) is still the most prominent bone of contention. Even if, in July 2021, Washington and Berlin seem to have found a suitable agreement to make the project's completion possible<sup>5</sup>, the document's many weaknesses seem to doom *Nord Stream 2* to new difficulties in the coming months (Lewis and Shalal, 2021; on the weaknesses of

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<sup>4</sup> In the German electoral system, the voter has two separate votes. The first vote (*Erststimme*) allows the electors to vote for a direct candidate of their constituency, who applies for a direct mandate in the Bundestag. Relative majority voting is used, which means that the most voted candidate gets the mandate. The first vote does not determine the power of the parties in the Bundestag since, for each direct mandate in a *Bundesland* the party get, it receives one mandate fewer from the second vote. The second vote (*Zweitstimme*) distributes the seats in the German Bundestag among the different parties and is pivotal in forming the governmental majorities. This vote allows the electors to vote for a party whose candidates are put together on the regional electoral list. Based on the proportion of second votes, the seats of the Bundestag are distributed to the parties which have achieved at least 5 per cent of valid second votes at the national level or had at least three candidates directly elected through the first votes.

<sup>5</sup> While announcing the accord, the parties delivered a joint declaration reassuring the Ukraine government, which is traditionally suspicious of *Nord Stream 2* due to its possible impacts on the country's role in the system of Russia-Europe energy relations. For the text of the declaration see: *Joint Statement of the United States and Germany on Support for Ukraine, European Energy Security, and our Climate Goals*, Washington, DC, July 21, 2021. Online: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-of-the-united-states-and-germany-on-support-for-ukraine-european-energy-security-and-our-climate-goals/> [accessed: October 10, 2021].

July agreement, see Herszenhorn, Hernandez and Gehrke, 2021).

Finally, the weakening of the US-German relationship could impact NATO in a moment when the Atlantic Alliance is trying, on the one hand, to redefine its role in more global terms, on the other to cope with more pressing European requests for greater strategic autonomy. In this field, too, Angela Merkel's Germany often acted as a balancing factor, 'sewing together' the European and US visions of security and – in the last years – inviting the Alliance to caution in assuming too rigid a position toward emerging China. Such an attitude clearly emerged – for instance – in the works of the last NATO summit in Brussels, where Berlin proposed itself as the leader in the bloc that favours a more "balanced" approach toward Beijing than the one enshrined in the summit's final communiqué (Herszenhorn and Momtaz, 2021)<sup>6</sup>. However, even this line could profoundly change if the new cabinet should rely on a red-yellow-green majority. In this event, Germany's attitude toward China could stiffen, and Berlin's bonds with Russia weaken. On the other hand, although NATO's role as an "indispensable actor for European security" has been finally accepted also by the historically anti-militarist Green Party (Benner, 2021), this does not mean that the new cabinet will automatically tighten its links with the United States and the Atlantic Alliance. Such an assertion will be especially true if the costs of the post-COVID-19 recovery should prove higher than expected, and this should force Olaf Schulz and his allies to decide whether to satisfy the demand from the electorate or stick to the commitments that Germany's NATO member status imposes.

### **Analysis, evaluation, and forecasts**

The impact of the German elections is multifaceted. Due to the internal divisions, the CDU/CSU scored the worst result since its formation soon after World War II (Ellyatt, 2021). On the other hand, the SPD has not reached the ambitious targets that its leaders had set, despite Olaf Scholz's positive image as Minister for Finance of the outgoing cabinet, primarily based on how he dealt with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the lesser parties are the real winners of the competition; lesser parties that, in their turn, have contrasting political agendas and worldviews, which could hamper the formation of the compact and credible cabinet that Germany's current international role requires. Dealing with both the United States and Europe, this state of things could prove a source of trouble. Most European countries still look at the German leadership favourably, even if its forms are sometimes contested, and from several corners calling for changes are starting to rise (Buras and Puglierin, 2021). For the United States, Berlin remains a fundamental ally, both in itself and due to its leading role in the European institutions. It is pretty impossible that this state of things could reverse whatever outcome the undergoing consultations will have. However, it is not impossible that their outcome could trigger some significant adjustment. At the same time, it is sure that it will take some time for Europe to adapt to the new German protagonism and for Germany itself to accept the more active role that it gained in the years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship, and that cannot relinquish now, despite the concerns that it rises at home and abroad.

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<sup>6</sup> The text of the Brussels summit final communiqué is in *Brussels Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021*. Online: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm) [accessed: October 10, 2021].



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## Ice melting and energy production in the Arctic region

At the beginning of September 2021, the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak, declared in the Russian Arctic region there are offshore reserves of almost 100 trillion cubic meters of natural gas and over 15 billion tons of oil<sup>1</sup>. Novak said the meteorological and geographical conditions of the area still make high the costs for exploitation of a large part of such reserves, also due to the related complex technologies needed for their extraction. The latter will enter full capacity only if necessary and when other more competitive Russian oil and gas reserves begin to run out. However, the news seems to be quite relevant, for a twofold reason: firstly, because it reaffirms the high energy potential of the Arctic region, especially in its Russian areas (as previously highlighted by the US Geological Survey)<sup>2</sup>; secondly, and more importantly, because it should be read in the context of the increasing ice melting phenomena concerning the Arctic area, recently highlighted by the Arctic Climate Forum of May 2021. Due to climate change and global warming, ice melting is contributing to risky imbalances for the environment and native populations<sup>3</sup>, as well as to increase the possibilities of human activities in the region (especially in the offshore environment, as the Arctic is largely covered by water)<sup>4</sup>. This is not only at the scientific-exploratory level, as shown in the summer 2021 by the expeditions of the Italian research vessels *Best Explorer* and *Laura Bass*<sup>5</sup>, but also for energy sources exploitation. Russia, in this sense, can be a primary player. The data shown below can give an idea of Moscow's comparative advantage, which seems to be strong mainly thanks to Siberia's natural resources.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://tass.com/economy/1333111>

<sup>2</sup> About two decades ago, the US Geological Survey indicated the presence of various metals and minerals in the Arctic, including antimony, beryllium, gallium, magnesium, tungsten, zinc, chromium, titanium, uranium and 'rare earths'; it assessed undiscovered hydrocarbon reserves as equal to approximately 90 billion barrels of oil, 17 trillion cubic feet of gas and 44 billion barrels of LNG (or, respectively, 16%, 30% and 26% of the respective world totals, mainly located offshore). Although with some variations, later estimates confirmed the high mineral and energy value of the area, with its oil and natural gas resources exceeding 25% of the world total, so that the Arctic has also been called 'The New Gulf'. Cfr. <http://large.stanford.edu/courses/2015/ph240/urban2/> ; see also: F. Pace, *Arctic region, climate change and multidimensional security*, LUISS 'Guido Carli', Dept. of Political Science, MA Thesis, 2021, p. 41, available through the following website: <https://tesi.luiss.it/> ; cf. also: <https://www.osservatorioartico.it/cos-e-artico/> , and the link below: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2018/01/russias-untapped-arctic-potential>

<sup>3</sup> Rising waters, displacement of vegetation and animals, changes concerning winds and cyclones and release of natural methane from rocks, due to permafrost melting which adds to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions pollution to human activity. After all, global warming in the Arctic is faster and more intense than in the rest of the planet. See the article by M. Cortellari, E. D'Acunto and L. Zucchetti, 2021, at the following link: <https://www.leggiscomodo.org/corsa-geopolitica-artico/>

For further details and related statistical and predictive data see the following links:  
<https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/arctic-sea-ice/> ; <https://www.iconaclima.it/salute-del-pianeta/ghiacci/artico-fusione-ghiacci-2021/>

<https://www.severe-weather.eu/global-weather/milne-ice-shelf-collapse-canada-mk/>

[https://www.climate.gov/sites/default/files/styles/featured-image/public/2020ARC\\_temp\\_map\\_graph\\_620.jpg?itok=V9wA5N5U](https://www.climate.gov/sites/default/files/styles/featured-image/public/2020ARC_temp_map_graph_620.jpg?itok=V9wA5N5U)

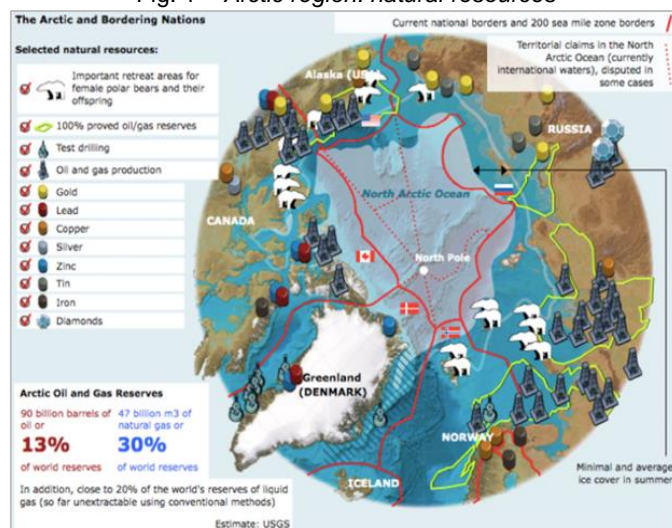
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634437/Future\\_of\\_the\\_sea-implications\\_from\\_opening\\_arctic\\_sea\\_routes\\_final.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634437/Future_of_the_sea-implications_from_opening_arctic_sea_routes_final.pdf)

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/arctic-summer-sea-ice-could-be-gone-by-2035>

<sup>4</sup> The 2021 Arctic Climate Forum saw the participation, among others, of the World Meteorological Organization, as well as Iceland, Norway, Canada and Russia: [https://arctic-rcc.org/sites/arctic-rcc.org/files/documents/acf-spring-2021/ACF-7\\_Consensus\\_Statement.pdf](https://arctic-rcc.org/sites/arctic-rcc.org/files/documents/acf-spring-2021/ACF-7_Consensus_Statement.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.osservatorioartico.it/missionie-compiuta-polarquest-2021/> ; <https://www.osservatorioartico.it/laura-bassi-conclude-attivita-artico/>

Fig. 1 – Arctic region: natural resources



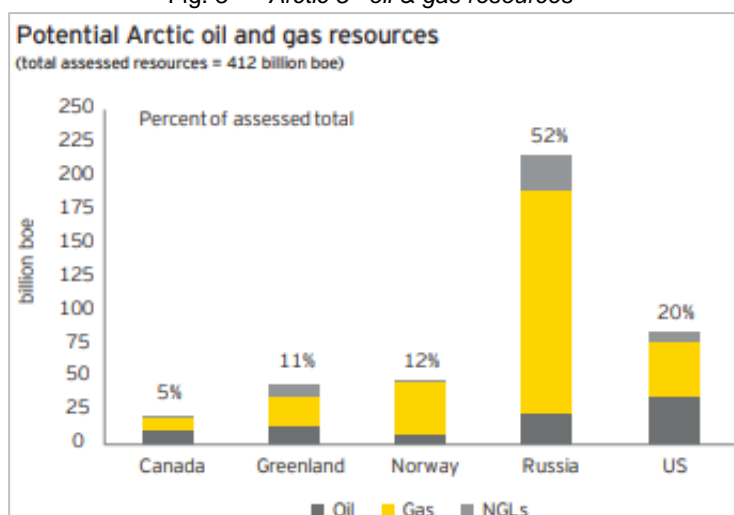
Source: F. Pace, 2021, cit., p. 15 (data from *Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna*)

Fig. 2 – Oil&gas reserves, Arctic area

Province Code	Province	Oil (MMBO)	Total Gas (BCFG)	NGL (MMBNGL)	BOE (MMBOE)
WSB	West Siberian Basin	3,659.88	651,498.56	20,328.69	132,571.66
AA	Arctic Alaska	29,960.94	221,397.60	5,904.97	72,765.52
EBB	East Barents Basin	7,406.49	317,557.97	1,422.28	61,755.10
EGR	East Greenland Rift Basins	8,902.13	86,180.06	8,121.57	31,387.04
YK	Yenisey-Khatanga Basin	5,583.74	99,964.26	2,675.15	24,919.61
AM	Amerasia Basin	9,723.58	56,891.21	541.69	19,747.14
WGEC	West Greenland-East Canada	7,274.40	51,818.16	1,152.59	17,063.35
LSS	Laptev Sea Shelf	3,115.57	32,562.84	867.16	9,409.87
NM	Norwegian Margin	1,437.29	32,281.01	504.73	7,322.19
BP	Barents Platform	2,055.51	26,218.67	278.71	6,704.00
EB	Eurasia Basin	1,342.15	19,475.43	520.26	5,108.31

Source: Ibidem, p. 16 (US Geological Survey data: <https://pubs.usgs.gov/dds/dds-060/>)

Fig. 3 – «Arctic 5» oil & gas resources<sup>6</sup>



Source: F. Pace, 2021, cit., p. 42 (data from Ernst & Young)

<sup>6</sup> Together with the Arctic Council (USA, Russia, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Finland, plus several other states and non-state actors admitted as observers), the Arctic 5 is one of the main international decision-making *fora* dealing with Arctic issues; although formally they are not intergovernmental organizations, both of them have a considerable political weight, and can also stimulate the negotiation of binding agreements.

As the ice melts in the area, and the operational conditions and the transport of hydrocarbons and other goods along its waters improve (see the other article on energy in this same issue of the Strategic Observatory), the costs of extraction and trade of Arctic crude oil and gas in the coming years could drop significantly, lowering the barrel breakeven point. In line with a trend already emerged in recent years, this would increase the competitiveness of the region's hydrocarbons compared to those, conventional and non-conventional, extracted in other areas of the planet<sup>7</sup>. After all, indicators of greater possibilities for economic exploitation of the Arctic in the last two decades came not only from the oil&gas sector, but also fishing and tourism<sup>8</sup>. In this framework, Russia launched several important projects in the region, so that according to some estimates it will obtain between 20 and 30% of its total hydrocarbon production by 2050 (after all, the Arctic would give the country at least 14% of its oil reserves and 40% of gas reserves)<sup>9</sup>. As already stated in 2013, and then in two specific strategic documents approved in 2020<sup>10</sup>, Moscow intends to significantly strengthen its economic and energy activities in the area, which in recent years has already provided 20% of GDP, 22% of exports and 10% of all investments on Russian soil. Furthermore, in 2021 Moscow allocated at least 20 billion rubles for the region, that is more than 220 million Euros, for infrastructural plans linked to the building of a floating nuclear power plant in the Chukotka Peninsula (for an expected total cost of about 450 million dollars). Also because of a production increase in liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the Arctic area, within 2035 the Russian percentage of world's gas should grow from over 4% to 20%, for an estimated annual income of 30 billion dollars. In 2035, Russian Arctic LNG should amount to 91 million tons, that is 10 times the value of 2018, whereas according to expectations the total production of Arctic natural gas will undergo a slight contraction – however covering that same year 79% of the respective national production, with that of Arctic oil equal to 26% of total Russian oil<sup>11</sup>. Among the main Arctic energy projects of Russia we find the Yamal LNG project, a huge work managed by Novatek, while a similar project, the Arktik 2 LNG, concerns the Gydan peninsula. In addition to the technical complexity and the costs of the two projects (respectively 27 and 21 billion dollars), it is of high relevance both projects see holdings by Chinese companies, equal to 30% and 20% respectively. Moreover, the geoeconomic role of China in the Arctic goes beyond these two projects and the relations between Moscow and Beijing,

<sup>7</sup> For 'barrel breakeven point' we mean the equilibrium production cost, i.e. when the fixed and variable costs of production, that is the sum of raw materials, labor, taxes, etc., does not exceed the expected revenues. According to a recent study, in the Russian Arctic the price to sell oil without losses is about 56 dollars per barrel, whereas oil production cost can vary from 42 to 70 dollars per barrel, depending on the different production areas (although there are single extraction fields where future expectations speak of barrel production costs close to 10 dollars); in some Norwegian Arctic waters there would already be break-even points of 35 and 27 dollars. Please refer to A. Chanyшева e A. Ilinova, *The Future of Russian Arctic Oil and Gas Projects*, 2021, freely available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1312/9/5/528/htm>

<sup>8</sup> Fishes in the Arctic region would amount to about 15% of the world total, although until recent years the local weather and sea conditions have obviously limited fishing activities; since 2010, annual tourist flows in the Arctic have more than doubled, while by 2022 they should number approximately 90,000 people. See M. Di Liddo – F. Manenti, *Competizione fra Stati e corsa alle risorse: geopolitica dell'Artico*, Ce.S.I., Rome, pp. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rosneft.com/business/Upstream/Offshoreprojects/>

<sup>10</sup> Documents can be downloaded here: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/russias-arctic-strategy-through-2035>

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to the following sources: <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/podcasts/focus/091721-german-elections-energy-transition-natural-gas-coal-nuclear-angela-merkel> ; F. Pace, cit., p. 43 ; <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/coal/102720-russia-approves-arctic-strategy-up-to-2035>

inasmuch as China is today one of the most active non-Arctic powers in the area<sup>12</sup>. In the Yamal project there is also the involvement of the French company Total, which holds 20% of the project<sup>13</sup> and is active in the region like several other companies not belonging to Arctic states, including Eni, the main Italian energy company. The latter has a partnership with the Russian oil company Rosneft for some exploration projects in the Barents Sea (where until 2014 Eni had already been a partner in similar projects through the company Severenergia). Furthermore, the Italian company is involved in similar projects in Norwegian waters in the Barents Sea. In March 2021, through exploration activities conducted by Vår Energi (a partnership between Eni at 70% and the Norwegian Hitecvision at 30%), a new offshore hydrocarbon field (Isflak) was discovered, for an estimated volume included between 65 and 100 million barrels of oil equivalent. After all, Eni has been working in the Arctic for several decades, although in recent years it diversified its energy portfolio, increasing its activities dealing with green energy. In 2020, for example, it announced the creation of a company called Vårgrønn, engaged in the development, construction, management and financing of renewable energy projects in Norway and the Nordic market<sup>14</sup>. However, Eni's main activities in the region concern the oil & gas sector, in particular the Goliat project (also known as Sevan 1000), whose the Italian company is the main operator with 65% through Vår Energi, while the rest of shares belongs to Norwegian company Statoil. The project concerns the largest floating offshore platform in the Barents Sea (whose pipelines connect to 22 wells in the area of the Kobbe and Realgrunnen fields, containing oil and gas). The platform, the first activated so north for hydrocarbon production and storage, should produce the equivalent of about 200 million oil barrels by 2035<sup>15</sup>. Eni is also active in Alaska (USA), with onshore and offshore fields, and in Greenland (Denmark)<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> In December 2019, Moscow and Beijing inaugurated the 'Power of Siberia' gas pipeline, which was built to transport gas from the Arctic Circle to China. In the Arctic, the latter has investment plans in the energy, port and infrastructure sectors. The 'way to the Arctic', considered as a strategic goal by the Chinese political-military establishment at least since 2010, is pursued on the basis of *China's Arctic Policy* (2018), where China defines itself as a 'near Arctic state' (although the point of Chinese territory closest to the region is at almost 1500 km). Beijing's Arctic approach for some years was not too well received by the states of the area, which initially opposed China's requests to enter the Arctic Council as an 'observer member state'; however, China was admitted in 2013. Starting from that date, Beijing launched several agreements with almost all Arctic countries, not infrequently putting large capitals on the table. Its scientific-exploratory activities are also relevant, including monitoring devices installed to observe atmospheric and oceanographic changes, which have aroused more than one apprehension, especially in the US and Denmark, about possible additional and undeclared military-informative purposes. However, it seems the latter could be useful to Beijing not in the short term, when a growing Chinese military presence in the area seems unlikely (also because it would probably be unfavored by Russia, at least as long as Moscow does not perceive changes in the Arctic altering the balance of power with the US and other Arctic NATO countries). For further details about Chinese role in the Arctic please refer to the links below:

[http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm)

<https://arcticportal.org/images/PDFs/SIPRIIP34.pdf> ; [https://www.corriere.it/esteri/17\\_febbraio\\_20/02-esteri-firma-standardcorriere-web-sezioni-6ec5e17e-f6dc-11e6-92e0-c5629d7a7635.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/esteri/17_febbraio_20/02-esteri-firma-standardcorriere-web-sezioni-6ec5e17e-f6dc-11e6-92e0-c5629d7a7635.shtml) ; <https://atlantic-community.org/the-dragon-looks-to-the-north-chinas-growing-role-in-the-arctic/> ; <https://www.leggiscomodo.org/corsa-geopolitica-artico/> ; [https://www.difesa.it/SMD/IM/CeMiSS/Pubblicazioni/ricerche/Pagine/AP\\_SMD\\_06\\_Astarita.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/SMD/IM/CeMiSS/Pubblicazioni/ricerche/Pagine/AP_SMD_06_Astarita.aspx)

<sup>13</sup> See Cortellari et al., cit.

<sup>14</sup> Born through a partnership between Eni and Hitecvision, the new company aims in particular at pursuing opportunities in the offshore wind sector in Norway, as well as contribute to the decarbonisation (reduction of climate-altering emissions) of the upstream assets of Vår Energi. Vårgrønn has the long-term goal of reaching an installed renewable electricity capacity of 1 GW in 2030.

<sup>15</sup> The infrastructural system is equipped with a particular cylindrical structure, designed and built over several years to be stable despite the complex operational conditions of the area (not infrequently exposed to very strong sea currents and 140 km/h gusts wind).

<sup>16</sup> On Eni's activities in the Arctic countries, see the data available at the following link: <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/eni-nel-mondo.html> (click on 'Americhe' and 'Eurasia', and then enter the Arctic countries); see also: <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/media/comunicati-stampa/2021/03/cs-eni-isflak.html> ; [https://www.eni.com/en\\_RU/eni-russia/eni-russia.page](https://www.eni.com/en_RU/eni-russia/eni-russia.page)

## Assessment and forecasting

Together with environmental concerns, the increase in energy production activities expected in the Arctic region due to ice melting seems to involve, albeit in a medium-long term perspective and not without uncertainties, also interesting development prospects. The latter can be caught mainly by Russia and other Arctic countries. Moscow declared a large part of its massive Arctic hydrocarbon sources will not be exploited in the short term; however, and despite any possible technical issues slowing their exploitation in the future, these could at least theoretically supply the country for several decades to come, increasing Moscow's energy export opportunities, as well as its political-diplomatic strength. This among other things can affect the reduction of climate-altering emissions and greater use of renewable energy, thus the timing of the global ecological-energy transition, whose goals were recently reaffirmed at the Italian preparatory meeting of the international Conference of the Parties on Climate (scheduled for November 2021, in the United Kingdom).

However, Arctic fossil fuels may also offer new exploitation opportunities for non-Arctic states capable of significantly projecting themselves into the region. In this sense, opportunity windows could increase not only for great economic powers such as China, but, as already shown by Italian activities in the area, also non Arctic countries possessing adequate know how and technologies. This could stimulate new forms of partnerships and international cooperation, in the oil & gas sector and the field of clean energy as well, inasmuch as the region has also great potential in hydric and wind power, minerals and rare earths to use in technologies and plants for their exploitation<sup>17</sup>.

At the same time, it is evident the increase in economic activity in the area, in general and the energy sector in particular, may also bring international competition. The interstate disputes that arose in the region in the years following the end of the Cold War, some of which now 'frozen', others apparently under slow but progressive resolution, concerned (or still concern) areas of the Arctic Ocean, the Beaufort Sea and the Sea of Barents, involving Canada, USA, Russia, Norway and Denmark (for example, Russia currently claims Arctic territories for about 463,000 square miles of seabed, in competition with claims from Denmark and Canada, which both are engaged in specific bilateral talks and negotiations with Moscow). These disputes have been managed so far, and sometimes even solved, through diplomatic channels<sup>18</sup>, also because the Arctic, although lacking a specific treaty regulating its status and management (like Antarctica), can still take advantage of various international laws applicable to it, as well as various regional and sub-regional governance institutions aimed at favoring a multilateral approach (although oriented, on the whole, more to environmental and scientific cooperation issues, or linked to the protection of law and safety at sea,

<sup>17</sup> Rare earths (also called "rare-earth elements" or "rare-earth metals") are 17 chemical elements of the periodic table, namely scandium, yttrium and 15 lanthanides; the first two are generally found in the same mineral deposits as lanthanides and possess similar chemical properties. Thanks to improvements in extraction techniques and technologies, rare earths are more and more used for superconductors, magnets, catalysts, micro-components and components for hybrid vehicles, optical fibers, applications for optoelectronics, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Some of them were triggered, however, by *fait accompli*, sometimes practiced according to the legally contestable idea the simple discovery of new territories, or the sending of scientific explorations or military vessels to certain areas, be enough to claim full territorial sovereignty. For further details, please refer to the articles by D. Talento and L. Borzi, at the following links respectively: <https://www.reportdifesa.it/artico-tra-rivendicazioni-territoriali-e-interessi-geopolitici/> ; [https://www.centrostudi-italiacanada.it/articles/perche\\_l\\_artico\\_sta\\_diventando\\_l\\_area\\_piu\\_strategica\\_del\\_mondo-209/](https://www.centrostudi-italiacanada.it/articles/perche_l_artico_sta_diventando_l_area_piu_strategica_del_mondo-209/)



rather than military and defense issues)<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, the great majority of Arctic minerals and natural sources, that is almost 90%, have a geographical-territorial location that allows them to fall quite clearly in the exclusive economic zone of different littoral states, which at least in part tends to facilitate a nonviolent management of energy related territorial disputes. In any case, as shown by what happened in the past in other areas with high density in energy sources, even in the Arctic the increase in exploitation chances could bring possible contrasts, not only among regional countries. This after all seems implicit in the different Arctic visions of the main states of the world, with various non-Arctic powers (China in the lead) oriented to see the region as a sort of global common, and the Arctic states inclined instead to consider it as fully comparable to other geographical 'regions' of the world (due to the very many resources of the area, its geographical peculiarity – i.e., vast international maritime spaces, low local demographic pressure, etc. – and the absence of a specific treaty, the first vision tends to extend exploitation rights for non Arctic powers)<sup>20</sup>. It does not seem accidental, moreover, that the geopolitical dynamics of the Arctic has also been showing, for some years now, a net reprise of military activities and exercises. While not showing real winds of war, or Cold War style massive arms races, this phenomenon is well documented on various national and international sources. It is primarily concerning Russia, but also the US and NATO (as well as single NATO Arctic countries, including Canada)<sup>21</sup>. At the moment, it is difficult to predict how the balance of power in the region will evolve in the medium and long term; in any case, in order for the situation to remain stable, it seems necessary on the one hand Russia does not exceed in its military activities, avoiding offensive or overly assertive postures (despite being, with its 24,140 km of Arctic coastline, the main regional country by extension, population and related economic interests); on the other hand, that the US and its partners contain and balance Moscow with coherence, continuity and decision, even if measuring very carefully their actions, not to divert useful resources from other areas and overly amplify any possible Russian perception of regional encirclement. After all, apart from Russia, all Arctic states belong to the American-Euro-Western sphere of influence, as 3 out of

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<sup>19</sup> In addition to specific bilateral treaties between Arctic states, among the legal references that can be used to govern regional affairs we find the Polar Code (2014), under the auspices of the International Maritime Organization, the Declaration on the Prevention of Unregulated Fisheries in the Arctic (2015), which later became a treaty also signed by China, Japan, South Korea and the EU (2017, 2021), the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982, 1994), the London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Waste Pollution (1972) and the related Additional Protocol (1996), the Ilulissat Declaration (2008), the Solas Convention (1974) for the Safety of Life at Sea and the MARPOL Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships. In addition to the Arctic Council (1996) and Arctic 5 (2008), the governance of the area can count on bodies such as the Euro-Arctic Council of Barents, the Regional Council of Barents and the Arctic Economic Council. The Coast Guard Forum, established in 2015 between the member states of the Arctic Council, has the goal to increase maritime-naval cooperation and coordination. Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> On the basis of the *sector theory*, the Arctic states favor instead a position for greater prerogatives and rights to regional countries, both at the maritime-territorial and conceptual levels. They consider as their own the maritime spaces that extend beyond the polar circle, conceiving a triangle in which the apex is the North Pole, and the base a line connecting the ends of the coasts of each State located in the area. Also inspired by a possibly extensive spatial interpretation of continental platforms and exclusive economic zones, this vision argues the Arctic has, like other regions of the globe, quite clear and precise internal and external borders. On these aspects see: F. Pace, *op. cit.*, 2021, pp. 10 – 12; cf. also D. Talento, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> On the military issues concerning the Arctic see B. Santorio, *La corsa all'Artico (navigabile)*, CeSMar, «Analisi Difesa», giugno 2021: <https://www.analisidifesa.it/2021/06/la-corsa-allartico-navigabile-conseguenze-geopolitiche-e-strategiche/>

See also: L. Borzi, *op. cit.*; M. Cortellari et al., *cit.*; F. Pace, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 ss.

Please also refer to the following links: <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/russia-elevates-importance-northern-fleet-upgrading-it-military-district-status> ; [https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/pdf/Russian-Military-Strategy-Core-Tenets-and-Operational-Concepts.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/pdf/Russian-Military-Strategy-Core-Tenets-and-Operational-Concepts.pdf) ;

[https://www.ilmessaggero.it/mondo/russia\\_putin\\_nuove\\_armi\\_artico\\_droni\\_bombardieri\\_passaggio\\_cina\\_oceano\\_co\\_sa\\_succede\\_veramente\\_spiegato\\_bene\\_5\\_aprile\\_2021-5877928.html](https://www.ilmessaggero.it/mondo/russia_putin_nuove_armi_artico_droni_bombardieri_passaggio_cina_oceano_co_sa_succede_veramente_spiegato_bene_5_aprile_2021-5877928.html)

[https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021\\_army\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021_army_arctic_strategy.pdf)

<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>

<https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF>

[1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF](https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF)



8 countries are in the EU (Denmark, Sweden and Finland), while 5 out of 8 are members of the Atlantic Alliance (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the US). Italy's strategic goal, in such framework, may be to protect its Arctic interests by increasing not only its activities and relations in the scientific and energy fields, but also those aimed at regional stability and security, in line with the *Italian Strategy for the Arctic* (2015, 2016). To this purpose, Italy could use its permanent observer status in the Arctic Council (which it got in 2013), and consider a potentially growing Arctic role for its Defence apparatus – which, moreover, is already involved in Arctic matters, through a marine geophysics research campaign led by the Italian Navy<sup>22</sup>. This seems to be needed also due to the still relatively embryonic Arctic role of the European Union<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> We think of the sector in question also in terms of defense companies. Official documents of the Italian Armed Forces expressly consider the Arctic region as an area of their strategic interest:  
[https://www.difesa.it/SMD/CaSMD/concetto\\_strategico\\_casmd/Pagine/3\\_Evoluzione\\_contesto\\_sicurezza.aspx](https://www.difesa.it/SMD/CaSMD/concetto_strategico_casmd/Pagine/3_Evoluzione_contesto_sicurezza.aspx)

[https://www.marina.difesa.it/media-cultura/editoria/marivista/Documents/supplementi/Linee\\_indirizzo\\_strategico\\_2019\\_2034.pdf](https://www.marina.difesa.it/media-cultura/editoria/marivista/Documents/supplementi/Linee_indirizzo_strategico_2019_2034.pdf) (p. 60). On the Arctic campaign led by the Italian Navy please refer to the following link: [https://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/per-la-ricerca/Pagine/high\\_north.aspx](https://www.marina.difesa.it/cosa-facciamo/per-la-ricerca/Pagine/high_north.aspx) ; the *Italian Strategy for the Arctic* is freely available at the link below: [https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2019/12/towards\\_an\\_italian\\_strategy\\_for\\_the\\_arctic\\_-\\_national\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2019/12/towards_an_italian_strategy_for_the_arctic_-_national_guidelines.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> The Arctic remained almost outside the trans-European orbit of Brussels until 2010. In the last ten years things changed, but more with declarations than concrete actions. Interest groups involved in the intra EU Arctic debate is focused on climate change and the protection of animals, or on economic and development issues (and less on security matters), with a sort of contrast between such two visions. In 2016, the EU updated its Integrated Policy for the Arctic Region, based on international cooperation, sustainable development, environmental protection and tackling climate change. In July 2020, the Commission and the European External Action Service launched a joint consultation program to elaborate a New Arctic Policy, and to initiate discussions on new challenges and opportunities, with the aim of gathering inputs on how to enhance the EU role in the Arctic area.

# **Osservatorio Strategico**

## **Part Two**

## **Tensions between Serbia and Kosovo over vehicle registration plates**

On September 27, Kosovar authorities deployed special police units (Rosu) in Serb-majority northern Kosovo after hundreds of Serbs blocked roads near the Jarinje border crossing and in the municipality of Zubin Potok to protest the decision of the government to force them to use Kosovo vehicle license plates instead of Serbian ones.

Kosovo's Interior Minister, Xhelal Svecila, wrote on Facebook that the decision "obliges to provide temporary number plates to all vehicles with Serbian plates entering the territory of the Republic of Kosovo at all border crossings".

In Pristina, Prime Minister Albin Kurti insisted that the new measures "are not directed against the Serbian community" and added in Parliament that "nothing extraordinary or discriminatory is happening today. We are just starting to implement an agreement that both Serbia and the European Union have agreed on. Today's actions undertaken by the competent institutions... do not aim to violate the right of Serbian citizens to free movement or to cause any destabilization".

In the face of mounting tensions, Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic has scheduled an emergency session of his National Security Council and Goran Rakic, the leader of the Belgrade-backed Serbian-Kosovo political party, Srpska Lista, has called on Vucic to respond to the decision of the government of Pristina. Vucic accused international partners of not wanting to see the repression conducted by the Kosovar authorities against the Serbian minority in the north of the country. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo or license plates with the letters RKS, for the Republic of Kosovo.

The decision to seek reciprocity came after Kosovo's Deputy Prime Minister Besnik Bislimi announced on September 9 that Pristina will not follow through on the existing license plate agreement with Belgrade, signed in 2011.

Under the agreement, which expired on September 15, vehicles with KS plates could enter Serbia freely, while those with RKS plates had to be replaced at the border and receive provisional paper plates. Vehicles with Serbian registration plates could enter Kosovo freely, without additional procedures.

There are two types of license plates in Kosovo, KS (Kosovo) and RKS (Republic of Kosovo). Plaques with the letters KS were issued under the former UN administration of Kosovo. The deepest meaning of the historical dispute hides precisely in the acronym used: the independence of Kosovo, which Belgrade does not recognize, considering the administrative boundaries.

The previous government of Kosovo issued a decision in mid-September 2020 to stop issuing new license plates with the KS registration and on Monday, Minister Svecila said that from 15 September KS plates will no longer be in circulation in Kosovo.

Since his inauguration, Prime Minister Kurti has repeatedly promised that his government would ask Serbia for reciprocity in all areas<sup>1</sup>.

Kosovo officials insisted that what they described as "reciprocity measures" considering that Serbia applies a similar measure requiring KS plates to be replaced at the border for RKS plates arriving from Kosovo, subject to specific authorization (3.5 euros for sixty days).

The same president of Kosovo, Vjosa Osmani, commented on Facebook that "The decision guarantees equal treatment and free movement for citizens of both countries" adding that the

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<sup>1</sup> Bami X. and Stojanovic M, *Kosovo Deploys Police as Serbs Protest in Licence Plate Dispute*, Balkan Insight 20/09/2021 <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/20/kosovo-deploys-police-as-serbs-protest-in-licence-plate-dispute/>

decision "is strictly implemented at all border crossings, except for two in the north Bernjak and Jarinje, where local Serbs are exploited by the Serbian government".

Jarinje and Bernjak / Brnjak border crossings in Serbian-majority northern Kosovo remained blocked after Serbs blocked roads with dozens of trucks in protest against changes to border regulations for vehicles with Serbian registration plates<sup>2</sup>.

Speaking on the tense situation in northern Kosovo, High Representative Josep Borrell said: "I continue to closely monitor the situation in northern Kosovo. Serbia and Kosovo must unconditionally reduce the situation on the ground by immediately withdrawing the special police units and dismantling the roadblocks. Any further provocations or unilateral actions are unacceptable. Kosovo and Serbia must find solutions to defuse the situation and agree on the way forward. The EU will actively support these efforts. Both Kosovo and Serbian leaders are fully responsible for any risks to the safety and well-being of local communities in both countries. The EU-facilitated dialogue continues to be the only platform to address and resolve all open issues between the parties, including those relating to freedom of movement and license plates, and I strongly urge Kosovo and Serbia to use it. Both chief negotiators who will come to Brussels in the coming days represent a positive first step. It is vital that they come with a mandate to discuss the way forward and find sustainable solutions that are in the interests of citizens.

We repeat that we expect both Kosovo and Serbia to return to promoting an environment conducive to reconciliation, regional stability and cooperation for the benefit of their citizens. This is fundamental to reach a comprehensive and legally binding agreement on the normalization of their relations, which is necessary so that both can advance on their respective European paths".

Borrell also underlined the important level of cooperation between KFOR and EULEX, reiterating the close contacts with the NATO Secretary General, Jen Stoltenberg<sup>3</sup>. The latter, after a series of telephone conversations with both Vucic and Kurti, asked with a tweet for the tension to be released. In parallel, on September 27 NATO forces stationed in Kosovo announced that they had stepped up patrols in Kosovo following rising tensions with Serbia. Belgrade sent armored vehicles to the border, near the north of its ancient province, in response to what it called the "provocations" of Pristina, namely the recent deployment of Kosovan special forces near two border towns in the north of the province, Jarinje. and Brnjak.

### **Analysis, evaluations and forecasts**

The resumption of tensions between Serbia and Kosovo preceded the Balkan mission of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who intends to prepare the ground for the EU-Balkans summit on October 6 and will visit both Pristina and Belgrade. "It is important that the parties sit together, put an end to the verbal escalation in the region and find a solution quickly," said Diana Spinant, a spokesperson for the Commission.

Kurti said he was ready for a dialogue with Serbia under the leadership of the EU, which for ten years has been trying to help the two opponents normalize relations. The Serbian president, Aleksandar Vucic, however, conditions the resumption of the reconciliation process on the withdrawal of the Kosovar special forces from the north of the territory. "We are attached to safeguarding peace" but "we will never allow the humiliation of Serbia and its citizens", insisted Vucic after a meeting with Western ambassadors.

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<sup>2</sup> Bami X., *Amid Border Tensions, Kosovo Police Deny Beating Serbs*, Balkan Insight 24/09/2021 <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/24/amid-border-tensions-kosovo-police-deny-beating-serbs/>

<sup>3</sup> Statement by High Representative Josep Borrell on the situation in the north of Kosovo, EEAS 26/09/2021 [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/104657/Statement%20by%20High%20Representative%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20situation%20in%20the%20north%20of%20Kosovo](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/104657/Statement%20by%20High%20Representative%20Josep%20Borrell%20on%20the%20situation%20in%20the%20north%20of%20Kosovo)

The period is likely not conducive to compromise, as both Kosovo and Serbia face electoral deadlines. An administrative vote is expected in Pristina in October, while political elections will be held in Serbia next year. However, the question seems to come at the right time for a test of maturity of the EU, which for weeks has been raising the need for greater "autonomy" and the need for a more effective capacity for action in its neighborhood<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Pioppi S., Rischio escalation tra Kosovo e Serbia. La prova di maturità per l'Ue, Formiche 27/09/2021 <https://formiche.net/2021/09/kosovo-escalation-ue-serbia/>

## **Syria and a new diplomatic framework?**

The security situation in Syria remains volatile at least in some regions of the country. In the last weeks, regime forces have been able to enter in Deraa where a precarious ceasefire held on September 6 after negotiators for rebel forces and the Syrian government tried to close to a comprehensive peace agreement to end a three-month siege. The tense negotiations to finalize the deal came after new government demands to deploy nine military checkpoints in Deraa, for the fighters to hand over more weapons and to allow government forces to search the city for wanted people. Finally, on September 8, Syrian government forces entered Daraa al-Balad to set up checkpoints under Russian supervision and begin searching for weapons used by terrorists.

At the end of September, Russian jets launched several air raids targeting a military base of Al-Hamza Division, a group affiliated with the National Army, in the village of Barad in Afrin in the northern countryside of Aleppo. Russia launched several raids in the Afrin area in those days, the targeted areas are under the control of the Turkish-allied National Army factions or controlled by HTS. By bombing such areas, Russia is asserting that all of them are Syrian territories and that it has the right to bomb them whenever it wants.

While the security situation remains volatile, from a diplomatic point of view the Syrian situation is improving or at least it seems that the regime is in a stronger political position. For instance, on September 13, Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad met in Moscow to discuss cooperation between their militaries and how to gain control of the last rebel-held areas in Syria. Putin, referring to the presence of both Turkish and American troops that support different local militias, has stressed that nowadays the main problem to stabilize Syria is that foreign armed forces remain in certain regions of the country without the approval of the United Nations and Syrian government.

On September 29, Russian President Vladimir Putin met also Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan with the aim of strengthening bilateral ties and addressing regional security issues. While neither leader made any detailed statements the talks, one of the main topic was surely the situation in Syria including joint patrols involving Russian military police. The most contentious item between Moscow and Ankara is the northwestern Syrian province of Idlib, where the escalation between the Russian-backed Syrian government forces and Turkish-backed rebels is mounting. Russia has conducted at least 150 air campaigns in the region in the past month, accusing Ankara of failing to fulfill its part in the cease-fire deals previously agreed on. According to Moscow, radical jihadi groups are using Turkish military posts in and around Idlib as a shield to attack forces loyal to Damascus<sup>1</sup>.

On September 24, Egypt's Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry met his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, for the first time in nearly 10 years. The meeting took place at the headquarters of the Permanent Mission of Egypt at the United Nations in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly meeting, as part of a broader move by Arab countries to reintegrate Syria into the Arab world. The main reason for this new approach is the fact that main military battles have tapered off, even though high level of violence remains in difference areas for example Idlib, and regional states are exploring the necessary steps to get out of the crisis and to restore Syria's political and diplomatic position. However, in order to resolve the Syrian crisis it is necessary to find a balance between the influential parties involved. The Egyptian step is not the first one in the direction of a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/erdogan-limps-away-putin-meeting>.

political solution, in late 2018, the UAE and Bahrain reopened their embassies in Damascus, while the Sultanate of Oman, one of the few Arab countries to maintain diplomatic relations with Damascus during the civil war, reinstated its ambassador to the Syrian capital in 2020. Jordan also appointed a senior diplomat in Damascus in 2019. The interests of Egypt in the Syrian crisis can also be linked to a broader geopolitical framework related to the tensions between Cairo and Ankara<sup>2</sup>.

Even with Jordan the diplomatic situation is changing. On September 19 a high-level delegation from Syria led by the country's defense minister met with Jordan's army chief to discuss border control with a focus on combating terrorism and border security. The meeting followed a Syrian military operation that recaptured an opposition enclave near the Jordanian border. The fighting prompted Jordan to announce in late July that it was pausing plans to fully reopen Jaber-Nassib, its only land border crossing for trade with Syria. The cease-fire brokered by Russia largely ended the fighting and handed control of Daraa al-Balad to Damascus. Therefore, the Jaber border crossing was opened on September 29 for trade and tourism. Not only in the same days the two countries discussed increasing bilateral cooperation, but also they announced that from October 3 commercial flights would be resume between Syria and Jordan after a nine-year hiatus.

Jordan and Syria are also collaborating to resolve the fuel problem in Lebanon, the energy ministers of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon met in Amman in mid September to discuss sending Egyptian natural gas and Jordanian electricity through Syrian territory to crisis-stricken Lebanon<sup>3</sup>. Jordan hosted Lebanese and Syrian officials Wednesday 06 for a discussion on providing energy-starved Lebanon with electricity. The energy and electricity ministers of the three countries agreed to restart an electricity line between Jordan and Syria as a first step toward providing Lebanon with electricity. Moreover, King Abdullah II and Assad spoke on the phone Sunday 03 for the first time in a decade<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/egypt-steps-efforts-restore-syrias-position-arab-world>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/09/syrias-defense-chief-visits-jordan-discuss-border-security>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/jordan-syria-lebanon-discuss-electricity-cooperation>.

### **The growing jihadist risk in Cameroon: the extension of ISWAP operations**

Besides the domestic instability factors, a growing regional threat undermines Cameroon's precarious security. The two prolonged domestic crises have fostered the spread of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter of Boko Haram, in the Far North region. The economic and human resources needed to address the two internal critical issues in the country diverted the attention of Cameroonian authorities from the jihadist threat, paving the way for the increased activity and presence of the ISWAP terrorist group. ISWAP emerged in 2015 when the then leader of Boko Haram, Abu-Bakr Shekau, decided to pledge allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu-Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Since then, the movement has witnessed a gradual rise becoming the main terrorist threat in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Since 2013, the Lake Chad Basin area has become a natural sanctuary for many Boko Haram fighters who fled Nigeria. In 2016, one year after Boko Haram had joined the Islamic State, a split in the movement resulted in two branches. The then Caliph al-Baghdadi appointed Abu Musab Al-Barnawi as his *wali* or commander for West Africa. The distrust that al-Baghdadi felt towards the Boko Haram historical leader, Abubakar Shekau, and his leadership was a key factor in the split. The schism led to the birth of two groups in open competition with each other. On one side, the ISWAP, that operates within a well-defined strategy, whose first aim is to make proselytism. On the other side, the original branch of Boko Haram, also known as Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād (JAS), was led by Abubakar Shekau. Between the two groups there was immediately a heated rivalry that led to several clashes. The ideological differences were compounded by the animosity between the Abubakar Shekau and ISWAP commander Abu Musab Al-Barnawi. In early 2020, there was a significant stream of affiliates from JAS to ISWAP. Several Boko Haram members who had fought in Libya chose to embrace the ISWAP cause once they returned to Nigeria.

Within Cameroon, the two terrorist groups operated competitively. The JAS group was active mainly in the Mayo-Sava and Mayo-Tsanaga districts, while ISWAP was confined to the provinces around Lake Chad, such as Lagone. In an attempt to gain new areas of influence, the two groups repeatedly collided. In one of these clashes, Abubakar died last May (France24, 2021). His death changed the balance of power between the two factions. In less than four months, the JAS group almost ceased to exist, and most of the fighters swore allegiance to the Caliphate (Salkida, 2021). Only the group known as Ba Koura remained loyal to JAS in the area. ISWAP increased both its offensive capacity and its range of action in Cameroonian territory. The rising ISWAP influence has changed the nature of attacks carried out by the terrorist group. Unlike Boko Haram, ISWAP avoids targeting civilians and local communities. The main targets are military installations and the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) contingents operating in the Mayo-Sava and Amchide areas, and some oil exploration sites (Fru and Tayo, 2021). Behind ISWAP's strategy lies the desire to mark the difference with the JAS, which had carried out across-the-board attacks and did not spare Muslim communities. Following the ideals promoted by the Islamic State, the organization's objective is to gain people's trust to present itself as a valid alternative to state authority. The acquisition of greater control of Cameroonian areas is part of the Islamic State's agenda for West Africa. The organization is developing a governance network that is extending from Borno State in Nigeria to the North and Far North regions of Cameroon. The body, composed of four distinct regional caliphates – Lake Chad, Sambisa, Timbuktu and Tumbuma - would report directly to Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-



Qurashi, leader of the Islamic State. Commanders or *wali* with their institutional structure would be responsible for the day-to-day governance of the region (Odunsi, 2021). What facilitates ISWAP penetration in the North and Far North regions is the lack of state control over the area. Although several state security forces operate in the districts, basic public services are unavailable. Over the last two decades, Yaoundé promoted several economic and social development programs. However, the Biya government has not implemented any of the plans because of the lack of resources and the high local corruption. As a result, the lack of basic services and infrastructures such as the electricity grid, schools, roads, hospitals have made local communities more receptive to ISWAP propaganda. The biggest risk in the coming months is that ISWAP may become deeply rooted in the region by increasingly expanding its footprint. Accordingly, the strengthening of the terrorist group is likely to strike a definitive blow to Cameroon's precarious stability. At the same time, if the country gets dragged into chaos by political instability, ISWAP will profit by exploiting the power vacuum.

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## **The new Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, between continuity and instability**

### **Introduction**

With the end of the Abe era (2012-2020), Japan is once again characterized by significant political instability, particularly in terms of leadership. The government led by Yoshihide Suga lasted only 12 months. Suga has decided not to run again in the primary elections for the leadership of the Liberal Democratic Party (*Jimintō*), ahead of the general elections scheduled for November 2021. This decision is due to the decline in consensus following an uncertain management of the pandemic and the unpopular decision to hold the Olympics, despite the increase in infections.

On September 29, 2021, Fumio Kishida won the majority of votes in the primary elections, becoming the new President of the party. This result led Kishida to assume the position of Prime Minister. Consequently, Kishida will run as a Prime Minister candidate in the upcoming elections. In all likelihood, given the internal divisions among the opposition parties and the dominant position of the Liberal Democratic Party within the Japanese political system, Kishida will lead the new government after the elections.

Kishida is viewed as a leader supported by the party's elders, but lacking a broad popular consensus. Furthermore, his victory is seen as the result of a compromise between the moderate factions and the right of the party, led by Shinzo Abe. Kishida managed to prevail over Taro Kono, his successor as Foreign Minister from 2017 to 2019 and Minister of Defence from 2019 to 2020. Kono was considered the most popular candidate and was supported by the younger members of the party. Furthermore, Kono stood out for a more direct communication style and a certain independence from internal factions, despite his political connection with an important faction leader, the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Taro Aso.

### **The new Prime Minister**

Fumio Kishida became Prime Minister at the age of 64 after a long political career in the LDP. He was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1993 in one of Hiroshima's electoral districts. Between 2007 and 2008 he held the position of Minister for Okinawa affairs in the governments of Yasuo Fukuda and Shinzo Abe. This was a particularly delicate position, since at the time Tokyo was negotiating the reduction of the American military presence on the island.

Kishida sided with the *Kōchikai* faction, assuming the leadership in 2012. This faction represents the centrist and moderate wing of the party. In the past, it has expressed several prime ministers including Hayato Ikeda (1960-1964), Masayoshi Ohira (1978-80), Zenko Suzuki (1980-82) and Kiichi Miyazawa (1991-93) and a long line of prominent ministers. In foreign policy, this faction is the most prudent and moderate, combining the will to consolidate the US-Japan with the need to preserve Article Nine of the Constitution and what remains of Japanese post-war pacifism<sup>1</sup>. In domestic politics, the members of the *Kōchikai* try to find a compromise between policies aimed at economic inclusion and reduction of inequalities and policies aimed at the growth and expansion of international trade (Zakowski, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Article 9 of the Japanese constitution states that: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized". On the gradual overcoming of post-war pacifism in Japan see Oros, 2017; Smith, 2019; Gustafsson, Hagström, and Hanssen, 2018.

Between 2012 and 2017 Fumio Kishida was the Foreign Minister of the Abe government. In this capacity, he was the main supporter and organizer of President Obama's visit to Hiroshima. The visit was considered as a key moment of reconciliation between the two countries. Moreover, it was seen as an opportunity to underline how the US-Japan alliance is based on common values as well as on shared interests (Dian, 2020). In 2017, Kishida left the government to take the leadership of the party's Policy Research Council, a position that is traditionally seen as a steppingstone towards the leadership of the party (Krauss and Pekkanen, 2011).

During his tenure as foreign minister, Kishida moved away from dovish positions in foreign policy, supporting Abe's efforts to strengthen Japanese defence position and consolidate the alliance with the United States. In economic realm, on the contrary, Kishida argued, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, for the promotion of a "new capitalism", more inclusive and attentive to the growing inequalities that characterize Japan. This combination of different positions allowed Kishida to gain the support of both the more conservative faction, linked to Abe and Suga, and the other factions within the party.

### **The Liberal Democratic Party: factions and political dynasties**

Recent events have renewed the attention of analysts and observers towards the nature of the Japanese political system. After a long period of stability at the top, associated with the political leadership of Shinzo Abe, who held the position of Prime Minister from December 2012 to September 2020, Tokyo seems to be returning to a period of instability, at least when it comes to political leadership.

The Japanese political system is characterized by a form of parliamentary government, which, in theory, could favour the alternation between different political parties and coalitions. Nevertheless, the country remains characterized by a "dominant party system", led by the Liberal Democratic Party. Since its creation in 1955, it has only given up power between 1994 and 1996 and between 2009 and 2012 (Krauss and Pekkanen, 2011; Scheiner, 2014).

For this reason, the most important competition takes place with the selection of the President of *Jimintō*, who is then elected Prime Minister. The procedure may vary between two models. The first, used in 2020 for the election of Yoshihide Suga, foresaw only one vote among the party's Diet members. The second, used for the election of Kishida, foresaw a first ballot involving all party members and a runoff reserved for parliamentarians.

The balance between factions is therefore decisive for the selection of leaders. The geography of the different groups is very fluid and complex. However, it is possible to identify the most relevant groups. Until Suga's resignation, in September 2021, the dominant faction was *Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyūkai*, associated with Abe. This faction was founded by Abe's maternal grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi. In the past, this faction was also led by Shintaro Abe (Shinzo Abe's father) and Junichiro Koizumi. This faction comprises revisionist foreign policy hawks, committed to overcoming the limits of post-war pacifism and modifying Article 9. In terms of economic policies, it promotes a reduction the state's role in favour of the market. The *Shikōkai* faction, led by Abe's Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, and *Heisei Kenkyūkai*, favour of Keynesian policies and a stronger role for the state in the economy. Furthermore, they consider a stable relationship with China as a key foreign policy priority. These factions, along with Kishida's *Kōchikai* have occupied a minority position during the past decade.

The other key feature of Japanese politics is the presence of political dynasties, at the top of parties and institutions. The centrality of the factions in the Liberal Democratic Party favours the creation of "dynastic" mechanisms for the transmission of power. Most Japanese leaders inherited their political and electoral base directly from their father or their extended family. This is due to the need to accumulate the three "bans": *jiban* (local electoral base), *kanban* (recognizability of the name), and *kaban* (economic resources). Today's leaders often represent the second or even third

generation of politicians. Kishida's father and grandfather were backbenchers in the Liberal Democratic Party. In addition to Abe (grandson of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, son of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and faction leader Shintaro Abe), other cases are those of Yukio Hatoyama (Prime Minister for the Democratic Party in 2009-2010, grandson of Ichiro Hatoyama, Prime Minister in the 1950s) and Yasuo Fukuda (Prime Minister in 2007-08, son of Takeo Fukuda, Prime Minister between 1976 and 1978). These examples are not isolated. 40% of the *Jimintō* MPs come from a "political dynasty". This phenomenon is not in decline. The next generation is defined by emerging leaders such as Yuko Obuchi, Shinjiro Koizumi, Tatsuo Fukuda, Gaku Hashimoto and Yasutaka Nakasone. Young leaders on the rise with the same trait, being the children of former Prime Ministers (Jain and Kobayashi, 2018). This trend is likely to reinforce the struggle between factions and dynasties, undermining the power of Prime Ministers and their control over the Party and the government.

### **Abe's legacy and the priorities of the new government.**

The new Prime Minister faces many challenges. On the domestic front, the main is the containment of the pandemic, which became more problematic after the Olympics during the summer. Furthermore, the pandemic requires the government to adopt measures to revive economic growth in the short term. Japan also needs to tackle structural problems that affect the country, as the demographic balance. The low birth rate and the aging of the population have generated demographic decline and a negative record in terms of the percentage of active population.

Kishida will confirm the use of the three arrows of Abenomics, expansive fiscal and monetary policies. As for the "third arrow", that of structural reforms, Kishida could give a more progressive imprint, with measures oriented towards the enhancement of welfare, with a slowdown in processes of privatization and liberalization favoured by Abenomics.

On the foreign policy front, Kishida will move along the path traced by Abe, characterized by the consolidation of the alliance and the promotion of a regional order based on the concept of Free and Open Indo Pacific. This concept entails a central role for Japan in cooperating with other democracies in the region to support liberal and democratic norms and rules, avoiding the emergence of a dominant position for China. The central difference with Abe is likely to concern the role of historical memory and the quest to overcome of post-war pacifism. Although in practice Kishida is in favour of an active defence policy, he will probably not focus on political and ideological issues as the idea of "ending the post-war period". With this expression Abe meant the need to overcome Article 9, rethinking the role of the war generation in the history of the country, and looking to the future without necessarily expressing apologies and contrition for the events of World War Two (Dian, 2017).

The government's ability to hold office to last in power will affect the possibility to handle these challenges. The Abe period (2012-2020) and the Koizumi period (2001-2007) were notable exceptions for contemporary Japan. During the post-Cold War period, the country was characterized by weak and short-lived governments. The reasons for the instability of governments are both the low popularity of some of the leaders, and to the competition between factions within the Liberal Democratic Party. To date, it is difficult to predict whether Kishida will be a short-lived Prime Minister or will be able to consolidate his power within the party, guaranteeing himself a longer mandate. The next political elections, scheduled for November 2021, will be a fundamental test. The political domination of the Liberal Democratic Party is likely to continue. The real determining factor seems to be the Prime Minister's ability to transform his position from an expression of a compromise between factions into a leadership capable of creating a consensus that overcomes internal divisions.

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## The Turkish Council role in the new Eurasian regional balance

The VIII Summit of the Turkish Council (*Türk Keneşi*) was held in Istanbul on 11 and 12 November 2021, focusing on the theme "Green technologies and smart cities in the digital age". The meeting was attended by foreign ministers of the member countries of the Turkish Council, as well as Turkmenistan, Hungary and the heads of Turkish cooperation organizations. The main objectives of the Council are the following: to consolidate links between Turkish-speaking countries, develop cooperation in the commercial, economic, transport, energy, tourism, cultural and humanitarian sectors and coordinate efforts to strengthen peace and security<sup>1</sup>. The summit was preceded, on March 31, 2021, by the unofficial meeting - via videoconference<sup>2</sup> - of the Cooperation Council of the Turkish-speaking States' leaders.

The virtual meeting expressed Ankara's desire to strengthen cooperation with the countries of Central Asia and, at the same time, its aspiration to become the fulcrum of the Organization, through the exploitation of its soft power such as historical, religious, and cultural ties, so important for its members. The focus is to create a multi-polar balance in an area where China is the first economic partner, while Moscow is responsible for regional security. Furthermore, the occasion was propitious to exchange greetings on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the independence of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and to express gratitude to the Republic of Turkey for being the first country to recognize their independence of Turkish-speaking States in 1991. This was followed by the first Summit of Heads of Turkish-speaking States (Ankara, 1992), which was quite promising: ambitious objectives were set, such as the free movement of goods and services, the foundation of a common bank for investments and development, integration of communication systems and, above all, the use of Turkey as the main transit hub in the supply of hydrocarbon exports of the new independent states.

The establishment of the International Organization of Turkish Culture (TÜRKSOY) in 1993 was a further step towards future attempts at political cooperation. Important steps ahead in this direction was made with the 2009 Nakhchivan Agreement, which gave way to the creation of the Turkish Council<sup>3</sup>. Since its foundation the Council showed great aspirations, translated in an attempt to cover a wide range of issues: from infrastructure and logistics projects between the Member States, to cooperation in business, education and sport. Bridging the huge gap between the Turkish states, which was created during the previous centuries of "oppressive colonialism and communist regimes"<sup>4</sup>, was (and is still) one of the primary objectives of the Council, which has demonstrated its ability to successfully apply the directives present in the Nakhchivan Agreement.

The Turkish Council welcomed Hungary as an observer in 2018 and, the following year, Turkmenistan (currently 15 countries have that status, which shows up the level of interest and importance it has achieved). In 2019 Uzbekistan has acquired the full membership. The Turkish

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<sup>1</sup> *Eighth Summit of the Organization of Turkic States was held in Istanbul*. Organization of Turkic States, 12.11.2021 [https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/eighth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-istanbul\\_2394](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/eighth-summit-of-the-organization-of-turkic-states-was-held-in-istanbul_2394)

<sup>2</sup> *Начался саммит Совета сотрудничества тюркоязычных государств (The summit of Turkish speaking countries cooperation council has begun)*, inform.kz 31.03.2021 [https://www.inform.kz/ru/nachalsya-sammit-soveta-sotrudnichestva-tyurkoyazychnyh-gosudarstv\\_a3770481](https://www.inform.kz/ru/nachalsya-sammit-soveta-sotrudnichestva-tyurkoyazychnyh-gosudarstv_a3770481); *Turkistan Declaration of the Informal Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States* [https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/turkistan-declaration-of-the-informal-summit-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states\\_2220](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/turkistan-declaration-of-the-informal-summit-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states_2220)

<sup>3</sup> *Nakhchivan Agreement on the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States*. [https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/temel\\_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf](https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/temel_belgeler/nakhchivan-agreement-on-the-establishment-of-the-cooperation-council-of-turkic-speaking-states-1-en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> The Turkic world is on the edge of a historic revival, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/the-turkic-world-is-on-the-edge-of-a-historic-revival-30327>

world is thus becoming stronger not only regionally but also internationally. The commonality of languages and spiritual values, historical and cultural ties of the participating countries, is in fact a powerful tool<sup>5</sup>. In his speech, the Secretary General of TÜRKPA (*Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler Parlamentler Asamblesi, Turkic Speaking Countries Parliamentary Assembly*) Mehmet Süreyya Er highlighted how much the VIII Summit and cooperation between member states - in particular thanks to Kazakhstan<sup>6</sup> - will be remembered as a milestone in terms of strengthening the spirit of unity between brother countries<sup>7</sup>. The drafting of a common textbook of Turkish history for member states<sup>8</sup> will be functional and for this purpose, with the support of the International Organization of Turkish Culture (*Uluslararası Türk Kültürü Teşkilatı, TÜRKSOY*)<sup>9</sup>, the Turkish Academy (*Türk Akademisi*)<sup>10</sup> and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation (*Türk Kültür ve Miras Vakfı*)<sup>11</sup>.

The summit was chaired by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who discussed with the presidents of the member countries the determination of new ways of cooperation with third parties, the establishment of the Turkic Investment Fund (*Türk Yatırım Fonu*) and the approval of Turkic World Vision-2040 (*Türk Dünyası 2040 Vizyonu*), which defines the Organization's<sup>12</sup> medium- and long-term objectives and tasks. The name of the Turkish Council was also changed to "Organization of Turkish States" (*Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı*)<sup>13</sup>, the status of observer was granted to Turkmenistan<sup>14</sup> and the Presidency of the Organization was transferred from Azerbaijan to Turkey.

Interesting and, at the same time, curious in the eyes of external observers, however, is the joining of Hungary as an observer of the Turkish Council and then a member of the Organization of Turkish-speaking Countries, moreover strongly desired by Erdoğan. Hungary even opened a representative office of the Turkish Council in Budapest in 2019<sup>15</sup> and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán promoted the theory that Hungarians are "Qipchaq Turks" (Cumans or *Половцы-Polovtsy*)<sup>16</sup> and Hungary "Turkish Christian land". This accession explains why Hungary is one of the 5 states of the European Union to veto sanctions against Turkey, despite its daily violations of Greek and Cypriot sovereignty. In recent years, there have been significant changes in both Hungary's internal and foreign policy. Thus, while relations with the EU have deteriorated, those with Eastern countries have improved, including China, Russia and Turkey in a context of "opening to the east" of the country. According to this line of action, Budapest tries to develop relations with Turkish countries. Already at the Bishkek Summit (September 2, 2018) Orbán spoke of historical and ethnic ties with

<sup>5</sup> Il "mondo turco" come realtà geopolitica del nostro tempo. La Riscossa, 25.01.2021 <https://www.lariscossa.info/mondo-turco-realta-geopolitica-del-nostro-tempo/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://elbasylibrary.gov.kz/en/news/library-elbasy-signed-memorandum-cooperation-turkpa; Congratulatory Message of Secretary General of Organization of Turkic States on the occasion of 30th Anniversary of Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan>, Organization of Turkic States, 15.12.2021

[https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/congratulatory-message-of-secretary-general-of-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-occasion-of-30th-anniversary-of-independence-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan\\_2420](https://www.turkkon.org/en/haberler/congratulatory-message-of-secretary-general-of-organization-of-turkic-states-on-the-occasion-of-30th-anniversary-of-independence-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan_2420)

<sup>7</sup> *TURKPA attended meeting of Council of Foreign Ministers. Pagina ufficiale del TURKPA*, 11.11.2021 [https://turkpa.org/en/content/news/turkpa\\_news/3294\\_turkpa\\_attended\\_meeting\\_of\\_council\\_of\\_foreign\\_ministers](https://turkpa.org/en/content/news/turkpa_news/3294_turkpa_attended_meeting_of_council_of_foreign_ministers)

<sup>8</sup> *Common Turkic History Textbook, Organization of Turkic States*, 24.04.2021

[https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alarlari/education\\_4/common-turkic-history-textbook\\_18](https://www.turkkon.org/en/isbirligi-alarlari/education_4/common-turkic-history-textbook_18)

<sup>9</sup> TURSOY Official page <https://www.turksoy.org/en>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.tasav.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Official page <http://www.turkishculturalfoundation.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Document (full text) <https://www.turkkon.org/assets/pdf/haberler/turkic-world-vision-2040-2396-97.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> *Turkic Council's name changed to Organization of Turkic States*, Anadolu Agency, 13.11.2021 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkic-council-s-name-changed-to-organization-of-turkic-states/2419633>

<sup>14</sup> *Turkmenistan's new status in Turkic States significant development*, Daily Sabah, 17.11.2021 <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkmenistans-new-status-in-turkic-states-significant-development>

<sup>15</sup> *Turkic Council inaugurates office in Budapest. Top diplomats from Turkey, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan attend inauguration ceremony*. Anadolu Agency, 20.09.2019 <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/energy/energy-diplomacy/turkic-council-inaugurates-office-in-budapest/26673>

<sup>16</sup> The Qipchaqs (or Cumans) were a Turkic nomadic people, originally from Eastern Mongolia (6th century AD) that ruled the Steppes of modern-day Kazakhstan and Southern Russia between the mid-11<sup>th</sup> to the early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Then, following the Mongol invasion, part of their confederation took refuge in the territories of the Kingdom of Hungary, since some Qipchaq groups already migrated there.

the Turkic world, stating that *"this is a unique and strange language, which is related to the Turkic languages. We have always closely followed the cooperation between countries of Turkic identity. Among you we are the people who have moved farthest West, and who also converted to Christianity. So we are a Christian people living in the West, standing on foundations of Hun-Turkic origins; the Hungarians see themselves as the late descendants of Attila"*, also underlining that *"We are living in a new world order, and its history is fundamentally determined by the development of the rising states in the East"*<sup>17</sup>. These ideas have come to the fore in recent years, materializing in the ideology of Turanism, supported by the Hungarian far right, embodied by Jobbik (an ideal continuation of the former pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party ) which criticizes liberalism, globalism and embraces the policy of the "eastern turn".

Uzbekistan's application for membership and Turkmenistan's observer state application to the Council showed that on the tenth anniversary of the Nakhchivan Agreement, the Council was following the path it had set itself. Obviously, the need for a new understanding and alternatives for East-West relations are the main driving force behind the interest in the Council. Initiatives such as the New Silk Road, the Belt and Road or a potential future economic union of Turkish-speaking states can be a game changer. In this context, Azerbaijan's "victory" in the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war has further strengthened the ties between Turkey - directly and indirectly involved in the conflict - Azerbaijan and member countries of the Organization. In this context, President İlham Aliyev was awarded by the Council of Heads of State of the "Supreme Order of the Turkic World" in recognition of the historic victory that ensured the liberation of the territories of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the restoration of its territorial integrity, thus contributing significantly to Turkish unity<sup>18</sup>. Azerbaijan, in fact, is functional to strengthening the Turkish leadership and command role in all these forums, starting with the economic one, such as the World Turkish Business Council (DEİK) and TÜRKPA. Azerbaijan's victory in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the recovery of seven occupied districts surrounding it (as well as the southern part of this enclave centered on the important cultural center of Shusha) would not have been possible without Turkish<sup>19</sup> diplomatic and military assistance.

In the recent past, Russia's relations with Turkey weren't very friendly, and with Azerbaijan's victory in the Nagorno Karabakh war, the bilateral dynamics between Moscow and Ankara have further deteriorated. Turkish diplomacy in the Eurasian region has been revitalized in recent times and the objectives of the Organization of Turkish States, permeated with a strong Panturkism aimed at uniting the Turkish populations of Eurasia, represent a direct challenge to Russia's position as in clear contrast with the Eurasian Economic Union and with the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty of which Moscow is the leader, but also with China (presumed issue of the Uyghurs). Although in the absence of alternatives, it is increasingly cooperating, both economically and militarily (and culturally) with China in the Eurasian region, but there is little chance that Moscow will repeat the mistakes of the past when it comes to increasing Turkish influence in Central Asia.

When Uzbekistan joined the Turkish Council in 2019 as a full member, Tashkent was already playing a constructive role in consolidating multilateral cooperation in Central Asia, so that the same task to perform between Turkish countries was crucial. Turkey's relations with Uzbekistan also moved to a higher level during President Mirziyoyev's regime<sup>20</sup>: Tashkent sees Turkey as an

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<sup>17</sup> *Hungarian rhapsody for Turkic Council*, *Hürriyet Daily News*, 05.10.2018 <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/opinion/teoman-ertugrul-tulun/hungarian-rhapsody-for-turkic-council-137540>

<sup>18</sup> *Mushvig Mehdiyev "President Aliyev Awarded Supreme Order of Turkic World"*, *Caspian News*, 14 nov. 2021 <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/president-aliyev-awarded-supreme-order-of-turkic-world-2021-11-14-0/>

<sup>19</sup> *Turkey challenges Russia, pushes into Central Asia with Organisation of Turkic States From Kazakhstan in the east to Turkey on the Mediterranean, the organisation can be a formidable bloc*. <https://www.siasat.com/turkey-challenges-russia-pushes-into-central-asia-with-organisation-of-turkic-states-2230165/>

<sup>20</sup> *Суть и значение стратегического сотрудничества между Узбекистаном и Турцией* <http://isrs.uz/ru/maqolalar/sut-i-znachenie-strategicheskogo-sotrudnicestva-mezdu-uzbekistanom-i-turciej>



alternative to Russian and Chinese<sup>21</sup> influence and, conversely, Ankara sees Tashkent as a way to expand its influence in Asia. This convergence of interests can be conducive to strengthening the influence of the Turkish Council as an international organization. Furthermore, the observer status obtained by Turkmenistan will renew the relations and energy connections between it and Azerbaijan, especially since, with the signing of the "Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea" (Aktau, Kazakhstan, 2018)<sup>22</sup>, the prospects gas exports from Turkmenistan to Europe via Azerbaijan have increased, thus giving a boost to the Trans-Caspian pipeline. The signing (between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on 21 January 2021) of the memorandum of understanding on the joint exploration and development of the hydrocarbon resources of the "Dostluq" (Friendship) field in the Caspian Sea<sup>23</sup> therefore goes in this direction. Turkmenistan is heavily dependent on China for its natural gas exports and facilitating this alternative gas export path will undoubtedly be strategically advantageous for Ashgabat's energy diplomacy.

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<sup>21</sup> *Uzbekistan as a Gateway for Turkey's Return to Central Asia*, *Insigh Turkey*, 2018 / Volume 20, Numero 4  
<https://www.insightturkey.com/commentaries/uzbekistan-as-a-gateway-for-turkeys-return-to-central-asia>

<sup>22</sup> *Лидеры стран «пятёрки» подписали Конвенцию о правовом статусе Каспийского моря*  
<https://russian.rt.com/ussr/news/544569-kaspiiskii-sammit-podpisanie-deklaraciya>

<sup>23</sup> *Turkmenistan strengthens energy ties with Azerbaijan*, *Center Of Analysis Of International Relations*  
<https://aircenter.az/en/post/turkmenistan-strengthens-energy-ties-with-azerbaijan-622>

## **The tensions on the international energy markets and their potential impact on security and economic recovery in the United States and Europe**

Due also to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was an *annus horribilis* for the US energy sector, especially in the oil & gas field. According to the Energy Information Agency (EIA), in 2020, despite the administration's support, crude oil production fell by 8.0 per cent from 12.2 to 11.3 million barrels per day (mb/d), the highest year-on-year drop in EIA's records<sup>1</sup>. According to the same source, in the same year, natural gas production in the continental US declined from 33,968 to 33,437 billion cubic feet (Bcf), pushed downward by the decline of aggregate demand. In 2021, there has been a partial recovery, with an increase that exceeded the original forecasts. In the natural gas sector, in early September, production estimates were 92.18 bcf/d in 2021 and 95.40 bcf/d in 2022, compared to 91-36 bcf/d in 2020 and the historical record of 93.06 bcf/d in 2019<sup>2</sup>. Although figures remained negative, the oil sector could contain the losses under the estimated level, with -160,000 b/d (11.12 mb/d) compared to an original estimate of -210,000 b/d<sup>3</sup>. The post-pandemic recovery – despite its ups and downs – played an essential role in this regard. The current increase in energy prices is primarily a product of greater economic activity: a positive sign also according to OPEC+, which, in early September, revised its 2022 consumption forecasts upward. However, we are still very far from the 2019 scenario, when – with global demand growing – the United States, thanks to the booming of their unconventional oil and gas reserves, seemed ready to return to play a significant role in the club of the largest energy-exporting countries.

From a certain point of view, it is a widespread problem. Production cuts and the decline of investments in 2020 means that producing countries face problems adapting their supply to the growing demand (Ghaddar, Lawler and Astakhova, 2021). This state of things, coupled with other contingent factors, has led to local shortages, a general increase in energy prices, and the adoption of rationing measures, which conveyed the overall idea that markets were facing new difficulties. In the past months, the producing countries (OPEC+ member countries first) started actively increasing their offer, acting also on the so-called 'baseline' (the production ceiling set for the different members) (Turak, 2021). However, such measures seem to have been unable to keep prices under control. Moreover, since early September, the production's dynamic seems to have slowed down, partly due to the OPEC+ decision to stop operating on the quotas system (Kozhanov, 2021; Fanzeres, 2021). On the demand side, adverse effects soon emerged. In the same weeks when OPEC+ decided to stop increasing its offer, in the United States, EIA's forecasts projected natural gas consumption to decline to 82.5 Bcf/d (-0.7 Bcf/d compared to 2020), followed by a recovery in 2022 but not strong enough to reach the 2020 levels<sup>4</sup>. In the following weeks, with prices further growing (although at far lower levels than in the European market), a new decline in energy demand has been recorded. Due

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. crude oil production fell by 8% in 2020, the largest annual decrease on record, EIA - Energy Information Agency, March 9, 2021. Online: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=47056#> [accessed: October 11, 2021].

<sup>2</sup> U.S. dry gas production to surpass record in 2022 - EIA, Reuters, September 8, 2021. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-dry-gas-production-surpass-record-2022-eia-2021-09-08/> [accessed: October 11, 2021].

<sup>3</sup> U.S. crude output to fall less in 2021 than previously forecast - EIA, Reuters, August 10, 2021. Online: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-crude-output-fall-less-2021-than-previously-forecast-eia-2021-08-10/> [accessed: October 11, 2021].

<sup>4</sup> U.S. natural gas consumption to decline through 2022, led by the electric power sector, EIA - Energy Information Agency, September 10, 2021. Online: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=49496> [accessed: October 11, 2021].

to the existing inflationary pressures, this trend has raised many concerns, especially regarding its potentially adverse effects on the post-pandemic recovery.

The OPEC countries flaunt (?) optimism. According to the organization, the current short-term rise in energy prices should help overcome the supply shortage by the end of the year and lead, in 2022, to a surplus that will stabilize the system (Smith, 2021). Higher prices should also relaunch the US unconventional sector, although – according to the most reliable figures – its offer should not reach the pre-pandemic level before 2024. COVID-19 has heightened the investors' cautiousness. Despite growing prices and some 5,000 actors operating in the unconventional sector, active plants are just 63 per cent of the pre-pandemic figure. However, companies have achieved significant technological improvements, reducing the break-even price to 35 dollars/barrel, compared to 50 dollars/barrel in mid-2019. The main difficulty is to understand what the attitude of the US administration actually is. On the one hand, the decision to resume exploration and development auctions in the federal territories could significantly contribute to the sector's relaunch; on the other hand, the bid for tighter environmental standards saps the national extractive industry's competitiveness (Duesterberg, 2021). In this perspective, the White House's position is pretty ambiguous. It could hardly be different since President Biden seems between a rock and a hard place: on the one hand, it needs to pursue an ambitious environmental strategy (also the strengthen its international role); on the other, it must protect the oil, gas & chemical sector (OG&C), which is crucial in the US economy and, in 2020, according to Deloitte, employed some 1.5 million workers.

In Europe, the lack of domestic reserves makes problems even more pressing. According to Eurostat, in 2020, energy imports from non-EU countries accounted for 757.9 million tons compared to 853.8 million tons in 2019. Due to lower prices, their value declined from 277.5 to 172.3 billion Euros. However, in 2021, the new rise in energy prices confirmed the non-structural nature of this trend. The situation in the different EU countries varies greatly. For example, in Sweden, France or Luxembourg, the role of fossil fuels in electric generation is almost negligible, while in other countries (such as the Netherlands, Poland, Malta, or Cyprus) their weight approaches 60 per cent. Against this backdrop, the provisions of the European Green Deal<sup>5</sup> and – for the relevant part – of the Next Generation EU program are important not only in promoting a smooth transition to more sustainable patterns of energy consumption, but also for their contribution to reducing EU energy dependency. In the last years, some steps have been already made. In 2020, for example, the share of renewable sources overcame that of fossil fuels in electric generation (Redl *et al.*, 2021). However, the analysis of the long-term trends highlights that imports' share in the EU's total fuel consumption has grown from 50.1 per cent in 1990 to 60.7 in 2019<sup>6</sup>. The opening of the *Nord Stream 2* gas pipeline (currently delayed by bureaucratic issues) risks worsening the situation, increasing Russia's already relevant weight among the EU suppliers and giving it another tool of influence. Unsurprisingly, the possibility has already raised concerns in Poland and Ukraine, which see the Russian project as an effort to marginalize them in a growingly interconnected energy market.

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<sup>5</sup> *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of The Regions - The European Green Deal*, Brussels, December 11, 2019. Online: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0002.02/DOC_1&format=PDF) [accessed: October 11, 2021].

<sup>6</sup> *Energy statistics - An overview*, Eurostat, Brussels, May 2021. Online: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Energy\\_statistics\\_-\\_an\\_overview#Energy\\_dependency866](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Energy_statistics_-_an_overview#Energy_dependency866) [accessed: October 11, 2021].

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## Maritime trade routes and oil and gas transportation across the Arctic

For some years now, ice melting in the Arctic region due to climate change and global warming has been leading to an increase in the possibilities of trade and transport of goods within the area, as well as from the latter to other regions of the world and viceversa. This change mainly concerns sea trade (after all, 90% of global trade still occurs on the sea, which is expected to host a doubling of tonnage in the next 15 years)<sup>1</sup>. In fact, albeit to varying degrees and not without pollution effects, the more the melting of Arctic ice increases, the more the surface of navigable water and the quality of navigation in the Arctic routes tend to raise, especially during the summer. This is particularly relevant for the transport of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG), that is to say two of the main goods already traded through the Arctic<sup>2</sup>. It implies possible future dramatic changes, since navigation along the region (potentially capable of connecting almost 75% of the global population) is generally more difficult than in many other areas of the globe, often dealing with extensive ice, extreme temperatures, visibility problems, mapping deficiencies and possible communication troubles, as well as requiring boats and crews specifically prepared for complex environments, high insurance costs and, at least to some vessels, fees for icebreakers support<sup>3</sup>. Assuming ice melting will not stop or undergo radical slowdowns in the coming years, Arctic summers could be almost completely ice free by 2035, although full development of regional maritime routes as dense trade areas will likely require very many investments and no less than a few decades<sup>4</sup>. That said, Arctic routes are significantly shorter than several alternative sea lanes more frequently and widely used for hydrocarbon and other commodity flows, particularly between Asia, Europe and the Americas. Moreover, these routes must not infrequently pass through Panama and Suez canals, Cape Horn, Cape of Good Hope, Straits of Malacca and Bab el Mandeb, that is choke points easier to navigate, but where there may exist, if not any limitations regarding the size of the ships, greater political and security risks<sup>5</sup> (which on the other hand in the next few decades could also increase in Arctic waters, due after all to almost inevitable increases in economic and military activities brought by ice melting<sup>6</sup>). All this explains why some of the main countries of the world, including the US, Canada, Russia and China, are investing significantly to improve their navigation and exploitation abilities in the Arctic

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<sup>1</sup> There are four types of (non military) transport that it is possible to undertake in the Arctic seas: destination transport, when a ship sails to arrive in the Arctic, conducts some activities (e.g. for research, tourism, fishing, etc.) and then sails back to the south; intra-Arctic transport: it consists in any activity conducted for connecting two or more Arctic states; trans-Arctic navigation, which includes voyages for trade purposes across the Arctic Ocean from Pacific to Atlantic oceans or vice versa; cabotage, which consists in shipping domestic goods by sea between ports in the same Arctic state. See F. Pace, *Arctic region, climate change and multidimensional security*, LUISS 'Guido Carli', Dept. of Political Science, MA Thesis, 2021, p. 97, available through the following website: <https://tesi.luiss.it/>

<sup>2</sup> The LNG cargoes who travelled the Northern Sea Route in 2019 burned about 239,000 tons of fuel, compared to 6,000 in 2017 (in addition to the release of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, there is also that of soot, which contributes to global warming and ice melting in the Arctic, increasing the absorption of sunlight). See the link below: <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/02/25/rotte-artiche-riscaldamento-globale/>

<sup>3</sup> Just to give a rough idea, over 200,000 dollars for the support of merchant ships of 30,000 tons.

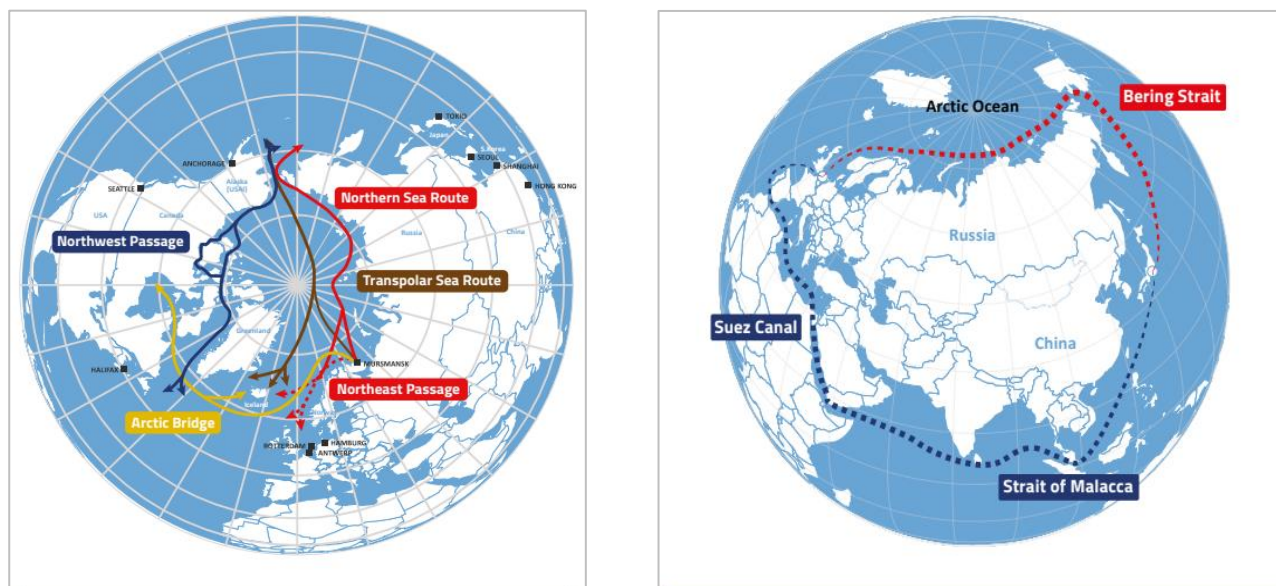
<sup>4</sup> See also the following websites: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/article/arctic-summer-sea-ice-could-be-gone-by-2035>; <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/commercial-shipping-northern-sea-route.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> For a brief review of the events that brought temporary closures of the Suez Canal in the last 150 years, refer to the following links: <https://www.rainews.it/dl/rainews/media/Suez-Prima-della-Ever-Given-tutte-le-crisi-che-hanno-portato-alla-chiusura-del-canale-in-passato-d9c18820-13b6-4d21-8c84-0fc727f1cf15.html#foto-1>

<sup>6</sup> Please refer to A. Todorov, *Assessment of Threats Related to Maritime Crimes in the Arctic*, «Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya», 2019, vol. 63, n. 9, pp. 104-111: <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2019-63-9-104-111>

routes. In this sense, the planned acquisition of new icebreakers by Moscow (which holds the numerical record), Washington, Ottawa and Beijing, is only one of the most evident indicators<sup>7</sup>.

Fig. 1 – Main Arctic sea routes and Northeast Passage vs. route through Strait of Malacca - Suez Canal



Source: <https://www.assoporti.it/media/6847/arctic-route-2020-isp-srm.pdf> (dati S.R.M. - Intesa San Paolo, 2020)

Although to varying degrees, and according to different timelines, the main routes are benefiting and will likely benefit in the future from the Arctic sea ice melting are the Northeast Passage, the Northwest Passage and the Transpolar Route; some of their main features are listed below:

- the Northeast Passage (NEP) connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the seas of Norway, Barents, Kara, Laptev, East Siberia, Chulki and Bering; over 13700 km long from Yokohama to Rotterdam, it is the shortest route to connect Asia and Europe. According to estimates, it would short commercial shipping time from 20 to over 40% if compared to the route passing through the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean, reducing the navigation period from 7 to 14 days (depending on the starting and ending points, where the entire navigation of the Suez route would be about 32 days on average). To go from Yokohama to Hamburg, the travel distance and days would be reduced by 36% and 44% respectively. Observing NEP from south to north (see figure 1), after a portion relating to northern European countries and especially Norway, the route, between the islands of Novaya Zemlya and the Bering Strait, includes the so-called Northern Sea Route, which is under the control of the state-owned Russian energy company Rosatom. Similar to Canada with the Northwest Passage, Moscow

<sup>7</sup> Including the most powerful nuclear icebreaker in the world (2020), capable of breaking ice almost 3 meters thick with its 173 meters long, 34 wide and a displacement of 33,540 tons, among units in service, in construction or planned to be built, the Russian fleet would count well over 40 icebreakers, while the US would have 3 (plus 6 under construction) and Canada 18 (plus two under construction), with China inaugurating its second in 2019, and having at least one under construction, that is a nuclear powered unit costing 142 million dollars, 152 meters long and 30 wide, with a displacement of 30,000 tons. Through its National Institute of Oceanography, Italy acquired its first icebreaker (made in Norway - 1995) in 2019, using it for scientific research purposes, both in the Arctic and Antarctica (in the first area, moreover, Italy operates, through its Navy, with two NATO research vessels in the context of the High North marine geophysics campaign, although these have limited ice navigation capabilities, and are therefore not classifiable as real icebreakers).

See M. Cortellari et al., *op. cit.*, e F. Pace, *cit.*, pp. 45, 53; see also: <https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2021/05/06/canada-to-build-two-polar-icebreakers-for-high-arctic-operations/> ; <https://www.osservatorioartico.it/laura-bassi-conclude-attivita-artico/>  
<https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2020/8/19/nato-looks-to-replace--pair-of-rd-vessels>



considers the Northern Sea Route is included in its 'inland waters'<sup>8</sup>, but if compared to Ottawa it tends to insist for greater participation with respect to its commercial passages, for example by demanding the use of its own pilots or icebreakers (though this might change in the future<sup>9</sup>), in addition to formal requests for transit. Between 2011 and 2018, the merchant traffic of the Northern Sea Route increased from just over 3 to over 20 million tons, and between 2016 and 2019 the ship traffic rose by 58%, while in the first half of 2020, despite the spread of Covid-19, its transits increased, compared to the same period of 2019, from 855 to 935; in all, in 2020, the Northern Sea Route host the transit of over 30 million tons of goods, including 18 million tons of liquefied natural gas. In absolute terms, this is certainly still little compared to the flows of other international sea routes<sup>10</sup>, but these trends are in any case rather impressive. Among those concerning the Arctic, the whole Northeast Passage route is the easiest to navigate, so that it is very likely it will result the first to fully develop in the coming decades (when it could host, according to recent estimates, almost 5% of world trade)<sup>11</sup>. After all, in February 2021, that is for the first time in winter, a LNG tanker, the *Christophe de Margerie*, was able to cover a long and complex part of such route; during the outward trip, it was not escorted by any icebreaker. The vessel did transport Russian LNG from the port of Sabetta, in northwestern Siberia, to Jiangsu area, in China<sup>12</sup>. For the Russian company Sovcomflot, one of the world's leading hydrocarbon shipping operators, this shows the Northern Sea Route can now be navigable, potentially, at all times of the year. To increase the transport of LNG along the route, the company plans to build 18 new LNG icebreaker cargos between 2023 and 2025. Russia, moreover, has planned to raise the merchant traffic of the Northern Route up to 80 million tons in 2024, 90 million in 2031 and up to 130 million after 2031<sup>13</sup>. After all, it is precisely in connection with the Northern Sea Route that the Polar Silk Road is expected to be built in the next years. The latter, which is the northern component of the New Chinese Silk Road, does represent a strategic goal to Beijing imports from Eurasia, especially for energy supply. The Polar Silk Road, which according to recent estimates would save China up to 127 billion dollars in annual transport costs, seems to be consistent with the economic-energy and infrastructural partnership launched in the Arctic by Moscow and Beijing (huge Chinese

<sup>8</sup> According to the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (1982,1996), the internal maritime waters of the State are those within the baselines – i.e., simplifying, a sea space generally very close to the coast (such as bays), where normally its laws find complete and unconditional application as within its boundaries; in these waters the state regulates *inter alia* the use of resources and the passage of ships. On the various legal categories used to determine the effectiveness and level of sovereignty of states over maritime spaces, please refer to the contents of the following links:

[https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1221515.pdf?\\_160839248850](https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1221515.pdf?_160839248850)

[https://sidigimare.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/glossario\\_iv\\_edizione.pdf](https://sidigimare.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/glossario_iv_edizione.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Also because of the need to increase trade flows along the route; on 3 September, 2021, President Vladimir Putin said Russia will not impose restrictions on other countries using the Northern Sea Route: <https://tass.com/economy/1333737>

<sup>10</sup> Almost 19,000 ships passed through the Suez Canal in 2020, carrying more than 10% of goods globally, including 7% of world oil, while the same year along the Northern Sea Route were about 300.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/commercial-shipping-northern-sea-route.pdf> (p. 11, 20-21).

<sup>12</sup> The journey did last 11 days and 10 hours. On the way back, the ship was accompanied by the Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker '50 Let Pobedy', from Cape Dežnev, the easternmost point of the Asian continent and the westernmost point of the Bering Strait, to the end of the route. The most difficult part was through the Chukchi Sea and the East Siberian Sea, two Arctic seas particularly risky for navigation.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/coal/102720-russia-approves-arctic-strategy-up-to-2035>

capitals are after all significantly contributing to several development projects in the region, not only in Russia)<sup>14</sup>.

Fig. 2 – Arctic route by Christophe de Margerie (2021)



Source: <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/02/25/rotte-artiche-riscaldamento-globale/>

- the Northwest Passage connects the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean through the Arctic archipelago of Canada and the Arctic Ocean (for a total distance of 8581 nautical miles). In connecting East Asia and Western Europe, it allows to save about 10,000 km compared to the route along the Panama Canal. Considered by Canada in its inland waters (while the US instead equates it to an 'international strait'), its navigation is generally more difficult than the Northeast Passage and the Northern Sea Route, due to both seabed conformation and older and thicker ice blocks. Even compared to the route along the Suez Canal (which is long 10,523 nautical miles), the North West Passage (NWP) allows significant navigation time savings, i.e. 18.5%. In addition, on average the total fuel consumption along the Suez route would be around 3275 tons, while for the NWP it would be 1994 tons. An important feature of the NWP is the lack of a fee system for its navigation (which is present instead in the route via Suez); this moreover should not change, at least in the short term (after all, the imposition of taxes on the transits along the route could decrease its use, which is still quite limited)<sup>15</sup>;
- the Transpolar Route connects the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans through the Arctic Ocean, passing near the North Pole. Currently, it is the shortest Arctic sea route and the only one that certainly passes entirely in international waters, thus not subject to forms of control and

<sup>14</sup> On Arctic maritime routes cf. F. Pace, *op. cit.*, p. 96 ff.; B. Santorio, *La corsa all'Artico*, in «Analisi Difesa», 2021: <https://www.analisdifesa.it/2021/06/la-corsa-allartico-navigabile-conseguenze-geopolitiche-e-strategiche/>; in addition, see: <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/02/25/rotte-artiche-riscaldamento-globale/> <https://www.assoporti.it/media/6847/arctic-route-2020-isp-srm.pdf> [https://businessindexnorth.com/sites/b/businessindexnorth.com/files/binrapport2019\\_small.pdf](https://businessindexnorth.com/sites/b/businessindexnorth.com/files/binrapport2019_small.pdf); cf. also M. Di Liddo – F. Manenti, *Competizione fra Stati e corsa alle risorse: geopolitica dell'Artico*, Ce.S.I., Roma, pp. 4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Please refer to the sources mentioned in the previous note.



taxation by littoral states. However, it can only be travelled at certain times of the year and with icebreaker boats or double acting tankers, that is cargo ships with the same performance capabilities both on the high seas and in frozen waters. It is presumed that, compared to the other main Arctic sea lanes, it will require a longer time to be developed as a route open to dense trade maritime fluxes<sup>16</sup>.

More or less gradually, in addition to shorter and cheaper intercontinental navigation, the increase in the navigability of Arctic routes may correspond to an increase in the revenues of some countries in the region, linked not only and not much to the payment of ship transit fees, but rather to the development of infrastructures to cope with increasing flows of commercial traffic. Although in a long-term perspective, and not without uncertainties and perhaps possible setbacks, this process seems important for the transport and market of hydrocarbons and other goods for Arctic states, as well as non-Arctic countries involved in productive activities and import/export relations concerning the area. For example, we observed how the phenomenon in question is already relevant for the relations between China and Russia (so that it could also assume a more extensive geopolitical significance, going beyond the energy-commercial domain); furthermore, it could involve, perhaps already in the short-medium term, significant developments also for Italy, not only for the energy relations binding Rome to Arctic countries such as Russia and Norway<sup>17</sup>, but also for potential opportunities for Italian companies in the port, infrastructural and shipbuilding sectors (e.g. for oil and LNG cargo ships), as well as for the export of low environmental impact systems and technologies for navigation in complex maritime environments. After all, in such business areas our country is already active with respect to the Arctic region, specifically through companies such as Leonardo, e-Geos and Fincantieri. That said, in the medium and long term the shift of hydrocarbon and other transport flows towards the Arctic could have a negative impact on trade flows along the Mediterranean Sea (which account for 20% of maritime trade): due to this, it also seems important Italy be equipped with projects, programs and wide-ranging investments aimed at increasing the competitiveness of its national seaport system.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Italy gets 11.1% of its oil imports from Russia, as well as 42.9% of its natural gas imports, while from Norway it receives 2.7% of its oil imports and just under 10.2% of its gas imports - although partially, a part of this hydrocarbon mix is also moved by ships along southern Arctic areas, where, among other things, Eni has been working for years with exploration and production activities in the Barents Sea; the company also has activities in Alaska (USA) and Greenland (Denmark). See the data available at the website below:  
[https://dgsaie.mise.gov.it/pub/sen/relazioni/relazione\\_annuale\\_situazione\\_energetica\\_nazionale\\_dati\\_2020.pdf](https://dgsaie.mise.gov.it/pub/sen/relazioni/relazione_annuale_situazione_energetica_nazionale_dati_2020.pdf) (pp. 10, 157, 164); please also refer to the relevant web pages at the following link: <https://www.eni.com/it-IT/eni-nel-mondo.html>

## **Acronyms list**

ASWJ: Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jamaah

AU: African Union

CAR: Central African Republic

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

ISWAP: Islamic State's West Africa Province

JAS: Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād

MINUSCA: United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Central African Republic

MNJTF: Multinational Joint Task Force

MSF: Mozambique Special Forces

M23: March 23 Movement

RDF: Rwanda Defence Force

RPA: Rwanda Patriotic Army

RPF: Rwandan Patriotic Front

R2P: Responsibility to Protect

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SAMIM: Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique

UNAMID: United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur

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