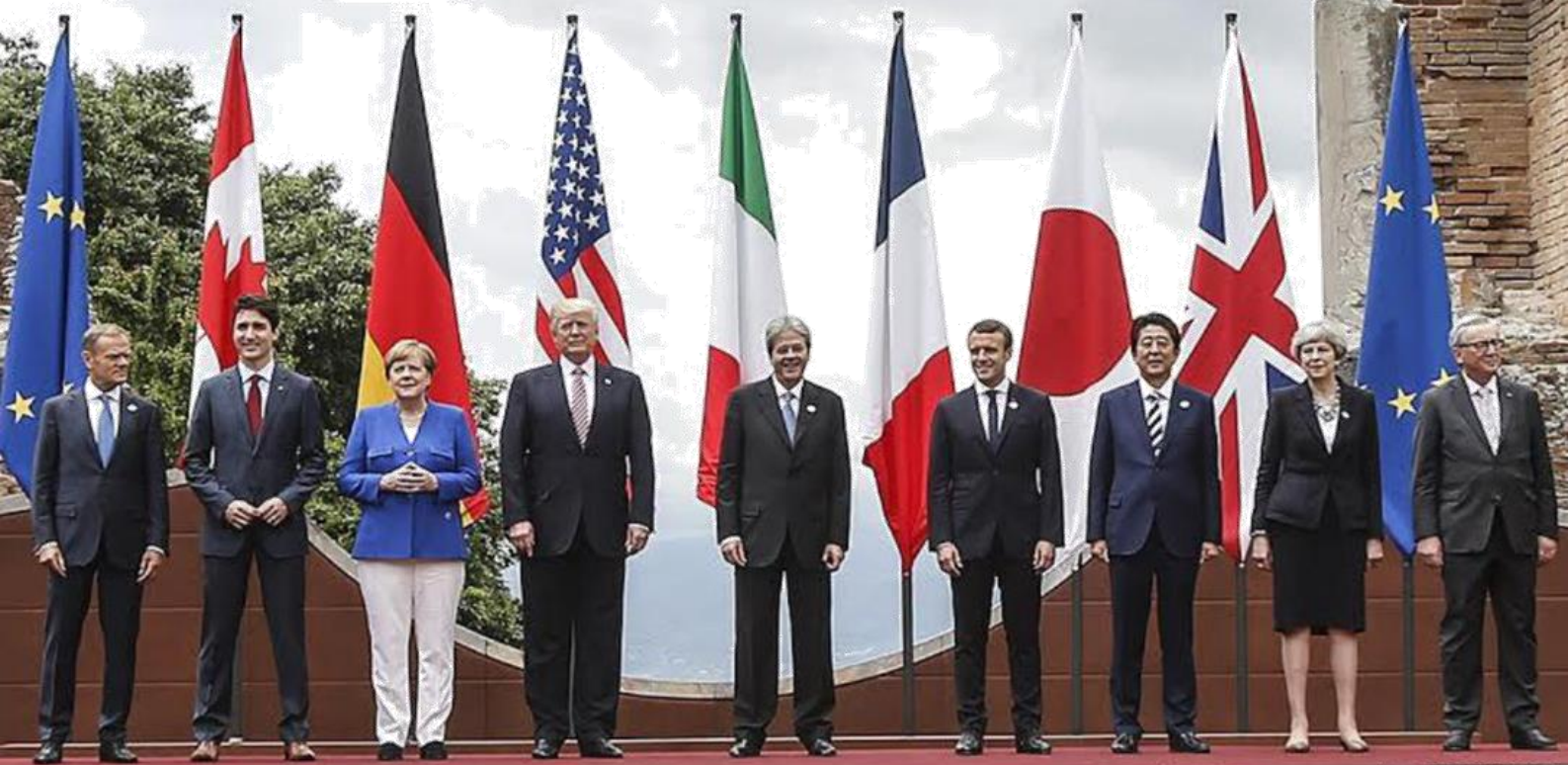

EU Foreign Policy Overview

May 2017



G7 2017 TAORMINA

EU Foreign Policy
Research Group

Dear Readers,

Slowly but consequently, we arrived at the end of the project of EU Foreign Policy Research Group with the May overview being the last monthly report produced by our team. This last period of monitoring the world-wide events gave us, however, a lot of material, being one of the most eventful months we have so far described.

The first foreign visit of President Trump to Saudi Arabia and Israel and his participation at the G7 and NATO summits brought significant consequences with the US withdrawal from the Paris agreement among others. Ongoing tensions on the Korean peninsula with provocative launches of missiles by North Korea leave the question of the regional security still open, especially with the new South Korean president taking the office. NATO has a chance to become an area of rivalry between EU and Turkey as European countries allegedly plan to block the possibility of organising the next NATO summit at the Turkish soil.

For the last months of close monitoring the developments in each region, we have noted numerous patterns and discovered new challenges that may be relevant from the point of view of the EU and the whole world. The least to say, the US seem to willingly give up the role of the “leader of free world”, as some experts have predicted after Donald Trump was elected. We decided to collect those patterns and challenges and describe and analyse them in a separate publication that will be issued in the upcoming weeks.

We cordially invite you to read the May overview and the following publication, as well as keep the interest in the EU foreign policy and ongoing developments in the world, as we may be currently experiencing an important shift within international affairs, the consequences of which are hard to predict.

Kinga Jaromin
Head of EU Foreign Policy
Research Group



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Balázs Kele

The month of May was an intensive period for Nigeria, where three important developments took place. Firstly, 82 Chibok schoolgirls were released from the captivity of Boko Haram. Three years ago, in April 2014, around 300 Chibok girls were kidnapped by the extremists, which resulted in a world-wide campaign to free them, drawing international attention to Nigeria and its fight against Boko Haram. In May, 82 of the captured girls were freed in exchange for five Boko Haram leaders (Maclean and Ross, 2017). The second development concerns the health status of incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari. The health status of the president has been a relevant topic for a long time in Nigeria as Buhari often leaves the country for medical tests in Europe. In May, he visited his doctors in London (Al-Jazeera, 2017a). As authorities have not shared any details about the health status of the ageing president, rumours started to circulate. The third development regarding Nigeria is the so-called war on corruption, which was launched by President Buhari to improve the economy of the country. It seems that a ground-breaking success is still far despite numerous actions undertaken by the authorities (Soyombo, 2017).

Newly inaugurated French president, Emmanuel Macron made his first trip outside of Europe. Macron visited Mali, where he met with President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita and vowed for speeding up the process of stabilisation of the Sahel region. In Gao, Macron visited the French contingent, which guards the volatile peace in Northern Mali, where separatists and Islamists fight against each other and governmental troops. Macron also urged the European allies, especially Germany, to increase their contribution to the stability of the region (Pennetier, 2017). It has a symbolic meaning that the first steps of the French president outside Europe led to Mali. It was an attempt to demonstrate Macron's dedication to resolve the ongoing clashes in West Africa.

This month did not bring any change in South Sudan, where ethnic tensions and human rights violations happen on daily basis. According to UN observers, in the town of Yei, pro-government forces looted, raped and tortured civilians between July 2016 and January 2017 (Miles, 2017). Besides ethnic tensions and the struggle for power between Dinkas and Nuers, the grim image of starvation is also an inevitable threat to the people of South Sudan. Due to desertification, climate change and the lack of rain during the rainy season, the yield was less than expected, which caused famine in the whole of Eastern Africa – from Somalia through Uganda to South Sudan (Al-Jazeera, 2017b).

South Sudan is in an especially bad condition as Red Cross, FAO and other organisations have decided to limit the access to the country due to the civil war and the persisting threat for international aid workers.

The situation is dire also in Somalia, where the authorities continue to fight a terrorist group al-Shabaab. At the London Somalia Conference 2017, President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (aka. Farmajo) vowed for the end of the arms embargo against his country. As he argued, the Somali army is in need for heavy weapons in the war against al-Shabaab (Mohamed, 2017). The terrorist group is a menace not just for Somalia but for the security of the whole region. It managed to carry out several successful attacks in the neighbouring Kenya. For example, police officers were killed as they run over an al-Shabaab planted landmine close the Somali border (Al-Jazeera, 2017c). Moreover, recently Somali pirates reactivated their activities and implemented several attacks against ships passing close to the coast (Gettleman, 2017). As a result of the London Somalia Conference 2017, HR/VP Federica Mogherini announced €200 million financial aid package to support the Somali government (EU External Action Service, 2017a). Just like South Sudanese people, Somalis are also facing starvation due to the same reason (Al-Jazeera, 2017d). However, the situation in Somalia is not that grim, as governmental forces are more cooperative with the relevant international organizations and try to secure their work in Somalia.

Finally, on the monthly meeting of EU foreign ministers, the new chairman of African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat participated as an honoured guest, while the main topic amongst the ministers was the European-African partnership. Federica Mogherini underlined the importance of the partnership and in the end of the year, in November Africa-EU summit will take place in Ivory Coast, which clearly draws the attention to the cooperation between the two continents (EU External Action, 2017b).

China and East Asia



**Evelyn
Shi**

The turbulent motions in international affairs in the past months have taken a possible turning point in May. Angela Merkel has clearly declared herself against an unconditioned alliance with the US due to President Trump's unreliable behaviour. Japan also seems to attempt to loosen its ties with the US. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is seeking a constitutional amendment by 2020, which would allow the existence of Japanese self-defence forces in order to resist military threats from the neighbouring countries.

Furthermore, South Korea's position on foreign policies seem precarious since the new Head of State Moon Jae-in, was elected. The improving relationship with the US (that the US seemed very eager to settle before a new president was elected) could be at stake, depending on how President Moon will act in the ongoing crisis with North Korea. While the US administration is still confident of their policies towards Pyongyang veering away from the former "strategic patience" under President Obama to a more sanctioning approach, President Moon Jae-in seeks for a dialogue instead of a conflict with North Korea, since his predecessor's approach did not succeed in ending NK's nuclear programme. He would be even prepared to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un under certain conditions, for example, a pledge by Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear and missile programmes. He also supports the reopening of the Kaesong industrial complex, a joint North-South project that was regarded as a symbol of cross-border cooperation until it was "temporarily" closed in early 2016.

However, he has made it clear that he would not tolerate advances in North Korea's nuclear programme, warning that any attack on South Korean soil would invite a devastating military response. But it seems rather unlikely for North Korea to abandon the tests, in order to sustain the domestic authority or to prove its power to the international community, especially the US and China. In fact, Pyongyang has performed three missile tests in this month, one of the missiles splashing down within Japan's exclusive economic zone, an area of sea where commercial ships are known to operate.

Like several previous North Korean tests, the timing of the last launch came close to a key international event: the G7-Summit in Italy, where Japan's Prime Minister met with US President Donald Trump and five other leaders from some world's most powerful countries. The other ones were launched chronologically close to the US-China summit in Florida last month and the Belt-and-Road Summit in Beijing at the beginning of May.

Despite a strong international criticism towards Pyongyang's actions, North Korea is not alienated due to the support from Russia. For instance, a new cargo ship was just launched between Russia and North Korea that also passes China. As part of growing political and economic ties, Russia and North Korea have also signed agreements to increase bilateral trade to \$1 billion by 2020 and build a railway from the Russian border to North Korea. The two countries have signed mutual extradition treaties, which human rights activists have said will worsen an existing problem of Russia deporting North Korean asylum seekers to face execution or labour camps in their homeland.

With the new head of state, South Korea seems more open to better their relationship with Asian countries such as North Korea, or even China. President Moon stated his openness to negotiating the recently deployed THAAD system, which China opposes. Improving alliances with North Korea and China would thus harm its relationship with the US, who implemented the anti-ballistic missile system.

Moon's presidency will begin immediately, rather than after the customary two-month transition period – an arrangement forced by Park's abrupt impeachment in December, that was followed by her removal from the office by a constitutional court ruling in March. The criminal trial about her corruptive affairs, that could send the country's former leader to lifelong imprisonment, has begun while Park has denied any wrongdoing.

Although China has been eclipsed in the background during the mentioned events, it is notable that they held a major conference on the Belt and Road Initiative in Beijing earlier this month. However, the project will not easily gain the approval of the European leaders, whereof some are criticising China's absent entrance-policy. There has been no unified EU policy towards the initiative, but German Chancellor Angela Merkel turned down the invitation to the summit. In fact, only one G7-leader, namely the Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, attended the event that President Xi Jinping initialised as an attempt to burnish his credentials as a responsible world leader in times, where the global leaders like the US and the UK turn away from globalisation.

The One Belt One Road initiative supposedly has the potential to massively overshadow the US' post-war Marshall reconstruction plan, involving about 65% of the world's population, by building massive amounts of infrastructure and connecting the countries around the globe. However, Western diplomats are concerned what China's true intentions are behind this project, especially how much involvement non-Chinese companies will be allowed. The EU should be aware of the benefits this initiative can bring to the international community but it should not play along Chinese rules without having a say.

Middle East and North Africa



**Stefan
Pfalzer**

Saudi Arabia became the destination of US President Trump's first ever trip as incumbent, shortly before he went on to visit Israel. The visit in Riyadh also saw a summit of Arab leaders focussing on ways to fight terrorism. Donald Trump once again named Iran as a major sponsor of terrorism, further demonising the country as the US took the Riyadh summit to sign a \$110 billion weapons deal with Saudi Arabia. As this deal was signed, Iranians cast their ballots to re-elect President Hassan Rouhani with 57% of votes with a turnout of 73%, defeating hard-line cleric Ebrahim Raisi (Patrikarakos 2017; Jafari 2017).

The EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini congratulated Rouhani for the strong mandate he is given for his second term (Bolongaro 2017). The EU welcomed the results as they are a public approval of President Rouhani's rapprochement between Iran and the West, especially the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement slowing Iran's nuclear program in return for economic sanctions relief. The EU continues to support the political direction Iran has chosen as many European investors and businesses are waiting at Iran's doorstep.

Shortly before US President Trump began his journey to the Middle East, his administration renewed the sanctions relief for Iran, despite Trump himself calling the JCPOA agreement, passed during the tenure of his predecessor Barack Obama, the "worst deal ever". However, some new sanctions were issued against individuals and a Chinese business alleged to support Iran's missile programme (BBC 2017). The lifting of sanctions means that US businesses could theoretically do business with Iran. However, this remains unlikely as the Trump administration continues to use strong rhetoric condemning Iran for destabilising the region and could potentially impose terrorism sanctions on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the armed forces controlled by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (Ashford 2017, Shear & Baker 2017). The IRGC and the Quds Forces commanded by Qasim Soleimani are engaged in conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. This involvement is the reason why the US condemns Iran for fuelling sectarian violence and sponsor terrorism.

Amid the Riyadh summit, some Iranian officials were quick to point out what they believed to be hypocrisy: Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif pointed out that while Trump was attacking Iran from the "bastion of democracy & moderation" in Riyadh, Iran was holding democratic elections.

President Rouhani responded to Trump's allegations that Iran funded, armed and trained terrorists and militias by pointing out that Saudi Arabia had given close to \$100 billion to former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s. He stated that those pretending to fight terrorism were in fact funding it (Jafari 2017).

What could the renewed hostilities between Iran and the US mean for the EU? While Iran is interested in complying with the JCPOA agreement in order to pursue its policies for economic development, stimulate growth, diminish unemployment and attract foreign investors, it probably will not comply at any cost. If the US were to continuously demonise Iran and eventually impose new paralysing sanctions, Iran could breach the JCPOA agreement and renew the efforts to pursue its nuclear program in an effort to deter its regional adversaries from any military aggression. While this option does not seem very likely at the moment, supporters of the multilateral agreement worry of the alternative to the status quo.

The US' weapons deals seek to reassure regional allies as well as satisfy the needs of the US military industry, it is not conducive to stability in the Middle East.

The EU will be interested in keeping good relations with Iran and will not feel beholden to the US and its isolation policy amid a diplomatic cool down between European leaders and Trump during G7 and NATO meetings in Italy and Belgium.

Russia and Eastern Europe



**Kinga
Jaromin**

The Victory Day was like always solemnly celebrated in Russia, with a large parade on the Red Square in Moscow as a culmination point of the festivities. This year, however, the parade was rather a demonstration of Russia's isolation than strength, as the only foreign leader who appeared next to Vladimir Putin was newly elected and openly pro-Russian President of Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon.

A couple of days later Sergey Lavrov arrived to the US in order to meet with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and President Donald Trump. The meeting later was heavily criticised for a number of reasons, including the absence of American press representatives who were not invited by the White House, despite the fact that the photographer of Mr Lavrov was present in the room and managed to capture exclusive photos from the meeting. Another scandalous aspect was a date of the Lavrov's visit which happened only a day after President Trump dismissed FBI Director James B. Comey, responsible for investigating his ties to Russia. Finally, allegedly President Trump revealed during the meeting highly classified information regarding the Islamic State which brought another wave of critic on him. Russian authorities, however, denied this allegation.

The controversies appeared also in Russia's relations with Estonia and Republic of Moldova. Both countries decided to expel Russian diplomats without disclosing the reason.

While the issue of Russian propaganda and the information war is still a popular topic in Europe, Russia is also treating this issue as a priority. President Putin has signed a decree on a new strategy for the development of Russia's information society from 2017-2030 which envisages, among others, protecting critical information infrastructure using state anti-hacking resources and encryption in all federal electronic correspondence and replacing imported software and computer equipment with domestic products across government institutions.

At the same time, Russia enforces more strict measures in the area of information technologies against its own population. A new bill banning anonymous users from using online messenger apps has been submitted to the Russian parliament. The plans would require users of apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram to identify themselves with their cell phone numbers.

New legislation adopted this month included also changes in the law on presidential elections. Numerous changes were introduced, among them the one concerning the date of the elections. According to the new way of determining the date, next presidential elections will be held on 18 March 2018 that is the fourth anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, which is celebrated in Russia as the Day of Crimea's Reunification with Russia, a powerful message sent by President Putin to Russian people.

Ukraine decided this month to introduce more sanctions on Russia, which this time were directed to Russian internet companies, blocking the access to such popular websites like Vkontakte, Odnoklassniki and search engine Yandex. Economic sanctions, including the freezing of assets and a ban on transactions and broadcasting, were also introduced against the largest Russian television networks and media outlets, namely TV Tsentr, RBK, VGTRK, NTV Plus, Zvezda, TNT, REN, and OTR. On another note, the EU visa waiver for Ukraine was finally signed. The agreement will be implemented since 11 June.

In Moldova, the parliament adopted the change of electoral regime introducing the mixed electoral system, which will be implemented in the parliamentary elections planned for the next year. As we mentioned in the April's EU Foreign Policy Overview, the project was a proposal of President Igor Dodon's Socialist Party and followed a debate of the possibility of introducing uninominal electoral system brought up by the main country's oligarch, Vlad Plahotniuc. The vote was highly criticised by European partners of Moldova, for example, the Members of European Parliament from EPP and ALDE, as it is clear that the move is supposed to help to ensure the victory of Vlad Plahotniuc's Democratic Party in the next year's elections.

The European Parliament decided even to postpone the disbursement of €100 million financial assistance to Moldova, granted earlier this year. The decision caused also limited citizens' protests, however, there is a low chance that they will have any effect.

Another important but less expected development included the arrest of the mayor of the Moldovan capital city Chisinau Dorin Chirtoacă citing the corruption charges. The decision had serious political consequences as the Liberal Party announced its withdrawal from the ruling coalition explaining the arrest of Chirtoacă as politically motivated. Although the ruling Democratic Party claims it controls the majority in the parliament, the snap elections cannot be ruled out.

Finally, the planned increased border cooperation between Moldova and Ukraine has come into effect as the first joint checkpoint at the Transnistrian section of their border, i.e. at the biggest border crossing point in the area, Kuchurgan-Pervomaisk has been opened. The joint checkpoint was a latest reason for tensions between Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities, as the transit of Transnistrian goods will now only be allowed with the necessary documentation issued by Moldovan authorities.

Turkey and Caucasus



**Federico
Salvati**

This month we witnessed the full restoration in relations between Russia and Turkey. The Russian president stated that mutual ties have fully recovered after the downing of the Russian fighter almost two years ago. Syria, energy exports and terrorism have been on the agenda during one hour and a half meeting between President Erdogan and President Putin on May, 3. Russia announced the creation of an investment fund for Turkey and additional perspectives on bilateral collaboration have been discussed as well. A few days later, on 6 May, Russia's Gazprom announced the start of the works for the construction of the Turkish Stream, undersea gas pipeline through the Black Sea. Gazprom's Chief Executive Alexei Miller said that the Turkish Stream project would be finished by the end of 2019. The pipeline will benefit both Turkey and Russia enhancing the position of Ankara as the East-West energy hub and facilitating the Russian access to European markets bypassing the Ukrainian route.

The collaboration between the countries has been further enhanced with a resumption of the Astana process on Syria. The Turkey-Russia-Iran triangle established this month a safe zone in Hama. The partners decided, furthermore, for the exclusion of the US coalition forces from the access to the safe zone. However, great doubts remain on the reliability of this intuitive. Rebel forces have not recognised it and refugees are not ready to come back to the region because they see it as a non-sustainable proposal since the international forces on the ground are unable to deliver supply and humanitarian aid to the country. Moreover, this decision comes in a period of uncertainty regarding the US-Turkey relations. Erdogan has harshly criticised the US involvement in the Syrian conflict bringing to the attention especially the US policies regarding the shipment of weaponry and other supplies in favour of the Kurd armed communities fighting ISIS. At the same time, on 16 May, President Erdogan pledged allegiance to the US, allegedly as a result of the acknowledgement of President Trump that the US will not back down from any kind of fight against terror, no matter the origin. Nonetheless, three days after the meeting, Turkey asked for the resignation of the US leadership from the counter-ISIS coalition bringing up again the US support for the Kurdish groups.

Unexpected but very welcomed was the visit of Turkish EU Affairs Minister Omer Celik to Brussels.

Despite the harsh comments of President Erdogan during the last month, the Minister said it is out of the question for Turkey to break off relations with the EU and the country will press ahead with its membership bid. However, the renewed commitment, as much as it is encouraging, does not dissolve the shadows on the stability and democratic nature of contemporary Turkish society. The trail has been opened for the alleged accomplices of the failed coup, while protests of activists continue against the big purges that have taken place after the same coup inside the public structures.

At the same time, Erdogan took advantage of the new constitutional changes to regain the presidency of the AKP party. This made him the first president of Turkey to retain a party leadership since the 50s. Commentators have stressed how this does nothing but to strengthen Erdogan grip on power. The gap between the EU and Ankara is yet to be widened. EU countries are seriously considering the possibility to block Turkey from hosting NATO summit in 2018. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had invited the leaders of NATO member countries to Istanbul for the 2018 summit during their meeting in Warsaw in July 2016. “We do not want to enhance Turkey’s international credentials and [we want to] avoid the impression that NATO supports the Turkish government’s internal policy,” a high-ranking NATO diplomat told Die Welt (Saeed, 2017).

In the Caucasus, new worries aroused concerning the socio-political situation of the region. In a report, the ILGA Europe (the European branch of the International Association of Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transgenders and Intersexuals) has reported on Armenia and Azerbaijan among the lowest scoring countries in the ranking for sexual minority rights (47 and 49 respectively out of 49). This does not come certainly as a surprise seen the numerous cases of offense and harassment that sexual minorities have suffered during the years after independence.

These news sadly couple with the decision of the Trump administration to cut back financial aid for the South Caucasus. The administration of the US president has offered to reduce financial help to Georgia by 57%, to Armenia – by 67%, and to Azerbaijan – by 90%. This follows from the draft budget of the US State Department for the 2018 financial year. Even if the new budget remains for now just a proposal, nonetheless, the general political direction seems to cut down funding for developing countries and the South Caucasus will be surely affected by this. This decision could mean an aggravation of the current geopolitical situation in the region and the deepening of the present geopolitical cleavages in the region. It is not unlikely that we will see Azerbaijan getting progressively more and more isolated, Georgia more and more depending on the EU and Armenia closer and closer to Russia.

Worth noticing at the end, is the declaration issued by the NATO PA which called on Russia to drop the recognition of the separatist territories of Abkhazia and Ossetia. The declaration follows a long period of scarce media coverage of the issue but on the other hand, it is unlikely that this will spark any concrete political dialogue able to bring forward negotiations.

United States of America



Jakub Zientala

May proved itself to be one of the most eventful months in the international politics in a long time. Tensions growing worldwide and incapacity of the White House to respond to the deteriorating international crises causes downward spiral that inevitably will lead towards diminishing influence of the United States across the globe. America under President Trump's rule is likely to lose much of its power as the global hegemon to the European Union, China and other rising powers. Certainly upcoming years will see increase of this trend and further shifting of the centre of global power from the West to Asian powerhouses such as India and China in general.

The month began with wave of electrifying news of the quickly escalating in crisis on Korean Peninsula. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has launched successfully to lesser or bigger extent mid- and long-range ballistic missiles, able to carry nuclear payloads. The news came as a shock to the international community, as the North Korean regime was developing its nuclear programme without visible progress or success. International experts and commentators remain baffled, how a country with so many international sanctions was able to develop nuclear warfare and means of carrying them. In short time of just a year, North Korea conducted series of nuclear and rocket tests. According to specialists, DRPK's rockets are able to reach the interior of the North America and the majority of Asia, reaching to the shores of Australia. According to the sources close to the previous White House administration, USA had been sabotaging North Korean arms program with cyber warfare and usage of sophisticated viruses that have caused self-destruction of rockets at launch (Broad and Sanger, 2017).

USA, which warrants the independence of many countries in South East Asia, including Japan and South Korea, has condemned regime of Kim Jong-Un. The USS Carl Vinson strike group has been redeployed to the region as show of force. President Trump has remained in touch with leaders of China and Russia, who also have put their armed forces in high alert in wake of crisis. Until this day the State Department is working very hard trying to defuse the nuclear firecrackers situation in Korean Peninsula, without any visible efforts.

One of the causes this situation the fact that Department of State under Secretary Tillerson remains heavily understaffed, and a large portion of the diplomatic posts remains vacant since the day President Trump took office.

It's the effect of the work of the transition team, which decided that all diplomatic personnel and State Department staff should leave their post on the day Mr Trump took a pledge of the office. That translates directly into impotence of the USA to act swift and efficiently on the global chessboard.

Diplomatic efforts have led President Trump to his first, nine-day-long foreign travel. During his trip US president a number of countries from Middle East's Saudi Arabia, through Israel and Vatican to Belgium and Italy. 45th POTUS took part in G7 and NATO summits not without many incidents and blunders, reported by the international media. However, Mr Trump summed up the visit as "a great victory for America".

In Saudi Arabia, US President has managed to secure one of the biggest arm deals in American history, selling \$110 billion worth of American military hardware, despite the critics raised from the national intelligence community and human rights organisations. Mr Trump unlike his predecessors does not consider the human rights as an important issue, thus creating a dangerous rift in international politics, where the Western leader openly disregards one of the West's core values. The consequences of this approach are difficult to foresee.

During the stay in Israel, President Trump has displayed his lack of knowledge on the complicated situation of the relations between Palestine and Israel. On the one side he has been a friend of Prime Minister Netanyahu and his family for a long time, however he wants Israel to cease the settlement process on the West Bank and supports a two state solution. Yet, he wishes to move American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, a city that is contested by Jewish state and the Palestine. Such contradicting statements do not make USA a reliable international partner.

During G7 and NATO summits, the ideological distance between Mr Trump and other politicians was obvious and perhaps even increased due to the meeting. During both gatherings Mr Trump clashed with the rest of world leaders on matters of trade, security and climate change. Finally, in the aftermath of the G7 summit, he cut out all the speculations and the US officially withdrew from the co-called Paris agreement.

During the NATO summit in Brussels, Mr Trump did not mention anything about Art. 5 of Washington Treaty, which is a corner stone of all Western collective security institutions. This seems to have worn down the patience of Trump's European counterparts, who openly criticised him. Chancellor Merkel stated that "Europeans must forge their own destiny" and USA has become unreliable partner. EU officials and member state leaders have followed similar rhetoric.

This statement might lead to opening of the whole new chapter in the West, where EU becomes one of two main rivals of the US instead of being its partner. Such situation, if persisted for a longer time, would only lead to creation of bigger hurdle in international relationships and could have potentially weakened the fabric upon which the globalisation has been built.

Western Balkans



**Aleksandra
Stankovic**

In order to prevent further rise of tensions in the Western Balkans (that were described in the previous overviews), EU High Representative Federica Mogherini organised a series of separate meetings with each of the six prime ministers of the Western Balkans countries on 24 May. The main idea of these meetings was not only the improvement of relations between Western Balkans countries but also a discussion concerning the possible creation of the common market in the Western Balkans. At the same time, Federica Mogherini wanted to confirm that Western Balkans and their EU membership remains important in the event of growing doubt among Balkan states about the EU's commitment to the region. The meetings and the following working dinner of all participants can be deemed successful since all ministers confirmed the strong willingness of continuation of the EU integration process and committed themselves to work more intensively on the improvement of the neighbourly relations.

The meeting and the ongoing commitment to engaging in the Western Balkans is a demonstration of the continued willingness of the EU to be a major player in this region. In the last years, the situation in the EU neighbourhood strongly deteriorated, with the war in Ukraine and in Syria and the Western Balkans is the only remaining neighbouring region to prove the EU's ability to ensure the peaceful and democratic development.

On another note, some experts, like Wolfgang Petritsch, the former UN representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina and former delegate of the EU for Kosovo, emphasise that the EU should implement a new strategy for Western Balkans, which will have a potential to incite stronger motivation to reforms among the Balkan countries and address the problem of low perspectives of joining the EU anytime soon.

In Macedonia, after months of political crisis, a new government has been formed on 1 June. Zoran Zaev, the leader of the centre-left Social Democrats, has been appointed a prime minister. Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn, the European commissioner for neighbourhood policy and enlargement negotiations, issued a joint statement vowing for all political parties of Macedonia to join the efforts in reforming the country and bringing it back on the European integration path. The latter is very likely as Prime Minister Zaev declared that the goal of integration with the EU and NATO will be one of the pillars of his government.

Montenegro, which also has chosen similar path and is at the very end of the procedure of joining NATO (the process is expected to be completed on 5th June 2017) is struggling with the internal opposition for this move and hostile Russian attitude. Such fate can be also a future of Macedonia where the division in society regarding the direction of the country is also significant.

Meanwhile in Serbia, on 31 May, the newly-elected president Aleksandar Vucic, resigned from his position as prime minister of Serbia and overtook his new role as a president of Serbia from the previous President Tomislav Nikolic. Despite an unquestionable victory (more than 50% voted in the first round) of Mr Vucic, the inauguration was met with protests from the opposition and citizens, who accuse the president of authoritarian inclinations. The predecessor of former President Tomislav Nikolic, Boris Tadic pointed out that opposition parties should unite in efforts to stop the possible development of Vucic's authoritarian tendencies.

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CHINA AND EAST ASIA

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