

RESEARCH STUDIES 19

# ISIS

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**Challenges to the Common  
Foreign and Security  
Policy of the European  
Union: Black Sea Region  
(Crimea) and Syria**

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## **Foreword**

A shorter version of this Research Study was presented at the International Conference: *“Bulgaria. Ten Years After Its Integration in the EU and the Upcoming Presidency of the EU Council 2018”*, convened on 21-22 November 2017 in Berlin, Germany, and organised by the Southeast Europe Association, Germany, The German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations, and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. The activity of Bulgaria and the EU during the Presidency of Sofia in the first half of 2018 proved the consistency of the assessments in the presented paper a year earlier. New developments and facts confirmed the growing complexity of the global strategic situation, the rising need of the Union to keep its unity in the intensifying competition of the global centers of power, the necessity of clear definition of the strategic autonomy of the EU. The slogan of the Bulgarian Presidency – “United We Stand”, vividly illustrated the correct Bulgaria’s perception of the evolving international political environment. The high assessment of the six months of Bulgarian Presidency by the EC, EU Parliament and the individual member states, the priorities, especially those concerning the Western Balkans, and their performance by Sofia have their logical link with the correct reading of the challenges to the Common Foreign and Security Policy in the Black Sea-Eastern Mediterranean region, discussed a year ago in the present paper.

## **EU's Strategic Background**

The challenges to the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (CFSP of the EU) stemming from the Black Sea region after the annexation of Crimea by Russia and from the Eastern Mediterranean in connection with the war in Syria are major elements of the present strategic environment and influential political factors during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Union has already given its clear assessment of these challenges and has developed its principal strategic instruments of dealing with them.

First, considering the Black Sea region and Crimea, the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (GSEUFSP) of June 2016, in the paragraph "The European Security Order" of part "3.4 Cooperative Regional Orders", clearly states: "We will not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, nor accept the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine"<sup>1</sup>. In the Strategy, as well as in the Joint Report of the European Commission (EC) and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HREUFASP) on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review of 18 May 2017<sup>2</sup> the approaches and the instruments of action by the EU for dealing with the challenges are formulated in details.

It deserves to mention the assessments of the less popular State of the National Security of Bulgaria in 2016 Report, adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria in the end of the summer of 2017 and approved with a Decision of the People's Assembly (the National Parliament) after majority voting in the autumn of the same year: "The activities of Russia are a source of regional instability and threaten our fundamental objective for a united, free and peaceful Europe. The challenges to the security – first of all in the regions of the Baltic Sea and the Black

Sea, are intensifying, as well as in the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, where Russia is enhancing its military capabilities and is increasing its military activities... The intensive augmenting and modernization of the Russian military capabilities on the territory of the illegally annexed Crimean peninsula, the continuing activities of its integration in the economy, the social and political life of Russia, as well as the widened outlet of this country to the Black Sea area, including to its energy resources – all this continued to lead to a long-term disruption of the geostrategic and the military balance in the Black Sea region. The lack of progress in the arrangement of the “frozen” conflicts in Transdnistria, Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia and in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements on Eastern Ukraine also contributes to the preservation of the high levels of the conflict potential in the region”<sup>3</sup>.

Second, for Syria such a strategically orienting document is the proposed by the EC and the HREUFASP on 14 March 2017, named “Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria”<sup>4</sup>. The war in Syria is qualified as one of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world after the end of the Second World War. The EU is trying to deal with it by increasing its role in finding a lasting political decision in Syria in the agreed by the United Nations Organization (UNO) framework, by assisting in reaching stability and reconstruction after signing agreements on these issues and negotiating a reliable political transition. EU treats the issue of dealing with the challenges of the Syrian crisis also in other of its strategic documents covering the Middle East region.

These strategically orienting documents shape considerably the perceptions and the political approaches of Bulgaria to the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean Sea regions. The referred acts of the Union are conceived in the context of the CFSP of the EU and as generators of political obligations for all member states. The framework strategic act orienting the foreign and security policy

of Bulgaria is the GSEUFSP. The major message of the Global Strategy – the shared vision of the EU member-states leading to common action with the objective of creating a stronger and peaceful European Union and continent in general, is seriously taken and internalized by Bulgarian society. This was statistically reflected in the Special Eurobarometer Report of April 2017 – “Designing Europe’s future: Security and Defence”. According to the survey Bulgaria rates in the group of the first eight countries – members of the EU with positive attitude to the common security policy of the Union with 87 percent of the opinion poll, favoring this policy and higher than the 78 percent EU average<sup>5</sup>. Sofia is in the group of the leading thirteen countries, favoring the EU Common foreign policy with 68 percent of the poll with 65 percent EU average<sup>6</sup>. Bulgarians approve with 75 percent of the poll the development of a common defence and security policy among EU member states, joining the group of the first fourteen member-states<sup>7</sup>. Bulgarians also favor the creation of an EU army with 70 percent and 55 percent EU average, becoming part of the group of the first four countries, supporting this project<sup>8</sup>.

In all these areas Bulgaria rates better or is equal to the opinions of the countries that are members of the Euro area. This is indicative of both a sober assessment by Bulgarian society of the geopolitical and strategic realities of the region of South East Europe, of Europe in general and the global international political situation. It also demonstrates a mature “EU” political identity and readiness to continue the construction of our unique integration community and its institutions. No doubt, the Bulgarian Presidency of the European Council is framed by this popular opinion and assessment. The reflection of the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria inevitably is determined by this historically new Bulgarian identity. That would also mean that Russia’s influence in the so called “near abroad”, in which Russian

politicians and analysts oftenly include also Bulgaria, would meet a screen that will not be easy to permeate. Bulgarians' historic resilience is well known.

Further on in the text I shall share some additional assessments and ideas.

## **Crimea and Syria in the Global Strategic Interrelationships**

The situations in Crimea and in Syria have their own characteristics and dynamics. Both of them have specific subregional meaning, reading and consequences. Each of the two conflictual situations has an impact on the national developments of the countries involved as well as on the adjacent ones. The future prospects of the non-EU Black Sea states is largely held on a stand-by regime by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The development of the Syrian conflict still may be in the direction of persisting military hostilities, but also in hard to foresee post-conflict build-up trends<sup>9</sup>. This possibility has additionally been augmented after the permanent stationing of Russian military bases<sup>10</sup>.

However, the understanding of the challenges and the motivations of dealing with both conflicts, the proper construction of EU's reactions and attitudes requires to treat them in a complex and in the context of the all-European and global strategic interrelationships. This need stems not just from the traditional geostrategic perception of the Black Sea as the northeastern extension of the Mediterranean Sea, but also due to the fact their areas together with the Baltic Sea were embraced by the Russia-built military-strategic arc, by which the territory of Europe and the EU are no longer just surrounded, but are placed under direct military control. This arc is drawn by the Russian military bases in Kaliningrad, Crimea and those in Tartus and Hmeimim (Syria).

In the last few years the Russian propaganda has consistently underlined the thesis of “the dangerous NATO approaching close to the the borders of the Russian Federation”. However, in the meantime the Russian Federation itself made operational the capacity to launch ballistic missiles by the “Iskander-M” complex, whose flight time from Kaliningrad to Warsaw is approximately three and a half minutes. Russia also militarized the Crimean peninsula, arming it with a similar potential. The Russian navy ships in the Mediterranean Sea and their cruise missiles can inflict damages on the whole territory of Europe and the European Union. It is logical to view the launch of missiles from the Caspian Sea and from the Eastern Mediterranean against targets in Syria as a successful training exercise for eventual similar missions elsewhere, especially in Europe.

In this military-strategic context as well as from a political and international legal perspective another challenge for the Common EU foreign and security policy could be formulated: will the member states of the Union be ready to accept the policy of “completed facts” in Crimea? Will they be in agreement with the absurd concept of “the permanent temporary status” of Crimea as part of the “historical territory” of Russia?<sup>11</sup> Bulgaria and the Bulgarians, including during the period of the country’s Presidency of the European Council, did not support nor encouraged such concepts, though there are politicians in EU states, including in Bulgaria, who either share or are not far from these ideas. Some of these politicians actively assist through practical participation in international forums in Crimea and by propaganda activities the full integration of the peninsula in the Russian Federation.

There are many arguments of continuing the policy of the EU of categorically denying the Russian aggressiveness. First, NATO’s strategic posture in Europe before the Russian invasion in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea has been in no way

threatening Russia's territory and sovereignty. NATO has been rather disarming on European territory while Russia has been pumping already for years its military muscle. Second, a long list of political and legal agreements have been violated by the Russian Federation with the annexation of Crimea<sup>12</sup>. This is deeply in contrast with EU's principal policy of respect of international law and the preservation of the stability on the European continent. The EU's image of a natural defender of a rules-based international order fixes the Crimea case and its legally-based solution into the priority list of interests of the Union with long-term significance. Power politics is dangerously turning into "the new normal" in the relations of the major actors of international relations. The persistence to defend the rule of law, the opposition to efforts to impose the military instruments as "THE instruments" of solving interstate issues continue to be the nucleus of EU's "soft power".

The aggressive Russian act in Crimea precluded for the time being the peaceful geopolitical competition of the EU and the Russian Federation about the future of former Soviet constituent republics and satellites. Obviously for Russia the economic, financial, standard of living arguments could not serve effectively in this peaceful competition and cooperation. It is quite well understood that neither the EU, nor NATO would wage a nuclear war for Crimea. But this by no means can prevent us from realizing what is the role of this peninsula in the broader military-political plans of Moscow. The developing situation since August 2008 in Georgia and especially since February 2014 in Ukraine has presented the majority of the EU member-states with the challenge to evolve from their traditional sub-regional foreign political approaches to a more comprehensive EU-based perspective on the international developments. This challenge is of an invariant character, but the drastic militarization of international relations by Russia calls for faster and responsible

adaptation to these developments. It was unfortunate that at the same time Great Britain decided to involve the Union into the Brexit mess. It can be hardly doubted, however, that the UK will remain a strong pillar in the security and defense system of the West, no matter what will happen with the country's membership of the Union.

It is of existential significance for the EU to strengthen its relations with NATO, of which the United Kingdom is a leading ally, as well as with the United States – the leader of NATO. This is needed to prevent any wrong Russian calculation that there are EU or Alliance members that may not be defended if attacked like Georgia or Ukraine. The new National Security Strategy of the United States of America strongly confirms the US commitment to both NATO and the EU in defending the security of the European allies and partners from the multitude of threats, generated at the Eastern and Southern neighborhoods of the continent and from other sources<sup>13</sup>.

Now it is important to observe to what extent the US Administration will keep to the pledges and practically implement what was written on paper by the national security expert team of the President. The world is already in the state of a new Cold War – after years of strategic neglect by the United States since 1999. The American presidents treated contemptuously the evolving Russian military preparations for revenge after the demise of the Soviet federation. The policy of sequestration of the defense budget of the United States and the mocking attitude to warnings<sup>14</sup> of the geopolitical danger this Russian regime presents to the democratic world led to the war in Ukraine and the annexation of a part of the territory of a sovereign state in Europe. Of course, the reasons for the geopolitical catastrophe that the Soviet Union suffered were purely Russian – the imperial inclinations of Moscow and the fundamental deficiencies of the Stalinist system. For years this historical humiliation

has been portrayed to the Russians as a Western plot, which deserves Moscow's backfire. The small steps undertaken by the Russian leadership ever since 1999 have been perceived from the perspective of Washington's wishful thinking and not assessed for their real value. This is why the words of the last American National Security Strategy need not be taken for granted but depending on the practical deeds of the present Administration in Washington, D. C. in defense of the values and interests of the free and democratic world, including of NATO and the EU states. The way in which the interaction of the democratic institutions of the executive, legislative and judicial power in the United States would evolve and the consequences of these relations on the foreign, security and defense policy of the leading country of the Alliance, has become crucial for the further evolution of the global strategic situation and the capacity of the democratic world to defend its values and territory.

### **Crimea and Syria in the Global Strategic Bargaining**

Crimea as well as Syria are elements of the the broader picture of the Russian efforts to restore its status of a leading global power, as its competitors the United States, China and the EU. Weakening of the capacity of the United States and of the EU, denying the superiority of their democratic societies that defend human rights and freedoms, plurality of opinions and the rule of law – this is a fundamental strategic position and objective of Moscow. Russia's conceptual replacement of these values of the democratic societies is the vague notion of a "Russian world" with clear chauvinistic messages of Russia's unique role in international realations and readiness to defend Russian people and those who claim Russian consciousness anywhere they are on the planet<sup>15</sup>. The real challenge for the EU and its member states is the realization of the fact that despite the attractiveness of the achievement of profits,

based on the otherwise useful economic cooperation with Russia, this Russian regime will not step back from the already taken and fixed military-strategic positions and aggressive inclinations. Why so?

The answer is in the domestic political needs to preserve this situation, to motivate with no other alternative the Russian society in the direction of supporting the ruling regime. From a foreign political perspective the answer is that a weak and militarily paralysed EU cannot be an obstacle in carrying out the planned geopolitical bargaining. In such a bargaining Russia, in the spirit of its traditional imperial tradition and style, expects to extract, eventually, from the United States long desired concessions. This could be possible if the governance problems in this great country continue to lead to further decline of its relative weight in the power relationships in the world. Then Russia may claim recognition of its membership and equal status in the “Board of Directors”, governing the world. The arguments would be the dramatically increased relative Russian nuclear and conventional military power as well as a new geopolitical and geostrategic positioning in Europe, its neighbourhood and in the world. This is why the state and atmosphere of a new Cold War are needed by Moscow. Only in these conditions peace could become the eventual payoff for gaining an equal status as the United States (or better).

A real challenge for the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy is the concern of the countries of the so-called B-9 or “Bucharest Nine” – the three Baltic states, the Visegrad Four, Romania and Bulgaria that the effect of such eventual developments is the return to the policy of dividing “spheres of influence” among the military power centers of the international relations system. Once Russia has tested its geopolitical whims by using force and reaching “territorial successes” may lead to the temptation to try again – why not in the EU or NATO territory. This perception is real

and undeniable in the countries of the so called “Eastern flank”. The historic experience of these countries during tense conflictual periods has been with tragic consequences and always within the big powers’ formula of using these countries as terrains for bargaining and dividing into “spheres of influence” in order to serve as “strategic buffers” or “strategic depths” in eventual military conflicts. Their sovereign decision to become members of NATO and the EU was undoubtedly motivated by the ambition to never allow this geopolitical fate be repeated again.

Another negative political and security consequence of the Russian aggression in Ukraine is the further worsening of the arms control and disarmament situation in Europe and the world. The record of these negative developments can be traced back to 2007 when Russia left the limitations of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and threatened to leave the limitations of a fundamental disarmament agreement with global consequences – The Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987. The Russian argument has been that the anti-ballistic missile system of NATO in Europe may be easily transformed into an attacking first-strike nuclear capability of the USA and the Alliance with decapitating strategic consequences for the Russian Federation.

In 2006-2007 the construction of the ballistic missile defense (BMD) system of NATO was clearly linked to the threat perception of a nuclearized Iran, and today – of the eventual North Korean nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile reach capability. The dangerous speculation by the Russian side on this issue, further dramatized after the conflict in Ukraine in 2014, has been based on a total disregard of the legal basis for the development of BMD in Poland and Romania. The normality of Russia’s violation of the rule of law, international law including, has been ‘pasted’ to the relations among NATO members. According to the Russian thinking whenever

Americans would decide unilaterally to transfer the BMD launchers into launchers for intermediate-range nuclear missiles, that would be easily carried out without asking the agreement of the governments of Poland or Romania by the American “Big Brother”. Not being democratic Russia easily re-creates the thinking and behavior of other states in the same pattern it imperially follows itself for centuries. Neither Romania, nor Poland have signed agreements of stationing on their territories of offensive land-based nuclear weapons, i. e. agreeing voluntarily, actively and willingly to become targets of the Russian nuclear arsenal. These are the rules of the game in NATO and as most of the Alliance members are also EU members, the consequences of the strategic relationships between NATO and Russia matter and need to be communicated clearly to the Russian public and government.

It is a matter of fact that the INF Treaty is one of the fundamental cornerstones of European security. Mutual credibility and trust between EU/NATO and Russia has dropped after Russia – a nuclear superpower, ruined the law-based international order by invading a smaller neighboring country – Georgia, and later, Ukraine. Strategic unpredictability has risen ever since the annexation of Crimea with a negative impact on global strategic stability. We can hardly expect a passiveness of the US nuclear policy, nuclear stockpiles and means of their delivery as well as preservation of the American strategic posture in this new situation. As Russia obviously planned these developments with the Crimea operation – now mutual nuclear deterrence is back again the dominant and operational ‘order of the day’. It is the order Russia understands best and has been traditionally used to because it allows it to possess the status of an undisputable “global military nuclear power and actor”.

The hope the INF issues will not run out of control is the broad range of mutual vulnerabilities for the Russian Federation and the United States once this

treaty is no longer applicable. This would directly destabilize the global strategic situation, which would be detrimental for the two parties of the treaty. Unfortunately, geopolitical adventures of the type the world witnessed in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 exacerbate the problems of the arms control and disarmament agenda. The interstate political relations, especially regional conflicts – hot or “frozen”, decisively influence this agenda. The EU needs to press for an active diplomatic dialogue between the parties of the INF Treaty. This is of direct interest for the strategic stability of Europe and of the world. EU’s nonproliferation and disarmament authority and positive experience may indirectly influence the improvement of the geopolitical situation and psychological atmosphere in conflicting regions as the one in Crimea. This is even more needed as Russia is violating the Treaty of 1987, as the United States declared that they leave the INF Treaty and there are states like China, Pakistan, India, North Korea and Iran that possess unlimited quantities of intermediate range missiles, potentially able to carry nuclear weapons.

There is no doubt the Crimea case and the Syrian case are severe trials for the internal resilience of the EU, for the Union’s ability to preserve and solidify its status of a leading center of power in the international relations system, for its ability to influence the improvement of the mutual trust among countries with acute conflicting interests, including in the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament area. This is especially needed in the conditions of a worsening military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Kiev is in a process of improving its national and international capacity to withstand and oppose the Russian aggression. Armaments race between Ukraine and Russia in the border areas is already gathering momentum, promising negative results in the implementation of the Minsk peace agreements. The persistent arming of the separatists in Eastern Ukraine by Moscow led to the long postponed decision of

the US government to supply Kiev with lethal weapons, which further froze bilateral Russian-American relations.

In this situation the preservation of the vitality of the transatlantic link by the EU with NATO and the United States, despite certain problems generated in Washington, is of key significance. Strengthening of the cooperation and coordination in the context of this link will guarantee in the longer term constructive results. The zero-sum-game that Russia initiated with the annexation of Crimea led to the generation of a dilemma the EU and NATO need to monitor and influence – transatlantic unity or disunity will get the upper hand. The brewing of the domestic political relations in Russia before the presidential elections in spring 2018 and after them, the worsening of the social-economic conditions, the stability based on the missing democratic political competition with one autocratic leader in charge of everything reflects a shaky internal situation. This will inevitably lead to real social and political issues and dramatic scenarios that Moscow has already twice experienced in the last one hundred years – in 1917 and in 1991. Russia's foreign political logic is just a reflection of these domestic developments. That is why preserving and strengthening of the transatlantic unity is of existential importance for the Union and the Alliance as well as for the stability of the European continent in general.

The EU needs to continue its effective partnerships with Japan and China, Canada and Australia, especially in the area of regulating global issues. The Union possesses adequate strategic vision and patience to simultaneously oppose Russia's aggression and find ways of cooperating in such international relations areas as the fight against terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, arranging the variety of issues in the Arctic region, climate change, etc. In this complicated, contradictory and worsening

international strategic situation the EU can strengthen its position as the needed flexible balancer and prevent the downsliding of the regional and global strategic stability and security. Thus the geopolitically provoked by the annexation of Crimea destruction of the INF Treaty should be stopped with active diplomatic aid by the EU. This is needed to prevent the negative global consequences of this destruction – a very probable build-up of INF postures in the Middle East (Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Israel), South Asia (India and Pakistan), the Far East North Korea, South Korea, Japan). The EU should persistently remind its Russian and American partners of the global meaning and effects of the INF Treaty. The Crimea annexation and its strategic consequences have brought the leading nuclear powers of the world as well as regional war-mongers closer to a situation in which human mistakes may trigger a chain reaction of developments that cannot be reversed or stopped. EU needs to be active now to prevent worsening of this situation. A researcher of EU's foreign policy wrote recently that “with its emphasis on soft power, its preference for legal solutions, and its enthusiasm for multilateral diplomacy, the EU has had trouble adjusting to a multipolar world increasingly ruled by power politics”<sup>16</sup>. It is time for mobilization and action to deal with these growing existential threats to the European security. And EU's diplomatic creativity is indispensable to deal with these challenges, especially in improving communications, avoiding misunderstanding and raising mutual trust no matter how difficult this will be.

Adding more substance to the EU defense arm of a strategically more autonomous Union and of a strengthened relationship with NATO would be equally important.

## **Syria – Far From the End of the Game**

The conflict in Syria has caused the death of almost 400,000 people by now and more than 11 million have been displaced since the beginning of the disturbances. The regime of Bashar al-Assad succeeded to survive thanks to the involvement of Iran in his favor, of Hezbollah and Shiite militias. However, the decisive support came from the Russian Federation, whose air-strikes since 2015, firing with cruise missiles from navy ships and submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea as well as from the Caspian Sea crushed the major forces of Daesh (the so called Islamic State) in Syria.

The price that the government in Damascus paid to Russia for keeping it in power, though in a devastated and divided into several pieces country, was the permanent stationing of two Russian military bases on Syrian territory. The bases are in Tartus and in Hmeimim. According to the bilateral agreement the naval base in Tartus – an old Soviet Union’s facility, will keep 11 vessels, including nuclear ones. Russia is allowed access to all Syrian ports and to the countries territorial waters. The term of the agreement is 49 years with options to be prolonged further. Russia was also allowed to improve the navy base’s capacity. The air base in Hmeimim will be used by Russia, according to the deal, indefinitely. Russia’s often indiscriminate air campaigns brought many deaths of innocent peaceful citizens. However, Assad’s regime was preserved and willing to strike bilateral deal about the bases. The Russian Duma already ratified the deal and thus Moscow established a permanent presence in Syria<sup>17</sup> with firepower adequate to maintain the country’s strategic posture in Europe and in the Middle East – a definitely new interpretation of the scope of the Russian national interest.

It will not be an exaggeration to say that Russia has been getting closer to the achievement of the centuries-old desired expansion towards warm seas and ports,

developed new buffer zones for its militarized concept of 21<sup>st</sup> century international relations. The achievements of the Syrian campaign of the Russian armed forces are another step in the efforts of finding a new balance with the United States in the world seas and oceans, of turning the American dominance into naval parity in the next years. So the Russian preparation for an eventual grand strategic bargain of dividing the world again as in the Cold War into “spheres of influence” is continuing. Using again military tools the Russian Federation is expecting the “right” moment for claiming its share from the American competitors. As was the case with the Syrian chemical weapons very probably Russia will choose this particular moment again as a ‘needed peacemaker’, ready to cooperate with the West, and the United States in particular. However, Russia has lost what was left of its negotiation reputation after the Assad government carried out its large-scale chemical attack on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2017 in Khan Sheikhoun in the province of Idlib<sup>18</sup>.

It deserves to mention that the bilateral Russian-Syrian military-to-military cooperation included re-organizing the chemical weapons stockpiles of Damascus. The official story is of fully eliminating these weapons of mass destruction, banned by international law. The reality has been several registered applications of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime against its opponents. Russia discarded any accusations of not implementing its obligations and promises about the liquidation of the chemical weapons of Syria. However, the facts of still existing and utilized for military purposes chemical agents makes the arms control and disarmament issue another significant challenge to the Union’s active policy towards the Middle East. Dealing away with chemical weapons in Syria poses two additional questions – about eliminating them in the region as a whole and discussing the nuclear and missiles non-proliferation topic.

EU has developed a practical strategy of participating in the resolution of the problems in Syria. This is especially valid for the period of the eventual post-conflict reconstruction of this country. It is needed to analyze carefully the dynamics of the developing processes and to apply adequately the tools provided by the strategy. The main accent is on preventing the intensification of violence. This issue is dependent on how the different still active political groups will relate to each other, including the relations with the Assad government. Though his regime seems to be the official winner, the political landscape is already thoroughly changed. Territorially the Syrian state is divided and there is no prospect of finding a uniting formula among pro-Assad, pro-opposition, pro-Turkish, pro-Iranian and Kurdish factions. Russia's military success against Daesh cannot be directly translated into peaceful political and territorial settlement. Iran's and Turkey's roles are hard to be neglected too. How the Syrian settlement will be perceived by Israel – a key Middle East actor? Will there be a compromise between Iran and Israel? How will Saudi Arabia and the United States step in the end-game? How far can the administration of the present American President go in the arrangement of the post-conflict military-to-military relations with Russia in Syria or the support of different political factions will shift the conflict back towards violence?

All these issues remain open and prone to further influence. It is hard to forget that the diplomatic settlement is not based only on the Astana agreements, but also of what will be the end result of the Geneva talks – both of them with different configurations of outside players. There is no doubt that the interested parties in the post-conflict rehabilitation efforts include also the EU, China and Japan. Their economic and financial capacity is more attractive than the Russian one. We should

add also the good geoeconomic positioning of Iran and Turkey for the post-conflict reconstruction tasks of Syria.

There are different possibilities for the development of the complicated situation, in which the local, regional and outside influential actors have various and with different probability options of political activity. It is clear that the EU is not a participant in the military regulation of the Syrian conflict. Notwithstanding the Union is the key factor in the supply of humanitarian aid. Among the different post-conflict rehabilitation actors the EU remains the most attractive one in the variety of political and territorial configurations that might come to existence. The EU has the potential know-how of creating different multistakeholder partnerships in the efforts of creating peaceful solutions for the future of the conflict-stricken territory<sup>19</sup>. The risks for global peace are high, the major military nuclear actors are in a negative trend of bilateral cooperation on strategic stability in the world and the EU is the right actor to promote its capacity for defending peace. Syria is both an element in the ambitious Russian drive for military bipolarity with effective geopolitical consequences for Moscow and a bargaining chip for extracting easier victories on economic and trade issues.

The challenge for the Union is how to energize the cooperative interaction of the Commission, the EU Parliament, the Presidency of the European Council, the specialized institutions for foreign, security and defense policy and the national governments of the member states. The upcoming period is loaded with risks and unpredictability. The logical response of the EU should be resilience, solidarity and courageous defense of peace on the continent and in the world, using the whole spectrum of soft power instruments while persistently developing the military

capacity of the Union. Mobilization on all these issues has been rarely that much needed as in the developing period.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (June 2016)*, in: Strategy Matters 2015-2016, EU Key Documents, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2016, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> EC, HREUFASP, Joint Report to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *Report on the Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review*, Brussels, 18.5.2017, JOIN(2017) 18 final.

<sup>3</sup> *State of the National Security of Bulgaria in 2016 Report*, adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria (in Bulgarian), 29 August 2017, at [www.government.bg/fce/001/0211/files/Doclad.doc](http://www.government.bg/fce/001/0211/files/Doclad.doc) - 17rh482pr1-441713(1)doc (accessed on 10 December 2017), approved by the National Parliament on 5 October 2017 and published in the State Gazette no 81/2017 at [www.parliament.bg](http://www.parliament.bg) (accessed on 10 December 2017).

<sup>4</sup> EC, HREUFASP, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: *Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria*, Strasbourg, 14.3.2017, JOIN(2017) 11 final.

<sup>5</sup> Special Eurobarometer 461, Report, *Designing Europe's future: Security and Defence*, April 2017. European Union, 2017, p. 7, at: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publication> (accessed on 30 November 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Minke Meijnders, Jaïr van der Lijn, Bas van Mierlo, *Syria in 2019: four scenarios. Implications for policy planning*. Clingendael Report (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', November 2017, 45 pp.).

<sup>10</sup> Yuliya Talmazan, *Russia establishing permanent presence at its Syrian bases: minister of defense*, at: <https://nbcnews.com/news>, Dec 26 2017 (accessed on 26 December 2017).

<sup>11</sup> The problem with the Russian "historical territories" is that huge areas and many countries have been part of the territories of the Russian Empire and its Soviet continuation in their historical fluctuations. Analysts are reminded by a concern that Ekaterina the Great of Russia had at her time – how much the Russian territory should continue to expand to feel her state is stable and secure.

<sup>12</sup> The Helsinki Act of 1975 provides inviolability of borders unless peaceful negotiations lead to other solutions; The Belovezh Agreement of 1991 for the dissolution of the USSR provides for guarantees of the territorial integrity of the constituent Soviet republics and for the inclusion of Crimea as an autonomous part of the Ukrainian state; The Lisbon Protocol of 23 May 1992 of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Belorussia, the Russian Federation and the United States about the mechanism of formalizing the accession of all 5 states to the START, and for Belorussia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan – to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968 as non-nuclear

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states; The Budapest Memorandum of 5 December 1994 of the United Kingdom, United States, Russian Federation and Ukraine that guarantees the security of Ukraine in light of the country's accession to the NPT against nuclear attack and of its territorial integrity; The Bilateral Treaty of the Russian Federation and Ukraine of 2003 for the regulation of the border between the two states – signed by Putin and ratified by the Russian Duma, and, The Harkov Agreement of 2010 between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, signed by Medvedev and Yanukovitch, about the right of Russia to base its Black Sea Navy in Sevastopol by 2042.

<sup>13</sup> *NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf*, at: [www.whitehouse.gov/NationalSecurity](http://www.whitehouse.gov/NationalSecurity), p.47-48 (accessed on 23 December 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Mitt Romney, the Republican candidate for the US President in 2012; the letter of Central/Eastern/South Eastern democratic leaders before the first mandate of President Obama; publications of experts from the same region of Europe in: *A. Wess Mitchell and Ted Reinart (Eds.), U.S.-Central European Relations in the Age of Obama*, Report No. 22, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), Washington, D.C. 20005, July 2009, 44 pp., etc.

<sup>15</sup> Ivo H. Daalder, *Responding to Russia's Resurgence: Not Quiet on the Eastern Front*, at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/authors/ivo-h-daalder> (accessed 15 December 2017); Andrew Monaghan, *Russia's world: Facing a century of instability*, Brief Issue No 3, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, February 2016, pp.1-4; Andrei Kolesnikov, *A Past That Divides: Russia's New Official History*, Article\_Kolesnikov\_102017\_ENG\_web.pdf at: <http://go.carnegieendowment.org> (accessed on 25 November 2017); Franklin Foer, *It's Putin's World: How the Russian president became the ideological hero of nationalists everywhere*, *The Atlantic*, March 2017 Issue, at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/author/franklin-foer> (accessed on 22 December 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Stefan Lehne, *Is There Hope for a E U Foreign Policy?*, December 05, 2017, at: [www.carnegie.eu](http://www.carnegie.eu) (accessed on 11 December 2017)

<sup>17</sup> Yulia Talmazan, *Russia establishing permanent presence at its Syrian bases: minister of defense*, Dec 26 2017, at: <https://nbcnews.com/news> (accessed on 26 December 2017); Polina Ivanova (Katya Golubkova and Robin Pomeroy, eds.), *Russia establishing permanent presence at its Syrian bases: RIA*, December 26, 2017, at: <https://www.reuters.com/news/archive/worldnews> (accessed on 26 Decemebr 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Anne Barnard and Michael R. Gordon, *Worst Chemical Attack in Years in Syria; U.S. Blames Assad*, *New York Times*, April 4, 2017, at: <https://www.nytimes.com> (accessed on 28 December 2017).

<sup>19</sup> *Michael Brzoska/Hans-Georg Ehrhart/Jens Narten (Eds.), Multi-Stakeholder Security Partnerships: A critical assessment with case studies from Afghanistan, DR Congo and Kosovo*, *Nomos*, D, 2011, 276 pp.

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