RELIANCE IN EU SURROUNDINGS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS
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1. Mutual dependence and resilience

Stability and security of the EU depend, to a large extent, on its neighbourhood. Economic, military, political, criminal, natural etc. threats may hit the EU's territory, first of all, from its direct land or sea neighbours. This neighbourhood has been composed by two great geographical regions: the southern (Mediterranean) countries connected with mainland Europe by land and sea, on the one hand, and the eastern neighbours attached to the EU mostly by land borders. The southern, Mediterranean neighbourhood has been divided by a stable and uncontested geographic criterion separating from each other European and non-European neighbours. On the eastern, continental side all the neighbours of core Europe fulfilled the "European" criterion, just like their further neighbours.

In the EU foreign policy context "resilience" –being originally a biological term – is to be understood as "the capacity of states … to withstand and absorb shocks, as well as recover from them" (Gaub-Popescu p. 7.). "Strong resilience" means the degree of preparedness "when potential crises are anticipated and planned for" and when crisis management scenarios are also at hand (ibid). In the new language of the European Union's Global Strategy several old and well-known problems have been re-labelled under the concept of "resilience" (van Veen p 37.) The high quality of analysis and responsiveness is not different from traditional tools of foreign policy, which – in parallel with planned diplomatic action – is always ready to confront any kind of unexpected events and challenges. In juxtaposing resilience with "fragility," the reactivity criterion appears in a new and contrasting light (ibid). The new terminology supports fresh thinking and may motivate strategic changes in EU foreign policy.

2. The specific challenges of 2019

The external position of the EU is determined by the situation of the internal integration. From this aspect, in 2019 the EU is at an unprecedented crossroad of complex challenges. First, this is an election year which opens the window for political reorientation. The re-election of the European Parliament as well as the appointment of a new European

Commission will challenge the political objectives and orientation of the Union. Second, a rare timely coincidence with the Multiannual Financial Framework occurs: the institutional renewal takes place in the very year when the finalisation of the long term EU budget for the 2021-2027 period should take place. This correlation offers an opportunity to harmonise the political objectives with the financial resources, at the same time institutional and political changes may hinder the approval of the new budget. Third, the unprecedented case of the United Kingdom's leaving of the EU is setting at probe the whole construction of the Union and represents a hard test to the resilience of common and coordinated action on behalf of the EU-27. In addition, increasing nationalism and populism in several member states fuel anti-integration political movements. In a few member states, such political parties are on government alone (Hungary, Poland) or in coalition (e.g. Italy, Austria) and have direct access to EU decision making in the Council, too.

In the European Parliament extreme right forces may increase the number of seats and strengthen the expansion of such political families reaching the cumulated size of blocking minorities. The new European Commission, which may enter in office by late autumn, will bear the political footprint of national governments having the rare opportunity of appointing one candidate per member state. The political composition of the new European Commission will reflect the mosaic picture of member states' governments by summer 2019. The most powerful EU institution, the Council, and the European Council at its highest level, will follow and replicate continuous political changes in the member countries. The overall political orientation of the EU, as well as the composition of decisive majorities or potential blocking minorities in the institutions, will depend, first of all, on the colours of governing majorities in the member states. In this respect, a continuous and dynamic interaction between national and EU level politics will determine the European positions including the neighbourhood policy.

3. Changing neighbourhood

The founding countries of the European Communities were surrounded by European states. In subsequent enlargement waves the EC-6 has taken, step by step, its European neighbours as members and integrated them into its own system. The central and northern European enlargement reached its final limits in 1995; only Switzerland, Norway and Iceland decided to stay out of the EU. The southern expansion was consolidated in 1986 by the accession of Spain and Portugal; Malta and Cyprus joined the EU in 2004. The eastern extension of the EU arrived to new borders in several steps in 2004, 2007 and 2013. On the

south-eastern periphery the remaining six Western Balkan countries[1] and Turkey are the last European neighbours with uncertain integration perspectives. In the "Eastern Partnership" region six more states would be eligible for EU membership[2]. The 28 member EU could be enlarged by 16 more European states if all "European" countries asked for EU membership and fulfil the necessary entry conditions (not counting the mini states, like Lichtenstein).

As new members joined the expanding organisation of European states, they not only extended and modified the internal structure of the organisation, but always attached new neighbours to the enlarging EU. With every enlargement the composition and the nature of the EU has changed, just like the location and the structure of its neighbourhood. When EU enlargement reached the Mediterranean coast line of the European peninsula (1986), the southern neighbourhood has come to a standstill: further neighbours of the Mediterranean and North-African (MENA) region are non-European states. This status determines and also limits the scope of potential relations between the two sides. On the eastern flanks of the EU the situation was fundamentally different: land neighbours have land neighbours themselves, and those land neighbours of the neighbours are also European states before reaching Russia or the Central Asian post-Soviet region directly neighbouring with Iran, China etc.

In the EU's history each enlargement wave was different: composed of another group of candidates and surrounded by different internal and external conditions. However, across all these specificities, a ten year regular pulsation of the EU's widening can be observed. According to this logic, the next major steps of rapprochement in neighbourly relations may intervene by the mid-2020s. In this short overview I will focus on some main elements determining the actual situation in the EU's neighbourhood, the mutual motivations on behalf of the EU and its neighbours concerning the next steps as well as external factors influencing the behaviour of both parties.

4. Enlarging the circle of neighbours

In the concept of the European Union's Global Strategy (2016) the Union's neighbourhood has taken a larger scope. On the southern side, next to the traditional MENA region, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf Cooperation Council are also mentioned. The eastern neighbours included in the past the Western Balkans, Turkey and the "Eastern Partnership" countries. In a new and wider approach, Post-Soviet Central Asia has been added, too.

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[1] Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Northern Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo.

[2] Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan.

However, surprisingly enough, the biggest neighbour, Russia is not on the list (Gaub-Popescu p. 9).

As to the eligibility for EU membership, fundamental political differences between the two neighbourly regions, the southern and the eastern, consist. According to Article 49 of the EU Treaty only "European" states can apply for EU membership, consequently the southern non-European neighbours are excluded from this perspective. For countries in the MENA region the best solution is close association with the EU in any form and by any name. For East European states, in principle, the option of EU membership is open depending on their compliance with the entry conditions. In this region, the EU has still serious reserves before reaching the final limits of "all European states": on the Western Balkans and in the eastern neighbourhood the above mentioned twelve countries[3] could be considered as potential future EU members.

Important parallels, even analogies, also characterise the two neighbouring regions. First of all, after a long period of frozen internal stability of mostly dictatorial political regimes, deep systemic changes have emerged in both areas. On the eastern side, the Soviet ("Communist") regimes collapsed after 1990. In parallel with sweeping internal changes, three federal states collapsed, too, giving birth to 24 new states.[4] Seven countries from this category are EU members[5], the other 17 belong to the neighbourhood. International recognition, territorial integrity, internal political, economic and social consolidation of new states exposes a wide range of extremely sensitive questions. It has been proven that EU conditionality is a useful but by far not sufficient remedy for the treatment of all such problems. In the south the "Arab Spring" brought about political earthquakes from 2010 on shaking petrified political structures. Since those fundamental turns, both regions are the sources of increased political instability which goes hand in hand with economic decline, criminality and a growing potential of migration targeting the developed centre of Europe. Resilience in the EU's surroundings can be measured by the perspectives of those worrisome changes.

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[3] See footnotes 1. and 2.

[4] Czechoslovakia was divided into two new states, Yugoslavia – after several changes – into 7 new countries and The Soviet Union into 15 new states.

[5] Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania.

5. An inward-looking Union

EU integration has traditionally been dominated by internal political procedures. The main reason for the supremacy of internal priorities was the twofold securitization of the West-European integration process. First, the birth of the core European Community (EC-6) was protected by the shelter of NATO. As all the founding members (just like five further acceding states) were NATO members, the nascent EC did not possess of – because it did not need – any own defence arm. Second, the military adversary of NATO – the Warsaw Pact – was kept at distance by the well-balanced mutual deterrence of the bipolar World system. Under those circumstances, the EU could focus on internal developments and neglected the external aspects of both the deepening and the widening of integration.

Ambitious integration programmes were adopted on the basis of one-sided, internally oriented blueprints without paying due attention to eventual external risks or potential threats. However, at a later stage, unexpected external shocks brought to light this original weakness of the top achievements of EU integration. The fragile construction of the Eurozone could not resist the 2008 economic crisis. The Schengen and Dublin systems proved to be inappropriate to handle the external migration wave peaking in 2015. "Common" foreign policy has been paralysed by major events in the outside world, like the aggressive expansionism of Russia, the political turn in Turkey or the economic penetration of China into the European sphere of interest by the large-scale One Belt One Road project.

The traditional inward-looking character is also reflected by the legal and institutional structure of the EU and its daily working practices. The adoption and implementation of the highly oversized EU legislation is diverting attention from the external dimensions of protecting European interests. In fact, the rich toolkit of internal action is rather disproportional compared to narrow external competences and activities kept at inter-governmental level. Internal differences or conflicts of interests between and among EU member states frequently block joint external action. A recent illustration of that phenomenon was the diversity of member states' attitudes in connection with the 2015 external migration shock demonstrating the deep differences between the motivations of entry, transit and target countries within the EU, not to speak about member states which do not belong to any of those three categories. Another side-effect of the predominantly inward oriented EU attitudes is a kind of prioritizing technicalities over political solutions. Many well-known examples could be mentioned (from the definition of the curve of canned cucumbers to the noise level of coffee machines), but the recent migration crisis served with a recent illustration: defining

resettlement quotas for the redistribution of refugees in an excel-table before attaining political consensus about the acceptance of a minimum level of mutual solidarity.

6. Third actors on the scene

Clear objectives and cohesive action are important on behalf of the partners, the EU and its neighbours, but a realistic approach to the resilience problem should also consider the interests and motivations of third actors. Indeed, the EU is not the only major player in its own neighbourhood, even if it mostly occupies the dominant role being the first trading partner and the leading investor. The gradual collapse of the bipolar system has serious consequences in the EU's surroundings, too. This process has started with the breakdown of the Soviet empire by 1990 and followed by a retarded turn on the western side manifested by the "new deal" of President Trump in the US and the Brexit in the EU as an emblematic step of European disintegration (both events taking place in 2016). Approaching to the year of 2020 a new, multipolar world is emerging where numerous economic actors appear (represented in the loose framework of the G-20) and ambitious nuclear powers ask for more influence (Iran, North Korea). Western Europe framed by the EU is not the focal centre any more of a large area built on the attraction and model role of European modernisation.

Zones of influence of the bipolar system have been dissolved or contested. Candidates for new positions in a multipolar world are testing the final limits of their weight an impact. China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and several others take aggressive expansionist steps in order to extend and consolidate their places before sitting down to a negotiating table and discussing new arrangements. The time of negotiations comes when none of the major players believes that it could improve its position by force, and the best option for them is consolidating the new status quo.

7. What EU strategy to follow?

Both great neighbourhood regions of the EU need detailed and differentiated strategies consisting of several sub-chapters. On the eastern flanks the Western Balkans, Turkey, the "Eastern Partnership" and Russia are the segments to be distinguished. On the southern side, the traditional Mediterranean dimension should be complemented by the Gulf states and the emerging complex set of problems of Sub-Saharan Africa in a similar, well-defined sub-regional approach. Let's see the main aspects and directions of EU action in the coming years!

The **Western Balkans** is the only region where accession talks are underway with some realistic perspectives. Montenegro and Serbia have begun earlier (2012, 2014); Albania has qualified for a near start and Macedonia, having settled the critical name issue, could join them soon. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the internal consolidation of the multinational state is still unsolved and Kosovo would need international recognition on behalf of all EU member states. In parallel with ongoing or future EU accession negotiations, the inclusion of the whole Western Balkan enclave into EU sectoral programmes would serve mutual interests. The long-term trans-European transport network project (TEN-T) has shown a good example, which other sectors could follow. The region may play a particularly important role in the control of external migration originating from Asia across Turkey (as the 2015 migration wave illustrated it). For this reason, the early adoption of the whole region into the Schengen system (even at the price of some transitional measures) would be beneficial for both sides. The political dilemma for the EU is the choice between two kinds of power holders in the Western Balkan states: "stabilitocrats" or reformers (Bechev, in: Gaub-Popescu, p. 71.). Urgent EU interests should, however, prevail over optimistic expectations for positive internal changes trusting that the consolidation of European influence in the region and more involvement in EU affairs would also trigger adequate political developments. In the region the EU is not the only point of orientation as important competitors, like Russia, Turkey and even the Gulf states are present, too (Nechev-Trauner).

Relations of the EU with **Turkey** are definitely more complex than an accession or conditionality case. After the attempted coup of 15 July 2016, government responses distanced Turkey from the EU model and membership requirements. The lengthy accession talks starting in 2005 have come to a new standstill. At the same time, the EU is in a demanding position in front of Turkey in the refugee problem and the interests of the two sides are interconnected in other issues as well (Cyprus, the Kurds, Armenia, the Black Sea region etc.). Turkey would need a new "tailor made" strategy from the EU based on long-term mutual motivations.

The EU's **Eastern Partnership** program including the last six East-European states in the post-Soviet region is ten years old in 2019. The over-ambitious programme has achieved uncontested results in three countries; but proved to be insufficient, or politically naïve, in the three others. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia opted for Europe. Ukraine paid for its western orientation with a painful territorial loss (Crimea), and war is still present in its eastern regions. The positioning of Georgia and Moldavia between the West and Russia is ambiguous and depends on the ruling political forces. The benefits of EU association containing Deep

and Comprehensive Free Trade agreements are not sufficient to counterbalance the attraction of the near Russian economy in spite the fact that free trade arrangements have increased trade "enormously" (Zeneli, in: Gaub-Popescu, p. 87.). All the three countries are embraced in the information space of Russia disseminating one-sided and fake news (Kobzova, in: Gaub-Popescu, p. 78.). Belarus was a non-starter in the Eastern Partnership project because of its close relations with Russia. Armenia made a turn and joined – just like Belarus – the Eurasian Economic Union dominated by Russia (EAEU). Azerbaijan is preserving its geopolitical autonomy based on gas exports. The whole Eastern Partnership region is interwoven by "frozen conflicts" or "protracted areas" provoked or controlled by Russia. The only state with uncontested territorial integrity is Belarus – in the threatening shadow of Russian aggression. After 10 years the Eastern Partnership concept would need a fundamental renewal considering also – in contrast to the beginnings – the intentions of Russia.

Russia is the biggest neighbour, but it is definitely more: a great challenge for the EU at the level of World politics. After some years of mutual rapprochement following the collapse of the Soviet Union, closer cooperation between the two sides proved to be unsuccessful. Russia felt temporarily weaker because of losing the Soviet republics, and the EU felt stronger in the light of the big enlargement bringing mostly ex-Soviet allies on board. The arrival of Vladimir Putin on power changed this situation and Russia started a new and particularly aggressive expansion using the whole arsenal of "hybrid war" (Rácz, in: Gaub-Popescu pp. 21-23.). For the time being, both partners test the final limits of expanding their spheres of influence in the post-Soviet area. Under such circumstances, no cooperation project would earn credibility on either side.

The **Black Sea area** deserves special attention from the EU as an important transport area connecting several states and regions and an international crossroad for energy pipelines. The EU has become a regional power through three member states (Greece, Romania, Bulgaria). The presence of other important actors (Russia, Ukraine, Turkey) would request a deeper investigation of European interests and a more detailed EU strategy.

Post-Soviet Central Asia and the **Gulf Cooperation Council** are remote areas for low cohesion EU foreign policy action. In both regions other big players (Russia, China, US) are present and active.

In the **MENA** region, in addition to the old and complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict, four particular countries represent high risk security threats: Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. With other, more or less stable or consolidated countries the extensive toolkit of the EU's Global Mediterranean Policy works well. However, the transformation process that started

with the "Arab Spring" movements may bring about new and unexpected developments. EU countries should be interested in conducting deeper analysis and forecasts about future developments in the MENA region, extend their influence and compete with other motivated actors (first of all China).

Sub-Saharan Africa is an extremely important area for Europe with special regard to the high proportion of least developed countries, declining economic growth and boosting demography. The challenge is well beyond the scope and toolkit of traditional EU neighbourhood policy and would need appropriate analysis as well as strategic decisions sub-divided into regions and particular countries.

European interests involved in the EU's neighbourhood relations and the various problems to be solved in those large areas request further improvements in EU neighbourhood strategies. Traditional methods based on the automatic attraction of the European model, preferential trade relations and other economic advantages are not enough. A deep analysis of political changes should be the starting point in order to understand the transformation of societies and economies. The growing influence of important third partners (Russia, Turkey, China etc.) should be considered as well.

In 2019 the Brexit keeps EU expert capacities busy (Marciaq, p. 17.). The re-election of the European Parliament and the nomination of a new European Commission open the ways for reconsidering the EU's neighbourhood relations and initiate new actions. Further concrete steps in the enlargement and neighbourhood policies should be foreseen for the office time of the new European Commission (2019-2024) and financing assured in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027). Neighbours should understand European expectations towards them and have a clear perspective about their future relations with the EU.

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