

## Security Policy in Eastern Europe: Challenges for the EU

The recently popular thesis concerning the EU turning to the South is an oversimplification and needs to be treated with reserve. Nevertheless, the interests and the involvement of the EU have been moving towards the African continent at least since 2010. This is clearly visible especially in the EU security policy. The civilian mission taking place in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the military operation in the Horn of Africa were supplemented by additional undertakings. In 2012 three new civilian missions were launched on the African continent: in the Sahel region (EUCAP Sahel Niger – support in the fight against terrorism), the Horn of Africa (EUCAP Nestor – coordination of the ongoing EU efforts in the region) and South Sudan (ensuring the security of the Juba airport). Moreover, a vivid debate is currently taking place concerning the initiation of a military-civilian mission in Mali, with France as its main supporter.

Despite the comparable, if not larger, scale of the problems in the security zone in Eastern Europe, no EU mission was launched there in this time period. What is more, the number of observers of the most important EU operation in the region, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, is decreasing each year. If we add the opinions of certain high EU officials – also those acting in the region – according to which the area should be a zone of special responsibility of Russia, as well as the ideas aimed at the EU policy of the “Taiwanization” of Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Transnistria, it is difficult not to have the impression of dealing with a negative trend. Even more so because Eastern Europe is not present in the EU agenda of expansion policy, which – if continued – will most likely be focused on the Balkans or the EFTA countries.

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## Why the EU?

Why is it the EU that should take the challenges related to the security of Eastern Europe on its shoulders? The easiest answer is that there are apparently no other candidates to play this role. The withdrawal of the UN and OSCE from South Caucasus after the war of 2008 is just one of the factors which contributed to the increasing security deficit in the region. The Union should square off against this problem in its own interest. The situation in Eastern Europe is shaped by at least six factors.

Firstly, economic uncertainty, the still present effects of the economic breakdown of 2008-2009 and the fear of the next wave of the crisis. Secondly, the general decrease in the importance of the region on the geopolitical world map resulting, among others, from the concentration of the international community on the challenges in the Middle East and the “reset” in relations between the U.S. and Russia. Thirdly, a raising assertiveness in the policy of Russia and the introduction of new integration projects in the economic and political sphere presented by Moscow: the Common Economic Space and the Eurasian Economic Union. Fourthly, the revitalization of the regional military cooperation animated by Russia, both multilateral (the Collective Security Treaty Organization) and bilateral (among others by extending the military presence in Armenia and Ukraine to the half of the 21st century, a dynamic development of bases within the Georgian territory and a possible investments of the same sort in Belarus). Fifthly, the strict internal divisions still present in some countries and the growing tendencies towards an authoritarian consolidation of power. Sixthly, the special foreign policy of the local political elites who often invoke unclear slogans, such as “multivectorness” or “non-blocness”.

## Unfulfilled Hopes

So far, the EU has not been able to utilize its political, military and economic potential to play an important role in the challenges of the Eastern European security. In relation to this region, the lack of cohesion in the Common Foreign and Security Policy has especially been visible. The individual European actors have a different perception of the place and importance of Russia and the countries of the Eastern Partnership, as well as the significance of the developed subpolicies, e.g. those directed at the regions of the Black Sea and the Danube. The multitude of tools used by Europe in external relations – such as bilateral programs, projects within the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, missions within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) – and their insufficient coordination make the matters even worse. The involvement of the EU in the security policy of Eastern Europe is of a reactive nature, being an *ad hoc* answer to the



appearing crises when the abilities to plan, predict and shape the course of events fail. Unfortunately, this results in errors made at early stages of the actions undertaken in Eastern Europe. For example, the missions developed within the CSDP, the goal of which is usually to “extinguish fires”, were assigned with mandates aimed at making the structural changes which have – in the majority of cases – a long-term scope.

### **The Successes of the EU**

Still, the European Union managed to perform certain successful actions and interventions in delicate crisis situations. The example of that may be the mediation of the French Presidency supported by Poland and the Baltic states, which helped end the war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. The three CSDP missions launched in Eastern Europe also deserve a positive evaluation. To be more precise, the EUJUST Themis (performed in 2004 in Georgia and aimed at supporting the reforms of the Georgian justice system and being a political reaction of the EU to the “Revolution of Roses”), EUBAM (supporting the functioning of the Ukrainian-Moldovan border since 2005, but not having any decisive influence on the prospective solution of the Transnistrian conflict) and since 2008 EUMM in Georgia. Especially the latter, despite its limitations (the problems with fulfilling its mandate because of the lack of consent of Russia to access the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia), resulted in the alleviation of the tensions between the sides, particularly when it comes to the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism.

The appointment of EU Special Representatives dealing with crises in Eastern Europe can also be considered an asset of the European Union: in 2003 for the South Caucasus, in 2008 for the crisis in Georgia (in 2011 substituted by Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia), in 2005 for the crisis in Moldova; the mandate of the latter ended in February 2011 and was not renewed. Its role was taken by the EU Permanent Delegations in Ukraine and Moldova. The presence of the Special Representatives allowed the EU to influence the course of events and facilitated the coordination of the European policy in these explosive regions.

The element whose long-term influence may turn out to be decisive for the success of the efforts of the EU to stabilize the Eastern neighborhood is the support of structural reforms in the countries of the region by the array of instruments being developed – despite the crisis – for the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. The EU also declared that it will focus more attention on the programs aimed at stabilizing the Eastern neighborhood. The concrete examples are the works on including the countries of the Eastern Partnership in educational and training programs of the European Security and



Defense College and the plans of the EU to get involved in creating comprehensive reform programs of the security sectors for the interested countries in Eastern Europe.

## Recommendations

An intelligent Eastern European policy of the EU should be based on the correct perception of the facts and their mutual relations, as well as on the understanding of the psychology of other parties. However, it should foremostly be founded on the understanding of own interests. In this context, it seems justified to propose that, in terms of broadly defined security, EU policy should be based on four primary recommendations:

- Firstly, thinking out of the box is a necessity. The opinions that the EU activity in Eastern Europe is completely ineffectual, and that this area has little significance for the Union, are false. This is what the European elite should be aware of while preparing any future initiatives in Eastern Europe.

- Secondly, more coordination: it is advisable to combine the safety policy tools that the EU possesses – such as the CSDP missions, the diplomatic measures, sanctions or the trust and confidence building measures – with instruments enabling the exertion of “soft” influence on the region. Currently, this purpose is mostly served by negotiating the Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreements, which are meant to facilitate the formulation of reforms and hasten the reform agenda in Eastern European countries, therefore, stabilizing them. The Eastern Partnership may also bring integrating and added value to the table - not only through the future development of the security-oriented programs, but also by creating a platform for multilateral dialogue. It is particularly important in the face of the low level of regional cooperation in Eastern Europe.

- Thirdly, the EU activities should be striking a balance between the consistent policy of denying recognition to “para-state” entities that emerge without regard to international law on the one hand, and the adoption of the policy to strive against their total international isolation on the other. Employing “soft” instruments serving the purpose of lowering tensions in the conflict zones is to be considered. These instruments could include facilitating local and regional cooperation, aiding the development of civic communities, facilitating contact between communities separated by the “demarcation lines”, engaging local elites in multilateral projects “neutral” in character (e.g. scientific, journalistic), or limited economic cooperation. These forms of cooperation, undertaken jointly with Tbilisi, Chişinău, Yerevan, Baku, and also with Kiev, could lay ground for the most difficult talks – concerning the final political status of the “para-states” functioning in the region.



- Finally, the EU's advantage is the ability to assume the role of a “honest broker”: a neutral party, not directly engaged with any side of the ongoing conflicts. This is important, because the regional stability models presented, for example, by Ankara or Moscow<sup>i</sup> turned out to be unacceptable in this respect for all Eastern European countries. The union model, therefore, remains the most attractive, presupposing the eastward spreading of economic and political standards that are in effect in the EU.

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<sup>i</sup> Russia and Turkey in the years 2008-2009 presented their own “agendas” for arranging relations in the region: the Turkish idea of “a platform of stability and cooperation” referring to the South Caucasus, aimed at creating a Turkish-Russian “duopoly” in the region; the Russian “zone of privileged interests” in the whole post-Soviet area.

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