The "post-factual" Politics or Officializing Manipulation

Orphan Europe

Is an US-Russia and even China alliance possible? It is even desirable!

Aleppo - a wound of international indifference

Recommended Reading: The New Tsar
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bought), Europe, or to be more precise, the European Union is behaving like an orphan, abandoned by its strong father, whose hand it held and whom he/she followed wherever he went. Europe does not know. Europe is asking. Europe has to know. Europe is warning. All this is addressed to the new leader who will take over the White House in mid-January next year.

17 Daesh goes... Al-Qaida comes back?
- Dinu COSTESCU

A return of Islamic State alongside Al-Qaida is theoretically out of the question if one takes into consideration on one hand that such an act would be certainly categorically disavowed by the core of Al-Qaida organization lead from Waziristan by Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri who, on the other hand, firmly disclaimed the "rebelliousness" manifested by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and the declared rejection by the latter of any submission or allegiance to Al-Zawahiri.

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14 The Arab world and Donald Trump

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- Lamya FOUAD

15 The syrian crisis - another year of war. What comes next?
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In the eyes of most Europeans, the EU is cold and remote. "Nobody could ever fall in love with the Single Market," warned Jacques Delors in the late 1980s, when the pioneering Commission president was at the height of his popularity and making the single market a reality.

- Giles MERRITT

In the Arab world there are, at least during this transition to a new Administration period, two manifest orientations as far as positioning towards Donald Trump’s win and its possible impact on the future relations between the United States and the Middle East region are concerned; there are two trends differentiated only by the extent to which each of them express the alarmed concern or, on the contrary, a cautious attitude limited to a natural unrest towards any cyclical change of the tenants of the White House and of "world’s leaders".

- Tomislav JAKIC

After Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential elections (which was, by the way, a surprise only to those indoctrinated, seduced or simply
Sometimes opinion polls are right. Italy after Mateo Renzi

Corneliu PIVARIU

As a result of the referendum held on December 4th, 2016 on the constitutional reform, the then prime minister - Matteo Renzi – announced his resignation next day and as of December 7th that has become effective. The referendum showed quite a heavy defeat as almost 60% of the participants voted against the reforms while for the reforms voted a little more than 40%. The rate of participation was one of the highest in Italy’s history, 65.5% of the population. Matteo Renzi announced that in case the reforms proposed by his government will not be backed by the population he shall resign, although the opinion polls published before the referendum stressed he would fail.

Political instability is nothing new for Italy as since the end of WWII 73 governments with 42 prime ministers have been replaced (some of them have been holding the portfolios 2-3 times) and 10 of them are still alive.

Following Renzi’s resignation the President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, nominated Paolo Gentiloni - foreign minister in the outgoing government, a member of the Democratic Party lead by Renzi, to form a new cabinet. He was invested following two parliamentarian session on December 13th and 14th by 169 yes votes and 99 votes against while the difference to 315 parliamentarians abstained from vote. Although Gentiloni was hoping to have a more substantial backing, the support he enjoyed was limited to the number the Democratic Party had previously. The opposition parties represented mainly by the Northern League (anti-EU) and Five Stars Movement want early elections in 2017 hopefully their position would be strengthened and would win.

Renzi is still the president of the Democratic Party and if he keeps his position after the party’s congress which date is to be announced soon, he will try to trigger early elections in June, 2017 (otherwise normally to be held in the summer of 2018).

The political instability in Italy is a proof of the worries the society of the peninsula are witnessing as it is confronted with four major problems: young generation’s serious disappointment; the economic problems; the situation of sovereign debt; immigration.

The young Italians have many reasons to be disappointed: although generally better trained than the previous generations, many of them have inferior jobs compared to their training or are unemployed, and live in the homes where they’\ve been born. These disillusions had as a result leaving the country for many of them and the rejection of participating to the political life within the main parties. If the current Italian political leadership does not secure more material and social opportunities for the young generation, enticing thus a greater and a real political commitment for them, then the consequences will be visible soon. It seems that part of the young generation is already moving towards the populist movement of the former comedian Beppe Grillo – Five Stars or other extremists movements.

Migration is another phenomenon Italy is especially confronted with as more than 173 ooo people crossed the Mediterranean for entering Italy in 2016, 20 000 more than in 2015. Although so far Italy was more of an entry point to Europe for the migrants, lately they are staying longer periods of time on the Italian territory and overpopulate the reception centers. Although Renzi government apportioned the migrants all over the country in towns and communes, the communities began protesting against new arrivals and it is quite clear they cannot absorb new immigrants indefinitely. According to certain recent sociological researches 50% of the Italians believe that the European Union is obstructing Italy in what concerns the migration management and 79% considers that EU’s migration policy is bad for Italy.

However, Italy’s biggest problem is its sovereign debt. The Italian government has to reimburse more than 211 billion euro due in 2017. Italy’s public debt reached already more than 135% of GDP. Two of the country’s biggest banks, Monte dei Paschi di Siena (the third) and UniCredit, should draw billions of euro for covering their unperforming loans given that the European Central Bank rejected the extension of the deadline for recapitalization. Italy fully contributes to the EU’s condition of uncertainty and instability: it is high time that the problems be professionally approached and solved decisively and seriously.
Althought part of the political, media and politologycal vocabulary since long time, two contemporary concepts were particularly brought back to the forefront and are now intensely circulated firstly on the Brexit issue, with all the polemics and parting it continues to cause and, more recently, on the American presidential elections won by the billionaire Donald Trump: it is about the so called “post-factual politics era” or “post-truth politics era”. Born in the USA in 2004, the said neologisms are very concisely defined as “a political culture on which foundation the political leaders or, as a case may be, mass-media are basing their discourse on offensively and predominantly exploiting the emotional factor at the expense of factual realities that are ignored or truncated or denied in order to get certain electoral benefits or promoting some tendentious media policies”¹. 2016 sanctioned the two concepts in a tempestuous way. When called for a national referendum on 23rd of June, the Britons decided their country’s exit from the European Community and on 8th of November the billionaire Donald Trump won the American presidential elections. The analysts who heeded critically the campaigns preceding the two instants emphasized a reality that did not match the traditional paradigms of such events, namely the intensity both the advocates of Brexit and Donald Trump refered abundantly to a disgraceful vocabulary accompanied by an entire theatrical setting plenty of eccentric hairdo, outbidded grimaces and an abundance of untruths presented as truths. This time the fundamentals of the “post-factual politics” materialized more precisely and proved to be embodied by the aggresivity of referring to the already mentioned emotional-humoral element and to the practice of outright denying or sidestepping the factual truth that could be perceived as a flagrant unconcern regarding the quality of information delivered to the recipient as well as its truth content.

Such a post-factual era is put in a synonymity relationship with another pivotal syntagm: that of the truth preceded by post- prefix.

But what truth is it about? The spontaneous and ready to hand answer would be that truth is the reality that can be easily proved and it is obvious. In his electoral campaign, when addressing to the millions of voting citizens Donald Trump stated for instance that he was resolutely opposed to the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. The journalists faithful to their professional deontology proved irrefutably the contrary: the criticism brought by Trump to the Iraqi invasion came one year later when the Baathist regime was already removed from power and Paul Bremer, the civilian administrator was implementing “Pax Americana” in an Iraq that even today is not pacified. Nothing new under the sun. George W. Bush exercised such post-factual politics when deceiving about the non-existent nuclear arsenals of Saddam Hussein.

It would be inaccurate to claim – as not a few analysts do – that “the post-truth era” exhibits its virtues in the western society only. On the contrary, it seems to include all geographical affected spaces in various degrees by the post-modernist canons and one discovers perplexed that rationality goes through a regressive orbit on the universal human values chain, being increasingly replaced by an anti-rationality that concocts and preaches its own truths disseminated also plentifully by globalisation and in this framework by the instruments of social media as well. The Arab world for instance has a long history whereby the assertions bordering enormity displace the undeniable truth and can be spread without hindrance and particularly without consequences or, in any case, without beneficial consequences for the more and more ignored truth. Again, this tendency is resistant to such an extent that any honourable attempt of entering upon a “fact-checking”, of a “debunking”, namely disclosing the coordinates and instruments spreading into this “post-factual era” remains without consequences. On the Internet the internauts are grouping themselves according to mutual beliefs, ideas, concerns and certitudes and any endeavour to dismantle their fallacies when it’s the case prove to

¹. The theory was promoted in 2004 by Ralph Keyes, in his book The Post-Truth Era:Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life, St. Martin Press, New York, 2004
be equally useless. And it is more unproductive the more modern governments let themselves pray to temptation of proclaiming their programs and ideologies as universal truths even at the risk that doing so they gravely and dramatically prejudice the value principles among which freedom of belief and free speech are at the forefront.

Fabrication, political manipulation and even disseminating conspiracy theories go certainly hand in hand with falsifying and misinterpreting the reality and this ascertainment raises the question if at the end of the day politics was ever synonymous with the truth? “There were- Machiavelli wrote, princes who observed too little of the promises made and of the words uttered and who by cunning manoeuvred the people’s minds and brains”. But is there really a need to search for telling examples of the XVth century when modern and contemporary history are generously offering them no matter if we speak of the Cold War period or of the time we are living in now? We concretely refered to the examples offered by Brexit process and by the recent presidential voting in the United States that generated already two new conceptual syntagms, “brexism” and, respectively “Trumpism”. The example offered by the Russian Federation’s policy that had taken the biggest strides towards the “post-factual” realm domestically and in the international context cannot be absent from this discussion about the “post-factual era”. We mention here only two of the many examples that can be given: the Ukrainian crisis that resulted in the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula using the facile excuse of “popular will” and the allegation according to which one of the causes that brought about the Russian interferences in the wasp’s nest of the Middle East resides according to the Muscovite discourse in the political factor’s desire - euphorically backed by the Russian Orthodox Church - to secure protection for the Eastern Christian minorities threatened by the Islamist-terrorist danger! President Vladimir Putin himself never hesitated to officially ensure that there is no Russian soldier in Ukraine and that the sole reason he is fighting in Syria is to eradicate jihadism and secure protection and assistance to the Christian coreligionists in the Arab world. From this standpoint, one should not forget a fact that – neither Vladimir Putin nor other bigger or smaller leaders ignore – the individual has the tendency of instinctively embrace the information offered to him, a preferable attitude instead of the effort implied by the sound endeavour of identifying the untruth. In other words, it is about the psychological factor the Nobel laureate Daniel Kahnemen called the “cognitive ease” through which man prefers to avoid those facts that once known would suppose a cognitive effort often uncomfortable and tiring.

If the world is really going through a post-factual and post-truth era, to what extent can we still pretend as the political elites do that the contemporary world is also living a democracy era based on the manipulation of facts and of the deep reality? And by accepting the essence of the “post-era”, namely that truth became a humble Cinderella and that the untruths disseminated by political elites and by mass media cannot be discerned from fiction any longer, it means that we are in front of a serious problem and that we are threatened from its thicket by two alternatives both equally defiant: either we are a humoral humanity destitute of the capacity of differentiating between emotional and factual or humanity is reduced to an island surrounded by the invasive ocean of disinformation, manipulation and lies that were raised to the status of political syllabus and behavioural attitude. The means of coming out from such a dilemma and to come back to normality are not lacking and we mention here only the will of being aware that precisely the reality that there is an “era” of untruth and that history is made, before the leaders, by what is called with a more and more despised word “people” or, in a more punctual hypostasis “electorate”.

Controllers, abusers and manipulative people don’t question themselves. They don’t ask themselves if the problem is them. They always say the problem is someone else.

Quotes & Thoughts

- Darlene Omiert

www.pinterest.com/quotesthoughts
Ambassador prof. Dumitru CHICAN

On 20th of January of the forthcoming year, Obama’s America will virtually become for the next four or eight years “Trumpist” America, and the insights, worries, hopes and questions of the international community are focused on the attention paid to the policy the new Donald Trump Administration will accredit and promote not only domestically but, to the same extent, in the field of America’s positioning herself with regard to the world’s nations and peoples and what impact the said policy might have internally for the chessboard of the states making up today’s conflictual world. The couple of considerations on the influence the changing of Washigton’s Administration could have abroad are natural to the extent that nobody can deny or ignore the weight and the role the policies emanated from the American capital within the concert of the nations of the world and within the global environment of the international order.

There is presently a quasi-unanimous appreciation that “Donald Trumps’ America” will be to a small extent only similar to “Barack Obama’s America”.

A first comment that might be made from this standpoint refers to the fact that the recent presidential elections in the United States gave and will continue to give a significant impulse to the rising on the political arena of the right ideologies and formations globally and particularly in the western world. The November American presidential voting divided, one may say, the world among those who regarded these elections enthusiastically and hopeful, those who evinced cautiousness and skepticism and those who did not hide their anxiety and even fear concerning the immediate future of the American political body. These cleavages could be noticed more intensely within the European community where an attentive view will uncover the forceful, manifold formal rise of the right even in states considered the “pillars of the Old continent” such as France, Germany and Great Britain. The same phenomenon can be also noticed on the other geographical coordinates of the western community and we refer here to Japan, as the same ascent tendency of the right ideology is manifest on other continents as well - Asia where the phenomenon is a strong one in India and Pakistan or in Latin America where lately the right political forces seized the levers of power in Brazil, Argentine and Venezuela, where a strong movement for removing the leftist president Nicolas Maduro from power is unfolding.

Various ideological forms of the right are covered by this advance and we refer especially to the radical nationalism or to the religious right, the latter being particularly vigorous within the Arab and Islamic world where the endeavour of interpreting the political and social domain exclusively through the prism of theological dogma leads to radical outbursts amounting to violent extremism and to sectarian terrorism. The cause of this phenomenon is not strange to the colonial nostalgia and to the ideologies that led to the outbreak of the two World Wars in the European western world or to turning back to the same glorious past of the caliphate which ghost is brought back once more to the forefront based exclusively on religious radicalisms.

A second comment we bring into question refers to the way the United States of America will address the contemporary world’s global issues and the manner the new Administration in Washington will relate to them.

In principle, the most probable perspective is that the Trump Administration way of managing domestic and international policies will be dominated by pragmatism, by the “functional” side or, in other words, the way in which these relations will be politically, economically, militarily, strategically and in terms of security advantageous to the American national interests. In a way, such an approach is expected if one takes into account the future president’s background as businessman for who the pragmatism, “gain” and “benefit” represent his life philosophy. Under such circumstances, America’s relations with the outside world will be driven to a lesser extent by theories, concepts and ideological and philosophical beliefs to the good of profit and its directly quantifiable outcome.

From this perspective it is expected that the foreign policy priorities of the new American Republican Administration be the result of a mix of realities and interests acquired and conveyed from
an administration to the next and of the analysis of the new realities the geostrategical and geopolitical developments will highlight. Depending on such a comparative scheme, the decision makers and the planners will determine the states and regional or international alliances that are judged useful and able to support a functional cooperation with Washington for achieving the latter’s foreign objectives or at least for facilitating such mission and countering the inconsistent policies or positions opposed to the Administration’s global policy projects. In practical terms that means perpetuating some policies and approaches taken over from former or even anterior to former Administration on which there is a traditional consensus that cannot be ignored once the tenants of of the White House are changed. But, at the same time it will mean that in case of certain states which guarantees proved times and again to back America’s political strategies the relationship will not be altered except when added dynamics to the already existing and traditional relations can be brought.

Finally we refer to United States’ future positioning towards the contemporary world’s main conflictual dossiers among which the existing situation in the Middle East and in the Islamic world are at the forefront. Obviously it is untimely to issue peremptory opinions on this issue or on the whole of the American foreign policy during Donald Trumps mandate but at least on some of the sections of this region’s dossier principled prognosis could be crystalized. Thus, as far as the relations between the new Administration and Israel are concerned it is unlikely they could be affected by dramatic transformations and even if such developments occur they will materialize through a more pronounced galvanization of the connections with the Jewish State, connections that witnessed frequently cold moments during Barack Obama’s two mandates. That will implicitly mean that the process of solving the Palestinian problem will be hereinafter blocked and without credible prospects as eventual new initiatives and proposals of the American diplomacy being possible only as far as Washington will consider at a certain moment that the continuation of this conflict would represent a threat to the USA’s interests or to the Jewish State’s security. In the same geographic area, the declarations during and subsequent to the electoral campaign can be understood that the new Administration contemplates denouncing the treaty concluded with Iran concerning the nuclear programs of that country. Nevertheless, reaching such a goal is not without obstacles if only in this case it is not a bilateral document between the United States and Iran but a collective one agreed between Tehran and a group of six states among which one finds The Russian Federation and China. In such a situation the American side will have two options only: either to remain party to the treaty and insist on some adjustments of the document or to unilaterally denounce it by ignoring the principles concerning concluding and denouncing the treaties.

At least in the light of the signals sent by Donald Trump with regard to the Arab and Islamic world, to refugees and to the presence of Muslims on the territory of the United States, one may generally assess that the relationship between Washington and the Arab and Islamic states will continue to be confused and tense.

Certainly any scenarios and prognoses drawn up ante factum have a more consistent or more reduced bit of relativism so that it may be assessed that only after the new president is sworn in at the White House a portrait of “new America” and its relationship with the world could be crystalized.

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**Euro-dole:**

**A German initiative that Berlin doesn't welcome**

In the eyes of most Europeans, the EU is cold and remote. “Nobody could ever fall in love with the Single Market,” warned Jacques Delors in the late 1980s, when the pioneering Commission president was at the height of his popularity and making the single market a reality.

There’s little love of any sort for the EU nowadays. The Union plumbs new depths of distrust and antagonism. To survive and flourish, the EU must become more directly relevant to the people of Europe – and there is a way to do it. An EU-wide unemployment benefit system has been mooted since 2012, if not before. Earlier...
models have been refined into one that looks feasible.

But while the details are important, the key point is a bigger one: the need to rebrand the European Union as a caring organisation rather than an arrogant and unfeeling bureaucracy.

Youth unemployment is widely seen as symptomatic of the EU’s failure to deliver the economic benefits it promised. It’s an unfair criticism: job creation policies to overcome mismatches and speed young people into work are defined at a national level – and often locally. But as we all know, in politics, perception is everything.

And that’s why a European benefits scheme is a good idea. It would be a high-profile sign that the EU is recovering the spirit of solidarity between member states that is currently in full retreat. Another reason – more complicated, but fundamentally more important still – is that it would move social policy back near the top of the EU’s agenda.

Saving the euro is vital, and a European benefits scheme would be a first step towards the fiscal integration the eurozone needs. It would also focus attention on Europe’s huge but overlooked demographic problem. By the middle of this century there will be only two working-age Europeans per pensioner (down from a four-to-one ratio today). Social protection will fast become the hottest political challenge of all time.

The latest European unemployment benefits model comes from a German research outfit – the state of Baden-Württemberg’s Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW). Its approach would be to harmonise national systems and pool relevant national budgets to create common levels of benefits. Quite apart from the scheme’s public relations value, its authors claim significant economic advantages. They reckon it would help smooth out the disparities between regions suffering from the uneven impacts of unemployment, and in the longer term would cushion the asymmetric shocks that have been a feature of the eurozone crisis.

Not everyone shares this view. Critics of the idea raise the ‘moral hazard’ question and ask whether it wouldn’t encourage weaker eurozone countries to keep on delaying reforms. They also argue that the wider benefits system could serve as a magnet to ‘benefits scroungers’ – and so encourage even more joblessness.

But the bottom line is, of course, the potential cost to the eurozone’s richer northern countries. Led by Germany, they are already opposed to proposals for eurozone bonds to help tackle sovereign debt problems.

So on the face of it, the unemployment benefits scheme stands no chance at all. But that is to ignore populist Euroscepticism – a far greater threat to the European project.

If the benefits scheme could be presented as a more human face of the EU, as well as a means of breaking the deadlock over the eurozone’s future, then maybe it has a future. That would offer Berlin an opportunity to refute the notion that, in the words of Oscar Wilde, it “knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing”.

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After Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential elections (which was, by the way, a surprise only to those indoctrinated, seduced or simply bought), Europe, or to be more precise: the European Union is behaving like an orphan, abandoned by its strong father, whose hand it held and whom he(she) followed wherever he went. Europe does not know. Europe is asking. Europe has to know. Europe is warning. All this is addressed to the new leader who will take over the White House in mid-January next year. When we say “Europe” we think, it should be repeated, on the European Union, although the countries, just a few of them remaining, who are not already members of the EU are equally puzzled, they don’t know what to do and who will give them instructions for their behavior in the future.

This total disorientation and – let us put it frankly – the fear from a situation in which they will have to think for themselves and to take over the responsibility for what they are doing, this is the main characteristic of European countries after Trump’s victory. If we believe him “nothing will be as it was”, but let us be aware of the fact that Europe got accustomed to the role of a US “lackey” from the first days after victory in WW 2 and especially in the days of the cold war and extremely tense relations between East and West. The only exemption was France in the years of President Charles de Gaulle. The general even took his country out of the military structure of NATO, because –as he saw it – the US dominance in the Atlantic Pact did not correspond with the role he wanted his country to play on the international scene. But the rest followed, although the public opinion in these countries would from time to time openly rebel against the American policy (just two examples: demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and against deploying the Pershing missiles in Germany). What is however important, is the fact that, despite these vigorous protests, the ruling elites in Europe accepted the role of followers of the US, without asking any unpleasant questions.

Even in recent years, when it became known that the US National Security Agency is spying worldwide whomever it wants, including leading politicians of the allied countries, not a single one of these allies dared to do, what any country with a sound self-respect would have done: send a protest note, sharply demand the spying to be stopped and recall its ambassador from Washington for consultations for an undefined period. No, the Old continent whose history gives him in many senses the right to think of itself as superior to the US (not economically and militarily, of course) choose to continue playing in the front row in a game it did not either plan or execute.

Such a position could have to a certain point been understood in the times when Europe was divided between the West (democratic) and the East (authoritarian, socialist). At that time “big brother” from the other side of the Atlantic was seen as a necessity in the West - as counterweight to the hegemony that threatened from the East. Although even then it was quite clear to anybody who was willing to see things as they were, that in Europe it is possible to wage a policy aimed in the first place on the benefit of Europe. The most evident proof of this is the period of the West German chancellor Willy Brand. To accept the German (East) – Polish border and to find a common language with the “other” Germany (although Bonn never officially recognized Berlin-Pankow), these were things unthinkable of in the - until then - practiced scenario of cold war. But, they were doable, because at that time Nixon and Kissinger forged in Washington the détente strategy, trying (and they will succeed!) in calming down US – Soviet relations and putting them on the normal track.

“In Europe, the continent of the sharpest ideological divide, with practically two halves militarily confronting each other all over the core sectors of the continent (where Atlantic Europe was behind some of the gravest atrocities of the 20th century, from French Indochina, Falklands/Malvinas, Indonesia, Congo, Rhodesia to Algeria and Egypt), and with its southern flank of Portugal, Spain and Greece (and Turkey sporadically) run by the US-backed murderous military Junta, Yugoslavia was remarkably mild island of stability, moderation and wisdom.” – accurately notes on irresponsibility of superpowers and its satellites prof. Anis H.
Indeed, another example of an independent policy in Europe was without any doubt Yugoslavia. And even the movement called “Euro-communism” based on the experience of the Yugoslav independent policy (in regard to Moscow) proved that in Europe there were ideas, there was knowledge and there was courage to emerge on a path that will be nobody’s, but European. And - that there were politicians who were ready to enter this path.

While all this was happening the European project was taking shape. It started as the Coal and Steel community (the first obstacle to possible new wars erected by those who experienced WW2) to become in our days the European union. But, although the Union (at that time still: Community) experienced its first big wave of enlargement after the collapse of socialism and disintegration of the Soviet Union, thus growing into a truly all-European project, it made at the same time a giant step backwards. For the sake of never totally subdued nationalism in the West and a fast emerging new nationalism in the East it abandoned for good, even as a distant goal, the idea of the United States of Europe. Washington did verbally always support the EU, but objectively speaking, for the strategists there a strong European Union was never seen as their interest. What they wanted was a strong NATO, which they transformed from an exclusively European defense alliance into a mighty tool of its own policy on the global scene. This was, among other things, demonstrated by the unwritten rule that every country aspiring to become EU member had to join NATO first. The membership in NATO was thus treated as some sort of preliminary examination (and qualification at the same time) for the membership in the European Union.

After the attacks of 9.11. (2001.) American policy inaugurated the division of the Old continent to the “old” and “new” Europe. From Washington’s point of view countries of “new” Europe were those ready to obey and do what they were told to do from the other side of the Atlantic. This “new Europe” free finally from the Soviet supremacy and so eager to accept a new one from another part of the world, applauded without hesitating for even a moment the so called Arab spring and supported the confrontation policy towards Russia (a renewed form of the “containment” from the cold war days). Nobody even mentioned that what happened in Ukraine would have most probably taken another course without the active involvement of the West, including the US. Today both the old and new Europe have lost the “father” who guided them by the hand and told them what to do, when and how, regardless of what was in question. And there are no new instructions!

One might judge Donald Trump this or that way – as the devil himself, or as a man with some new ideas, some of them encouraging (rejection of the policy of imposing regimes), some – worrying (non-acceptance of the fact of global warming). But, we are not discussing Trump, we are speaking about Europe. And neither this continent, nor the European Union showed that they deserve to be treated as being mature. The Union, not only yesterday, didn’t use the unique chance to become an equal partner to the US, Russia or China, by being unable to formulate its own, common foreign or security policy, yesterday – a tragic lack of orientation in confronting the refugee wave (that would not be as it is now without the US policy, as it was) and it is demonstrating – today – a total lack of orientation in a situation when it is clear that a candidate (now President-elect) who is not the favorite of mighty either financial, or political circles is preparing to enter the White House.

And this is why Europe is standing lost on the global scene – as an orphan.
Aleppo – a wound of international indifference

I do not ask you to save our narrow streets, our markets, our walls, they are gone! I do not ask you to save the deceased souls, they are gone! I do not ask you to save the freedom, it's gone! I ask for something more I ask you to save the rest of our lives, our women and children…

(from a letter addressed by Aleppo’s Mayor to the President of the European Council, December 14, 2016)

Corneliu PIVARIU

Once upon a time there was a country called Syria and a famous city called Aleppo. Attested as being inhabited since the VIth millenium B.C., Aleppo was the third biggest city of the Ottoman Empire after Constantinople/Istanbul and Cairo and according to the 2004 census, it had 2.1 million inhabitants being therefore Syria’s biggest city with an important Christian community (including an important Armenian community as well). 80% of Aleppo’s population was Sunni. When writing this paper and after more than four years of civil war, Aleppo is the most affected Syrian city as the estimations concerning the civil population remaining in the city varies between 60 000 – 100 000 inhabitants. It is appreciated that during almost five years of civil war around 200 000 people died and the material destructions are difficult to estimate as the city lies waste even if the official propaganda of Assad’s regime shows some areas (in the West of the city that was permanently under the latter’s control) where no signs of the conflict are visible. The destructions of the universal heritage are immeasurable; 1,500 out of 1,600 of the old and famous Aleppo’s bazaar shops were destroyed.

The ruler of the presidential pallace on the Kassioun Mountain in Damascus (yet no one knows exactly if and how much of this location he still controls) and I refer here to Bashar al-Assad claims he liberated the city. In fact, his troops had a rather pale contribution to this action (the aviation distinguished itself by indiscriminately bombing whatever targets - hospitals included) and the success is due to Russian actions and to other foreign forces – the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iranian Guardians of the Revolution and the Iraki Shia militias.

Numerous war crimes were perpetrated and the international community was incapable to put an end to this bloody episode of the Syrian civil war. It was on December the 6th only when one of the heavyweights of today’s world – Chancellor Angela Merkel declared that the situation in Aleppo is a “disgrace” for the international community, a day after the UN Security Council failed to adopt a new resolution on a temporary cease-fire allowing for the evacuation of the wounded and the sick and the access of humanitarian convoys to the rebels controlled area as Russia and China vetoed the resolution. Besides, Aleppo’s fall is not a surprise since the event that announced the situation was the rebels’ offensive on October the 28th, 2016 when their attempt to break the encirclement failed lamentably. It is likely that when this paper is sent to press the last pockets of resistance (totalling around 3-4 km²) would have been eliminated according to the declarations of the Russian Foreign Affairs minister Lavrov: “those who will not leave the city willingly will be annihilated”, while presenting the USA’s attempt to get a cease-fire as a tentative to succeed in rearming and resupplying the rebels and added that a “serious conversation with our American partners didn’t bear fruits”.

Aleppo’s victory of the troops under Bashar al-Assad’s label is the greatest success since the beginning of the civil war and, at the same time, the heaviest defeat for Assad regime’s opponents. The troops loyal to Assad control Syria’s first five important towns and this achievement will make them try to take over control of other areas through military means. The problem Assad’s regime cannot acknowledge publicly but that is of its great concern is the real control on the Syrian territory. The Syrian Army properly suffered important losses during the years of civil war through betrayals or defections and bringing in foreign fighters is not the appropriate solution. Without Moscow’s and Tehran’s assistance, Assad’s regime was since long gone and the price it has to pay will not be easily accepted as in fact Bashar is a puppet of his allies and the latter will not hesitate to underline as the case may be. An eventual attempt to decisively change the sectarian composition by increasing the Shia’s presence in Sunni majority areas would be a failure of the current regime in Damascus. Syria became really a experimental testing ground not only for different arms and armaments, for military training but also for experimenting of new developments in international relations where Russia will have the initiative at least for this period and probably during 2017. That was possible as a result of numerous hesitations and lack of action of the international community beginning with the UN, the Arab League, USA, the European Union and other important international players. Aleppo is the open wound through which Syria continues its agony under the yet world’s helpless eyes.
No matter what causes determined the billionaire Donald Trump’s winning the contest for the White House Presidency one may say that the American electorate voted for change to the detriment of continuity, for the candidate coming from outside the establishment and who entered the race armed with a rich arsenal of atypical visions and ideas that have too little in common with the American electoral tradition, ideas that shocked not only domestically but also the majority of world’s capitals which do not hide or are hardly disguising their surprise and uneasiness past the congratulation messages sent to the winner and equally cordial and prompt answers of the latter.

In the Arab world there are, at least during this transition to a new Administration period, two manifest orientations as far as positioning towards Donald Trump’s win and its possible impact on the future relations between the United States and the Middle East region are concerned; there are two trends differentiated only by the extent to which each of them express the alarmed concern or, on the contrary, a cautious attitude limited to a natural unrest towards any cyclical change of the tenants of the White House and of “world’s leaders”. The Arab world, like the entire international community went through the whole spectrum of such changes whereby Democrat, Republican, neoconservative, liberal, advocates of interventionism or of isolationism presidents paraded the Oval Office. All of them came over and went away but America’s major interests remained and were protected by all the presidents who, in discharge of their duty were modeled to different degrees by the planning and decision making institutions in order to fall within the functioning mechanism of the system. The new president cannot be an exception as once being sworn in the institutional customary “grinding machine” will start spontaneously for bringing the leader within the American historical paradigm.

It might be said that such an analysis is typical for the first above mentioned category. As far as the second orientation of the alarmists of the Arab world is concerned, they start from a directly opposite approach based on the conviction that the leader considered in his own individuality had always a decisive role in history by influencing it, orienting it and leaving his mark on it.

No matter what the reasoning, arguments and analyses each camp has, the general climate prevailing equally within the two trends is a cautious one particularly when taking into account that during the course of his electoral campaign Donald Trump was not too cordial when referring to the Arab world and Islamic community on the whole, leaving the impression of ignorance and distance from the problems of this geographical area equating not a few times the sintagms “Arab” and “Muslim” with “radical terrorist”. These side-slips are natural at the end of the day in a society that identity-wise and conceptually is constructed on a double ideational foundation namely that the international community means “America first” on one hand and, on the other hand the rest of the world is seen through the prism of a differentiation between black and white, between the futile enemies and allies or friends appreciated as such from the exclusivist perspective of the American national interest. From this standpoint, Donald Trump’s conceptual and programmatic offer is rather a mix of “isolationism” and several facets of a neoimperialism towards states traditionally considered hostile but that can become friendly such as the Russian Federation’s case seen through Donald Trump’s eyes and also towards allies and friends, nevertheless conditional on their paying “the services rendered by America and to obey more to Washington’s voice than they did so far”.

The Arab world is also circumscribed to such a construction of the new American president’s doctrine under the heavy historical responsibility of generating one of the most serious challenges to the American global interests, namely terrorism inspired by religious Islam. From this perspective, the Arabs can be, according to the same Donald Trump’s vision either friends to the extent they repudiate the religious extremism or foes who, accept and support more or less this destructive ideology. That means that for benefitting from America’s friendship and protection, both types of Arabs have to pay the price of this friendship and security provided by the USA through the involvement, together with the Arab “friends” in the annihilation of this contemporary world’s scourge. Yet another reason for concern is mentioned by the mediatic
commentaries in the Arab space, namely that being at the same time Muslims and citizens coming from the Arab world they could have the surprise of not benefitting from a benevolent welcome when they would want to travel to or to settle on the American territory while those Arabs already in America and having even American citizenship will be subject to extra security supervision that limitates the minimum of liberties and social rights they have in their adoptive homeland.

However, the feeling dominating now the Arab analysis and assessments concerning the relationship with the USA is that the practice of the more or less strategic alliances and of the American-Arab cooperation as they were carried out after the Second World War lack the perspective of going on. And especially on the Arab shores of the Persian Gulf there are not a few questions about the extent to which the Republican Administration will advance in implementing its warnings with regard to denouncing the “nuclear treaty” with Iran – even against the principles provided for in the international law of treaties, i.e. from the Arab perspective, that means a return to zero, to a more pronounced radicalization of the Iranian theocratic regime and to enhancing the “export of revolution” in the region without any credible guarantee that the Republican Administration will grant assistance and protection (and without knowing for the time being what are, in accordance with Donald Trump’s approaches, the required costs for fulfilling its role of “gendarme”).

All these assessments are inevitably drawn up on the basis of the statements and declarations made by Donald Trump himself, which seriousness will be tested to their real dimensions only when, on 20th of January, Trump’s America will move from words to deeds. This “passage from words to deeds” became lately a sintagm that has made more frequently recourse to the Arab leaders and deidents’ political discourse – especially Bashar Al-Assad’s without any of them analyzing the reverse of the medal expressed by an interrogation: what would be if within this relationship, Donald Trump asks in his turn the same thing from the Arab world: passage to deeds. And, in such a case, what should be the deeds expected from the Arab community? And moreover, will the Arab world be ready to answer unitary and solidary to the American requests concerning the “deeds” demanded from the Arab side?

It is quite a certainty that any form of future relationship between the United States of America and the Arab-Islamic community will be differently substantiated from the so far existing one, the period of Barack Obama’s two mandates included and the one who in 2009 in his “historical speech delivered in Cairo” was “stretching a hand to the Arabs” and assured them of the wish of normality in the bilateral relations and was awarded for that a Nobel Prize for Peace, a peace he didn’t succeed in achieving it. Donald Trump will certainly be more reserved in extending offers without coverage. Especially as he demonstrated discursively so far, the billionaire Trump who became in the mean time President-elect Trump doesn’t seem to be interested in old Alfred Nobel’s laurels.

THE SYRIAN CRISIS – ANOTHER YEAR OF WAR. WHAT COMES NEXT?

Maher NABOULSI, Syria

The year ending soon, the sixths since the outbreak of the bloody protest upheaval turned rapidly into a multi-ethnic, sectarian and multinational civil war meant for Syria reaching a climax of brutal violence and of a diplomacy not only mercantile and hypocritical but also ineffective, a peak from where the Syrians, in the first place and together with them the involved international community expect a radical change of the weathervane towards an as rapid as possible stopping of brutality and suffering and a return to rationality and normality after the change of the electoral paradigm in the United States of America.

All along the year coming to an end, the conflict in this country acquired the baleful pivotal role of the contest for poaching the Middle East and a chessboard on which possibly the most intensive post-war competition among the great regional and international powers aimed at reconfiguring the geopolitical and strategic map or using it as currency in dealing with other conflicts for power, expansion and political, military, strategic and not the least underneath ideological influence is under way in spite of the fact that the ideology that splitted the world for half a century in two irreconcilable blocks exhausted its role and was replaced globally by a tentacular form of neomperialism. 2016 was, with all these, the period whereby the Syrian crisis turned into one of the most destabilising elements regionally and one disturbing the international balances.

The Russian direct intervention in the Syrian conflict militarily-wise at the end of September, 2015
had a strong impact not only on the military “front” but also on the individual, collective, regional and multilateral diplomacy, an impact that during the current year remodeled the perception of the Syrian conflict by both the United States and the Russian Federation and opened a new chapter, that proved to be infertile so far, on the world’s new global order. The “new” isolationist strategy adopted by Obama Administration during the second mandate combined with the Russian Federation’s pragmatic military aggressivity and that of its allies in the Syrian crisis lead to pushing the political and diplomatic initiatives in obscurity and turning Syria into an open field of confrontations for remodeling and making a problem out of some traditional concepts such as “zones of influence”, “the new global order” or “proxy war” waged by the great regional and extra regional powers in order to revise the “zones of influence” as they were inherited after the fall of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War and and after the materialization of the colonialist agreement known by the names of its authors – Sykes-Picot signed 100 years ago, a century full of troubled history.

As of November, 2015 Washington and Moscow initiated a political and diplomatic initiative meant to easing the military side of the crisis and to finally defuse it politically. This joint initiative materialized among others in setting up the International Syria Support Group that included Iran in spite of the opposition of the conservative Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf. One month later, the UN Security Council voted the Resolution 2245 that set up a “road map” for peace negotiations, while the Syrian opposition backed by Saudi Arabia reacted by setting up a self-titled “High Committee for Negotiations”, an entity that for the first time was made up of a large representation of civilian and Islamic factions and of the political and military resistance. Unfortunately the diplomatic endeavours unfolded permanently on the background of the military confrontations that continued and escalated especially in Aleppo city area. Nevertheless the American and Russian ministers of foreign affairs John Kerry and Serghei Lavrov respectively agreed upon imposing the beligerent parties a national truce for ceasing hostilities, an agreement which provisions did not include the main Islamist groups active on the battlefield – Islamic State/Daesh and Djabhat Al-Nussra (the Syrian affiliate of Al-Qaida renamed later “Fateh Al-Sham” - Conquerors of Syria). For the first time such an armistice was agreed upon by the myriad opposition but the continuation by the Syrian army and the Russian and Iranian troops of punctually fighting the rebel groups lead to the falling apart of the armistice and the fighting resumed and generalised with increased violence and brutality.

The political and diplomatic process proved to be unapt for paving the way to a durable solution to the conflict and this is fundamentally due to the fact that the political and military chessboard was monopolized by the Russian Federation and the United States and the two showed either inability or lack of political will to exert each of them pressure on the beligerent groups they back for determining the latter to be really involved in implementing what has been agreed upon at the table of dialogue. One adds to the situation the main actor’s – the United States and the Russian Federation – hanging on to the dilemma connected to Bashar Al-Assad’s leaving power or including his regime into the political process and this dispute is strongly affected by the influential regional players, mainly Saudii Arabia, Turkey and Iran. This element as well as lack of a workable alternative in the process of diplomatic negotiations had and has another detrimental effect namely bringing to the forefront of the discourse the issue of Syria’s
By the end of 2016, Moscow controls most of the items on Syria’s agenda. Russia’s military operations there, underestimated by Barack Obama Administration’s decision makers had tangible results in what concerns Syrian regime’s durability and placed the Russian Federation at least so far at the forefront of the policies of the entire Middle East’s dossier whereby the region’s leaders – the Gulf monarchs, the King of Jordan, the head of the Egyptian state, the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other regional politicians made a genuine pilgrimage to Moscow having in mind either to determine Russia relinquishes its military intervention on Vladimir Putin’s Eastern intentions or in the end to offer him a series of commercial and economic benefits hoping for a Kremlin’s more flexible position. None of the said endeavours had the expected results.

The electoral campaign for the presidential elections in the US and the billionaire Donald Trump’s – the Republican candidate – win shocked not only the majority of the capitals involved in a way or another in the unfolding of the Syrian dossier but also from the perspective of profoundly complicating the way this crisis is approached. In his electoral campaign the Republican candidate for the presidency tackled in his characteristic style the Middle East issue and explicitly the developments in Syria. Not a few regional leaders were in all likelihood surprised by the ideas contemplated by the new American president for who the present Syrian regime leaving power “is no loner a priority” and a functional relation with Moscow becomes a possibility. Sure enough the declarations of “candidate” Trump cannot be taken for granted so that the president-elect can still make unexpected surprises. Yet, if “his words” turn into “deeds” (as some regional leaders urge), then there may be reasons for hope for bringing the Syrian tragedy to an end and alleviating the tensions of the general climate of this world’s sensitive and complicated region.

DAESH GOES... AL-QAIDA COMES BACK?

Dinu COSTESCU

On October the 30th the quarterly periodical issued by Al-Mustaqbal Center for Strategic Studies in Abu Dhabi published a study of Samuel Marrero, Executive Director of the Center for Strategic Studies on the Middle East and South Asia of Pentagon where the author contemplated the idea that as Islamic State/Daesh regresses towards disintegration, the front of the Islamic radical phenomenon will witness a forceful coming back of Al-Qaeda with the possibility that the remains and the franchises of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s “Islamic caliphate” return to the original entity Al-Qaeda from which they split up at the end of the phase dominated by former Al-Qaeda in Iraq set up and ruled until 2009 by the Jordanian Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi. The idea was taken over and enlarged upon by Stratfor in its weekly analysis bulletin of November the 3rd.

It is assumed in both situations that after the territorial losses registered in Syria and the offensive launched in Iraq for liberating Mossul from the jihadists’ control that would be followed by a similar onslaught in Syria for regaining Rakka, the current “jihadist capital”, the entity named Daesh enters a stage of material, military and human irreversible regress accompanied by a progressive loss of its attractiveness, theses and dogmatic and ideological arguments on which foundation Daesh was established and witnessed the already known expansion that started in 2014 once Islamic State was proclaimed to be converted shortly after into “Islamic caliphate”.

The destruction of certain vital centers of the jihadist-terrorist logistical presence in Iraq and Syria, dismantling the communications networks and channels with the outside world, of supply and arming routes and cutting off fi-
nancing or physical liquidation of some important commanders of the organization are some only of the causal factors that contributed to weakening of the operational capacities of the group that, nevertheless continues to exist at the end of this year and that furthermore it has in place a network of satellite groupings affiliated by oath of allegiance and spread geographically over 25 countries where 24 “vilayets” were proclaimed and then became self-declared provinces of the “caliphate” which ideology and practices are enforced more or less faithfully in the areas it is present while 16 of them are in Syria and Iraq only. That does not exclude the fact that, following the campaign against the terrorist phenomenon the number of victims of brutal actions carried out or claimed by Daesh in different parts of the world might have diminished during the last few months by 10% according to the report concerning the dynamics of the jihadist terrorism published on November the 16th.

Is the collapse of the “caliphate” in the offing?

In spite of the regresses witnessed in other geographical areas, like for instance in Libya, of the optimistic reports concerning the advance of the Iraqi government forces on the Mossul front and of the encirclement of Rakka in the context of the awaited decisive anti-terrorist onslaught, the answer to this question is still uncertain at least in light of previous experiences that showed the group still has a significant potential of coping with crisis situations and of overcoming them. Between 2006 and 2008 the former group descending from Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi’s Al-Qaida registered losses yet that did not dramatically affect its survival capacity as it happened in Anbar Province in Iraq and in the famous Sunni triangle of the same country. That does not mean that the group is not badly shaken including its attractiveness and the credibility of some of its doctrinary founding legends such as the lengthy publicized “Dabiq m-

“apocaliptical little town” has fallen the credibility among Daesh jihadists of the imam and “supreme commander’s” of the ‘new caliphate” phantasmal prophecies shattered dramatically.

It is important that sooner or later Daesh will not be any longer what it was in 2014 and the above-mentioned analyses of Stratfor and researcher Samuel Marrero start from this supposition when assessing that inevitably the disintegration of Daesh will mean it will either scatter or return within Al-Qaida original matrix or the latter will revert to the forefront of the Islamic terrorist jihadist framework. And in favour of the idea of “renaissance” of the network created by Ossama Bin Laden the researchers advance a summum of arguments among with one should firstly mention:

- Dramatic decrease of Daesh’s human potential that according to American General Sean MacFerland, high commander within the International Anti-terrorist Coalition reached the estimated threshold of 20 000 men after only between August and the launching of “Mossul Operation” in Iraq around 45 000 jihadist fighters were eliminated and it is supposed that during forthcoming period, after launching the offensive towards Rakka the group’s human capacity will continue to diminish;

- As compared to Al-Qaeda’s, Daesh’s influence and “prestige” is dwindling and the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan where Daesh is loosing ground in favour of Al-Qaida type jihadism is telling;

- From the same comparative outlook, Al-Qaida proves to be more flexible and having more adaptability to the changing conditions of fighting fronts against the “remote ennemy” avoiding at the same time oppressive and repressive acts against the tribal and social environment within which it operates as it receives from the said environment assistance, protection and material and informational
support. Even after 9/11 the Al-Qaeda terrorist network succeeded in reorganizing relatively quickly and kept a functional coordination relatively away from conflicts and frictions with the other Islamist radical extremist groups in Afghanistan and Yemen in contrast to the isolationism promoted by Daesh in relations to other factions of the belligerent jihadism.

- The mentioned authors as well as other analysts and researchers of the jihadist phenomenon underline the possibility that the mess Islamic State will be confronted with in the framework of Mossul and Rakka campaigns, a series of Al-Qaeda type factions that joined sides with Daesh under the oath of allegiance will revert their decisions and return to the origins and Al-Qaeda’s fighting principles and in this case it is about entities like Boko Haram in Mali, Al-Qaeda factions in the Islamic Maghreb and in the Arabic peninsula or tiny Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq that gave up the affiliation to Daesh to return to initial Al-Qaeda type formations especially Fateh Al-Sham movement, ex-Djabbhat Al-Nussra.

How feasible is the presumption of changes the studied analyses are talking about?

The authors proceeded probably to a simple imagination exercise as a scenario of the type of the numerous scenarios that are circulated when there is not enough information and documentary bases on a possible evolution or when the authors’ own desire turns into a development prerequisite of such office exercises.

A return of Islamic State alongside Al-Qaeda is theoretically out of the question if one takes into consideration on one hand that such an act would be certainly categorically disavowed by the core of Al-Qaeda organization lead from Waziristan by Dr. Ayman Al-Zawahiri who, on the other hand, firmly disclaimed the “rebelliousness” manifested by Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi and the declared rejection by the latter of any submission or allegiance to Al-Zawahiri. The two-year old history of Islamic State characterized by the most brutal and bloody indiscriminate terrorist acts including against other jihadist groups that did not unconditionally accept imam Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi’s way of thinking and totally contravened Al-Qaida’s fighting tactics makes it difficult to believe that Al-Qaida’s leaders who disavowed constantly the slaughter of civilian population will too easily accept re-engaging the jihadists of Daesh who, according the Al-Qaida’s way of thinking bear the responsibility of coalescing the whole world against holy jihad on “God’s way”.

It is more probably that we will rather witness a metamorphosis of Daesh jihadism that will be able to find other organizational forms, other identity namings, other leaders and commanders and denominations but it will never totally disappear.

Besides, such particularizations of some imaginary scenarios do not bring a significant contribution to a correctly positioning towards the terrorist phenomenon as long as it has less or no importance whether such terrorism is carried out under Islamic State’s black flag or under Al-Qaida’s banner. And the possible changes of alliances and affiliations will be at the end of the day but the undeniable proof that jihadism goes on and continues to adapt its strategies and conceptions without renouncing its so often declared goals: fight against “crusaders” and carrying along the ghost of the Muslim caliphate of the IIIrd millenium.
Earlier this year, in January, when such a statement seemed more than hazardous I signaled that it was not to rule out a rapprochement between Russia and Turkey. In December 2015, at the time when I was writing "Is the West a sitting duck? It seems it is!" where I mentioned this possibility, we were about a month after the downing of the Russian Su-24 aircraft by Turkey. Sanctions from Russia and a strong tension between Moscow and Ankara followed. At that time, after the annexation of Crimea, the invasion and de facto control of eastern Ukraine by Russia, tensions, actions and counteractions already appeared between EU, US, NATO, on the one hand, and Russia on the other. However, the objective analysis did not exclude a rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, and behold it was produced.

I come today and put on the paper another possibility, which I am already analyzing and pointing out for a long time - since last year - signaling that a rapprochement is not at all insubstantial, followed by an agreement between the US and Russia. Although a few months ago, at first glance this change in the global geopolitics might seemed far, far less likely than the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey, however, the conditions are created and the analysis towards this was leading us even before Donald Trump said it in the presidential election campaign. The signals that this is possible began to pile up, and the possibility turns every day into probability.

Let us explain!

Russia is continuously expanding since the Middle Ages. If in 1462, the Russians mastered 430,000 km², 70 years later, in 1533, they had 2.8 million km² and 5.4 million km² after another 50 years, in 1584, and 22.4022 million km² at the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Beyond that moment of recoil, Russia resumed recovering the territory of its empire, aiming to extend it further. Now, it has 17,098,242 km² recognized by the international community, and by the Commonwealth of Independent States actually owns 20,996,932 km². The annexation of Crimea (27,000 km²) and the de facto taking over of the eastern Ukraine (20,000 km²) is part of this expansion. On medium and longer term, there is no hindrance for Russia towards westward to the Atlantic, no European people being able or willing to oppose it. The EU has no required military handy tool, and the EU itself is about disintegrating, the fragmenting nationalist sentiment feeling being fed with interest by Moscow. In theory, NATO might make it to Russia, but the Alliance lacks the unity, and the Western states have reduced over many years their military spending. In addition, not all of the European nations are hostile to Russia, and their re-orientation is in full progress. For many years, Viktor Orban is flirting with Moscow, and Bulgaria and Moldova just elected pro-Russian presidents in November. The Right in France doesn’t seem hostile, either, and the Germans are very friendly with Putin. The Serbs have very strong sympathies for Russia.

Now, from a military perspective, NATO is actually equivalent to the US military system. But were, and especially are Americans really willing to enter into a catastrophic war with Russia to defend an Europe that is not willing to defend itself? The new elected president Donald Trump gave signals since the election campaign that the answer is no, and the American voters no more let themselves frightened by the threat of Russia, intensively flagged by Hillary Clinton.

Tensions emerged in East Asia, too, with the Chinese expansion. In that region, the situation is similar to the European one, but with another expansionist. It would seem that this moment Washington is more willing to confront China than Russia, its military construction in the region being higher than in Europe. It should be considered that even the US superpower cannot cope with both Russia and China simultaneously. Therefore, it must choose. What the new US administration will choose? It is quite predictable. In the geostrategic game, Russia and China have made an approach already holding joint military exercises in the China Sea. We must not forget, however, that China has borders with Russia, they are both expansionist, they had territorial disputes during the USSR, and that none of them has borders with the US. From this point of view is more natural a Russia-US alliance or a China-US one.
The draft of the foreign policy promoted by Donald Trump in the presidential campaign is leading to pragmatism and isolationism. Which ultimately is merely a continuation of the catastrophic foreign policy pursued by Barack Obama. Can the US afford that? On short term yes, but on the medium and longer terms the losses would be incalculable.

So, Russia and China are expanding and only the US could cope with that, but on the price of a world war that would pretty sure result in the human extinction. Until now, that were the given of the global geostrategic theater. But there is another extraordinarily dangerous actor for each of the superpowers, and the world powers overlooked it with extremely irresponsibility until now, and that will lead to the disappearance not only of them as states, but of the entire Western, Asian, South American, African, Australian civilizations: Islam.

Even since its creation Islam was infallible programmed by Muhammad for perpetual conquer on behalf the Islamic faith until it will rule the whole wide world, all the people being subject to a unique caliphate, headed by a caliph, as the representative of Allah on Earth. What is determining the infallibility of Islam? Deep inside the foundation of Muslims' faith, the Koran is the verbatim transcript of the Commandments of Allah, written by the prophet Muhammad. As a result, nothing can be changed in this writing, and the commands shall be executed precisely. They require collective obligation for the Muslims (Fardh al-Kifayah) to wage the holy war (jihad) for spreading the Islam throughout the Earth, the fighters (mujahideen) being promised the Paradise. The Quranic commandments also set the whole social order, what people must believe and how they live, all written in the Sharia. Because these rules are commanded by Allah, they are binding and cannot be changed, so Muslims are living in the XXI century by the same precepts as 1,500 years ago. The harshness is so great that once a Muslim, the believer cannot renounce his belief, because that is considered apostasy, which in most Islamic countries is punishable by death, only in some by hard years of imprisonment. To death is also condemned anybody questioning the Qur'an thesis, the good faith of Muhammad, his morality, his teachings.

As a result of the brutality of the Quranic commandments, which are translated into the daily behavior and into the warfare, the Muslims have achieved an explosive expansion of Islam immediately after its appearance. So, in the first 70 years, with lightning speed they conquered Syria, Armenia, Egypt, North Africa, Cyprus and besieged Constantinople. Between 711-719 they conquered the entire Iberian Peninsula, and then advanced to Toulouse and Narbona, being stopped in Western Europe only after their defeat in the Battle of Tours in 732. However, it took the Spanish 770 years to banish Islam from Spain. In the ninth century, the Muslims had conquered Sicily and Crete and attacked Rome, Bari and Piedmont. In the fourteenth century they conquered Thrace, in 1453 besieged and took the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, the Christian Constantinople, then advanced far into the Eastern European continent, occupying the entire Balkan Peninsula, and 76 years later, in 1529, besieged Vienna. Vienna was also besieged 150 years later, in 1683. The Muslims were defeated then, but it was necessary to create the Holy League in 1684 and another 15 years of fighting (the war with the Christian Austrians between 1683-1697) for they to be finally, definitively defeated and rejected from the center of the European continent. The Treaty of Karlowitz followed, signed in 1699, and was for the first time in history when the Turks ceded a conquered territory (Hungary and Transylvania, ie
160,000 km²). The European decline of the Turks continued, so that in the nineteenth century, Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Romania have managed to win their independence, followed by Bulgaria in 1908. Remember, 100 years ago, the Muslims still ruled European nations!

Simultaneously with the conquest of Europe and North Africa, Islam also spread to the west, east, southeast and south. In the VII-X centuries the Islamists swept the western and eastern coastal areas in Africa, from where they then spread to the center of the continent. Also in the seventh century, Muslim missionaries reached southern Asia, the first Indian mosque being built even during the life of Mohammed, in 629. By the end of the seventh century, Islam engulfed the west coast of India and in the eighth century, arrived in Bengal. Also in the eighth century, by military conquest, the Islamists have expanded their religion and mastering towards the Indian subcontinent, but whose full conquest occurred between the XII-XVI centuries. The only spreading of Islam by peaceful conversion through missionaries and traders, was in Southeast Asia.

The temporary stopping of the expansion of Islam was due to the wars waged by the Europeans and the Russians. If they would not have been able to defeat them, we can say with fear of being wrong that the whole globe was now Muslim and we were all ruled by a caliph. But the Islamic conquest resumed! A first attempt to recoup the losses suffered in the last 200 years, and to resume the offensive was undertaken by Turkey (then still the Ottoman Empire) in the early twentieth century, by entering the First World War in alliance with the Central Powers. Only that it chose the wrong allies and, after defeat, the empire was dismembered, appearing the modern, so called democratic Turkey, which is only a fragment of the old Empire. Situation with which the Turks did not reconcile and which now Recep Tayyip Erdogan seeks to restore. Turkey is already unilaterally stepping up its presence in Syria and Iraq, as a first step for the rebirth, and then the expanding of the Ottoman Empire.

The Islamists have never give up their ultimate goal to conquer and rule the world; they only adapted to the conditions, at the same time continuing their expansion. If in 1900, the number of Muslims in Africa was 34.5 million (ie 20% of the population), in 2000 it increased to 315 million (ie 40%). The growth has been steady on the other continents, too, but the pace was lower. Islam is now the fastest growing religion in the world. And this is rarely peaceful through voluntary conversion.

The Islamists have formed the needed Islamic organizations at State and Community levels, both the accepted ones by the international community, and those considered terrorist, because in one way or another, preferably simultaneously, jihad must be waged! For example, the "Muslim Brotherhood" was created in 1928, openly aimed from the beginning mainly for recreating the caliphate, that Mustafa Kemal "Ataturk" abolished only four years before (in 1924).

The Muslim world garnered the necessary resources and went on the offensive on all levels, both peaceful, and by jihad. For the peaceful means it used the same instruments the other states were working with. Islamists joined the League of Nations, and then the United Nations, to work from the inside, with the democratic tools provided by the Westerners, but against them. And they do it in full, because they represent 22% of the UN member states. They did not hesitate to distance themselves with great vehemence from the international laws that does not suit them and are restricting their movements. Thus, in 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ratified in 1976, and thus becoming international law. With one exception: not for the Islamic states! Even on the signing of the Declaration in 1948, Saudi Arabia refused to vote because it was contrary to Sharia! In 1982, Iran's representative to the UN - Khorassani Said Raja - said that the UDHR was "a secular understanding of the Judeo-Christian tradition" which the Muslims can not implement without trespassing the Islamic law Sharia. So, in 1990, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (now the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) adopted in Cairo the "Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam" internationally establishing the inequalities of Islam in terms of religion, conversion, gender, sexuality, political rights and many other aspects of personal and social life. So – a fact overlooked with extraordinarily high carelessness by the liberal Westerners – there are two human rights: the universal ones for all the other, and the Muslims', the latter being totally different from those of democracy. While all the UN member states are obliged to implement and protect the human rights, the Islamic countries are not doing it. All the other states are held accountable for these violations, except the Muslims, and this double standard are passed over in silence for fear of their violent actions.
Because in an open war of conquest, the Islamic countries still can not defeat the world's superpowers, the armed jihad goes through the so-called "terrorist organization", of which Al Qaeda, ISIS and Boko Haram are the most notorious. The establishment of the caliphate was meant to conglomerate the full potential of the Islamic world, and the reaction was immediate and terrifying, towards the caliphate congregating tens of thousands of mujahideen from around the world, including from the Western countries and Russia. The most powerful tool that the Islamist thinkers are relying on and which is paralyzing the Western leadership is the awakening for the armed struggle of the Islamists that are already there.

But the conquest of the West is also done from the inside, peaceful, slower but inexorable: by the massive and uncontrolled migration turned into invasion. Once a sufficient percentage reached the realm, using the democratic rights of the Western man, but which they actually reject, the Islamists are infiltrating the political, legislative, power structures, and take the power. The imam and preacher Fethullah Gulen gave this advice: "You must move within the arteries of the system, without anyone noticing your existence, until you reach all the power centres". The current president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan openly declared to the crowds even in 1997: "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers". Since coming to power, he built 17,000 Islamic places of worship, not only in Turkey but also in the neighboring countries, especially in the European capitals. Only last year, he financed the construction of 10 mosques, Moscow included, and provided funding for another 10, Cambridge, Tirana, Bucharest included. The most beautiful mosque in Europe will be inaugurated in the summer of 2017 in Amsterdam. But even in the US, in Maryland, it will also be built a mega-mosque with Turkish money. In Switzerland, Turkey is funding 30 Islamic places of worship, and controls 900 mosques in Germany. To build mosques and spread the Islam, Erdoğan expanded the Diyanet, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, increasing its strength from 72 employees in 2004 to 120,000 in 2016, and giving it a budget of EUR 2 billion, as 12 other ministries together! As of the aggressive spread of Islam - and of the most radical one, the Salafism-Wahhabism - Saudi Arabia surpasses Turkey by far.

So, Islam is on the offensive on all levels. It is imperative for the West to cease to look at and judge Islam through the lens of secularism, ie the complete separation of politics from religion, which it takes for granted. In Islam things does not happen like that at all, but just the opposite, and Muslims not only won't want modernization and secularization, but oppose them with great power. According to the opinion polls, a large percentage of Muslims want Islam to dominate the politics, the public life, the state, not to diminish its influence. So, far from evolving according to the globalists' wishes! A survey in 2015 of the "Pew Research Center" shows that 99% of Afghans, 91% of Iranians, 84% of Pakistanis, 84% of Bangladeshis, 74% of Egyptians, 71% of Nigerians want the Sharia to be the official law. Another survey, this time by the "Arab Barometer Surveys" shows that in seven Arab countries, only 14% of people want democracy to the detriment of Sharia. The role of Islam is growing explosively even in countries in which it was considered that it was declining, such as Turkey and Tunisia. In Islam, the secularism is a concept considered highly undesirable, even hated, and therefore refuted. Things are similar among the Muslims in Europe.

The world's population increases, and the globalization is real and unstoppable. The fact that Europe and Russia are aging, and their populations decrease or, at best, remain, is also true. But this by far does not justify the surrendering to Islam on the argument that the society can not economically survive. After all, which of the two evils is worse? The solution that might work both in step with the increasing of the world population, with its natural mixing, with the economic development, and with the preservation of the democracy and the human rights is allowing and even encouraging the globalization, but only while at the same time strongly ideologically fighting Islam and finally defeating it. But, I stress once again: the struggle and the victory must be ideological, not military, and it must be undertaken now, before it's too late.

An old Bedouin proverb says: "I am against my brother, my brother and I are against my cousin, my cousin and I are against the stranger". In addition to the Sharia primitivism, this is the ancestral tribalism facing the West, the civilization as a whole, and for this confrontation we must prepare.

Dr. Harold Rhode, a professor of history of Islam, a former analyst and adviser for 28 years for the Pentagon on the Middle Eastern affairs who traveled and studied extensively in the Islamic world (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) in an interview this...
fall, said: "Once Muslims conquer a territory, it’s Muslim forever. And there is no compromise on that. There is only temporary solutions. A cease if you wish. .... Muslim lands must be ruled by Muslims. And that can’t be changed. At least until there is an intellectual reform, a thought revolution that cannot be changed until there is a thought revolution in the Muslim world. And that I believe unfortunately will only come if there is a tremendous defeat, a catastrophic defeat, of the Muslim world by the West led by the United States if it has a leader who is prepared to stand up for American values. I don’t want, I hate what I just said. I don’t like the idea that there should be a catastrophic defeat of the Muslim world. But ... if he comes to America in order to make America a part of the Muslim world, that is unacceptable."

Almost a year ago, on 12.08.2015, the former prime minister of Australia, Tonny Abbott, in an editorial published in "The Daily Telegraph", also acknowledged that the West has a serious problem with Islam, and that to deny it is not solving it. He suggested that it is time for Islam to undergo reforms or a revival. Even the President of Egypt, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, himself a Muslim, at the beginning of 2015, on the birth anniversary of Prophet Mohammed asked for a "religious revolution".

But if they do not have before them a united, fearless and frightening front, once started the ideological fight the Islamic countries will rise to armed struggle, which would be backed by the Islamists in the Western countries and Russia. Only if the US, Russia and China achieved a frightening alliance and are firmly united - adopting a status quo on their divergences pending the resolution of the Islamic danger - it can be defeated without reaching a global conflagration.

According to the classic geostrategic considerations, the three superpowers, the USA, Russia and China have contradictory interests and thus will be on permanent antagonistic positions. That is very true and it happens with intensity right now. But before a mega-opponent, irrecognizable aggressive and which will destroy and subdue them with certainty, to survive, USA, Russia and China should make a joint front. Once the danger will pass, they can resume their differences.

To repel this extremely aggressive religion, if it is really wanted, it is needed a hard ideological struggle, the adaptation of the international and the internal laws, the amending of the human rights or even the temporary waiv-

Will the political classes and the leaders of the US, Russia and China be able to let aside for the moment the pursuing of the classical individual interests and the fight between them to escape the deadly and inexorable common enemy? Russia seems ready, even eager. But is the US? In the presidential election campaign, Donald Trump made such statements and some congressmen have also expressed similar views. What about China? As we can see, the EU and even Europe as a whole are out of the picture. It should be however borne in mind that, contrary to what the current Western European "establishment" wanted so far (for what reason escapes us), and apparently further wants, the Western populations change their vision and options. Brexit was the first signal that surprised everyone (and by far it should not have happen; we were not surprised, so it was not only predictable, but even expectable). The winning by Donald Trump was a confirmation of the trend and a strengthening of it, which again surprised, and at least this time it should not have (because, again, it was to be expected, and we were not surprised). Let’s hope that the fact that is absolutely necessary for the US, Russia and China to achieve a historical understanding, will finally be understand. In any event, the populations of the Western Europe and the US show signs of awakening and changing their views, that will be already felt next year.

The leaders of the Eastern European countries, including Romania, must consider these possibilities and be prepared if they will be achieved.
The RS-26 Rubezh Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) is currently under development in Russia. It is being developed by Moscow Institute of Thermal Technology. It is believed that development commenced in 2008. Flight tests began in 2012 and missile demonstrated a range of 5,800 km. Development was planned to be completed in 2014. It was planned that the first RS-26 regiment will become operational in 2015.

This missile is intended to suppress missile defense systems in Europe. It is also intended to supplement the Russian ballistic missile fleet as a more mobile weapon system with shorter range.

It is claimed that the RS-26 is based on the Yars. Officially the RS-26 is an intercontinental ballistic missile. However it has a different weight class and is smaller than the current Russian Topol-M and Yars intercontinental ballistic missiles. In terms of dimensions it is similar to the new Russian submarine-launched Bulava.

Although the RS-26 is legally an ICBM, it may be that the demonstrated range of 5,800 km is close to the maximum range of the missile. It is worth noting that missile demonstrated this range with a single warhead. It is possible that it may not demonstrate ICBM range with multiple warheads. In this case this missile falls into the class of Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs). It is worth noting that medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles with a range of up to 5,500 km are banned by INF Treaty. So the Russians found a way to field an intermediate-range ballistic missile and to fill the gap that was once covered by the more accurate than current ballistic missiles. Also it is claimed that this missile is capable of penetrating even the most sophisticated missile defenses.

It is likely that the new missile will be carried and launched from a TEL, based on the Belarusian MZKT-79291, or the new Russian KamAZ-78509 special wheeled chassis. Both of these vehicles have 6 axles and some degree of cross-country mobility. Both of these vehicles are broadly similar in design to the MAZ-547 which was used as a TEL for the RSD-10 Pioneer missile.

Road-mobile missiles are more survivable. These are harder to detect and hit. Once on high alert vehicles with RS-26 missiles can leave their bases and operate in remote forest area. The mobile launcher has autonomy on roads in excess of 500 km. It allows the vehicle to operate undetected in an area equivalent to a small European country. So these missiles are more likely to survive the first strike.

During field deployment the TEL launcher with ballistic missile will be escorted by a host of support vehicles, including control vehicle, signals vehicle, fuel tanker, as well as a number of other military vehicles with troops to ensure security of the missile. In case of emergency the TEL vehicle can operate autonomously without its escort; also it can launch its missile from prepared site, special garage with a sliding roof, or from unprepared position during field deployment. Once the missile is launched vehicle can leave its position.

Presented by Cornel VAIDA
The New Tsar
Author: Steven Lee Myers
Published by Corint Books, 2016

Steven Lee Myers has been working at the prestigious American newspaper The New York Times since 1989. After several years at the editorial office of New York, Myers moved to Washington in 1996, being accredited to the State Department and Pentagon. After 11 September 2001, he went to Moscow, where he was a correspondent and then head of bureau for The New York Times. Thus, he witnessed and wrote about many important events that marked the Putin era: the war in Chechnya, the Olympic Games in Sochi, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea. Currently, Myers lives with his family in Washington, where he deals with the issue of American national security.

In the 750 pages of the book, the author gives a biography full of details about the family of the Russian President, about the environment he grew up in, his private circle since his appointment at the head of the Moscow government to the annexation of Crimea by Russia. The annexation of Crimea was perceived as a cry calling on the Russian nation to unite behind Putin, the annexation itself has raised the trust in Putin to 85% and then the “state of siege” that followed maintained Putin’s popular support, for the Russians it meant that once again they had an enemy at the door, while the voices of those who had different opinions than the Russian leader were not heard anymore. Putin has found a new unifying factor by which he created a new Russia with characteristics specific both to the Czarist Empire and the defunct Soviet Union. When in March 2015, he “disappeared” for ten days, the political elite in Moscow was paralyzed, his short absence from the public attention proved that only he was able to provide the stability of the complicated corrupt system and the balance between the factions created by Putin.

There have also been opponents of the regime, but they were avoided or removed: the historian Andrei Zubov was dismissed from the State Institute in Moscow, Alexei Navalnii spent almost the entire year 2014 in house arrest and Boris Nemtsov was shot while walking in the Red Square - one of the most heavily guarded places by the police on the planet - one night in February 2015.

“No personality has influenced so much the European history in the twenty-first century as Vladimir Putin did. The New Tsar is a fascinating detailed biography that explains almost in a Shakespearean manner the resorts of Putin’s actions”. Robert D. Kaplan

“The New Tsar” by Steven Lee Myers is not the first biography of Putin, but it is undoubtedly one of the greatest force of all those that have been written so far. Logical and comprehensive, it manages to remove the veil of mystery that covers one of the most secretive world leaders”. Daniel Treisman, The Washington Post

“What Steven Lee Myers understands and describes so well in The New Tsar, his recent comprehensive biography — the richest in information and the most extended written in English - is that in reality Putin believes that he is the last one interposed between order and chaos... A complete biography, written by a well informed author...” Gal Beckerman, The New York Times Book Review.

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