European Neighbourhood Watch

ENLARGEMENT: THE PRICE OF STABILITY

Editorial  |  Toby Vogel

Events over the last few weeks have highlighted the risks inherent in the European Union’s habit of putting stability above democratisation in its dealings with candidates for membership from south-eastern Europe.

Most dramatically, in Macedonia, violent supporters of Nikola Gruevski, a nationalist who was forced to resign as prime minister following a massive wiretapping scandal in 2015, stormed the national parliament last Thursday (April 27th) and injured a number of parliamentarians. They were angered by the election of a new speaker of parliament, where following an early election last year an opposition coalition now holds a slim majority. The election of the speaker takes the opposition candidate one step closer towards becoming prime minister – a move that has so far been blocked by the country’s president, a Gruevski loyalist.

Gruevski himself was in Vienna during the violence, attending meetings with senior officials from the centre-right Austrian People’s Party. The ÖVP’s star politician, Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz, had campaigned for Gruevski’s VMRO-DPMNE ahead of last year’s election. European politicians and officials had long viewed Gruevski as a strong, pro-European leader who could deliver on reform and guarantee stability in a troubled region. They take the same attitude towards Milo Đukanović, who has been in control in Montenegro for more than 25 years.

Turkey

Another instance of this short-sighted view is Turkey under President Erdoğan. On April 16th, Turkish voters endorsed, by a slim majority, their country’s transformation into an executive presidential system. The shift hands unprecedented power to Erdogan, whose authoritarian tendencies, in evidence for many years, were reinforced by a coup attempt last summer. He has aggressively clamped down on dissent in the public administration, the military, the media, academia and other parts of civil society, in a purge that flies in the face of the EU’s Copenhagen criteria for candidate countries and that continues to this day.

As Steven Blockmans and Sinem Yilmaz have argued in a recent CEPS Commentary, the constitutional amendments should have been sufficient for the EU to break off accession
negotiations with Turkey. The EU seems to be taking a different line, primarily in order not to endanger relations with the man seen as crucial for the continued implementation of the EU’s migration deal with Turkey, which is supposed to keep migrants and refugees from reaching European shores. EU foreign ministers meeting in Malta last weekend (April 28th-29th) discussed the question but without reaching consensus even on a suspension of talks, let alone their termination.

**Serbia**

If the constitutional referendum codified Turkey’s shift towards autocracy, Serbia is in a phase where power is shifting informally as Aleksandar Vučić prepares to move from the prime minister’s office to the presidency (while remaining leader of the ruling Progressives, the strongest party in parliament). Whatever the constitution may say about the relative power of prime minister and president, Vučić was firmly in control as prime minister and will be firmly in control as president. Informal and uncodified, this might be a milder form of autocracy because it is reversible once the incumbent leaves office. But the informality of this power shift also means that it might be less open to legal challenge or political accountability – a worrying development in a country with weak institutions, a cowed media and shrinking space for civil society. Yet the EU continues to hold on to the fiction that Vučić is a pro-European reformer – just as it used to do with Erdoğan and Gruevski until the situation in Turkey and Macedonia spiralled out of control.

The ultimate irony of such a policy is that it allows stability to prevail over democratisation, increasing the chances of a result that is neither stability nor democracy.

**General news**

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 03 April 2017. Link

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 03 April 2017. Link

**Eastern Neighbourhood**

**Armenia**

Statement by the Spokesperson on the Parliamentary elections in Armenia, Brussels, 03 April 2017. Link

EU-Armenia talks on Comprehensive Air Transport Agreement kick off in Yerevan, Yerevan, 27 April 2017. Link

The European Union Delegation in Armenia has informed the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) about potential irregularities in relation to projects in Armenia funded by the European Union. OLAF investigated and informed the
Armenian authorities, which, at the former’s recommendation, have been conducting their own investigation, Yerevan, 27 April 2017. Link

Georgia

Statement by the Spokesperson on the so-called Presidential elections and the referendum on amending the name of the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia, 08 April 2017. Link

European Commission approves disbursement of EUR 23 million in assistance to Georgia, Brussels, 27 April 2017. Link

Moldova

Republic of Moldova: Council agrees to €100 million financial assistance, Brussels, 12 April 2017. Link

Ukraine

Statement by HRVP Federica Mogherini on the killing of an OSCE SMM monitor in a non-government controlled part of eastern Ukraine, 23 April 2017. Link

Parliament approves Ukraine visa waiver, 06 April 2017. Link

EU launches EUR 6 million project to support ‘model police stations’ in 20 Ukrainian districts and new model of public order policing based on Scandinavian approach, Kyiv, 28 April 2017. Link

Russia

Statement by the Spokesperson on the explosion in the Saint Petersburg metro, Brussels, 03 April 2017. Link

Statement by the Spokesperson on the human rights abuses of gay men in Chechnya, Brussels, 06 April 2017. Link

Statement on the ban of the activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses in Russia, Brussels, 21 April 2017. Link

Remarks by HR/VP Mogherini at the joint press conference with Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov, Moscow, 24 April 2017. Link

Southern Neighbourhood

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the joint press point with the Secretary General of the League of Arab States,
Mr Ahmed Aboul Gheit, during the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 03 April 2017. Link

European and Arab partners discuss development challenges and priorities across the Arab region, Brussels, 06 April 2017. Link

EU to work with Mediterranean partners on research and innovation – informal deal with EP, Brussels, 11 April 2017. Link

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini during the visit at EUNAVFOR MED Sophia vessel ITS San Giusto, La Valetta, 26 April 2017. Link

Algeria

Remarques de Federica Mogherini lors de la conférence de presse avec Ramtane Lamamra, Ministre des Affaires étrangères de l'Algérie, 09 April 2017. Link

Egypt

Statement by Federica Mogherini on the attacks on Coptic Churches in Egypt, Brussels, 09 April 2017. Link

Israel

Local EU Statement on Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, Tel Aviv, 21 April 2017. Link

Jordan

EU and Jordan: partners for democratic governance, Brussels, 06 April 2017. Link

Lebanon

The Delegation of the European Union and the EU Ambassadors in Lebanon issue the following statement, 20 April 2017. Link

Libya

EU-Libya relations, factsheet, Brussels, 12 April 2017. Link

EU Trust Fund for Africa adopts €90 million programme on protection of migrants and improved migration management in Libya, Brussels, 12 April 2017. Link

Statement by the Spokesperson on the latest developments in Libya, Brussels, 17 April 2017. Link

Palestine

Local statement of the exit restrictions from Gaza introduced on 26 March 2017, 06 April 2017. Link
Local statement on the execution of three prisoners in Gaza on 06 April 2017, Jerusalem, 14 April 2017. Link

Syria

Council adopts EU strategy on Syria, 03 April 2017. Link

The EU and the crisis in Syria, factsheet, Brussels, 04 April 2017. Link

Remarks by Federica Mogherini with the United Nations Special Envoy for Syria, Mr Staffan de Mistura, Brussels, 04 April 2017. Link

Doorstep remarks by Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Brussels Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", Brussels, 05 April 2017. Link

Remarks by Federica Mogherini and by António Guterres upon arrival to the Brussels Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the region", Brussels, 05 April 2017. Link

Remarks by Federica Mogherini at the joint press conference of the Brussels Conference ‘Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region’, Brussels 05 April 2017. Link

Supporting the future of Syria and the region: co-chairs declaration, Brussels, 05 April 2017. Link

Mogherini meets with the Syrian opposition representatives to discuss the political process and support for resilience inside Syria, 06 April 2017. Link

Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the alleged chemical attack in Idlib, Syria, Brussels, 07 April 2017. Link

Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the US strike in Syria, Brussels, 07 April 2017. Link

Syria: High Representative Federica Mogherini speaks to various interlocutors, 07 April 2017. Link

Enlargement/Other

Albania

Statement by Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn on the latest developments in Albania, Brussels, 12 April 2017. Link

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ambassador Wigemark: "Now is the time to take a stand in favour of jobs and growth", 06 April 2017. Link
Kosovo

Kosovo and European Union discuss trade, industry, customs and taxation, within SAA framework, Pristina, 06 April 2017. [Link]

EU is concerned by a lack of implementation of Constitutional Court ruling on the land dispute case in Decan/e, Pristina, 20 April 2017. [Link]

Macedonia

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov, 03 April 2017. [Link]

Statement by Federica Mogherini and Johannes Hahn on today’s developments in Skopje, Brussels, 27 April 2017. [Link]

Serbia

Letter of congratulations from Presidents Tusk and Juncker to Aleksandar Vučić on his election as President of Serbia, 03 April 2017. [Link]

Fourth Meeting of EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Committee, 27 April 2017. [Link]

Turkey

Relocation and Resettlement: Steady progress made but more efforts needed to meet targets, Brussels, 12 April 2017. [Link]

Statement on the referendum in Turkey, Brussels, 16 April 2017. [Link]

MEPs advocate reviewing EU-Turkey relations and suspending EU accession talks, 26 April 2017. [Link]

European Parliament Plenary Session: New Beginnings: Reassessing EU-Turkey Relations, 27 April 2017. [Link]

Mogherini leads frank ministerial discussions on future relations with Turkey, 28 April 2017. [Link]

Switzerland

Pressesstatement von Kommissionspräsident Juncker bei der gemeinsamen Pressebegegnung mit Doris Leuthard, Bundespräsidentin der Schweizerischen Eidgenossenschaft, 06 April 2017. [Link]

CEPS Commentary: Why the EU should terminate accession negotiations with Turkey
In this Commentary, Steven Blockmans and Sinem Yilmaz argue that "the test of a dictator like President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan isn't how he came to power but how he treats critics, journalists, minorities, and whether he can still be outvoted".

"Now that a narrow majority of Turkish voters in the referendum has supported the codification of autocracy, any hope for the democratic removal of Erdoğan has evaporated," they continue. "Given this sorry state of affairs, the EU has no other choice but to terminate Turkey's accession process. By constitutionalising an executive presidential system that erases the separation of powers and frees Erdoğan's hands to deepen repression, Turkey will be in breach of the 'political' criteria for EU membership for years, if not decades, to come."

To read the full text of this Commentary, click the button below.

CEPS Commentary: The Syria donor conference: a still-born initiative of the EU's new strategy?

The EU should "more actively promote transitional justice for the Syrian people", argue Steven Blockmans and Astrid Viaud in a CEPS Commentary published on April 28th. The chemical attack on Khan Sheikhoum overshadowed a donor conference in Brussels on April 4th-5th co-hosted by the EU and a communication by the European Commission and the High Representative containing elements of a new Syria strategy. "The military and political fall-out of the chemical attack on Khan Sheikhoum has delivered an immediate blow to the EU's strategic aims, which were to be served by the donor conference in strengthening international support for the UN-led political process," the authors write. "The failure of the EU to attain this political objective works to the obvious benefit of Bashar al-Assad and his overlords in Moscow and Tehran, who are engaged in the Astana talks with Turkey and its Syrian proxies to determine the conditions for a ceasefire to the conflict."

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