

opinion

Sven Biscop: *The Rediscovery of Geopolitics*

The Russian invasion of Ukraine created a new geopolitical fact: from a buffer state, Ukraine has become a border state. De facto, the independent Ukraine that is fighting for its survival (with all the support that the EU and NATO can give, while remaining non-belligerents themselves), today is already a member of the Western security architecture. The EU underscored that by granting Ukraine candidate status.

Consequently, it is now an important EU interest that Ukraine survives as the strongest possible border state, on as large a territory as possible, with access to the sea. For, if Ukraine falls, the EU will share a long border with a different Belarus: a Russian satellite that no longer makes its own decisions, which would complicate deterrence and defence. A victorious Russia might also use Ukraine as a springboard for further incursions into the wider Black Sea and Mediterranean areas.

This reconfirms the traditional importance of Turkey’s geopolitical position: not only as a buffer against immigration and other challenges or security threats from the wider Middle East (as it has long been perceived in the EU), but also as a bulwark against Russian encroachment. If Turkey does not fully assume the latter responsibility - and in recent years it has not - then Europe’s south-eastern flank remains exposed.

If the geopolitical situation in the Black Sea remains fuzzy, due to what one might call Turkey’s bid for “strategic autonomy”, in other parts of Europe the geopolitical dividing lines have hardened. Most evidently, Finland and Sweden have both abandoned their long-standing neutrality to join NATO. On the other side of the divide, Belarus has become entirely vassalized by Russia. During the large-scale protests in 2020 and 2021,...



news

“Europe, closer!” - The priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU in decisive times for the future of the Union

“Europe, closer” (*Europa, más cerca*, in Spanish) is the motto under which Spain took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, on July 1, 2023, for a period of six months¹. It is the fifth presidency since its accession to the European Union in 1986, and probably, nowadays, it comes across as the most difficult one, if we take into account the current international geopolitical and economic evolutions. Although faced with multiple vulnerabilities, such as the impact of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the hybrid and ideological attacks on national governments (of EU members, of partners or associates of the EU), the issue of energy autonomy and that of countering the harmful effects of climate change, the cybersecurity threats or the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (viewed from an economic and public health standpoint), the member states will deal in a positive way with any action or fact that might endanger the safety and prosperity of European citizens, by reinforcing their unity, ...

¹ “Europe, closer”, the Spanish Presidency’s motto for its semester, <https://spanish-presidium.consilium.europa.eu/en/presidency/logo-and-motto/>, accessed at 30.06.2023.

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The Rediscovery of Geopolitics

[continued from page 1] Moscow declined to intervene militarily (fearing, perhaps, that it would alienate even the supporters of Vladimir Putin and Aleksandr Lukashenko, as happened in Ukraine in 2014). But lately, Russia has marched tens of thousands of troops into Belarus, and it has even announced the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons.

The future of the Republic of Moldova, which also received EU candidate status, has become closely entwined with that of Ukraine. If the latter falls, the Republic of Moldova could be the next target (and with the 1500 or so troops still in the breakaway region of Transnistria, Russia already has a bridgehead). If it holds, both Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are set on the path to eventual EU membership.

The Russo-Ukraine war has thus resulted in a sharply divided European continent again; the buffer zones are disappearing. NATO's New Force Model, a reorganisation of the Alliance's conventional posture in Europe, reflects this. Once again, as during the Cold War, the "border" will be divided into sectors, and each of these sectors will be allotted to a group of Allies that will maintain a rotational military presence there. Relations between the West and Russia will indeed resemble a "mini-Cold War": mini, as long as the entire world is not divided into two rival blocs that will gradually decouple from each other.

One should underline that the consolidation of the enlarged EU had already changed the geopolitics of Europe long before the outbreak of the current war. In the past, Russia was one of the several European powers that fought with each other in ever-shifting coalitions, from the Seven Years' War to World War II. Today, there is no longer a European system of states. The EU, which has ended the possibility of war among its member states, is now in itself the core of the European security architecture (with the alliance with the US as a further guarantee against threats from outside the EU). Since Russia cannot join the EU, it will never be fully part of the European security architecture in the sense of having decision-making power over its members.

Therefore, the main question is: does Russia want cooperative or confrontational relations with the EU? Constructive relations may be restored and sanctions phased out, if a pragmatic Russian leadership (be it still authoritarian) emerges and sincerely seeks a peace agreement with Ukraine. Nonetheless, the economic decoupling of the EU from Russia, in the energy sector in particular, is structural, as is, the distrust that Moscow has sowed.

Sven Biscop

*This piece is based on a section of an [Egmont Paper](#).

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"Europe, closer!" - The Priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU in Decisive Times for the Future of the Union

[continued from page 1] cohesion and resilience, as the new Presidency of the Council of the European Union assures us².

A "Europe of prosperity" that leads its citizens to the necessary financial and energy security, an autonomous Europe, open to new members threatened by hostile powers, a Europe which is not merely "geopolitical", but also contributes to the "global architecture" of the current political order, shall be Spain's main objective, said the Spanish Ambassador to Romania, H.E. Mr. José Antonio Hernandez Pérez-Solorzano, during the Launch Conference of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Bucharest³.

The four essential priorities, which will guide the actions of the Spanish Presidency, aim at⁴:

Reindustrializing the European Union and ensuring an open strategic autonomy

The Spanish government has set for itself the goal of reducing the dependence on industries developed outside the Union, generally in areas such as energy, health, digital technologies, agriculture, and food. The objective of the Iberian Presidency of the Council of the EU is to transform the present state of affairs into an opportunity to reindustrialize the member states, thus creating new jobs for European citizens and protecting them against external threats. A stronger Europe is industrially, technologically, and digitally autonomous.

The Spanish Presidency will pursue two lines of action: advancing dossiers that include the development of strategic

² The official site of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council is <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/presidency/logo-and-motto/>, accessed at 30.06.2023.

³ The video recording of the Launch Conference of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council in Bucharest, 07/03/2023, the intervention of the Spanish ambassador can be heard here, <https://www.facebook.com/comisia.europeana.in.romania/videos/578416084471883/>, accessed at 04.03.2023.

⁴ The priorities of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/programme/priorities/>, accessed at 30.06.2023.

industries and technologies in Europe, as well as strengthening trade and cultural relations with Latin America by reinforcing the EU's proximity to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC - Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños).

The presidency will provide the certainty of continuing and solving the most difficult problems already present on Brussels' agenda.

The progress of the ecological transition and the adaptation to climate change

For Madrid, the dramatic effects of the environmental transformations caused by global warming can become an extraordinary opportunity to reduce dependence on energy and raw materials, as well as to increase the competitiveness of the green energy market, thereby significantly increasing offers on the job market.

The Spanish Presidency is also determined to implement a reform of the electricity market aimed at accelerating the development of renewables and lowering electricity prices. Thus, Madrid will speed up the resolution of legislative files for *Fit for 55*, such as the "Gas and Hydrogen" package, but also the norms related to energy efficiency. **The EU will continue to represent the fundamental pillar of the global fight against the negative consequences of climate change.**

Promoting social and economic justice

On the agenda of the Presidency, economic and social well-being is definitely a priority. Not only the growth of the European GDP will be an indicator of prosperity, but also the financial situation of each citizen, as well as their degree of protection against any type of vulnerability, shall constitute relevant indicators. Spain, therefore, proposes a greater orientation towards the medical field, especially towards reducing the number of seriously ill people, by offering benefits and opportunities for the protection of vulnerable Europeans, victims of violence, and people with serious health conditions or disabilities. The economy will need to be thriving and at the same time sustainable for the EU citizens. To sum up, the Spanish presidency will support the creation of a system of common taxation standards and will design tools to combat tax evasion. Additionally, it will advocate for the revision of the *Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027* in order to overcome austerity and foster the equitable allocation of funds, ensuring the sustainability of public finances and the dual transition.

Strengthening the European unity

It is the firm belief of the Spanish Presidency that the European Union must be united and prepared to face any kind of challenges in terms of security threats, in today's uncertain world. Only through joint efforts and progress on integration will the member states be able to cope with the current dangers. In an era of uncertainty and growing geopolitical tensions, the EU must remain united. Thus, the objectives pursued are: the deepening of the EU internal market, the enhancement of the capital markets union, as well as the completion of the banking union, but also concerted actions for the sustainability and efficiency of programmes such as the **NextGenerationEU**, migration and asylum and, last but not least, the provision of consolidated support to Ukraine.

The Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, with the support of all the EU institutions and member states, will continue to promote the common European identity and values, in order to initiate a new stage in the development of the European project.

Upon assuming the duties of the Presidency, the head of the Spanish government, Pedro Sánchez, reaffirmed the need for the member states to remain resilient and united: **"The responsibility that lies in our hands is immense. Europe faces major challenges at home and abroad"**⁵. On the other hand, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, highlighted the importance of continuing the effort to help Kyiv: **"It has been 500 days of suffering for the Ukrainian people, but also of their resistance as they fight for their freedom. Our duty is to live up to that resilience"**. Supporting the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in their EU accession process is essential, the head of the EU Commission recalled⁶.

As for Romania's position, it will strongly endorse the actions of the Spanish Presidency, continuing, above all, to support the Republic of Moldova in its European and Euro-Atlantic perspective and therefore will not cease to offer all the necessary assistance to Ukraine by contributing to the post-war reconstruction efforts⁷.

Ioana Elena Secu
European Studies Unit



Copyright: Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU

⁵ "The Spanish presidency will promote the changes and decisions needed to tackle the EU's major challenges", 3 July 2023, <https://spanish-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/european-commission-madrid-spanish-presidency-council-eu/>, accessed at 3.07.2023.

⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷ "Participation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Luminița Odobescu, at the launch event in Bucharest of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council", Press release, 03.07.2023, <http://mae.ro/node/62303>, accessed at 04.07.2023.

The Summer Issue of the Romanian Journal of European Affairs: Quality Research on the EU's Impact on the Daily Lives of European Citizens

In 2023, the journal aims at publishing quality research on topics such as **energy, good governance, and road infrastructure, the current geopolitical situation, the EU's economic governance, and regional cooperation**, all resulting from a European perspective. To this end, papers on the aforementioned subjects have been selected, as they meet the requirements and bring an important scientific contribution to the general debate on key European policies. The papers that have been accepted for the June issue of RJEА address the following themes: the role of the national independent fiscal institutions within the EU's new economic governance and fiscal framework; the current geopolitical situation, especially with regard to the financial sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia; regional cooperation, namely the comparison between the Open Balkan Initiative and the Berlin Process, and insights into the contribution of the Visegrád Group to the European integration of the Western Balkan states. The journal also analyses aspects impact the daily lives of European citizens, such as the energy efficiency, the influence of good governance on the quality of road infrastructure in the EU or the role of the digital transition in transforming the agricultural sector in states like Romania and Hungary. The current issue also presents a book review about the 30-year functioning of the European single market.

Daniel Dăianu (President of the Romanian Fiscal Council and Professor of Economics at the National University of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest) addresses the topic of the EU's economic governance framework and the role of national Independent Fiscal Institutions (IFIs). The author argues that the adequacy of the EU's fiscal framework has to be judged in relation to the overall structure of economic governance in the Union. The full article is available [here](#).

Dorina Clichici (Senior Researcher at the Institute for World Economy) and **Andreea-Emanuela Drăgoi** (Senior Researcher at the Institute for World Economy) fill in the literature gap on the impact of the 2022 EU sanctions on the Russian economy and its financial system, by examining the resilience of the Russian banking system to the restrictions imposed upon it. The authors found that whilst, in the initial phase, the Russian financial system has been significantly disrupted by the EU sanctions, which caused the “most significant drop in the history of Moscow's stock market”, the negative impact of the sanctions was mitigated, at a later stage, by extensive measures adopted by the monetary authorities of Russia. The full article is available [here](#).

Andrea Szalavetz (Research Advisor at the Institute of World Economics) compared Romanian and Hungarian start-ups specialised in digital agricultural technology (AT) to determine whether such AT start-ups have a beneficial impact on upgrading local agriculture. The paper argues that the large-scale adoption of such smart AT solutions, as well as the intensive training for upskilling the farmers, would take decades before any substantial results will be noticed. Therefore, this author calls for consistent, long-term systemic policies targeting the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the market for agricultural technology in the two countries. The full article is available [here](#).

Cezar Teclean (Associate Researcher, Bucharest University of Economic Studies) and **Gabriela Drăgan** (Professor at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies) assesses the role of good governance in promoting road quality in the European Union. By considering four dimensions in relation to good governance (effectiveness of government, quality of legislation, control of corruption, and political stability), the researchers discovered that different levels of good governance have an unevenly distributed input on road quality. Government effectiveness makes the most relevant contribution to the feasibility of the road network in five states, the quality of legislation has a major influence in seven states, political stability has the highest impact in six states, and in ten states the most significant contribution comes from corruption control. This heterogeneity is caused by the lack of a unified European strategy regarding the road network, due to the absence of political will and the quality of government performance which is distinctly different in the member states of the European Union. The full article is available [here](#).

Dalina-Maria Andrei (Researcher at the Institute for Economic Forecasting, Romanian Academy, Bucharest) investigates to what extent the member states will be receptive to the incorporation of the EU's energy efficiency goals, namely the 2050 climate neutrality, into their own strategies. After assessing the energy consumption data retrieved from Eurostat and the International Energy Agency (IEA), the author argues that despite “an obvious progress” of compliance on the part of each member, only some of the countries are in a satisfactory situation of complying with the targets set for 2030. Such differences might be caused by various priorities and interests expressed by the member state, and could entail risks to national security. The full article is available [here](#).

Mihai Christopher Marian Radovici (PhD candidate at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies) and **Lukas Danko** (Assistant Professor at the Tomas Bata University in Zlin, Faculty of Management and Economics) employed official statements, memorandums, declarations, and official statistics to explore the role of the Visegrád Group (V4). The authors emphasised that, although it was created as a comprehensive and complementary project to the EU's integration efforts, the Visegrád Group is currently a key factor for the successful completion of the EU's integration process of the Western Balkans. One of the main contributions is the group's involvement in the construction of a stronger European security architecture. The paper concludes that the V4 can be regarded as a transnational enabler of dialogue and a platform that safeguards collective interests and increases representation within the wider region. The full article is available [here](#).



publications

Gelanda Shkurta (Professor in the Law Department at „Epoka University”, Tirana) analysed two integration processes, one initiated by three Balkan leaders (the Open Balkan Initiative) and the other pertaining to the European politics (the Berlin Process), in order to assess which is the most suitable for a comprehensive integration, without inter-ethnic conflicts and the mutual influence of the economic expansion. Considering the historical background and the geopolitics of the region, the author concluded that the Western Balkan countries need to be guided by an organisation with political and economic power, such as the European Union. The full article is available [here](#).

We are inviting our readers to also explore a review of the book: “*Single Market at 30*”, coordinated by Eugen Dijmărescu, written by **Iulian Oneaşcă** (Expert within the European Institute of Romania) on the 30 years’ anniversary of the European single market. The cited material is available [here](#).

The next issue of the *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* will be published in early December. More details about the international scientific databases the journal is part of can be accessed [here](#).

Emanuela Ignăţoiu-Sora
European Studies Unit

events

International Events Organised by the European Institute of Romania in June 2023

The influences of climate change on the future of Europe were the topic of a debate organized on June 14th, 2023, by the European Institute of Romania and the *Trans European Policy Studies Association* (TEPSA). The occasion was the launch of a collective volume called “*Climate Change and the Future of Europe: views from the Capitals*” for which two experts of the European Institute of Romania wrote the national contribution. The event was moderated by **Michael Kaeding**, co-editor of the book and Professor of European Integration and EU Policy at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. The main interventions were carried out by:

PUBLIC DEBATE
Climate Change and the Future of Europe
14 JUNE
14:30-16:00 EET
(13:30-15:00 CET)
ONLINE
via Zoom

OANA-MIHAELA MOCANU
Director General
European Institute of Romania

ELIZA VAŞ
Expert
European Institute of Romania

MIHAI SEBE
Head of Training, European Studies
European Institute of Romania

PROF. ALINA BÂRGĂOANU
National University of Political Studies
and Public Administration

CIPRIAN STĂNESCU
President & CEO
Social Innovation Solutions

TEPSA
Trans European Policy Studies Association

EIR
European Institute of Romania

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Eliza Vaş and Mihai Sebe (EIR experts and authors of the book chapter about Romania), Professor Alina Bârgăoanu, president of the Board of the European Institute in Romania; and by Ciprian Stănescu, president and CEO of *Social Innovation Solutions*. Among the main ideas conveyed by the guests and participants in the dialogue, the support enjoyed by the green transition in Romania and the interest of its citizens regarding climate change were noted. Here, but also in the wider world, the response to the phenomenon of global warming must be correlated with the magnitude of the phenomenon and the costs distributed according to the impact and the different capacities of the member states or administrative regions. Climate change, accompanied by negative manifestations, must also be seen as an opportunity for the green transition (e.g. in the field of energy, agriculture, or the circular economy).

On June 21st, 2023, the European Institute of Romania facilitated an expert discussion on the future of the Three Seas Initiative, in anticipation of the 2023 Bucharest Summit. The event was a follow-up to the collective report published by EIR in April 2023, titled “*Anticipating the 2023 Three Seas Initiative Bucharest Summit. Advancing the common agenda*”. The meeting was conducted under Chatham House Rule and was moderated by Mihai Sebe, Head of Training and Projects Unit. The participants evoked the political aspect of the Three Seas Initiative which focuses on economic cooperation and development. The differentiated manifestations of economic hardships and security concerns, brought about by the ongoing war in Ukraine, reshaped priorities of this framework of partnership. Nevertheless, cooperation in the region is more important than ever; there is a need to strengthen and deepen it. The prospects of the 3SI extension were welcomed by all participants. Whether the participation of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, will be formal or have a specific form of involvement, is a matter of opportunity. The 3SI provides considerable and much-needed room for cooperation and regional integration. The debate put emphasis on several recommendations for the 2023 Three Seas Initiative Bucharest Summit. These include the following: the development of the institutional infrastructure, the integration of a much-needed scientific research dimension, and the boost of visibility and communication with regard to the 3SI among the general public, civil society, and governments.

Iulian Oneaşcă
European Studies Unit

EIR Participation in European Events

Between May and June, representatives of the European Institute of Romania participated in a series of public communication activities, among which we recall:

Mihai Sebe, currently Head of Training and Projects Unit participated, as moderator and speaker, on Tuesday, May 16, 2023, at the conference “Three Seas - One Opportunity”, which took place in Warsaw, Republic of Poland. The interventions focused on the implications of major geopolitical changes on the Three Seas Initiative (I3M) and also addressed the relationship between the Initiative and its neighbouring states. For more details, please see [here](#).

Furthermore, on Wednesday, May 17, 2023, he participated as speaker in the panel “The Three Seas Initiative as a research theme: exploring regional cooperation from different academic perspectives” organised within the Congress of Local Authorities of the Three Seas Initiative, in Lublin, Poland. More details are available [here](#).

The European Institute of Romania was represented by Mihai Sebe, in his capacity as general delegate, at the conference dedicated to the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union organised in Madrid, Spain on 1-2 June 2023 by TEPSA and the Elcano Institute. The conference allowed for high-level discussions between researchers from the TEPSA network, members of the public, including students and representatives of civil society, and key decision-makers of the Spanish government, including Maria Lledó, Secretary General for the European Union, of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the Conference, TEPSA also presented a number of Recommendations for the incoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The recommendations from the members of the TEPSA network to the incoming Spanish Presidency form part of a long history of interaction between TEPSA and the Council Presidencies, starting with the first pre-presidency conference in 1974. They were disseminated to key decision-makers in Spain. For more details, please visit the TEPSA website [here](#).



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Mihai Sebe
Training and Projects Unit

The European Court of Human Rights Case-law Guide on Social Rights

The new guide translated by the Translation Coordination Unit is part of the Case-Law Guides series published by the European Court of Human Rights (the English and French versions are available on the Court’s [website](#)) to inform legal practitioners about the fundamental judgments and the decisions delivered by the Strasbourg Court. This guide analyses and sums up the case-law on a wide range of provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights relating to social rights and should be read together with the *Case-Law Guides by Article* series, to which it refers systematically. The case-law cited has been selected among the leading, major, and/or recent judgments and decisions.

Although the European Convention on Human Rights sets forth what the civil and political rights essentially are, many of these carry social or economic implications. The mere fact that an interpretation of the Convention may extend into the sphere of social and economic rights should not be a reason for dismissing such an interpretation, as there is no clear-cut separation between this sphere and the field covered by the Convention. Through its case-law, the Court has interpreted various articles of the Convention as giving rise to certain rights that can be considered of a social nature.



Source: Council of Europe

translations

Furthermore, certain rights protected under the Convention and its Protocols are also regulated, sometimes in greater detail, under the European Social Charter (the 1961 Charter, or the Revised Charter, adopted in 1996), including trade union rights, the prohibition of forced labour, the right to education or the prohibition of discrimination. Both treaty systems are complementary and interdependent.

This case-law guide summarises and analyses the case-law of the Court concerning social rights. It covers issues such as health, labour rights, trade union rights, social benefits, and pensions as well as certain emerging issues such as housing, the rights of specific vulnerable groups, etc. The relevant cases are numerous, and they relate to a significant number of substantive rules of the Convention, and focus on different thematic issues and their correlation with the articles of the Convention.

The guide includes an index of cited cases - judgments or decisions delivered by the Court, as well as decisions or reports of the European Commission of Human Rights. The hyperlinks to the cases cited in the electronic version of the guide are directed to the [HUDOC database](#), which provides access to the case-law of the Court (Grand Chamber, Chamber, and Committee judgments and decisions, communicated cases, advisory opinions and legal summaries from the Case-Law Information Note) and of the Commission (decisions and reports) as well as to the resolutions of the Committee of Ministers.

The Romanian translation of the guide is available on the [website](#) of the European Institute of Romania. All the guides that are part of the series *Case-Law Guides*, published by the Court, are now available in Romanian on this page, thanks to the Translation Coordination Unit.

Costin Fălcuță
Translation Coordination Unit

publications

Editorial release: *A Half-Open Window: Opportunities and Obstacles to the Signature and Ratification of the European Union-MERCOSUR Agreement*



In the context of Spain's takeover of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Institute of Romania has published a policy brief entitled: "A Half-Open Window: Opportunities and Obstacles to the Signature and Ratification of the European Union-MERCOSUR Agreement". Stefano Arroque presents a current analysis of the relations between the European Union and the MERCOSUR countries and the study period after 2010. The final section of the document also presents a number of recommendations that can increase the rapprochement between the two partners. The full text of the material, available in English, can be accessed [here](#).

**A Half-Open Window:
Opportunities and Obstacles
to the Signature and
Ratification of the European
Union-MERCOSUR
Agreement**

Stefano ARROQUE

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