

International Institute for Peace

The International Institute for Peace (IIP) is a non-governmental organization with consultative status to the ECOSOC and UNESCO

The IIP functions as a platform to promote peace and non-violent conflict resolution across the world to a wide range of stakeholders – scholars, diplomats, practitioners, military personnel, and civil society as well as students and private citizens. The Institute strives to address the most topical issues of the day and promote dialogue, public engagement, and a common understanding to ensure a holistic approach to conflict resolution and a durable peace.



INTERNATIONAL
INSTITUTE FOR
PEACE

Annual Report 2021

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On February 24, 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine. For many years the IIP has been focusing on developments in and around Ukraine. Russia's attack on a sovereign state that it claims to be a brotherly nation has shocked the whole world. Russia is committing a horrible crime in Ukraine that can have no justification. Official references to Art.51/defense of the Donbas are simply wrong. We hope that violence ends quickly. Our thoughts are with Ukraine. The IIP will continue its efforts in maintaining the dialogue with everyone who is willing to have it.

Vienna, March 2022

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Preface

Stephanie Fenkart & Hannes Swoboda

2021 was another challenging year. The Covid-19 pandemic continued to have a huge global impact on all societies, their socioeconomic well-being, and their health. With the development of vaccines, the hope for an end to the pandemic grew, but questions about distribution arose. Whereas in some Western countries the envisaged goal of 80-90% vaccination rates was reached, the so-called Global South still lacks sufficient access to vaccines .

Although the world was surprised by the rapid evacuation of US/NATO troops in Afghanistan in August 2021 after a 20-year deployment, the radical-Islamist Taliban swiftly regained power in the country, destroying hopes for a gradual democratic process and raising international concern about the human rights and humanitarian situation in the country. The failure of the military intervention shows the limitation of military interventions in general if they are not accompanied by holistic policies that take different contexts, histories, societal arrangements, and more into account. The most basic requirement of any military intervention is the “do no harm” principle, which is unfortunately not often considered.

Since Joe Biden entered office in the US in January 2021, the world does not seem to have become a safer place. The confrontation with China is ongoing, Afghanistan is perceived as a failure, and in November a possible war between Russia and Ukraine began gaining widespread public attention, putting the current European security order under threat and raising fears about the outbreak of a war on European territory.

Elsewhere in Europe, the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina further adds to the many challenges that the EU is facing, including the pandemic, the climate crisis, democratic backsliding in member states, insecurity at its borders, international migration, cyber threats, and terrorism.

With all these challenges ahead, the IIP tried to tackle the main issues by providing a platform for dialogue and exchange, engaging in critical discussions about the future of Europe, providing information to the public, and discussing possible scenarios to contribute to conflict-prevention, peacebuilding, and common understanding, which is the basis for any compromise.

It is our philosophy to address current issues but also to consider the long-term consequences - beyond the actual divisions and conflicts. And we always ask our guests and speakers to envisage alternative solutions to achieve peace. Especially in times when some politicians and experts nonchalantly discuss war, we want to explore possibilities to avoid conflict and establish a just and long-lasting peace.

In 2021, we organized 33 public discussions with 110 speakers from all over the world with a gender balance of 56%-44% (male/female), including two conferences: the 3rd Vienna Peace and Security Talks titled “European Security: What Role Can and Should the OSCE, EU and NATO Play?” and an international conference titled “Thirty Years On: Is There Still a Post-Soviet Space?” Additionally, we conducted approximately 55 interviews with experts, diplomats, scientists, researchers, politicians, and civil society activists on a wide range of topics. The IIP Peace Blog also published 61 commentaries on international politics and conflict prevention.



With a group of young experts from the Western Balkans, the IIP organized a study trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2021. The group met with diplomats, politicians, heads of states, the EU, the OHR, and civil society representatives to discuss alternative horizons that could ultimately pave a way for BiH to become more prosperous and more democratic and provide a perspective for its people to stay in the country instead of leaving it for good.

All these activities would not have been possible without the support of our many national and international partners and, most importantly, the very engaged team of the IIP. We would like to convey our special appreciation to our Vice President Angela Kane, the Chair of our Advisory Board Heinz Gärtner, our board members, and our advisory board members. Our special thanks goes to the team of the IIP: our researcher Marylia Hushcha, our project assistant Luka Cekic, and our technical expert Michel Andriessen, without whom the manifold activities we conducted throughout 2021 would not have been possible.

In 2022, we will continue to look at the most pressing issues in areas such as international security and disarmament, transatlantic relations, developments in the MENA region, conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, developments in the Western Balkans, climate and healthcare, and many other topics. Even though we focus on geopolitical developments all over the world, it is at the center of the IIP's work not to forget about the impact of these developments on basic human rights and democracy but especially on the individual humans and societies who are most affected by these politics and policies.



About the IIP

The International Institute for Peace (IIP) is an international, non-governmental organization with its headquarters in Vienna, Austria. The IIP has consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the United Nations Organization for Education, Science, Culture and Communication (UNESCO). It operates on the basis of Austrian law as a non-profit association. Established in 1956, the Institute was re-founded by its former president Erwin Lanc in 1989, and its current president is Dr. Hannes Swoboda.

The IIP functions as a platform to promote peace and non-violent conflict resolution across the world to a wide range of stakeholders – scholars, diplomats, practitioners, military personnel, and civil society as well as students and private citizens. The Institute strives to address the most topical issues of the day and promote dialogue, public engagement, and a common understanding to ensure a holistic approach to conflict resolution and a durable peace.

In order to address the diverse and multifaceted approaches to peaceful conflict resolution, the IIP collaborates with various national and international institutions and organisations (see our [partners](#)). The IIP, both alone and through collaborations, organizes lectures, conferences, seminars, background talks, workshops, and symposia on a wide range of issues.

In recent years, the IIP has focused in particular on the areas of international security, disarmament, arms control, migration, and non-proliferation. On a regional level, the IIP emphasizes the EU's neighborhood, including the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia, the Middle East, and Africa. However, the IIP has also featured events on topics ranging from the arts and EU foreign policy to the Korean peninsula and Latin America.

The IIP's values:

- **Diversity and dialogue:** The IIP seeks to include and represent voices and perspectives from a variety of backgrounds and identities.
- **Peace and human rights:** The IIP emphasizes the need to support and protect human rights and peace at all times and in all circumstances, both in our events and discussions as well as through our actions.
- **Cooperation and partnership:** The IIP strives to actively collaborate with partner organizations to utilize our relative strengths and foster teamwork.
- **Gender:** The IIP aims to promote gender equality and mainstream gender perspectives, from ensuring equal representation on panels to highlighting gender as a topic. The IIP is a proud member of International Gender Champions, a leadership network that brings together female and male decision-makers to break down gender barriers.
- **Nonpartisanship:** The IIP avoids all partisan affiliations and works to engage with voices from all political parties and outlooks.
- **Public engagement:** The IIP welcomes all interested members of the public to our panel events and discussions and publishes information and recaps of all events to improve accessibility.
- **Support for our interns:** The IIP is committed to paying its interns in order to allow students and young professionals to gain practical experience in the field.

IIP Team and Board



Hannes Swoboda, President



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Stephanie Fenkart, Director



Erwin Lanc, Honorary President



Heinz Gärtner, President of the Advisory Board



Marylia Hushcha, Researcher





Luka Cekic, Project Assistant

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Dr. Pascal Lago, Avenir Suisse, Switzerland

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Mmag. Martin Zartl, MSc., Austrian Orient-Society Hammer-Purgstall Association for the Middle East

IIP in Numbers





Projects and Activities



International Security and Disarmament

Angela Kane

The year started on such a positive note: after four years of dismantling the bilateral and multilateral arms control regime by US President Donald Trump, President Biden came into office in January. During his campaign in 2019, he made the statement “We don’t need more nuclear weapons, period”, and so hopes were high that he would bring stability and fresh initiatives into the stagnant nuclear discourse.

Biden did engage Russia immediately in extending the New START Treaty, giving the world another five years of limiting US and Russian deployed long-range nuclear weapons. This was a hopeful beginning of the Biden presidency, but the optimism largely petered out during the course of the year.

The JCPOA, from which Trump had unilaterally withdrawn in 2018, was the next challenge. While Biden had indicated that the US was prepared to return to full compliance if Iran did the same, the year continued to see the maximum pressure policy and the continuation of sanctions that were scaled up under Trump. It remains to be seen if an agreement can be arrived at in 2022 that is acceptable.

Another disappointment was the US budget increase for more destructive nuclear warheads as well as other military programs. Late in 2021, Biden signed into law the Defense Authorization Act, which is a nearly \$770 billion military bill, and includes over \$27 billion for nuclear weapons.

Other countries also increased their military spending: according to SIPRI, world military expenditure in 2020 rose to \$1981 billion, an increase in real terms of 2.6% compared to the previous year – while global GDP shrank by 4.4% in the same period.

One notable highlight was the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) which had 59 States Parties and 89 signatories at the end of 2021. While the Treaty makes nuclear weapons illegal under international law and reinforces the norm against nuclear bombs, the nine nuclear weapons-possessing countries continue to strongly oppose it. In a departure from the alliance, two NATO members, Germany and Norway, agreed to attend the first meeting of States Parties to take place in 2022, as has Switzerland.

COVID-19 continued to disrupt the regular schedule of diplomatic encounters and deliberations in multilateral fora. The Tenth Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) was rescheduled repeatedly from 2020, and consultations are ongoing on the exact dates when an in-person meeting can take place. The delay and resultant uncertainty have not helped improve the atmosphere between the five nuclear powers in the NPT and the non-nuclear possessors, as the former are seen to be strongly resisting any steps to implement Article VI of the NPT, however modest.

Two positive developments need to be mentioned: the first is the increased transparency in disclosing the US nuclear budget, stockpile and dismantlement figures, though this transparency was not matched by other nuclear possessors. The second is the US-Russian agreement to initiate a strategic stability dialogue which was the result of a Biden-Putin meeting in June. While only two meetings took place in 2021, it is a commitment to engage in the

complex topic of arms control and could lead to genuine progress, though the Russian shift to move troops to the Ukraine border raises the specter not only of instability but of a real military threat and escalation. This shift intensified late in 2021.

A final note of concern: the increasing and provocative build-up of nuclear weapons and missile launches by North Korea. The United Nations Security Council met repeatedly on the developments, but with already the most punishing sanctions imposed on North Korea by the Council, the diplomatic toolbox is largely empty, and an initiative to engage in negotiations or even discussions is not on the table.

Overall, 2021 has been a disappointing year for arms control and disarmament, with – at least for this author – the only bright spots being the extension of New START and the entry into force of the TPNW.

Selected projects

Vienna Peace and Security Talks 2021

European Security: What Role Can and Should the OSCE, EU, and NATO Play?

The European security system is in deep crisis, facing difficult times, major challenges, and myriad hybrid threats: armed or frozen conflicts in the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, global migration crisis, systemic terrorism, pervasive cyber threats, and the return of the forgotten conflict with Russia. All these developments are taking place against a backdrop of profound changes in the international order, the rise of Asia, and a redefinition of the global role of the USA.

The downward spiral in the European Security Architecture is also reflected in the crisis of the OSCE. As a matter of consequence of the spirit of confrontation between Russia and its allies and the Western states, the OSCE decision mechanisms are far too often paralysed. The OSCE member states are hardly able to find the necessary consensus even when it comes to decisions of minor importance.

Furthermore, the undignified withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan demonstrated the limits of this potentially powerful organisation. It made also clear – yet for another time – that the EU lacks strategic autonomy and depends on US capabilities and leadership. When Washington acts against European interests especially on peace and security matters, the EU often lacks the will and means to pursue its own foreign and security policy.

Date	19-20 September 2021
Venue	Urania Dachsaal, Uraniastraße 1, 1010 Vienna
Format	Conference
Partners	Friedrich Ebert Foundation Regional Office in Vienna; Karl-Renner Institut; Society for Eurasian Studies
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revitalizing security in the OSCE area. How is this done and by whom? - OSCE's roadmap to 2025. How can you reverse the current trend? - Cooperation with autocracies. Do we need this?
Public panel	<p>European Security and Fallout from Afghanistan: Lessons for the EU, OSCE, and NATO.</p> <p>Introduction: Hannes Swoboda, President at the IIP, former MEP</p> <p>Speakers: Daniel Hamilton (Wilson Center & Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation); Bruno Maçães (Flint Global & Hudson Institute); Clarisse Pasztory (Deputy Head of the OSCE presence in Albania); Lejla Visnjic (Secretary General of the Socialist Youth Austria)</p> <p>Moderator: Gerhard Marchl, Karl-Renner Institut</p>
Conference paper	Available online here



USA - Back to Multilateralism? The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) enters into force

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entered into force on 22 January 2021. On this occasion the IIP organized a virtual debate about the future of nuclear weapons. The Ban Treaty expresses concern about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons and calls for their complete elimination. Even though the catastrophic consequences of the use of nuclear weapons are widely recognized, nuclear-armed states remain convinced by the concept of nuclear deterrence, which they believe protects them from a nuclear or massive conventional attack. Therefore, nuclear weapon states and all NATO-states oppose the Ban Treaty. Advocates of the Treaty think that nuclear deterrence is only credible if the nuclear armed adversaries permanently demonstrate that they are serious about using nuclear weapons.

Date	20 January 2021
Format	Online panel discussion
Moderation	STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP
Participants	Prof. HEINZ GÄRTNER, Chair of IIP's Advisory Board; Lecturer at the University of Vienna ANGELA KANE, Vice-President of the IIP; former Under-Secretary General at the United Nations Amb. ret. THOMAS HAJNOCZI, Director for Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation in the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs. NADJA SCHMIDT, Chair, International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Austria (ICAN) TOM SAUER, Antwerp University



The Political Significance of TPNW

Date	19 January 2021
Format	Blog article
Author	THOMAS HAJNOCZI, Ambassador (ret.) at the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, member of the IIP Advisory Board

With its entry into force on 22 January 2021 the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) will become binding international law for the growing number of State Parties, for the moment 51 countries. Moreover, it is also having an effect on those states that do not intend to join it.

The nuclear weapon states themselves testify to the TPNW's effectiveness by their campaign against it. They could have ignored it instead of pressuring countries not to sign and ratify.

The TPNW has clearly revealed their lack of will to comply with their obligation to nuclear disarmament in Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Since the latter's entry into force 50 years ago, the nuclear weapon states have not only failed to disarm, but have not even started to elaborate a plan for how to do it.

Instead, they are investing trillions of dollars in modernizing their arsenals, developing a new generation of even more sophisticated nuclear weapons, and lowering the threshold for their use.

For many years, the US has been on record at the UN to declare that they seek a world free of nuclear weapons and that such a world requires a legally binding prohibition norm. So, it is not the concept of the TPNW that is contentious, rather it is the fact that it has been put into existence by the majority of states without waiting for the nuclear weapon states. The nuclear weapon states had been invited to the negotiations, yet they preferred to boycott them. Some even put pressure on those countries which have chosen to put themselves under their nuclear umbrella to stay away from the negotiations. By doing so, it could be said that the nuclear weapon states have violated Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty that requires them „to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament “.

The nuclear weapon states argued against the negotiations, insisting that a prohibition norm should only be created once there were almost no nuclear weapons left. This stands in stark contrast to the history of the prohibition of the other classes of weapons of mass destruction. If this line of thinking would have prevailed, neither the prohibition of chemical weapons would exist, since their destruction is still not completed. Without a prohibition norm against chemical weapons in place, the use of them by Syria and others over the last years would not have violated international law. This example, as many others regarding conventional arms, corroborates why the prohibition of a class of weapons always precedes their destruction.

The campaign against the TPNW centers on the argument that the TPNW does not eliminate a single nuclear warhead. This criticism falls back on the nuclear weapon states themselves, because no treaty and no non-nuclear weapon state can destroy their nuclear weapons for them. As long as they fail to do so, the risk to humankind will persist. For that reason, the TPNW is a focused prohibition treaty that leaves detailed procedures for destruction and verification to future regulation with states possessing nuclear weapons, once they join the treaty. As the mandate of the negotiations already expressed, the TPNW is designed to lead to the total

elimination of nuclear weapons. The TPNW creates an indispensable basis on which further legal and practical steps can build.

What the TPNW underscores is that nuclear weapons are in fundamental contradiction to humanitarian values and international law. Since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki it has been rightfully argued that the use of nuclear weapons violates international humanitarian law, for these weapons cause excessive suffering and kill overwhelmingly civilians. The required clarity that nuclear weapons are illegal has finally been established by the TPNW.

Indeed, the catastrophic humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the unacceptable risks which they bring about were the main motivation for the process that led to the adoption of the TPNW. Even a limited nuclear confrontation would result in global effects like „nuclear winter“. A considerable number of cases is documented in which misunderstandings, error or technical breakdowns almost caused the detonation of nuclear weapons. No humanitarian crisis response capacity exists or could ever be created that can cope with the humanitarian devastation that nuclear weapons would cause. For those reasons, the only guarantee that such a catastrophe does not occur is the prohibition of nuclear weapons and their total elimination.

The TPNW delegitimizes nuclear deterrence at a time in history when this concept dating from the bipolar world of the Cold War area has been put in question by facts. How could nuclear deterrence be effective in a multipolar and digitalized world, when cyber hacking of nuclear systems can happen and hypersonic weapons by their sheer speed and non-ballistic course might permit a first strike without retaliation? In addition, the credibility of the concept of nuclear deterrence necessitates the readiness to use nuclear weapons and thus to kill millions of people, including one's own population. As President Reagan has said on nuclear deterrence as a means to make sure that nuclear weapons would never be used: „But then would it not be better to do away with nuclear weapons entirely?“

The prohibition implies that states must not build their security strategy on reliance on nuclear weapons. This concerns not only the nuclear armed states, but also those countries that have chosen to found their security on reliance on nuclear weapons of others. The TPNW exposes the contradiction in the position of these so-called „umbrella states“ that profess to work for the elimination of nuclear weapons and simultaneously want their continued existence for their „protection“. As in most umbrella states a majority of the population favours joining the TPNW, these dynamics might lead to a serious debate on nuclear disarmament resulting in a change of the position on disarmament. Another effect of the TPNW is the growing trend to disinvest from companies involved in the nuclear weapons industry. Not only the largest public funds are taking this course, but also an increasing number of investment funds of banks are doing so.

The entry into force of the TPNW coincides with a global pandemic, a threat to global, national and personal security that cannot be fought by nuclear weapons. Most of the major contemporary challenges to security starting with climate change cannot be confronted with weapons, let alone nuclear weapons. On the contrary, the modernization programs and upkeep of nuclear weapons systems siphons off the funds that would be desperately needed to tackle the predominant challenges to security.

This broader concept of security has also set the premises of the TPNW. National and humanitarian security mean the same thing: the security of the people living in a given country. If their own country uses nuclear weapons, the people would suffer in a horrific way and their very survival would be imperiled: first, by an expected nuclear counterstrike of the attacked

state and secondly, as all of mankind, by the global humanitarian consequences of nuclear warfare. This is not security.

The global impact of nuclear weapons makes nuclear disarmament an issue in which all states have a stake and a say, since all would be affected. The TPNW is the first nuclear disarmament treaty that reflects this fact by treating all states at equal level.

The TPNW has also set a new standard that will become the new normal in another regard. In bringing about the TPNW, civil society has played a decisive role. The impact of the findings of scientists have informed the negotiations. NGOs and the International Committee of the Red Cross have contributed throughout the whole process greatly which has been acknowledged by the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to ICAN (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons). The multi-stakeholder approach has been established before for cyber and environmental issues and is by now a well-worn approach with regard to anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. With the TPNW it has reached the nuclear disarmament area. Matters of security are not exclusive to the military and diplomats anymore.

Finally, the TPNW mentions rightly the unacceptable suffering of the hibakushas, i.e. the victims of the nuclear bombings in 1945. It contains obligations on victim assistance and environmental remediation. In the negotiations these real-life effects of nuclear weapons were a strong motivation. The TPNW has succeeded in putting the fate of the individual into the center. Future disarmament treaties must follow suit.

All Activities: International Security and Disarmament

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)

November 3 | Vienna Peace and Security Talks 2021 - Conference Paper 

September 23 | European Security: Fallout from Afghanistan - Lessons for EU, OSCE, and NATO 

September 7 | Engaged Neutral States 

July 6 | Will the negotiations on the Iran Nuclear Agreement (JCPOA) in Vienna be successful? 


July 6 | The Future of Diplomacy After COVID-19: Multilateralism and Maintaining International Peace and Security 

May 20 | A Bright Side to Proliferation? 

April 13 | Biden – Rüstung – China–Frieden 


March 19 | USA: Back to Multilateralism? The Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) and a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East 

March 15 | Biden is on the Verge of Making the Same Mistakes 

February 22 | USA: Back to Multilateralism? Extension of New START and Implications: A start in rebuilding arms control architecture? 

February 10 | How Nuclear Dependent States Could Respond to the Entry into Force of the TPNW 

February 4 | Außer Kontrolle? Aufrüstung und die Misstrauensspirale 

February 4 | What Future of US-EU cooperation? Reflections on the Inauguration of the 46th president of the US 

February 3 | USA/EU: Eine neue Allianz? 

January 21 | USA - Back to Multilateralism? The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) enters into force 

January 19 | The political significance of the TPNW 



Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Russia

Marylia Hushcha

2021 has been a tumultuous year in Eastern Europe, Russia, and the South Caucasus, with the pandemic still in full swing alongside multiple political crises.

The year marked three decades since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the IIP held a special conference on the topic in November. The post-Soviet space is not a homogenous region, with significant differences along socioeconomic, political, and cultural lines across the former Soviet republics. The very notion of a post-Soviet space is increasingly questioned since, as time goes by, it makes ever less sense to situate these diverse countries in one grouping. At the same time, it remains a relevant concept in regard to Russia's policy towards the area.

The IIP examined developments in the region throughout the year, especially the events in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.

Russia

The year started off with the arrest of opposition leader Alexey Navalny and mass protests in his support. Notably, civic mobilization took place across the entire country, not only in metropolitan areas. With mass rallies in neighboring Belarus still fresh in mind, government forces in Russia cracked down on protesters, using force and detaining thousands.

Parliamentary elections in September took place without major surprises, solidifying the pre-existing trends concerning the increasing erosion of political liberties and the preservation of the political system. Vladimir Putin's 'United Russia' party won a constitutional majority, and not a single non-systemic opposition candidate was elected to the State Duma (many were prevented from running in the first place).

Russia-West relations reached another low in 2021. Russia's amassing of troops close to the Ukrainian border and backing of Lukashenka in Belarus were seen by the West as a threat to the European security order and a breach of liberal democratic values. Moscow, on the other hand, viewed its policy as a 'restoration of justice,' reclaiming the great power status that it was denied by the West after the collapse of the USSR. The construction of the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline was completed in September, but its anticipated launch exposed further divisions between the US and the EU, as well as inside Germany – the main potential beneficiary of the project.

Belarus

2021 saw the consolidation of a new aspect of Lukashenka's regime based almost exclusively on the threat of violence and Russia's backing. The number of political prisoners at the end of the year reached almost one thousand, while tens of thousands were detained. Major non-state media were closed alongside many NGOs, including those dealing with nonpolitical issues (e.g. the environment, people with disabilities). Russia's backing is essential for the regime's survival, and this has increasingly limited Lukashenka's room for maneuver and ability to take any autonomous action.

Western sanctions have never been harsher, especially sectoral sanctions aimed to hurt the main export-oriented industries. However, virtually no sanctions can force the regime in Belarus to make any concessions, as it exists in survival mode. Sanctions might be used as leverage in some potential future negotiations, although for the time being this prospect seems remote and uncertain. The migrant crisis on the EU border that the Belarusian regime engineered by bringing asylum-seekers from the Middle East to the Polish and Lithuanian borders did not provide leverage against the EU, but instead further angered it.

Ukraine

Ukraine remained a turbulent place, not only due to the conflict in the Donbas, which at the end of 2021 faced the second major escalation in one year, but also in domestic politics. Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky made a nationalist turn in his political credo, alienating some of his former supporters in the country's southeast. His law on oligarchs, while aimed at restricting their pervasive political influence, was adopted hastily and without due procedure. The sanctioning of the Russia-friendly Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk seems to have been motivated by the desire to improve Zelensky's own popularity rather than to rid Ukraine of the oligarchic system. The dismissal of Zelensky's own party member and speaker of the parliament Dmytro Razumkov was indicative of his attempts to prevent dissent within his own party.

The conflict in the Donbas region further deteriorated, with the continued and increasingly worrying military presence of Russia on the Ukrainian border. The Minsk agreements are in a stalemate, and the humanitarian situation for people in the conflict area remains dire.

In 2021, Ukraine's relations with Belarus also deteriorated. On the one hand, many Belarusians fled or migrated to Ukraine due to the persecution and worsening political situation in their home country. Ukraine partially joined Western sanctions against Belarus, for example banning Belarusian planes from its airspace after the forced landing of an EU civilian plane and the arrest of an opposition blogger who was on board. Kyiv is also concerned about the growing dependence of the regime in Minsk on Russia.

The Caucasus and Moldova

The implications of the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh continued to unfold in 2021. Although the territory is provisionally back under Azerbaijani control, it faces a critical humanitarian situation; many areas are covered in landmines, which take a long time to clear. The situation today is unstable, as there are shootings every day and constant border disputes. The area is presently controlled by Russian peacekeepers.

Armenia has been coming to terms with the new reality. However, it has passed a test of resilience – despite the popular uproar after their military defeat in 2020, Armenians went on to re-elect the pro-democracy party of Nikol Pashinyan, as opposed to Karabakh hardliners.

Meanwhile, Moldova elected the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), which has managed to overcome the traditional East-West geopolitical divide that has historically dominated Moldova's elections. In its election campaign, PAS put an emphasis on reforms and tackling corruption, which was well-received by the public.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit took place in December. It did not lead to any breakthroughs, but the states managed to agree on a joint declaration, even though Azerbaijan



disassociated itself from the paragraph concerning Belarus, while Belarus suspended its participation in the EaP and did not attend the summit.

The IIP will continue to closely follow the events in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Russia in 2022.



Selected projects

Thirty Years On: Is There Still a Post-Soviet Space?

The dissolution of the Soviet Union thirty years ago had a tremendous impact on the European and global order. The former Soviet states themselves were affected the most, however. The conference looked at the former Soviet states, how they have transformed in the last three decades, and whether one can still put the countries in this increasingly diverse region under the same umbrella of a ‘post-Soviet space’. What guides their political and economic development? What regional and global actors do they lean towards? What other regional identities and narratives prevail in public discourses today? Finally, the conference looked at EU relations with its Eastern Neighbours and Russia, discussing the current challenges and suggesting potential paths for their further development.

Date	15-16 November 2021
Venue	University of Vienna - Skylounge, Oskar-Morgenstern Platz 1, 1090 Vienna IIP – Möllwaldplatz 5-7, 1040 Vienna
Format	Conference
Partners	Konrad Adenauer Foundation for Multilateral Dialogue, the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, the Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe
Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political systems: From autocracy to different state systems - ‘Homo Sovieticus’: Does this archetype still exist? - Old Conflicts – New Realities: The South Caucasus and Transnistria - Belarus and Ukraine: Geopolitical Answers to Civil Society Movements - Transformations in Central Asia - Socio-Economic Lessons from Long-Term Transformation
Public panel	<p>The EU and its Neighbors to the East: Prospects for Future Relations</p> <p>Opening speech: Professor of Central European History at the University of Vienna, Director of the Research Center for the History of Transformations</p> <p>Speakers: Vasily Astrov (Economist at the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies), Tinatin Khidasheli (Chair of Civic IDEA, former Georgian Defense Minister), Kristi Raik (Director of the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute at the ICDS), Tatiana Romanova (Associate Professor at St. Petersburg State University), Sebastian Schäffer (Managing Director at the Institute for Danube Region and Central Europe)</p> <p>Moderator: Hannes Swoboda, President at the IIP, former MEP</p>
Conference outputs	Available online here



Geopolitical Struggle for the Black Sea Region - A Struggle for Dominance in the Caucasus?

The shores of the Black Sea bring together countries of diverse economic, political and cultural orientations. Bulgaria and Romania are EU and NATO members, while Turkey is a NATO member and a prominent actor in the Middle East. Russia is the biggest regional power with a strong military presence and political clout in the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have problematic relations with Russia, and they aspire for closer ties with the EU and NATO. Armenia and Azerbaijan are less ambitious with regard to the EU and look towards other regional actors, namely Russia and Turkey respectively. Considering these diverse and sometimes adversarial relations, does the Black sea unite or separate the countries on its coast and its wider regional context?

The event series ‘Geopolitical Struggle for the Black Sea Region’ included three events dedicated to the developments around the South Caucasus, Ukraine, and the EU’s role in the region.

Date	19 March 2021
Format	Online panel discussion
Partner	Center for International and European Studies at Kadir Haas University, Istanbul
Moderation	STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP
Participants	RICHARD GIRAGOSIAN, Founding Director, Regional Studies Center (RSC), an independent “think tank” in Yerevan LEILA ALIEVA, Oxford School for Global and Area Studies MITAT ÇELIKPALA, Professor of International Relations and Vice Rector, Kadir Has University, Istanbul SERGEI MARKEDONOV, Leading Researcher at the MGIMO Institute for International Studies



Sanctioning Belarus: Yes, No, or Does it Matter?

Date	24 June 2021
Format	Blog article
Author	MARYLIA HUSHCHA, Researcher at the IIP

A month ago, a Ryanair civilian plane flying from Athens to Vilnius was forced to land in Minsk when it was flying through Belarus' airspace. Belarusian authorities arrested two passengers who were on board of the plane: Raman Pratasevich – a blogger and opposition activist and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega. The incident produced an international scandal, resulting in the immediate closure of the EU's airspace for Belarusian planes.

With the EU being directly affected by the political crisis inside Belarus, European officials promised to speed up their work on an additional sanctions package to be adopted at the end of this week. USA, UK and Canada have also imposed further sanctions over Belarus in light of the incident.

While it is doubtful that sanctions will help release Pratasevich any time soon, the overall impact on Belarus' economy is going to be much more severe than previous measures. Nevertheless, the question remains whether the deteriorating economic situation will make the regime in Belarus change its course.

Sanctions after August 2020

Since the start of the crisis in Belarus in August 2020 three rounds of sanctions were introduced against the Belarusian regime by the EU. The first round came in early October 2020 – almost two months after the violent crackdown on the demonstrations in the country had started. The package included targeted sanctions against forty Belarussian officials and members of the security forces whose assets in the EU were frozen and they were banned from entering the EU's territory. The second round of sanctions followed in November, with restrictions adopted against further 14 high level officials as well as Aliaksandr Lukashenka himself. In December, further 29 individuals and seven enterprises (primarily involved in the military industry) were added to the sanctions list. The talk about a fourth package came in February 2021 already but the discussion in the European Council has been repeatedly postponed.

The fourth package to be adopted this week includes much more far-reaching measures. Further 78 names are added to the travel ban and asset freeze list, including top businessmen with close ties to the regime¹. In total there are now 166 individuals and 15 entities on the list. Belarus' major export-oriented enterprises in the oil and potash industries will also be banned from the EU market. Lastly, sanctions on the financial sector will limit the possibilities for Belarusian banks to take loans and receiving investments from banks in the EU. This last part of the package was put in danger by Austrian resistance to sanctions in the banking sector last week. Vienna has been one of major Western investors in Belarus, with Austrian Raiffeisen bank operating in the country through its daughter Priorbank.

EU sanctions policy before the political crisis

The logic behind sanctions might be manifold. Sanctions do not necessarily aim at altering behavior of political leaders but can serve to weaken the economic and military potential of the

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2021:219I:FULL&from=EN>

country, demonstrate the capacity to act, stigmatize the wrongful acts or help uphold international norms².

To date, the EU has repeatedly put sanctions on Belarus. In fact, the arms embargo introduced in 2011 has never been lifted since, despite periods of rapprochement in relations between Brussels and Minsk. As a result of the authoritarian backlash in Belarus that was visible already in the 1990s, Belarus has never signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU (unlike the rest of the Eastern Partnership countries) and its participation in the EU's General System of Preferences was suspended.

EU sanctions usually came as a reaction to authoritarian tendencies inside Belarus, such as undemocratic constitutional changes, rigged parliamentary and presidential elections, crackdown on demonstrations and independent media, and imprisonment of opposition leaders. Sanctions were suspended during periods of relative liberalization and improvement of relations with the West. For example, privatization and release of imprisoned presidential candidates in 2008 resulted into restoration of contacts with the EU and suspension of travel bans for senior officials³. The last sanctions regime prior to the events of 2020 had been lifted in early 2016. At that time, Belarus did not support the annexation of Crimea, thereby angering Russians. Belarus' position on Crimea also enabled rapprochement with the EU who was concerned with the Crimean scenario repeating itself in Belarus and thus less insistent on its conditionality demands⁴. In 2017 Lukashenka was even invited to attend the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels. He sent his foreign minister instead, though.

Overall, attempts of rapprochement with the West from the Belarusian side were undertaken out of pragmatic reasons rather than change of heart. Improvement of ties with the EU correlates to the worsening of Belarus-Russia relations, the latter one was usually accompanied by cuts in subsidies to Belarus' economy. Through rapprochement with Western partners Belarusian authorities were primarily seeking access to alternative sources of financial support (e.g. USD 3,5 billion IMF loan in 2009). In addition, Lukashenka skillfully utilized these improved ties politically, using them as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Russia. In 2010, just ten days before the presidential elections he managed to strike a favorable deal with Vladimir Putin on gas prices and crude oil despite months of stand-off before⁵. Finally, liberalization inside the country was permitted to the extent that it did not endanger the existing political system and its elites.

Do sanctions have an impact?

The track record of sanctions on Belarus is rather mixed. They proved successful in some instances because of conflicts with Russia and the leadership's desire to preserve wealth⁶. In addition, it was indirect effects of sanctions rather than the direct impact of blacklists and visa-bans that made the difference. International financial institutions and development banks did not operate in Belarus while it was under sanctions. Stigmatization and reputational damages

² Niklas Helwig, Juha Jokela, Clara Portela (eds.), 2020. *Sharpening EU sanctions policy for a geopolitical era*. Prime Minister's Office Helsinki

³ Clara Portela (2011). 'The European Union and Belarus: Sanctions and partnership?' *Comparative European Politics* (9:4/5).

⁴ Mikkel Sejersen (2019). 'Democratic sanctions meet black knight support: Revisiting the Belarusian case'. *Democratization* (26:3).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Clara Portela (2011). 'The European Union and Belarus: Sanctions and partnership?' *Comparative European Politics* (9:4/5).

that came along with sanctions most likely discouraged other potential investors from entering the Belarusian market, too.

The arms embargo demonstrated a principled position of the EU not to sell weapons to the regimes which could use them against their own population. It was hardly an actual restraint for Belarus, as Minsk purchased its weapons mostly from Russia in any case. Some argue that sanctions imposed on Belarus in the aftermath of 2010 elections produced a specific outcome, as the EU made their lifting conditional on the release of political prisoners⁷. Others claim, however, that sanctions played only a secondary role, as Minsk had already sought better relations with the West and thus would have eventually released political prisoners with or without sanctions⁸.

In any event, the calculations of the regime in Belarus these days differ starkly from any previous case. Since August 2020, it has existed in a survival mode. While in all previous election cycles Lukashenka enjoyed considerable popular support (even if the elections had not been rigged, he would have probably won them), his presidential legitimacy today is recognized and supported virtually only by Russia. Brussels does not see him as a legitimate leader and demands his departure – a non-starter for Lukashenka. A tough sectoral sanctions regime might not necessarily force him to concede to the EU's demands. At the same time, sectoral sanctions have been a rare event in the EU policy that has traditionally prioritized individual restrictions. Their adoption shows the extent of shock over the forced landing of the Ryanair plane in Minsk. The strong EU reaction had certainly not been expected by the regime.

Sanctions do put pressure on the regime in absolute terms, but they will not change the dynamic of the political crisis in Belarus. Furthermore, stark economic decline can push Lukashenka even more towards Russia and make him more vulnerable to Moscow's demands. Increasing dependence of the regime on Russia would likely happen with or without sanctions. Sanctions however accelerate it. The European Commission has tried to offer carrots, promising a € 3 billion aid package to Belarus in exchange for new elections⁹. However, this is not sufficient to impress Belarusian authorities. Putin promised Lukashenka a similar amount already in September last year.

What else can the EU do?

Ultimately, the sanctions regime on Belarus fulfils several functions for the EU. Having the ambition of becoming a serious geopolitical player, the EU has viewed sanctions as a centerpiece of its foreign policy¹⁰. The Austrian resistance to the newest sanctions package – as well as the initial veto of Cyprus to the first sanctions package which had been used out of national interest - was eventually overcome. Importantly, sanctions also serve as a signal to the EU's own population and other authoritarian regimes in the world that the normative aspect of the EU's foreign policy is still present.

The sanctions' potential to push the regime in Belarus to stop the repressions – let alone to hold new elections – is very doubtful in the current circumstances. Positive engagement with Belarusian citizens at any level possible remains crucial and needs to be stepped up. For

⁷ Shraibman vs. Preiherman: Sankcyi Zachadu – na skodu ci na karysc? Euroradio (5 August 2020). Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1Vl1dd60bU>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_2685

¹⁰ Niklas Helwig, Juha Jokela, Clara Portela (eds.), 2020. *Sharpening EU sanctions policy for a geopolitical era*. Prime Minister's Office Helsinki

example, working towards the abolition of the visa regime for Belarusians entering the EU would be a meaningful sign of support to the society. The economic decline due to sectoral sanctions will surely be utilized by the regime to blame the West for Belarus' problems. It may make Belarusians skeptical about the EU's intentions. Visa liberalization, on the other hand, would highlight that the EU supports the citizens but opposes the political regime in the country. Ultimately, however unlikely it seems today, efforts to get Russia onboard for a mediation process in Belarus should not be abandoned. Along with that, the EU – and the West more broadly – should keep separate its policies towards Russia and Belarus¹¹.

¹¹ Joanna Hosa and Pavel Slunkin (26 May 2021). 'After the Pratasevich arrest: Four key steps for the EU on Belarus'. *European Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://ecfr.eu/article/after-the-pratasevich-arrest-four-key-steps-for-the-eu-on-belarus/>

All Activities: Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Russia

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)

December 28 | New regionalism in Central Asia 

December 17 | From the Soviet Union to the Post-Soviet Space and Beyond 

December 15 | The Russian Political System: The Trap of the Empire's Legacy 

December 14 | Some thoughts on the “homo sovieticus”: Is it a useful term? 

December 13 | What does Putin Want? 

November 15-16 | Conference: Thirty Years On: Is There Still a Post-Soviet Space?  

September 15 | The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict 

August 24 | Russian parliamentary elections: Continuation of the previous trend 

August 11 | Nord Stream 2 – A Contested Pipeline 


July 8 | Snap elections in Moldova: What is at stake? 

June 24 | Sanctioning Belarus: Yes, no, or does it matter? 

May 27 | PART III: Geopolitical Struggle for the Black Sea - EU's role in the Region 

May 24 | Ukraine: What happened to the bridge-building efforts of President Zelensky? 

May 18 | Escalation in Eastern Ukraine and Zelensky's Domestic Challenges 

April 1 | PART II: Geopolitical Struggle for the Black Sea Region - Shared and Conflicting Interests 

March 19 | EU-Russia: How to Deal with Each Other? 

March 19 | PART I: Geopolitical Struggle for the Black Sea Region - A Struggle for Dominance in the Caucasus? 

March 16 | EU Sanctions and Russia 

March 4 | Belarus: Welche Chance hat die Protestbewegung? ORF-Podcast 

February 22 | Actions and Reactions: Political Crisis in Belarus as Seen from Brussels and Moscow  

January 11 | Können Panzer den Frieden bringen? 



The Western Balkans Initiative

Stephanie Fenkart

The project “Young Generations for the New Western Balkans 2030,” which the IIP launched together with its partners the Karl-Renner Institut and the Austrian Institute for International Affairs in 2018, focused this year on the outcomes and implications of the elections in Albania and Kosovo, the Slovenian EU presidency, the 30-year anniversary of the breakup of Yugoslavia, reconciliation in the region, and the political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, unfortunately, is far from over.

A change of power happened in spring 2021 when Albin Kurti and his Lëvizja Vetëvendosje (Self-determination Movement) party came into power in Kosovo. The party aims to fight corruption and nepotism, forge a new development path, and work towards a welfare state. However, Kosovo still faces many challenges deriving from its complicated past, high levels of corruption, weak economy, and difficult relationship with Serbia. At the same time, the country has a vibrant civil society, and its population is among the most pro-European. However, the dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo is in a stalemate, and there is not much hope for a solution, which would be essential to pave the way towards deeper integration between Kosovo and the EU.

Albanians also elected a new parliament and a new government. Edi Rama, prime minister since 2013, claimed a “beautiful victory” for his Socialist Party and an unprecedented third term in office. Together with North Macedonia, Albania’s perspectives for further EU integration are among the most realistic in the region, especially after its extensive judicial reform introduced in recent years. However, given all the problems it currently faces, the EU is not eager to take further steps toward integration. Whereas some countries -- including Austria -- are still trying to keep EU enlargement for the Western Balkans on the agenda, others -- including France, Denmark, and the Netherlands -- are more skeptical. The disappointment over the EU not keeping its promises to aspiring candidate countries is tangible and should not be underestimated. Even though most still see EU integration as the only viable path towards becoming more democratic and prosperous, other actors -- such as Turkey, China, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates -- are increasingly investing in the region, both economically and politically.

The good news is that the EU still formally stands by its commitment that the Western Balkan countries will become EU members, although it recognizes the difficult realities on the ground. This includes the ongoing political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina -- unresolved until today and perceived as highly concerning by the public in both the Federation of BiH as well as Republika Srpska. Twenty-six years ago, the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and laid the foundations for the constitutional and institutional architecture of the Bosnian state, consisting of two entities -- the Federation of BiH and Republika Srpska. Today, the country still faces enormous challenges and is going through one of its most significant political crises. Corruption is widespread and ethnonationalism is rising, which both weigh on the educational and political system to a large degree. The country’s infrastructure is lacking, the economy is weak, the healthcare system is deficient, and pollution is extremely high.

If the dominant political narrative is fed by nationalist and separatist rhetoric, it becomes very difficult for a state to reconcile with its past. Reconciliation is often perceived as a buzzword

with a vague meaning, but it is essential for a post-conflict society that has experienced countless atrocities and war crimes in order to pursue a democratic and stable nation-building project based on European and international norms and values. It is a pity that this process was never truly begun in the region and is today still contested by different political forces that do not even dare to say the word “reconciliation.” “Reconciliation is a way of life rather than a process,” as Vesna Pusic said during one of our interviews with her.



Selected projects

Reconciliation: 30 Years since the Breakup of Yugoslavia

30 years after the breakup of Yugoslavia the ghosts of the past continue to haunt the region. Old-fashioned backwards-oriented politics and nationalism are still present and even on the rise. The past is still instrumentalized for political purposes. The lack of economic, educational, or social perspectives for the youth drives many young people to leave their countries towards the West searching for a better life and more opportunities. In terms of dealing with the past a lot of efforts were made to initiate and support reconciliation, yet the results are rather limited and the question of effectiveness of tools and means applied remains. How important is reconciliation for the young generation of the Western Balkans? How do they perceive the multi-sided dimensions of history and truth, victimhood and human rights abuses? What importance does reconciliation have for the future of the region, be it for the regional cooperation, good-neighborly relations or personal encounters and exchange between youngsters in Southeastern Europe? What role did internal actors play so far and how can a reconciliation process be supported from within and from the outside? How important is reconciliation to shape a prosperous future for those who were not yet born when Yugoslavia went through dissolution and wars?

Date	July 2021
Format	Expert interviews and panel discussion
Partner	Karl-Renner Institut and the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (ÖIIP)
Participants	Vedran Dzihic (Senior Researcher at ÖIIP); Vesna Pusic (former Foreign Minister of Croatia); Adnan Cerimagic (Senior Analyst at the European Stability Initiative); Erhard Busek (former Vice-Chancellor of Austria); Goran Svilanovic (former Foreign Minister of Serbia); Hannes Swoboda (former MEP; president of the IIP); Mario Mazic (Partner at Europe & Southeast, Advisor at Peace Nexus Foundation); Wolfgang Petritsch (Former High Representative of the United Nations to Bosnia and Herzegovina); Sabina Cehajic-Clancy (Professor at Stockholm University); Ulrike Lunacek (former Vice-President of the European Parliament); Florian Bieber (Professor at University of Graz); Christina Koulouri (Rector of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences); Maja Bjelos (Public policy analyst in the area of security sector reform and gender); Luka Cekic (Project assistant at the IIP); Donika Emini (Executive Director of the CiviKos Platform); Stefani Spirovska (Youth Educational Forum, Skopje); Samir Beharic (Youth activist)
Project outputs	Available online here



BiH: On the Path Back to Conflict or to Progressive Reforms?

From 15th to 20th of October 2021, a group of young experts from the region in cooperation with a team of the Austria-based think tanks – International Institute for Peace, the Karl-Renner Institut and the Austrian Institute for International Affairs – went on a study trip to Sarajevo, Jajce and Mostar. The group met with diplomats, politicians, head of states, the EU, the OHR and civil society representatives to discuss alternative horizons which ultimately could pave a way for BiH to become more prosperous and more democratic and to provide a perspective for the people to stay in the country instead of leaving it for good. With all the difficulties and challenges BiH is facing, it is important not to give up hope and to look for alternatives.

Date	October 2021
Format	Study trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina
Partner	Karl-Renner Institut and the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (ÖIIP)
Participants	Adnan Cerimagic (Senior Analyst at the European Stability Initiative); Hannes Swoboda (former MEP; president of the IIP); Maja Bjelos (Public policy analyst in the area of security sector reform and gender); Luka Cekic (Project assistant at the IIP); Samir Beharic (Youth activist); Vilson Bolloshmi (student, Tirana); Laura Crnic (student, Zagreb); Stephanie Fenkart (Director of the IIP); Gerhard Marchl (Karl-Renner Institut); Denis Miskic (volunteer at Srebrenica Memorial Center);
Project outputs	Available online here



China's Influence in the Western Balkans: Partnership or Confrontation?

Date 21 September 2021
Format Blog article
Author STEPHANIE FENKART, Director at the IIP

After the events in 2014 in Ukraine, namely the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the military interference in Eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation, many experts started to talk about the eruption of a new Cold War. However, this has been challenged again by many, who stated that the circumstances are now different and that we do not see a competition of capitalist versus communist ideology. However, another very influential actor into the geopolitical sphere gained attention. China. So, the tenor shifted towards the notion that there is something like a new Cold War, but it is not about the West versus Russia, but about the West versus China.

After it introduced its One Belt One Road initiative in 2013, economic investments have been the main tool for China in its foreign policy. Whereas China has been active in many African states for a long time already, as well as in EU countries, the engagement of China in the Western Balkan countries only recently attracted the attention of many observers.

So let us have a look at the context. In 2003, the European Union stated in its declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit: "The EU reiterates its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries." This has been a very important sign for the WB 6 (those not yet a member of the EU: Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, North-Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) towards EU integration. With a possible EU accession, the hope of democratic and economic development, rule of law, human rights and better living-conditions arose within the societies in the region and Croatia in 2013 became a member of the EU. However, for the other WB6, the process of integration advances very slowly and there is still a huge gap in the socio-economic development between the WB and EU countries. With internal problems inside the EU - Brexit, democratic backsliding in some member countries, now the Covid-19 pandemic, migration influx, and instabilities in its neighborhood – a lack of interest of the EU in the region became obvious for the governments and the people. This disappointment with the slow process of integration, even though there have been incentives to step up regional cooperation e.g., the Berlin Process [1] which was launched in 2014, opens the door for traditional (Russia, Turkey) and non-traditional third actors (China and the United Arab Emirates).

Contrary to Russia and Turkey, who have historical and religious ties towards the region as well as geopolitical ambitions, China's involvement in the Western Balkans is different. Investments in infrastructure, the energy sector and in communications follow their approach in foreign policy which culminates in the 1B1R initiative. The main aim is to create corridors to improve Sino-EU trade and to position itself as an indispensable international actor in the international arena. Therefore, the main value of the Western Balkan countries for Beijing lies in their proximity to the EU which is a major export market for China and not so much in the region's countries themselves. China has been investing in many big infrastructure projects in the region, but for all the WB countries, the EU still is the leading trade partner accounting for almost 70% of the region's total trade, whereas China accounts for less than 10% (between 6-10% imports and only 2-4% exports). Considering the lack of capital in the region and the ambitions to develop their infrastructure projects, Chinese investments are not per se a bad choice, so why should the EU bother about China's presence?

What is China's Strategy in the Western Balkans?

China already set up the 17+1 initiative where it tries to promote business and investment relations between China and 16 countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Although five of the six Western Balkan countries (Kosovo is excluded, as China has never recognized it and does not have official diplomatic relations with Pristina) are part of this initiative, China prefers a government-to-government approach dealing with each country on an individual level. Even though it cannot be stated often enough that the EU is by far the biggest investor in the region, China did step up its state-led economic engagement in various fields. Since the EU did refrain from several infrastructure projects in the region which are considered important for some countries, the possibility of Chinese investments gained widespread attraction. Contrary to the EU, which has a multilateral approach and introduces conditionalities in sectors like transparency, public procurement, fiscal rentability, rule of law, anti-corruption and environmental protection, China with its no-conditionality approach seems to be an attractive alternative. A concrete example is the Chinese loan to Montenegro to build Bar-Boljare Highway which is perceived as a chance to profit from the one Belt one Road initiative by the Montenegrin government. Considering the small size of the country, the huge amount of the EUR 670 million loan makes Montenegro owing 22% of its total foreign debt to China. Additionally, the negotiations have been perceived as non-transparent, contracts were assigned to Chinese companies - and China insisted that in case of disputes the arbitration would be in Shanghai. Moreover, the import of construction-material was excluded from taxation. China also acquired the Smederevo Steel Manufacturing in Serbia and built the Pupin Bridge in Belgrade. Another big project in Serbia is the Belgrade-Budapest railway which in combination makes Serbia the most important partner in the region for China. In Albania, Chinese privately-owned Geo-Jade Petroleum bought the Canadian company Bankers Petroleum which is the country's largest oil producer. There are other big investments in infrastructure projects and in the energy sector in BiH and North-Macedonia.

Generally, Chinese investments in the region consist primarily of loans. The high expectations of the region, therefore, have not been met since Chinese foreign direct investments, which are comparably small anyway, did not really materialize in green-field developments, but rather in the acquisition of companies. The high debt of Montenegro puts it in a specific situation of vulnerability even though China delayed the first payback, which was due in July 2021, considering the economic difficulties with which Montenegro is confronted since the outbreak of the Covid-19 health crisis. China, therefore, is a "lending-power" not an "investment-power".

Political and soft-power relations

Even though the Chinese approach towards the region is mostly economically driven, there is also a political side to the investments – for China and the region itself. Serbia, who is the most important partner to China builds upon a longer relationship. China does not accept Kosovo's independence and the (unintentional) bombing of the Chinese Embassy in 1999 by NATO brought the countries closer together - already before the One Belt One Road initiative was introduced. In exchange, China is looking for support in the international arena when it comes to its disputed behavior in the South-China Sea, relations with Taiwan (which is not recognized by Serbia), the situation in Hong Kong and the treatment of the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. Western Balkan countries generally refrain from official statements condemning Chinese behavior in the above-mentioned contexts in the hope of future investments.

When the EU and the rest of the world was hit by the pandemic in 2020 followed by an export-ban of medical supplies, Serbia's president Alexander Vučić took advantage of the general

disappointment. He openly criticized the lack of solidarity of the EU, praised China and declared that Serbia would turn to China, who, as he argued, was ‘the only one who can help’. When doctors arrived in Belgrade from Beijing, Vučić kissed the Chinese flag, a picture which ended up on the front pages of Serbian media. Shortly afterwards, the EU announced it would provide Serbia with US\$18 million in immediate medical support and US\$94m in social and economic aid – far more than China gave and without a big media campaign. Serbia therefore tries to balance its interests and its negotiation position towards the West by having close ties to China, but also to Russia with which it has a long-lasting historical cooperation.

Another quite new Chinese approach in the region is trying to foster its image as a well-intentioned partner by setting up Confucius Institutes in all WB6, memorandums of understanding, building of schools and academic exchange. China is also setting up media cooperation to promote a win-win collaboration and to influence the public opinion towards the One Belt One Road Initiative. Moreover, China organizes study trips and cultural events which tend to become more institutionalized and finally part of its cultural diplomacy strategy. These developments have gained attention only recently and admittedly, they started from a very low base considering that China is culturally and historically far away from the region. But even if these activities show the multilayered approach China pursues in the Western Balkans, its relevance should not be overstated. The European Union does have far more leverage in this context, its relations are much more institutionalized, and the EU and NATO aspirations are still very high on the political agenda but also when it comes to the public opinion.

What does China’s presence in the Balkans mean for the EU?

China already became the third most important actor in the Western Balkans and the EU should not ignore China’s influence. China, contrarily to Russia, is not opposing the EU-path of the Western Balkan countries simply because the EU prospect creates more stability in the region which is important for Chinese investments. Even though China is trying to promote within the region, it has no strategy of exporting its ideology. The main goal is still to export goods to the EU and Central and Eastern European states via different routes using its main foreign policy tool – the 1B1R initiative. Expectations of a positive outcome of Chinese investments have been high in the region, but criticism from civil society organizations concerning corruption, environmental impact, and lack of transparency in public procurement, along with the lack of real foreign direct investments in greenfield developments, have curtailed the initial euphoria about China. Nevertheless, the region can profit from infrastructure projects. Chinese fundings are not a problem per se since investments are definitely needed. It can only be problematic when it hinders the EU path, when EU requirements are not met and when it – even if unintentionally – gives room for corrupt policies and if it hinders important reforms in rule of law. Especially important is the environmental situation considering that the Western Balkans are one of the most polluted regions in Europe. China does have an own energy policy which takes the climate crisis into account, and it also supports the Paris agreement. Yet, its investments in hydro and coal-fired power plants in the WB are detrimental to environmental protection and do affect the EU directly (pollution of its neighborhood) and indirectly (environmental migration). China eventually could have a positive influence on environmental protection by greening Chinese foreign infrastructure investments.

For the European Union, the Western Balkans are way more than an economic tool to boost trade. The EU has close historical, political, people-to-people, and economic ties with the region. The WB6 countries are encircled by EU countries, and the EU integration is still not contested by any member state, even though sometimes there are bilateral considerations which hinder the accession process. Additionally, they are also important for European security since

it is the closest neighbor of the EU. The “no” of France, Denmark, and the Netherlands in 2019 to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia after they had introduced/carried out significant reforms, was a result of domestic considerations and left the population disappointed (in March 2020, Albania and North Macedonia were granted with the opening of accession talks). In order to be seen as a credible partner, the EU needs to stick to its commitments in its own interest and the interest of its neighboring region. Only if the EU manages to keep up its transformative power when it comes to its fundamental values, it can pave the way to change the countries into liberal and prosperous democracies based on rule of law and market economy.

A Way Forward?

The EU should have a pragmatic approach when it comes to China. Chinese investment can be beneficial to Europe if China also respects European interests – especially in the field of environment, human rights, and rule of law. The EU should enhance cooperation with China but on mutually beneficial terms. The EU Strategy on China states that the EU's engagement with China will be principled, practical, and pragmatic, staying true to its interests and values. It could incorporate China-specific goals also in its enlargement policy and it can support civil society organizations which tackle aspects like environmental protection, workers-rights or fight against corruption. It is also important to use its political leverage when it comes to the fundamental values (art. 2 EUV) on which the EU is built upon: *“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”*

Even though China does have an increased presence in the Western Balkans it is important to take note that the influence and investments of the EU does exceed those of China on a large scale and holistically. Unfortunately, the EU seems not to be able to make its engagement more visible which opens room for other actors to fill this gap. Europe needs to reconsider its public diplomacy strategy. People in the region and within the European Union should be able to see and acknowledge the positive impacts EU-funding, its political leverage and its investments do have in the region. Support of independent Civil Society organizations can be one way to put pressure on political elites, but also official diplomatic relations – bi- and multilateral - should play a role to hold stakeholders responsible for their actions.

Yet, even if the EU is confronted on many different levels with internal and external challenges, it is not only the EU – or other third actors like China, Russia, or Turkey - who is responsible for the transformation of the Western Balkan countries into prosperous democracies. The first and most important actors are the leaders and governments in the region who, unfortunately, sometimes put their own good before the benefits of the society. Pressure on media freedom, corruption, nationalism and clientelism are just some of the internal problems, which hinder the path towards EU integration. So, frustration with the governing elites but also with the seemingly unwillingness of the EU to be tough on reforms while not pushing the region away is becoming a big concern for many civil society organizations working for a democratic region based on the rule of law.

It is very true that China can be a partner, but it is also important to understand that the main actors in the region for responsible policies are the people in power, the respective governments, its leaders, and in the end - not China. It is not another new Cold War what is needed, but

pragmatism and partnership wherever it is possible - in line with the EU's values – to close the socioeconomic gap between the EU and its neighbors.



All Activities: The Western Balkans Initiative

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)

November 3 | Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia – Calm but Fragile 

October 22 | Will There be a War Again? 

October 7 | Es braucht Stufenweisen-Prozess bei EU-Beitritt der Westbalkanländer 


October | BiH: On the Path Back to Conflict or to Progressive Reforms?  

September 21 | China's Influence in the Western Balkans: Partnership or Confrontation? 

July 13 | Commemorating Srebrenica 

July 6 | Reconciliation: How does the past shape the future for the young generation? 

July 5 | Berlin Process - Request to the EU Member States and Western Balkans leaders: Enable the freedom of movement for all the Western Balkan citizens 

July 1 | IIP Talk: The Slovenian EU-Presidency and its implications for the Western Balkan Region 

July | Reconciliation: 30 Years since the Breakup of Yugoslavia  

June 18 | Thirty Years after the Breakup of Yugoslavia 

May 4 | IIP Talk - What Future for Albania? Reflection on the Election Results 

March 12 | Zoran Djindjic and His Legacy - Interview with Vuk Velebit 

February 22 | What Future for Kosovo? Reflection on the Election Results 

January 26 | Belgrade, Pristina can't reach agreement on their own 

January 11 | Bosnian and Herzegovinian Peace Agreement turns 25 



Middle East and North Africa

Hannes Swoboda

The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remains predominantly fragile and conflict-afflicted. There have been a few positive developments that can provide some grounds for hope, but they are too weak to signal a genuine turnaround for the region. One such positive change is the improvement in relations between Israel and some Arab countries following the signing of the Abraham Accords. However, this development is effectively limited to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain. In addition, the UAE could play an increasing role in the region. Aside from its agreement with Israel, the UAE has improved its relations with Syria, Turkey, and even Iran, and it has some ideas for finding a solution to the war in Yemen. But much depends on how its principal ally, Saudi Arabia, will react to these initiatives.

Iran remains the number one enemy for Israel. The Strategic Survey for Israel 2022¹² by the Israeli Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) underlines that Iran is the primary threat due to its nuclear program as well as its activities in Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip. But opinion polls show that there would be no majority support among the Israeli population for unilateral military action against Iran. Interestingly, number two on the list of threats in the INSS survey is the Palestinian issue, with the threat of the disintegration of the Palestinian Authority and a “dangerous slide into a bi-national state.” To leave out and neglect the Palestinian issue was the biggest mistake of the Abraham Accords, which were promoted by the Trump Administration. The third security challenge, according to the INSS, is the growing polarization in Israel itself.

Iran is not only perceived as a threat to Israel but is seen as a threat to certain groups inside Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen. Direct intervention by Iran or an engagement by Hezbollah in Lebanon itself or outside its country of origin are seen as major contributors to insecurity in the Middle East. But it would be wrong to underestimate the power aspirations of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, even as they had to compromise with respect to Qatar.

A growing polarization between the political class and the population can be observed in Lebanon. This, in addition to the continuous rifts between political parties representing the different ethnic/religious groups and the horrific economic situation, characterizes Lebanon as a failed state with little hope of overcoming its current crisis soon. Equally in Iraq, there is not much hope for radical improvements. In Syria, different conflicts are ongoing, and part of the country remains occupied or at least outside government control. Turkey in particular remains engaged in the northern part of the country. The biggest tragedy is that the Assad regime survived with the help of Russia and Iran. The suffering of Syria’s people will continue, as the West is – besides some humanitarian aid – not ready to invest in reconstruction as long as the corrupt Assad clan rules the country.

Overall, Turkey is trying to gain some more room to maneuver. It has started to improve relations with Arab countries that were once seen as enemies and even Israel. The biggest handicap remains the conflict over Cyprus with Greece. The Eastern Mediterranean would be an excellent area of cooperation for extracting and distributing energy, but numerous political conflicts and disputes over coastal and maritime zones prevent a coordinated and cooperative strategy between Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Libya, and others.

¹² <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/strategic-survey-for-israel-2022/>

Perhaps the new messages coming from Ankara have the potential to create fresh conditions for pragmatic cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. This cooperation could also have some positive influence on the situation in Libya, where the recently planned elections were postponed and efforts to stabilize the country and reduce foreign influence have made no progress.

In Egypt, the autocratic system established by President Sisi seems in no danger of being toppled by another revolution. The quick return of the military and authoritarian rule has been the biggest failure of the Arab Spring. Another big disappointment has been the recent developments in Tunisia. The model country of the Arab Spring has already been in a tumultuous situation for some time. But that did not improve with the coup d'état organized by the Tunisian president, Kais Saied. His actions against the parliament and the Supreme Judicial Council do not give much hope for a quick return to democracy.

Any hope for a strong process of democratization has also been abandoned in Algeria. The active opposition by citizens who took to the streets has been crushed, and there has been no real transition from the old regime to a new and younger generation of politicians free from the powerful influence of the military and security apparatus. In addition to the domestic stalemate, Algeria's relations with Morocco have deteriorated even further.

There is no hope for an active and cooperative Arab Maghreb Union. Morocco itself is focused on further improving its relations with Sub-Saharan Africa after having once again joined the African Union. By strengthening these relations, it enhances its position that Western Sahara is a part of Morocco. Meanwhile, there are no continued discussions on Western Sahara's proposed autonomy, as the Polisario Front and Algeria are not ready to participate in such a dialogue.

Heinz Gärtner

The Vienna Talks on Iran's Nuclear Program

Current Status of the Negotiations

In April 2021, the negotiations on Iran's nuclear program began in Vienna. During the six rounds through June 2021, 75% of the issues were agreed upon, including the lifting of around 1,000 sanctions. The talks focused on three areas: 1) Iran's nuclear program, 2) sanctions relief, and 3) implementation. Since November 2021 (the 7th and 8th rounds), multilateral and bilateral meetings have taken place.

The Vienna talks in February 2022 are now in a delicate phase. Political decisions are being made, and either success or failure is possible. However, technical discussions have reached the level where political decisions are feasible. In addition, conditions for direct talks between Iran and the US are being prepared.

Opposition to an agreement is growing in the US Congress. This closely mirrors the period when former President Obama negotiated the JCPOA before July 14, 2015. The arguments by opponents to the negotiations are similar: "No deal is better than a deal." If the current

negotiations fail, Iran may enhance its nuclear activities, there would be less or no verification, and the “breakout time” would be shortened.

Issues

During the 8th round of negotiations, the delegations agreed on a 20-page draft text on the remaining issues. There was broad agreement both on the verification of Iran’s nuclear program (through the IAEA) and on the verification of sanctions relief (through the amount of oil sales).

It remained unclear how Iran could get guarantees that the US will not once again renege on the deal. One possibility would be to conclude long-term economic contracts. The question of what to do with Iran’s modern centrifuges also remains unresolved. Proposals that were discussed include sealing them or shipping them out of the country, destroying them, or setting “sunset clauses” back to 2015. There must be an implementation phase of about two months after a final agreement is adopted. The sequencing can be done through a series of steps so that no side needs to make the first move.

Technical Steps

There was an interim agreement between Iran with the IAEA on re-installing cameras at the Karaj site, but the IAEA had no access to the memory cards.

In the first week of February 2022, the US announced the restoration of “nuclear waivers” for Europe, Russia, and China. Regardless, peaceful nuclear technology is Iran’s right under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This right was disregarded by President Trump, with the US citing safety and non-proliferation as concerns. Waivers are not directly related to the JCPOA but are a signal to continue with sanctions relief.

An interim agreement according to which Iran would limit enriching uranium to 20 percent in return for some frozen assets was discarded. This would have legitimized both sanctions and Iran’s nuclear program. It would have only delayed the decisions, and the situation might get worse after two years.

Failure

A failure of the talks would increase the suspicion that Iran is working on the bomb. Israel in particular would cry foul. Indeed, Iran might in fact enhance its nuclear program. For the time being, Iran would stay in the NPT and the “safeguards agreement” with the IAEA. This would still be sufficient for Israel to consider and conduct military strikes, and it would try to involve the US. Iran would react asymmetrically. The new destabilizing situation would affect Europe and, to a lesser degree, the US.

Success

A success for the negotiations in Vienna would have several consequences. EU-Iran economic relations would improve, although perhaps not back to the initial post-JCPOA level. Iran’s economy would get a boost, and the deal would bring internal stability. The risk of nuclear proliferation would be dramatically reduced.

Success would also create a platform for regional cooperation, which would be in the interest of all parties. Under the current climate of great power competition, a successful JCPOA would be an example that multilateralism can work.

Is there an alternative to the Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East?

The project of the NWFZ in the Middle East has not gotten off the ground for decades because of the resistance of the US in the UN Security Council. There is an alternative possibility. To come closer to the implementation of the NWFZ in the Middle East, the African NWFZ Treaty could be extended northeast to Iran and include the Arab states in the south.

Iran could pledge to join the Central Asian NWFZ Treaty if the US ratifies the protocol of the treaty, which provides assurances not to attack or threaten to attack parties to the zone with nuclear weapons, also known as negative security assurances (NSAs). Geographically, historically, and culturally, Iran is closer to the countries of the Central Asian Semipalatinsk Treaty (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) than to its Arab neighbors. This move would add an additional security layer to the JCPOA, thus placating skeptics who are concerned that some of its provisions would expire. The JCPOA should, however, remain in place.

Egypt has already signed but not ratified the African NWFZ Treaty. If the Arab states and Iran are serious about the creation of a NWFZ in the Middle East, they should support this idea and try to join one of the existing NWFZs. The Arab states and Iran would not have to give up anything themselves if they joined such zones; on the contrary, they would attain NSAs.

Eventually, a large NWFZ stretching from nuclear-free Mongolia through Central Asia to Africa could emerge (the small Chinese-Russian stretch between Mongolia and Kazakhstan could be bridged or included through negotiations).

Selected projects

Will the negotiations on the Iran Nuclear Agreement in Vienna be successful?

According to most international observers the talks on the revival of the agreement on Iran's nuclear program (JCPOA) are in the final phase. Much has been agreed upon. Some hurdles still remain. Three working groups have been set up to negotiate which sanctions on Iran will be lifted and how Iran will return to its commitments of the original JCPOA of 2015. The panel discussed the course of the negotiations in Vienna and the interests of the different parties.

Date	6 July 2021
Format	Online panel discussion
Moderation	STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP
Participants	HEINZ GÄRTNER, International Institute for Peace (IIP), Universities of Vienna and Krems, Vienna STEPHEN HERZOG, Harvard University, Boston ALI ASGHAR SOLTANIEH, former Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the Vienna- and Geneva based international organizations, Vienna



Strategic Realignments in the Middle East Ahead of Biden's Presidency: A View from Jerusalem

Since his first foreign visit to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 2017, then President Donald Trump repeatedly surprised international observers. The May 2018 withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear deal with Iran, and the consequent policy of “maximum pressure” towards Iran, created the context and pretext for a subsequent normalization of Israeli relations with some Arab states.

With the election of Joe Biden as the new president of the US, inaugurated in January 2021, geopolitical considerations run high in the Middle East and different stakeholders are realigning their positions. How does the incoming US administration affect the Middle East and consequently Israel's regional positioning, notably with respect to Iran, the Abraham Accords and the conflict with the Palestinians? What policies can be expected from the incoming Biden administration and how would these developments affect Israeli politics and domestic politics?

Date	22 February 2021
Format	Interview
Partner	Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), Herbert C. Kelman Institute for Interactive Conflict Transformation (HKI)
Moderation	STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP
Participants	GUDRUN KRAMER, Director of the ASPR OFER ZALZBERG, Middle East Program Director, HKI



25 January 2011: The Arab Revolution Takes Speed Before it Fails

Date 21 January 2021
 Format Blog article
 Author HANNES SWOBODA, President at the IIP

The Arab revolt, or revolution, started not in Cairo but in Tunisia in December 2010. It started when a young Tunisian – Mohamed Bouazizi – set himself on fire because of continuing harassment by the police. (See my blog in German from December). It required some weeks for the revolutionary spirit to arrive in Egypt, the most populous Arab country. For a long time the dissatisfaction with the different regimes in Egypt had been growing in the population. Egypt never experienced a democratic system. After different colonial powers – sometimes governing in parallel – and a corrupt monarchy the military ousted the old regime and founded a new, dictatorial system. For years it managed to govern with repression by shifting the blame for all misfortunes on external enemies, the West and especially Israel. Nevertheless, opposition and dissatisfaction especially among the young were growing.

Opposition from different sides

On the one side there were different Islamist groups, especially the Muslim Brothers. On the other side, there were secular, mostly liberal parties, which had never had a chance to get influence on politics. When I first visited Cairo in a political function in December 2006, I had a chance to meet both groups and saw their desperation. The regime of President Hosni Mubarak controlled the whole political spectrum and it decided if and how strongly these two groups could participate in elections and have presence in the “Parliament”. At the time of my visit, the Muslim Brothers were just semi-legal. The EU Commission delegation in Cairo arranged a meeting with their leadership. They presented a new program with more respect for the role of women in Egypt’s society, maintaining, however, that the position of the country’s president should be reserved for men only. In their eyes, the head of state had to be also a religious leader and that must be a man.

Overall, the Muslim Brothers tried to present themselves as a moderate group, but in the end, religion and faith played the dominant role. Already during this visit, I had the impression that they were stronger than the traditional liberal parties, which did not have young and dynamic members and followers. They lacked the religious fire and vision, that the Islamists got strength from. The liberal parties also had no vision or program which could attract young urban population. They were understandably frustrated and had no clue how to change the country. Both groups were as surprised as the regime when the revolt started and changed the course of developments, at least for some months.

January, 25th: The revolution starts on Tahrir square

The dissatisfaction of the Egyptians exploded in the situation of this fragile equilibrium between the regime, the Muslim Brothers and the liberals. It happened on January 25th at Tahrir square in the center of Cairo. Ahdaf Soueif wrote in her book Cairo: “In one of the most moving moments of the revolution – and there were to be many – the people’s delegations had come in from the cities and provinces of Egypt, set up their banners around the garden and set up the chant “El-shar3eyya m’nel-Tahrir”- legitimacy from Tahrir”. Indeed, it was moving to see all those (mostly young) people who expressed their hope for drastic change and a new democratic Egypt. Many thought there was no way back to the old repressive regime.

But irrespective of many delegations from all over Egypt, the revolutionaries demonstrating in Cairo did not represent the majority of Egyptians. The famous Egyptian novelist Alaa Al Aswany – whom I had the honor to present the “Bruno Kreisky Award for the Political Book” for his wonderful novel *The Yacoubian Building* – wrote in his more recent book - *The Dictatorship Syndrome*: “On 25 January 2011, Egyptians rose up to try to bring down the dictator Mubarak. It is estimated that the revolutionaries made up only about 20 per cent of the population – 20 million out of 90 million Egyptians.” According to Alaa Al Aswany, it is the “good citizens” who are not interested in a revolution. The good citizens have been “educated” over the years by official propaganda to mistrust change and free political discussions, as they allegedly would lead to chaos. “The good citizen neither understands nor wants revolution. They keep a wary eye on it and are the first to believe counter-revolutionary propaganda accusing revolutionaries of treachery and of working for foreign interests.” These “good citizens” primarily live in the country side. As President Nasser once said: “Egypt is the Egypt of the villages”. Here the dictators – from Nasser to Mubarak – but also the Muslim Brothers had their stronghold. Both are rather conservative and not revolutionary.

Rise and fall of the Muslim Brothers

The first presidential elections showed weakened support for the old regime, but the candidate of the Muslim Brothers, Muhammed Morsi became president. As Ahdaf Soueif wrote: “Morsi wooed various secular parties and coalitions and made them sweet promises about how he would be the president of whole Egypt, not just of the Brotherhood.” Morsi had no convincing strategy to reform the country and find an alliance with the revolutionary groups. He had no economic and social strategy either. As Ahdaf Soueif defined his policies: “We find that the economic ideology of the Muslim Brothers is not very different from that of the Mubarak regime; essentially it is a free market, capitalist ideology that favors the corporation over the citizen and the rich over the poor. Where it differs is possibly, in its attitude to the poor; where the Mubarak regime discounted the poor, the Brotherhood sees them as objects of charity – and useful foot soldiers.” That is the tragedy of the Muslim Brotherhood (as well as other Islamist movements): their religious fixation prevents the development of a forward-looking economic and social program and of a convincing concept for a democratic renewal.

Thus, it was relatively easy for the military forces to overthrow President Morsi. It was clearly a coup d’etat, but it was one which managed to gather a broad support – ranging from the Salafists to most of the revolutionary groups from the Tahrir place. When I visited Cairo again in December 2013, only the representative of the “Movement of April 6” was critical about the forced deposition of Morsi, not because of him but because they foresaw that the new repression would not only affect the Muslim Brothers, but also all democratic groups and parties. General Al-Sisi was already a strong man and he became the new dictator. Until today many young revolutionaries or protesters are persecuted, many put into jail, or forced to flee the country. Members of the “Movement of April 6” suffered extraordinarily, as they continued their resistance. In addition to the widespread repression, the regime did nothing to reduce social hardships and the poverty rate is increasing, while no viable economic or social policy is in place.

International support for a dictator, but revolutionary memory remains intact

After it became clear that the new regime is not only fighting the Muslim Brothers but any democratic movement, the West, including President Barack Obama, distanced itself from the new Egyptian president. But Moscow did not hesitate to strengthen its ties with Al-Sisi. Step by step the West renewed its links to the Egyptian president too. It is especially deplorable that

the Italian government is neglecting the death of one of its citizens, Giulio Regeni, who was tortured to death by the Egyptian security forces, while President Emmanuel Macron is honoring President Al-Sisi with a very distinguished order and selling him French weapons. The Egyptian dictator is on best terms with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Together they fear the Muslim Brothers, similar to secular revolutionaries. They also support General Haftar in Libya who is trying to overthrow the country's internationally recognized government. This international support, together with the domestic repression, certainly reduces the chance for a new uprising. But events in Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon have shown that dissatisfaction in many Arab countries is huge. There are enough economic and social reasons to oust the present dictatorial regimes. In 2011 there were about 8 million people in the Middle East and North Africa living below the poverty line. By 2018, that number had swelled to 28 million and it certainly continues to grow. Nearly half of the young people aged between 18 and 24 have the intention to leave their country, according to opinion polls.

These economic and social conditions do not lead automatically to revolutions. However, opinion polls show that many young people view the Arab revolution in a positive light. It failed last time, but it could rise again. Let us not forget: the Arab revolt was one of the street and not a coup d'état by a small (military) elite. These people are still longing to live in decent political, economic, social and environmental conditions. But no regime and no government of the region seems to be interested in promoting such conditions. Europe tries to help, but the original ideas of a "Marshall plan" disappeared. At the same time, there is no request for it from the regional governments either. Even the establishment of a comprehensive students exchange program is not on the agenda. I still remember a discussion I had with students at the University of Alexandria in 20006. Their most urgent wish was to at least study for some time in Europe. But most of the regimes do not want to enhance these exchange programs, as life in European societies would give these students new ideas about changing their repressive and failing regimes at home. And that should be prevented at all costs.

All Activities: Middle East and North Africa

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code)



December 14 | Ein neues Selbstbewusstsein des Iran bei den Wiener Verhandlungen 

December 4 | Peace, geopolitics and nuclear proliferation in the Middle East 

November 24 | Talks on Reviving the JCPOA: Moving from Distrust to Trust? 

August 23 | Das Nuklearabkommen und der neue iranische Präsident 

July 6 | Will the negotiations on the Iran Nuclear Agreement in Vienna be successful? 

July 5 | Magazin International - Iran-Atomdeal, wie geht es weiter? - Heinz Gärtner 

May 31 | Podcast with Prof. Heinz Gaertner on the Iran Nuclear Deal and the West 


May 15 | Die Trump-Netanjahu Pläne sind gescheitert 

May 14 | Heinz Gärtner zu Raketenangriffen auf Israel 

May 13 | Israel/Palästina: Wieder dreht sich die Gewaltspirale 

May 4 | Promising Talks on Iran's Nuclear Program Resume in Vienna 

April 21 | Ein Erfolg der Wiener Gespräche über das iranische Nuklearprogramm ist greifbar

March 23 | Dispute settlement through territorial autonomy: Moroccan autonomy Initiative for the Sahara region and practical lessons learned from the autonomy system of South Tyrol 

March 19 | 10 Years War in Syria – Is a Political Newroz Possible? 

March 19 | USA: Back to Multilateralism? The Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) and a Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East 

March 4 | Iran's "Look to the East Policy": Pivot Towards China and the Eurasian Economic Union 

March 1 | Antisemitism, Israel, and Palestine 

February 22 | Strategic Realignments in the Middle East Ahead of Biden's Presidency: A View from Jerusalem 

February 22 | The Middle East: Is there light at the end of the Long Corridor? 

January 21 | 25 January 2011: The Arab Revolution Takes Speed Before it Fails 

January 5 | Normalization and the balance of power in the Middle East 

Sub Saharan Africa

Hannes Swoboda

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted African countries in an especially severe way. Although Africa has a young population that was not as directly affected by the virus, the economic and social consequences of the pandemic have been enormous. African countries do not have the same economic resources or financial reserves as industrialized countries in order to sustain long periods of lockdowns or disruptions to trade. Consequently, African countries could only provide limited support to affected citizens and businesses and/or had to accept higher public debts.

As the debt relief measures offered by the international community have been insufficient, the overall economic situation of several African countries is now rather bleak. In addition to economic instability – and in part because of it – these countries now face growing political instability. In West Africa in particular, we have seen several coups d'état by the military. Sometimes these military interventions were welcomed by the public after growing disappointment in the activities (or non-activities) of elected politicians, but it has become obvious that the military is not a viable alternative and lacks the experience and knowledge necessary to govern.

The deficiencies of elected and non-elected governments have also contributed to the advancement of jihadist groups. These groups have taken advantage of pre-existing ethnic, economic, and social divisions within African societies. One such example is the conflict between farming and pastoralist communities. The increase in activity by jihadist groups is partly due to setbacks experienced by jihadists in the Middle East. In addition, given the neglect shown toward the underlying economic and social conditions that feed jihadism in the region, the largely military intervention of Western powers (including the EU) was unable to defeat or contain the jihadists.

A particularly acute issue in the region is the ongoing conflict in Ethiopia. Great hopes were placed in election of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, who was even awarded the Nobel Peace Prize after concluding a peace agreement with his Eritrean counterpart. However, not long thereafter, tribal conflicts inside Ethiopia resurfaced and an ugly civil war broke out, including intervention by Eritrea. It is difficult to identify the main party responsible for the war, but it is a human and political catastrophe in a deeply fragile region.

Another tragic development we witnessed was in Sudan. There was a successful revolution – with the strong and notable participation of women – against the authoritarian regime of Omar al-Bashir (with some even calling it a “women’s revolution”). But the military did not keep its promise and staged a counterrevolution. For the time being, the situation is undecided and remains in a delicate limbo.

Weak governance and, at the same time, authoritarian governments – oriented towards and captured by “strong” politicians – are unable to meet the primary challenges of African societies. The rising number of young people need jobs, the continent needs investment in areas such as renewable energy in order to combat climate change -- which is affecting Africa in particular – and improving healthcare outcomes requires drugs and vaccines to be produced on the continent. The attention of African leaders must be directed toward these challenges instead of providing for their continued stay in power.

Needless to say, Africans deserve not only better leaders but a clear and deliberate response from the industrialized world. In this regard, the EU and its member states are especially obliged to support African countries. A new approach towards respecting the needs of our neighbors in the South must be developed, and the EU must align its interests with the fundamental interests of Africans.

The EU's Global Gateway initiative can help to enhance African infrastructure and should be connected to the Green Deal. But the vaccine issue must also be addressed with much more sensitivity from the EU. Even if the EU has shared a significant number of vaccines with African countries and is supporting local vaccine production, the strong resistance against a TRIPS waiver over intellectual property for vaccine production was -- and is -- much criticized in Africa.

The EU should also fight for fair prices for African minerals and other primary products. These prices should cover the high external -- especially environmental -- costs of extracting the minerals from African soil that are necessary for the EU's energy transition. And they should guarantee incomes that enable workers and their families to lead decent lives. The Africa-EU summit in 2022 should give a new impetus to enhancing the relationship between these two neighboring continents.

Irrespective of these current and urgent issues, the EU must develop an attitude of partnership instead of superiority. In this area, the restoration of African art to the owners and countries of origin can create the conditions for a new and equitable cultural cooperation between the two continents. A promising start is already underway, but many more steps remain.

The question of migration, which some EU member states center in dealing with Africa, can only be seriously discussed within the framework of a new comprehensive cooperation between the two continents. Stronger engagement by the EU should not only come as a reaction to the increased engagement of China, India, Turkey, and Russia in Africa. It is an opportunity to give the EU leverage in its global aspirations, and it is a question of fairness after decades and even centuries of unfair and unequal relations.

Selected projects

Peace: Reflections on Africa” Exhibition and Talk

On the occasion of the opening of the exhibition of Solomon Okpurukhre on the topic “Peace: Reflections on Africa”, the experts from the fields of art, peaceful conflict resolution and politics will discuss the power of art in peace-building, and how talking about peace connects people across cultures and from different countries.

Date	24 June 2021
Format	Exhibition opening and discussion
Moderation	STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP
Participants	SOLOMON OKPURUKHRE: Visual artist, Painter, sculptor, Graphic designer, and Curator, Nigeria/Austria VICTOR OCHEN (via zoom): Founder and Executive Director for African Youth Initiative Network, Uganda, member of the Global Advisory Group to the UNHCR on Gender, Forced Displacement and Protection MIHRET KEBEDE: Co-founder of Tobiya poetic Jazz, Netsa Art Village Artist Collective, and Addis Video Art festival HANNES SWOBODA: President IIP, former MEP FRANZ SCHMIDJELL: Vienna Centre for Dialogue and Cooperation, Deputy manager, Global Dialogue African Politics

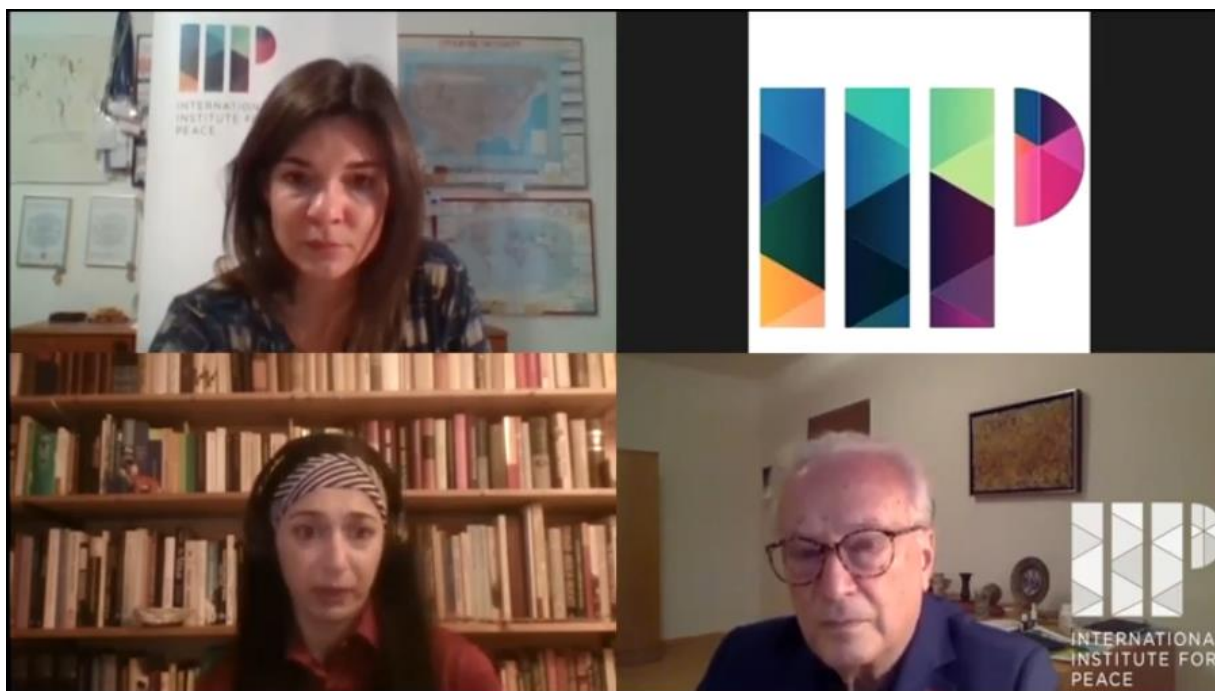


Peace in Ethiopia through Military Force? What can we learn about the Tigray conflict from Medemer and Welkait (ወልቃይት)?

In 2019, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his attempts to pacify the country and the Horn of Africa. Yet, in November 2020 he deployed military forces to control a conflict in the Tigray Region. Did the Nobel Peace laureate turn into a war monger? Why did he not practice the reconciliation, brotherhood and unity he preached?

These questions will be approached from two angles. First, this talk addresses Abiy Ahmed's reconciliation and peace-building approach of Medemer. How did he want to create synergy to reach the goal of unity, peace and prosperity in the poor and multi-ethnic country? And does the idea work in practice? Second, to answer the latter question, the talk focuses on the Welkait conflict in Western Tigray – arguably the most suppressed identity question in modern Ethiopian history. People questioning whether Welkait should be in Tigray or rather part of Amhara Region were incarcerated, tortured or killed. After he was appointed Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed promised to solve the question democratically. Now, through the military engagement, the regional borders are being redrawn. People are fleeing from Tigray to Sudan. Is this the end of Abiy Ahmed's peace and reconciliation process – or the beginning?

Date	8 February 2021
Format	Online public discussion
Partner	FIRE – Forum Interdisziplinärer Rhetorik und Expertise
Moderation	HANNES SWOBODA, President of the International Institute for Peace (IIP), former MEP
Participants	Dr. SONJA JOHN, Free lecturer at the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education / Department of Educational Science, University of Klagenfurt STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP



All Activities: Sub-Saharan Africa

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)


October 13 | Kolonialismus Revisited 

September 28 | Afrika – EU Energie Partnerschaft 

June 24 | “Peace: Reflections on Africa” Exhibition and Talk 

April 28 | Ethiopia – On the Brink of Civil War? 

February 15 | Africa 2021 and Covid-19 

February 3 | Peace in Ethiopia through Military Force? What can we learn about the Tigray conflict from Medemer and Welkait (ወልቃይት)? 

January 15 | Congo – Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism and Continuing Wars 

January 11 | Können Panzer den Frieden bringen? 



Asia

Stephanie Fenkart

Central Asia was a region of special concern in 2021 after the US-led NATO intervention in Afghanistan ended after 20 years, paving the way for the radical-Islamist Taliban to retake control of the country. Many were surprised by the speed of the advances that the Taliban was able to achieve, and the blame-game began shortly thereafter, with some calling Afghanistan one of the biggest mistakes in US foreign policy and questioning the whole NATO mission. It seems that everyone fails when it comes to Afghanistan: the colonial British Empire, the Soviet Union, and now the “West.” However, what the experience in Afghanistan reveals is the limited capacity of military interventions to bring about democratic change. The minimum requirement for a justified foreign military intervention is to do no harm, but it is essential to analyze all details beforehand, seek alternatives, and look for regional partners who might be able to better understand the specific circumstances. Peace for Afghanistan – and this is the greatest tragedy – is still far away, and nobody knows what this will mean for the people living in Afghanistan over the years to come, especially women and girls. It is crucial that we do not forget about the devastating humanitarian situation, even if Afghanistan has already disappeared from the daily news.

The country in Asia that has gained particular attention in recent years in international politics is China, which has become the main counterpart to the US in an economic but also socio-political competition and which will define the international order in the future. The One Belt One Road Initiative, which is the main foreign policy instrument of China, aims at building and financing infrastructure to transport Chinese goods to European (and African) markets. Apart from that, China is increasingly – albeit still on a small scale – putting efforts into its political and soft power in Europe by, for example, providing masks and medical equipment in the early days of the pandemic or by setting up Confucius Institutes to bolster its image. For the EU, it is a challenge to find a way to cooperate with China when necessary – for example in combatting climate change – while still being outspoken about the human rights violations in Xinjiang and the general lack of freedom for its citizens.

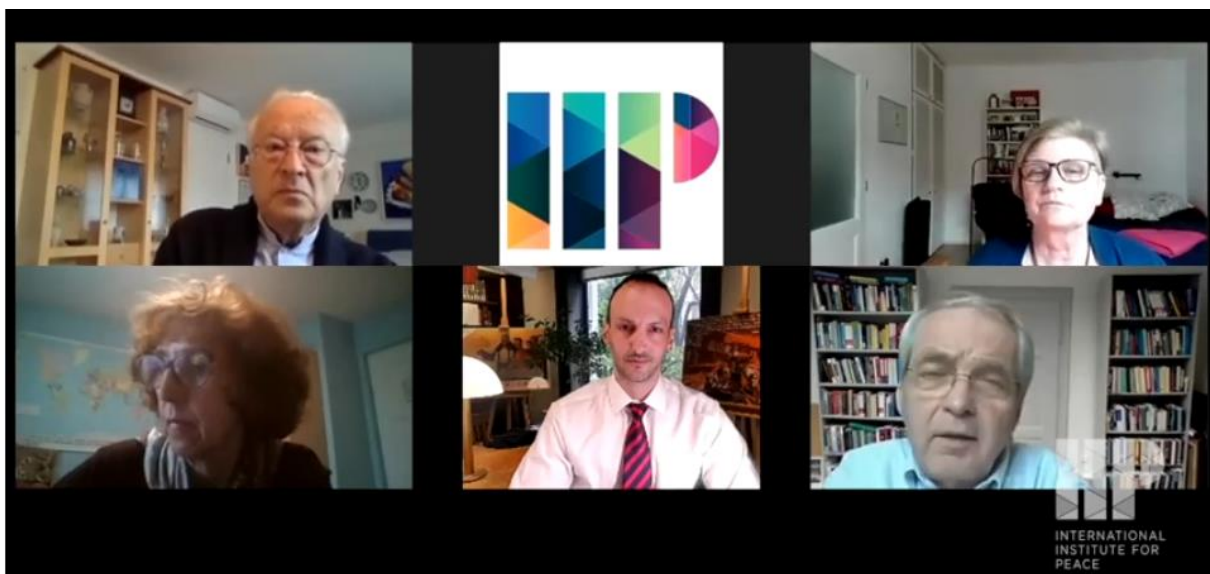
From an international security point of view, the nuclear rivalry and land disputes between India and Pakistan are still of high concern. The same is true for North Korea, which receded somewhat from international attention after Donald Trump left office in the US. South Asia is also one of the regions in the world most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with hundreds of millions of South Asians facing serious threats to their ways of life, livelihoods, and physical survival. As economies in the region continue to expand, industrialization and urbanization will also continue at rapid rates, further increasing the demand for precious natural resources such as energy, agricultural land, and fresh water – the latter two of which are already in limited supply and under great strain. These challenges are unfolding within broader socioeconomic and political contexts that are underpinned by high levels of inequality and social injustice. How policymakers respond to these emerging security challenges in South Asia will determine the fate of a vast swathe of humanity with implications far beyond South Asia’s borders.

Selected projects

China and Multilateralism: China after the 13th National People's Congress

The 13th National People's Congress (NPC) was held in Beijing mid of March 11, 2021. At the domestic level, the NPC adopted a Five-Year-Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives through 2035. It passed a decision on adapting the electoral system of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. The panel also asked how resilient China was against the pandemic. On foreign policy, the panelists looked at China's engagements in multilateral organizations (e.g. WHO, WTO), regional arrangements (like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and others), the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and at relations with the US, Russia, and the EU. The economic relations of the EU with China (e.g. the Comprehensive Investment Agreement and mutual trade) were also discussed, along with the sanctions for human rights abuses imposed by the EU, including ones committed against China's Uighur minority.

Date	5 May 2021
Format	Online public discussion
Moderation	HANNES SWOBODA, President of the International Institute for Peace (IIP), former MEP
Participants	SUSANNE WEIGELIN-SCHWIEDRZIK, Lecturer of International Politics at the University of Vienna WALTRAUT URBAN, Senior Research Associate at WIIW, IIP Advisory Board JÜRGEN KÄHLER, University of Erlangen VASILIS TRIGKAS, Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow, Schwarzman College, Tsinghua University



Emerging Security Challenges in South Asia

South Asia is a region marked by numerous armed conflicts, border disputes and inter-state hostilities, including the nuclear rivalry between India and Pakistan. For decades, security scholarship and policy-making in the region has been dominated by a focus on these traditional or ‘hard’ security issues that are focused primarily on security of the state and its apparatus. Yet, South Asia is also home to the largest number of poor and hungry people in the world. It is also one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the impacts of climate change, with hundreds of millions of South Asians facing serious threats to their ways of life, livelihoods, and physical survival. These challenges are unfolding within broader socio-economic and political contexts that are underpinned by high levels of inequalities and social injustice. How policymakers respond to these emerging security challenges in South Asia will determine the fate of a vast swathe of humanity that has implications beyond South Asia’s borders.

Date	7 April 2021
Format	Virtual conference
Participants	<p>HINA RABBANI KHAR, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan</p> <p>HANNES SWOBODA, former MEP and President of the IIP</p> <p>ASHOK SWAIN, Professor at Uppsala University, UNESCO Chair on International Water Cooperation</p> <p>SYED MOHAMMAD ALI, Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington D.C & Lecturer at Georgetown, John Hopkins and George Washington universities</p> <p>KISHORE MANDHYAN, Political Director and Deputy Director of Peacekeeping, Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs in the Cabinet of the Secretary General of the United Nations</p> <p>SABA GUL KHATTAK, Member of the Planning Commission of Pakistan & former Executive Director at Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI)</p> <p>STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP</p> <p>AFSAR RATHOR, President of Lios-Soil Organization</p> <p>HEINZ GÄRTNER, Chair of the IIP Advisory Board and Lecturer at the University of Vienna</p>



Eine regionale Konferenz und ein neutrales Afghanistan

Date	18 August 2021
Format	Blog article
Author	Prof. HEINZ GÄRTNER, Chair of the IIP Advisory Board, Lecturer at the University of Vienna

Präsident Biden setzte, im Gegensatz zu seinen Vorgängern, sein Versprechen um, die US-Soldaten und Soldatinnen aus Afghanistan abzuziehen. Diese Entscheidung beruhte auf der Erkenntnis, dass „wir nicht glauben, dass militärische Gewalt die Antwort auf die Herausforderungen in der Region ist“.[1] Das Ergebnis dieses zwanzigjährigen Krieges hat weitgehend den Vorkriegszustand wieder hergestellt. Die Terrororganisation Al-Qaida und die Taliban waren keine Einheit. Al-Qaida zu bekämpfen, war im Wesentlichen mit Kommandooperationen und meistens außerhalb von Afghanistan erfolgreich. Eine weitreichende Invasion wäre nicht notwendig gewesen. Die Tötung von Osama bin Laden in Pakistan durch eine Spezialeinheit ist das bezeichnendste Beispiel dafür. Die Taliban wären auch bereit gewesen, Osama bin Laden an irgendein Land, außer an die USA, auszuliefern.[2] Joseph Biden machte bei einer Pressekonferenz am 8. Juli 2021, klar[3], dass die Ziele der USA erreicht worden seien. Al-Qaida hätte keine Basis mehr in Afghanistan, wovon Gefahr für die USA ausgehen könnte, und Osama bin Laden wurde ausgeschaltet. Die USA wären ja niemals in Afghanistan gewesen, um Wiederaufbau zu leisten („to nation-building“).[4]

Für die USA gab es letztlich keine Alternative, als die Truppen abzuziehen. Ein weiteres Hinauszögern um Monate und Jahre hätte keine Veränderung gebracht. Joseph Biden hatte den Mut, diese Erkenntnis umzusetzen. Wie bei allen Kriegen, die nicht gewonnen werden, werden die Amerikaner auch kriegsmüde. Präsidenten, die ein Ende der Kriege versprachen, haben auch die darauffolgenden Wahlen gewonnen. Das traf auf Dwight Eisenhower und den Koreakrieg, auf Richard Nixon und den Vietnamkrieg sowie Barack Obama und den Irakkrieg zu. Siebzig Prozent der Amerikaner befürworteten den Abzug aus Afghanistan.[5] Bis zu den nächsten Präsidentschaftswahlen wird sich auch die Kritik am Abzug gemildert haben.

Enttäuschte Europäer

Erst nachdem Präsident Joseph Biden den Abzug der US-Truppen aus Afghanistan angekündigt hatte, folgten die NATO-Europäer nach. Sie hatten sich völlig auf die Informationen der US-Nachrichtendienste verlassen, die die Stärke der Regierungstruppen und die Stabilität der Regierung überschätzten, und die Fähigkeiten der Taliban unterschätzten. Die NATO-Europäer hatten ihren Einsatz in Afghanistan mit der Beistandspflicht des Bündnisses gerechtfertigt. Ihre vermeintliche Bündnistreue wurde aber nicht belohnt. Die erste Initiative der Regierung Biden in Westasien im März 2021, eine Konferenz der Vereinten Nationen über Afghanistan einzuberufen, erfolgte ohne Einbeziehung Europas, obwohl seit zwanzig Jahren auch Soldaten und Soldatinnen aus europäischen Ländern in Afghanistan stationiert waren. Vertreten waren neben den USA, die Türkei, Pakistan, China, Russland, Indien und der Iran. Auch zu weiteren Initiativen war die EU nicht eingeladen. Länder eines erweiterten Troika-Formates, das ursprünglich 2019 ins Leben gerufen worden war[6], trafen sich im August 2021, um die innerafghanische Situation nach dem Abzug der USA zu besprechen. Vertreten waren neben Vertretern der afghanischen Regierung und der Taliban, Russland, China, Pakistan und die USA. Europa, das neben dem Iran und Pakistan hauptsächlich von der bevorstehenden Flüchtlingswelle betroffen sein würde, war nicht eingeladen. Im Gegenteil, die EU hätte selbst diese Initiative ergreifen müssen.

Aber gerade das hatten die Europäer geglaubt, wozu sie in Afghanistan wären. Der frühere deutsche Verteidigungsminister Peter Struck drückte es 2002 so aus „Die Sicherheit der Bundesrepublik Deutschland wird auch am Hindukusch verteidigt.“ Damit meinte er nicht nur die Bekämpfung des Terrorismus, sondern auch den Schutz beim Aufbau der Infrastruktur oder Schulen. „Unsere Sicherheit wird größer, wenn sich die Bundeswehr mit Erfolg am Wiederaufbau unter demokratischen Vorzeichen auf dem Balkan und in Afghanistan beteiligt, indem sie hilft, dort das dringend benötigte sichere Umfeld zu schaffen.“[7] Der Abzug der US-Truppen aus Afghanistan beruhte auf der Erkenntnis, dass dieser Krieg militärisch nicht zu gewinnen sei, weil die Taliban zu sehr in der Gesellschaft verankert waren. Eine derartige Einschätzung wurde von Nachrichtendiensten aus EU-Staaten schon viel früher getroffen. Darunter war übrigens auch der österreichische; deswegen war die österreichische Beteiligung an den internationalen Truppen im Gegensatz zu den NATO-Truppen militärisch unerheblich. Dennoch entschieden sich die NATO-Verbündeten, mit den USA den Krieg weiterzuführen.

Vietnamalogie

Die Verantwortung für die Sicherheit wurde nun den lokalen Kräften übergeben. Diese Strategie wurde schon von Präsident Nixon angewendet,[8] als er vor dem Abzug der US-Truppen aus Vietnam 1975 die „Vietnamisierung“ Südvietnams ankündigte, was die Übernahme durch die nordvietnamesischen Truppen ermöglichte. Ähnlich haben die Taliban in Afghanistan die Macht im August 2021 übernommen. Vietnam blieb ein kommunistischer Staat. Die USA nahmen 1995 diplomatische Beziehungen mit Vietnam auf, die sich seit Jahrzehnten weiterentwickelten. Das ist umso erstaunlicher, als sechzigtausend amerikanische Soldaten in diesem Krieg gefallen waren. Die amerikanische Erzählung über das Trauma der Geiselnahme im Iran von 1979, bei dem es keine Opfer gab, hält aber an. Wenn es ihren geopolitischen Interessen entspricht, würden sich die USA auch mit einer Taliban-Regierung arrangieren, wie sie es auch mit Saudi-Arabien taten. Sie könnten etwa ein Gegengewicht gegen den Iran aufbauen wollen. Das sunnitische Saudi Arabien könnte ein williger Verbündeter gegen den schiitischen Iran sein.[9]

Der Ankündigung Präsident Bidens, die Truppen aus Afghanistan abzuziehen, folgte im Juli 2021 die die Kampftruppen aus dem Irak abzuziehen. Die Wichtigkeit des Mittleren Ostens für die USA wurde zunehmend durch die Großmacht Konkurrenz verdrängt. Wenn allerdings die Spannungen mit dem Iran zunehmen, wird der Mittlere Osten plötzlich wieder auf der Prioritätenliste nach oben gereiht werden müssen.

Neutralität statt Vakuum

Von Experten wird immer wieder die Befürchtung eines „Vakuums“ angesprochen, das von Russland und China gefüllt werden würde. Diese Vorstellung ist sehr kurzsichtig, da weder russische noch chinesische Truppen in Afghanistan einmarschieren werden. Es wäre traurig, wenn die westlichen Werte nur mit Truppen durchgesetzt werden könnten. Alle internationalen und regionalen Staaten werden aber ihren politischen Einfluss geltend machen wollen. Damit sich aber internationale Einflussnahmen im Sinne des Kalten Krieges nicht wiederholt, wird Afghanistan einen glaubwürdigen neutralen Kurs verfolgen müssen. Präsident Jimmy Carter hatte 1979 einen Vorschlag für ein neutrales Afghanistan als Alternative zur sowjetischen Besetzung gemacht.[10] Für die Sowjetunion wie auch die USA wäre das damals tatsächlich die bessere Alternative gewesen. Die Großmächte sollten die Lehre daraus ziehen. Solange sich keine terroristischen Organisationen in Afghanistan einnisten, was die Taliban versprochen hatten, wäre ein neutrales Afghanistan nach dem Abzug der ausländischen Truppen, das von den USA, China, Russland, und der EU garantiert werden sollte, die beste Option für alle.

Eine regionale Alternative wäre eine regionale Sicherheitskonferenz über den Mittleren Osten mit Beteiligung der Großmächte nach dem Modell der Konferenz über Sicherheit und Zusammenarbeit in Europa (KSZE) nach 1975 verbunden mit einem regionalen Nichtangriffspakt und mit vertrauens- und sicherheitsbildenden Maßnahmen. Ein derartiger Prozess müsste einen gewissen Wertekatalog enthalten, wie ihn auch die Sowjetunion unterzeichnet hatte. Die EU sollte diese Initiative ergreifen. Österreich als neutraler Staat wäre ein idealer erster Gastgeber eines derartigen Prozesses.

Notes and references

- [1] The White House (March 2021), Washington, *Interim National Security Guidance*.
- [2] John Mueller (2021), *The Stupidity of War: American Foreign Policy and the case for complacency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 97-120, hier 99-100.
- [3] The White House (July 8, 2021), *Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan*,
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/07/08/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-drawdown-of-u-s-forces-in-afghanistan/>.
- [4] Präsident Biden wiederholte diese Argumente bei einer Pressekonferenz am 16. August 2021.
- [5] Dina Smeltz and Emily Sullivan (August 9, 2021), US Public Supports Withdrawal From Afghanistan, *Chicago Council on Global Affairs*,
<https://www.thechicagocouncil.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/us-public-supports-withdrawal-afghanistan>.
- [6] James M. Dorsey (March 11, 2021), Russia foreign minister's Gulf tour: A bellwether of US-Saudi relations, *Responsible Statecraft*.
- [7] Die Bundesregierung (20. Dezember 2002), Rede des Bundesministers der Verteidigung Dr. Peter Struck zur Fortsetzung der Beteiligung bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte an dem Einsatz einer Internationalen Sicherheitsunterstützungstruppe in Afghanistan vor dem Deutschen Bundestag am 20. Dezember 2002 in Berlin: Bulletin 104-2
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- [8] Heinz Gärtner (2017), *Der Kalte Krieg* (Wiesbaden: marixverlag), 64-65, 96-106.
- [9] James M. Dorsey (August 8, 2021), Afghanistan may be a bellwether for Saudi-Iranian rivalry, *Responsible Statecraft*.
- [10] Todd Greentree (February 5, 2019), Afghanistan: Remembering the Long, Long War We Would Rather Forget, *Texas National Security Review*,
<https://warontherocks.com/2019/02/afghanistan-remembering-the-long-long-war-we-would-rather-forget/>.

All Activities: Asia

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)

October 4 | Lernen von Afghanistan 

September 10 | 9/11 and Afghanistan: What to Do Now? 

September 8 | Scheitern oder Versagen: Deutschland diskutiert die Hintergründe und sicherheitspolitischen Folgen des historischen Debakels in Afghanistan 

September 7 | Neutrality and Vulnerable States: An Analysis of Afghanistan's Permanent Neutrality 

August 26 | The Fall of Kabul and Biden's Speech - The crisis of the West and its origin 

August 19 | Afghanistan: Give the UN a Chance 

August 19 | Afghanistan: Interview mit Heinz Gärtner 

August 18 | Eine regionale Konferenz und ein neutrales Afghanistan 

August 17 | The Afghan Tragedy Continues 

May 5 | China and Multilateralism: China after the 13th National People's Congress 

April 19 | China – The World's Future Number One: How to Deal with it? 

April 7 | Emerging Security Challenges in South Asia 



Global topics and Multilateralism

Hannes Swoboda

It is obvious that the current global situation and today's conflicts and challenges can be understood from a variety of perspectives, both geographic and cultural. We must accept that there is not even a single Western perspective, but several. Nevertheless, Western views have some commonalities -- or at least they should. The Western approach should have a critical evaluation of its own (colonial) history, and it should not employ a narrow, nationalistic attitude towards its neighbors and partners or even its "enemies." And it should provide for policies to integrate, cooperate, support, help, and more. More specifically, this means that the West – and I use the term not in its geographic sense – should try to strengthen multilateralism.

Seen from this specific Western perspective, the past year has demonstrated some progress but also many deficiencies. Certainly, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) delivered some progress. It was not a big step forward, but some small steps towards decarbonization were taken. In particular, the special support for South Africa to transition from coal to renewables could be a model for agreements with other large countries in need of help. At COP26, we also saw a principal agreement concluded between the US and China.

On the other hand, relations between these two countries did not really improve. For the US, China is its primary and rising economic and political competitor. For China, the US is a declining power that can be challenged without fear of strong repercussions. Both aspire to an economic and technological decoupling, but their economies and businesses are still very much interlinked. Due to rifts and interruptions in supply chains, it is understandable that different continents and countries long for self-sufficiency in important basic products and production processes. And this is particularly true and important for the EU if it wishes to become a global actor. But a general economic decoupling, which many also demand in respect to Russia, can lead to even less political understanding and cooperation. Thus, it will be necessary to find a pragmatic mix of self-reliance and mutual (!) interdependence on a global scale.

The election of President Biden was widely welcomed in the West – or at least by those who were deeply disappointed and disturbed by former President Trump's erratic policies. Especially in regard to the issue of climate change, Biden has pursued some important initiatives both at home and globally. Concerning foreign policy, however, there has been no significant change. China remains the main issue, and improving relations with Europe have merely served to align Europe more closely with the US. Biden has accomplished this by reducing pressure and threats, but his administration has left Europe in no doubt about who the leader is. It seems the Ukraine crisis is also being used to remind Europeans both who the military commander of the West is and that Europe is dependent on the US concerning its security – which is largely true. Even an active European defense policy will not change this dependence dramatically, but it could give the Europeans more leverage. Questions remain over the costs and ultimate aim of a stronger defense commitment by Europe.

An area where both the EU and the US failed was – and continues to be – the global vaccination campaign against Covid. The fact that both China and Russia also promised more than they could deliver is no excuse for the West. It is understandable that governments in the US and the EU – including the European Commission – prioritized securing the health of their own populations. But in parallel to trying to achieve a high vaccination rate – which has had mixed results – the West should have had a clear strategy on how to support lower-income countries.

There were long discussions about a TRIPS waiver concerning intellectual property and/or giving free licenses as well as creating new production capacity in lower-income countries – apart from India. And there were some efforts to cooperate on delivering vaccines in the framework of the COVAX initiative, in addition to bilateral provisions. But all these discussions and efforts should have rapidly led to a more precise and manageable support program. The global spread of the virus made clear that only a global answer can achieve quick and thorough results.

If the West – and especially the EU – wants to win the values and systems competition with Russia and China, more efforts are necessary than simply stepping up military activities. Transatlantic cooperation must enhance technological innovations and prove that a liberal market system is more efficient and more humane than autocratic governance. There are more than enough possibilities to show the advantages of the Western approach, from healthcare and climate change to using modern technology to enhance individual and collective rights, rather than for control and surveillance. More broadly, the West must find a way of retaining and enhancing its economic and social strengths and, at the same time, use that strength to promote multilateral approaches. Peace can only be maintained and preserved by such a multilateral approach. No matter what, the West should stick to that strategy and avoid the failures of the past – for example by avoiding useless and costly military interventions. This is one of the lessons of 2021 and the years before.

Heinz Gärtner

The US in 2021 and 2022

During his campaign for the 2020 elections, President Joe Biden mapped out his future foreign policy strategy. China should not be allowed to catch up with the US, either economically or militarily. To prevent this, global alliances will be established and underpinned with a legitimacy based on values such as democracy (his idea of an “Alliance of Democracies” against autocracies is a case in point). However, he will not hesitate to ally with authoritarian states if it serves the geopolitical interests of the US. NATO and Ukraine will be armed in preparation for an assumed Russian attack. He will not be able to get new treaties through Congress but will instead impose sanctions. He will try to come to a multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran (JCPOA) despite strong domestic resistance, as he knows that the failure to do so might lead to a war in the Middle East in which he does not want to become entangled.

Biden’s current opinion polls are not favorable. The Republicans and the hawks in his own Democratic Party are requesting an offensive foreign policy. To gain the support of conservative voters at the midterm elections in November 2022, Biden will take a tough stance on international affairs.

This offensive strategy did not help former President Jimmy Carter. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, he suspended the US policy of détente and began a massive arms buildup. Through the Carter Doctrine, he threatened intervention if a foreign power intervened in the Middle East. He launched a human rights campaign against the Soviet Union and China, and he tried (without success) to liberate the hostages held in Iran through military action. Despite this hardline foreign policy, Carter lost the elections to Ronald Reagan in 1980, and a very aggressive foreign policy followed. This analogy might tell us what the world can expect for 2022 and the years to follow.

It goes without saying that the US is a democracy with elections, the separation of powers, and free speech. It is not, however, a model of democracy. The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2021 Democracy Index ranked the US as a "flawed democracy." Meanwhile, Reporters Without Borders ranked the US 44th in its 2021 World Press Freedom Index. There are numerous examples of problems with the US model of democracy'. The US Senate is not based on proportional representation and gives undue representation to smaller, rural states. Fifty million votes are not represented. The gerrymandering of district boundaries excludes voters of other parties, and votes by minorities are often suppressed. The judges of the Supreme Court are appointed according to political preferences, and voting in the Senate can be prevented through long "filibuster" speeches. In no other democracy in the world does the majority of one of the major parties not recognize election results.

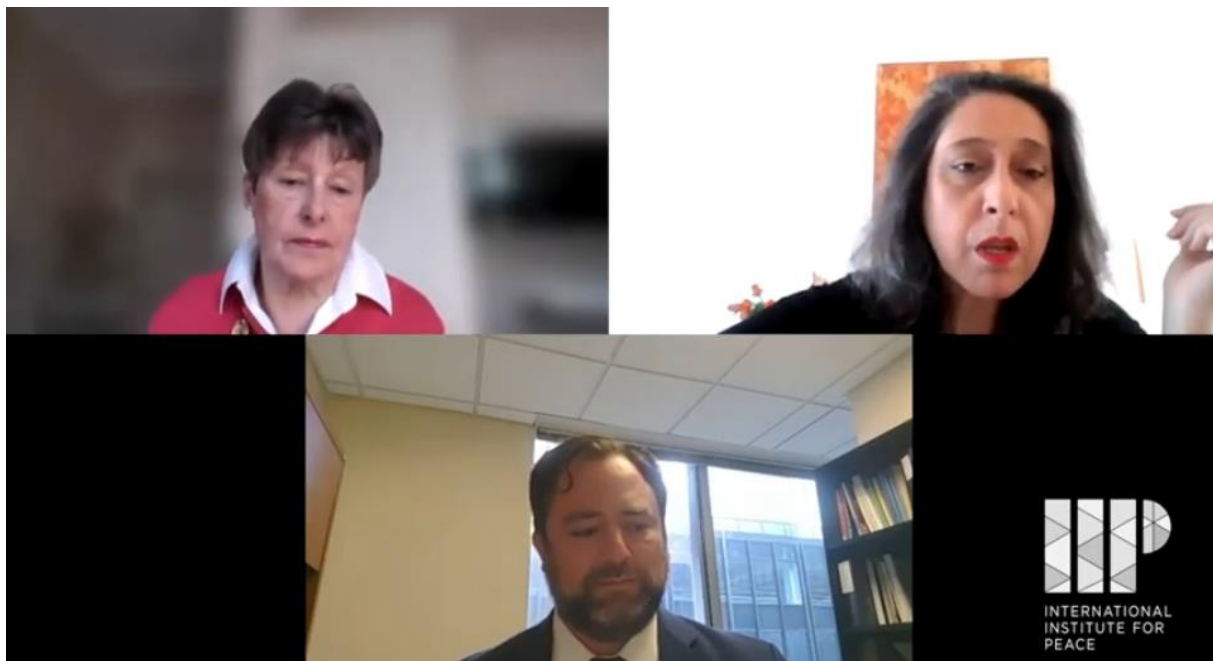
It is about time that the US stops claiming to be an "exceptional" country and instead recognizes that it is, in fact, a normal country.

Selected projects

The Future of Diplomacy After COVID-19: Multilateralism and Maintaining International Peace and Security

The pandemic has had and is still having a strong impact on international diplomacy. It became clear that global cooperation and solidarity are central to dealing with the socio-economic effects of the global health crisis. Global challenges need global answers. The question therefore arises whether multilateral institutions like the World Health Organization and the United Nations, which celebrated its 75th anniversary in October 2020, are sufficiently efficient and effective to tackle the many global challenges and whether the commitment to universal values is strong enough to overcome narrow national interests. Our guests have co-authored a book with other UN diplomats on the [Future of Diplomacy After COVID-19](#) that explores the lessons learned from the last year and offers their key recommendations for the post-pandemic world to strengthen multilateralism and the ability of multilateral institutions to maintain international peace and security.

Date	6 July 2021
Format	Online public discussion
Moderation	ANGELA KANE, Vice-President of the International Institute for Peace and former United Nations Under Secretary General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs
Participants	MONA ALI KHALIL, Director, MAK Law International, Strategic Consulting Service, and former Senior Legal Officer of the UN Office of the Legal Counsel ANDRES FIALLO, Ecuadorian diplomat with experience in various UN processes as a Negotiator, Coordinator and Senior Advisor on international law, peace and security



The First 100 Days of President Joe Biden's Administration: Successes and Challenges

The IIP asked experts about successes and challenges in the first 100 days of President Biden's Administration.

Date	April 2021
Format	Expert interviews
Experts	<p>BRUNO MAÇÃES, Political Scientist, former Europe Minister of Portugal</p> <p>ANGELA KANE, Vice President of the IIP, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Management</p> <p>VIVIEN SCHMIDT, Boston University, IIP Executive Board member</p> <p>PATRICK MCGRATH, Researcher</p> <p>SHIREEN T. HUNTER, Honorary Fellow, Georgetown University</p> <p>FRED TANNER, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva; former Senior Advisor to the OSCE Secretary General, IIP Advisory Board member</p> <p>HEINZ GÄRTNER, Head of the IIP Advisory Board, Lecturer at the University of Vienna</p> <p>STEPHANIE FENKART, Director of the IIP</p> <p>THOMAS HAJNOCZI, Ambassador (ret.), IIP Advisory Board member</p> <p>HANNES SWOBODA, President of the IIP, former MEP</p> <p>FRANZ BAUMANN, Visiting Research Professor at New York University & former United Nations Special Adviser on Environment and Peace Operations</p>



Vaccine geopolitics, ‘big’ and ‘small’, and Europe’s challenge

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Format Blog article
Author Luiza Bialasiewicz, University of Amsterdam

With respect to the vaccine, ‘global’ and ‘everyday’ geopolitical imaginaries are profoundly interconnected.

The first doses of the Covid-19 vaccines being administered across the EU in the last days of 2020 marked a critical passage point in the management of the pandemic. In these first weeks, the epidemiological value of the vaccines could be seen as largely symbolic, as the number of those able to be vaccinated is still quite limited. Yet symbols matter, and EU leaders have seized this opportunity to underline how both the approval of the vaccine, and the organization of the common ‘V [for vaccine] days’ across the Union are a ‘touching proof of unity’ in Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s words.

But as with all symbolic imaginaries this one, too, is not uncontested. Apart from the complex regulatory hurdles that the vaccines have had to face and the considerable logistical challenges of their transport, storage and administration, EU officials are being confronted with another crisis-within-a-crisis that risks undermining the success of the vaccination campaigns. It is this: in a significant number of EU states, an insufficient percentage of the general population is currently expressing its willingness to be vaccinated. Such doubters are far more substantial in numbers than outright anti-vaxxers and Covid-19 negationists, and while it is possible that once the vaccination campaigns have begun in earnest, public opinion will shift, the surprisingly low levels of public trust in the vaccines are drawing serious concern.

Communication about the vaccine is a crucial battleground for European leaders at this moment. For while in most EU states popular opposition to vaccines is being articulated around the right to ‘personal freedom’ regarding when (and if) to vaccinate, the information ecosystem shaping those choices is far from ‘free’, as various studies are showing, and has very little to do with ‘personal’ choices. Just as the Covid-19 pandemic itself, vaccination efforts are being made the object of campaigns of disinformation serving a variety of political interests, at the national, European but also global scales. Indeed, the geopolitics that will shape the success of the vaccination campaigns will not only be contested in big-power ‘global’ competition over the vaccines’ access, distribution and associated influence – it will also be fought over in much more mundane settings, on screens and newspapers, in a much less evident competition for Europeans’ ‘everyday’ geopolitical imaginaries of security and insecurity, trust and mistrust.

Such ‘global’ and ‘everyday’ geopolitical imaginaries are profoundly interconnected, as feminist scholars of geopolitics have long argued: ‘big’ geopolitics is always also folded into the intimate spaces of everyday life, with bodies, feelings (such as fear and hope), but also mundane objects and everyday habits becoming sites for the reproduction of ‘big’ geopolitical imaginaries and possibilities.[i] In moments of ‘geopolitical vertigo’ such as the current pandemic moment, the need to make sense of the world, both at the intimate scale of the body as well as that of global affairs, opens ample space to conspiratorial thinking that provides facile narratives of ‘what is wrong’ and ‘who is to blame’. Conspiratorial geopolitical imaginaries of the Covid-19 vaccine function at these multiple scales.

The Covid-19 vaccine has, for months now, been a geopolitical playground, of the overt, but also not-so-overt kind.

The Covid-19 vaccine has, for months now, been a geopolitical playground, of the overt, but also not-so-overt kind. For the key global players, the race towards the vaccine has become a race to demonstrate geopolitical dominance: for China, it has been an attempt to redeem its image from virus diffuser to sanitary saviour (of its own citizens but also of populations in the Global South); for Russia, an attempt to affirm its continuing scientific excellence and autarky, but also its role as a regional power; for the Trump administration, a way to show how the US is able to accelerate the opening of its economy through entrepreneurial scientific progress rather than restrictions; for the UK, a chance to demonstrate how the country is able to do things better and faster without the EU in the (almost) post-Brexit era. For the EU, the common procurement strategy and the common roll-out of the vaccination campaign has been wielded as proof of unity and solidarity among Member States. At the same time, ensuring equal access to vaccination world-wide has also become – in rhetoric at least – part of the EU’s geopolitical self-representation, with High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borrell affirming Europe’s commitment to ‘leave no one behind and make the Covid-19 vaccine a global public good’.

The ‘battle’ for the vaccine thus has a number of overt, ‘big-geopolitical’ aspects and, as such, has been frequently described with appeals to military metaphors. From intimations of ‘vaccine nationalism’ and the struggle between states for claiming primacy in ‘capturing’ sufficient resources/doses for its population, to the actual deployment of military personnel for the administration of the vaccines and their secure storage and transport, the imagery but also the material infrastructure of war-making abounds. And like in other conflicts, this one too is not simply a struggle for ‘saving’ national bodies: it is equally a war for minds, in which targeted strategies of disinformation are being powerfully deployed by a variety of actors to undermine public trust in the vaccine and those charged with its administration.

Drawing on just such militarized evocations, in a front-page editorial on Italy’s leading daily *La Repubblica* on the eve of the EU-wide ‘V-days’, Maurizio Molinari compared the vaccination campaign to a ‘campaign for continental liberation’. But, unlike in military campaigns, he noted, here the challenges were not simply a matter of successful strategy and logistics; this ‘campaign’ also had an important Achilles’ heel. It was the worrisome percentage of European citizens who, for one reason or another, were contrary to vaccination, either due to lack of proper information, or a combination of fears.

As a poll commissioned in the closing days of 2020 by Poland’s largest newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* showed, only 43.4% of Poles were willing to get vaccinated against Covid-19; slightly more were opposed (43.8%), while almost 13% declared themselves ‘unsure’. The numbers are very similar in France: an Ipsos Global Advisor poll conducted on the eve of the ‘V-days’ showed that just one in four French citizens was willing to take the vaccine. For the EU-wide aim of achieving group immunity by the end of 2021 (that requires at least 70% vaccination coverage), these numbers are extremely worrisome.

Vaccination is being made the object of campaigns of disinformation serving a variety of political interests, at the national, European but also global level.

The various scales of geopolitical imaginaries indeed reinforce one another: in Hungary, where current polls show only 15% willing to be vaccinated, the Orbán government has spent the past months undermining public trust in the EU’s approval process, lamenting its slowness and doubting its efficacy, proclaiming that Hungarians would be better off with Russian or Chinese vaccines. No Russian or Chinese vaccines arrived, needless to say, but when the EU-approved ones did, very few Hungarians were willing to be vaccinated. Here, the battle quickly extended

from the vaccines themselves to also the freedom to speak about them, turning increasingly violent: Péter Krekó, a prominent Hungarian political analyst, received death threats after a comment he made in the above cited POLITICO article regarding the instrumentalization of anti-vaccination attitudes by the Orban regime was misrepresented by pro-government media outlets. Conservative factions of the Catholic Church have also contributed in recent months to sowing doubt regarding not just the safety but also the morality of vaccines that may be produced by companies making use of foetal tissue: the Bioethics Group of Experts of the Polish Episcopal Council on the eve of the vaccines' arrival issued the ambiguous recommendation of leaving it to Catholics' 'individual choice'.^[ii]

Yet such 'overt' actors are not the only ones shaping the everyday geopolitics of vaccines, and perhaps not even the most impactful. Over the past months, organizations including the EU's own External Action Service EUvsDisinfo project ^[iii] as well as various groups of scholars and activists studying disinformation on social media such as the Anglo-Dutch 'Infodemic' project or the FirstDraft media network have been tracking the development and spread of disruptive narratives and especially conspiracy theories: first about the pandemic itself, and more recently about Covid-19 vaccines.

As these and other studies highlight, such strategies of disinformation are directly geopolitical, working to undermine not just trust in the vaccine but trust in European public institutions and expertise more broadly. The studies also note, however, that the spread of such disinformation is compounded by the "complexities and vulnerabilities of the information ecosystem" which, as the FirstDraft report notes, "is full of 'data deficits' — situations where demand for information about a topic is high, but the supply of credible information is low — that are being exploited by a variety of actors". And "when people can't easily access reliable information around vaccines and when mistrust in actors and institutions related to vaccines is high, misinformation narratives rush in to fill the vacuum".

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The question of 'data deficits' – or, better yet, the perception of unequal access to the 'real' information – is crucial to understanding how disinformation works, but also to how it can be combatted. The Covid-19 pandemic is not the first time that a health crisis has unleashed fanciful imaginations and a variety of conspiracy theories. In a recent story on the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Australian philosopher of neuroscience Colin Klein reminds us that when "things are changing rapidly, it's not actually unreasonable to [assume] some people have more information than others", with "conspiracy theories born out of the murky feeling that not all is being revealed to us, that the truth is still in shadow, and someone else is pulling the strings". The fact that conspiracy theories 'stick' most powerfully in moments of crisis – and especially in those places and among those publics that feel least 'in control' of events – is thus not surprising.

Indeed, as various commentators have noted, the geographies of vaccination will be as uneven as the spread of the virus: both because unvaccinated people will not be randomly strewn but will rather form clusters in those communities that do not have equal access to the vaccines – but also because vaccine skepticism spreads among friends and families, in the everyday exchange of geopolitical imaginaries, physical as well as virtual.^[iv]

This is already evident today, with vaccine skepticism directly bound up (and clustered) with wider conspiratorial beliefs, but also most strongly concentrated among those populations that feel least in control over their future fate, political-economic and socio-sanitary.

One of the most striking geographical contexts in this sense are the Western Balkans, marked not only by the highest opposition to the vaccine, but also by the highest rates of support for a variety of conspiracy theories regarding the virus' origins, spread and the 'real' motives of attempts to combat it. In a study carried out by the Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group led by Florian Bieber at the University of Graz, the research revealed that over 75% of citizens in the Western Balkans believed in one or more conspiracy theories regarding Covid-19 (the percentages in EU states such as Germany or Italy are somewhere between 20-25%). What was striking is that while education, age or gender did not impact these beliefs, they were directly linked to wider geopolitical orientations, whether regarding the EU, Russia, the US or China. What is more, conspiratorial leanings also mapped directly unto broader political beliefs and 'world views', including trust in the democratic process and institutions, highlighting how 'big' geopolitical imaginaries and everyday fears are profoundly connected.[v]

How to combat such fears that do not only have immediate relevance for European public health agendas but also possibly much longer and pernicious effects on trust in public institutions and officials? Making European citizens feel they have full and equal access to information regarding the pandemic and the vaccines designed to combat it is a critical first step, and both national and EU bodies are doing their best to extend the range and availability of popularly-understandable scientific information. But alongside these science-communication efforts, governments should also make European publics better aware that what they may believe are freely informed 'personal choices' regarding the vaccine are not free and personal at all, but rather the object of targeted geopolitical strategies of hostile actors.

Notes and references

[i] See, among others, Rachel Pain and Susan Smith (2008) *Fear: Critical Geopolitics and Everyday Life*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

[ii] It is relevant to note here that Pope Francis has been unequivocal in his appeals in favour of vaccination. In his Christmas 'Urbi et Orbi' address, the Pope called the vaccine 'a light of hope', free and equal access to which should not be tainted 'by closed nationalisms' and 'radical individualism'.

[iii] Launched in 2015 to address Russian strategies of disinformation targeting the EU and the wider region, but now with a much wider remit, including disinformation flows on the pandemic.

[iv] Including this excellent overview by Ed Yong for *The Atlantic*.

[v] As others have noted on these pages, European far-right movements have also ably exploited the pandemic to sow mistrust in government agendas. See [here](#) among others.

All Activities: Global topics and multilateralism

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)

December 23 | IIP Special: Gemeinsam für den Frieden: 70 Jahre Internationale Diplomatie, Politik und Politikwissenschaft 

December 10 | COP26 and the Geopolitics of Climate Policy 

December 7 | Democracy summit - a problematic endeavor 

November 18 | A New Division in Europe and How to Fight It 

September 28 | The West, Culture, Tolerance, and Conflicts 

July 30 | Architecture, Climate, and Peace 

July 6 | The Future of Diplomacy After COVID-19: Multilateralism and Maintaining International Peace and Security 

June 1 | EU Industrial Strategy as a Geopolitical Instrument 

May 31 | Colombia and the resistance to change 

May 10 | SRF Podcast mit Angela Kane: Hat die UNO ein Frauenproblem? 

May 9 | EU – Aus Mängeln Lernen und die Zukunft Vorbereiten 

May 5 | 100 Tage Biden 

April 29 | The First 100 Days of President Joe Biden's Administration: Successes and Challenges 

April 28 | Politologe: „Innenpolitisch bekommt Joe Biden relativ gute Noten“ 

April 16 | Gerecht impfen in einer ungerechten Welt? 

April 13 | Die ersten hundert Tage Außenpolitik der Präsidentschaft Bidens 

March 19 | Making Sense of Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean 

March 10 | Feminist Foreign Policy: More Than Gender Equality? 

March 9 | What Does Biden's Presidency Mean for Multilateralism? 

February 9 | Globale Impfstrategie statt Impfnationalismus! 

January 14 | Vaccine geopolitics, ‘big’ and ‘small’, and Europe’s challenge 

January 4 | Learning from Brexit 



Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe is an initiative that was for the first time suggested by the French President Emmanuel Macron in 2019. Its aim is to bring the European Union closer to the citizens and to have a comprehensive debate before the next elections to the European Parliament in 2024. The IIP has engaged in this debate by interviewing its network of experts on challenges and opportunities the EU is set to face in the coming years. The interviews discussed issue areas prioritized by the Conference on the Future of Europe, including environment, digitalization, economy, geopolitics, European values, the international role of the EU, democracy, and other.

Date	April-June 2021
Format	Expert interviews
Experts	<p>FRANZ BAUMANN, Professor at New York University, former UN Special Adviser on Environment and Peace Operations</p> <p>MONIKA BEGOVIC, President of the Atlantic Council of Croatia, IIP Executive Board member</p> <p>DJORDJE BOJOVIC, expert of the Initiative ‘Young Generations for the New Western Balkans’</p> <p>IRINA BOLGOVA, associate professor at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, IIP Advisory Board member</p> <p>ADNAN CERIMAGIC, Analyst at the European Stability Initiative, IIP Advisory Board member</p> <p>CLAUDIA GAMON, MEP (Renew Europe Group)</p> <p>GUDRUN KRAMER, Director of the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, IIP Advisory Board member</p> <p>STEFAN LEHNE, Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Europe, Brussels</p> <p>HANNO LOEWY, curator and writer, Director of the Jewish Museum Hohenems</p> <p>BRUNO MACAES, political scientist, former Foreign Minister of Portugal</p> <p>LUKAS MANDL, MEP (European People's Party)</p> <p>VIVIEN SCHMIDT, Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration, Boston University, IIP Executive Board member</p> <p>ANDREAS SCHIEDER, MEP (Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats)</p> <p>ELKE SCHRAIK, Doctoral Researcher at the Centre for European Integration Research, Department of Political Science, University of Vienna</p> <p>HANS DIETMAR SCHWEISGUT, Ambassador (ret.), Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe</p> <p>KATSIARYNA SHMATSINA, Researcher, Rethink.CEE Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States</p> <p>HANNES SWOBODA, President of the IIP, former MEP</p>
Project outputs	Available online here

All Interviews on the Conference on the Future of Europe

(click on the activity for more details or use the QR code below)



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The Future of Europe is the Future of Homeland Earth – Gudrun Kramer

Participation, Cooperation, Partnership and Geopolitics – Lukas Mandl

Human Rights – Monika Begovic

Partnership with Africa – Hannes Swoboda

Future of Europe in the International System and Geopolitics of Vaccination – Stefan Lehne

The Future of Larger Europe: Belarus – Katsiaryna Shmatsina

Social and Neighborhood Policies for the Future of Europe – Djordje Bojovic

Climate Policy in the Western Balkans for the Future of Europe - Adnan Cerimagic

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Der Standard Blog: Gesellschaft - Macht – Frieden

The IIP, in cooperation with Sir Peter Ustinov Institute and Think- and Do-Tank Shabka, run an online blog section at one of Austria's largest daily newspapers – Der Standard.

Gesellschaftliche- und Machtverhältnisse schaffen Frieden – wenn sie von Gerechtigkeit geprägt sind. Herrschen Vorurteile und Hass ist es nicht weit bis zu Gewalt und Krieg. Das Sir Peter Ustinov Institut widmet sich der Erforschung und Bekämpfung von Vorurteilen als Grundvoraussetzung für ein friedliches Zusammenleben. Der Förderung eines globalen Friedens hat sich das International Institute for Peace verschrieben und Shabka als strategischer Think & Do Tank versteht sich als zivilgesellschaftliche außen- und sicherheitspolitische Plattform. Zusammen sind wir Teil einer starken Zivilgesellschaft, für die das Streben nach Gerechtigkeit die Voraussetzung für nationalen-, europäischen- und globalen Frieden ist.

Die einzelnen Beiträge spiegeln die Meinungen der AutorInnen wider und nicht zwangsläufig die der Institute.

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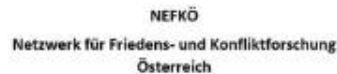
- 7. Jänner | Polen halt? Das Verhältnis von Kirche und Staat
- 11. Jänner | Können Panzer den Frieden bringen?
- 1 Februar | USA/EU: Eine neue Allianz?
- 9. Februar | Globale Impfstrategie statt Impfnationalismus!
- 3. März | Warum Antisemitismus heute noch immer eine Herausforderung ist
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- 11 Juni | Die Macht der (Des-)Information
- 22. Juli | Antisemitismus in der Pandemie: Vom Kuheuter bis zu Pfizer
- 30. September | Lernen von Afghanistan
- 22. November | Warum wir uns in diesen Zeiten an Stefan Zweig erinnern sollten



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