

KAS INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS AND
VALUE-DRIVEN POLICY



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Konrad
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Stiftung



EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

Along its southern and eastern periphery, in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe, the European Union is confronted with violent conflicts, which also have implications for the future of Germany and Europe. The situation is reflected not least in the current refugee crisis, which is putting the EU member states severely to the test and which some already describe as a "crisis of solidarity". The war in Ukraine represents one further situation where solidarity is required. In this context, the European partners are called upon to support the government in Kiev in implementing its political and economic reforms – even against Russia's interests.

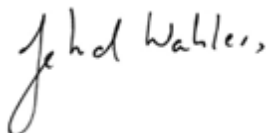
The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung maintains offices in many countries that are currently gripped by war and violence. While the conditions under which we carry out our work have deteriorated in many places not only due to conflicts and civil war but also due to the increasingly authoritarian conduct of many governments, our local staff and partners continue in their endeavours to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. At the same time, we are making efforts in Germany and Europe to provide advice on conflict prevention and issues of security policy to decision-makers in the political dialogue.

In their articles in the current issue, the authors take a close look at the current political situation in Russia, the countries of the Eastern Partnership, and the situation of Christians and the instrumentalisation of religion in the Middle East. Leaving aside concrete security challenges facing the European Union in these regions, the EU has committed itself through its Community Treaties to follow a normative course in shaping its foreign relations. In his article, Professor Jörg Dosch examines the role the EU can play as a "soft power" in Asia with its value-focused policies and the extent to which it can influence the discourse on the topics of democracy, human rights and good governance there.

Claudia Crawford, head of the KAS office in Moscow, reports about the deterioration in the mood among the Russian population with respect to the West one year on from the annexation of Crimea, a change in which the media play a significant role. Critics of the Russian President are denounced as traitors and are in danger of their lives, as illustrated by the murder of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov this February. The West is called upon to make alternative sources of information available to the Russian people and to facilitate an exchange at civil society level. Stephan Malerius who heads up an EU project for supporting civil society in the countries of the European Partnership implemented by the foundation, explains the incompatibility between the integrative policies of the European Union and the Russian thinking in spheres of influence.

The war in Syria is characterised by intensifying violence and stagnation in the political resolution process. Vast swathes of the country have been devastated and no longer provide a basis for people's livelihoods. More than 13 million Syrians and Iraqis have either been displaced internally or are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries.

The situation of Christians and other religious minorities in Syria and Iraq is particularly precarious, as Otmar Oehring, head of the KAS office in Amman, reports. In his article, which is partly based on eye-witness accounts by clerics in the two countries, he describes the conditions under which many Christians had to leave their traditional settlement areas and the extent of their desperation. He fears that the situation of the Christians has in fact not yet reached its nadir. In his article, Martin Pabst investigates the confessionalisation of conflicts in the Arab world, asking the question as to whether the disputes in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq are, in fact, based on ethnic, religious or even tribal motives – or whether these are actually used as a cover by the actors in the region intent on enforcing their own claims to power.



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ONE YEAR ON FROM THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

Claudia Crawford



Claudia Crawford is head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's office in Moscow.

Sunset, a church in Crimea bathed in the evening light, a helicopter in front of an orange sun at dusk, and President Putin, reporting with some obvious pride about the events during an undercover operation to evacuate the Ukrainian President the night of 22 to 23 February last year. These were the opening scenes of a documentary broadcast on the *Russia 1* TV channel on the evening of 15 March 2015.¹ In close to two and a half hours, the events that took place in Kiev and in Crimea in February and March last year were depicted from a Russian perspective. Particularly from the perspective of the Russian President. He personally explains in the film which steps he took when and why, making a point of stressing the significance of Crimea to Russia. He recalled the statement he had made at the end of the all-night meeting, in the early hours of 23 February 2014: "We are forced to begin work on returning Crimea to Russia."²

However, if you believe Leonid Gratch, communist, ex-military and former Chairman of the Crimean parliament, this work had, in fact, begun some time earlier. In an interview with the *Zeit* newspaper, he reported that three Russian generals had already been talking to him about the path to a Russian-controlled Crimea on the afternoon of 20 February 2014.³ And the statements made in a televised disputation by Igor Girkin, aka Igor Strelko, who subsequently headed the militia and security forces of the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" in Sloviansk, provide

- 1 | Andrei Kondrashov, "Крым. Путь на Родину" (Crimea. The way home), *Россия-1*, http://russia.tv/brand/show/brand_id/59195 (accessed 9 Jun 2015).
- 2 | Christian Weisflog, "Sie hätten ihn einfach liquidiert", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9 Mar 2015, <http://nzz.ch/international/1.18498365> (accessed 1 Jun 2015).
- 3 | Herwig G. Höller, "Wann die Krim-Annexion wirklich begann", *Zeit Online*, 16 Mar 2015, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-03/krim-annexion-leonid-gratsch-putin> (accessed 1 Jun 2015).

clues as to how the election of the new Prime Minister of Crimea on 27 February 2014 and the scheduling of the referendum for 16 March 2014 were “organised” with massive pressure being applied to the Members of Parliament in office at the time. ⁴In the documentary of 15 March, Putin himself admits that Russian soldiers, the so-called “little green men” or “polite men”, had of course secured the process of the referendum in Crimea – unlike a year ago, when he denied the involvement of Russian military and remarked laconically that uniforms could be bought at any street corner.

All these “confessions” do not fit in with Moscow’s rhetoric about Crimean inhabitants feeling threatened by the events in Kiev and therefore seeking protection from Moscow. In fact, they point to Russia engaging in a proactive intervention, although it is not clear how far back the actual planning went. An intervention that had the enthusiastic backing of the great majority of the Russian population. According to a police statement, over 100,000 people attended a celebration of the one-year anniversary of the “reunification of Crimea and Sevastopol with the Russian Federation” on Red Square. Whether they were all there of their own volition may be doubtful, but according to a statement issued by *Russia 1*, more than 40 per cent of all television viewers over the age of 18 watched the documentary about Crimea on the evening of 15 March. People could hardly be coerced into doing that. The backing by the population is reflected above all in the high approval ratings for Vladimir Putin’s policies, which have exceeded 80 per cent for the last twelve months – ever since the annexation of Crimea.⁵

CHANGE IN MOOD VIS-À-VIS THE WEST

There has been a noticeable change in the general mood in Russia over the last year. This has manifested particularly in the stance towards the West becoming more negative.

- 4 | Christian Weisflog, “Wir haben sie zur Abstimmung getrieben”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 27 Jan 2015, <http://nzz.ch/international/1.18469931> (accessed 1 Jun 2015); disputation: “Гиркин Мы насильно сгоняли депутатов Крыма голосовать за отделение от Украины” (Girkin – We chased the Crimean representatives to vote for secession from Ukraine), <http://youtu.be/cyLD2HI9G0g> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).
- 5 | Press release from 25 Mar 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/25-03-2015/martovskie-reitingi-odobreniya-i-doveriya> (accessed 29 Jun 2015). Second graphic and table from the top. Question: Do you support President Putin’s work in principle or not?

In a survey on Russia's relations with the EU conducted by the independent Levada Center, 51 per cent of respondents stated as recently as January 2014 that these were very good (one per cent) / mostly good (50 per cent); only 34 per cent of the respondents thought that they were very bad (four per cent) / mostly bad (30 per cent). In January this year, only 20 per cent rated relations between Russia and the EU as very good (two per cent) / mostly good (18 per cent); 71 per cent thought they were very bad (28 per cent) / mostly bad (43 per cent).⁶ It stands to reason that the massive campaign in the Russian media, particularly on the television, has contributed significantly to this shift in opinion. The propaganda is aimed at a society which has little in the way of personal international experience. According to the pollster Lev Gudkov, only 18 per cent of Russians possess a passport.⁷ Against this backdrop, it may have been a mistake to maintain the visa requirement for Russians wishing to enter the Schengen Area.



In Russia there is a climate of fear. The murder of the Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov in February 2015 demonstrates that regime critics rightly fear for their lives. | Source: © Sharifulin Valery, picture alliance / TASS.

- 6 | Press release from 9 Feb 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/09-02-2015/mezhdunarodnye-otnosheniya> (accessed 29 Jun 2015). Second graphic and table from the top. Above those the question relating to the relations with the USA.
- 7 | Florian Willershausen, "Vielen Russen fehlt es an kritischem Denken", *Wirtschaftswoche*, 9 Sep 2014, <http://wiwo.de/politik/ausland/10657292.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

The annexation of Crimea is not only being used to elicit patriotic sentiment. Anyone who voices criticism or does not go along with the national mainstream is viewed with suspicion and is berated. As far back as a year ago, Putin described those participating in a demonstration against the annexation of Crimea as traitors. Pressure is also being applied to NGOs which cooperate with Western partners or receive funding from abroad. The provisions about organisations having to register as “foreign agents”, based on the criteria of “political activities” and “funding from abroad”, are so loosely defined that it is easy to apply the label to NGOs whose activities are inconvenient to the regime.

This situation has produced a political atmosphere of fear that can be sensed when speaking to NGO representatives and manifests in connection with cooperation projects when the conversation turns to contracts or statements are solicited. The unsettled atmosphere is even evident in university institutions, even more so in the regions than in Moscow. The murder of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov illustrates that this fear is not without foundation. Where is a country heading if political opposition figures fear for their lives? The Nemtsov case has

still not been solved. Many doubt that it ever will be. Since the murder was committed, proceedings have been initiated against five suspects, four of them from Chechnya and one from neighbouring Ingushetia. They are

Only those with inside knowledge can understand how such proximity to nationalists can be reconciled with the fight against the alleged “neo-Nazis and fascists” in Kiev.

accused of having carried out a contract killing, but who gave the orders and the motive remains a mystery. There is some speculation that the murder was retribution for Nemtsov’s support of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*. But it is plausible that some form of nationalism is behind it. Nationalism is gaining support in Russia; there is no problem with publicly declaring oneself a nationalist. On 22 March of this year, European nationalists, including representatives of the NPD, the British National Party and the Greek Golden Dawn party, assembled in St. Petersburg of all places.⁸ They had followed an invitation by the Rodina party, one of whose close allies is Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.⁹ A small group assembled to protest against the rally, some of

8 | Friedrich Schmidt, “Böse Nazis, gute Nazis”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 21 Mar 2015, <http://faz.net/-hox-81a2o> (accessed 4 Jun 2015); Steffen Dobbert, “Obama, auch so ein Nazi”, *Zeit Online*, 23 Mar 2015, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-03/rusland-nazis-eu-rechte-konferenz-faschismus-europa-usa/komplettansicht> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

9 | Dmitry Rogozin was chairman of the Rodina party during the period 2003 to 2006.

whom were immediately arrested by the police.¹⁰ Only those with inside knowledge can understand how such proximity to nationalists can be reconciled with the fight against the alleged “neo-Nazis and fascists” in Kiev.

ECONOMY IN ROUGH WATERS

The sanctions imposed by the West are hitting the economy hard; the restrictions on access to the Western financial market in particular pose problems for Russian companies.

The national feeling of elation does not, in fact, correlate with the country’s economic situation, which is distinctly poor at the moment. The sanctions imposed by the West are hitting the economy hard; the restrictions on access to the Western financial market in particular pose problems for Russian companies. The tit-for-tat sanctions by Russia are resulting in significantly higher prices, particularly for food. In addition, the low oil price means lower state revenues and the costs for propping up the banks and major companies are putting pressure on the national budget. High levels of capital flight, clear signs of which had been in evidence from as far back as 2013, illustrate Russian population’s distrust of the current economic situation, which was clearly illustrated by the collapse of the rouble towards the end of last year.

Russian people joining ranks may be due to their capacity for suffering, maybe also to the conviction that the West’s intentions toward Russia are not benign and that one therefore has to face hard times together; alternatively, it may be due to the well-targeted propaganda, or maybe to a mixture of all these. In any case, there is currently no indication of the population rebelling against the Kremlin’s policies. Surveys confirm that the motivation among Russians for demonstrating to air their grievances is very low. Only twelve per cent of the population are prepared to take part in demonstrations to protest economic ills and only ten per cent to voice political dissatisfaction.¹¹

In this context one should not forget that the Russian population has had to endure a great deal already. The latest hardships only date back 15 years. While the period during which Boris Yeltsin presided over the country was seen in a fairly positive light in the

10 | “Russland heißt Europas Rechtsextreme willkommen”, *Zeit Online*, 22 Mar 2015, <http://zeit.de/politik/ausland/2015-03/russland-rechtsparteien-npd-udo-voigt> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

11 | Press release from 27 Mar 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/27-02-2015/protest-vozmozhnosti-i-gotovnost-uchastvovat> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

West, it entailed drastic repercussions for Russian society and for the economy, which were difficult to cope with. For most people in Russia, the 1990s went hand in hand with a massive decline in their living standards and fundamental uncertainty. They are therefore referred to as the “years of chaos”. Only a very few were clever enough to take advantage of the privatisation process and become rich in a short space of time. Monopolies developed, and with them came the oligarchs.



Putin’s sociopolitical initiatives after the “chaos years” under Yeltsin were at the expense of the much-needed modernisation of the Russian economy. | Source: carlfbagge, flickr ©©©©.

Only by taking all this into account can one understand how Vladimir Putin succeeded in becoming popular as President in a relatively short time. He appeared to bring back order to the country, people’s pay increased slowly, and pensions were paid on time. People did not take much account of the fact that the economic conditions were totally different for Putin than they had been for his predecessor Boris Yeltsin due to the developments in the oil price. While the oil price rarely rose above 20 U.S. dollars in the 1990s, it rose steadily up to 90 U.S. dollars between 2001 and 2008.¹² That provided the Russian treasury, whose revenues were predominantly derived from the sale of natural resources such

12 | Tecson, “Entwicklung der Ölpreise. Ölpreisentwicklung auf dem Weltmarkt im Rückblick”, <http://tecson.de/historische-oelpreise.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

as oil and gas, with entirely new options. Putin took advantage of the situation to ameliorate social hardships and build up state reserves. At the same time, the opportunity was missed to modernise and diversify the economy, thereby placing it on a broader footing. That makes it all the more vulnerable now.

Many do not see the increasing concentration of power in the Kremlin, which also began with Putin's arrival, as a problem. Surveys do not give the impression that a majority of Russians are unhappy about a lack of democracy. On the contrary: in March 2014, 38 per cent of respondents in a survey conducted by the Levada Center stated they were convinced that their country was undergoing a development towards democracy. Only some 15 per cent (and this proportion has remained stable since 2007) think their country is becoming increasingly more authoritarian.¹³

Currently, the predominant feeling in the country is that Putin is protecting Russia against external threats. The domestic situation could be an inducement to maintain these threats.

Moods can, of course, shift spontaneously, and there is no knowing how opinions will change over the course of a year of poor economic conditions. Currently, however, the predominant feeling in the country is that

Putin is protecting Russia against external threats. If the tensions in connection with Ukraine are resolved, the people may redirect their attention to the domestic situation, which could fuel dissatisfaction. This assumption could, however, also be an inducement to maintain the alleged external threats. In an article on the above-mentioned documentary published on 16 March 2015, the daily newspaper *Vedomosti* described it as representing "Putin's Farewell to the West".¹⁴ Anybody who admits openly to having lied appears unconcerned about opinion in the West. And the current denials about regular Russian troops being involved in eastern Ukraine also lack credibility after this film – quite apart from the fact that there are further indications of their existence. This appears to have been accepted as a price worth paying. Russia's turning away from the West did, in fact, probably begin much earlier. It has been a gradual process, the beginning of which is difficult to pin down.

13 | Press release from 17 Mar 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/17-03-2014/pozitsii-rossii-na-mirovoi-arene> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

14 | Andrei Sinitsyn, "Владимир Путин обозначил новый этап и уровень самоизоляции России", (Vladimir Putin outlined a new phase and the level of self-isolation of Russia), *Vedomosti*, 16 Mar 2015, <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/articles/2015/03/16/ot-redaktsii-putin-idet-na-rodinu> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

RUSSIA'S TURNING AWAY FROM THE WEST

It is legitimate to interpret Russia's involvement in the BRICS, an association of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, as a step to openly oppose what it perceives as the dominance of the West. It does seem surprising that Russia is seeking an alliance in which the former superpower places itself at the same level as states which are in part still facing the problems of developing countries. Russia is due to take over the BRICS presidency later this year.¹⁵ The main point on the agenda will be the implementation of the resolutions on a development bank of their own – to rival the IMF and the World Bank. A further common objective of the BRICS states is to counter the supremacy of the U.S. dollar.

The most obvious indication of Russia's aim to raise its profile in the international arena has been the project of the Eurasian Economic Union, which entered into effect on 1 January 2015. The founding members are Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Armenia has since joined as the fourth member state.

The structures for this union have already taken shape in very concrete form. Both the Council of the Eurasian Commission and its Collegium, modelled to a certain degree on EU structures, have already begun their

Both the Council of the Eurasian Commission and its Collegium, modelled to a certain degree on EU structures, have already begun their work, as has the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union.

work, as has the Court of the Eurasian Economic Union. The steps taken to implement the common economic area have so far been very pragmatic. They are aimed at harmonising standards, norms, regulations and taxes. Stressing this is important because this integration project is, in principle, a political one. After all, there do not appear to be compelling economic reasons for Russia to press ahead with this project. If one observes the volume of trade between the current member states, particularly before the agreement on the customs union, one sees that it only accounted for a small proportion of the total trading volume of each country. Furthermore, the economies are not complementary, but operate in competition with each other. The Russian President Vladimir Putin himself revealed that his motivation for the integration project was predominantly geopolitical in nature. On 3 October 2011, he wrote an article in the newspaper *Izvestia*, in which he presented his idea of the Eurasian Union to the public: "We

15 | "Meeting of BRICS heads of state and government", Kremlin, 15 Nov 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47017> (accessed 15 Jun 2015); BRICS, "Official Website of Russia's Presidency in BRICS", <http://en.brics2015.ru> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

suggest a powerful supranational association capable of becoming one of the poles in the modern world and serving as an efficient bridge between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region.”¹⁶ With this statement, Putin expressed his hope that the project would provide him greater negotiating power and that it would create a pole within a multipolar world.



Through cooperation with the BRICS countries and the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, Russia aims to strengthen its relevance in foreign politics and to oppose the policies of the West. | Source: Roberto Stuckert Filho, GCIS ZA, flickr ©©©.

Losing its superpower status hit Russia hard. Not least because, in its view, the Western partners have disregarded Russia's interests and wishes: Russia was not invited to join the Eastern Partnership. The Founding Act between NATO and Russia did not result in fundamental trust between NATO and Russia; Russia was not able to prevent the 1999 NATO mission against the Milošević regime in the former Yugoslavia aimed at ending the mass expulsion and murder of Kosovo Albanians. Nor was there any real prospect of integration into Western structures – be it due to a lack of capabilities or due to continuing distrust dating back to the Cold War era. From Russia's perspective, its interests were not taken into

16 | “Мы предлагаем модель мощного наднационального объединения, способного стать одним из полюсов современного мира и при этом играть роль эффективной ‘связки’ между Европой и динамичным Азиатско-Тихоокеанским регионом.” Cited in Vladimir Putin, “Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии – будущее, которое рождается сегодня” (A new integration project for Eurasia – a future that is born today), *Izvestia*, 3 Oct 2011, <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761#ixzz2mUZwYQ4h> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

account during the accession negotiations between Ukraine and the EU. Russians also felt hurt by the West's stance during the Olympic Games in Sochi: Russia was criticised unrelentingly and there appeared to be no appreciation of domestic developments in Russia on the part of the West. This was how former Soviet President Gorbachev described the mood within the country during a visit to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 2014: "The West has treated Russia like a loser for the last 25 years." His vision of a "common house of Europe", which he shared with the German Chancellor at the time, Helmut Kohl, did not attract sufficient enthusiastic supporters.

NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS – COULD THE WEST HAVE DONE MORE?

Russia was particularly critical of the eastern expansion of NATO and of the EU. In Russia's eyes, any rapprochement to the EU implies a simultaneous rapprochement to NATO. In the past, NATO membership frequently predated EU membership. While the Russian side concedes that there was no written agreement precluding an eastern expansion of NATO, that is what Russia has understood the agreements made in the 1990s to mean. Russia repeatedly signalled that it felt the West was ignoring its security interests. One only need to think back to Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference or to Medvedev's proposal to conduct talks on a European security architecture. However, the West never responded to these signals, as Russian security experts regularly point out. Nobody was forced to become a member of NATO or of the EU, and it happened at the countries' explicit wish. The sovereignty of Europe's countries is also enshrined in accepted law, and they are entitled to choose which alliances to enter. But Russia felt that this development was directed against itself and saw the geographic buffer between itself and NATO shrinking more and more.

Russia repeatedly signalled that it felt ignored its security interests by the West. However, the West never responded to these signals, as Russian security experts regularly point out.

The negotiations over an association agreement were meant to bring Ukraine closer to the EU. This would not only have meant that Ukraine, which Russia considered indispensable to the success of the Eurasian Economic Union, would have been lost to this integration project. It was also likely that the subject of Ukraine's potential NATO membership would be back on the agenda. The EU should, in principle, have realised how sensitive this issue was. The question is whether a different negotiating tactic would not

have been opportune, particularly in view of the fact that the EU was not even prepared to offer Ukraine the prospect of accession.



Western criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine is dismissed by Putin with the reference to "double standards" of the West and its interventions in Iraq and Libya. | Source: Roel Wijnants, flickr ©️️️.

Russia, for its part, intervened by exerting influence on former Ukrainian President Yanukovich, to good effect. However, no one had counted on the massive opposition by the Ukrainian population, which escalated to the extent that Yanukovich felt he had to flee the capital. Moscow's influence over Kiev then appeared to dwindle, but Russia regained the initiative by annexing Crimea. From its perspective, Russia defended its legitimate security interests by taking this action. Accusations by the West that this was in blatant contravention of international law were refuted with the comment that the West was operating according to double standards: one only need look at events in Kosovo, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. But there are also those who point out that the situation in Crimea is much more complex historically. The post-war order in Europe developed with a functioning Soviet Union in place. What we are seeing now are the belated repercussions of its collapse, which took its course with relatively little bloodshed 25 years ago.

The fact that Putin is receiving such widespread support for his decisive action in Crimea among the Russian population cannot only be explained by the fact that many Russians consider the

Crimean Peninsula as historically Russian territory. It also has to do with a certain satisfaction about finally standing up to the West. There is a feeling of having returned to the world stage and playing an important role. Russia can once more hold its head up high. Surveys indicate that it is important to many Russians to live in a large country that is noticed and respected by the world. The Levada Center regularly asks in its surveys which country people would prefer to live in: a country that is a major power, respected and even somewhat feared by the world, or a country with high living standards, even if it is not one of the most powerful countries in the world. In March 2014, 48 per cent of the respondents plumped for the major power, while 47 voted for the high living standards.¹⁷ By March 2015, the percentages had shifted a little towards the high living standards.¹⁸

THE FEAR OF A “COLOUR REVOLUTION”

The security threat perceived by Putin and his inner circle also has another name: “colour revolution”. This is the fear of an alternative model of society, which would entail the loss of their power and very probably also their wealth. There was the Orange Revolution in Ukraine back in 2004, but the other protest movements, including the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Arab Spring, have not been forgotten either. President Putin never tires of remarking that all these upheavals were initiated by the West, first and foremost the USA, with assistance from the NGOs, the so-called Fifth Column, operating in the countries. Those in power presumably fear that similar events could take place in Russia. The Moscow elite still vividly remember the mass protests in Moscow in 2011/2012 after the election fraud during the Duma elections and the so-called “castling” between Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin involving the presidential office. The protests must have come so unexpected for Putin that he was genuinely shocked. In those cases too, he spoke of forces in the West controlling the protests. Public debates ignore the question as to whether a middle class may already have developed in Russia, which would have something to lose if the regime became even more autocratic. Instead, efforts are made to ensure that such events cannot happen again. To this

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17 | Press release from 17 Mar 2014, <http://www.levada.ru/17-03-2014/pozitsii-rossii-na-mirovoi-arene> (accessed 29 Jun 2015). Third table from the top.

18 | Press release from 23 Mar 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/23-03-2015/pozitsii-rossii-na-mezhdunarodnoi-arene> (accessed 29 Jun 2015).

end, increasing pressure is exerted on NGOs, and instructions are sent out to the regions on how to take preventative action against a potential "colour revolution". There are also frequent statements made in the media that such a revolution would not be tolerated.

COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS IN THE UKRAINE CONFLICT

The Ukraine conflict illustrates that Russia has made a cost-benefit analysis of its own regarding its dispute with the West, which is not based on economic data. The Russian economy is already suffering considerably from the sanctions imposed by the West, particularly by the loss of trust among investors. But to date this appears to only have resulted in a further closing of ranks and increasingly strident propaganda. Russia's leadership is demonstrating in unprecedented fashion what hybrid warfare means, one of its aims being to undermine trust in any form of reporting. The measures to reform its military capabilities are already showing some results. Both the number of military manoeuvres and the number of instances of Russia violating the airspace of EU Member States are rising.¹⁹ Military expenditure currently makes up 4.2 per cent of Russian GDP;²⁰ despite the deteriorating economic situation, Russia intends to go ahead with its plans for the modernisation of its military arsenal.²¹ President Putin has made it clear that nuclear weapons figure prominently in this.

The Western partners have a different cost-benefit analysis. To Western democracies, it is essential to enable their own populations to prosper. Greater defence expenditure regularly meets with strong opposition. Against the backdrop of the current serious disputes with Russia, the Member States of the European Union will be facing uncomfortable decisions in this context. At their last summit in Wales,²² the NATO partners took important decisions and reconfirmed previous ones: the establishment of a

19 | "Mehr als 400 russische Militärmaschinen abgefangen", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 30 Jan 2015, <http://nzz.ch/international/europa/1.18472402> (accessed 4 Jun 2015); Kai Küster, "Russlands Kampfjets kommen näher", *tagesschau.de*, 30 Jan 2015, <http://tagesschau.de/nato-russland-luftraum-101.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

20 | "Russian Defense Budget to Hit Record \$81 Billion in 2015", *The Moscow Times*, 16 Oct 2014, <http://themoscowtimes.com/business/article/509536.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

21 | Vladimir Isachenkov, "Putin Spending Big On Military Modernization Despite Russia's Economic Woes", *The World Post*, 2 Apr 2015, http://huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/04/_n_6612418.html (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

22 | NATO, "Wales Summit Declaration", 5 Sep 2014, http://nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, (VJTF), a stronger presence in the eastern EU Member States, raising the national defence budgets to two per cent of the respective GDP. However, the implementation of the last point by the national parliaments is still outstanding in most countries. The decision by the EU to tie the easing of the sanctions against Russia to the implementation of the Minsk protocol²³ is correct in the current situation.



Despite the poor economic development and budgetary position of Russia, Putin sticks to a costly modernisation of the Russian military. | Source: Dmitry Terekhov, flickr ©©©.

CONCERTED EU ACTION AS A CLEAR SIGNAL

It is unlikely that the sanctions will produce any change in Russia's policies in the short term. The Western partners will therefore need to persevere and continue to act in concert. Disunity would weaken the EU at this point in time. If Moscow were to succeed in undermining unity within the EU, this would do untold damage to the credibility of the West.

Many observers in Russia assume that the conflict will continue for a long time. The ceasefire agreed in Minsk is fragile, and Russia's foreign policy has become unpredictable, not least because President Putin cannot afford to lose face. In this sense, he is not acting

23 | Federal Agency for Civic Education, "Dokumentation: Minsker Protokoll vom 5. September 2014", 17 Sep 2014, <http://bpb.de/191799> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

from a position of strength but from one of weakness. Foreign politics has become an instrument of domestic politics. Nor can one discount the possibility that Putin may not have made up his mind about what steps to take next and is waiting to see how the West will react before making any decisions. It appears that he had not counted on the EU states closing ranks and on the painful economic sanctions. It is therefore all the more important to maintain this concerted action as a clear signal. In addition, every effort must be made to seek to resolve the conflict with Russia by diplomatic means. There are currently not sufficient channels of communication open.

It would also be important to investigate what could be offered to Russian society. No doubt it is difficult to counter the current propaganda with anything that could make an impact. A first step would be to at least make objective information available to people in the Russian language. An alternative offering in Russian could well be worth a try, not least for the numerous ethnic German resettlers from the former USSR, who frequently obtain their information predominantly from the Russian media even in Germany. Many of these people still have close links with Russia and could take on a mediating role at civil society level. Further important measures could include study opportunities, work placements and other visiting opportunities, which would enable young Russians to gain their own impression of the West. And maybe it would be worth attempting once again to eliminate the hurdle the visa requirement represents for Russian people. One thing should be made perfectly clear: the West is opposed to Russia engaging in aggressive policies and attempting to deny other states their sovereignty. The West is not turning against the Russian people or against Russia as such. On the contrary: Russia is an important partner. It is in our interest to make common cause with Russia in countering global challenges such as the increasing Islamist fundamentalism and terror in the Middle East. This does, however, require the two sides to come to an understanding about common principles in foreign and security policy.

RING OF FRIENDS OR RING OF FIRE?

EASTERN EUROPE BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EURASIAN UNION

Stephan Malerius

The main concern for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which was launched in 2004, was to create a “ring of friends and stable states”¹ at the external borders of the European Union. Ten years later, in January 2015, former Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt concluded on Twitter that the EU is facing a ring of fire in its neighbourhood.²

The EU has shown itself to be neither prepared for the war Russia is waging in Ukraine, nor to have succeeded in solving the numerous (frozen) conflicts in its eastern neighbourhood over the past several years. These two issues are interrelated. The main reason for this is the incompatibility of the EU’s integrative policy with the Russian thinking on spheres of influence.³ From a Russian



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- 1 | In 2003, then President of the European Commission Romano Prodi said: “Instead of trying to establish new dividing lines, deeper integration between the EU and the ring of friends will accelerate our mutual political, economic and cultural dynamism.” Quoted from European Commission, “Wider Europe Neighbourhood: proposed new framework for relations with the EU’s Eastern and Southern Neighbours”, European Commission Press Release Database, 3 Nov 2003, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-03-358_en.htm (accessed 08 June 2015).
- 2 | Carl Bildt, Twitter post, 11 Jan 2015, 7.24 pm, <https://twitter.com/carlbildt>: “A decade or two ago we worked for a Europe surrounded by a ring of friends. Now we find ourselves surrounded by a ring of fire.” (accessed 8 Jun 2015).
- 3 | Cf. former Human Rights Commissioner of Russia Vladimir Lukin in an interview in February 2015 marking the first anniversary of the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine: “Unfortunately, the West played and still plays the most fateful role. Through the EU and NATO it tries to shift the earlier dividing lines in Europe, from the Elbe to the gates of Smolensk on our western border. [...] The doctrine of robbing Russia -

perspective, countries are “perceived as objects of action for powerful external forces and as territorial bones of contention”.⁴

A key event for the European-Russian rivalry in Eastern Europe was the EU Eastern Partnership summit held in Vilnius in November 2013. The summit was preceeded by blatant promotion on the part of the EU and Russia for at least four of six Eastern European countries. This had particularly fatal consequences for Ukraine:

Then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich refusing to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius was the starting point for the Euromaidan protests.

Then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich refused to sign an Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius, which had been negotiated through a process spanning several years. This decision appeared to be made under pressure from Russia, which had adopted a number of restrictions on imports of Ukrainian goods that summer. In addition, it had offered the bankrupt Ukraine a loan of 15 billion euros just before the summit if it would step back from signing the agreement. This yielding to Putin was the starting point for the Euromaidan protests before Yanukovich fled to Russia in February 2014. Initially, the Kremlin regarded the Maidan protests as an intra-Ukrainian affair. However, Ukraine’s foreign policy reorientation, which not only saw the signing of the Association Agreement with the European Union in the summer of 2014 but also struck the country’s non-aligned status from its constitution and openly aspired to join NATO, provoked Putin to launch a war against the neighbouring country.

Yet the Vilnius summit was not solely centered around Ukraine; it led the way for at least three other Eastern European countries. Georgia and Moldova decided to enter into an Association Agreement with the EU, while Armenia, which had also been involved in long negotiations with the EU, announced ahead of the summit that it would join the Eurasian Economic Union.

of its historical zone of influence in Ukraine and perhaps even Belarus has unfortunately been implemented in opposition to the Paris Charter of 1990.” Matthias Schepp, “Jahrestag des Maidan-Aufstands: ‘Im Palast herrschte Panik’”, *Spiegel Online*, 19 Feb 2015, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-1018970.html> (accessed 04 June 2015). Lukin’s representation of the situation is rather absurd as it omits the fact that the Paris Charter of 1990 codifies that every state has the ability to decide for itself the alliance it wishes to belong to.

4 | Anna Veronika Wendland, “Hilflos im Dunkeln”, *Osteuropa*, Sep/Oct 2014, p. 25 f.

This “trend-setting” outlines the dilemma of European foreign policy in Eastern Europe in recent years: the rivalry with Russia has meant the situation that the countries themselves are facing has been neglected – in terms of economic, foreign and domestic policy.

COMPETITION IN “MEDIAN EUROPE”

Nevertheless, with the Eastern Partnership, the EU had a program which was to be aligned with the constitutionality of the countries in its eastern neighbourhood: Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the countries of the Southern Caucasus, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan. Due to substantial commonalities, it was expedient to combine these countries in one specific neighbourhood program:

- They occupy an area between the EU and NATO and Russia.
- They are former Soviet republics.
- They are countries in transition.
- All these countries are facing territorial conflicts: in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan (over Nagorno-Karabakh), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and Moldova (Transnistria), these are frozen conflicts; Ukraine, however, is facing both a half-frozen conflict (Crimea) and a latent conflict (eastern Ukraine). Belarus is the only country without any territorial conflicts, though it makes up for this with a frozen political conflict (with President Lukashenko, who has ruled for over 20 years).

The fact that the EU would be entering into an open conflict with Russia’s interests in the region was underestimated when drafting the Eastern Partnership:

- Russia considers this area between itself and the EU to be a “canonical territory”. The former Soviet republics are seen as a “near abroad”, where influence by other actors is not tolerated.⁵

5 | Cf. Robert Kagan, “New Europe, Old Russia”, *The Washington Post*, 6 Feb 2008, <http://wapo.st/1MRI72p> (accessed 4 Jun 2015). Kagan foresaw this confrontation already in February 2008: “Putin laments the fall of the Soviet Union and seeks to regain predominant influence in the Baltic states and Eastern Europe, as well as over Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the rest of what Russians call their ‘near abroad’. But the former are now formally part of Europe, and the latter are what Europeans call their ‘new neighbourhood’ [...] It is not hard to imagine the tremors along the Euro-Russian fault line erupting into confrontation. A crisis over Ukraine, which wants to join NATO, could bring confrontation with Russia. Conflict between the Georgian government and Russian-supported separatist forces in ▶

- The Russian elite is not interested in the democratic transformation of the countries in the area bordering the EU; the example of a modern and prosperous nation in its immediate vicinity would cast a harsh light on the failed reforms in Russia itself and could have a "contagious" effect.
- Russia is not interested in a solution to the territorial conflicts in its neighbourhood because it would stand to lose important influence in the region.

In 2008, Hannes Adomeit already pointed out these conflicting interests of the EU and Russia in the region. His study anticipates much of what actually materialised between 2013 and 2015: in particular, the tightening of Russian foreign and security policy both in terms of rhetoric and the "military reality".⁶ Adomeit's study is also distinguished by the fact that he closely intertwines the rivalry between Russia and the EU with the perspectives of the "Median European" countries, as he refers to the region.

The war Russia is waging on Ukraine also reflects the competition between two models of integration – European and Eurasian.

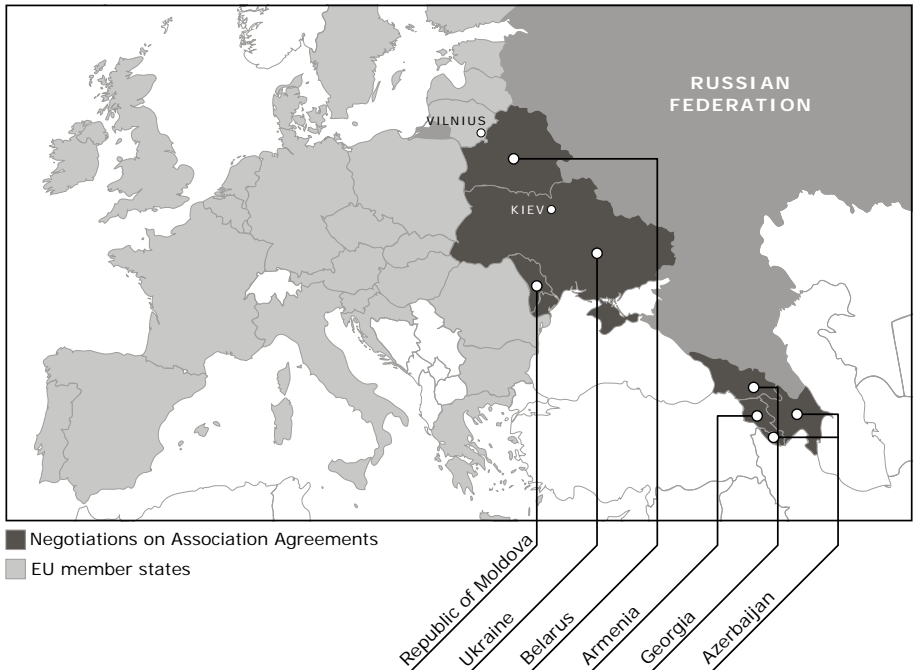
Seven years later, the Russian-European rivalry has resulted in an open conflict to be played out in Ukraine due to Russia's military aggression and in which it is mainly Ukrainians who are paying with their lives. In Europe is largely ignored that the war Russia is waging on Ukraine does not center around minority rights, separatism or the problems of a supposedly divided country but instead is also largely focused on the competition between two models of integration – the European and Eurasian. Furthermore, with the war in Ukraine, Putin attempts to divert attention from domestic problems such as the failed modernisation of Russia, the corruption that is rampant because nothing is done to combat it and the threat of a contagious knock-on effect of the Maidan protests.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia could spark a military conflict between Tbilisi and Moscow. What would Europe and the United States do if Russia played hardball in Ukraine or Georgia? They might well do nothing."

6 | Cf. Hannes Adomeit, "Russland – EU und NATO: Konkurrenz in 'Zwischeneuropa'", in: Hannes Adomeit/Peter W. Schulze/Andrei V. Zagorski (eds.), *Russland, die EU und "Zwischeneuropa"*, Sozialwissenschaftliche Schriftenreihe, Oct 2008, p.3-26, <http://iilp.at/index.php?download=103.pdf> (accessed 04 June 2015). With regard to Ukraine, Adomeit quotes a source that directly anticipates the events of 2014/2015: "According to American reports, Putin is said to have become more explicit in the NATO-Russia Council and questioned the sovereignty of Ukraine, from there going on to mention that if Crimea and eastern Ukraine were to accede to NATO, they could be detached from Ukraine and annexed to Russia." Cf. *ibid.* p. 13.

Fig. 1

Countries Participating in the Eastern Partnership and the EU Summit in Vilnius in 2013⁷



EUROPEAN INTEGRATION: EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY AND EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

In May 2004, alongside its eastward enlargement, the EU launched a program focused on its new immediate neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe and ten countries in the Mediterranean region in the form of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The framework for economic, political and cultural cooperation with these new neighbours was outlined in the ENP. In the process, the intention is to offer these countries incentives to modernise their politics, economy and society through a stronger association with the EU and to provide support in respecting human rights, the rule of law and the development of the market economy. The pace of this rapprochement between the EU and ENP countries should depend on the extent to which individual countries engage in the program's objectives. The ENP explicitly did not include any prospects of membership.

7 | Cf. "Vilnius Summit: Where Former Soviet Republics Stand", novinite.com, 28 Nov 2013, <http://novinite.com/articles/155938> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

Relations with Russia have found new footing following the 2004 expansion: In May 2005, a program was agreed upon for the creation of four “Common Spaces” (economy; freedom, security and justice; external security; research, education and cultural aspects). “Road maps” were to serve to fill these spaces. However, the program proved to be too non-binding. Although it included an extensive and rather specific task catalogue, its implementation depended on political will, which was ultimately lacking. Here, it is worth noting that drawing up an Association Contract with the EU that went beyond the Common Spaces was certainly discussed by the Russian establishment in 2005. However, this would have had to have included restrictions on or completely excluded the EU’s influence over Russia, while at the same time Russia wanted to be involved in discussions and decision-making processes within the EU.⁸

The biggest problem facing the ENP was that it lacked specifics and did not differentiate between eastern and southern neighbouring countries. It was for this reason that, at France’s urging, the Union for the Mediterranean was established, followed shortly after by the Eastern Partnership at the initiative of Poland and Sweden. The decision was made at the European Council in December 2008, and the founding summit was held in Prague on 7 May 2009.

The main objective of the EaP was to establish the necessary conditions for political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries in Eastern Europe. The EaP is founded upon the conclusion of extensive Association Agreements, which also include “deep and extensive” free trade agreements. The Association Agreements were intended to replace the existing and somewhat outdated Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) and renew the EU’s relations with its partners.

Russia initially reacted negatively to the Eastern Partnership. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called the program an establishment of the EU’s influence in its eastern neighbourhood.⁹ And by 2008, Moscow had made the accusation that the initiative forced the countries in question to choose between Russia and the EU.

8 | Cf. Hannes Adomeit/Rainer Lindner, “Die ‘Gemeinsamen Räume’ Rußlands und der EU. Wunschbild oder Wirklichkeit”, *SWP-Studie* 34, Nov 2005, http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2005_S34_adm_ldr_ks.pdf (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

9 | Cf. *ibid.*

Voices from the Duma called on the EU “to consult with Russia before starting any initiatives that concern Russia’s ‘traditional interests’”.¹⁰

EURASIAN INTEGRATION: EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION

Out of the realisation that the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had never functioned properly in the wake of the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union and certainly as a reaction to the Eastern Partnership, Russia began pushing its own models of integration:

Russia began pushing its own model of integration: a Customs Union was established in 2010, and in 2011, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan decided on the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union.

a Customs Union was established in July 2010, which included Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. All customs borders between the three states were dismantled by July 2011. Through free trade agreements, Ukraine enjoyed duty-free access to the common market of the Customs Union for many goods. In November 2011, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan approved the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) by January 2015.

The founding treaty was signed in May 2014. Armenia joined in October 2014. Accordingly, the EAEU was launched in January 2015 with four member states, with Kyrgyzstan joining as a fifth member in the course of the year. The EAEU is headed by the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council, which is made up of the heads of state of the member states, and the Eurasian Integration Council comprised of prime ministers. The primary objective of the EAEU is to facilitate the exchange of goods, capital, services and labour.¹¹ Furthermore, it seeks the free choice of training and work places, joint coordination in areas such as energy, industry, agriculture and transport, and in the longer term, a common energy market (2019), a common oil and gas market (2025) and the establishment of conditions for a uniform financial market (2025). At an EAEU summit in Astana in March 2015, Vladimir Putin once again raised the idea of a common currency.¹²

10 | Susan Steward, “Russland und die Östliche Partnerschaft. Harsche Kritik, punktuell Kooperationeninteresse”, *SWP-aktuell* 21, Apr 2009, http://swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/aktuell/2009A21_stw_ks.pdf (accessed 6 Apr 2015).

11 | For more on the Eurasian Union and the “Game of Unions”(Europe and Eurasia): Nicu Popescu, “Eurasian Union: the real, the imaginary and the likely”, *Challiot Papers* 132, Sep 2014, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/CP_132.pdf (accessed 8 Jun 2015).

12 | Cf. “Putin Proposes Talks on Currency Union”, *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, 20 Mar 2015, <http://rferl.org/content/kazakhstan-putin-lukashenka-nazarbaev/26911076.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

Including territories to the EAEU that officially belong to states associated with the EU is an indication that the European integration policy is intended to be actively torpedoed.

An expansion of the EAEU to include the conflict regions of South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria and the DPR/LPR (Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic), which are de-facto occupied by Russia

and are not internationally recognised states, is repeatedly a topic of discussion. The fact that these are territories that officially belong to the EU associated states of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova is an indication that through the EAEU the European integration policy in the region is intended to be actively torpedoed.

A DIFFERENTIATED APPROACH

With the signing of the Association Agreements between the European Union and Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in June 2014 and Armenia joining the EAEU in October 2014, the region has lost its character as Median Europe. For the EU, this means that a further differentiation of its policy towards its eastern neighbours is essential.¹³ Both the internal development of the countries and Russia's policies in the region will need to be taken into consideration.

Belarus

Out of all the Soviet Union successor states, the relations between Belarus and Russia were always the closest. Already by the mid-1990s, Presidents Lukashenko and Yeltsin had decided to establish a Union State, yet once Putin took office in 2000, this resulted in very little real political impact: while Putin framed the Union as the inclusion of Belarus in the Russian Federation, Lukashenko insisted on an equal merger.

However, irrespective of the largely formal Union State idea, there are numerous profound links between the two countries: In terms of economy, Belarus depends considerably on support from

13 | This is what Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makey was referring to in mid-February when he said: "The European Union should have a 'differentiated approach' to dealing with the countries involved in its Eastern Partnership program and look for mutually acceptable formats of cooperation. [...] Someone wants to be a member of the European Union in the future, someone sees himself as a member of the EU in the distant future, and someone simply wants to have proper economic and political relations with it." Iryna Turchyna, "EU should treat each Eastern Partnership country differently, Makey says", *Belapan*, 20 Feb 2015, http://belapan.com/archive/2015/02/20/en_16040220H (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

Russia. This endowment of the Belarusian state budget through reduced gas prices, revenues from oil export duties and lending amounts to 7.7 billion U.S. dollars per year.¹⁴ Russia is currently building the first nuclear power plant in northern Belarus and owns 100 per cent of the gas pipeline network in Belarus, through which Russian gas is transported to Europe. Border controls at the common "Union State border" are practically non-existent.



Lukashenko and Putin this spring: A permanent distrust marks the relationship between the two heads of state. | Source: Kremlin ©📷

A treaty on military cooperation has also been in place between the two countries since 1997. Every two years, large-scale military exercises are held alternatively in Belarus and Russia, including "Zapad" (West) in 2009, in which an attack on Poland was simulated.¹⁵ Russia maintains a radar station near the military airfield in Baranovichi as part of a joint CIS air defence force, and both sides also closely coordinate their arms industries with one another.

However, problems in the relations between Belarus and Russia result among other things from the mutual personal dislike of Presidents Putin and Lukashenko as well as from the question

14 | Cf. German Economic Team Belarus, "Bewertung der wirtschaftlichen Lage durch GET Belarus", Get Belarus, Sep 2014, <http://get-belarus.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/WAB-2014-01.pdf> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

15 | Cf. Anna Dunin, "Intel Brief: Poland on Edge Over Russian Drills", *The International Relations and Security Network*, 18 Nov 2009, <http://isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=109702&Ing=en> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

of Belarus' actual political independence from Russia, which is rarely discussed openly but forms a breeding ground for constant mistrust.

It is for this reason that Lukashenko has perfected a "see-saw policy" between Russia and the EU over the past decade, where, despite economic dependencies on all sides, he makes an effort to occasionally take independent positions in terms of foreign policy. This was most evident in 2008 when he refused to recognise Russian occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the Russian-Georgian war. This was followed by a cautious rapprochement between Belarus and the EU accompanied by a rapid deterioration of Russian-Belarusian relations. Lukashenko's release of political prisoners was observed with suspicion by Moscow, while the EU in turn lifted account blocks and entry restrictions. This rapprochement came to an abrupt end with the presidential elections held in December 2010 when, after a surprisingly liberal campaign, a peaceful demonstration on the eve of the elections was brutally suppressed. This once again resulted in Belarus being isolated from Europe and returned deep into Moscow's sphere of influence.

As a founding member of the EAEU and given its economic dependence on Russia, Belarus remains destined for Eurasian integration. Aside from institutionalised cooperation, there is nevertheless strong potential for enhanced sectoral cooperation between Belarus and the EU.

Armenia

Strong historical ties also exist between Armenia and Russia. Russia is seen as the protector of the country, whose borders are closed to its eastern neighbour, Azerbaijan, due to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, and its southern neighbour, Turkey, due to the issue of the Armenian genocide in 1915/1916. Alongside the Republic of Moldova, Armenia is one of the poorest countries in the region and does not have significant own resources or access to the sea. In terms of (energy) industry, the country is heavily dependent on Russia.

In the war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region that raged between Armenia and Azerbaijan between 1991 and 1994, more than 40,000 people were killed and more than one million people became refugees. Since the ceasefire in May 1994, Armenia has maintained control over Nagorno-Karabakh, which is located in

Azerbaijani territory and is inhabited by ethnic Armenians. The conflict is politically frozen; yet time and again it descends into a military conflict with many victims. Although oil-rich Azerbaijan is likely to be far superior to its neighbour militarily speaking – Azerbaijan’s military budget is about as high as the entire state budget of Armenia – it shies away from open confrontation. This is due to the Russian military presence in Armenia. Russia maintains an air base in Gyumri.

The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is politically frozen; yet time and again it descends into a military conflict with many victims.

In 2012 and 2013, Armenia had been negotiating with the EU on an Association Agreement as part of the Eastern Partnership, making good progress by regional standards (compared to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) by mid-2013.¹⁶ Still in the summer of 2013, it had been expected that Armenia would establish an Association Agreement with the EU at the summit in Vilnius. Russia responded to this development with a short-term increase in the prices of energy supplies to Armenia. In early September 2013, Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan travelled to Moscow to meet with Putin, where he made the surprising announcement that Armenia would join the Eurasian Union. It was then reported that Putin not only “reminded” Sargsyan of Armenia’s economic dependence on Russia,¹⁷ but also “informed” him that Russia had just concluded an agreement on arms sales with Azerbaijan measuring in the billions.

This existential economic and military dependence on Russia dominates Armenia’s foreign policy. Unlike with Russia, no fundamental security guarantees are realistically likely to come from the EU either with regards to the conflict with Azerbaijan (which the EU is courting because of its oil) or the conflict with NATO member Turkey. Nevertheless, Armenia is interested in closer cooperation with the EU, which, unlike Russia, is seen as an engine for the country’s modernisation.

16 | For details, cf. Olga Kvashuk et al., International Renaissance Foundation / The Open Society Foundations / The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *European Integration Index 2013 for Eastern Partnership Countries*, http://eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP_Index_2013_0.pdf (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

17 | “Putin and Sargsyan both used the Moscow meeting to highlight Russia’s massive economic presence in Armenia [...]. Russian cumulative investment in Armenia currently exceeding \$3 billion, or approximately one half of total foreign investment in this country whose total annual total GDP was reported at \$9.8 billion in 2012.” Quoted from Vladimir Socor, “Armenia Chooses Russia and Eurasia over the European Union”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 156, 5 Sep 2013, http://jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41319 (accessed 4 Jun 2015).



While Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan (l.) actively negotiated with the EU on an association agreement in 2012 and 2013, he announced in September 2013 Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Union and therefore made a U-turn under Russian pressure. | Source: Enzo Zucchi, European Council, flickr ©①⑤©.

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is the only country in Eastern Europe to show no serious interest in either the European or Eurasian model of integration. The rivalry between Russia and the EU is therefore at its lowest in Azerbaijan. Due to its immense oil reserves, the country is largely economically independent. Azerbaijan is the only Muslim country of the six EaP countries and has close historical ties to Turkey. Neither of the two countries have any diplomatic relations with neighbouring Armenia.

Azerbaijan's policy towards Russia is marked by cautious reserve and a kind of mutual diplomatic inaction: Although Azerbaijan would have been justified in condemning Russia's actions in Crimea as it bears similarity to the pattern of the Armenian occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh, no open criticism of Moscow was levelled by Baku. No official comment has been made even on Russia's repressive handling of Crimean Tatar, another Muslim ethnic group. However, Azerbaijan is in the process of negotiating with the European Union on the supply of Caspian oil (and likely gas as well) bypassing Russia via Georgia and Turkey to Italy. Russia observes with distrust the way in which Caspian oil makes Europe less dependent on Russian energy supplies, yet is careful

not to openly criticise Baku's leadership for this. Unlike with all the other Eastern European countries, Russia's economic influence on Azerbaijan is low.



In 2014, Azerbaijan has chaired the Council of Europe. Nevertheless, it lacks a common foundation of values with the countries of the European Union: Baku has no understanding for European criticism of various human rights violations in the South Caucasian state. | Source: Dominique Edte, flickr @👤👤.

However, the South Caucasus state is not seeking an association with the European Union. Although it participates formally in the program of the Eastern Partnership, the signing of a visa facilitation agreement with the EU at the summit in Vilnius is the extent of its commitment. However, there is a distinct lack of a common foundation of values. In particular, Baku has little understanding for the European criticism of the violation of human rights in Azerbaijan, for the brutal actions of the security forces and the lack of civil liberties. The EU's main problem with Azerbaijan is the double standards in place: the human rights situation in the country is worse than in Belarus with nearly 100 political prisoners serving time in Azerbaijani prisons; in 2014 there was a wave of repression against the opposition, journalists beaten and accounts of independent institutions blocked. At the same time, the country held the Presidency of the Council of Europe in 2014 and the EU has never seriously discussed sanctions against the Aliyev regime, unlike in the case of Belarus.

Russia has understood that the combination of an authoritarian state on the one hand, and an abundance of resources on the other constitutes a political dilemma for the European Union. This dilemma, together with the frozen Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, provide important leverage for Russia to exert its – albeit limited – political influence on its southern neighbours.

Georgia

Since the Revolution of Roses brought Mikheil Saakashvili the presidency in 2003, Georgian (foreign) policy has focused on the European Union. Fundamental reforms had been implemented in Georgia long before the start of the Eastern Partnership: reduced bureaucracy and economic liberalisation meant that the old elites and networks were largely disempowered and state institutions sustainably strengthened. In addition, corruption and crime were prosecuted and the police in particular saw radical reform.¹⁸

Saakashvili's foreign policy priority was the reintegration of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adjara into Georgian territory. This goal was achieved in the case of Adjara, but failed in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which border Russia. This policy has resulted in a rapid deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations, with Russia imposing economic embargoes and closing border crossings in 2007. Tensions escalated in August 2008 during a five-day war between Georgia and Russia in which some 850 people lost their lives. "Georgian Dream", established by oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, has been the ruling party since 2012 and has thus far sought without success to improve relations with Russia.

The flip side of such shattered relations with Russia is Georgia's interest in closer integration into European and Western structures: a strategic partnership with NATO was concluded in 2004 and Georgia was in negotiations with the EU on an Association Agreement beginning in 2008, which was concluded at the EU summit in Vilnius in November 2013 and signed in June 2014 in Brussels. Amongst the Georgian people, the policy of European rapprochement enjoys broad support. By contrast, Russia's intention

18 | Some reformers from Saakashvili's first term of office took over important functions in the Ukrainian government formed in autumn 2014: Alexander Kvitashvili is the Ukrainian Minister of Healthcare, Eka Zguladze is the First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Saakashvili himself serves as an adviser to President Poroshenko, as well as Governor of the Odessa region since late May.

is primarily to torpedo the European integration of its southern neighbour via the breakaway regions there: Moscow concluded a strategic partnership alliance last year with the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, regions which both officially belong to Georgia; this is seen as an attempt towards legal legitimisation of Russian annexation.¹⁹



Georgian soldiers on their return from the front: The attempt to reintegrate the regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Adzharia in the Georgian territory by then-Georgian President Saakashvili was followed by a five-day war with Russia in August 2008. | Source: Håkan Henriksson ©1.

Georgia has faced and continues to face immense economic, political and military pressures from Russia and the European Union has thus far not reacted appropriately: "Russian advances, including the removal of Georgian territory in 2008, have not lead to the countermeasures that were presumably required,"²⁰ writes retired General Klaus Dieter Naumann. He contends that this mistake also contributed to the 2014 crisis in Ukraine. Naumann urges the West to affirm that the changing of European borders by force will not be tolerated, yet to do so "without returning to the Cold War, but instead by sending a clear signal of 'thus far and no further'!"²¹

19 | Cf. Mikhail Bushuev, "Russland und Südossetien. „Maximale Integration“, *Deutsche Welle*, 17 Feb 2015, <http://dw.de/p/1EdD6> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

20 | Klaus Dieter Naumann, "Hat der Westen alles falsch gemacht? Über das Verhältnis des Westens zu Moskau von 1988 bis heute", *Die Politische Meinung*, Special Volume Oct 2014, p.77, http://kas.de/wf/doc/kas_38977-544-1-30.pdf (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

21 | Naumann's criticism is shared by many observers; for example, Stefan Auer said "Europas Reaktion auf Russlands imperialistische Ambitionen war inadäquat." Quoted from Stefan Auer, "Der Maidan, die EU und die Rückkehr der Geopolitik", in: Katharina Raabe/Manfred Sapper (eds.), *Testfall Ukraine – Europa und seine Werte*, Berlin, 2015, p. 206.

Republic of Moldova

The paradox of the political development of the Republic of Moldova over the past decade lies in the fact that it was the communists assumed to be loyal to Moscow under President Voronin who sustainably strengthened the European vector of the country after 2005. In 2011, the Republic of Moldova held negotiations with the EU on an Association Agreement, which was successfully concluded at the summit in Vilnius in 2013. The agreement was signed in June 2014 and ratified in July in Chisinau. Already by April 2014, the visa requirement for Moldovan nationals travelling to the EU had been lifted.

Although the country, which borders Ukraine to the east and Romania in the west, is not of strategic importance to Russia, and despite the fact that, unlike in Georgia or Ukraine, NATO membership has never seriously been discussed in the Republic of Moldova, the country's European rapprochement is a thorn in Putin's side. Russia has a great deal of leverage in influencing the situation in the Republic of Moldova and puts it to use:

- The country is almost entirely dependent on Russian energy supplies. Half of the Moldovan state gas company Moldovagas belongs to the Russian company Gazprom.
- Russia is the main market for Moldovan agricultural products, particularly for Moldovan wine.
- Hundreds of thousands of Moldovan guest workers work in Russia. Their transfers of funds make up a large part of the Moldovan GNP.
- Russia controls and finances some of the country's political parties. Currently most of this control is directed towards the "Party of Socialists", which became the strongest parliamentary party in the November 2014 elections.
- The Moldovan oligarchs who dominate the economy, politics and media in the Republic of Moldova have made their fortunes through opaque business ties in Russia.
- Political leaders in the Gagauzia autonomous region in the southern part of the country have long threatened secession from the Republic of Moldova and annexation to Russia.
- In the Transnistria region that broke away 25 years ago, Russia has established an extensive arsenal and has stationed some 2,000 troops there, refusing to reduce this troop deployment despite an agreement put in place since 1999.

Russia uses the frozen Transnistrian conflict in particular to destabilise the situation in the Republic of Moldova. Transnistria is considered to be a “black hole” in Europe where arms are illegally traded, human trafficking takes place and money is laundered.²²

Despite the Republic of Moldova’s numerous structural problems, there is no alternative but to implement the Association Agreement with the EU: “If we were to say now that everything has failed,” says Elmar Brok, “we would be placing the Republic of Moldova in the lion’s mouth of Russia and Putin will have won, which we of course do not want.”²³

Ukraine

The milestones of political development in Ukraine over the past year and a half are well-known: the corrupt regime of Viktor Yanukovich, the Euromaidan protests, Yanukovich’s escape, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the war in the eastern part of the country. Four issues of concern neglected in Western discourse bear highlighting:

Despite the Republic of Moldova’s numerous structural problems, there is no alternative but to implement the Association Agreement with the EU.

- The fighting in the Lugansk and Donetsk territories is not an intra-Ukrainian confrontation or a conflict with pro-Russian separatists, rather is an act of Russian aggression against Ukraine.
- A major reason for the war Russia is waging against Ukraine is Ukraine’s decision not to join the Eurasian Union, instead choosing the path of European rapprochement. This is tantamount to a Russian war by proxy to which it is mainly Ukrainians who have fallen victim.
- The EU and the West bear some responsibility for solving the conflict due to their international obligations: in autumn 1990, every NATO country and what was then the Soviet Union signed the Paris Declaration, in which the principles of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 were reaffirmed. These include the inviolability of territorial boundaries, the renunciation of violence in states’ dealings with one another and the freedom of each state to be able to decide for itself which alliances it would likely engage in.

22 | Cf. Jan Marinus Wiersma, “Bericht: Ad-hoc-Delegation für Moldawien 05. und 06. Juni 2002”, 2 Jul 2002, p. 6, <http://europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/committees/afet/20021007/473437DE.pdf> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

23 | Keno Verseck, “Warnung der NATO: Putin hat die Republik Moldau im Blick”, *Spiegel Online*, 26 Feb 2015, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-1020428.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

In addition, in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, the United States, Great Britain and Russia pledged to Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine to respect their sovereignty and existing borders (Art. 1), as well as their political and economic independence (Art. 2 f.) in return for their renunciation of nuclear weapons.

- Successful political and economic reforms in Ukraine are the most effective tool in the conflict with Russia. These reforms can only succeed if guarantees are made over the security of the remaining, non-occupied Ukrainian territory. The West must advocate for those guarantees.

CONCLUSION

The European and the Eurasian integration models are fundamentally different: by seeking rapprochement with the EU, states are provided with support for modernisation, good governance and economic reforms. The Copenhagen Criteria codifies the standards for European rapprochement in a way that is both transparent and applies equally to all countries. European integration is based on the self-determination and sovereignty of states, which have entered freely into the decision to engage in European rapprochement (or to reject this; see Iceland).

States choosing to integrate into the Eurasian Economic Union are promised cheap energy, loans, state budget subsidies and military assistance. The Eurasian Economic Union is designed as a rival project to that of the European Union for rapid geographical growth, which is to be achieved through economic and military pressure. Russia is the dominant state, and no guarantees are given regarding the sovereignty and integrity of potential acceding countries.

Despite these differences, the compatibility of the two integration models must be scrutinised: ahead of the meeting in Minsk on curbing the violence in Ukraine in February 2015, Angela Merkel once again raised the idea of a free trade area from Lisbon to Vladivostok.²⁴ At the same time, relationships with Russia will have to be redefined. The policy of integration and partnership for modernisation has failed. However, continuing this dialogue with Russia is essential despite the fact that it is currently unclear who in the country's political leadership this can be discussed with.

24 | Cf. Hans-Jürgen Maurus, "Merkels Handels-Angebot. Das laute Schweigen der Russen", *tagesschau.de*, 23 Jan 2015, <http://tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/merkel-freihandel-russland-105.html> (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

In addition, the policy towards eastern neighbourhood states must be fundamentally reworked. According to Bundestag President Norbert Lammert, the continuation and modification of the Eastern Partnership is one of the priority tasks of the EU. However, this process cannot follow a standard format since each partner country is subject to its own unique conditions and requirements and the principle of self-determination must be applied.²⁵

25 | German Bundestag, "Lammert: Östliche Partnerschaft der EU weiterentwickeln", 1 Oct 2014, http://bundestag.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2014/pm_141001/332912 (accessed 4 Jun 2015).

POWER STRUGGLE OR RELIGIOUS WAR?

THE CONFESSIONALISATION OF CONFLICTS IN THE ARAB WORLD: THE SITUATION IN SYRIA, LEBANON AND IRAQ

Martin Pabst



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Armed conflicts in the Arab world are often referred to as “ethnic conflicts” or “religious wars” and assumed to be unavoidable. When viewed from this standpoint, Arabs are the sworn enemies of Kurds and Iranians, Muslims are fierce opponents of Jews and Christians, and Sunni and Shiite Muslims are in a state of constant feud. However, other observers refute the claim that the conflicts have an underlying ethnic, religious or tribal motivation. They believe that existing resentments are simply being instrumentalised in the struggle for power, expansion or control over resources. Using the examples of Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, this article investigates whether and to what extent ethnic and religious identities determine the actions of the protagonists in these conflicts.

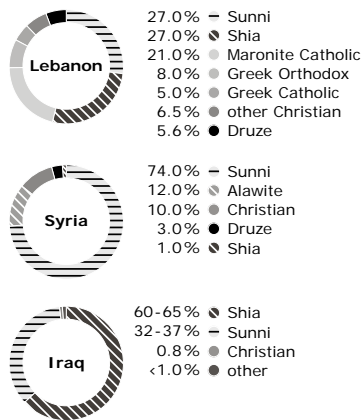
In Europe, in the wake of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, sovereign territorial states began to take the place of supranational empires. This process was completed after the First World War with the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires. The 19th century saw the spread of the idea of the nation state, in which the nation and its people identify with the polity. The nation state seeks to create a homogeneous body politic based on an ethnic, linguistic or cultural foundation (*Kulturnation*, cultural nation) or on the citizens’ will (*Staatsnation*, willed nation). Group identities are depoliticised or levelled out by means of administration and laws, the nation state’s ideology, language policy and educational system and through compulsory military service. This homogenisation may also take place via resettlement or the persecution of particular sections of the population.

The Arab world followed a different pattern. With the exception of Morocco, the Arabian Peninsula and Oman, this region was formerly part of the Ottoman Empire. The provinces of Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus, Mosul, Baghdad and Basra were the predecessors of today's Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. They are extremely diverse in ethnic, religious and tribal terms and have strong, overlapping group identities.

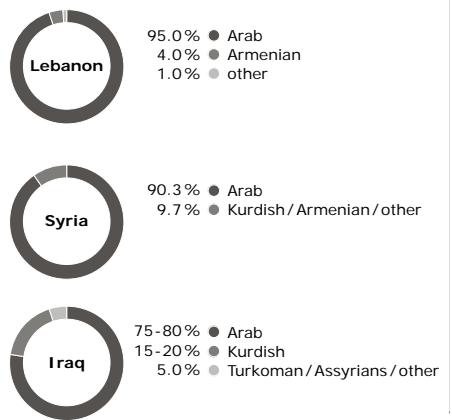
Fig. 1
Population composition



Religious Groups



Ethnic Groups



Source: Own illustration based on: CIA, *The World Factbook*, 2013-2014, Washington DC, <http://cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook> (accessed 12 Jun 2015). Data on Lebanon is controversial for lack of updated census.

Over the ages, individualism has been afforded little significance in these societies. People are part of an extended family, and also of a tribe, a religious group and an ethnic/linguistic/cultural community. Group identities continue to carry great weight in the Middle East, despite the fact that individualism is beginning to take hold among today's youth, partly as a result of their access to global media and social networks. Religious groups have particular significance because of their historic role over past centuries. They have become the main political and social frameworks for identity. However, they are not necessarily linked to extreme devoutness.

In the Ottoman Empire there was no nation, just a Muslim "nationality", along with "millets" (self-administered and additionally taxed non-Muslim religious communities, such as Jews, Armenian Apostolic Christians and Greek Orthodox Christians). Their religious leader was also their political leader, and in return he was responsible for the loyalty of his community to the government. This system allowed the communities to live peacefully side-by-side for many centuries.¹

In the Ottoman Empire, Shiites were accused of being "fifth columnists" of the Persians. Post-Islamic religious communities such as the Alawites and the Druze found themselves even more disadvantaged.

Shiites had no legal status because Sunni Islam was the state religion. In the Mesopotamian provinces they were constantly accused of being "fifth columnists" of the Persians.

They were barred from holding high administrative or military positions. In 1915/1916 the Shiites rose up in protest against the Ottomans.² Post-Islamic religious communities such as the Alawites (also known as the Nusayris) and the Druze found themselves even more disadvantaged. The followers of both these religious groups withdrew to live in the mountainous regions. Periods of persecution alternated with periods of pragmatic tolerance.³

In the Ottoman Empire, religious communities did not only provide identity, but also cared for the solidarity and survival of their members. The reach of the government was limited in the Arab provinces, so in times of economic need, war and natural catastrophe people fell back on their religious or tribal communities.

- 1 | Cf. Udo Steinbach, *Die Türkei im 20. Jahrhundert. Schwieriger Partner Europas*, Bergisch-Gladbach, 1996, p. 66 f.
- 2 | Cf. Henner Fürtig, "Irak", in: Werner Ende/Udo Steinbach (eds.), *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*, Munich, 5th edition 2005, p. 516.
- 3 | Cf. William Harris, *Lebanon. A History. 600-2011*, Oxford, 2012, p. 85.

Their members lived in particular areas, villages or urban districts; they married each other, were given jobs by their friends and family and helped each other in times of need. Today, religious communities in the Arab world still provide their members with solidarity and help when times are hard. Furthermore, the fundamental lack of individual and civil rights means that religious and tribal communities are vital for lobbying the government on issues that affect their members.

DIVIDE AND RULE

When the power of the Ottoman Empire began to fade in the 19th century, the European powers hoped to be able to make some territorial gains. They tried to fuel tensions between the different population groups in order to destabilise the rule of the sultan, and they instigated and encouraged the growth of independence movements.

The European nations used the pretext of protecting minorities to meddle with the internal policies of the Ottoman Empire. France became the protective power for the Catholics, the Russian Empire protected the Orthodox Christians, and Britain protected the Jews. The minorities benefited from this external support, but their privileged status bred resentment among the Muslim majority population.⁴

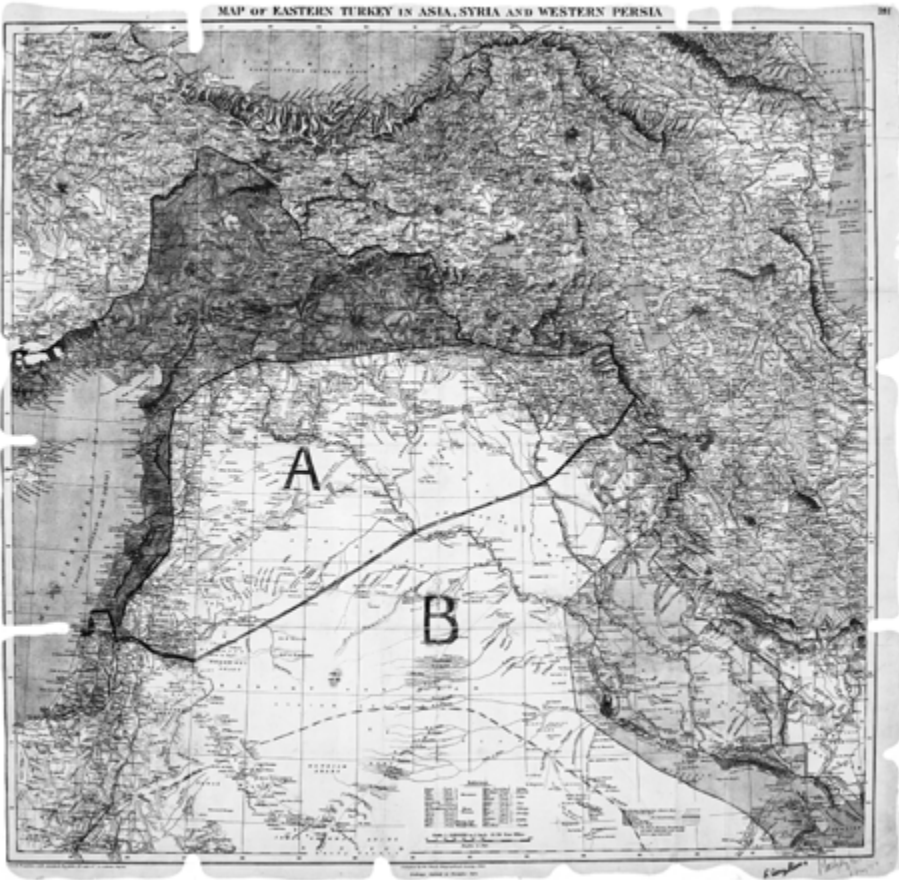
In particular Russia supported the Armenian and Kurdish independence movements. The possibility of a nation state was dangled in front of these two peoples, despite the fact that the supporters were well aware that the territories being claimed were largely overlapping. The creation of Armenian and Kurdish states would quickly have triggered a fierce conflict between the two sides. It is worth noting how these states were never founded after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War.⁵

In turn, as the 19th century drew to a close, the Ottoman government sought to cling to power by adopting a policy of divide and rule. Sultan Abdul Hamid II (who ruled from 1876 to 1909) played the Kurds of Anatolia off against the Armenians, who generally acted as merchants and tax collectors. In Lebanon, he set the

4 | Cf. Johanna Pink, "Der Islam und die nichtislamischen Minderheiten", in: Ende/Steinbach (eds.), n. 2, p. 734.

5 | Cf. Erich Feigl, *Die Kurden. Geschichte und Schicksal eines Volkes*, Munich, 1995, p. 159-183.

Druze against the Catholic Maronites, in Syria the Sunnis against the Alawites, and in Iraq the Sunni nomads from the Steppes against the Shiite arable farmers.⁶



On 16 May 1916, Great Britain and France signed the confidential Sykes-Picot Agreement on the partitioning of Osmanic territories in the Near and Middle East – after decade-long interventions in the Osmanic Empire’s domestic politics. In a modified form, the agreement has become the fundament for the borders of the British and French mandate of the league of nations that were arranged in San Remo in 1920. | Source: Royal Geographical Society, The National Archives (UK), MPK1/426 ©©.

In the First World War Arab tribes became British allies and were promised an Arab nation state. But in contrast London and Paris were negotiating the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which was signed on 16 May 1916. This defined their spheres of influence and control over Ottoman territories in the Middle East. Based on this

6 | Cf. Ernst Werner/Walter Markow, *Geschichte der Türken. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, Berlin-Ost, 1979, p. 215.

agreement, in 1920 the provinces of Beirut, Aleppo and Damascus went to France under the League of Nations Mandate for Syria, while the provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra went to Britain under the League of Nations Mandate for Iraq.

In true “divide and rule” fashion, Paris and London favoured the minorities over the majority and in this way made them dependent. France initially planned to partition its

France partitioned its mandate along confessional lines. Four administrative areas were set up: the mainly Christian Lebanon, the State of Jabal Druze, the State of Alawites and the rest of Syria.

mandate into six territories along confessional lines. In the end, four administrative areas were set up: the mainly Christian Lebanon, the State of Jabal Druze, the State of Alawites and the rest of Syria.⁷ The French mainly recruited Christians and Alawites for administrative and military functions. The French made enemies of the Druze by attacking their feudal system, leading to a major Druze uprising between 1925 and 1927. For a time, Sunni Syrians fought on the side of the Druze, though this alliance was destined to be short-lived. In 1936 France ended the autonomy of the Jabal Druze and Alawite State. From then on, the Sunni-dominated government did everything it could to prevent any aspirations for Druze or Alawite autonomy.⁸

In Iraq, the British did not focus on the Shiite majority, whose clerics had spoken out against British influence during and after the war, but on the Sunni upper classes in Baghdad and certain Sunni tribal leaders. A foreign Sunni royal dynasty was also imposed on Iraq in the shape of the Hashemites of Hejaz. The British predominantly recruited Kurds and Christian Assyrians to the armed forces and used them to suppress uprisings. To the Sunni and Shiite Arabs, these groups appeared as henchmen of the British Mandate. Massacres of Assyrians were carried out just eight months after Iraq gained independence in 1932.⁹

7 | The Sandjak of Alexandretta (also known as Hatay) on the Mediterranean coast was governed separately, too. In 1938 its parliament declared it autonomous, in 1939 it proclaimed the unification with Turkey after a controversial referendum. This was approved by France. Syria, which became independent in 1944, did not recognize Hatay's union with Turkey. See Steinbach, n. 1, p. 149 f.

8 | Cf. Margret Boveri, *Vom Minarett zum Bohrturm. Eine politische Biographie Vorderasiens*, Zurich/Leipzig/Berlin, 1938, p. 158-167, 382-408; Liselotte Abid, “Die Religion ist für Gott – das Land ist für alle”, in: Fritz Edlinger/Tyma Kraitt (eds.), *Syrien. Hintergründe, Analysen, Berichte*, Vienna, 2013, p. 24 f.

9 | Cf. Boveri, n. 8, p. 138-143, 435-455.

Unlike Syria, Iraq was an artificial construct, as political, economic and social links between the Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra had been marginal. The Kurds who were living in Northern Iraq showed little loyalty to Iraq from the start and had separatist aspirations. From 1922 to 1924 they unsuccessfully tried to create a separate "Kingdom of Kurdistan".¹⁰ Relations between Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites had been tense for hundreds of years. In Shiite strongholds such as Najaf, Karbala and Kufa there had again and yet again been uprisings against Sunni rule.

Eyewitness Margret Boveri wrote: "After the war, when the new state of Iraq was to be built, the enmity between Sunnis and Shiites was so deep and insurmountable that it often threatened to tear the young nation apart."¹¹

NATION-BUILDING AS PART OF PAN-ARAB NATIONALISM

Pan-Arab nationalism recognised all ancestral religions as being part of Arab culture, but they were not to be given any influence over politics, law or administration. The same applied to tribal identities.

Following the European model, pan-Arab nationalists aimed to set up independent "cultural nations". All ancestral religions were recognised as being part of Arab culture, but they were not to be given any influence over politics, law or administration. The same applied to tribal identities. The ultimate goal was to bring the Arab states together to create a powerful pan-Arab nation.¹²

Syria, which gained independence in 1944, was the first to be gripped by pan-Arab nationalism. When Shukri al-Quwatli was elected president in 1955, this became the dominant ideology, and in 1958 Syria created a pan-Arab union with Egypt under Nasser in the form of the United Arab Republic (UAR). This was dissolved in 1961, but in 1963 the equally pan-Arabist Ba'ath Party seized power in Syria.

After gaining its independence in 1932, Iraq initially remained a conservative kingdom with close ties to Britain under the rule of its Hashemite king and the Sunni upper class. When the king was deposed in 1958, left-wing parties took over, and in 1963 the pan-Arab Ba'ath Party seized power also in this country after a military coup.

10 | Fürtig, n. 2, p. 517.

11 | Boveri, n. 8, p. 151.

12 | Albert Hourani, *Die Geschichte der arabischen Völker*, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, p. 483-494.

Lebanon's story was very different. Here, Ottoman group particularism was not overcome but elevated to the organisational principle behind the state after it gained independence in 1943. In light of a blockade between supporters of independence and supporters of a union with Syria, the two sides agreed to the National Pact, which remains in place today. This agreed that the sovereign state of Lebanon should be set up, that there should be no union with Syria, that France should not be a protective power and that there should be no military alliance with the West. Lebanon was set up as a consociational democracy without majority rule, based on 18 recognised religious communities (Sunnis, Sevens and Twelver Shiites, Druze, Alawites, Jews and twelve Christian religious denominations). Parliamentary seats, furthermore the highest governmental positions and many other posts were allocated according to a set ratio of 6:5 in favour of Christians. To some extent, the constitution was a continuation of the Ottoman millet system, but the Sunnis were no longer afforded their previous privileges. The absence of a parliamentary majority and special constitutional provisions necessarily led to consociationalism. Syria viewed Lebanon's independence as a neocolonial manoeuvre on the part of France, and indeed only recognised its independence in 2008.¹³



Places of worship of different religions shape Beirut's cityscape up to this day. They reflect Lebanon's religious diversity. | Source: Frode Bjørshol, flickr ©.

13 | Cf. Maximilian Felsch, "Der Libanon zwischen Integration und Fragmentierung", in: Rüdiger Robert/Daniela Schlicht/Shazia Saleem (eds.), *Kollektive Identitäten im Nahen und Mittleren Osten*, Münster, 2010, p. 379-398.

In Syria in the 1960s, the idea of nation-building gained ground among all the various groups. This secular one-party state allowed relatively large amounts of religious and cultural freedom, but individual freedoms were severely curtailed. Some of these group freedoms were retained when the country came under the rule of the Assad clan in 1970. In contrast, Iraq only paid lip-service to the idea of nation-building, as the majority Shiites were still effectively excluded. For a long time, the Shiites saw pan-Arab nationalism as an instrument for equal political participation. When the Ba'ath Party seized power in 1963, Shiites made up the majority of its members and held 54 per cent of its leadership positions. But this unity party soon became dominated by Sunnis. By 1968 Shiites held only six per cent of the leading positions in the party. Effectively excluded, many of them turned to Islamic underground organisations such as Da'wa (Islamic Call), supported by their clergy.¹⁴

The main group to suffer from Pan-Arabism was the Kurds. As a people, they have a very clear sense of identity but are very divided in terms of clanship, language and religious beliefs.

As the aim was to create a "cultural nation" rather than a "willed nation", Syria and Iraq both allowed discrimination based on ethnicity, language and culture. Non-Arabs were treated as de facto second-class citizens. The main group to suffer was the Kurds. As a people, they have a very clear sense of identity but are very divided in terms of clanship, language and religious beliefs (they include Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, Jews and adherents of smaller religions such as Ahl-e Haqq, Haqqa, Yazidis and Shabaks). From the outset, the Kurds were sceptical of pan-Arab nationalism, preferring to support communist parties and secessionist movements.¹⁵

Between 1960 and 1970 in Iraq, Kurds conducted a bitter guerrilla war to try to gain autonomy. The Iraqi government responded by introducing forced assimilation and resettlement measures. The oil-rich region of Kirkuk was resettled by Arabs at the expense of the Kurds, Assyrians and Turkmens.¹⁶ Syria also pursued a policy of Arabisation in its Kurdish north. In 1962 thousands of Kurds had their citizenship withdrawn, and by 2011 over 150,000 had

14 | Cf. Fürtig, n. 2, p. 518.

15 | Cf. Wolfgang Bretholz, *Aufstand der Araber*, Vienna/Munich/Basel, 1960, p. 361.

16 | Cf. Brendan O'Leary, "Power Sharing, Pluralist federation and Federacy", in: Brendan O'Leary/John McGarry/Khaled Salih (eds.), *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq*, Philadelphia PA, 2005, p. 78-86.

been left stateless. From the 1970s onwards, Arab Bedouins were settled in Northern Syria in order to create an "Arab belt" in the border region.¹⁷

RULING CLIQUES UNDER ASSAD AND HUSSEIN

Tensions between the various groups increased during the 1970s, when pan-Arab nationalism in Syria and Iraq was in fact replaced by the rule of small cliques. In 1970, Air Force General Hafiz al-Assad seized power in Syria. Al-Assad's main supporters came from his clan base in the coastal mountains (Jebel Ansariye) and from his religious group, the Alawites. He also courted other religious minorities such as the Christians, Druze and Shiites and gave them positions in his government, civil service and army. From the Sunni camp, he co-opted the merchant classes in Damascus and Aleppo and the conservative clergy in Damascus. Otherwise, Arab Sunnis were discriminated against when official posts, resources and public services were being distributed. Assad's ruling position was precarious, as his Alawite religious group only made up one tenth of the Syrian population. Attracting the support of other privileged groups meant he could count on at least one third of the Syrian population.¹⁸

The status of the co-opted religious community is similar to the Ottoman's millet system. The Grand Mufti of Damascus, the Christian bishops and other religious leaders are personally responsible for ensuring the loyalty

If their political behaviour is correct, the religious communities are rewarded. So it is hardly surprising that all Syrian religious leaders have remained loyal to President Bashar al-Assad.

of their followers to the country's president. In return, the Syrian state affords them the official status and privileges of ministers. If their political behaviour is correct, the religious communities are rewarded with favours. So it is hardly surprising that all Syrian religious leaders have so far remained (or had to remain) loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, the son and successor to Hafiz al-Assad.

In Iraq Saddam Hussein took power in 1979 and also created a ruling clique supported by his family clan, his Al-Bu-Nasir tribe and others tribes and Arab Sunnis (who make up one quarter of the population of Iraq). Saddam Hussein also co-opted Arab religious

17 | Cf. Kristin Helberg, *Brennpunkt Syrien. Einblick in ein verschlossenes Land*, Freiburg i.Br., 2012, p. 99-108.

18 | Cf. Tyma Kraitt, "Eine alawitische Militärdiktatur? Zum Verhältnis von Staat, Militär und Religion in Syrien", in: Edlinger/Kraitt (eds.), n. 8, p. 31-44.

minorities such as Christians and Mandean and his government applied similar mechanisms to those used in Syria. The appointment of the Chaldean Catholic Tarik Aziz (born Mikhail Yuhanna) as Deputy Prime Minister in 1979 and as Foreign Minister in 1983 was a signal to Iraqi Christians that they would be rewarded if their political behaviour was correct.¹⁹

The clearest and perhaps most painful manifestation of the crypto-confessionalist nature of the system could be found in the security forces and secret services. In Syria, their leaders and elite units came from the Alawite minority, in Iraq they were recruited from the Sunni minority.



Bashar al-Assad (photo) as well as Saddam Hussein secured their power through the establishment of a ruling clique and the co-opting of religious minorities, economic interest groups and tribes. | Source: Beshr Abdulhadi, flickr ©.

The majority of the population were discriminated against and in both countries increasingly turned towards Islamism. This ideology gained in popularity, while pan-Arabism became discredited after the Arab states' devastating defeat by Israel in 1967 and because of its failure to deliver on its economic promises. The Islamists promised honesty, fairness, global power and a different kind of supranational union based on a common faith.

19 | Saddam Hussein also used a divide and rule policy to control the tribes in his country. He sought alliances with powerful tribes and played them off against other tribes. Cf. Amatzia Baram, "The Iraqi Tribes and the Post-Saddam System", *Brookings Paper*, 8 Jul 2003, <http://brookings.edu/research/papers/2003/07/08iraq-baram> (accessed 28 May 2015).

In Syria the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood made rapid advances in rural areas during the 1970s. The dominance of the “heretical” Alawites was a particular thorn in the side of the Brotherhood. Its radical wing declared war on the government in 1976 and carried out some bloody attacks. Hafiz al-Assad reacted by persecuting them mercilessly, culminating in the Hama massacre in 1982, when tens of thousands were killed.²⁰

In Iraq the Shiite-Islamist underground movement gained momentum thanks to the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. Attacks proliferated against public officials and symbols of the Ba’ath regime. Saddam Hussein reacted

Saddam Hussein’s attack on Iran in September 1980 was a result of his fear of radicalisation on the part of Iraqi Shiites. However, they generally remained loyal to him during the First Gulf War.

by deporting or murdering activists. His attack on Iran in September 1980 was also a result of his fear of radicalisation on the part of Iraqi Shiites. However, they generally remained loyal to the government during the First Gulf War. After Iraq’s defeat in the Second Gulf War, the Shiites dared to revolt in 1991. Hussein’s brutal clampdown cost the lives of up to 100,000 people. He continued with his deportation policy and also widely decimated the Shiite clergy.²¹ Even when he was on his way to the gallows on 30 December 2006, Saddam Hussein was still cursing the “Persians”. This clearly demonstrates how the dictator always viewed the Iraqi Shiites as a fifth column of Tehran.²²

Saddam Hussein was equally brutal in his treatment of the Kurds, who, unlike the Shiites, had openly collaborated with Iran during the First Gulf War. During the Anfal Campaign between 1986 and 1989, thousands of Kurdish villages were levelled and tens of thousands of Kurds were killed, some by chemical weapons.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the U.S. occupiers failed to initiate the building of an Iraqi nation that encompassed all its various groups. During the country’s rebuilding process, civilian administrator Paul Bremer turned to the divided ethnic and religious groups and to the tribal sheikhs. This contributed to the country’s ongoing particularisation.²³ New political parties were largely founded based on ethnic, religious and tribal affiliations. Fair general elections resulted 2005 in the Shiite majority taking power for

20 | Cf. Werner Schmucker, “Sekten und Sondergruppen”, in: Ende/Steinbach (eds.), n. 2, p. 720.

21 | Cf. Fürtig, n. 2, p. 518-520.

22 | Cf. “Saddam starb mit Hasstiraden auf den Lippen”, *Die Welt*, 31 Mar 2006, <http://welt.de/705683> (accessed 26 May 2015).

23 | Cf. Fürtig, n. 2, p. 520.

the first time in the country's history. A constitutional reform with three widely self-governed constituent states that was propagated by senator Joseph R. Biden and Leslie H. Gelb was dismissed by the Bush administration in favor of the status quo of a strong federal government.²⁴ Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006 to 2014) of the Islamist Da'wa Party turned the former ruling system on its head. Now the Shiite majority discriminated against the Sunni minority when designating positions in government, the civil service and the security forces, and in the provision of infrastructure and public services. The Kurds were able to get validation for their autonomy in Northern Iraq they had achieved in 1991 and worked on extending it still further. Today the words of Peter W. Galbraith still resonate in the artificially created state of Iraq: "The fundamental problem of Iraq is an absence of Iraqis."²⁵

With its long and barely controlled borders, Iraq became a magnet for radical Sunni Islamists from abroad. The group conflict increasingly turned into a proxy war.

Maliki's policy of reverse discrimination and the ongoing stationing of U.S. troops on Iraqi soil fuelled the fires of Arab Sunni resistance.

With its long and barely controlled borders, Iraq became a magnet for radical Islamists from abroad. The group conflict increasingly turned into a proxy war, with Saudi Arabia and its allies supporting the Sunni resistance fighters and Iran supporting Maliki's Shiite government. In this way, the two countries brought their ideological and geopolitical rivalry onto Iraqi soil.

THE SUNNI-SHIA DIVIDE

The origins of the Sunni-Shia divide lie in the distant past.²⁶ After the death of the Prophet, a bitter political battle for succession developed between the more dynastic-oriented Sunni party and the Shiite party, which believed in the supremacy of blood ties. In the end it was the Sunnis who prevailed and since then the Shiites have managed to hold on to long-term political power in just two countries – Yemen (897 to 1962) and Iran (1501 to today). Throughout history, the relationship between the two sects has generally been characterised by resentment and prejudice, yet there are still many places where Sunnis and Shiites coexisted

24 | Joseph R. Biden/Leslie H. Gelb, "Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq", *The New York Times*, 1 May 2006.

25 | Peter W. Galbraith, "What Went Wrong", in: O'Leary/McGarry/Salih (eds.), n. 16, p. 242.

26 | Cf. Council on Foreign Relations, "The Sunni-Shia Divide", 2014, <http://cfr.org/peace-conflict-and-human-rights/sunni-shia-divide/p33176#!> (accessed 26 May 2015).

peacefully for centuries. This all changed in the 18th century with the beginning of the Sunni Wahhabist movement on the Arabian Peninsula. The puritanical Wahhabis believed in the idea of returning to an idealised form of a pristine Muslim community. They saw Shiites as traitors and deviants and fought bitterly against them. This kind of puritanical thinking also tends to be shared by today's Salafists and Jihadists.

In the 1920s the Wahhabis conquered large swathes of the Arabian Peninsula and founded the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which went on to become the dominant power in the Gulf on account of its extensive oil reserves. As a result, Saudi Arabia became Iran's key political rival in the region. Following the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the rivalry between the two countries became ideological as well as political. Both

countries sought to become the leaders of the Gulf region and the leaders of the Muslim world. However, there are fundamental differences between the two: Saudi Arabia tends to act anti-Shiite, whereas Iran does

Saudi Arabia tries to promote the Wahhabist way in the Muslim world, while Iran simply promotes its political model of an Islamic Republic as the ideal for all Muslims, including Sunnis.

not act anti-Sunni. Saudi Arabia seeks to promote the Wahhabist way in the Muslim world, while Iran simply promotes its political model of an Islamic Republic as the ideal for all Muslims, including Sunnis. Iran has endeavoured to strengthen Shiite communities in Arab countries in order to gain political influence. Saudi Arabia is worried about the anti-monarchical politicisation of Shiites in the Gulf and is seeking to form its own anti-Iranian Sunni bloc. For at least a decade, Saudi Arabia has also had to live with serious concerns over Iran's alleged military nuclear program. In December 2004, King Abdullah of Jordan warned of the formation of an Iranian-led "Shia Crescent" stretching from the Mediterranean to the Gulf, which would pose a serious threat to the Sunni states.²⁷

In many places, the political and ideological struggle for power between the Saudi and Iranian camps has succeeded in poisoning relations between many Sunnis (who make up some 85 per cent of all Muslims worldwide) and Shiites (some 15 per cent). Violent attacks are on the increase, mostly carried out by fanatical Sunni activists. In Syria and Iraq, these activists see it as their divine mission to destroy the Shiite "heretics" and their "temples" (i.e. mosques). They also consider the Alawites to be Shiites as

27 | Cf. Ian Black, "Fear of a Shia full moon", *The Guardian*, 26 Jan 2007, <http://theguardian.com/world/2007/jan/26/worlddispatch.ianblack> (accessed 26 May 2015).

their movement grew out of Shia Islam in the 9th century. For their part, senior Shiite clerics such as Ali al-Sistani of Najaf have repeatedly and successfully called on the followers of their own branch of Islam to exercise restraint. Admittedly, repeated attacks by Salafists and Jihadists in recent years has resulted in the formation of militant Shiite militias in Syria and Iraq, which have fought on the side of those countries' governments.²⁸



The most important party of the Lebanese Shiites is the Hezbollah (Party of God), which is led by Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah. It commands a battle-trying militia that is currently also fighting in Syria on the government's side. | Source: © Martin Pabst.

DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 2011

In March 2011, Syria became the next country to be affected by the Arab protest movement. As the police fired on protestors and imprisoned and mistreated young demonstrators, the protests spread to the suburbs of Damascus and large swathes of rural Syria. At first, the government wavered between giving in to the protests and suppressing them, but by the middle of the year it had decided it was in its interests to quash the protest movement. The response from the demonstrators was to take up arms and form militias in order to fight back. Defectors from the government's armed forces and local volunteers formed themselves into a "Free Syrian Army" (FSA).

28 | Cf. Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival. How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, New York/London, 2007, p. 178/197.

The protest movement was striving for political freedom and better economic opportunities. It was dominated by the disadvantaged Sunni majority, but was also joined by representatives from minorities, such as the Alawite writer Samar Yazbek. During the protests, demonstrators invoked the idea of the national unity with chants such as "We are all Syrians, we are united" and "No to sectarianism". Small Alawite and Christian militias were even formed under the umbrella of the FSA.²⁹

The strategy of the Syrian government was and still is to present the protest movement as an insurrection by radical Islamist Sunnis in order to create fear amongst the country's minorities. This strategy has been successful as the overwhelming majority of Syrian Alawites, Christians, Druze and Shiites have remained loyal to the government or at least remained neutral. The fear of revenge and retaliation is especially widespread amongst the Alawites – a fear that is justified in light of their painful history.

A number of developments have ensured that the Syrian resistance movement has in fact gradually taken a confessionalist direction. Turkey, for example, has been able to exert significant influence over the FSA because its high command and training camps were based in the Turkish province of Hatay. The opposition Syrian National Council (SNC) also set itself up in Turkey. Ankara made sure the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood exerted a disproportionate amount of influence on its committees, thus bolstering Sunni dominance.

The FSA and SNC were not recognised by every resistance group in the country. However, confessionalist tendencies also gradually increased in these independent groups, as evidenced by the decidedly Sunni names given to many of the new militias. Islamisation also grew stronger during the fierce battle for Aleppo in mid-2012, largely due to the infiltration of Salafist preachers and mercenaries. Battle-hardened radical Sunni groups such as Liwa al-Tawhid and Jabhat al-Nusra (part of the al-Qaeda network) began playing an ever more prominent role, while slogans such as "Christians to the Lebanon, Alawites to the coffin" could be heard being chanted at rallies. By 2013, the newly formed rebel alliance Islamic Front had attracted some 45,000 fighters, far outstripping the FSA. It

29 | Cf. Samar Yazbek, *Schrei nach Freiheit. Bericht aus dem Innern der syrischen Revolution*, Munich, 2012.

was also clearly anti-Shiite and anti-Alawite.³⁰ The appearance of the Jihadist “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria” (ISIS, now known as Islamic State/IS) in the same year represented an additional and, as yet, unprecedented level of radicalisation.



Saudi Arabia’s emergence as a regional power is closely linked to its oil deposits. In addition motivated by the Wahhabi Islam, it rivals for the pre-dominance in the Gulf region with Shiite Iran. | Source: hamza82, flickr ©️📷.

There were a number of reasons for this particular development. The Syrian government itself contributed to the rise of Islamic extremism when, in early 2011, it released numerous Sunni Islamist prisoners and began to focus its attacks more strongly on secular rather than Islamist resistance groups.³¹ Their rationale was that a fear of Salafists and Jihadists would force the West to decide the government was the lesser of two evils. Secondly, a clear picture of the enemy increased the combat strength of both

30 | Cf. Ulrike Putz, “Syriens Alawiten: Minderheit in Todesangst”, *Spiegel Online*, 22 Feb 2012, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-816735.html> (accessed 26 May 2015).

31 | According to information gathered from defectors, Zahran Alloush and Hassan Aboud, for example, were released from the Sednaya prison near Damascus in 2011. With the possible help of the Syrian secret service, they set up and led the Islamist resistance groups Jaysh al Islam and Ahrar al Sham. Cf. Phil Sands/Justin Vela/Suha Maayah, “Assad regime set free extremists from prison to fire up trouble during peaceful uprising”, *The National*, 21 Jan 2014, <http://thenational.ae/world/syria/assad-regime-set-free-extremists-from-prison-to-fire-up-trouble-during-peaceful-uprising> (accessed 26 May 2015).

sides and confessional aspects became increasingly important. This made it also easier for government and opposition alike to attract external support. The Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi-Shiite militias, for example, felt compelled to fight on behalf of the government in order to protect Shiite villages and holy sites (such as the Sayyidah Zaynab Shrine in Damascus) against Salafists and Jihadists. Meanwhile, opposition militia saw an influx of Sunni volunteers from many different countries, all keen to join the fight against "heretical Shiites". By adding a confessional aspect to the image of the enemy, external actors such as Iran, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia were able to recruit fighters to join the conflict in Syria as a front for their own political ambitions. The confessionalisation of the conflict was also a direct result of the unending civil war, the progressive collapse of public services and the state losing its monopoly on the use of force. The only way that people could survive the daily attacks and destruction of their way of life was by falling back on the support of their communities. And finally, feelings of hatred and revenge were also fuelled by the brutal war crimes committed on civilians solely on account of their religious affiliations.

Since 2011, both sides have been guilty of carrying out numerous massacres and expulsions. As we saw in the Balkans in the 1990s, this kind of ethnic cleansing is a popular tool for realigning and consolidating territorial boundaries. IS in particular is currently pursuing a policy of systematic settlement by Sunnis in the territory it controls across Syria and Iraq, an area the size of Britain. Other religious groups in the area (Shiites, Alawites, Yazidis, Shabaks and recently also Christians) have been either displaced or killed and their houses and possessions redistributed.

IS is pursuing a policy of systematic settlement by Sunnis in the territory it controls across Syria and Iraq. Other religious groups in the area have been either displaced or killed.

In Iraq, Sunni resistance, which has been supported by Saudi Arabia since the fall of Saddam Hussein, has resulted in a civil war breaking out in the country along confessional lines. Radical Sunni terrorist organisations in Iraq, such as Al Qaeda in Iraq (the forerunner to IS) led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, have carried out numerous brutal attacks on Shiite residential areas, mosques and holy sites. Religious hatred has been combined with calculated confrontation strategies with a view to creating solidarity.

THE SITUATION TODAY

The instrumentalisation of minorities in the Ottoman Empire by external states, the divide and rule policy of Sultan Abdul Hamid II and the European colonial powers, the failure of pan-Arab nationalism to provide all citizens with freedom and equality and the resulting authoritarian ruling cliques that favoured particular minorities in their allocation of power and resources – all these led to heightened tensions between the various population groups, and particularly between religious groups.

After 2003 tensions in Iraq escalated into a state of permanent armed conflict between the Sunni minority and the now-dominant Shiite majority. Salafist and Jihadist groups supported from the Sunni Gulf states carried out targeted campaigns against Shiites.

The longer the – now overlapping – wars in Syria and Iraq drag on, the more the population is gripped by the confessional polarities that are being fuelled from outside.

This constellation increasingly coloured the simply-drawn lines of the Syrian civil war: Sunnis vs. Shiites (and Alawites). Both sides present the enemy in extreme terms in order

to consolidate and mobilise their own camps. The longer the – now overlapping – wars in Syria and Iraq drag on, the more the population is gripped by the confessional polarities that are being fuelled from outside. They are being pigeonholed, whether they like it or not. The armed conflicts are “religious wars” only from the viewpoint of Salafists and Jihadists, yet polarisation actually occurs along religious lines; mutual resentment has increased massively and is being instrumentalised by the political parties.

Flight and expulsion have led to huge population movements that will be largely irreversible. The virtual “segregation” of the various groups and the resulting hatred makes it unrealistic to expect a return to the multireligious and multicultural status quo of the past. Any peace agreement must focus primarily on reconciliation, but this will not be enough in itself. New systems of government have to be found that will make it possible for people to enjoy a permanent, peaceful coexistence.

ARE NEW STATES THE SOLUTION?

It is increasingly being reported that the young nation states of Syria and Iraq have failed and that the best solution is now to redraw their territories on religious, ethnic or tribal lines based on historical group identities. The journalist Rainer Herrmann writes

in *Internationale Politik* magazine: "The political map of the Middle East is disintegrating. Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Egypt – the list of collapsing states is long. [...] But why shouldn't there be three Iraqs if one Iraq doesn't work? Why shouldn't there be six or more Libyas if a single Libya is unable to hold together?"³²

The idea of partition is nothing new. In 2006, the author, media commentator and former Pentagon staff officer Ralph Peters caused a stir when he published a book calling for the borders in the Middle East to be redrawn. He believed this should include an expanded Lebanon that took in the Syrian coastal strip dominated by Alawites, Christians and other minorities; a "Free Kurdistan" made up of Iraqi, Iranian, Syrian and Turkish territories; a "Sunni Iraq" and an "Arab Shia State".³³ Two decades earlier, Oded Yinon, a journalist with close ties to Likud and a former employee at the Israeli foreign office, proposed breaking up large Arab states such as Egypt, Syria and Iraq into smaller units along ethnic and religious lines. Some of his suggestions seem to have anticipated current developments:

"Syria will disintegrate into several states along the lines of its ethnic and sectarian structure, as is happening in Lebanon today. As a result, there will be a Shiite Alawi state, the district of Aleppo [sic!] will be a Sunni state, and the district of Damascus, another state which is hostile to the northern one. The Druze – even those of the Golan – should form a state in Hauran and in northern Jordan. This will be the long-run guarantee for security and peace in the entire region. [...] Iraq can be divided on regional and sectarian lines just like Syria in the Ottoman era. There will be three states, or more, around the three major cities, Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, while Shiite areas in the south will separate from the Sunni north which is mostly Kurdish."³⁴

32 | Rainer Hermann, "Nach dem Staatszerfall", *Internationale Politik* 5, Sep-Oct 2014, p. 8-15. Also dealing with debates concerning border demarcations: Yaroslav Trofimov, "Would New Borders Mean Less Conflict in the Middle East?", *Wall Street Journal*, 10 Apr 2015, <http://wsj.com/articles/would-new-borders-mean-less-conflict-in-the-middle-east-1428680793> (accessed 8 Jun 2015).

33 | Cf. Ralph Peters, *Never Quit the Fight*, Mechanicsburg PA, 2006. The presentation of Peter's map at the NATO Defence College in Rome in September 2006 by an American colonel led to massive Turkish protest and an apology by the U.S. State Department. Suleyman Kurt, "Carved-up Map of Turkey at NATO Prompts US Apology", *Zaman*, 29 Sep 2006.

34 | Oded Yinon, "Making the Arab World Collapse", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 / Vol. 12, No. 1, "Special Issue: The War in Lebanon", Summer/Autumn 1982, p. 213 f. (issued first in: *Kivvonim*, Winter 1981/82, Feb 1982).

At first glance, these seem to be quite promising ideas. But they hold many pitfalls. First of all, partitioning is generally proposed by interested third parties. This leads many Arabs to fear that the Arab world will once again be the victim of an external "Sykes-Picot" type of agreement.

Yinon also primarily proposed the strategic division of Arab countries as being to Israel's advantage in terms of security policy: "Every inter-Arab confrontation will help us to persist in the short run and it will hasten the achievement of the supreme goal, namely sub-dividing Iraq into elements like Syria and Lebanon."³⁵

It is hard to imagine that representatives of Arab governments and population groups could ever come together at a peace conference and amicably agree on redrawing the borders. In general, border changes are either the result of military victories or are imposed from outside. Both of these scenarios sow the seeds of future conflicts.



The Islamification of Syria's opposition intensified in the context of the battle of Aleppo (mid-2012) – a process desired and discretely supported by the Syrian government. | Source: Christiaan Triebert, flickr ©.

35 | Ibid., p. 213. Consequently, the Israeli government is today one of the supporters of Kurdish independence in Northern Iraq. In a speech given to the Institute for National Security at Tel Aviv University on 29 June 2014, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel would support a Kurdish declaration of independence Cf. "Israel's prime minister backs Kurdish independence", *The Guardian*, 29 Jun 2014, <http://theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/29/israel-prime-minister-kurdish-independence> (accessed 26 May 2015).

A restructuring of the Middle East would also be problematic because of the region's overlapping religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and tribal identities. Which principle should be employed? Division along religious lines would seem to be the easiest, but this would result in splitting mixed Sunni/Shiite tribes such as the Jubur or the Shammar. Population groups such as the Kurds tend to define themselves in ethnic, linguistic and cultural terms, not in terms of their religion.

It is also doubtful whether new states created on the basis of group identities could lead to peace. Of course it would mean that different population groups would have their own "homeland", but this would still result in the new and old states having minorities (as happened with Serbs in Kosovo and Kosovo Albanians in Serbia). Very often, it is these minorities who are the losers in the event of separation. At best they manage to negotiate protective rights, otherwise they run the risk of discrimination, persecution or expulsion.

What is more, the groups are not homogeneous. Christians in the Middle East are divided into a dozen different denominations with their own strong identities. Peoples such as the Kurds certainly have a strong sense of being one nation, but they are still divided into numerous tribes and religious communities. There is not even a common Kurdish language.

Founding a state for small population groups (such as the Yezidis and Shabaks on religious lines, or the Turkmens on ethnic/linguistic/cultural lines) is hardly a viable option; they would not benefit from such a solution. The principle of separation also goes against the centuries-old tradition of coexistence in the Middle East. Finally, it could only be pushed through with the aid of yet more painful population movements.

By redrawing borders, events may be set in motion that gain their own independent momentum. Creating a break-away Alawite state from Syria could turn into a Piedmont for the "unredeemed" Alawites in the Lebanon and the Turkish province of Hatay. Creating a break-away Kurdish state from Iraq could turn into a Piedmont for the "unredeemed" Kurds in Iran, Syria and Turkey. This would only provoke new regional conflicts.³⁶

36 | The Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was the trigger for Italian unification in the 19th century and the annexation of "unredeemed" territories (*terra irredenta*) with Italian populations in neighbouring states.

It should also be borne in mind that secession can lead to long conflicts about borders and resources. The examples of today's Ethiopia/Eritrea and Sudan/South Sudan should act as warnings in this respect.

Even if over the next few years there were to be a successful secession of certain territories such as Iraqi Kurdistan or South Yemen, a new political map of the Middle East is simply not a panacea for creating peace in the region.

IS AN ISLAMIC SYSTEM THE SOLUTION?

Islamists do not propagate the creation of new states, but on the contrary want to see all Muslim states unite on the basis of the *ummah* (community of believers). There are a number of possible models for this, from a confederation to a caliphate.

In a Sunni Islam commonwealth Shiites and non-Muslims would not be equal members of the *ummah*. At best they would be tolerated as protected minorities or they may be discriminated against or even persecuted.

This solution has the advantage that it (at least in theory) integrates Muslims of different ethnic origins. So in a Sunni Islam commonwealth, the Sunni Kurds and Turkmens would be de jure citizens with equal rights.

On the other hand, Shiites and non-Muslims would not be equal members of the *ummah*. At best they would be tolerated as protected minorities (as is the case with Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians in the Islamic Republic of Iran), or they may be discriminated against or even persecuted.

Islamic systems therefore only have limited capacity to resolve conflicts between groups. It is also doubtful as to whether and to what extent it is possible to combine democracy and Islamism, as postulated in the Islamic Republic of Iran and propagated by the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, radical Islamists are fundamentally opposed to democracy and religious pluralism.

OTHER SOLUTIONS?

A general, equal and unitary democracy with guaranteed basic liberties and human rights is certainly not sufficient in light of the strong group identities and the way that enmities have been fuelled over recent years. The following systems may be alternatives:

- A federal state with provinces enjoying certain powers,
- Territorial autonomy for a particular population group,
- radical decentralization and self-administration of different groups,³⁷
- Consociational democracy without majority rule (need for grand coalitions, veto rights, proportional representation).

All the above systems have their pros and cons. A federal system may reduce the dominance of a larger population group in a state, yet at provincial level there may still be tensions between different groups. Territorial autonomy favours a particular population group, which of course may lead to resentment among other groups. Consociational democracy without majority rule explicitly involves all population groups in the political process and prevents the largest group from outvoting other groups. But consociational democracy can be very bureaucratic, making it difficult to make quick decisions.

Lebanon is a good example of the latter system. It was not consociational democracy as such, but the lack of adaptation to demographic realities that caused the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, coupled with malign external influences (such as the Palestinian Fatah, Israel and Syria). Lebanon is the only country in the Arab world that has consistently upheld democracy since its independence, and no other Arab country enjoys such high levels of religious and cultural freedom and freedom of opinion.

Regardless of how Syria and Iraq will choose to restructure themselves, one thing is clear: they will have to take into account the complexity of group identities and guarantee that all their people enjoy protection and equal rights. If state borders would lose their dividing impact due to regional integration, the basis for a peaceful coexistence of different groups would be strengthened.

37 | This approach is lately brought forward by the Kurdistan Worker's Party under the name "Democratic Confederalism". Every religious, ethnic and cultural group has the right to democratic self-governance. It is said that this concept is already being implemented in Syria's Kurdish regions ("Rojava"). Cf. Songül Karabulut/Müslüm Örtülü, "Rojava oder das Konzept des Demokratischen Konföderalismus", *WeltTrends*, No. 101, Mar 2015, p. 42-48.

ON THE SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Otmar Oehring



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"PERSECUTED – Christians are being driven out of the Middle East."¹ This was the headline on the cover of the *Newsweek* magazine on 3 April 2015. The exodus of Christians from the Middle East is not a new phenomenon and its causes are many and varied. However, there is no doubt that the invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 and the consequences for Iraq and the entire region, which had not been anticipated in the form they have taken, have had a massive impact in accelerating the exodus of Christians from the entire Middle East.

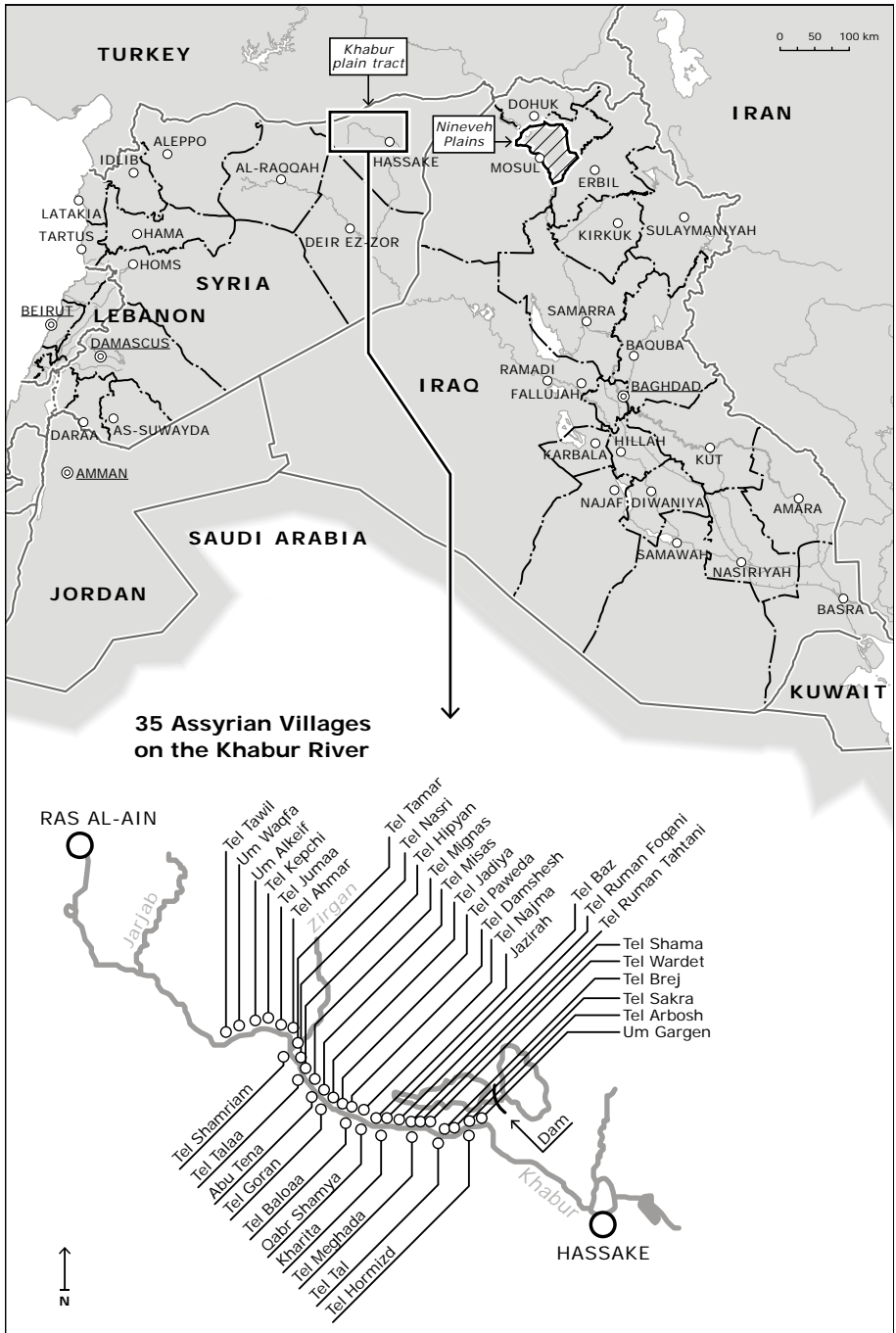
Further drivers for Christians fleeing the region include

- the unresolved conflict in Syria, which has now gone on for over four years;
- the simmering domestic conflict in Iraq;
- and the circumstances of the parliamentary elections in Egypt in late 2011 and early 2012 as well as the presidential elections in May 2012.

While developments in Egypt are now looking more positive with respect to the situation of Christians at least for the time being, the fear is that the situation of the Christians in Iraq and in Syria has still not reached its nadir.

1 | "PERSECUTED – Christians are being driven out of the Middle East", *Newsweek*, 3 Apr 2015, <http://newsweek.com/2015/04/03/emea-issue.html> (accessed 17 Jun 2015).

Fig. 1
**Administrative structure of Lebanon, Syria and Iraq,
Assyrian villages on the Khabur River**



Source: Own illustration based on: Christian Aid Program CAPNI, "Thirty Five Assyrian Villages on the Kabur River in Syria".

PERSECUTION BY ISLAMIC STATE

The conflicts in Syria and Iraq served as the breeding ground for new radical Islamic groupings in those countries. This development culminated in the establishment of the so-called Islamic State (IS). This organisation developed from the jihadist-Salafist terror organisation Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and, respectively, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has been operating since 2003, itself arising from Al-Qaeda.

From mid-2013 onwards, IS was initially able to bring large swathes of land in the north and east of Syria under its control and establish its "capital" in Raqqa in northern Syria. In the early spring of 2014, IS overran several Iraqi provinces, took the major city of Mosul in north-western Iraq and expelled Yazidis and Christians from their traditional settlement areas in the foothills of the Shingal or Sinjar Mountains² and, respectively, the Nineveh Plains. According to the organisation's own statements, these campaigns were not only about territorial gain, but about nothing less than world domination. What this means for the Christians and other religious minorities living in the region

In an Islamic State, everybody has to be Muslim; anybody who was not Muslim would have to become Muslim, and Christians were non-believers.

becomes clear from a recently published interview with two IS fighters, who had been captured by Kurdish People's Protection Units.³⁴ Asked about the aims of IS, the first

IS fighter responded that IS wanted to rule the entire world and eradicate the non-believers, the Christians. He waved aside the objection that faith was, after all, a matter of self-determination and should not be imposed on people⁵ with the comment that it was what his faith dictated. In an Islamic State, everybody has to be Muslim; anybody who was not Muslim would have to become Muslim, and Christians were non-believers. In response to the

- 2 | In the English-speaking media reporting, the mountain range was generally referred to by the Arabic name Sinjar. The name used locally is Shingal.
- 3 | Kurdish: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG); combat units of the Syrian Kurdish party Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD), English: Democratic Union Party), which is close to the PKK.
- 4 | "Captured fighters reveal inner-workings of ISIS", *Rûdaw*, 29 Mar 2015, <http://rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/290320151> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).
- 5 | This question relates to sura 2 (Al Baqara), verse 256 of the Quran, which states (in the translation by A. J. Arberry, 1964): "No compulsion is there in religion (i.e. nobody can be forced to adopt the (right) faith."

question regarding what they had been told about the Christians, the second captive replied, "Christians are non-believers".⁶



The leader of the Islamic State, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, has submitted to the Christians in the capital of the IS – or rather forced upon them – a "protection contract". | Source: © picture alliance / AP Photo.

In fact, Christians, although they are members of a revealed religion ("People of the Book"), are considered non-believers in the Islamic tradition in exactly the same way as all those who do not have a holy book, because they do not believe in the Quran and Mohammed in the role of prophet. Christians accordingly only have the choice of adopting Islam, accepting the *dhimmi* status, i.e. the status of a "protected person" who has to pay the *jizya* tax in return, or of fighting. From the perspective of fighters from radical Islamist groupings, who are either religiously uneducated or ill-informed about Islamic traditions, Christians effectively only have one choice: converting to Islam.

That is surprising insofar as Christians had been presented with – or more accurately had been forced upon them – a "protection" agreement on 26 February 2014 in Raqqa in Syria, the "capital" of the so-called Islamic State, by its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in which Baghdadi granted protection to the Christians, their assets

6 | "ISIS fighter: we wanted to take over the world", *Rüdaw*, 30 Mar 2015, <http://rudaw.net/english/interview/300320151?keyword=christians> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

and their churches.⁷ But this agreement also includes the following provisions:

- [Christians] will not build in their city or its environs a new monastery, church or priest's hermitage, or rebuild those that have been destroyed.
- They will not display a cross or anything from their books in any of the Muslims' streets or markets [and] they will not use megaphones in the performance of their prayers, or in any of their rites.
- They will not make Muslims listen to the recitation of their books or the ringing of their [church] bells.
- They will not engage in any acts inimical to the Islamic State.
- They will not prevent any Christian from converting to Islam if he desires to do so.
- Christians must pay the *jizya* for each male among them, amounting to four gold dinars for the wealthy, half that amount for the middle-class, and a quarter of that amount for the poor.
- They will not engage in the trade of pigs or wine with Muslims or in their markets, and they will not drink wine publicly.⁸

The comment that Christians must desist from any inimical act against the Islamic State could already be seen in the Spring of 2014 as a prelude to the absolutely arbitrary way in which IS would subsequently treat the Christian minority.

CHRISTIANS IN IRAQ – THE CAPTURE OF MOSUL

In 2011, there were still some 12,000 Christians living in Mosul despite the risk of attacks by radicals. By the time Mosul was overrun by IS, the number had dwindled to less than 3,000.

By the time Mosul was captured on 9 June 2014, there was hardly any further mention of the rules of the above "protection" agreement. The Christians in Mosul essentially only had the choice to flee, convert to Islam

or be executed. In 2011, there were still some 12,000 Christians⁹ living in Mosul despite the permanent risk of attacks by radicals allied to Al-Qaeda; by the time Mosul was overrun by IS, the number had dwindled to less than 3,000. No one had foreseen the

7 | Cf. Jürg Bischoff, "Aufbau eines islamischen Staates in der Provinz – Kopfsteuer für Christen in Rakka", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28 Feb 2014, <http://nzz.ch/1.18252898> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

8 | Cf. Kamal Shekho, "Christians Leave Raqqa, the Capital of the Islamic Caliphate", *The Syrian Observer*, 16 Jul 2014, <http://syrianobserver.com/EN/Features/27510> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

9 | Interview with Archbishop Emil Nona, Chaldean Archbishop of Mosul, and Archbishop Bashar Warda, Chaldean Bishop of Erbil, Aachen, 20 Aug 2012.

capture of the city on 9 June 2014. Many Christians – particularly those working in the public sector – had already left Mosul during the preceding months because Muslims of their acquaintance had signalled to them that they were no longer welcome there. During the days following the capture by IS, most of the remaining Christians fled the city – predominantly heading for the Christian villages and small towns of the Nineveh Plains. 15 July 2014 was the first Sunday since Christianity had become established in Iraq that no Christian service was conducted in Mosul.¹⁰

On 18 July 2014, Islamic State forced the remaining Christians to decide whether they wanted to convert to Islam or accept *dhimmi* status, pay the *jizya*¹¹ and remain in Mosul.

IS fighters have marked the homes and businesses of Christians with the Arabic letter nūn, which stands for the term *nasara* (Christians).

The only other options were to flee or suffer death by the sword. IS fighters had previously gone through the city and marked the homes and businesses of Christians with the Arabic letter *nūn*, which stands for the term *nasara* (Christians) used in the Quran. This was very obviously intended to make it easier to keep a check on the remaining Christians and their assets. IS received support in its actions from local Muslims, who no doubt had their own selfish reasons.

In view of the flight of the last Christians from Mosul, the Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako, who had never lost hope in the continued Christian presence after the 2003 invasion of Iraq despite the violence against Christians, which caused many of them to flee, stated dejectedly: "There are no Christians left in Mosul for the first time in Iraq's history."¹² Christians had become targets of radical Islamist groups in Iraq immediately after the 2003 U.S. invasion. They were branded as supporters of the "Christian" USA, which for its part, fell back on old patterns of behaviour in its rhetoric – there was some talk of a crusade – which could only be to the detriment of the Iraqi Christians. Despite the grim situation, the Patriarch appealed to the Christians from Mosul: "Be brave in front of what you are facing, do not be afraid, you have deep roots in Iraq, do not give up for frustration and despair, confident that "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword" (Matthew

10 | Interview with Archbishop Bashar Warda, Chaldean Bishop of Erbil, Erbil, 22 Jun 2014.

11 | Cf. Hamed Abdel Samad, "Christenvertreibung – Kopfsteuer für Christen", *Die Zeit*, 14 Aug 2014, <http://www.zeit.de/2014/32/christen-vertreibung-irak-tradition> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

12 | Cf. "Tausende Christen fliehen aus Mosul", *Die Zeit*, 19 Jul 2014, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-07/irak-christen-mosul> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

26:52) and evil does not last".¹³ However, Sako is akin to the lone voice in the wilderness with this appeal, because it is not likely to elicit any response in view of what the Christians have suffered in Iraq since IS captured Mosul.



Christians in Germany protest against the expulsion of their co-religionists from traditional settlement areas in Syria and Iraq: Unless the region is permanently freed from "Islamic state", a return for Christians is impossible. | Source: Joachim S. Müller, flickr ©①②.

EXPULSION FROM THE NINEVEH PLAINS

This will probably be inevitable, not least because only a short time after the fall of Mosul, areas in the Nineveh Plains where Christians had traditionally settled were also being targeted by IS and finally overrun. The Nineveh Plains is one of the regions in dispute between the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan (ARK) and the Iraqi central government with respect to their inclusion in ARK territory. According to Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution, a referendum was to be conducted by 31 December 2007 for the disputed areas, which were effectively arabised through ethnic cleansing during the rule of the Baath Party under Saddam Hussein. The referendum was repeatedly postponed and has still not taken place. Shortly after IS had captured Mosul, Kurdish Peshmerga established facts on the ground by taking control of the city of Kirkuk, which is located in disputed territory, as well

13 | Louis Raphael I Sako, "Patriarch Sako's Speech to Iraqi Christians and Mosul's Christians Particularly", Saint-Adday, 22 Jul 2014, <http://saint-adday.com/permalink/6326.html> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

as the oil fields in the surrounding area.¹⁴ The President of the ARK, Masoud Barzani, announced at the end of June 2014 that a referendum would be held in the near future in Kirkuk and the other disputed territories

The President of the ARK, Masoud Barzani, announced in 2014 that a referendum would be held in the near future in disputed territories on whether these regions should all form part of the ARK.

on whether these regions should all form part of the ARK.¹⁵ However, there still has been no referendum. Originally, all disputed areas were inhabited predominantly by Kurds, Christians, Yazidi, Shiite Turkmen and other ethnic-religious minorities, plus some Sunni Arabs.

The Nineveh Plains comprise the districts of Al-Hamdaniya, Tel Keppe (Tel Kaif) and Shekhan. While the population had lately been ethnically and religiously mixed in many areas, some places such as Bakhdida (Qaraqosh), Bartella, Karamlesh in Al-Hamdaniya District and Tel Keppe (Tel Kaif) in the district of the same name had been inhabited mainly by Christians until most recently. These and other towns of mixed population came under IS control as of 6 August 2014. Some 100,000 Christians, who lived in the Nineveh Plains, fled to the ARK, to Erbil, Dohuk and Zakho. The Kurdish Peshmerga, who had been charged with defending the towns now captured by IS and who had demonstrated the Kurdish claim to power by their presence, had fled at the first sign of the arrival of IS fighters, undermining the confidence of the Christian population in them. During the following weeks, Peshmerga forces joined by Christian militias have, in fact, been successful in recapturing some towns formerly inhabited by Christians, such as Bakhdida (Qaraqosh). However, the situation in the entire region remains extremely volatile, which is why the Christian refugees have not returned to any of the recaptured towns. It is also unlikely that they will return until such time as the entire region is permanently liberated from IS. The Christians also expect that there will be no "Arabs" left in and around the towns they previously inhabited – in this context, "Arab" is synonymous with Sunni Muslims. In many cases, these had "forgotten" their previously quite good or at least unproblematic relations with their Christian neighbours during the onslaught by the IS fighters and carried favour with IS, for whatever reason, thereby causing the Christians to lose all trust in them.

14 | Cf. Namo Abdulla, "Kirkuk Under Kurdish Peshmerga Control", *Rudaw*, 12 Jun 2014, <http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/iraq/120620142> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

15 | Cf. "Baghdad must accept Kirkuk is now part of Kurdistan – KRG official", *Asharq Al-Awsat*, 30 Jun 2014, <http://aawsat.net/2014/06/article55333791> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

Some ten years ago, the situation of the Christians and other minority groups had been similarly precarious. While the threat comes from IS these days, it came from groups affiliated to Al-Qaeda in the years from 2006. At that time, large numbers of Christians were driven out of Baghdad as well as Mosul. Many of those who did not flee to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria or Turkey aimed for places in the Nineveh Plains whose populations were partly or overwhelmingly Christian. Others fled to areas in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan which were predominantly Christian. Many only speak Arabic – and possibly a Western foreign language – but none of them speak the neo-Aramaic dialects spoken by Christians in northern Iraq, and certainly not the official language Kurdish, which is virtually a prerequisite for acquiring a job in the ARK.

The Christian Churches in Iraq rejected the Nineveh Plains Project at the time, because it contradicted the concept of a centralised state and would have made the Christians more exposed and vulnerable.

The Nineveh Plains Project, which has been under discussion since 2006 among Christian groups in Iraq, but above all among Assyrian nationalists in the diaspora in the USA and Europe,¹⁶ envisages the creation of an autonomous region for Christians in the Nineveh Plains north of Mosul. The Christian Churches in Iraq rejected the Nineveh Plains Project at the time,¹⁷ because it contradicted the concept of Iraq as a centralised state and would have made the Christians even more exposed and therefore vulnerable. It was also unclear how the protection of such an autonomous region could be secured without its own armed forces.

After talks about this project had died down in recent years, the threat posed by IS has rekindled the debate. In a speech before a congress in Berlin organised by the CDU/CSU parliamentary group on the subject of "Religious freedom as a human right – How do we protect persecuted Christians?",¹⁸ the Chaldean Archbishop of Ainkawa, Bashar Warda – previously an ardent opponent of the project – demanded a secure, self-governed homeland for the

16 | On the subject: Jeremy Courtney, "What everyone gets wrong about the persecution of Christians in Iraq", *The Week*, 10 Apr 2015, <http://theweek.com/articles/548138/iraq> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

17 | Cf. i.e. Saad Hanna Sirop, "Kidnapped Chaldean Priest: No to the Niniveh plain ethnic project", *AsiaNews*, 8 Jun 2007, <http://asianews.it/news-en/-9498.html> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

18 | CDU/CSU-Fraktion im Deutschen Bundestag, "Menschenrecht Religionsfreiheit – Wie schützen wir verfolgte Christen?", <http://cducus.de/veranstaltungen/menschenrecht-religionsfreiheit-wie-schuetzen-wir-verfolgte-christen-teil-1> (accessed 9 Jun 2015) und <http://cducus.de/veranstaltungen/menschenrecht-religionsfreiheit-wie-schuetzen-wir-verfolgte-christen-teil-2> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

non-Muslim minorities in the Nineveh Plains. He justified his demand by stating that 1,700 years of coexistence with the majority Muslim population had only resulted in the Christian, Yazidi and Sabian community now being at risk of total annihilation and exodus from the homeland of their forefathers.

That said, the Nineveh Plains Project is no more an option now than it was in 2006. While it may be desirable to have a safe homeland for Christians and other ethnic-religious minorities in northern Iraq, there remains the practically insoluble question of how to ensure the safety of people living in such an area. Even reports indicating that Christians in the region have started setting up their own militias will not change that. Furthermore, such a solution would almost inevitably require an ethnic cleansing of the area. And no one can seriously want that to happen.

EXODUS OF CHRISTIANS FROM SYRIA

Before 2011, some 1.1 million Christians lived in Syria. Since the beginning of the conflict, up to 700,000 Christians are estimated to have left the country, up to 30,000 fleeing from Aleppo and some 10,000 from Homs.¹⁹ And the Exodus continues.

On 23 February 2015, IS began to attack Assyrian villages along a 40-kilometer front line on the southern bank of the Khabur River in the northeast of Syria (cf. fig. 1). While many inhabitants were able to flee and seek

It is thought that the IS attack of Assyrian villages around Hassake had not been part of any long-term planning, and that a new target was merely selected following the defeat in Kobani.

refuge in the town of al-Hasakah, several hundred Assyrians were trapped in their villages and taken prisoner by IS. Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG),²⁰ which had previously controlled the area, tried to bring the villages back under their control.²¹ It is thought that the IS attack had not been part of any long-term planning, and that a new target was merely selected following the defeat in Kobani (Ayn al-Arab). Should this be the case, further attacks by IS can be expected anywhere within Syria for as long as it has not been totally vanquished.

19 | Cf. Janine di Lorenzo/Conor Gaffey, "The New Exodus: Christians Flee ISIS in the Middle East", *Newsweek*, 26 Mar 2015, <http://newsweek.com/2015/04/03/new-exodus-christians-flee-isis-middle-east-316785.html> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

20 | N. 3.

21 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email (1), 24 Feb 2015.



A destroyed Assyrian church in the Khabur area: The trust of the Christian population in the Peshmerga troupe wanes, as they are unable to maintain permanent protection against the IS. | Source: © CAPNI.

REPORTS FROM THE KHABUR AREA

To the southeast of the city of Ras al-Ayn, there are 35 villages on both sides of the Khabur River. They were founded by Assyrians who fled from the surroundings of the city of Simmele, to the west of Dokuk in Iraq, in 1933 and had settled in Syria in the hope that they would be able to return to their homes one day.²² Almost 220 families and 60 individuals, including some Christian militiamen, were taken prisoner by IS in these villages between 24 and 26 February 2015²³ and moved to IS-controlled territory, including the Arab-Sunni village of Um Al-Masamier, with men, women and children being separated in the process.²⁴ The attack resulted in casualties among both the civilian population and the attackers and defenders – YPG fighters and Assyrian militiamen. Some

22 | During the Simmele massacre, troops from the Kingdom of Iraq had used force against the inhabitants of 63 Assyrian villages in the Dohuk and Mosul Districts. There were some 3,000 fatalities to mourn. To this very day, the Assyrians refer to their settlements in the Khabur area not as villages or towns but merely as camps, in which they settled until they could return to Iraq. However, even Simmele and the surrounding villages had not been the original homeland of the Christians who fled the area – they had fled there from villages in the mountainous area around the City of Hakkari during the genocide in present-day Turkey.

23 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email (2), 24.02.2015; email, 25 Feb 2015; email, 26 Feb 2015.

24 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email, 25 Feb 2015.

1,200 families managed to escape to Al-Hasakah and Qamishli,²⁵ some attempted to flee directly to Turkey, but found the border closed to them.²⁶ On 27 February 2015, no Assyrians were left in the 35 Assyrian villages along the Khabur River.²⁷

As happened in Iraq in the summer of 2014, the Arab-Sunni population showed solidarity with IS here as well.²⁸ Apparently, an announcement was made in the mosque of Bab Alfaraj village that there would be a mass execution of “non-believers” on Friday, 27 February 2015, on Mount Abdulaziz, where the prisoners had been taken²⁹ – although this did not actually take place. There were also reports that the sharia court in the town of al-Shadadi south of Al-Hasakah – in IS-controlled territory – was to decide on the fate of the captured Christians in accordance with sharia law. As *dhimmi*s, they would be subject to the payment of the *jizya* prescribed in Islam. In fact, several Christians were released upon payment of a ransom according to press reports.³⁰ One should not fail to mention that the Arab-Sunni population showed some solidarity with the Christians in individual cases: inhabitants of the Arab-Sunni village of Qaber Shamiat, for instance, gave 15 Assyrians safe passage to Al-Hasakah.³¹

The Syrian Catholic Bishop of Al-Hasakah, Behnam Hindo, complained that the air raids the coalition carried out against Islamic State were too little too late,³² making the IS advance possible in the first place. Air raids

Air raids by the anti-IS coalition from the beginning of March enabled the YPG and Assyrian fighters to free captives and to recapture the northern bank of the Khabur River.

by the anti-IS coalition from the beginning of March enabled the YPG and Assyrian fighters to free 14 Assyrian fighters who were pinned down by IS on Raqba hill between Tel Nasri and Tel Tamar and to recapture the northern bank of the Khabur River.³³ But this

25 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email, 26 Feb 2015.

26 | Cf. Elise Harris, “Turkish border closed as Christian hostages in Syria spike to 250”, Catholic News Agency, 26 Feb 2015, <http://catholicnewsagency.com/news/turkish-border-closed-as-christian-hostages-in-syria-spike-to-250-54799> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

27 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email, 28 Feb 2015.

28 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email (2), 24 Feb 2015; email, 25 Feb 2015.

29 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email, 28 Feb 2015.

30 | Cf. “Terror in Syrien: IS-Miliz lässt 19 Christen gegen Lösegeld frei”, *Der Spiegel*, 2 Mar 2015, <http://spiegel.de/politik/ausland/a-1021228.html> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

31 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email (2), 24 Feb 2015.

32 | Cf. Harris, n. 26.

33 | Archimandrit Emanuel Youkhana, email, 10 Mar 2015.

does not mean the situation has stabilised by any means and the Christians can return. On 5 April 2015, for instance, IS blew up the Church of the Virgin Mary in Tel Nasri, when YPG fighters and Christian militiamen attempted to recapture the village.³⁴



An attack of the anti-IS Coalition in Kobani: The setback moved the IS to attack other targets. | Source: Scott Bobb, Voice of America News ©©.

It is doubtful as to whether the Christians who fled the area will ever return to the villages on the Khabur River because all of them came from families that had experienced expulsion and the need to flee repeatedly for several generations. It is therefore not surprising that the first refugees from these villages arrived in Istanbul and Beirut³⁵ only a few days after the IS attacks – and they will be followed by many more.

THE SITUATION IN IDLIB

Just one month later, at the end of March 2015, the provincial capital of Idlib in the northwest of Syria, which the Assad regime had succeeded in holding over the last few years despite numerous attempts to capture it, was taken by a coalition of Islamist militias allied to Al-Qaeda and several so-called moderate groups. The Salafist Jabhat al-Nusra militia played an important, albeit not the decisive, role, and other groups providing support included

34 | Cf. "ISIS destroys Assyrian Church in Syria", *AINA News*, 5 Apr 2015, <http://www.aina.org/news/20150405112823.htm> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

35 | Cf. Patricia Khoder, "Le calvaire des exilés chrétiens du Khabour au Liban", *L'Orient le Jour*, 7 Mar 2015, <http://lorientlejour.com/article/914596> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

the like-minded Ahrar al-Sham, Jund al-Aqsa, Liwa al-Haqq and Failaq al-Sham. Further support was provided by the Free Syrian Army, classed as moderate by Western governments.³⁶ Idlib, with a population of some 165,000, had a sizeable Christian minority – but only a few hundred Christians are said to have remained living there in the end.³⁷ Prior to the city's capture, concerned observers had wondered how the various militias were going to treat the Christians remaining in Idlib. A leading cleric from the Islamist Jabhat al-Nusra tried to allay the Christians' fears with the comment that attacking Christians or stealing from them was *haram* – forbidden under sharia.³⁸ In fact, many Christians tried to flee from Idlib and in some cases actually received assistance from Islamist fighters, for instance when 20 Christian families were given safe passage to the Turkish border.³⁹ Other Christians fled to Mhardeh, Ariha and Banyas on the Mediterranean coast. It appears that those who stayed behind had put themselves into a precarious situation. There were reports, for instance, that the only priest remaining behind, the Greek-Orthodox Father Ibrahim Farah, was abducted by the Jabhat al-Nusra militia with several other Christians at the end of March. They were to be put before a sharia court. It is said that an announcement was made in a mosque in Idlib that the Christians would either have to pay the *jizya* or leave the city.⁴⁰ In a video published on YouTube on 3 April, however, the priest appears to deny the veracity of these reports.⁴¹ What appears to be beyond doubt, though, is that two Christians who ran a liquor

A leading cleric from the Islamist Jabhat al-Nusra tried to allay the Christians' fears with the comment that attacking Christians or stealing from them was forbidden under sharia.

36 | In greater detail: Jeffrey White, "The Battle for Idlib: Military Implications", 30 Mar 2015, Policywatch 2396, The Washington Institute, 30 Mar 2015, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-battle-for-idlib-military-implications> (accessed 9 Jun 2015); see also: Aaron Kliegman, "Sunni Jihadists Gain Ground in Syria", Center for Security Policy, 1 Apr 2015, <http://centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2015/04/01/sunni-jihadists-gain-ground-in-syria> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

37 | "al Nusra Kidnapps Father Ibrahim Farah in Idlib", *Notes on Arab Orthodoxy*, 31 Mar 2015, <http://araborthodoxy.blogspot.com/2015/03/al-nusra-kidnapps-fr-ibrahim-farah-in.html> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

38 | Cf. "After 'united' rebel win, who will rule Idlib city?", *Syria: direct*, 30 Mar 2015, <http://syriadirect.org/main/37-videos/1948-after-united-rebel-win-who-will-rule-idlib-city> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

39 | "Christians flee Idlib amidst rising death toll", *Syria: direct*, 31 Mar 2015, <http://syriadirect.org/rss/1949-syria-direct-news-update-3-31-15> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

40 | Cf. n. 37.

41 | "The Priest of the Virgin Mary Church in Idlib denies his abduction", YouTube, 3 Apr 2015, <http://youtu.be/pXjWmRZ2iTI> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

store were killed – not by the Salafist Jabhat al-Nusra militia as initially reported,⁴² but by the Ahrar al-Sham militia, which is described as moderate.⁴³

The reports from the Khabur area in the northeast and the Idlib area in the northwest of Syria illustrate how tense the situation is for Christians in many places in the country. They have effectively been caught between the fronts. The regime, to which most of them had felt loyal until the conflict broke out, continues to claim their support. But that is precisely what the Islamist opposition now holds against them. Like large numbers of Muslims – Alawites and Sunnis – they have become victims of a conflict that will not be resolved in Syria. It should be resolved as soon as possible, though, if one wants to prevent those areas of Syria which are still relatively peaceful from being sucked into the vortex of violence.

OUTLOOK

It is difficult to anticipate what the future will hold for Christians in the Middle East. There are still some countries including Jordan and Lebanon where Christians continue to feel safe. But these states are also running the risk of being dragged into the conflicts raging in the neighbouring countries. This has been the case for the multi-faith and multi-denominational Lebanon for some time, at least since the Shia Hezbollah started intervening in the fighting in Syria on the side of the Assad regime. The religiously more homogeneous Jordan, on the other hand, appears immune to similar developments. However, what consequences the announced decisive action against Islamic State in the Iraqi border region of Anbar will have for Jordan remains to be seen.

Bringing an end to the current violent conflicts remains the only hope for the affected countries and particularly for the Christians in the Middle East. If there is no resolution to the conflicts, even more Christians will leave the region. But ultimately, this would result in the moderate forces in these countries becoming ever more isolated and radical Islamists finding it easier to realise their vision of world domination – albeit only at a regional level. Surely, there cannot be many who would wish for that to happen.

42 | Cf. n. 37.

43 | Cf. Patrick Poole, "Syrian Rebel Group Ahrar al-Sham Executes Christians in 'Liberated' Idlib", *PJ Media*, 1 Apr 2015, <http://pjmedia.com/tatler/2015/04/01/syrian-rebel-group-ahrar-al-sham-executes-christians-in-liberated-idlib> (accessed 9 Jun 2015).

CAN THE EU BE A SOURCE OF IDEAS AND SOFT POWER IN ASIA?

Jörn Dosch

Unlike the USA, when it comes to issues of security policy the EU and its individual Member States cannot traditionally be viewed as major players in Asia. However, the role of European actors in the Asia-Pacific region is significant in that they are said to exert a decisive influence on a wide range of politically relevant – and often controversial – activities and issues. These include trade and investment, democracy and human rights, migration, the environment, food and energy security, to name but a few. So the argument goes that the EU exerts normative or soft power in Asia. Soft power describes the normative influence exerted by states or groups of states in the international system by non-military means.¹ As far as the EU is concerned, soft power has two main aspects. Firstly, Brussels has the benefit of its largely positive experience of European integration. There may have been periodic crises, but these have not had a permanent effect on this positive perception. Therefore the EU is in a position to make use of this experience to actively contribute to deepening integration processes in other regions. By promoting regional cooperation, the EU hopes to achieve a prosperity dividend for the countries involved through increased regional trade, but above all it aims to have a positive effect on their peace and stability. And secondly the EU is keen to contribute to the global spread of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and other liberal values. In this process of providing and implementing ideas, the EU leans heavily on development cooperation and traditional diplomacy, which in the case of Asia involves a multi-layered and complex dialogue. The following comments on the role, success and limitations of the EU's soft power in Asia mainly refer to the conceptual approaches and policies of the European Commission. Unless otherwise noted, these findings are based on personal interviews with government



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1 | Cf. Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, 2004.

officials at a number of foreign ministries across East/Southeast Asia, staff at the European Commission and international and regional organisations in Asia, NGO representatives, academics and journalists.

EUROPE'S SOFT POWER

Consideration of the extent to which the EU can generally exert soft power in international policy is largely based on the debates that have been ongoing since the 1970s about the EU's characterisation as a civilian power.² In contrast to traditional powers, the EU has relied on the primacy of diplomatic cooperation as a solution to global problems. From this, we can deduce that the EU is a normative power. Richard Rosecrance described this very succinctly when he wrote: "It is perhaps a paradox to note that the continent which once ruled the world through the physical impositions of imperialism is now coming to set world standards in normative terms."³ Before the concept of soft power became common in international relations, Johan Galtung had already come close to it with his phrase "the power of ideas".⁴

The EU has drawn up a number of treaties that officially oblige it to pursue a normative approach in its external relations – for example the Treaty of Lisbon.

Why is the EU unique in being so strongly focused on pursuing an explicitly normative direction when establishing external relations with Asia and other regions of the world? The

answer is that, firstly, the EU has drawn up a number of treaties that officially oblige it to follow this course. The normative power of the EU as a source of ideas is strengthened by the fact that, in its case, constitutive and regulative norms have a mutually reinforcing effect. Constitutive norms, for example international law, create actors and contribute to their identity – this applies to sovereign states and international organisations alike. Regulative norms determine the behaviour of actors in specific situations. In the case of the EU, the normative foundations of European integration also serve to define expectations and perceptions of the EU's actions in its external relations. The Treaty of Lisbon is a good

2 | Cf. François Duchêne, "Europe's Role in World Peace", in: Richard Mayne (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, London, 1972, p.31-47; Knut Kirste/Hanns W. Maull, "Zivilmacht und Rollentheorie", *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1996, p. 283-312.

3 | Richard Rosecrance, R., "The European Union: A New Type of International Actor", in: Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, Den Haag, 1998, p. 22.

4 | Cf. Johan Galtung, *The European Community: A Superpower in the Making*, London, 1973, p. 33.

example of this. It stipulates that the EU's international relations should be governed by the following basic principles (or constitutive norms): democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. At the same time, the EU must make every effort to propagate and implement these basic principles (now as regulative norms) around the globe.⁵



In December 2012, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – for their contribution to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights. It endeavors to internationally promote and to implement these values as regulatory standards internationally. | Source: Georges Boulougouris, European Union, flickr ©1133.

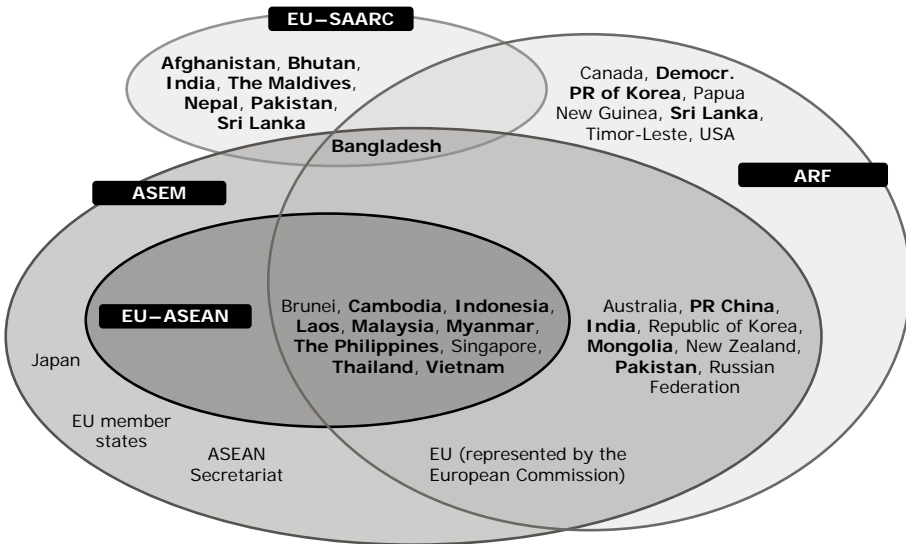
It seems likely that the idea of Europe's normative influence and soft power in Asia will strike a particular chord in places with similar institutional structures. In other words, the EU is more likely to have an effect as a provider of ideas when it works with other regional organisations. Here the focus particularly turns to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which was founded in 1967. But this is not a matter of course. In the early 1990s European actors reacted nervously to predictions of an imminent "Pacific century", in which relations between the USA and the Asia-Pacific region would become the main axis of global power. This scenario left little room for Europe to play a prominent and proactive role in 21st century international relations, and meant that Europeans had to accept responsibility for their difficult situation. It suggested that Europe was to blame for failing to place its relations with Asia on a solid institutional basis. The idea of a Europe in decline was far removed from reality, but

5 | See Article III-193(1), Article I-2 and I-3.

the ensuing intensive debate about the post-bipolar world order certainly had an effect. Since the mid-1990s, the EU and leading Asian actors, including ASEAN, have made major quantitative and qualitative improvements to their relations by setting up new mechanisms for cooperation.

Fig. 1

EU-supported regional and inter-regional organisations and dialogue mechanisms in Asia



Note: The highlighted countries are those covered under the EU-Asia Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) 2007-2013. | Source: Own and amended illustration based on: Particip, n. 14, p. 11.

Indeed, the foundations for these mechanisms had already been in place for some time. In 1977 the European Economic Community (EEC) and ASEAN formalised relations and went on to sign a widely acclaimed Cooperation Agreement in 1980. This was the first international agreement that the EEC had negotiated with another regional organisation. It included the important statement that the cooperation was between “equal partners”.⁶ This cooperation was expanded and enhanced in 1996 with the establishment of the ASEAN-Europe Meeting (ASEM). This aimed to strengthen

6 | Cf. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), “Cooperation Agreement between Member Countries of ASEAN and European Community Kuala Lumpur, 7 March 1980”, <http://asean.org/asean/external-relations/european-union/item/external-relations-european-union-nuremberg-declaration-on-an-eu-asean-enhanced-partnership-nuremberg-germany-15-march-2007> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

relations and increase understanding between the two regions in the spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. The EU is also a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), founded in 1994, which meets on an annual basis to discuss security issues in the Asia-Pacific region. The latest addition to the dialogue with Asia occurred in 2006, when the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) granted the EU observer status.

Ever since the early days of Southeast Asian regionalism, there has been a strong belief that ASEAN does not view the European integration process and the EU as an organisation as a model that it wishes to emulate. This belief has become so entrenched that the region's politicians almost ritualistically refute any comparisons with the EU, as they do not want to allow the impression to arise that ASEAN could develop into a supranational organisation. Most of the relatively young nation states in Southeast Asia are not keen to see the institution evolve in this way. Indeed, the huge differences in the economic growth and political systems of the various nations mean that such a development is unrealistic at the present time. But the picture is very different when we leave the sphere of political rhetoric and look at the everyday activities of this regional association. Today, the EU is viewed by the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta and the foreign and trade ministries of its member states as being an important source of experience on specific integration issues. ASEAN does not necessarily see the EU as providing a blueprint for its own integration project, but it realises that it can learn from Europe's experiences. The ongoing financial crisis in the EU has done little to change this view. A high-ranking official at the Secretariat simply states: "We are trying to follow what the EU does and also what the EU's Member States do." A number of high-level ASEAN decision-makers, including two former Deputy Secretary Generals, have also confirmed that ASEAN could not exist without the substantial financial support provided by international donors and above all the EU.

EU-ASEAN COOPERATION

Between 1996 and 2013 the European Commission provided the ASEAN nations with almost 200 million euros as part of its development cooperation work. This funding was used to support a range of integration projects, particularly in the economic sphere, but also latterly in a number of other areas. For 2014 to 2020, Brussels has budgeted 320 million euros for the promotion of regional integration in Asia. 170 million euros of this is destined

for ASEAN, an average of 24 million euros per year.⁷ The relevance and scale of this financial support is particularly revealed when we realise that ASEAN's annual budget is just 16.2 million U.S. dollars (as at 2013). This sum is made up of ten equal contributions by the ASEAN member states and basically only covers the Secretariat's operating and staff costs. Without outside assistance, ASEAN is simply not in a position to finance the implementation of projects such as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which should be at least partially in place by the end of 2015. The funding for amending the legal and regulative frameworks, training the officials involved, creating the necessary physical infrastructure and other key measures has been almost totally provided by international donors and particularly the EU.

A number of large projects funded by the European Commission are of particular significance here: the multi-million ASEAN Program for Regional Integration Support (APRIS, 2003 to 2010) and its successor ASEAN Regional Integration Support from the EU

The Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017), adopted in April 2012, aims to intensify cooperation areas.

(ARISE, 2013 to 2016); the EU-ASEAN Project on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights (ECAP), which has been running since 1993; and the Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (READI), which has been ongoing since 2011 and addresses non-economic issues such as disaster preparedness and management, energy security and human rights. The current initiatives form part of the Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership (2013 to 2017), adopted in April 2012. This broad agreement aims to intensify cooperation in the areas of policy and security policy (including human rights), business and trade, socio-cultural and civil society issues and institutional cooperation.⁸

7 | Cf. Dimitri Vanoverbeke/Michael Reiterer, "ASEAN's Regional Approach to Human Rights: The Limits of the European Model?" in: Wolfgang Benedek et al. (eds.), *European Yearbook on Human Rights 2014*, Antwerpen, 2014, p. 186; European Commission, *Regional Programming for Asia Multiannual Indicative Programme, 2014-2020*, p. 8, http://eeas.europa.eu/asia/docs/rsp/regional-asia-mip-2014-2020_en.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

8 | Cf. Federal Foreign Office, "Bandar Seri Begawan Plan of Action to Strengthen the ASEAN-EU Enhanced Partnership (2013-2017)", <http://auswaertiges-amt.de/cae/servlet/contentblob/630156/publicationFile/173526> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).



EU-funded projects have influence on the establishment of new standards by the ASEAN member countries in fields such as cross-border transport of goods and customs. | Source: Hans Hillewaert, flickr [©1133](#).

Development agencies in other countries, such as America's USAID or Australia's AUSAID, are also trying to strengthen ASEAN as an institution, but there are a number of areas where central new norms have clearly been established as a result of EU projects. For example, the ASEAN member states went against the U.S. by adopting the EU norm of geographical indications in the protection of intellectual property (Champagne, Serrano ham, etc.). The U.S. does not recognise geographical indications in patent law and relies exclusively on trademarks in this respect. In addition, almost all ASEAN states have adapted the legal foundations of their patent laws and the administration of their patent approvals and processes in line with the EU model and have introduced the same software as that used by the European Patent Office. A number of other norms have been adopted as a result of EU projects. These include standards for electronic and cosmetic products and foodstuffs and the harmonisation of customs norms and procedures, such as important certificates of origin. The ARISE Project, which has received 15 million euros in funding, has a vital role to play in the gradual implementation of the AEC. EU support is particularly important in the creation of a single goods market, the ongoing harmonisation of technical standards, the improvement of cross-border goods transportation and improved cooperation on customs matters. A pilot project funded by ARISE lies at the heart of the process of implementing

the ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS). More specifically, it involves the creation of a North-South corridor from Thailand through Malaysia to Singapore, including harmonised export and import procedures for greater efficiency and effectiveness. In the second phase, an East-West corridor is planned to run through Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The projects that receive funding from the EU budget are supplemented by initiatives on the part of individual EU Member States. Germany is prominent in this respect, with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) running four of its own ASEAN-wide programs in the region: Capacity Building for the ASEAN Secretariat and Capacity Development for the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) (funded by the German Foreign Office) and two projects of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Competition Policy and Law in ASEAN and Support to ASEAN Supreme Audit Institutions. Across all the EU Member States, GIZ is the only actor in the area of development cooperation to have a presence at the ASEAN Secretariat. Germany's political foundations are also making major contributions to ASEAN integration as part of European/Asian cooperation in economic, social and security-related fields. The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) has offices in eight of the ten ASEAN countries and runs projects co-funded by the EU in a number of countries, including Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. According to Asian dialogue partners, the largely EU funded "EU-Asia Dialogue" that has been implemented by the KAS Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia (based in Singapore)⁹ has contributed to the transfer of European ideas and concepts with regard to issues such as climate change, eco-cities, migration and food security.

NORMATIVE INFLUENCE ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN ASIA

In this way, the EU is not only exerting soft power with regard to trade policies and the institutional framework for regional integration but EU actors are also clearly having a normative influence – above and beyond ASEAN – on the human rights discourse in Asia. This first became evident in 2000 during the ASEM summit in Seoul, when the majority of participating Asian nations

9 | The full project title is "Shaping a Common Future for Europe and Asia – Sharing Policy Innovation and Best Practices in Addressing Common Challenges".

moved away from the previously postulated approach of localised Asian human rights and began to accept and agree on a European understanding of human rights. In her detailed analysis of the European-Asian human rights discourse, Maria-Gabriela Manea points out how the dialogue that the EU and ASEAN had been conducting for so many years at so many levels finally led to a radical rethinking.¹⁰ This process concluded with the codification of human rights norms in Southeast Asia, firstly in the form of the ASEAN Charter of 2007 and later and most importantly culminating in the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration of 2012. It is true that the EU did not directly influence the creation of these two documents, but an attendee at the AICHR meetings reports that the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), which was responsible for formulating the Declaration, used the European Convention on Human Rights as a model during certain difficult situations that arose during the negotiations. As the world's most comprehensive mechanism for protecting human rights, the European approach provides "a reference point and source of inspiration for ASEAN in the gradual process of constructing its own system".¹¹ However, the normative power of the EU rests not only in its role as a model (to a certain extent at least), but is also the result of its active promotion of human rights.

In 1991 the European Commission decreed that all new international agreements should include a human rights clause as an indispensable component. In 1992 the Treaty on European Union (known as the Maastricht Treaty) stated that the spread of democracy,

In 1992 the Treaty on European Union stated that the spread of democracy, human rights and basic freedoms was a key goal of development cooperation and created an appropriate legal framework in this respect.

human rights and basic freedoms was a key goal of development cooperation and created an appropriate legal framework in this respect. In 1994 the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) was set up as a funding instrument for the worldwide advancement of participatory and representative democracy, political pluralism, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EIDHR's budget has grown steadily and is now in the region of 1.3 billion euros for 2014 to 2020 (since 2006 the I stands for Instrument). Also in 1994, the EU announced its first Asia Strategy, stating its aim was to work on

10 | Cf. Maria-Gabriela Manea, "Human rights and the interregional dialogue between Asia and Europe: ASEAN-EU relations and ASEM", *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 2, 2008, No. 1, 2008, p. 380.

11 | Cf. Vanoverbeke/Reiterer, n. 7, p. 195.

“the development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” as a direct contribution towards security and stability in Asia.¹² Since then, this approach has been steadily intensified and differentiated. The establishment of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) in 2006 provided its chief impetus. It replaced all the EU’s previous geographical and thematic approaches to development cooperation and brought them together in a single funding instrument. Under the DCI, the EU agrees to promote good governance, democracy, human rights and institutional reforms.¹³ The target countries in this respect are those listed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD’s) Development Assistance Committee (DAC).

THE EU’S NATIONAL AND REGIONAL STRATEGIES

As part of the EU’s regional strategy from 2007 to 2013, which received 618 million euros over the same period, a particular focus was placed on providing support for uprooted population groups and demobilised former fighters.

The EU set out its cooperation with developing nations in Asia for the period from 2007 to 2013 in 18 national strategies and one regional strategy for the whole continent (excluding Central Asia, which has its own strategy) and made available funding to the

tune of 5.2 billion euros. As part of the regional strategy, which received 618 million euros over the same period, a particular focus was placed on providing support for uprooted population groups and demobilised former fighters (Aid to Uprooted People, AUP). One third of the funding was earmarked for this area. AUP is closely linked to human and civil rights in that the program aims to achieve the integration and reintegration of uprooted people in order to strengthen their basic rights and provide an opportunity to curtail forced labour and human trafficking. An independent evaluation of the 2007 to 2013 regional strategy concluded that – despite the enormous challenges it faced and the fact that it was not always able to achieve its goals – the AUP had made an effective contribution to improving the lives of uprooted people and former fighters, particularly in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran,

12 | Cf. European Commission, “Mitteilung der Kommission an den Rat: Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Asien-Strategie”, KOM (94) 314 final, Brussels, 13 Jul 1994, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/DE/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:51994DC0314&from=EN> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

13 | “Finanzierungsinstrument für die Entwicklungszusammenarbeit – DCI (2007-2013)”, in: *Europa. Zusammenfassung der EU-Gesetzgebung*, 20 Oct 2010, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/development/general_development_framework/l14173_de.htm (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

Myanmar, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In Myanmar the EU is the largest source of aid for uprooted people such as the Muslim Rohingya.¹⁴

Equally, the (also independent and publicly accessible) evaluations of the cooperation with individual Asian countries provide further evidence of the EU's soft power. By combining diplomacy with targeted support for Philippine human rights organisations (within the EIDHR framework), in 2006 the EU made a major contribution to the abolition of the death penalty in the Philippines.¹⁵ In Nepal the EU "has directly contributed to expanding the outreach of human rights monitoring in the country and, to some extent, to the reduction of human rights violations and discrimination against women and vulnerable people".¹⁶ In Vietnam the situation of ethnic minorities was improved by a number of EU-funded projects, particularly those which provided access to education and health services in highland regions. However, the poorest and most disadvantaged population groups often still gained little or no benefit from the projects.¹⁷ In India the government worked on joint initiatives with the EU to involve people and institutions at village level in rural development planning. This led to democratic structures being strengthened at local level.¹⁸ Taking the situation in Thailand as a final example, in June 2014 the Council of the European Union reacted to the country's military coup with an official statement that included two key measures: firstly, it suspended official visits to and from Thailand; and

14 | Cf. Particip, "Evaluation of the European Union's regional cooperation with Asia. Final Report. Volume 1", Mar 2014, p. 52-58, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/reports/2014/1326_vol1_en.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

15 | Cf. Particip, "Evaluation of the European Commission's Cooperation with the Philippines. Final Report. Volume 2", Jun 2011, p. 218, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/evaluation-cooperation-ec-philippines-1299-annex-201106_en_0.pdf (accessed 30 Jun 2015).


16 | Cf. Particip, "Evaluation of the Commission of the European Union's Cooperation with Nepal Country Level Evaluation. Final Report, Vol. 1 – Main Report", Mar 2012, p. 20, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/evaluation-cooperation-ec-nepal-1302-main-report-201203_en_0.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

17 | Cf. Particip, "Evaluation of the European Commission's Cooperation with Vietnam. Final Report, Vol. 1", Oct 2009, <http://oecd.org/countries/vietnam/44652744.pdf> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

18 | Cf. Particip, "Evaluation of the European Commission's Support to the Republic of India. Final Report", Aug 2007, p. 51, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/evaluation-cooperation-ec-india-1091-main-report-200708_en_0.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

secondly it postponed the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Thailand.¹⁹



The projects of the European Union extend to actions in the field of rural development. In this way, democratic structures and the participation of local populations and institutions can be strengthened. | Source: Lynhdan, flickr ©.

However, these examples of the EU's positive influence on human rights and democracy cannot detract from the fact that its normative power has not led to widespread, comprehensive change. Despite the fact that the EU has conducted a human rights dialogue with almost all its partners in Asia, the Human Rights Risk Index 2014 still rated the risk of human rights abuses in all Asian countries (with the exception of Japan, South Korea and Taiwan) as "high" or "extremely high".²⁰ This index is published annually by Reliefweb, an information service that is part of the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The only two ASEAN countries to have abolished the death penalty are the Philippines and Cambodia.

19 | Cf. Council of the European Union, "Schlussfolgerungen des Rates zu Thailand", Brussels, 23 Jun 2014, http://parlament.gv.at/PAKT/EU/XXV/EU/03/05/EU_30541/imfname_10477428.pdf (accessed 17 Jun 2015).

20 | Cf. Reliefweb, "World: Human Rights Risk Index 2014", <http://reliefweb.int/map/world/world-human-rights-risk-index-2014> (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

THE LIMITATIONS OF NORMATIVE INFLUENCE

There is other evidence that the EU's soft power has not met with universal success. Evaluations of the EU's development cooperation with countries such as China and Bangladesh and other regional associations in Asia such as SAARC show that in these cases the EU has played a minor role as a provider of ideas. The evaluation of cooperation with China that was carried out some years ago responded to the question "to what extent has the EU contributed to promoting transition to an open society based on rule of law, democratic processes, and respect for human rights?" by stating: "The EU has provided welcome technical advice, capacity-building, best-practice training, awareness raising, etc., but in the end the pace of progress is driven by Chinese policy priorities and politics."²¹ Regarding this point some might argue that any other result would have been unexpected. Of course the findings of a 100-page report cannot be summarised in a single sentence, but the evaluation still throws doubt on whether the EU is realistic about what it can achieve through soft power. Does the European Commission really think it can make a significant contribution to establishing a democratic and open society in China? The current strategy document titled "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation" is less ambitious in its aims (unsurprisingly, as it is a joint European-Chinese paper).

It simply refers to the desirability of deepening exchange on human rights "on the basis of equality and mutual respect".²² Since 1995 the EU has maintained a regular human rights dialogue with China, including discussions on issues such as the

death penalty, the rights of ethnic minorities and political and civil freedoms, but there is little evidence that this has had an effect. Indeed, in her comprehensive study, Katrin Kinzelbach concludes that the EU has failed in its goal of having a positive influence on the human rights climate in China. She also believes that the EU has in fact achieved the opposite of what it is seeking. She claims that over the years Chinese government officials have become

Since 1995 the EU has maintained a regular human rights dialogue with China, among other issues dealing with the rights of ethnic minorities. But there is little evidence that this has had an effect.

21 | Cf. Partcip, "Evaluation of the European Commission's Co-operation and Partnership with the People's Republic of China. Country Level Evaluation. Final Synthesis Report", Apr 2007, p.31, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/reports/2007/1077_vol1_en.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

22 | Cf. European External Action Service, "EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation", p.4, http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/20131123_agenda_2020_en.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

experts in dealing with the human rights dialogue. Secret talks behind closed doors have become a diplomatic ritual. They have provided Chinese participants with intensive training on how to handle international criticism and recommendations about China's human rights policy and reject this in the most effective way.²³



In December 2014, the 33rd EU – China Dialogue on Human Rights took place. Katrin Kinzelbach, Associate Director at the Global Public Policy Institute, notes in a study that the EU did not manage to influence the human rights climate in China positively. | Source: Tashana Batista, EU Council/EEAS, flickr ©①②③.

Of course China is a complex case and cannot necessarily be seen as a representative example of the EU's soft power in Asia on the whole. However, the EU also has to deal with the criticism that it has failed to make the most of existing opportunities or in fact has knowingly wasted them. Its relations with SAARC provide a good example of this. The EU has observer status, which allows Brussels to take part in SAARC summits. This opened the door to stronger relations between the two organisations, but this potential has not been fully exploited. Unlike other observers, the EU has never sent any high-level representatives, a fact that is a source of some annoyance for SAARC and EU officials. An EU representative bemoaned the fact that so much time and effort was poured into gaining observer status only to waste it by not sending

23 | Cf. Katrin Kinzelbach, *The EU's Human Rights Dialogue with China: Quiet Diplomacy and its Limits*, London, 2014, p.214. For a summary in German cf. Katrin Kinzelbach, "Menschenrechtsdialog in der Krise", *Deutscher Studienpreis. Ergebnisse 2011*, http://koerber-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_upload/wissenschaft/studienpreis/preistraeger/2011/pdf/1-DSP-2011_Kinzelbach.pdf (accessed 11 Jun 2015).

appropriate delegates to the meetings. Similar concerns have been voiced about ASEAN-EU relations and the ASEM summit. In both these cases, the Asian side has tended to send higher-level representatives than the EU, a fact that has been viewed with some incomprehension by Asian governments. A good example of this was the ASEAN-EU summit held on 22 November 2007 in Singapore, marking the 30th anniversary of the establishment of official relations. It was planned that the meeting should be attended by heads of state and government, but unlike the ASEAN nations, only a few EU Member States sent their heads of government. Today, observers still talk of the EU's embarrassment and the loss of face suffered by Singapore, which had a negative impact on subsequent diplomatic relations.²⁴

To be fair, when it comes to foreign policy the EU's institutional structure means it cannot act in the same way as an individual state. Coordination on foreign and security policy issues has increased, but the EU's external relations still represent the sum of the interests and strategies of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the 28 member states. They do not all consider relations with Asia to be one of their top priorities. Although the Union now has a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who looks after the day-to-day conduct of external relations, this has not necessarily increased the effectiveness of European diplomacy, at least with regard to Asia. The visit by former High Representative Catherine Ashton to the ASEAN Secretariat in November 2013 attracted little public attention, whereas Hillary Clinton's visit in September 2012 in her role as U.S. Secretary of State was reported in the media for weeks.

At the end of the day, high-level diplomacy only plays a minor role in building and expanding normative power. It is equally – or perhaps more – important to focus on the everyday reality of the bilateral and multilateral relations that develop as a result of communication and negotiation between the officials of the governments concerned. The EU's apparatus is characterised by multilayered decision-making processes, complex coordination procedures and the principle of rotation. This means that it often lacks the flexibility to make compromises during negotiations, and regular personnel changes make it more difficult to build mutual trust and understanding. It is an open secret that the free trade negotiations between the EU and ASEAN which began in 2007 and broke down in 2009 largely failed because the Brussels

representatives tried to push through the EU draft without being willing or able to respond to the specific requirements and wishes of ASEAN.

CONCLUSION

This all may give the impression that the EU has failed in its objective of exercising a normative influence on Asia, or at least that it has been less successful than Brussels would like to suggest. However, such a verdict fails to take into account the fact that diplomacy is only one side of the coin. There is little public awareness of the EU's development cooperation with Asia, but the above examples show that it does indeed play a role as an accepted source of ideas. There is clearly a European tone to Southeast Asian regionalism and the Asian discourse on human rights, democracy and good governance.

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