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GLOBAL POLICY ANALYSIS

NIZAMI GANJAVI INTERNATIONAL CENTER

A NON-TRADITIONAL
SECURITY THREAT



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FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

I am delighted to celebrate the launch of the Global Policy Analysis(GPA), the inaugural issue of the magazine of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center.

Our goal is to provide the reader of Global Policy Analysis with a new, well constructed, informative, and educational magazine. It will be published bimonthly by the Nizami Ganjavi International Center; all articles will be submitted and circulated both electronically and printed.

We aim to tackle the important questions of our time: What will humanity and the world look like in the future to come?

We will share the views and opinions of distinguished world leaders, experts, and thinkers to address a wide range of challenging issues such as Environment and economy, conflict over natural resources; Leadership in climate change; How can the countries of Central and Eastern Europe find new engines of sustained growth? How the global challenges before us require a new multilateralism? How is the international order equipped to promote the balance between cooperation and competition that will be necessary to face global challenges from war and peace to longer-term tasks like the SDGs, biodiversity loss, and Climate Change? How can we build on the legacy of the 20th century to move to a new world order suitable to the 21st? How can we reconcile continued economic development with ecological security and the rights of future generations? Why we have a problem with global climate change and leadership? How is leadership changing in changing world order?

We will be debating these questions with internationally renowned experts from all fields of research, including politics, science, sociology, economy, culture, humanities, and ethics.

Lastly, I consider it an honor to be the Editor-in-Chief of the Global Policy Analysis and would like to emphasize that the success of any magazine is built primarily on people: contributors, reviewers & publication staff. I would like to thank all of them and express my sincere appreciation for the support they have given to Global Policy Analysis. I look forward to continuing this relationship and receiving your suggestions and ideas for making Global Policy Analysis more valuable for our community. I would also like to announce that we are now welcoming submissions for future issues of the magazine.

ROVSHAN MURADOV

*Editor-in-Chief, Global Policy Analysis
Secretary General, Nizami Ganjavi International Center*



A NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY THREAT

COVID-19 GLOBAL ALERT: HOW TO RESPOND?

We were a little surprised by what had happened in Wuhan, but not so much so that we feel it is a national crisis, as if life stopped. I served as a Chinese Ambassador in Geneva to the World Health Organization, so I am quite familiar with the international efforts to cope with the outbreak of epidemics. We experienced SARS in 2003, so for China it is not such a surprise.

We didn't expect it to be repeated. But we certainly know the world will not be devoid of any virus attacks in the future. It is something you have to live with. The only thing you need to do is to strengthen your research, and set-up a national emergency response system at different levels. So as something happens, you need to act quickly on solid evidence that something has happened, based on scientific evidence. I think at this time the Chinese government, Chinese people, or China for that purpose, has acted timely and effectively.

We need to get prepared. We need to learn more about virus, the origin of the virus, in what conditions it will come back possibly. Lots of R&D should be put into that. I think human-kind, the international community for that matter, has put a lot of effort, money, equipment into how to prevent war for instance, weapons of mass destruction, etc. But we haven't paid enough attention to life-threatening viruses.

We have been complacent with the advance of medicine and technology. We believe everything is curable, which is not true. When I was in Geneva, I heard very often from WHO experts, from Margaret Chan, for instance, the former Director-General, warning us and not just China but the world that virus is dangerous. We need to put in more resources in trying to do more research, strengthening

countries' public health system and emergency response system, etc., so that whenever it happens, we have something ready to cope with it.

We have been hearing stories already about carmakers, they cannot fulfil their production quota because the supplies components are not being produced adequately in China. The same thing is happening to Apple. So, in this globalized world, China is in a very difficult position - on the one hand, it continues to fight the COVID-19 outbreak and has taken tough measures; on the other hand, the government now has been all-out trying to restore production of goods.

We understand some cautionary measures (taken in different parts of the world). But you should not overreact to the point that you cut-off international travel. If you cut-off international travel, certainly you will cut-off international trade.

The virus has an effect of a wake-up call, telling us that, hey, look, we live in a world that is complicated, with a lot of threats.

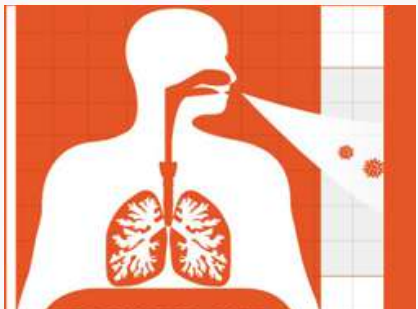
This is one of the non-traditional security threats. We're not going to see a war in the foreseeable future. But what is more threatening to humankind is non-traditional threats such like viruses, especially for public health. Global public health is extremely important.

As far as China is concerned, or for that matter, the U.S. is included, we need to do more in Africa, because they have much weaker public health systems.

When I look at China, I can see we are "fortunate" - because of SARS, China has since set-up a national system that can cope with such an outbreak of a virus. You can see the quick mobilization nationally of all kinds of resources. We are thankful to international assistance for instance from Japan, from Europe, including from the United States, and we are grateful for the international assistance to help China to tide over the difficulties.

HE YAFEI

Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs
of People's Republic of China



DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

At present, cases can only be confirmed after laboratory testing. There is no specific treatment: Medical care is supportive and to help relieve symptoms. There is no vaccine.

PREVENTIVE STEPS



Wash your hands often with soap and water or a hand sanitiser and help your children do the same.



Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze then throw the tissue in the trash.



Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

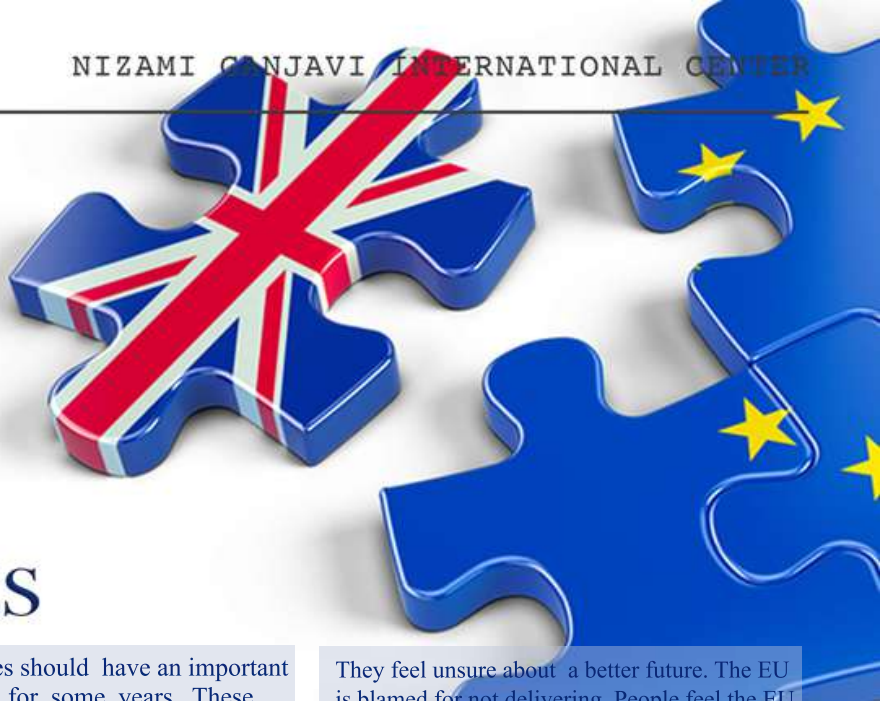


Avoid closer contact, such as kissing, sharing cups, or sharing eating utensils, with sick people.



Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as toys and doorknobs

EUROPE'S POST-BREXIT FUTURE : TIME TO MEET THE CHALLENGES



For the European continent, the decision by the UK to leave the European Union is for sure a 'game changer' as such. And furthermore, the Brexit-saga unfolded at a time where our European nation-states and their leadership were already under pressure for different reasons, potentially affecting their ability to respond to this historic challenge.

The EU-institutions however, have been renewed and this helps creating new momentum. The traditional difficulties to strike a deal about the Multiannual Financial Framework should only persist for a couple of weeks more.

The European Union should in any case definitely spend more time and political energy than ever before on strategic thinking and action about its way ahead.

Easier said than done, of course. There are new urgencies, a multitude of issues to tackle at the national level, a lack also of stable governance in some Member States, a decisive transition in Germany, etc.... Nevertheless, it is of utmost importance to set priorities.

These certainly include the following:

1 *Restore a solid macro-economic surveillance*

The level of debt of both the public and private sectors is just unsustainably high in several member states of the EU and the Eurozone. Interest rates remain artificially low. Although recent developments might have given the contrary impression, there are limits to the monetary policy implemented since the crisis of the sovereign debt. The problem of the difficult refinancing of the debt has been solved by creating more debt.

All member states should have an important primary surplus for some years. These member states with very important surpluses should invest in domestic consumption and productivity-enhancing investments.

2 *Increase the competitiveness of the European industry and services*

Although the impact of authorities and the EU is limited, policies should aim at strengthening the competitiveness of European enterprises. To achieve this, taxation and economic, infrastructural, digital, educational and R&D-policies should be better designed in all member states to increase productivity. The internal market, trade and competition policies of the EU should also better defend our industrial and economic interests.

3 *Coordinate efficiently the concrete implementation of climate change policies*

The European Union has rightly been leading the debate about concrete policies to tackle the climate change. The goals that were decided and announced in terms of so called « Green Deal », in terms of reduction of CO₂-emission and the shift to renewable energy production are very high. Implementation of all necessary measures should be pursued with the EU-Commission in an active coordinating role.

4 *Seize every chance to make the economy more inclusive*

The European integration coincided to a very important extend, with the development of the welfare state. European integration and socio-economic progress seemed to be mutually reinforcing. And it is fair to say that indeed the single market and structural policies brought extra wealth. Presently, increasing parts of the population are at least under the impression that the dynamic is broken.

They feel unsure about a better future. The EU is blamed for not delivering. People feel the EU is often 'big on small and small on big'. Of course, competencies of the EU in the field of social policies are very limited. Nevertheless, the EU should be taking the lead in prioritising policy initiatives that ensure a better distribution of wealth. This includes strengthening the capacity of public authorities to collect a fair tax on big global multinationals, but there is a lot more to do.

5 *Empower and implement an effective migration policy*

The European Union is geographically a peninsula at the west-end of the Eurasian continent and located closest possible to the African continent with its booming demography.

The common policies and actions in the field of migration should be strengthened and should promote an approach based on transparency, human values, clarity and realistic assessment of the individual and collective capacities of the members states. The policy goals as stated by the Commission are not the problem, important is to have the member states united in their implementation.

6 *Resume enlargement*

The founding fathers were right that economic and political integration could be no less than a guarantee for sustainable peace on the European continent. The European Union is undoubtedly one of the most successful examples of international cooperation that have ever been decided.

There is a historic responsibility for the present generation to continue to unify the continent.

Of course, opening accession-talks has to be decided on merit-based arguments. On the other hand, in the case of the Western Balkans, it is now time to make progress.



7 *Fight against irrelevance on the global stage*

Of course, the European Union is a gigantic market and is a strong sponsor of development aid-efforts. Other parts of a comprehensive common EU-foreign policy are just less convincing at this stage. National agendas prevail for the biggest EU-members states on the global stage. These bigger EU-countries - midsize countries globally speaking-wrongly think they individually have the power to weigh when it comes to the global trade, multi-lateral and security agenda.

Certainly, post-Brexit this is an important issue. France is now the only EU-Member State with a veto right as a permanent member of the UNSC. It is also the only EU-Member State with own relevant defense capacity and an active military presence in Africa.

The EU is surrounded by challenging situations that deserve and need a common approach. Until now, we only see very timid initiatives to address these.

Achieving on a series of new realistic and balanced trade deals, revitalising the Neighbourhood-policy, building an own defense capacity, and agreeing on a new partnership with China are key priorities.

8 *Build a real EU-defense policy*

For decades, Western Europe was privileged to live under the protective US-umbrella. Nato has been a very successful guarantee for lasting peace and security. The fundamentally changed vision of the US - earlier and broader than the current President - on their military engagement worldwide and the burden-sharing with Europe when it more specifically comes to the defense of peace and security in Europe and in parts of the world vital to our interests, confronts the European countries with a challenging responsibility.

The UK should remain a strong partner, a strong ally. The EU has to politically invest in that relationship, not the least in the post-Brexit era. Furthermore, the EU-member states have to pay the political, diplomatic and financial price for the defense of their security and their interests.

Strengthening the European pillar within Nato and developing an EU-policy in the field of diplomacy, security and defense are crucial priorities for the next years.

9 *Build a new consensus on making the European Integration stronger and more delivering*

Whatever the quality of the underpinning debate and arguments may be, the decision by the UK to leave has made clear that the EU has to better deserve the trust by its member states and their population. A condition to do so is a new consensus on what Europe integration is and should be.

A Conference on the Future of Europe has been launched. It is, of course, the key to see Europe's citizens and civil society involved in this Conference and to have breakthroughs in more ownership of the agenda and decisionmaking by the citizens. Furthermore, Europe's leaders should also seize the momentum to improve European integration and decisionmaking.

The abovementioned agenda is, of course, not exhaustive and not sufficiently detailed. The 9 points mentioned however are crucial not only for the political in-crowd, but for the present and future welfare and wellbeing of Europe's citizens. A crisis is always a chance for improvement. The Brexit-decision by the UK will hopefully be a turning point to an even better EU.

YVES LETERME

Board Member of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center
Prime Minister of Belgium 2008, 2009-2011



The sudden COVID-19 outbreak is a severe challenge to the Chinese people and a major test of China's national governance system and governance capabilities. However, since the epidemic, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core, the Chinese government has taken quick, scientific and precise measures with strengthened confidence and concerted efforts to form a strategic anti-epidemic system of comprehensive mobilization, deployment, prevention and control. Faced with the rapid spread of the epidemic, the people of all ethnic groups in China have united as one with a powerful joint force to fight the epidemic and written a heroic chapter of fighting against the epidemic. At present, China's epidemic control work has achieved initial results. The situation of the epidemic control continues to be improved, and the production and living order is recovering. China's measures have been recognized as effective methods and won admiration and support from the international community. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said during a previous visit to China that "the speed and scale of China's epidemic prevention operations are rare. This is the advantage of the Chinese system and the relevant experience is worth learning from other countries."

I would like to take this opportunity to share the following experience on China's fighting against the epidemic and explain the reason why China can achieve such great results in a short period of time.

Firstly, China established a nationwide system to fight against the outbreak by fully taking advantage of its political system. Since the outbreak, under the unified command, coordination, and distribution of the CPC Central Committee, national supports have been provided to Hubei and Wuhan. More than 300 medical teams and 40,000 medical staff all over the country went to epidemic areas, 19 provinces provided targeted support. Within 10 days, the construction of centralized

treatment hospitals and square cabin hospitals such as Huoshenshan and Leishenshan were completed. Coordinating all the activities of the nation as a whole and establishing a joint prevention and control mechanism, 31 provinces have successively initiated first-level responses to public health emergencies. The government has mobilized all citizens to implement the most stringent quarantine measures to restrict population movements, block epidemic areas, prevent internal and external proliferation, and quarantine external people for 14 days. The legislative body has accelerated the legislation process to provide legal basis to the subject of epidemic control command to realize fighting against the epidemic according to the law.

Secondly, the Chinese government has always maintained people-oriented, scientific and accurate control. Facing the complicated and severe epidemic situation, the Chinese government upheld the "people-centered" governing philosophy, putting the people's lives and health in the first place. Measures such as free testing and treatment for infected patients, mandatory rotation rest of medical staff have been taken. The government strengthened the supply of necessities for residents, such as vegetables, meat, eggs, milk, and food, and medical protective materials. In terms of information gathering, advanced information technology methods such as cloud services plus big data and grid management were used to build community control data platforms, generate community control apps and QR codes, and complete health information monitoring and sharing. The role of basic organizations in epidemic control was emphasized. The grassroots level prevention was regarded as the core of the battle against the epidemic. The force and work of basic organization were further strengthened. Territorial responsibilities and grid-based management measures were strictly implemented.

Thirdly, the role of the media to promote public awareness is highly valued. The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 was overwhelming. Facing the complicated and severe situation of epidemic control, the Chinese government gave full play to the role of the media to timely spread government control measures and epidemic information to the public.

Field surveys and new media channels such as WeChat and Tiktok were used to gather public opinion from both online and offline to know the needs of the people and solve their doubts. Media plays an important role in forming a united ideological front of an entire nation and strengthening the people's confidence in fighting against the epidemic by spreading the knowledge on epidemic prevention and control, guiding the people not to believe or spread rumors and cooperate with the government to ensure home isolation.

Fourthly, China attaches great importance to international cooperation to stop the spread of the epidemic. Serious public health problems can't be solved without the joint efforts of the international community. After the outbreak, China has always maintained an open and transparent attitude, notified the world of the epidemic situation in a timely manner, and shared the whole sequence of the COVID-19 to WHO as soon as possible. Information exchange and scientific research cooperation with various countries were carried out soon after the outbreak. Facing the shortage of domestic epidemic prevention materials, measures are taken to procure international material through various overseas agencies and establish a green channel for international donations. At present, the COVID-19 epidemic has taken place in many other countries, and China understands their situation and has provided medical assistance and donation to related countries including sending a medical expert team to Iran, providing a batch of virus detection kits to Japan, and donating scarce medical equipment including masks to South Korea. In order to prevent imported cases and consolidate the results of China's epidemic control, quarantine measures have been taken for people from countries with severe epidemics, and cross-country joint control cooperation mechanism has been discussed with relevant countries.

Lastly, comprehensive measures have been taken to strictly control and battle against the epidemic while keeping the economic development. At present, the situation of epidemic control in China is keeping a good momentum. The development of the epidemic situation has entered a period of mitigation. It is a challenge to coordinate epidemic control and socio-economic development. According to President Xi Jinping's instructions, based on the "taking measures according to local conditions, and implementing policies by districts", work and production have been resumed in an orderly manner according to laws and regulations in accordance with the epidemic situation in different regions. The Chinese government closely monitors the operation of the economy. Policies have been made to restore supply and expand domestic demand simultaneously. The Ministry of Finance of China has implemented a special purpose re-loan and interest subsidy policy for the first time. Local governments have done their best to introduce effective policies to reduce the burden on enterprises and the impact of the epidemic on socioeconomic development and business operations.

Those who desire the same will win, and those who go with the storm will rise. At the time of the epidemic, the people of the whole country are united in their efforts to overcome the difficulties together. When disaster strikes, help comes from all sides.

China's strength and boosted the national spirit has been fully demonstrated. A friend in need is a friend indeed. China is not alone in the battle against the epidemic. China can't win this battle without the valuable and vigorous support from the international community. Viruses are the enemies of mankind. This epidemic once again shows to the international community that no one can survive alone in disasters. In the era of globalization, the destinies of nations are connected together. Therefore, we shall uphold the concept of a community of shared future for mankind, actively carry out international and regional cooperation, deeply participate in global public health management, work together to address non-traditional security challenges, and build a global village with common interests, common benefits and common security.

WU HAILONG
President of Chinese Public Diplomacy Association



ISLAM AND THE WEST: WHY THE ENMITY?

A TALE OF TWO NARRATIVES...

Islam and the West. A shorthand summary statement that leads to confusions and feeds the worst stereotype and misconceptions.

These days it is very much in the political headlines and is fodder to the extremist elements in every society. One of the contributing factors to the prevalence of hostile attitudes in both Europe and the US against Islam and Muslims, is the pervasiveness of a negative narrative that has cast Islam and Muslims as the “Other”, even when talking of the significant minority of Muslims who are now Europeans. In the Muslim majority countries, there is a parallel widespread historical narrative that casts the Western powers as villains.

In the West, Islam is seen as a ferocious religion that promotes violence and bigotry, and that is profoundly aggressive towards the Judeo-Christian West with its democratic and secular societies. The historical narrative that the West carries for its cultural evolution is based on the Greek origin of Western civilization, The Muslim “Other” was blocked by Charles Martel (688 – 741) at the battle of Tours, (October of 732), where he defeated the advancing armies of the Islamic Umayyad Empire and saved Europe from Islamic domination. Later there were other major conflicts between Christian Europeans and Muslims, symbolized by the Crusades. The European renaissance, was accompanied by the re-conquest of Spain, which threw out the Muslims from their strongholds in al-Andalus (where they had stayed for some 750 years), while the from the east came the Ottoman invasion of Constantinople and parts of Eastern Europe up to and including Greece. In that historical narrative relationships were always seen as hostile. The achievements of the European scientific and industrial revolutions, and the rise of a hegemonic Europe, are recognized with the pride that they deserve. But the other side of that hegemony, which led to European colonialism, is underplayed. And among the colonies would be almost all the Muslim-majority countries.

The Western narrative continues into the present, where a large and growing minority of European citizens are Muslims. Here the immigrant Muslims, escaping the tyranny in their own Muslim majority countries, have created chaos and mayhem in those Western countries that have been foolish enough to welcome them with open arms. And in the last few decades, from Afghanistan to the Middle East and North

Africa and the Sahel, from Chechnya to the Sudan, Muslim militants have brought nothing, but terror and instability, and they also exported their horrors to the countries of the West, from 9/11 in the USA to various outrages in the West. The ultimate horrors of Al-Qaeda and of ISIS indicate that these organizations need to be exterminated. The military defeat of ISIS is the only way to deal with “these people”.

On the other hand, the view from the Muslim societies is very different. It starts with a different historical narrative. The Muslim religion is considered the most tolerant, and in its heyday in the Middle Ages the Muslim states were a refuge from the European dark ages. Muslims advanced knowledge and science and rationality for a thousand years. The Crusades were politically and commercially motivated invasions ...just look at how Saladin treated people when he retook Jerusalem after the battle of Hittin. Then the Western powers colonized almost all the Muslim countries. Today, they see what they consider a vast array of tolerant societies of Muslim peoples who are a minority in some places and a majority in some countries, but who are all under attack. From the Uighurs in China to the Rohingya in Myanmar, from India and Kashmir to Palestine, onto the Arab states and into the heart of Africa, they see Muslims being attacked and persecuted. Vast conspiracy theories are advanced.

Obviously, both of these caricatures are quite wrong. Like all stereotypes, they have a small kernel of truth. The conflicts are real. But from there to adopt these narratives and the perceptions they encourage, just tends to polarize the issues, as the adherents of both of these fallacious positions seem to do.

This polarization is both factually wrong and politically dangerous.

I believe that the true narrative is one where, over thousands of years, the torch of learning and science passed many times between the two sides of the Mediterranean. From the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians to the Greeks and then back to Hellenistic Alexandria, then back to Rome and Constantinople, then to back to the Muslim empires that spread from Spain to India and from Central Asia to Central Africa. Later the European renaissance, the scientific and industrial revolutions would bring the period of hegemonic European (and American) culture that we are still living in, with its negatives, but certainly with all its enormously positive contributions to enlightened rational thought, scientific advances, Human Rights and democratic practice.

Thus we need a historical narrative that recognizes that our global civilization did not start with the Greeks and that the Muslim contribution to the renaissance and the scientific revolution that followed – and by extension – to contemporary European culture and civilization was quite significant.

Adopting such a narrative is – to my mind – an essential part to overcoming the alienation of many young European Muslims, who would see that their forbears made major contributions to the societies that they live in. It is also a part of the basis to have better attitudes between the West and the societies of the Muslim Majority countries, loosely referred to as “the Muslim World”. Furthermore, it is undoubtedly truthful and supported by mountains of evidence and serious scholarship.

But let us return to “The Muslim World” which is suffering from deep cleavages within itself as well as between it and the rest of the world. Many see that as a war between Islam and the West. But it is primarily a war between political radicals and terrorists who use the name and words of Islam to try to legitimize their political agenda and the forces of the established order. The overwhelming majority of the victims of these confrontations are Muslims in Muslim countries, and the overwhelming majority of the soldiers fighting Da’ish (or ISIS), the boots on the ground, are Muslims.

And Muslim-Majority Countries also face other cleavages, between Shia and Sunna as well as between secularists and those who favor a state with a strong Islamic identity, not to mention many ethnic and sectarian groupings. And in some cases, the terrorists believe that they can take over the government and fashion a theocratic state that they would rule.

But we also see terrorism striking in Europe as well as the Muslim-Majority Countries. Why?

Surely, the terrorists cannot imagine that killing a dozen citizens will bring about the downfall of the government of a European country. No. They have another objective, and one that they are actually succeeding at: They want by these terrorist actions to drive a wedge between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities in these European countries. Some of these communities, with their insistence on their “Otherness” from dress to treatment of women, are facilitating that wedge. Just as we see the rise of populist politicians articulating these views, and seizing upon the issues of immigration to Europe to mobilize people with the identity politics of hatred and fear.

I have written a lot about these issues and I have frequently said that all the tension and violence that the Arab world is witnessing underlines the need for people like myself to critically ask ourselves one question: Why did our countries — Arab and Muslim countries — become a breeding ground for extremist thought and barbaric violence?



That has been treated in many of my prior publications. We need to fight extremist thought with new and constructive thinking that can reach the hearts and minds of a younger generation.

Europeans should also start asking themselves why is there such disenchantment with the magnificent European construction that so inspired past generations? Why is there a rise of nationalist sentiment and ethnic concern? Why do children of immigrants, born and raised in Europe, find the monstrous ideology of Da’ish attractive? What should Europe do to deal effectively with its new minorities and with adherents to Islam, its second religion? Exclusion of the minority “Other” – whether it is due to race or religion – is not the same as the sense of alienation and anomie that the youth of the poorest classes feel, even if there is an overlap between the two.

Extremism and violence have trampled all that is reasonable and humane. Undoubtedly, confronting the terrorism and violence practiced by extremists necessitates resorting to force that would restore the prestige of the state and the rule of law, and ensure citizens’ rights to security and peace. But we must also oppose the ideas that beget violence, and these must be confronted with other ideas...

1. This view was well articulated by Gilles Kepel in his recent book *La Fracture [The Fracture]* Paris: Gallimard, 2018.

2. That could lead to major breaks in societies and possibly lead to paralysis if not open conflict in the powerful European countries. But that kind of a scenario requires a totally different discussion

3. See inter alia, Ismail Serageldin, “Reflections on extremism and violence and on how to fight them” in *Ismail Serageldin. New Essays for Our Time*, NGIC, Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2017, pp. 89-119. Also Ismail Serageldin *Al-Tahhady (the Challenge)*, General Book Organization, Cairo, 2015

ISMAIL SERAGELDIN

Co-Chair of the Nizami Ganjavi International Center
Vice President of the World Bank 1992-2000



Women's Empow

I CELEBRATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ALL THE TALENTED, STRONG AND SUCCESSFUL WOMEN WHO HAVE BROKEN THROUGH AN ENDLESS VARIETY OF GLASS CEILINGS. I FEEL FOR ALL THE GIRLS AND WOMEN WHO DAILY SUFFER INJUSTICE, PREJUDICE, VIOLENCE, AND VIOLATION. I ENCOURAGE THEM TO REMEMBER THAT THEY HAVE AN INHERENT WORTH AND VALUE AS UNIQUE HUMAN BEINGS THAT NO FORCE IN THE WORLD CAN TAKE AWAY FROM THEM. WOMEN HAVE THE SAME RIGHT AS MEN TO LOVE, COMPASSION, RESPECT, AND DIGNITY; THEY HAVE THE SAME RIGHT TO PURSUE THEIR DREAMS AND TO DEVELOP THEIR TALENTS.

VAIRA VIKE-FREIBERGA,
PRESIDENT OF LATVIA 1999-2007
CO-CHAIR OF NGIC

erment Month

ALWAYS AIM HIGH, WORK HARD,
AND CARE DEEPLY ABOUT WHAT
YOU BELIEVE IN. AND, WHEN YOU
STUMBLE, KEEP FAITH. AND, WHEN
YOU'RE KNOCKED DOWN, GET
RIGHT BACK UP AND NEVER
LISTEN TO ANYONE WHO SAYS
YOU CAN'T OR SHOULDN'T GO ON.

HILARY CLINTON
FIRST LADY OF THE UNITED
STATES 1993-2001

I'VE GOT A WOMAN'S ABILITY TO
STICK TO A JOB AND GET ON
WITH IT WHEN EVERYONE ELSE
WALKS OFF AND LEAVES IT.

MARGARET THATCHER
PRIME MINISTER OF UK 1979-1990



ITALIAN-AZERBAIJANI RELATIONS

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev paid a historic state visit to Rome, Italy (February 20-21 2020). President Aliyev was accompanied by numerous ministers, top government officials, and First Lady and First Vice-President Mehriban Aliyeva. The State Visit in Italy marked the highest level of the bilateral relations between Italy and Azerbaijan, following the historic visit of the Italian President Mattarella in Baku in July 2018.

President Aliyev was received by the President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Sergio Mattarella, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, the President of the Senate Alberti Casellati, the President of the Chamber of Deputies Fico, and jointly opened the Italy-Azerbaijan Business Forum at the Farnesina with Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio. President Aliyev also met the Mayor of Rome Virginia Raggi.

More than 25 bilateral documents and agreements in various fields were signed during the visit. The more important of those documents is the Joint Declaration on Strengthening the Multidimensional Strategic Partnership, signed by Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte, and President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev at Palazzo Chigi. By signing the Joint Declaration, Italy and Azerbaijan recognize each other as strategic partners and jointly declare an interest in the further development of this partnership.

High-level visits are a good indicator of the degree of trust and mutual understanding between countries and governments. Italy has been one of Azerbaijan's top partners in the European Union since the beginning of the South Caucasus country's post-Soviet independence. Italy is also Azerbaijan's top trade partner in the world. In the last 10 years, Italy imported 55.5 billion Euros of crude oil from Azerbaijan (5 billion average every year).

The bilateral trade accounts for 92 percent of Italy's overall trade with the South Caucasus region. Additionally, 17 percent of Italy's annual oil consumption is supplied by Azerbaijan and almost 35 percent of Azerbaijani exports go to Italy.

In recent years, energy sector cooperation between our two states has been further reinforced by the construction of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC), which, starting in late 2020, will annually deliver 10 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Azerbaijani natural gas to the European market for the first time in history, through Italy. The last, fourth component of the Southern Gas Corridor (TAP) has been completed by 92 percent and commencement of commercial operations is expected by 2020.

The Italian government has consistently supported that project over the years, bearing in mind its role in further diversifying Italy and the EU's gas supplies, and accelerating our transition toward a clean energy mix. This infrastructure will link physically the two countries, Italy and Azerbaijan. This physical connection is the sign of a strong friendship existing between our countries, between our people.

In recent months, the Italian Embassy in Baku launched a simple but ambitious concept: "Beyond oil & gas". In fact, Azerbaijan is not only about oil & gas. We closely follow the reforms pursued by President Aliyev and the Azerbaijani government in terms of improving the business climate, and look forward to further measures: I am sure we are creating a new phase in the partnership between Rome and Baku, in political, economic, cultural and scientific areas.

Our friendship originated centuries ago, and strengthened along the centuries: now we have to build together our future relationship!

AUGUSTO MASSARI
Ambassador of Italy to Azerbaijan



SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SDG'S

The urgency is upon us. Threats of unprecedented magnitude weigh on the future of humanity: Climate Change; Multilateralism; Shared Prosperity: these three pillars are vacillating and if any of them gives in, the whole system might collapse.

In the face of the storm, the international order that prevailed in the twentieth century and embodied by the United Nations General Assembly is fissuring, sidestepped and contested by all sides.

However, there is one hope: consciousness - be it political, media, social or on the financial front, is mounting everywhere.

The time for reflection has passed and concrete actions are called for.

The illustration of this phenomenon is the ever-increasing number of questions about the global role of listed companies in the public perception.

In this new area, the international community is engaged in an unprecedented manner, to bring together interests around the Sustainable Development Goals and to take the lead in coalition diplomacy along the lines of the Paris Agreement.

Indeed, the time has come for the next stage of multilateralism better suited to meet new environmental and economic challenges of our century.

It is crucial to create an acute realization in the public debate by designing new forms of global governance that work in the troubled geopolitical climate.

The civil society could accelerate this sustainable movement.

Indeed, none of these objectives can be achieved without mobilizing public-private coalitions with the engagement and contribution of social entrepreneurs.

We must accelerate this process and propose concrete actions to align with the United Nations' Agenda 2030, the only universal reference point that sets the direction for our common future.

Only the global resources mobilization will lead the way to a new, prosperous and resilient society.

When it comes to aligning with the objectives of **Sustainable Development Goals**, I do believe that social entrepreneurs in the private sector have a crucial role to play in finding lasting solutions to the major challenges of our time.

Together, we must pave the road to achieve this **Sustainable New Deal**.

More than ever, the future of our planet depends on these strategic coalitions: the structured partnerships between the Public institutions, the Civil Society, the Private sector and Social entrepreneurs.

NATHALIE DE GAULLE
Founder of Societer & NB-INOVA
Founder under 40

THE ASIAN CENTURY

how will rising economic and political powers in Asia reshape the world order?

Leading analysts and experts call the 21st century - the century of Asia. Perhaps this is due to the stable and sustainable economic recovery that has been demonstrated by an increasing number of Asian countries over the past two decades. First of all, this applies to Japan and the Republic of Korea, China and India, as well as countries within ASEAN. A significant contribution to the development of Asia is made by a group of Gulf countries, whose economies are growing due to the presence of large oil and gas reserves. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that in Asia, along with economic giants and tigers, countries with economies in transition are also represented; 12 Asian countries (out of 49 in the world) are landlocked, not to mention the group of least developed countries. And yet, the leadership of Asia is becoming more apparent, primarily due to its flagships.

Of course, I am speaking of China. At present, China's GDP is about 16% of the total world economy, and China's contribution to world economic growth exceeds 30%. In connection with the epidemic of pneumonia caused by coronavirus, leading economists make a variety of, including pessimistic forecasts regarding the near future socio-economic development of China. However, the Chinese government is confident that the epidemic situation will not be able to affect the basic aspects of the Chinese economy and the positive trend of its development in the long term. Experience shows that China is able to adequately overcome crisis situations.

By 2030, global GDP growth is expected to reach 2.5%. "Asian tigers" will stand next to the mature economies of the world. PPP of China will be 20% of the global (\$ 38 trillion), India, by the middle of the century, (possibly even before) will take second place in the world economy, and Japan may be fourth after the United States. Most Asian countries will be established as middle-income countries by 2030. Asia will rightfully become the leading region on the world economic scene.

In addition, by 2030, Asia may (with high probability) become the key conductor of the new technological revolution. In ten years, it is expected that 20 million or 8.5% of all manufacturing jobs in the world will be occupied by industrial robots, of which 12 million will be in China. Modern India is already one of the main suppliers of software and a number of other high technologies to the world market.

The dominance in world trade, according to forecasts, will be electronic commerce, in which Asia is already a leader. As the banking system develops, mobile payments will become the norm. For example, in 2019 in China, 86% (!) of the population used online wallets, and Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines were among the ten world leaders in the integration and use of mobile applications. The main direction of the development of electronic commerce in the world will be B2C, where Asia also sets the tone. A good example is the Alibaba Group's plans to create an e-commerce infrastructure in Southeast Asia by 2030 with the participation of 8 million small and medium-

sized entrepreneurs. In 10 years, it is expected that the majority of the Asian population will be involved in financial and credit systems. By this time (2030), 3 out of 4 people will have a mobile device with Internet access, and the middle class will have great purchasing power. Together, these two factors will provide a powerful breakthrough for e-commerce. This, in particular, is indicated by the colossal reserves that electronic banking has in Asia. For example, in Indonesia, 65% of adults do not yet have a bank account; in Vietnam - 71%; in the Philippines, 65%. This huge potential will be in maximum demand.

Another powerful engine of the Asian as well as the global economy in the next decade will be intra-regional trade. Multilateral forms of partnership and integration, such as ASEAN, SCO and EURASEC, will actively stimulate the rapid growth of regionalization of trade. The implementation of regional projects within the framework of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative will ensure transport interconnectedness in the region and will provide an additional impetus to the development of Asia.

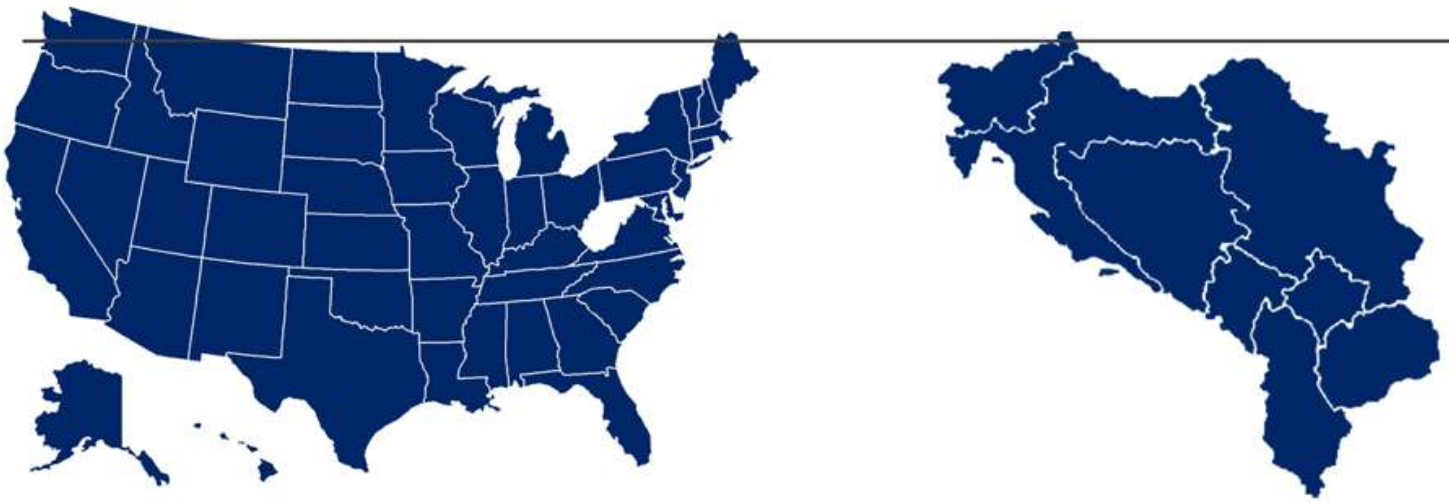
And one more stroke to the "age of Asia." According to UN estimates, by 2030 the world's population will grow by one billion and reach 8.5 billion people. At the same time, more than half of the world's population will live in Asia. Currently, the largest countries in the world in terms of population are China and India, which account for 37% of the total world population. Three more Asian countries - Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan are also among the ten largest states in the world. The trend of Asian leadership in population will continue until the end of the 21st century.

Given these and other factors, it can be argued that the global balance of power in the rapidly changing modern world is redistributed, primarily due to the establishment of new development centers in Asia. It is here that the center of international politics is gradually and steadily shifting. At the same time, the situation in global politics and economics remains turbulent and tense, sometimes even unpredictable.

The world in the 21st century is interconnected as never before. No matter how influential countries or groups of countries are, they all need to be responsible participants in the emerging new system of international relations, in which everyone's efforts should be aimed at ensuring peace and security, equal conditions for joint development.

RASHID ALIMOV
Secretary-General of the Shanghai
Cooperation Organisation (2016-2018)





THE UNITED STATES AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

Over the past 20 years, the Western Balkans has been an important area of focus for American policymakers. Precipitated by the attempted coup in Montenegro, and political tensions in Serbia and the then-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, American interest in the Western Balkans was on the upswing at the beginning of the Trump Administration. Vice President Mike Pence visited the region in 2017 to attend an Adriatic Charter Summit meeting, telling regional leaders that the “future of the Western Balkans is in the West.” Initially helped along by advisors keenly interested in integrating the region more deeply into the European Union (EU) and NATO, it now appears that the U.S. Government lacks a coherent strategy and has taken a more hands-off approach.

Central to this lack of a consistent strategy is the Administration’s vocal scrutiny of the core institutions, the EU and NATO, promised as the ultimate prize for long-standing reform efforts spearheaded by many generations of American and European diplomats. By not resolutely committing to either the EU or NATO (with words or actions), the efficacy and desirability of these institutions are called into question. Highlighting a flagrant contradiction, the United States is keen to see the Western Balkans more deeply integrated into the “West,” while at the same time distancing itself from the very institutions with which it entices them. This is generating a widening gap between the United States and the region, through which influence is quickly being lost.

Perceptibly warmer attitudes toward Russia from the highest reaches of the U.S. Administration, coupled with the aforementioned rhetorical contradictions, also undermine stated policy goals. This weakens the ability of all actors in the region to counter the disinformation campaigns, and outright examples of malign influence that are a part of Russia’s strategy for tilting the Balkans away from further Western alignment. The accession of Montenegro to full NATO membership in 2017 helped to enhance pro-Western feelings in the region and solidify a path forward for its hopeful neighbors,

however, more recent developments color future accession aspirations less brightly—deepening the gap created by inconsistent U.S. policy and European miscues. The decision by France and the Netherlands to block the start of EU accession talks for Albania and North Macedonia in October 2019 deviated from the rhetorical position of both the U.S. and the EU to great international condemnation. Despite a positive recommendation offered by the European Commission’s top official for enlargement negotiations, the accession aspirations for every country in the region—and any positive influence associated with those aspirations—suffered a major blow. Though not the doing of American officials, this EU enlargement misstep exacerbates the lack of American policy cohesion; creating a rich breeding ground for hostile campaigns of - targeted misinformation, and malign influence.

The decline of U.S. and European preeminence is visible, as a more influential global power, China, is now playing an outsized role in the region. Increased overseas investment from China is rapidly changing the economic landscape, as cash-strapped nations in desperate need of foreign financial attention look past Europe and the United States. Located at the European terminus of the Belt and Road Initiative, the Balkan Peninsula is a vital access point for goods, services and people moving from East to West, from Asia to Europe. Chinese enterprises are proving to be substantial investors in Serbia, Italy and Greece—key economic actors in the region. A Chinese state-owned enterprise is the majority owner of Greece’s largest port, Italy is itself a formal participant in the Belt and Road Initiative, and the visible presence of Chinese infrastructure and manufacturing investment in Serbia is noteworthy. This Chinese financial support often comes quickly with few strings attached; making it in many ways more desirable than abundant European funds. Though it is easy to paint Russian action as a primary motivator for many Balkan nations, the growing influence of China is palpable, and requires a defined and unified strategy on the parts of the United States and Europe. In response to these concerns, the U.S. State Department has taken a noticeably more Balkans forward tone in recent months, and Europe. In response to these concerns, the U.S. State Department has taken a noticeably more Balkans forward tone in recent months, at least with regard to countering Russian influence.

Matthew Palmer, a Deputy Assistant Secretary at State, was named Special Representative for the Western Balkans, with a mandate to help integrate the region into Western institutions. In an era of American executive-level leaders with avowed distrust of special representatives and career diplomats, Palmer’s appointment is noteworthy. Quoted in February 2020, Palmer succinctly and clearly laid out that the U.S. supports Albanian and North Macedonian accession to the EU, and is deeply committed to preserving the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece. He added that Russia “prefers a Western Balkans that is fractious, that is divided against itself, that is suspicious, that has an element of chaos,” and is “an area where [Russia] can turn the level of tension up and down.” These tensions, he continued, “can be used as a wedge between the Western Balkans and the international community and the Western community of nations.” This policy position aligns strongly with early Trump Administration efforts to put their best foot forward in the region, and sets a positive tone for the future of U.S.-Balkan relations.

The Western Balkans resides at a rare intersection in geopolitics: a place where combined interests of the United States, the European Union, Russia, and China are playing out in real time. Deep political investment and historical commitments on the part of the United States and the European Union are visible through two important, ongoing, peacekeeping missions: NATO’s KFOR and the EU’s Operation Althea (formerly EUFOR). Messaging is also improving with regard to specific regional concerns—a welcome sign in a confusing policy landscape. Additionally, given the ongoing support for the region from leading members of the U.S. Congress, including a specific citation of concern for the region in the National Defense Authorization Act, the legacy of the American role in the Western Balkans remains evident in Washington. While further investment in the future of the region and robust top-level attention are needed, the United States perceives a legitimate connection to its national interests in the Western Balkans, and remains a strong partner in the face of Russian subversion and unclear Chinese intentions.

HOW DINOSAURS BECAME EXTINCT

reflections on the world order

The post-Cold War context has given birth to firm beliefs that global solutions could be agreed upon and implemented to tackle global challenges. Binding global agreements, international law, would be implemented and enforced with the help of strong international institutions. The future, it seemed, belonged to global governance.

This proved to be an illusion. The institutional architecture of globalisation failed to develop as had been hoped. The World Trade Organization established in 1995, today finds itself in agony only 25 years after creation. Plans for global institutions to oversee investment, competition, or the environment are shelved. The past five years have seen worsening trends across conflict indicators: more wars, more people killed and civilians increasingly targeted.

- *Over 68 million people are now displaced due to conflict and persecution - more than ever recorded.*
- *At least 70 conflicts involve non-state actors, a historic high.*
- *An estimated 151,887 people were killed in conflicts in 2018.*

Finally, the old superpowers' demolition of classical ideas of international society – ideas of the “society of nations” that were essential to the way the then new world order was envisioned after 1918 – has turned the nation-state system into a lawless “gangland”; and this is now producing a nihilistic backlash from the ones who have been most terrorised and despoiled.

Exhaustion, hopelessness, the dwindling effectiveness of traditional multilateralism: these are the themes of politics all across the world.

When looking at the current state of the world, it is difficult to escape the feeling that the world is not just witnessing a series of smaller and bigger crises, but that there is a more fundamental problem.

For nearly four centuries, since the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War, the concept of sovereignty — the right of nations to an independent existence and autonomy has occupied the core of what international order there has been. This made sense, for as every century including the current one has witnessed, a world in which borders are forcibly violated is a world of instability and conflict.

But an approach to international order premised solely on respect for sovereignty, together with the maintenance of the balance of power necessary to secure it, is no longer sufficient. In brief, 20th-century political structures are drowning in the 21st-century ocean of deregulated finance, autonomous technologies, organized violence in various disguises and authoritarian regimes' unscrupulous “externalization” of internal problems (e.g. distraction by war).

What does it mean? In a world of 7.7 billion people, it is no surprise that our global system is more complex than at any other time in history. In 1945, when the building blocks of the current global system were constructed, the world population was less than a third of what it is today. Similarly regarding the global economy, after World War II exports comprised a mere 5% of global GDP. Today, that percentage is roughly five times higher, even as global GDP has increased multifold as well. The world is not just more complex, it is also changing ever faster. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has already introduced more new technologies than any of its predecessors, including artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles and gene editing, among others.

Moreover, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is powered by increasingly faster chips, and by an exponential rise in their computing power.

The number of people using the internet has surged over the past year, with more than one million people coming online for the first time each day since January 2018.

- * *There are 5.11 billion unique mobile users in the world today, up 100 million (2 percent) in the past year.*
 - * *There are 4.39 billion internet users in 2019, an increase of 366 million (9 percent) versus January 2018.*
 - * *3.26 billion people use social media on mobile devices in January 2019, with growth of 297 million new users representing a year-on-year increase of more than 10 percent*
- The hourly Internet traffic have exceeded the annual traffic of the year 2000!*

The current systems and institutions of international cooperation were built to address 19th and 20th-century problems. But in today's complex and fast-paced digital world, these structures cannot operate at ‘internet speed’.

Two thousand years ago the entire Pax Romana was doomed like a dinosaur whose brain was too small for such a huge body. Our current world system seems to have similar constraints.

In his Prison Notebooks, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” In a way, this is an apt description of world order today.

As the result, the current “interregnum” world order is characterised more by a general decline in power (or growing power vacuum) than the broadly discussed shifts of power from the North to the South or from the West to the East. As Moisés Naím puts it, “power no longer buys as much as it did in the past. In the twenty-first century, power is easier to get, harder to use — and easier to lose”.

The new actors are already entering the politics: the state maintains (so far?) a monopoly on certain policies’ areas, but non-state actors play an increasingly important role on the stage of defining the problem, analysing the problems links, and ultimately shaping the political discourse. The Danish government recently decided to establish a post of the Ambassador responsible for relationship not with another foreign state but with... corporations. The “digital ambassador” of Denmark will be facilitating relationship between Denmark and (!) Apple, Google and Microsoft. The French followed last year.

Big data companies (Google, Facebook etc) have already assumed many functions previously associated with the state, from cartography to surveillance. Now they are the primary gatekeepers of social reality!

Should we consider the nation-state a “zombie” concept? Not at all, in fact many of the historical categories - like class, race, ethnicity, gender – hastily “archived” by some overzealous political scientists remain powerful stratifying forces in the world and so is the state. If you look at the distributive consequences of global economic integration for the people around the world, both inside nation-states and outside nation-states, then you must conclude that states still matter.

However, already today, computer algorithms have made the financial system so complicated that few humans can understand it. As AI develops, we might soon reach a point when no human can make sense of finance anymore. What will that do to the political process? Can you imagine a government that waits humbly for an algorithm to approve its budget or its new tax reform?

The gap between the nascent plurilateral world and global governance system traditionally understood and applied within post-Westphalian concepts is widening and feeding disorder and disruptiveness of the political system. And this gap will not be bridged by any new iterations of a traditional uni, bi or even multi-polar global world order.

The 21st century world order, if it does indeed emerge, will have little in common with the liberal theories of the last century and with its foreign policy practices. It will require new polycentric architecture ensuring that policy is based on collective decision-making processes of the search and understanding of participating governments and non-state actors, ie, a priori based on the “distributed/divided sovereignty” principle.

Translating that claim into reality requires recognising that we live in a world in which both state power and networks of people coexist and uniting a variety of actors in the networks that can provide more effective solutions to humanity’s global problems than usual existing hierarchical, state-driven efforts.

ALEXANDER LIKHOTAL

Former President,
Green Cross International

UN-AZERBAIJAN'S NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On 24 September 2019, the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a global call for a decade of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The call followed on from the political declaration of the SDG Summit in 2019, in which heads of states and governments urged the Secretary-General to ensure collective action is taken to move this agenda forward.

At less than a decade left to deliver on the SDGs, the Secretary-General recognises that bold leadership and new partnerships are required to tackle current obstacles to sustainable development. This includes, among other actions, the necessity to end conflicts and prevent violence; the need to reorient domestic development policies in ways that fulfil the 2030 Agenda; and the mobilisation of partnerships like never before.

The 2030 Agenda is a roadmap for a world free from want and fear. It is also a vision for society in which the most vulnerable populations, those who risk being left behind in development processes, are visible and able to access resources and opportunities for development on an equal footing with others.

This ambitious agenda has underpinned the work of the United Nations Country Team in Azerbaijan for the past five years. We continue to cooperate with the Government and various other partners in civil society and the private sector to ensure the country remains on track for the 17 SDGs, 88 targets and 119 indicators that it has prioritised.

The year 2020 is a transition period for the United Nations team in Azerbaijan. It is the last year in the implementation of the UN-Azerbaijan Partnership Framework (UNAPF) for the period of 2016-2020, and the year in which we start planning the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF) for 2021-2025.

The transition does not just involve a change in acronyms, but a new vision for cooperation that is firmly grounded in a partnership for the realization of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Under the UNAPF, we offered our technical support on the SDGs to respond to Azerbaijan's development aspirations as set out in the government's "2020: Vision of the Future" framework. Thus, we focused on supporting the country to achieve sustainable and inclusive economic development; to strengthen institutional capacities in ways that ensure better delivery of public and social services; and to improve environmental management and resilience to hazards and disasters.

While the new UNSCDF recognises these areas as continuing priorities, it will adopt a more integrated, forward-thinking and people-centric approach. It will recognise the need to ensure that technical cooperation translates into a long-term improvement in the living conditions of those left furthest behind, as well as greater capacity for our national partners to sustain those changes. It will also reshape our cooperation with the authorities into a format where we deliver as one UN system, and where cross-cutting challenges such as gender equality and evidence-based monitoring of the SDGs are better articulated and tackled.



This change in direction will of course require strong national ownership and engagement with the UN system for achieving its intended results. The Decade of Action calls on all sectors of society to mobilize for accelerating sustainable solutions to end poverty and inequality as well as tackle climate change. To amplify this decade of action, the United Nations will draw on the continued support of local, national and global partners to secure and strengthen existing efforts. The urgency of this decade demands that all sectors of society galvanize to secure greater participation and leadership, more resources and improved, game-changing solutions to address increasing inequality and the escalating climate emergency.

Azerbaijan was also among the first countries to adopt concrete actions to accelerate progress toward the SDGs including the creation by Presidential Decree of the National Coordination Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) on 6 October 2016. It has since, with the support of United Nations organizations, published and presented two National Voluntary Review reports to the High Level Political Forum in New York in 2017 and 2019. The NCCSD has been engaging with the United Nations Development System's SDG Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support (MAPS) platform since 2017. This has helped our national partners agree on core guidelines regarding ways in which they will accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda, in a charter dubbed "the Baku Principles".

An innovative National Information Portal on the SDGs was also set up with the support of the United Nations. It uses an interactive dashboard of consolidated data on the SDGs from designated government institutions, which helps the country track and monitor its progress in real-time.

The United Nations welcomes and encourages these efforts, not least because they are forging a space in which representatives of different constituencies are able to come together and think collectively, including people who represent government agencies, youth organisations, large corporations, small enterprises, and the media.

While there are encouraging signs that Azerbaijan will achieve most of the SDGs, some gaps remain with respect to improving access and quality of health system (Goal 3), promoting gender equality (Goal 5), supporting sustainable and diversified economic growth and employment (Goal 8), reducing inequality (Goal 10) and tackling environmental issues and climate change (Goals 7,11,13). For Azerbaijan to deliver on these goals, it needs transition and alignment of policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks at national and sub-national levels. The United Nations stands ready to support the Government of Azerbaijan to translate these actions into a Vision 2030 document, a commitment already made by the Government in its 2019 Voluntary National Reviews report.

We will continue building on this impressive work as we start a global conversation that will lead us to the 75th anniversary of the United Nations on 24 October 2020. We would like to use this year-long conversation to gauge the hopes and expectations of Azerbaijanis for 2030 and beyond.

To do so, we have set up a 'one-minute Survey' in which people will be able to express their visions for the future society in which they want to live. As we collect responses in different countries, I encourage Azerbaijan to continue taking the lead in shaping global development response, and in shaping the future of the United Nations more broadly.

GHULAM M. ISACZAI,
United Nations Resident Coordinator in Azerbaijan

WHAT'S NEW WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSION ACCESSION PROCESS FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS



It was exactly 2 months ago that the European Commission put forward a proposal to drive forward the EU accession process for the Western Balkans. Is this a recycling of the previous Brussels phraseology or is it an entirely new approach towards this important issue?

What is new? The new methodology is built on four main principles: Credibility, Stronger political steer, A more dynamic process and Predictability for both sides.

A number of analysts suggested that the European Commission has changed its acceptance criteria. However, when reading the EC strategy more thoroughly, it is evident that this is not the case. The new proposals will just improve the accession process and make the Copenhagen criteria more comprehensive.

It is not true either that the previous enlargement countries did not have to fulfil all these conditions. They actually had to. The revised methodology is based on the same, well-established criteria. In the case of the Western Balkans, additional conditions for membership were set out in the 'Stabilisation and Association Process', mostly relating to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations with a view of the bloody events from 25 years ago – which is understandable.

One thing is sure - there are no shortcuts to membership. It is true that the accession process today is more demanding than in the past. But this is because the current challenges for these new candidate countries are more and more difficult. As compensation, they will be provided with financial incentives.

From 2014-2020, the EU dedicated EUR 11.7 billion for this purpose and for 2021-2027 this assistance will be increased. The EU together with the national authorities decides where these funds will be invested.

Undoubtedly, financial support is of critical importance, but the European Commission continues to place a stronger focus on the fundamentals such as the functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform and supporting economic reforms and of course, the rule of law.

Negotiations on the fundamentals will be opened first and closed last and progress on them will decide the speed at which negotiations will be conducted. The rule of law will become even more central, e.g. through anti-corruption work becoming more incorporated: “Is there a common political will among the EU countries for further enlargement and how the EU-US relations will influence that process?”

Let us look first at the two engines of the EU – France and Germany. The differences between Paris and Berlin, which were always solved by compromises, are now an obstacle for the EU’s future enlargement. Germany has consistently supported the expansion of the EU, while France has traditionally been more sceptical.

North Macedonia is directly affected by the Berlin - Paris disagreement as the country’s leadership had hoped to start the accession negotiations immediately after the Prespa Agreement, as they had met the criteria for the negotiations with Brussels.

Now, membership with NATO is on track, but not with the EU. During a summit of EU leaders on October 17–18 last year, President Macron vetoed the start of EU accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia. Macedonian Prime minister Zoran Zaev immediately announced his resignation. New elections are planned for April 12th this year. Bearing in mind that some political parties in North Macedonia and Greece still oppose the name deal, I personally await the outcome of these elections with concern. And so should the European Commission.

France is not alone in its opposition to further enlargement, especially regarding Albania – a few other EU countries support Macron. His argument is that the EU needs first to get its own house in order before taking in new members, meaning to resolve the current issues of more political and economic integration inside the EU. The events in Poland and Hungary, in addition to the corruption in some of the newcomers to the EU (not that the older EU member states are faultless) can be easily used as excuses against further enlargement.



I personally believe that this would be a huge strategic mistake. Yes, there is still a lot to be required from the Western Balkan countries, but not only from them. However, if Europe officially postpones the EU accession for those states, on the one hand, it would betray its bold views about Europe's future after the fall of the Berlin wall; on the other hand, it's the issue of trust: EU leaders promised these countries membership back in 2003. Accession talks take years, but it's the psychological impact of such talks that is important for these countries' feeling of belonging to the larger European community.

If this fails, other big geopolitical players will seize the opportunity and gain influence in the region. Then we have to say goodbye to our dream for United Europe entrusted to us by the EU founding fathers. Not mentioning the disastrous political, economic, humanitarian and other consequences that would arise both for the Eastern European members of the EU as Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria, for the Western Balkan countries and for Europe as a whole. One look at the map is sufficient to realize that if there is a non-EU enclave in the heart of the Balkans, surrounded by EU member states; it would annihilate the historic achievements from the fall of the Berlin Wall.

How does it look from the perspective of Capitol Hill?

US interest in this part of the world has traditionally been insignificant, even after the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. After the start of the bloody events on the territory of former Yugoslavia, the then-Secretary of State James Baker declared: the US has "no dog in this fight". American diplomacy probably believed that this was an issue within the European sphere of influence and the EU was capable of dealing with it.

However, the way the war developed proved that only within the framework of NATO and with American engagement the allies were able to end the hostilities – at the cost of an enormous number of human tragedies on all sides. I believe that America then realized the role it played as the leader of the democratic world as well as its position as NATO champion.

One more thing - America came to know something which was already known in Europe – local wars in the Balkans could have an effect not only on the Balkans and Europe but on a much larger scale. Maybe this explains the recent reactivation of American diplomacy in the region. A clear signal for this is the appointment of Matthew Palmer as a US special envoy for the Balkans and Richard Grenell, the US Ambassador to Germany as a special envoy for the Kosovo and Serbia dialogue.

The conclusion is clear – regardless of certain differences between them, the US and the EU must work together when the future of the Western Balkans is concerned. When they stand together, there is hope and progress. When they are divided, there is a decline and failure.

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