

D.S.M. WEEKLY REPORT - Main Political and Military Developments - WEEK 10 of 2019

Monitorul Apărării și Securității



Sursă foto: Mediafax

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I. UNITED STATES. EUCOM assesses the military situation in Europe.

On March 3rd, GEN. Curtis Scaparrotti, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and head of the United States European Command (USEUCOM) presented the military situation in Europe^[1] to the US Senate Armed Forces Committee. This document describes a high level defined official image of the threat, force ratio, and measures taken or needed to

be taken in Europe. SACEUR informed the Senate that, according to the 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 Military Security Strategy, the US took the necessary measures in Europe to consolidate Washington's ally defense, basically through the European Deterrence Initiative. The US military force in Europe mission is to "deter Russian aggression", as "a revisionist Russia is the primary threat to a stable Euro-Atlantic security environment".

The steps made by Russia (occupy Crimea, its military aggression against Ukraine, beefed up by the recent incidents, i.e. limiting the freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov, hostile actions against western countries, ranging from meddling into elections to cyber-attacks and breaching the INF, all demonstrate Moscow's willingness to violate international laws and legally-binding treaties in force, in order to exert malign influence. The conclusion is trans-Atlantic: "Russia threatens the United States' vital national interests in preserving a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace".

Moscow's strategy, to undermine the West, "the strategic competitor", and control the neighboring nations, was implemented through Russia's military consolidation, including in the nuclear domain. Russia modernized its nuclear forces, including its intermediate range missiles breaching the INF, and its substrategic forces. Russia also "by-passed" the present agreements by developing new weapon systems, the hypersonic warheads. These two elements are fundamental, beyond the modernization of conventional forces and the implementation of hybrid and cyber components. In response to this threat, EUCOM is adapting its disposition and capabilities, including the nuclear deterrence forces. The most dangerous though, *Russia considers that the escalation towards utilizing the nuclear weapon offers an advantage.* The A2AD systems and the EW capabilities developed by Russia were also mentioned. As for the Area of Operation, Russia is everywhere, from the Arctic and the North Atlantic to the Eastern Mediterranean, with a remarkable activity of the Russian submarines.

Russia sought to destabilize Ukraine by not implementing the Minsk agreements and by continuing the aggression, this time at sea. Moscow persists in pressing Georgia and plays an obstructive role in the Balkans. The Baltics and Poland were mentioned in the EUCOM document as being threatened and in quest for developing their defense capabilities beyond NATO's support measures. Turkey, Israel, and terrorism were additional issues presented in SACEUR's military threat assessment. On this backdrop, there was wording that US deems Turkey's procurement of anti-aircraft defense systems S-400 as incompatible with Turkey's plan to buy F-35 aircraft.

EUCOM's 2019 Posture Statement also states that America's NATO allies support Washington's withdrawal from INF in response to Russia's breach of this treaty. However, it is not known yet what the West's concrete response will be (against the SSC-8 missiles). It was also mentioned that, although the US maintains global military superiority, the Russian military capabilities seek to diminish this advantage by limiting the freedom of movement in certain areas and thus limiting the capability to counter Russian aggressions.

The EUCOM document also presents the US stance on the NATO advanced military presence, meaning an increase of Pentagon's military presence in the front-line nations, but also an increase in the NATO ally contributions, including the "Four Thirties" and the VJTF. An important detail, *the validity of Article 5 was also mentioned*. GEN. Scaparrotti declared that "We have already made significant strides in adapting our European force posture to meet these threats", but he is "not comfortable yet with the deterrent posture" of the US military in Europe and its ability to deter Russian aggression, recommending US to deploy more troops and warships to Europe.

Two more US destroyers are to be added to the four destroyers already deployed at Rota, Spain: "I have asked for two more destroyers for EUCOM", because there is the "need for greater capacity particularly given the modernisation and growth of the Russian fleets in Europe". Additional anti-submarine capabilities were also requested. Notably, although it sparks Russia's negative reaction, the US presence in the Black Sea will increase: "Frankly speaking, they [Russians] do not like our presence in the Black Sea, but these are international waters, and our ships should go there, and our planes should fly". The military support to Ukraine was also mentioned, including the anti-tank missiles Javelin, as well as the continuation of this support. The US focuses on providing lethal military support to Ukraine, in order to support this nation to repel a naval Russian aggression.

GEN Curtis Scaparrotti summarized NATO's military position, respectively the US military posture in Europe, in this critical moment, before the US withdrawal from INF, and there are not many issues to comment on that: *this is the US position, common with the other NATO nations' position on the current situation in Europe, and based on this assessment, we benefit from American military support assuring our security*.

For Romania, the reference to the Black Sea is important, with an American / NATO presence being an important deterrence factor, in Romania and Ukraine's views. From other sources, an American official stated that the US would support NATO nations to modernize their maritime surveillance systems. Would that be enough to persuade Moscow that its aggression against Ukraine must stop? As we are used with an almost 75-year lasting peace, we might find it difficult

to imagine the hardships they live in Ukraine. There are these deterrence elements and the Kremlin reaching its limits when preferring to stop in Ukraine. Based on this, we can hope to have, for the future, the peace we all wish for, under the NATO shield, which is, most of it, American. However, it would be nice to have certain national military capabilities operationalized, especially since the Trump Administration requests a larger financial contribution to support its military presence, for the near future, not only from the rich nations.

An immediate reaction came from Turkey, which reminded it would not renounce its contract to purchase Russian S-400 anti-aircraft systems. The discussions will likely continue, but the result is predictable: Turkey will not get the F-35 aircraft. Ankara knows that, as the decision to purchase the S-400 is a political decision already taken, and it can be explained by the developments and the perspective of its relations with the West in general, and with the US in particular. Probably both sides already made their decisions.

II. REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA. Autonomous Gagauzia wants the Constitution modified.

The Popular Assembly of Gagauzia (autonomous district) is preparing to issue a proposal for modifying the Constitution of Republic of Moldova (RM) by inserting an article stipulating that Gagauzia may split from RM, had this country lose statehood. The provisional bill with such wording was published on March 3rd on the Popular Assembly of Gagauzia website and is still in the making. The text includes the phrase “should the Republic of Moldova status change from independent state, the people of Gagauzia has the right of foreign self-determination”.

Apparently unimportant, this action relaunches^[2] a dangerous process promoted by the separatists in Gagauzia, very likely enticed by Russia. The threat of this district claiming independence in case RM lost its independence represents a standing warning to the central authorities, because the wording “RM losing independence” means RM uniting with Romania. The southern autonomous district of Gagauzia is strongly pro-Russian and is ruled by a leadership as connected to Moscow as President Igor Dodon is. Now, Gagauzia is used, as usually, to increase the pressure on the central authorities in Chişinău. Such action is more dangerous now, in the stalemate situation generated by the results of the parliamentary elections.

By this request, with minimal chances to be passed in the RM Parliament, Gagauzia is marketed to become a third relevant entity in RM, should this country be jeopardized to lose its independence and, in fact, to disappear as a state. In such event, RM would become just one entity in an equation with two others, when the autonomous Gagauzia surfaces along the separatist Transnistria. Even

worse, besides uniting with Romania, the options of RM losing independence might include the course of action where RM and Transnistria "unite in a new state", as the new Kozak plan tries to achieve. And this time, the new Kozak plan was distributed by the very president Igor Dodon!

So, this action is just one of the multiple pressure measures exerted now in Chişinău, with the "supreme leader" Vladimir Plahotniuc, and Russia as main players. V. Plahotniuc has allowed the mandate validation for all elected deputies. So, the appearance of legality has been preserved. But the complaints regarding illegal voting incidents, filed by the ACUM opposition coalition, were not accepted and, on March 9th, the Constitutional Court validated the results of parliamentary elections.

The ACUM continued to refuse forming an alliance with Plahotniuc's Democratic Party of RM (PDM), and V. Plahotniuc is now angrily accusing this coalition for damaging, by its refusal, the nation's interests to have a government. Even more, the pressure rose after a decision to increase the retirement pensions starting with April 1st was issued. Consequently, there is now the perspective of PDM taking some of the ACUM votes, if snap elections were decided, because ACUM is accused for harboring mean interests jeopardizing the national interest embodied by... V. Plahotniuc. It seems that the Socialists were ordered from Moscow to keep off any agreement with the PDM, and V. Plahotniuc is now in the position to seek the necessary additional deputies by "specific means" from either ACUM or the Socialists. The problem is keeping up appearances of legality. If he cannot find a solution, Vladimir Plahotniuc should brace himself for snap elections, because it seems that a minority government with ACUM support in the parliament, bill by bill, is not an option. But time goes by, there is no money (the EU is the only hope), and V. Plahotniuc must take a decision. Meanwhile, Moscow is preparing its move, and Gagauzia's proposal is part of it.

III. RUSSIA - BULGARIA. Prime-Minister Dmitri Medvedev visits Bulgaria.

On March 3rd, Russian Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev has visited Bulgaria in the attempts to relaunch the bilateral economic ties, as both nations are interested in such development. Although the importance of economic relations was underlined, the conclusion was drawn by D. Medvedev: "Unfortunately, the status of our trade and economic ties is fairly complicated, although Russia remains one of Bulgaria's major trade partners. We export energy to Bulgaria and Bulgaria supplies us with machines and equipment, and medications. However, since sanctions were imposed, it no longer supplies us with some goods – once again I am not sure this is a good thing.

Although there are no indicators of a major increase in bilateral trade, there still exists a wide corridor of opportunities. I hope we will manage to restore the pre-crisis level of cooperation we had in 2012". Indeed, the EU sanctions on Russia had a major impact on the bilateral trade, which decreased from \$5 billions to only \$3 billions.

There is an upwards trend in resuming the economic exchanges, with the intergovernmental economic commission meeting in October for the first time in three years, but almost nothing tangible came out of that. Even this very visit did not pan out anything else than promises and declarations of good intentions, with nothing being signed except an agreement of cooperation in tourism. But that is good enough though, considering the importance of this sector for Bulgaria, and the large number of Russian tourists visiting Bulgaria.

On energy cooperation, linking Bulgaria to the TurkStream was discussed. However, considering Russia's experience with the South Stream, Moscow asks for guarantees that the bad experience will not repeat: "reliable guarantees from the European Commission to the effect that this project will not collapse and will not face any obstacles". Bulgaria is concerned about the danger of losing its status of transit country for gas for Turkey after the TurkStream becomes operational, and it does not find a place in future energy projects.

The same goes for the nuclear plant at Belene, on the Danube. Russia is ready to commit, but, again, this is an energy project "on EU territory". Regarding Belene, the Bulgarian Prime-Minister, Boyko Borissov mentioned Russia's generosity after winning the process at the Paris-based International Court of Arbitration: the judges ruled that Bulgaria must pay 1.2 billion euros, plus interest, for the two reactors built by Russia but which belong to Bulgaria already; what Moscow did, was to allow Sofia not to pay any interest, and now Bulgaria owns two generation 3+ nuclear reactors. This time, Bulgaria tries to inch the Belene issue, but the Russian support will not come unconditionally, as it is expected by the authorities in Sofia.

Although Bulgaria wants to be perceived other than "Russia's Trojan horse in NATO", Prime-Minister B. Borissov mentioned the fear of a new arms race (such a dear idea to Moscow, who started the new race!), and the fact that Bulgaria wants the Black Sea for tourists, not for militaries. The declaration of faithfulness was explicit: "There are forces that are against your presence, that want us to choose between NATO and Russia. But we have said clearly that Bulgaria is a NATO member and yet a good partner of Russia. And we would like the Black Sea to remain a sea of tourism and friendship. This beautiful sea is too small for warships. I urge Russia and my NATO colleagues to launch talks". The Bulgarian Prime-Minister also mentioned that "We need to

maintain the combat ability of the fighter planes we bought in Russia at least for the next few years, until we buy new planes”.

Russia is working to relaunch its economic relations with the Europeans, albeit with the less important among them. Thus, the Russian prime-minister visited not only Bulgaria, but also Luxemburg, the little “Europe’s big bank”. Considering the historical and cultural ties, as well as the solid Russian investments in Bulgaria (a Russian parliamentarian declared that “we own half of Bulgaria”), this country would seem to be the perfect place to restart the economic relations, especially since Russia’s political influence in Bulgaria is also significant. However, a hesitating Bulgaria cannot move things ahead and, instead of being an exemplary bridge, Bulgaria is in the situation of falling between the chairs. The Russo-Bulgarian economic projects have little chances to flourish until the Russo-European relations come back to a level allowing the sanctions to be lifted.

From the position of a NATO member nation, Bulgaria’s opening towards Russia has also little chances to bear fruits. The rift between Russia and the US is too wide for Bulgaria’s call to be heard, and Sofia’s position ends up being regarded exactly how it does not want it to be perceived. It is not the case of a “Trojan horse”, but when the rift is so wide, one needs to choose, and wavering is counterproductive.

Bulgaria had no real revolution in 1989, meaning a real replacement of the elite ruling the country, and the transition to a functional democracy, rule of law and market economy is not finished. The saddest lesson learned from Bulgaria’s experience might be that, when you have serious political problems, it is not a good idea to play along with Russia. Both Russia’s political and economic influence are not profitable for Bulgaria’s either domestic political development or its foreign policy, because Russia certainly comes with its own manner of conducting business in any domain.

For Russia, the problem is even more complicated: no alternative has been identified to its economic relations with the West, and the EU sanctions begin to kick in. Therefore, the importance given to Luxemburg, the place where money flows. But even here the things do not look any better: when the big nations in the West perceive a real threat for their societies, and identifying Russia as such a threat is done, they circle the wagons around a common position. The West has its own weaknesses, with the latest scandal standing proof, but slowly, even against the will of some western actors, the noose gets tight around Russia. The latest financial scandal regarding Russian money laundering displays all the ingredients: the mob feature – laundering of hundreds of thousands of dollars, under-the-counter money siphoned from the Russian economy; the Kremlin connection – involvement of a Putin’s henchman; illegality at the highest level – one of the largest

banks in Russia is involved, and it is led by a “pro-western” Armenian, with money being transferred in accounts belonging to innocent and poor... peasants in Armenia; and the greedy western link – the complicity of important western banks.

This is the true race, not the arms race, but it is Russia’s race it cannot avoid, to escape its economic and political isolation. In its turn, Bulgaria has its own race it cannot avoid just by consolidating its economic relations with Russia, and that race is about building a western type state (functional democracy), or else it’s failure.

IV. EUROPEAN UNION. Emmanuel Macron issues a European message.

On March 4th, the French President, Emmanuel Macron, communicated to all European nations a message regarding the “European renaissance”, in view of the European Parliament elections to be held in May. He presented these elections as being decisive, he warned that Europe is in danger, and called for fundamental reforms in the Union: “In a few weeks, the European elections will be decisive for the future of our continent. Europe has never been as necessary since World War Two as it is now and yet never has Europe been in such danger”. E. Macron also warned about nationalism: “nationalism offers nothing. It is a project of rejection.”

The measures are meant to protect the European citizens by giving the EU a new momentum in the face of global competition. The proposals include a European Agency for the Protection of Democracies, an institution intended to provide experts to protect the electorate from manipulations, and to ban any funding of political parties by foreign powers. E. Macron suggested that the Schengen system needs revision, a border police needs to be established, and an asylum granting European office is necessary.

The French president insisted for a “Europe that protects”, and tried to convince the European voters with a plan oriented towards reforming Europe in all fields (trade, competition, climate policies and digital policies). He also called for banning the companies which threaten Europe’s strategic interests, and called for a “Europe first” policy.

E. Macron proposed to the European institutions and nations a “Conference for Europe” to be held before the end of this year. The objective is to decide changes to the EU political projects, including a review of the treaties: “In this Europe, the people will have truly taken back control of their destiny; in this Europe, Britain, I am sure, will find its place”.

E. Macron's message, sent in all European languages, represents a series of liberal and French measures for coping with the present challenges, especially in response to the dangerous advance of the nationalists and populists, who threaten to win a large number of votes in the future European Parliament.

There were reactions across the board, which shows that E. Macron has indeed launched a European level debate: some reactions reproached the mundane statements (reinventing the wheel), some of them criticized the centralism (especially the Germans), and other chastized the liberalism (the French Socialists: now he proposes a minimum wage in Europe, but what did he do in France?!).

Clearly, E. Macron's message takes credit for identifying the problems and proposing solutions, in the same time accepting debates in search for solutions. It is difficult to believe that we will have again a Europe with its peoples in charge, when this is exactly the problem: national elites are those who rule, and they are also those who negotiate their interests with Brussels. And some of those elites even manipulate their electorate at the most brutal level possible, by inventing short-lived realities). This is the crucial tension in Europe, beyond the geographic, historical and cultural aspects: the tension between the national elites, who want to rule independently from Brussels, and the European institutions' elite, less corrupt, but located farther from the nations though. Therefore the acceptance of this message by outstanding opponents to centralized Europe, such as Viktor Orbán, based on the logic that "we negotiate anything, from the future of Europe to the future of our countries, but we do not negotiate *our future* and the foundation thereof, a way of life, partly illegal".

E. Macron touched upon all challenges that EU faces, including migration, but the proposed solutions are far from meeting the majority, given the specifics of those challenges: they are French, not European. European will only be the common denominator, accepted by everybody.

In fact, Macron knows this, and his message has a mobilizing feature and... that's it. Europe's big ones (France, Germany, UK?, the Scandinavians, Italy, Spain, Poland - even with Visegrad and all, should they agree amongst them) will likely identify a common denominator. However, for this, they must accept the present political forces, ranging from Polish conservatism to Italian populism (to the extent it can economically support itself). Meanwhile, the smaller nations are only left to accept one line of thought and join one of the camps. Traditionally, Romania went along with the big nations, but now nothing is sure anymore. Anyway, the Easterners have arguments: the very "productive base of the nation" is already European, while the elite, in any

flavor, is not open to divorce the EU, for not knowing what is to be expected in the non-European unknown. So, beyond all worries, let's not expect the worst, because that will not come too soon.

V. Developments to track this Week 11 of 2019.

- **SERBIA - KOSOVO.** The message brought by the US envoy, David Hale, to Belgrade and Priština, was unequivocal: stop the provocations and resume dialogue. D. Hale strongly requested Priština to give up the excessive tariffs. Probably Priština will yield, and we will have a new beginning (perhaps after Belgrade accepts Kosovo's candidacy to Interpol?). Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić sent an equally clear message: Belgrade is open to compromise, but not to one-way concessions, intending to benefit from some of these arrangements (perhaps the Serbs north of River Ibar, with their territory included). Priština is not open to that, especially the clans close to the prime-minister, and the proof is the legislative attempts to build a bulwark against any border change. Last-ditch discussions would be most welcomed, in order to reach an understanding allowing both Serbia and Kosovo to turn their back to the past, and thus relieving the Western Balkans of a major source of instability.
- **HUNGARY.** The fate of Viktor Orbán's party in the European Popular Party (EPP) is to be decided soon. The main European parties reached the limit of their patience with V. Orbán. The ultimatum they sent to the leader in Budapest, to apologize for his latest actions, was firmly rejected, but V. Orbán also sent messages he would be open to compromise. Even the posters with Jean-Claude Juncker were put down... one week later. In the same time, V. Orbán seeks a dialogue with the Polish conservatives, but maybe this is just another ruse: Orbán will not exchange the German certainty for the Polish would-be. Considering the urgency of upcoming European elections, Orbán has a strong trump card, and, most likely, a compromise will extend the problem, not solve it. Of course, the problem would be solved if Orbán moderated his policy, but is it not his attitude the very core of his regime and the success he has enjoyed?
- **UNITED KINGDOM.** On March 12th, we will witness a new vote in the Parliament on the Brexit, after Teresa May came almost empty-handed from Brussels (of course, renegotiating the agreement is out of the question). Maybe, despite Teresa May's calls, "her agreement" will not pass in the Parliament, which will likely vote for a postponement of Brexit. We will see, maybe Teresa May's blackmail will finally work, although the main deciding force are the conservatives, who adhere to a total split of the UK from EU. However, a postponement would open new avenues, including discussions on the whole business of UK leaving the EU.
- **UKRAINE.** The presidential elections campaign is in full swing, and President Petro Poroshenko has still to work to make sure he steps into the second round. His credibility is low, and neither the measures on ousting those accused of corruption, or the announcement about Russia's military disposition do not seem to help him. About Russia, indeed, Moscow finalized its troop disposition on three main directions, but why does Kyiv announce this now, when the West is disappointed by what the politic elite does about the... fight against corruption? Only some money tossed to the population (subventions, postponing increases in prices, promises to increase pensions) and other populist measures can bring an immediate gain, and this is what P.

Poroshenko is doing. For the rest, we will likely hear breaking news regarding what we know well: how corrupt the Ukrainian political elite is.

- **SYRIA.** Turkey started to patrol in Idlib, in the attempt to demonstrate that the region is under control. Will Turkey manage to please Russia? Hard to believe, because the Jihadists are there, and they do not show signs they are open to a compromise. And is Bashar al-Assad open to compromise, after the Iranians and the Russians have conquered his country? As about the agreement between Russia and Israel, on withdrawing all foreign forces from Syria, none of them have either the capacity or the interest to contribute to such action (Iran is vital for Russia, and the US is vital for Israel). Things are not clear about the Turkey-Kurds security zone either. It is certain though, that US – Turkey relations go south, as result of Turkey’s decision to purchase Russian S-400 anti-aircraft systems.

[1] USEUCOM Posture Statement 2019.

[2] On February 2nd, 2014, Gagauzia held a referendum which ended with a 98.9% majority supporting the decision that this autonomous district become independent in case Republic of Moldova lost its independence and joined Romania. The referendum was considered illegal by the central authorities, and the General Prosecutor Office opened a criminal case against the organizers of the referendum.