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The Security Complex of the European Union

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The security regime of Europe has enormously changed in the last thirty years. The European Union has developed not only on the political but also on the geographical level. That means, the former regional interpretation of the European security complex requires a review. With the new challenges and aspects, the European Union must redefine its foreign policy to be able to act as a global power, which is the declared ambition of the EU.

KEYWORDS: European Union, regional security complex, European security, European foreign policy

Az Európai Unió biztonsági komplexuma

Az európai biztonsági környezet hatalmas változáson ment keresztül az elmúlt harminc évben. Az Európai Unió integrációs folyamata révén számos új tagállammal bővült, az együttműködés pedig tovább mélyült. Az európai biztonsági komplexum korábbi definíciója elavulttá vált, így szükséges annak felülvizsgálata. Az Európai Uniónak pedig szembe kell néznie az új kihívásokkal, annak érdekében, hogy globális hatalmi ambícióit elérhesse. Ez pedig egy alapos felülvizsgálattal és bizonyos évtizedes mechanizmusok megváltoztatásával járhat.

It is widely known and often stressed that the European Union (*and* its predecessors) has provided sustainable peace and security for the continent since the beginning of the European integration process. However, it is very important to highlight that it means peace only for the member states and within the EU - not for the whole region. The Balkan wars, the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, the Crimean crisis in 2014 and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine are just a few examples for the uncertainties, conflicts in the region. Europe is changing and so is the European Union. The community has grown from the six founding states up to twenty-eight members in 2013. With Brexit, such thing happened that no one had ever imagined before, a member state left the community. Brexit is not only a political or economic issue, but also it has its effects from the aspects of security. How does the European security look like nowadays? What role does the European Union play in the European and the wider security system? I will present it in the followings.

After the Cold war, the regional security complex theory (RSCT)² became one of the most popular security theories. This theory describes the world as a complex system of regions. Nowadays RSCT is the subject of numerous criticisms³ because of its strict rules to determine regions and because of the military's central approach, but it still remains the basis of the region-

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² Barry Buzan and Ole Waever presented their thoughts about the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in *Regions and Powers – The Structure of International Security*. In this book, Buzan and Waever continued their work about the new approach of security which had been published in *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. BUZAN and WAEVER, 2003

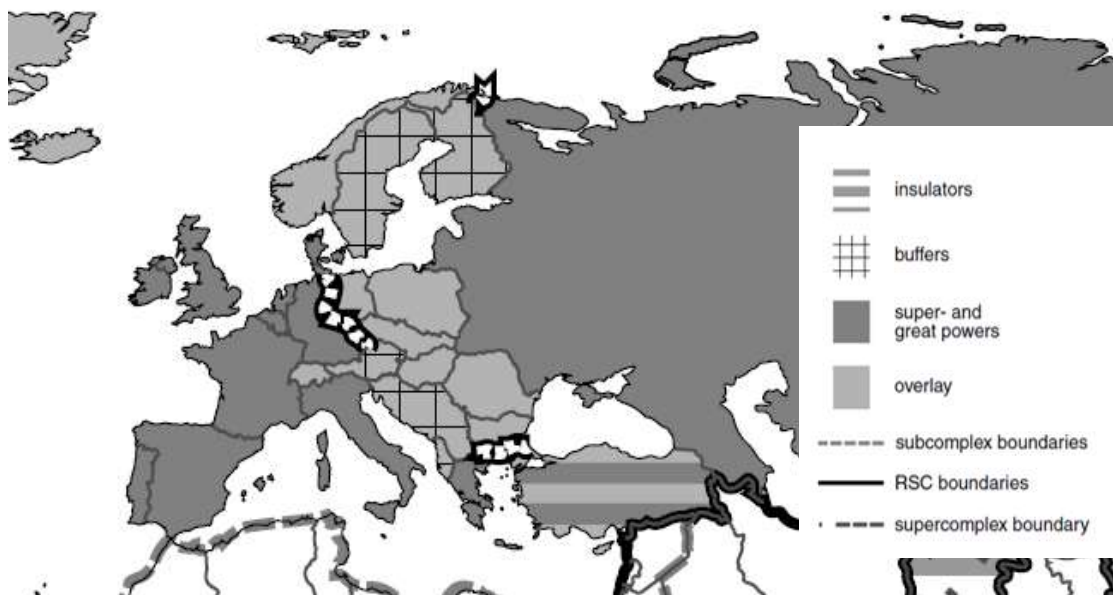
³ For example, the Middle Eastern RSC can be divided into three subcomplexes (Levant, Gulf, Maghreb) or in the Mediterranean region Euro-Mediterranean RSC is definable. REMEK Éva, 2017

centred thinking in the security studies. First of all, I will present Europe based on the approach of RSCT.

The European Union as a region

First, we shall clarify what the regional security complex is. To ease the understanding of the RSC, there are two definitions from Buzan and Weaver. Buzan's original description from 1983 says: "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another". In 1998, the authors redefined it as "a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both, are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another". The core of the definition did not change, but it left behind the state-centred view and the primarily military based approach.

If we examine the changes of the European security complex, it is undoubtful that in comparison to other regions, Europe shows the most significant alteration after the Cold war. The regional approach is supported by the fact that it is almost impossible to define the European complex without the neighbouring Russian-centred region. Until the 1990's, the Western-Soviet rivalry ruled the security dynamics of the European region. As it can be seen on the 1st map, Central and Eastern-Europe were overlaid by the great powers and part of them played a buffer role.



Map 1:

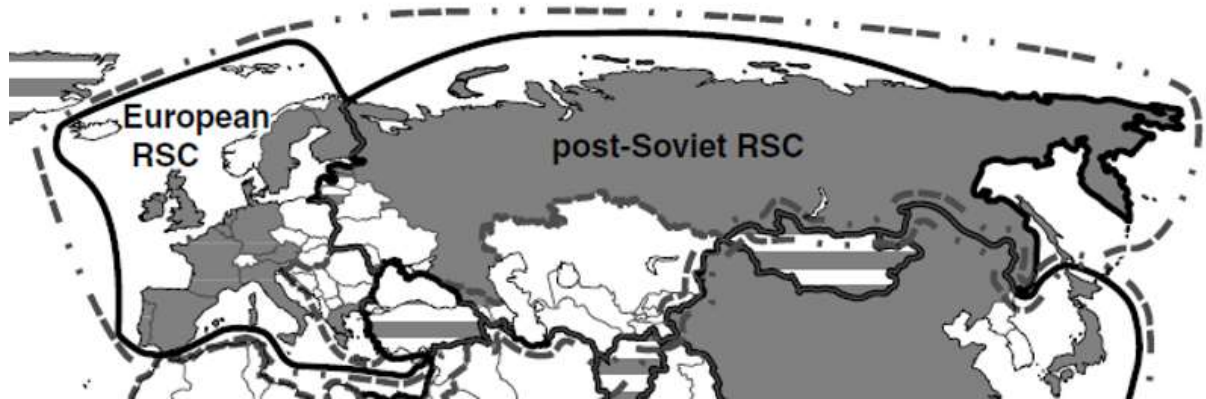
Europe during the Cold War

(Source: BUZAN and WAEVER, 2003)

The three most influential processes on the change of the European security dynamics were the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the integration process of the European Union and the

continuous enlargement of the NATO. After the Soviet Union fell apart, Russia was clearly in need for a recovery period. In this period, the borderline of the European complex moved to east. The buffer states in Scandinavia, as well as in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Balkan became essential parts of the European complex with their new EU and/or NATO memberships or just by their close cooperation with them.

The second Map shows Europe in 2003



Map 2:

The European RSC and Russia in the post-Soviet Era

(Source: BUZAN and WAEVER, 2003)

Russia and the EU⁴

In the book *Regions and Powers*, the authors stated, Russia is not part of the European RSC, but as I already mentioned above, the European security cannot be defined without taking Russia into account. In this way, the European complex and Russia form together a supercomplex.

The political changes in these regions tended to increase the importance of the neighbouring countries for Russia. In different ways, Russia made steps to make them impossible to join any of the European integrational organizations. We can mention Georgia as a good example for this. The EU had built close relationship with Georgia by 2006 and it also became a potential NATO member. In order to block the Georgian integration, Russia fired up the conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia with the five days war between Russia and Georgia. This war did not last long, but the large number of remaining Russian troops in the territories mentioned was enough to slow down the Georgian membership process. In 2011, NATO mentioned Georgia as an aspirant country.

In Ukraine, Russia started a more complex operation after the political changes in 2013, that were the demonstrations of the Euromaidan. By 2013, the majority in Ukraine had wanted

⁴ RÁCZ András, 2020

a change in the country's politics, therefore, they supported a closer relation with the European Union instead of Russia, as well as with the Eurasian Economic Union. It is an essential part of the Russian foreign and security policy not to allow – or even prevent - Ukraine's integration into the European Union. The ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine shows the same intention we saw in Georgia. Also, the Annexation of Crimea was part of the Russian global strategy by maintaining the access to the sea in the south.

The third example is Belarus. In 2020, after the disputed elections, thousands started to protest against the regime of Lukashenko. Despite the recent conflicts between Russia and Belarus, Russian president Vladimir Putin was the first who congratulated to Lukashenko. After the continuous protests, Russia also stated they were ready to deploy police forces in case the situation would get out of control.⁵ The Crimean example showed that Russia shall be ready to offer any help and to intervene if their interests required it. In regional level, it is essential for Russia to prevent the Georgian and Ukrainian integration and even the possibility of political changes in Belarus.

We also have to mention that Buzan and Waever divided Europe into three parts: the EU, the Balkans, and the post-Soviet space. In the followings, I will not follow this classification, because today both integration of the EU or the NATO have overgrown these borders. And this integration has yet to finish, as President von der Leyen told at the European Parliament to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, which was a historic moment and “the future of the whole region lies in the EU”.⁶

As Jean Monnet said “There will be no peace in Europe, if the states are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty [...] The European states must constitute themselves into a federation...”.⁷ For more than 60 years now Jean Monnet was right, and between the members of the integration, there has been peace. This ideology, this kind of ambition attracts more and more states to join the European Union.

Turkey, the EU, and the Energy security

Both in the European complex and the European-Russian supercomplex, there is a very special actor. Turkey is a member of the NATO and as part of this community, the country has an important impact in the “western” integration. Turkey is not only a member state of the NATO, but it also obtained the EU candidate status in 1999. Turkey has a very special role in the European neighbourhood on the political, the geographical and on the security level, too. However, Turkey has at least the same number of pros as contras towards the European Union. Since the country received the candidate status, the process has missed to reach any real landmarks and this fact is disadvantageous for the relationship.

Whilst the accession negotiations with the EU seem to be getting stuck, Turkey has been a NATO member since 1952. Turkey has been playing an important role in the alliance over

⁵ BBC 1, 2020

⁶ Ursula von der LEYEN, 2020

⁷ Jean MONNET

the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, reaching the Middle East, and it is also very close to Russia. Moreover, not only its location, but also the size of its armed forces, are significant. Turkey has the second largest number of military personnel in the NATO members.⁸

Nevertheless, Turkey has changed a lot over the decades and made many different or even opposite decisions compared to the other NATO members' or the European Union's opinion or interest. The first example is Syria. The interests of Turkey in Syria had been significantly different to the pursuit of the NATO or the EU since the Kurdish forces were strengthened in the northern territory. An autonomous Kurdish area on the Syrian-Turkish border is a risky security challenge to Turkey. Also, the millions of Syrian refugees impose a huge burden on the Turkish state. Nevertheless, this also became a strategic tool against the EU. In this way, Turkey plays a key role in the European Union's migration crisis. This fact will be an essential factor for a long time in the relation between the EU and Turkey.⁹

Another sensitive part is the Russian connections. It is not easy to describe the relationship between Turkey and Russia in a few words, because on one hand we can see clear opposition between them in Libya or Syria. On the other hand, Turkey made military developments with Russian technology despite the NATO's interests. The deal of the S-400 missile system became a possible threat and leak in NATO's security system. Turkey, with these steps, has angered many European member states and also the USA.

Finally, the never-ending Greek-Turkish-Cyprian conflict received a new push in the past months. However, this time the question is not the future of the island of Cyprus, but the division of the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey reached an agreement with Libya about establishing a new exclusive economic zone. The Turkish ambitions to redistribute the economic areas in the Mediterranean Sea appear alongside with an aggressive presence of the navy. This behaviour makes it harder to build up new natural gas extraction points, and pipelines, which could be very important for the European Union to reduce the energy dependency to Russia.¹⁰ The energy sector is a key political issue for the European Union, and the Turkish aspirations have been endangered it. This question will also be a key element of the relationship between the EU and Turkey in the coming years.

The EU and the MENA

One of the wider approaches of the regional complexes is the Euro-Mediterranean complex. The Mediterranean Sea, with all the challenges and opportunities, makes a huge impact on the international security. In this way, it is able to generate a complex which contains all actors around the Mediterranean Sea. What does this mean for the European Union? For the European identity, the culture and of course for the security, the Mediterranean Sea is an essential component with its thousands-years background.

⁸ STATISTA, 2019

⁹ EGERESI Zoltán, 2020

¹⁰ ILLÉS Gergő, 2020

The effects of the Civil War in Syria and the Libyan conflict on the European Union's security prove examples to show us why the EU shall pay attention to the Middle East and North-Africa (MENA). The Mediterranean region is close enough to have a direct impact on the European security. As the previously mentioned the example of the thousands of Syrian refugees in the section of the Turkish relations, and this is just a narrow part of the conflict. The economic, social, cultural challenges have long-term effects on Europe. The Libyan civil war showed us that the EU shall improve its strategic thinking, including the ability of power-projection and to enforce their own interests. Europe has learned that it is not easy to choose between a stable dictatorship ensuring security or the possibility to have a new regime working by the European values. The result for now is an unstable failed state with different groups seeking power and a huge leak on the southern border of the EU.

The Libyan events opened the possibility for the Sahel crisis to easily flee to Europe, and in this way it also opened the European eyes that the European interest does not stop on the edge of the Mediterranean region. It is the fundamental interest of Europe to be able to stand up at all the stages where the European interests can be found. But what are the European interests?

The European interests

First, we shall take one step back to examine the European Union's interest – if it does exist at all. Or each member state has their own interest that they try to assert by the European institutions. The European Union has come a long way since the Rome Treaties established the European Communities. I have already quoted Jean Monnet, and based on his vision, it is clear that the European Communities' mission extended far more than the economic cooperation of the members. During the long way of the integration, we can also state that by today the European Union has overgrown the expectation of the founding members. The European Union became not only an economic community, but also an institution with political, cultural, and financial cooperation. Despite the contradictions and disputes of the member states, the European Union has common values, common strategy for the future and in this way, the EU does have its own interests. These interests build up from the ones of the member states'. Furthermore, there are a lot of areas that are more relevant to some members and less to the others.

In order to achieve its goals, the European Union has made many steps since the Maastricht Treaty. They built an institution and mechanisms to represent the EU, to express the European interests, to show unity towards third countries and other partners. The establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy its transformation into European Security and Defence Policy with the creation of a clear representation of the EU was a very exhausting procedure.

In 2016, the EU presented the new strategy – for the foreign and security policy. The title of the strategy is Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe.¹¹ This document aimed to be the guideline for the European Union to become a global power. As it says the citizens

¹¹ European Union, 2016

and the partners have huge expectations of Europe to ‘play a major role, including as a global security provider’. This role will be accessible only if the members are capable to work together, act together and have the shared vision that the title of the Strategy refers to. The European Union seems to miss the element of share vision and cooperation.

The EU enjoys great opportunities to become a key player in the field of international relations. Just a few examples of the different rankings of countries: after Brexit the EU still has four members (Germany, France, Italy, Spain) who are in the top-15 countries by GDP¹², three countries (France, Italy, Germany) by potential military strength,¹³ and six (Ireland, Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark, Finland) by the Human development index.¹⁴ The EU has more than 440 million citizens, which is the third on the list after China and India. The EU, as we can see, has a good potential, but why we cannot see these prevail in the international politics?

The Lisbon Treaty, signed in December 2007, gave a huge institutional reform for the EU’s foreign policy. This reform established a more effective, somewhat coherent system with more continuity. This, however, cannot dissolve the duplication of foreign policy between the member states and the EU.¹⁵ The decision making of the European Union’s foreign policy still requires the agreement of the member states; the ultimate decision-making body is still the European Council.¹⁶ Therefore, in any crisis, the member states can act with flexibility, but the EU has a slow and inflexible process to act. Furthermore, many members do not have the intention to act in the area of the foreign policy, while some countries want a more significant role for the EU. Even the more influential countries have different strategies of foreign policy. It should be also noted that the Brexit changed the European Union’s profile a lot. With the exit of the UK from the Union, one of the leading economies left the integration, with a huge military potential, political routine, and also it is a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

It shall be noted that in certain questions different groups of the members act together, as inside security communities of the EU. The biggest cooperation, the Weimar triangle - contains France, Germany, and Poland -, is almost thirty-year-old now. The Visegrad Group (with Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia) is also a good example. These groups do not only cooperate in the policy level, but also they established the EU battlegroups: Weimar BG in 2013, Visegrad BG in 2016 and 2019. We can also find example to member states act together in certain occasions. The Normandy Format talks aimed to find solution to resolve the war in Ukraine. The members (Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine) met six times until October 2020.

¹² Global PEO Services, 2020

¹³ Global Fire Power, 2020

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme, 2019

¹⁵ Stefan LEHNE, 2017

¹⁶ European Union 2018

France

On the countries' level, we need to underline the efforts by France. France is one of the most active engines of the European integration. The country has always been a supporter of the political cooperation, and the deepening of the European institutions, as well as the foreign policy of the EU constitutes a huge part of the French ambitions. The European Union's target areas and the French priorities are nearly the same: North-Africa, the Western Balkans, the Middle East with attention to Asia and Central-Africa.¹⁷

France has not only been active in the European policy making but also it was a significant actor during different crises. In 2008, during the Russia-Georgia war, the presidency of the EU was held by France. This gave an excellent opportunity for the French President Nicolas Sarkozy to give a boost to the European Union' foreign activity, and to strengthen the position of France among the great powers. With his active contribution, the ceasefire agreement was reached after a few days of the conflict.¹⁸ After the presidency of Sarkozy, President Holland represented a different attitude, but Emmanuel Macron drove back France to a more proactive foreign policy. As I have already mentioned above, France is an active member of the Normandy format in finding a solution in Ukraine. Macron tried to mediate when the USA experimented to make the Iranian nuclear deal impossible to operate.¹⁹ After the explosion²⁰ in Beirut, August 2020, Macron was the first and the most active leader to offer help to Lebanon. Not only had he offered support after the catastrophe, but also he urged political changes in an exchange of the aids to solve the deeper inner problems of the country.²¹

The most spectacular act of France was definitely the intervention in Mali. France made it clear that they had the capacity and the will to intervene in the sphere of interest of Europe, if that was necessary. The civil war in Mali proved that it is not enough to establish a good framework for the foreign policy by the EU. The EU needs real common goals in this field, and clear standards with requirements to different crises, to make it clear when and how the EU shall act in these situations.

Germany

Germany has been going hand in hand in the past decades with France as the engines of the integration. In addition, Germany has represented a so different behaviour. German politics are nearly identical with Merkel's politics, while Angela Merkel is on her fourth term as Chancellor of Germany. Germany as one of the biggest member states of the EU, and the EU's leading economy (4th GDP in the world) would play a decisive role itself in the European Union. Together with the continuity that Merkel has represented Germany is an inevitable actor in the EU. In the highest level of foreign policy, Germany is an active member. Merkel was a key

¹⁷ Lukáš PACHTA, 2003

¹⁸ BENES Károly, 2015

¹⁹ Julian BORGER, 2019

²⁰ BBC 2, 2020

²¹ TECHET Péter, 2020

person in the Normandy Format talks, many European leaders had discussions with her after the Ukrainian conflict had broken out.

In spite of of this leading role, for historical reasons, Germany is restrained with the hard power solutions. Significant parts of the society still reject the use of the German military forces abroad or just with strict restrictions. In different missions, the so-called national caveats limit the usage of the Bundeswehr.²² That does not mean that Germany refuses to take part in different missions. Germany is very active in the NATO missions, but the national caveats represent them reluctant and stubborn.²³ In this way, Germany is not trying to push the EU's capabilities forward the way as France do. The German foreign policy is much more economy-centred – with high export rates – than military intervention based.

Other member states do not have enough economic and/or political power to represent a similar role in the EU's foreign policy or outside the EU. For instance, I mentioned Italy both in the top-15 list of GDP and military potential, but even with this background, Italy cannot implement its own foreign policy as a regional power. This could be the reason why the Atlanticism and Europeanism are cornerstones of the priorities of the Italian foreign policy.²⁴

Conclusions

The European Union has grown beyond the borders of the post-cold war security complex. The level of the presented ambitions, the world-wide economic connections and the political relations of the European Union draw a far wider area of the European interests than the European RSC, which was described by Buzan and Waever. The European Union has fulfilled one of its greatest objectives: peace among the member states. The EU has built an incredibly deep cooperation from the most various areas of the citizens' life to the states level.

On the one hand, every single enlargement process, every deepening or widening of the Treaties brought more and more achievements on the path of the European integration. At the same time, opening new areas of the cooperation, integrating other countries, incorporating a new approach need more and more efforts from the members and to reach an agreement.

The different conflicts in the neighbourhood of the EU have showed also that the European Union does have its own interests. The EU has identified properly these regions, naming them in the Global Strategy as areas where the EU has special goals. However, on the level of actions, the European Union is unable to perform with the sufficient efficiency, as we can see in several cases.

The Balkan Wars pointed out the weaknesses in the abilities of the European foreign policy and the conflict management. The migration crisis in 2015 opened up a long dispute between the members that has failed to find a solution. The unsolved crisis in Libya has brought the problems of the Sahel region onto the threshold of the EU. These experiences have proved that different challenges can redefine the security complexes.

²² HETTYEY András, 2014

²³ CSIKI Tamás, 2014

²⁴ Elena MASLOVA, 2019

The root cause of the problems of the EU' foreign policy are the way too complicated decision-making process and the diverse interests of the member countries. One clear solution could be the deepening of the integration with dividing the foreign policy into such areas so as to define areas that become exclusive competence of the EU and such areas that remain in the competence of the member states.

The background to all these unresolved and prolonged issues is the weakness of the common foreign and security policy. It seems that the current operation of the European foreign policy fails to fully serve the interest of the European Union, with crumbling among the interests of the member states. As a result, it hardly will be able to quickly intervene in different crises without the consensus of the member states. If the Union keeps missing these chances, the only way that remains for the members is to find their own solutions just like France did so in Mali. In this way, the European Union cannot reach the goal set out in the Global Strategy of becoming a global power. The questions are still remaining: what the long term goals of the EU are? Is there anything that could give a boost to take a step forward, or there is no political ambition in deepening the collaboration in this field? The EU institutions and the representatives of the member states are challenged in finding a compromise in these questions in the near future.

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