

2017 a Russia's Year

A year ahead of us will have some very interesting political events which can lead to even more interesting geopolitical changes. In 2017 we will have elections in three major EU countries: Germany, France and Italy. On January the 20th the next US President Donald Trump will take office. During this year the Syrian crisis will probably reach a next stage, also in the upcoming year we can expect some raising tensions between Iran and the US. Russian Federation as a global actor can benefit from all these events. If Moscow plays its cards right Russia can prosper on many different fronts including economy, security as well as in status as a global power-broker.

The upcoming elections in Europe (more precisely in Germany, France and Italy) can determine the future of the EU as a transnational organization. The right-leaning parties, which are apparently on the rise, if elected will probably try to weaken Brussels' power of governing the EU's foreign policy (and overall Brussels' political dominance in Europe). If so, Russia can easily influence the new governments of Europe to change their stance towards the Russian sanctions or to completely abolish them. We should also remember that sanctions against Russia were implemented as a punitive measure for the Russian involvement in Eastern Ukraine. A right-leaning Europe will probably have a more skeptical approach towards the whole Ukrainian problem, which further suggest that Russian sanctions over this issue can become obsolete. Also keep in mind that EU sanctions against Russia are a product of the US diplomatic pressure on Europe; and that the former US President had very close relations with many leading EU officials, especially Merkel, which made it easy to impose the United States foreign agenda over all other EU countries.

Promises of better relations with Russia were often heard from Donald Trump during the elections, since he is already in the oval office we can expect some changes throughout the year. During Trump's Presidency (if he stays true to his words) Moscow may expect better relations with the US. This can imply a couple of things. Resolving the Ukrainian issue which can also mean removing the sanctions. Despite US-Russia disagreements on Syria and the Assad regime, the Ukrainian issue is the main problem between Moscow and Washington. The new American President seems much friendlier towards Russia hence we can expect that resolving the Ukrainian problem may shift Ukraine back to the Russian sphere of influence. This can also have positive effects on Europe as well. Despite Poroshenko's constant cries for joining the EU, Ukraine as well as many other Eastern European states (even those who are members of the EU) have no actual economic structure nor power to support other members of this transnational organization. Better relations with Washington can also benefit Russian government on the Syrian issue. The next American administration might be more reasonable when it comes to the issue of the Assad regime and the "moderate" opposition in Syria. Despite Trump's speeches on America's future isolationist approach, it is not to be expected that the US troops will be leaving

Middle East that easily. The US is still closely bound to the Saudi's oil and President Trump has pledged allot more support to Israel than his predecessor.

Regarding the Middle East, Iran and Trump's cabinet will probably face many disagreements considering Iran's nuclear program. Although there are marginal chances that the Iranian deal will be abolished (as I stated in my previous article "[Possible Shift in the US Geopolitics](#)") the future US government will certainly make this deal allot harder for Teheran. During the Obama's administration, the West managed to make a significant shift with the Iranian politics and their controversial nuclear program. However, President Trump has promised a tougher stance towards Iran and its nuclear aspirations. If the diplomatic situation between these two countries becomes gradually worse or more complicated a mediator will be needed in order to resolve this matter. Moscow may become this potential moderator. Since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Russia and Iran cooperated on a number of issues and as the crisis evolved so did the cooperation between these two countries. Teheran sees Moscow as a major Christian ally with whom they share interests regarding security, economy, foreign policy as well as on the matters of Syria and Caspian Basin. If the Russian government manages to mediate and establish an agreement between Iran and the US, it will significantly bolster their international image as a power-broker. This would also further bound Iran to Russia and its regional politics.

These are the three main political frontiers on which Russia can achieve potential victories during the year. Besides these, there are other geopolitical scenes in which Moscow can maneuver. The NATO question, will the future American administration implement Trump's words and tighten the financial policy towards other NATO members? Many NATO countries simply can't afford to actively participate in this organization, hence they usually rely on foreign help and that help generally comes from the United States. Possible tightening of NATO politics may result in some significant changes to the alliance's structure, and any deterioration inside NATO will benefit Moscow. This can also lead to further rapprochement between Russia and Turkey. It is already evident that diplomatic relations between these countries are getting better each month. If President Erdogan decides to stay on course and make Turkey the leading power in the region, it will inevitably drift further from the West. Turkey needs Russia in order to resolve or contain the Syrian crisis and stop the potential spillover to the Anatolian plateau. Finally, Russia can potentially fortify its influence over the Balkans (in Serbia and the Republika Srpska primarily) if Brussels' authority starts to fade.

Despite this potential progress that 2017 can bring to Russia, there are certain issues which draw attention and some projects which will probably stay on hold. One of the main economic subjects for Russia is the diversification of their exports. Russia's exports are mostly oil, gas and overall energy resources. This can be very problematic because if the prices on global energy markets start to fluctuate it can threaten Russia's overall economy, this can be further employed as a political tool against Russia. The other issue is the Caucasus region: Russia's deeper involvement in Syria will cause a backlash among more radical Muslim population in the country. Throughout the last year, we saw violent actions against Russian

police in the Caucasus, and as the Syrian crisis is prolonged the potential for violence in the Caucasus among radicals is likely to increase. Additionally, Moscow and Ankara need to guarantee security and stability among other countries in this region, especially between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

The BRICS, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are also Russian projects (or projects in which Russia is deeply involved) that need attention, however, due to more concerning matters at hand, Russia will have a more passive approach. The next BRICS summit will be held in China, probably focusing on new American administration and economic strategy that President Trump tends to utilize. EAEU led by Moscow is planning on integrating Egypt, Iran and India into the organization. But at the same time, China is proposing a free-trade-area inside Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This will challenge Russia and the Eurasian integration since countries are prone to follow a stronger economy. Lastly, the CSTO during the year will have similar activities as in the past. Military drills that were held with Belarus, Serbia and Egypt last year will have their successors in 2017. Nevertheless, any deeper Russian engagement in CSTO will be on hold until the Syrian issue is under control. The year ahead of us will bring many geopolitical challenges, Russia as a global player needs to be present in many of them and secure its position on the global power stage.

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