

Transcript

Trouble on Europe's Periphery

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Andrew Dorman

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Andrew Dorman, I'm the new commissioning editor for *International Affairs*. I've succeeded Caroline Soper, who has gone into retirement. Welcome to our evening event on 'Trouble on Europe's Periphery'. This builds on the current edition of *International Affairs*, which came out in May, looking at a whole set of pieces. We have three of the authors with us tonight.

This event is on the record, so whatever is said will be recorded and perpetually remembered. We've got Twitter running throughout this so if you want to engage in social media, #CHEvents.

Each of our speakers will speak for about eight minutes. I'll briefly introduce them. On my immediate left is Professor Sten Rynning from the University of Southern Denmark. Sten heads up their Centre for War Studies and has written extensively on defence transformation, NATO and European security. To Sten's left is Tracey German, who's a senior lecturer at King's College London, specializing in the Caucasus and Eurasia. On my far left is Mr Bill Park, also from King's College London, who will be speaking on Turkey. Sten?

Sten Rynning

Thank you for the invitation to speak here today. It's a pleasure to be here.

The Ukrainian crisis, and Russia and the West – that was the topic of my article. I took a big sweep approach to the topic and started really with the big questions that always come with a crisis of this magnitude, namely: what is really driving the crisis? What is really at stake in the crisis? Will the crisis turn out bad? I have a sketch of an answer to all three questions in my eight minutes.

The short version is that the crisis, in my view, is about regime survival. It's about regime survival on both sides of the spectrum, both in east and West. In the east, it's Putin's regime which is at stake; in the West, it is the western concert of nations. I'll have a few more words on that in a moment.

Given that it's about regime survival for both camps, it is, in a way, an existential crisis. This type of crisis, I believe, is best managed by developing an explicit balance-of-power policy, not pretending that you can agree and you can develop partnerships. You have to be explicit about how to balance power. That was the short version. Let me attach a few comments to this.

Regime survival for Putin is what the Ukrainian question is about for him. It's not really about Crimea, it's not about the Donbas region. It's about Ukraine as a possible role model for how eastern European countries can develop. If Ukraine were to develop an alternative model for modernizing its society and its state, its politics and economy, it would be directly dangerous to the Putin regime because it would be an alternative. Of course, there are alternative models of modernization – it could be the United Kingdom, it could be France, it could be Germany – but they are too far removed from Russia to be real alternatives that can mobilize opinion against Putin. If Ukraine were to modernize, it would be a different story. That's why the association agreement in late 2013 provoked such drama.

I don't see this as a crisis of ideology or Putin having a project of pursuing certain ideas like *Novorossiya*. I think these ideological elements are weak in his regime and I think it's essentially about perpetuating power.

Let's move to the West, which is slightly more complicated. I think it's also a question of regime survival. By regime, I mean the regime of western institutions that have allowed western nations – west and central Europe and North America – to concert power and concert their policies. This concert of western nations is, at a fundamental level, involved in this question. What a concert does is that it aligns power and legitimacy, but to align these two things you need to sort it out. One of the more well-known examples of a concert of power was in Europe post-Napoleon, after 1815, where the alliance that fought Napoleon's France started the peace-making by signing an alliance agreement that they would stay together for 20 years. Then they defined the frontiers of France, restoring France as they wanted it. Then they defined the concert of power that became the Concert of Europe.

In 1990, we saw nothing like this approach. They didn't sort out power. They didn't sort out legitimacy, and by legitimacy I mean the restoration of frontiers of France or Russia. They went straight to the concert. That was the Paris Charter. They didn't sort out whether the alliance (NATO) was to be transformed or not. They said it was to be transformed but they didn't sort out Russia's role in relation to NATO. They said Russia would be transforming as well, everyone would be transforming, leaving unclear what restoration meant in Europe. So given that they did not define continental concert but pretended it was possible, in effect the group of states which could drive European diplomacy became the western concert, because that had staying power. It could actually function as a concert.

I believe the real issue of the crisis is that this western concert of power is challenged by what is happening in Ukraine and could fragment in a fundamental way. Why is it threatened, the western concert of power, which I think is the real issue of the Ukraine crisis? Let me name four issues, quickly.

One is all the SPDs of Europe. Of course, I mean the German SPD – that tradition of thinking in terms of, we must balance east and west. We must be in the middle of Europe and work for the greater European vision. There are plenty of SPD types in my country, certainly, in Denmark and also in other countries. The Steinmeiers – I believe Steinmeier is doing a solid job in many respects, but the [indiscernible] of Europe, they challenge the western concert.

Second, the 'come home Americans', the American debate on why the key priority is either nation-building at home in North America or pivoting to Asia because that's where the future is. They are withdrawing US engagement in Europe, leaving Europeans to sort it out.

We have the SPDs but we also have what I would say – this is the third – a new stream of new nationalists, essentially political actors who increasingly see the European Union as a technocratic empire that is to be struggled against for the sake of saving the nation. They come in light versions, they come in dark versions. Some of the dark versions happen to be in my country, so I know them. But I think you have plenty of those in your country as well. What comes out of this new nationalist debate is also: didn't we really, by way of our big institutions (EU, NATO), cause the Ukraine crisis? We were the ones who enlarged, we were the ones not to offer Gorbachev a good deal in the very beginning, in 1990, and so on.

If we take these three streams of thinking, or political mood – the [indiscernible] of this continent, the 'come home Americans' and the new nationalists – I think you have a playing field where Putin is able to operate. Obviously, what he would like to do is play to these sentiments. I think ultimately if those three streams of thinking can be nourished by Putin, and vice versa, then we will see the end of effective institutionalized cooperation among western states, the end of the concert.

Let me finish with a note on whether this actually will happen. Will the West disintegrate? I think we need to ask two questions. Will the United States continue to be engaged in NATO and keep NATO in place as a

framework for EU politics? Secondly, will the United Kingdom and France bother to have the will and the means to join Germany in the leadership of Europe. Those two questions go together. European leadership will have to happen within a transatlantic framework, I think the lesson is. If these three countries – the United States, the United Kingdom and France – can agree to support Germany, then we have a western concert and then we can establish a continental balance of power with Russia. The way that will happen will be the United States taking the lead, linking issues (from Iran to ISIS to Syria to Ukraine) and defining a balance of power that could stabilize the continent.

If those three countries do not continue in NATO or support Germany in the EU, then I think we will see a very gradual but still re-emergence of the German tradition of *Mitteleuropäische* policy – meaning that Germany will slowly detach itself from the institutionalized cooperation in the EU and in NATO, which means the institutional frameworks will be hollowed out and we will return to a kind of flexible, greater European diplomacy that we knew 150 years ago, which will play to Russia's strengths and will be exciting to follow from an academic perspective but maybe not pleasant to live in.

Tracey German

Following on from Sten's look at what's been going on in Europe and the institutions, I want to look at one of the small states on the periphery that I think has been caught up in some of the troubles, some of the vacillations from some of these key states and also these institutions. Georgia, in the south Caucasus, has long pursued an aspiration for much deeper integration with the West, particularly with NATO and the European Union, highlighted last week during the Riga summit, which really focused on the European Union's relations with those states in the post-Soviet space. How to balance those, how to manage those, against the backdrop of what's going on in Ukraine. Georgia was very much hoping last week to achieve a visa-free regime. Although it didn't achieve that, its significant progress in reform was noted in the summit declaration document.

I think it's very interesting to look at Georgian foreign policy over the last 10 to 15 years and its remarkable consistency both in pursuit of integration with the West, particularly NATO and the EU, and also this attempt to recast itself as a European state, removing itself from what it sees as the post-Soviet space and trying to reshape itself. It's remained kind of staunch in its desire for integration with the West despite significant pressure from Moscow – diplomatic, economic, and military in 2008 – as well as several changes in government and internal political crises. But we've seen very little substantive change in Georgian foreign policy.

My piece traces the development of Georgian foreign policy since about 2000, since 1999. I focus really on the narrative of the Georgian political elite that has emerged, so very much the state level, with regard to the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. There are two key themes that emerge and I identified, one of which is that policymakers, Georgian politicians, the key documents, very much emphasize the fact that this is about choice. This is Georgia's choice. It's about countering the Russian narrative that the West is trying to grab countries within the post-Soviet space, seeking to interfere in Russia's zone of privileged influence. The Georgian narrative is very much: this is our choice, as a sovereign state. Something you see an awful lot of in their documents and some of the statements by prime ministers and presidents.

That reflects high levels of support at the public and popular levels for both NATO and EU membership and closer integration. The opinion polls generally have stayed at around the high 60s, low 70s, in terms of support for membership of those two institutions. Although there have been some signs in the past month or so of what you could perceive to be a bit of disillusionment with what is being seen by some as empty promises from NATO and the EU, and there's been a steady rise in support for Georgia joining the

Eurasian Economic Union – not, interestingly, at the detriment of joining some of the western security organizations.

The second key theme that runs through is this idea of Georgia's European-ness. Speaking and coming from a country that does its best to pretend that it's not European in any way, shape or form, I think it's very interesting to look at a country that has really sought to define itself as being European from the moment that Zurab Zhvania stood up in the European Parliament and said, 'I am Georgian and therefore I am European'. I think from then on, that has been very much a theme running throughout their foreign policy, their documents. It's about moving forward as a European state. This argument that they are historically European, that events over the centuries have cut Georgia off from what they consider to be their rightful place within the European family, and that now they are just reclaiming that rightful place. It's very interesting because there is a debate about what it means to be European, about what actually constitutes Europe. Obviously Georgia is geographically right on the periphery of what we would define as Europe. But actually, they talk very much – the politicians, the narrative – about values, about traditional Georgian values being European values. So things like democracy, human rights, respect for the rule of law. So this idea that Europe and being European is also about values, not just about your geographical position.

All very interesting, but I think a lot of what falls out of this is, well, who are they trying to message, and so what? I think the idea of audience is very interesting. I think there are various audiences for this European narrative. Obviously the European organizations themselves, trying to recast Georgia and say: we are European, we recognize these values that you espouse politically and culturally. I think it's also aimed perhaps at Russia, an attempt to clearly define themselves. There's been a big debate among Georgian scholars about whether Georgia's European choice is linked to its efforts to modernize the state, whether it's actually about this idea of making a clear distinction with the past and its Soviet history, whether it's just about identity and nothing more.

I think try as it might to reorient itself, there is still the big problem of Russian perception. Russia perceives Georgia to lie within its zone of privileged interest. Partly down to geographical realities – obviously Georgia lies on a key route between Russia and one of its principal allies in the region, Armenia. So there is the geographical reality.

I think some of the 'so what' that comes out of this for European institutions such as NATO and the EU – some very big questions to be asked here. There is a country that is really knocking on the door of these institutions, that has made huge efforts to reform and actually come a long way – but there is still vacillation, there are still divisions. There is still a lack of agreement which I think is something Russia can leverage, the fact that there is a lack of consensus – both within NATO about future enlargement but also within the European Union. I think that is a challenge for these institutions.

I think actually there's a big question for stability both in Georgia and within the South Caucasus if some of the promises that have come out of these institutions are found to be empty promises and wanting. So I think I'll leave it there.

Bill Park

Actually my opening remark will be one that I hadn't actually planned to make, but it follows on from the two previous speakers. It seems to me one of the things that Turkey is going through at the moment is a question of where it fits in this European order. It's asking questions about its own identity. I think a lot of what I tried to look at in the article in *International Affairs* is where does that take Turkey and where

does it take Turkey's relationship with its traditional western allies. So in a way, Turkey might be seen to be moving in a direction or identifying itself in a way that is quite different from, for example, what Georgia is seeking to do or would like to do.

My research question, if I can put it this way, is: Turkey's always been a difficult ally for the West; are we seeing anything different? Is this just a period of turbulence or is there some structural change that is taking place in Turkey, in the way it sees itself, in the way it conducts itself, in the kind of society and state that it is? If so, what are the implications of that for its western alliance? That's my kind of research question. Are we just looking at stuff happening now or are we looking at a bigger change?

To some extent, I think what I've sort of done is just offered a snapshot both of what it seems to me Turkey is doing, how it sees itself, and also what some of the reaction to that is amongst its western allies. I probably also ought to say, just to cover myself, that snapshots can be blurry. There's a couple of things about Turkey that I think we need to bear in mind. One is there's an election coming up on June 7th. My personal prediction is there isn't going to be much change. I'm hoping that what I say will survive and have credence beyond June 7th but we have to bear that in mind, there might be some coalition government or a government that in some sense is tempered, or indeed a major crisis in Turkey, which we could look at later.

The other reason why the snapshot is a bit blurred is that, as I say somewhere in the article, Turkey is impossibly unpredictable – not only in the long term and medium term but also in the short term, like tomorrow or the day after. I have great fun looking at Turkish newspapers every day and finding out something that at least minimum surprises me and quite often shocks me, takes me by surprise, and I hadn't anticipated. I think a lot of Turkey observers are having that sort of problem.

So bear that in mind, it's a snapshot. I'm quite confident about it but there are issues out there that we need to think about what we're trying to work out what what is happening now means for Turkey's future and its future relationships with the West.

I suppose my proposition, sort of bottom line up front (as sometimes people like to say), is that I think Turkey has undergone – not is undergoing, I think it has undergone – a paradigm shift and it's a different kind of country now from the one that the West has been dealing with, or at least has convinced itself it's been dealing with, for most of the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War period. Turks themselves like to talk about – or the Turkish government and its supporters like to talk about – the new Turkey. I think we do have a new Turkey. So what I'd like to do is look at what that Turkey is, what's driven these changes, what do the changes consist of and what do we do about it.

The very simple thing would be to say that Turkey's different now because in 2002 the Justice and Development Party came to power, and it's still in power with ever-bigger majorities each time it confronts the electorate. That's probably not going to be the case after June 7th, in terms of a bigger majority, but my guess is it's still going to be the governing party.

When the AK Party came to power, however, it seemed to be doing all the right things. It started a reform process that was doing everything that the EU seemed to want of it. It tried its best to do a deal on Cyprus. So the initial signs in the first term were good. One wouldn't necessarily have predicted, say in 2004 or 2005, that we would be where we are now, when you look at the behaviour of the AK Party government during its first term.

But it seems to me that we are in a different place now, so what are the reasons? I think one reason – it's a familiar political observation – they have won too many elections. Erdogan in particular – now president, formerly prime minister – has won too many elections. The AK Party has got used to the idea of governing and it's become drunk with power, if you like. We can recognize that. People like to use the Thatcher example in the UK and I think there is something in that. They've had catastrophic success politically and, to a degree, whether they get all the credit or whatever, economically as well. Turkey has done well and I think this has boosted the confidence of the ruling party.

I think also one of the things they have done with that power is not only tamed the military, who always were the guardians of Turkish politics, Turkish democracy, but actually taken a lot of steps (that they are still taking) to create a kind of party-state. More and more the ruling party has taken over the state. So the ruling party can now manipulate and dictate and direct the state in ways that it wants. I think that enables the AK Party now to behave differently from the way it did in the early years.

I also think that you have a mindset which mostly in the article I put down to former foreign minister – before that, adviser on foreign policy – then foreign minister, now prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu. In a way, Davutoglu is an example of Huntington describing Turkey as a torn state. Davutoglu, in his thinking, reflected that part of Turkish identity that is not exclusively – and I would say for the leadership of the AK Party even now not mainly – European in its identity. What Davutoglu did was point to the Islamic nature of Turkey, the developing country identity of Turkey, Turkey as a Middle Eastern country. Turkey as a country that carries around some of the baggage that you will find in that region about the West, the West being in some way responsible for the plight of the Middle East region.

As I say, I've explained that largely by tracing Davutoglu's thinking, as the kind of easier and most documented way of stating it. But I would say that Davutoglu reflects more broadly the government, more broadly the AK Party, but beyond that, that big chunk of the Turkish electorate that were never that much touched or persuaded by the Kemalist revolution. That part of Turkey – provincial, Anatolian, devout, at least until relatively recently sort of non-urbanized, less educated – that you might say is *la Turquie profonde*. It's the 'deep Turkey' that was kind of excluded by the Kemalists but has now, via the AK Party, emerged as the sort of characteristic of this new Turkey. I think when you trace political Islam in Turkey, the Welfare Party that the AK Party leadership came from, the [indiscernible] movement before that, you can see this intellectual, cultural and identity root that has always been there but in the past the Kemalist elite has been able to sort of marginalize and exclude and hide from view. Now we have it in full view.

So what is there about this new Turkey that we need to look at? There are a number of issues in foreign policy and this is mostly what I talk about in the article, that I think have loomed quite large and have started to bother people in Washington and in Europe. Mostly I'm not going to talk about the EU. I'll state it quite openly: Turkey, in almost everything that it's doing, is moving away from the EU. I think EU accession is dead for the foreseeable future.

In the more regional foreign policy things that Turkey has done, we can see where the tension between Turkey and the West and its allies have come from. A lot of focus is on Syria. That is often epitomized by the siege of Kobani, Turkey not doing anything, and Turkey not joining the coalition against Islamic State. It's tempting, if you look at Turkey's behaviour toward Syria and add things like its relationship with Iran, its more general relationship (at least up until the Arab Spring) with the region, to fall into the trap that I think a lot of American neo-cons fell into, which is that Turkey is moving east and leaving the West. Actually, Turkey has also left the east, in the sense that many of its regional policies have not only upset the West but upset regional powers. So I think you have to kind of slice Turkish policy a little more than just say it's become regional or Islamic or anti-western or whatever.

What you see is a – I don't want to call it sectarian, because it's not even quite that, but certainly a pro-Muslim Brotherhood stance on almost all the regional issues, whether that be most obviously in Egypt but also in Iraq, in Syria, in Libya. Turkey has or is alleged to have supported Muslim Brotherhood elements and that has upset many of its regional neighbours.

It's also adopted rhetoric that is much tougher on its western allies than it is on, for example, Russia – especially Russia and China. The list of differences between Turkey and Russia on almost all the issues – Crimea, Syria, even Iran's nuclear programme – is really quite substantial but actually the rhetoric Turkey adopts is much softer towards Russia than towards the West. I think this also reflects identity as being a factor in Turkish foreign policy that sometimes is bigger than the issues. So if I take the Armenian genocide commemoration, which actually occurred after I had written this piece, it's okay to recall the Turkish ambassador from Luxembourg but not from Russia. Actually, the president of Russia, Putin, signed the declaration that this was an Armenian genocide, which was a much more explicit statement but the Turkish response was much more muted. You could say the same with Crimea as well. Turkey, in one sense, presents itself as the protector of the Crimean Tatars in particular, but at the same time Erdogan quite explicitly said: I kind of think the Russians are dealing with this issue, especially the Crimean Tatars, okay. So a much different kind of approach to the one that Turkey adopted towards the West.

Then there's the big issue that has not yet been resolved, or maybe it's going to dissipate, about Turkey's decision – remember, as a NATO ally – to seem to choose a Chinese surface-to-air defence system, provided by a Chinese company that is subject to US sanctions, and to privilege that, prioritize or prefer that arrangement over the offer from European or American companies.

So the next issue is, I suppose, the future. How bad might things get? It's very tempting, and I'm not totally confident myself about this, to say if you take Erdogan, the president, and maybe Davutoglu, the prime minister, out of the picture, things can settle down. I think that is possible. It might be that an AK Party government or a future Turkish government that comes from the sort of Islamic wing of society might be easier to deal with. I think that's perfectly within the realms of possibility, that to some extent this is about personalities.

But I also think that there is a new Turkey, for the reasons I've indicated. That part of the Turkish population which I would say is certainly half of the population, if not all of it, never did buy into Turkish identity that aligned with the West in the way that Turkey in the past has aligned with the West. So if I project forward, I can imagine a Turkey that has an easier relationship with its western allies. What I can't imagine is a Turkey either domestically or in foreign policy terms that will readily behave in the way one might expect an ally to behave. There can be overlaps of interest, there can be areas of agreement, but the US or NATO can have that with Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, all sorts of countries. What is really hard to see is how from within this new Turkish identity, new Turkish political system, new Turkish foreign policy, how Turkey can so easily present itself in the future as the kind of ally to NATO that it's been able to present itself in the past.

So my prediction, or expectation I suppose, is a fairly gloomy one about Turkey-western relations, even if you take the sometimes toxic personalities out of the picture. I think the paradigm has shifted and that's what I seek to explore. Thank you.