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Democracy in Eastern Europe after Brexit

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Abstract

This paper explores the way Brexit and associated processes within the European Union as well as the foreign policy changes brought by the new US administration will influence the state of democracy in EU post-communist member states and in the so-called Eastern Neighborhood. Geopolitical factors, President Trump's personality traits, and the internal dynamics of the European Union are analyzed against the backdrop of Russia's expansionistic plans in order to construct four possible scenarios. The most probable one suggests that in the medium- and long-term Eastern Europe will become the arena of a mainly three-cornered rivalry whose actors will be Russia, the Franco-German axis or Germany, and the US in alliance with the UK and certain East European states. Critically, the Kantian, cooperative 'post-modern' vision of geopolitics that EU member states presently share and try to promote within their eastern neighborhood will likely be replaced by the 'neoclassical' geopolitical perspective shared by Russia and, to a large extent, by President Trump. In turn, this will impact negatively on the state of democracy and on the Europeanization process in Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, Brexit, President Trump, Russia, European Union, democracy

1. Introduction

This paper explores the way Brexit and associated processes within the European Union as well as the foreign policy changes brought by the new US administration will influence the state of democracy in Eastern Europe (a region defined as including EU post-communist member states as well as the western part of the Commonwealth of Independent States). This influence is twofold. On the one hand, Brexit and, to a lesser extent, the election of President Trump have already encouraged populist, nationalist political forces all over Europe. Much attention was paid to the 2017 presidential bid of Marine Le Pen - who explicitly tried to capitalize on the victory of British and US populists - but it should not be forgotten that at that time similar political parties

already were in power in Poland and Hungary. Yet, Brexit does not represent the cause of their electoral success. Rather, both Brexiteers and populists in continental Europe have taken advantage of the negative consequences of globalization and of European Union's inability to appropriately address major issues such as the financial crisis, the immigrant wave, or Islamist terrorism. On the other hand, however, Brexit will trigger a series of processes within the European Union that, in conjunction with President Trump's new foreign policy approach, will have major geopolitical consequences. The most important ones concern the restructuring of the East European security complex in a way that will greatly favor Russia's expansionistic plans. Critically, the Kantian, cooperative 'post-modern' vision of geopolitics that EU member states presently share and try to promote within their eastern neighborhood will likely be replaced by the 'neoclassical' geopolitical perspective shared by Russia and, to a large extent, by President Trump. In turn, this will impact negatively on the state of democracy and on the Europeanization process in Eastern Europe. Accordingly, this paper proposes a geopolitical analysis of Brexit and of its eastern consequences.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section sets up the appropriate theoretical framework. Section 3 presents the features of the East European regional security complex. Section 4 analyzes geopolitical factors as well as President Trump's personality in order to construct two main scenarios for America's future foreign policy. Section 5 presents three possible scenarios for the internal dynamics of post-Brexit EU as well as their foreign policy consequences. Section 6 analyzes the key European national actors. Section 7 constructs four scenarios for the future evolution of the East European regional security complex and its power constellation and discusses their probability. The final section analyzes the consequences of these developments on the state of democracy in Eastern Europe.

2. Geopolitical approaches, regional security complexes, and political psychology

If you are interested in reading the rest of this paper, please contact the author at

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