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Stalemate: Geopolitical Games in Syria

I. Introduction

By now it turned out that the Syrian crisis has been a combination of strategic struggle for power and influence in the Middle East and the internal and external factors which were based on ethnic lines. The uprising in Syria started as peaceful demonstrations against some undemocratic practices by the Assad government. In a short time the demonstrations took a denominational line setting the minority but dominant Alawites² against the majority Sunni Muslims. The “rebellion” was encouraged by the successes of the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and the efforts of rebels were strengthened up by the consequences of a governmental crackdown and interference by militant forces. In this way, all in all, Syria has fallen in a civil war, that is to say, in the country some are supporting the Assad regime, while others are against it. But the effect of the crisis has not stopped at the borders of Syria.

What is more, the whole conflict has been transformed from a domestic and regional issue to a real, global security issue with the same conclusion: some (Putin’s Russia) are supporting the Assad regime, while some (the U.S. with Turkey) are against it. I wonder if the battle between the U.S. and Russia, which had been ended by the demise of the Soviet Union, has been reanimated. In this paper first I want to point out that both states have sought to protect their regions of influence and in the era beginning with the Arab spring, and the doctrine of humanitarian intervention has been used to justify their own geopolitical interventions.

On the other hand, there is another issue on the agenda, which has been beyond the extent to keep the crisis off the rest of the world, especially off Europe. This is nothing else than a humanitarian disaster; hundreds of thousands of people left their home to find a haven of refuge. Just in the seven months from January to July 2015, a total of 125,000 asylum seekers arrived in Greece. Then in August alone, 108,000 people came. In September, the number was 153,000. The flow of people seemed extraordinary and its measure was growing fast. What ought to be done? Actually, in political sense, asylum and immigration policies within the European Union have been characterised by a competition between two conflicting policy frames; the “realist frame” of internal security, which emphasises the tightening of borders, and the “liberal frame” of humanitarianism, advocating a human rights-based notion of refugee protection and freedom of movement.³

Two key political leaders could be identified as shaping these frames in Europe, Viktor Orbán of Hungary and Angela Merkel of Germany. Viktor Orbán embodies a sharp realist philosophy as he is placing Hungary and its citizens first, insisting that Hungarians have the right not to live with populous Muslim communities, whilst describing those migrating as a real threat to Hungary’s security and cultural identity.⁴ Following Orbán, there were lots of speech and newspaper article in which they agreed that the EU has to secure its external borders; that the border must be sealed; that thorough border controls have to be implemented; that infrastructure needs to be strengthened. The

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² Alawites are a part of a branch of Islam, centred in Syria, who belong to Shia Islam.

³ Sandra Lavenex: Migration and the EU’s New Eastern Border: Between Realism and Liberalism. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 8, No.1, 2001. pp. 24-42.

⁴ Of course, it was not Orbán first to give voice of this view. It is a favourite topic among right-wing populists in their policy based on antagonism of “Us versus Them”. An emblematic person here the Dutch Geert Wilders who ran roadshows with his anti-Islamic views all over the world. However, in the migration crisis, Orbán as current PM was the politician in Europe to get in limelight, taking a stand against Merkel and the recipient EU migration policy.

stance of Orbán directly contrasts to that of the Chancellor of Germany. Merkel made efforts to put an end to the migration crisis, but to do so in ways that reassert Europe's commitment to universal human rights. On a liberal basis, Merkel stressed Europe had a vital interest in maintaining respect for international norms. She is uniquely placed to propose a credible EU policy, given her popularity in her own country, her visibility in the world and the fact that she has staked her political capital on Germany's ability to handle this crisis.

The endeavours of both political leaders mentioned before seem logical based upon their own way of reasoning governing concrete measures. However, as if either politician overemphasized the sustainability of their own policies related to the situation evolved. To seal the borders and to close Europe as a fortress could not be an ultimate solution; neither is it if any foreigner is let in. To give refuge seekers shelter and take them in are necessary but not sufficient responses. No doubt that we have to tackle the problem at the root and not just treat the symptoms. The prosecution of human traffickers who exploit the suffering of these people hardly solves the problem. Especially not for those desperate people who are willing to pay any price to escape their current situation. The debate needs to focus more on what action can and ought to be taken by the international community to stop human rights violations. And so we have arrived at the doctrine of humanitarian intervention again. My main concern is that the whole issue is captured by the states playing their own egoistic geopolitical games. In this paper I would like to briefly present the background of the issue from the perspectives of all the relevant bilateral relationships related to the crisis. And finally to come to a conclusion what settings of policy seem to me as worthy of following.

II. Geopolitical stance from the perspective of U.S.-Turkey relations⁵

With tremendous dead, millions displaced, the presence of extremists (ISIS), and a strong Iranian and Russian support for the Assad regime, the Syrian crisis is now a global security challenge and, at the same time, is jeopardizing the interests of both the U.S. and Turkey. In fact, the crisis has manifested a strategic completion between pro-western bloc (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan etc) and anti-Western bloc (Syria, Iran, Russia and Lebanon). The removal of Assad is a central step for the Syrian people as well as the anti-Assad camp. The U.S. has numerous national security interests at stake in Syria like foiling Iran's aspirations for regional hegemony; lessening the dominance of political Islam; denying terrorists (ISIS) another safe haven; preventing the use of chemical weapons; stabilization of Iraq; and reducing a threat to Israeli security.

In the meantime, the U.S. influence inside Syria is currently limited. The U.S. is not directly involved in the Syrian crisis. Its policy has been revolving around humanitarian issues and containing the influence of extremists. So, in order to safeguard its interests in Syria, the U.S. will require the assistance and support of other regional as well as world powers. For example, Turkey can clearly be an important, and considering its geopolitical position, a natural partner. However, the interests of both states do not perfectly match with each other. As far as Turkey is concerned, instability in Syria is the single foreign policy challenge facing Turkey today. One of the main concerns for Turkish policy in Syria has been the political role of Syria's Kurds in particular and

⁵ The discussion of this section based on three reports:

- Stephen J. Flanagan–Samuel J. Brannen: Turkey's Shifting Dynamics: Implications for U.S.–Turkey Relations. Centre for Strategic & International Studies, June 2008. (37 p.).
- Erol Cebeci–Kadir Üstün: The Syrian Quagmire: What's Holding Turkey Back? Insight Turkey, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2012. pp. 13-21.
- Morton I. Abramowitz–Eric S. Edelman: U.S.–Turkish Cooperation toward a Post-Assad Syria. Bipartisan Policy Center, April 2013. (40 p.).

Kurds in general. In addition, the prolonged conflict endangers regional stability as the fighting continues to send refugees and violence into neighbouring countries, especially Turkey. The flow of refugees has strained Turkey's political, social as well as economic aspects. Nevertheless, Turkey is not quite satisfied with the U.S. unwillingness to give aids for the opposition to topple the Assad regime. Also, there are disagreements between Turkey and the U.S. over which elements of Syrian opposition to support. From the Turkish perspective, the U.S. policy is ambiguous and does not have any clear picture. U.S.'s "ISIS first" approach does not coincide with the Turkish policy, which considers Assad regime's fall as its main foreign policy objective.

Both Turkey and Syria had national interests in stability of the Middle East, countering terrorism and extremism, securing energy flows, and maintaining fruitful relations with Europe. However, the relationships between Turkey and Syria have been edgy due to some historical territorial disputes, which include the following chief issues in the 1980's and 1990's: – Turkey's annexation of Hatay province in 1939; – Conflict over control of the Tigris and Euphrates water basin; – Turkey's close relations with the West in general and Israel in particular; and – Syria's support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, which is a left-wing organization and the main rebel group based in Turkey and Iraq. Also, and this aspect seems extremely important by shifting from regional to global context, both countries were on opposite sides in the cold war. Turkey was a founding member of NATO and Syria was one of the USSR's allies. However, in the past decade, Turkey developed wide relations with Syria. The new relationship was based on the framework of Turkey's self-declared "zero problems with neighbours" policy.⁶

In March 2011 when the Assad regime started its violent and brutal crackdown on the protesters, Turkey began to support the Syrian political opposition by hosting its members in Turkey. As the crisis escalated, first Turkey suspended its diplomatic relations with Syria, then in order to put more pressure on the regime, Turkey imposed sanctions on Syria; finally, in August 2016, Turkish mounted a military offensive in the north-western area of Syria. The intention of the Turks is complex. There are some primer interests of Turkey to cope with the crisis by reducing the tensions in the region. So the Turks work towards the fall of Bashar Al-Assad's regime: they want to stop the flow of refugees into Turkey and to settle them inside Syria in safe zones. That's the reason why the Turkish PM, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, continuously urge the establishment of a buffer zone, a no-fly zone or a safe-corridor on the territory of Syria.⁷

However, Turkey has multiple interests at stake in Syria. Prominent among them is to negate the influence of Kurds in Syria, since the Syrian crisis has given new impetus to the Kurdish issue. The Kurds, an ethnic group are spread out in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Syria, have long aspired to have their own state. Turkey continues to suffer from its prevalent Kurdish problem; Turkey is concerned about cross-border "spillover effects".⁸ The Syrian conflict has had a direct impact on the Kurdish question in Turkey. The conflict in Syria has drawn attention to the Kurdish minority over there. The Syrian Kurds are now more vocal than ever, and it is feared that in the near future they might pronounce autonomy or even independence.⁹ And finally, do not forget an important regional geopolitical consequence that the developments in Syria have contributed to sharpening an implicit competition between Turkey and Iran.¹⁰

Turn to the U.S. policy towards Syria now. In the U.S. official view Syrian conflict is as more of a humanitarian problem than as a direct threat to U.S. security. Despite the gross violations of

⁶ Ibid. Cebeci-Üstün, pp. 14.

⁷ "Turkey's Erdogan proposes Syria 'no-fly zone' to US, Russia". AFP, September 5, 2016. Internet Access: <http://www.news24.com/World/News/turkeys-erdogan-proposes-syria-no-fly-zone-to-us-russia-20160905>

⁸ "Syria's Mutating Conflict". International Crisis Group, Middle East Report, No. 128, August 1, 2012. pp. 33. Internet Access: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/128-syria-s-mutating-conflict.pdf>

⁹ Idrees Mohammad: The Syrian Kurdish Issue in Turkish-Iranian-Iraqi Relations. Ekurd Daily Online, 09.11.2012. Internet Access: <http://ekurd.net/mismas/articles/misc2012/12/syriakurd706.htm>

¹⁰ Madeleine K. Albright (ed.): US-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership. Council on Foreign Relations, Independent Task Force Report, No.69, May 1, 2012. pp. 41.

human rights and repeated breach of international norms, the U.S. failed to act properly. After Assad regime's brutal and forceful actions against the opposition, the U.S. policy was misguided and the U.S. administration seemed to be indecisive about the next step. The U.S. administration is divided on this issue, and thus it is against any kind of military intervention in Syria. Some argue that the U.S. should military intervene in the Syrian crisis in order to protect civilian or to fulfil the declared the U.S. goal of removing Assad from power. The critics argue that the opposition forces that are not unified and may include groups with extremist views. Unfortunately, the U.S's inaction and misguided approach contributed to the deteriorating situation on the ground.

It is also interesting to explore the bilateral relationship between U.S. and Turkey. Turkey was the key player of a containment strategy that protected the West from communist expansion. In this great strategy of the U.S. some problematic Turkish issues could remain inconsiderable such as the issues of Cyprus, and Turkish internal governance. Aftermath of the cold war, the necessity for this alliance has been disappeared. However, the U.S. and the EU continued to look on Turkey as an ally. For the U.S., Turkey is instrumental in any strategy to stabilize and would-exit Iraq, as Turkey is the only NATO ally that has borders with Iraq and Syria, its absence or unwillingness will complicate any kind of strategy vis-à-vis Syria. However, the Syrian crisis is putting tremendous strain on US-Turkey relations. The reason is being rooted in differing priorities with relation to the Syrian crisis. As far as Turkey is concerned, its policy is focused on to bring down the Syrian regime, while as the U.S. has focused its policy in fighting the ISIS. Despite the divergent points of their bilateral relations, both countries need for each other in any kind of settlements in Syria.

III. Geopolitical stance from the perspective of US-Russia relations

One of the main elements of the U.S. realist approach to international relations is *The Monroe Doctrine* declared by the U.S. president James Monroe in 1823.¹¹ The declaration includes two important settings of objectives in foreign policy: i) Further efforts by European nations to colonize land or interfere with states in North or South America would be viewed as acts of aggression, requiring U.S. intervention. ii) The US would neither interfere with existing European colonies nor meddle in the internal concerns of European countries. Up to the WW2, this guideline conducted the isolation policy of the U.S. To look back in the past, the Monroe Doctrine was the most influential geopolitical doctrine that has leveraged great powers to try and curve their own exclusive spheres of influence and control that are regarded as regions of national interest.

As the U.S. is becoming hegemonic power on the stage of world politics, additional doctrines were declared on and on (Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Reagan, Bush). As first in the sequence of doctrines, and as a reply to the Greek Civil War, the Truman doctrine in 1947 argued that if Greece and Turkey did not receive the aid that they urgently needed, they would inevitably fall to communism with grave consequences throughout the region. This was the conception of domino effect that communism would inevitably spread without the containment of the U.S-led West as the representative of the free world. Later on, this idea has become the milestone of the U.S. great strategy during the Cold War. In January 1980 *the Carter Doctrine* added the Middle East as strategic region on this "territorial list" by claiming that an attempt by any outside power to gain control of would be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the U.S, which would be repelled by any means necessary, including military forces.¹² The Carter doctrine was promulgated in order to deter the then Soviet Union from encroaching into the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions after the Soviets had invaded Afghanistan in 1979.

Equally, even after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has its own regional control doctrine.

¹¹ Internet access: http://malikdolgozat.uw.hu/cikk/Monroe_doctrine.PDF

¹² President Jimmy Carter quoted in Bob Woodward: *The Commanders*. Simon and Schuster, New York, 1991, pp. 230

Russia has always taken active and passive actions to guard the Caucasus region, and the former Soviet countries from external interference specifically interference from the USA. Any encroachment into this region is regarded as a threat to Russian national interest and security. The U.S., on the other side, has been an offensive actor in the Middle East relations. The region is important for the U.S. not only on the need to keep the petroleum taps running to USA and its allies and curbing terrorism, but also on the need to control the petrodollar system¹³ and the existence of Israel.

According to the spirit of the Carter Doctrine, the U.S. Middle East policy is continuously reviewed and threats redefined. This is exemplified by Saddam Hussein who at one time is seen as a USA ally and later turns into a foe and got invaded in 2003. The constant transformation of the U.S.'s Middle East policy is the reason why Syria, which was not much seen as a special interesting state, becomes important soon after the fall of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Syria grew to be a state of importance arguably because as a state under Alawites as Shiites it was the last major ally of Iran, which the then U.S. President George Bush classified among the "axis of evil" states together Iraq and North Korea.¹⁴ Being under the control of Alawites meant that Syria, like Iran, was viewed as a threat by the dominant Sunni states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates, in the region who are all U.S. allies.

Another reason for the need to change the leadership in Syria might be conducted by Israel's security concerns. Israel has several principal objectives in the Syria conflict, including minimizing Iranian and Russian influences in Syria, blocking the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah, preventing Syria from posing a credible military threat to Israel or permitting Iran to do so, undermining the legitimacy of Syria's claims to the Golan Heights, and preventing Sunni militants from establishing infrastructure or operational bases along Israel's border.¹⁵ Though Israel has little ability to influence events on the ground in Syria, giving it few tools for advancing its goals directly, it basically shares on strategic objectives with the U.S.

At the United Nations (UN) level the USA and its allies sponsored Security Council resolutions that sought to pave way for an international military intervention and empower the Syrian opposition in a manner resolution 1973 paved way for the military intervention and support for Libyan National Transitional Council. Outside the UN, the U.S. gave the Syrian National Coalition financial support. It also supported the different militia groups that were not classified as terrorist or working with terrorist, with military support.¹⁶ In brief, the U.S. and its allies financed and armed the rebels and also called for a military intervention to assist the same rebels.

Russia and its allies, however, continued to arm and defend the Syria government in the Security Council. Strategic reasons are worth seeing as providing a better understanding of the Russian behaviour in relation to the Syrian case. At least since Soviet times, Russian leaders have been keen on outlining long-term plans and doctrines in which the aims and means of their policy are explained to the people and the surrounding world. Just like Putin in 2000, President Medvedev after his accession to power launched a new Foreign Policy Concept in 2008, a new National Security Strategy in 2009, and a new Defence Doctrine in 2010.¹⁷ The spirit and the gist of a new Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech was the same at the 70th UN General Assembly session

¹³ Claudio Grass: End of an Era: The Rise and Fall of the Petrodollar system. Gold and Liberty. 12 July 2016. Internet Access: <http://goldandliberty.com/money-markets/end-era-rise-fall-petrodollar-system/>

¹⁴ George W. Bush: "Bush's State of the Union address", January 29, 2002. Internet Access: www.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/01/29/bush.speech.txt/

¹⁵ Larry Hanauer: Israel's Interests and Options in Syria. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2016. Access: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE185.html>

¹⁶ Angela Joya: Syria and the Arab Spring: The Evolution of the Conflict and the Role of the Domestic and External Factors. Ortadogu Etütleri, Vol. 4, No 1, July 2012, pp.27-52.

¹⁷ A good summary in English is the work by Ingmar Olberg: Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev. Swedish Institute of International Affairs, No. 1, 2010. (25 p.)

in New York City, on 28th September 2015.¹⁸

Now, to sum up the main elements of the Russian geopolitical doctrine: 1) Russia wants a multi-polar world where it safeguards the security of the country, maintains and strengthens the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Russia, and wants to be one of the influential centres in the world. 2) Russia lays emphasis on the supremacy of international law, in particular the principles of the UN Charter. It seeks consensus and coinciding positions with other states and international organisations in the process of solving tasks defined by in terms of Russia's national interests. 3) Russia gives a comprehensive defence of the rights and interests of Russian citizens and compatriots living abroad. It promotes and popularises the Russian language and the cultures of the peoples of Russia abroad. 4) Russia does not isolate itself from others but there are regions where it has privileged interests due to historic or geographic ties.

Each of these items describe a country with great power ambitions and active foreign policy including offensive and defensive components. And let's face the music: this ambition is not totally ungrounded. However, from this sketch of the Russian geopolitical doctrine some paradoxical behaviour comes to be clear. Hence, the argument that Russia did not allow the passage of any resolution on Syria due to the Libyan experience is questionable at once. Russia could have allowed the passage of resolution 1973 because Muammar Ghaddafi had drifted to the western hemisphere and redirected his foreign policy to placate western powers. This is evidenced by Libya's acceptance of the responsibility of Lockerbie bombing, and oil and other business agreements and investments with and/or in Europe and the U.S. companies. However, looking at the Syrian case from under Russian spectacles is different from that of Libya. While Libya had "shrugged off" its traditional allies in its re-engagement overdrive with the west, Syria remained a true Russian ally since the days of Hafez al Assad. Even when Syria cooperated with the USA in fighting Al Qaeda, which was okay by Russians, considering Syria's own security and national interest, it did not do so at the expense of its relationship with Russia. Syria is also a strengthening ally of Iran against the Shia-Sunni regional battle. Iran being a Russian ally in the Middle East could not be allowed to begin the process of falling through the fall of Syria. Russia, therefore, used its veto powers in the Security Council on Syria more than it had done on any other country to maintain equilibrium in Middle East so as to balance its influence against that of Russia. And, to tell the truth, the U.S. should not blame Russia for this policy, because the whole world could see Libya was not the U.S.'s strong suit.

If we carefully look at what happens in the Middle East, the best description of the behaviour of the leading powers is "twist and turns and thrust". The Syrian crisis just shows again that the U.S. and Russia as still the two leading military powers in the world intervened in the conflict not because of the need to fulfil a moral responsibility to protect the civilians, but with hidden interest to pursue geopolitical influence. And what is really bitter here that all the calculations were at the expense of the suffering civilians. This humping and dumping was then really evident during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 where the two parties played the same roles with the same prop; though everybody knew that for Russians it is now not a proxy war in fact even if almost all the Russian actions were taken in covered. Any expert also knows that the Middle East and Eastern Europe are regions of strategic importance for both the U.S. and Russia. And what is the result now? The situation has turned into bloody steady-state civil war in Syria, and the crisis both in Syria and in Ukraine ends with stalemate. Although Donald Trump has floated the idea of creating a new alliance with Russia, saying a reset of relations is necessary to help ease tensions in Syria and elsewhere. All I do not see is how the new U.S. administration is capable of achieving this goal, as to fold the clash of regional control doctrines between the two states seems hopeless to resolve.

¹⁸ Transcription available at <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>

IV. Geopolitical stance from the perspective of EU-Turkey relations

Life is similar; for example, stalemate does not mean the end of the game. Civilians are real who wants to survive this nightmare and dead-end situation, waiting for depletion in the egoist and impotent game of the leading powers, which will surely supervene sooner or later. But each people has an only life, all the persons want to bring up their children, and want to live a normal way of life. Despite the absence of authorisation, individuals, Syrians and others, are prepared to risk their lives and leave their homes behind in the search for safety. This has occurred on a vast scale during the current migration crisis, which has seen over one million migrants and refugees crossing into Europe just in 2015. And if I am right in that the geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and Russia remains permanent in the region, the chance of arrangement seems to be far-off.

Europe is in trouble. The humanitarian crisis is fast becoming a political one, with the potential to shake the European Union to its foundations. The European hawks fantasises about ever-higher fences, refugee boats pushed back to sea, and camps to incarcerate those who slip through. If it looks as if there is no limit to the number of refugees arriving in the EU, the public's compassion will eventually be trumped by fear. This is ruthlessly exploited by the far-right, which conjures up visions of millions of impoverished migrants arriving from around the world, to swamp European values and destroy the European way of life.

On the other hand, there is another camp in Europe, associated with the most influential leader of Europe, the German chancellor, Angela Merkel, who pioneered an open-door refugee policy, which has seen more than one million people enter Germany over the past years. Germany's approach to the migration crisis upholds the liberal characteristics of welfare and human rights, with Angela Merkel supporting an EU-wide solution and the relocation of refugees to European countries. Nevertheless, Salvatore Babones has referred to Germany's open-door policy based upon the German *Willkommenskultur* as "unrestrained idealism", judging it to have encouraged more dangerous sea crossings, generated mass disorder in the poorer EU member states and disrupted the continent's rail network.¹⁹ I believe this to be true. In having an open-door policy, Germany has gone against the Dublin II Regulation and its "first host country" principle,²⁰ which assigns responsibility to the state that first enables the entry of the foreigner.²¹ Chaos was caused as migrants and refugees fled to Germany in their thousands. However, although I personally do not believe the open-door policy to be a practical solution, Germany's policy is rooted in humanitarianism and morality, two characteristics that seem lacking from the policy of the U.S. and Russia in Syria and in Ukraine, though they hypocritically refer to humanitarianism always, and from the Orbán-led European hawks and the far-right extremists. In the meantime, there appeared a beaten party in this political contest, British PM David Cameron, who had to leave his office. And the United Kingdom seems to have become in a geopolitical vacuum with dystopia after referendum commonly known as Brexit with a result of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

Before the year is out Merkel and the Germans have however shifted from their original position by working out a program. There are more than 1.9 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey. And it is from Turkey that most refugees begin their journey to Europe. The central idea of the Merkel Plan was that it is both the EU's and Turkey's interest to share this burden. In very short the key elements of the plan are as follows:²² i) Germany agrees to grant asylum to Syrian refugees

¹⁹ Salvatore Babones: Europe's Migrant Crisis: Ideals vs. Realities. The National Interest. 16 Sept. 2015. Internet Access: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/europes-migrant-crisis-ideals-vs-realities-13851>

²⁰ Council Regulation (EC) 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a Third-country national [2003] OJ L 50.

²¹ Ibid. Lavenex, pp. 29.

²² "The Merkel Plan – Restoring Control; Retaining Compassion". ESI Proposal, Berlin-Brussels-Istanbul, 4 October 2015 (14 p.)

registered in Turkey over the next period of the year (2016). ii) Germany already expects high numbers of refugees to arrive in Germany. But rather than waiting for them to undertake the perilous journey across the Aegean and the Western Balkans, Germany accepts claims from Turkey through a fair and orderly process and provide safe transport to successful applicants. The offer will be limited to Syrian refugees already registered with the Turkish authorities, to avoid creating incentives for new migration flows into Turkey. Other EU member states also affiliate. iii) In return, from a specified date, Turkey agrees to accept back all new migrants reaching Greece from its territory. This would quickly reduce the flood of boats crossing the Aegean to a trickle. iv) Germany agrees to give aid for Turkey to obtain visa-free travel in 2016.

The vision of the devisers of the plan is that it would have positive effects on the migrant crisis. First of all, asylum seekers will stop undertaking the perilous boat journey to Greece. If everybody is returned to Turkey within days, and there is a viable alternative way of achieving asylum in the EU, the journey would quickly become futile. Smugglers would lose their clients. The EU might have restored control over its Aegean border, which is very often appearing argument in the debates, saying that “as long as the borders are not controlled,” any arrangement of burden-sharing is out of question. Germany and the other participating EU countries will have time to organise accommodation and support services for the recognised refugees before transporting them to their final destinations. The process will become orderly and organised. Furthermore, the German authorities will regain control over the number of refugees arriving in Germany, restoring the public’s trust in the government. Then cooperation on a practical mission like this in the Aegean should help build confidence and revive talks between Athens and Ankara on other bilateral issues in the Aegean. And finally, and this could be the most crucial effect, the fact that the EU is exercising leadership on this issue, what is more in humanitarian and not military fashion, will allow it to call on other nations to contribute in turn and alleviate the humanitarian effects of the Syrian war.

First off the Merkel Plan seems imposing, but why would it be in Turkey’s interest to help Germany and the EU in this way? In fact, this agreement could make a significant contribution to Turkey’s security. In recent times, a resurgent Russia has been revising borders, annexing territories and supporting separatists in the northern Black Sea. It has moved its military into annexed territories in the Southern Caucasus. Now, it has launched a major military intervention on Turkey’s southern border, attacking groups that the U.S. and Turkey have long supported. Turkey today finds itself surrounded by hostile states and armed groups, in a more precarious strategic position than at any time since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, good relations with Europe are a key anchor for Turkish security. The rise of an anti-Muslim, pro-Putin far-right in European politics should therefore be a cause for real concern. It brings the prospect of EU politics moving in the direction of aligned its foreign policy more with the Kremlin. That’s the reason why the U.S. is also interested in a Merkel Plan’s way of arrangements. In this spirit there has come off an agreement between the EU and Turkey on migration issue in March 2016. However, in the summer of 2016 an army coup attempt happened in Turkey, which though ended in failure, but its political and diplomatic consequences are too confused still to contemplate.

V. Conclusion

Here we are now at the end of the year 2016. We all have learnt and thus have known since Hans Morgenthau’s famous six principles²³ that actions in international politics cannot be reduced to morals, political ethics different from the universal moral principles, and national interest is defined in terms of power. That’s the reason why I myself consider neither German’s open-door policy nor

²³ Hans J. Morgenthau: *Politics Among Nations. Chapter 1: “A Realist Theory of International Politics”*. McGraw-Hill, New York, 1978. pp. 3–16.

Hungarian harsh realistic approach to the issue with sympathy. Both Merkel and Orbán and their political allies in Europe ought to understand the message. Merkel seems more likely to have open-minded in this respect. My interpretation of Morgenthau's principles is that it does not matter in international politics that who is right in an issue. The only imperative is that which allies you have to put your policy across. I am a realist true yet I talk against now the camp I should belong to. And though I admit the situation is much more tentative and confused rather than fixed and clear, logical (realist "policy frame") and moral (liberal "policy frame") considerations carrying toward consensus on a practical ground tend to recommend following the settings of the Merkel Plan in the stalemate situation. The aim of this study was to present why I personally think like that.