

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



October 31, 2018

Presidential Elections: Threatened by A Chaotic Technical and Managerial Legacy

While the Independent Election Commission is effortlessly trying to process the National Parliament elections of Afghanistan, and has not announced its results yet, UNAMA has asked the IEC to develop an announce the Afghan Presidential elections Schedule.

The Five year term of President Ghani will end by next 8 months. And based on the Afghanistan constitution, the presidential elections shall be held 2 months prior to the end of the tenure of the current president. However, the Independent electoral Commission has said it was working on finalizing the presidential elections schedule.

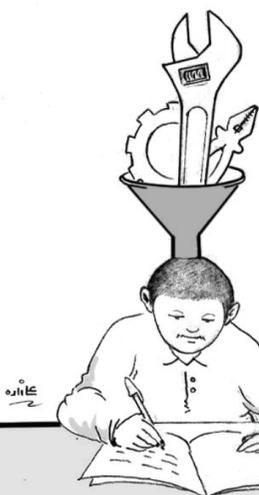
The use of electoral processes to choose the occupants of major public offices has been one of the most striking features of Afghanistan's post-2001 political transition. Thus, Afghanistan will hold its next presidential election on April 20, 2019. However, the last presidential election in 2014 produced no clear winner after accusations of massive electoral fraud by supporters of both Ghani and his rival, Abdullah Abdullah. As the lengthy dispute between Abdullah and Ghani over the June 14 poll had threatened Afghanistan's first democratic transfer of power just months before foreign troops were to withdraw. Alarmed by the impasse, the Obama administration dispatched Kerry to Kabul to mediate. Therefore, after months of argument, the two rivals signed up to a U.S.-brokered deal forming a national unity government, in which Ghani took the presidency and Abdullah took the specially created post of chief executive.

There is indeed a mystery surrounding the question of the prospects for free, fair, transparent and credible presidential elections in Afghanistan due to different technical and managerial deficiencies the country just experienced in the National Parliamentary elections. And more or less, beyond physical security are questions about the technical security — and transparency — of the election, which will be conducted using a new biometrics system in 2019. The Afghan parliamentary election was a chaotic one. Because many polling centers failed to open or opened late on October 20, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) ruled that some could also open the next day. However, only some actually opened the next day and voters were presented with the same bureaucratic and technical difficulties as the first day. As a result, it came under scathing criticism from the Election Complaints Commission about its management of the election. Then the decision of the Complaint Commission to falsify non-biometric votes further complicated the situations, because many people voted using the previous system, as there was no functional biometric system in many polling stations.

As a result, The Afghan citizens and the international community recall that the Afghan Government, political leaders, and the Independent Electoral Commission and Electoral Complaints Commission carry the primary responsibility to create the necessary conditions for credible elections to take place in 2019. This underscore the importance of developing sustainable democratic institutions in Afghanistan based on inclusive, transparent and credible elections, and stress the need to promote the full and safe participation of women as well as members of minority groups, including ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, both as voters and candidates.

In terms of electoral observation, It is vital that civil society to conduct observation at every polling station to monitor voting, counting, tabulating, and transmission of results. And also appropriate electoral observation missions shall be in place, and the international partners shall provide support at the request of the Afghan Government, and all parties shall facilitate and respect the observers' work.

In many ways, the parliamentary elections this month were a test run for the presidential elections planned for 2019. As it has been termed as an absolute failure in electoral management, the Afghan government and international community shall develop a comprehensive electoral plan to address the technical and managerial shortfalls in order to have a fair, free, credible and transparent presidential election in 2019.



Europe's Coming Year of Reckoning

By: Joschka Fischer

Politically, 2019 will be an extraordinarily important year for the European Union. The United Kingdom is currently on track to leave the EU on March 29, 2019. And, following elections to the European Parliament in May, nearly all of the most important leadership positions across EU institutions will turn over. Thus, depending on how parliamentary seats are distributed, Europe could witness a major realignment of power among member states, within EU institutions, and between member states and the Parliament.

The new distribution of power within EU institutions will be reflected largely through personnel. New presidents of the European Commission, the European Council, and the European Central Bank will be appointed, and a new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will be chosen. If nationalist Euroskeptic parties become the largest group in the European Parliament, these appointments could represent an abrupt break from the past.

EU member states are more divided now than ever, even on the most fundamental issues concerning the European project. The broad pro-European consensus of the past has been replaced by a resurgent nationalism. Moreover, east is increasingly pitted against west, and north against south. And there is good reason to fear that these widening rifts will be reflected in the new composition of the Parliament, making majority governance difficult if not impossible. Today's de facto grand coalition between the conservative European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) most likely will not survive beyond the elections. The S&D, in particular, is in deep — indeed, existential — crisis across Europe. And there are new players on the field, including French President Emmanuel Macron's centrist La République En Marche! and a smattering of radical Euroskeptic and nationalist parties.

Given the unprecedented prominence of nationalist parties in this election cycle, the usual pro forma European campaign issues will inevitably take a back seat. This will be a contest about Europe and the future of European democracy. Recent developments in a number of member states have challenged foundational EU principles such as the rule of law and the separation of powers. These democratic institutions, as well as questions of European solidarity and sovereignty, will all effectively be on the ballot.

Needless to say, the parliamentary elections will have far-reaching implications for Europe's future in a rapidly changing world. The current president of the United States has such disdain for the EU

that many now talk of "the end of the West." An increasingly revanchist Russia is waging wars along the European periphery and in Syria. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is taking his country down the path of authoritarianism. And China is demanding recognition as a global power.

Worse still, US President Donald Trump's recent decision to withdraw the US from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia raises the threat of a renewed arms race. And this is coinciding with an escalating climate crisis and a global contest for predominance in artificial intelligence, the risks of which are still largely unaccounted for.

Against this dismal backdrop, the question is what will become of Europe. Will Europeans manage to hold on to their sovereignty, or will their self-inflicted disunity render them ever more dependent on other powers?

Pro-EU parties must make Europe's place in the world a central issue of the parliamentary election campaign; otherwise, they will suffer a shattering defeat at the hands of the new nationalists. The nationalists want to return to the past; it is up to the pro-Europeans to offer answers for the future.

Make no mistake: a nationalist victory next year would rock the EU to its core and throw it into another deep crisis. It would represent a defeat for the fundamental values of the European project. Given the scale of the threat, pro-Europeans cannot count on business as usual. Recent upheavals in many member states' party systems have altered the electoral calculus, and the pro-Europeans must adapt accordingly.

For my part, I foresee next year's elections auguring dramatic change in Europe. For better or worse, the question of Europe itself has been politicized, and now it must be decided. There will either be a rebirth of nationalism or a victory for EU-level democracy and unity. Sadly, pro-Europeans cannot hope for any help from abroad. In fact, the opposite is true: Europe must be vigilant in policing foreign interference in its affairs — including its elections.

In recent years, there has been much talk of the EU suffering from a "democratic deficit." But the fight for a majority in the European Parliament actually represents a major opportunity for democracy. Pro-Europeans need only wake up in time to seize it — or Europe's enemies will.

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.

The New Tyranny of the Dollar

By: Mark Leonard

Donald Trump may not want to launch wars in the Middle East, but that doesn't mean he's getting the United States out of the regime-change business. His administration has made it clear that it wants crippling sanctions on Iran to serve the same purpose as the Bush administration's 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Since withdrawing in May from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Trump has been looking for ways to turn up the pressure on the Iranian regime. On November 4, US sanctions on the country's vital oil industry will go into force. And the administration wants to go even further, by imposing secondary sanctions on other countries with the goal of shutting Iran out of the dollar-based global economy entirely.

To that end, the US wants to bar Iranian banks from the Society for World Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) and the global payments system that it oversees. This would effectively send Iran back to a pre-globalization dark age. The problem for Trump and his advisers, though, is that SWIFT is not a US institution. It is registered and based in Belgium, which, along with the European Union's 27 other member states, supports the JCPOA.

America's exploration of increasingly sophisticated "smart" sanctions is not new. At least since the start of the "war on terror," the US has been pulling every financial lever that it can to destroy global networks like the one Osama bin Laden used to launch the attacks of September 11, 2001.

At first, the US focused mainly on freezing the assets of extremist groups and their affiliates. But then Stuart Levey, the under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence at the US Department of the Treasury, had another idea. While traveling in Bahrain, he read a local newspaper report about a Swiss bank shutting down its business with Iran. It occurred to him that the US could use its own influence over the private sector to block malign actors from the global economy.

Soon thereafter, the US started pressuring banks around the world to drop their business with Iran. Eventually, the authorities declared that any bank doing business with Iran would be shut out of the US market. With that announcement, "secondary sanctions" were born. Levey's secondary sanctions were tremendously successful. No sane business leader would ever choose the basket-case economy of a Middle Eastern mullah state over that of the US. And when banks (namely, France's BNP Paribas) were accused of violating the sanctions, the fines were so large that they sent shockwaves through global financial markets. It didn't take long for the US to deploy similar methods of "connectivity warfare" against North Korea, Sudan, and even Russia.

Former CIA Director Michael Hayden once likened secondary sanctions to a "twenty-first-century precision-guided munition." Because they are more of a scalpel than a sledgehammer, they were particularly attractive to Europeans, who recognized them as an effective alternative to war. Unlike the West's sanctions against Iraq in the 1990s, they offered a way to punish regimes rather than entire

populations.

Under President Barack Obama, targeted sanctions became America's weapon of first resort. Together with the EU, the Obama administration sharpened and fine-tuned the punitive measures against Iran. This proved so effective that Iran eventually came to the negotiating table, where it agreed to limit its nuclear-enrichment activities under the JCPOA.

In Trump's hands, however, the scalpel has become a sledgehammer. As one senior European policymaker put it to me, the Trump administration's new sanctions are like cluster bombs, falling on friend and foe alike.

Since Trump scrapped the JCPOA, European leaders have been looking for ways to preserve some of the benefits for Iran, so that it will not restart its nuclear program. But the US has been making this difficult, by threatening individuals on European corporate boards, including the directors of SWIFT, with targeted sanctions.

Even more shocking, similar threats have reportedly been made against key European public officials. European leaders' request to the European Investment Bank for its help in supporting the Iran nuclear deal doesn't seem to have borne fruit, most likely owing to US threats against the EIB's corporate interests and directors.

Moreover, there are even rumors of veiled US threats against central bankers, including the directors of the European Central Bank. For its part, the Bundesbank was considering opening an account to finance trade with Tehran, so that private German banks would not be forced to comply with the whims of an American president; but it dropped the idea fairly quickly and without much explanation. The Banque de France actually did create an account (through the French public investment bank, Bpifrance) to finance trade with Iran; but it, too, quickly reversed course.

At this point, one cannot rule out the alarming possibility that top European officials are being pressured to shirk international law out of fear of being imprisoned on their next trip to the US. Not surprisingly, Europeans are debating anew the appropriate use of sanctions. Moreover, as the US financial system increasingly becomes an extension of Trump's national-security policy, European policymakers have begun to lament the "tyranny" of the dollar. In a recent commentary in Handelsblatt, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas went so far as to call for the creation of an independent European payments system. It would seem that even the most staunchly Atlanticist EU member states are being driven to create an alternative to the dollar regime, even if that alternative is nowhere in sight yet. In the near term, the question for Europeans is how to hold their own in a dollar-denominated world. The EU has already stood up to Trump's protectionist attacks, by threatening counter-measures against US producers. Now, it must do the same in the financial sector. Threats to European institutions and personnel should be met with threats of proportionate counter-measures. That, unfortunately, is the only diplomatic language Trump seems to understand.

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