



## RUSSIA November 2016

### **Relevant events, still irrelevant changes**

It is always useful and instructive to try to look closely at a country forgetting one's own point of view and adopting the angle of that country through an adequate overall insight. One might discover that the supposed "new horrible enemy" has an understandable Western logic and could have some points, albeit counterfactually in some cases.

Moscow is an excellent study case and the first thing that one can see is the consolidation of power. Never do adventurism abroad if your house is not in order. The ceremony of the parliamentary elections in Russia and the renewal of some regional governments have taken place. No surprise here: United Russia has gained a full score and smaller parties remain minor and irrelevant to the political scene.

The next pressing issue is of course Syria. Unfortunately there has been the diplomatic failure of the US-Russian agreement on that tormented country. But one should better to say "the failure of the Kerry-Russia agreements". Kissinger should do the world once again the favour of using the telephone number metaphor: there is a single phone number for the USA, but one is never quite sure who answers for whom at the device. Lavrov, for instance, represented and represents the position of the government of Russia, while Kerry apparently only his own and plus a happy few in the White House, because already in the Pentagon the thinking is different.

That said, Russia is in Europe and what can be seen is rather bewildering. The EU continues to seek the way out of an economic and institutional crisis of confidence and is unable to find answers to its budgetary and financial problems, together with still uncertain and ineffective employment and migration policies. Behind this once reassuring label one can see distinctly some nations rowing against the common objectives of the Union and much to the benefit of their exclusive interests. In addition to that a wave of nationalistic populism is clearly in some countries (e.g. Hungary, Poland, the Baltics), while a staunchly

anti-Russian elite is in power in Ukraine (still not cleaning up its ranks from its fascist and racist elements). From a strictly Muscovite point of view, in some places there is a glimpse of hope for a rapprochement to Russia (Bulgaria, Moldova), but one swallow doesn't make a summer.

On the wings of the continent, the situation is no more enthralling: the hard therapy for Greece still does not show noticeable effects, while the those of UK's exit from the Union are up today hazy and difficult to predict.

Turkey instead, fully engulfed in its internal problems and authoritarian trends, is positioning itself far away from Europe. The silver lining is that, after some considerable delay, it is understanding that be against Russia, while supporting ISIS and fighting Assad, entails little say on the new post-conflict borders in Syria and Iraq and also a good chance to see the birth of a Kurdish state.

In this scenario of extreme disunity and lack of common vision among members and candidates of the European Union and NATO, where uncertainty troubles politicians, diplomats, analysts and commentators, happened the big surprise of the American election. President-elect Trump has confused the world with an election outcome unexpected for all, but for many, however, quite desirable. If he will follow up on its statements during the election campaign, the cure should only be better than the drug dispensed to date, judging from the present effects.

To be very frank, all this is seen from Moscow with high expectations and deep scepticism. In fact it would be too good and too logical that a rapprochement between the US and Russia in the Middle East would lead to the definitive annihilation of ISIS and the creation of new nations based on religious affiliation in Syria and Iraq (Shiite Alawites in western Syria, Sunnis in the central portion of Syria and Iraq, Kurds in the northern regions of the two countries and Shiite state in southern Iraq). This could be usefully complemented with a reduction of tensions in Ukraine and a new role for a NATO that could see in Russia not an enemy but an ally.

It would be useful and practical, the Kremlin awaits for concrete actions.