

**Partnership as an Alternative to Spheres of Influence: The Case of Europe**

**By Prof. Dr. Srgjan Kerim**

*“It is not tolerable, it is not possible, that from so much death, so much sacrifice and ruin, so much heroism, a greater and better humanity shall not emerge”*

*Charles de Gaulle*

Europe's territoriality has been so eloquently described by the prominent French general and statesman, Charles de Gaulle, whose words echo sentiments of the kind of Europe from the past, Europe from the historic books that marked the infamous era of the Cold War. De Gaulle denoted that in those circumstances Europe was to be measured from the Atlantic to the Ural Mountains. Today, history urges us to look deeper when attempting to define Europe, which is by all means not only a continent. It is the cradle of civilization, a synonym for both diversity and unity.

Renowned French philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin has stated, "One nation always has a shared past. It is a communality of states with a related culture which more often than not has a similar language. And one nation can be upheld through collective memories, norms and rules...through a vibrant past, mutual experiences, events, suffering, happiness, defeat, triumphs, and eminence...The destiny of tomorrow has the power to retroactively influence Europe's past and create unification through a similar consciousness that connects the source of conflict with an emphatic solidarity"

The history of mankind is to great extent determined by different processes, events and developments which were generated in Europe. The vast European tradition and unique demographic positioning makes this land politically and socially relevant, and its partnerships and alliances with the rest of the world globally significant. Europe is not only a continent. It is a partnering community, a place where both World Wars started and were carried out, leaving a historic and political mark on all humankind.

I believe Europeans have learned a lot from history, and I would say from geography. Therefore, time has come for the creation of new forms and methods through which international relations will be conducted and international cooperations will be formed. These concepts however, must fully reflect and adhere to the picture of today's world; a world of globalization, multilateralism, regional integration and sustainable development.

And if we are searching for the common denominator of all these simultaneous processes it is **partnership**. Partnerships are the contemporary alternatives to spheres of influence. They are gradually corroding the archaic system of state-centrism and coming at the forefront on the global political stage, signifying evolvement, growth and progress.

One such example that signals the emergence and adaption of global partnerships as a highly valuable political tool is the denunciation of the Monroe Doctrine by US Secretary of State John Kerry.

In a speech to the Inter-American Dialogue Organization in 2013, Kerry firmly repudiated the Monroe doctrine announcing that a new era of global governance will pave the way for conducting international relations. Kerry stated “Today, however, we have made a different choice. The era of the Monroe Doctrine is over... The relationship that we seek and that we have worked hard to foster is not about a United States declaration on how and when it will intervene in the affairs of other American states. It’s about all of our countries viewing one another as equals, sharing responsibilities, cooperating on security issues, and adhering not to doctrine, but to the decisions that we make as partners to advance the values and the interests that we share.” The recent turnabout between US and Cuba including the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two neighboring countries is an appropriate example in this regard.

A similar denunciation must be applied to the so-called Brezhnev Doctrine which was aimed at reducing the sovereignty of countries who belonged to the same ideological, military and political camp. Legitimized through the Warsaw Pact, the Brezhnev Doctrine authorized the use of forces under the pretense of protecting the communist rule and gave legality to the concept of “blatant interference.” This concept was fully enacted when the Soviets crushed the Prague Spring Movement and invaded Czechoslovakia as well as during the uprising of Hungary and in the German Democratic Republic in the 50’s.

Fortunately, the world of camps based on common ideologies is gone and with it the Cold War Era. Therefore, it is necessary that both the Monroe and Brezhnev Doctrine completely disappear from the realm of implementation.

During the last decade of the 20th century people in Eastern Europe have made two historic decisions: first, to become sovereign nations as well as democracies based on freedom of speech and second, to adopt the rule of law and market economies. This marked the beginning of a new era of international relations in Europe which profoundly changed its geopolitical configuration. Today, the European continent counts 50 internationally recognized and sovereign states. The initial structure of the European Union on the other hand counted only six nations including Germany, Italy, Belgium, France, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The political configuration

of the EU today has significantly changed; it has enlarged reaching 28 member countries. And as Federica Mogherini stated in her speech at the 2015 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue “the European Union is also a foreign policy community, a security and defense provider. For our own people - within our borders and in the rest of the world; in our own region.” The European Union while still upholding the values of regionalism and power politics is inevitably transitioning. Not being immune to the effects of globalization, the EU is gradually starting to advance a communal platform primarily based on multilateralism as a direct substitute to spheres of influence. Nonetheless, it is crucial to discern that the EU is build upon the principle balance of interest rather than balance of power which characterizes the relations and cooperation model of the union.

Consequently, the main concern that arises in the discussion of building greater cooperation among nations in Europe is how to strengthen the economic dimension as a form of partnership which kicked off 25 years ago at the Bonn Conference on Economic Cooperation in 1990 (one of the landmark conferences that established the CSCE –Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe later transformed in OSCE-Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe).

Currently, several world leaders have addressed this question by underlying that joint efforts on creating transparent institutions, eliminating corruption, dealing with security threats and establishing regional stability can subsequently lead to building stronger economies and economic relations among nations.

The President of the European Council, Donald Tusk affirmed the importance of building long-withstanding and productive coalitions speaking at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga 2015. Tusk stated, “our relationship is built on free will, respect and equality. And our partnership will go forward step-by-step, just as the European Union has been built. Through concrete progress on matters such as trade, energy, transport, mobility and reforms our partnership will grow increasingly closer and offer by far the best prospects for Europe as a whole.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has emphasized the relevance and value of EU’s cooperation with the states of Eastern Europe. In her address at the Bundestag, just a few days before the beginning of the Riga Summit, she stressed the importance of fostering mutual partnerships not as a threatening alliance to other nations as it may be understood but rather as a building block to mutual prosperity. Merkel stated, “The Eastern Partnership is not directed against anyone” and in

addition to that she described the G7 states as a community of shared values. Nonetheless, the decision to exclude Russia from the G8 remains controversial. Although the Ukraine crisis and conflict, led to a serious deterioration of relations between the West and Russia, it remains questionable if this decision was appropriate bearing in mind that partnership with Russia is of utmost importance for peace and security in the broadest sense. Subsequently, we must not forget that the role of the G8 as a channel, that is relevant for fostering partnership between Russia and the transatlantic alliance, is not being fully attained with such a decision.

Russian president Vladimir Putin pointed out in his 2014 Valdai International Discussion Club's speech: "In light of the fundamental changes in the international environment, the increase in uncontrollability and various threats, we need a new global consensus of responsible forces. It's not about some local deals or a division of spheres of influence in the spirit of classic diplomacy, or somebody's complete global domination. I think that we need a new version of interdependence. We should not be afraid of it. On the contrary, this is a good instrument for harmonizing positions."

A sound partnership between Russia and the European Union would certainly serve this cause. Efforts must be made on both sides to not only implement already existing principles of OSCE and UN policies but also to build on them and to make these values resistant from any temptations to violate them on the account of "weaker" partners.

In the Joint Declaration of the **Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga**, on May 22 of 2015 words of commitment, dedication and loyalty in the partnering relations echo in the statements that read, "The participants of the Riga summit reconfirm the high importance they attach to the Eastern Partnership as a specific dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy... Summit participants recommit themselves to strengthen democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the principles and norms of international law...They recall that the Eastern Partnership is founded on shared ownership, responsibility, differentiation and mutual accountability."

Federica Mogherini reaffirmed a similar notion during her 2015 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue speech stating, "we share: political partnerships, security cooperation, global challenges to which we need to give responses that will be effective only if they will be joint ones. From terrorism to climate change, from natural disasters to cyber-attacks, the threats we face today have no borders - they are global by nature, by definition. And we need strong, global partnerships to face them."

Furthermore, we can witness how the words “interest” and “influence” are being substituted with the concept of “values” which represents the political basis and cornerstone for building any form of partnerships.

Such shifts that come as a direct result of the current political configuration and the pressing challenges of today, that need to be adequately addressed, signal the relevance of partnerships as not only an alternative to spheres of influence but rather as a much desired necessity. If we use this latter concept we participate in building a world of shared values, ethics and principles.

The effects of globalization require that we tackle the problems and contemporary issues through multilateral cooperation often times as the only method and possibility for plausible resolutions with conflicts.

Only through comprehensive partnership can we address climate change, security issues, terrorism and financial crisis. Partnership alludes to political solidarity and not animosity. It denotes commonality instead of elitism, isolationism, dominance and state individuality. Political, social and cultural partnerships can eliminate divisions, and transgress borders by creating global unification on matters relevant for sustaining a better world.

A quarter of a century later, one has to pose the question of whether Europe, through all these developments, has truly eliminated the spheres of influence approach.

In an article entitled “Geography Rules” renowned scholar Robert Kaplan writes “The media is preoccupied with democracy, human rights and other values-driven elements that reflect the discourse of foreign policy among elites and that often have little to do with the actual motivations of governments behind closed doors. So what is really going on in the world, what really motivates governments? In fact, the globe is a venue for struggles over geographic spheres of influence to the same extent it has been in former ages.”

Let us take as an example the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** between NATO and Russia, which was established to prevent tensions and conflicts among the two partners and to stimulate

cooperation between the former enemies in the post Cold War Era. The PfP has the potential to rebuild, enhance, and strengthen trust and stability between Euro-Atlantic nations, and specifically to strengthen collaboration when it comes to peacekeeping principles and defense planning strategies between Russia and NATO. Undoubtedly, it was the right decision at the right time. Regrettably, this model of collaboration and partnership turned out not to be so instrumental in 2008 and 2014 during the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine. Evidently, the logic of spheres of influence prevailed over the logic of partnership in both cases. If one wants to draw lessons from these bitter experiences, the first instance that comes to mind is to reexamine the role of OSCE and the United Nations or to adopt new peace and security arrangements in this kind of developments. It seems that already existing instruments and rules are not sufficient and applicable to prevent such conflicts and to secure cooperation and partnership.

In order to disintegrate the model of spheres of influence, future partnerships must be built on solid grounds, through sound and coherent terms which will prevent conflicts and possible controversies (especially as the ones singled out in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 that include for example both “Inviolability of frontiers” and “Equal rights and self-determination of the peoples” which are by default two clashing principles difficult to uphold simultaneously without certain controversy). The textbook example of how partnerships should be developed and built is the **Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership** (TTIP) between the USA and EU. The possibility for signing this kind of Treaty between the European Union and Russia on the other hand, should definitely be examined as it might serve as the second pillar of security.

Nevertheless, if possible controversies are to be successfully eliminated partnerships must be formed according to a structured paradigm that will be based on four main pillars; 1) transparency, 2) a point of shared benefit or plausible crisis, 3) amalgamated values and 4) political equilibrium. A simple elaboration on the significance of transparency as the first pillar of any social, cultural, diplomatic, military or political partnership is the simple need for mutual honesty. Alliances and collaborations cannot be sustained if nations have different prolific agendas and dual intentions when forming such connections. Structured allegiances function only through a fair and transparent platform brought forth as a prerequisite for a trustworthy, respectful and productive cooperation. In essence, if transparency is excluded from the

operational manual of any partnering agreement it is safe to conclude that the method of spheres of influence has prevailed in such political contracts.

Consequently, the point of shared benefit or plausible crisis is what brings the partnering sides together and dictates the theme, course and end result of the desired cooperation. It has always been known since the beginning of civilization that triumph and misery unite people and consolidate partnerships. Therefore, in today's era of globalization it seems that the same destiny of victory or anguish can create strong alliances.

The synchronicity of shared values between partnering nations inextricably becomes the main theme that characterizes a certain partnership. The amalgamation of ideas, motives, standards and ideals must occur in order for a partnership to be formed on the grounds of a certain objective. If members have disparate and contradicting values when determining the main goals of an exact agreement the outcome is more likely to be unconstructive for that matter. Finally, the aspect of political equilibrium in partnerships signifies a form of impartiality or balance in the formed relationship. In structured and coherent alliances there are no "weaker" and "stronger" parties but rather each member involved has equivalent "power" in the decision-making process or in the negotiating phase.

Another example of a comprehensive partnership that rests predominantly on the aforementioned pillars is the **Central European Initiative** that contains 18 member states of which 9 EU members and 9 non-EU members. The CEI represents a good model of how highly-valuable synergies can be created through partnerships which are aimed at preventing ethnic border conflicts (for instance when drawing borders along ethnic lines or nation states as we have witnessed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and with Serbia) and their escalation.

Initiatives like CEI represent strong partnerships that aid in the process of eradicating ethnic tensions. The very basis of CEI is contained in its slogan that reads "... regional cooperation for European integration and bridge between macro-regions" and its strategic objectives include "support CEI Member States on their path towards European integration; promote the alignment of CEI Member States to EU standards; implement small and medium-sized projects; open to convert constructive ideas into innovative results." We must not forget that partnerships need to stimulate and encourage regional progress; they must ultimately build bridges that will prevail

through difficult trials and tribulations. The CEI propagates a partnership built exactly on support, implementation, constructivism and reinforcement. Consequently, only if partnerships are structured in a consistent and firm manner with concrete policies they have the potential to be the ultimate alternative to spheres of influence.

The status of South Tyrol or Alto-Adige in Italy is probably the most relevant example that speaks to the significance of overcoming clashing principles such as territoriality, ethnic unrest and minority rights. It could serve as a pattern for the resolution of conflicts between neighboring countries which involve ethnic minorities in Europe, for many decades after the Second World War including the recent one in Ukraine.

Violence in South Tyrol erupted between the German and Italian population when in 1930, a mass relocation of Southern Italians occurred into the territory. Author Sonja Steinbrech writes, “Those residents who declared themselves of German heritage were forced to relocate into the area of the Third Reich and the ‘Italianization’ of the Province began.” The flourishing of German culture was suppressed, schools and churches were closed and after years of repression and subjugation, in 1960, German-speaking activists started retaliating and committing terror against the public.

The conflict was resolved by providing the German-speaking ethnic minority with their basic rights, freedoms and successive laws. The manner in which the status of South Tyrol was regulated is an exemplary case which proves that controversial and contradicting principles (“inviolability of frontiers,” “equal rights and self-determination of the peoples” and “territorial integrity of states”) can be dissolved and unified as complimentary rather than contradictory.

One should not forget how Austria acted, being the immediate neighbor and one of the concerned parties. It did not behave as part of the problem but rather as part of the solution which implied full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Italy.

The regulation of the problem was based on the simultaneous recognition of Italy on one side and the German-speaking minority on the other side, on the level of both the nation state and the level of the province.

Equally, in this scenario where the German-speaking minority provisionally becomes the majority having the right of provincial management, while foreign affairs and military action

remain in the hands of the Italian state, we can witness a true form of co-governance which can only be possible through means of partnership.

Ultimately, Europe has witnessed similar situations in many parts of the continent involving more than a dozen of European countries from the Balkans to the Baltics. This model can be applied in the case of the conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine, building up on the Minsk Agreement from 2014. Recent history proves that drawing ethnic borders is a dangerous and counterproductive pattern. Being aware of this fact, European states decided to design and adopt The Helsinki Final Act, 40 years ago as well as the OSCE Charter of Paris.

Therefore, the aforementioned three principles, part and parcel, of these documents together with others (such as “Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty, Refraining from the threat or use of force, Peaceful settlement of disputes, Non-intervention in internal affairs, Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, Co-operation among States and Fulfillment in good faith of obligations under international law”) were aimed at preserving not only peace and security in Europe but also encouraging cooperation across the continent.

Whereas promotion of human rights and minority rights represents a benign and peaceful approach for the resolution of such conflicts, changing of borders and annexation are a painful and dangerous approach.

The outcome in both cases is clear. While the former leads to an outcome which is based on the preservation of peace and security, the latter one leads to conflicts and wars.

Evidently, the implications of the first approach are in full accordance with the principles of OSCE and the UN, as opposed to the implications of the latter approach that mean collision with the same.

The long debated controversial question of so-called “minority” and so-called “majority” was resolved in South Tyrol, proving once and for all that these political epithets should not be a reason for animosity but rather a motivation for prosperity. This example should truly encourage organizations like OSCE and UN, keeping South Tyrol as a paradigm of a fruitful settlement, to undertake additional efforts in building mechanisms and instruments for strong and long-term partnerships between neighboring countries, as well as on sub-regional and regional level.

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## Author's Biography

Dr. Srgjan Kerim is a professor and holds a Ph.D. in international economics. In the period between 2000 and 2001 he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of the Republic of Macedonia. In 2007, Dr. Kerim was elected as the President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York. In 2008 he was selected as the Special Envoy on Climate Change to the UN Secretary General. In the period between 2003 until 2012 he was the General Director of the media group WAZ for Southeast Europe and the General Manager of "Media Print Macedonia." Since 2012 he is the President of the Board of Directors at "Media Print Macedonia."