



Newsletter

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Nexus website

Dear Nexus member

Just a reminder to send our way anything you think is relevant to the new Nexus website;

- Any articles written by members possible for publication on the website are appreciated.
- Information on interesting events or opportunities that may be of interest to Nexus members is also welcomed.

Analysis of territorial disputes in Asia

The latest publication with the Italian think tank ISPI:

An analysis of territorial disputes in Asia, which remain a serious challenge to peace, stability, and prosperity of the region. In fact, of all interstate disputes, those over territory tend to be nearly twice as likely as other issues to lead to armed conflict. A mix of political and economic interests, normative reasons, and competition over scarce natural resources has been suggested as drivers of conflict over disputed territories. In Asia today, geopolitical shifts, natural resources, and environmental degradation are a source of concern. The East and South China Seas are particular flashpoints that could lead to devastating confrontations for the region and beyond. At the same time, the continuing trend toward integration in the region, the growing relevance of regional institutions and arrangements, and the processes of democratization are reasons to be optimistic about peaceful settlements of territorial disputes in Asia.

The paper can be found at:

<http://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/uncertain-borders-territorial-disputes-asia#sthash.hxzCSRtK.dpuf>

All the best,

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Issue briefs by Florence Gaub

Libya: the struggle for security

With the security situation in Libya rapidly spiralling out of control, this brief analyses the challenges faced by the country in its attempts to establish an effective internal security apparatus since the fall of Qaddafi, the dangers of the current security vacuum and the difficulties in disbanding and reintegrating the plethora of powerful militia groups. Click [here](#) to read the brief

Arabism - 100 years of solitude

In recognition of a centenary of Arabism, this alert explores the historical notions of a political union between Arab states and demonstrates, despite the geopolitical antagonisms of the MENA region and the rise of Islamism, that this unifying force is not yet dead. Click [here](#) to read the alert

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What is wrong with the European Commission?

by Charles Grant

The European Commission, a crucial EU institution, is beset with difficulties. It is popular with neither governments nor voters. Twenty years ago, many people looked to the Commission to set the EU's agenda and take the lead in managing crises. But few people expect the Commission to play that role today. Ever since the time when Jacques Delors ran the Commission (1985 to 1995), its authority vis-à-vis EU governments has been waning. The member-states – and especially the big ones – have sought to constrain an institution that they consider over-mighty. The Lisbon treaty, in force since 2009, created two important institutional innovations: the permanent president of the European Council, a post now occupied by Herman Van Rompuy; and the European External Action Service (EEAS), a body now led by Catherine Ashton. Both of these carry out some tasks that the Commission used to do and have contributed to its sense of insecurity. Paradoxically, the euro crisis has led to the Commission gaining unprecedented formal powers – on the surveillance of national economic policies – but further eroded its standing and credibility. National governments have provided the money for helping countries in trouble, so they set the terms for bail-outs. The Commission has had to leave the high politics to the European Council, and often to a few key governments, while focusing on its subordinate though important technical role.

The eurozone's travails have accelerated a longstanding shift in the nature of EU governance. The EU used to take few executive decisions that were politically salient. The Commission proposed laws and regulated, while the Council of Ministers and European Parliament passed laws. Both the Commission and the Council acted, from time to time, as an executive – for example the former blocked corporate mergers and the latter imposed sanctions on countries in other parts of the world. But the euro crisis has drawn the EU into taking increasingly political executive decisions. The EU has forced heavily-indebted countries to cut budget deficits, pass painful reforms and wind up banks. The Commission may propose such measures, but only eurozone prime ministers or finance ministers have the authority to take these decisions.

These are long-term trends, but personalities also matter. The current 'college' of commissioners contains few heavyweight politicians. Within the Commission, Barroso is a strong leader who dominates his colleagues; given the number of commissioners – one for each of the 28 member-states – he may have no choice but to rule with a firm hand. But outside the Commission, some governments complain about what they perceive as weak leadership. During Barroso's second term as president, which started in 2009, Berlin, Paris and London have become more critical of the Commission. Even some of the smaller member-states, traditionally allies of the Commission, complain about it more than they used to.

A number of governments accuse the Commission of failing to prioritise; of implementing new initiatives too slowly; or of focusing insufficiently on fixing the eurozone. Some of this is unfair: the politicians who criticise the Commission for not coming up with relevant solutions to the eurozone's problems are sometimes the same ones who get annoyed when it does propose a big idea, such as eurobonds. And while the Germans have sometimes whinged about the Commission being too soft on countries under surveillance, many others believe that it has been too Germanic in its enthusiasm for budgetary discipline. Evidently, the Commission cannot please everyone.

Two reasons, in particular, explain the member-states' Diminishing confidence in the Commission. First, they argue that the Commission proposes too many detailed rules, particularly in areas such as the environment, food safety and social policy. In May 2013, for example, Polish ministers complained about Commission attempts to regulate the shale gas industry and to ban menthol cigarettes – both of which are popular in Poland. In the same month the Commission proposed banning olive oil in re-usable bottles, but then climbed down after a storm of protest. Earlier in the year, German politicians sharply criticised a Commission proposal to set quotas for women on company boards. Some senior Commission officials acknowledge that the institution can be over-active. But they blame the increasing sway of the Parliament over the Commission. And that is the second reason why some national capitals have turned against the Commission.

The Parliament has exerted more influence over the second Barroso Commission than the first, and not only because the Lisbon treaty gave it more power. Lobbyists and NGOs find it quite easy to get MEPs to support their projects for new EU rules. The Parliament then puts pressure on commissioners to come up with new directives. They are loath to annoy the Parliament since it can make trouble. Another reason why commissioners like to propose new rules is to justify their existence. The Commission's secretariat-general works hard to cull what it regards as superfluous legislative proposals, but does not always win arguments against commissioners. None of this is to say that the Commission should ignore the Parliament. That body is better placed than any other to vet the work of commissioners and, working with the Court of Auditors, to criticise their mistakes. Before the appointment of the last two Commissions, the Parliament played an admirable role in questioning sub-standard commissioners-designate and forcing them to withdraw. Given the Parliament's powers of co-decision over new laws, the Commission cannot and should not ignore it.

The problem is that over the past four years the Commission has become much closer to the Parliament than to the Council on many issues. The Commission should be accountable to both – it is appointed by governments and approved by the Parliament. But it should also be independent of both. The politicisation of the Commission is a problem. There has always been some ambiguity over its contradictory roles: it is a political body that initiates legislation and brokers compromises among the member-states, but also a technical body that polices markets and rules, and negotiates on behalf of the member-states. During the euro crisis the Commission's technical role has grown, which makes the ambiguity more problematic. When it pronounces, say, that France may be given two further years in which to meet the 3 per cent budget rule, is that the result of objective economic analysis or a reflection of the shifting political climate in national capitals? This ambiguity gives governments and others an excuse to criticise the Commission.

Politicisation can mean favouring political parties. Some socialist politicians claim that the Commission has been over-indulgent of Viktor Orban, the prime minister accused of curtailing political pluralism in Hungary, because his European People's Party is the leading force in the Commission and the Parliament. There is not much evidence for that particular allegation, but if the Commission becomes too party-political, its ability to carry out technical functions effectively – or in this case, to act as a guardian of liberal democracy – may be compromised. Next year's European elections could accelerate the Commission's politicisation. Most of the pan-European political parties say they will each designate a candidate for Commission president. After the elections they want the European Council to propose the candidate of the party with the most MEPs as president – and then the Parliament to invest him or her. Were the European Council to propose any other name, MEPs would reject it.

If this scheme works, there might be a bit more interest in the European elections. But it is far from certain that the political parties and the European Council will, in the end, play this game. If they do allow the Parliament to appoint Barroso's successor, the Commission is likely to become more beholden to the Parliament – and the leading party within it – than is currently the case. Such an outcome would be alarming, because the EU needs a strong and independent Commission – to consider the wider European interest, draw governments' attention to long-term trends, propose solutions to pressing problems (whether in the wider EU or the eurozone), work doggedly to deepen the single market, and perform its monitoring role in eurozone governance. As the eurozone integrates, one key task will be to ensure a smooth relationship between the countries inside the euro and those outside it. Decisions made by the eurozone should not damage or fragment the single market.

So what can be done to strengthen this flagging institution? The most important step requires not a treaty amendment or an institutional reform, but simply an agreement among heads of government. They should decide to reinforce the Commission's independence by appointing strong figures as commissioners, and above all by ensuring that a heavyweight politician takes on the presidency. The member-states should mandate the new president and his team to maintain their independence from the European Parliament, and support them in their efforts to do so. After the last European elections the Commission and the Parliament reached an 'inter-institutional agreement', covering future legislation and procedures, which gave the Parliament several things that it wanted. The Council of Ministers spurned the opportunity to make this a tripartite arrangement; if it had done, it could have balanced the legislative activism of the Parliament and pulled the Commission closer to it. After the next European elections the three main EU institutions should seek a tripartite accord on the EU's work programme.

As for reform of the Commission itself, the problem of too many commissioners needs to be tackled. There are not enough important jobs for 28 of them, and with so many people around the table, substantive discussions are almost impossible. The one-commissioner-per-country rule encourages both governments and those they appoint to the Commission to assume – in breach of the treaties – that the job of commissioners is to represent their homeland. So the next president should divide his or her commissioners into seniors – who could become vice presidents – and juniors. There should be an informal understanding that, though all commissioners are of equal legal status, the senior ones will co-ordinate the work of the juniors in their particular areas of responsibility. The seniors should meet regularly. In the longer run, when the treaties are re-opened, the EU should adopt a system whereby big countries would always have a commissioner (though not necessarily one of the top jobs) and smaller countries would take it in turns.

Another useful treaty change would be to give the European Council the right to sack the Commission. The Parliament has that power and by threatening to use it forced the resignation of the Santer Commission in 1999. If the treaties said that either body could sack the Commission, its equidistance between governments and MEPs would be reinforced. And that would help to give the EU the strong and independent Commission that it needs.

Charles Grant is director at the Centre for European Reform.

<http://cer.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e5ac52c2f8bd1b249ef1a8d18&id=dabb02b04e&e=ba8869b585>

HIGHLIGHTS FROM [ATLANTIC-COMMUNITY.ORG](http://atlantic-community.org)

Looking South: A New Direction for Transatlantic Relations

Courtenay Mitchell: Transatlantic relations are in transition. For example, where once Europe dominated US concerns, Asia now occupies center stage. If they are to successfully confront future challenges, the transatlantic partners must reevaluate their alliance and bring it up to date with current global realities.

<http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/looking-south-a-new-direction-for-transatlantic-relations>

Obama Has to Lead on NATO

Michael Williams: During his trip to Europe, President Obama will focus mainly on economic issues. This, however, comes at the expense of a wider strengthening of the transatlantic relationship. The President should not only push forward with the TTIP, he should also address security, namely reinvigorating NATO.

<http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/obama-has-to-lead-on-nato>

White-hat Hacker Fights Cyber Intrusions on NATO Systems

NATO: Cyber attacks around the world are becoming more frequent, alarming and complex. NATO calls on the skills of cyber-security experts, like Nuri Fattah, Senior Security Consultant at the NATO Communications and Information Agency, to assess its computer networks and takes measures to avert and defend against cyber attacks.

<http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/white-hat-hacker-fights-cyber-intrusions-on-nato-systems>

From Our Partner ISIS Europe

The situation in Mali remains worrying. The organization of elections in July 2013 indicates a positive step towards democratization, but the majority of the problems that Mali has been facing for the past years persist. How many things have changed in the security situation in Mali? Did the international community learn from its past mistakes or is this an impression of a déjà vu? To read this piece from our Partner, ISIS Europe, go to:

<http://www.atlantic-community.org/-/mali-the-complex-impression-of-a-deja-vu>

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TWO NEW SECURITY POLICY BRIEFS PUBLISHED BY EGMONT

No. 47 by Jo Coelmont & Maurice de Langlois

Recalibrating CSDP-NATO Relations: The Real Pivot

In an age of major power shifts, which we know from history always to be particularly dangerous, different scenarios are possible; the only promising one is that of more and well-structured international cooperation. Yet, critical voices point at a drifting apart of longstanding allies. Recalibrating CSDP-NATO relations has become more important than ever.

<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/papers/13/sec-gov/SPB47.pdf>

No. 48 by Quentin Huxham & Dinesh H.C. Rempling

The Start-Up Fund - An Elegant Treaty Mechanism for Sustaining Defence Capabilities

When the European Council meets in December, it will face a range of decisions which will lay the foundations for Europe's defence posture and role in the wider world for decades to come, perhaps even beyond the remainder of this century. The Lisbon Treaty has, for the first time, equipped the EU with the range of means to meet that role in practice. The question that remains to be answered is whether Europe's leaders have the political will to implement those means in full.

<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/papers/13/sec-gov/>