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From Parisian School Desks to a Geopolitical Fault Line: What Are the Streets of Europe Whispering?

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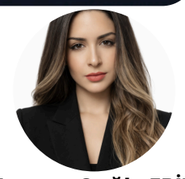
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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

Xi Jinping and Donald Trump 2026 Summit: Overcoming the Thucydides Trap



Zeynep Çağla ERİN

The summit between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping, held in Washington on September 23–25, 2026, represents one of the most critical diplomatic turning points of the 21st century from a global economic and political perspective. Although interactions between hegemonic powers and rising powers have historically often carried the potential for conflict, this meeting served as a platform for the emergence of a new paradigm of manageable competition and balance of power, distinct from the practices of the Cold War period. Rather than permanently resolving structural crises, the leaders of the two superpowers have opted to stabilize the asymmetric interdependence and ideological differences between them through symbolic diplomatic gestures. Trump's reception of Xi at Joint Base Andrews with a red carpet reflects the rational expectation that personal ties between leaders and personal diplomacy can mitigate structural state conflicts. The Chinese side, however, interpreted this diplomatic pomp as a validation of its own claims to global equality and a symbolic victory in the transition to a multipolar world order.[i]

The intellectual and historical backdrop of this diplomatic engagement has been shaped by the concept of the "Thucydides Trap," formulated by Graham Allison, a scholar at Harvard University. The thesis put forward by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides who claimed that the fear instilled in the established power, Sparta, by the rising power of Athens made war inevitable,has long been interpreted to mean that relations between the United States (U.S.) and China are destined to escalate into an inevitable armed conflict. However, Xi's most striking geopolitical intervention at the summit was his declaration that the Thucydides Trap has now been overcome and that the two great powers can continue on their paths without being dragged into a destructive war, having broken free from this historical determinism. This constructive narrative—which rejects the view that China's economic, military, and technological rise constitutes an existential threat to the U.S.—is based on the argument that Beijing can achieve its goal of becoming a central power in the global system without engaging in a hegemonic conflict. Xi's skillful reframing of this concept constitutes a proactive narrative of peaceful rise aimed at preventing Washington's Cold War-era containment strategies.[ii]

The summit's most significant conceptual outcome—one that will be debated for many years to come in current policy circles and academic literature—is the thesis that the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" and Trump's vision of "Making America Great Again" can coexist in a harmonious manner. Traditional political science theories expect these two nationalist, isolationist, and populist doctrines to create a zero-sum game on the international stage. However, Xi's argument that these two distinct historical narratives are not mutually exclusive suggests that states can reach a compromise along the axis of pragmatic isolationism focused solely on national interests. China's ideal of permanently ending the century-long era of humiliation that began with the

Opium Wars and returning to the heart of the ancient Asian civilization, coupled with the U.S.'s goal of revitalizing its deteriorating industrial infrastructure and shrinking middle class, paradoxically offers common ground. Both leaders aim to solidify their legitimacy by focusing on domestic political consolidation rather than global adventures. The MAGA doctrine, which Donald Trump has cemented as of 2026, has steered American foreign policy away from the principles of liberal internationalism and free trade, driving it toward rigid mercantilism, economic nationalism, and neo-protectionism.This paradigm shift frames the relocation of production chains back from Asia to the U.S. continent, the radical strengthening of border security, and the protection of domestic industry through high tariffs as an existential national security issue. Within this framework, Trump's strategy regarding China relies on pragmatism—specifically targeting trade deficits and intellectual property protection—instead of an ideological crusade for regime change. The fact that the two leaders publicly praise one another and display warm relations demonstrates that Washington has set aside its normative criticisms of China's domestic policies and human rights issues and has adopted a purely interest-based, realpolitik model of negotiation.

On another front, the vision of the "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" is the most fundamental ontological foundation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Xi's leadership. The strategy to become the world's number one power in every field by 2049 (the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China) is built specifically on technological independence. In the face of U.S. embargoes on semiconductors and advanced artificial intelligence (AI), China has launched a massive innovation drive through "Made in China 2025" and domestic circulation mechanisms. The primary motivation behind this push, originating in Beijing, is a strategy to buy time. Until China has completely eliminated its asymmetric dependence on American high technology and the financial system, it is carefully avoiding entering into a destructive military or economic hot conflict with the U.S. For this reason, the diplomatic courtesy and conciliatory language used by Xi actually serve as a long-term shield designed to close the technological gap.

The practical implementation of this conceptual consensus was evident in the 8th round of China-U.S. economic and trade consultations, held in New York and Washington from September 20 to 23, 2026. According to official statements from sources at the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, economic policymakers from both countries succeeded in building a positive consensus, thereby laying a concrete foundation for the leaders' summit. These intense negotiations between Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng and U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent demonstrated that trade barriers between the two economic giants could be eased, albeit to a limited extent.[iii]

The most tangible outcome of this positive consensus is the agreement to radically reduce tariffs on imported goods worth approximately $30 billion on both sides. The alignment of these tariffs—which will apply to approximately 90% of the goods—with most-favored-nation standards is a critical indicator of a return to free-market principles. Furthermore, China's agreement to import significant amounts of coal from the U.S. in 2027 and 2028 is intended to serve as a major political victory that Trump can present to his voter base in rural and traditional industrial regions. The establishment of an investment council to enhance economic institutionalization and a special agricultural working group to address sectoral crises confirms the intention to conduct bilateral relations through permanent technocratic mechanisms, free from short-term political reactions.[iv]

In today's geopolitical landscape, classic military deterrence has rapidly been replaced by AI and a borderless high-tech race. Although no definitive solution to the technological divide was reached during the summit, the decision by the parties to establish an official U.S.-China AI Dialogue represents a unique development in terms of managing global security risks. Although there are structural differences between this vision—which Trump referred to as "Super Intelligence" in his political rhetoric—and China's AI Security Governance Framework 3.0, which took effect in September 2026, the establishment of a bilateral emergency communication channel to prevent potential algorithmic crises and autonomous cybersecurity threats represents a historic compromise. While the Beijing administration aims to ease the U.S. semiconductor embargo through this dialogue mechanism, the Washington administration is planning to slow down China's model distillation operations.

The Taiwan issue which is the most intractable fault line in bilateral relations was also addressed at this summit from the perspective of strategic uncertainty. While Xi Jinping reiterated that the U.S. administration must unconditionally oppose Taiwan's independence in order to ensure regional peace and establish China-U.S. cooperation on a solid foundation, the Trump administration—while maintaining its so-called commitment to the "One China" policy—refrained from making official declarations of independence but continued to send covert messages of military support to preserve the island's de facto status.

The decision by the two leaders to extend the ceasefire—which has put economic disputes on hold—until January 10, 2027, has had a reassuring effect on all global markets. In exchange for certain tariff exemptions granted by the Trump administration, China's commitment to continue exporting rare earth elements—which are vital to global technology production—under free-market conditions and to lift barriers on U.S. agricultural products has directly reduced the fragility of global supply chains.

However, in diplomacy, form and substance often diverge. Despite the positive atmosphere created by the summit, international relations analysts also view this meeting as "photo-op diplomacy." It is evident that the leaders took no significant steps on critical geopolitical issues—such as Iran, the North Korean nuclear program, and the Russia-Ukraine War—which have escalated into global crises. While the unprecedented military welcome ceremony Shi received at Joint Base Andrews and the new pandas promised to the zoo (Panda Diplomacy) highlighted the summit's public relations dimension, while the fact that the parties did not budge even an inch from their positions on core points of contention—such as espionage allegations, intellectual property theft, and military buildup—shows that the relationship is fundamentally trapped in a strategic impasse.

In light of all these dynamics, it can be concluded that U.S.-China relations have moved beyond the post-Cold War paradigm and entered an entirely new phase of competition without mutual destruction. The U.S. 's expectations of democratization and institutionalization from the previous era have given way to MAGA's transactional and protectionist realpolitik; China's strategy of quiet growth, meanwhile, has evolved into a claim to global leadership under the banner of "Great Rejuvenation."

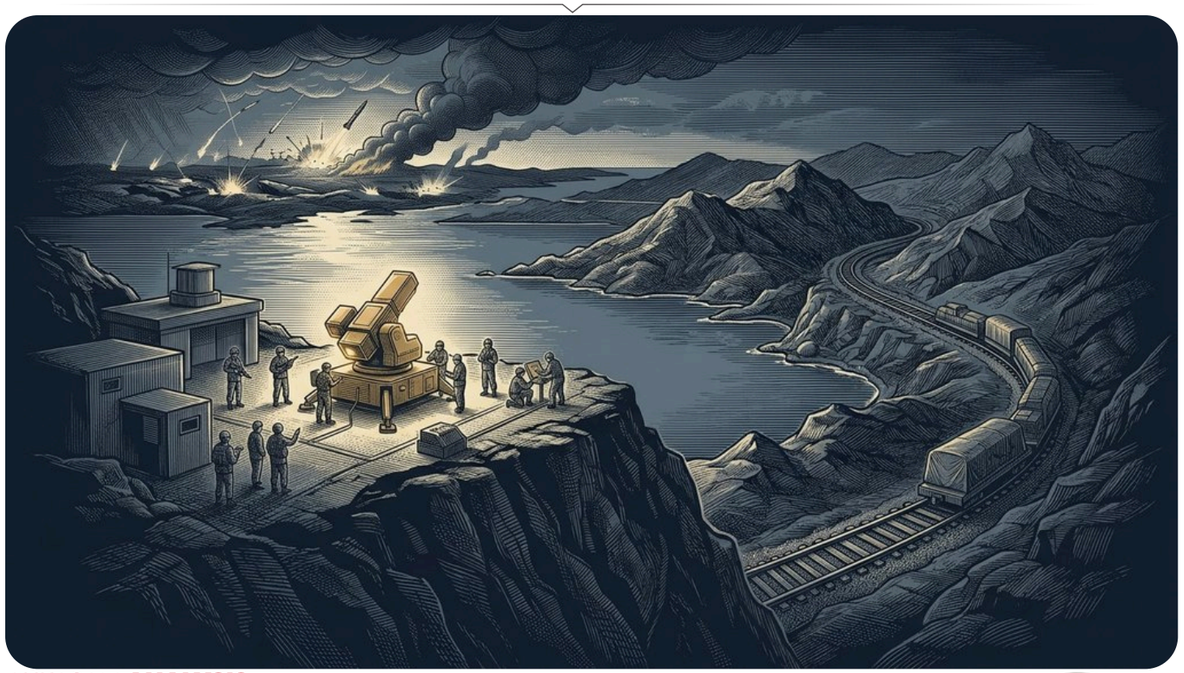
Consequently, the Trump-Xi summit held in September 2026 is not merely a negotiating table for a trade dispute. The meeting marked a historic turning point in which the rules of the 21st-century global order were rewritten. The thesis that the MAGA and "Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" doctrines can coexist on a manageable basis of disagreement within different geographical and ideological ecosystems—without mutually excluding one another—has been theoretically validated.

[i] "The Limits of Trump and Xi's Photo-Op Summit", *CFR*, https://www.cfr.org/articles/the-limits-of-trump-and-xis-photo-op-summit, (Date Accessed: 28.09.2026).

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[iii] "Eighth round of China-US economic and trade consultations yields positive consensus, says commerce ministry", *CGTN,* https://news.cgtn.com/news/2026-09-28/Commerce-Ministry-Chinese-US-economic-teams-reach-positive-consensus-1QNCco72p56 (Date Accessed: 28.09.2026).

[iv] *Ibid.*



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

North Korea’s Role in the Russia-Ukraine War



Başak ERTUNÇ

The transfer to South Korea of two North Korean soldiers captured by Ukraine while fighting in Russia’s Kursk region has once again brought the security implications of the Russia–Ukraine War for the Korean Peninsula to the forefront. According to information released on September 28, 2026, the soldiers are expected to undergo interrogation and security screening in South Korea, after which their status will be assessed in accordance with existing legislation concerning North Korean defectors.[i] The arrival of the two soldiers in South Korea from the battlefield in Ukraine can be regarded as more than an individual transfer case; it represents a concrete indication of the increasingly close connection between the ongoing war in Europe and security dynamics in Northeast Asia.

North Korea’s role in the Russia–Ukraine War initially took the form of supplying Russia with weapons and ammunition, but later expanded to include the direct deployment of military personnel. According to assessments as of August 2026, Pyongyang is reported to have sent approximately 14,000–15,000 troops to Russia, while also supplying millions of artillery and mortar rounds, as well as hundreds of ballistic missiles. Additionally, Ukrainian intelligence has alleged that a North Korean missile unit consisting of approximately 90 personnel has been deployed to Russia’s Voronezh region.[ii] Accordingly, Pyongyang’s role in the war is evolving from that of an external actor supplying ammunition to Russia’s war economy into that of a military partner gaining direct operational experience under the conditions of modern warfare.

One of the institutional foundations of this transformation is the Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed between Moscow and Pyongyang in 2024. The deepening of Russia–North Korea military relations is not limited to personnel deployments. According to a report by the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team, there is evidence that artillery systems, ballistic missiles, and military vehicles have been transferred from North Korea to Russia, while Russia has provided North Korea with air defense systems and Russian forces have trained North Korean soldiers. The same report states that more than 11,000 North Korean troops have been deployed to Russia since October 2024.[iii] Consequently, the Russia–Ukraine War has played a significant role in transforming relations between the two countries from short-term military cooperation into a more comprehensive and institutionalized security partnership.

One of the most significant consequences of this development for the Korean Peninsula is that North Korean forces are gaining direct experience under modern warfare conditions. The activities of North Korean forces in Ukraine provide an important learning environment, particularly in relation to unmanned aerial vehicles, counter-drone measures, reconnaissance and surveillance systems, and small-unit tactics. While North Korean units were associated with high casualty rates during the early stages of the war, subsequent observations indicate that they have adapted in areas such as camouflage techniques, rapid redeployment, and conducting operations in smaller and more mobile formations. At the same time, operating alongside Russian forces allows North Korean units to observe the coordinated use of drone and artillery systems.[iv]

This experience has the potential to encourage the further integration of low-cost unmanned systems into North Korea’s asymmetric warfare capabilities. Battlefield learning is not taking place solely at the personnel level. The use of North Korean-made KN-23 short-range ballistic missiles under real combat conditions in Ukraine has the potential to provide Pyongyang with feedback on the performance of its weapons systems

beyond the data previously obtainable only from test ranges. While there are assessments suggesting that accuracy problems reported during their initial use have subsequently decreased, uncertainty remains in open-source information regarding the extent of Russian technical support behind this development.[v]

However, the military gains generated by the Russia–Ukraine War for Pyongyang are not limited to battlefield experience. North Korea is assessed to have increased its access to economic resources and opportunities for military-technological cooperation in exchange for the troops, ammunition, and missile support it has provided to Russia. The current trajectory of Russia–North Korea relations also raises the possibility of greater integration between the two countries’ defense supply chains and the transfer of certain advanced military technologies.[vi] In this context, the potential gains North Korea may derive from the Russia–Ukraine War are developing through two distinct channels: on the one hand, operational experience gained directly on the battlefield and, on the other, deepening military and technological cooperation with Russia. The simultaneous development of these two processes is significant in terms of extending the effects of the war beyond Ukraine.

Nevertheless, it may be misleading to interpret the impact of battlefield experience on North Korea’s military capabilities as a direct strategic advantage. A significant portion of the experience gained in Ukraine has been limited to infantry and small-unit operations. There is insufficient evidence to suggest that North Korea’s air force, logistical elements, and artillery units have acquired a comparable level of direct combat experience. This constitutes an important limitation in terms of joint operations capability, one of the fundamental elements of modern warfare.[vii] Moreover, the significant casualties suffered by the units deployed to Russia indicate that the battlefield experience gained has also imposed certain military costs on Pyongyang. Therefore, the extent to which the experience acquired in Ukraine can be transferred to the distinct geographical, technological, and operational conditions of the Korean Peninsula remains uncertain.

Nevertheless, the deepening of military cooperation between Russia and North Korea is making it increasingly difficult to assess security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula solely in terms of the military balance between North and South Korea. The operational experience gained in Ukraine and the potential for military-technological cooperation with Russia to enhance North Korea’s capabilities are also creating new security concerns for South Korea. This process is increasing the strategic importance of Seoul’s cooperation with Euro-Atlantic security actors. During military talks held between NATO and South Korea in June 2026, the two sides discussed strengthening cooperation in areas such as interoperability, standardization, cyber exercises, and emerging technologies. NATO has also noted that security developments in the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic regions are becoming increasingly interconnected, including through the broader implications of the Russia–Ukraine War.[viii]

In this context, North Korea’s participation in the Russia–Ukraine War can be regarded as part of a broader trend toward the interregionalization of international security. While the war in Europe has enabled Russia to obtain military support from North Korea, it has also provided Pyongyang with an opportunity to gain experience in modern warfare and deepen its relations with Moscow. Conversely, South Korea’s growing ties with Euro-Atlantic security actors constitute another dimension of this interregional interaction. As a result, a mutual interaction is emerging between security dynamics in Europe and Northeast Asia. This development suggests that it is becoming increasingly difficult to assess security threats and alliance relationships within geographically distinct regional frameworks.

In conclusion, the transfer of two North Korean soldiers from Ukraine to South Korea represents one of the most visible examples of the security linkage between the Russia–Ukraine War and the Korean Peninsula. However, the strategic significance of this connection lies less in the transfer of the soldiers themselves than in the operational experience Pyongyang has gained through the war, the use of North Korean weapons systems under real combat conditions, and the deepening of military-technological relations with Russia. The extent to which these gains will be reflected in North Korea’s military capabilities remains uncertain. Nevertheless, the current trajectory of Moscow–Pyongyang cooperation is making it increasingly difficult to assess the security environment on the Korean Peninsula independently of developments in Europe. The Russia–Ukraine War is therefore also acquiring the characteristics of an interregional security process that strengthens the links between Euro-Atlantic and Northeast Asian security dynamics.

Keywords: North Korea, Russia, Russia–Ukraine War, South Korea, NATO, Korean Peninsula, Interregional Security.

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[ii] “What we know about North Korean forces joining Russia’s war against Ukraine”, *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/what-we-know-about-north-korean-forces-joining-russias-war-against-ukraine-2026-08-06/, (Accessed: 28 September 2026).

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[iv] Michael Aldeman, “Drones and Operational Shift: North Korea’s Adaptation to a Changing Warfare Environment”, *38 North*, https://www.38north.org/2026/04/drones-and-operational-shift-north-koreas-adaptation-to-a-changing-warfare-environment/, (Accessed: 28 September 2026).

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[vi] Eul-Chul Lim ve Jong Eun Lee, “All the Way With Moscow? Pyongyang’s Strategic Calculations in Support of Russia’s War”, *38 North*, https://www.38north.org/2026/08/all-the-way-with-moscow-pyongyangs-strategic-calculations-in-support-of-russias-war/, (Accessed: 28 September 2026).

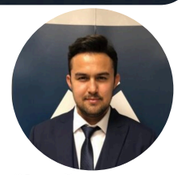
[vii] Aldeman, *a.g.e.*

[viii] “NATO and the Republic of Korea discuss military cooperation”, *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2026/06/24/nato-and-the-republic-of-korea-discuss-military-cooperation, (Accessed: 28 September 2026).



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The Middle Corridor's Promise of Two Million New Jobs: From a Geopolitical Route to a Development Corridor



Göktuğ ÇALIŞKAN

The estimate of two million additional jobs announced for the Middle Corridor shifts the debate on transport in Eurasia away from the competition between routes on the map and towards a calculation of jobs and income. According to the calculation, which covers nine countries and approximately 200 million people, investments in railways, ports and logistics could more than triple trade along the route by 2040, halve transit times and increase Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 3.3 per cent.[i] These figures can only be achieved under an investment and reform scenario in which the countries act together.

The figure of two million does not correspond to the total number of people who directly lay tracks, work at ports or carry freight. The calculation rests on a more indirect chain. As transport becomes cheaper, firms reach new markets, production grows, and this growth generates jobs in a range of fields, from services to agricultural processing. A train crossing a border faster does not in itself create development. If, however, the same train regularly carries a local factory's products to foreign markets, economic life around the route can change permanently.

The cost of this is also considerable. At least $25 billion is needed by 2040 to remove physical bottlenecks, and approximately $30.5 billion for the roads, terminals, logistics centres, wagons and digital systems that will connect local economies to the main line. Three quarters of the 16 critical infrastructure investments identified are either under way or at an advanced stage of preparation.[ii] What most often slows the route down is not so much the lack of a new bridge or railway as the inability to operate existing facilities together in a predictable way and according to commercial logic.

This is immediately visible in the geography of the Middle Corridor. Depending on the route chosen, a shipment may cross four or five borders, change rail gauge twice, be transferred between train and ship up to four times and pass through ten separate customs procedures.[iii] Each transfer means a possible delay, damage or additional charge. Shippers care more about knowing the delivery date in advance than about the average transit time. A container that is supposed to arrive within a week but sometimes arrives in ten days and sometimes in twenty can make a route that appears fast expensive in commercial terms.

Whether the employment promise is fulfilled will depend on the links established between the main route and the cities and production areas around it. A railway running across the Kazakh steppe remains merely a metal line for the local population if it does not connect farms to cold storage facilities and export terminals. If maintenance, packaging, warehousing and customs clearance services do not develop around a growing port, income may once again be concentrated in a narrow transport sector.

How the economic returns will be distributed can be estimated by looking at the current freight mix on the route. While grain, fertiliser, fuel and construction materials require high volumes and low costs, container transport relies on regular services, fast handling and precise timing. The corridor may grow in bulk cargo, but it can increase skilled employment only to the extent that it attracts high value-added goods such as machine parts, processed food, textiles and electronic components. In such a transformation, increasing the number of trains is only a small part of the task; the rest depends on producers' ability to access finance, standards and reliable customs information.

Governance problems come before infrastructure. Most of the railways, ports and maritime transport companies along the route are state-owned. When each institution seeks to protect its own revenue and capacity, the efficiency of the route as a whole may be pushed into the background. The fact that port tariffs are set separately in one country, train schedules in another and border controls in a third makes it difficult to offer cargo owners a single service. Unless an operating framework based on common performance indicators and revenue sharing is established, national investments may fail to produce a seamless regional service.

The proposed common digital document therefore cannot be dismissed as a technical detail. Entering transport contracts, transit records and trade data once and using them across countries could reduce duplication and declaration discrepancies at border crossings. The system can work when customs administrations trust data sharing, when electronic signatures are mutually recognised and when small firms are able to access it. If digitalisation makes things easier for large logistics companies while excluding local businesses through high software costs, the resulting efficiency gains will not spread to local entrepreneurship.

The rise of the corridor cannot be reduced to a temporary geopolitical reaction to the northern route running through Russia. Disruptions in supply chains, security risks on sea routes and extreme weather events push companies to keep more than one route available. The Middle Corridor can respond to this search, but it cannot be expected to take over the entire freight volume of the northern and maritime routes. The realistic goal is to offer a reliable option for certain product groups and to reduce the dependence of the countries in the region on a single transit route.

Türkiye's calculations involve not only transferring freight coming from the east to Europe but also connecting its own production regions to the railway network. In March 2026, $2 billion in financing was approved for the planned northern railway crossing of the Istanbul Strait, and it was announced that the project could raise annual freight capacity from three million tonnes to 50 million tonnes.[iv] Combined with the renewal of lines in Eastern Anatolia, this investment could strengthen the flow stretching from Kars to the European border. Whether the gains will remain confined to the few cities that host logistics centres will depend on whether industrial and agricultural enterprises are able to access the new capacity.

Alongside the opportunities they offer, large transport projects also create a distribution problem. New terminals can drive up land values, increase pressure for expropriation and reduce livelihood opportunities. When temporary jobs during the construction phase are presented as permanent employment, expectations become inflated. If vocational training programmes are not redesigned around train operations, port management, maintenance, software and customs services, skilled personnel may be brought in from outside, while the local population remains in low-wage jobs. The real social impact of the two-million promise will be determined by where, at what skill level and for how long the jobs are created.

The success of the Middle Corridor will be measured not only by the tonnage carried but also by the value generated along the route. Port, rail and bridge investments can speed up the flow, but it is local companies that take part in this flow as producers, suppliers and service providers that can expand employment. If the countries harmonise their border procedures, run state-owned enterprises with commercial efficiency and connect the main line to economic centres in inland regions, two million jobs can become an achievable development goal. Otherwise, more freight will be carried across Eurasia, but the societies through which it passes may not experience the transformation they expect.

Keywords: Middle Corridor, Central Asia, Logistics, Regional Development, Employment.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The Dilemma of Enlargement and Deepening in the European Union: Geopolitical Transformation, Institutional Reform and Strategic Security



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When the historical development of European integration is examined, it can be seen that the processes of enlargement and deepening have been the fundamental dynamics shaping the institutional, political and economic transformation of the Union. European integration initially emerged as a project aimed at establishing lasting peace across the continent through economic interdependence, and over time evolved into a more comprehensive political structure through the development of common institutions, the harmonization of national policies, and the strengthening of supranational decision-making mechanisms. However, the relationship between the expansion of the Union's geographical scope and the enhancement of its institutional depth has been reshaped at every stage of the integration process under the influence of different political and economic priorities. Particularly with the accession of Central and Eastern European countries to the Union following the end of the Cold War, an important stage was reached in overcoming Europe's historical division and ensuring democratic stability across the continent. However, the increase in the number of member states through the 2004 and 2007 enlargements also brought new institutional problems in areas such as the effectiveness of decision-making processes, economic convergence, and the feasibility of implementing common policies. This historical experience has demonstrated that enlargement is not limited merely to an increase in the number of members, but is also a multidimensional process requiring the restructuring of the Union's institutional capacity, financial resources, and common political will.

The geopolitical transformations that have taken place in the international system in recent years have brought the historical tension between enlargement and deepening to a more complex dimension. In particular, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its large-scale military intervention against Ukraine in 2022 directly affected Europe's security architecture and led to a reassessment of the European Union's policies toward its eastern neighborhood. These developments have brought security and geopolitical stability objectives to the forefront alongside the conditions on which enlargement policy has traditionally been based, such as democratization, the rule of law, economic convergence, and the adoption of the acquis. In particular, the strengthening of the membership perspectives of Ukraine and Moldova, the renewed strategic importance of the long-standing accession processes in the Western Balkans, and the search for a stable political space along Europe's eastern borders demonstrate that enlargement has evolved from a technical harmonization mechanism into a strategic policy area affecting the Union's position in the international system. In this framework, while enlargement has the potential to expand Europe's geopolitical sphere of influence and limit the regional influence of third actors, it also envisages ensuring the candidate countries' compliance with democratic

standards, the rule of law, and common European values. However, although geopolitical priorities have gained greater weight in the membership process and increased expectations for accelerating enlargement, the consistent application of membership criteria remains important for preserving the Union's normative legitimacy and institutional integrity.

As a result of this transformation, gradual integration and phased membership models are gaining greater importance in the European Union's enlargement policy. While meeting the Copenhagen criteria, aligning with the acquis, and completing the negotiation processes stand out as the fundamental conditions in the traditional accession process, the gradual integration approach envisages the phased participation of candidate countries in certain policy areas and economic mechanisms before full membership is achieved. In particular, the Growth Plan developed for the Western Balkans aims to facilitate candidate countries' access to certain parts of the European Single Market, support economic reforms, and deepen regional economic integration. This approach enables the relations of candidate countries with the European Union to move beyond being dependent solely on progress in membership negotiations and allows economic and institutional integration to be developed at earlier stages. For example, phased access to strategic areas such as energy, transportation, digital infrastructure, industry, and trade is expected to strengthen the economic resilience of candidate countries and contribute to their more comprehensive alignment with European values and regulatory standards. However, although gradual integration imposes economic obligations on candidate countries, its provision of limited opportunities for participation in decision-making processes may create a structural asymmetry between representation and responsibility. If the membership perspective is not linked to a clear timetable and predictable conditions, gradual integration may cease to be a temporary transitional mechanism and turn into a permanent intermediate status. Such a development may strengthen the perception of second-class partnership among candidate countries while also weakening the transformative effect of the membership process and political support for reforms. Therefore, designing gradual integration not as an alternative to full membership, but as a complementary mechanism based on merit and preserving the ultimate goal of membership, is important for the sustainability of enlargement policy.

The institutional and financial dimensions of the enlargement process are directly connected to discussions concerning the European Union's future political structure. An increase in the number of member states may make it more difficult to preserve the effectiveness of existing decision-making mechanisms, while it may also increase the reflection of economic and political differences among member states in the formulation of common policies. The application of the unanimity principle, particularly in strategic areas such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy and taxation, is one of the main areas where the tension between national sovereignty and supranational decision-making capacity becomes evident. While unanimity enables member states to protect their vital national interests, it may also lead to common decisions being delayed or blocked due to the objection of a single state. Therefore, extending qualified majority voting to more policy areas is among the reform proposals aimed at preserving the decision-making capacity of an expanding Union. However, considering that the right of veto serves as a safeguard, particularly for small and medium-sized member states, against the political and economic weight of larger countries, the transition from unanimity to qualified majority cannot be assessed solely on the basis of administrative efficiency. This change also represents a more comprehensive institutional transformation concerning the areas in which national sovereignty will be shared with common institutions, how the political equality of member states will be protected, and through which mechanisms the democratic legitimacy of common decisions will be ensured. Indeed, the European Commission's approach to enlargement considers it necessary not only to prepare candidate countries for membership, but also for the Union to achieve the institutional capacity to accommodate a larger membership structure. In this context, restructuring decision-making mechanisms is one of the prerequisites for enlargement, while it is also important that reforms be implemented without creating new political divisions among member states.

In this framework, the institutional reform debates that have recently been rising in the EU will inevitably have important consequences in terms of the structure of the European Commission and the representation of member states within the executive body. The presence of one commissioner from each member state within the Commission serves an important function in terms of national representation and institutional legitimacy. However, an increase in the number of member states as a result of enlargement may create new difficulties in terms of determining the areas of responsibility of commissioners, ensuring policy coordination, and effectively conducting decision-making processes. Today, proposals such as limiting the number of commissioners, developing a rotating representation system, or reorganizing the distribution of responsibilities are being discussed within the EU to overcome these problems. However, limiting the expectation that every member state should be represented within the Commission may increase concerns, particularly among smaller countries, about being excluded from decision-making processes. Therefore, the balance to be established between institutional efficiency and political representation will inevitably be one of the fundamental governance problems the Union will face after enlargement. In other words, while differentiated integration models offer flexible mechanisms for addressing this problem, they also carry the risk of fragmenting the common legal and

political structure. For example, some member states moving toward deeper integration in certain policy areas while others remain at a more limited level of participation may cause European integration to evolve into a multi-layered structure. On the one hand, this may facilitate the management of different national priorities within a common institutional framework, while on the other hand, it may lead to the emergence of different categories of rights and obligations among members. Therefore, the sustainability of differentiated integration depends on preserving the common treaty framework, clearly defining transition mechanisms between levels of participation, and maintaining the validity of fundamental legal principles for all member states.

Another important issue facing the European Union in its enlargement process is the sustainability of financial resources and the ability of existing budget mechanisms to adapt to the accession of new members. The Multiannual Financial Framework is the fundamental financial mechanism determining the Union's spending priorities in policy areas such as agriculture, regional development, research, innovation, infrastructure, energy, and external relations. The accession of new members will require not only an increase in the size of the budget, but also a reassessment of the distribution of existing resources and spending priorities. In particular, Ukraine's possible membership stands out as a development that could have significant effects on the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy due to its extensive agricultural production capacity, population, and need for economic reconstruction. In the event of Ukraine's accession to the European Union, the conditions under which agricultural support will be implemented, how existing support mechanisms will be transformed, and according to which criteria regional development funds will be distributed will be among the main topics of budget negotiations. However, the extent of the impact of enlargement on the budget will be shaped depending on membership conditions, transition periods, the structure of agricultural support, and future budget arrangements. In this respect, the preparations carried out by the European Commission within the scope of enlargement bring to the agenda the advance assessment of the financial burdens and changes in policy areas that may arise from the accession of new members and the restructuring of the Union's financial structure in accordance with the enlargement process.

This process will also lead to financial priority differences between countries contributing to the Union budget and countries benefiting more from the budget becoming more pronounced. In this situation, net contributor countries will prioritize the effectiveness of budget expenditures and the preservation of fiscal discipline, while net beneficiary countries will attach importance to the continuation of existing support and the maintenance of economic convergence. In addition, increased competition for resources among agricultural support, regional development funds, and new strategic spending areas following enlargement may make it more complex to achieve budgetary compromise among member states. Moreover, priorities such as increasing defense expenditures, strengthening energy security, supporting digital transformation, and rebuilding Ukraine may place additional pressure on traditional budget items. Therefore, the financial sustainability of enlargement will depend not only on securing new resources but also on restructuring existing spending policies, increasing the effectiveness of financial support, and preserving financial solidarity among member states.

This interdependence between enlargement and institutional reform is also evident in the European Union's migration and border security policies. The expanding geographical scope of the Union's external borders requires the strengthening of common border management, asylum procedures, and security coordination in order to keep internal borders open to free movement. The Schengen system guarantees freedom of movement based on the removal of internal border controls while requiring the management of external borders according to common standards and the maintenance of mutual trust among member states. Therefore, border security has ceased to be an issue addressed solely within national jurisdictions and has become one of the European Union's policy areas requiring common responsibility. The Migration and Asylum Pact, adopted in 2024 and beginning to be implemented as of June 12, 2026, aims to reorganize responsibility-sharing among member states, harmonize asylum procedures, and strengthen common capacity in external border management.

One of the fundamental elements of the Pact, the flexible solidarity mechanism, envisages supporting member states under migration pressure through relocation, financial contributions, or operational support from other members. This mechanism aims to reduce the unequal effects of migration movements on member states and strengthen the understanding of common responsibility. However, the ability of member states to fulfill their solidarity obligations in different forms may lead to debates concerning the scope and effectiveness of common responsibility in practice. Particularly where financial contributions can substitute for physical relocation obligations, the genuine nature of solidarity is questioned, deepening criticisms that this reduces migration management to merely a cost-balancing mechanism. Therefore, the success of the Pact is connected not only to strengthening border controls or accelerating asylum procedures, but also to establishing sustainable responsibility-sharing among member states and guaranteeing the rights of persons in need of international protection.

Another element gaining increasing importance in the European Union's migration policy is the externalization of border management and strategic partnerships developed with third countries. This approach aims to manage irregular migration movements through cooperation with countries of origin and transit before they reach the borders of the European Union.

Readmission agreements, border surveillance, combating human trafficking, financial support, and the development of migration management capacity are among the main components of the externalization policy. In this context, the European Union is deepening cooperation with neighboring and transit countries in order to manage migration movements and limit cross-border security threats. However, transferring migration management beyond the Union's borders also brings significant problems concerning the scope of legal responsibilities, access to asylum applications, and the protection of fundamental rights. In particular, the implementation of safe third-country practices, accelerated border procedures, and return mechanisms must be assessed within the framework of the principle of non-refoulement and international protection obligations. The principle of non-refoulement, one of the fundamental principles of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, prohibits the sending of persons to countries where their lives or freedoms are under threat and determines the legal limits of the European Union's migration policies. Therefore, the externalization of migration must be evaluated not only in terms of operational efficiency and border security, but also in terms of the protection of human rights and compliance with international law. Therefore, the balance to be established between strengthening border security and protecting human rights is of decisive importance for both the European Union's internal legitimacy and its international normative identity.

The transformation taking place in the European Union's enlargement and border security policies also necessitates a reassessment of the relationship between the Union's normative power identity and its capacity to act as a geopolitical actor. European integration historically developed as a political project aiming to exert influence in the international system through the institutionalization of principles such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and multilateral cooperation. Within this framework, enlargement policy has been used as a tool not only to create a stable and democratic political space around Europe, but also to support the economic and institutional transformation of candidate countries. However, the intensification of great power competition, the increase in regional conflicts, the transformation of energy dependencies into a strategic instrument, and competition over critical technologies have led the European Union to develop a more pronounced geopolitical approach in international relations.

Following the Russia-Ukraine War, strengthening security and defense capacity, diversifying energy supplies, reducing strategic economic dependencies, and improving foreign policy coordination have gained greater prominence among the Union's priority policy areas. While these developments do not mean that the European Union has completely abandoned its normative identity, they point to a transformation requiring value-based foreign policy objectives and strategic interests to be managed within the same institutional framework. In particular, the increasing geopolitical importance of enlargement policy makes strategic assessments more influential in the membership processes of candidate countries while also making the consistent application of conditions concerning democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights more important. The European Commission explicitly emphasized in its 2025 enlargement approach that the advantages provided by gradual integration should depend on reform progress and the fulfillment of fundamental conditions such as the rule of law. In this context, the European Union's strengthening as a geopolitical actor depends not only on increasing its economic and military capacity, but also on the extent to which it can preserve its normative principles in its foreign policy practices.

The enlargement, institutional reform, financial sustainability, and border security problems facing the European Union stand out not as independent developments from one another, but as interdependent dynamics shaping the future of integration. Enlargement has the potential to expand the Union's geographical and geopolitical sphere of influence, while also bringing to the agenda the restructuring of existing institutional mechanisms, the distribution of financial resources, and the common political framework. Gradual integration offers a flexible model that can enable candidate countries to participate in the Union's economic and institutional structure at earlier stages, while carrying risks such as different levels of participation becoming permanent and the ultimate membership perspective becoming uncertain. Similarly, expanding qualified majority voting and restructuring the Commission have the potential to increase decision-making capacity, but may also raise new debates concerning the national competences of member states and institutional trust.

In the financial sphere, the resource needs created by enlargement will bring the reassessment of traditional spending areas such as the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy to the agenda, while common responsibility mechanisms in the field of migration and border security and strengthened cooperation with third countries are gaining importance. In this framework, the future of the European Union depends not only on the speed of enlargement or the increase in the number of members, but also on reconciling different national priorities around common objectives, developing institutional capacity, and maintaining financial solidarity. Therefore, the fundamental issue facing the Union is to establish the institutional and political conditions under which the two processes can support each other, rather than making a definitive choice between enlargement and deepening. The sustainability of the future integration model will depend on maintaining a credible membership perspective, the effectiveness of decision-making processes, financial solidarity, and the conduct of security policies in accordance with fundamental rights.



ANKASAM **PERSPECTIVE**

The Mecca Pact's Riyadh Test: The Era of "Flexible Defense" in the Middle East, New Balances of Power, and the Potential for Geopolitical Expansion



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Signed on 7 August 2026, the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement (Mecca Pact), which ushered in a new era in the security architecture of the Middle East and South Asia, has been subjected to an asymmetric litmus test that has shaken the regional status quo before its institutional construction was even completed. Following critical Houthi attacks targeting Saudi Arabia's civilian and economic infrastructure, the Strategic Political and Defense Committee, the alliance's highest decision-making body, convened in Riyadh on Monday, 5 October 2026, with an extraordinary agenda, transforming the pact from a mere declaration of intent on paper into an operational reality.

Beyond this, the summit triggered efforts by Iran and Israel—the two poles of the regional power matrix—to limit or manipulate the pact's sphere of influence, while also activating the global geopolitical assessments of the United States/CENTCOM, Europe, Russia, China, and India regarding the pact's autonomous structure, as well as dynamics of geographical expansion centered on Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, and the UAE in the Gulf. This study subjects the Riyadh Summit and the joint communiqué to a methodological analysis through the conceptual frameworks of the "Flexible Resistance Doctrine" and "Premature Birth Pressure"—concepts that I highlighted in my ANKASAM analysis titled *"Premature Birth Pressure on the Mecca Pact and the Flexible Resistance Doctrine as a Crisis-Exit Strategy"* and which are defined in the literature as fundamental paradigms of the pact's existence.

Institutional Rationality in the Face of "Premature Birth Pressure"

One of the most important geopolitical assessments made during the establishment phase of the alliance was that revisionist actors in the region—particularly Iran-backed proxy forces and Israel's aggressive expansionism—would force this formation to react before it had matured, thereby creating a form of "premature birth pressure." Indeed, the Houthi missile and UAV attacks were intended to test the pact's collective-defense logic—"an attack against one is an attack against all"—before its institutional structures, such as the secretariat and joint headquarters, had been fully established.

So, was this first extraordinary meeting effective?

The meeting was unquestionably productive and operationally successful. Rather than panicking under premature birth pressure or seeking to evade its obligations, the alliance demonstrated a will to use the crisis as leverage to accelerate institutionalization. The appointment of retired Pakistani Lieutenant General Nauman Mahmood as Secretary-General for a three-year term was the clearest indication that the alliance had acquired an institutional backbone and had ceased to be merely "a declaration of intent on paper." By transforming crisis management into a stage of institutionalization, the meeting generated strategic rationality.

The "Flexible Resistance Doctrine" in the Field: The National-Law Filter

The most striking and analytically significant phrase in the joint statement issued following the meeting is the following:

"…the provision of agreed military forces and capabilities to Saudi Arabia within the framework of agreed arrangements, subject to the national laws of the parties…"

This formulation constitutes concrete evidence that the "Flexible Resistance Doctrine," proposed as the pact's crisis-exit strategy, has been fully put into practice. "Flexible Resistance" is an intelligent flexibility model that provides a collective deterrence umbrella while safeguarding the sovereignty rights, domestic legal mechanisms, and national interests of member states.

The distinctive dynamics of this doctrine become evident on three principal levels when compared with classical rigid alliance structures.

First, the response mechanism characteristic of traditional alliance models—such as NATO's Article 5, which seeks an automatic and binding military commitment—is replaced under the Flexible Resistance Doctrine by a gradual process subject to national legislation and domestic legal approval.

Second, instead of traditional burden-sharing obligations that impose an all-out war or rigid military integration, the model is based on the transfer of the parties' "agreed capabilities," namely strategic assets such as intelligence, technology, and logistics.

Finally, the pressure for top-down collective command is replaced by a structure that prioritizes the absolute primacy of national parliaments and constitutional processes and places the preservation of sovereignty at the forefront.

The fact that the deterrence message in the joint statement was framed within national legislation and calibrated around the "minimum necessary level of responsibility" should not be interpreted as a weakness or an attempt to evade commitments. Rather, it constitutes a geopolitical insurance policy that ensures the sustainability of the alliance. Had the pact automatically dragged its members into a proxy war—or "common war"—in the Yemeni deserts, the result could have been the collapse of the pact during its first crisis while its institutional and identity-building processes were still underway, or it could have triggered extremely severe reactions on the grounds that it would lead to an "Islamic civil war." Thanks to flexible resistance, the alliance has pledged to defend Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity ("collective defense") while leaving the legal and military boundaries of any operation to the discretion of each member's own capital.

The Geopolitical Reading of Global Powers

The institutionalization of the Mecca Alliance will undoubtedly have a direct impact on Washington's military and strategic architecture in the Middle East. The United States and CENTCOM (Central Command) are analyzing the emergence of this autonomous pact and its demonstration of resolve in Riyadh from two different perspectives and are shaping their future institutional relations accordingly:

- **"Tactical Integration" with CENTCOM and Early-Warning Cooperation:** Rather than seeing the pact evolve into a completely independent command center, the United States is likely to seek its integration into the existing U.S. military umbrella. CENTCOM will particularly seek to incorporate the Mecca Pact into its *Prosperity Guardian* operation against Houthi missile/UAV threats along the Red Sea and Gulf corridor, as well as into the concept of a regional integrated air-defense network. In the future, it is highly likely that data-sharing protocols will be signed between the pact's new secretariat and CENTCOM, with tactical early-warning intelligence flowing into the pact's "Intelligence Pool."
- **Washington's Satisfaction with "Burden Sharing":** Washington has long called upon its Gulf partners to assume greater responsibility for their own security. In this respect, the Mecca Pact's willingness to provide collective protection to Saudi Arabia represents a strategic development that could reduce the U.S. military burden in the region. It would therefore come as no surprise if Washington viewed this structure as a "cost-effective" means of balancing the Iranian axis without directly exposing American troops to risk, and encouraged the pact's institutional development through logistical and technological support.
- **The Risk of "Autonomy Friction":** On the other hand, the fact that the pact is likely to be shaped by actors such as Turkey and Pakistan, which operate outside NATO or pursue autonomous policies, creates structural reservations in Washington. In this context, the United States may seek to constrain the institutional relationship to "defense industry cooperation and counter-Iranian terrorism" in order to prevent the pact from evolving into a collective pressure mechanism against Israel.

As I also addressed in my ANKASAM analysis titled *"The 'Mecca Pact' in the Expanded Indo-Pacific Geopolitics: The Strategic Construction of Geographical Will from Gibraltar to Malacca,"* the institutional resolve demonstrated by the Mecca Alliance in Riyadh has generated profound strategic reverberations in other global centers of power beyond Washington. Their approaches to the "Flexible Resistance" doctrine and the pact's emerging military architecture can be summarized as follows:

- **Europe (the United Kingdom and the EU): "Cautious Support and Commercial Pragmatism":** The United Kingdom and the EU regard the preservation of energy infrastructure in the Gulf and the security of maritime trade in the Red Sea as vital interests and therefore view the pact's deterrence measures with cautious approval. London, in particular, appears likely to seek to institutionalize its traditional defense cooperation with Gulf states through the secretariat. Brussels, however, appears concerned that the alliance's autonomous structure and Turkey's growing regional weight could bypass the EU's Middle East policies.
- **Russia: "Balancing Strategy and Diplomacy-Oriented Approach":** Moscow views the pact as a multipolar development capable of breaking the West's absolute military monopoly in the region. However, given Russia's strategic partnership with Iran, Moscow opposes the transformation of this structure into a rigid anti-Iranian bloc. Russia's strategy appears to involve supporting the allocation of decisions to national legislation by praising the alliance's "Flexible Resistance" structure, thereby seeking to prevent the pact from launching an all-out military operation against Tehran.
- **China: "Belt and Road Security and Concern over Mediation":** Beijing advocates stability in view of its enormous energy investments in the region and the security of the Belt and Road Initiative. Having mediated Saudi-Iranian normalization in 2023, China is concerned that the institutionalization of the pact could overshadow this diplomatic achievement. China may therefore seek close relations with the secretariat

under Lieutenant General Mahmood's leadership and encourage the pact to remain a "stabilizing factor" securing economic corridors rather than becoming an instrument of military escalation.

- **India: "Pakistan Concern and Corridor Diplomacy":** New Delhi is the actor most distant from the pact's institutional backbone. The fact that a retired general from nuclear rival Pakistan has assumed the top position within the pact represents a major setback to India's efforts to contain Pakistan through the Gulf. India is uncomfortable with Pakistan gaining military and strategic legitimacy in the Gulf. Moreover, concerned that the pact could make the security of the U.S.-backed India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) dependent on a Pakistan-oriented military umbrella, New Delhi appears likely to deepen its bilateral defense relations with Saudi Arabia while keeping the pact outside that framework.

Regional Reaction Matrix: Possible Responses from Iran and Israel

The institutionalization steps of the Mecca Alliance, the new secretariat model led by a Pakistani Secretary-General, and potential areas of engagement with the United States are being monitored by Iran and Israel—the region's two principal geopolitical poles—from different threat perceptions. Tehran interprets this institutional structure directly as a "regional containment project" directed against itself. However, the alliance's adoption of the "Flexible Resistance" doctrine rather than a rigid bloc also differentiates Iran's response strategy. In this context, Iran may pursue the following courses:

- **A "Test of Institutional Resilience" through Proxy Forces:** Iran may continue a policy of controlled escalation through the Houthis or other proxy forces in Iraq in order to measure the pact's capacity for a collective response. The objective could be to paralyze the coordination speed of the secretariat and expose the pact's deterrence vulnerability by portraying "Flexible Resistance" as merely a cover for inaction.
- **The Pakistan Factor and Asymmetric Diplomacy:** Lieutenant General Mahmood's position as Secretary-General creates sensitive balances for Tehran. Seeking to avoid tensions with Islamabad over border security and the Balochistan issue, Iran may seek diplomatic assurances along the Islamabad–Ankara axis in order to prevent the pact from transforming into an anti-Iranian military offensive alliance.
- **Exploiting Gaps in "National Legislation":** Iranian diplomacy may use the emphasis on national legislation in the joint statement as leverage to divide the pact. By exploiting domestic political debates and delays in members' constitutional processes, Tehran could wage information campaigns designed to prevent the pact from producing a unified response during crises.

Israel, meanwhile, may view the emergence of defense architectures against Iran positively in principle, but is structurally uncomfortable with the Mecca Alliance being established around an Arab-Turkish-Pakistani axis as a model of regional ownership independent of the West and Israel itself. In this context, Israel may pursue the following courses:

- **Pressure for Integration through the "Abraham Accords" Axis:** Tel Aviv may interpret Riyadh's effort to establish and expand its own security through the pact and local actors as a strategy for postponing full normalization with Israel. Israel's response could involve attempts to establish indirect intelligence-sharing mechanisms with the pact's military wing and secretariat, potentially through the Pentagon or CENTCOM.
- **Concern over Technological Superiority and Balancing Ankara:** The institutionalization of the pact and the concept of capability transfers would mean that Turkish defense-industry products establish a permanent military footprint in the Gulf. Israel may closely monitor this Turkish-Saudi defense integration, which could undermine its objective of marketing its own air-defense systems to Saudi Arabia, and seek to offer its own technology as an alternative.
- **Strategic Threat Perception Regarding Pakistan's Presence:** The leadership of the secretariat by a Pakistani general creates, in Israeli strategic assessments, the risk of Gulf security becoming linked to nuclear-armed Pakistan. Taking into account the potential for this structure to form a bloc against Israel in future crises involving Palestine or the Eastern Mediterranean, Israel may lobby Washington to ensure that the secretariat's military authorities remain limited.

Geopolitical Expansion Potential: Qatar and Oman Scenarios

Following the demonstration of institutional maturity in Riyadh, the pact's potential for geographical and strategic expansion within the Gulf will become increasingly prominent as the process advances. In this context, the possibility of Qatar and Oman joining the alliance presents two distinct geopolitical scenarios that could alter the nature of the pact:

- **The Qatar Scenario: "Strategic Depth and Financial-Technological Synergy":** The possibility of Qatar joining the alliance is relatively high, and such a development would have a multiplier effect for the pact. Doha, which maintains a longstanding military alliance with Ankara and has fully normalized relations with Riyadh, could provide the pact's institutional secretariat with substantial financial power and logistical depth. Qatar's participation would facilitate the integration of Turkey's military footprint in the Gulf—through the Turkish military base in Doha—into the pact's joint mechanisms. Moreover, Qatar's alignment with the "Flexible Resistance" doctrine could materialize through the transfer of its defense-industry investments into the pact's common capability pool.
- **The Oman Scenario: "Diplomatic Buffer and Geographical Threshold":** Oman's participation would be more difficult than Qatar's, but far more critical from a geostrategic perspective. Muscat has traditionally pursued a policy of absolute neutrality and balance between Iran and the Gulf. Oman's inclusion in the pact would serve as a diplomatic shield, strengthening the argument that the alliance is not an "anti-Iranian war pact." Geographically situated near the Strait of Hormuz and the Yemeni border, Oman's integration into the pact's intelligence and radar network would dramatically enhance its ability to detect Houthi attacks at an early stage. However, in accordance with its constitutional principle of neutrality, Muscat may prefer to join the pact not as a full member but as a "Strategic Intelligence and Logistics-Sharing Partner."

The Kuwait–UAE Dilemma during the Expansion Process

The expansion potential of the Mecca Alliance presents Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with profound geopolitical dilemmas. Kuwait is concerned that the pact could evolve into an anti-Tehran military bloc because of its tradition of constitutional neutrality and sensitive geographical proximity to Iran. At the same time, however, its vital security ties with Saudi Arabia create a fear of isolation if it remains outside the pact.

The UAE, on the other hand, does not wish to sacrifice its strategic partnership with Israel, constructed through the "Abraham Accords," or its goal of autonomous regional influence to the institutional discipline of this new pact, whose center of gravity is shaped by Turkey and Pakistan. Abu Dhabi, which competes with Riyadh, is caught between the risk of being excluded from the regional security architecture by remaining outside the pact and the dilemma of limiting its autonomy by joining it. For both actors, the "Flexible Resistance Doctrine" emerges as the only viable formula through which they can engage selectively with the pact while preserving their sovereignty.

Situational Analysis and Window of Opportunity for Türkiye

Linking the deterrence message to a national-law filter constitutes a strategic and constitutional necessity for Türkiye. Article 92 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye makes the deployment of troops to foreign countries subject to a decision by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). The inclusion of this qualification in the joint text in Riyadh confirms that Turkish diplomacy preserved constitutional boundaries as a red line at the negotiating table and did not permit any international engagement that would bypass domestic law. This situation can be assessed from three principal perspectives for Türkiye:

1. **Risk Management and Avoidance of Proxy Wars:** Türkiye has stood firmly with Riyadh by strongly condemning Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia and attempts to target holy sites. However, the reference to "national legislation" serves as a strategic buffer preventing Türkiye from entering into direct confrontation with Iran. While supporting the legitimate need for Saudi Arabia's self-defense, Türkiye has avoided the risk of becoming a direct combatant in Yemen's complex civil war.
2. **The "Military Capability" Concept and Defense-Industry Diplomacy:** The phrase "military forces and capabilities" in the communiqué should not be interpreted merely as the deployment of combat troops. The integration of Türkiye's layered air-defense systems, electronic-warfare capabilities, and indigenous platforms such as the Baykar Akıncı UCAV into the Saudi defense ecosystem constitutes the essence of this capability-sharing approach. Rather than directly deploying combat infantry, Türkiye has gained the opportunity to build deterrence through military-technological superiority.
3. **The Principle of Regional Ownership:** Through the Mecca Pact, Türkiye is institutionalizing its vision that "regional problems should be resolved by regional actors" in opposition to designs imposed by Western powers or external actors. The emphasis on national legislation demonstrates that the alliance is not being constructed under the direction of a hegemon but on the basis of the sovereignty of equal partners.

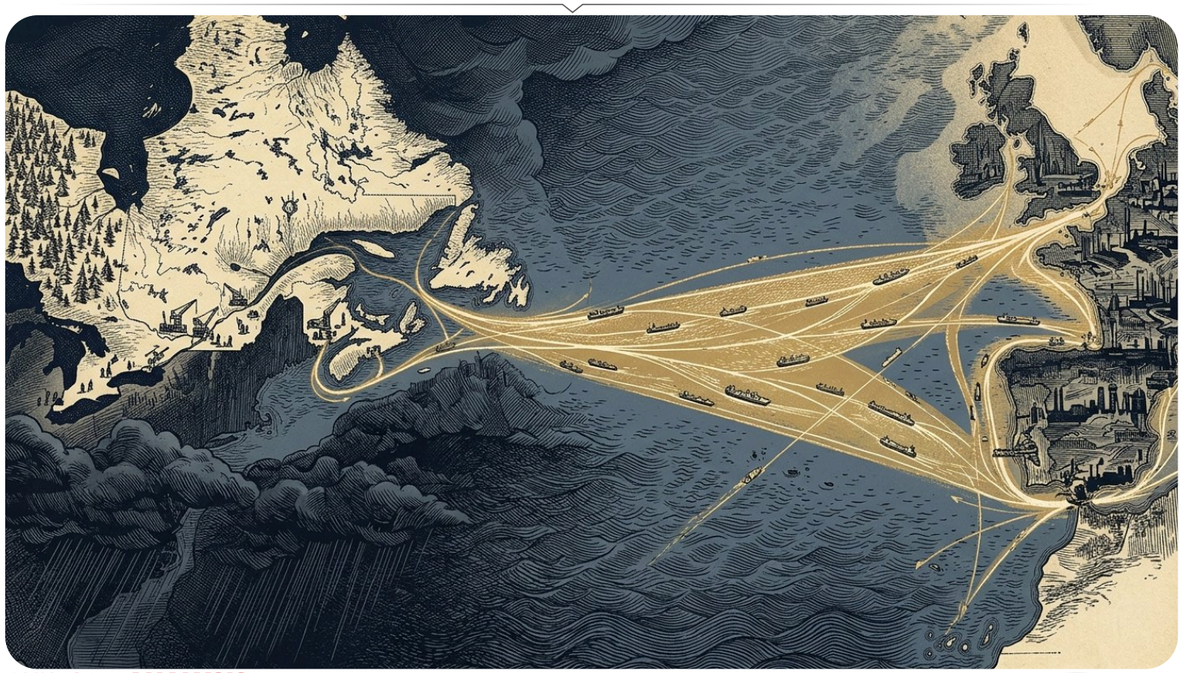
Conclusion

The Riyadh Extraordinary Summit has demonstrated that the Mecca Alliance, under "Premature Birth Pressure," has transformed the crisis into a platform for institutional advancement rather than structurally disintegrating or sinking into inaction. By putting the "Flexible Resistance Doctrine" into practice in the face of asymmetric threats, the alliance has successfully passed its first litmus test. The autonomous secretariat architecture established through the appointment of a Pakistani Secretary-General provides methodological evidence that the pact will not remain merely a declaration of intent on paper, but will evolve into a dynamic "Capability Accreditation Pool" harmonizing the constitutional boundaries of its member states.

Undoubtedly, the future sustainability of the pact and its weight in regional geopolitics will depend on its ability to manage the multilayered pressures exerted by global and regional centers of power. The projections presented here indicate that the pact must, on the one hand, urgently establish an autonomous "Joint Intelligence Pool" against the asymmetric attrition strategies of Iran and its proxy forces, while on the other hand preserving its autonomous posture against efforts by the United States/CENTCOM, Israel, and India to integrate the pact into their respective strategic axes or marginalize it.

As the process advances, incorporating Qatar and Oman into the pact's periphery will strengthen its strategic resilience, while Kuwait's neutrality concerns and the UAE's autonomy dilemma will test the limits of the pact's flexibility. The multipolar vision of global powers such as Russia and China, meanwhile, offers a diplomatic lever for expanding the pact's autonomous space outside the Western sphere.

For Türkiye, this pact emerges as a rational foreign-policy instrument that places its military-technological—particularly its UCAV and smart-munitions ecosystem—and doctrinal capabilities at the service of regional stability while preserving its constitutional red lines and the absolute sovereign rights of the TBMM. In this context, the flexibilization of deterrence within the framework of the Mecca Alliance by tying it not to rigid commitments but to the limits of each country's national legislation should not be regarded as a sign of weakness. On the contrary, it may be considered the greatest methodological guarantee of a collective resilience capable of bending without breaking in the face of regional shockwaves, crises of geographical expansion, and strategies by global actors aimed at eroding national sovereignty.



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

A New Quest in Transatlantic Relations: The Rapprochement Between Canada and the European Union



Ali Caner İNCESU

The emerging new partnership model between Canada and the European Union (EU) is provoking renewed debate over the established geographical and political boundaries of transatlantic relations. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's proposal for a new status for Canada-characterized as an "associate member"-reflects a political quest to broaden the scope of bilateral relations rather than a legally defined form of EU membership under current conditions. Furthermore, United States (US) President Donald Trump's statement that severe tariffs could be imposed on Europe should this initiative be directed against Washington elevates the Canada–EU rapprochement beyond the realm of bilateral ties. Consequently, the debate brings to the fore the question of the extent to which middle powers can act autonomously vis-à-vis to the US within an evolving transatlantic framework.[i]

From Canada's perspective, the rapprochement with the EU is primarily driven by ongoing trade tensions with the US. The high degree of integration between the Canadian economy and the US market severely constrains Ottawa's room for manoeuvre against economic pressure applied by Washington. Trump's remarks suggesting that "Canada should become the 51st US state," alongside the ensuing trade war between the two nations, have accelerated Prime Minister Mark Carney's efforts to diversify Canada's economic and diplomatic relations. Carney's references to establishing a "unique alliance" between Canada and the EU can therefore be interpreted not merely as an effort to foster relations with Europe, but as part of a broader, more comprehensive strategy aimed at reducing the country's economic dependence on the US.[ii]

This endeavour also highlights the shifting position of middle powers within the international system. Carney's previous assertion that the world order is undergoing a structural rupture-and that middle powers must act in concert-forms the cornerstone of Canada's new foreign policy orientation. Developing fresh avenues of cooperation among actors with shared concerns, rather than forming unilateral dependency relationships with major economic hubs such as the US, China, or the EU, emerges as a viable option to expand the strategic autonomy of middle-ranking states. In this regard, the Canada-EU rapprochement constitutes not only an economic response, but also a political reaction against growing uncertainty in the international arena.

From the EU's standpoint, the planned relationship with Canada extends far beyond a conventional free trade agreement. Alongside the reduction of trade barriers, discussions encompass deepening cooperation in strategic domains such as energy, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, technology, cybersecurity, and defence. Initiatives such as laying submarine cables between Europe and Canada and facilitating the flow of Canadian energy supplies to European markets illustrate how economic security is

increasingly shaped by geopolitical competition. The transformation of energy resources, critical minerals, and advanced technological infrastructure into vital components of national security renders Canada a crucial partner for Europe.

Nevertheless, the legal boundaries of the relationship Canada might establish with the EU remain undefined. EU law contains no existing mechanism for an "associate membership" status applicable to Canada. The primary hurdle to full membership remains the Treaty on European Union itself, which restricts membership exclusively to European states. Hence, the model under debate is far more likely to yield a bespoke institutional framework tailored to Canada rather than a classic accession pathway. Should a structure of this nature materialise-encompassing diverse areas such as trade, defence, technology, energy, and the mobility of persons-it would pioneer a novel partnership model in the EU's relations with third countries.

The current volume of bilateral economic relations provides a solid foundation for such rapprochement. Trade volumes have expanded substantially since the provisional application of the comprehensive trade agreement between the EU and Canada-the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)-commenced in 2017. The fact that bilateral trade in goods and services is projected to reach €130.8 billion in 2025 demonstrates that the economic relationship possesses the prerequisite infrastructure for an upgraded political and strategic partnership.[iii] Nevertheless, the fact that CETA has yet to be fully ratified by certain EU member states indicates that deeper integration between Canada and the EU may encounter political and legal hurdles within Europe itself.

The posture of the Trump administration reinforces the geopolitical dimension of this convergence. Trump's announcement that he could interpret the new arrangement between Canada and Europe as an "unfriendly act"-depending on its intent-and subsequently slap punitive tariffs on the EU underscores the continued employment of trade policy as an instrument of foreign relations. Von der Leyen's explicit emphasis that the prospective relationship with Canada is not directed against any specific actor demonstrates Europe's desire to avoid an appearance of direct confrontation with Washington. This dynamic illustrates that whilst both the EU and Canada seek to diminish their reliance on the US, they remain constrained by the necessity of preserving ties with Washington, one of the world's premier economic and security actors.[iv]

Public sentiment in Canada indicates that this foreign policy pursuit enjoys genuine domestic support. Opinion polls reveal that a substantial majority of Canadians support closer cooperation with the EU across foreign policy, defence, and economic affairs. Conversely, the lack of commensurate support for full EU membership suggests that Canadian society draws a clear distinction between closer alignment with Europe and the delegation of national sovereignty. The opposition's discourse-asserting that Canada must neither become the 51st state of the US nor the 28th member of the EU-further signals that the debate is increasingly framed domestically as a matter of national sovereignty.[v]

In conclusion, assessing the Canada-EU rapprochement merely as a new trade deal or an unusual debate over membership would be an incomplete analysis. The unfolding situation demonstrates that the Trump administration's intensified leverage of economic pressure in its relations with allies can compel traditional partners to seek alternative alliances. Canada's pivot towards Europe, combined with the EU's openness to this convergence, indicates that Washington-centric structures within the transatlantic system may evolve into a more diversified framework. Nevertheless, Canada's deep integration into the US economy, alongside Europe's transatlantic security ties, precludes the emergence of a fully independent axis in the short term. Consequently, the true significance of the Canada-EU initiative lies not in the creation of a new bloc, but in the reality that middle powers and traditional US allies have begun actively seeking greater strategic autonomy.

Keywords: Canada, EU, US, Foreign Policy, Strategy

[i] Harvey, Lex, and Hanna Ziady. "Trump Says Canada Becoming 'Associate Member' of EU Could Be a 'Hostile Act.'", *CNN*, https://edition.cnn.com/2026/09/15/americas/canada-mark-carney-eu-trump-hnk, (Date Accessed: 04.10.2026).

[ii] *Ibid.*

[iii] *Ibid.*

[iv] *Ibid.*

[v] *Ibid.*



ANKASAM **PERSPECTIVE**

“Asymmetric Sabotage” Against the Turkic World: “Strategic Prudence” and the “Central Power Paradigm” Against Polemics and Manipulation



Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL

Global power balances are undergoing a historic transformation in which the West is becoming stagnant while the East is rising radically. While this profound transformation is deeply shaking traditional structures of hegemony, it is also bringing about the construction of a new global architecture through deliberately manufactured crises and a state of chaos in international relations. The Russia-Ukraine war and the escalating regional conflicts in the Middle East are merely the initial stages of this macro-operation. The objective is to establish global hegemony through instability.

At the very center of this geopolitical storm lies the geopolitics of the Turkic world, which encompasses some of the world’s most strategic underground resources and logistical trade corridors.

Today, the Turkic world stands at an irreversible critical juncture between the risk of becoming an open operational theater and an object of influence struggles among global actors, and the opportunity to become a powerful “Central Actor” capable of changing the course of history. The only way to capitalize on the unique and unparalleled opportunity offered by this geography is to move beyond ambitions, artificial polemics, and narrow interests, and to act with a shared awareness of a common destiny grounded in historical lessons. The Turkic states must unite under a single strategic mind against all forms of external intervention aimed at sabotaging their integration processes, and institutionalize the will for unity, solidarity, and cooperation on the ground.

It is evident that the Turkic world needs a new conceptual framework in order to understand the risks it faces and the potential it possesses under the current circumstances. In this context, it would be useful to approach the process through the following three conceptual lenses:

- **Risk of Asymmetric Sabotage:** Global actors are triggering micro-nationalism and extreme nation-state-centric rhetoric in target geographies in order to undermine emerging integration processes. At a time when even well-established structures such as the EU are showing signs of fragmentation, the emerging Turkic integration process is being forced toward a “stillbirth.”
- **Balancer of Imbalance (Central Actor):** The Turkic world has the potential to become not merely a bridge within the geopolitical space between East and West, but the sole “Central Actor” capable of absorbing global instability and balancing global disequilibrium.

- **Strategic Traps (Thucydides and Pyrrhus):** On the slippery terrain of international relations, short-term gains achieved by actors at enormous cost—“Pyrrhic victories”—may ultimately lead them into the conflict traps set by global powers, namely the “Thucydides Trap.” Regional actors must develop immunity against such traps.

If the Turkic world fails to manage the current process through a common will, the following scenarios will inevitably emerge in the period ahead:

- **Becoming the Stage for a “New Great Game”:** If supply chains, energy corridors (such as the Belt and Road and the Middle Corridor), and strategic underground resources cannot be managed collectively by the Turkic world, they will come under the direct control of global powers, turning the region into an operational theater.
- **A Century-Long Survival Crisis:** Impulsive and unilateral nation-state-centric moves that harm the integration process—and, in this context, the vital interests and objectives of each member state, particularly their national survival—will push regional states toward alternative strategies and toward “compelled balancing” arrangements that are far from desirable. This situation could undoubtedly trigger a fragmentation and survival crisis in the Turkestan and Caucasus regions lasting for at least a century.
- **Total Loss and Destruction:** In an era in which the global system is being reconstructed, acting in a fragmented manner means leaving each individual state vulnerable to global operations. Such a loss could be far more devastating for certain regional countries that possess high geopolitical vulnerability and are undergoing sensitive transitional processes.

Proactive Recommendations for a Solution and Strategic Harmony

At this point, the urgent action plan that the Turkic world should implement in order to break through the global traps and encirclement it faces, both directly and indirectly, and transform itself into a center of attraction, could rest on the following pillars:

- **“Strategic Patience” and the “Doctrine of Prudence”:** Actors must remain calm in the face of provocations, disinformation, threats and pressure, and “tempting promises.” Instead of day-to-day reactions, a mechanism of strategic patience that preserves a long-term vision must be put into operation.
- **“Collective Strategic Mind” and “Integration of National Power”:** In this critical process, full harmony must be established among “policy, strategy, and instruments.” The military, economic, technological, and demographic elements of national power possessed by the states should be coordinated within a common pool in a manner that generates a multiplier effect on a global scale.

Accordingly, Strategic Harmony of Mind should be constructed through the following linear flow: The process begins with the **Policy** phase, which represents a common vision; this vision is then transformed into a feasible action plan and transferred to the **Strategy** phase; finally, it is implemented on the ground through the **Instruments** phase, in which the elements of national power are employed effectively.

Institutional Infrastructure, Diplomacy, and the Media Corridor

a) A Joint Crisis Management and Consultation Mechanism within the OTS

In response to the instantaneous and asymmetric threats generated by the global order of chaos, an **Institutional Consultation and Permanent Crisis Management Center (OTS-KRM)** could be established within the **Organization of Turkic States (OTS)**. This structure should connect the foreign affairs, defense, and intelligence agencies of member states through a secure digital network operating on a continuous 24/7 basis. In the event of a regional border violation, cyberattack, or terrorist threat, the mechanism would proactively activate an **“Early Warning System.”**

In order to prevent impulsive and unilateral nation-state-centric reactions during crises, joint decisions could be placed on a legal foundation through a **“Strategic Coordination Council.”** By preventing members from being pushed toward divergent searches on the “slippery terrain” of relations, this structure would function as a collective shield. Thus, the speed of response to asymmetric operations would be increased, while the common backbone would be protected from being fractured by ambitions and manipulations, thereby institutionalizing a will for joint governance and collective security.

b) Preventive Public Diplomacy Methods Against Global Manipulation

A proactive **Turkic World Media and Communication Doctrine** could be implemented against disinformation and actors seeking to sabotage the process of integration. In this regard, a common data center and an **“AI-Supported Perception Monitoring Unit”** should be established. Manipulative content in the global media should be detected before it spreads on the ground and immediately countered through simultaneous multilingual broadcasting. In gray areas where direct diplomacy becomes blocked, channels of indirect diplomacy should be activated.

Within this framework, a common historical and geopolitical awareness incorporated into national education curricula would make younger generations more resilient against hybrid warfare agents. With regard to global public opinion, themes such as the security of the **“Belt and Corridors”** and the stability of energy supplies should be emphasized in order to communicate that the Turkic world

is a **"Balancer of Imbalance"** and a peaceful **"Central Actor."** Defensive lines must be established on the digital front before perceptions are manipulated.

c) A Concrete Media Action Plan for Global Perception Management

In order to break global manipulation, a **"Common Turkic Media and Digital Broadcasting Platform"** could be established. Within this platform, a **"OTS News Agency"** broadcasting in 12 languages and supported by artificial intelligence could be launched. In the first phase of the action plan, a joint **"Digital Strategy Center"** could be established to counter social media algorithmic manipulation, while young content creators could be supported. In the second phase, a format of joint and simultaneous **"Strategic Agenda"** broadcasts could be implemented across the national channels of member states in order to prevent manipulation during geopolitical moments of rupture.

Furthermore, **"Turkestan Geopolitical Forums"** could be organized on a global scale and disseminated to international public opinion through digital networks in order to activate and mobilize channels of indirect diplomacy and public diplomacy. High-budget documentaries and digital content focusing on the security of energy routes and the Middle Corridor could be broadcast on global live-streaming platforms. In this way, the defensive line could be shifted from reactive denials toward proactive content creation and built around the narrative of the **"Central Actor."**

Historical Responsibility at the Threshold of a Common Destiny

The geopolitics of the Turkic world constitutes such a vital backbone that it cannot be sacrificed to any internal polemic. In this turbulent era, in which global fault lines are shifting, ambitions and artificial tensions must not be allowed to blind strategic judgment. The Turkic states will either become passive objects caught in the vortex of global chaos and hybrid operations, or they will unite around a compass of common strategic wisdom and prudence and consolidate their position as a **"Central Actor"** shaping the multipolar world of the future.

In this regard, the proposed institutionalization of the **"OTS Crisis Management Center," "Preventive Public Diplomacy Doctrine,"** and **"Multilayered Media Action Plan"** represents more than abstract aspirations; these are vital shields that the Turkic world needs to develop against asymmetric threats.

A geography that cannot proactively establish its defensive lines on the digital front, within intelligence-sharing pools, and in the intellectual sphere cannot possibly protect its physical borders and strategic resources. Against micro-nationalist traps and disinformation aimed at undermining integration processes, **"strategic patience"** and the **"indirect diplomacy factor,"** as the strategic intelligence and coordination center of public diplomacy, constitute our greatest safeguards.

In conclusion, remaining standing on this slippery terrain between East and West, preserving the enormous energy and supply advantages at our disposal, and managing the future collectively require unity and solidarity. These are no longer romantic ideals; they are an absolute, inevitable, and historic existential imperative for survival.

The geopolitics and prudence of the Turkic world stand above all forms of polemics and manipulation, regardless of their source or origin.



ANKASAM **PERSPECTIVE**

From Parisian School Desks to a Geopolitical Fault Line: What Are the Streets of Europe Whispering?



Prof. Dr. Mehmet Seyfettin EROL

Europe is once again facing a wave of mass unrest deeply embedded in its historical codes. The protests that began among high school students in France and quickly spread to Belgium are shaking the continent's long-established foundations. At first glance, this wave may appear to be an isolated youth reaction to micro-level educational problems such as overcrowded classrooms, budget cuts, collapsing infrastructure, and rising tuition fees. In reality, however, it points to a massive geopolitical iceberg beneath the surface. For the burning barricades in the metropolises that serve as strongholds of Western liberalism are not merely local protests; they are the tangible manifestations on the streets of a socioeconomic system at an impasse, a crisis of sovereignty, and global power struggles.

As is well known, the process was initially triggered by micro-level dynamics, including austerity cuts in education and a growing sense of hopelessness about the future among younger generations. Yet this spark rapidly converged with macro-geopolitical pressures, such as the enormous costs of the war in Ukraine, mounting pressure on defense budgets, and soaring energy bills resulting from the shift from Russian gas to American LNG. Although not explicitly addressed, the growing social polarization surrounding Gaza and Lebanon is also regarded as a factor that has heightened tensions on the streets in the background. Ultimately, what emerges is a systemic struggle for sovereignty between attempts to sabotage the pursuit of a "Renewed Europe" and "Strategic Autonomy" and the Atlanticist status quo. At this critical historical juncture, as global balances of power are being redistributed, continental Europe finds itself caught between domestic peace and the transatlantic status quo.

This analysis examines in depth the macro-level design underlying the student uprisings, the actors involved, hybrid warfare operations and manipulation, the crisis of integration, and the fault lines that will shape Europe's future.

Beyond Socioeconomic Boundaries: The Intersection of Domestic and Foreign Politics

Interpreting these events solely in terms of declining economic prosperity or under the umbrella of "public austerity measures" would be an incomplete analysis. The domestic political dimension of these events concerns the crisis of legitimacy facing mainstream politics in Europe. As governments become increasingly disconnected from their popular base, they create fertile ground for radical right-wing and radical left-wing movements.

There is a direct link between the European Central Bank's (ECB) interest-rate policies aimed at curbing inflation and the dismantling of public services such as education and healthcare. By keeping interest rates high for an extended period in an effort to contain inflation, the ECB has pushed borrowing costs for member states to unsustainable levels. To service enormous debt burdens and close budget deficits, governments have turned to the areas they consider easiest to sacrifice, implementing radical cutbacks in education, healthcare, and social assistance.

Young people's anger, therefore, manifests itself as a revolt against a structural financial-capital system that is passing its bill directly on to schools and future generations.

On the foreign policy front, the situation leads to a far more striking equation: continental Europe has become a domain for overt intervention and manipulation by external forces and global actors. Two key issues stand out in this context:

- **The European Army and the Yellow Vests Paradox:** In the past, whenever France spoke out forcefully in favor of a "European Army" independent of NATO, it suddenly found itself engulfed in the Yellow Vests crisis and turmoil in the streets. Today, France is once again being drawn into a vortex of chaos along the Paris–Brussels axis at a time when it is challenging the Washington-centered Atlanticist status quo, seeking "Strategic Autonomy," and attempting to pursue a more measured or independent diplomatic course in the Russia–Ukraine war. This sequence of events cannot be explained simply as a coincidence of chronology.
- **An Independent Course Being "Punished":** A European or EU vision that seeks to calibrate its level of engagement in the Russia–Ukraine crisis, places the recognition of a Palestinian state on the table in response to Israel's aggression in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, and pushes for a two-state solution is being pressured by hegemonic centers through the threat of destabilization. Hybrid intervention tools ranging from social media algorithms to the financing of marginal groups on the streets serve as a clear warning to the "Renewed Europe" project and its aspirations for independence.

Hybrid Warfare, Algorithms, and Cyber Disinformation

An examination of the speed at which these protests have spread reveals the influence of digital surveillance technologies and next-generation social media algorithms. Cyber disinformation and social media manipulation have turned organic public reactions into geopolitical weapons. TikTok, X, and Telegram algorithms amplify unverified disinformation and videos of police violence, fueling mass anger. In line with hybrid warfare doctrines, it is alleged that extra-continental actors coordinate through cyber bot farms and exploit existing social fault lines. Artificial intelligence-powered deepfake content and manipulative narratives are used to influence young people on the streets while pushing nation-states into security crises. At the same time, governments are also deploying AI-powered surveillance systems to profile and suppress the masses. While social media creates a hybrid manipulation arena for external actors, it is becoming an authoritarian mechanism of control for nation-states.

Conflicting Interests, Alliances, and Electoral Strategies Among the Actors

This climate of chaos serves the interests of certain actors at both global and local levels:

1. **The Anglo-Saxon/Atlanticist Bloc:** This bloc wants Europe to remain wholly dependent on Washington militarily, economically, and diplomatically; to be left with no alternative to the United States during the energy crisis; and to see defense industry contracts awarded to transatlantic suppliers. Undoubtedly, Europe's inward turn would shelve its claims to strategic autonomy or, at the very least, seriously undermine them for an extended period.
2. **Russia:** A Europe paralyzed by its own domestic problems, coupled with a suspension of financial and military assistance to Ukraine, would strengthen Moscow's geopolitical position. In this respect, the fact that young protesters are chanting slogans such as "Spend budgets on education, not on arms" is particularly significant.
3. **Radical Factions Within the Continent:** Anti-system marginal left-wing groups and far-right parties that consolidate their support by opposing irregular migration are converging, directly or indirectly, along similar lines through hybrid operations conducted by external powers. These groups obtain logistical, media, and financial support from external forces seeking to undermine existing EU structures.

Far-right parties are turning the crisis in the streets and the student demonstrations into strategic political capital ahead of upcoming elections. In France, the National Rally (RN), and in Belgium, Vlaams Belang, are developing populist rhetoric by portraying the protests of left-leaning young people as evidence of "the failure of the existing liberal elites and uncontrolled globalization." By emphasizing security and public order, these parties argue that centrist governments are incapable of maintaining law and order and seek to translate the middle class's distrust of the political establishment into electoral gains. By highlighting vandalism committed by radical left-wing groups, the far right presents itself as the only reliable guarantor of stability and seeks to consolidate its rise across the political spectrum.

Another structural question that must not be overlooked concerns the impact of Europe's shift in energy dependence—from Russian gas to American LNG—on these social costs. Having lost access to cheap Russian gas, suffered industrial contraction, and faced soaring energy costs, Europe has become dependent on American LNG. This has eroded the competitiveness of the European economy, generated a massive budget deficit, and forced governments to cut education spending. The impoverishment experienced by students on the streets is, in essence, a direct consequence of the independence Europe has lost in the energy wars.

Intersecting Fault Lines of the Crisis: Migration and Integration

The mass mobilization achieved by these youth movements is also inextricably linked to Europe's chronic migration policy problems and integration crisis. Young people of second- and third-generation immigrant backgrounds from disadvantaged urban neighborhoods who participate in the protests constitute one of the groups hardest hit by educational inequality and budget cuts. Structural problems such as institutional racism, the formation of ghettos, and exclusion from the labor market are further radicalizing the anger expressed on the streets through the defense of the right to education. When governments' failures in integration policy combine with budgetary restrictions, they deepen these young people's alienation from the system. Student protests, therefore, go beyond academic demands: they reflect the collapse of Europe's promise of multiculturalism and the accumulated structural pressures of marginalized social classes reaching a breaking point in their confrontation with the system.

The Domino Effect: The Potential Spread to Germany and Italy

The likelihood that the unrest developing along the France–Belgium axis will spread to Germany and Italy, the EU's two other major engines, is considerable. Germany already resembles a powder keg ready to explode socially because of budget crises, fears of deindustrialization, and austerity policies. In Berlin, where educational infrastructure is raising alarm and debates over fiscal discipline are shaking the government, the triggering of similar high school boycotts may be only a matter of time.

Italy, meanwhile, is highly vulnerable to this wave because of high youth unemployment, precarious working conditions, and the budget restrictions imposed by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government. University and high school students in major cities such as Rome and Milan see the spark ignited in France as a source of inspiration for their own struggles to defend their rights. Economic contraction and the dismantling of the welfare state are making this domino effect increasingly difficult to avoid.

How Valid Is the Comparison with the Revolutions of 1848?

The tendency of street movements to spread across European metropolises brings to mind the "Springtime of the Peoples" revolutions of 1848. The two historical periods can be compared along several dimensions.

First, the main driving forces behind the Revolutions of 1848 were industrialization, opposition to absolutism, nationalism, and hunger. In contemporary Europe, by contrast, the dominant factors are post-industrial decline, the welfare-state crisis, and growing insecurity. In terms of how unrest spreads, the waves of 1848 took months to travel through word of mouth and the limited press of the period. Today, by contrast, social media networks and cyber manipulation can carry unrest across national borders within a single day. Finally, in terms of objectives, the Revolutions of 1848 sought to overthrow the old order and establish nation-states, whereas contemporary movements aim to protect public rights against the global oligarchy and overthrow existing elites.

It is therefore sociologically valid, to a certain extent, to draw parallels between these events and 1848, since in both periods the existing system had become incapable of meeting the demands of a new generation. The difference today, however, is that the streets have been turned into a hybrid front in proxy wars. Whereas 1848 represented an organic uprising from the grassroots upward, current developments carry the risk that organic discontent may be manipulated by inorganic actors.

Scenarios on the Horizon and the Future of Strategic Autonomy

These developments will profoundly shake the EU's ambitions to assert itself on the global stage. In this context, the concept of "Strategic Autonomy," which symbolizes Europe's aspiration to become a global actor, faces the risk of being shelved altogether in light of these domestic upheavals and geopolitical assessments. Reports from Brussels-based think tanks clearly indicate that Europe cannot become an independent pole in global power competition if it is unable to maintain internal stability and its budget is repeatedly shaken by street unrest.

As member states are forced to increase security spending, they lose public support by cutting social budgets. Yet when they spend money to pacify the streets, they are compelled to compromise on their defense ambitions. Paris and Brussels may have to postpone investments in defense and energy independence in order to restore domestic stability. This would prevent the vision of strategic autonomy from progressing beyond an intellectual aspiration and force the continent to seek shelter once again almost entirely under the Atlantic umbrella.

Against this backdrop, two major scenarios appear likely to emerge in the period ahead:

- **Scenario A: Retreat and Satellite Status.** Unable to withstand pressure from the streets, artificially engineered hybrid destabilization, and economic attrition, European leaders abandon their claims to independence. A "satellite Europe" is fashioned: a continent that has surrendered entirely to the Atlanticist line on foreign policy issues such as Gaza, the Middle East, and Russia; adopted hard-line security policies at home to suppress protests; and lost its global vision.
- **Scenario B: Polarized Radicalism and Collapse.** As states restrict freedoms in an attempt to suppress street demonstrations, the myth of liberal democracy collapses. This accelerates the far right's march toward power by allowing it to capitalize on the security concerns generated by unrest. The result is a compliant and fragmented union that has completely lost its strategic autonomy, rebuilt its internal borders, and abandoned its geopolitical ambitions.

Conclusion: Europe in the Global Design Laboratory

Ultimately, the burning rubbish containers and rising barricades in the streets of France and Belgium do not merely express superficial anger over local budget cuts. This upheaval represents a hybrid geopolitical price being exacted by Atlanticist centers seeking to impose a unipolar direction on the global system and enforce their hegemonic interests on the Paris–Brussels axis as it pursues independence in foreign policy and strategic autonomy.

Continental Europe must either overcome this mass, organic rupture—which sociologically evokes the spirit of 1848—through far-reaching socioeconomic restoration, returning to its distinctive welfare-state model and an independent foreign policy, or risk becoming a passive territory fragmented within a hybrid design laboratory fueled by the cyber disinformation networks of external powers.

Time is running out for Europe's visionless centrist elites, who are sacrificing education, deepening the integration crisis by pushing young people into ghettos, and surrendering the continent's geopolitical future to cyber manipulation. With other major European economies, including Germany and Italy, increasingly within the reach of this domino effect, the crisis has become a shared existential challenge for the entire continent.

The cry of revolt rising from Europe's streets is the clearest harbinger of the great, inevitable historical and strategic struggle over the future of civilization: whether Europe will meekly accept the constraints of submission imposed by global hegemonic powers or determine its own destiny through its free will. The continent will either shake off and break these insidious chains of tutelage once and for all, or remain condemned to become a marginal neighborhood on the periphery of the global system.



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

School Attacks: Children's Anger or a Warning of a Social Crisis?

Dr. Defne YILMAZ

In recent years, the rising incidence of violence in schools around the world points to a social problem that goes beyond the safety of children and youth. According to a recent report published in the United States (US), 46 attacks in and around schools during 2026 alone resulted in 31 fatalities.[i] The majority of those who died were students, including children. In Europe, on the other hand, students' anger, anxiety, and concerns are now spilling outside of school. In early October 2026 in France, during protests that began over resource shortages, teacher deficits, and overcrowded classrooms in the education system, students from high schools to universities have begun exhibiting violence and being subjected to violence.[ii]

Explaining such incidents—which have also started to be seen in our country in recent years—with labels such as a temporary reaction of a specific generation, the behavior of angry adolescents, economic entrapment, or the influence of social media means reducing a multi-causal phenomenon to a single cause and moving away from the true dimensions of the situation. ***To understand school attacks, rather than focusing on the "perpetrators," it is necessary to examine the network of relationships that makes violence possible.*** However, understanding why children and youth turn to violence does not mean condoning violence; rather, it is investigating which relationships, institutions, and social conditions fell short and what needs to be done.

Not "Generation Z," but Bonds Between Generations are in Crisis

The frequently voiced rhetoric of the "problematic Generation Z" after school attacks is labeling that ignores the institutional responsibilities of adults. Adolescence is a period during which physical changes, the search for identity, the need for belonging, impulse control, peer relationships, and future life expectations develop intensely. ***These characteristics do not inherently bring about aggression. In the emergence of violence, alongside individual sensitivities, family relationships, peer bullying, exclusion, exposure to violence, access to weapons, and social conditions play roles together.***

An important concept here is **"invisible exclusion"**: a child's not being seen or listened to, despite being present at school or within the family, and not being able to feel like a meaningful member of a community. The perception of failure, humiliation, loneliness, or injustice can accumulate and fuel anger. However, not every excluded child turns to violence; aggression must be evaluated within the interaction of specific risks and protective factors.

Incidents extending from high schools to middle schools require us not to collectively declare age groups or at-risk children and youth dangerous, but rather to examine peer, family, and societal bullying starting at earlier ages, skills in expressing emotions, trust in adults, and the effectiveness of support resources for the child.

Violence Has No Single Cause or Culprit: Economy, Digital World, and Substance Use

Economic inequality, anxiety about the future, precarity, and differences in families' access to resources narrow children's developmental opportunities. Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate support services, and an educational approach that reduces success to exam results can also weaken some students' sense of belonging. However, poverty is not a direct cause of aggression; the fact that children growing up in similar conditions follow different paths demonstrates the importance of protective relationships.

Digital environments add a new layer to this picture. The turning of violence into a spectacle, the heroization of aggressive figures, cyberbullying, and the rapid spread of misinformation can influence the behaviors and perceptions of violence of some youth. It is also possible for online conflicts among peers to spill over into school corridors. Nonetheless, screen time or a single game cannot be considered the cause of violence on its own. As recommended by the World Health Organization (2019), preventing online violence requires addressing digital safety alongside peer relationships, family involvement, and school-based work.[iii]

The transformation of digital use into a loss of control can be seen alongside issues such as difficulties in cognitive functions, impairment in sleep and functionality, isolation, and impulsivity. The use of alcohol and other substances also negatively affects decision-making skills and impulse control. However, there is no direct cause-and-effect relationship between addictions and aggression. Every child must be evaluated within their individual and environmental context.

The Disconnection Among Family, School, and Society

The presence of secure and affection-inspiring bonds, consistent boundaries, and healthy role models in the family is a protective factor. Yet, holding the family solely responsible is not a solution either. Parents' ways of coping with economic and psychological burdens, long working hours, relationships with the screen and digital world, or their own experiences of violence affect their relationship with the child. Healthy authority should not be about intimidation; it should involve behaviors that can protect the relationship and the child while setting boundaries.

School, on the other hand, should not be merely an institution that transfers knowledge, but one where the child learns to be accepted, to express themselves within relationships, and to experience a sense of justice. Teachers' skills in recognizing signs of violence from the perspectives of both the aggressor and the victim, intervening appropriately and necessarily against bullying, and guiding students without stigmatizing them are important. In this context, it should not be overlooked that school psychological counselors have obligations under both professional ethics and legal terms to know, monitor, provide psychological support to the child, and—when necessary—work together with security and health organizations to support the healthy development of children.

Regarding this issue, which is becoming widespread globally and affecting the future and security of both youth and society, the measures of the Ministry of National Education are also on the agenda in Turkey. Regulations concerning psychological counseling and guidance services in educational institutions are based on developmental and preventive services, as well as student-family-teacher cooperation.[iv] School mental health specialists play a role in early recognition and prevention, psychosocial support, and post-crisis recovery; community mental health and child-adolescent mental health specialists play a role in clinical evaluation and treatment when necessary. ***Specifically regarding school attacks, an approach that takes threats seriously, yet does not declare every angry or withdrawn child a potential aggressor, is required.*** A psychological counselor cannot keep every child under constant individual surveillance through interviews and programs they will conduct, nor is it possible for them to heal a child alone. ***Against risk signs, the school, family, and relevant mental health, social, and security service units must act in coordination.*** Consequently, the conditions necessary for school counselors to effectively monitor children come to the agenda. The number of "competent" school psychological counselors per student, responsibilities toward the child and the boundaries of confidentiality, active family participation, referral mechanisms, and access to specialists must be examined together.

Is a Security Guard Enough? International Impacts and National Policies

It is assumed that security guards, controlled entrances, reduced access to weapons and cutting tools, emergency plans, and rapid intervention in schools can lower the risk of loss of life. However, such preparations directed toward the approach of a potential attack cannot single-handedly solve the exclusion, threat, or accumulated conflict that brought the child to this point before the attack. ***The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) also treats school violence as an area that requires evaluating individual, relational, social, and structural risks together.[v]***

News of attacks in the US and Europe, shares in digital communities, and content glorifying violence can influence the models encountered by youth in Turkey. However, there is no situation where direct external political intervention or the policies of a specific country cause these attacks. ***Global polarization, the perception of impunity, hardening in public language, and the reflections of violence becoming ordinary and going unpunished in daily community life are factors worth researching.*** Politics' responsibility is to evaluate systematic data, audit institutions, and guarantee children's rights without causing institutions to mutually blame one another.

What Should Change, What Awaits Us?

The publication of regular, comparable national data for school attacks and bullying can be seen as a fundamental step. Within this scope, the role of pre-incident warnings, family and school interventions, access to weapons, and the social environment should be examined independently. Concrete practices regarding the unacceptability of bullying in schools, student participation, family trainings, and functional specialist support should gain continuity. Alongside rapid and fair investigations, the law must ensure the protection of victims and interventions appropriate to the developmental needs of children.

Otherwise, the most objectionable things happen: demands for more security measures, harsher punishments, and more intensive surveillance targeting children and youth increase. Moreover, in the child and adolescent who cannot be understood, cannot feel loved, does not witness compassion, is not taught self-control while being spoiled, and cannot express themselves, fear, stigmatization, anger, hatred, and alienation from school also deepen. The functional option is to sustain security and freedom through a relationship of trust, rather than viewing them as opposing poles.

Therefore, the following questions must also be asked: Who remains invisible at school? Do students find a reliable adult to turn to when they are wronged? Why do children reporting threats of violence feel afraid, and how does the process work in practice following the report? Do institutions record and monitor warnings? How do they monitor them? How competent are the practitioners on the ground? Does children's access to mental health support vary according to economic income? Does news of violence unintentionally heroize the aggressor? Is family culture protective of the child against violence in the screen and virtual world? Do institutional support resources responsible for the child take protective actions in the face of violence witnessed or experienced within the family?

Conclusion

The phenomenon of school-related violence is an obstacle before children's and adolescents' rights to education, health, and well-being. As long as students face violence at school, inclusive and equal-quality education cannot be achieved in any country. [vi]***School attacks test not only problems specific to children and adolescents, but actually the quality of the relationship that society establishes with children. They require questioning a multi-layered structure extending from the family to the school, and from social relationships to public policies.***

The prevention of violence requires meeting children's needs for belonging, security, justice, and being understood; supporting families; strengthening educators and school psychological counselors; and facilitating access to mental health services. ***Security measures are important, of course; however, no practice that fails to change the conditions growing children up amidst violence is sufficient on its own.*** Taking early warnings into account, evaluating threats of violence seriously, and supporting children without stigmatization must form the basis of the protective approach.

A society that can notice children's silence, anger, and calls for help in a timely manner can produce preventive, fair, and applicable solutions by going beyond punishment in the fight against violence. All factors—from digital risks to social inequalities, and from institutional negligences to discourses that trivialize violence—must be evaluated together. The ultimate goal is to establish a system that protects children and strengthens inter-institutional cooperation.

Because protecting children is protecting the future!

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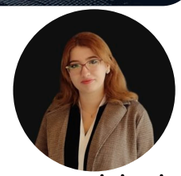
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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

From School Protests to a Crisis of Political Legitimacy in France



Sena BİRİNCİ

Student protests that began in response to problems within France's education system have quickly evolved into a broader social movement bringing together debates over economic inequality, the quality of public services, and political representation. Demonstrations held across the country in October 2026 have drawn not only students but also trade unions, public-sector employees, and various social groups affected by the cost of living. Violent incidents at some demonstrations, attacks on public buildings, and police interventions have also brought the security dimension of the crisis to the forefront.[i] However, assessing these developments solely in terms of the breakdown of public order would mean overlooking the political and social dynamics underlying the protests. The central issue is how discontent that first became visible in the education sector has evolved into a broader debate over political legitimacy.

The protests initially stemmed from teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate educational conditions, particularly in high schools in the working-class suburbs of Paris. As demonstrations that began in September spread to other cities, students' demands became increasingly linked to the quality of public services and young people's expectations for the future. The continuation of the protests while France's National Assembly debated the 2027 budget on 13 October 2026 demonstrated that the issue extended beyond education policy alone.[ii] Despite the government's announcements of increased funding for education and measures to address teacher shortages, the continuation of the protests points to a mismatch between the measures adopted and public expectations.

Education occupies a particularly important place in France's political identity. In the French republican tradition, founded on the principles of republicanism, secularism, and equal opportunity, public education is regarded as one of the fundamental instruments of social integration. Consequently, disparities in the resources available to different schools can be seen not merely as an administrative shortcoming, but as an issue that calls into question the Republic's commitment to equality. As young people's belief in their ability to improve their social position through education weakens, opposition to education policies can develop into a broader critique of the system.

The expansion of the movement has also been influenced by the convergence of student demands with the economic and political grievances expressed by the Yellow Vest movement, which emerged in 2018. Initially centred on fuel taxes and the cost of living, the movement gradually became a symbol of demands for fairer income distribution, economic justice, and greater participation in decision-making processes. The convergence of students, trade unions, and Yellow Vest supporters during the October 2026 demonstrations has brought accumulated social discontent back into the spotlight.[iii]

Although these different groups do not share identical demands, their concerns converge on the question of how the state allocates its resources and which segments of society it prioritises. Students focus on educational conditions, public-sector employees on wages and working conditions, and other groups on purchasing power. The expansion of the protests is therefore linked not so much to the widespread

adoption of a single demand as to the perception among different groups that they are inadequately represented within the existing economic and political order.

Debates surrounding the 2027 budget have also played a decisive role in turning this discontent into a political crisis. Spending cuts proposed as part of efforts to reduce the public deficit and ensure fiscal sustainability have heightened concerns about the funding of public services. While fiscal discipline remains a priority for the government, citizens may view these policies through the lens of the risk that their living conditions will deteriorate further.[iv] Thus, the tension between the technical rationale behind economic policies and their social consequences has become central to the debate over political legitimacy.

The fragmented political landscape that emerged in France following the 2024 parliamentary elections has further complicated this process. The failure of any political bloc to secure an outright majority has made it more difficult to reach consensus on the budget and public policy. Under these circumstances, street protests have become a means not only of opposing specific decisions but also of questioning the ability of political actors to represent societal demands. Even when democratic institutions remain intact, citizens' loss of faith in their ability to achieve tangible outcomes through these institutions can deepen the crisis of political representation.

The violent incidents that occurred during the demonstrations have brought the security approach to the centre of the debate. Attacks on public buildings and clashes between police and demonstrators have raised questions about the state's responsibility to maintain public order. However, it would be inaccurate to place all those participating in the protests in the same category as those involved in violent incidents. The state's approach to the demonstrations is important not only in terms of security but also for the protection of democratic rights. Treating the protests solely as a problem to be controlled may push the underlying economic and social causes into the background. It is therefore necessary to strike a balance between maintaining public order and safeguarding the right to demonstrate.

These developments are also significant in the context of the rise of the far right. Marine Le Pen's acknowledgment of public discontent while arguing that the movement is being driven by the far left demonstrates how different political actors interpret the crisis in line with their own narratives.[v] Perceptions of economic insecurity and disorder can create new opportunities for political actors who mobilise support around immigration and identity. US President Donald Trump's linking of the protests in France to immigration also illustrates how demonstrations can be reframed within international political discourse.[vi] Thus, a movement initially driven by concerns over education, the budget, and the cost of living can also become part of broader debates over national identity and immigration.

The main risk here is that economic and institutional problems may be explained through accusations directed at specific social groups, such as immigrants. Such an approach can push structural issues, including resource allocation, the quality of public services, and political representation, into the background. Nevertheless, it would also be premature to regard the future political consequences of the protests as predetermined. Which actors ultimately come to represent public discontent will depend on how the crisis is managed and the extent to which political parties can respond to societal demands.

The transformation of school protests in France into a broader political crisis cannot be explained solely by shortcomings in the education system or violent incidents on the streets. These developments reflect the simultaneous erosion of economic security, expectations regarding public services, and trust in mechanisms of political representation. The convergence of students' demands with those of the Yellow Vest movement and trade unions demonstrates how different segments of society can frame their grievances within a shared debate over justice and representation. The tension between the government's priorities regarding fiscal discipline and public order and citizens' expectations for social protection and participation further complicates efforts to resolve the crisis.

These developments are also significant for European politics beyond France. In contexts where economic problems evolve into a crisis of political representation, the far right may find opportunities to channel public discontent in line with its own political narrative. However, this outcome is not inevitable. The decisive factor is the ability of democratic institutions to respond to societal demands and restore public confidence that citizens can participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. The central issue highlighted by developments in France is not simply whether the state can restore order, but also the extent to which it can address expectations of justice and representation that underpin social cohesion. A lasting solution requires addressing the conditions that gave rise to the protests, as well as preventing violence on the streets.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The New Center of Gravity of Catholicism: "Africa"



Göktuğ ÇALIŞKAN

The Catholic world has long been searching for a new direction. Data released by the Vatican on October 16 2026, has now clearly demonstrated this shift. According to the data, the number of Catholics in Africa has reached 288.312.000, while the number in Europe has remained at 287.240.000. Thus, Africa has surpassed Europe in the latest statistics.[i]Even though the difference may still seem small, a strong indication has emerged of the direction in which Catholicism's human resources, its daily vitality, and its expectations for the future are heading.

This change is an outcome of steady growth in Africa rather than a sudden decline in the Catholic presence in Europe. While the global Catholic population increased to 1.422 billion, 7.58 million of that annual increase occurred in Africa.[ii]A numerical growth has also been recorded in Europe. However, the aging population, low birth rates and declining church persistence are reducing the continent's share of the global total. In Africa, however, the young population, strong family ties, and the social weight of community life provide a broader foundation that fuels growth.

Demographic superiority has also begun to be reciprocated in the capacity to train clergy. Africa has been the only continent to see the increase in the number of students at major seminaries, reaching a total of 35.710 students. While the number of priests in Africa increased by 1.676, it decreased by 2.483 in Europe.[iii] Nevertheless, the pastoral burden is extremely heavy. Since, in Africa, there is one nun for every 5.000 Catholics, whereas in Europe, that number is around 1.800. Consequently, while growth brings vitality to the Church, it also creates pressures in terms of education, organization, and human resources.

The strength of African Catholicism is not limited to the crowds attending Mass. Church-run schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations directly impact the daily lives of communities in many regions where the government services fall short. According to current statistics, Africa ranks first with more than 21 million students attending Catholic elementary schools, while it also leads other continents in the number of hospitals and clinics.[iv] This widespread network transforms the Church from a religious institution into a local actor that provides education, healthcare, and social welfare.

Nevertheless, the fact that numbers are coming to the fore does not mean that decision-making power has automatically shifted to Africa. Administrative structures in Rome, financial resources, major theological centers, and a significant part of international Catholic organizations are still concentrated in Europe and North America. As the distance between where the faithful are growing in number and where institutional decisions are made widens, the debate over representation will deepen. While the increased

visibility of African bishops may help reduce this gap, their actual influence will be measured by their ability to have a say in appointments, budget allocations, and doctrinal debates.

It is also important to take into consideration the continent's significant internal differences. In countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, and Uganda, Catholicism is rooted in a broad social base, while in Algeria, Morocco, or Somalia, it is present through small communities. It is easy to describe a region where French, English, Portuguese, and hundreds of local languages are spoken using the single term "African Church," but this term can conceal different histories, political conditions, and religious traditions. The new center of gravity is a broad area seeking common ground amid diversity, rather than a monolithic bloc.

This diversity is apparent in the relationship between belief and local cultures. In African religious ceremonies, music, dance, storytelling, and a strong sense of community are prominent; however, the question of how local traditions can be integrated with Catholic doctrine gives rise to different debates in each country. The Church will endure to the extent that it preserves its universal character while remaining connected to the daily experiences of Africans. Simply replicating patterns imported from outside may push younger generations away, while the excessive sanctification of local culture may weaken the common language of faith.

Urbanization further complicates this balance. In rapidly growing cities such as Lagos, Kinshasa, Nairobi, and Luanda, people are breaking away from the familiar relationships of their rural communities and entering a more dynamic and competitive religious environment. Pentecostal churches, independent preachers, and digital platforms offer young people quick answers, a strong sense of belonging, and narratives of personal success. The Catholic Church's deeply rooted institutional structure is a significant advantage, but a language that fails to address youth concerns about unemployment, migration, housing, and identity may erode that advantage over time.

The financial structure is also one of the key headings that will determine the future of growth. As congregations in Europe shrink, it may become increasingly difficult for dioceses in Africa to continue relying on external donations to the same extent for an extended period. Developing local sources of income, transparently tracking expenditures, and involving congregations in financial responsibility will strengthen institutional independence. The aim here is not so much to turn the Church into a commercial enterprise as it is to ensure that schools, clinics, seminaries, and charitable activities can remain viable in the face of economic fluctuations. In the absence of financial independence, demographic size may not carry the expected weight in decision-making processes.

Catholic institutions in Africa find themselves in a sensitive position regarding politics. In some countries, bishops are among the voices the public listens to most closely on issues such as the integrity of elections, corruption, violence, and the distribution of natural resources. This position can contribute to peace talks and social reconciliation, but becoming too deeply involved in power struggles could damage the Church's credibility among different segments of society.

Discussions in the field of teaching will be more Africa-centric in the coming period. On issues such as the family, sexuality, the role of women within the Church, the climate crisis, migration, and poverty, African clergy are developing a more open language rooted in the experiences within their own communities. This approach may at times clash with trends in Europe, but the tension in question is a natural consequence of Catholicism's global nature. The important thing is not to suppress these differences through silence or to turn them into claims of cultural superiority, but rather to bring them into serious dialogue within the bounds of the common doctrine.

The center of gravity of Catholicism has shifted to Africa, yet this shift marks the beginning of a long transformation more than a complete handover. While the population, the pool of clergy candidates, and the social service network are paving the way for a strong future on the continent, representation, funding, and the development of new ideas have not yet kept pace. When the Church in Africa preserves its diversity and strengthens its local human resources, it will move beyond being a community growing on the periphery of Rome to become one of the key actors shaping the global direction of Catholicism. The coming period will show whether these numbers can be translated into institutional and intellectual clout.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

EU-Ukraine Cybersecurity Cooperation: A Multi-Actor Security Architecture in Europe



Başak ERTUNÇ

The Fifth Cyber Dialogue between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine, held in Brussels on 9 October 2026, highlighted the growing strategic importance of cyber cooperation within Europe's evolving security architecture. During the talks, an administrative arrangement was signed between CERT-EU, which is responsible for the cybersecurity of EU institutions, and Ukraine's State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP). The arrangement aims to enhance information sharing between CERT-EU and CERT-UA, Ukraine's computer emergency response team.[i] The dialogue also addressed cyber defence, crisis management, private-sector partnerships, and alignment with European cybersecurity standards. These developments indicate that Ukraine's ties with the European security architecture are deepening at both the institutional and operational levels.

The Russia-Ukraine War has made cybersecurity a key component of Europe's shared threat perception. Attacks targeting energy infrastructure, public services, and communication systems have demonstrated that cyber operations can serve as a complement to military operations while directly affecting the continuity of civilian life. Under these circumstances, cyber resilience involves not only preventing attacks but also maintaining essential services and restoring systems to operational capacity. The threats facing Ukraine are also significant in terms of European countries' preparedness for similar attacks. Therefore, cyber support provided to Kyiv is linked not only to meeting Ukraine's defence needs but also to strengthening Europe's collective security capacity.

The foundations of institutional rapprochement between the EU and Ukraine were laid during the early years of the war. In November 2023, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) signed a working arrangement with Ukraine's National Cybersecurity Coordination Center and the State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection (SSSCIP) aimed at capacity-building, sharing best practices, and enhancing joint threat awareness.[ii]

The new arrangement in October 2026 focuses specifically on information exchange between CERT-EU and CERT-UA, the teams directly responsible for responding to cyber incidents. This broadens cooperation from general capacity-building objectives towards direct operational coordination. However, the mechanism does not imply that the two parties' cybersecurity systems are being integrated into a single institutional structure.

One of the notable milestones in this rapprochement was the Council of the EU's approval, on 15 June 2026, of Ukraine's access to support from the EU Cybersecurity Reserve. Decision 2026/1354 established the legal basis for Ukraine to benefit from the incident response services provided under the reserve when addressing large-scale cyber incidents.[iii] The reserve, operated by ENISA, incorporates the expertise of trusted private-sector providers into cyber crisis response and recovery processes. This extends Europe's cybersecurity capacity beyond the existing capabilities of public institutions. Ukraine's access to this mechanism is a concrete example of functional integration, enabling the country to benefit from certain European security instruments before EU membership is achieved.

The relationships that European technology companies have developed with Ukraine highlight the private-sector dimension of this transformation. In October 2025, Finland-based WithSecure signed a memorandum of understanding with Ukraine's Ministry of Economy aimed at strengthening cyber resilience. The agreement covers the testing of security solutions, pilot projects, knowledge sharing, and technical support.[iv] Slovakia-based ESET, meanwhile, worked with CERT-UA to investigate the Industroyer2 attack targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure in April 2022.[v] These examples illustrate different forms of cooperation: the former represents an institutional partnership focused on technology development and capacity sharing, while the latter demonstrates operational coordination in response to an actual cyberattack.

The role of the private sector is also evident in international support efforts carried out through the Tallinn Mechanism. Established in 2023 to strengthen Ukraine's civilian cybersecurity capacity, the mechanism had secured commitments totalling €302.6 million as of March 2026.[vi]

In the same year, new participation opportunities were developed to facilitate cooperation between private companies and donor countries. In March 2026, the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV) also signed framework agreements with twelve companies from seven countries for cybersecurity projects.[vii] Although these agreements do not indicate that specific projects have been completed, they demonstrate that the private sector is assuming an increasingly systematic role in the implementation of international cyber assistance.

These developments are strengthening the multi-actor governance of cybersecurity. Whereas traditional security approaches assess defence capacity largely in terms of state institutions and military structures, expertise, infrastructure, and response capabilities in cyberspace are distributed among a wider range of actors. While EU institutions establish the regulatory and financial framework, private companies provide technical expertise and services. Ukraine, meanwhile, occupies a central position in identifying operational needs and developing defence practices. Security capacity is shaped by the coordination among these actors. However, growing reliance on private service providers may also create new challenges in terms of data security and accountability.

Ukraine's position within this ecosystem makes it difficult to view the relationship as a one-way assistance mechanism. Having faced Russian cyber operations for many years, Ukrainian institutions have gained considerable experience in threat detection, critical infrastructure protection, and service restoration following attacks. The joint work of ESET and CERT-UA on the Industroyer2 attack demonstrates how the expertise of different actors can be brought together in operational processes. Ukraine's experience can serve as a source of knowledge for European institutions and technology companies in developing response methods to address shared threats. Cooperation should therefore not be understood as a one-way process in which the EU transfers technical capacity to Ukraine. However, institutionalising mutual learning depends on the sharing of operational information, the development of trust between the parties, and the continuity of joint practices.

This process is also linked to Ukraine's EU membership perspective. The Fifth Cyber Dialogue addressed regulatory frameworks such as the Network and Information Systems Security Directive (NIS2), the Cyber Resilience Act, and the 5G Cybersecurity Toolbox. Ukraine's alignment with European standards could contribute to the development of common rules for protecting digital infrastructure. However, the strategic significance of the current cooperation lies in the fact that regulatory convergence is being supported by operational mechanisms. In this respect, Ukraine's integration into the European security architecture can deepen in specific areas independently of progress in its accession negotiations. Cybersecurity is therefore one of the key areas in which Ukraine's functional integration with the EU is advancing ahead of membership.

The limits of this rapprochement should also not be overlooked. Access to the EU Cybersecurity Reserve does not mean that Ukraine has unconditional access to all European cybersecurity mechanisms. Similarly, the scope of agreements signed with private companies should be assessed in terms of their practical implementation and the results achieved. Differences in responsibilities between civilian cyber resilience and military cyber defence may also complicate institutional coordination. Therefore, the effectiveness of Europe's multi-actor cybersecurity framework depends less on the number of mechanisms established than on their ability to operate together during crises.

In conclusion, the Fifth EU-Ukraine Cyber Dialogue is a recent indicator of the broader transformation underway in Europe's security architecture. The developing relationships among EU institutions, Ukraine's cybersecurity structures, and European technology companies demonstrate that security capacity is being built within a multi-actor framework. The experience Ukraine has gained under wartime conditions holds significant potential for the future development of this framework. However, lasting security integration requires technical cooperation to be underpinned by institutional trust, common standards, and sustainable response capabilities. The future of Europe's cyber resilience will depend on the extent to which these different actors can bring together their knowledge and resources in pursuit of shared security objectives.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

Commercial Geopolitics on the Rise in Central Asia



Göktuğ ÇALIŞKAN

The visit of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio to Samarkand on October 19, 2026, accompanied by a large business delegation, signals a distinct new shift in Washington's approach to Central Asia.[i] At the center of the visit were corporations, investment opportunities, and supply chains rather than military bases or high-pitched political demands. The fact that Rubio was accompanied by more than 200 American business leaders demonstrates that this transformation goes far beyond an ordinary diplomatic visit. The region is transitioning from a distant geography remembered only when crises erupt into a core component of economic security calculations.

The business program in Samarkand clearly illustrated the scale of this approach. More than 100 American companies, 100 companies from other Central Asian nations, and 200 businesses from Uzbekistan participated in the meetings, with discussions spanning six sectors ranging from digital technologies and mining to energy and transportation.[ii] As state diplomacy and commercial engagement converged in the same hall, foreign policy evolved from abstract expressions of partnership into a pursuit of concrete projects. Washington's message is quite clear: the U.S. is returning to the region with its companies' capital, technology, and market connections.

This state of affairs makes the concept of "commercial geopolitics" much more meaningful. Today, influence is not always established through military presence. After all, the financing of a railway, the technology of a mineral processing facility, or a digital payment infrastructure can also shape the long-term orientation of countries. Along with investments, companies carry technical standards, legal systems, and supply relationships. Therefore, a commercial agreement signed in Samarkand can produce political consequences that determine which market the region will integrate into and under what rules it will manufacture goods.

The C5+1 format was launched at the ministerial level in Samarkand back in 2015. Over the past decade, while security and cross-border threats stood at the forefront, today's agenda has acquired a broader economic content. The latest joint communique addressed the development of the Trans-Caspian Trade Corridor, the harmonization of customs procedures, the boost of intra-regional trade, and the extraction and domestic processing of critical minerals in Central Asia altogether.[iii] This choice suggests that Washington has begun viewing the five countries as a unified economic space that gains value when interconnected.

Critical minerals constitute the most strategic dimension of this renewed interest. Kazakhstan's uranium, Uzbekistan's gold and copper capacity, and the rich reserves of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are becoming increasingly vital for the energy transition and the defense industry. In contrast, the regional countries are skeptical of the old model of extracting raw ores and shipping them abroad.

The true gain will emerge when minerals are processed in local facilities and transformed into industrial inputs. The enduring footprint of American companies also depends on their concrete commitments regarding local processing, vocational training, and technology transfer.

It has been reported that the 54 trade, investment, and technology agreements announced between Uzbekistan and the U.S. will reach $12 billion if implemented.[iv] The package covers a wide spectrum from the localization of railway equipment and aircraft engines to mining, finance, and satellite communications. While these figures are quite impressive, their tangible benefits will only be seen when put into practice. Without financing or the resolution of administrative hurdles, a letter of intent does not transform into a factory. The success of Samarkand can be measured two or three years later through operational facilities, newly created employment areas, and increased export capacity.

The transportation issue remains the weak link of this commercial opening. Lacking direct access to the sea, Central Asia depends on the infrastructure of its neighbors to reach major markets. The Trans-Caspian route offers an alternative corridor stretching from Kazakhstan to the Caspian Sea, and onward to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Europe. However, connecting American investments regularly to the global market will be difficult unless port capacities, railcar compatibility, customs delays, and transport costs are resolved. Establishing an integration among mining agreements and railway, port, warehousing, and insurance projects will constitute the true test of commercial geopolitics.

Washington will not encounter a complete vacuum in the field. This is because China has already established a strong economic network in the region through credit, infrastructure, and trade routes, while Russia maintains its influence through language, migration, energy lines, and security institutions. Interpreting the arrival of the U.S. as a move to push these two actors out of the region would be inaccurate. Capitals also do not wish to substitute one partner for another. What is sought is a multi-directional order of relations that reduces dependency on a single center and expands the scope for negotiation. American companies will gain acceptance to the extent that they add a new option to this balance.

The primary opportunity lies in the ability to tie great power competition to development goals. Uzbekistan aims to become a production and logistics hub, Kazakhstan targets combining its mineral wealth with advanced industry, and smaller economies aim to benefit from transportation connections. If each country enters a separate race through tax breaks and cheap raw materials to attract investors, external companies may profit while the regional value chain weakens. By developing common standards, ease of transit, and complementary industrial investments, the bargaining power of the five countries can be enhanced.

Commercial geopolitics carries risks as well as its bright side. If mining and infrastructure projects are not managed through transparent contracts, public revenues may concentrate within a narrow circle; facilities consuming heavy water and energy can trigger local tensions. Furthermore, the heavy reliance of American financing on political conditions, sanction regimes, or shifts in Washington's administration may impact the continuity of projects. Regional governments account not only for the source of capital, but also for what the contract contributes to local production, employment, and know-how. A lasting partnership demands a reliable and predictable business environment beyond big figures.

For the U.S., the fundamental issue is continuity. In the past, Washington approached Central Asia through the lens of Afghanistan, counter-terrorism, or competition with Russia and China, reducing its engagement when the agenda shifted. The entry of corporations into the field can curb this volatility, as a factory, railway equipment, or financial partnership builds a relationship spanning years. Still, the private sector cannot ensure political continuity on its own. Without credit guarantees, diplomatic follow-up, regular C5+1 meetings, and an approach respectful of the region's priorities, the initial enthusiasm could quickly fade away.

The Samarkand gathering demonstrates that the era of viewing Central Asia as a passive transit arena is left behind. Utilizing their resources, transport locations, and young populations, regional countries are becoming more selective among external partners. The return of Washington via corporations has opened a new channel; yet, the transformation of this channel into lasting influence depends more on the quality of investment than on trade volume. If projects that expand local production, interconnect trade routes, and strengthen regional cooperation come to life, Samarkand can be counted as the dawn of a new era. Otherwise, high figures will remain nothing more than a flashy yet short-lived stage of commercial geopolitics.

[i] "Rubio Seeks to Expand Central Asia Ties with Pomp-Filled Uzbekistan Visit", *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rubio-seeks-expand-central-asia-ties-with-pomp-filled-uzbekistan-visit-2026-10-19/, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2026).

[ii] "Large-Scale C5+1 Business Program Kicks Off in Samarkand", *Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, https://gov.uz/en/miit/news/view/234891, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2026).

[iii] "C5+1: Historic Partnership, Prosperous Future", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, https://gov.uz/en/mfa/news/view/234672, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2026).

[iv] "Agreements Worth $12 Billion Signed between Uzbekistan and the USA," Government Portal of the Republic of Uzbekistan, https://gov.uz/en/news/view/235113, (Date of Accession: 22.10.2026).



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

DeepSeek's Chip Move and the US-China Rivalry



Atakan KÖPRÜLÜ

On July 7, 2026, the Chinese artificial intelligence company DeepSeek announced that it is developing its own AI chip.[i] The chip in question is designed not for training new models, but for the "inference" phase where already trained models generate responses to user queries. Two developments in the third week of October clarified the significance of this move:It was reported that DeepSeek is collaborating with Huawei on the design of next-generation Ascend chips, and around the same time, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) signed a decision excluding DeepSeek product from the information systems and procurement processes of federal civilian agencies.[ii] When these three developments are read together, it would be incorrect to view DeepSeek's chip initiative merely as a company's supplier diversification. Essentially, this can be interpreted as a shift in the US-China technology rivalry from the axis of chip export controls to an integrated struggle of "technology stacks" encompassing models, hardware, and software.

The backdrop to DeepSeek's shift toward the hardware sector is US export restrictions. The company's model, which shook the markets in January 2025, was trained using Nvidia H800 chips, the sale of which to China was banned by Washington in late 2023; following the bans, the company's reliance on Huawei increased. During this period, Huawei held nearly half of China's approximately $50 billion AI chip market.[iii] This picture demonstrates that US restrictions directed demand toward domestic suppliers rather than halting China's capacity. However, the resulting structure, from DeepSeek's perspective, is the replacement of one dependency with another. The company's chip move can be read as a quest to manage this second dependency.

The focus on an inference chip is also no coincidence. As AI applications become more widespread, the sector's computational load is shifting from model training to running models; this area can be sustained with cheaper and less energy-consuming chips compared to general-purpose graphics processing units. Considering that DeepSeek owes its global recognition to low-cost and efficient models, shaping the hardware, which constitutes the bulk of service costs, according to its own models is an attempt to carry the efficiency advantage established in software over to the hardware layer. Therefore, the move is a logical extension of the company's business model.

From Beijing's perspective, the crux of the matter is the software ecosystem surrounding the chip rather than the chip itself. Chinese state media presented the full adaptation of DeepSeek's V4 model, released in April 2026, to Huawei Ascend chips as a sign of an era where domestic chips have ceased to be an "option" and become a "necessity"; emphasizing that dependency on Nvidia's CUDA ecosystem pushed China into a passive position of "having models but lacking computing power."[iv] This discourse clearly

indicates that Beijing views the competition as a structural problem beyond a mere performance gap. Indeed, without software independence, even if domestic chips become stronger, developers will remain tethered to US standards.

The path DeepSeek is taking consists of two complementary tracks. On one hand, a co-design process is being carried out with Huawei that will reflect the computational challenges encountered in running large language models onto the memory bandwidth and inter-chip connection architecture of Ascend chips. On the other hand, the company is holding talks with chip design, foundry, and memory companies for its own inference chip and is increasing its hiring of chip design engineers. This dual structure is a choice to rely on Huawei's scale in model training, where thousands of chips operate simultaneously, while establishing its own control in the inference domain, where cost is the determining factor.Thus, DeepSeek is building bargaining power that avoids being condemned to a single supplier in the domestic market.

For the Chinese giant Huawei, this collaboration carries the potential to transform the company from a substitute supplier replacing Nvidia into the load-bearing pillar of the ecosystem. Both the company's plan to strengthen its CANN software platform to rival CUDA and its Ascend 960 roadmap announced for 2027 serve this goal.[v] The real workloads of a leading model developer serving as input for chip design is the Chinese equivalent of the feedback loop Nvidia has maintained with US labs for years. However, DeepSeek's own chip is a factor that could, in the long run, turn Huawei's customer into its competitor.

Consequently, the relationship between the two companies is a structure where cooperation and competition are intertwined. This tension does not contradict Beijing's preferences. The fact that Alibaba and Baidu are also gaining market share by developing their own AI chips, and that domestic producers like Cambricon, Moore Threads, and Hygon adapted to the V4 model on its release day, shows that China aims for a pluralistic, mutually balancing domestic ecosystem rather than a single national champion. This approach is a resilience strategy that prevents a potential sanction or production disruption from paralyzing the entire system. Therefore, DeepSeek's chip move can be evaluated as the corporate-level reflection of Beijing's goal of self-reliance in science and technology.[vi]

In conclusion, DeepSeek's initiative to develop its own chip and its deepening co-design process with Huawei show that China is building an integrated Techno-Hub that aligns models, hardware, and software. Washington's response has accordingly extended from restricting inputs to excluding outputs: The DHS decision mandates the removal of third-party products built on DeepSeek models, alongside DeepSeek products themselves, from the systems of federal civilian agencies. On October 20, 2026, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Mao Ning stated that they oppose the expansion of the national security concept and the politicization of technological and economic issues, adding that they will resolutely protect the legitimate rights of Chinese companies.[vii] The fact that this reaction does not contain a concrete retaliation indicates that Beijing views the ban more as a development validating its domestic technology narrative than a loss. Therefore, in the coming period, the decoupling between the two stacks is expected to deepen, and the question of which ecosystem third countries will prefer is expected to become increasingly strategic.

[i] "China's DeepSeek developing its own AI chip, sources say", *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-deepseek-developing-its-own-ai-chip-sources-say-2026-07-07/, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[ii] "DeepSeek and Huawei team up on AI chip design to challenge Nvidia", *Dataconomy*, https://dataconomy.com/2026/10/20/deepseek-huawei-ai-chip-design-challenge-nvidia/, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026); "Notice of Order Regarding Exclusion and Removal of DeepSeek Products from Federal Civilian Executive Branch Information Technology Systems and Procurements", *U.S. Department of Homeland Security – Federal Register*, https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2026-21447, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[iii] "China's DeepSeek developing its own AI chip, sources say", *Reuters*, https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-deepseek-developing-its-own-ai-chip-sources-say-2026-07-07/, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[iv] "瞭望 | 国产算力突围重塑产业竞争逻辑", *新华社*, https://finance.eastmoney.com/a/202605073729524171.html, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[v] "DeepSeek and Huawei team up on AI chip design to challenge Nvidia", *Dataconomy*, https://dataconomy.com/2026/10/20/deepseek-huawei-ai-chip-design-challenge-nvidia/, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[vi] "瞭望 | 国产算力突围重塑产业竞争逻辑", *新华社*, https://finance.eastmoney.com/a/202605073729524171.html, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).

[vii] "2026年10月20日外交部发言人毛宁主持例行记者会", *中华人民共和国驻印度尼西亚共和国大使馆*, https://id.china-embassy.gov.cn/fyrth/202610/t20261020_12043799.htm, (Erişim Tarihi: 23.10.2026).



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

From the Streets to Institutions: France's Fault Lines and the European Union's Legitimacy Dilemma



Prof. Dr. Murat ERCAN

In October 2026, mass protests spreading across various French cities revealed a multifaceted social movement in which economic discontent, concerns over public order, and a crisis of political representation converged. Demonstrations in cities such as Paris, Marseille, Lyon, Toulouse, and Limoges brought together grievances over the rising cost of living, shortcomings in the education system, inadequate public services, declining purchasing power among workers, and growing distrust of government policies. According to recent reports in national and international media, hundreds of thousands of people took part in demonstrations across France, some of which escalated into violence, causing significant damage to public buildings and commercial establishments. Initially driven by students' demands concerning educational conditions, the movement quickly evolved into a broader expression of social dissent, bringing together economic and political grievances.

The developments in France are rooted in the widening gap between the state's economic and social policies and society's expectations regarding justice, prosperity, and political representation. Although protesters' demands vary, they share a common perception that the existing political system is failing to adequately address the everyday concerns of a significant portion of the population. Rising energy bills, rents, and food prices are narrowing the financial room for maneuver of low- and middle-income groups, while teacher shortages, poorly maintained school buildings, and concerns about the quality of public services are extending social discontent beyond the economic sphere. Therefore, the protests in France point to a broader social and political crisis in which not only economic inequalities but also the social protections provided by the state, the quality of public services, and citizens' future expectations are being called into question.

When examining the economic dimension of this crisis, the relationship between economic strength and social welfare becomes particularly important. Although France is one of Europe's leading economies, its substantial national economic capacity does not necessarily mean that all segments of society benefit equally from it. The gap between macroeconomic indicators and households' everyday economic experiences is one of the main sources of political discontent. A country's economy may be considered successful in terms of total output, fiscal sustainability, or international competitiveness; however, these achievements alone cannot guarantee political legitimacy when citizens struggle to meet their basic needs, including housing, transportation, education, and essential consumer goods. What matters to society is not merely whether economic growth occurs, but also how its benefits are distributed, and which social groups bear the costs of economic transformation.

At this point, a clear tension emerges between the French government's economic policies and protesters' expectations of social justice. While the government considers maintaining fiscal discipline, controlling public spending, and continuing economic reforms necessary, various segments of society focus on the impact of these policies on their living conditions. Although cuts in public spending or changes to

social policies may be justified on the grounds of maintaining budgetary balance, they can generate social costs if they lead to a decline in the quality of services such as education, healthcare, transportation, and social security. Particularly during periods of heightened economic pressure, the perception that the state's capacity to provide social protection is weakening can transform economic grievances into direct political opposition. Therefore, economic and social issues, particularly the rising cost of living and inadequate public services, are among the key drivers of the protests in France.

The historical background of the situation in France is closely linked to the role of protest within the country's political culture. The French Revolution of 1789 was not merely a transfer of power that resulted in the end of the monarchy, but also a profound transformation that shaped European history in terms of sovereignty, citizenship, equality, and political legitimacy. The Revolution strengthened the idea that state authority cannot be accepted solely on the basis of tradition or legal existence; rather, the legitimacy of the social order is also linked to principles such as justice, representation, and political participation. Although the French Revolution of 1789 and contemporary protests in France emerged under different historical circumstances, they share similar dynamics in terms of economic inequalities, perceptions of social injustice, and declining trust in political authority. Today's protests are not driven by a revolutionary aim to abolish the monarchy, but rather by expectations of strengthening economic security within the democratic system, ensuring that social demands are reflected in political decision-making, and increasing government accountability. However, these differences do not eliminate the historical connection between the two periods. In both cases, the growing perception that the existing social order is unjust undermines the legitimacy of political authority and turns street protests into one of the main arenas for expressing social demands and pursuing political change.

The legacy of the French Revolution demonstrates that contemporary protests cannot be viewed solely as a matter of public security. France has a long-standing tradition of social struggle, in which trade unions, students, workers, and various political groups have collectively challenged government policies. However, this tradition does not mean that every protest or action is legitimate. A clear distinction must be made between the right to peaceful assembly and acts involving looting, arson, and physical violence. Incidents such as the looting of shops in Paris, the arson attacks on businesses in Marseille, and the setting fire to the historic town hall in Limoges cannot be equated with peaceful protest. Nevertheless, acts of violence do not justify overlooking the economic and social problems underlying the protests. Treating peaceful demonstrators in the same way as groups involved in violent acts can lead to the criminalization of social demands, a greater emphasis on security policies, and the marginalization of structural problems.

In this context, the Yellow Vest movement, which began in 2018, provides an important historical comparison for understanding the protests taking place today. Initially driven by opposition to fuel taxes, the movement quickly evolved into a broader mobilization that reflected the sense of economic exclusion among people living in rural and suburban areas, concerns over the declining purchasing power of working people, and the perception that they were being excluded from political decision-making. One of the movement's defining features was that social groups outside traditional trade unions and established political parties gained political visibility through direct action. In this respect, the Yellow Vest movement demonstrated how an economic demand can evolve into a broader crisis of political representation.

The renewed visibility of the Yellow Vest movement in October 2026 indicates that the social tensions of the past have not entirely disappeared. The fact that current protests began with concerns over education and subsequently expanded to include the rising cost of living, public services, and economic justice demonstrates how seemingly distinct problems affecting different social groups can converge into a shared source of discontent. In other words, the protests in France have moved beyond the initial demands of students to encompass broader economic and social grievances.

The key factor here is not so much the organization of social movements around a single demand, but rather the way in which different demands are brought together within a shared political narrative. While problems within the education system represent uncertainty about the future for younger generations, the rising cost of living reflects workers' concerns about their inability to maintain their current living standards. Debates over the pension system, meanwhile, raise questions about extending working lives, protecting social rights, and ensuring intergenerational justice. When these different issues converge, protests move beyond calls for the withdrawal of a specific reform and bring fundamental questions to the forefront of public debate, including how the state distributes its economic resources, which social groups' needs it prioritizes, and to what extent it responds to citizens' expectations.

Pension reform is one of the clearest examples of this tension. The Macron government's decision to raise the retirement age is linked to the long-term challenges of maintaining public finance sustainability, including an ageing population and the financing of the pension system. In contrast, trade unions and opposition movements argue that the costs of the reform are being borne by workers, particularly those in physically demanding jobs who are being required to work for longer. The conflict is not merely about the retirement age itself. The central issue is the principles through which economic sustainability is pursued and how the costs of reform are distributed across society. As a result, a technical fiscal reform can quickly develop into a broader debate over social justice and political representation.

Another important dimension of the political crisis in France is the way protests have brought the expectations of younger generations to the forefront through concerns over the education system. Issues such as the physical condition of school buildings, teacher shortages, and insufficient educational resources affect not only the state's capacity to provide public services but also opportunities for social mobility. In modern societies, education is one of the main means through which individuals can improve their economic and social position. When concerns about declining educational standards become widespread, young people begin to question not only their current conditions but also their prospects of building a better life in the future. Therefore, the convergence of student protests with

economic demands is not coincidental. The difficulties young people face in education, together with adults' concerns about employment, income, and social security, bring different generations together around a shared sense of uncertainty about the future.

The relationship between the protests in France and state authority also constitutes an important dimension of the crisis. A democratic state is responsible for maintaining public order and preventing violence while also safeguarding the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. An imbalance between these two responsibilities can directly affect political legitimacy. Although there are circumstances in which security forces need to intervene in acts of violence, the proportionality and legality of the methods used are also fundamental criteria of democratic governance. Therefore, the serious injury of a young person during police intervention at the October 2026 demonstrations highlights the delicate balance between protecting the right to protest and defining the limits of law enforcement measures.

In this context, measuring state authority solely by the ability of security forces to maintain control on the ground is insufficient. A government may restore control of the streets within a short period, disperse demonstrations, and protect public buildings. However, these achievements do not mean that the economic and political causes of the protests have been resolved. On the contrary, making security policies the primary approach and treating social demands as a secondary concern may deepen doubts about the government's ability to listen to society. In such circumstances, the temporary restoration of public order becomes distinct from the long-term establishment of political stability. Therefore, the key challenge for France is not to maintain order through repression, but to address underlying problems by regaining public trust.

The challenges facing Macron go beyond public opposition to specific reforms. The central issue is the executive's difficulty in achieving social consensus despite its strong institutional powers. At the root of this problem lies the perception that the government's decision-making processes have become disconnected from social demands. As a result, rather than facilitating consensus, the executive's institutional power has become a focal point of criticism. In this context, the protests highlight the tension between the implementation of economic reforms and democratic legitimacy. In particular, criticism of the social costs of reforms, the perception that economic burdens are not being distributed fairly, and the belief that channels for political opposition are inadequate are transforming debates over economic governance into a broader political crisis concerning the government's decision-making process.

From this perspective, the French presidential election expected to take place in 2027 will serve as an important turning point for assessing the political repercussions of the current crisis and voters' attitudes towards the incumbent government. Although constitutional term limits prevent Macron from being elected president for a third consecutive term in 2027, the upcoming election remains significant for evaluating public support for the current administration's policies and the political balance in France. Therefore, the electoral process will be decisive not only in terms of the transfer of power, but also in revealing the political consequences of the economic and social policies pursued during Macron's presidency and helping to understand their impact on France's future political direction.

In this context, the rise of political figures representing different ideological positions, such as Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon, is important for understanding how social discontent in France is being reflected in the political arena. Declining trust in traditional political parties, economic difficulties, and criticism that the current administration has failed to adequately address social demands are increasing the visibility of different political movements among voters. The growing influence of the far right and the radical left also reflects the changing expectations and demands for solutions among different segments of society regarding issues such as economic inequality, national identity, immigration, social policies, and political representation. These differences are clearly reflected in the political platforms of the National Rally, led by Marine Le Pen, and La France Insoumise (France Unbowed), led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

The National Rally seeks to gain public support by emphasizing national sovereignty, immigration policies, public security, and criticism of political elites. In contrast, La France Insoumise (France Unbowed) prioritizes reducing economic inequalities, protecting social rights, environmental policies, and transforming political institutions. Thus, the two movements approach France's economic and social problems from different ideological perspectives, offering voters distinct political alternatives. At the same time, their rhetoric, which moves away from the traditional political center, highlights the growing importance of the relationship between voter demands and existing mechanisms of political representation in French politics. This demonstrates that political competition in France is shaped not only by economic policies and ideological divisions, but also by trust in political institutions, the extent to which social expectations are reflected in decision-making processes, and criticism of the current model of governance.

The political uncertainty surrounding the end of Macron's term in office extends the debate in France beyond a simple change of leadership. The central issue is not who will succeed Macron, but rather how the French political system will engage with different segments of society. If economic discontent, distrust in public services, and problems of political representation become entrenched, a change of president alone will not be sufficient to resolve these structural issues. Under these circumstances, the 2027 election is likely to become more than a choice between candidates; it will also represent a contest over how France's economic and social priorities should be redefined.

The wider European implications of the sociopolitical developments in France become more apparent in this context. Given the differences in the political, economic, and institutional structures of European countries, it would be reductive to assume that protests originating in France will be replicated in the same way elsewhere. Nevertheless, structural issues such as the rising cost of living, housing affordability, the financing of public services, uncertainty surrounding the future prospects of younger generations, and declining trust in traditional

political institutions are also sources of socioeconomic tension across European societies. The occurrence of mass demonstrations driven by economic and social demands in various European countries as of October 2026 suggests that these structural challenges cannot be treated as isolated problems confined to individual nation-states, but instead reflect shared, systemic pressures across the continent.

These shared dynamics reveal a fundamental tension facing Europe's process of economic and political integration. While European economies seek to enhance global competitiveness, maintain fiscal discipline, and adapt to macroeconomic transformations, they are simultaneously under pressure to meet citizens' expectations regarding social welfare, income security, and public services. When the socioeconomic costs of structural reforms are perceived as unfair by broad segments of society, the democratic legitimacy of both supranational integration and the policies pursued by national governments begins to erode. This dynamic deepens political polarization across the continent, providing populist far-right and radical-left movements opposed to the established political order with greater legitimacy and opportunities for mobilization.

France occupies a particularly important position in this regard due to its economic and political weight within the European Union and its historical tradition of protest. Therefore, a deepening social crisis in France has the potential not only to threaten the stability of the national government but also to directly influence ongoing debates over economic governance models and social policy choices across the Union. However, interpreting the protests in France as the beginning of a continent-wide revolution would be a premature generalization unsupported by empirical evidence. Rather, the current events expose structural and institutional vulnerabilities across Europe, creating favorable conditions for similar waves of social mobilization in different countries.

In light of these developments, the protests taking place in France constitute structural indicators of a crisis of institutional and political legitimacy. However, such revolutionary processes cannot be explained solely in terms of mass street demonstrations or acts of violence. For social mobilization to evolve into a revolutionary transformation, existing institutional mechanisms must become dysfunctional, social demands must converge within a counter-hegemonic political project, and state capacity must begin to break down. Growing economic discontent in France, the convergence of different social groups around a common basis for mobilization, and the declining legitimacy of the established political center are contributing to these dynamics of institutional transformation. However, these indicators are insufficient to claim that France's administrative and institutional structures have become paralyzed or that a radical change of regime has become inevitable.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify a key potential trajectory for the crisis. If the French government continues to treat economic grievances solely as security issues, leaves problems concerning the quality of public services unresolved, and fails to strengthen the participation of social groups in decision-making processes, protests may re-emerge and converge around broader political demands. In such a scenario, demonstrations would move beyond calls for the withdrawal of specific reforms and bring the reassessment of the economic model, the welfare state, and mechanisms of political representation to the forefront. Conversely, ensuring that security measures remain within legal limits, addressing social demands, and distributing the costs of reform fairly could help prevent the crisis from deepening, whereas approaches that fail to do so could further intensify it.

The mass demonstrations that gained visibility during the October 2026 wave in France represent more than a temporary reaction to the rising cost of living or an isolated public order issue; they symbolize the erosion of the social contract between France's institutional framework and society. The country's long-standing tradition of protest, stretching from the French Revolution of 1789 to the Yellow Vest movement, is being renewed through a multifaceted set of shared grievances, ranging from declining educational standards and the burden of pension reform to diminishing purchasing power and a crisis of intergenerational justice. The central lesson of this crisis is that technocratic reforms pursued in the name of macroeconomic stability and fiscal discipline can create a direct deficit of political legitimacy when they are perceived as unfair by broad segments of society. By relying on its strong constitutional powers, relegating social consensus to a secondary concern, and attempting to suppress public dissent primarily through securitization policies, the executive may protect public buildings in the short term but risks seriously undermining trust between the state and its citizens in the long run. The erosion of the traditional political center and the growing influence of anti-establishment figures such as Marine Le Pen and Jean-Luc Mélenchon reflect this loss of legitimacy within institutional politics. In this respect, the 2027 presidential election will represent not merely a contest to succeed Macron, but also a fundamental reassessment of France's economic priorities, welfare state model, and mechanisms of democratic representation.

Ultimately, the fault lines in France serve as an early warning of the structural challenges facing other European societies grappling with the rising cost of living, the housing crisis, and the deterioration of public services. Although the protests echoing through the streets of Paris do not, in themselves, prove that the country is on the brink of a regime-threatening revolution, they clearly demonstrate how vulnerable the European model becomes when it loses its balance between a "competitive market" and "social justice." The key factor shaping the future of France and Europe more broadly will be the ability to make the state a common source of security for its citizens through fair distribution and genuine democratic dialogue, rather than suppressing social dissent. Otherwise, each wave of suppressed protests may become a prelude to the next, laying the groundwork for far more disruptive social upheavals in the future. This would not only undermine the stability of national governments but also lead to growing scrutiny of the existing integration model, which prioritizes market discipline over social welfare, ultimately bringing the European Union's institutional foundations and political legitimacy into question.



ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The Trump-Xi-Putin Triangle and the New World Order



Dr. Cenk TAMER

Discussions surrounding a possible trilateral summit between Donald Trump, Xi Jinping, and Vladimir Putin, which came to the fore in October 2026, have also brought the parties' expectations for such a summit into focus. While Trump is primarily emphasizing issues such as arms control and nuclear risks, Putin may seek to reopen negotiations on Ukraine and NATO expansion. China, drawn into the negotiations between the United States and Russia, may find an opportunity to articulate its own expectations and principles.

The conferences held after World War II served as platforms for major powers seeking to reshape the international order in line with their own interests.[i] The Yalta Conference, held in February 1945, was one of the meetings that shaped the postwar political order in Europe at a time when the defeat of Nazi Germany was approaching.[ii] However, commitments concerning postwar elections and the principle of national self-determination failed to prevent the expansion of Soviet influence, particularly in Eastern Europe. This historical experience demonstrates that agreements reached by major powers in the name of stability may fail to safeguard the free will of the countries concerned.[iii]

Today's circumstances, however, differ considerably from those of 1945. While the United States, Russia, and China do not share an alliance based on a common wartime experience, they compete across multiple domains, including global influence, technology, trade, and military superiority. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to interpret a potential trilateral summit as a pre-agreed plan to divide up the world. Nevertheless, such a summit could provide a negotiating platform on which the three countries might temporarily reconcile their strategic objectives. The principal danger is that, despite their disagreements with one another, the three countries could reach an understanding that disregards the interests of third countries. The most significant actor whose interests could be overlooked is Europe.

For Trump, a trilateral meeting would offer an opportunity to portray himself as a leader capable of ending wars, building peace, and brokering agreements among major powers. He may also seek tangible gains in areas such as trade, energy, sanctions, and nuclear arms control. Accordingly, it would be misguided to interpret Trump's efforts to engage with Russia and China solely through the lens of Ukraine and European security. For Putin, meanwhile, the summit's most significant benefit would be the weakening of Russia's international isolation and Moscow's renewed recognition as one of the principal powers shaping the future of European security.[iv] On Ukraine, Russia is not merely seeking a ceasefire; it also wants the war to end in a manner consistent with its own strategic objectives.[v] From Xi's perspective, managing economic and technological competition with Washington is a primary objective.

Moreover, in the rivalry between Russia and the United States, China could serve as a balancing actor by virtue of its principled foreign policy stance.

Indeed, China could expand its room for maneuver in foreign policy by negotiating at the same table as the United States and Russia.[vi] While maintaining its strategic relationship with Moscow, Beijing must also manage the costs of direct confrontation with Washington. Furthermore, Russia's diplomatic objectives and China's long-term interests do not always align. In fact, China's principled position in defending Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty runs counter to Russia's interests.[vii] Consequently, a trilateral summit could force China to adopt an explicit position on particularly sensitive issues such as Ukraine and nuclear disarmament. China's principled approach to foreign policy is a source of discomfort for both Russia and the United States. Therefore, the considerable difficulty of reaching an understanding with China through diplomacy could push Russia and the United States toward a new accommodation of their own.

China also maintains a principled position on nuclear arms control. While the nuclear capabilities of the United States and Russia are broadly comparable, China's nuclear arsenal is still in the process of development. Beijing therefore argues that, given the smaller size of its nuclear arsenal relative to those of the United States and Russia, the two countries should reduce their own arsenals first.[viii] For this reason, Washington and Moscow's desire to bring Beijing into a trilateral arms control arrangement carries the risk of placing constraints on China's future military capabilities.

Xi may seek symbolic gains by hosting the meeting, but he is unlikely to support a specific compromise on Ukraine or agree to restrictions on China's nuclear capabilities. Beijing argues in favor of state sovereignty and inclusive approaches to resolving international disputes. Participating in a summit that excludes Ukraine would therefore risk contradicting China's own rhetoric. Consequently, China could seek to redirect the meeting toward a broader agenda focused on strategic stability, economic relations, or the reduction of nuclear risks. The issues Beijing is willing to bring to the negotiating table, as well as those on which it chooses to maintain ambiguity, could determine the limits of any potential agreement.

In conclusion, discussions surrounding a Trump–Xi–Putin summit bring one of the fundamental contradictions of the international system into sharp relief: while major powers need cooperation to ensure global stability, any potential agreement risks disregarding the interests, security, and sovereignty of other states. The leaders of the three countries could establish a balance of interests through which they temporarily support one another's objectives. Rather than laying the foundations for international peace, an agreement among major powers could divide the world into new spheres of influence.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The Political and Security Dimensions of Social Protests in Europe



Başak ERTUNÇ

The protests that intensified throughout October in various European countries have brought to light the problems accumulating within the continent's economic, social, and political structures. In France, rising living costs and dissatisfaction with public services have brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets, while in Italy, economic demands have converged with opposition to defence policies. Demonstrations focusing on the housing crisis in Portugal, pension rights in Spain, and educational conditions in Belgium have taken on a different dimension in Albania and Serbia, where debates over political accountability and democratic representation have come to the fore.[i] Although each country has its own distinct political circumstances, these developments indicate that the relationship between citizens' economic expectations and states' capacity to formulate and implement policies is increasingly being called into question across Europe. It would therefore be inaccurate to regard these protests merely as temporary crises concerning public order.

In France, one of the countries most affected by the protests, approximately 410,000 people participated in demonstrations held on 24 October 2026, according to data from the Ministry of the Interior. Trade unions, however, argued that the turnout was higher. In Paris and several other cities, clashes broke out between security forces and certain groups following marches that had begun largely peacefully. The government's deployment of approximately 70,000 police officers and gendarmes highlights the growing importance of security measures in managing social movements.[ii] At the same time, it is noteworthy that demands concerning educational conditions and the cost of living, which had initially dominated the demonstrations, evolved into broader expressions of economic discontent. Developments in France demonstrate how social unrest can expand from objections to specific public policies into a broader questioning of the government's overall political and economic approach.

A similar wave of mobilisation has been observed in Italy, although the foreign policy and security dimensions of the protests are more pronounced. Demonstrations held in cities such as Rome, Milan, Turin, and Bologna have brought together demands concerning the cost of living, low wages, and public services with opposition to increased military spending and war policies. The Meloni government's expansion of security measures, the deployment of an additional 500 soldiers to Milan, and extensive security checks conducted ahead of the demonstrations indicate a strengthening of the approach to maintaining public order. While clashes between security forces and demonstrators occurred in some cities, marches in Milan remained largely peaceful.[iii] However, the principal significance of the Italian case for international relations lies in the debate over the social and economic costs of defence policies. As strengthening military capabilities becomes a priority in Europe's security environment, citizens'

expectations regarding social expenditure are emerging as a factor that could affect the political legitimacy of defence budgets. This situation demonstrates that European security cannot be assessed solely in terms of military capabilities.

Developments in Portugal, Spain, and Belgium, meanwhile, highlight the social welfare dimension of the protests. In Lisbon, the police dismantling of a tent encampment established following demonstrations against rising housing prices and rents has intensified the debate over the right to housing and public order. The fact that housing prices in Portugal have more than doubled since 2017, with young people particularly affected by housing costs, helps explain the economic background to the protests.[iv] In Spain, mass demonstrations over pension rights have brought demands concerning the sustainability of the social security system and income distribution to the forefront.[v] In Belgium, clashes with the police occurred during demonstrations by young people calling for increased education funding.[vi] These examples demonstrate that not all social movements in Europe are shaped by violence or demands for a change of government. Economic insecurity and access to public services constitute common areas of concern capable of mobilising different social groups within democratic systems.

The fact that these developments have resonated particularly strongly among younger generations is important for understanding the long-term dimension of social discontent in Europe. Student movements in France, Italy, Belgium, and Albania, alongside protests over housing problems in Portugal, demonstrate how uncertainty about young people's economic futures can fuel social mobilisation across different countries. The fact that protests in some countries have been initiated by students and subsequently spread to other social groups illustrates how demands initially directed at a particular sector can evolve into broader political movements.[vii] Nevertheless, it is not possible to claim that a common protest organisation or a single political programme shared by all demonstrators exists across Europe. The fact that similar economic conditions are intensifying social mobilisation in different countries does not mean that these movements pursue the same political objectives.

Developments in Albania and Serbia add the dimensions of democratic representation and European integration to this debate. In Albania, protests against Prime Minister Edi Rama's government have expanded around allegations of corruption, insufficient employment opportunities, education policies, and demands for political accountability. Clashes in Tirana on 24 October, during which demonstrators attacked public buildings and police used tear gas and water cannon, revealed the extent of political tensions. [viii] In Serbia, the student movement that gained momentum following the fatal collapse at the Novi Sad railway station has turned towards electoral politics, demonstrating that social mobilisation can develop into institutional political participation.[ix] The EU membership prospects of both countries mean that domestic political developments are closely linked to the European Union's enlargement policy. In this context, the significance of the protests stems from the fact that the functioning of democratic institutions in candidate countries and governments' responses to societal demands are among the key areas assessed during the accession process.

Developments across Europe have also revived a broader debate over consistency in the EU's approach to democratic norms. Under the Copenhagen Criteria, candidate countries are required to uphold democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of fundamental rights, while compliance with democratic obligations in existing member states is monitored through different institutional mechanisms. In its statement on the protests in Albania on 18 October 2026, the European Commission condemned violence and emphasised the need for security forces to respond proportionately, illustrating the Union's approach to democratic standards.[x] At the same time, restrictions on demonstrations in France and other member states raise the question of how the same principles are upheld after accession. Differences in legal status between member states and candidate countries do not automatically constitute a double standard. However, variations in the effectiveness of the implementation of democratic values have the potential to affect the EU's normative credibility and the legitimacy of its enlargement policy.

Another important dimension of the protests is the increasingly visible security-oriented responses adopted by governments to address societal demands. Expanded police operations in France and Italy, security interventions in Albania, and clashes in Belgium illustrate the political implications of treating social movements primarily as matters of public order. This process can be examined through the concept of securitisation in international relations. Defining economic or political demands as security threats may create the conditions for governments to introduce measures that go beyond conventional instruments of political negotiation. Nevertheless, intervening in incidents of violence and restricting peaceful protests are not the same legal issue. Nor does every security intervention, in itself, demonstrate the existence of a securitisation process.

The significance of this wave of mobilisation across Europe for international security lies in the relationship between domestic political stability and foreign policy capacity. Intensifying economic discontent may narrow governments' room for manoeuvre in making budgetary choices and implementing reform programmes. Tensions may emerge between foreign policy priorities and societal expectations, particularly in areas such as defence spending, energy security, and public finances. Indeed, the convergence of debates over the cost of living in Europe with concerns about energy prices and economic growth demonstrates that domestic political developments cannot be assessed independently of international economic conditions.[xi] At the same time, political

developments in the Western Balkans have the potential to affect the EU's objectives concerning regional stability and enlargement. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the current protests have directly altered Europe's security architecture. The key issue to watch is the long-term impact of domestic political legitimacy on the sustainability of foreign policy decisions.

In conclusion, the protests in Europe point to a period in which the relationship between economic welfare, democratic representation, and security policies is being reassessed, extending beyond a series of seemingly unrelated national crises. The decisive question is not simply whether governments can manage social unrest through security measures alone, but also the extent to which they can incorporate economic and political demands into democratic decision-making mechanisms. Europe's political stability and its capacity to act as an international actor will be shaped by the nature of the relationship that can be established between societal expectations and institutional policies.

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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

Reconsidering Human Mobility in the Context of Global Climate Change



İpeksu AYDIN

Recent figures from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) expose a stark contradiction in contemporary border governance: Mediterranean and Atlantic border governance: despite measurable fluctuations and localized declines in arrivals along maritime corridors, such as Atlantic route to the Canary Islands between 2024 and 2025, the mortality rate at sea has remained stubbornly consistent.[i] Rather than curbing irregular mobility, militarized border protocols and externalized controls merely force displaced populations into longer, more dangerous routes. This persistence of high-risk migration underscores a fundamental policy failure: state-centered deterrence frameworks attempt to suppress physical movement while failing to address its underlying structural drivers. Across West Africa and the Sahel, accelerating environmental degradation—manifested through prolonged droughts, desertification, unpredictable monsoon patterns, and severe soil erosion—erodes agrarian livelihoods and destabilizes rural economies. Consequently, international governance frameworks, particularly within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP process, must reframe human mobility away from national security paradigms toward urgent climate adaptation, mobility governance, and "Loss and Damage" priority allocations.[ii]

This reactive reliance on border militarization stems from a broader conceptual shift in state strategy: the reframing of climate-induced crises from environmental disasters into core national security threats. The primary reason environmental degradation is perceived through a security lens is not merely the severity of natural events themselves, but their capacity to exceed state administrative and economic capacities. Through the loss of agricultural land, the depletion of water resources, and the collapse of infrastructure, climate change erodes the ability of states to function effectively. These unmanaged environmental stress factors act as institutional friction points, amplifying pre-existing ethnic, economic, and political vulnerabilities, which frequently culminate in localized conflict and internal displacement. Within this analytical framework, climate change functions as a "risk multiplier." Consequently, state security apparatuses and destination governments increasingly view climate-displaced populations through a threat lens. Rather than recognizing displaced communities as populations experiencing severe environmental vulnerability, sovereign border regimes categorize them as destabilizing risks to internal security, public order, and territorial integrity.

This securitized stance is further sustained by the international legal framework governing human mobility. The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee strictly through a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.[iii] Designed in the early Cold War era to address state-driven political persecution, this legal framework contains no explicit recognition or protection mechanisms for

individuals forced to move due to environmental degradation or sudden climate disasters. This structural legal void means states hold no explicit international obligations to grant protection based on environmental factors. Exploiting this legal gap, destination governments routinely categorize climate-displaced individuals as "voluntary economic migrants" or "irregular entrants." This classification legitimizes coercive enforcement measures, border interdictions, and pushbacks, reducing complex human mobility management to a unilateral border enforcement operation. While non-binding international initiatives such as the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) attempt to bridge this protection gap, the absence of a legal regime allows states to prioritize national security over international burden-sharing.[iv]

Crucially, this vulnerability and institutional strain are no longer confined to the Global South. Widespread wildfires in Greece and Spain highlight that climate displacement is now a pan-European reality.[v] Recognizing this escalating baseline, COP30 in Belém marked a critical turning point by pushing human mobility from the structural margins into core climate architecture. Grounded in advocacy from bodies like the IOM and UNHCR, COP30 emphasized that adaptation finance, the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), and the operationalized Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) must explicitly account for human mobility. As the international community prepares for COP31 in Antalya, expectations have shifted toward implementation and structural resilience. [vi] With compounding natural catastrophes continuing to test regional capacities worldwide, COP31 faces mounting pressure to move beyond abstract acknowledgments of "displacement" in text toward concrete mechanisms: local urban adaptation, risk insurance, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

Concrete mechanisms play out on two fronts. Low-lying Pacific islands face existential sea-level rise, forcing communities into planned relocations, land purchases abroad, and digital statehood preservation. Meanwhile, key transit and destination regions are shifting their focus to municipal infrastructure resilience to manage incoming climate displacement. A primary example is the strategic partnership between the European Union and Türkiye leading up to COP31 in Antalya. Through initiatives aimed at building "climate-resilient cities" and financing facilities like the Sustainable Urban Resilience Financing Facility (SURFF), this cooperation reflects a transition from passive border enforcement to proactive, localized urban adaptation. By strengthening host-city infrastructure and municipal capacity, regional actors recognize that long-term stability relies on absorbing displaced populations into resilient urban environments rather than managing them through reactive security protocols.[vii]

Ultimately, the persistent failure of militarized border externalization demonstrates that state-centered deterrence cannot suppress mobility driven by environmental breakdown. As traditional international legal definitions fall short of protecting climate-displaced individuals, multilateral climate arenas, spanning COP30 in Belém to COP31 in Antalya, offer the only viable alternative governance model. The tension between state claims to absolute territorial sovereignty and the reality of global climate-induced mobility highlights the limits of unilateral border enforcement. Moving forward, bridging global climate finance, Loss and Damage mechanisms, and localized urban resilience will be essential to ensure that human mobility is addressed not as a security threat to be policed, but as a fundamental dimension of climate justice and global adaptation. Addressing human mobility not as a national security threat to be policed, but as a central component of global adaptation architecture and climate justice, remains essential for long-term international governance.

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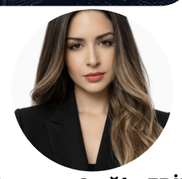
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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and the Deepening of Security Competition in the Asia-Pacific



Zeynep Çağla ERİN

The 20th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the 13th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), held on 28–29 October 2026 in Cebu, Philippines, have once again brought to the forefront the question of the conditions under which security relations in Southeast Asia can be sustained. Press statements concerning the meetings have interpreted the Philippines' emphasis on the South China Sea issue and the efforts by the United States (US) and Japan to strengthen defence cooperation in terms of the risk that the regional dialogue mechanism could evolve into a platform for containing China. This assessment offers an important discursive framework reflecting China's security perceptions. Nevertheless, explaining the significance of the meetings solely through Beijing's concerns would relegate Southeast Asian countries' own security priorities and foreign policy calculations to the background. The central issue is the extent to which regional institutions can preserve their capacity to constrain competition among major powers.[i]

ADMM-Plus brings together ASEAN's eleven members with Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States within the same institutional framework. This structure is based on an understanding of diplomacy that does not define regional security exclusively in terms of military capabilities and alliance relations. Cooperation developed in areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, cybersecurity and military medicine enables the parties to maintain open channels of communication. However, the fact that members sit at the same table does not mean that fundamental strategic disagreements can be resolved. The function of ADMM-Plus can be assessed primarily in terms of developing confidence-building measures, maintaining military contacts and reducing the likelihood of crises spiralling out of control. Accordingly, the success of the meetings can be measured by the degree of convergence in the parties' statements and by the preservation of mechanisms that prevent competition from turning into actual conflict.[ii]

The South China Sea is one of the most sensitive arenas of power competition in the Asia-Pacific. While the region encompasses major maritime routes for global trade, fishing resources and potential energy reserves, it is also where the maritime jurisdictional claims of coastal states intersect. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to treat the dispute between China and the Philippines merely as a sovereignty disagreement between two states. The delimitation of maritime zones, freedom of navigation, military activities and the implementation of international law are all components of a broader debate over the regional order. The Philippines' emphasis on the 2016 arbitral award in its diplomatic discourse demonstrates Manila's efforts to combine its legal arguments with the pursuit of international support. China, for its part, has long maintained that it does not recognise either the arbitration proceedings or the

award. This contrast also reveals the parties' divergent positions on the rules and mechanisms through which disputes should be resolved.[iii]

The 2016 arbitral award was issued following proceedings initiated by the Philippines under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The award addressed issues including historical rights claims, the legal status of maritime features and the compatibility of the parties' activities in maritime areas with the Convention. Nevertheless, the scope of the award must be accurately defined. The arbitral tribunal did not resolve all sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, nor did it determine which party holds sovereignty over the islands. This distinction is important when assessing the Philippines' legal strategy. While Manila seeks to strengthen its diplomatic legitimacy through international law, China maintains a different legal and political position based on historical rights and its approach to sovereignty. The incorporation of the legal dispute into political competition in this manner leads the parties to assess each other's moves not only in the context of bilateral relations but also in terms of their implications for the regional order.[iv]

The Philippines' decision to keep the South China Sea issue on the agenda of defence diplomacy during its 2026 ASEAN chairmanship is closely linked to changes in the country's foreign policy orientation. The Philippines is seeking to enhance its deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis China by strengthening its alliance with the United States and expanding its defence ties with partners such as Japan. Underlying this approach is the security assessment that tensions in maritime areas cannot be contained through diplomatic statements alone. Nevertheless, viewing the Philippines' choices entirely as an extension of the US regional strategy would also be an incomplete assessment. The Philippines is pursuing its own objectives of protecting its maritime jurisdictional areas, developing its military capabilities and expanding international support. While its relations with the United States and Japan serve these objectives, they may also expand Manila's capacity to shape the regional agenda. On the other hand, these choices could reinforce China's perception of containment and generate new tensions in diplomatic relations.

The meeting held in Cebu on 28 October 2026 between Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth gave concrete expression to the bilateral military coordination dimension of the meeting's agenda. According to the official statement issued by Japan's Ministry of Defense, the parties reached an understanding on strengthening deterrence and response capabilities, integrated air and missile defence, and closer coordination under crisis conditions. The meeting demonstrates that the US-Japan alliance is also one of the fundamental components of the broader security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Interpreting this cooperation as part of a containment strategy directed against China reflects Beijing's concerns regarding the military implications of alliance networks. However, the official statements issued by Japan and the United States frame these measures in terms of regional deterrence and preventing unilateral changes to the status quo through the use of force. The difference between these two narratives is important because it illustrates how the same military arrangement can be interpreted through different security perceptions.

One of the contemporary dimensions of the deterrence debate is the defence approach known as *denial defence*, which aims to prevent an adversary from achieving its military objectives. Rather than simply threatening the opposing party with the costs of potential retaliation, this strategy seeks to reduce the likelihood of an attack succeeding. The efforts of Japan and the United States to develop air defence, missile defence and coordinated operational capabilities can be assessed within this framework. Efforts to develop capabilities aimed at restricting military access and freedom of movement around the First Island Chain may carry particular strategic significance during a potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait and the Western Pacific. From China's perspective, such preparations represent the strengthening of a network that could constrain its military freedom of manoeuvre in the near seas. For Washington and Tokyo, however, the objective is to increase the costs of attempts to alter the status quo through the use of force. Thus, deterrence may become not only a mechanism capable of alleviating the parties' security concerns but also a dynamic that intensifies mutual threat perceptions.[v]

At this point, it would be inaccurate to assume that there is a symbiotic relationship between the strengthening of alliances and the provision of regional security. An increase in military capabilities may deter a decision to launch an attack. However, the possibility that parties may misinterpret each other's intentions or perceive the political costs of backing down during a crisis as excessively high also creates a risk of escalation. Particularly in areas where naval and air assets operate in close proximity, an incident at the tactical level may develop into a political crisis. Therefore, assessing the regional implications of US-Japan cooperation solely in terms of increased military capabilities would not constitute a sound strategic approach. Communication channels, crisis management mechanisms and arrangements designed to prevent mutual miscalculation are also essential components of the deterrence architecture. This is where the importance of ADMM-Plus becomes apparent: although it cannot be expected to replace alliances, this mechanism can ensure the continuation of dialogue among actors with different security perspectives.

ASEAN's position within the regional security architecture demonstrates that competition among major powers cannot be explained solely through military balances. One of the organisation's fundamental priorities is to engage the regional policies of powerful actors such as the United States and China through ASEAN-centred diplomatic mechanisms. This approach enables member states to

address security issues among themselves and maintain relations with external partners without becoming dependent on a single major power. Nevertheless, ASEAN members have different priorities regarding the continuation of their economic relations with China and the preservation of their security ties with the United States. Differences between the Philippines' position on maritime security and the more cautious approaches adopted by other members may make it difficult to establish a common security stance. Beeson's (2022) study examining ASEAN's position in the face of great-power competition also draws attention to how member states' efforts to balance between the two powers may complicate the preservation of the organisation's central role.[vi]

The future of ASEAN centrality does not depend on member states reaching agreement on every strategic issue. A more realistic criterion is whether disagreements can be managed without paralysing the organisation's functioning. The Philippines' decision to bring the South China Sea issue to the forefront is associated, from Manila's perspective, with national security and the protection of international law. From China's perspective, however, the same initiatives may be interpreted as the internationalisation of bilateral disputes through multilateral platforms and the expansion of opportunities for external powers to intervene. This contrast creates a significant institutional dilemma for ASEAN. A balance must be established between making members' security concerns visible and preventing competition among major powers from determining the organisation's agenda.

The ADMM and ADMM-Plus meetings held in Cebu demonstrate that security in the Asia-Pacific is being shaped by three fundamental dynamics: (i) unresolved disputes in the South China Sea, (ii) the expansion of US-Japan defence cooperation, and (iii) ASEAN's efforts to preserve its position in regional diplomacy. China assesses these developments through the risks of containment and bloc formation. However, this approach cannot be accepted as the sole framework for explaining the security policies of regional actors. The Philippines' legal and diplomatic initiatives, Japan's efforts to develop its defence capabilities and ASEAN members' attempts to sustain multilateral mechanisms are the outcomes of different security perceptions and national interests. The tensions among these actors' policies demonstrate that the regional order cannot be reduced to the strategic choices of major powers.

In the coming period, the decisive question for regional security will not be whether ASEAN-centred mechanisms can remain outside strategic competition, but rather the extent to which they can manage it. Establishing a binding security order through ASEAN that reconciles the interests of all parties appears unlikely in the short term. Differences in threat perceptions among member states, the military and economic weight of major powers, and the continuation of legal disputes in the South China Sea define the limits of a common approach. Nevertheless, platforms such as ADMM-Plus retain considerable significance.

In conclusion, the Cebu meetings demonstrate that power competition in the Asia-Pacific has reached a stage in which institutional dialogue and military deterrence are advancing simultaneously. China's concerns about containment, the deterrence objectives of the US-Japan alliance and the Philippines' maritime security policy are interconnected issues. Together, they constitute an arena of strategic interaction in which different expectations concerning the future of the regional order intersect. ASEAN's importance stems not from its ability to eliminate power disparities among these actors, but from its capacity to provide a platform where competition can be addressed through multilateral diplomacy. For ASEAN centrality to be sustained, member states must support institutional dialogue with tangible security cooperation. Otherwise, regional platforms may turn into meetings where parties merely declare their existing positions without being able to reduce mutual distrust. The future of stability in the Asia-Pacific will be shaped not only by the distribution of military capabilities but also by the capacity of diplomatic mechanisms to manage crises and by the strategic decision-making autonomy of regional states.

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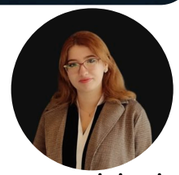
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ANKASAM **ANALYSIS**

Political Transformation in Serbia: The Student Movement and EU Relations



Sena BİRİNCİ

The electoral success of the student-led political movement in Serbia can be regarded as a significant development extending beyond the country's domestic struggle for power, with important implications for the democratic future of the Balkans and Serbia's relations with the European Union (EU). Emerging in opposition to the long-standing political dominance of Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party, the movement has brought demands for combating corruption, ensuring accountability, and safeguarding institutional independence into electoral politics. According to the preliminary results announced following the elections held on 25 October 2026, the Student List reportedly received approximately 52.7 percent of the vote and was expected to secure a parliamentary majority.[i] Nevertheless, the final confirmation of the election results and the movement's ability to translate its electoral success into lasting political transformation remain the key factors that will determine the future course of this process.

The protests in Serbia were triggered by the collapse of the roof of the railway station in Novi Sad in November 2024, which claimed the lives of 16 people.[ii] Initially perceived as an infrastructure disaster, the incident quickly became the focal point of broader debates concerning the functioning of public administration, transparency in public procurement, and political responsibility. For students, the issue was not merely about establishing the causes of the accident, but also about questioning the model of governance that had created the conditions for such tragedies to occur. The public reaction that followed the incident evolved into a broader debate about the responsibility of state institutions towards citizens and the accountability of those in political power.

The social impact of the protests stemmed from the fact that the students' demands were not confined to university campuses. University boycotts and mass demonstrations gradually evolved into a broader movement, attracting participation from diverse segments of society. Academics, professional groups, civil society actors, and citizens dissatisfied with government policies strengthened the movement's social base. This expansion enabled students to move beyond their initial role as a group demanding clarification of a specific incident and to become representatives of broader objections to the country's system of governance.

One of the movement's most distinctive characteristics has been its adoption of an organisational and representative model that differs from traditional party politics. Rather than revolving around a prominent leader, it has emphasised collective decision-making and horizontal organisational structures, making it easier for different segments of society to identify with and support the protests. This model offers an alternative that could reduce political movements' dependence on leader-centred structures. Nevertheless, a movement without clearly defined leadership may also encounter difficulties in post-election decision-making,

assuming responsibility, and implementing a common political programme.[iii] The anti-corruption stance that brought together different viewpoints during street protests may, on its own, prove insufficient to establish a common position on issues such as the economy, foreign policy, and public administration once responsibility for governing is assumed.

For this reason, electoral success represents not the end of the movement's journey but the beginning of a more complex phase. The most important challenge facing the student-led formation will be to translate the demands articulated during the election campaign into concrete policies.[iv] Key priorities include strengthening oversight of public procurement, ensuring independent investigations into allegations of corruption, safeguarding the judiciary from political influence, and increasing transparency in public institutions. Developing solutions to problems in education, healthcare, and social services will also be essential to maintaining the movement's public support. The possibility that the expectations bringing together different social groups during the electoral process may turn into competing priorities once in government should not be overlooked.

Another important dimension of developments in Serbia is that the elections cannot be assessed solely in terms of vote counts and the distribution of parliamentary seats. European institutions and election observers have drawn attention to various problems concerning the quality of democratic competition in the country. Allegations of pressure on voters, the use of public resources in favour of the ruling party, media imbalances, and instances of political intimidation have raised concerns about the fairness of the electoral environment. Following the electoral process, the EU also reiterated its expectations regarding improvements to electoral legislation and the implementation of recommendations made by international observers.[v]

In this context, the democratic significance of the election results is not limited to the possibility of a transfer of power. The sustainability of democratic systems depends not only on who exercises power but also on the rules and institutional mechanisms that constrain it. The fact that new political actors enjoy a different form of public support from the incumbent administration does not mean that institutional transformation will occur automatically. The student movement's ability to introduce lasting reforms in judicial independence, media freedom, and electoral security will be crucial to ensuring that change does not remain dependent on particular individuals. Otherwise, electoral victory may amount to little more than a change in the political personnel currently in power.

Serbia's relations with the EU are also at the centre of this debate on democratic transformation. The country's long-standing EU accession process has encountered various obstacles due to the slow pace of reforms in areas such as the rule of law, judicial independence, the fight against corruption, and fundamental rights. The emphasis placed by Brussels in its post-election statements on strengthening democratic institutions, media freedom, and the rule of law indicates the criteria that are likely to shape bilateral relations in the new period.[vi] Progress by the student movement in these areas could pave the way for a new chapter in Serbia's relations with the EU.

However, it would be inaccurate to interpret the election results as definitive proof that Serbia is moving towards EU membership. The student movement's public support is largely rooted in opposition to corruption, demands for accountability, and calls for change in the country's governance. Although these demands are consistent with the EU's democratic standards, the movement's approach to foreign policy issues is more complex. A desire to improve relations with the EU does not necessarily mean acceptance of all the conditions attached to the accession process. Therefore, the main issue for Brussels will be whether the reform commitments announced following the electoral victory are actually implemented.

Serbia's foreign policy is shaped not only by its objective of European integration but also by its relations with Russia and China. Russia remains important to Belgrade, particularly because of bilateral ties in the energy sector and its diplomatic support regarding the Kosovo issue. China, meanwhile, has become an influential actor in the country's external relations through its economic investments and infrastructure projects.[vii] Serbia's efforts to advance its EU membership aspirations while maintaining relations with these countries form part of its long-standing pursuit of a multi-vector foreign policy balance.

The student movement's approach to these issues will constitute one of the most significant policy challenges it would face if it came to power. Issues such as sanctions against Russia and the status of Kosovo demonstrate that relations with the EU involve much more than democratic reforms alone. The tension between Serbia's refusal to recognise Kosovo's independence and its pursuit of European integration is not an issue that a new government could easily resolve. Similarly, decisions concerning the future of relations with Russia will require a balance between energy security, perceptions of national interest, and the objective of integration with European institutions.[viii] Consequently, whether the student movement has a pro-European orientation should be assessed not merely through its rhetoric but also through the responses it provides to these concrete foreign policy challenges.

These developments also constitute a test for the EU. The Union's enlargement policy aims to encourage the strengthening of democratic institutions in candidate countries. However, the failure of the accession process to produce tangible progress over many years can raise questions about the credibility of European integration in candidate countries. In Serbia's case, the electoral success of a social movement advocating democratic reforms offers the EU an opportunity to translate this support into a concrete

policy framework. Nevertheless, it will not be sufficient for Brussels simply to welcome the political change. Progress in the accession process must be based on clear benchmarks, consistent conditions, and a feasible timetable to preserve the credibility of European institutions in promoting democratisation.

The quality of democratic transformation could also be undermined if the EU's relationship with Serbia's new political actors is shaped exclusively by geopolitical interests. Serbia's relations with Russia and China, energy resources, and regional security considerations occupy an important place in Brussels' strategic calculations. However, allowing these priorities to take precedence over democratic standards could create a situation that contradicts the fundamental values of European integration. The EU's approach must therefore combine the promotion of reforms with consistency in its expectations concerning the rule of law and fundamental rights.

The regional implications of the student movement in Serbia also merit close attention. In the Western Balkans, the quality of democratic institutions, the fight against corruption, and European integration have long been interconnected areas of debate. The electoral success of the student-led movement demonstrates that demands for political change do not necessarily have to be articulated through traditional opposition parties. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Serbia's experience offers a single model that can be directly replicated in other countries. Each country has its own political institutions, social structures, and external relations. The regional significance of the movement lies not so much in providing a ready-made solution as in demonstrating that civic participation and demands for accountability can produce tangible political outcomes.

In conclusion, the electoral success of the student-led movement in Serbia represents the translation of a powerful societal challenge to the country's long-standing model of governance into institutional politics. However, transforming this success into lasting democratic change will depend on the movement's ability to turn its shared demands into viable policies, strengthen independent institutions, and address the democratic shortcomings brought to light during the electoral process. Relations with the EU will constitute an important part of this process. Serbia's ability to advance its objective of European integration will be determined not only by its foreign policy choices but also by the steps it takes domestically to uphold the rule of law and ensure democratic accountability. Accordingly, the success of the student movement should be measured not merely by its potential to change the existing political order but also by its ability to make the exercise of power more transparent and accountable. Ultimately, what matters most is whether the expectations of political change that emerged on election night will translate into tangible improvements in everyday politics and the functioning of state institutions.

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