

Role of European Union in post 9/11 Afghanistan

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The events of September 11, 2001 that took place in New York and Washington DC shook the world in many ways. America's symbols of power, its financial and military hubs, were targeted in well-coordinated attacks that left thousands dead. Infrastructure worth hundreds of millions of dollars was destroyed in the attack and America's image and ego were badly hurt. It was all but certain that the most powerful country in the world would retaliate in the strongest of manners. The event changed how terrorism and was seen globally. The United States and its allies were quick to respond to what was now seen as *global terrorism threat*. The attack was not seen as one just targeting the United States, but was instead perceived to be an attack on Western democratic values and way of life. It became a unifying factor globally, with America and its allies joining forces to strike back. The European Union, or the EU, was one of the main allies of the United States through its campaign. With the 9/11 attacks directly linked with Al-Qaeda, then Afghan regime of Taliban came under severe international pressure as they housed Al-Qaeda's now deceased leader Osama bin Laden along with a large number of fighters.¹A refusal by the Taliban to handover bin Laden led to the international forces invading Afghanistan and eventually grabbing hold of its power.

¹Mölling C., 'Pooling and sharing in the EU and NATO: European defence needs political commitment rather than technocratic solutions', SWP Comments No. 18, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, June 2012.

This international action resulted in the weakening of Al-Qaeda and its leaders going into a hiding. The Taliban government was deposed and a new set-up was brought in by the coalition forces. Ever since, skirmishes between the Afghan authorities and the Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters have continued with varying frequency. To date, the Afghan government has been unable to counter the Taliban entirely, who still enjoy control in parts of the country and exult a certain level of influence on society.

The Aftermath of US and Alliance Invasion

As the Taliban regime came to an end, the United States (US) and its allies came forth to help the country in developing a new political system and build its nearly nonexistent infrastructure system. The idea was to ensure that future governments in the country would be democratically elected as well as supportive of the Western values. There were also challenges relating to social injustice, lack of opportunities for the masses and gender inequality among a host of other concerns.

It was clear that the Western powers did not want to leave the country at the risk of returning to extremist ideologies in the future or providing space for the preaching of those ideals. The allies face myriad challenges in accomplishing this task, as the country's little infrastructure was mostly destroyed during the war with the former Soviet Union as well as the civil war that followed afterwards. Afghanistan's social fabric was also severely damaged owing to the conditions of almost constant war. Many of these challenges still exist, at least to a certain degree, and some have even have taken stronger roots since the removal of the Taliban from power. The list of tasks to accomplish was both long and daunting: it included establishing a new political system, building roads and buildings, providing basic amenities developing systems for the future, establishing peace and transforming the society into a united, forward looking nation. Efforts to date are ongoing in

achieving these goals, with a reasonable amount of success achieved.

European Union and its role in Afghanistan

The European Commission established its office in Kabul in May of 2002. The EU has been one of the more active players in Afghanistan since international forces first entered the country in 2001. The EU has played a part in all aspects of the rebuilding effort, including security, infrastructure, social reforms, education and revising the Afghan economy. The process has been a long and painstaking one and it continues today in different forms.

As a part of its commitment to the battle torn country, the bloc has pledged billions of euros in aid and has delivered its promises to better Afghan society. It has also provided the country with necessary human resources in order to train the locals in many fields of life. Some of these include military, social reforms, education, and infrastructure building among others. The EU has also engaged in trade with Afghanistan and provides aid in policy making on the matter. Trade between the two allies has yet to boom but the potential remains and must be realized in the near future for both parties to benefit. Afghanistan is also important to the EU because it is a hotbed for the narcotics trade and about 90% of the heroin on the streets of Europe comes from Afghanistan.²Controlling the spread of the Afghan poppy fields, an annual industry worth around 50 billion dollars' by some estimates, will be crucial for controlling the supply of drugs over the world in the coming years.

²O'Donnell, C. M., 'Britain's coalition government and EU defense cooperation: undermining British interests', *International Affairs*, vol. 87, no. 2 (2011), pp. 419-33; and Howorth, J., 'The EU and NATO after Libya and Afghanistan: the future of Euro-U.S. security cooperation', *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, 26 Feb. 2013.

International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan

A large number of international troops arrived in Afghanistan in 2001 when U.S. and its allies went ahead with a full assault against the sitting regime. It took international forces a relatively brief amount of time to overthrow the Taliban and secure control of the country. International forces were aided by local anti-Taliban leaders, which helped hasten the demise of the Taliban. Security most certainly is one of the most important issues in Afghanistan and prosperity can only completely return to the country when the security situation is completely under control. International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF, a security mission led by Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since late 2001, were mandated with the security of Afghanistan under a UN resolution. ISAF since then has been performing various crucial security related tasks. The task force comprises of troops from 28 NATO countries including the U.S., the UK, Germany and France among others and 14 non-NATO countries including Australia, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

ISAF initially engaged in **protection of Kabul** and the surrounding areas from the insurgents. This, however, changed in 2003 as the UN authorized ISAF to provide security to the entire country. Over the next few years, the forces were involved in many operations against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in order to improve security conditions in Afghanistan. During this period, many ISAF troops have lost their lives or been injured in the line of duty. Until its departure from Afghanistan in 2014, ISAF continued maintaining law and order in the restive country. A multi-pronged approach was the call of the hour and that was exactly what ISAF adopted for achieving long lasting development of peace.

Apart from providing security, ISAF also worked on **development the local security forces**, the Afghan National Security Forces, or ANSF, to ensure that they were able to counter the current and future threats. The Afghan armed forces, thanks to the efforts of ISAF, are professionally trained

and well equipped to deal with grave threats posed by militancy. ISAF also played its part with the local government in developing intelligence forces and infrastructure, crucial for maintaining peace in any part of the world. Without timely and reliable intelligence, it would almost be impossible to counter the threat of insurgents in the country.

Security Challenges in Afghanistan

There were numerous challenges for ISAF in Afghanistan, a country full of rugged terrain. The greatest security challenge in Afghanistan to this day is insurgency. Without controlling insurgents, long lasting peace in the country cannot be achieved. This has proven to be a tough ask since many of the insurgents were fighters who fought the Afghan war against Soviet forces and are battle-hardened veterans. These fighters are well equipped to carry out guerilla warfare and are at home with the use of modern weaponry as well.³ Warlords are also a big issue due to their regional influence, armed presence and the propensity to challenge allegiances as they see fit. Another recent challenge that the security forces in Afghanistan face is that of ISIS. The international terrorist organization has been trying hard to establish its presence in different regions in the world, including Afghanistan. Recently, there has been fighting between Taliban and ISIS fighters in Afghanistan. Despite the fight over territory between the two groups, the Afghan security forces cannot take the matters lightly and must remain vigilant. A merger or even implicit cooperation between the groups could deal a severe blow to the country's security. Finally, there are also challenges in the Pak-Afghan border regions where militant can easily move between borders due its porous nature. This creates issues for forces on both sides of the fence as they are unable to carry hot pursuits beyond their own boundaries.

³Schake, K., 'US retrenchment is right and overdue', ed. T. Valasek, *All Alone? What US Retrenchment Means for Europe and NATO* (Centre for European Reform: London, 2012).

European Union forces in Afghanistan

Thousands of EU troops have remained on the ground over the years for ensuring that the aforementioned goals are achieved. Overall 27,000 troops performed their services for ISAF. Ground and air forces have been involved in various operations that have led to capture and killing of many Al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters in different regions of the country. War, however, comes at a cost and international forces have lost troops in large numbers.

Like all countries, EU forces have suffered casualties in the disposal of their duties. Britain as suffered over 450 fatalities with more 2100 injured over the years. Germans and Italians too have had more than 50 fatalities in Afghanistan. Other EU members' states have also lost Soldiers during battle in Afghanistan. The UK in July of 2018 pledged to raise its number of troops in the country to 1,100 with an additional 440 non-combat troops on the ground. As a part of a long term commitment, European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, **EUPOL Afghanistan** was formed in 2007 as a civilian Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) mission. European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) works within the upgraded framework supported by the Afghan government.⁴ While they have played their part well, they have received the occasional criticism for not doing enough in the restive **eastern and southern parts** of Afghanistan. Some have raised questions about The EU forces overall leadership owing to lack of action in these regions.

Financial Support from European Union

Afghanistan by 2001 was left with little infrastructure and facilities owing to the constant wars for decades. Finances for rebuilding the country were scant. The annual per capita

⁴Atlantic Council, Strategic Advisors Group, 'Saving Afghanistan: an appeal and plan for urgent action', Issue Brief, Mar. 2008, cited in Cook, F., 'NATO operations: current priorities and lessons learned', NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 158 DSC 08 E, para. 148.

income in 2001 was a meager 120 dollars. It has since moved up to around 600 dollars. The lack of opportunities, resources, and poverty put the locals at risk of famine. This increased the chances that locals would join insurgent groups to earn their bread and butter. Foreign aid was the need of the hour in order to support a society at deep peril. Without instant funds, the country was at a danger of falling apart. International donors pledged and provided finances for Afghanistan's upheaval from the very start with The EU at the forefront of finances. During the early days, the **European Commission pledged** a total of €1 billion for reconstruction efforts between 2002 and 2006. Along with the member states, the European Commission accounted for a third of the total pledges at donor conferences in Tokyo in 2002 and Berlin in 2004. The EU with its member states committed about 8 billion euros in aid to Afghanistan between 2002 and 2010.

The provision of financing has since continued from the bloc. During a **donor conference at Brussels** in 2016, EU and its member states pledged 5 billion euros from a total 13.6 billion euros pledged.⁵ These funds will be provided to Afghanistan between 2016 and 2020. The European bloc also provided Afghanistan with a €100 million to ensure for public development, maintaining macroeconomic stability in the country, further public financial management and to reinforce budget transparency. The funds are to be allocated to various areas in the national budget.

Continuing in the same vein, The EU decided in July, 2018 to provide the Afghan government with another €98 million to back reforms relating to finalization and operationalization of its development policies for Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) and National Priority Programs (NPPs), as well as to maintain economic stability and better organize domestic revenue, among other reforms. Over the years, billions of euros have flowed in

⁵Coker, C., 'Why NATO should return home: the case for a twenty-first century alliance', RUSI Journal, vol. 153, no. 4 (2008), p. 11.

the areas of security, health and food and for social reforms for the country. In the foreseeable future, the aid will need to continue in order to achieve the desired results in the overall rebuilding process. The aid has also allowed The EU and Afghanistan to forge strong ties that will be very important in decades to come.

Social Reforms in Afghanistan and EU's role

After the removal of the Taliban regime, social reforms were of utmost importance. Afghanistan had been through a war with the former Soviet Union and then through a civil war for many years. A whole generation of Afghans had experienced the horrors of battles first hand. Many had lost loved ones owing to these conflicts. The psychological toll on the people of the country was unprecedented.

The wars also left a complete path of destruction in terms of societal development. Prior to the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan had a relatively stable governing system and mechanisms for day to day operations were in place. However, that changed and along with the destruction of infrastructure, the systems to run the country also went into ruins. After the Taliban took over, they did little in terms of creating new systems that could help the society in performing its functions more efficiently and effectively.⁶ The hard-line approach including banning girls from school pushed society into further turmoil. The international community has played its positive part in restoring important functions in the society and bringing much needed social changes in Afghanistan. The EU has been one of the main players in bringing about much of the change in the country. The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), established its presence in Afghanistan by opening its office in Kabul in January of 2002. It has inked deeds with the Afghan officials to support important initiatives by providing technical and financial help.

⁶Rupp, R. E., *NATO After 9/11: An Alliance in Continuing Decline* (Palgrave: New York, 2006).

A formal treaty called the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD), was signed last year in February at the Munich Security Conference between the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the Minister of Finance of Afghanistan, Eklil Ahmad Hakimi. The deed was inked with the President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani in audience. The treaty will serve as the basis for developing a mutually advantageous relationship in wider fields such as rule of law, health, education, rural development, science and technology, along with actions to counter corruption, terrorism financing, money laundering, organized criminal activity and narcotics.⁷ The European Commission also undertook a reconstruction program between 2007 and 2010 with a budget of 700 million Euros. The program aimed at improving the critical areas of rural development, supporting the creation of alternative livelihoods and food security. The program also had funding for governance which included funds for police and justice and a significant portion for health. To date, The EU has been involved in many social reforms projects in the country including electoral reform, cultural reforms and projects for gender equality. The EU also helps former militants integrate back into society and find means of livelihood. The support has helped the country in improving its overall social fabric and continued help under the Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development (CAPD) will improve Afghan society further.

Infrastructure Building

As previously mentioned, Afghanistan suffers from chronic lack of much needed infrastructure owing to constant wars. The

⁷ European Union common security and defense policy operations FrederikNaert. - In: The practice of shared responsibility in international law. - Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2017. - p. 669-700 <http://www.sharesproject.nl/publication/shared-responsibility-in-the-framework-of-the-european-unions-common-security-defense-policy-operations/>

matter still is not at an ideal stage owing to the constant threats of insurgency. Projects are generally delayed in various parts of the country due to security concerns. Roads, probably the most important means of travel in any country, were destroyed during decades of wars. Connectivity is therefore reliant on a limited number of roads, which is a major issue for trade. In the last few years, international agencies have been involved in rebuilding roads and the situation is certainly getting better. Electricity is also a major concern as a majority of the population has little or no access to it. In recent years, capacity building is being done to get the country on track. Without electricity, businesses and industry cannot thrive.⁸ With impeded economic activity, the country will continue to struggle to rise financially. More work needs to be done in this regard to help the economy and create greater chances for the local populace. Lack of railways is also another major infrastructural road block. The railways are almost nonexistent which leads to higher costs of transportation. The options to transport goods within the country and to the neighboring countries have been limited as well. This, needless to say, has a negative effect on the overall condition of the Afghan economy. Health sector, a crucial area for any populace, was also lacking and needed immediate uplifting. International donors including the EU worked in the sector over a long period of time to ensure that the situation improved and people were provided with basic health services.

The EU has also been engaging in the international community's efforts for building critical infrastructure for the economy of the country and has provided hundreds of millions of dollars for various projects. Countries from the bloc in their individual capacity have invested in Afghanistan's infrastructure, aiding the uplifting of the depleted nation. Some of these have been in form of direct payments to the

⁸Biscop, S. et al., 'What do Europeans want from NATO?', European Union Institute for Security Studies Report no. 8, Nov. 2010, p. 26.

government, while in other cases, donor agencies have carried out the much needed work.

European Union's Trade Partnership with Afghanistan

International trade by Afghanistan is relatively limited due to a narrow range of products being produced as well as fewer consumers at home that would indulge in foreign produced items. Another aspect has been a relative lack of a clear direction in which the trade must move. This problem is being addressed through the introduction of National Export Strategy. The policy has identified six sectors that will be prioritized due to the high potential for export growth along with employment generation and innovation. These sectors are saffron, dried fruits and nuts, fresh fruits and vegetables, marble and granite, carpets, and precious stones/jewelry. Afghanistan's Chief Executive Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, at the launch event, was all praise for the European Union and its implementing partner, the International Trade Centre (ITC), for their financial and technical support in the formulation of the strategy.⁹ The policy will be imperative for furthering the Advanced Afghan Trade project, which is being funded by the European Union and being realized by International Trade Centre (ITC) in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

The role of The EU in Afghanistan's trade related matters must be applauded. With their financial and technical support, The EU has truly helped the country in moving in the right direction on trade. Policies, if developed and implemented properly, will help Afghanistan in achieving greater trade volumes not only with the European Union (EU) but also with countries all over the world.

In June 2018, the European Union (EU), Government of Afghanistan, KfW (German Development Bank) and Agha Khan Development Foundation (AKDN) launched an initiative

⁹Binnendijk, H., 'Rethinking U.S. security strategy', The New York Times, 24 Mar. 2013.

in the war torn country to boost regional economic development and integration in the border regions of Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Known as "Supporting Cooperation and Opportunities for Regional Economic Development," or SCORED, it will support better trade relationship between Afghanistan and neighboring Tajikistan. One concerning aspect of the mutual trade relationship between The EU and Afghanistan, however, has been the dropping trade volume despite custom duty exemptions for Afghan products. The trade volume in recent times has declined from 2 billion dollars to 300 million dollars annually. The main factor believed to contribute to this sharp decrease is the departure of foreign forces. Much of the imports from Europe were being consumed by these foreign troops. With fewer troops, the demand for these products has naturally declined.

Refugee Crisis effects on Afghan Asylum Seekers

A refugee crisis has gripped all of Europe as conflicts in the Middle East continue to displace people from their homes. The problem is getting worse by the day with international powers supporting opposing sides in some cases. Different attitudes can be seen across the board. While some countries have been very willing to take refugees on board and provide them with a chance to lead decent and safe life, other countries have taken a hardline approach and have rebuked ideas of refugee intake. There have been reported cases where boats carrying refugees have stayed in water while reaching the coast due to not receiving permission from the local authorities to disembark people on them. Over the years, many Afghan citizens have taken refuge in various parts of the world due to similar concerns as those in the Middle East. However, with a relatively stable political government and conditions in their home country getting better than before, it is expected that the refugee seekers will get smaller in numbers. To counter the rising numbers, the European Union (EU) and Afghanistan inked a deal called Joint Way Forward which has eased the

process of Afghan refugee seekers.¹⁰The deal also impacts women and children, the most vulnerable groups of all. While EU has emphasized that it will ensure that the deportations of those at risk only take place when favorable circumstances are available for them in their home country, this may not be adequate owing to the fragile nature of peace in Afghanistan.

Overall, there are thousands of refugees that will be eventually deported under the program. A special terminal for the deportees was being considered in Afghanistan at the time of the agreement being signed in order to cater to the large numbers coming back into the country. There is some resentment about the deal due to the tough conditions faced by the refugees and their often harrowing experiences of the past. While it is quite natural that all refugees and asylum seekers cannot be homed by other countries, it is important to not shut the door entirely to them. The EU has taken a relatively heavy handed approach on the matter which can lead to some resentment from the Afghan government and people. The Afghan government, due to its dependence on aid from. The EU has little space to maneuver on the matter and needs to adhere to the policy from the bloc. It also adds greater risk for the individuals that return to a relatively unstable country.

Recently, however, the European Union and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) inked an agreement worth about €34 million for supporting the nearly 6.5 million Afghans in the Islamic Republics of Iran and Pakistan, as well as approximately 1.2 million internally displaced Afghans. The action will likely help the migrants and lower the resentment against the stringent EU measures against Afghan asylum seekers.

European Union's Success to Date in Afghanistan

The EU has, for the most part, been successful with its policies in Afghanistan and has played a positive part in many ways.

¹⁰Not as smooth as silk', *The Economist*, 2 Mar. 2013.

First and foremost, it has provided the Afghan government with much needed funding. The country had little in terms of finances and without support from overseas,; it would have not been possible for it to move forward.¹¹The financial support, which has been in billions of dollars since 2001, has had a positive impact on the country in many ways, which will continue to show for a long time to come.

The EU also has played a very crucial role in improving the security situation of the country. It has provided Afghanistan with troops, military equipment and training in order to improve the overall law and order situation. Many of the soldiers from the EU have paid the ultimate price in the pursuit of a better, safer Afghanistan. The EUPOL also has had a great impact on the safety and security of the country by protecting citizens and training local law enforcers to carry out the same tasks long after they are gone. EU has also been very active in helping the rebuilding of infrastructure, allowing the country to get back on its own feet. It is a long and laborious process that comes with a high cost but the EU and other international agencies have seen it through. Through different programs, the European bloc has pledged and paid billions of dollars to Afghanistan for its infrastructure development. Efforts such as these have started moving the country in the right direction and allowing it to carry out more trade and achieve a better economy.

The role in boosting Afghanistan's overall trade played by the EU merits applause. Often a lack of good policies is the greatest threat to budding industries. Developing countries more often than not lack workable framework to boost their trade and hit the right areas in order to gain maximum traction

¹¹'Taliban talks in Doha drag on endlessly', Al Jazeera, 26 Feb. 2013; 'New scenery for breaking the ice with the Taliban', New York Times , 20 Dec. 2012; and 'David Cameron invites Taliban for talks over Afghanistan's future', The Guardian, 3 Feb. 2013.

and benefit.¹²The EU has played an instrumental part in developing Afghanistan's National Export Strategy. The strategy will be the guideline used by the government now and in the future to ensure that exports increase and bring much needed foreign exchange to the country.

Future Role of European Union in Afghanistan

This is an extremely crucial matter for both Afghanistan and the European Union. Afghanistan as a country is very important for the EU and the rest of the world. It was torn by wars for decades which led to the creation of entities like the Taliban. It lost its peace, people, infrastructure and much more. Many of those who took up insurgency were the children of war and had known little else. In case of future generations following a similar path, worldwide peace will be at risk. The EU must now take a leadership role in this regard and must not be reluctant. It will be imperative to help Afghanistan financially stable and self-dependent to minimize future risk. It is important because the more Afghani people rely on their own resources,; the smaller is the chance of them returning to militancy. It also means that people will stay away from cultivating crops that lead to production of narcotic drugs, something that affects the people on the streets of Europe directly.

To achieve the task, The EU will need to invest more in the country and convince other big players to follow suit. It will need to invest into policy making that allows greater employment opportunities as well as in creating opportunities on its own at the same time. It should invest in developing skilled labor which can boost the existing industries as well as work in newer fields. It will also benefit the countries in the EU as they can have some of the skilled labor migrate to them. It is also important that The EU continues to push for **social**

¹²Mark "Max" Maxwell, Richard V. Meyer. In: Penn state journal of law & international affairs, Vol. 5, issue 1, 2017, p. 111-163
<https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/jlia/vol5/iss1/6>

reforms in the country. Social reforms help people in becoming prosperous, something that leads to peace in the longer run. Social justice will allow society to thrive and reach its full potential.¹³

Afghanistan is a country that has **ethnic divide** on the basis of language and it has a long history of trouble due to that divide. By providing everyone with a just environment, the effects of ethnicities can be lessened tremendously. Efforts will also be needed to reduce the tensions between people of different ethnicities in general so that a friendly and inclusive environment is created. The EU will also need to work hard along with other international players to ensure long **lasting peace in Afghanistan**. Training and arming of the local security forces is an important part of that. However, bringing the Taliban and other insurgents into the fold holds even greater importance. If these warring factions can be brought into the mainstream and allowed to become a part of the political process, violence can be reduced quickly and permanently. The EU must play a part in the process. Dialogues have taken place between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban but they bore little fruit. It is crucial that more meaningful talks take place which cannot happen without the support of the international community.

Boosting **trade ties** will also be an important task for The EU in Afghanistan. It has been an important party in improving the current trade conditions in the country and has been more than helpful in bringing about policies in the area. A higher volume of trade by Afghanistan will bolster its economy and help reduce its dependence on foreign aid. At the same time, The EU and Afghan government need to work on controlling the smuggling of narcotics since this creates hurdles in export of genuine products as well. With smooth trade, more people in Afghanistan will take up business and more clients

¹³Armed groups and procedural accountability : a roadmap for further thought Katharine Fortin. In: Yearbook of international humanitarian law, Vol. 19, 2016, p. 157-180.

overseas will be willing to use products produced in the country. With a multidimensional approach, the EU can bring about a lot of stability and positive change in Afghanistan. Currently, China is actively engaging in such a role. While it is surely a useful action on the part of the Asian nation, it will look to secure its own stakes. If The EU leaves a void, it can be negatively affected by this. On the other hand, a-continued support to Afghanistan from the EU will not only help all stakeholders, it will especially benefit Europe in numerous ways.¹⁴At the end of the day, a peaceful and forward moving Afghanistan will bring peace to the region and lessen the risk of war expansion around the world.

¹⁴The international responsibility of NATO and its personnel during military operations by David Nauta. - Leiden ; Boston : Brill Nijhoff, 2018. - XVI, 194 p.