

THE EUROPEAN REPUBLIC ON THE WORLD STAGE

Thinking back to the multilateral world of conferences she had once studied, Sofia knew that the lessons of the 20th century world would only get Europe so far in the hard-nosed global contest that had emerged since. She wasn't prepared to drop all her ideals, however, but was to pursue them with a realist zeal.

Tbilisi, 9 May 2049. *Europi Shakli* [House of Europe]

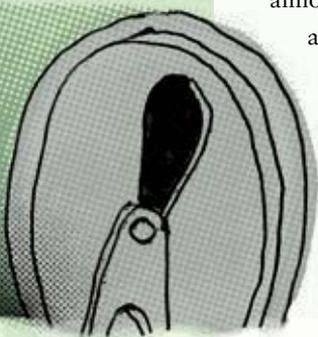
How the city has changed...

Sofia Belver-Tamarashvili leant out of a window in the House of Europe's vast office. How the whole country has changed since it joined the European Union.

Actually, we don't say EU anymore. We just say 'Europe' – ever since the Great Reconstruction of 2033 and the Treaty of Athens, which made amends for the mistakes that followed the 2008 financial crisis. After almost a century of existence, the European project has matured, grown and changed. It overcame the dark days of the 2020s and the trendy fascism of an entire generation of leaders – young, macho, energetic, xenophobic, and authoritarian. The walls of their Fortress Europe eventually fell, but Europe remained standing.

And for 10 years, Sofia has been in charge of its foreign policy.

It was in this capacity, that very morning in her home town, that she had opened proceedings at the conference on 'Middle East Peace and Regeneration' a region devastated by a flash conflict lasting several months in 2047. Millions dead, unimaginable destruction and the use of tactical nuclear weapons, shamelessly and cynically supplied by Washington and Beijing to live-test their military technology in a theatre of operations incidental to their interests since the energy transition of the 2030s had rendered oil obsolete.



A victim of collateral damage, the United Nations – already weakened by the short shrift it received from Trump and his successors and discredited by its own impotence – did not survive. Since 2048, Europe has been on manoeuvres. The only power still driven by a sense of duty to stand up to the egocentric giants, the European Republic is at last more than just an actor on the international stage: it *is* the international stage. Both mediator and leader, its mission is to pull the belligerents out of the spiral of violence and open the way for cooperation, despite the reluctance of certain partners.

“What do you think, Adrian?”

“I think it’s in the bag. The Americans know they screwed up big time and must shoulder most of the blame for the march to war. Even indirectly, it’s their fault if all that’s left of Riyadh, Tel Aviv, and Tehran are gaping craters. The region has been flattened by the nukes with which they complacently supplied their puppets, and now they have 3 million deaths on their conscience to share with Beijing... So at first they’ll pretend that they’re not thirsty, but eventually they’ll end up downing the Europe-made SaveOurSouls potion in one. We’re saving their arses. Kagan can strut around like it’s Austerlitz, but really it’s Waterloo. She’s just trying to spin this mess to her advantage by blaming the previous administration so it doesn’t compromise her presidential hopes...”

It was a rhetorical question, of course. But the bombastic, slang-peppered language of her young special advisor always made her smile. Adrian Veseli, a Romanian environmentalist, polyglot, and PhD in Gandhian studies, is also a diplomat of sharp intellect... and coarse language, perfectly cut out for the power-plays that still shape international relations.

Just like Emily Kagan, the main adversary in this multiplayer game of chess. The American Secretary of State is a creature of power. Aggressive beauty and manipulative intelligence have rewarded her with political success. Her stint as Secretary of Defense in the brief and only Democratic administration post-Trump in 2036 left the top brass with fond memories. Her strong will and forceful language swept away the prejudices of macho American culture. Between them, Emily Kagan and Jennifer Rodriguez, the ultra-conservative Latino Republican president who held office from 2028 to 2036, certainly changed the face of post-Trump America, if not the tone. They brought less vulgar nonsense, but just as much aggressiveness and defiance towards their partners. Less idiocy, but more cynicism.

Adrian remains cautious, but Sofia has no doubt: Emily Kagan will be the next president of the United States. She will be a formidable adversary, a seductive ghost from the old world. They will try to undermine the brutal power relations and sterile politics that Kagan brings, which have always prevented humanity from viewing the planet as one big interdependent system.

These are the international relations that Sofia strives to change – both in style and substance – making climate, life, and human beings absolute priorities. Whether whales or bees, forests or ice caps, poor people here or indigenous people there, every facet of the diamond that is planet Earth merits public action – and must not be neglected. What with the fourth industrial revolution and sixth mass extinction, Sofia is constantly reminded that it is question of far more than ‘corrective’ action. It is about profoundly changing our vision of the world – and the economy. “Over three centuries, macho Western men have endangered millennia-old equilibria that women had nurtured. We must urgently restore these balances!” she explains, softly.

Non-violence, inclusion, dialogue, listening, welcoming: steeped in the lessons of transactional justice, well versed in the two-pronged political and spiritual approach of a ‘syncretic’ feminism, the former academic and historian of “heretical movements and political dissidence throughout the ages”, as her bio put it, had, at 52, come to embody the European Republic. Georgian through her father, Spanish through her mother and European through her children, Sofia was today the face of Europe – and its phone number, ready to respond to all the Kissingers of the world.

“You see, Adrian, holding the violent accountable, making them face the consequences of their actions, avoiding the moralising judgements that put their egos on the defensive, using conscience to force them to atone for their excesses... our approach works... and Emily Kagan will have no choice but to come round to it, especially when she’s president – despite what she may think.”

“Especially under the unblinking eye of the emerging global community,” he agreed, pensively.

Finding the balance between carrot and stick, between the collective and the individual, between different levels... Making the planet the national interest: that was the grand ambition of this attempt at a global cultural and ideological reset. But by capturing imaginations tainted by the century of nations, from the very first months of her mandate they pulled off a

masterstroke that would cement her political credibility: they saved the oceans by granting them the legal status of a nation. “In a world divided into nations, what is the only right that can check the voracious hunger for territory and resources that marks the nation-state ideology? Another nation,” she had explained to her team. “A border to abolish borders. A state that trumps all others to destroy imperialism,” she had continued. “We’re going to subvert international law.”

And, in her big speech before the UN General Assembly in 2039: “The oceans are the source of life on Earth. This primordial soup has nurtured us and enabled us to grow. It is mother and father to us all. It is the place we were born – our universal *natio*.”

Then things happened pretty fast. The first regeneration programmes, which helped spur the gradual renaissance of the Aral Sea and halt the advance of the Sahara; the “Semper virens” initiative to protect and revitalise the Amazon, Indonesia, and the Congo; food programmes based on small-scale farming; a policy of converting tax havens to alternative development models based on research centres and networked university libraries – the appropriately named “Sofia” programme, one of Adrian’s ideas – and one which had so moved her that she couldn’t object. Education, culture, nature, women’s liberation, basic rights, migration, soft technologies, the commons... All European programmes rely on the same recipe for systematic change: break the mindset of linear development, empower local communities, and restore the natural equilibriums disrupted by extractivist economic models.

Minister Belver-Tamarashvili’s Europe had become the driving force behind a New Planetary Order, a guiding light for nations looking to escape the darkness of past decades. Some analysts call it a ‘feminist foreign policy’. *Foreign Policy* recently carried a feature on it, which was, unsurprisingly, very critical. But as the academic world seizes upon it, the doctrine asserts itself.

Sofia gazes at the three portraits on the wall, portraits that adorn every official EU office worldwide: Simone Veil, Vandana Shiva, and Michelle Obama flash bright, winning smiles back at her. Three lives, three careers, three inspirations.

Above all, Michelle Obama, who twice failed in her presidential bid. Not because she was black or female. But because her message of balanced, gentle firmness contrasted too sharply with the culture of force so engrained in American politics. Too nuanced, too inclusive, too much Venus, not enough Mars?

Was the emergence of this alternative foreign policy only really ever possible in Europe? She knew that two phenomena in particular had favoured this development.

First, the experience of the ‘New Age of Man’. This decade of political and cultural masculinist reactionary hysteria in fact provoked a strong backlash. And by the mid-2030s, the Enough movement had swept away all before it, bringing to power a new generation of feminists who came of age in the shadow of a male domination that was as exaggerated as it was ridiculous. A politically engaged intellectual who had enjoyed a high media profile since the end of the 2020s, Sofia Belver-Tamarashvili was one of the leading figures of this quiet cultural revolution.

But most important of all, Sofia is not naïve. She knows that her words and ways benefit from the EU’s accumulation of economic and military power over the decades, as well as from the greater weight the bloc carries on the international stage as a result. She knows that, since 2028, the EU has built up an independent military capability to underpin its diplomacy. She knows that the euro now lies at the centre of the international monetary system after the great dollar crisis at the end of Trump’s second term, something that makes it easier to fund expensive programmes – and, at times, to exert subtle pressure to get its way, as it did at the end of 2036 to rein in Beijing’s territorial ambitions in the South China Sea.

She knows that brute force hasn’t gone anywhere. And she uses it.

“Subvert force to render it unnecessary. Make flexibility and moderation signs of strength.” More than a motto: a practical philosophy.



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