

# The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood Today



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*Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives*

Edited by

Valentin Naumescu and Dan Dungaciu

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# INTRODUCTION: THE NEW “EASTERN EUROPE” AND COLD WAR II

VALENTIN NAUMESCU

## Abstract

*The pre-1989 “Eastern Europe” has become “Central Europe” and is now part and parcel of the North-Atlantic Alliance and the European Union. The new “Eastern Europe”, under the soft, Eurocratic name of “Eastern Neighbourhood”, stretching from Belarus to the North, to Azerbaijan to the South, switched from the status of Soviet republics - until 1991 - to the one of a disputed “buffer zone” between the West and Russia. Formally, the six countries included in the EU programme of the Eastern Partnership might have a more or less realistic European perspective. Three of them have signed and ratified the Association Agreements with the EU (Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia), while the other three countries (Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan) have not yet assumed this strategic option and remain, politically and economically, close to Russia.*

**Keywords:** The European Union, Eastern Neighbourhood, Eastern Partnership, Association Agreement, the United States, Russia, Ukraine, influence

This is not just wordplay with the “West”, “Central” and “Eastern” Europe. It is actually a historical process of westernization of a long contested region of Europe, located essentially between Germany and Russia, which has entered its second major phase: the “absorption” of the former republics of the Soviet Union into the Euro-Atlantic system. When the post-World War II Western order advanced for first time towards the East and extended NATO’s security umbrella over 12 former communist countries (11 in the case of the EU), the Russian sphere of influence on the European continent substantially diminished. The sequence of several

enlargements of NATO (1999, 2004 and 2008) and of the European Union (2004, 2007 and 2013) pushed the strategic, political, military and economic frontier of the West closer to the Russian territory, but still kept a thin “buffer zone” between the two blocs.

Launched in May 2009 at the Prague Summit<sup>1</sup>, the Eastern Partnership was based on the idea of strengthening the European Union’s political and economic relations with the abovementioned countries. President Putin saw this new step of westernization taking place in the redefined “Eastern Europe” as an “assault” against Russian strategic interests in the region and decided to combat the process of rapprochement between these states and the European Union or NATO. The new EU attempt at pushing to the East, through the Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreements, faced this time the aggressive opposition of Moscow, especially in the case of Ukraine, and probably, in the future, in that of Moldova. The dramatic events in Kyiv in the winter of 2013-2014 were followed by the ousting of then-President Yanukovych and, soon after, by the severe military crisis of Crimea, in March 2014. It was the moment when we started speaking about the “second Cold War”<sup>2</sup>. This volume is an attempt to define some major regional opportunities, vulnerabilities and dilemmas, and explore the complex perspectives of the new Eastern Europe, under its current name of the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood.

### **Preamble. From “Eastern Europe” (until 1989) to “East-Central Europe” (1990s), then to the European Union’s Eastern Neighbourhood (after 2009)**

The region of Europe located between Germany and Russia underwent a process in which it was repeatedly renamed after World War II. All successive labels assigned to this group of countries had ideological connotations and, therefore, were generally associated with negative perceptions in the West.

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, “Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit”, 7 May 2009, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf), accessed March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Valentin Naumescu, “Ukraine lost Crimea. The West won’t defend it militarily! The second Cold War starts”, 1 March 2014, *Contributors*, <http://www.contributors.ro/editorial/ucraina-a-pierdut-crimeea-occidentul-nu-o-va-apara-militar-incepe-al-doilea-razboi-rece>.

In other words, for a number of generations (and, to some extent, even today), Eastern Europe has been defined rather politically than geographically. This is the reason why Prague, for instance, was for a half-century placed in “Eastern Europe”, whilst Vienna and Helsinki, although more eastward than Prague, were part of the “West”. The “mental map” of the continent reflected in fact, for opinion leaders as well as for ordinary citizens, the political arrangements of the post-war order.

Before 1989, “Eastern Europe” was the synthetic name given in the West to the group of eight communist countries<sup>3</sup> beyond the Iron Curtain, other than the Soviet Union, which was considered distinct. Altogether, the USSR and Eastern Europe formed the “socialist bloc”, rivalling with the Western bloc in the so-called Cold War.

As per Keith Crawford’s analysis:

“from the Western viewpoint there was little difference between the various countries of Soviet-dominated ‘Eastern Europe’: they were all part of what former US President Ronald Reagan once called the ‘evil empire’. [...] So once they were freed from the yoke of Soviet occupation, they sought to distance themselves quickly from the idea of ‘Eastern Europe’, with all its previous, mostly negative connotations”.<sup>4</sup>

The year 1989 created the perspective of a new name for the former “Eastern Europe”, once those countries succeeded in abolishing their communist regimes and took distance from the Soviet Union. The new concept of “East-Central Europe” (ECE) reflected both a desire to return to their Central European cultural identity and a will to render it clear that none of them was an appendix of the Soviet Empire, still existing at that time. The number of states increased from eight to thirteen: East Germany (GDR, which very soon disappeared after the German reunification of October 1990), Poland, the Czech and the Slovak Republics (after the split of Czechoslovakia, effective from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1993), Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania and, later, six sovereign states emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Montenegro.

The general claim of the former “Eastern European” countries to be considered part of Central Europe (not of Eastern Europe, as in the past) had a number of historical, cultural and obviously political reasons. Milan

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<sup>3</sup> East Germany (GDR), Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Albania.

<sup>4</sup> Keith Crawford, *East Central European Politics Today: From Chaos to Stability?*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996, 1-2.

Kundera, the famous Czech writer and dissident, explained them in an essay entitled “The Tragedy of Central Europe”, based on the idea that Central European countries had always been closer culturally and spiritually to the West<sup>5</sup> than to the East of the continent, but it was only the Iron Curtain and the Cold War that made them belong to “Eastern Europe”, against the will of their nations.

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the proclamation of independence of the former Soviet republics, ECE was also meant to distinguish the “intermediate group” of countries (having no Soviet history) from ex-Soviet republics such as Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and, obviously, the Russian Federation itself. Thus, the ECE concept did not include the former Soviet territory.

Between 2004 and 2013, 11 countries<sup>6</sup> from East-Central Europe joined the European Union and, therefore, gained their full geopolitical place in Central Europe. After 2009, once the Eastern Partnership programme was initiated, a new “Eastern Europe” appeared: the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union, represented by six former Soviet republics: Belarus, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This is where our analysis starts from.

## **The Eastern Partnership – integration without accession?**

When the Eastern Partnership was launched, at the Prague EU Summit of May 2009, it was supposed to be another success story of the European Union. The outcome was nevertheless ambiguous even in the most optimistic scenario.

In official terms, it is mentioned that “the initiative aims to tighten the relationship between the EU and the Eastern partners by deepening their political co-operation and economic integration. The EaP neither promises nor precludes the prospect of EU membership to the partner states”<sup>7</sup>. In simple words, it was an attempt to expand the European model of governance and the Western economic system onto the six former USSR components, without giving them guarantees for future membership status. Nevertheless, this new potential wave of European integration faced the virulent opposition of Moscow. Despite high costs, limited capacities and

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<sup>5</sup> Milan Kundera, “The Tragedy of Central Europe”, *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 13, Issue 7, 16 April 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia.

<sup>7</sup> Eastern Partnership Community, *EaP at a glance*,

<http://www.easternpartnership.org/content/eap-at-a-glance>, accessed March 2014.

the lack of membership prospects, the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood Policy continues to stir interest on the continent, as Julia Langbein and Tanja Borzel aim to demonstrate in their recent book, *Explaining Policy Change in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood*<sup>8</sup>. More and more voices nowadays ask Brussels to review the Eastern Partnership and consider a European perspective for the EaP countries. The new Juncker Commission does not envisage any enlargement of the European Union in the next five years (2014-2019).

What essentially explains the new tension between the West and the Russian Federation amid the recent efforts of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to head for the Euro-Atlantic structures is an old but crystal-clear declaration of Russian President Vladimir Putin. "Above all, we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama"<sup>9</sup>, concluded the Russian leader in April 2005, with regard to the historical end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the communist super-power. President Putin and his government would like to see this process of disintegration end and, moreover, in vice-premier Rogozin's words, "the broken pieces of USSR gathered again"<sup>10</sup>.

The enlargement of NATO and the EU towards Eastern Europe, including some former Soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), as well as the subsequent tensions with an undaunted Russia, had been predicted long before the first waves of enlargement. In the mid '90s, when the US and its Western allies were still hesitating regarding Eastern enlargement, Zbigniew Brzezinski anticipated:

"some will say that the impotence to extend the Alliance could predict a Yalta II, that is a *de facto* recognition of a special sphere of influence of Russia on the territory of the former Soviet Union and Central Europe. [...] Although a Yalta II is impossible today, according to Russia's state and new realities in Central Europe, only a clear manifestation of the US

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Langbein, Tanja Borzel, (eds.), *Explaining Policy Change in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood*, Routledge, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation", 25 April 2005, *Kremlin Archives*, [http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031\\_type70029type82912\\_87086.shtml](http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml), consulted in March 2014.

<sup>10</sup> R.M., "Dmitri Rogozin: The Time Has Come to Gather the USSR Pieces Again", *Hotnews*, 12 June 2014, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-17472541-dmitri-rogozin-venit-timpul-adunam-bucatile-urss.htm>, consulted on 15 June 2014.

President will end the increasing temptation to treat in a populist form the relation with Russia and the future of Europe”<sup>11</sup>.

The similarities with the current situation, almost 20 years after that sharp and realistic analysis made by Brzezinski well before the Madrid NATO Summit of 1997, are shocking indeed, with the single difference that the frontiers of the West have advanced in the meantime from the former Berlin Wall to the so-called “Eastern Neighbourhood”, we may add. The former Eastern Europe is now part of Central Europe, while the new Eastern Europe is represented by the six former Soviet republics included in the Eastern partnership.

The paradoxical relation between the West and Russia, seen from a historical perspective, is explained magisterially by Alain Besançon in his book *Holy Russia*:

“The West was fascinated by Russia. From the first moment the West met Russia, it tried to understand who they really are. The West was attracted by Russia but at the same time stood in fear of it. The West tried to include Russia in its world; it also tried to exclude it. They succeeded neither the former, nor the latter.”<sup>12</sup>

The accurate observation made by the French writer is valid not only for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’ Russian Empire, but also for the 20<sup>th</sup> century Soviet Union, and today for the economically attractive but politically controversial Russian Federation.

The tensions in the Eastern periphery of the European Union arose on the occasion of the Vilnius EU Summit of November 2013. At the end of its five-year term, the European Commission led by José Manuel Barroso wanted to present a major success story and also to prove the full potential of the European Union to work with Eastern European countries. From the total six member states of the Eastern Partnership<sup>13</sup> (EaP), at least four were credited in the early phases with real chances to continue the political and institutional rapprochement with Brussels: Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Armenia. Belarus and Azerbaijan were accepted in the programme in order to have a complete image of the region (from the

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<sup>11</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Central and Eastern Europe in the Storm of Transition*, Bucharest: Diogene, 1995, 317.

<sup>12</sup> Alain Besançon, *Sfânta Rusie [Holy Russia]*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2014, 7.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, the Eastern Partnership programme numbers 34 states, given the fact that all 28 EU member states are part of it, but for the simplicity of the discussion we consider only the six non-EU countries.

North of the continent to South Caucasus), but there were no consistent hopes to see them any time soon as associate members of the Union.

Among the six EaP member states, three countries are affected by frozen conflicts (not to mention the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and have Russian troops on their territories: the Republic of Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and, more recently, Ukraine, which has witnessed the annexation of Crimea by Russia, despite the fact that the international community does not recognise the territorial loss suffered by Ukraine. “Nobody was able to remove Russia from this territory”, according to Romanian Presidential Adviser Iulian Chifu, “either from Abkhazia, or from South Ossetia or Transnistria. [...] All this ‘because we can’, ‘because you cannot make us leave’, or ‘because nobody could prevent us from staying there’.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, Moscow used the *fait accompli* policy in the region.

The beginning of the fall of 2013 revealed one first unpleasant surprise for the Western leaders: Armenia unexpectedly chose to follow Moscow and enter the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. “We have [...] held a detailed exchange of views on issues of Eurasian integration, and I confirmed Armenia’s desire to join the Customs Union and to join in the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union”<sup>15</sup>, said Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan, after a meeting with Russia’s Putin in September 2013. The short list of potentially pro-European Eastern countries thus shrunk to three: *the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine*, less than three months before the Vilnius Summit.

The other two reluctant EaP member states, namely Belarus and Azerbaijan, sided with Russia from the early phases of discussions. It therefore came as no surprise to see Minsk and Baku (the northernmost and the southernmost capital cities of the EaP programme) stay away from the perspective of initialling the Association Agreements (AAs) with the European Union. The former is an autocratic regime with a very strong pro-Russian orientation, while the latter used to be a pro-West (especially pro-US) country, recently disappointed by the lack of interest in its strategic potential showed by the United States. “In Azerbaijan you listen to their desire to be friends with the United States and bewilderment of

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<sup>14</sup> Iulian Chifu, Narciz Bălășoiu, Radu Arghir, *The East-West Black Sea-Caspian Sea Strategic Corridor*, Bucharest: Romanian Academy’s Institute for Political Science and International Relations Publishing House, 2014, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Gardner, “Armenia chooses Russia over EU”, *European Voice*, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2013/september/armenia-chooses-russia-over-eu/78090.aspx>, 3 September 2013, accessed in March 2014.

American indifference. [...] They feel let down by the United States and they are”<sup>16</sup>, noticed George Friedman in his June 2013 Stratfor analysis.

The biggest drama in Vilnius was by far Ukraine, while the Republic of Moldova and Georgia were very firm and enthusiastic in initialling their AAs. President Yanukovich of Ukraine had seemed for a few months, before the Vilnius Summit, committed to siding with the EU. A pro-European public campaign was launched by the regime of Kyiv during the months of the 2013 summer and early fall. In fact, Ukraine was even more advanced than Georgia and the Republic of Moldova from this perspective, given the fact that Ukraine had initialled the AA in the past and was in the process of signing the documents.

Starting with the fall of 2013, Russia began to put economic pressure<sup>17</sup> on pro-European countries preparing to sign/initial Association Agreements, especially Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Moldovan wines were banned on the Russian market<sup>18</sup>. Ukraine was notified of the \$20 billion debt to the Russian economy and banks, part of which it owed to the giant Gazprom. Winter was quickly approaching and, ironically or not, Russian meteorologists were predicting the harshest winter in the past 100 years...

After a discrete Putin-Yanukovich meeting at a Moscow military airport in early November, the Ukrainian leader announced that he would not sign the Association Agreement with the European Union at the Vilnius Summit and would turn politically and economically to Russia. The failure to seal the deal with Ukraine stirred an angry riposte of some European media and analysts, claiming the ineffectiveness of the German-led EU strategy on Ukraine. Many voices blamed the rigid “Free Tymoshenko” clause imposed by Berlin to Yanukovich as unrealistic and exaggerated (the EU only dropped this condition during the days of the Summit) and also criticised the lack of substantial financial support granted to Kyiv ahead of a difficult winter.

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<sup>16</sup> George Friedman, “Geopolitical Journey: Azerbaijan and America”, *Stratfor*, June 11, 2013, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/geopolitical-journey-azerbaijan-and-america>, consulted in June 2013.

<sup>17</sup> A.O., “Ukraine and the EU: Politics of Brutal Pressure”, *The Economist*, 22 November 2013, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2013/11/ukraine-and-eu-0>, accessed in March 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Nikolaj Nielsen, “Russia bans Moldova wines ahead of EU Summit”, *EU Observer*, 9 November 2013, <http://euobserver.com/foreign/121388>, consulted in March 2014.

“The inability of European bureaucrats to keep up with the Kremlin's manipulations – or Kiev's political calculations – has cost the EU a trade deal with Ukraine, and severely damaged its foreign policy. [...] The EU offered cooperation, free trade and financial contributions in exchange for democratic reforms. Officials in Brussels spoke enthusiastically about the emergence of a historic Eastern European policy, not unlike former German Chancellor Willy Brandt's rapprochement with the Warsaw Pact countries in the 1970s. [...] The EU's other goal, even though it was not as openly expressed, was to limit Russia's influence and define how far Europe extends into the East. For Russia, the struggle to win over Ukraine is not only about maintaining its geopolitical influence, but also about having control over a region that was the nucleus of the Russian empire a millennium ago. This helped create Cold War-style grappling between Moscow and Brussels”

...concluded *Der Spiegel*<sup>19</sup> in the aftermath of the devastating Kyiv announcement.

The episode in Vilnius thus ended with a semi-failure of the European Union and its Eastern Neighbourhood Policy. Only two out of the six countries decided to get closer to Brussels. The biggest stake in Vilnius, as it was unanimously agreed, namely Ukraine, was eventually among the reluctant European states. The failing Eastern Neighbourhood Policy, in the light of the poor Vilnius Summit results, was extensively presented in a Report of the French Senate's Commission for European Affairs, in December 2013, as a major malfunction of the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation<sup>20</sup>.

Looking back on the Vilnius Summit of November 2013, it is difficult to consider whether a different negotiation strategy in relation to Yanukovych could have led to a positive decision. Probably not, I suppose. With or without the request of releasing Yulia Tymoshenko from prison, then-President Yanukovych would still not have signed the Association Agreement. The main reason for not siding with Brussels was probably the Kyiv regime's fear that Ukraine would not be able to resist in

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<sup>19</sup> Spiegel Staff, “Putin's Gambit: How EU lost Ukraine”, *Spiegel Online International*, November 25, 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/how-the-eu-lost-to-russia-in-negotiations-over-ukraine-trade-deal-a-935476.html>, accessed in March 2014.

<sup>20</sup> The Senate of France, *Information Report with regard to the Relations between the European Union and Russia*, the Commission for European Affairs, <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-237/r13-2371.pdf>, 17 December 2013, consulted in April 2014.

the following months the increasing Russian economic pressures, amid its massive debt to Gazprom and Russian banks.

A few days after the Vilnius Summit, when President Putin publicly promised a bailout of 2 bn. euro for the Ukrainian economy and any hope for a European perspective seemed lost, virulent protests started in Kyiv’s “Euro Mайдan” and, soon after, in many Western Ukrainian cities. Angry people demanded Yanukovych’s resignation, a return to the Constitution before 2004 and an early presidential election. This is where a new and complicated chapter in Ukraine and Eastern Europe’s history was about to start.

### **The strategic West-Russia dispute over Ukraine: the starting point of the Second Cold War?**

Ukraine seems today the cornerstone of the revitalised Russian strategic thinking aiming to recover influence over the geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union. Long before the Euro Mайдan revolution, Zbigniew Brzezinski had noted: “Russia confronts with the Ukrainian problem, too. For Kremlin, keeping the option of a possible re-absorption of Ukraine represents a central strategic objective.”<sup>21</sup>

In only a few months, from October 2013 to February 2014, Ukraine switched dramatically back and forth, three times, from a neutral Eastern European country to a pro-EU declarative policy (early fall of 2013), then more or less surprisingly to a Russian-oriented regime (November 2013, ahead of the Vilnius Summit), then again to a pro-West attitude (late February 2014), after the ousting of President Yanukovych. Each of these three turning points left about half of the country dissatisfied, alternatively.

It is therefore not so difficult to understand that a country which can move so quickly from one political approach to the complete opposite and then back (and so on) has at least two strong, dividing political options within its society. This symptom of a hesitating and divergent societal structure, balancing between East and West, has proved to be the most proper land for a “head-on collision” between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic system. We can agree that both political orientations in Ukraine have numerous supporters and, at the same time, each of them discontents large categories of people or entire regions. Both dimensions are substantial, but neither is sufficiently developed so as to make Ukraine an indistinctive part of Russia or Europe.

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<sup>21</sup> Brzezinski, *Op. cit.*, 312.

Essentially, there is almost consensus on admitting that the West of the country is pro-West and has a number of European cultural features, while the East is overwhelmingly pro-Russia. From language and religion (Greek Catholic in the West, Russian Orthodox in the East), architecture, culture and civilisation style, to political options, everything seems to divide the two halves of the country, with Kyiv in the centre as the main engine of the European option. Earlier in 2013, I suggested that Ukraine as a whole seemed stuck between two divergent systems, with not enough arguments and not enough sincere affinity either for Russia or for Western culture, but rather a permanent borderline between the major blocs of interest<sup>22</sup>.

Eugene Chausovsky comes with an interesting connection between cultural and political cleavages within the Ukrainian society:

“The east-west Ukrainian cultural divide is deep, and unsurprisingly it is reflected in the country’s politics. Election results from the past 10 years show a clear dividing line between voting patterns in western and central Ukraine and those in the southern and eastern parts of the country. In the 2005 and 2010 presidential elections, Yanukovich received overwhelming support in the east and Crimea, but only marginal support in the west. Ukraine does not have ‘swing states’.”<sup>23</sup>

The Stratfor analyst goes further with his predictions:

“Such internal political and cultural divisions would be difficult to overcome under normal circumstances, but Ukraine’s geographic and geopolitical position magnifies them exponentially. Ukraine is the quintessential borderland country, eternally trapped between Europe to the west and Russia to the east. Given its strategic location in the middle of the Eurasian heartland, the country has constantly been – and will constantly be – an arena in which the West and Russia duel for influence”.

The text from which these two citations are extracted was published only a few days before the referendum in Crimea.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2014, upon the decision of the so-called Parliament of Crimea, local authorities organised a referendum on

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<sup>22</sup> Valentin Naumescu, *Issues of International Politics: Conflicts, Tensions, Debates*, Cluj-Napoca: European Studies Foundation’s Publishing House, 2014, 324-27.

<sup>23</sup> Eugene Chausovsky, “Ukraine’s increasing polarization and the Western challenge”, *Stratfor*, 11 March 2014, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/ukraines-increasing-polarization-and-western-challenge>, consulted March 2014.

secession from Ukraine and joining the Russian Federation. Not at all surprisingly, the result was an overwhelming 96.77% in favour of secession (independence), immediately followed by an application to join Russia<sup>24</sup>. Two days later, President Vladimir Putin signed the “treaty” on Crimea’s annexation. In fact, that was an incredibly fast operation on the part of Russia, without any military resistance from Ukrainian troops. Less than four weeks after the fall of Yanukovych on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Russia took control of Crimea, notwithstanding massive political and diplomatic protests and criticism from the United States, the European Union and almost all over the world.

Even the (usually) neutral China went on record as a supporter of Ukraine’s territorial integrity and in favour of respecting the provisions of international law:

“China always respects all countries’ sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The Crimean issue should be resolved politically under a framework of law and order. All parties should exercise restraint and refrain from raising the tension.”<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, on the eve of the Crimean referendum, Russia vetoed a resolution of the UN Security Council intending to declare the referendum unconstitutional, eventually supported by 13 member states out of 15. China abstained.

If the European Union’s first reaction to the annexation of Crimea was rather timid, what about the economic, military and political levers of Russia in Ukraine and in the region? Andrew Wilson, from the European Council on Foreign Relations, reveals them, starting from the context of the Vilnius Summit and the Euro Mайдan revolution in Kyiv:

“Russia has been pressurizing all its neighbours since 2013 to dissuade them from closer relations with the EU. The threat of a new but anarchic democracy on Russia’s doorstep will make things even harder for Moscow to accept. At the same time, Russia cannot rely on all of the levers of influence that worked under the old Yanukovych regime, but

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<sup>24</sup> The Voice of Russia, “Crimea applied to become part of Russia following referendum”, 17 March 2014, [http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014\\_03\\_17/Crimea-applied-to-become-part-of-Russia-following-referendum-2860/](http://voiceofrussia.com/news/2014_03_17/Crimea-applied-to-become-part-of-Russia-following-referendum-2860/), consulted in March 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, “China Reacts to the Crimea Referendum”, *The Diplomat*, March 18, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/china-reacts-to-the-crimea-referendum/>, consulted in March 2014.

might use some new ones that have been taboo so far – such as threatening to provoke the split up of the country.”<sup>26</sup>

Wilson mentions, among such levers, the desperate need for economic assistance and the immense debt of Ukraine to Russian banks, gas dependency, and strategic industries such as aviation, shipbuilding, metallurgy or nuclear power, all of which are dependent on Russian capital, resources or technology. Last but not least, compact Russian communities in Eastern industrialised cities like Donetsk, Kharkiv or Dnipropetrovsk represent a mass of political manoeuvre and structural vulnerability for the Ukrainian state. The episode of Crimea is more than relevant for the weakness of the Kyiv government in relation to the territories inhabited by large majorities of Russian ethnics. Although President Putin has announced he is not interested in annexing more territories, in Ukraine and in other countries in the region (Georgia, Moldova), the fear persists that the situation could repeat itself in Eastern Ukraine, Transnistria, Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

### **Discussions over NATO’s Eastern Pivot and Consolidation. Why different tones in Germany (Western Europe) and the US?**

The Crimean crisis has prompted a serious debate in the North-Atlantic Alliance with regard to Central and Eastern Europe’s defence against revitalized Russian expansionist ambitions. The vulnerability of Central European member states of the Alliance, as well as of the non-NATO but West-oriented countries in Eastern Europe (the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia) is based not only on their smaller size, in comparison to the Russian military might, but also on the scarcity of NATO military facilities in Central Europe, at the Eastern border of the Alliance.

A Report of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) from March 2014 reveals this severe imbalance between the massive deployment of NATO troops and installations in Western Europe (a reminiscence of the Cold War, 1949-1990) and Central Europe (Baltic republics, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria).

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Wilson, “Supporting the Ukrainian Revolution”, *European Council on Foreign Affairs – Policy Memo*, February 2014, [www.ecfr.eu](http://www.ecfr.eu), consulted in March 2014.

“But NATO behaviour has also fuelled CEE insecurity. Under the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, which preceded the first round of eastern enlargement, Alliance members issued a joint declaration (the so-called “three Nos”) stating that they had ‘no intentions, no plans and no reason’ to place significant military assets, including especially tactical nuclear weapons, in CEE countries. While receiving the all-important Article 5 guarantee (the essence of the NATO commitment and a revolutionary improvement in security), the CEE member states have been given few physical embodiments of that guarantee. In short, their security rests more on trust than military muscle.”<sup>27</sup>

Basically, the NATO debate was triggered by the Russian annexation of Crimea and the absence of a credible political and economic response from the European Union. The discussions over possible EU sanctions against Russia only led to a visa ban affecting 33 Russian second-level officials, which was considered almost ridiculous and completely ineffective. For many analysts, the weakness of the EU’s reaction was mainly due to Europe’s strong dependency on Russian gas. Moreover, the interests of some big German companies to keep their access and connections to the Russian market and resources made Berlin’s voice quite timid during the crisis. The fact that Germany “pulled back” and became relatively quiet after Crimea’s annexation by Russia is actually contradictory with initial German exigencies with regard to Yanukovich and the regime’s brutal intervention in Euro Mайдan. Their favourite former opposition leader, Vitali Klitschko, withdrew from the presidential race to run for the capital city’s mayoral position.

When things went too far, Germany realised that a full-fledged Cold War II against Russia, accompanied by severe EU sanctions, would seriously damage its economic interests. The prudence of the Berlin administration to go ahead with the idea of economic sanctions was visible for many European and North-American analysts. For Vlad Mixich, it seems that:

“Putin relies on its strongest allies within the most important EU member state: the giant German companies with which he makes businesses [...]

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<sup>27</sup> Edward Lucas and A. Wess Mitchell (lead authors), “Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO’s Eastern Defenses”, *Center for European Policy Analysis, Report no. 35*, Washington D.C., March 2014.

For instance, the President of Rotschild Deutschland, Klaus Mangold, has recently affirmed that ‘sanctions are the wrong way’<sup>28</sup>

Mixich comes with details in his report regarding the magnitude of BASF, Wintershall, RWE, E.on, Metro, Volkswagen or Siemens investments and connections with the Russian market.

On the contrary, the US’ attitude and tone on Crimea’s annexation and Russian intrusion in Eastern Ukraine’s separatist movement was far more critical than the EU’s and it clearly stressed the necessity for international sanctions. There are at least three possible reasons for the vigorous American reaction: the traditional Democrat-Republican rivalry which gave the conservative opposition the opportunity to criticise the weakness of the Obama administration and, thus, to raise the political stakes of the issue, the US’ interests in leading NATO’s restructuring and increasing military capabilities at the Eastern European border of the Alliance, and Washington’s strategy to contain Russia, inspired by Cold War I. New York Times’ columnist Peter Baker explained, in April 2014, the old and new US policy in the region:

“Just as the United States resolved in the aftermath of World War II to counter the Soviet Union and its global ambitions, Mr. Obama is focused on isolating President Vladimir V. Putin’s Russia by cutting off its economic and political ties to the outside world, limiting its expansionist ambitions in its own neighborhood and effectively making it a pariah state.”<sup>29</sup>

For Republicans, it seems that this is not enough. Arizona Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain conducts the tough musical score of the “hawks” in clear and strong words:

“The first, and most urgent, is crisis management. We need to work with our allies to shore up Ukraine, reassure shaken friends in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, show Mr. Putin a strong, united front, and prevent the crisis from getting worse. This does not mean military action against Russia. But it should mean sanctioning Russian officials, isolating Russia

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<sup>28</sup> Vlad Mixich, “Putin’s Most Powerful European Ally”, *Hotnews*, 20 March 2014, <http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-16863473-cel-mai-puternic-aliat-european-lui-vladimir-putin.htm>, consulted in March 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Baker, “In Cold War Echo, Obama Strategy Writes Off Putin”, *The New York Times*, 19 April 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/world/europe/in-cold-war-echo-obama-strategy-writes-off-putin.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/20/world/europe/in-cold-war-echo-obama-strategy-writes-off-putin.html?hp&_r=0), consulted in April 2014.

internationally, and increasing NATO’s military presence and exercises on its eastern frontier. It should mean boycotting the Group of 8 Summit in Sochi and convening the Group of 7 elsewhere. It should also mean making every effort to support and resupply Ukrainian patriots, both soldiers and civilians, who are standing their ground in government facilities across Crimea. They refuse to accept the dismemberment of their country. So should we”<sup>30</sup>.

In fact, the occult interference of the “other side” in the Ukrainian crisis is exactly what both US and Russian leaders are suspecting: the one of the Western powers in the Euro Maidan Revolution (as per Kremlin’s view) and the one of Russia in the separatist movements from Eastern Ukraine, in retaliation for the new pro-West orientation of Kyiv.

An interesting, clear and well-balanced perspective on the US’ approach to the Ukrainian crisis is proposed by Steven Pifer. The Director of the Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative defines the American response with the following main lines of action:

“The U.S. government’s response has been organized along three vectors: (1) bolster the Ukrainian government; (2) reassure NATO allies unnerved by Moscow’s aggressive behavior; and (3) penalize Russia with the objective of promoting a change in Russian policy. [...] Russia’s actions constitute a fundamental challenge to the post-war order in Europe. The illegal seizure of Crimea is the most blatant land-grab that Europe has seen since 1945. The United States and Europe need to respond adequately and ensure that Russia faces consequences for this kind of behavior. Otherwise, the danger is that Mr. Putin may pursue other actions that would further threaten European security and stability.”<sup>31</sup>

It is not difficult to identify in these short comments and analyses the same fears and considerations which used to underlie the Truman doctrine of containment in 1947, fuelling the onset of the Cold War.

The fall of the pro-Russian regime of President Yanukovich in Kyiv, after massive and violent protests, was perceived by Moscow as the West’s obscure manoeuvre.

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<sup>30</sup>John McCain, “Obama Has Made America Look Weak”, *The New York Times*, 14 March 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/15/opinion/mccain-a-return-to-us-realism.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/15/opinion/mccain-a-return-to-us-realism.html?_r=0), consulted in March 2014.

<sup>31</sup>Steven Pifer, “Ukraine, Russia and the U.S. Policy Response”, *Brookings*, 5 June 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2014/06/05-ukraine-russia-us-policy-response-pifer>, consulted on 11 June 2014.

“The Russians are convinced that the uprising in Kiev was fomented by Western intelligence services supporting nongovernmental organizations and that without this, the demonstrations would have died out and the government would have survived. [...] That means that they believe that Western intelligence has the ability to destabilize Ukraine and potentially other countries in the Russian sphere of influence, or even Russia itself. This makes the Russians wary of U.S. power”<sup>32</sup>

...explains George Friedman with respect to Putin’s aggressive riposte against Ukraine, immediately after the ousting of Yanukovich.

The NATO Summit in Newport/Cardiff on September 4-5<sup>th</sup>, 2014, was another significant moment of Cold War II. The talks were focused on balancing the Eastern flank of the Alliance and reassuring the new NATO member states in Central Europe with regard to a full observance of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Baltic countries, Poland, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria insisted on establishing permanent military bases in the region, but the Western powers (especially Germany and France) were reluctant to this idea and evoked the 1997 promise made to Russia, just before the first decision of NATO enlargement. The Alliance decided eventually to strengthen its “Readiness Action Plan”<sup>33</sup>, to establish three regional headquarters in its Eastern periphery (most probably in Poland, Romania and Lithuania), to rotate some troops on a temporary basis in these countries and to fight against cyber espionage.

## **Conclusions: A Region between Lack of Economic Solutions and Prevalence of Geopolitical Interests**

The quadripartite<sup>34</sup> Accord of Geneva from April 17, 2014, neither resolved the crisis of Ukraine nor stopped Cold War II in Eastern Europe, between Russia and the West. Although the idea of disarming the illegal groups and vacating occupied buildings on the territory of Ukraine was fair and reasonable, just a few days later, the first victims were announced in the separatist regions. It is a clear sign that the crisis is still far from

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<sup>32</sup> George Friedman, “Russia and the United States Negotiate the Future of Ukraine”, *Stratfor*, <http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russia-and-united-states-negotiate-future-ukraine>, April 2014.

<sup>33</sup> For details, see *Wales Summit Declaration*, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm), consulted in September 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Ukraine, Russia, the United States, the European Union.

over. In the fall of 2014, the official death toll already surpassed 3700 in the Donbass region.

The perspective of a new Cold War, though officially rejected by both sides, has a number of robust arguments. The divergent and mutually criticising political discourses of Western and Russian officials, the defiance of international law and prior arrangements (such as the Budapest Memorandum on Ukraine of 1994<sup>35</sup>), the tougher or softer sanctions, threats and isolation, the military manoeuvres in the region (Russian as well as NATO drills), the intelligence services’ wars, the exclusion of Russia from G8 and return to the old G7, the reinvented ideological propaganda on certain media channels etc. are among the symbolic and combatant-like gestures that remind us of the tensions before 1989.

In his already mentioned analysis, Steven Pifer hits the nail on the head:

“What Mr. Putin does want is a sphere of influence, which he views as a key component of Moscow’s great power status. Countries within that sphere are expected to eschew policies, such as drawing too close to NATO or the European Union that Kremlin regards as inconsistent with Russian interests.”<sup>36</sup>

However, he suggests that a quick admission of Ukraine to NATO or the European Union is not realistic, from the perspective of the West’s criteria.

Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Professor at Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, sees a preliminary connection of the current Cold War with the Russian-US dispute from the past years, with regard to the deployment of an American anti-missile shield in Eastern Europe, and elaborates on this idea in the context:

“Can you see that the Russians were right to fear the installation of the [American] shield? But actually this is false: the Russians are not doing brilliantly, economically speaking, and it is not the right time for them to

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<sup>35</sup> The US, UK, Russia and Ukraine signed a Memorandum to guarantee Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity in exchange for Ukraine’s renouncement of holding nuclear arms, inherited from the Soviet Union epoch. For details, see Terry Atlas, “Ukraine Gave Up Nuclear Arms in 1994 Deal Russia Flouts”, *Bloomberg*, 5 March 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-05/ukraine-gave-up-nuclear-arms-in-1994-deal-russia-flouts.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Pifer, *op. cit.*

openly defy everybody. This being said, the Cold War is upon us and the more sanctions we impose, the more we have to negotiate with them.<sup>37</sup>

The tragedy of Eastern Europe, in its old and new version, is chiefly represented by the same paradoxical cleavage between high geopolitical significance and the economic weakness of the region. Albeit the former “East-Central Europe” has relatively escaped Russia’s economic influence after joining the European Union in the 2000s (although some EU member states still rely considerably on Russian gas), the countries of the “Eastern Neighbourhood” depend on the Russian market and trade to a large extent.

*The Economist* analyses the gas dependency of the European Union in relation to Russia, affecting an average of 24% for the 28 member states, but with countries such as Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia and Finland completely dependent on Russian gas supply or having very high levels of dependency: Bulgaria 89%, Slovakia 83%, Hungary 80%, Poland 59% etc. According to the same analysis, the largest European economy, namely Germany, has a 37% dependency rate on Russian gas supply<sup>38</sup>.

The substantial energy dependence on Russian gas resources and, in most cases, Russian imports and exports, represents a major vulnerability of the countries aspiring to Western integration. The economic aid from the West is slow and insufficient. There are no immediate solutions for the huge debts of Ukraine to the Russian economy or for the fragility Moldova is bound to face once it loses access to the immense market in the East. None of these countries are competitive enough to simply switch from the Russian market to the EU market, despite the facilities offered through the Free Economic Exchange Accord, as part of the Association Agreement.

The lack of firmness and effective solutions and the hesitant response of the West to Crimea’s annexation are deeply concerning the countries in the region. According to Professor Aurel Braun from the University of Toronto:

“as they witness the shrinking of the democratic space in Russia and elsewhere and the rise of extremist movements globally, the Eastern European concerns are emblematic of larger global problems. Though

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<sup>37</sup> Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, “Șapte idei greșite despre criza din Ucraina” (Seven Misconceptions about the Ukraine crisis), *România Liberă*, 3 March 2014, <http://www.romanalibera.ro/opinii/comentarii/%C5%9Eapte-idei-gresite-despre-criza-din-ucraina-327667>, consulted in March 2014.

<sup>38</sup> *The Economist*, “Conscious uncoupling”, *The Economist*, 5 April 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21600111-reducing-europes-dependence-russian-gas-possible-but-it-will-take-time-money-and-sustained>, consulted on 3 July 2014.

American declinism may be overstated at times and a post-Obama administration may more fully and vigorously reengage America, for the next few years the search for security depends on strengthening other sources.”<sup>39</sup>

It is not yet clear which “other sources” of European security could be taken into consideration if neither the United States nor the European Union are ready to effectively oppose the Russian strategic offensive in the former Soviet republics.

Cold War II reveals the strategic potential and geopolitical attractiveness of the Eastern European periphery, as well as its fragility, limits and vulnerabilities. The West would definitely like to see these countries turn their hook upon Russia but, at the same time, neither the European Union nor the United States are prepared to help them consistently. Russia started a restructuring of the balance of power in the region, in order to restore its strategic influence, at least in the former perimeter of the defunct Soviet Union. At the end of the day, this tension will end in a new balance of power in the region. We do not yet know whether Putin’s attempt to increase the international profile of his country by “defending traditional Russian interests in the region” (as Foreign Minister Lavrov often explains) and keep the West away from the former USSR frontiers will be successful or not. What we do know for sure is the fact that, maybe for the first time in their history, countries like Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova or Georgia could have a real opportunity to decide on what direction they would like to take, albeit (for one reason or another) this decision might be far more difficult than they expected a few years ago, when the Eastern Partnership was enthusiastically launched.

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<sup>39</sup> Aurel Braun, “On Promoting Democracy and Security”, *Democracy and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Perspectives on a Changing World*, Editor Valentin Naumescu, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, xii.

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