

Department of Scienze Politiche

Comparative Politics

EU - RUSSIA RELATIONS

EUROPEAN POWERS IN THE UKRAINE CRISIS: A FOCUS ON GERMANY, POLAND AND ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Three full years after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and the reunification of Crimea to the Russian Federation, the European-Russian international relations have touched historic lows. The implementation of economic sanctions and counter-sanctions between the parties under analysis have failed in providing significant shakes to either side of the conflicting parties. While the Russian Federation and its leadership have adopted a clear strategy in dealing with its European neighbours, within the European Union have emerged different interpretations of the Euro-Russian relations thus shedding ambiguity upon the formally unitary EU foreign policy towards the Russian Federation. This paper will argue that different voices have influenced the quality of the EU-Russia relations lately. The focus of the analysis will be set on the difference between the Polish, the German and the Italian approaches to EU-Russia relations following the Ukraine crisis. In conclusion, it will be argued that despite the inner differences within the EU decision-making process, the German “balanced” leadership has managed to unite and coordinate the foreign policy posture of all Member States towards the Russian Federation, and this balance of power within the EU is not set to change any time soon.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD	<i>Anno Domini</i>	ISIL	<i>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant</i>
AGIP	<i>Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli</i> (General Italian Oil Company)	KGB	<i>КОМИТЕТ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ</i> (Russian Committee for State Security)
ALDE	<i>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats</i>	LN	<i>Lega Nord (Northern League)</i>
BRICS	<i>Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa</i>	MENA	<i>Middle East – Northern Africa</i>
CDU	<i>Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands</i> (Christian Democratic Union of Germany)	MFA	<i>Minister of Foreign Affairs</i>
CIS	<i>Commonwealth of Independent States</i>	MS	<i>Member State</i>
CST	<i>Collective Security Treaty</i>	NATO	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</i>
CSTO	<i>Collective Security Treaty Organisation</i>	NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
CSU	<i>Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern</i> (Christian Social Union in Bavaria)	NKVD	<i>НАРОДНЫЙ КОМИССАРИАТ ВНУТРЕННИХ ДЕЛ</i> (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs)
CTR	<i>Cooperative Threat Reduction</i>	OHCHR	<i>Office of the UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights</i>
EaP	<i>Eastern Partnership</i>	OSCE	<i>Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe</i>
EEC	<i>European Economic Community</i>	OUN	<i>ОРГАНІЗАЦІЯ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ НАЦІОНАЛІСТІВ</i> (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists)
EEZ	<i>Exclusive Economic Zone</i>	PiS	<i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice)</i>
ENI	<i>Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi (National Entity of Hydrocarbons)</i>	PM	<i>Prime Minister</i>
EP	<i>European Parliament</i>	PO	<i>Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform)</i>
EU	<i>European Union</i>	PPP	<i>Purchasing Power Parity</i>
FN	<i>Front national (National Front)</i>	PRC	<i>People's Republic of China</i>
G7	<i>Group of 7 (of 8, of 20)</i>	R2P	<i>Responsibility to Protect</i>
GDP	<i>Gross Domestic Product</i>	RF	<i>The Russian Federation</i>
GNU	<i>Government of National Unity</i>	RS	<i>РОССИЯ СЕГОДНЯ (Russia Today)</i>
GUAM	<i>Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova</i>	RSFSR	<i>Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic</i>
HE	<i>His/Her Excellency</i>	RT	<i>Russia Today (TV network)</i>
HRMMU	<i>Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine</i>	SPD	<i>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands</i> (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
ICJ	<i>International Court of Justice</i>		
IMF	<i>International Monetary Fund</i>		

SYRIZA ΣΥΝΑΣΤΙΣΜΟΣ ΡΙΖΟΣΠΑΣΤΙΚΗΣ ΑΡΙΣΤΕΡΑΣ
(Coalition of the Radical Left)

SVR СЛУЖБА ВНЕШНЕЙ РАЗВЕДКИ (Foreign
Intelligence Service – of the RF)

TAP Trans Adriatic Pipeline

TEU Treaty on European Union

TPP Trans-Pacific Partnership

TTIP Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment
Partnership

UK The United Kingdom

UkSSR Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

UN The United Nations

UNHRC United Nations Human Rights Council

UNSC United Nations Security Council

UR ЕДИНАЯ РОССИЯ (United Russia)

USA The United States of America

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WB World Bank

WTO World Trade Organisation

WWI/II World War (I/II)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
List of Abbreviations	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
1. The Ukraine Crisis: Brief Historical Perspective	8
Diverging Perspectives	8
After the Fall of the USSR	24
From Euromaidan to the Crimean reunification.....	36
2. European Retaliation	46
The American Influence	53
EU Foreign Policy: Formal Unity	61
Russian Countersanctions.....	71
3. Different Voices within the European Union	77
The Case of Germany: Balanced Leadership.....	80
The Case of Poland: Hostility.....	86
The Case of Italy: Freeriding Friendship.....	98
Conclusions	103
Bibliography	109

INTRODUCTION

I have spent one full year in Moscow and one full year in Rome prior to the writing of this final thesis. In fact, I had the chance to grasp from two very different systems and educational models, each of which with their pros and cons. During my studies, I have developed a certain interest in geopolitical and foreign policy analysis, which brought me on several occasions to tackle one of the most defining historical events in a generation: the Ukraine Crisis.

The study of the International Relations, both on the Russian and the European side brought back theories and thoughts that had partly vanished after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the resurgence of a West-Russian rivalry has tickled the creativity of many scholars around the academic world, and a lot of work has been done, rich in depth and diversity.

Among the most credited theories is the realist. The realist school of thought provides us with the tools to understand the great-power dynamic that brought the international chessboard to crisis following Euromaidan. An understanding of spheres of influence, of lines in the sand, of security dilemmas and nuclear deterrence is indeed crucial to assess at least parts of what came after the Crimean reunification.

Some respected authors argue that the Ukraine Crisis is indeed caused by the same great-power game which rules had not been clearly defined after the fall of the Soviet Union. This is the case of John Mearsheimer now famous article for Foreign Affairs (Mearsheimer 2014), cited and quoted literally hundreds (if not thousands) of times in almost every piece of literature which has something to do with Russia-EU/US relations, the Ukraine Crisis, NATO enlargement and so forth.

However interesting Mearsheimer's article is, I decided not to base my final thesis on such article. The vision of the world shared by Mr. Mearsheimer is indeed one that is shared by many, but in my humble opinion, that is just one part of a much broader picture. The article of which I am talking about, "*Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault*", is a brilliant realist explanation, whereby the clash of interest between the Russian Federation and the West is represented lucidly and without hesitation. The said article claims that had NATO (and the EU) not expanded so much into Russia's backyard, today we would not have issues such as the Ukraine Crisis or the Georgian War. In conclusion, Mearsheimer maintains that the only way for the West and Russia to put an end to the fighting, is to accept that Russia has a core interest in Ukraine, and therefore Ukraine should be transformed into a buffer-zone that would give Moscow enough air and less reasons to feel cornered.

While this theory is certainly interesting and even commendable (although debatable), in my honest opinion I think that is just not enough to fully understand what is behind the Ukraine Crisis, and thus understand the actors, their history, their actions and their reactions. What I personally refuse to accept of Mearsheimer's analysis is the fact that there is almost no mention of the Ukrainian people and their politicians in the article. There is no mention of the passion of the Russians living in Crimea while the Parliament was depriving them of the dignity of having their native language recognised as an official language in their cities. Everything is focused on the Washington – Moscow rivalry, taking for granted the definition that just a handful of people (some at the Kremlin, some at the White House) are responsible and can influence the fate of the world.

While it would be trivial to ignore or underestimate the specific weight of Moscow and Washington in this crisis, I decided that I would focus on

everything else for this final thesis. I honestly do not think that another thesis on the Russia-US relations over Ukraine could contribute to the study of the said crisis. On the other hand, I find that too little has been written about the Ukrainian actors and the European perspective of such a divisive issue.

For these reasons, I dedicated the whole first chapter of this final thesis to a detailed and meticulous analysis of the background that led the Ukrainian government to crumble and lose Ukraine's territorial integrity to Russia, which leadership risked international sanctions and isolation for the reintegration of Crimea within its borders.

The Ukrainian independence in 1991 was a shock for most Russians. As a matter of fact, Ukraine and Russia shared large parts of the last millennium, and for centuries large parts of present-day Ukraine have been integral part of Russia. Russian intellectuals such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn¹ defined in 1990 (that is when the USSR was still united) the potential Ukrainian independence as “aberration”, arguing that what everyone should call Russia does not coincide with the RSFSR, but in fact it is the place where “the *Malorussians*², the *Great Russians* and the *White Russians*³ used to live, that is the territories that the ancient people used to call Rus”. Viktor Kremenjuk⁴ defined the Ukrainian independence as nothing less than “treason”, because while in AD 654 Ukraine was nothing but a “small and underpopulated land”, essentially thanks to “the Russian efforts” it became a large and relevant State.

As a matter of fact, Russian nationalists are not even convinced that Ukrainian can rationally form a nation of their own, because they are essentially a variation of the Russian nation. Ukrainian is not even a real language but more

¹ Cited by Emmanuelle Armandon (Armandon 2013, 159-173)

² Malorussians or Little Russians are those who inhabit Malo-Russia, that is Ukraine.

³ White Russians or Belarusians are those who inhabit White Russia, that is Belarus.

⁴ Cited by Emmanuelle Armandon (Armandon 2013, 159-173)

of a dialect according to different studies (Armandon 2013, 159-173). Boris Yeltsin wrote in his memoirs that for him it was very difficult to accept that Ukrainians had left Russia, because he believed that for historical reasons, including the fact that “Kiev used to be the capital city of Rus” and “Ukraine the cradle of the Russian national identity”, “the Russian people view the Ukrainians as well as the Belarusian as brothers” given the “incredible affinities, including the language, the costumes and the way of life” (Armandon 2013, 159-173). Therefore, the cultural, historical and geographical links between Russia and Ukraine provides us with some tools to better understand the current state of affairs.

The first chapter shall therefore illustrate what brought the Ukrainian and the Ukraine Crises to provoke a geopolitical earthquake in Europe of Cold War dimensions. The different political souls of Ukraine collided in the Euromaidan movement, causing a regime change and a polarised Europe, jeopardising decades of slow but steady confidence-building efforts to normalise Russia-Western relations. The first chapter will end with the reunion of Crimea and Russia.

On the second chapter, this thesis will tackle the reaction of the West to what was broadly considered as a blatant breach of the international law and a pure act of aggression towards an independent and sovereign country. The most relevant items in this regard are clearly the military and security implications of the Ukraine Crisis, and the retaliation against the Russian Federation with economic sanctions.

The West did not exactly act in perfect synchrony. American sanctions and European sanctions were indeed similar, but the decision-making process behind it was not. If the US administration had no doubts regarding the immediate retaliation of the West against Russia, the EU showed more fatigue

in coordinating and finding a common line to sanction the Crimean secession and the Russian “annexation”. Different voices within the EU have created just the impression of a common line and a coherent unity vis-à-vis the Ukraine Crisis and how to handle it.

This is in fact the topic of the third and last chapter, in which this thesis will explore three different countries of the EU and their approach to the Ukraine Crisis. Germany, Poland and Italy will be the cornerstones of the chapter, through an analysis of their diverse approaches on the handling of the crisis. The key words in this regard will be “balanced leadership”, “hostility” and “freeriding friendship”.

Germany, as the economic and (more and more) the political leader of the EU was certainly the unhappiest with the renewed rivalry with the Russian Federation. A balanced Germany has the authority and the responsibility to lead the Union based on a neat understanding of the founding values of the liberal order of Europe, exercising a balanced leadership that takes into account the needs and fears of all the members of the community. What was perceived as a violation of the territorial integrity of a neighbouring State had to be punished in light of a possible recidivism of Russia’s aggressive manners⁵. The German economy would later be the one that in total numbers lost more in the economic war with Russia, loosing thousands of jobs in relation to the sanction regime.

Poland is one of the most promising European economies, on its path to become a medium power within the EU. Its historic ties with both the Russians, the Germans and the Ukrainians make it a very interesting actor in the unfolding of this crisis. Poland was coming to terms with a pacified Russia in the post-Cold War order, feeling rather safe within the Western institutions, including

⁵ Needless to say, the West and Russia did not really agree on what had happened in Georgia only six years before.

NATO. After the mass protests of Euromaidan put down more than 77 people, its MFA mediated (together with the French and the German) between Yanukovych and the insurgents, brokering a deal that the most optimistic would have hoped it could calm the spirits of the crowd. But when the situation collapsed and Russia secured Crimea preparing it for accession, Poland became increasingly hostile towards Russia.

It was at the next NATO Summit at Celtic Manor in Wales that the West decided to step up the military presence along the NATO-Russian borders, and it was in Warsaw during the last NATO Summit that Poland made clear that the Russian approach would not be tolerated in Europe, urging all MSs to increase the military contribution to defend the Eastern Flank of the Alliance. This included clearly also the request that Italian personnel serve as every other MS in the patrolling and safeguard missions in the Baltics.

The Italian position is much different from the other two. The Italian public and especially the secondary sector of the Italian economy are reluctant to keep a trade war with Russia for Ukraine. The Italian interests in Russia have been increasing year after year, especially since Putin came to power. The Italian exports in Russia represent a significant source of income for Italy, and the trading sector surely put pressure on the Italian executive in order to find a solution to this situation.

The Italian stance is indeed one of support for the European institution and of loyalty to the American leadership, but it is also one of freeriding. As a matter of fact, within the Russian territory there is little if any concrete coordination between the most important economies of the EU. Every State there plays its own game, and Italy has been remarkably successful in Moscow lately. Former President of the Council Mr. Matteo Renzi was the first major EU leader to pay a state visit to Moscow, signing trade deals and securing the “special-guest”

status at the 2016 SPIEF (Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum). Vis-à-vis Russia, Italy is reluctant to align itself with the other European States. Former President of the Council (and close friend of Mr. Putin) Mr. Silvio Berlusconi even visited Crimea on a private visit to Mr. Putin.

In conclusion, we will find that the Ukraine Crisis has revealed that the unity of the foreign policy within the EU has been shook and proved. The relationship between Europe and the Russian Federation is of primary importance for the stability of the EU, both from a security and an economic point of view. The emergence of a common foreign policy is far from accomplished yet, and the EU will need to define its own strategy in the years to come should it want to be a relevant actor of the international arena.

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation will need to address its problem of credibility and its isolation vis-à-vis the West, bearing in mind the chilling situation of Russia's economy and its structural problems. While the strategy that led Russia to be considered again a resolute continental power that fights for its own strategic interest has rewarded the Russian leadership with the accession of Crimea, the next government cycle should indeed focus on the stabilisation of its own economy and the diplomatic solution of the Ukraine Crisis, in order to get over the sanction regime and regain prosperity in close partnership with the European partners.

1. THE UKRAINE CRISIS: BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

DIVERGING PERSPECTIVES

The Ukraine Crisis is the result of asymmetries that date back since the fall of the USSR. When the USSR collapsed and the walls came down, when everyone in Europe was rejoicing for the end of the Cold War and for what appeared to be the end of history, where wars could not be possible and people would live peacefully and freely in Europe, the West organised itself against the remains of the Soviet Union. Thus begun the marginalisation of Russia within an integrated European security dialogue, with NATO prevailing over every alternative view, and resisting the death of its enemy.

The notion of Ukraine and its statehood is still largely debated within the Country and outside. Richard Sakwa (Sakwa 2016), in his largely explanatory 2015 book “Frontline Ukraine – Crisis in the Borderlands”, explores the mechanisms that led to the Ukraine Crisis, arguing that what we have now is not only the Ukraine Crisis *per se*, but rather its intersection with what he calls the “Ukrainian Crisis”. Sakwa puts a stress on the difference between the two, the latter being a crisis which “emerged out of the contradictions of the country’s nation and state building since independence in 1991” (Sakwa 2016, 3), and the former being just one of the clearest manifestations of the divergence of centres of power in the post-Soviet space⁶ since the end of the Cold War.

Indeed, what appears to be a trivial consideration nowadays, is in fact quite crucial to the understanding of the current state of affairs in Eastern Europe.

⁶ The notion of post-Soviet space, as theorised by Russian scholar Prof. Tatiana Shakleina roughly coincides with the Commonwealth of Independent States and represents the informal privileged area of strategic interests of the Russian Federation, which is defined as a great power exercising its influence over its subsystem made of weaker and dependent States. (T. Shakleina 2013)

Central to the explanation of the Ukraine Crisis is the fact that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev met at the Malta Summit on December 1989, no “peace treaty” what so ever was drafted. Some scholars consider the 1989 Malta Summit the formal end to the Cold War, and while the media portrayed the Malta Summit as the most significant since the 1945 Yalta Conference (BBC News 1989), the said meeting did not produce any significant document that could actually settle the many security challenges deriving from the lifting of the Iron Curtain. The Cold War was thus resolved with tremendous ambiguity and a neat reciprocal misunderstanding of the terms and conditions of the new world order.

Gorbachev indeed declared that under his Secretariat the Soviet Union would never wage hot war against the United States of America, but he also embraced a vision of the post-Cold War where the Soviet Union and the USA would stand equal in the international arena as the sole two superpowers and could equally and peacefully discuss the management of Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic however, there was a clear perception of unconditional surrender of the Soviet Union and the disarray of an ideological architecture brought to pieces in a trend that terminated in what has been called the end of history. The West, in short, declared victory of the Cold War, and the rhetoric that followed, was not one of expansion and conquest, but rather one of soft power and inclusive aggregation force.

NATO military force and indeed European integration remained concepts largely unquestioned and undoubtedly unchallenged throughout the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s. Proof of this is the failed attempt to establish a red line on Kosovo by former President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Boris Yeltsin. In April 1999, as the NATO response to the Bosnian War (1998-1999) already involved the carpet-bombing of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, President

Yeltsin of Russia, after condemning the military actions as “nothing more than open aggression”, declared that should NATO not cease the military operations in Serbia and Montenegro, and should the Russia ever intervene in the conflict, that would represent the start of the Third World War (BBC News 1999).

Following the turn of the century and indeed the resignation of Mr. Boris Yeltsin, many things changed. It was largely recognised by everyone that the USA represented at that time the sole “policeman of the world”. Russia has been weak and did not have the tools to counterbalance the US hegemony in Europe. With the reforms put in place by both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, the Russian Federation was struggling to becoming a democracy and a market economy amid tremendous difficulties linked with corruption and a crony economy. However, the 2000s represented a turning point for the Russian Federation, enshrined in the image of current President Vladimir V. Putin. The political earthquakes in Latin America and the US campaign in the Middle East, combined with the outstanding economic performance of the People’s Republic of China raised the price of raw materials (especially oil and gas), which supported Russia’s revival and its strong GDP growth of around 7% until 2008.

Putin’s Russia until 2008 was not revisionist or revanchist vis-à-vis the West, and in fact shared the Western optimism on the economic side and in the geopolitical sphere, with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council under the auspices of the “*Spirit of Pratica di Mare*”⁷ sponsored by Italian President of

⁷ The *Spirit of Pratica di Mare* is a journalistic expression which owes its name to the military airport of *Pratica di Mare*, a small village south of Rome, whereby on May the 28th 2002, at the presence of 20 Heads of States and Governments, it was signed the Rome Declaration as a follow up of the Rome NATO Summit 2002, which established the NATO-Russia Council. Several scholars consider the Declaration of Rome the real end of the Cold War. The “spirit” of this event, strongly supported by former President of the Council of Italy Mr. Berlusconi, entails the set of institutions that enhance the cooperation of the Russian Federation, the United States of America with the inclusion of Europe as an essential partner of both for the international stability. The spirit of Pratica di Mare is embodied in the iconic picture of G. W. Bush, V. Putin and S. Berlusconi holding hands “United for Peace”, available at: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-7SPrc78pGv0/Vlp9RuAFI/AAAAAAAAA5no/ysEuJEAQI4/s1600/1.jpg>

the Council Mr. Silvio Berlusconi in May 2002. Putin's policies were aiming at restoring the State power at home, taking back public assets previously fallen in the hands of numerous oligarchs. The respect of constitutional limitation to his presidential powers at the end of his second presidential mandate (which expired in 2008), led him to transfer power to Mr. Dmitry Medvedev (currently the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation), from the same political party. This democratic transition signalled that Russia was steadily becoming a stable and trusted partner worldwide.

However, during Mr. Medvedev's presidential term (which roughly coincided with Mr. Obama's first term), the international financial crisis and various agitations and military actions in the MENA Region and in the Caucasus severely threatened the international stability and strained the cordiality and the trust building process between the USA and the Russian Federation. The "Arab Spring" and the revolts that followed, mixed with the international financial crises of 2008 and 2011 put pressure on the European Union at the domestic level. The 2012 Russian Presidential elections confirmed Mr. Putin as the leader of the Russian Federation, who considerably changed the Russian posture vis-à-vis the Western partners and especially the USA. Russia grew more assertive in foreign crises management, starting with the condemnation of the NATO-led intervention on the Libyan skies (though backed by the UNSC), and later using its veto power within the UNSC over the proposed resolution to promote a political transition of power in Syria in February 2012 (Harris, et al. 2012).

The Syrian crisis would later become one of the defining moments in the post-Cold War relations between the Russian Federation and the USA. The determined foreign policy used by Mr. Putin and his Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Sergey Lavrov obtained diplomatic victories against a softer Obama Administration over Syria. This caused the USA to retreat after having issued a

warning on Mr. Bashar al-Assad's government over the use of chemical weapons against its citizens, and later on the Russian Federation entered the Syrian crisis on Mr. al-Assad's side in a bid to fight the militias of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant⁸.

Throughout this first part of Putin's third term, of course, also occurred the Ukraine Crisis – by far the most significant historical event in recent European history, and the “battleground” for the “resumption of Great Power rivalry” for influence in Europe (Trenin 2014). Even though many authors have claimed that the Cold War has come back, it is important to underline some aspects that – besides the legitimate analogies between the two different epochs – make the current international situation revolving around the Ukraine Crisis very different from what the Cold War has been in the past⁹.

First of all, there are some analogies between the Cold War and the present situation indeed. The main players still are Russia and the West, and of course lays in the background the same chilling threat of nuclear holocaust for a fair share of the Earth's population. However, there are significant differences too. Most importantly, notwithstanding the ideological weigh of the rhetoric used

⁸ The military intervention of the Russian Federation in Syria has been met with mixed reactions. While the Russian deployment in Syria has been announced by Moscow as a tool to halt the ISIL advance in Syria, Western sources including newspapers (The Guardian 2015), the US State Department (U. S. Department of State 2015) and NATO (NATO 2015) inter alia, have expressed doubts over the actual target of the Russian Air Force, as at times it appeared not to lay solely on ISIL militias, but rather on anti-governmental insurgents (including groups supported by the international community). However, the Russian military successfully engaged ISIL and even helped the Syrian army free cities previously held by ISIL rebels, including the ancient city of Palmyra. The Russian intervention was arguably motivated also by the fact that an estimated 800 foreign fighters (in 2014) actually come from Russia alone. These numbers have been increasing at alarming pace up to 2400 Russian foreign fighters in Syria (figures updated September 2015) suggesting a +300% increase in the numbers, which are projected to further expand, according to a December 2015 report by the Soufan Group (Soufan Group 2015).

⁹ Dmitri Trenin (Trenin 2014) provides an exhaustive clarification on whether the US-Russia actual rivalry is comparable to the Cold War.

by both parties over Ukraine (and especially Crimea), the importance and the centrality of the actual set of values involved is not even closely comparable to what was the Cold War between Communism and Western Democracy. In addition, also the military dimension of this epoch – if on the rise – is too distant in the numbers of the Cold War, and for at least two reasons. Firstly, the current rivalry is not central to the global system, and there are other at least equivalent threats to global security other than the Ukraine Crisis. Secondly, the two powers are involved in an extremely asymmetrical contest, especially now that Russia’s military is stretching from Europe to the Middle East and NATO is focused on the (modest) build-up in Eastern Europe¹⁰.

Nevertheless, this rivalry is yet a defining feature of the current international system, which in turn is arguably the result of some sort of “Cold Peace”¹¹ rather than a revival of the Cold War. And while no clear set of rules or peace treaties were established after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the former Soviet “bloc” dispersed, and the Russian Federation started working on establishing trustful relations with most of the former Soviet subject States. Some of the former Soviet States and States within the Warsaw Pact sphere of influence abandoned the Russian integration project for good. Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Baltic Republics, Poland Romania, and some former Yugoslavian States gradually entered Western international institutions thus abandoning the Russian sphere of influence for good.

¹⁰ Dmitri Trenin argues that the recent 9% budget increase for the US defence sponsored by the Trump administration *per se* makes up for the entirety of the Russian defence budget. The video-interview, made by the Eurasian Group is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4ZO_SuohTo

¹¹ Boris Yeltsin defined in 1994 the distension between the former USSR and the West “Cold Peace” because EU-NATO integration did monopolize the European security architecture marginalising the Russian Federation, creating asymmetries which both Yeltsin and Putin tried to overcome. (Sakwa 2016, Preface: X)

The separation of the former Soviet republics from Moscow, and the very disintegration of the Cold War order caused an ever growing sense of encirclement in Russia, one that pushed the Russian leadership to do whatever it takes to protect their national interests today. The Clinton years signed the NATO enlargement in countries previously considered by the Soviet Union as buffer States, and shortly after the enlargement became an encirclement that involved former Soviet Republics including the Baltic Republics and even Georgia. However, if the geopolitical stance of Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's Russia was dictated by a limited set of possible choices (given the dramatic state of the economy and the weight of internal conflicts in the USSR) that included the German Reunification and the acceptance of the US hegemony in Western Europe, today's Russia is in a completely different state.

Moreover, if it is true that many States in the post-Soviet space distanced themselves from Russia and embraced the road towards European integration, it is also true that many more decided to cooperate with the Russian Federation. The Central Asian and Caucasian former Soviet Republics, and other European States (Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine) indeed entered the Russian sphere of influence. Thus were formed institutions such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (December 1991), the CST (1992 and later CSTO since 2002) and the CIS Free Trade Area (1994, not launched 2011). The need to cooperate between the fresh new States was explained by the inexperience and/or inability of the new States in the management of domestic and most of all international policy in the first place, and of course by the fact that the Russian Federation was considered the only legal heir of the Soviet Union and was thus dominant on all other States.

History though, has not been too soft on the Russian Eurasian integration ambition. After a handful of years Ukraine, the second most important of all

countries formerly part of the Soviet Union, abandoned every plan that would commit itself to fall under the Russian economic and security hegemony. Following the implementation of the Nunn-Lugar plan of “Cooperative Threat Reduction” (CTR), which consisted in the elimination and the removal of what had left of the Soviet nuclear arsenal in former Soviet Republics (including Ukraine), it was clear that the Ukrainian State would not be influential enough vis-à-vis the Russian Federation and the international community. Nevertheless, the relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation were on point and enjoyed a decent quality for the following decade.

Given the disastrous outcome of the “civilised divorce”¹² which was the end of the Soviet Union, the priorities for Moscow revolved on the management of the economic crisis, the institutional nightmare facing the Russian Federation, its posture vis-à-vis the international community and the basic security of the State. Thus, many problems linked with the dissolution of the Soviet Union were left untouched. This is the case for the “Crimean Question”, which is the core of this dissertation.

In the 1990s, therefore, the “Crimean Question” had started to emerge right after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was indeed clear to all (especially in Moscow) that the case for Crimea to be left outside the Russian Federation was an “historic accident”¹³. Crimea, which was originally inhabited by Tatars, was later annexed to the Russian Empire by Catherine II at the end of the XVIII century. It was only then that was colonised by ethnic Russians, throughout the XIX and XX centuries. In 1954 Crimea was ceded by Nikita Khrushchev to the

¹² Yulia Nikitina, Russian scholar and expert in security studies and regional organisations, recalls this expression as written in official CIS documents, highlighting the mutual understanding of the process lying at the base of the disintegration of the USSR. In (Nikitina 2013)

¹³ Anne de Tinguy, in the preface of (Armandon 2013)

UkSSR at a time when borders between the Soviet Republics were no more than administrative lines. As a matter of fact, the former Russian Empire (and therefore the Russian SFSR before numerous changes of borders) also included the entirety of present-day Kazakhstan and the Baltic Republics.

Arguably, the Crimean Peninsula is one of the focal centres of the Russian culture. It is in Crimea that Vladimir the Great, then ruler of the Kievan Rus', converted to Christianity, starting the Russian Orthodox Church with the Baptism of the Rus' in AD 987-988. Although both Ukraine and Russia claim to be descendants of the Kievan Rus', modern day Russia is the greatest and largest heir of the then Kievan Rus', also bearing in mind that present-day Ukraine is largely made of land which in the past used to belong either to Poland, Hungary, Germany or other present day States. As a matter of fact, Ukraine is considered the cradle of the Russian State, being Kiev considered the "mother of all Russian cities" (Armandon 2013, 159-173). After the Mongol invasion and, later on, the creation of the Russian Empire, Catherine the Great annexed Crimea in 1784, and so began the exodus of the local Tatar population.

During the Soviet Union, significant portions of the Tatar population had been deported to other parts of the USSR, and only some of the original Tatar descendants came back to Crimea once the Soviet Union ended. It was Stalin who enacted the most significant effort in the deportation of Tatars of Crimea. In 1944, the whole Tatar population (accounting for circa 230.000 people) left Crimea for Central Asia and Siberia, amid allegations of collaborationism with the Nazi regime. Therefore, if Moscow and the Russian irredentist rhetoric imply that Crimea is "historically Russian", the Tatars reckon Crimea is

“historically Tatar”, and the ethnic Russians have been (and still are) seen as no less than oppressors.¹⁴

But despite the historical territorial claims of the Tatar minority, the main actors of the Crimean question are, needless to say, the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The degree of interdependence of Ukraine and Russia was so high at the end of the USSR that Russia continued to provide Kiev with convenient trade deals, especially concerning Russian oil and gas flowing to Ukraine below market prices for at least two decades since 1991. This policy had in mind an eventual reunion with Ukraine some sort of federative or confederative subject. However, this strategy was doomed to fail, and ceased to exist before the Ukraine Crisis, in 2013. (Zubok 2016)

In the 1990s, the socio-economic situation of Russia became unsustainable, and the liberal ideas that characterised the Yeltsin’s years were wiped out with the 1998 default and later in 1999 with the NATO campaign in Yugoslavia and the Polish, Czech and Hungarian access to NATO. The loyalty and admiration of the Russian élite towards the USA and the American soft power had vanished in the wait for a more concrete support and even inclusion in the European and international institutions. While the concept of the “end of history” celebrated the funeral march of geopolitics and the end of all great power ambitions in Europe, the Russian Federation had to choose its own destiny: either at the margins of the European security architecture and international affairs, or resuming the regional -if not great- power aspirations and needs of Russia.

When Putin came to power, he famously tried to reset the US-Russia relations, even participating in the G8 and the Permanent Joint Council of NATO. However, the role of Russia in the management of Europe was met with

¹⁴ Ibid.

modest excitement in the West and the Russian sphere of influence and of special interest was breached several times. NATO and the European Union expanded, and eventually appeared on the table the option of making Georgia and even Ukraine part of NATO in the foreseeable future. The so-called *neocons* have been labelled responsible for NATO overextension, and the anti-American (and anti-Western) sentiment grew in Russia year after year. In 2001, the USA withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty ratified by the USA and the USSR in 1972. Shortly after the Bush administration declared the intention to set a ballistic missile defence in Poland and the Czech Republic to shield from rogue States in the Middle East (read: Iran). This move was an emblematic case of security dilemma, and the American missile build-up in Europe is still a heavily debated topic in Russia.

Therefore, Ukraine became a top priority for Russia in the years to come. For circa two decades Ukraine was considered by Moscow as a weak and fragile State, often unreliable and at times a threat for the energy security of Russia and the EU. The 2004 Orange Revolution, which defined the Ukraine posture between Russia and the EU was considered the smoking gun of a Western strategy to hurt Moscow and the Russian interests in Europe. Indeed the Orange Revolution would later be classified one of the many “coloured revolutions” that happened in the post-Soviet space. Prominent Russian officials including current Minister of Foreign Affairs of the RF Mr. Lavrov, current Minister of Defence of the RF Mr. Shoygu allegedly indicated that coloured revolutions are indeed a new form of warfare, used by foreign powers to perform regime changes in strategic States¹⁵. Current President of the RF Mr. Putin also shared

¹⁵ Anthony Cordesman, editor at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), reports the declarations of senior Russian officials at the III Moscow Conference on International Security, hosted by the Ministry of the Defence of the Russian Federation in May 2014. The speaker list included (but was not limited to) Lavrov and Shoygu. The said report is available at: http://csis.org/files/publication/140529_Russia_Color_Revolution_Summary.pdf.

the same view, defining it a proper “technology” for war use and profit, including the “redistribution of spheres of interest”¹⁶.

The Russian perspective over the nationalist and anti-Russian protests and revolutions which took place along its borders starting from Saakashvili’s Georgian “Rose” revolution in 2003 up until “Euromaidan” in 2014, is therefore one of deep mistrust in the actions of the Western partners and one of anger, too. Indeed, the Orange Revolution (and much more significantly Euromaidan) was a matter of concern for Moscow, which considered it to be the plot of the West, which sponsored and even orchestrated the very protests in the streets of Kiev.

Following the 2004 Orange revolution, Ukraine looked at the EU with increasing interest, and indeed the EU provided a roadmap to enter the EU orbit, which would later include the Eastern Partnership as a matter of fact. The Ukraine case was considered a good example of best practice for accessing the EU. However, the Russian Federation played its cards with Ukraine, as well. The launch of the Eurasian Economic Union and the single Eurasian market, Putin’s ambitious plan (now reality), together with a broader set of trade deals between Russia and Ukraine were tools used by Russia to counter the EU in the negotiations with Ukraine. Ukraine is indeed a geopolitical pivot, due to its size (45-50mln people) and of course geographical location. It is indeed too relevant for the Russian Federation to let it go. The Simferopol naval base is home to the Black Sea Fleet, in a peninsula with a significant number of ethnic Russians.

Ukraine did not become a bridge between the EU and the Russian Federation. In fact, the talks with Russia and the EU became a game of opportunity, played by Yushchenko as well by Yanukovich. However, during

¹⁶ “Putin vows to prevent ‘colour revolutions’ for Russia and its Eurasian allies” – available at: <https://www.rt.com/politics/384451-putin-vows-to-prevent-color/>.

the Yanukovych presidency the clash of interests evolved in a zero-sum game. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) came with a timeline and a decision to make: with Russia or with the EU. Yanukovych, who lost the 2005 elections against Yushchenko at the run-off stage for just 4 points, won the 2010 elections in a landslide. He and his entourage from Donetsk however, on the one hand gave their fellow Ukrainians the prospect of the EaP, and on the other hand were confronted with the Russian pressure, which included heavy trade and economic restrictions due to oil & gas cost. The Eurasian Economic Union was indeed tempting for the Ukrainian leadership, to which, however, preferred the EaP. Moreover, the EU would rule out the possibility of talking to third Countries while in the line for the association with the EU.

When the time came to proceed with the steps indicated by the EaP roadmap, in late 2013, the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych suspended the signature to the treaty, and accepted instead a generous economic package from Moscow in December. This move is motivated by the incumbent needs of the State in striking a deal with Russia while at the same time keeping alive the support for his presidency before the next Presidential election, scheduled for 2015. It was not the first time that Yanukovych chose to cooperate with Russia. In 2010 he sponsored with the then President of the RF Dmitry Medvedev the Kharkiv Accords, which established Russian rights on the Crimean base until 2042 in exchange for more convenient oil&gas prices. However, the opportunistic move from Yanukovych backfired, and from what started as a civic protest quickly escalated to street guerrilla and a proper civil war. This phase saw the participation in the revolts of nationalist groups and even neo-fascist groups from the Eastern regions of Ukraine.

When the revolts, and thus Euromaidan, could no more be contained by the police, the President had to negotiate with the opposition groups who took the

streets. The Ukrainian Crisis of Euromaidan was then addressed by the chancelleries of Poland, France and Germany, which representatives co-signed the agreement between Yanukovich and the opposition. However, such deal, which established a set of concessions (repeal of Constitutional amendments, early Presidential Elections, amnesty on protesters and an investigation to punish those responsible for the deaths of Euromaidan inter alia) that were imposed on Yanukovich, was not at all enough for Euromaidan. The protesters did in fact called for the president to step down from the presidential office immediately. Yanukovich left Kiev on February the 21st, 2014. He was later seen in Crimea before setting off for Russia, where he still lives to date.

To sum up, Ukraine is the focal point of a clash between Russia and the EU (or the West, broadly speaking), which derives from the diverging interpretations of history and indeed politics. The liberal approach of the EU and NATO expansion, based on the spontaneous application by third countries, was seen by Moscow as a means of the US used to take advantage over a weak and troubled Russia. Every former Soviet Republic which unilaterally decided to apply for membership of either NATO or EU had been a piece of unlawful territory taken away from Russia by force. When the Russian Federation grew strong enough to make a point and protect its national interest in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU and NATO enlargement stopped¹⁷, but there came the EaP. From the Russian point of view, the EaP is nothing less than a tool to reduce Russian area of manoeuvre in Europe. Indeed, the prospect of not seeing Ukraine joining neither NATO nor the EU has been seen as a diplomatic victory for Russia, nevertheless.

What stems from this argument is that the deterioration of the EU-Russian relations (Russia – West relations, broadly speaking) is not just a matter of

¹⁷ with the exclusion of Croatia, which joined the EU in 2013 and Montenegro, which joined NATO in June 2017.

enlargement of Western institutions such as the very EU and NATO. Russia does participate and cooperate in other institutions such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, the UNSC and more, as a matter of fact. The real issue at the basis of this situation is that the Russian Federation has been systematically left out of the bottom rooms. The Russian Federation has been a norm-taker for almost 20 years after its foundation. Today, and especially after the consolidation of anti-Western sentiment in Moscow, the Russian Federation asserts its role of not just norm-setter, but actually one that makes sure that certain principles and norms are applied accordingly with its own strategic interests and the principle of universality.

The West's failure to solve decades-old frozen conflict gives a hint on how inefficient it is to cut out the Russian Federation from the negotiation tables. If the West will fail to include the Russian Federation in the security architecture (and other relevant spheres of shared interest) of Europe, the Russian Federation has shown the West that it is ready to fight for what it is worth. Be it the GUAM¹⁸ area or elsewhere. As of yet, however, the real capabilities and the actual reach of the Russian power, including its soft power and the projection of its military might, are not fully clear or evident.

The diverging perspectives are thus here. The Russian is one of defence against a perceived sense of encirclement and rising military threats (including NATO missile capabilities in Europe). The Western (led by the American) is a more hawkish one. The USA, continuously –but with a stronger posture with the Obama I administration – perceives Russia merely as a revisionist power, which only tries to reacquire its great-power status and possibly using an aggressive expansion strategy (in Georgia and in Ukraine) to complete the Eurasian integration and project its hegemony.

¹⁸ Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova

AFTER THE FALL OF THE USSR

The Ukraine Crisis comes from the past. For the many internal fractures left from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the post-Cold War order, all the conditions were set to bring about a secessionist conflict that appeared inevitable¹⁹. From the Euromaidan crisis emerged a new Ukrainian leader, Mr. Petro Poroshenko. Poroshenko is an oligarch who made his fortune thanks to his creation, *Roshen*, a confectionary corporation he built after the fall of the Soviet Union, to which he owes his nickname: The Chocolate King. According to Sakwa²⁰, Poroshenko is one of the one hundred people who control between the 80% and the 85% of Ukraine's total wealth. Such oligarchy allegedly developed and prospered under Leonid Kuchma's decade in the presidential post (from 1994 to 2004). Mr. Poroshenko won the popular vote at the first turn amid hopes to pacify Eastern Ukraine while reaffirming the pro-European stance of Ukraine amid growing instability and tension in the relations with the Russian Federation and the rebels in the Donbas region.

The Ukrainian society is incredibly polarised and soaked in its powerful oligarchy. There is a wide range of examples of blatant corruption that encompass roughly every political party connection with local economic giants. From Kuchma to Yushchenko, from Yulia Timoshenko to Viktor Yanukovich and Poroshenko nowadays, every one of them had or still have skeletons in their cupboards. Whereas in Putin's Russia the State became the most powerful actor (notwithstanding tremendous problems concerning corruption), and many

¹⁹ In her book "*La Crimée entre Russie et Ukraine*" (Crimea between Russia and Ukraine), Emmanuelle Armandon argues that because of the many centrifugal forces in place in Ukraine, notably in *Novorossia* and in Crimea, the conflict between Ukraine and Russia appeared inevitable.

²⁰ He (Sakwa 2016, 61) cites the study of Sławomir Matuszak. Yulia Timoshenko is also believed to among the richest oligarchs in Ukraine.

oligarchs have lost significant relevance (some of them have been arrested), the Ukrainian State was never able to prevail over local strongmen and women. This includes Yulia Tymoshenko's struggle with Ukrainian justice. Her case is singular because although she was convicted and released twice, the surrounding issues and allegations have been labelled (also by international and independent committees) as part of a suppressive politically-motivated plan to take her out of the business.

All this establishment-level corruption, and the clear oligarchy put in place add up to the *per se* disastrous socio-economic conditions of the Country. Besides, while the current President, Mr. Poroshenko has committed to free the Country from its oligarchy, few are the signals that he will be successful in such plan, as he is himself an oligarch, although he might well be "a different kind of oligarch, certainly the best of the bunch" as Matthew Rojansky and Mykhailo Minakov sarcastically write in an article for the Yale Global Online blog²¹. Ukraine is the only European post-Soviet State which has not yet reached pre-independence levels of wellbeing. For instance, comparing Ukraine²² to Belarus, Bulgaria and Poland in the period 1990-2015, highlights how poor has the Ukrainian economic performance been so far. If Belarus' and Bulgaria's GDP (at PPP at current international US Dollar) tripled, and Poland's quadrupled, the Ukrainian (in 2015) had actually fallen (even though by just 10b USD). Notably, Ukraine's GDP (at PPP at current international US Dollar) was a little higher than Poland's in 1990. In terms of GDP per capita (at PPP at current

²¹ The full article, published in 2015 and concerning the theme of Ukrainian "exceptionalism", with a well-rounded analysis on the state of affairs of Ukraine's political environment is available at: <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/new-ukrainian-exceptionalism>

²² Chart made using WB online resources at: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/states-compared/id/b25546a5>.

international US Dollar), whereas the Belarusian and the Bulgarian tripled, the Polish quadrupled, the Ukrainian was almost halved.

To this date, Ukraine has lost Crimea. However hard to accept it might be for the Ukrainian government²³ and the international community, Ukraine does not exercise its State power upon the Crimean population as a matter of fact. Whether the loss of Crimea is due to territorial expansion or secessionism is up to debate. However, it is undoubted that in Crimea existed for long (especially after 1991) strong secessionist – not merely separatist – movements, waved by the aim of leaving Ukraine and reattach to Russia. The force behind this project stems from the fact that international borders drawn under the Soviet Union, including the Ukrainian, did not follow neither a historical path, nor geographical lines or the area inhabited by Russian nationals.

This project had strengthened under the Crimean presidency of Mr. Yuri Mechkov in 1994, who had publicly declared his will to reunite with the Russian Federation (Armandon 2013, 15-23). However, Leonid Kuchma's government, in March 1995 abolished the Crimean Constitution and its presidency, in order to suppress the Russian secessionist movement, thus causing critiques from

²³ The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via the Embassy of Ukraine to the Republic of Italy, produced a Facebook post on the 9th of January, 2016 in order to publicly defy a map representing Crimea under the control of the Russian Federation issued by the Italian review of Geopolitics "Limes". Link to the Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/UkraineMFA/posts/937690959618158>. The Facebook post followed an official letter by the Ukrainian Ambassador HE E. Perelygin sent to Limes' editorial staff (available at: http://www.limesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/lettera_ambasciatore_ucraina_116.jpg) on the 6th of January, 2016, in which the Ambassador complained about the representation of Crimea as part of the Russian Federation in an article issued by the said magazine on the 30th of December, 2015 (available at: <http://www.limesonline.com/lattivismo-militare-della-russia-nel-2015/88860>), which included the aforementioned map (available at: <http://www.limesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/attivismo-militare-Russia-rivista.jpg>). The director of Limes, Mr. Lucio Caracciolo replied to the Ambassador on the grounds of "factual reality" and committing to produce a map representing Crimea as part of Ukraine when and if it will return under the control of Kiev.

Moscow. The diplomatic crisis found a solution in the Sochi meeting between Leonid Kuchma and Boris Yeltsin, in June 1995, where the two agreed to establish the terms of use and the rights of the Black Sea Fleet in the Sebastopol naval base²⁴ (Armandon 2013, 250-257).

However, the Crimean “detachment” does not only lie on the issue of international borders. Emmanuelle Armandon (Armandon 2013) identifies three main causes that could ignite the separation of Crimea and Ukraine²⁵. The first is the difference in views between the administrations in Kiev and in Simferopol regarding the very statute of the Crimean Autonomous Region and the existence of the said secessionist movements. Secondly, the inter-ethnic tensions are very high in Crimea. As a matter of fact, the majority of the population of the Crimean Peninsula is made of ethnic Russians, who hardly tolerated the repatriation of the ethnic Tatars at the end of the Soviet Union. To date, the Russian population accounts for 65-70% of the Crimean inhabitants, Ukrainians are around the 15% and Tatars are around 10%. Lastly, and clearly, is the fact that Crimea has represented in the years following the independence of Ukraine an object of dispute between Kiev and Moscow, posing a continuous threat to Russo-Ukrainian relations.

Therefore, the existence of such a multidimensional complexity of the Crimean issue posed a continuous threat to the wellbeing of the Russo-Ukrainian relations, and the intersection of these different tracks has brought Crimea outside of Ukraine and into the Russian Federation. As it has been mentioned above, the Crimean population was largely of Russian ethnicity, and

²⁴ The said agreement did not establish Russian ownership of the said base, because that would be excluded by the Ukrainian Constitution (which Art. 17 states “The location of foreign military bases in the territory of Ukraine shall not be permitted.”), but rather give the Russian Black Sea Fleet basing rights in Sebastopol.

²⁵ Armandon wrote her book in 2013, and at that time she did not exclude that the Crimean issue could turn into open and armed conflict, but in fact that did not happen before more than one year had passed from the publication of the book.

had already large forces pushing towards either independence or Russian reunification.

But when we look at how the Crimean Peninsula defected to the Russian Federation concretely, it is important to understand the actual political turbulence in the Country. First of all, the presidency of Mr. Yanukovich has been characterised by ambiguity in the gameplay with Russia and the EU. While the EaP was gaining increasing popular support (especially in the Western part of Ukraine), pressing issues concerning the oil&gas imports from Russia and the State's debts towards Russia's Gazprom were posing a threat to the energy security of Ukraine. Therefore, in a bid to continue the double relation with both Russia and the EU, Yanukovich pushed forward an agenda that prioritised the EaP negotiations while trying to make deals with the Russians.

When the Russian proposal to join the Eurasian Economic Union was offered to Kiev, the Ukrainian administration refused in light of the comparative advantages of joining the EaP with the EU. At that point, even the deal signed by Medvedev and Yanukovich in Kharkiv in April 2010 (Yanukovich had just been elected) concerning the extension of the lease of the Russian rights for the Black Sea Fleet in the port of Sevastopol did not work as a counterbalance for the Russian strategic interests. At the same time, an increasing corruption and a large part of the population being into poverty, really made the Ukrainian people take the streets.

The Euromaidan started as a civic protest against the government and its corruption, and the suspension of the EaP negotiations was just the tip of the iceberg. Yanukovich only had one year before the next presidential elections (expected to take place in February 2015) when he was removed from power. His bid to win the presidency actually started right after the 2004 Orange Revolution. The 2004 presidential election run-off phase had to be repeated

amid concerns of electoral manipulation that favoured Yanukovych. The first run-off election between Yushchenko and Yanukovych saw the latter win the popular vote 49.5% against the former's 46.6%.

However, international observers declared the said election did not follow international standards and thus the election result was nullified. The first victory of Yanukovych was met with concern by the Western nations, including every EU Member State (each of which declared not to recognise Yanukovych as the legitimate president of Ukraine) and the USA. At the end of 2004, the run-off stage was repeated and it resulted in a clear victory for Mr. Yushchenko, who took over the 52% of the popular vote. Mr. Yanukovych later participated and won the 2010 against the then "Orange" Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko in an election that although highly criticised in its legitimacy (concerns that induced to believe that the elections had been rigged), passed international observers' scrutiny and established the victory of Yanukovych.

As already mentioned, the protest against Yanukovych and his administration has deeper roots than just the suspension of EaP accession talks. The different souls of Ukraine merged on Independence Square (Maidan), each of which presenting and advocating for different scenarios and agendas for the Ukrainian State. Particularly, what was contested was mostly the idea of Ukraine in the mind of Yanukovych. His vision entailed Ukraine as a state between Russia and the West, a natural geopolitical bridge and neutral buffer zone aimed at avoiding border friction between the Russian Federation and the EU. Yanukovych excluded any NATO membership for his Country, and did not further Eurasian Economic Union partnership with Russia. This lack of decisiveness betrayed a part of the Country which aspired in a truly independent Ukraine.

During the 2014 Euromaidan demonstrations, thousands rallied for a procession celebrating the 105th birthday of Stepan Bandera, a nationalist intellectual, who in the 1930s was the chair of the Organisation of the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN). His thinking was soaked in racism and radical nationalism, particularly due to the hatred of Poles, Jews and Russians (the latter being considered the worst of all of them). His movement, the OUN, supported and allied with Nazi Germany in a bid to gain support to establish the Ukrainian independent nation. Under his leadership, the OUN participated in the slaughtering and the deportation of thousands of people, under the authority of the Nazi command. He was assassinated by the KGB in Munich, in 1959²⁶.

This controversial man from another era, has found renewed support for his ideal and the very notion of integral nationalism²⁷ not only in nationalist groups and parties, but also in Mrs. Yulia Timoshenko's party, *Batkivshchyna* (Fatherland). This political idea, that represents the Russians and the Soviet heritage as scars and with hatred, was not shared by every group of the Ukrainian society. In the eastern part of Ukraine, especially in the *Novorossiia* area (from Transnistria in the West to Donetsk and Luhansk in the East) and in Crimea, the Soviet Union and its Communist Party was – and partly still is – perceived as a benevolent ruler that brought progress and wealth to an otherwise poor State. It is in the separatist and secessionist east of Ukraine that there is the highest concentration of wealth and productivity. Coincidentally, the same situation applies to Transnistria in Moldova²⁸.

²⁶ For a more detailed profile of Stepan Bandera and his actions, see (Sakwa 2016, 14-26)

²⁷ according to Zaitsev, (cited in Sakwa 2016, 14-26), integral nationalism is “a form of authoritarian nationalism” whereby the nation has supreme importance and relevance over the individual and “humanity as a whole”

²⁸ Chisinau, located on the western, mostly pro-EU, Romanian side of Moldova, does not (and cannot) rule upon Transnistria, where most of the national wealth is. Transnistria uses Russian Rubles as their currency and has adopted its own flag, which is the same as the Moldovan flag under the Soviet Union.

However extreme might the figure of Bandera, nationalist symbols and practices emerged after the Ukrainian independence. Ukraine was establishing its independence through measures aiming at the relative homogenisation of its citizens. This kind of nationalism did not in fact reflect the reality of things (that is that a large number of non-Ukrainian speakers live in eastern-Ukraine), and significant segments of the Ukrainian society were left out of the civic life. In *Novorossiya*, some people could not understand official documents, nor instructions at polling stations, because they would only be written in Ukrainian.

This indeed enhanced a certain level of resentment among the Russian population of Ukraine. Although highly controversial, the figure of Bandera is critical to understand the dynamics of power and interests that have been going on in Ukraine since the end of WWII. When the Soviet freed Ukraine and pacified (and also gave shape to) the war-torn nation, the OUN formed an exiled government which lasted until 1986, gaining some international recognition as “Captive Nation”, thus portraying Russia as inherently evil and imperialist. Yulia Tymoshenko was not the only top-tyre politician to align herself to the reactionary positions of Bandera. As a matter of fact, former president Yushchenko himself being one of the leaders of the Orange Revolution, had ties with the OUN, and his second wife, an American citizen, used to publish anti-Russian articles in US newspapers²⁹.

When Yushchenko took power in 2004-2005, he joined efforts with many different political forces of Ukraine, including Andriy Parubiy, who used to be the leader of the neo-Nazi, ultra-nationalist, reactionary and revolutionary party “Social-National Party of Ukraine” in 1991 (recalling Hitler’s National Socialist German Workers’ Party), which now changed its name to *Svoboda* (Freedom).

²⁹ Cited by (Sakwa 2016, 14-26)

Yushchenko pushed his mildly nationalist agenda, including condemning Holodomor³⁰ denial as a criminal felony. Yushchenko also revived the figure of Bandera, whom he awarded a “Hero of Ukraine”. Viktor Yanukovich repealed these laws when he became President in 2010.

Therefore, in Ukraine, the existence of a compact front of pro-EU forces (including Poroshenko, Yushchenko, Timoshenko and Svoboda) is not only traceable in the ambition to join a bloc of countries which share the same values (regarding human rights, the rule of law, transparency and good governance), but also out of the repulsion and rejection of the Russian interests in their country.

That is to say that although the socio-economic benefits of joining the European Union (and possibly NATO) are clear and shared, there is a deeper sentiment that runs through the most heated currents of Ukrainian nationalism that maintain that going with the West is inherently good in that it means going on the opposite direction as Russia, notably limiting Russia’s abilities to manage the region and pursue its own interests. It is precisely with this in mind that the Ukrainian leadership after the Orange Revolution looked forward to increasing its participation in the European integration, both with the EU and NATO. The pursuance of NATO membership was put forward especially after 2008 Georgian War, knowing that the Russian side would refuse to accept it and despise such idea. The Orange “revolutionaries” advanced the NATO membership program even against the popular will³¹.

³⁰ Holodomor is the Ukrainian name for the famine of 1932-33, when between 2.5 and 12 million Ukrainian people lost their lives during the first Soviet 5-years plan. Although such famine hit large parts of the USSR, including Siberia and Kazakhstan, Ukrainian nationalist and other intellectuals believe that the famine was a genocide induced by Stalin in a bid to suppress his political opponents and crush Ukrainian independentism movements.

³¹ Surveys conducted by Gallup in the last decade have shown that the Ukrainian population has a very low sympathy for NATO, considering it a threat more than something that could protect them. NATO enjoyed popular support in Ukraine just during the years 2014-15, but it has lost it by 2016. For a detailed analysis on this topic and the methodology of the poll check: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/203819/nato-members-eastern-europe-protection.aspx>

For what concerns the Ukraine-EU relations, the EaP was meant to be more of a symbolic milestone in Ukraine's integration into Western Europe, and a political and definitive detachment from Russia. Although for years the negotiations had been proceeding slowly and steadily, the content of the said agreement was little political and more focused on free access to market. This came without the prospect of becoming an actual MS (or even candidate status) for Ukraine. As a matter of fact, the agreement came as a proposed alternative to the Russian-sponsored Eurasian integration. The EaP prescribed that Ukraine should harmonise a number of its policies with the EUMSs, including in terms of security and foreign policy. The European proposal meant that Ukraine would exit the Russian sphere of influence, threatening the existence of a comfort zone between the European borders and Moscow.

Also in economic terms, the EaP would put an end to (or at least reduce significantly) the economic relation between Russia and Ukraine, which economy is largely dependent on Russia's to date. Imports from Russia (mostly natural resources) accounted in 2013 for one third of Ukraine's total imports, and exports towards Russia accounted for circa one fourth of the total. The production of industrial machinery and the arms industry that serves significant segments of Russia's army and railway system is based in Ukraine, which makes the relation between the two economies one of complementarity. The most relevant part of these production sites is based in the separatist (and secessionist) region of Donbas (Sakwa 2016, 72-80).

Therefore, the Russian national interest was at stake, and halfway through 2013, Moscow started putting pressure on the Ukrainian resilience. From July 2013, the Russian Federation stopped imports of several food products from Ukraine on the ground that they no longer respected the health and hygienic standards of the Russian Federation. This harmed Mr. Poroshenko's *Roshen*,

which was no allowed to trade with Russia anymore (Sakwa 2016, 72-80). In September, also the Ukrainian machinery industry (notably the railway industry) was stopped at the border, allowing the already fragile industrial output of the Donbas³² region to continue its freefall³².

In such a divisive and debatable choice, the Russian Federation had made clear that there would be repercussions for Ukraine should it align with Europe and leave the Russian field. On the other hand, the EU pressed Yanukovich to sign the EaP having well in mind that such a treaty would harm Russian-Ukrainian relations. Mr. Putin himself would later clarify that the Russian opposition to the Ukraine-EU agreement was grounded on crude numbers. As many as 245 Ukrainian enterprises used to work solely to serve the Russian Army, for products that have no market what so ever within the EU or the West. Also, the rules to trade with and enter the EU market are so strict that in the immediate future the detachment of Russia and the entrance in the EaP would actually be counterproductive for Ukraine³³.

While the EU Association Agreement was made of an indeed a serious long-term reform agenda with conditionality clauses (including the release of Yulia Timoshenko), the Russian Federation put some 15b USD on the table and discounts on the oil&gas directed to Kiev. If the EaP represented an ambitious reform plan, the very implementation of such a reform agenda would likely destabilise Yanukovich's government. The Russian loan on the other hand represented a short-term solution that would allow the Ukrainian administration some air to breathe. Therefore, Yanukovich (partly persuaded

³² Sakwa reports that the total industrial output of Donbas fell by over the 12% in 2014, with peaks in Donetsk, where the industrial output fell by over the 28% since the previous year.

³³ President Vladimir V. Putin at the 18th St. Petersburg's Economic Forum, held on May 2014, declared that Russian interests were largely "snubbed" by the West. Mr. Putin's press conference (inclusive of the Q&A) is available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/21080>

by Russia, but essentially in need of buying some time) decided to suspend the signing of the Association Agreement on the 21st of November 2013 in order to have some more time to evaluate the impact it would have on Ukraine. Shortly after, on the 17th of December, he signed the agreement with Russia.

While Yanukovych was arguably not likely to throw the EU Partnership out of the window for good, his playing on both sides (like roughly every past Ukrainian President had done before him) turned out to be a dangerous game. As a matter of fact, if for the West Ukraine represented just another country and a good way to limit Russia's influence in Europe, for Russia, on the other hand, Ukraine was its primary interest in Europe. A strategic, economic and political interest that had to be persuaded to stay with Moscow. Ukraine thus became a geopolitical challenge and a competing interest for Russia and the West. As Mr. Putin himself noted, “[Ukraine] for us is an issue of vital importance while the US only dealt with Ukraine only superficially”³⁴.

All of these issues, including the domestic situation of Ukraine, its ethnic tensions, its economic recession, its ever-eroding foreign policy consistency, and the clash of interests between Russia and the West, happened to put in place the conditions for (in the wording of Richard Sakwa (Sakwa 2016, 80)) the “perfect storm” which ultimately hit Europe with the November 2013 “Euromaidan” demonstrations and finally with the February ’14 Revolution.

³⁴ Ibidem

FROM EUROMAIDAN TO THE CRIMEAN REUNIFICATION

On 21st November 2013, President Viktor Yanukovych announced that he would not sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, suspending the negotiation procedure indefinitely in order to further evaluate the possible impacts of the EaP upon the Ukrainian economy. On the same day, an appeal to gather on Maidan Square started circulating on Twitter and other social media, and thus started what became Euromaidan.

Euromaidan started with a few hundred people, but soon, anti-government movements managed to create a permanent rally that gathered thousands of citizens. The people of Ukraine took the streets following a series of government actions and decisions that were perceived as a betrayal of the 2004 Orange Revolution and that led the country's economy to shrink while the oligarch class was prospering. Euromaidan lasted from the end of November 2013 to the end of February 2014 for approximately one hundred days.

After one week of protests, the government decided to disperse the protesters from Maidan Square on the grounds that the square had to be prepared for the Christmas decorations. This generated public outrage, and on the 1st December around half a million people occupied the public soil in Maidan Square and the city centre. In that occasion, the people on the streets pulled down the statue of Lenin, heritage of the Soviet Union. The main opposition parties' leaders, including Oleg Tyagnybok of Svoboda, Yulia Tymoshenko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, pledged alliance for the common cause of defeating Yanukovych in the next presidential elections, scheduled on 2015.

The composition of the crowd was indeed diverse. Although the majority of demonstrators were Ukrainian males of over 30 years of age, a large number of Russians and students also joined Euromaidan to protest against the perceived

corruption and bad governance. Soon after, the figure of Stepan Bandera appeared for the celebrations on his 105th birthday. Bandera used to be a Ukrainian nationalist in the 1940s, who pledged allegiance to the Nazi regime in a bid to get rid of the Soviet Union and eventually gain Ukrainian independence. His figure was reintroduced to the public by former President Yushchenko and later banned again by Yanukovych.

As the government failed to tackle the crowd's concerns, Euromaidan turned into a large-scale insurrection, that brought ordinary citizens to occupy government buildings in the surrounding areas. In the meanwhile, the political class and several oligarchs took sides in the ongoing protest, and therefore Euromaidan gained heavy sponsorships in terms of money and organisation facilities (including tents and food).

In response to the mass protests, the Ukrainian Parliament (*Rada*) adopted what soon would be dubbed the “dictatorship laws” (Sakwa 2016, 81-90), regulating the protest through twelve laws. These laws would impose heavy penalties to whom organised and/or participated in mass protests, including conviction in jail. The set of laws had been forcefully approved by the government's majority, which allegedly breached the constitutional provisions concerning the approval of legislation in order to speed up the process and tackle the Euromaidan as soon as possible.

On the 22nd of January, the first demonstrator had been killed by the national authorities. This led to an unchecked escalation that brought people in several regions of Ukraine to seize government buildings and military facilities. Thus was founded an alternative Parliament, and what used to be a civic protest evolved in a revolution. The insurgents gained guns and armed Maidan Square. The protest was animated largely by Svoboda and its affiliates, giving a nationalistic blueprint to the movement. With Bandera in mind, a fair share of

the insurgents embraced the idea that the EU was the only tool in the hands of Ukrainians to put an end to Russia's oppressing presence.

However, while the protest started in a bid to reverse Yanukovych's decision to halt the EaP, soon Euromaidan became a radicalised movement which final goal was to overthrow Yanukovych. Sakwa argues that the radicalisation of Euromaidan is to blame on the government, which in three occasions used force against its own people causing a flaming reaction. Arguably, Yanukovych should have used force with much more determination if he intended to break the protest (Sakwa 2016, 81-90).

By February, the Yanukovych's administration seemed to be doomed. The death of 28 people (including 10 policemen) on 18 February prepared the ground for the famous day of the sniper shootings, on which over 50 people (both insurgents and policemen) were taken down by snipers. It was the 20th of February 2014, and on that day several policemen lost their lives, killed by the same kind of bullets that also murdered protesters. Amid poisonous waters, Yanukovych agreed to negotiate with the opposition leaders.

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Germany and France, with Mr. Putin's special representative, Mr. Vladimir Lukin worked together with the Ukrainian government and the insurgent leaders to find a shared agreement on the resolution of what had become a proper civil war. An agreement was found in fact, and it was signed by the three EU MFAs, Yanukovych, Yatsenyuk, Tyagnybok and Klitschko³⁵. The agreement had six key points:

³⁵ Mr. Lukin did not sign the agreement in that he allegedly had no authority to do it, arguing that he would only discuss and witness the talks without meddling into the internal affairs of Ukraine. Mr. Lukin was reported to declare that the Russian presence at the meeting was meant to be helpful, although the Russian Federation did not intend to "assume obligations that are not entirely clear". <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?id=482950>

1. Revocation of constitutional amendments and return to the 2004 constitution and formation of a government of national unity (GNU) within ten days;
2. The GNU would draft a new constitution that would further limit the presidential powers;
3. The new constitution would precede the early presidential elections, to be held before December 2014;
4. A joint commission of the national authorities, the opposition and a delegation from the Council of Europe would investigate on the outbreak of violence that interested Ukraine during the demonstrations;
5. The Government would not enforce the state of emergency and would withdraw its forces from Maidan Square, and the insurgent militias would be disarmed;
6. Call for immediate ceasefire.

Although the international community reacted with a mild enthusiasm to the outcome of the meeting, which found a peaceful solution, the Maidan Square met the agreement with frustration and outrage. Euromaidan demanded the immediate resignation of the president, the release of protesters held in jail and the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU. Since none of these requests were met, one of the revolution leaders, Mr. Vladimir Parasyuk declared “We don’t want to see Yanukovych in power. [...] unless he steps down, then we will take arms and go, I swear”³⁶. Likewise, Mr. Klitscho (former international heavy-weight boxer, at the moment mayor of Kiev and at that time leader of UDAR - Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform) even apologised for shaking hands with Yanukovych³⁷.

³⁶ cited by Sakwa in (Sakwa 2016, 81-90)

³⁷ Ibidem

The following day, as the government honoured the obligation to withdraw from Maidan Square, the insurgents occupied the Parliament and destroyed statues of Lenin. The strong and heavy-handed government presided by Yanukovich was crumbling, and during the night between the 21st and the 22nd of February 2014 he left Kiev for good. On his way out of Kiev he endured four assassination attempts, and when he got to Crimea, with Russian help he managed to escape to Rostov. Technically, according to the Ukrainian constitution he still was the rightful President of Ukraine, and he held the post (formally) until the inauguration of Mr. Poroshenko's administration. As a matter of fact, Yanukovich did not die, was not mentally ill and was not impeached. He was just removed.

On the 6th of February 2014, a conversation between the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, Mrs. Victoria Nuland and the US Ambassador to Kiev, Mr. Geoffrey Pyatt, started circulating on YouTube and other online platforms (allegedly intercepted and leaked by Russia), which revealed that the USA was planning ahead on Ukraine. Mrs. Nuland allegedly mentioned that Mr. Yatsenyuk would be the best candidate to occupy the Prime Ministerial post, arguing that he had the “economic experience, the governing experience”. Mrs. Nuland also expressed her wish that the UN could take an active role in the management of the transition of power in Ukraine, blaming the EU for the hesitancy and the lack of decisiveness in the management of the said crisis. She famously stated: “you know, fuck the EU”³⁸.

While the Association Agreement of the EaP was promoted as a trade deal that would enhance the economic integration of Ukraine into Wider Europe, the

³⁸ The whole transcript of the said telephone conversation has been shared countless times on the internet. One version of the transcript is available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>

EU and the USA both spent substantial sums of money in Ukraine. As much as 5 billion USD were spent in democracy-promotion by the USA alone since Ukraine obtained independence. Another half a billion euros were put by the EU since the outbreak of the Orange Revolution to sponsor “front groups”³⁹. This detail should not however compromise the spontaneity and the seriousness of Euromaidan.

While Euromaidan started as an advocacy for EU integration, shortly after the protests focused on the conduct of the government and the perceived corruption. A large nationalist sentiment spread in the insurgents, and Euromaidan gathered people not just from the more pro-EU Western Ukraine, but actually from all parts of the Country. It was indeed a moment of national unity. Russophobia became predominant in the crowd, and the Russian media and even officials rapidly assessed that the February Revolution was a coup d'état committed by “ultra-nationalists”, “fascists”, “neo-Nazis” and “anti-Semites”⁴⁰. Russian Prime Minister Mr. Medvedev claimed that whoever took the power following Yanukovych’s escape had no legitimacy to represent the Ukrainian Government, on the grounds that *“if people crossing Kiev in black masks and Kalashnikov rifles are considered a government, it will be difficult for us to work with such a government”*, adding *“Some of our foreign, western partners think otherwise, considering them to be legitimate authorities. I do not know which constitution, which laws, they were reading, but it seems to me it is an aberration*

³⁹ As quoted by Sakwa (Sakwa 2016, 90-99)

⁴⁰ Coverage of how the Russian media handled the Ukraine Crisis at the following links: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/17/crimea-crisis-russia-propaganda-media>; <http://time.com/3545855/russia-ukraine-war-history/>

*of perception when something that is essentially the result of a mutiny is called legitimate*⁴¹.

Therefore, when the February Revolution was accomplished, it brought with it Russophobia and pro-EU sentiment. In large areas of Ukraine, especially in the West, statues of Lenin and other important Soviet or Imperial symbols were toppled. Although the power-structure did not change (including the oligarchy, which survived and later prospered with the election of Mr. Poroshenko), an arrest warrant had been issued against Mr. Yanukovich, who had already left for Russia. The revolutionary impulse was led by nationalist forces, and predicaments of Ukrainian independence and self-determination. At the same moment, in the East of the Country, a massive reaction to the Revolution had gained altitude. The Russian-speaking population, who previously had Yanukovich elected and envisaged a pluralist Ukraine where there could be space and respect for ethnic Russians, rebelled against Kiev's revolutionary government.

On February the 23rd, the Ukrainian Parliament voted by large majority to cancel various pieces of legislation put forward by former president Yanukovich. This included a 2012 law that would grant minorities that their language become official languages of their regions⁴². On the following week, acting president Turchynov vetoed the parliamentary decision. However, the Russian-speakers had already took the streets. Drawing from the same experience of Euromaidan, the people of Novorossia and Crimea occupied

⁴¹ Coverage on the Russian reaction to the change of power in Kiev: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/24/ukraine-viktor-yanukovich-arrest-warrant>

⁴² This law, passed by the Yanukovich administration in July 2012, aimed at including and safeguarding minorities rights. Especially in *Novorossia* and Crimea, the Russian language (but also the Hungarian and Romanian) became an official language of the region.

governmental buildings and raised Russian flags on top of them. This was the beginning of the civil war.

In the days following the departure of Yanukovych, the pro-Russian forces in Crimea managed to organise a paramilitary unit amid fears of punishment from Kiev. Volunteers signed up and on February the 27th they stormed the Crimean Autonomous Parliament in a bid to oust the current Prime Minister, Mr. Anatoly Mogilev for the pro-Russian politician Sergey Aksenev⁴³. On the same circumstances, the Crimean Parliament scheduled a “sovereignty referendum” for the next 16th of March.

In the meanwhile, the new Aksenev prime ministership was condemned by Kiev, which expressed resolute determination to undertake a criminal investigation and to suppress the mutiny. Aksenev then appealed to Russia, asking Moscow to include the Crimean Peninsula in the Russian Federation. Following the escalation of tensions, the so-called “little green men” had appeared. Highly trained personnel of the Russian Army concealed their insignias and pretended to be just average volunteers. In fact, they were working to secure Crimea from Ukrainian repression, and shortly after, the bloodless detachment of Crimea from Ukraine was more concrete than ever before. The Simferopol Airport had been seized and controlled by the 28th of February.

Quietly, on the 16th of March, the Crimean population was given two questions: either to join the Russian Federation as a federal subject, or to restore the 1992 constitution and thus gain autonomy within the Ukrainian State. In such a widely condemned and contested referendum, that saw no participation

⁴³ While the former PM had been appointed by former president Yanukovych after having secured 80% of the Parliament for his party, Mr. Aksenev was expressed by the *Russian Unity* Party, which took 4% at the previous 2010 elections.

whatsoever of independent observers, more than the 80% of Crimea's population took part in the referendum, the 96.7% of whom expressed their wish to join the Russian Federation. Later on, the Russian Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights claimed that in fact only between 30 and 50 per cent went to the polling stations, meaning that the decision to leave Ukraine for the Russian Federation was actually passed by circa the 15-30% of the population.

The international law, unambiguously states that the referendum has no legal value whatsoever. Which is the reason why the international community still does not recognize neither the Crimean independence nor the reunification to the Russian Federation (which the West generally understands as “annexation”). In (Sciso 2014) it is made crystal clear that the passage of Crimea from Ukraine to independence and eventually to the Russian Federation has no legal basis nor justification. While the right to self-determination has been invoked to justify the accession to Russia, as well as the comparison with the Kosovar independence, the international law rules out the validity of such action.

Notwithstanding the differences between the independence of Kosovo and of Crimea⁴⁴, including the concept of remedial secession and the doubtful

⁴⁴ The independence of Kosovo has been declared lawful by the International Court of Justice on the grounds that the relative Declaration of Independence was in accordance with the universally recognised principle of self-determination of peoples. ICJ on the Kosovar independence: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/16012.pdf?PHPSESSID=b0b24a6135eaf2347d5b0a0badec77ff>

The Crimean declaration of independence, on the contrary, does not meet any possible criteria that would allow a portion of a unitary country to secede. In particular, the later accession to the Russian Federation might be in breach of the first section of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 on the territorial integrity of European States. The Helsinki Final Act: <http://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act?download=true>

interpretation of the right to self-determination⁴⁵, Crimea is not *de facto* part of Russia. *De jure* it might still be part of Ukraine, but given that Kiev does not (nor can) exercise its executive power upon Crimea, for the sake of reality it is only wise to acknowledge the change of borders.

Nevertheless, on the 18th of March 2014 Crimea accessed the Russian Federation. Therefore, the Russian Federation gained two new subjects: the autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Federal City of Sevastopol. On the ratification of the accession, President Putin expressed his solidarity with the Russian people of Crimea, who allegedly suffered threats of repression. In commenting the Western allegations that such procedure was in violation of international norms, Mr. Putin declared “[...] it’s a good thing that they at least remember that there exists such a thing as international law: better late than never”⁴⁶.

Soon after, and in the years that followed, in Moscow and on the TV a slogan would often appear: “Крым наш” – or, “Crimea is ours”.

⁴⁵ According to the ICJ, “the international law of self-determination developed in such a way as to create a right to independence for the peoples of non-self-governing territories and peoples subject to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation”. Judge Cançado Trindade stated in (International Court of Justice 2010) that the right to self-determination “applicable, beyond decolonization, in new situations of systematic oppression, subjugation and tyranny”.

The situation in Crimea was clearly not one of neither oppression nor tyranny. Crimea had an autonomous and self-governing status, unlike in Kosovo.

⁴⁶ Address by the President of the Russian Federation on the day that Crimea became part of the Russian Federation, on 18 March 2014: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

2. EUROPEAN RETALIATION

Following the Crimean Referendum of 16 March 2014, the EU and the USA established a common front against the Russian Federation, now openly accused of conducting an aggressive and expansionist foreign policy against Ukraine and ultimately against the stability of Europe as a whole.

Critical to such development, there was the will of the USA to form a unilateral response to the Russian actions in Eastern Europe, and the EU (and other “Western” democracies such as but not limited to Australia, Canada, Japan and Norway) followed the US leadership.

The sanctioned individuals were allegedly involved in the exasperation of the Ukraine crisis which led to the Crimean reunification, considered illegal by itself. The European Union and the USA decided to impose economic sanctions against Russia, which was deemed responsible for the happenings in the said area, amid wishes to create political pressure on the Russian leadership and thus obtaining a step back on Crimea.

The sanction regime is still in place today and its purpose is to politically and economically isolate the Russian Federation and put pressure on his government, especially in the person of the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. V.V. Putin and his “entourage”. At the same time, the Western “retaliation” aimed at the persons responsible for the allegedly criminal acts committed in the context of Euromaidan and of the civil war unfolding in both Crimea and Novorossia.

The Obama Administration and the EU leaders had announced already on March the 6th through an executive order that the USA and the European Union were planning to issue sanctions against Russian and Ukrainian persons deemed responsible for the actions that had taken place in Ukraine. The sanctions regime was later formally implemented on March the 17th and it targeted

Russian officials such as one Advisor to the President of the RF Mr. Sergey Glazyev, the former Chairman of the State Council of Crimea Mr. Vladimir Konstantinov⁴⁷ and Viktor Yanukovych inter alia⁴⁸.

The sanctions worked in such a way that the assets of the individuals targeted were frozen if within range of Western economic institutions such as banks. When the sanctions expanded, more individuals and then companies and banks were targeted, reducing the relatively free movement of financial transactions and trade of goods between the West and Russia. This involved the halt of any West-Russia exchange “including on access to capital markets, defence, dual-use goods, and sensitive technologies, including in the energy sector”⁴⁹.

Such restrictive measures were adopted in the same period as the crisis of the Russian currency, which value plummeted in the months following Euromaidan and kept falling for years. The strong link between the oil prices and the strength of the Russian currency highlight one of the most important weaknesses of the Russian economy. This signals that the Russian economy is in fact far more exposed to the fluctuations in the oil market than to Western – temporary – sanctions.

However, the economic crisis that hit the Russian Federation not only reinforced Russian leadership’s popularity at home, especially in the person of

⁴⁷ Mr. Konstantinov today serves as the Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Crimea. Therefore he has only formally changed his role, because as a matter of fact he never stepped down from his post. As the Chairman of the State Council, he is practically the Speaker of the Parliament. He used to refer to Khrushchev’s decision to symbolically “cede” Crimea to the UkSSR as a mistake, and he is generally seen as one of the most committed supporters of the Crimean reunification with the RF.

⁴⁸ The US sanctions were imposed on 11 individuals at first. The EU issued sanctions against 21 persons and shortly after it broadened the number of targets.

⁴⁹ COUNCIL DECISION 2014/512/CFSP of 31 July 2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine, available online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32014D0512>

the President⁵⁰, but also relatively damaged the public support for Western leaders in relation to the sanctions against Russia and the related economic damage for European businesses that are now cut from the – still big – Russian market.

As the Western sanctions expanded and hampered Russia's access to international capitals, the development and the expansion of Arctic explorations and drilling sites in continental Russia and within its EEZ and continental shelf, the trade of military and dual-use goods and even the development of infrastructures aimed at the integration of Crimea⁵¹, also Moscow put in place a trade ban.

The trade ban issued by the Russian Federation was imposed on certain foodstuff coming for the EU and other Western States, in a bid to put pressure on Western leaders as parts of the export companies at home would suffer the weight of such trade dispute. In the Kremlin's strategy, more pressure was put on States previously part of the Soviet Union, the Moscow-controlled Eastern European States and the formerly non-aligned States. Among the hardest hit there was indeed Poland, the Baltic Republics, Norway, Romania and Germany, although other States suffered losses as result of the economic crisis that hit Russia and the contextual rise in prices for Western goods.

⁵⁰ Russian President Mr. V. Putin saw an increasing public support that hit 87% in July 2015 according to polls carried out by Levada Centre. The data show a correlation between the growth of Putin's popularity and the Russian intervention in Ukraine. Mr. Putin has regularly enjoyed much higher approval ratings than his Western counterparts.

A graph issued by the Levada Centre and reported by the Guardian is available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/datablog/2015/jul/23/vladimir-putins-approval-rating-at-record-levels>

For more detailed data see: <http://www.levada.ru/old/23-07-2015/iyulskie-reitingi-odobreniya-i-doveriya>

⁵¹ The simple passage of underwater cables from continental Russia to the Crimean Peninsula would be a trivial challenge for specialised EU firms. The Russian infrastructure development however (probably due to the morphology of Russia) has acquired less expertise in these kinds of projects. However, the Russian Government has finally connected Crimea to the national grid and built a bridge from continental Russia to Crimea to ensure connection.

The sanctioned products included all sorts of meat, fruit and nuts, milk and dairy products, fish and cheese. Ambiguously, certain products such as wine or certain canned and confectioned food such as Italian pasta and sauces have not been restricted. This might be seen as a favour to both France and Italy, which wine exports dominate the Russian wine market. The rationale behind the sanctions however is not only a matter of trade wars. The Russian government has used such historical moment to introduce the economic concept of income substitution amid hopes that the local production could improve and provide jobs and expertise in the agricultural sector as well as in the high-tech and mechanic industrial sector.

However, although encouraging might some figures appear (such as the increase in the production of crops and grains, and of pork meat for instance), the average Russian citizen has suffered since 2014 the weight of the sanctions and “counter-sanctions” in terms of rising prices, poorer quality of food and emergence of countless counterfeit products, such as the countless versions of *Пармезан* (read: Parmesan), coming either from Russia or other countries worldwide⁵².

The issue of lifting sanctions comes up very frequently both in the public opinion of the EU⁵³ and at the institutional level. Most States have lost billions

⁵² Belarus, Uruguay and other countries have exported such “*Parmesan*” cheese to the Russian Federation thus far. This is clearly a problem first and foremost for Italy and its agricultural sector, but it is also a fraud against the average Russian consumer. Cheese was previously imported from Ireland, Greece, Germany and Italy (inter alia). Today, the production of Russian-made cheese is appalling for its poor quality. The Moscow Times has reported a story regarding the problems with such counterfeit cheese, citing an official investigation that alleged more than 60% of all cheese sold in Russia is not made with milk but in fact with palm oil. More on this at the following website for a general picture of the problem of fake food: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/warning-this-is-not-cheese-in-russia-watch-what-you-eat-54689> and at the following website for a focus on fake cheese, where it is alleged that an astonishing 80% of all cheese in Russia’s stores is fake: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/fake-cheese-floods-russian-stores-50029>

⁵³ Less bothered are the American lawmakers and citizens, as their trade with the RF was already not too relevant in relation with the US GDP and export.

of euros in exports, and EU or State institutions have done very little if anything to compensate the business hurt by the sanctions regime. The issue of sanctions against Russia has also polarised the public opinion and the political scene in some States.

In Greece, the radical left -now majority- party *SYRIZA* maintained in the August 2014 that Greece should immediately lift sanctions against the Russian Federation following the implementation of the Russian counter-sanctions, because the portion of export and trade enjoyed by Greece and the RF was too important to be sacrificed on the shrine of the unity of the EU and NATO⁵⁴. However, once *SYRIZA* won the general elections (twice in a row within nine months in January and September 2015), the commitment of lifting the sanctions against Russia was not upheld and the renewal of them was not prioritised by Greece's Prime Minister Mr. Alexis Tsipras.

Other important politicians such as Mr. Matteo Salvini, leader of Italy's *Lega Nord* (Northern League) and Mrs. Marine Le Pen, former leader of France's *Front national* (National Front) have been highly critical of the EU/USA sanctions against the Russian Federation. Both of them have been strong advocates for the dropping of such sanctions⁵⁵ on the grounds that the retaliatory measure was harming their Countries' interests and that Russia should be seen as a friendly neighbour not as enemy of Europe.

⁵⁴ Russia Today reported in August 2014 the statement of then member of *SIRIZA* secretariat and later Vice Minister of the Defence of Greece Mr. Kostas Isychos. See: <https://www.rt.com/business/178888-russia-trade-ban-who-hurts/> Mr. Isychos left *SYRIZA* before the September 2015 elections and he is no longer part of the majority.

⁵⁵ For the BBC coverage of a March 2017 meeting between FN leader (and then French presidential candidate) Mrs. Marine Le Pen and the President of the RF Mr. Vladimir V. Putin in Moscow see: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39375969> For a December 2016 New York Times analysis of Italian political parties and their relations with the Russian Federation, including LN leader Mr. Matteo Salvini and his comments regarding EU sanctions against the RF, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/02/world/europe/italy-fake-news.html>

Despite the criticism around the issue of sanctions in the West (especially within the EU), and the economic crisis still underway in the Russian Federation, little makes think that such restrictions to trade will be dropped soon. The net loss is of economic relevance in Russia as well as in Europe. Besides, the current state of affairs signals that the Western sanctions have not worked too well if the aim was to put pressure or destabilise Putin's presidency or his inner circle. In Russia, the import substitution hoped for has not materialised if not marginally, and the increase of inflation and the worsening of product quality is currently harming the average Russian citizen indeed.

Nevertheless, the economic sanctions and counter-sanctions have acquired a political connotation and a geopolitical and strategic meaning. As a matter of fact, Europe has lost large sources of revenue from the Russian market, and Russia has had to stop pursuing Arctic exploration and other projects aimed at the exploitation of Russia's plentiful natural energy resources.

The Western sanctions are linked today to the fulfilment of the February 2015 "Minsk II" agreement concerning the normalisation of the situation in the Donbas region, which involves that Russia uses its influence to halt the Luhansk and Donetsk armed separatists and secessionists so that Kiev could take control again of these areas of its territory in exchange for some sort of devolution been conceded to the separatist regions. However, nor Russia nor Ukraine seems to be able (arguably nor willing) to provide for the fulfilment of this peace deal⁵⁶, which puts the peace process (and thus the Western sanctions) in a stalemate.

This conflict, which has become a frozen conflict, is keeping the good relations between the Russian Federation and the EU (and the rest of the Western World) hostage, posing a threat to the development of fruitful and

⁵⁶ For different and diverging opinions reported by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace on the implementation and the alleged failure of the Minsk II agreement see: <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=68084>

peaceful cooperation in a series of matters of prime and vital interest for both sides. Not lastly on the fight against organised crime, international terrorism, climate change and free trade.

In the following sections of this chapter, there will be room for analysis of the role of the USA in the proposal and issuance of the sanctions, including the background of the US-Russia relations and how they worsened over the course of the last decade. Moreover, this dissertation will explore the internal dynamics of the EU consensus regarding the implementation of the sanctions and the issue of creating a common, unitary and cogent EU foreign policy and –ideally– EU-Russia relations playbook. Finally, there will be a focus on the Russian trade restrictions, which are treated as counter-sanctions, how well they performed and what have been their effects.

THE AMERICAN INFLUENCE

The US-Russia relations are critical to the understanding of the Ukraine Crisis. When Mr. Barack H. Obama took the presidential post in 2009 following the 2008 elections, after the Georgian Crisis, the US-Russia relations were already deteriorating, and they hardly became better off in the following 8 years. As argued in Chapter 1, the Ukraine Crisis can be analysed as a conflict which happened in the wake of the Cold War and especially because of the poor management (if not mismanagement) of the post-Cold War order in Europe. As a matter of fact, the Obama Administration held power at a time when the Russian Federation was growing more assertive on matters of national and geopolitical interests, and the clash of the two powers became apparent during the mandate of former US Secretary of State Mrs. Hillary D. Clinton. The critical posture taken by the USA following the Georgian Crisis brought Russia and the USA at the collision point after the military intervention of the US-led coalition in the Libyan theatre against the forces of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

The Arab Spring, seen as just one example of the implementation of the “technology of coloured revolutions” by Moscow, brought to an end the rule of several MENA leaders, including Tunisia’s Ben Ali, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak and Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi, while threatening others such as Syria’s Bashar al-Assad. The Libyan Civil War in particular, provoked an unprecedented bloodshed which according to the UNHRC caused some 10 000 to 15 000 deaths, including governmental forces, rebels and civilian casualties⁵⁷.

⁵⁷ Mr. Cherif Bassiouni, who led a UNHRC mission to Tripoli and in the rebels held areas until April 2011, announced the said death toll, as reported by Reuters at the following website: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-un-deaths-idUSTRE7584UY20110609>

This led the UNSC to the approval of a resolution⁵⁸ which supported independent Nations or regional organisations (i.e. NATO) to engage the Libyan Army with the establishment of a no-fly zone over the Libyan airspace.

The Western intervention posed an end to the war crimes being committed by Colonel Gaddafi, but at the same time were highly criticised by the Russian Federation and also in the West, because the intervention allegedly breached the limits established upon it by the very resolution, and although it might have prevented the death toll to increase, it also allegedly supported the rebels in overthrowing a legitimate government and mercifully murdering its leader, Colonel Gaddafi. The Libyan intervention, based on the rather young concept of R2P (Responsibility to Protect) is probably the last example of a UN resolution that found consensus to limit State sovereignty in a bid to protect civilians' lives⁵⁹.

The Russian Federation highly criticised the Libyan intervention and denounced the assertive posture of the West in pursuing regime changes in the MENA according to their own strategic interests. Although this point is highly debatable (it is hard to be convinced that the current situation in the MENA is much more convenient for the West than it was before the Arab Spring), the season of the revolutions represented a great divide in the relations between Russia and the West, a new era in the Russia-US relations despite the efforts to “reset” them.

⁵⁸ UNSC resolution 1973 of 17 March 2011 passed unanimously with 10 votes in favour and 5 abstentions (Brazil, China, Germany, India and the Russian Federation). The full text of the UNSC resolution that established the no-fly zone, S/RES/1973 (2011), is available at the following link:

[https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)&referer=/english/&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%20(2011)&referer=/english/&Lang=E)

⁵⁹ Bearing in mind that the NATO bombing campaign in the Balkans in 1999 did gain international legitimacy only years later (although still today it remains controversial).

The Syrian continuation of the Arab Spring has finally emerged as probably the most notable and significant direct diplomatic conflict between Moscow and Washington after the Ukraine Crisis. When the USA, in the person of the US President Obama, claimed that the al-Assad regime should not cross the red line over chemical weapons, the Russian Federation made clear that it would not tolerate another Libya-style Western intervention that might lead to the perpetration of civil war among extremist groups in Syria. In September 2015, the Russian Federation would start providing its support to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in a bid to defeat the rebel forces of ISIL with the engagement of the Russian Armed Forces and the SVR. Such involvement in the Syrian Civil War signalled that the Russian Federation would protect international stability supporting legitimate governments and not the rebels.

During the second term of the Obama Administration, the US State Department had changed its leadership and was then led by Mr. John F. Kerry. Under his leadership, the US-Russia relations did not progress too much, and because of the Ukraine Crisis came to a virtual end. The USA and all NATO partners agreed to suspend the NATO-Russia Council following the collapse of the Ukrainian situation, and the USA indeed condemned the Russian actions in Ukraine. Mr. Kerry declared that the Russian actions in Ukraine were “personally driven”, arguing that the Russian President Mr. Putin was behaving with resentment and in a way which is unfit for the 21st century.

Mr. Kerry was hinting at the rise of nationalism in the separatist parts of Ukraine, claiming that the Russian Federation was carrying out a plan to reacquire territories otherwise lost. The State Department was indeed claiming that the same people who allegedly manipulated and provoked the protests in Crimea, happened to be the same individuals who previously stationed in Georgia and were operating in the separatist Donbas region (Sakwa 2016, 183-

187). Incidentally – maybe ironically – these allegations sound very similar to Russian claims that the US was behind the revolts of Euromaidan. The US piece of intelligence that indicates that the Kremlin had a certain role in the unfolding of the events in Donbas were gathered with highly sophisticated intelligence facilities, including but not limited to special jets equipped with advanced sensors and a software capable of intercepting electronic communications. The USA and NATO worked together to analyse the unfolding events.

NATO, although not directly involved in the fighting of Ukraine’s Civil War, focused on “setting the record straight⁶⁰” on the Ukraine Crisis and indeed on collect allegations of the Russian contribution in the exasperation of the crisis and its direct involvement with combat troops both in Crimea and in the Donbas region. Indeed, this is one example of what incumbent President of Ukraine Mr. Petro Poroshenko described as “information war”. According to his statement⁶¹, anyone who joined the rebels in the fight against Kiev’s authority had been brainwashed (with the convenient exclusion of external professional soldiers) and therefore any means, including violence, would need to be used to win such information war.

At this point, the information war was indeed played by Washington, too. Thus, the USA concurred in the political isolation of the Russian Federation and backed any claim or allegation coming from Kiev if that served the cause of condemning the Russian actions in Ukraine. In a tit-for-tat gameplay, allegations were brought up on international media by both Russia and the

⁶⁰ “Setting the record straight” is the title to a section of the NATO website which aim is to debunk what NATO calls “myths” about the Alliance, its history and its activities, presumably aimed at Ukrainian or Russian readers. The website also maintains that Russia has used its military within the Ukrainian territory and provides satellite images to back such claims.

⁶¹ Mr. Poroshenko declared on June the 18th 2014 that the ongoing conflict in the Donbas was an “information war” whereby the fighters (inclusive of mercenaries, volunteers, professionals and the local population) had been brainwashed. (Sakwa 2016, 183-187)

West, each party accusing one another of even unverified facts, including human rights violations perpetrated by Kiev or by the rebels.

The information war is still today fought also on social media and mass-media. The latest tensions between the two Powers emerged during every recent election in Europe and especially in the USA, whereby still today a federal investigation is ongoing amid allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US Presidential Elections. Notably, Russia's majority party, *Единая Россия* (United Russia, UR), presented a report which accuses US media outlets to have meddled in 2016 Duma (Russian Parliament) elections, with the spread of misinformation and propaganda thus distorting the democratic process in Russia. Such alleged propaganda is circulated by the US through media outlets such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (Radio Svoboda in its Russian version), CNN TV and Voice of America⁶².

On the other side, the state-funded Russian media outlet *Россия Сегодня* (Russia Today, RS⁶³) and TV network Russia Today, have lately been under fire in the West with identical allegations. RS and RT have grown significantly in the last years, with a steady increase in their budget that led both media outlets to expand at a fast pace in Europe and elsewhere. The RS network includes the news and radio online agency "Sputnik News", which publishes stories in over thirty different languages including English, German, Italian and Polish.

Both Sputnik News and Russia Today have been declared sources of misinformation and propaganda in several occasions by either national

⁶² As reported by The Moscow Times on May 19 2017 at the following website: <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/united-russia-accuses-us-media-in-meddling-with-2016-duma-elections-58044>

⁶³ Not to be confused with *Russia Today*, a TV network, also funded by the Russian government but directed to the foreign public.

leaders⁶⁴ and even the EP, the latter of which commissioned a report that analysed the influence of propaganda coming from the Russian Federation and from ISIL⁶⁵.

The leadership of the USA within NATO and of course the significant weight of the transatlantic relations of the USA and every EU MS has been a driver of the issuance of sanctions directed against Russian (and Ukrainian) citizens and corporations. The USA policy towards the Russian Federation began to be one of containment again, dominated by the information war that puts the two powers in a virtual battlefield cornered by a zero-sum-game vision of the international relations. The isolation of Russia, not its direct engagement, became the ideal solution for the USA. This became increasingly visible during the Obama Administration.

As a matter of fact, in the eight years of Obama, the American focus shifted from Europe and marginally from the MENA to another area of the world, where there is true competition and the balance is not stable: The South China Sea. Obama's understanding was that no matter how tense the situation could grow with Russia in Europe, the Russian Federation would still be a declining regional power⁶⁶ with a declining population and a smaller economy than Canada⁶⁷,

⁶⁴ President of the French Republic Mr. Emmanuel Macron (then candidate) openly criticised such media outlets announcing they would not be allowed to cover his electoral campaign as they have “the systematic desire to issue fake news and false information” (gathered at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/27/russia-emmanuel-macron-banned-news-outlets-discrimination>). Mr. Macron would confirm this thought in a joint press release with Russia's Mr. Putin on May 29, 2017 in Versailles (full report available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/29/world/europe/emmanuel-macron-putin-france-russia.html>)

⁶⁵ The reportage was criticised because it discussed in the same document of fake news coming from both Russia and the terrorist-led quasi-State ISIL. The full text of the document is available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA\(2016\)578008_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2016/578008/EXPO_IDA(2016)578008_EN.pdf)

⁶⁶ With the exception of its nuclear arsenal and its space facilities (both inherited from the USSR).

⁶⁷ In terms of nominal GDP, as reported by the WB, the IMF, the UN and other agencies.

therefore not capable of posing a concrete threat to the stability or the security of the USA. Therefore, efforts to counter the Chinese hegemony in Southeast Asia had stepped up, particularly on the economic field. The TPP⁶⁸ has been one of the top priorities of the Obama Administration (and a tremendous effort had been put on the negotiations of the TTIP, which failed), and when the Ukraine Crisis unfolded, the USA made clear that they would pursue only non-military pressure towards the RF.

However redundant would be to talk and debate about whether Russia is or is not a great or regional power, it is important to notice that virtually every crisis or war theatre in Europe and the MENA needs the USA to have a constant contact with the Russian Federation, meaning that the RF is indeed able to project its power and has a substantial drive to protect its interests especially around its borders. This fact had been acknowledged by the USA even before Mr. Obama ended its second presidential term, as the NATO-Russia Council was resumed precisely to have a diplomatic channel open to discuss the frozen conflict of Donbas.

Today, the newly elected President of the USA, Mr. Donald J. Trump has based his first months repudiating and repealing certain pieces of Obama's legacy, including domestic and foreign affairs. On his first mission abroad, he visited three religious centres, including Saudi Arabia, Israel and the Vatican, before addressing his fellow NATO Heads of Government at the May 2017 NATO Brussels Summit. In that occasion, he caused some nervousness among the presents as he did not reaffirm the US commitment to the Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty on the

⁶⁸ The TPP took years of negotiations internationally and it was a highly-debated topic in Washington, as well. The TPP would be a multilateral agreement that establishes common trade rules for the majority of States on the Pacific Ocean, thus conveniently excluding the PRC from the agreement. The USA has now withdrawn from the trade agreement following incumbent President Mr. Donald J. Trump's decision to adopt a more cautious posture in international free trade agreements.

automatic response of the whole alliance in case of any attack directed to any MS. This has raised some eyebrows especially for the Eastern European MS, as they are the most vulnerable to a potential (although highly, highly unlikely) Russian terrestrial invasion.

Nevertheless, the sanction regime towards Russia is still in place, and as of yet, the new President has not shared any statement or document that could signal that a radical change in the US-Russia relations is going to happen soon. Independent bodies in the USA (such as the Judiciary) is putting pressure on certain elements of the Trump Administration amid allegations of ties with Russian officials who might have influenced the very outcome of the 2016 presidential elections.

The USA will undoubtedly retain its influence upon the EU and the rest of NATO, including on the posture vis-à-vis the Russian Federation, and little if anything is going to change this balance of power in Europe. From a realist perspective, the USA is likely to keep its current behaviour in Europe and in its relations with the Russian Federation. However, Mr. Trump, whom many intellectuals and scholars consider a true outsider of the US “deep state”, technically has the power to affect the direction of the USA (and he has used this power to make tremendous U-turns already⁶⁹), and he is thus capable of influencing the State rationality assumed by the realist school of thought, including changing the Russia policy that has endured so far in Washington and in Europe⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Most importantly with the withdrawal from the Paris Accord on climate change

⁷⁰ “Technically” means that the Trump Administration actually enjoys a safe majority in the US Congress and might therefore pursue his policies according to the official playbook. Strictly speaking, the President of the USA is also in charge of the US foreign policy, but the reader must bear in mind that in fact the State apparatus is usually more “conservative” on long term policies such as the Russia policy. The Russian hostility has been taken as a constant in the US political discourse, and large sectors of the very Republican Party do share such view and posture vis-à-vis the Eurasian power.

EU FOREIGN POLICY: FORMAL UNITY

The relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union is an indispensable feature of both globalisation and even European security (both energy security and conventional response to direct threats to Europe). This is an obvious conclusion, one which appears crystal clear just by looking at a geographical map. The interexchange of the two is indeed based on the Russian raw materials export, but also on European goods and services (including expertise and technology) which are imported to Russia since it has been an open country. However, the quality of such relations has suffered highs and lows since the end of the Cold War.

The European Union is indeed divided on the inside. Diverging interests and priorities of various medium-sized regional powers put the unity of the EU on the political ground below the threshold of international credibility as a unitary and rational actor in the international relations chessboard. The various “souls” that form the EU provide it with wealth, diversification in terms of the economy and culture. This aspect has generally been a value added to the ambitious EU integration project, but they are often perceived as its biggest weakness at the same time.

Although there is little divergence in terms of fundamental values across the EU, different languages and strategic priorities put the deepening of EU integration in a stalemate. Most importantly, the uneven distribution of power (in terms of economic power and even geopolitical assets) make most EU leaders reluctant to give up more portions of their national sovereignty in a bid to unite the EU. The German reluctance to issue “Eurobonds”, for instance, is symptomatic of the poor willingness to take on responsibilities which would otherwise belong to national political classes.

In order to cope with this increased conservative approach to EU integration, the EU has become a supranational body that focused on highly technical issues such as drafting regulations on measures of meshes in fishing nets in the Baltic Sea⁷¹ and advanced economic regulations, generally failing to address aspects of life of more practical application for the average EU citizen. Sarcasm aside, the EU and its specialised agencies have focused on worked relentlessly to harmonise the diverse economies and markets of the EU MSs in many fields, and today the EU is a set of States at the forefront in food security and with a tremendously integrated agricultural sector.

However, following the financial crises of 2008 and 2011, and especially the migratory crisis that unfolded after the Arab Spring, the EU has suffered a certain degree of fatigue that led to the creation of consensus around “Eurosceptic” ideas and political parties. The pressure of anti-EU parties peaked between 2015 and 2017, during which time Eurosceptic parties gained momentum in all parts of the EU. In Hungary, PM Mr. Orbán has furthered an agenda that for many Europeans was perceived as one that was going towards the opposite direction as the one envisioned by the previous generation of European integration. Hungary has become less democratic and has been highly criticised for “suffocating civil society⁷²”. The populist drift that has been recorded in Hungary has been nourished also by what has been studied as

⁷¹ For an accurate overview of allowed measures of meshes in fishing nets used in the Baltic Sea, see: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:349:0001:0023:EN:PDF>

⁷² The Telegraph has reported that the recent action taken by Budapest that led to the shutdown of the “Central European University” of Budapest (funded by Hungarian-born multi-billionaire Mr. George Soros) has been highly condemned by European leaders and that it represented a crash on the liberal opposition to Mr. Orbán’s *Fidesz*. For a more detailed analysis, see: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/05/orban-accused-suffocating-civil-society-university-law/>

*referendocracy*⁷³. Referenda in Hungary have been used to depart from EU guidelines on matters of refugee allocation, thus creating a powerful precedent of non-alignment to the consensus of Brussels.

Perhaps the most important referendum in the recent history of the EU, is the British consultation on the permanence in the EU as a full MS. *Brexit* passed against all odds and for the first time in history one MS decided to leave the EU through the unexplored waters of the Art. 50 TEU. The *Brexit* referendum shook the UK, and PM Mr. David Cameron stepped down as a result of the unexpected defeat just months after a general election victory above all expectations. *Brexit* also shook the EU, giving momentum to Eurosceptic movements across Europe, but also increasing the awareness on the need to step up the integration rhythm in the pro-European chancelleries and societies.

One such optimistic politician is indeed ALDE leader and former Belgium PM Mr. Guy Verhofstadt, who has written several books on the need for the EU to speed up the integration process following the example of the USA, thus creating a multicultural and multilinguistic federation, ideally the United States of Europe. In (Verhofstadt 2016), Mr. Verhofstadt touches a series of problems concerning the state of the EU, with an introductory chapter of a sinister title: “Divided We Fall”. He argues that the EU is currently a “dwarf” of foreign policy, especially facing issues (or threats) such as the complicated relations with the RF, its poor policy on the MENA and the inability to react to the migratory crisis and the “mass grave of the Mediterranean” which it produced. He maintains that internal policies and politics are harming the development of the EU.

⁷³ Agnieszka Łada has produced a study titled “*Referendocracy. Will referenda lead to strengthening or weakening of European democracy?*”, where it is argued that the instrumental and tactical use of referenda is a feature of a weakening democracy, which is effectively harming the foreign policy capability of the EU. The said study, is reported in (Balcer, et al. 2017), and is available only in Polish at the following website: <http://www.isp.org.pl/publikacje,1,905.html>

Among them of course the “Quagmire of European Institutions” and national drifts such as Brexit and the allegedly authoritarian path taken by Mr. Orbán’s Hungary (Verhofstadt 2016, 103-116).

His vision is a very Europeanist one, based on the primacy of European values and the distancing of foreign interference, be that the Russian or even the American, of which he is very critical. In particular, his stance towards the Russian government is a very hostile one. Verhofstadt argues that the inability of the EU to (truly) act united vis-à-vis the Russian Federation demonstrates that single EU MS have been “outclassed” by their “rivals”. In his view (citing one Russian opposition activist, Mr. Aleksey Navalny), the RF is led by a Russian criminal gang, whom, in his opinion, should be blamed for the death of political dissidents and journalists such as Boris Nemtsov or Alexandr Litvinenko (Verhofstadt 2016, 63-74).

Verhofstadt unambiguously condemns the Russian foreign policy actions in the Georgian Crisis of 2008 and in Crimea, including the legitimacy of the Crimean referendum, arguing that the majority of the Crimean population did not even participate in the said referendum. He collects facts that have been already touched upon in the previous chapter of this thesis (although with a more neutral and detached perspective), including the Russian and the American reactions to the Ukraine Crisis. In his opinion, the famous call between the US Assistant Secretary of State Mrs. Victoria Nuland and the then US Ambassador to Ukraine⁷⁴, signalled that “for the Americans, Europe is now a troublemaker, a dwarf, more likely to get in the way when things get serious than to make meaningful contributions” (Verhofstadt 2016, 63-74).

⁷⁴ Find more on which in Chapter 1 of this document; see note #38

However, European voices and records on the relations with Russia are not at all as hostile as Mr. Verhofstadt's. Large parts of EU societies have a much friendlier attitude towards the Russian Federation, notwithstanding the historic low that occurred following the Ukraine Crisis. Greece, France, Italy, but also Germany to some extent, have enjoyed historically better relations with Russia than Belgium in fact. The economic turnout of these countries with the Russian Federation, and the relative penetration of such economies into the Russian market makes the entertainment of good relations a long-term necessary priority for them and for the EU as a whole.

However, as of yet, there is little unity around a joint and common EU policy towards the Russian Federation. Even at the senior level, the European Institutions have often looked inconsistent in their approach to the RF. While (Polish) President of the European Council Mr. Donald Tusk has responded with toughness towards Russia with regards of the unfolding Ukraine Crisis, the (Italian) High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mrs. Federica Mogherini has generally used softer words, seeking an "appeasement" of Russia⁷⁵.

The issue of European sanctions is indeed a very polarising and divisive topic within the EU, and its automatic renewal has been met with resistance, notably by Italian diplomats under the leadership of former Italian PM Mr. Matteo Renzi⁷⁶. Also former President of France Mr. François Hollande expressed doubts over the automatic renewal of sanctions following Russian-

⁷⁵ The Reuters news agency covered a *Twitter* debate started by the Polish senior EU official Mr. Tusk responding to the actions taken by Mrs. Mogherini regarding the escalation of tensions in the East of Ukraine. The two senior officials belong to different EU parties. For the coverage, see: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-eu-idUSKBNOKYOJY20150125>

⁷⁶ For a Financial Times coverage on the Italian "retreat", see: <https://www.ft.com/content/ec8594ee-a766-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1>

French talks after the November 2015 terrorist attack hit Paris in one of the most deadliest terrorist attacks in a Western Capital of the XXI century⁷⁷.

The EU imposed sanctions upon Russian and Ukrainian individual citizens responsible directly or indirectly to the spiral of violence that was happening in Ukraine, including the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation. The trade restrictions were designed in a way such to limit the access to international credit of Russian banks and institutions, and to put pressure upon Putin's "inner circle". The restrictions did not tackle the oil&gas sector, as the EU and Russia are too heavily interconnected in such matter. Meanwhile, the development of shale gas fracking technologies in the USA was opening the road for much more significant room for a US supply of energy resources to the EU. However, such path remained largely unexplored, and the trade of energy resources with Russia remained untouched.

The sanctions rationale was anchored (and still is) to the fulfilment of the Geneva Statement on Ukraine first, the Minsk Protocol and Memorandum then and the Minsk II package finally. The fulfilment of such accords has seen little progress since 2014, and the very respect of such clauses is arguably ignored by both the separatists (and the Russian Federation) and Kiev. Technically, both US and EU sanctions have been imposed upon Russia for a conflict to which it does not officially participate. Formally, the Crimean reunification is not the reason why the sanctions are in force still today. However, it is generally acknowledged and agreed on that the Russian Federation has the capabilities and the authority to influence the actions of the separatist rebels, especially in the self-declared Republics of Luhansk and Donetsk.

⁷⁷ For a New York Times coverage on the issue of automatic renewal of sanctions, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/15/world/europe/italy-delays-eus-renewal-of-sanctions-against-russia.html>

From Moscow, the issue of sanctions has been met with deep resentment. According to a *Levada Centre* survey, only 12% of the Russian population linked the sanctions to any kind of illegal annexation by the Russian Federation. The majority of the respondents to such survey (67%) think that the Western sanctions are a mere tool to pressure Russia (Fischer 2015). It is argued that the sanctions have been imposed upon Russia while virtually nothing has been done to push Kiev to the negotiations table on the future of Ukraine's political system, therefore leading to an escalation of violence in the East of Ukraine. Ultimately, the sanctions not only could not harm Putin's presidency, but reinforced it and eventually damaged the degree of cooperation and interconnectedness that was being slowly developed in the previous decades.

The trade restrictions put more weight upon the weak Russian economy, and certainly harmed it and hit in the worst possible moment, that is at a time of plummeting of oil prices. However, the export of the EU in Russia also suffered significantly. Previously, the French wine export in Russia was flourishing, and it was the second greatest exporter of wine to Russia (behind the Italian). However, if in early 2014 an average Muscovite could afford a 30 EUR bottle of *Bordeaux*, just one year later she would probably take a cheaper Italian or Georgian wine, as the price had doubled in a few months (from around 1 300 roubles to more than 2 400 roubles, bearing in mind that the average monthly salary in Russia in 2014-2015 used to be around 33 000 – 35 000 RUB⁷⁸ and that from 2014 to 2015 the Russian economy has sustained an inflation rate of over 10%⁷⁹).

⁷⁸ According to the Russian Federation Federal State Statistic Service it has increased to circa 38 000 RUB in 2017. All figures are available at <http://www.gks.ru/>

⁷⁹ According to *Statbureau* (<https://www.statbureau.org/>) it has now decreased to around 4% in March 2017

Therefore, the worsening of the Russian economy (with or without sanctions) has harmed the European export, even for goods upon which had not been imposed Russian sanctions, such as wine and manufactured goods such as furniture or shoes. It is understandable therefore that several EU MSs were not too happy to either impose or further sanctions upon the already weak Russian economy. As a matter of fact, the American *hawks*, including Republican Senator Mr. John McCain criticised the lack of resoluteness of Western States towards Russia, arguing that while the combined sanctions were a good tactic *per se*, those were not strict nor harmful enough in his opinion. Not surprisingly, those less exposed and less connected with the Russian economy were the most fervent proponents of sanctions (Sakwa 2016, 183-204).

The EU following the Ukraine Crisis had indeed problems of energy security, since significant parts of oil&gas imported by the EU come from the Russian Federation transiting through Ukraine. The EU developed the *Energy Union* which aimed at creating a more integrated EU energy net, ensuring that potential scarcities of energy resources due to the uncertainties in Ukraine and with Russia, would be covered by other EU Member States. With the Ukraine Crisis were also put on hold ambitious infrastructure projects such as the South Stream, which would connect the EU and Russia in a gas pipeline that would bypass traditional transit States such as Ukraine. Despite the initial resistance of Bulgaria to abide to the ban to develop the said infrastructure in its territory, at the end, such project stopped. Initially, the South Stream could switch to Turkey instead of the EU, but after the Russo-Turkish Crisis following the downing of a Russian jet that had allegedly breached the territorial sovereignty of Turkey in November 2015. The Turkish Stream project has now resumed and the laying of the first segments has already started.

The Energy Union and the Ukraine Crisis made the EU commit to reduce its energy dependency on the Russian Federation, thus the stop of the South Stream while privileging the TAP. However, criticism was raised when the proposed expansion of the Nord Stream was approved by the EU. The Nord Stream “2” would reinforce the existing infrastructure that provides Germany with Russian gas through a set of pipelines on the seabed of the Baltic Sea, thus bypassing another traditional transit State, Poland. Both in the USA (namely by Senator John McCain and Senator Marco Rubio) and within the EU. Former Italian PM Mr. Matteo Renzi and incumbent Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán and Polish President of the European Council Mr. Donald Tusk among others, jointly criticised the Nord Stream 2 project, on the grounds that this contradicts the EU strategy and its sanctions towards Russia⁸⁰.

To sum up, the EU has managed to endorse the US sanctions and act accordingly, in turn issuing its own set of sanctions targeting particular individuals and specific companies. The idea of contrasting the Russian interest in a bid to destabilise Putin’s leadership at home has put the whole EU on the same shore. However, the importance of the Russian market, and of course of Russia’s natural resources have divided the EU from within. While external problems have been on the rise, from the Migration Crisis to the Ukraine Crisis, the destabilisation of the MENA and the economic stagnation, the EU exits the current decade slightly weaker and with a damaged external credibility. The less enthusiastic approach to European security put forward by what seems to be the Trump doctrine, and the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU institutions has shaken the EU to its roots.

⁸⁰ For a detailed analysis by Politico, please see: <http://www.politico.eu/article/matteo-renzi-pipeline-politics-energy-south-stream-germany-russia-dependency/>

In the medium to long run, therefore, such sanctions regime might actually be of little use for the EU and the pursuit of its foreign policy ambitions (however mixed and unclear they might be). Russia is a fundamental actor for the stability of Europe, and an all-out trade and economic war could be potentially highly harmful for the EU. The EU has followed the US leadership in the management of the Ukraine Crisis, showing to the rest of the international community that the EU does not have the means to produce an independent and cogent foreign policy (especially towards the Russian Federation). The USA have used sanctions several times in the past, as an instrument to exert and project their hegemony and their economic power worldwide.

Despite an overall stalemate of the Ukraine Crisis, EU-Russia relations appear to have simply adapted to the new standard. Certain EU Member States have broken the ice with Moscow, and today diplomatic and economic channels have opened again. Italian former PM Mr. Renzi has singlehandedly broken the ranks by visiting Russia in March 2015, and this diplomatic engagement was not met with enthusiasm. However, several other EU leaders have followed his steps thereafter, thus practically accepting the *status quo* of the international arena as it is today, including with the Russian ownership of Crimea (although, obviously, not formally nor openly). Certainly, the EU has failed to obtain concrete steps back from Moscow over the Ukraine Crisis, and the current situation is harming the EU, for which the Russian market represent a much-needed occasion to relaunch significant parts of its export, including drilling technologies and military contracts. In turn, the EU needs a strong and stable Russia, not just for economic reasons, but primarily for matters of European security and geopolitical stability both in Europe and the Middle East.

RUSSIAN COUNTERSANCTIONS

For Russia, the return of Crimea has represented an important step in solving a major national geopolitical issue, that is the uncertainty regarding the permanence of the Black Sea Fleet in the Crimean naval base of Sebastopol. It is difficult to understand if Moscow had foreseen the joint US-EU sanctions, but the rationale behind the acceptance of Crimea's accession proposal undoubtedly prioritised the national interest and the strategic and geopolitical plan of Russia over any kind of either diplomatic isolation or economic consequences. Besides, the Russian Federation, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the economic crisis of 1996 proved to be capable of sustaining the weight of economic hardships, and the Russian people once again demonstrated an enviable degree of resilience.

The Russian Federation, as argued before, views Ukraine as a primary national interest for a number of reasons. Andrey Sushentsov provides a detailed account of the cultural, historical, religious, economic and military aspects of such bond⁸¹. Sushentsov argues that the fact that Russia intervened in Ukraine in 2014⁸², highlights that the very vital interests of the RF were severely compromised. Around 10 million ethnic Russians live in Ukraine, and around six million Ukrainian citizens every year travel to Russia for work.

The Russian interest in Ukraine, besides the permanence of the Black Sea Fleet (which it has being secured as Crimea is *de facto* controlled and governed by the Russian Federation), lays in having a stable and relatively strong

⁸¹ For a deeper analysis on the Ukraine Crisis and the Russian stance, including a detailed collection of data regarding the economic and political interdependence of Russia and Ukraine, see Andrey Sushentsov "Ukraine—A Battlefield or a Bridge between Russia and the West?", available at: <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/UkraineA-Battlefield-or-a-Bridge-between-Russia-and-the-West-17991>

⁸² And it did intervene only in Georgia before that, in 2008 (and in Syria in 2015, but in a different context than post-Soviet space).

Ukrainian economy (due to the interdependence of the two economies) and ensuring that Ukraine remains a neutral State in international relations, ensuring the safe transit of Russian energy resources export to the EU. This is a goal that has been pursued by Russia after the fall of the USSR through subsidies and investments, but also with cooperation in the management of nuclear energy and favourable, below-market prices for Russian gas.

In Moscow, there is the perception that it was Kiev not Moscow that put a threat on the other, given the concrete exposure and vulnerability of Russian material and immaterial assets in Ukraine. For these reasons, Moscow was arguably ready to travel across the storm should sanctions or other forms of political “punishment” be imposed upon them. Sushentsov unambiguously argues that the rather friendly Russian attitude of Moscow toward Ukraine, which aimed for a deeper integration of the two States, has failed. Therefore, the Russian Federation has revised its expectations and ambitions on Kiev, thus focusing on limiting the potential damage that the Ukraine situation could cause to Russia, including by progressively reducing its dependence on Ukraine⁸³ while ensuring that Ukraine remains stable and neutral.

Nowadays, according to Sushentsov, the ideal outcome for Moscow would be to find a comprehensive settlement, which ensures that the internal divisions of Ukraine be pacified, thus ensuring the safeguard of ethnic Russians in Ukraine while reducing the risk of further destabilising the eastern-border regions. In his opinion, however, both the Kiev’s will to isolate such regions, and the Western attitude (of snubbing the internal divisions of Ukraine) makes room

⁸³ Creation and improvement of infrastructures that bypass Ukraine for the Russian gas transit, diversification of investments and reduced exposure of Russian institutions and companies in Ukraine, *inter alia*.

for little if any optimism on the matter. If the conflict is not resolved, sanctions (and counter-sanctions) can be expected to last longer than thought.

The economic sanctions imposed upon Russia harmed its economy but arguably did not work in terms of destabilising its leadership or provoking social unrest. The popularity and the national support enjoyed by President Putin skyrocketed following the Ukraine Crisis, and large parts of the Russian population perceived the implementation of sanctions exclusively as a tool to break Russia, not much to protect Ukraine. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, also decided to impose sanctions against its Western partners, which served as a tool to push forward an ambitious agenda of import substitution. Although economically inefficient and harming for the average Russian consumer, the Russian production of products previously imported from Europe, increased. Not much for what concerns highly advanced technologies and services, for which there must be a prolonged process of research and development which takes time and resources.

The sanctions implemented by Moscow regarded some key export goods of the EU. This includes milk, dairy products, fish, meat and poultry. However broad the list of sanctioned products, the exclusion of some items from such list signals that the Russian officials worked in a way such to target some States more and some others less. The untouched trade rules for oil or wine and other products, for instance, limited the losses for Countries considered “friendlier” to Russia, such as Italy and Greece. However, as the Russian Federation was at the same time hit by a large scale economic crisis derived from low oil prices, the relative cost of such products in Russia skyrocketed, thus contracting the demand for such high-quality goods and other services.

The Russian Federation has adopted the practice of issuing sanctions before the Ukraine Crisis, and has kept imposing sanctions against third

countries thereafter. On 1st January 2013, for instance, the law “On Sanctions for Individuals Violating Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of the Citizens of the Russian Federation” took effect. The said legislation, which was largely criticised in Russia and especially abroad, imposed sanctions and established the freezing of assets and investments for US citizens in Russia found guilty of breaching human rights. The bill also banned some US citizens and officials from entering the Russian Federation and established a ban on the adoption of Russian orphans by American citizens. The Russian lawmakers outlined a list of US citizens, whose enterprises, NGOs, investments and anything of the like have been suspended. This piece of legislation has been seen as a reaction to a previously introduced US restriction of some Russian officials from entering the USA due to their alleged responsibility for the death in jail of lawyer Sergey Magnitsky⁸⁴ in 2012.

Also in 2013, the Russian Federation issued a ban on American meat, due to hygienic concerns, linked to the potential traces of growth stimulants to be found in American meat which are allegedly dangerous to human health. As a matter of fact, also the EU had previously banned American beef, which was found contaminated with certain kinds of hormones which are illegal in the EU. Several WTO disputes between the EU and the USA decided that the USA had

⁸⁴ Sergey Magnitsky used to be a lawyer hired by a British-American businessman, Mr. Bill Browder. Browder was banned from entering Russia amid charges of tax evasion in 2005. Magnitsky had apparently developed a theory that involved a series of misconduct charges against Russian police and officials, but could never prove the allegations, as he was arrested of collusion with the allegedly criminal offender Mr. Browder’s company “Hermitage”. He died in custody in 2009 following an heart attack. An investigation upon the jail doctors, accused of negligence in treating the late lawyer, had all the doctors acquitted by the Russian judiciary. The Russian judiciary would later assess his guilt and confirmed Mr. Browder’s charge for tax evasion. The case became a scandal of international resonance, and led to the approval of the Magnitsky Bill in the USA.

the right to impose sanctions on the EU as much as the EU had the right to limit the trade of such products.

Countersanctions have been used by Russia in other occasions such as after the Russo-Turkish crisis over the shutdown of the Russian Sukhoi “Su-24” Airforce jet in the context of the Russian military campaign in Syria. In that event, the Russian jet allegedly violated the Turkish airspace and was thus downed after having been warned. The diplomatic crisis that unfolded thereafter included allegations that Turkey was financing ISIL through the purchase of oil produced in ISIL-occupied areas, led the Russian State Duma to adopt a bill making it a felony to deny the Armenian Genocide, and also imposed trade restrictions on Turkish fruit, vegetables, poultry and salt, restricted tourism companies from organising or selling trips to Turkey or even using charter flights to connect Russia and Turkey⁸⁵. The Turkish Stream project was also shelved, although after the diplomatic crisis ended, works have been restored and the Black Sea pipeline is now under construction.

The countersanctions towards the West, which mostly harm Eastern European States, have not influenced the balance of power significantly. If anything, the Russian domestic production, as argued before, benefited from such protectionism, although the quality of the foodstuff now produced in Russia has fallen behind Western standards. The marginal economic loss that has caused in Europe, however, has put a mounting pressure on European leaders, including Italy’s, Germany’s and France’s. As of yet, however, no major steps towards a lifting of sanctions have been taken.

If the European Union was divided on sanctions, and most States simply followed the lead of Germany and the pressure of Eastern European States

⁸⁵ For a reportage by the BBC see: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35209987>

(notably the Baltic Republics and Poland) in imposing them, other international actors refused to take part in such an economic warfare. The People's Republic of China, with a slightly lower GDP growth rate than expected, was openly opposed to issuing sanctions against Russia, and the BRICS cooperation showed some resilience in that. However, BRICS solidarity did not go much further than this.

Even though the Western sanctions damaged the Russian Federation more than what the countersanctions could do to the West, Richard Sakwa (Sakwa 2016, 183-204) argues that the “decision” to impose sanctions upon Russia clearly was not going to make Russia “surrender”. The philosophy of such sanctions, according to Sakwa, lays in the fact that such step would allow Western leaders to “avoid facing hard questions about how the structure of post-Cold War international politics could have allowed the [Ukraine Crisis]”.

3. DIFFERENT VOICES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is a project that brought together the belligerents of the previous World Wars (France and Germany overall) and pacified the European continent, winning the Nobel Prize for Peace in the process, as a benchmark of good faith of the European project. The European Union as a historical evolution of statehood and international relations, has been able to collect the different (and frequently diverging) souls and voices of the European States, at a time when these such States were still able to project their power with a major military might. The union of the winners and the losers of WWII (although considering France a winner of WWII is largely debatable) put an end to conflict between them once and for all.

Since the founding fathers of the EU, and the “inner six” nations decided to pool the reserves of steel and coal in a bid to prevent new conflicts to happen again between them, the future of Europe was envisaged as a united and pacified continent, where each national group could peacefully coexist with one another. The concept behind this rationale is enshrined in the EU official motto, which is “*In Varietate Concordia*”, or, in its English translation: “United in Diversity”. The optimism of those years (probably based upon the fact that most of them – Spaak, De Gasperi, Adenauer and Schuman *inter alia* – spoke fluent German among themselves) led the EEC⁸⁶ to a progressive enlargement, which last development was the accession of Croatia in 2013, that brought the total number of EU Member States to 28.

The European Union can hardly be seeing therefore as a unitary and rational entity. However, from the appropriate perspective, the EU can be considered a

⁸⁶ Formally, the EU was born in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty. Before that moment, the EU used to be the European Economic Community (EEC), which was established in 1957 with the Rome Treaty, signed by the “inner six” nations: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands.

superpower, because it has all the features to be considered as one⁸⁷. However weak it has appeared while facing the migratory crisis, the economic crises, the Ukraine Crisis and the overwhelming American influence (if not pressure), the EU has managed to push forward for a deeper integration while being able to effectively coordinate when it came to supranational challenges and threats.

The European Union is home to the richest market on Earth, to three of the languages with most speakers worldwide (English, Spanish and French), to two effective nuclear powers (the UK and France), to the second highest defence budget on Earth after the USA, to the best-seller car firm worldwide (Volkswagen), to the most popular and richest sports on Earth (football, tennis, cricket, volleyball among others), to a good one third of the top one-hundred universities in the world, to the cultural pillars of Western civilisation (from Plato to Aristoteles, from Cicero to Virgil, from Julius Caesar to Napoleon, from Dante Alighieri to William Shakespeare, from Michelangelo to Leonardo Da Vinci, and then J.S. Bach, L. V. Beethoven, G. Verdi, Voltaire, Descartes, Goethe, Van Gogh, Karl Marx, Picasso and many, many more). The European history is one of the richest in scientific discovery, in arts and in war.

Today, the EU individual States are among the most active with their armies in military operations abroad, they collectively contribute more to the UN budget than any other country on Earth, they have the highest standards in environmental security, food safety and welfare state. The EU is the largest provider of foreign aid in the world today, and it has a major decision power in every relevant international organisation, including the UNSC, the WTO, the G7 (or G8), the G20, NATO and countless more. Despite not being united, nor being some sort of United States of Europe (as Mr.

⁸⁷ Prof. Andrew Moravcsik has written a well-rounded article for Foreign Policy on why the EU should be considered a superpower, providing examples on military power, soft power, culture, sports and so forth, arguing that however diverse and in disarray it might seem, the EU is still united and fully operating as a single entity, and it will likely do so in the decades to come. The full text of such article can be retrieved at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/13/europe-is-still-a-superpower/>

Winston Churchill had proposed before the EU even in the plans, in a 1946 speech in Zurich), the EU has the potential to become stronger and more integrated. The recent events of the migratory crisis, the international terrorism threat, the rise of populism and *Brexit* are arguably putting the whole EU on track to further their union and closing ranks for a common and shared aim.

However, as of yet, within the Union there are significant different voices, because there are in fact many different souls. This chapter will explore the differences and the diverging interests of three important EU Member States: Germany, Poland and Italy. The choice of these three nations lays upon the peculiarity of them regarding their stance and posture vis-à-vis Russia in the context of the Ukraine Crisis which has been previously explored in depth.

The three Countries are presented recalling details of their history, their relations with the Russian Federation and their position within the EU. Germany will be presented first, as it is the strongest State in Europe, and has a larger stake in the relations with the Russian Federation than any other EU Member State. Its posture, it is argued, is one of “balanced leadership”, drawing from its status of unchallenged leader of all European Union States and its resolute pragmatism in handling the Ukraine Crisis, acting as a “honest broker” (Sakwa 2016, 205-237) between Russia and the rest of Europe.

This final chapter then explores the case of Poland, which has demonstrated a good degree of “hostility” towards Russia especially after the Ukraine Crisis (although quite in line with its historical heritage). Poland, as one of the “new” EUMSs has influenced the EU also in terms of perception of the Russian “threat”, followed by most Eastern European States. This has now become one of the defining traits of the EU, arguably. Finally, on the opposite side, the case of Italy, described as a “freeriding friendship”. A historical heritage of rather good relations in politics and trade made Italy the second largest European trade partner of Russia, also thanks to the low profile of Italy’s leadership in the development of the Ukraine Crisis.

THE CASE OF GERMANY: BALANCED LEADERSHIP

Germany is by far the strongest State within the European Union, both in terms of economy, of political stability and soft power. As such, it has a dominant posture within the European Union, and it is thus relatively able to influence the behaviour of the other MSs to its national interest. Germany is not just in a position of dominance, quite on the contrary, it has endorsed (especially in the last decade) a more pro-active role, one of leadership. The strategic interests of Germany are to have a rich and politically stable European Union that can sustain the German industrial output and the supply it generates, as much as it needs a pacified and stable Eastern Europe (including Russia) that would not threaten EU and Germany's energy security.

The German leadership does not only push for financial stability and austerity. It is also a prominent member of NATO⁸⁸, and as such it has an interest in guaranteeing the tenure of the Alliance by cooperating with Washington in setting realistic and shared foreign policy objectives. Among which are the containment of the Russian Federation and the sanctioning of Russian actions concerning the Ukraine Crisis. While Germany and France have been on talks to consider the creation of a unified European Army with one command centre, the path ahead looks still rather long for Europe to have a common foreign policy and a common projection of military power. Therefore, the containment of Russia as of yet is not carried out militarily (if one excludes the small-entity NATO troops deployed in the Baltics and the rest of Eastern Europe).

The process of leadership of the EU, in Germany's perspective, has so far focused on economics, and the foreign policy of the EU has been influenced by

⁸⁸ Although its military might remains low thanks to the American clout and the nuclear umbrella.

Germany, but has not been controlled by it. The influence of the USA has played a major role in handling the Ukraine Crisis and the response to Russia, and the combination of the Eastern European Countries, the Baltic Republics and the UK determined the rather hostile posture towards Russia. Thus it was taken the decision to align with the USA and issue trade restrictions and sanctions in order to hit the Russian ruling class by putting pressure on the Russian economy. As it has been argued before, the sanctions regime has harmed the Russian economy but has certainly proved ineffective against Putin and his entourage.

The Ukraine Crisis, however, has divided Germany profoundly, even at the government level⁸⁹, with the German Chancellor Mrs. Angela Merkel of CDU/CSU and the then German MFA (who now is the incumbent President of the German Federation) Mr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier of SPD resorting to different strategies in dealing with Russia in such context. The division in the Country became apparent when the business community (which is deeply involved in the Russian market) proclaimed their scepticism regarding the imposition of sanctions as a solution of the crisis, while a former leader of SPD, Mr. Matthias Platzeck said he would recognise the Crimean reunification⁹⁰.

Mr. Steinmeier has enjoyed a good degree of autonomy during his mandate, and he has been deeply involved in the Ukraine Crisis. His mandate started in December 2013, and the next February he was in Kiev helping to broker the Yanukovich-opposition deal – which was never adopted. Steinmeier has been a vocal critic of the NATO eastern strengthening following Polish and other Eastern Countries' concerns, as he was convinced that such an attitude would

⁸⁹ The incumbent German government, the *Merkel III*, was formed in December 2013, and it is a *Große Koalition* between Mrs. Angela Merkel's CDU/CSU and (then) Mr. Sigmar Gabriel's SPD

⁹⁰ An analysis on the divisions within Germany around the Ukraine Crisis by the Polish think tank OSW is retrievable at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-11-26/russia-driving-a-wedge-germany>

only create pretexts for Russia and increase tensions between Moscow and the rest of Europe⁹¹. His party is the depositary of *Ostpolitik*, at the end of the day.

While the German MFA under Steinmeier adopted a more pragmatic and behind the lights kind of diplomacy towards Russia, the rest of the cabinet polarised and endorsed the US-sponsored view, which brought a hysterical Russophobia in Germany. Thus, Germany reversed its long-established role of mediator and bridge between Russia and the West and led the rest of the EU to the adoption and the endorsement of sanctions. Nevertheless, the legacy of Steinmeier remained and appeals to find a shared and diplomatic solution to the Ukraine Crisis are renewed every time the sanctions are renewed. Notwithstanding the shared opinion that the military solution is not on the table to solve the Ukraine Crisis, the diplomatic solution does not seem to make too much progress, considering that the Minsk II protocol is not one inch closer to its fulfilment than it was when Steinmeier was still the MFA.

Therefore, Germany has adopted a “balanced leadership” in Europe with regards to Russia in the Ukraine Crisis context. The need to address the pressure (and fear) of the “new Europe” and to weigh the Atlantic foreign policy made Germany one of the most vocal and toughest critics of Russia, straining the “special relation” between Berlin and Moscow. The German leadership therefore focused on making sure that the EU could act coordinated and united in its rejection of the Crimean independence and reunification. The sanctions, however tough, represented the lowest common denominator within the EU, one that could be reversible and not too harmful.

As a matter of fact, Germany has around 6 200 companies working in/for the Russian market, with around 25 000 of jobs at risk of being lost due to trade

⁹¹ Reuters report at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-russia-germany-idUSKCN0Z40LE>

decline between Russia and Germany, bearing in mind that some 300 000 German jobs are dependent on trade with Russia⁹². The German economic interest with Russia is not only a matter of jobs and export. In fact, the trade balance in 2013 has reported a German –unusual – trade deficit of more than 5.5 billion euros at the benefit of Russia⁹³, which provides Germany with around 30% of the energy resources required by Germany⁹⁴.

The cornerstone of such Russian supply of energy resources comes with the Nord Stream pipeline, which grants Germany direct access to Russian gas bypassing the traditional transit Countries. Recently, after the South Stream project was scrapped because of new competition rules of the EU, the Nord Stream 2 will increase the Russian supply to Germany, with a strengthening of the existing infrastructure that will involve several European companies in the building process. Nord Stream 2 has been wildly criticized by many countries in Europe, including the traditional transit countries and even Italy, which arguably missed the chance of becoming the southern hub of Russian gas to Europe just months before Germany could double its dominance in such field.

While critics of Nord Stream 2 argue that doing business with Gazprom is at odds with the philosophy of sanctions (bearing in mind that European companies will sustain a large part of the costs related with the very construction of the infrastructure), Germany's national interest has prevailed, ensuring that such temporary crisis does not damage Germany in the medium and long run. The chairmanship of the company (Nord Stream AG, controlled

⁹² As reported by Reuters at the following website: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-germany-economy-idUSKBN0G30CD20140803>

⁹³ According to statistics cited by the Polish OSW think tank (as in note 90) and available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-11-26/russia-driving-a-wedge-germany>

⁹⁴ As reported by the New York Times at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/14/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-hardens-germany-against-russia-an-old-partner.html>

by Russian Gazprom) belongs to former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, signaling the goodwill of both parties in discussing business.

And the “business-like” nature of current talks between Germany and Russia is confirmed by the circumstances⁹⁵. The incoming German elections in fall 2017 are critical to the development of any new strategy in dealing with either Russia, Ukraine or establishing a new EU foreign policy. As of yet, it is increasingly clear that the current state of affairs is in fact quite sustainable. The status quo is now ensuring that the situation does not collapse before a diplomatic solution can truly be found.

The German history is still today a ghost that haunts Germany’s leadership capabilities, especially in terms of military leadership and independence. Germany is by far the strongest economy in Europe, and its governmental stability and rationality has paid, especially in terms of trust. With a *Brexit* Britain, a weaker France and a more isolationist USA, Germany is virtually the only possible leadership in Europe. Its leader, Mrs. Angela Merkel, has ensured a continued 12 years of strong and stable leadership, working in a coalition with all major parties represented in the *Bundestag*. Former President Obama took her very seriously, and despite President Trump is apparently focusing less on matters of European security and European affairs, Mrs. Merkel appears to have support among fellow European Leaders when she stresses that the “Europeans need to take their destiny into their hands” on the basis that Europe cannot “fully count on others” any more⁹⁶.

⁹⁵ The last Merkel-Putin meeting in Sochi in May 2017 was defined as “business-like” in an interview to Valdai Club expert Mr. Reinhard Krumm. The said interview is available at: <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/putin-merkel-talks-in-sochi-status-quo-is-the-best/>

⁹⁶ During a campaign event in May 2017, just days after the G7 Summit of Taormina (Italy) and the NATO Summit of Brussels, Chancellor Merkel stressed that notwithstanding the importance of good relations with the US, the UK and even Russia, she acknowledged that the “others” cannot be fully trusted on, and therefore Europe must become more independent.

However, the military might of Germany is still lagging far behind, and if the skillful diplomats and the strong economy of Germany fail in a negotiation table, the German limits are crystal-clear. Germany is not in a position to warn third Countries, nor to ensure the independence of them, let alone fight a war against Russia over Ukraine. For this reason, Germany foreign policy and leadership needs to be balanced, and needs to cope with its limits. The NATO alliance is central for the stability of Germany and the EU, and therefore the German leadership will be exercised within the narrow path between Moscow, Brussels and Washington.

THE CASE OF POLAND: HOSTILITY

Poland has been at the centre of Europe in the XX century. Both World Wars and the USSR contributed to the change of its borders several times in a relatively short time frame. After WWII, in particular, the Polish People's Republic was awarded some of the formerly German territories, making it the sixth largest Member State of the European Union.

Poland Used to be a successful and large country at the time of the *Rzeczpospolita* or, the Republic of the two nations, before 1772. The *Rzeczpospolita* was the product of the union of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and included large parts of present day Belarus, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. Today Poland has a highly homogeneous population, with over the 97% of the citizens being Poles.

For the Poles, WWII was clearly a defining moment. Paolo Morawski (P. Morawski, *Acqua sulle sciabole. Polonia e Ucraina* 2008), a Polish born intellectual, expert of Polish history and Polish current affairs, argues that for the Poles, WWII started twice. The first time on the 1st September 1939 with the Nazi invasion of Western Poland, and on the 17th September 1939, with the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland, in accordance with the then secret Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact which would organise the spheres of influence between the USSR and the Third Reich.

The Soviet annexation of Poland lasted for 21 months, during which time many Polish landowners, clergymen, politicians and simple citizens who opposed the USSR were arrested, murdered and deprived of their belongings. An estimated tenth of the whole Polish population had been arrested, including some 250 000 soldiers and officials. Between 1939 and 1941 many Poles

(including Jewish people) fled Eastern Poland in a bid to escape the Soviet “terror” and went to the General Governorate⁹⁷.

In fact, the Nazi administration of Western Poland and the General Governorate was not softer on either Poles or Jewish people, given that during the five-year Nazi occupation around 3 million Jewish Poles and more than 2.7 million ethnic Poles were murdered⁹⁸. In a bid to annihilate the Polish élite and its intelligentsia, Hitler commissioned the execution of over the 20% of all Catholic priests of Poland (2000), 45% of doctors, 57% of lawyers, 50% of engineers, 30% of technicians, 15% of teachers and 40% of academics⁹⁹. However different in the numbers, the neutralisation of the Polish élite (and of the Belarusian, Ukrainian and Jewish) was a priority for Moscow as well.

At that time, Poland ceded parts of its Eastern flank and some 8 million citizens to Ukraine, including the city of *Lwow*¹⁰⁰, under the management of the USSR. At least 130 000 ethnic Poles were reported murdered in formerly Polish territories of Galicia and Volhynia between 1939 and 1941. A large number of Polish people considered either defectors or simply enemies of the Revolution were deported to the Eastern Soviet Union in their hundreds of thousands. Parts

⁹⁷ The General Governorate (or General Government) was a march between the Western part of Poland (then annexed by Germany) and the Eastern part of Poland, then fallen under Soviet’s sphere of influence.

⁹⁸ As a matter of fact, the crimes of the Third Reich in occupied Poland brought death to around 90% of the pre-war population of Jewish Poles, and around 11% of pre-war ethnic Poles.

⁹⁹ Cited by (Kennedy 1991, 18)

¹⁰⁰ *Lwow*, now *Lviv*, is a Western Ukrainian border city in the macro region of Galicia. The city, named after Lev, son of Danylo Romanovych (King of Ruthenia and Grand Prince of Kiev in the XIII century), has had a history of continuous changes of borders, and therefore changed its own name frequently. In Latin, it was referred to as *Leopolis*; it became *Lviv* under Ruthenian rule; then *Lwów* under the Polish Kingdom and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth; then it became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and got its German name of *Lemberg*, while the Jewish population would name it *Lemberik*; then it became Polish again and turned into *Lwów*; then under the Soviet rule it became *Lvov*; eventually became part of the UkSSR acquiring the name of *Lviv*, which has kept ever since.

of these prisoners are believed to have ended up in Siberia, in Kazakhstan, in Kirghizstan and other parts of Central Asia. While some Polish sources claim that more than 1.7 million Poles were deported, Soviet statistics document the movement of “only” 320 000 Poles. An estimated 300 000 Polish people came back to Poland when WWII was over (P. Morawski, *Acqua sulle sciabole. Polonia e Ucraina* 2008).

During the Soviet occupation of Poland, one event in particular, provoked national disdain. It is the Massacre of Katyń, which still today is remembered with bitterness in Poland and worldwide. The Massacre of Katyń refers to the murdering in cold blood of over 22 000 Poles, including 14 500 officials of the Polish Army (who were POWs at that time) and more than 7 000 civilians in the areas around the Katyń Forest between April and May 1940. The crime, committed by the NKVD, Stalin’s secret police is believed to be “exceptional” even in comparison with other barbaric suppressions of the Stalinist era. The USSR at that time blamed the Third Reich, and through the NKVD organised a false flag operation which let the cover-up last until very recently. From the early 1990s to 2010, the Russian administration has been slowly providing the Polish Government with evidence that Stalin had organised the cover-up. In 2010, the Russian State *Duma* produced an official declaration attributing the crime not to the Nazi invaders but rather to Stalin’s regime. Still today Russian and Polish observers do not agree on whether the Katyń Massacre should be considered a genocide or not.

Also the Western allies of Poland betrayed it. While it seemed very unlikely that the Third Reich had committed the Katyń Massacre, the Western allies valued the alliance with the Soviet Union against Hitler more than the moral values attached to such a war crime. Poland was therefore a geopolitical object rather than subject of the international relations (Caracciolo, *Prefazione* 2006).

Just like Ukraine, its borders did not necessarily follow the national ideal nor the Polish leadership's. However hard was the attempt to "*Polonise*" broader Poland after WWI by Warsaw, the joint intervention of Hitler first, and the anti-Hitler coalition later, gave Poland the shape it has today. Poland nowadays shares borders with seven Countries (the Russian Federation's exclave of Kaliningrad, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. However, during the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, its State borders expanded within almost each of today's bordering countries.

The creation of Belarus and the annexation of Eastern Polish territories to Ukraine were nothing but the decision of Stalin and the winners of WWII. However, today there is little if any willingness to reacquire the lost territories. Nevertheless, the territorial disputes between Ukraine and Poland have represented a constant problem, even during the Communist era. As a matter of fact, the Eastern regions of Poland (now Ukraine) used to be a part of the multicultural State which was Poland. Thousands of Poles, Ukrainians and Jewish people used to live together although the Polish rule used to be focus on the harmonisation and the homogenisation of society there. Therefore the Ukrainian minorities there used to suffer the Polish rule, and it was there that nationalist movements such as the OUN of Stepan Bandera gained momentum before and after WWII.

Stepan Bandera and his entourage sponsored the idea that Ukraine's problems were grounded on the several invaders that harmed their land. The Russians were the primary enemy of Ukraine according to such nationalist theories, and the Polish (and the Czech as well), too happened to gain the hatred of Bandera's movement. Once the dispute over Poland was over, and Stalin rearranged the borders of Poland (to the benefit of the UkSSR), in the

Western part of Ukraine there happened genuine episodes of ethnic cleansing involving the deaths of hundreds of thousands ethnic Poles.

Nevertheless, the tensions between Poland and Ukraine have eased nowadays, and their relations have arguably never been better than today. Especially after the Orange Revolution, the Polish public grew more interested in the Ukrainian political environment, as it was seen as a sign of “westernisation” and detachment from the Russian Federation. Having shared a certain amount of time under the same sphere of influence, behind the wing of Moscow, the two Countries are inevitably connected. However, as noted before¹⁰¹, while Ukraine and Poland shared the same levels of human development, income and other economic indicators in 1990, today Poland’ economy is roughly four times as large as Ukraine’s, and this is so for a number of reasons.

First of all, Poland accessed NATO in 1999 and five years later, in 2004, it became a Member State of the EU. This integration with Wider Europe meant that Poland benefited from economic support from the European partners and could successfully stabilise its domestic environment, including reforming its institutions. Ukraine on the other hand is nowadays relatively poorer than it was in 1990, making it the only European Country (together with Moldova) to have a GDP per capita comparable to South-east Asian or African States’. A crony economy and a number of political (both domestic and external) issues have harmed the Ukrainian ability to cope with the XXI century.

Nevertheless, despite obvious similarities between the two States have brought Poland to grow its interests and concerns about whatever is happening in Ukraine. This is particularly appropriate for what is perceived as a common

¹⁰¹ See note #22, on the comparison between Polish and Ukrainian economic indicators between 1990 and 2015.

threat for both nations: the Russian presence. The Russian takeover of secessionist Crimea was perceived as a warning sign for Warsaw (and most of the other Eastern European Countries, especially for the Baltic Republics). At the Celtic Manor NATO Summit of September 2014, the Alliance invited Ukraine to the meeting, and jointly declared the unlawfulness of the Russian acquisition of Crimea¹⁰². In fact, the Polish position (shared by the Baltic Republics) was one of crucial importance at that meeting.

The bid for increased security was taken seriously. At the Summit, NATO agreed to strengthen and reinforce its Eastern flank, arguing however that this should not have been perceived as a threatening posture vis-à-vis Russia. The USA agreed to send troops and hardware to Poland, the Baltic Republics, Hungary and Romania. The UK introduced the Joint Expeditionary Force, a UK-led high-readiness unit of all branches of the army, with the participation of the Baltic Republics, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands. As a matter of fact, at the Wales Summit the Alliance reaffirmed the intention to keep the economic sanctions against the Russian Federation as a tool to warn Russia. The combination of these unitary actions, bearing in mind that it was Poland, weeks before the Crimean Referendum, to invoke Art. 4 of the Washington Treaty amid fears that Russia was threatening the territorial integrity of the very Alliance, was a political victory for Warsaw. The following NATO Summit was held in Warsaw, in July 2016, and focused on the organisation of the NATO troops in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe.

Concerning the issuance of joint EU sanctions against the Russian Federation, Poland was indeed convinced that something had to be done to

¹⁰² “Wales Summit Declaration” 05/09/2014 – available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/351406/Wales_Summit_Declaration.pdf

warn Russia. The sanctions hit many Russian firms, banks and individuals especially around Mr. Putin. However, when the RF responded with counter-sanctions regarding the import of foodstuff from Europe (the EU and third States such as Norway), Poland was the EU MS which was hit the most. As a matter of fact, the trade ban costed Poland some 1.2b USD as of August 2014¹⁰³, damaging the Polish food export, especially the export of apples. This loss is around double the size of Germany's loss in foodstuff exports and around four times larger than France's.

This stance vis-à-vis the Russian Federation has deep roots indeed. The very accession of Poland to NATO was not good news for the Kremlin, as well as the other participants in the Western "Eastwards expansion". Polish security services detected multiple times the presence of Russian spies engaged in undermining the Polish reputation before its Western allies in a bid to halt the Western Eastwards expansion¹⁰⁴. This episode led to the expulsion of 9 Russian diplomats from the Polish territory in 2005¹⁰⁵.

Another critical issue on the Russian-Polish relations is indeed characterised by Ukraine. Ukraine and Poland established a strategic partnership that would push for a more independent Ukraine and a gradual shift towards European institutions. However, the Putin administration, probably learning from the first round of Eastern enlargement, has proved that Russia would fight back in order to keep a special relation with Kiev, and more importantly to keep it out of the Western clout.

¹⁰³ "The Countries Hardest Hit by Russia's Trade Ban", available online at: <https://www.statista.com/chart/2572/sanctioned-food-exports-to-russia/>

¹⁰⁴ J. Nowak-Jezioranski, cited in (Morawski e Morawski, Polonia Mon Amour 2006, 142-154)

¹⁰⁵ Although common for foreign agents to pursue their Government's interests abroad, this episode has generated an open hostility between Poland and Russia, especially considering the strong Polish ambition to enter the EU and join Wider European institutions.

However, Poland was still an ideal bridge between the West and Russia, and both in Moscow and in Warsaw, the need to normalise and enhance such international relation was one of primary relevance. From Moscow, there was the idea that “a Country, unlike a person, when it changes track, cannot simply look only in a new direction. A Country has the ability to look in both directions”¹⁰⁶. In Warsaw, despite the primary need to secure that Ukraine remains an independent nation (to avoid bordering with an imperialistic nation, according to Jerzy Giedroyc, former Director of *Kultura*, a Paris-based journal of international affairs), there was also the need to ease the tensions between Russia and Poland, in the light of the good economic turnout that benefitted Poland and its exports.

Clearly, every aspect of the Polish-Russian relations was put into perspective, at least in Warsaw. First and foremost, the enhancement of the Polish-Russian relations had to suit the real priority in the Polish foreign policy: its relations with Germany. Despite having suffered horrendous crimes from both Russia and Germany, Poland was soaked in anti-Russian feelings, probably because anti-German feelings did not prosper too much under the rule of the USSR. Germany was seen as a gateway to progress and hope, especially following the successful reunification, while Russia was perceived as a fragile and unpredictable actor at the turn of the millennium.

The accession of Poland to NATO was met with enthusiasm or at least neutrality in Europe, with the obvious exclusion of Russia. In an interview released in 1997, Mr. Władysław Bartoszewski, former Polish MFA¹⁰⁷, declared

¹⁰⁶ In the words of Mr. Dimitri Rogozin, former Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Russian Duma between the years 1999 and 2002. His thought drew from the fact that he perceived that Poland was able to integrate faster than Russia within the Western institutions, and therefore it would represent a natural bridge between Russia and the West. Cited in (Morawski e Morawski, *Polonia Mon Amour* 2006, 142-154)

¹⁰⁷ In 1995, in the last phase of Mr. Lech Wałęsa’s Government.

that Ukraine did not at all oppose the Polish Membership to NATO, arguing that in fact Ukraine would feel “safer” now that Poland is a MS of NATO, knowing that Poland does not (nor would) threaten Ukraine’s territorial integrity (Morawski e Morawski, *Polonia Mon Amour* 2006, 168-171).

In December 2005, the Polish path towards deeper European integration slowed with the election of conservative “PiS” candidate Lech Kaczyński for the presidential post. His (and his twin’s) party, “*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*” (Law and Justice, PiS) won the national elections with the motion of rethinking the orthodox neo-liberalist doctrine that governed the Polish economy since the third Republic. In 2007 however, Mr. Donald Tusk’s “*Platforma Obywatelska*” (Civic Platform, PO) won the general elections and Donald Tusk became Poland’s 14th Prime Minister. The pro-Europeanism of his government (which would be confirmed by popular vote in the 2011 Parliamentary Elections) therefore balanced a more nationalistic and traditionalistic approach to politics sponsored by Kaczyński.

Lech Kaczyński’s Presidency came to a dramatic end in 2010 following the crash of the Polish Air Force jet that was bringing him and other 95 people (including senior officials of the Polish Army and members of the opposition) to Smolensk (Russian Federation). His fate was cruel, and countless stories (and even conspiracy theories) were written around his tragic accident. He died on his way to the joint Russian-Polish memorial of the Katyń massacre, under the official invitation of the then Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir V. Putin.

With the presidential election already scheduled, his premature death put an end to the PiS leadership of Poland, paving the path for the first PO presidency in 2010, with Bronisław Komorowski defeating Jarosław Kaczyński (the twin of the late President) with a 6% margin at the second turn. With Donald Tusk

confirmed as head of the Polish Government in the general elections of 2011, Poland reaffirmed its pro-European vocation, seen by the public opinion as a source of opportunities and a chance for Poland to strengthen its position within the Western institutions.

However, the following elections (the presidential and the parliamentary elections in 2015) established the victory of PiS. Mr. Andrzej Duda was sworn President of Poland and Mrs. Beata Szydło became the Prime Minister. The right-wing party changed the foreign policy concept of Poland, withdrawing from an uncritical acceptance of all European rules and norms, and even challenging the very EU institutions. The proposal submitted by Jarosław Kaczyński, chairman of PiS, to limit EU institutions and competences in agreement with Hungary's right-wing Prime Minister, Mr. Viktor Orbán, is arguably rooted not much on the public opinion (which is still today one of the most pro-Europe in the whole EU) but rather on the belief that further integration into wider Europe (and globalisation altogether) poses a threat to Polish identity, traditions and values.

Today's Polish government, led by PiS president and prime minister is considered to have endorsed a "close" attitude in foreign policy. It is closed in the sense that it entails "the idealisation of one's own nation and the view that its homogeneity is the ideal status, support for material values (social security, geared towards survival), traditionalism (the role of religion in public life), a preference for authoritarian and community-based attitudes (collectivism), mistrust of international and transnational institutions, fear of foreigners, and the pre-eminence of the desire to defend the country from external influences and risks over the wish to search for the benefits of international cooperation" (Balcer, et al. 2017).

Regarding its current relations vis-à-vis the Russia Federation, the question around NATO membership and engagement are of crucial importance. A January 2017 paper issued by the Batory Foundation (Balcer, et al. 2017), highlights that the Polish public is slightly against the engagement of the Polish Army should Russia ever attack a NATO/EU MS and thus invoke Art.5 of the Washington Treaty. However, the current government, in line with the previous, chaired by current President of the European Council Mr. Donald Tusk, is keen on reaffirming the importance of NATO for Poland and indeed it urges that NATO allies contribute to the security of Poland, the Baltics and Eastern Europe.

While the Polish people used to positively reconsider their assessment towards the Russian Federation and separate the Russian state from the Russian people in 2012, just two years later, in the middle of the Ukraine Crisis, the Polish people “closed ranks” and gave a negative assessment to Russia and its citizens. According to (Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding 2015) and their report issued in 2015, “While in the survey of 2012 the percentage of people considering Russians to be friendly towards Poles clearly exceeded the percentage of people with opposing views (61% versus 39%), the study at the end of 2014 showed that more than half (54%) of Poles believe Russians to be inimical, while fewer people have opposing beliefs (46%).” This dataset provides the impression that the Ukraine Crisis has had a critical impact in the Polish perspective on Russia overall.

Such approach is indeed represented by the Polish government, and historically this has been a constant despite the efforts of Tusk and Putin around 2010 to better their relations. Arguably since the fall of the Soviet Union, Poland and Ukraine saw in Russia a feature of their shared destiny and indeed national interest. While Warsaw had a vested interest in seeing an independent Ukraine

as a way of having a buffer zone between Poland and a potentially resurgent Russian “imperialism”, Kiev saw in Poland a friendly intermediary between Ukraine and Wider Europe (A. Morawski 1998).

This section aims at demonstrating the hostility of Warsaw vis-à-vis the Russian Federation in the context of the Ukraine crisis. This hostility does not lay solely on the Ukraine Crisis by itself. According to Russian intellectuals Irina Kobrinskaya and Boris Frumkin (Kobrinskaya e Frumkin 2014), the very fact that nowadays the PiS is in power blocks even the most willing and wishful intentions of rapprochement between Moscow and Warsaw.

To sum up, the current Polish stance in the international chessboard is a product of its history and so is its society. The tragic actions committed by its neighbours in the past have left a wound which still needs to heal. However, Poland has also developed a linear and cogent national interest and foreign policy strategy over the last two decades. First of all, its membership to NATO and the EU put an end to any territorial claim Poland might have had over Western Ukraine. The integration into Wider Europe also means that Poland portrays itself as a geopolitical subject on the same side as Germany, and most importantly as opposed to any Russian interest in Eastern Europe. Secondly, the relation with Russia was polluted in the past during the Soviet occupation of Poland and indeed by the recent Ukraine Crisis. Finally, the Polish-Ukraine relations have resumed to cordiality and even friendship. The mutual understanding of each other’s geopolitical situation brings about a common thread linking both countries’ destinies as natural buffer zones between Russia and the EU.

THE CASE OF ITALY: FREERIDING FRIENDSHIP

The last case considered is that of Italy. In the past decade, Italy has been the second most important EU trade partner for Russia, with a considerable trade in agricultural goods, in manufactures (shoes, furniture) and an active cooperation in infrastructure building, especially the oil&gas sector. Of particular relevance, there is the Italian wine export to Russia, which dominates the wine market outperforming France and Georgia¹⁰⁸.

The Russian countersanctions have thus limited the damage incurred to the whole EU trade with Russia, for Italy, as wine was left untouched in the sanctions regime issued by Moscow. The Italian economic interest and good relationship with Russia is also found in international projects, such as the Nord Stream 2, where *Saipem* will participate as one of the contracting parties. Before it was scrapped due to EU regulations at odds with the Russian business plan, the construction of the South Stream would also see the participation of Italy's *ENI*.

However, the rather good relations between Moscow and Rome are not solely founded on current trade deals. As a matter of fact, during the Cold War the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was the largest Communist party in the West, and had continuous relations with Moscow for that reason. In the 1960s, the rise of charismatic leaders such as Enrico Mattei – a public administrator who dismantled AGIP to found ENI – allowed Italy to develop new and solid relations in the energy sector, including with MENA States and the USSR. While

¹⁰⁸ According to a non-official website, [italianfood.net](https://www.italianfood.net), the Italian wine has a 25% share of the total Russian wine market. France follows at 15% and Georgia at 13%. The information is reported at: <https://www.italianfood.net/blog/2016/06/01/italy-leads-russia-wine-market/>

Notably, informal sources at the Italian Embassy to Moscow confirm such data, and add that Italian sparkling wines in particular have an overall much higher share of the Russian sparkling wine market.

remaining a key NATO MS, Italy worked as a mediator between the Western Block and the Soviet Union while pursuing its own interests – energetic and political.

After the fall Soviet Union, Italy strengthened its energetic and economic ties with Russia, leading to a successful integration of its corporations into the Russian market, making it one of the principal trade partners of the Russian Federation. Yet, despite the historical ties between Italy and former Soviet States, its NATO and EU commitments continue to be the cornerstones of Italy's national interest. For this reason Italy is forced to continue its endorsement of the Western sanctions against Russia, even though the price to this committed has risen to circa 10 billion euros as of 2016¹⁰⁹.

Italy can therefore hardly be seen as a completely independent foreign policy actor, as its international stature is conditional to the health of both EU unity and NATO commitment. The approval of the USA is therefore cornerstone to the Italian foreign policy, and the political dialogue with Moscow pursued by Italy is now narrower than ever. The current Italian government, led by Mr. Paolo Gentiloni is generally appreciated for its pragmatic approach to international relations, arguably in line with every Italian government since the 1990s.

This means that Italy seeks to obtain a bridge position between Russia and the West, so that it can protect its economic interest (linked with the Russian market access) and its strategic security interest, especially in Libya, whereby the pro-active attitude of Russia (and possibly its support) could prove essential to the solution of the Libyan ongoing civil war, which increases the cost of the

¹⁰⁹ According to the Valdai Club, which analysis is available at: <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/italy-russia-keeping-the-line/>

migratory crisis and threatens the economic interest of Italian companies involved in the MENA.

Italy is clearly a geopolitical subject, because of its strategic geographical position, its economy and its population. Italy has a unique advantage for being at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. It hosts a large number of NATO and American troops and nuclear warheads, and has important airfields and shooting ranges which have been operated in the most relevant international missions (including the engagement of Libya in 2011). It is also the natural bridge between North Africa and Europe, which has its costs in terms of sustained flows of immigrants and criminality (drug and human trafficking), but is also the door to Europe for North African energy resources (Italy imports most its gas from Algeria). Italy is also set to become one of the European ends of the Chinese project “*New Silk Way*”, which is likely to generate a truly significant increase in trade volumes for Italy in the next decades.

Within the European Union, is of course one of the principal States, both in terms of population and economy (it ranks 4th in both cases), and Italy’s most relevant foreign policy objective is set to grow more influential within the EU. Nevertheless, Italy’s ambitions within the EU is not likely to ever challenge the German “hegemony”, which is clearly in the driver’s seat for what concerns all matters related to the economic and fiscal aspect of the Union.

Italy has not intervened in the Ukraine Crisis, remaining in the side-lines to protect its low-profile when it comes to West-Russia relations. The imposition of sanctions was not met with enthusiasm in Rome and in more than one occasion has Italy openly criticised such approach to the solution of the Ukraine Crisis. Former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, a personal friend of President Putin, visited Crimea in 2015, allegedly opening a more than two centuries-old

bottle of wine, worthy around 90 000 USD, which, according to Kiev, is a crime against Ukrainian heritage¹¹⁰.

The double-standard used by Italy (align with the West – befriend the Russians) is met with suspicion, but the famous visit of former PM Matteo Renzi to Russia (as already mentioned, he was the first prominent Western leader to visit Russia after the Ukraine Crisis¹¹¹) and the presence of former PM Enrico Letta at the Opening Ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics (he was the only Western leader to attend the ceremony) inspired other Western Countries to act accordingly, thus adapting to the new status quo, where trade, diplomacy and communication remains a on the table despite the Ukrainian frozen conflict and the trade restrictions.

However, there is also scepticism regarding this kind of relations. First of all, while Italy kept the commitment to align with the rest of the EU on its stance towards Russia, other countries have exploited the stalemate in the EU-Russia trade relations to their advantage. Notably, both the American and the German activism are keeping Italy behind when it comes to exploit the Russian market. The US trade to Russia in the last months of 2016 has increased of almost 44%, while Italy's growth in trade volumes remained modest¹¹².

“Sympathy is not a strategy”, however. As Mr. Stefano Silvestri writes for the Italian Geopolitical Journal *Limes*¹¹³, the fact that Italians and Russians actually

¹¹⁰ As reported by the BBC at this website: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34297545>

¹¹¹ An analysis of the State visit is available at: <http://www.lastampa.it/2015/03/05/esteri/renzi-a-mosca-lomaggio-a-nemzov-mkYpmhurqCoo1jhbO9uZVK/pagina.html>

¹¹² As reported by the Valdai Club in the article “Italy-Russia: Keeping the Line”, available online at: <http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/italy-russia-keeping-the-line/>

¹¹³ The said article is available at: <http://www.limesonline.com/cartaceo/la-simpatia-non-e-una-strategia-note-sul-rapporto-italia-russia>

do like one another does not mean that there is actually a cogent strategy behind such liking. The most significant foreign policy action used by Italy to bridge the West-Russia differences, was the creation of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002, under the auspices of what has been called the *Spirit of Pratica di Mare*, under the premiership of former PM Silvio Berlusconi. However, the NATO-Russia Council has not been much consequential, and after the Ukraine Crisis it was immediately blocked, showing that more than a common platform for discussing common problems, it was used to further isolate Russia when it stopped complying to the Western geopolitical model.

Although Italy might be the only Country in Europe actually capable of acting as a bridge between the West and Moscow, as incumbent PM Paolo Gentiloni hinted at the latest G7 Summit in Taormina (Italy), stating that during the Italian presidency of the G7, Rome will try and put back on track the relations with Russia standing firm in their values, principles and loyal to their allies, the Italian initiative might be halted by the current balance of power in Europe. Firstly because it is now in Germany's interests to glue the EU so that it can act together (and accordingly with Germany's strategic interest), and because the recent reinforcement of NATO's Eastern flank is not going to bring about the de-escalation with Moscow.

Therefore, the Italian possibilities and choices are limited, and given its priorities in foreign policy, Rome will likely align with Washington, Berlin and Brussels in coping with both the Ukraine Crisis (to which the –impossible– fulfilment of the Minsk II protocol remains the basis for any further development, and with Russia, which is yet going through a bad economic crisis that has a negative on business and the Italian exports in Russia.

CONCLUSIONS

This work was carried out with the aim of trying to understand the logic, the causes and the actions that led to the Ukraine Crisis in the first place and to analyse the current circumstances that are keeping a significant part of Eastern Europe under the cross-fire of a civil war. The numbers of the Ukraine Crisis are dreadful and scary altogether.

The UN HRMMU and the UN OHCHR update the numbers and the figures of the Ukraine Crisis every month, registering an awful situation in terms of human lives. The latest publication, issued on the 15th of May 2017 and based on a “conservative” estimate, reports more than 34 000 conflict-related casualties since April 2014, including over 10 000 deaths (of which over 2 700 were civilians) and around 24 000 injured people. As many as 193 conflict-related casualties, including 36 deaths (according to a conservative estimate based on available data) in the period February-May 2017, representing a steep increase since the period November 2016-February 2017.

These numbers include the 298 victims (including 80 children) of the Malaysian Airlines MH17 plane crash on the 17th of July 2014, caused by the bombing of the said airplane by unidentified actors¹¹⁴ and Andrea Rocchelli (with his Russian interpreter Andrey N. Mironov), an Italian freelance journalist who lost his life while reporting the suffering of the civilian population in the Donbas, and whose killers have not been identified, yet¹¹⁵. Rocchelli died in Sloviansk on the 24th

¹¹⁴ While most Western investigations blame the separatist forces, possibly with the direct help and support of the Russian Armed Forces, the Russian Ministry of Defence declared that the evidence provided by the Ukrainian government has been polluted in a bid to blame the rebels or the Russians, arguing instead that the Ukrainian Armed Forces were in fact responsible for such a tragic bloodshed. As of today, there is not a shared interpretation of the plane crash.

¹¹⁵ The Italian Ambassador to Kiev, HE Fabrizio Romano, and the then Italian MFA Mr. Paolo Gentiloni, put pressure on Kiev in order to disclose the truth about the killing of the Italian citizen. The dossier issued by Kiev was blatantly inconclusive, as even the ballistics report (which came out over one year after the incident) stated that it was impossible to establish who committed the murder or what kind of bullet killed Rocchelli.

of May 2014. For his photo-reports he was awarded posthumously with the World Press Photo prize and, together with his Russian interpreter with the Kamerton Prize.

The OHCHR/HRMMU report also highlights the substantial and continuous breach of basic human rights in the conflict zones. Among the crimes committed since the start of the conflict, the UN reports, are summary executions, unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, abductions, torture, exchange of POWs and conflict-related sexual violence (Office of the UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights 2017).

According to the same report, there are very few signals that the Minsk II agreement is under course of implementation, highlighting that truces and ceasefires are temporal and superficial in nature, and heavy weaponry is constantly deployed in both sides of the conflict.

The international community has achieved next to nothing to unlock the current conflict, which is becoming a “classic” example of European frozen conflict (adding to those in Transnistria, in the Nagorny-Karabakh etc.). The most involved actors, Kiev and the filo-Russian rebels are not realistically going to give up one inch so far as the international community does not step up in the resolution of the conflict. However, the Russian Federation, too, has a strategic national interest in keeping a leverage with Kiev if it wants to protect Russian nationals in Ukraine and honour its credibility and reputation worldwide.

Russia has been put at the absolute centre of the conflict, despite the fact that the whole region clearly had problems since the fall of the USSR (to the very least). The literature that has been selected for this work, has been fundamental in understanding the long-term causes that provoked the explosive

cocktail that resulted in the overthrow of a legitimate government and the secession of one of the richest part of Ukraine, Crimea, which defected to Russia.

Emmanuelle Armandon's "*La Crimée entre Russie et Ukraine – Un conflit qui n'a pas eu lieu*" is a clear example that the study of the inner problems and situation of these troubled States and societies is possible indeed, and it can give real and valuable pieces of advice to decision-makers. Richard Sakwa's "*Frontline Ukraine – Crisis in the Borderlands*" has been of unparalleled use in developing a coherent structure to this thesis, providing countless inspiring hints and an overall neutral and *super partes* perspective on such a divisive issue.

The Ukraine Crisis has not find its conclusion, and as long as both Russia and Ukraine will keep the territorial claim on Crimea, it is highly unlikely that the fighting will go away. The object of this dissertation has been the analysis of the different voices in the West (with focus on the EU) and their relations with the Russian Federation at a time of a renewed rivalry (although with less ideology involved) between the West and Russia. Dario Fabbri, editorialist at *Limes* cites John Updike's "*Rabbit at rest*", saying "*Cold war. It gave you a reason to get up in the morning. [...] Without the Cold War, what's the point of being American?*" in his article "*Così l'America ha Ritrovato il suo Nemico Ideale*" (*And so, America found his ideal enemy again*), arguing that Russia and America, after the "unipolar" world of the 1990s are in some way the perfect enemies.

It is argued that despite China being clearly the most credible challenger to the US hegemony in the medium-long term, the antagonism of Russia is the perfect tool to provide a precise and definite "moral horizon", which is made of the American imperatives as the policeman of the world and the only plausible shield for the European security (Fabbri 2016). However, the USA and the Russian Federation, if they can be considered enemies, are not in a symmetrical situation, as they used to be during the Cold War.

This particular moment in history is full in risky and crucial decisions to be made. The world nowadays is divided between staying open to globalization or to close and bounce back the risks associated with an increased interconnectedness. The commitments on the climate change, the fight against terrorism and radicalization, the security threats linked with the spread of new diseases and an increasingly dangerous cyber-space which might be subject to governmental regulation in the future. These are all challenges that will define an epoch.

Among these challenges there is the future of the European Union. The project that came out of the ruins of WWII, has managed to secure an almost never-ending peace for the whole continent, and its continuous enlargement became a dream of progress and liberty for many, and a risk of alienation and encirclement for many others. Despite the acknowledged success of the European integration process in the last decades, ever serious doubts now emerge around whether this kind of organization with many hearts, many minds and countless differences within it, will be able to adapt to an evolving international political environment.

Sceptics about the future of the EU can already see it is close to the finish line to become a failed experiment of the past, not much differently than what the USSR during Gorbachev's years. Optimists, on the other hand, build on the fact that the setbacks of the EU will ultimately serve as boosters of a deeper integration and are part of the necessary path of uncertainties that even the United States of America had to walk.

But the picture of the future provided by different analysts and intellectuals is somewhat of lesser use when it comes to understanding the current political situation and what drives it.

The focus of this thesis was put on three different European MSs: Germany, Poland and Italy. They have different relations with the Russian Federation (and had completely different and diverging relations with it in the near past), but the three of them are now part of the same system, the EU, which needs their alignment to show credibility and protect the principles and norms that the EU claims to consider their founding values.

As a matter of fact, however, to find a common and a shared point of view on such a divisive issue as the Ukraine Crisis (not to talk about the immigration crisis and the fiscal discipline) has proved to be one of the hardest jobs. In order to put everyone on the same side and line of thought, it is needed a leadership, one which can depict a clear horizon and a rational path towards a common objective. At a time when the traditional use of force to resolve conflicts is less frequent than ever, the German leadership has managed to provide a message of stability and economic prosperity, without discarding European principles.

The German leadership has probably done whatever needed to be done in such circumstances. The imposition of sanctions upon certain individuals and companies of the Russian Federation (it was clear since the very start) were not going to change the world, nor make the Russian Federation give up Crimea, after all the rhetoric and public excitement that surrounded the “reunification”. Germany was (and still is) compressed between Washington and Moscow, and at the same time has serious national interests in keeping a strong and stable European Union, a continued commitment to European security from the USA while making sure that the channels of dialogue with Moscow remain (at least narrowly) open.

In doing so, the German leadership has grown to become a balanced leader, one that ensures with pragmatism that appreciable results will be achieved and that no one will be left (at least not too far) behind. The German

leadership is a somewhat shy one. It is not an invasive leadership, nor a leadership forced upon subjects. In fact, it is a leadership that could bring together two opposite voices regarding the EU-Russia relations, namely Italy and Poland.

Other recipes are theoretically on the table and ready for discussion, but in fact, no European State is able to take the lead, nor it will, for a long time.

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EU - RUSSIA RELATIONS

EUROPEAN POWERS IN THE UKRAINE CRISIS: A FOCUS ON GERMANY, POLAND AND ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Three full years after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and the reunification of Crimea to the Russian Federation, the European-Russian international relations have touched historic lows. The implementation of economic sanctions and counter-sanctions between the parties under analysis have failed in providing significant shakes to either side of the conflicting parties. While the Russian Federation and its leadership have adopted a clear strategy in dealing with its European neighbours, within the European Union have emerged different interpretations of the Euro-Russian relations thus shedding ambiguity upon the formally unitary EU foreign policy towards the Russian Federation. This paper will argue that different voices have influenced the quality of the EU-Russia relations lately. The focus of the analysis will be set on the difference between the Polish, the German and the Italian approaches to EU-Russia relations following the Ukraine crisis. In conclusion, it will be argued that despite the inner differences within the EU decision-making process, the German “balanced” leadership has managed to unite and coordinate the foreign policy posture of all Member States towards the Russian Federation, and this balance of power within the EU is not set to change any time soon.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
List of Abbreviations.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	1
Introduction.....	2
1. The Ukraine Crisis: Brief Historical Perspective.....	9
Diverging Perspectives.....	9
After the Fall of the USSR.....	24
From Euromaidan to the Crimean reunification.....	36
2. European Retaliation.....	46
The American Influence.....	53
EU Foreign Policy: Formal Unity.....	61
Russian Countersanctions.....	71
3. Different Voices within the European Union.....	77
The Case of Germany: Balanced Leadership.....	81
The Case of Poland: Hostility.....	87
The Case of Italy: Freeriding Friendship.....	99
Conclusions.....	104
Bibliography.....	110

SUMMARY

I have spent one full year in Moscow and one full year in Rome prior to the writing of this final thesis. In fact, I had the chance to grasp from two very different systems and educational models, each of which with their pros and cons. During my studies, I have developed a certain interest in geopolitical and foreign policy analysis, which brought me on several occasions to tackle one of the most defining historical events in a generation: the Ukraine Crisis.

The study of the International Relations, both on the Russian and the European side brought back theories and thoughts that had partly vanished after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the resurgence of a West-Russian rivalry has tickled the creativity of many scholars around the academic world, and a lot of work has been done, rich in depth and diversity.

Among the most credited theories is the realist. The realist school of thought provides us with the tools to understand the great-power dynamic that brought the international chessboard to crisis following Euromaidan. An understanding of spheres of influence, of lines in the sand, of security dilemmas and nuclear deterrence is indeed crucial to assess at least parts of what came after the Crimean reunification.

Some respected authors argue that the Ukraine Crisis is indeed caused by the same great-power game which rules had not been clearly defined after the fall of the Soviet Union. This is the case of John Mearsheimer now famous article for Foreign Affairs (Mearsheimer 2014), cited and quoted literally hundreds (if not thousands) of times in almost every piece of literature which has something to do with Russia-EU/US relations, the Ukraine Crisis, NATO enlargement and so forth.

However interesting Mearsheimer's article is, I decided not to base my final thesis on such article. The vision of the world shared by Mr. Mearsheimer is indeed one that is shared by many, but in my humble opinion, that is just one part of a much broader picture. The article of which I am talking about, "*Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault*", is a brilliant realist explanation, whereby the clash of interest between the Russian Federation and the West is represented lucidly and without hesitation. The said article claims that had NATO (and the EU) not expanded so much into Russia's backyard, today we would not have issues such as the Ukraine Crisis or the Georgian War. In conclusion, Mearsheimer maintains that the only way for the West and Russia to put an end to the fighting, is to accept that Russia has a core interest in Ukraine, and therefore Ukraine should be transformed into a buffer-zone that would give Moscow enough air and less reasons to feel cornered.

While this theory is certainly interesting and even commendable (although debatable), in my honest opinion I think that is just not enough to fully understand what is behind the Ukraine Crisis, and thus understand the actors, their history, their actions and their reactions. What I personally refuse to accept of Mearsheimer's analysis is the fact that there is almost no mention of the Ukrainian people and their politicians in the article. There is no mention of the passion of the Russians living in Crimea while the Parliament was depriving them of the dignity of having their native language recognised as an official language in their cities. Everything is focused on the Washington – Moscow rivalry, taking for granted the definition that just a handful of people (some at the Kremlin, some at the White House) are responsible and can influence the fate of the world.

While it would be trivial to ignore or underestimate the specific weight of Moscow and Washington in this crisis, I decided that I would focus on

everything else for this final thesis. I honestly do not think that another thesis on the Russia-US relations over Ukraine could contribute to the study of the said crisis. On the other hand, I find that too little has been written about the Ukrainian actors and the European perspective of such a divisive issue.

For these reasons, I dedicated the whole first chapter of this final thesis to a detailed and meticulous analysis of the background that led the Ukrainian government to crumble and lose Ukraine's territorial integrity to Russia, which leadership risked international sanctions and isolation for the reintegration of Crimea within its borders.

The Ukrainian independence in 1991 was a shock for most Russians. As a matter of fact, Ukraine and Russia shared large parts of the last millennium, and for centuries large parts of present-day Ukraine have been integral part of Russia. Russian intellectuals such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn¹¹⁶ defined in 1990 (that is when the USSR was still united) the potential Ukrainian independence as “aberration”, arguing that what everyone should call Russia does not coincide with the RSFSR, but in fact it is the place where “the *Malorussians*¹¹⁷, the *Great Russians* and the *White Russians*¹¹⁸ used to live, that is the territories that the ancient people used to call Rus”. Viktor Kremeniiuk¹¹⁹ defined the Ukrainian independence as nothing less than “treason”, because while in AD 654 Ukraine was nothing but a “small and underpopulated land”, essentially thanks to “the Russian efforts” it became a large and relevant State.

Ukraine today is in fact the outcome of the choices made by Soviet leaders, notably by Stalin (who gave Ukraine much of its current territory) and by Khrushchev, who decided that Crimea should be administered by the UkSSR

¹¹⁶ Cited by Emmanuelle Armandon (Armandon 2013, 159-173)

¹¹⁷ Malorussians or Little Russians are those who inhabit Malo-Russia, that is Ukraine.

¹¹⁸ White Russians or Belarusians are those who inhabit White Russia, that is Belarus.

¹¹⁹ Cited by Emmanuelle Armandon (Armandon 2013, 159-173)

(Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic), at a time when it really did not make any difference that Crimea was administered by Moscow or Kiev, given that it was a border-free USSR.

As a matter of fact, Russian nationalists are not even convinced that Ukrainian people can rationally form a nation of their own, because they are essentially a variation of the Russian nation. Ukrainian is not even a real language but more of a dialect according to different studies (Armandon 2013, 159-173). Boris Yeltsin wrote in his memoirs that for him it was very difficult to accept that Ukrainians had left Russia, because he believed that for historical reasons, including the fact that “Kiev used to be the capital city of Rus” and “Ukraine the cradle of the Russian national identity”, “the Russian people view the Ukrainians as well as the Belarusian as brothers” given the “incredible affinities, including the language, the costumes and the way of life” (Armandon 2013, 159-173). Therefore, the cultural, historical and geographical links between Russia and Ukraine provides us with some tools to better understand the current state of affairs.

The first chapter shall therefore illustrate what brought the Ukrainian and the Ukraine Crises to provoke a geopolitical earthquake in Europe of Cold War dimensions. The different political souls of Ukraine collided in the Euromaidan movement, causing a regime change and a polarised Europe, jeopardising decades of slow but steady confidence-building efforts to normalise Russia-Western relations. The first chapter will end with the reunion of Crimea and Russia.

On the second chapter, this thesis will tackle the reaction of the West to what was broadly considered as a blatant breach of the international law and a pure act of aggression towards an independent and sovereign country. The most relevant items in this regard are clearly the military and security implications of

the Ukraine Crisis, and the retaliation against the Russian Federation with economic sanctions.

The West did not exactly act in perfect synchrony. American sanctions and European sanctions were indeed similar, but the decision-making process behind it was not. If the US administration had no doubts regarding the immediate retaliation of the West against Russia, the EU showed more fatigue in coordinating and finding a common line to sanction the Crimean secession and the Russian “annexation”. Different voices within the EU have created just the impression of a common line and a coherent unity vis-à-vis the Ukraine Crisis and how to handle it.

This is in fact the topic of the third and last chapter, in which this thesis will explore three different countries of the EU and their approach to the Ukraine Crisis. Germany, Poland and Italy will be the cornerstones of the chapter, through an analysis of their diverse approaches on the handling of the crisis. The key words in this regard will be “balanced leadership”, “hostility” and “freeriding friendship”.

Germany, as the economic and (more and more) the political leader of the EU was certainly the unhappiest with the renewed rivalry with the Russian Federation. A balanced Germany has the authority and the responsibility to lead the Union based on a neat understanding of the founding values of the liberal order of Europe, exercising a balanced leadership that takes into account the needs and fears of all the members of the community. What was perceived as a violation of the territorial integrity of a neighbouring State had to be punished in light of a possible recidivism of Russia’s aggressive manners¹²⁰. The German

¹²⁰ Needless to say, the West and Russia did not really agree on what had happened in Georgia only six years before.

economy would later be the one that in total numbers lost more in the economic war with Russia, loosing thousands of jobs in relation to the sanction regime.

Poland is one of the most promising European economies, on its path to become a medium power within the EU. Its historic ties with both the Russians, the Germans and the Ukrainians make it a very interesting actor in the unfolding of this crisis. Poland was coming to terms with a pacified Russia in the post-Cold War order, feeling rather safe within the Western institutions, including NATO. After the mass protests of Euromaidan put down more than 77 people, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs mediated (together with the French and the German) between Yanukovych and the insurgents, brokering a deal that the most optimistic would have hoped it could calm the spirits of the crowd. But when the situation collapsed and Russia secured Crimea preparing it for accession, Poland became increasingly hostile towards Russia.

It was at the next NATO Summit at Celtic Manor in Wales that the West decided to step up the military presence along the NATO-Russian borders, and it was in Warsaw during the last NATO Summit that Poland made clear that the Russian approach would not be tolerated in Europe, urging all MSs to increase the military contribution to defend the Eastern Flank of the Alliance. This included clearly also the request that Italian personnel serve as every other MS in the patrolling and safeguard missions in the Baltics.

The Italian position is much different from the other two. The Italian public and especially the secondary sector of the Italian economy are reluctant to keep a trade war with Russia for Ukraine. The Italian interests in Russia have been increasing year after year, especially since Putin came to power. The Italian exports in Russia represent a significant source of income for Italy, and the trading sector surely put pressure on the Italian executive in order to find a solution to this situation.

The Italian stance is indeed one of support for the European institution and of loyalty to the American leadership, but it is also one of freeriding. As a matter of fact, within the Russian territory there is little if any concrete coordination between the most important economies of the EU. Every State there plays its own game, and Italy has been remarkably successful in Moscow lately. Former President of the Council Mr. Matteo Renzi was the first major EU leader to pay a state visit to Moscow, signing trade deals and securing the “special-guest” status at the 2016 SPIEF (Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum). Vis-à-vis Russia, Italy is reluctant to align itself with the other European States. Former President of the Council (and close friend of Mr. Putin) Mr. Silvio Berlusconi even visited Crimea on a private visit to Mr. Putin.

In conclusion, we will find that the Ukraine Crisis has revealed that the unity of the foreign policy within the EU has been shook and proved. The relationship between Europe and the Russian Federation is of primary importance for the stability of the EU, both from a security and an economic point of view. The emergence of a common foreign policy is far from accomplished yet, and the EU will need to define its own strategy in the years to come should it want to be a relevant actor of the international arena.

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation will need to address its problem of credibility and its isolation vis-à-vis the West, bearing in mind the chilling situation of Russia’s economy and its structural problems. While the strategy that led Russia to be considered again a resolute continental power that fights for its own strategic interest has rewarded the Russian leadership with the accession of Crimea, the next government cycle should indeed focus on the stabilisation of its own economy and the diplomatic solution of the Ukraine Crisis, in order to get over the sanction regime and regain prosperity in close partnership with the European partners.

This work was carried out with the aim of trying to understand the logic, the causes and the actions that led to the Ukraine Crisis in the first place and to analyse the current circumstances that are keeping a significant part of Eastern Europe under the cross-fire of a civil war. The numbers of the Ukraine Crisis are dreadful and scary altogether.

The UN HRMMU (Human Rights Monitoring Mission for Ukraine) and the UN OHCHR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights) update the numbers and the figures of the Ukraine Crisis every month, registering an awful situation in terms of human lives. The latest publication, issued on the 15th of May 2017 and based on a “conservative” estimate, reports more than 34 000 conflict-related casualties since April 2014, including over 10 000 deaths (of which over 2 700 were civilians) and around 24 000 injured people. As many as 193 conflict-related casualties, including 36 deaths (according to a conservative estimate based on available data) in the period February-May 2017, representing a steep increase since the period November 2016-February 2017.

These numbers include the 298 victims (including 80 children) of the Malaysian Airlines MH17 plane crash on the 17th of July 2014, caused by the bombing of the said airplane by unidentified actors¹²¹ and Andrea Rocchelli (with his Russian interpreter Andrey N. Mironov), an Italian freelance journalist who lost his life while reporting the suffering of the civilian population in the Donbas, and whose killers have not been identified, yet¹²². Rocchelli died in Sloviansk on the 24th of May 2014.

¹²¹ While most Western investigations blame the separatist forces, possibly with the direct help and support of the Russian Armed Forces, the Russian Ministry of Defence declared that the evidence provided by the Ukrainian government has been polluted in a bid to blame the rebels or the Russians, arguing instead that the Ukrainian Armed Forces were in fact responsible for such a tragic bloodshed. As of today, there is not a shared interpretation of the plane crash.

¹²² The Italian Ambassador to Kiev, HE Fabrizio Romano, and the then Italian MFA Mr. Paolo Gentiloni, put pressure on Kiev in order to disclose the truth about the killing of the Italian citizen. The dossier issued by Kiev was blatantly inconclusive, as even the ballistics report (which came out over one year after the incident) stated that it was impossible to establish who committed the murder or what kind of bullet killed Rocchelli.

For his photo-reports he was awarded posthumously with the World Press Photo prize and, together with his Russian interpreter with the Kamerton Prize¹²³.

The OHCHR/HRMMU report also highlights the substantial and continuous breach of basic human rights in the conflict zones. Among the crimes committed since the start of the conflict, the UN reports, are summary executions, unlawful and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, abductions, torture, exchange of POWs and conflict-related sexual violence (Office of the UN High Commissioner for the Human Rights 2017).

According to the same report, there are very few signals that the Minsk II agreement is under course of implementation, highlighting that truces and ceasefires are temporal and superficial in nature, and heavy weaponry is constantly deployed in both sides of the conflict.

The international community has achieved next to nothing to unlock the current conflict, which is becoming a “classic” example of European frozen conflict (adding to those in Transnistria, in the Nagorny-Karabakh etc.). The most involved actors, Kiev and the filo-Russian rebels are not realistically going to give up one inch so far as the international community does not step up in the resolution of the conflict. However, the Russian Federation, too, has a strategic national interest in keeping a leverage with Kiev if it wants to protect Russian nationals in Ukraine and honour its credibility and reputation worldwide.

Russia has been put at the absolute centre of the conflict, despite the fact that the whole region clearly had problems since the fall of the USSR (to the

¹²³ A prize established in the memory of the late Russian journalist Anna Politovskaya, who was murdered on the day of Putin's 54th birthday, on 7 October 2006, under mysterious circumstances. She is believed to have been murdered by a hired killer with either the direct or indirect approval of the Kremlin. Such allegations have remained unconfirmed.

very least). The literature that has been selected for this work, has been fundamental in understanding the long-term causes that provoked the explosive cocktail that resulted in the overthrow of a legitimate government and the secession of one of the richest part of Ukraine, Crimea, which defected to Russia.

Emmanuelle Armandon's *"La Crimée entre Russie et Ukraine – Un conflit qui n'a pas eu lieu"* is a clear example that the study of the inner problems and situation of these troubled States and societies is possible indeed, and it can give real and valuable pieces of advice to decision-makers. Richard Sakwa's *"Frontline Ukraine – Crisis in the Borderlands"* has been of unparalleled use in developing a coherent structure to this thesis, providing countless inspiring hints and an overall neutral and *super partes* perspective on such a divisive issue.

The Ukraine Crisis has not find its conclusion, and as long as both Russia and Ukraine will keep the territorial claim on Crimea, it is highly unlikely that the fighting will go away. The object of this dissertation has been the analysis of the different voices in the West (with focus on the EU) and their relations with the Russian Federation at a time of a renewed rivalry (although with less ideology involved) between the West and Russia. Dario Fabbri, editorialist at *Limes* cites John Updike's *"Rabbit at rest"*, saying *"Cold war. It gave you a reason to get up in the morning. [...] Without the Cold War, what's the point of being American?"* in his article *"Così l'America ha Ritrovato il suo Nemico Ideale"* (*And so, America found his ideal enemy again*), arguing that Russia and America, after the "unipolar" world of the 1990s are in some way the perfect enemies.

It is argued that despite China being clearly the most credible challenger to the US hegemony in the medium-long term, the antagonism of Russia is the perfect tool to provide a precise and definite "moral horizon", which is made of the American imperatives as the policeman of the world and the only plausible shield for the European security (Fabbri 2016). However, the USA and the

Russian Federation, if they can be considered enemies, are not in a symmetrical situation, as they used to be during the Cold War.

This particular moment in history is full in risky and crucial decisions to be made. The world nowadays is divided between staying open to globalization or to close and bounce back the risks associated with an increased interconnectedness. The commitments on the climate change, the fight against terrorism and radicalization, the security threats linked with the spread of new diseases and an increasingly dangerous cyber-space which might be subject to governmental regulation in the future. These are all challenges that will define an epoch.

Among these challenges there is the future of the European Union. The project that came out of the ruins of WWII, has managed to secure an almost never-ending peace for the whole continent, and its continuous enlargement became a dream of progress and liberty for many, and a risk of alienation and encirclement for many others. Despite the acknowledged success of the European integration process in the last decades, ever serious doubts now emerge around whether this kind of organization with many hearts, many minds and countless differences within it, will be able to adapt to an evolving international political environment.

Sceptics about the EU can already see it is close to the finish line to become a failed experiment of the past, not much differently than what the USSR during Gorbachev's years. Optimists, on the other hand, build on the fact that the setbacks of the EU will ultimately serve as boosters of a deeper integration and are part of the necessary path of uncertainties that even the United States of America had to walk.

But the picture of the future provided by different analysts and intellectuals is somewhat of lesser use when it comes to understanding the current political situation and what drives it.

The focus of this thesis was put on three different European MSs: Germany, Poland and Italy. They have different relations with the Russian Federation (and had completely different and diverging relations with it in the near past), but the three of them are now part of the same system, the EU, which needs their alignment to show credibility and protect the principles and norms that the EU claims to consider their founding values.

As a matter of fact, however, to find a common and a shared point of view on such a divisive issue as the Ukraine Crisis (not to talk about the immigration crisis and the fiscal discipline) has proved to be one of the hardest jobs. In order to put everyone on the same side and line of thought, it is needed a leadership, one which can depict a clear horizon and a rational path towards a common objective. At a time when the traditional use of force to resolve conflicts is less frequent than ever, the German leadership has managed to provide a message of stability and economic prosperity, without discarding European principles.

The German leadership has probably done whatever needed to be done in such circumstances. The imposition of sanctions upon certain individuals and companies of the Russian Federation (it was clear since the very start) were not going to change the world, nor make the Russian Federation give up Crimea, after all the rhetoric and public excitement that surrounded the “reunification”. Germany was (and still is) compressed between Washington and Moscow, and at the same time has serious national interests in keeping a strong and stable European Union, a continued commitment to European security from the USA while making sure that the channels of dialogue with Moscow remain (at least narrowly) open.

In doing so, the German leadership has grown to become a balanced leader, one that ensures with pragmatism that appreciable results will be achieved and that no one will be left (at least not too far) behind. The German leadership is a somewhat shy one. It is not an invasive leadership, nor a leadership forced upon subjects. In fact, it is a leadership that could bring together two opposite voices regarding the EU-Russia relations, namely Italy and Poland.

Other recipes could theoretically be put on the table and ready for discussion, but in fact, no European State is able to take the lead, nor it will, for at least one entire generation.

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