EURO-ATLANTIC STUDIES

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A partnership in time of crisis: U.S. - Ukraine relations during the Obama administration

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Keywords: U.S. – Ukraine relations, Obama administration, U.S. foreign policy, NATO, Russia, European Union, Euromaidan protests, Annexation of Crimea

Abstract: *Since it gained its independence in 1991, Ukraine received great attention from the United States. With its strategic position, between East and West, Ukraine and its democratic development after the dissolution of the Soviet Union became a key interest in Western politics. Thus, for almost two decades, U.S. policy towards Ukraine has been centered on achieving and consolidating a democratic, prosperous, and secure country, more closely integrated into Europe and Euro-Atlantic structures. But the large size of Ukraine and its ethnic diversity have made it difficult to consolidate its identity as part of the European models. Besides that, Ukraine's political scene was dominated by oligarchic „clans" that led the state toward corruption, personal conflicts, and a perilous balancing act in foreign policy. For President Barack Obama, the U.S. – Ukraine relations were not a priority in the first years of his administration, but as much as Kyiv entered into a*

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political crisis at the end of 2013 and Russia started its incursion in Ukrainian territory, the Obama administration began to give Ukraine much more importance on its foreign policy agenda. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the Russian backing of separatists from eastern Ukraine created an international crisis that tested American leadership and the future of U.S.-Russia relations. This article aims to offer an analysis of the U.S. – Ukraine relations during the Obama presidency, with a primary focus on the measures that the U.S. took after the anti-government protests erupted on the streets of Kyiv in November 2013. The article addresses the problem of NATO enlargement to include Ukraine, why American relations with Kyiv were also viewed as part of U.S. relations with Russia, and why Moscow perceived the U.S. activities in Kyiv as a way to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty.

Ukraine at the crossroads of West and East

Ukraine achieved its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and since then has tried to find its place in Europe as a unified and prosperous society. As one of the USSR's largest successors, by territory, population, and economy, Ukraine rapidly gained importance on the international scene. Its democratic development was considered essential for a stable European security system. A successful Ukrainian political system would promote stability in the region and curb Russia's imperial ambitions which became a security concern for the U.S. and its allies gradually.

Relations between the U.S. and Ukraine begin with Ukraine's transition to democracy. At the time of the Soviet Union's collapse, Ukraine had the world's third-largest strategic nuclear arsenal on its territory. Because of its nuclear inheritance, Ukraine became rapidly a priority on the foreign policy agenda of

the U.S. during the '90. In January 1994, Ukraine, Russian Federation, and the U.S., after a series of negotiations, signed the Trilateral Agreement in which Ukraine committed to full nuclear disarmament, in exchange for economic support and security assurances from the U.S. and Russia. To solidify security commitments to Ukraine, the U.S., Russia, and the United Kingdom signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances on December 5, 1994. According to the Memorandum, the U.S., Russia, and the U.K. reaffirmed „their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations."[2]

The denuclearization of Ukraine was a real success in the American nuclear non-proliferation effort after the Cold War and opened the way to an expanded bilateral relationship. As part of the doctrine of democratic enlargement, President Bill Clinton began his support for democratic and market reform in Ukraine, including a comprehensive assistance package.[3] A Joint U.S.-Ukrainian Statement on Friendship and Partnership was issued in 1994 and, two years later, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and American Vice President Al Gore announced a new U.S.-Ukraine „strategic partnership" that was a further manifestation of the ever-improving relationship.[4]

Ukraine seemed to be on its way to becoming a functioning democracy, forging strategic partnerships with other democratic countries. After being one of

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[2] „Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons", Budapest, 5 December 1994 https://bit.ly/3Vm9TJ6
[3] „A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement: February 1995", in *Historical Office – Office of the Secretary of Defense*, p.5 https://bit.ly/3EAXpYu
[4] „U.S.-Ukraine Relations", in *U.S. Department of State – Archive* https://bit.ly/3SYD1Vm

the first countries to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace, Ukraine agreed to become part of a distinctive partnership with NATO in 1997 that established the NATO-Ukraine Commission. This level of cooperation, which was only offered to two countries – Ukraine and Russia – confirmed the special interest that NATO and its western allies had in the region. An independent, democratic, and stable Ukraine was one of the key factors for ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe and the continent as a whole, according to the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the two countries.[5] A partnership with NATO offered more incentives for building more transparency and stability in a volatile region that struggled to create its own national and political identity after the communist regime.

In the late 1990s, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma often described his foreign policy as a „multi-vector" reaching out to Russia, Europe, and the U.S. During the time he concluded partnerships with Washington, Kuchma signed with Russian President Boris Yeltsin a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership. President Yeltsin stated that he and Kuchma have solved all outstanding questions in their countries' bilateral relations and had „left no problems behind".[6] The treaty, lasting for 10 years, made Russia recognize Ukraine's sovereignty, including sovereignty over the city of Sevastopol, where Russia's Black Sea Fleet was stationed. The Friendship Treaty was a turning point in Ukraine – Russia relations, and Kuchma's balancing act in foreign policy seemed to be an apparent success for a time. However, anti-democratic practices

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[5] „Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine", in *North Atlantic Treaty Organization – Official texts*, 9 July 1997 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm
[6] Floriana Fossato, „Russia: Kremlin Chooses Pragmatic Approach--An Analysis", in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 09, 1997, https://www.rferl.org/a/1085096.html

that Ukrainian President Kuchma started to apply after winning his second term led to growing concerns in the U.S. and European governments. His efforts to control the Parliament, the coercion of the opposition, and the possible involvement in the murder of the journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000 were signals to the Western governments that the democratic reform of Ukraine was far more difficult than it was expected.[7]

As NATO was extending into Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine found itself in a so-called „gray zone", bordering two key Euro-Atlantic institutions, NATO and the European Union (EU), and a lengthy border with Russia. Even if Ukraine's defense and security council chief, Yevhen Marchuk, announced in 2002 that Ukraine wanted to join NATO, the prospects of the country's admission to NATO were far from being considered at that moment. Ukraine was suffering from a „post-Soviet syndrome"[8] that made it difficult to adopt the kinds of democratic, economic, and military reforms that the alliance asked of other aspirants. The political system became corrupt, the economy was controlled by a small elite with close ties to the political leadership, the rule of law was weak, and the commercial ties between Russian oligarchs and wealthy businessmen reinforced the influence of Russia on its neighbor.

When American President George W. Bush came into office in 2001, U.S. – Ukraine relations took a negative turn. The anti-democratic practices of Leonid Kuchma transform Ukraine into a „hybrid state with a competitive authoritarian

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[7] Paul D'Anieri, „Ukrainian foreign policy from independence to inertia", in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 3/4, Special Issue: Disintegration of the Soviet Union. Twenty years later. Assessment. Quo Vadis? (September/December 2012), p. 449 https://www.jstor.org/stable/48610366

[8] Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Princeton University Press, 2014, p.136.

regime".[9] Besides the fact that he allowed corruption to proliferate in the state, Kuchma was suspected of approving the sale of a new type of aircraft tracking system to Iraq. This violation of the embargo imposed by the United Nations Security Council determined the Bush administration to suspend $55 million in aid to Ukraine.[10] Bush's suspicion was also highlighted when the Ukrainian presidential election was due to take place. The U.S. President warned President Kuchma in a letter from 20 November 2004 that the U.S will have to review its relations with Ukraine if the electoral process is characterized by fraud and manipulation.[11] Eventually, the incumbent Ukrainian President and his chosen successor backed by Russia, Viktor Yanukovych, tried to steal the election by adding votes to Yanukovych's tally in the second round.

When widespread electoral fraud has been revealed, thousands of protesters gathered on the streets of Kyiv demanding that the election have to be rerun. The protests, known as the Orange Revolution, had set a landmark in the post-communist history of Eastern Europe and show the desire of Ukrainians to shift Westward. With two presidential candidates, Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych, that seemed to represent either the pro-Western camp or the pro-Russia one, the events that happened in Ukraine turned soon into a competition for influence between Washington and Moscow. In the election campaign, several prominent American personalities, including former President George H.W. Bush and former U.S. National Security adviser Zbigniew

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[9] Taras Kuzio, „ Regime type and politics in Ukraine under Kuchma", in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, Special Issue: Ukraine: Elections and Democratisation (June 2005), p. 175 https://www.jstor.org/stable/48609535

[10] „U.S. checks into report of Ukraine sale to Iraq", in *CNN*, October 2, 2002 http://edition.cnn.com/2002/US/10/02/ukraine.iraq.us/

[11] „Bush Warns Ukraine To Conduct Fair Election", in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, November 20, 2004 https://www.rferl.org/a/1055987.html

Brzezinski visited Kyiv to raise the importance of free elections and democratization as a prerequisite for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. On the other hand, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Ukraine to express his support for Yanukovych and praise the Kuchma's government for positively structuring the relationship with Russia „not only in economics... [but] in politics as well".[12]

Intending to turn the Ukrainian state towards Western values, the U.S. has invested since the '90s in organizations such as the *U.S. Agency for International Development* or *National Endowment for Democracy*, which aimed to develop democratic institutions in the country by providing grants and technical assistance to Ukrainian civil society. But instead of promoting measures to advance democracy, Moscow saw these organizations as orchestrated conspiracy funded by the American government to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty, weaken Russia's sphere of influence, and expand Washington's imperial reach.[13] The Orange Revolution was considered the most obvious example. Then, American organizations focused their resources on creating the conditions for free and fair elections, providing training and direct assistance to election monitoring organizations and independent media. Additionally, although the U.S. did not express any explicit preference for a candidate in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election, Viktor Yushchenko was popular in Washington due to the time he spent as chairman of the Central Bank.[14] After the Ukrainian Supreme Court declared the election null and demand a rerun of the election, which

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[12] Nick Paton Walsh, „Putin's Kyiv visit 'timed to influence Ukraine poll'", in *The Guardian*, 27 October 2004 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/27/ukraine.russia

[13] Michael McFaul, „'Meddling' In Ukraine: Democracy is not an American plot.", in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 21 December 2004 https://bit.ly/3t0V9Tp

[14] Angel Stent, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

would result in the victory of the pro-Western candidate Yushchenko, a consensus has emerged in Russia that the West – especially the U.S. – engineered the entire revolution on the streets of Kyiv to ensure that their candidate will come to power.

For Russia, this alleged Western intervention in Ukraine was considered a danger to national security interests. 80% of Russia's gas exports to Europe passed through Ukraine, the Russian Black Sea fleet was stationed in the Crimean Peninsula, and about 17.3% of the country's population was ethnic Russian. The continued enlargement of NATO, the expansion of the EU, and the promotion of democracy in Ukraine created an increasingly strong sense of threat for the Kremlin.

Once he became president, Viktor Yushchenko indicated a desire for a stable relationship with Russia, but the focus of his foreign policy would be to bring Ukraine closer to the West, including integration with NATO and the EU. But his tensions with prim-minister Yulia Timoshenko and the failure to combine the ideals and aspirations of the Orange Revolution with the competence to govern made it difficult for the U.S. and the EU to help Kyiv accomplish much in the reform area.

At the beginning of 2008, Yushchenko was determined to attach high priority to securing a Membership Action Plan (MAP) from NATO at the Bucharest summit scheduled in April. President Viktor Yushchenko, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, and Parliament Chairman Arseny Yatsenyuk sent a joint letter to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declaring Ukraine's readiness to advance to a MAP, which is an essential step towards membership. The three Ukrainian leaders' letter states that the country sees itself as part of the

Euro-Atlantic security space and is determined to counteract threats to common security alongside NATO countries.[15] Nevertheless, the potential accession of Ukraine to NATO was prevented by the lack of public support for accession in Ukraine, Russia's opposition, and the slow progress in security sector reform.

The lack of consensus on NATO membership in Ukrainian society was split largely along regional lines. Those living in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine, whether ethnic Russians or Ukrainians, tend to oppose NATO membership and support close ties with Russia. Supporters of NATO membership were concentrated in western Ukraine, where Ukrainian speakers are suspicious of Russia and prefer a western orientation.[16] By 2008, less than one-quarter of the population supported NATO membership.

A harsh critic of NATO enlargement since its first wave of expansion, Russia didn't hide away its opposition to the possible accession of Ukraine in the Euro-Atlantic alliance. After the Ukrainian officials made public the letter in which they express the aspiration of joining NATO, Russian President Vladimir Putin rapidly declared his discontent. Alarmed by the potential deployment of a U.S. missile shield in Ukraine when the country would become a NATO member, Putin said that he would be forced to target Russian rockets at Ukraine in response: „I am not only terrified to utter this, it is scary even to think that Russia …would have to target its offensive rocket systems at Ukraine".[17] To defuse Russian criticism over the decision to seek MAP, the Ukrainian President said

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[15] Vladimir Socor, „Ukraine's top three leaders request NATO Membership Action Plan", in *The Jamestown Foundation*, January 18, 2008 https://bit.ly/3g43LW3
[16] Paul Gallis, Paul Belkin, Carl Ek, Julie Kim, Jim Nichol, Steven Woehrel, „CRS Report for Congress: Enlargement Issues at NATO's Bucharest Summit", in *Congressional Research Service*, March 12, 2008, p. 23 https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL34415.pdf
[17] Rosalind Ryan, „Join Nato and we'll target missiles at Kyiv, Putin warns Ukraine", in *The Guardian*, 12 February 2008 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/12/russia.ukraine

that his country would not allow the establishment of NATO bases on Ukrainian soil: „If the Russian side is worried about military bases then Ukraine will never go for that … We are ready to underpin that constitutionally", according to Yushchenko.[18]

Even in that case, Russia's opposition remained strong. At the NATO Bucharest summit in April 2008, the alliance welcomed the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the two former Soviet republics, Ukraine and Georgia, to join NATO. Although the statement was a vague pledge to invite the two to join the alliance at some point in the future, it managed to trouble Russia once again. Shortly after the summit, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow will do everything it can to prevent the two countries from becoming NATO members: „We will do all we can to prevent Ukraine's and Georgia's accession into NATO and to avoid an inevitable serious exacerbation of our relations with both the alliance and our neighbors."[19]

As it said, Russia was ready to take all the necessary measures for ensuring its interests along its borders. In august 2008, after Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili ordered his troops to capture the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion, moving troops to the border and carrying out airstrikes on Georgian positions in Ossetia and Abkhazia, the two separatist regions openly supported by Moscow. Russia defeated the Georgian forces in five days and then recognized the independence of the two regions. Occupied by Russian troops, Georgia couldn't fit anymore

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[18] „ Ukraine says will not allow NATO bases", in *Reuters*, 13 February 2008 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-ukraine-idUSL1388247420080213

[19] „Russia Talks Tough in Response to NATO's Eastward Expansion", in *Deutsche Welle*, 11 April 2008
https://www.dw.com/en/russia-talks-tough-in-response-to-natos-eastward-expansion/a-3261078

into the NATO criteria for joining the alliance. The Russian-Georgian conflict significantly complicated not only Tbilisi's efforts to join NATO but also Ukraine's. The Russian threat seemed to hang over Ukraine if Kyiv wanted to move closer to the West.

As an attempt to curb Russian aggression in the region, the Bush Administration was determined to reassure Ukraine of the American commitments and signed the U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership in December 2008. The Charter highlighted the importance of the bilateral relationship and outlined enhanced cooperation in the areas of defense, security, economics and trade, energy security, democracy, and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the text stated that deepening Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions is a mutual priority.[20]

The American Administration saw the Charter as something of a consolation prize for the failure to get Ukraine a MAP. In the context of continuing political disarray in the Ukrainian government, of lack of consensus about the place of Ukraine on the international scene, and the assertiveness of Russia, the near future of Ukraine seemed to remain characterized by the same balancing act between East and West.

U.S. and Ukraine relations during first term of the Obama Administration

When Barack Obama took office as President of the U.S., the American and global economies were in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the

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[20] „United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership", in the *U.S. Department of State Archive*, 19 December 2008 https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/113366.htm

Great Depression of 1929, and America's popularity worldwide was declining. The state of Ukraine was not a foreign policy priority for the U.S. President, who was heavily preoccupied with the financial crisis, two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran's nuclear program, and the emergence of China. The developments in Ukraine seemed to permit a relative retreat, although some concerns continued to be raised as part of its intention to reassure the old allies about American commitments.

Once the Obama administration announced its intent to „reset" relations with Russia, it laid out its views about the Russian influence in the former Soviet space. In February 2009, during the Munich Security Conference, Vice President Joe Biden declared that in recent years there had been a „dangerous drift" in the relationship between Russia and Western allies, which is why it is time to „press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia."[21] To reassure Russia's neighbors that the U.S. would not ignore their security concerns while forging a new kind of relationship with Moscow, Biden stated that „we will not agree with Russia on everything … We will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence."[22]

By rejecting the notion of spheres of influence and stressing the importance of sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Obama Administration reiterated the position of the previous administration and reassured Ukrainian allies about American support. In his visit to Moscow, in July 2009, President Obama made a subtle criticism of Russia's actions and ensured American allies of

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[21] „Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Briefing Room: Speeches & Remarks*, 7 February 2009 https://bit.ly/3ruVcGo
[22] *Ibidem.*

his view about Moscow's intrusion into the sovereignty of other states, declaring that „state sovereignty must be a cornerstone of international order. Just as all states should have the right to choose their leaders, states must have the right to borders that are secure, and to their own foreign policies. That is true for Russia, just as it is true for the United States [...] we must apply this principle to all nations -- and that includes nations like Georgia and Ukraine."[23]

However, his statements didn't convey the necessary trust. The so-called „reset" policy with Russia launched by President Obama at the beginning of his presidency raised some concerns in the post-Soviet space about what intentions the new American administration would have. Even if the „reset" was a strategy for achieving American security and economic objectives in dealing with Moscow, some thought that Obama would make concessions to the detriment of Russian neighbors. To counter those concerns, Vice-President Joe Biden visited Kyiv just after Obama's trip to Moscow and his meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Biden's trip to Kyiv was viewed as an opportunity to demonstrate that Washington would not pursue its reset in relations with Russia at the expense of Russia's neighbors nor would pursue relations with these neighbors through a Russian prism.[24] In the meeting with President Viktor Yushchenko, the American Vice-President reaffirmed the strategic partnership between the two countries and reassured Ukrainians that the reset in the American relationship with Russia would not come at Ukraine's expense.[25] On

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[23] „Remarks By The President At The New Economic School Graduation", in *The White House – President Barack Obama: Speeches & Remarks*, July 7, 2009 https://bit.ly/3Tt0LAV

[24] David J. Kramer, „Biden's Critical Trip to Ukraine and Georgia", in *German Marshall Fund of the United States*, 2009 http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep18785

[25] „Statement by Vice President Biden After Meeting with President Viktor Yushchenko of Ukraine", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Speeches & Remarks*, 21 July 2009 https://bit.ly/3PQQRbK

the contrary, according to Biden, a good relationship with Moscow can defuse the zero-sum thinking about the relations with Russia's neighbors.

The American Vice-President's visit underscored that the U.S. wanted to deepen relations with Ukraine and its people regardless of the political disarray within the Ukrainian government. But regarding NATO-Ukraine relations the situation was different. Although Biden said in his visit to Kyiv that „President Obama and I have stated clearly that if you choose to be part of Euro-Atlantic integration -- which I believe you have -- that we strongly support that"[26], the possibility of granting Ukraine a MAP was far from happening. The lack of progress in the political, economic, defense and security sectors was still an impediment to Ukraine's path toward NATO membership. During the first NATO summit of the Obama Presidency, held in April 2009, the NATO allies made it clear that the enlargement would take a pause for Ukraine and Georgia. At the summit, they reaffirmed the commitment to assist the two states in their reform efforts, but reiterate that political stability is of crucial importance to the successful implementation of these reforms that make possible the integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.[27]

President Obama approached the post-Soviet space by taking into account Russian concerns. In his first year in office, he avoided making statements that would have enraged Russia. He expressed his support for NATO expansion, declaring that „it was important to send a clear signal throughout Europe that we are going to continue to abide by the central belief ... that countries who seek and

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[26] *Ibidem.*

[27] „Strasbourg / Kehl Summit Declaration", in *NATO – Newsroom*, 04 April 2009 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm

aspire to join NATO are able to join NATO"[28], but he didn't explicitly state that the U.S. supports Ukraine joining NATO or being granted a MAP. With his pragmatic approach, Obama wanted to make sure to maintain the U.S. – Russia relationship on a good path, at least until the U.S. goals were obtained. He needed Russia's support for achieving some American security objectives like a new arms control treaty, reducing nuclear proliferation, expanding a northern supply route through Russia to Afghanistan, and preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

The failure of Victor Yushchenko to combat corruption and unite Ukraine paved to way for Viktor Yanukovych to mount an unlikely comeback and win the 2010 presidential election race. The election took place on January 17, 2010. Yanukovych at 32% and Yulia Tymoshenko at 25% gained the most votes. The incumbent Yushchenko placed fifth, with less than 6%. In the February 7 runoff, Yanukovych outpolled Tymoshenko 48.9% to 45.5%.[29] Viktor Yanukovych, a candidate deemed as pro-Moscow and the Ukrainian opposition leader whose first presidential election victory was overturned by the courts after the 2004 Orange Revolution, promised to end years of turmoil. According to OSCE, Ukraine's presidential election, the fifth since the country regained its independence when the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, was „democratic and organized in a transparent manner".[30]

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[28] „Obama Voices Support for NATO Expansion Despite Russian Qualms", in *Deutsche Welle*, 25 March 2009
https://www.dw.com/en/obama-voices-support-for-nato-expansion-despite-russian-qualms/a-4126973

[29] Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident: U.S. – Ukraine Relations in Turbulent Times*, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution Press, 2017, p. 290.

[30] Daryna Krasnolutska; Kateryna Choursina, „Yanukovych Wins Ukraine's Presidential Election", in *OSCE Parliamentary Assembly – News & Media*, 2010 https://bit.ly/3VC4D4f

Despite serious questions about Yanukovych's character, Washington was prepared to give him a chance. Shortly after winning the elections, Yanukovych was congratulated by the Obama administration. The White House said Obama wished Yanukovych „success in carrying out his mandate" and „commended the Ukrainian people" on the conduct of the vote.[31] The democratic elections made him a legitimate President and a possible good partner for consolidating the bilateral relationship.

In April 2010, U.S. President Barack Obama and his Ukrainian counterpart issued a joint statement reaffirming the strategic partnership between the two states and the common interests of their countries. The partnership that the American administration forged with President Yanukovych seemed to be pragmatic, plainly aimed at getting Ukraine's cooperation on Obama's policy of building a world without nuclear weapons. In their meeting that preceded the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit, President Yanukovych announced Ukraine's decision to get rid of all of its stocks of highly-enriched uranium by the time of the next Nuclear Security Summit, while the United States would provide necessary technical and financial assistance to support this effort.[32] In an effort to engage Obama and show his willingness to collaborate with the West, the Ukrainian President made one of the biggest commitments at the nuclear summit with his promise to dispose of all highly enriched uranium by 2012.

But unlike his predecessor, whose stance was more pro-Western, Yanukovych sought to improve relations with Moscow and keep a healthy

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[31] „Obama Congratulates Yanukovych On Victory", in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 11 February 2010 https://www.rferl.org/a/Obama_Congratulates_Yanukovych_On_Victory/1955681.html
[32] „Joint Statement by President Obama and President Yanukovych", in *The White House – President Barack Obama: Statements & Releases*, April 12, 2010 https://bit.ly/3SctNUe

balance between East and West. During his meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the Ukrainian President said he would perform a sharp U-turn on the policies pursued by Yushchenko, ending the tensions between Moscow and Kyiv that arose in the wake of the 2004 Orange Revolution.[33] As a result, he agreed to extend the lease of the port of Sevastopol, which allowed the stationing of the Russian Black Sea fleet for another 25 years, and in June 2010 the Ukrainian Parliament passed the law prohibiting Ukraine from joining any military bloc. The law, however, allowed cooperation with NATO as a partner and possible accession to the European Union, this derogation leaving the image of a balanced foreign policy that Yanukovych wanted to follow.[34]

The seemingly pro-Russian measures taken by the Ukrainian President gradually started to worry the American government. During a visit to Kyiv in July 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton highlighted the importance of balance in Ukraine's foreign policy, declaring that „Ukraine is an independent nation, and we hope Ukraine will have good relations with its neighbors – including Russia – and that Ukraine will pursue close, constructive relationships with the United States and countries of the European Union."[35] With a law that certified Ukraine as a European non-bloc nation and low public support for the country to become a NATO member, with only 28% of Ukrainians in favor of joining the Alliance,[36] the U.S. acknowledged that the support for NATO

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[33] Luke Harding, „Viktor Yanukovych promises Ukraine will embrace Russia", in *The Guardian*, 5 March   2010 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/05/ukraine-russia-relations-viktor-yanukovych
[34] „Ukraine's parliament votes to abandon Nato ambitions", in *BBC News*, 3 June 2010 https://www.bbc.com/news/10229626
[35] „Remarks With Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych", in *U.S.Department of State – Remarks by Secretary Clinton: July 2010* https://bit.ly/38AktZK
[36] Kathleen Holzwart Sprehe, „Ukraine Says 'No' to NATO", in *Pew Research Center*, 29 March 2010 https://pewrsr.ch/3PPV9zx

integration, even only at the declarative level, would no longer be well received. Thus, the Obama administration encouraged Kyiv to work more with the European Union to deepen Ukraine's links with the West and prevent backsliding in the Russian sphere of influence. The EU became Washington's one of the main tools for democracy promotion in Ukraine.

From the beginning of his presidency, Viktor Yanukovych stated that integration into the EU was still an absolute priority in terms of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy. With his balanced foreign policy which recalled Leonid Kuchma's presidency, Yanukovych considered that links with Moscow were not incompatible with the goal of joining the EU. Indeed, the dialogue between the Ukrainian President and EU leaders was maintained despite the Russo-Ukrainian rapprochement and led to a certain amount of progress. Following the EU-Ukraine Summit, held in November 2010 in Brussels, the European leaders announced Ukraine's signature of the accession Protocol to the Energy Community, welcomed the Action Plan towards visa liberalization for Ukraine, and stressed the importance of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement which was being negotiated. Moreover, the Ukrainian side welcomed the EU's commitment to provide additional support through a macro-financial assistance package of €610 million.[37]

Quite soon, concern about Yanukovych's commitment to democracy grew and the measures implemented by Ukrainian authorities in terms of domestic policy hardly correspond with the EU's efforts to establish the universal values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the Eastern neighborhood. In the

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[37]„Media statement from 14th EU-Ukraine summit", in *Kyiv Post*, 22 November 2010 https://bit.ly/3VMeGEa

autumn of 2010, Ukraine's Constitutional Court restored the constitution of 1996 that strengthened the powers of the President. This lack of checks and balances was considered an obstacle to building genuine democratic structures and a step toward an authoritarian regime. Furthermore, a criminal case against the former prime minister and opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko accused of exceeding her authority while negotiating the gas agreement with Russia in 2009, became the main obstacle to signing the Association Agreement at the December 2011 Ukraine-EU Summit.[38]

Eventually, the American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, issued a joint statement in 2012 stating that the European Union and Ukraine had completed negotiations on an ambitious Association Agreement in December 2011, that would provide for the country's political association and economic integration with the European Union, including by establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area.[39] The use of administrative resources in election campaigns to favor candidates of the ruling party or the imprisonment of opposition leaders without respecting international standards, as in the case of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, were considered to be worrying trends that complicated the process of the possible accession of Kyiv to the EU shortly.

The U.S. and EU leaders had agreed on the importance of a coordinated Western message to Ukraine. The Obama administration's policy of „engagement

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[38] Nazar Kholod, „Reforming the Ukrainian Economy under Yanukovych: The First Two Years", in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 02 April 2012 https://bit.ly/3SbDVN9

[39] „Ukraine's Troubling Trends", in *U.S. Department of State - Remarks by Secretary Clinton: October 2012* https://bit.ly/3NGI2Ph

without endorsement"[40] of the Yanukovych regime was characterized by bilateral cooperation with Kyiv only where common interests collided and collaboration with the EU as a way to maintain Ukraine in the Western camp. Yanukovych's balanced policy became to be seen as unsuccessful for the international position of Ukraine, his measures guaranteeing neither a stable partnership with Brussels nor with Moscow. This condition made Ukraine even more politically vulnerable.

As Obama's first term drew to a close, so did the reset with Russia. Issues that were frozen during the détente at the start of Obama's presidency were once again put in the spotlight. With the objectives of the „reset" agenda almost completely achieved, the Obama administration didn't hesitate anymore to be more critical of Moscow's actions. If in the first years of Obama's administration, the criticism was made subtly, from 2012 onward the American officials spoke their minds more clearly about the Russian undemocratic practices and the influence that Moscow wanted to project in the former Soviet space.

Finding the developing partnership between the EU and Ukraine an economic and security threat, Russia tried to attract Ukraine into a Eurasian Economic Union, the Russian equivalent of the EU. In 2004, the Ukrainian parliament, together with that of Russia and Kazakhstan, ratified a treaty that established a Single Economic Space, a structure in which the regulation of the economies of the three states would be shared and trade tariffs abolished to ensure the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor.[41] The outbreak of the Orange Revolution and the coming to power of Viktor Yushchenko blocked, however, the process of Ukraine's integration into Russia's organizational

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[40] Steven Pifer, *op.cit.*, p. 293.
[41] Askold Krushelnycky, „CIS: Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh Parliaments Ratify Treaty On Single Economic Space", in *Radio Free Liberty*, 21 April 2004 https://www.rferl.org/a/1052410.html

structures. The return of a pro-Russian leader in 2010 was seen by Moscow as a possible resumption of such economic cooperation, which many considered a Russian imperialist move. In 2012, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared that „there is a move to re-Sovietize the region [...] It's not going to be called that. It's going to be called a customs union, it will be called Eurasian Union and all of that. But let's make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it."[42]

The Russian economic project wasn't just about the sphere of influence that Moscow wanted to re-established in the post-Soviet region, as the American secretary of state declared. It was also about the vital economic interests that Russia had to protect. The Russian-led community in Eurasia that Moscow began building would give Russia certain economic benefits and, no less important, better bargaining positions with regard to the country's big continental neighbors, the EU to the west and China to the east.[43] Incorporating a country with almost 45 million consumers like Ukraine into its economic sphere would have given Russia real economic advantages and a stronger position at any negotiation table.

The U.S. response to Euromaidan protests and the Russian annexation of Crimea

Yanukovych's efforts to continue its balanced foreign policy seemed to get more difficult. As it was for President Kuchma at the beginning of the 21st

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[42] Bradley Klapper, „Clinton fears efforts to 're-Sovietize' in Europe", in *AP News*, 6 December 2012 https://bit.ly/3NMaTlr

[43] Dmitri Trenin, „The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry", in *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2014, p.4 http://www.jstor.com/stable/resrep13067

century, the policy of balancing relations between the West and Russia began to be more and more perilous. The apparent close relationship between the EU and Ukraine made Russia become wary about what the future might bring for its security and economic interests in the region. President Putin started to consider that EU ties could anchor Kyiv in the European structures just as much as a relationship with NATO would. So, to prevent such a move, Russia launched a campaign of both inducements and threats toward the Ukrainian President to make him abandon European integration.

Once EU negotiators announced that they agreed for Ukraine to sign the Association Agreement at the summit in Vilnius on 28-29 November 2013, Russia began to put increasing pressure on Yanukovych to rethink his plans. In July 2013, Russia started to impose trade sanctions on Ukraine. For several days in the following month, the Russian authorities applied extensive customs controls to all imports from Ukraine. Although normal trade resumed in less than a week, the message of these actions was clear: if Ukraine were to sign the Agreement with the EU, it should expect a disruption in bilateral trade with Russia.[44]

Determined to prevent Ukraine from turning toward the West, President Vladimir Putin intervened personally and on 9 November he met at a military airport near Moscow with President Yanukovych. The meeting had the effect that the Kremlin desired. A week before the EU summit in Vilnius, the Ukrainian President announced that would suspend the preparations for signing the Association Agreement with the EU, citing national security interests and the need to restore lost trade with Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States

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[44] Samuel Charap, Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia*, Londra, Routledge, 2016, pp. 118-119.

partners.[45] A few weeks after the announcement, Putin welcomed Yanukovych to Moscow to celebrate his apparent triumph over the West. Russia has promised to purchase $15 billion in Ukrainian Eurobonds and cut the price of gas offered to Ukraine by about a third.[46] Russia was prepared to pay a high price to block the possible expansion of the EU at its borders.

President Yanukovych's decision to suspend preparations for the signing of the Agreement with the EU sparked massive civil protests in Kyiv in late November, which would come to be known as „Euromaidan". Despite the many EU flags on display, the focus of the protests gradually came to be on Yanukovych's removal from power. Violence escalated in the following weeks, with government snipers killing several protesters, and far-right groups, which were infiltrating through peaceful protesters, being responsible for the deaths of several police officers.

After three months of unrest, the political crisis in Ukraine reached a critical point in February 2014. EU and U.S. officials have urged Yanukovych and his ministers to reach a compromise with the opposition to end the violent clashes. In his State of the Union Address from January 2014, President Barack Obama referred to the situation in Ukraine and declared that the U.S. stands for „the principle that all people have the right to express themselves freely and peacefully, and have a say in their country's future."[47]

As the revolt and political instability continued, Ukraine moved back onto the American government's radar. The Obama administration tried to find a

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[45] „ENP Country Progress Report 2013 – Ukraine", in *European Commission*, 27 March 2014 https://bit.ly/3MWA8RU
[46] Samuel Charap, Timothy J. Colton, *op.cit.*, p. 121.
[47] „President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Speeches & Remarks*, 28 January 2014 https://bit.ly/3t5talR

peaceful solution to stop the crisis in Ukraine. Vice-president Joe Biden urged the Ukrainian president in a series of phone calls to take steps to end the violence and to meaningfully address the legitimate concerns of protesters.[48] Moreover, several U.S. officials, alongside European dignitaries, visit Kyiv to show support for the anti-government protesters. In December 2013, American Senator John McCain met in Kyiv with protesters and opposition leaders who called for Yanukovych's government to resign and for early elections.[49] US Ambassador to Kyiv Geoffrey Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland also visited Kyiv's Independence Square (Maidan) where the riots took place and talk with protesters and the opposition. Along with EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, they urged the government and the opposition to work out a solution to the crisis.[50]

The U.S. efforts to de-escalate the situation fueled Moscow's suspicions that the West, especially Washington, is meddling in Ukraine's politics and preparing a regime change. A secret phone conversation between Ambassador Pyatt and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland that was leaked on YouTube further grew Kremlin suspicions. According to the recording, the two officials were apparently discussing not only how to mediate the situation in Ukraine, but also how the next Ukrainian government should be like.[51] While not disputing the authenticity of the recording, U.S. officials have denied that

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[48] „Readout of Vice President Biden's Call with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Statements & Releases*, 23 January 2014 https://bit.ly/393mgqa

[49] Gabriela Baczynska, Alissa de Carbonnel, „Senator McCain meets Ukrainian protest leaders amid rival rallies", in *Reuters*, 14 December 2013 https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-protest-idUKBRE9BD0E220131214

[50] „Top U.S. official visits protesters in Kyiv as Obama admin. ups pressure on Ukraine president Yanukovich", in *CBC News*, 11 December 2013 https://cbsn.ws/3x0RFBx

[51] „Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call", in *BBC News*, 7 February 2014 https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957

Washington tried to meddle in Kyiv's internal affairs. The spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State Jen Psaki accused Russia of releasing the tape, saying in a press briefing that the U.S. believes the episode was „a new low in Russian tradecraft."[52] Triggered by President Yanukovych's refusal to sign the EU deal, the crisis in Ukraine was starting to become a new source of tension in U.S.-Russian relations and a geopolitical East-West tug-of-war in which Ukraine was once again at the center of it.

On 21 February, President Yanukovych and the opposition managed to reach a compromise agreement. The agreement, facilitated by the EU through the foreign ministers of Germany, France, and Poland, and witnessed by a Russian special envoy, called for constitutional reform to balance the power of the president, the government, and parliament, the formation of a government of national unity within ten days, presidential elections by December 2014, the handing over of illegal weapons to the bodies of Ministry of Interior and an immediate end to violence.[53]

After the agreement was concluded, President Obama and President Putin held a telephone conversation in which they agreed that the political agreement reached in Kyiv must be implemented quickly and that all parties must refrain from further violence.[54] The agreement, which looked more like a truce between Russia and the West, fell through immediately. Soon after signing it, President Yanukovych lost his authority as the police left their posts across the

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[52] „US official apologizes to EU over disparaging remarks", in *Deutsche Welle*, 7 February 2014 https://bit.ly/3z2tdTc

[53] „Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine - full text", in *The Guardian*, 21 February 2014 https://bit.ly/3GNFVap

[54] „Readout of President Obama's Call with President Putin", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Statements & Releases*, 21 February 2014 https://bit.ly/3LWo6Xz

capital, and protesters were allowed into government buildings. Yanukovych fled Kyiv the next day, then the Ukrainian Parliament voted to remove him from office and called new elections. The Rada appointed Oleksandr Turchynov as interim president and Oleh Yatsenyuk as acting prime minister. The new Ukrainian transitional government, although more Western-oriented, was dominated by Ukrainian ethno-nationalist members, with one out of three ministries belonging to the far-right party, with virulently anti-Russian rhetoric, Svoboda.[55]

From Moscow's point of view, the government installed in Kyiv was illegitimate. Dmitri Medvedev, who became prime minister with Putin's return to the Kremlin, issued a statement questioning the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and saying the unrest in Kyiv posed a threat to Russian interests: „We do not understand what is going on there. There is a real threat to our interests and to the lives of our citizens." Speaking about the way the U.S. and European countries reacted to the new government in Ukraine, he added that „some of our foreign partners think differently ... it seems to me it is an aberration to call legitimate what is essentially the result of an armed mutiny."[56]

With the impression that the collapse of the 21 February agreement resulted in part from a Western plot to install a loyal government in Kyiv that would move Ukraine toward the EU and even NATO, Russia started to act for defending its interests. Shortly after the new government in Kyiv was installed, armed men without identification marks began occupying key facilities and checkpoints in the Crimean Peninsula. Under the protection of these troops,

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[55] Samuel Charap, Timothy J. Colton, *op.cit.*, pp.126-127.
[56] „Russia says doubts legitimacy of Ukrainian authorities", in *Reuters*, 24 February 2014 https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-russia-medvedev-idUKBREA1N0SF20140224

pro-Russian separatists took over the local government, demanded the accession of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia, and held a referendum. Asked at the start of the operation if those fighters were Russian soldiers, President Putin said they were „local self-defense units". At the same time, he recognized that any Russian intervention would be a humanitarian mission for the protection of ethnic Russians, in full compliance with general norms of international law.[57] Speaking about how legitimate Moscow's actions are, the Russian leader recalled the U.S. actions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, saying that the U.S. government „either acted without any UN sanctions or completely distorted the content of such resolutions, as it was in the case of the intervention in Libya."[58]

In a telephone conversation, Obama told the Russian leader that if Russia has concerns about the treatment of ethnic Russian and minority populations in Ukraine, the appropriate way to address the issue is through peaceful means, engaging directly with the government of Ukraine and sending international observers under the auspices of the United Nations Security Council or the OSCE. The American President stated that Russia's actions in Crimea were a clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, including Russia's obligations under the UN Charter, and of its 1997 military basing agreement with Ukraine, and inconsistent with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and the Helsinki Final Act. Given this breach of international law, Obama has warned Putin that the U.S. will suspend Russia's future participation in preparatory meetings for the G8, and continued violation of international law

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[57] „Vladimir Putin answered journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine", in *President of Russia – Events*, 4 March 2014 http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366
[58] *Ibidem.*

will lead to further political and economic isolation.[59] President Putin, however, drew Obama's attention to the provocative and criminal actions of the ultranationalists who are in fact being supported by the current authorities in Kyiv. The Russian leader stressed that in case of any further spread of violence to Eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Russia retains the right to protect its interests and the Russian-speaking population of those areas.[60]

Convinced that his actions do not violate international law, on 18 March President Putin announced „the reunification of the Republic of Crimea with Russia." He cited the result of the referendum, with over 96% of Crimeans voting for joining Russia. Furthermore, in an act of defiance to the West, he brought to attention the case of Kosovo. Then, according to Putin, the unilateral separation of the Kosovo region from Serbia, „exactly what Crimea is doing now", was considered legitimate and did not require the permission of the country's central authorities: „For some reason, things that Kosovo Albanians (and we have full respect for them) were permitted to do, Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars in Crimea are not allowed. Again, one wonders why."[61]

Following almost the same scenario as in Georgia in 2008, Russia acted militarily when it felt that the West is possible to get closer to its borders. He tried to take revenge on the West while sending a clear message: if Russia could not have a friendly government in Kyiv, plan B was to turn Ukraine into a dysfunctional state, torn by conflict. After the annexation of Crimea, in April

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[59] „Readout of President Obama's Call with President Putin", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Statements & Releases*, 1 March 2014 https://bit.ly/3M7oB15
[60] „Telephone conversation with US President Barack Obama", in *President of Russia – Events*, 2 March 2014 http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20355
[61] „Address by President of the Russian Federation", in *President of Russia – Events*, 18 March 2014 http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603

2014, Russia started to support armed separatists in the ethnically Russian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, providing funding and weaponry. This led to an outbreak of a full military conflict between Ukrainian forces and Moscow. By creating a frozen conflict in Ukraine, Russia could again exploit the lack of consensus in NATO on the question of admitting a country with an unresolved conflict on its territory.

Although Western officials acknowledged that there was a strong sentiment in Crimea for reintegration into Russia, they considered the referendum illegal under Ukrainian law, especially since it was also being held in the presence of 20,000 Russian troops. According to the Ukrainian constitution, any changes to Ukraine's territory have to be approved by a referendum of the entire Ukrainian people. The requirement was consistent with general principles of international law, which respects the territorial integrity of states and does not recognize a right of secession by a group or region in a country unless the group or region has been denied a right to „internal self-determination" by the central government or has been subject to grave human rights violations by the central government.[62]

Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, President Obama signed a series of Executive Orders authorizing sanctions against individuals and entities responsible for violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. On 20 March, several Russian and Ukrainian entities were additionally sanctioned, including 14 defense companies and individuals in Putin's inner circle, as well as

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[62] Interview by John B. Bellinger III, Interviewee Jonathan Masters, „Why the Crimean Referendum Is Illegitimate", in *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 March 2014 https://on.cfr.org/3zgdhNn

limiting certain funding to six of Russia's largest banks and four energy companies.[63]

For the first time since the end of the Second World War, a European country had annexed the territory of another country. For President Obama, Russia's action was an expression of weakness rather than strength: „Russia is a regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbours, not out of strength but out of weakness". He added that „the U.S. also has influence over its neighbours, but we generally don't need to invade them in order to have a strong cooperative relationship with them."[64] Aiming to restore regional dominance, Putin's main strategic concern was to prevent NATO's eastward expansion. In the American President's opinion, a sense of insecurity gripped the Russian leader: „He felt as if he was being further and further surrounded by NATO members, folks who are looking west economically, from a security perspective."[65]

Instead of halting Ukraine's westward shift, Russia accelerated it with the actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Besides, U.S. support for Ukraine grew stronger. In March 2014, President Barack Obama met with Ukraine's interim Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk at the White House. In their bilateral meeting, Obama stressed that the U.S. stands with the Ukrainian people and announced that his administration has asked Congress „to act promptly to deliver on an aid package, including a $1 billion loan guarantee that can help smooth the path for reform inside of Ukraine." To show how willing is Ukraine to resume European

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[63] „Ukraine and Russia Sanctions", in *U.S. Department of State - Economic Sanctions Policy, and Implementation* https://bit.ly/38Z61KU

[64] Julian Borger, „Barack Obama: Russia is a regional power showing weakness over Ukraine", in *The Guardian*, 25 March 2014 https://bit.ly/3x2KE4C

[65] „Transcript And Audio: President Obama's Full NPR Interview", in *National Public Radio*, 29 May 2014 https://n.pr/3x4Euzw

integration, prim-minister Yatsenyuk declared that „probably in the nearest future, next week or in 10 days, Ukraine is to sign a political part of -- association agreement with the European Union."[66]

In May 2014, pro-European businessman Petro Poroshenko won the presidential election in Ukraine with 56% of the vote. [67] To reiterate U.S. support, Vice-President Joe Biden attended the inauguration of Poroshenko together with the other members of the President's delegation that were actively involved in the Ukrainian political transition since the Euromaidan protests erupted: Senators John McCain, Ron Johnson, Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, and Ambassadors Dan Baer and Geoff Pyatt. During the visit to Kyiv, Biden also pledged that Washington would contribute with additional financial aid to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia for advancing their reforms and European aspirations.[68] Russia's invasion of Ukraine made the U.S. administration rethink its priorities, the former Soviet space being now once again an important point on the American foreign affairs agenda.

Anyway, while battles in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine continued and Poroshenko asked the U.S. Congress for more military equipment, both „lethal and nonlethal", Barack Obama kept a cautious strategy regarding the situation in Ukraine. He saw the crisis in Ukraine as an international security issue that has to be managed peacefully, without the use of armed force: „We are not taking military action to solve the Ukrainian problem. What we're doing is to

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[66] „Remarks by President Obama and Ukraine Prime Minister Yatsenyuk after Bilateral Meeting", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Speeches & Remarks*, 12 March 2014 https://bit.ly/3scCT8O

[67] Shaun Walker, Alec Luhn, „Petro Poroshenko wins Ukraine presidency, according to exit polls", in *The Guardian*, 25 May 2014 https://bit.ly/3goysoU

[68] „US to offer financial assistance to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia", in *The Guardian*, 7 June 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/07/john-kerry-saint-briac-ukraine-tensions

mobilize the international community to apply pressure on Russia [...] is not in the cards for us to see a military confrontation between Russia and the United States in this region."[69] The American President realized that Ukraine was a core interest of Russia and a more peripheral one for the West. While was necessary for Russia to pay a price for its invasion of Ukraine, it was not necessary for the U.S. to go to war over the issue. It was essential to support the democratic aspiration of the Ukrainian people, but not to go to war for a state that didn't have the security guarantee of a NATO member. President Obama preferred to reassure the Allies about the U.S. commitment to NATO's principle of collective defense. He announced a military program called the European Reassurance Initiative to increase U.S. force presence in Europe and expand exercises and training with NATO Allies and partners.

His stance began to be antithetical to that of the American Congress. U.S. Senator Jim Inhofe, backed by several other senators, introduced a bill that authorizes the President to provide lethal weapons to the Government of Ukraine to defend itself against Russian-backed rebel separatists in eastern Ukraine. The idea to arm Ukraine was also supported by former senior-ranking diplomatic and military officials who called on President Obama to provide Ukraine with lethal weaponry and encourage other NATO countries – particularly those that possess and use former Soviet equipment and weaponry – to do the same.[70]

In his press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Obama stated that „if diplomacy fails [...] what I've asked my team to do is to

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[69] „Statement by the President", in *The White House: President Barack Obama – Speeches & Remarks*, 28 August 2014 https://bit.ly/3x6MyBm

[70] „Inhofe Authors Bill to Arm Ukraine with Lethal Military Aid", in *James M. Inhofe – News: Press Releases*, 11 February 2015 https://bit.ly/3CVa8lY

look at all options – and the possibility of lethal defensive weapons is one of those options that are being examined."[71] The German chancellor, like Obama, rejected the notion that sending weapons to Kyiv would help resolve the conflict. At that time, Angela Merkel, alongside French President François Hollande, tried to lay the groundwork for new talks between Ukraine and Russia. After the Minsk agreement from September 2014 had been violated, Merkel, Hollande, Poroshenko, and Putin (the Normandy Quartet) negotiated a new set of measures for the solution of the conflict that would be known as „Minsk II". The agreement, endorsed by the U.S. government, called for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons monitored and verified by OSCE, constitutional reform with a new Constitution entering into force by the end of 2015 that would provide decentralization of government authority, and special status for the Donbas region.[72]

As the peace process stalled and violence escalated in Eastern Ukraine, pressure on the White House to provide Ukraine with lethal aid increased. Senator John McCain said that the response to Russia's aggression had been insufficient. Referring to what Ukrainians were asking for, McCain declared that „they are not asking for a single boot on the ground [...] I am a bit taken aback by the vociferous opposition to weapons help."[73] The American President's hesitation reflected the long-standing concern that arming Ukraine would provoke Moscow into a further escalation that could drag Washington into a

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[71] „Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference", in *The White House – President Barack Obama: Speeches & Remarks*, 9 February 2015 https://bit.ly/3eNrv0a
[72] „Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements", in *UN Peacemaker* https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA_150212_MinskAgreement_en.pdf
[73] Jennifer Steinhauer, David M. Herszenhorn, „Defying Obama, Many in Congress Press to Arm Ukraine", in *The New York Times*, 11 June 2015 https://nyti.ms/3yZOP1N

proxy war. Obama's administration would focus instead on delivering security assistance to Ukraine in the form of counter-mortar radar, radios, vehicles, patrol boats, body armor, helmets, and night-vision goggles. In November 2015, the U.S. delivered two new anti-artillery radar systems to Ukraine, worth US$10 million each. To avoid Russians' concerns, the systems had been modified to ensure that Ukrainian forces do not „escalate the current conflict by using the new systems to counter fire ... from Russian territory", according to U.S. officials. [74] Until the end of 2015, the total security assistance committed to Ukraine in response to the crisis was more than $265 million.[75]

As the ceasefire was still in limbo, the leaders of France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine agreed in a conference call on 30 December 2015 to extend the implementation of the Minsk II peace agreement beyond the 31 December 2015 deadline into 2016. Both parties seemed to carry significant responsibility for the blockage in implementing the Minsk deal. According to a December 2015 report by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) ammunition, weaponry, and fighters were still pouring in from the Russian Federation to the rebel-held areas of eastern Ukraine.[76] On the other hand, the constitutional reform in Ukraine hasn't been received with too much enthusiasm. The constitutional amendments on decentralization triggered a violent reaction from supporters of far-right groups who clashed with the police outside the parliament building. In addition, Ukraine was mired again in a political crisis.

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[74] Julian E. Barnes, Gordon Lubold, „US to Ship Modified Radar Systems to Ukraine", in *Atlantic Council*, 22 October 2015 https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/us-to-ship-modified-radar-systems-to-ukraine/

[75] „United States Delivers Two Q-36 Counter Battery Radar Systems to Ukraine", in *U.S. Embassy in Ukraine*, 14 November 2015 https://bit.ly/3SF6dQt

[76] „Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 August to 15 November 2015", in *United Nations Human Rights – Office of the High Commissioner*, p.5 https://bit.ly/3MYuLlZ

Ukrainians' support for the government has plummeted from 22% to just 2% because it has been able to do very little to combat corruption.[77] This loss of support led President Petro Poroshenko to ask Yatsenyuk to resign in February 2016.

When addressing the Ukrainian Rada, in December 2015, Vice-President Joe Biden noted the problems that Ukraine has with corruption. He praised the democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian people, but said bluntly that the government doesn't take the necessary measures to combat the rampant corruption: „It's not enough to push through laws to increase transparency with regard to official sources of income. Senior elected officials have to remove all conflicts between their business interest and their government responsibilities."[78]

A long supporter of pro-Western democratic movements in Ukraine for both ideological and geopolitical reasons, as was seen, the U.S. continued to assist Ukraine in the efforts to resist Russian invasion. The National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2016 allocated $300 millions to Ukraine for providing security assistance and intelligence support, including training, equipment, and logistics.[79] At the same time, in an attempt to find ways for implementing the Minsk agreement, Washington opened a bilateral channel with Moscow that operated without publicity. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland has been tasked to conduct unofficial discussions with Moscow about Ukraine. According to Nuland, this bilateral channel operated „in parallel with"

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[77] Roman Goncharenko, „Looming government crisis in Kyiv", in *Deutsche Welle*, October 2015 https://www.dw.com/en/pressure-builds-in-kyiv-ahead-of-crucial-deadline/a-18910948
[78] „Remarks by Vice President Joe Biden to The Ukrainian Rada", in *The White House – President Barack Obama: Speeches & Remarks*, 9 December 2015 https://bit.ly/3TuBYg3
[79] „National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2016 includes $300 millions for Ukrainian military", in *Embassy of Ukraine to the United States of America*, 7 October 2015 https://bit.ly/3SxAUGR

and as a „reinforcement of" the Normandy format, „by agreement with its participants".[80] The chief of Russia's presidential administration, Sergei Ivanov, declared the bilateral Russia-US format to be more effective than the Normandy format.[81] This kind of format was embraced by Moscow because it allowed Russia to be perceived as a great power that can interact with the U.S. on an equal footing.

In late 2016, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was defined by continuous low-level fighting punctuated by periodic upheavals in violence. Neither the Normandy format nor the bilateral channel between Washington and Moscow couldn't put pressure on both sides to respect the Minsk II. The blockage of the peace process made the Obama administration turn its attention to other regions, like Syria, where the threats to international security had to be managed more urgently. As Barack Obama referred in an interview, Ukraine is a core Russian interest but not an American one, so Russia will always be able to maintain escalatory dominance there.[82]

Conclusions

With its strategic position, between East and West, Ukraine moved over time in the shadow of great power rivalries. A combination of both internal and external factors placed Ukraine in a dangerous position that transformed its territory into a competition for influence that threatened the post-Cold War

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[80] Vladimir Socor, „Surkov-Nuland Talks on Ukraine: A Nontransparent Channel (Part One)", in *The Jamestown Foundation*, 27 May 2016 https://bit.ly/3VUKVkA
[81] Vladimir Socor, „Obama Administration Undercutting Ukraine's Position in the Minsk Armistice Negotiations", in *The Jamestown Foundation*, 24 July 2015 https://bit.ly/3z5R17W
[82]Jeffrey Goldberg, „The Obama Doctrine", in *The Atlantic*, April 2016 https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/

international order. The Ukraine crisis that broke out at the end of 2013 seemed to be the last straw for all the parties involved in the standoff: Ukraine, Russia, and the West.

The U.S. – Ukraine relations have often mirrored America's changing relationship with Russia. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. made continuous efforts to bolster Ukraine's independence and its path to democratic reforms. But as Russia regarded Ukraine as being within not only Moscow's economic and political sphere of influence but also within its core security zone, the two former adversaries engaged in a diplomatic tug-of-war that put Ukraine in a difficult position.

During the Obama administration, the relationship between the U.S. and Ukraine was characterized by the same cooperation and political warnings that featured the bilateral relationship since 1991. As was during Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, the Obama administration has maintained engagement with Kyiv and support for democracy development but also alert its ally when the political affairs seemed to slip toward autocratic practices or Russia's sphere of influence. With the everlasting domestic turmoil and balanced foreign policy between the West and Russia, Ukraine received from the Obama administration the same assurances and prudence that other American Presidents gave.

The response that the American administration has taken after the Euromaidan crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea seemed to be the anticipated one. The U.S. continued its unhindered support for democracy development and Ukraine's westward shift without taking military steps that would have provoked Russia even more. Acting in a self-interest manner,

Washington considered that Ukraine was not a vital interest that would go to war for, especially at a time when other international crises more threatening to American national security were taking place.

Putin's Playbook: a comparison between the Russo-Georgian War and the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War

Alice Sprînceană [1]

Keywords: Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, China, August 2008 War, Donbas, Donetsk, Lugansk, Kyiv, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Tbilisi, Gori, Poti, NATO, EU, PFP, JCC, OSCE, Putin, Saakashvili, Stalin, Ivan Ilyin

Abstract

*Prior to the 2022 **"special military operation"** (according to Putin's view) carried out by the Russian military in Ukraine, in 2008 Russia had another target in sight along its borders, residing in the infamously unstable region of Transcaucasia, Georgia. In an eerily similar fashion to what the current conflict unfolds in terms of Russian military prowess and display of warfare, in August 2008 the Russo – Georgian War marked the beginning of Russia's reemergence as a military power for both the West as well as its former Soviet*

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constituent states and further deepened the conflict between the NATO block and Russia. The latter plunged into initiating a long streak of instabilities inside the former Soviet states that broke away from the USSR.

*Many see the **Russo-Georgian War of 2008** and the ongoing **Russo-Ukrainian War** as manifestations of a renewed geopolitical rivalry between major world powers. Both wars have been driven by a desire to assert Russian dominance and control over the regions in question and have led to various consequences that have had profound implications for the nations involved. In the case of Russia, the invasion of Ukraine has been seen as the biggest threat to peace and security in Europe since the end of The Cold War.*

*However, for the first part, the Russo-Georgian war solely lasted for 5 days, (stretching from the 8th to the 12th of August), albeit tensions were carried out from earlier that year and turmoil was about to spread at any moment. The primary purpose of sending Russian troops to the separatist regions of **Abkhazia** and **South Ossetia** was to support these pro-Russian regions' armies against the Georgian military hidden under different pretexts (i.e., "humanitarian aid" sent to repair a railway in the region of Abkhazia). For the second case, this perspective cannot be applied in the current Russo-Ukrainian war. Despite sporting a similar battle tactic in achieving its goal (keeping in mind that the conflict debuted as early as 2014 with the annexation of the **Crimean Peninsula**, as well as the **Donbas** region by sending Russian troops under the pretext of defending the local "repressed" minority from the regions of **Donetsk** and **Lugansk, see Fig.No.1**), the Russian military has marked only temporary victories at the cost of a staggering number of casualties. This comes to show that Moscow's war plan carried out in Ukraine might become a lesson for future aggressors in regard to undermining opponents and show how miscalculations can overturn primary predictions, despite the fact that it is a major power with a bristling arsenal.*

*Looking back at the Russo-Georgian War case, the Russians' success had permanently dented Georgia's image in the long term. It halted the country's progress of aligning itself with the West by adopting for the first time in 2004 under Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency a pro-European stance, as well as deterred it from aspiring to join the EU and NATO, by solely remaining a **PFP** member since 1994. In the case of Ukraine, also a PFP member, but from 1995, their military has undergone training in this NATO partnership and collaboration from that period up to nowadays. Moreover, its geopolitical location, size, and implicated political and economic agents active on its territory also make it a much more valuable pawn on this imaginary chessboard between Russia and the West. NATO and the EU continue their support of Ukraine through the means of its member states that send weapons, ammunition, and many types of light and heavy military equipment, including anti-tank and air defense systems, howitzers, and drones.[2]*

The Georgian example comes to show that the Russian rhetoric cannot be trusted and that it further continues to spread disinformation, this time around, by accusing Ukraine of staging military provocations in the Eastern Donbas region. Ironically, the Ukrainian government hasn't had intentions of changing the status quo throughout its eight years of the ongoing war in Donbas by intervening in the occupied Lugansk and Donetsk regions, thus making it even less plausible that Kyiv would have taken such a risk amidst Russia's largest military mobilization in decades. Putin has gone further, issuing "genocide" claims regarding killings allegedly taking place in the said region. In 2014, the Kremlin justified its military offensive by claiming ethnic Russians were being threatened in eastern Ukraine. Similar accusations were also at the forefront of Russian information warfare in

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[2] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization. *"NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine."* December 9, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm.

2008, when the Kremlin blamed Tbilisi for committing ethnic cleansing—a charge later dismissed by a ruling of the European Court of International Rights.[3]

This paper aims to draw a comparison between the similarities of the Russian forces' applied strategies during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, and the 2014 Annexation of Crimea and Donbas region with aftermaths in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war respectively, as well as question what were the factors that determined the major differences in the way these two states were perceived by the West, eventually leading to such a different timeline. Furthermore, I will attempt to analyze if one country had more probability to appease to Western political and economic interests, as well as if the geopolitical location and size of Ukraine were of more importance than Georgia's. I will attempt to justify if Georgia was perceived as a scapegoat that prepared Ukrainian troops for similar future conflict escalations on behalf of Russia, and finally if Russia's victory in Ukraine is even possible and what the aftermath of that action would be.

Introduction

One of Vladimir Putin's most notable quotes is that the "collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 21st century".[4] This has been widely interpreted as being part of the ex-KGB agent's yearning for a return to the Soviet past. However, Putin has made his thoughts known while talking about the vicious wars that have erupted in their aftermath and the ongoing conflicts that were bound to come in the future.

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[3] Natla Seskurla, *"Russia Is Reenacting Its Georgia Playbook in Ukraine,"* Foreign Policy. February 22, 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/22/russia-ukraine-invasion-georgia-2008-south-ossetia-tskhinvali/.

[4] Claire Biggs, *"World: Was Soviet Collapse Last Century,"* RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty. April 29, 2005, https://www.rferl.org/a/1058688.html.

To begin with, it is worth noting that in both the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, these countries were invaded on Kremlin's decision due to **political objectives** rather than material security. Putin's rhetoric has held a similar fluctuation since the 2007 Munich Security Conference, in which he insisted that his actions were a counter-reaction to NATO's further eastward enlargement as a national security measure.

Secondly, another motivating force in Putin's actions conducted in 2008 and 2022 is regime survival. There is a connection between the Russian President's initiated wars; they are a continuation of domestic policies. Apart from the general paranoia that sprung from the "color revolutions" that occurred throughout the 2000s in these regions, he has also long feared **economic and democratic development** contagion coming from Georgia and Ukraine. "Georgia's economic growth averaged 10.5% per year between 2005 and 2007. In comparison, in late 2021 and right before the 2022 invasion, Ukrainian GDP expanded 5.9% year-on-year in the fourth quarter of 2021, up from 2.7% the previous quarter".[5] What's curious is that both states' economies were on the rise right before their respective invasions. Thus, it seems as though Russia was attempting to prevent Georgia and Ukraine's chance of providing their prosperity and opportunity to their people outside of the Russian alliance system, which in turn could also potentially surpass what Russia can offer its own people as well.

On the one hand, Georgia and Ukraine were constituent states of the Soviet Union. Both have had a tense relationship with their **minority groups** which have most of the time been backed up by Russian forces. While it is true that Vladimir

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[5] Natia Gamkrelidze and Tinatin Japaridze, "The Limits of the Georgia Prism in Ukraine," Middle East Institute, March 2, 2022, https://www.mei.edu/publications/limits-georgia-prism-ukraine.

Putin and the Kremlin undoubtedly have greatly profited off the tensions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it is unwise to assume that it was their creation. The situation of the Ossetians and Abkhaz minorities would be more comparable as a regional conflict with that of Transnistria, a shallow body of land that is run by Moscow-loyal separatists whilst remaining officially a part of Moldova, whereas the same cannot be said about Ukraine's geopolitical confrontations, as well as its status in the USSR and Cold War period.

But on the other hand, given Ukraine's status of having reached a cornerstone in the USSR, it couldn't hold the same faith as Georgia. It held high importance in its population and agricultural production numbers, defense industries, military (here including the Black Sea Fleet) as well as being home to a portion of the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Georgia is primarily recognized as being among one of the first Soviet republics to vow for its independence from the Union since 1989, which has solely grown throughout the successive years up until the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Seeking the opportunity, Ukraine, the once vital **geopolitical flashpoint** of the union sought a similar opportunity by distancing itself as well in 1991, which proved to be a coup de grâce for the ailing superpower.[6] However, a point of equilibrium would prove to be a tricky goal to achieve for the two emerging states, still holding deep historical and cultural ties to Russia, in its territory, and minorities respectively.

The autonomous regions of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia **(see Fig.No.2)** have held a special status ever since Georgia had been annexed to the Soviet Union

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[6] Jonathan Masters, *"Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia | Council ..,"* Council on Foreign Relations. October 11, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia.

in 1921. There is much controversy about the arrival of the Ossetian minority in the Transcaucasia region, where these ethnic conflicts seem to be part of Stalin's legacy. Arbitrary boundaries and forced repatriation are two of the causes behind the constant conflicts in the former Soviet Union.[7]

While at first the newly arrived community integrated quickly and lived peacefully with the locals, the rise of nationalism, because of a new international policy established after the First World War, led to numerous conflicts between the two communities. The situation was repeated in much the same way in Abkhazia. The Soviet invasion in 1921 meant the end of the conflict for Georgia for a time, with Ossetia and Abkhazia acquiring the status of an **autonomous region** (oblast) within the USSR. The status is seen as a reward for the collaboration with the Soviet authorities, supported by the two communities. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1992, additional conflicts arose in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia. With the help of certain Russian military divisions and the Confederation of the Peoples of Northern Caucasus, they defeated Georgian forces and became *de facto* independent. Yet since then, neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia has gained international recognition for their independence.[8] Georgia has maintained a truce with the two breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which *de facto* maintained their independence with Russian military support. Tensions rose once more in 2008 when Georgia expressed interest in joining NATO.

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[7] Shaun Walkers, "Ethnic Tensions: War in the Caucasus Is Stalin's Legacy," independent. August 17, 2008, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ethnic-tensions-war-in-the-caucasus-is-stalin-s-legacy-899615.html.

[8] "Government of Georgia: About Georgia". gov.ge. Archived from the original on 21 August 2016. https://web.archive.org/web/20160821030240/http://gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=193

When Russia sent additional forces to Abkhazia, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili denounced an attempt to annex the enclave. After months of escalations and skirmishes, the situation exploded into a full-scale war. Tbilisi said Russian troops seized South Ossetia before the army began an assault aimed at regaining control of the region, but Moscow has accused Georgia of opening fire first.

Nowadays, Russia and Ukraine are also taking different positions in two separatist regions, Donetsk and Luhansk. The two have remained in a state of frozen conflict since 2014, when, after overthrowing the pro-Russian president Viktor Ianukovic from Kyiv, these regions have been backed up by separatist pro-Russian forces. Moscow, however, has repeatedly denied supporting these rebels.

Donbas has been the witness of several migration waves. In the beginning, it was Catherine the Great who sent to the newly conquered lands Christians from the Ottoman Empire, Greece, and Serbia, as well as from her native country, Germany, settlers who were invited with the promise of obtaining a patch of land. With the turn of the 20th century, the poorest and most reckless from all over the empire arrived in Donbas in staggering numbers, during the Russian Empire's fairly short industrial revolution. The natural resources of coal fields, seaports, and railway systems had suddenly become a valuable source of exploitation. Albeit rich in said sources, the population suffered due to terrible working conditions and livelihood, the Donbas population also being affected by its constant migration and high mortality rate. During the Second World War, the next wave of migration consisting of the communist youth and political prisoners had settled in, with the intention to rebuild the region's industry which was in shambles. "And then there were the blooming 1960s and 1970s when youth from the entire Soviet Union

rushed to Donbas for jobs in coal mining, one of the most prestigious industries during Soviet rule."[9]

Back in 2008, when Putin was Vice-President and held a meeting with former US President George W. Bush, he declared that Ukraine didn't even have the status of a state. He would later go on to show signs of fretfulness. "What about Ukraine? Part of its territory is Eastern Europe and the other noteworthy part was given to it by us! You have to tell me what Ukraine is because I don't know. Ukraine is nothing."[10]

After this public scene, Putin would later go on to apologize for raising his voice. Afterwards, he made the hypothetical claim that if Ukraine were to be accepted into NATO, it would immediately cease to exist simply as a state, further adding that in such a case Russia would immediately start annexing Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which would eventually materialize later in 2014 and 2022.

Inside Putin's head.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to launch an all-out invasion of Ukraine took the world by storm, but this was an event that was long in the making. His longer-term motivations for invading Ukraine are much more

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[9] Alina Smutko, "The 'Russian Minority in Donbas' and the History of the Majority," IWM WEBSITE, n.d., https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-russian-minority-in-donbas-and-the-history-of-the-majority.

[10] Daniel Contescu, *"În 2008, Putin Ar Fi Strigat La Bush: „Ucraina Nu Este Un Stat, Este nimic!,*Mediafax. March 24, 2022, https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/in-2008-putin-ar-fi-strigat-la-bush-ucraina-nu-este-un-stat-este-nimic-20665614.

important for our purposes than the acts and events that eventually led him to give the order for this "special military operation." The main ideologists behind his point of view are Vladislav Surkov, **Ivan Ilyin**, and Alexandr Dugin.

However, throughout his career and even in his latest speech, Putin has shown his interest once more in following the ideology of the fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin. This has been backed up by other scholars as well, primarily Timothy Snyder, a well-respected historian who has conducted considerable research and writings on the theme of fascism and has undisputedly been fascinated by the leadership of Putin to understand his ideology by thoroughly analyzing his speeches and political tactics, and who his mentors are respectively.

Thus, Ivan Ilyin is crucial in understanding the core concept after which President Putin guides his autocracy. For starters, according to Ilyin's writings, any mention of Ukrainians or Georgians, or other nationalities of the Russian Empire was put into quotes, since he believed that these were only **sub-nationalities** or parts without any true difference to the larger Russian body National. Any mention of Ukraine as a separate national or cultural construct of identity that could act independently of Russia was to be seen as treason against Russia and severely punished.

Secondly, in his essay entitled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" Putin vowed for a mythological approach that matches with Ilyin's perspective of the **"cell and body"** when highlighting the equality of the Ukrainians and Russians on a "spiritual, human and civilizational" level that makes them all together "one people". In his perspective, Ukraine is inseparable

from Russia and exemplifies Ilyin's lust for unity and totality.[11] The "sin" that Ukraine must be severely punished for at this moment is its aspiration for "Westernization", by establishing democracy and joining NATO, comprising in a nutshell "God's sin" as perceived by both Putin and Ilyin.

Western stance on Georgia vs Ukraine

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War had erupted at the start of the **Beijing Summer Olympics**, much to the dismay of Chinese officials, a state with which Russia holds powerful financial ties in a common effort to build an alliance against the United States. This was also used as a tactic to divert attention from the ongoing turmoil and advancement of the Russian troops within the separatist regions of Georgia. To avoid upsetting China once more, Putin has this time waited until after the Winter Games' closing ceremony, also held in Beijing, before striking again in Ukraine. Putin's move signaled an eerie déjà vu for Georgians still reeling from their country's bruising defeat at the hands of Russia.[12]

Before Washington D.C. said on the 14th of august 2008 that Russian troops were showing signs of withdrawal, the Georgian territory continued to be the scene of brutal destruction carried out by Moscow-led forces. In at least three Georgian cities, including Gori and the port of Poti, Russian occupiers, equipped with tanks and armored vehicles, blew up various targets. Uniforms and military

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[11] Hampton Terrell, "How Understanding Philosopher Ivan Ilyin…" Du Clarion. April 19, 2022, https://duclarion.com/2022/04/how-understanding-philosopher-ivan-ilyin-can-give-insight-into-vladimir-putin/.

[12] Benjamin Dodman, "Moldova, Then Georgia, Now Ukraine: How Russia Built, " France24. February 22, 2022, https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220222-moldova-then-georgia-now-ukraine-how-russia-built-bridgeheads-into-post-soviet-space.

insignia were also looted from Georgian barracks, probably for future sabotage or diversionary operations. Moscow said the six-point peace plan negotiated under the EU presidency would allow it to adopt additional security measures pending the deployment of international observers to the region.

The Kremlin seemed determined to defy the West in general, and the US in particular, to suggest to the westward-looking former Soviet republics that they cannot rely on support from the West. This was partly achieved by the staging in Moscow of the two separatist leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia's apparent ignoring of Ukraine's decision to force the Russian fleet in Crimea to seek authorization for their operations before launching them has also served the same purpose. Finally, increasingly insistent calls for peace and pro-Georgian statements by US officials have been met with some of the most acid retorts from Moscow.

The Russo-Georgian War of 2008 raised serious questions regarding the reliability of political blocks such as **European security**, only further exacerbated by the lack of sanctions which were mere and inefficient accusations said at the conference room exchanged between US spokeswoman Condoleezza Rice and Russian diplomatic chief Lavrov. The inability of the US and the EU to offer any resilience in face of the aggressor later left Putin with a mindset of the feebleness of the blocks. Thus, this war and its aftermath showed the effects of incoherent policymaking, enfeebled political will, and disunity in the Western alliance. For Washington, it also represented a harvest of a misconceived policy towards

Georgia that lost control over Georgian policy and may have contributed to Tbilisi's recklessness.[13]

The primary stakeholders in the Russo-Georgian War were the United States of America, NATO, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and Russia. A Joint Control Commission **(JCC)** and the Joint Peacekeeping Forces group were established by the OSCE in search of a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were supported by Russia. The international reaction to Russia's military campaign in Georgia was to prove remarkably muted, with Moscow suffering few negative consequences. On the contrary, EU leaders led calls for a ceasefire that appeared to favor Russian interests, while the US under the new Obama administration was soon calling for a reset in relations with the Kremlin. Understandably, many in Moscow interpreted this accommodating approach as an informal invitation for further acts of aggression in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. As a result, there were no sanctions against Russia at the time.

Georgia is thought to be greatly disadvantaged by its geopolitical location; a post-Soviet legacy in the South Caucasus region tailored by the various interests that other countries pursue in the region, some being more powerful external players with different agendas than the others such as Russia, the EU, Turkey, US, China, Central Asia - particularly Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and finally Iran,[14] all these international actors follow a tendency of imposing their power on

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[13] Stephen Blank, "America and the Russo-Georgian War," Small Wars & Insurgencies 20, no. 2 (July 24, 2009): 425-451, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310902975547.

[14] Christine Karelska, "Georgia's Balancing Act Between Russia and the West," Visegrad Hindsight. November 24, 2022, https://visegradinsight.eu/georgias-balancing-act-between-russia-and-the-west/.

the entire region and assert their own rules, thus further blocking Georgia's foreign policy room for maneuver.

Despite its regional differences and resilience with the other states, as well as its economic dependence on Russia, Georgia tries to maintain a point of balance with the EU and NATO. In fact, Georgia was considered to be on top of the list of the Eastern Partnership initiative alongside Ukraine and Moldova, together comprising the **Association Trio**. Furthermore, the state is constantly working on strengthening its strategic cooperation with the two political blocs to the next possible extent, striving for a "reliable partner" status, as well as a contributor to the order of international security, whilst treading carefully not to land in scalding waters with Moscow. However, despite its best efforts, Georgia has suffered a serious blow to its status, and the morale of its nation respectively when its candidacy status to the EU was rejected alongside the promise of embracing the European Perspective and continues to walk an unpaved and yet unknown road.

In the case of Ukraine, it is viewed as a key partner in the Euro-Atlantic region because it is a cornerstone for security, democracy, and human rights in the region. This is further supported by the fact that the War in Ukraine has plunged the EU into economic shock; the third after the "2008 financial and economic crisis, the following Eurozone crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic."[15] As a countermeasure to this, the EU has stepped up its capacity by showing solidarity with the affected state. On their behalf, states such as Germany have begun to take significant measures to invest "€100 billion additional defense spending in 2022

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[15] Josep Borrell, "The War in Ukraine and Its Implications for the EU | EEAS Website," European Union External Action. March 14, 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/war-ukraine-and-its-implications-eu_en.

and an increase of the defense budget to above 2 % of GDP from 2024." According to Josep Borell, Vice-President of the EU Commission, the return of war to European soil implies that all European members are required to contribute more actively to taking responsibility for their security, whilst following frameworks that are in full complementarity with NATO.

Furthermore, NATO has developed a network of structured partnerships with countries from the Euro-Atlantic area, the Mediterranean, and others to incorporate Ukraine fully into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Canada is also committed to using its international assistance to support Ukraine's goals for greater Euro-Atlantic integration. Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine have also seriously undermined Euro-Atlantic security, making Ukraine a key partner in the region. The US, NATO, and EU have all expressed strong support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and have implemented several measures to help Ukraine defend itself from Russia's aggression. The US and EU have imposed sanctions on Russia, while NATO has increased its presence in the Black Sea and has provided Ukraine with a **Comprehensive Assistance Package**. This package includes support for capability development and capacity-building, as well as financial and political assistance. Additionally, NATO has condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing activities in eastern Ukraine and has called on Russia to immediately stop the war and withdraw its forces from Ukraine. The US, NATO, and EU have all made it clear that they are firmly committed to supporting Ukraine's independence and securing its future.

Was Georgia used as inspiration for Putin's playbook in Ukraine?

We can conclude that Georgia did serve as a major influence in Putin's "special military operation" carried out in Ukraine. In 2008, the Kremlin used Georgia as a testing ground for its strategy of hybrid warfare, utilizing both conventional military and non-conventional tactics such as disinformation campaigns and economic sanctions to achieve its objectives. The Georgian war has also allowed Moscow to gain control over two separatist enclaves, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, which it has since recognized as independent states.

In the case of Ukraine, the Kremlin has already applied the same tactics as in Georgia, such as the use of disinformation campaigns to discredit the Ukrainian government and the deployment of military forces along its borders. Moscow has also issued passports to citizens of occupied eastern Ukraine and has recognized the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, two separatist entities established in 2014. Furthermore, the Russian military has conducted exercises in Belarus and falsely announced partial troop withdrawals to give the illusion of de-escalation. All these tactics are eerily similar to those used in Georgia in 2008.

What remains in store for the future?

We cannot state for certain if Russia's victory in Ukraine is a plausible scenario, however, it is difficult to project at this moment in time the outcome of the confrontation. It is common knowledge that the war has been a tragedy for Ukraine and Ukrainians, however, it has also been a losing campaign for Russia which has debuted with a major backlash and one which I strongly believe will be

a major key point for the uphold of its progress; the outdated and failing Soviet conscription.

Military service is compulsory for men ages 18 to 27 in Russia, however, the majority is comprised of groups of youths with little to no experience in combat. Conscription has always been mandatory in Russia, since 1918, however, it is largely viewed by the public with disdain, being "closely linked to numerous exposés about the endemic abuses in the armed forces",[16] as well as finding judicial loopholes in the system to avoid the military service altogether. Thus, the more fitting, healthy, and educated young men successfully get away, whilst recruitment officials are oftentimes left to choose conscripts from youths with low education levels, as well as severe health issues. To add salt to injury, as of the 5th of November, President Putin signed a decree in which convicts of crimes such as drug trafficking and homicide were immobilized in the Russian army.

For a quick comparison, in 2008 the Russian military topped off as successful in the confrontation, due to a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic strikes that quickly overwhelmed the Georgian army and government. Moreover, it seems that Russia was well-prepared for the war and had practiced for it for several years prior to the hostilities. Thus, it was able to effectively move troops to the battlefield and effectively utilize its air power, whereas, for the Georgian part, the war revealed major deficiencies in its army, including a lack of coordination between the different services and poor intelligence.

This time around in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war, the same cannot be said about Russia's swift tactics. According to an article from the New York Times

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[16] "Conscription Through Detention IN RUSSIA," Human Rights Watch. 2002, https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/russia/russia1102-01.htm.

gathered from interviews, intercepts, documents, and secret battle plans, the issues start from the poor equipment that the soldiers use to initiate their campaign: instructions read from Wikipedia for weapons that they hold minimum knowledge of using **(see Fig.No.3)**. outdated maps of Ukraine from around the 1960s, sometimes recovered from the battlefield, other times scouting with no maps at all **(see Fig.No.4)**. Poor battle tactics such as open use of cellphone lines give away their positions, whilst military training takes place in dilapidated Russian bases "hollowed out by corruption."[17] **(see Fig.No.5)**.

  If Russia were to prevail in Ukraine, it would lead to broader Russian claims and demands to rewrite the European security order following its interests. There would also be consequences for U.S.-Russian relations, with any near-term restoration of normalcy between the two countries becoming difficult, if not impossible.

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[17] Michael Schwirtz et al., "Putin's War: The inside Story of a Catastrophe," The New York Times (The New York Times, December 17, 2022), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/12/16/world/europe/russia-putin-war-failures-ukraine.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=styln-russia-ukraine&variant=show&region=BELOW_MAIN_CONTENT&block=storyline_flex_guide_recirc.
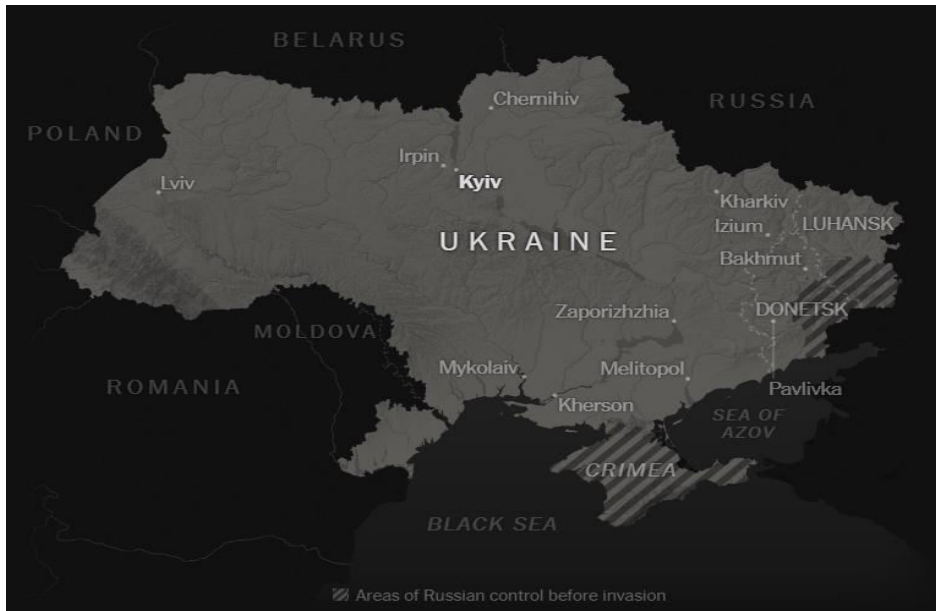
Fig. No.1

Figure II. Georgia

Sources: Map created by CRS. Map information generated using data from the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (2018), DeLorme (2018), Department of State (2017), and Esri (2017).

Fig. No.3

Fig. No.4
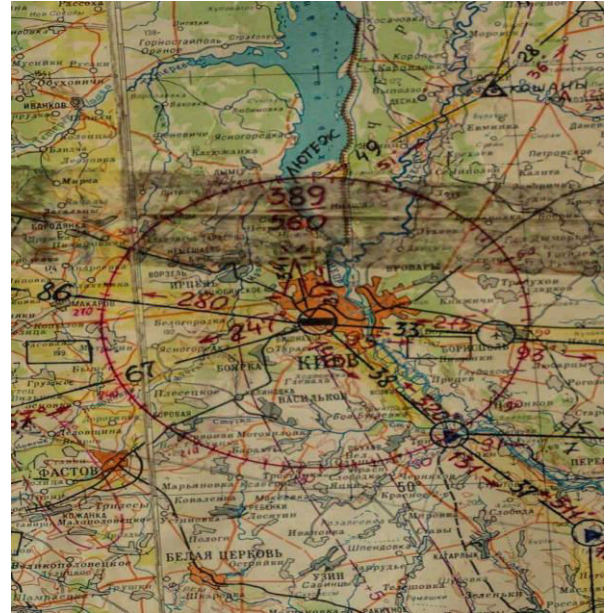
Fig. No.5

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Digital security- emphasizing the need for a new comprehensive theoretical approach of cybernetic security due to society's digitalization. Glimpses of digitalization in the Black Sea Region

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Keywords: Digital Security, Digitalization of Society, (Social) Internet of Things, Metaverse, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity

Abstract: *As development of information and communications technologies rapidly advances within nations, it is the responsibility of society's key stakeholders – business specialists, non-governmental organizations, researchers, academics and policymakers, to provide specialized in-depth awareness in regards to security related issues. In order to achieve knowledge on technological challenges and build tailor-made public policies, society's key stakeholders ought to tackle the impact of digitalization. Nations need to become aware that the process entails the whole of society. As the digital evolution and revolution emerge and expand become synonymous not only to economic proficiency but to digital disruption as well. We can agree that the evolution of Artificial Intelligence, (Social) Internet of Things, Metaverse, Digital Twins, Human Robots, Virtual Influencers, etc. provides opportunities and challenges to societies that we have*

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never faced before in human history. Given these circumstances, does cybersecurity fully encompass the digital changes and disruption or do we need to further expand our research on digital security?

1. ***Digitalization of societies as a primordial feature of the digital age***

Can societies be digitalized? Not only that our answer is affirmative, but digital integration is a current reality and a global trend (see *Figure no. 1 – Digitalization in the Black Sea Region*).

The concept of "*digitalization of society*" was first used by Robert Wachal in 1971, in an essay published in the "North American Review" magazine (Brennen and Kreiss, "*Digitization and Digitalization*", 2014), to describe the debate on the social implications of the use of information technology in the context of objections that were taking shape at the level of American society regarding the development of research activities in human activities assisted by computers.

Obviously, despite the opponents, the development of information and communication technology (IT&C) systems has evolved from 1971 to the present day, but together with this evolution, the debate within societies regarding digitalization has persisted and even intensified, a debate to which we do propose to contribute constructively.

	Country Score	Broadband	Cloud	AI	IOT	Experience	Potential
Bulgaria	52	65	36	24	27	60	40
Romania	50	69	39	24	30	64	43
Russia	50	72	36	27	33	63	42
Ukraine	43	51	33	24	30	59	37
Turkiye	46	60	36	24	27	63	39
World Average	60	62	42	30	40	61	50
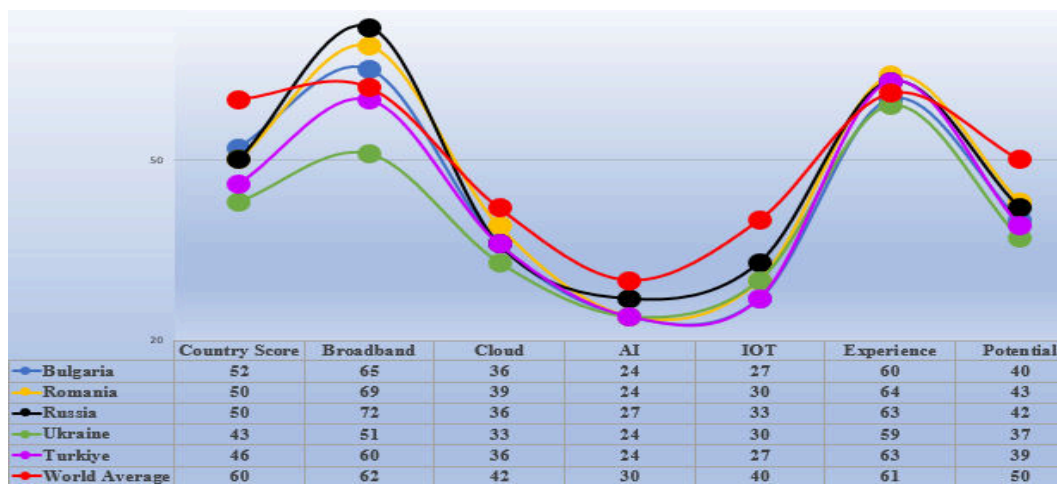
Figure no. 1 – Digitalization in the Black Sea Region [3]

From a technical point of view, *IT&C designates the technology that underlies the process of development, maintenance and use of computer systems, software applications and computer networks for the processing and distribution of digital data* (Merriam-Webster, "*Definition of information technology*").

Thus, we note that the term IT&C includes both computer and telecommunications technology (Castagna and Bigelow, "Information Technology", 2021), and the main fields are represented by:

1. *Implementation* and *maintenance* of applications, services and digital infrastructure (servers, networks, external storage capacities);

2. *Monitoring*, *optimizing* and *troubleshooting* the performance of applications, services and infrastructure; as well as

3. *Cyber security* oversight and governance of applications, services and infrastructure.

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[3] Figure data are based on *2020 Global Connectivity Index* calculated by Huawei Technologies on a sepctrum of 40 indicators. Huawei analized 79 countries (Georgia and Moldova not included) and the potential maximum score for each indicator is 120. GCI Source: https://www.huawei.com/minisite/gci/en/country-profile.html

Consequently, in our consideration, *IT&C represents those physical devices endowed with software programs that have computing, storage and networking capabilities; as well as the infrastructure and processes for creating, processing, storing, securing and exchanging all forms of electronic data* (see *Figure 2 – Information Technology Components and Functions*).

However, precisely to eliminate possible confusion, we propose to clarify the semantic difference between the terms *digitization* and *digitalization*, sometimes treated similarly in the specialized literature.

Thus, *digitization* is the process by which data and information in physical or analog format are transformed into data and information in digital format (TruQC LLC, "*Digitization vs. digitalization: Differences, definitions and examples*").

Practically, *digitization is a transformational process of the form in which the data and information present themselves in the physical space to the cybernetic space*. As a simple example, digitization is the translation of a physical document into an electronic document through the process of photography.

Information technology components and functions

Figure no. 2 – The components and functions of information technology[4]

On the other hand, *digitalization* is a much more complex process than digitization, and from a certain perspective of interpretation, *digitalization includes digitization*, the latter representing a first phase of digitalization, of collecting information.

Digitalization includes, but is not limited to, both *digitization* and the *IT&C processes* described above, precisely because it is a process that involves human activity.

Therefore, although there is a diverse variety of definitions of *digitalization* (Reis, "*Digitalization: A Literature Review and Research Agenda*", 447-448), we note that *digitalization is a process of using digital technologies to change the economic model of an organization in order to capitalize on opportunities to generate new monetary income and increase added value* (Gartner Glossary, "*Information Technology*").

Thus, we draw attention to the fact that *digitalization* is the most important current trend of change for both societies and businesses, in the context in which organizations - regardless of their type - are under constant pressure to use digital technologies and adapt models and operating strategies to this new reality.

Through *digitalization*, industrial societies are rapidly transforming into informational societies on a global level.

However, even if we agree that *digitalization* has mainly an economic influence, we cannot help but notice that such an approach is limiting, precisely because the impact of *digitalization* is exhaustive and holistic, with reverberations throughout the whole of society and all its domains – military, political,

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[4] Source: Castagna and Bigelow, "Information Technology", 2021

economic, social and environmental (Mândraș, "*Security's Multidimensionality. Societal Security in the Age of Information Technology*", 78-95).

From a scientific perspective, the debate on the understanding of the concept of *digitalization* is still far from being completed, but its effects on societies are increasingly visible, noting the intensification of digitalization not only at the level of private entities but also at the government level, which increasingly integrates information technologies in its own mode of operation for the performance of public activities (Reis, "*Digitalization: A Literature Review and Research Agenda*", 443-456).

Considering these aspects, we feel obliged to criticize the approach to the digitalization of societies strictly from the point of view of economic influence, meaning for which we propose a comprehensive approach, taking into account the fact that these *new types of information technologies generate new types of human interactions at all levels of societies* – macro, micro and nano

Therefore, in our opinion, *digitalization of societies is a societal process through which digital technologies modify, transform, disrupt or destroy processes, the models and strategies of individuals and social groups, in all their fields – military, political, social and environmental, in order to capitalize on the opportunities to make all human activities more efficient*.

2. ***Digital evolution and societal revolution. Digital space and disruptive technologies***

The development of digital technologies is closely related to the invention of cyber information, the Internet, artificial intelligence and process automation, bio-materials, and so on. Cumulatively, these technologies have generated new

innovative mechanisms for reconfiguring and streamlining the systems of production of goods and delivery of services, mainly for economic purposes.

Information technologies not only make the goods-producing industry more efficient but also generate new types of industries that offer economic services without owning industrial production capabilities.

Thus, the global economic market has come to be dominated by *digital companies* (see Kabra, "Top 20 Biggest Tech Companies in The World in 2022"), among which stand out digital unicorns, which have a cumulative market value of approximately 3.857 billion USD. Individually, digital unicorns have a market value of at least one billion USD, sometimes more than the GDP of entire countries (CBINSIGHTS, "The Complete List of Unicorn Companies", 2022).

Such a value of *digital companies* is not strictly limited to economic power, but sometimes even to the *social influence power* that such companies possess.

Cumulatively, these new economic models stimulated by digitalization, impose not only changes in industrial processes, through the gradual elimination of human labor at the expense of automated and/or robotic labor but also behavioral changes of people and the organizations they belong to, regardless of the type of these organizations.

Consequently, the societal changes produced by digitalization are generated by two distinct elements, which act synergistically at the level of individuals and societies, respectively:

A. The emergence of a new space for human activities – the *digital space*;

B. Development of *disruptive digital technologies*.

2.1. Digital space as a new dimension of human activities in cyberspace

Perhaps one of the current confusions among specialists and the general public is given by the differentiation between physical, cyber (virtual), and digital space.

From a military perspective, *cyberspace* represents a *global domain* composed of the interconnection of all IT&C, networks, and digital data, including independent and isolated ones that process, store, or transmit data, being assimilated in importance to other operational environments in which military actions take place - land, naval, air and space (NATO Standardization Office, "Allied Joint Publication-3.20 (AJP-3.20)", 2020, 4).

In terms of cyberspace components, NATO identifies 3, respectively: *physical* – which includes the physical components (digital devices), located in a delimited geographical space; *logical* – which includes software elements and digital data; and *cyber-persona* – which consists of virtual representations of the identity of physical and real persons or institutions.

However, we allow ourselves to note that this last component of cyberspace, the *cyber-persona*, even if it can exist independently, without being correlated with the physical and real person or organization with which it is associated, it can only operate in cyberspace in close correlation with its physical and real counterpart. By operating in cyberspace, we mean the actions, activities, or behaviors performed by the individual or organization in this virtual space.

Precisely for these reasons, we consider that *cyberspace is not confused with digital space*. Thus, if *cyberspace (virtual) is represented by IT&C components* (devices, software, and digital data), *digital space is represented by human actions, activities, and behaviors, at an individual or organizational level, within cyberspace, with repercussions both in the space cyber as well as in real space.*

Moreover, the 3 types of spaces are not only interdependent, but human or automated operations in cyberspace produce effects in physical space in 3 interdependent dimensions, and we consider these dimensions to be: physical, informational, and bio-psycho-social (see *Figure no. 3 – Digital inter-relationships*) and not *physical*, *informational* and *cognitive* (*idem*, 1).

Regarding the *physical dimension*, this includes all IT&C devices located in the physical space that process digital information, regardless of whether they work independently or in a network, with or without an Internet connection.

The *informational dimension*, dubbed by some specialists the *informational environment* (Kuehl, "From Cyberspace to Cyberpower: Defining the Problem", *apud*. Schreier, "On Cyberwarfare", 2015, 11), includes the *virtual information contained in the systems arranged in the physical space, which can be subjected to processes of dissemination, processing, storage, exploitation, transformation, manipulation, extraction, destruction*, etc.

Regarding the *bio-psycho-social dimension*, we argue that *physical entities –* persons or organizations, *act on and operate with digital information, and the result of these processes produce societal effects at the biological, psychological, and sociological levels*[5] and not only at the human cognitive level.

As a consequence, human digital inter-relationship does not occur exclusively at a cognitive level, but at a higher, three-dimensional level. Respectively, at the biological level, when *digitalization affects the biological and*

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[5] Cognitive processes (sensations, perceptions, representations, thinking, memory, imagination and language), together with affective processes (emotions, feelings and passions), regulatory (will and motivation), and conditional (attention and skills), form the totality of psychic processes. The latter, together with mental activities (play, learning, work, creation and communication) and mental attributes (temperament, skills and character), are integrated into what psychology calls the human psychic system.

informational system of living beings; psychologically, when *digitalization affects individual virtual relationships and behaviors*, and *sociologically*, when *digitalization affects virtual relationships and behaviors between at least two virtually represented physical entities*.

All these dimensions, bio-psycho-social, have physical effects at the individual and societal level, by affecting human behaviors and, directly or indirectly, by influencing the identity and culture of societies.

Intrinsically, we consider that *the main characteristic of the digital space is its duality*, it is at the same time a physical–cybernetic network of digital information exchange, as well as a global phenomenon of influencing people and societies, which is constantly expanding, specifically due to the development of virtual social networks.
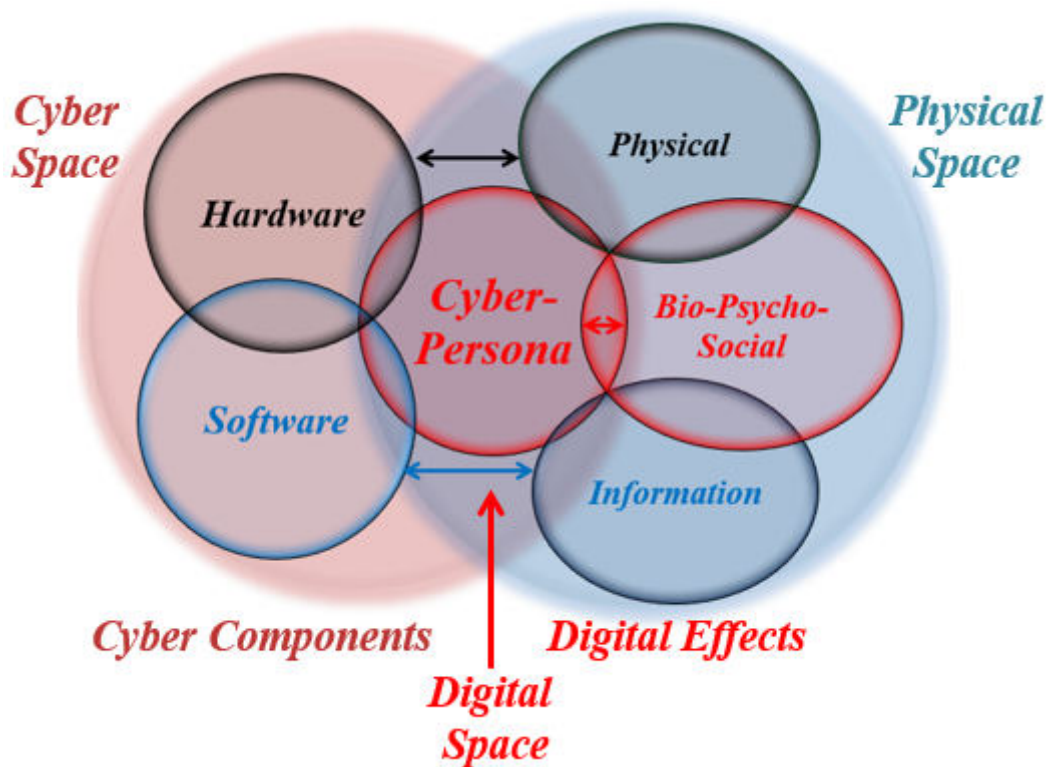
Figure no. 3 – Digital inter-relationships

Through human action in cyberspace, digital space represents a virtual domain where people discover information, educate themselves, work, socialize and, last but not least, play and have fun (Le Merle, and Davis, "Corporate Innovation in the fifth era. Lessons from Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Apple, Facebook and Microsoft", 2017, 42).

Moreover, from a societal perspective, the digital relationships between physical entities are identical to the relationships in the physical space and are of three main types, namely *cooperation*, *neutral*, or *confrontational*.

2.2. Disruptive digital technologies – Internet, Internet of Things, Social Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence with Machine Learning capability,

Robotics, Metaverse, Digital Twins, Digital and Virtual Influencers, and Humans 2.0

Included in the category of general-purpose technologies (DPTs) (Azhar, "EXPONENTIAL. How Accelerating Technology Is Leaving Us Behind and What to Do About It", 2021, 43 and following), the Internet was developed in the 1960s by the US in the form of small digital communication networks between several government computers, with the main objective of creating a structure that would ensure the integrity and transfer of information, resistant to potential nuclear attacks by the USSR.

Afterward, the Internet developed progressively in two relatively distinct stages. The first stage took place in the 1990s when the Internet was "democratized", being practically made available to the general public and gradually transformed into a global public network in exponential growth due to the popularization of personal computers.

A second stage in the development of the Internet was generated by the rapid development of smartphone-type mobile phones with Internet connection capabilities, which enabled the amazing development of the mobility of digital connectivity.

Currently, the Internet is a global network of human interconnectivity, and at the beginning of 2022 (Kemp, "Digital 2022: Global Overview Report", 2022), out of a total global population of 7.91 billion, 5.31 billion (67.1%) people are mobile phone users, 4.95 billion (62.5%) are internet users, and 4.62 billion (58.4%) are active users of some social networks (see *Figure no. 4 – Digital space in the Black Sea Region*).

Considered the 3rd wave of Internet development, the *Internet of Things* (IoT) is another type of technology that has the potential to affect all human activities (Tripathy, and Anuradha (ed.), "Internet of Things (IoT): Technologies, Applications, Challenges and Solutions", 2018, p. ix).

Basically, *IoT means the ability of physical devices and people to be permanently interconnected through the Internet*, which causes the emergence of new types of digital ecosystems capable of increased productivity, increased energy efficiency, as well as increased economic profitability, in almost all fields of human activities (see *Figure no 5 - Applications of digital technologies*).

The name "IoT" was proposed for the first time by the British Kevin Ashton in 1999, and the specific difference of IoT from the Internet is given by the fact that digital devices not only have the possibility to collect electronic information from the physical and virtual environment, but essentially, IoT has the ability to analyze this information, make decisions without human intervention and learn from accumulated experience (McAfee, and Brynjolfsson, "Machine, platform. Crowd: Harnessing our Digital Future", 2017 *apud.* Dufva, and Dufva, "Grasping the future of the digital society", 2019, 17).

Complementary to IoT, as its particular form, *Social Internet of Things* (SIoT) describes the symbiosis between human social networks and IoT, in the sense that *digital objects form their own social networks* and, despite constructive particularities, manage to communicate and relate autonomously through the Internet, without direct human intervention (Lee et al., "How and what to study about IoT: Research trends and future directions from the perspective of social science", 2017, pp. 1056-1067 *apud.* Rad et al., "Social Internet of Things: vision, challenges, and trends", 2020). The end result is social networks of digital objects

of different complexities that relate based on common interests in order to provide improved services to end users (Rad et al., "Social Internet of Things: vision, challenges, and trends", 2020).

	Urbanisation %	GDP per Capita	Internet users %	Social Media Users %	Facebook Users %	Mobile Connections %
Bulgaria	76.4	26.705	78	64.8	52.4	134.5
Georgia	60.3	16.997	72.5	84.3	67.9	144.1
Moldova	43.2	15.637	76.1	46.5	32.3	110.5
Romania	54.6	35.414	88	69.7	51.9	143.7
Russia	75.2	32.803	89	72.7	5.9	155.8
Ukraine	70	14.219	71.8	64.6	35.7	144.6
Turkiye	77	30.472	82	80.8	40.3	91.4
World Average	57	18.721	62.5	58.4	36.8	67.1
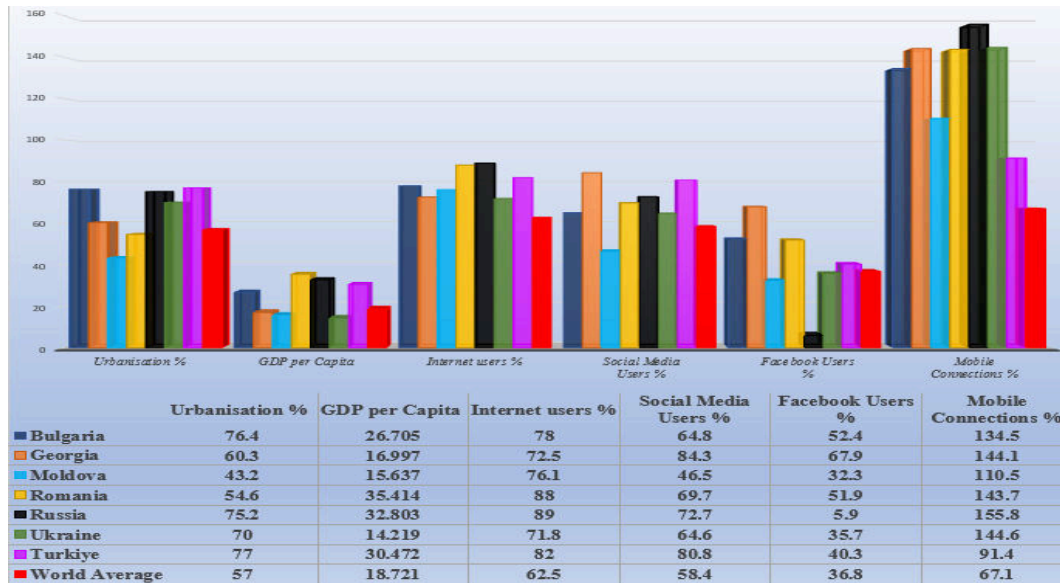
Figure no. 4 – Digital space in the Black Sea Region[6]

Through SIoT, digital devices imitate the human way of relating in order to communicate and select "friends" to provide increased performances of the services offered. The effects of increased performances occur at different levels, including the level of interactions between people and objects.

Precisely as a consequence of the "socializing" characteristic, digital objects within SIoT become more performing than digital objects that act in a unitary

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[6] *GDP per Capita* is expressed in USD. Source of data: The World Bank Group, „GDP per capita, PPP (current international $)".
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?name_desc=false&view=chart. *Urbanisation*, *Internet Users*, *Social Media Users*, *Facebook Users*, and *Mobile Connections* is expressed as a percentage of total population. Source of data: Kemp, „Digital 2022: Global Overview Report". https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report

way, mainly due to the quality and quantity of information that they exchange with the other SIoT member objects.

Human intervention within the SIoT is decisive precisely by owning the function of *owner control* (Rad et al., "Social Internet of Things: vision, challenges, and trends") a function exercised by assigning to the network a set of rules to control the behavior of objects in the network and the way of communication between objects.

From a technical point of view, the functioning of physical devices is based on software codes, without which digital operations cannot be carried out. Thus, *software codes are operating programs* of these devices, which can support changes, updates, repairs, storage and analysis, without direct intervention on the objects that include them.

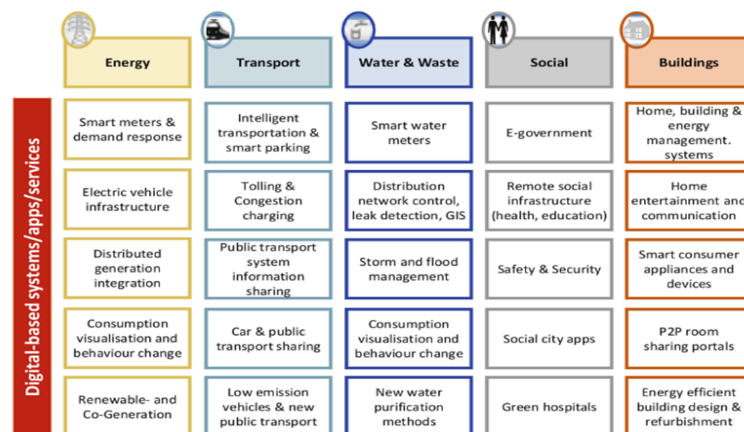|	Energy	Transport	Water & Waste	Social	Buildings
Digital-based systems/apps/services	Smart meters & demand response	Intelligent transportation & smart parking	Smart water meters	E-government	Home, building & energy management. systems
	Electric vehicle infrastructure	Tolling & Congestion charging	Distribution network control, leak detection, GIS	Remote social infrastructure (health, education)	Home entertainment and communication
	Distributed generation integration	Public transport system information sharing	Storm and flood management	Safety & Security	Smart consumer appliances and devices
	Consumption visualisation and behaviour change	Car & public transport sharing	Consumption visualisation and behaviour change	Social city apps	P2P room sharing portals
	Renewable- and Co-Generation	Low emission vehicles & new public transport	New water purification methods	Green hospitals	Energy efficient building design & refurbishment

Figure no. 5 – Applications of digital technologies [7]

Obviously, the evolution of software codes has been gradual but galloping in the last decades, and from the first software with the ability to perform simple

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[7] Source: Vagadia, „Digital Disruption. Implications and opportunities for Economies, Society, Policy Makers and Business Leaders", 2020, 91.

and repetitive tasks, nowadays they have the ability to perform complex tasks, automatically and with the possibility of self-learning and improving, known as machine learning capabilities, similar to the functioning of the human psychic system.

This last category of software is represented by Artificial Intelligence (AI), a "queen" of software. Even though it is difficult to define it specifically, *AI can be characterized as an artificial decision-making system, similar to the human system, based on unique algorithms and mathematical estimations* (Siroya, and Mandot, "Role of AI in Cyber Security" in Bhargava et al. (Eds.), "Artificial Intelligence and Data Mining Approaches in Security Frameworks", 2021, 2).

According to some authors with whom we agree (Schwab, and Davis, "Shaping the future of the fourth industrial revolution. A guide to building a better world", 2018, 138), AI is already reinventing the digital economy and has the capacity to reconfigure the physical economy in the near future, by empowering autonomous devices to navigate the physical world and by owning the ability to improve and streamline both inter-relationships between people, as well as the inter-relationship between people and information devices.

The main ability of AI lies in its *cognitive capacity*, *learning*, and *reasoning*, including those based on *intuition*, which is based on a rapid pace of self-improvement and which *already clearly exceeds human cognitive capacity*.

Additionally, innovations in physical materials and endowing them with AI capabilities have developed a new industry, *robotics*.

Since 1961, when the first industrial robot was used in a factory (*ibidem*), robots have been subject to amazing developments, and nowadays we can find different types of robots with AI functions within societies, such as *industrial*

robots, *robots with the ability to fly* – drones, auto*nomous vehicles* and, last but not least, *humanoid robots*, capable of providing personal assistant services or even social assistance for people, such an example being *Sophia the Robot* (Lokhande, "Sophia and Other 11 Best Humanoid Robots of 2022").

With the improvement of AI's ability to make decisions, it is expected that the fields of applicability of AI robots will also increase. Implicitly, the influence of AI robots within societies will intensify as well, and maybe one of the most debated topics of this century will regard granting human rights to AI robots (see Marko, "Robot rights - a legal necessity or ethical absurdity?", 2019).

Moreover, AI robot's societal effects can be both beneficial – by identifying solutions to the current problems of humanity beyond the ability to human understanding, as well as harmful – especially through the development of weapon systems based on AI robots, already in the prototype stage and expected to represent 30% of the military forces of some states in the next 10 years (Pro Robots, "Top 5 Most Advanced Army Robots. Tank Robots, Robot Dogs, Unmanned Vehicles. Military Robots", 2020).

Another technology with a fast pace of development is *Metaverse*. First imagined in 1992 by science fiction author Neal Stephenspon in his short story "Snow Crash", the term *Metaverse* denotes a vision of a virtual reality in which people use their own digital avatar to explore the online world via the Internet (Huddleston Jr., "This 29-year-old book predicted the 'metaverse' — and some of Facebook's plans are eerily similar", 2021).

Even if Stephenspon imagined his Metaverse as an alternative virtual form to the dystopian physical reality, the concept was taken over by digital companies such as Meta (Meta, "Inside the Lab: Building for the Metaverse with

AI", 2022), Microsoft (Roach, "Mesh for Microsoft Teams aims to make collaboration in the 'metaverse' personal and fun", 2021), Roblox (McDonald, "Roblox's metaverse is already here, and it's wildly popular", 2021) or Epic Games (Kim, "Metaverse Is a Multitrillion-Dollar Opportunity, Epic CEO Says", 2021). Such companies are trying to develop their own digital universes, sensing both an economic opportunity in people's desire to "escape" from physical reality, but also possibilities to expand lucrative activities in the digital space.

Also called Collaborative Virtual Environments (CVEs) (Eustáquio, and Carneiro de Sousa, "Creative Collaborative Virtual Environments"), or Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS), or Cyber-Physical System Virtual Organization (CPS-VO) (Skilton, and Hovsepian, "The 4th Industrial Revolution. Responding to the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Business", 11 and following), the *Metaverse is a virtual space where people meet other people, entities or objects, in their virtual replica*, as participants and not spectators, that engage in relational and creative activities. The latter case is specific for CVEs, as it provides its users the ability to create, modify, transform and redistribute media content, such as audio-visual components or even software programming codes.

As digital systems integrating cybernetic components and human users, Metaverses are based on what the literature calls *Digital Twins* (Song et al., "Cyber-Physical Systems: Foundations, Principles and Applications" *apud.* Skilton, and Hovsepian, *idem*), namely a conjunction and coordination of physical and informational resources of virtual representation of physical and human systems. In other words, *Digital Twins are digital avatars of people, places and physical objects*.

Also, according to the most recent developments, correlated primarily with the emergence of digital communications and social networks, but also with Metaverse, the digital environment has allowed the emergence of two new categories of digital entities with the role of influencing people's behavior, attitudes and activities in the online and offline environment, respectively *Digital Influencer* and *Virtual Influencer*.

Thus, a *Digital Influencer is a real person who generates interactions in the online environment, creates content through digital communication channels and who influences the purchasing decision of the public to whom he is addressed, through the authority, knowledge or position or visibility he holds in the digital media environment* (Brandmentions, "What Is a Digital Influencer").

Though, we do not consider it appropriate to use the term Digital Influencer merely to depict it as a marketing tool used by individuals or companies to stimulate their own brands and sales (see Forbes, "Top Creators 2022"). Therefore, we expand our view and agree that a *Digital Influencer is a real person or organization who acts in the digital space as an agent of influencing social relations and behaviors, manifesting itself as a security actor as well.*

With these aspects in mind, what is a Virtual Influencer and what is the specific similarity and difference to a Digital Influencer?

To answer this question, we note both the definition according to which a *Virtual Influencer is a digital character created by means of graphic software, who has a human personality and permanently acts as an influencer on social media platforms*, and the fact that a *Virtual Influencer can have up to 3 times the target community influence rate than a Digital Influencer*, explained by the fact that it can perform all the

activities of the real version, but with *more control and involvement* (Molenaar, "Discover The Top 15 Virtual Influencers for 2022", 2021).

Thus, we consider that, like a Digital Influencer, a *Virtual Influencer is an autonomous digital medium that acts in the digital space as an agent of influencing social relations and behaviors, manifesting itself as a security actor as well.* Unlike a Digital Influencer, who is a physical person, a *Virtual Influencer is a digital "persona" with AI ability to learn and improve its interactions in the digital space with real people.*

Even if at the moment most Digital and Virtual Influencers are assimilated into Social Media Influencers, we consider that it is very likely that digital influencing activities will develop in the near future within the Internet and the Metaverse platforms as well.

In this regard, we note recent research related to creating a *digital workforce for the Metaverse*, such as *Humans OS 2.0* (Soul Machines, "How we bring Digital People to life", 2022), in the form of people's digital twins acting as autonomous animations powered by AI technologies, web services, and other digital means, and we believe that Humans OS 2.0 can also act as a Virtual Influencer.

It is a reality that the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly stimulated both digital economic activities and "work from home" activities carried out "at a distance" from the classic work locations, via the Internet. From this perspective, we can debate Bill Gates' opinion (Gates, "Reasons for optimism after a difficult year", 2021) that this global trend of online "work from home" will continue post-pandemic and that within 2-3 years most online working or social dating will move into the Metaverse, with the help of avatars and digital space.

But if the Metaverse is a form of human imagination becoming a virtual reality through digitalization, it remains to be seen what will really happen in the

medium term regarding the scale of real human activities that will cross the "border" to Metaverse.

At the moment, this new digital environment seems to be treated with humor and sarcasm, especially since Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Meta, spent over $10,000,000 to take his first digital selfie in the Metaverse (Parsons, "Mark Zuckerberg responds to everyone that mocked his metaverse selfie", 2022).

However, we consider that the prospects for Metaverse development are obvious and consistent, and from this perspective, we encourage further research of its implications on societies and security.

3. ***The digital disruption of the physical space. Assessing digital insecurity sources***

Considering the evolution of digital space and technologies, it is a logical consequence to inquire ourselves the following question: *are there sources of digital insecurity? If so, which are they?*

As we highlighted previously, *digitalization is a transformational societal process, and new types of information technologies generate new types of interactions at all levels of societies* – macro, micro, and nano, which have effects both in the cyber and real world.

Additionally, these *digital interactions modify, transform, disrupt or destroy the processes, models, and strategies of societies*, in all their fields - military, political, social, and environmental, *producing both opportunities for the development of societies, as well as risks, threats and dangers to security.*

At the same time, the inter-relationships in the cyberspace and the ever-increasing interconnectivity of the physical and virtual environments produce physical, informational, and bio-psycho-social effects in societies. By

default, digital relationships between physical entities are identical to relationships in physical space and are of three major types, namely *cooperation*, *neutral* or *confrontational*.

With these aspects in mind, we believe that *there are sources of digital insecurity that affect all three main security actors – individuals, societies, and states*. These sources of insecurity come both within the framework of confrontations in the cyber and digital space, but also as effects of cyber inter-relationships in the physical environment, in all areas of security.

Thus, as regards the sources of digital insecurity arising from the confrontation in cyberspace, they mainly affect the security of states and are presented as follows:

◎ At a *physical level*, by affecting the functioning of devices and digital networks or the flow of data between devices in the network – cyberwar and cybersecurity;

◎ At the *informational level*, through the digital influence of information, ideas and values in order to change the behavior of the population and its leaders – information warfare and digital influence;

◎ At the bio-*psycho-sociological level*, by affecting the biological information system, at the genetic or psychological level – biohacking and cyberpsychology.

From a technical point of view, the basis of IT&C operation is the software codes, which are programmed to support changes, updates, repairs, storage and analysis, without direct intervention on the objects that contain them.

However, the "Achilles' heel" of software and hardware devices resides precisely in the possibility of intervention on them by external entities, often malicious, who wish to exploit the vulnerabilities of military or non-military

digital systems to extract, corrupt, or destroy data or to obtain prestige, military or political advantages or profit. Such vulnerabilities expose both devices and digital data as well as the entire architecture to cyber security risks, embodied in cyber-attacks and alteration of digital information.

From this perspective, data privacy is equivalent for digital users to the ownership of physical assets, and ensuring the cyber security of digital technologies requires the simultaneous fulfillment of a series of requirements, such as resilience to cyber-attacks; data authenticity; access control; and user data privacy.

Therefore, *the main source of digital insecurity at the physical level derives from the vulnerability of cyber ecosystems*, with negative repercussions in ensuring the integral security of the digital data that the system circulates, but also the confidentiality of this data, in the sense of protecting digital data and ensuring control over digital activities that take place within the digital architecture.

It is indubitable that today's information society benefits from the most developed means of mass communication in human history. Thus, IT&C almost dominates as means of public communication, in times of peace, crisis and war. Virtual communications, through the accessibility of information under the conditions of the existence of mobile phones permanently connected to the Internet, the Internet itself and virtual social networks, have led to an "explosion" in the speed with which information is produced and distributed to target audiences.

Under these conditions, at the regional, national and global level, the digital space is already or is in the process of becoming the main information medium used as a means of mass communication.

Thus, *the main source of digital insecurity at the informational level derives from the manipulation of the informational environment achieved by influencing information, ideas, and values in order to change the behaviors of the population and its leaders.*

From a technical point of view, we agree that we can discuss several *technological developments of digital influencing and conducting "human mind games"* (Chifu, "Aspecte privind războiul informaţional: alterarea realităţii", 2018, 15-16) – disinformation, propaganda, active measures and elements of psychological operations, and from our point of view they can be grouped into seven categories (see *Figure no. 6 – Technological evolution of digital informational influence*), as follows:

(I) *Fake news* – using cyber space to spread fake news;

(II) *Social Media Targeting* – the use of social networks to polarize societies and hijack public debates;

(III) *Big Data Mining* – individual and collective access, based on the analysis of patterns and digital data;

(IV) *Tailor Profiling & Hacking* – "tailor made" digital monitoring and influencing, including through character attack and assassination (see Chifu, "Character assassination" – armă ofensivă în războiul informational", 2017, 11-17);

(V) *Deep Fake* – use of video processing technologies;

(VI) *AI Quantum Virtual Influencers* – automating influence through the use of virtual influencers that combine all previous technological generations through artificial intelligence and quantum computing capacity;

(VII) *Biological Hacking* – the ability to exploit human beings through the ability to combine biological knowledge with quantum computing power and digital data.
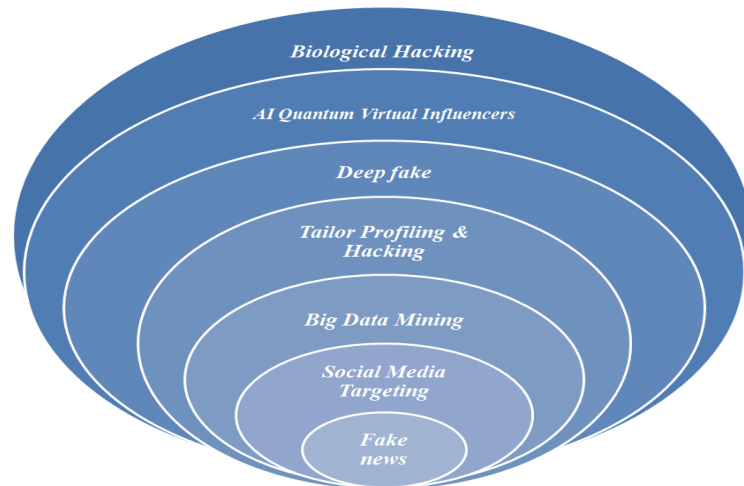

Figure no. 6 – Technological evolution of digital informational influence

For the international community, *information influence* is not defined in an identifiable way, although states officially recognize it. Whilst the Western NATO members acknowledge terms like *information operations* or *influence operations*, the Eastern European states, with reference mainly to the Russian Federation and its predecessors, own terms like *information war* or *psycho-information confrontation* (Fridman, Kabernik, and Granelli, "The Nature of Information Operations", 2022, p. 3) or "*active measures*" or "*information warfare*" (Scîrlet and Ichimescu, "Conflictele/operațiile informaționale ale Federației Ruse în contextul SARS-CoV-2", 2020, 12).

For NATO (NATO, "*AJP-3.10, Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations*", 2009, 1-3, *apud.* Ichimescu, "*Operațiile informaționale și mediul informațional global*", 2016, 49), *information* or *influence operations* represent

informational activities carried out during times of peace, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict, in order to create the desired effects on the will, understanding, and capabilities of adversaries, potential adversaries and other types of audiences, in support of the objectives the mission.

For the Russian Federation (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Voyennyy Entsiklopedich-eskiy Slovar'" *apud.* Fridman, Kabernik, and Granelli, *op.cit*.), the *psycho-informational confrontation* represents an *informational and psychological system with an impact on the level of informational resources and on the level of consciousness and feelings of the military personnel and civilian population of the adversary, as well as a set of measures to protect one's own informational and psychological resources.*

At least during the Cold War, this Russian psycho-informational system exceeded the manipulation of the informational environment and included what the specialized literature defines as a "*program of active measures*" (Flavius, "Teză de doctorat. Relațiile serviciilor de securitate și informații românești cu structurile similare sovietice în perioada 1964-1989. Impactul programului de măsuri active desfășurat de KGB-GRU asupra securității naționale a României – Lecții învățate", 2018, 41), representing a *set of means, such as disinformation, subversion, intoxication, influence, propaganda, covert actions, deception, rumors, manipulation, forgeries and maskirovka, used to generate strategic events in order to create long-term advantages short, medium and long social, political, military, economic and informational by weakening an adversary informationally.*

In our understanding, *digital information influencing represents any activity or attempt by a state or non-state actor to influence the cyber information environment for its own benefit, at a regional or national level, at the level of the adversary or at the global*

level, both offensively and defensively, for changing the behavior of individuals, societies or their leaders.

With regard to the *bio-psycho-social component*, we note not only the fact that *technological evolution allows changes in the biological-genetic information*, but also the fact that *genetic experiments have begun to be carried out outside specialized laboratories, without complying with specific regulations*. Due to the fact that such biotechnologies are becoming accessible to the public at a relatively low cost, *unregulated biohacking becomes a public health risk* (Zettler, Guerrini and Sherkow, "Regulating genetic biohacking", 2019, 34-36).

At the same time, human activity in the digital space arouses an ever-increasing interest for the scientific community in the field of social sciences, which materializes in a new field, cyber-*psychology*. Current studies and debates on the human use of digital technologies, behavior in the digital space and how it affects the human psyche focus on *digital dementia*, *memory loss* and *cognitive impairment*.

Consequently, *the main source of digital insecurity at the bio-psycho-social level derives from the faulty handling of genetic information and the damage to the human psychic system as a result of uncontrolled activity in the digital space.*

Moreover, the sources of digital insecurity arise as effects of cyber-digital-physical inter-relationships, affect all security actors, and occur in all domains of security. Under these circumstances, the digital domain becomes itself a security domain, along with the military, political, economic, social and environmental.

Briefly (see Mândraș, "Security's Multidimensionality. Societal Security in the Age of Information Technology", 2020, 78-95), the *sources of digital insecurity*

affect all areas of security, and they consist at least of: *the automation of weapon systems* – affecting the military domain (see *Table no. 1 – Military power and autonomous systems in the Black Sea region*); *the paternalism, control, influence and manipulation of individual and societal behavior* – affecting the political and social domain; *the authoritarian behavior of states that use the collection of digital data of their own citizens for social and individual control* – affecting the political and social domain; *the digital addiction and digital dementia* – affecting the social field; *the unjust social justice* – affecting the political and social field; *the creation of a digital surveillance economy* (Clarke, " Risks inherent in the digital surveillance economy: A research agenda", 2019) – affecting the economic field; *the economic exploitation, discrimination and even social exclusion* – affecting the economic, political and social field; and, not least, *the security of digital devices and data* – affecting the military and economic domain.

Table no. 1 – Military power and autonomous systems in the Black Sea region[8]

Black Sea Region	Military Strength Power Index	Defense Budget (USD)	Military Personnel (Active, Reserve and Paramilitary)	Local companies that develop autonomous military systems	
Bulgaria	1.1071	1,105,760,000	33,000	*No*	
Georgia	2.0014	286,020,000	30,400	*No*	
Moldova	2.2515	47,640,000	19,000	*No*	
Romania	0.5938	5,148,090,000	132,000	*No*	
Russia	0.0501	154,000,000,000	1,350,000	1.	*Almaz-Antey:*

[8] Source of data for *military strength power index* – lower index provides stronger power, *defense budget,* and *military personnel*: GlobalFirePower, „ 2022 Military Strength Ranking"; Source of data for *local companies that develop autonomous military systems*: Slijper, „Slippery Slope. The arms industry and increasingly autonomous weapons", 2019, pp. 6-8.

				a. ***Unmanned modular electric platform*** (BMPD, "Almaz-Antey presented an unmanned modular electric platform", 2021)**;** b. ***Sarma autonomous underwater drone*** (TASS, "Russian tech firm to feature versatile underwater drone at Urals industrial show", 2021) 2. ***Rostec*** (***Kalashnikov – ZALA Aero***; ***Ural vagonzavod):*** a. ***Lantset loitering munitions:*** Lantset (Lance) loitering munition comes in two configurations: the heavier Lantset-3 carries a 3-kilogram warhead and has a 40-minute mission endurance, while the lighter Lantset-1 has a 1-kilogram warhead and 30-minute mission endurance. 143 b. ***KYB drone:*** KYB was presented at the IDEX arms fair in Abu Dhabi in 2019. its producer also developed *artificial intelligence visual identification* (AIVI). c. ***Uran-9 UGV:*** The Uran UGVs includes the Uran-6 mine clearing vehicle and the Uran-9 combat tank, which was used by Russia in the war in Syria. d. ***Unmanned T-72 tank.*** 3. ***United Aircraft (Sukhoi):*** a. ***Sukhoi Okhotnik unmanned combat aerial vehicle (UCAV)*** (Vranic, "Russian Okhotnik UCAV conducts first PGM launches", 2022)

				4. *National Center for the Development of Technology and Basic Elements of Robotics and the Android Technics company* a. *Marker UGV robot* (TASS/Army Recognition Group, "Russian Marker UGV robot to operate in friend-or-foe identification mode", 2021)
Ukraine	0.3266	11,870,000,000	500,000	*No*
Turkiye	0.1961	9,690,000,000	775,000	1. *Savunma Teknolojileri Mühendislik ve Ticaret (STM):* *a. KARGU (autonomous tactical multi-rotor attack)* KARGU system was improved through the use of AI, including facial recognition, as well as increasing the diversity of the explosives the system can use, currently thought to include fragmentation and thermobaric options. Weighing less than 7 kilograms each, KARGU has a range of 15 kilometers and can stay in the air for 30 minutes. It is possible to operate up to 30 KARGUs together in a swarm that could destroy a military unit or warship. *b. ALPAGU (fixed-wing autonomous tactical attack);* *c. TOGAN (autonomous multi-rotor reconnaissance) loitering systems.*

4.   *DIGITAL SECURITY. The need for a new theoretical approach.*

Expanding cybersecurity to bio-technological and cyber-psychological security

threats

Is it needed a new theoretical approach to digital security in cyberspace considering the actual "inflation" of cyber-security studies?

The specialized literature from various fields, such as international relations, security studies and military sciences, psychology or sociology, does not offer a unitary approach to the concept of security. We join those who believe that it is almost impossible to establish a generally valid definition of security (Miller, "The Concept of Security: Should it be Redefined?", 2001, 13-42), and our argumentation rests on the fact that security has differentiated characteristics that cannot be treated comprehensively and unitarily for all possible situations in real life.

Therefore, when dealing with the issue of security, it is necessary to take into account at least 3 essential elements and provide an answer to the inherent questions.

Who is the subject of security? Respectively, whose security are we referring to?

What is the reference object of security? Respectively, what are the sources of insecurity and what are the actions that generate them?

What are the security actors? That is, who must ensure security by countering threats, removing vulnerabilities, and increasing resilience? Who are the insecure actors? Respectively, who or what generates the sources of insecurity that manifest in threats and dangers?

An answer to all of these questions that is valid in every human situation is challenging and has yet to be identified. However, in our attempt to conceptually clarify the term *security*, we found that the literature addresses at least 15 types of security.

For a better understanding of these types and their integration into a unitary concept, we consider that *security has 4 main dimensions* (see Mândraş, "Desecretizarea" conceptului de securitate. Noțiuni, componente, dimensiuni, domenii și tipuri de Securitate", 2021, 27-39), grouped by specific fields, as follows: (1) *the dimension of security subjects*, classified according to the main security actors – the state, society and the individual; (2) *the dimension of domains of insecurity*, classified according to the main sources of insecurity, which simultaneously represent security assurance areas – military, political, economy, societal, environment; (3) *the dimension of security sources*, which mainly refers to state security, classified according to the behavior of states in achieving their own security within international relations – joint, collective, cooperation; and (4) *the dimension of the security environment*, which mainly refers to state security, classified according to the geopolitical depth of the security environment – regional and international.

Given this wide variety of digital insecurity sources, as we have previously detailed, is the current theoretical framework inclusive enough?

Prior to providing an answer, we note that the specialized literature gives almost exclusive importance to cyber security which it treats from the perspective of state security. In this situation, the sources of digital insecurity derive from the need to protect the hardware and software components that contain digital information, the flows of this digital information, but also the digital informational environment that is of interest to state actors, the types of security studied being *cyber security* and *security of digital data flows*.

Regarding *cyber security*, we note that it does not have a universally accepted definition, similar to many other concepts in the field of security studies.

For NATO ("Cyberdefence", 2020), cyberspace has been recognized since July 2016 as a field of military operations, along with land, air, naval, and space, following the cyber-attacks on some public and private institutions in Estonia in 2007. Therefore, such a recognition implied that the alliance must entail measures for the defense of the member states in cyberspace, for which it also adopted a *Policy on cyber defense* on the occasion of the September 2014 Summit (See "NATO Cyber Defence", 2016).

Within this policy, *NATO considers cyber security to consist mainly of defending its own cyber networks, its missions and operations, as well as increasing the organization's resilience, including through the development of capabilities for cyber education – training and exercises*.

From the US perspective, *cyber security* represents an "*activity or process, ability or capability or state by which computer and communication systems, as well as the information contained therein, are protected/defended against destruction or access, modification, or unauthorized exploitation*" (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "Cybersecurity Glossary", 2021).

According to the US Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the defense of cyber security and activities includes a whole range of actions, strategies, policies and standards to reduce threats, vulnerabilities and destruction, through international engagement, incident response, resilience, ensuring information availability, law enforcement, diplomacy, development of military capabilities, or carrying out missions within the intelligence activity,

ensuring the security and stability of the global infrastructure of information and communication systems.

At first glance, the *security of digital data flows* can be easily confused with cyber security, but its distinctive character is given by the existence of digital information both from the perspective of its belonging to an IT system located in a certain geographical territory, and from the perspective of the flow that digital information travels within several digital systems, especially if they are located on the territory of several states and are subject to several jurisdictions and legal regulations.

Thus, *the security of digital data flows* does not only refer to ensuring the security of digital economic exchanges – energy, products and services, but also to ensuring the digital security of financial exchanges, data and ideas (Verhagen, Chavannes, and Bekkers, "Flow Security in the Information Age", 2020, 7).

As depicted above, we can only note that security studies treat cyber security almost exclusively from the perspective of ensuring the security of a single security actor – the states, almost ignoring the perspective of individual and societal security.

Given these circumstances, we agree with the need claimed by Robert Reardon and Nazli Choucri for giving greater importance to individual rights within the objectives of the cyber agenda and creating a stronger link between the rulers and the ruled (Reardon, and Choucri, "The role of Cyberspace in international relations: A view of the literature", 2012, 7), and we argue that cyberspace is an environment of insecurity both to states, but also to individuals and communities that are part of societies.

Consequently, we criticize the approach to cyber security only from the state perspective and consider that the approach must be extended to digital security in order to include the perspective of the other two security actors – individuals and societies, and all types of sources of digital insecurity.

Security is three-dimensional, as it is (1) *a reality formed by sources of insecurity*, (2) a *perception formed by the interpretation of the dangers generated by these sources of insecurity*, but also (3) an *action or non-action taken diminish and counter the sources of insecurity.*

Under these conditions, the reality of security is also formed through the cyber inter-relationships between different security actors, which have independent or congruent effects in the cyber and digital space, and generate digital insecurity sources.

Considering the above-mentioned arguments, we conclude that the *digitalization of societies generates a new type of security, which affects all security subjects* – individuals, societies, and states, and *we argue the need to **expand the concept of cyber security to the concept of digital security*** (see *Figure no. 7 – Dimensions of security*).
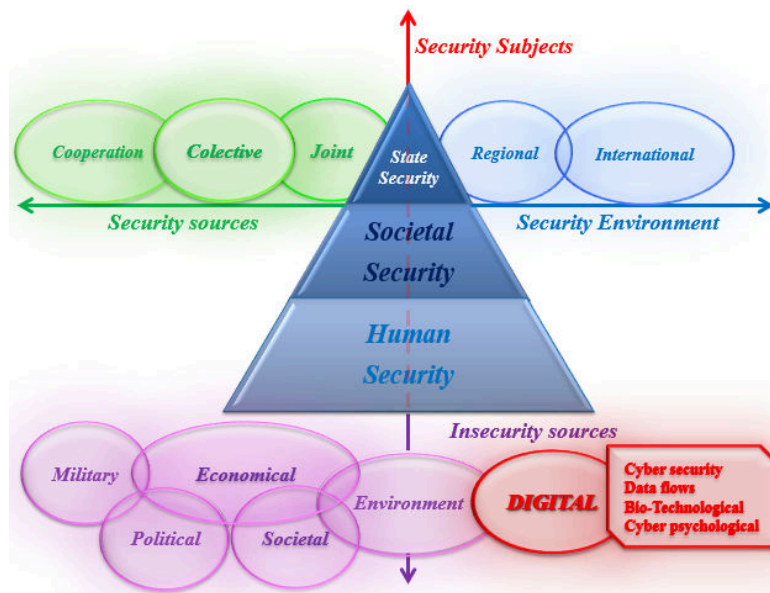
Figure no. 7 – Dimensions of security

Consequently, *digital security consists of all the activities, processes, skills, or capabilities to identify and defend against the disruptive effects of cyberspace, and digital space in physical space, embodied in sources of digital insecurity, respectively physical effects – cyber protection and defense; informational effects - defense of the informational environment and protection against hostile digital influences and bio-psycho-social effects – protection against bio-technological and cyber-psychological dangers*

Within our interpretation of the security concept, digital security (see *Figure no. 8 – Digital security*) is part of the dimension of insecurity sources domain, it refers to all digital insecurity sources, it affects all security subjects, and includes four components:

- ◎ Cyber security;
- ◎ Security of data flows;
- ◎ Bio-technological security; and
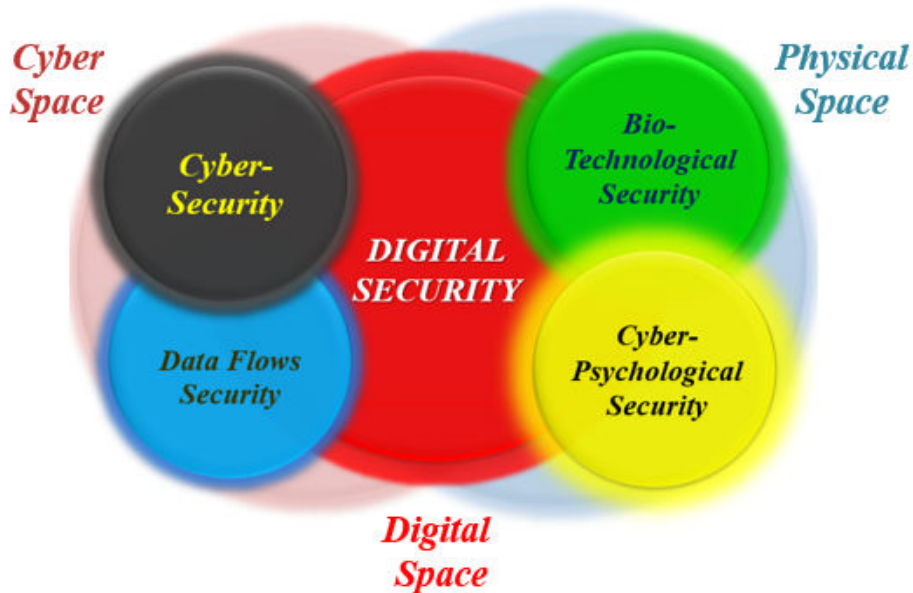
⊚   Cyber-psychological security.

Figure no. 8 – Digital security

Instead of conclusions, we emphasize that a new theoretical approach to digital security in cyberspace is needed due to the wide variety of digital insecurity sources.

Given the facts and circumstances detailed above, we consider that cybersecurity does not provide a theoretical frame that fully encompasses the digital changes and disruption societies face due to the technological evolution and societal revolution of human activities conducted in digital space.

Therefore, we provide a new theoretical approach of digital security that encompasses 4 types of mainstream digital disruptions and stands out as a model for building more appropriate tailor-made public policies that should tackle all types of digital insecurity sources.

Nevertheless, we encourage the whole of society, but especially its key stakeholders – business specialists, non-governmental organizations, researchers, academics, and governmental policymakers to further assess the impact of digitalization, expand research on all types of digital disruptions and provide guidelines for further regulations.

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Geopolitical, geostrategic trilaterally, and geoeconomics of the two Seas:
Baltic and Black Sea:
The interest of the Russian Federation in these areas

Alex Berca[1]

Abstract: *I would like to recall one of the views of the American scholar Robert Kogan, a non-conservative and critic of US foreign policy and a leading proponent of liberal interventionism, who said:*

"... we are in a moment of the end of dreams and the return to history".
Unfortunately, the return to history has a rather or perhaps even too optimistic note if we refer to the years that have passed since the end of the Cold War period, marked among other things by the reduction of some ideological or some military conflicts.
Current conditions confirm to us, that what were called "hopes" of the world they did not become realities, and the competition between the great powers was not abandoned, but resumed, and reached a degree and proportions far greater, and with effects far more accentuated and serious, than those we thought of. I am referring in particular to the reality by which the competition that manifests itself, especially in the last few decades, has brought on the stage new actors who impose their presence with a special predisposition from the West to the East and vice versa, with direct reference to the present moment – to China, Japan, North Korea, and Russia and with a relatively short time perspective, India.
I am not specifically referring to the large number of the population of China, or India, (which is showing an even greater increase than China's), but to the degree of development and the trend of their evolution in the future.

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Plans and hopes for cooperation between the Russian Federation and NATO after the Cold War

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany, NATO and the Soviet Union (now Russia) began to engage in multi-level talks, including a continued push for arms control treaties such as the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze made a first visit to NATO headquarters on 19 December 1989, followed by informal talks in 1990 between NATO and Soviet military leaders.

In June 1990, the Turnberry message was described as "the first step in the evolution of [modern] NATO-Russia relations.

NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner would visit Moscow in July 1990 to discuss future cooperation, a first for NATO-Russia relations.

Official contacts and cooperation between Russia and NATO began in 1991 in the framework of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council), and were further deepened as Russia joined the Peace Program on 22 June 1994.

The founding act on mutual relations, cooperation and security was created in 1997. On May 27, 1997, at the joint meeting held in Paris, representatives of NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act on mutual relations, cooperation and security, for their future work. Thus, a new forum was established: the "*Permanent Joint NATO-Russia Council*" (PJC) as a way of consultation and cooperation.No document signed at this joint meeting contained any provision giving either NATO or Russia any veto power over the other's actions.

From the agenda of cooperation and conflict between Russia and NATO between 2009–2014

Based on the cooperation agreement, in December 2009, NATO asked Russia for help in Afghanistan, wanting to send goods (including some military) by flights over Russian territory. At this request, Russia allowed only the transit of non-military supplies across its territory. On 6 June 2011, NATO and Russia participated in their first joint combat aircraft exercise, called "*Vigilant Skies 2011*".
 Since the Cold War, this was the second joint military association between the NATO alliance and Russia, (the first was a joint submarine exercise that began on 30 May 2011). On 1 April 2014, although NATO unanimously decided to suspend

all practical cooperation with the Russian Federation in response to the annexation of Crimea, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was not suspended.

In early March 2014, tensions between NATO and Russia increased following Russia's actions to annex Crimea. NATO called on Russia to end its actions and said it supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. On 1 April 2014, NATO issued a statement of foreign ministers (of NATO member countries), in which they announced the decision to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia.

The statement states:

Our political dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council can continue, as appropriate, at the level of ambassadors to allow us to exchange views, primarily on this crisis. The statement condemned "Russia's illegal military intervention in Ukraine and Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

In the spring, the Russian Defense Ministry announced plans to deploy additional forces to Crimea as part of strengthening its Black Sea fleet, including redeploying by 2016 a long-range strike (Tupolev Tu-22M3 - ("Backfire") with nuclear capability. which was considered the backbone of the Soviet naval strike units during the Cold War, but these military units were later withdrawn from the Crimean bases.

Such moves have alarmed NATO as well: in November 2021 NATO's top military commander, US General Philip Breedlove, said the alliance was "waiting for indications" amid fears that Russia might move its nuclear arsenal to the peninsula.

In December 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that this would be a legitimate action because "Crimea has now become part of a country that possesses such weapons under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

At the NATO meeting held in Wales in early September 2021, the NATO-Ukraine Commission adopted a Joint Statement which "strongly condemned Russia's self-declared illegal and illegitimate 'annexation' of Crimea and its continued and deliberate destabilization of the eastern Ukraine, in violation of international law"; this position was reaffirmed in the statement of the beginning of December 2021, by the same body.

A report released in November highlighted that close military encounters between Russia and the West (mainly NATO countries) have reached Cold War-like levels, with 40 dangerous or sensitive incidents recorded in the eight months alone, including a near the collision between a Russian reconnaissance

plane and a passenger plane taking off from Denmark (in March 2022), with 132 passengers on board.

An unprecedented increase in Russian air force and naval activity in the Baltic region has prompted NATO to step up its rotation of long-range military aircraft to Lithuania.

The Russian Air Force has intensified its activity in the Asia-Pacific region, which was based on the resumption of the use of the previously abandoned Soviet military base in Cam Ranh Bay,

In March 2015, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoygu stated that Russia's long-range bombers would continue to patrol various parts of the world and expand to other regions

In July, the US formally accused Russia of violating the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty after testing an intermediate-range ground-based cruise missile (probably the R-500) and threatened to will act accordingly.

In early June 2015, the US State Department reported that Russia had failed to correct its breach of the I.N.F.

An October 2014 US government report claimed Russia had 1,643 launch-ready nuclear warheads (up from 1,537 in 2011) – one more than the US, surpassing the US for the first time since 2000.

The deployed capability of both countries violated the 2010 New START treaty which had stipulated maintaining only a ceiling of 1,550 nuclear warheads. Also, just before 2014, the US began implementing a large-scale, $1 trillion program for the global revitalization of its atomic energy industry, which included plans for a new generation of weapons carriers and building such sites. as the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement Facility in Los Alamos, New Mexico and the National Security Campus in South Kansas City

On February 18, 2017, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said:

"... we support the resumption of military cooperation with the NATO alliance"!

After about six months, in October 2021, following an incident in which NATO a expelled eight Russian officials from its headquarters in Brussels, Russia suspended its mission in NATO and ordered the closure of the NATO office in Moscow. Such perspectives offer the opportunity and even the obligation of some of the currently developed countries, from the political, economic and social point of view, to re-analyze the current and future status in order to ensure or at least maintain an advanced place in the world for the next decades.

No matter how optimistic those who follow and analyze the current changes taking place on the world level from the point of view: political, social but especially economic, one cannot fail to notice the rapid and clear trend of the power of Asia in general and of China in especially concurrently with the decrease of the presence and power of the United States, from the point of view: economically and socially - by destroying national cohesion, ideology and various political aspects, based on arrogance, and incapacity, and the incompetence of leadership at the national level and with even more so internationally.

With all this perspective, it should also be mentioned that some countries such as Indonesia, Brazil and Mexico will seek to ensure a potential role in world decisions, and behind them new supporters will appear such as: Bangladesh, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam that in less than half a century will be able to create military forces to help them make their presence felt and also impose some key positions in the areas where they find themselves.

As some analysts have noted, in the current evolution of the world, in a particularly complex way and in a completely unimaginable dynamic, the various conflicting aspects manifested by confrontations between values, beliefs and some fundamental perceptions regarding democracy and totalitarianism the new criminal acts of some international terrorist groups that act and are financially supported by individuals or states interested in maintaining and provoking global disturbances, from which they can secure special benefits, are added.

The existence and manifestation of such factors allowed the opening of the appetite of some countries to secure positions of command and each trying according to their own models and according to the possibilities they have of awarding leadership positions.

The evolution of some of these actors on the world level is manifested by their degree of upward development from the economic point of view (such as the case of China), correlated with (or in some cases only by) the allocation of substantial funds for militarization (most often to the detriment of social funds (as in the case of North Korea-n.n.).

A special case is currently represented by the Russian Federation which has created in the last decades, more precisely after the year 2000 (after Vladimir Putin was elected as president), a special status through its economic policy supported by the energy factor, offering many countries European and even the United States, at competitive oil and natural gas prices.

Behind this "generous" policy are not only aspects of a purely economic nature nor the creation of good economic relations based on equality and economic collaboration, but an economic blackmail plan through which Vladimir Putin intends to gradually bring him back under the auspices of Russia the former countries of Eastern Europe and even the former Soviet Union that gained independence after the liquidation of communism in Russia.

In a similar sense to ensure international dominance and a place among the "powerful", there is evidence of contracts concluded with China (for the next 30 years) and with India through the same energy blackmail intentions and plans.

1. Vladimir Putin's conflict plans from the Baltic Sea and Black Sea area

The international mass media, through the opinions of some military analysts and strategists, have come to the conclusion that the context of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea Region differs from Russia's actions in both areas, but they seem to be part of the same strategy aimed at transforming the security order of the whole of Europe and even the whole world.

The Putin administration appears to be pursuing similar policies and tactics, mainly through the militarization of the Kaliningrad region and Crimea on the one hand as centerpieces of its counter-power strategy vis-à-vis NATO and the European Union.

A possible war in both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea are, at least for the moment, still uncertain scenarios, but after a tactic that the Russians have already practiced and through which the effects on EU member countries are tested, they can be repeated and even extended.

The results of tensions of a military character and even some specific accidents of such tensions and which might get out of control and have multiple disastrous effects through the loss of many human lives and material values, cannot and should not be excluded from the list of possible risks.

The two mentioned areas present a combination of similar elements but also some differences through the countries that are members of NATO and some that are not (such as, for example: Georgia and Ukraine).

The context of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea Region differ, but Russia's actions in both areas are aimed at transforming the European security order. All-out war remains an unlikely scenario, but tensions or accidents leading to an undesirable situation and an uncontrolled escalation of this armed conflict cannot

be completely ruled out. The tensions and brutal display of Russian military forces reflect the developments taking place in both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, and are not the only ways of their manifestation. Russia is testing the Euro-Atlantic response and the reaction of the world in general.

To assess how far Vladimir Putin might be willing to pursue the conflict of invasion of Ukraine and other countries, it is necessary to assess how Russia perceives the West's position and actions, taking into account the deep and deep-rooted clash of perceptions between Brussels and Moscow and its worldview.

2. The Baltic Sea area, The Baltic Sea countries

Source: One World- Nations Online, 2022

According to the various sources of the international media, the Baltic countries, or as they are also called, the Baltic Republics, are geopolitical terms used to mark the regions of northeastern Europe located on the eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, which currently corresponds to the 3 Baltic countries: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and the former East Prussia (including the Kaliningrad region of Russia).

In general, according to the opinion of geopolitical analysts, the term Baltic States includes only the 3 Baltic republics (without the Kaliningrad region).

International statistics show the following characteristics (area and population) of these countries:

Country	(Km.p.) Country Surface	Nr. of Population
Estonia	45,227	1,321,000
Latvia	64,589	2,070,371
Lithuania	65,300	3,201,344

Source: Baltic states, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. 2021

What must be remembered, especially in the current geopolitical conditions is Finland's position and role; sometimes this country is considered as a Baltic state, (this consideration was taken into account especially during the Second World War, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact)[2], sometimes it is not taken into account.

The three Baltic states, mentioned above, became members of the European Union and NATO since 2004. From the economic point of view, there is an annual growth of around 5-7%, which is above the average of European countries.

Regarding the Russian policy towards these three Baltic countries, it is marked by a particular vulnerability of the Kremlin's actions, although there is the umbrella that protects them as NATO members.

These three countries regained their independence from the former Soviet Union (in 1991). From the point of view of the socio-economic evolution, these three countries, but especially Estonia, can be considered as a country whose culture is closest to that with a Nordic character, similar to that of Finland or Sweden.

Russia's interest in the Baltic countries

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the subsequent war in eastern Ukraine have prompted discussions in the Baltic states and among their allies about the possibility of a similar Russian hybrid war intervention in these NATO member states. To be sure, the Baltic states also have a sizeable Russian

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[2] Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact - non-aggression pact between Nazi Germany and The Soviet Union, which allowed the two powers to divide Poland between them. The pact was signed in Moscow on August 23, 1939 by the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Soviet Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov.

minority and have long been the object of Russia's historic imperial ambitions. The main question raised by expert analysts in the evolution of the Baltic countries is: What are the main motives of Russia and especially of President Putin regarding the Baltic states that could lead Russia to the risk of confrontation with NATO (to challenge collective security guarantees as they are presented in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty)?

Also, in order to better understand what are the essential elements of Moscow's policy towards the Baltic countries, the demographic factor and the structure of this factor on ethnicities and the languages spoken by the various minorities existing in these countries must be taken into account. In the Baltic States, the main factor that could motivate and facilitate Russia's policies of interventionism or aggression is directly related to the large population and concentration of Russian ethnic minorities and Russian speakers living near the border of the Russian Federation. Estonia and Latvia have particularly large ethnic Russian minorities, with approximately 24% and 27% respectively of their total population, while Lithuania's Russian population is under 6%. The percentage of Russian speakers is a figure that also includes other Baltic minorities such as: Poles, Ukrainians and Belarusians.

In Latvia, Russian minorities are mainly concentrated in two locations: Riga, the capital, and the Latgale region bordering Russia. Estonia's sizable Russian minorities are also concentrated in the capital Tallinn and the town of Ida-Viru, which is near the border with Russia. The largest city of Narva in the region, for example, has an 82% Russian population, and 97 percent of the population is Russian-speaking. About a third of the population also holds Russian citizenship.

In Lithuania, Russians and Russian-speakers are concentrated in the capital Vilnius, the port city of Klaipėda (near the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad) and the small town of Visaginas, close to the border with Belarus. In addition to the common ideological drive to unite the Russian diaspora in neighboring countries under the Russian flag, Moscow has a number of historical reasons for re-incorporating the Baltic states into the "Russian empire" or at least within Russia's sphere of influence. Russia has been pursuing a consistent policy of imperialization and Russification of the Baltic territories since the 18th century.

Equally important are Russia's economic interests vis-à-vis the Baltic states. Like Crimea, which serves as a base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet and a route to the Mediterranean, the Baltic states have ice-free ports and can be considered a gateway to the West, factors that have been the target of Russian

expansionism since Tsar Peter the Great. Despite the growth of Baltic trade and ties with the EU, the Baltic and Russian economies still have many legacy links. Baltic ports have historically served to transport Russian oil and oil products to European markets. For example, throughout the 1990s until the opening of an oil terminal in the Russian port of Primorsk in 2001. Latvia's Ventspils Nafta was the second largest Russian oil exporting terminal and the largest exporter outside of Russian territory.

Since the 2000s, Russia has directed its energy flows away from the Baltic countries by building its own ports, terminals and new pipeline systems in the northern Baltic Sea and the North Sea. These Baltic territories and ports continue to serve as transit routes for Western goods that Russia imports.

Another economic factor: Generally, the Baltic states are energy poor states. The city of Ida-Viru in Estonia is an exception, being rich in energy sources. This area is located in the eastern part of the country near the border with Russia, between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Peipus, and is predominantly inhabited by Russian speakers.

Shale oil deposits in the region are used for heating and electricity production, which provides about 80% of Estonia's electricity needs.

For a country with few natural resources and which is totally dependent on Russian gas, the Ida-Viru shale oil is particularly important from a strategic point of view. Like the coal mines in eastern Ukraine, it is a tempting target for Moscow.

It is clear that Russia's interests in the three Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not limited to the presence of significant populations (of Russian minorities and Russian speakers living there -n.n.), but are linked by historical, economic and energetic.

However, what makes the current situation particularly worrisome not only for the people of the Baltic countries, but for the entire population of the world, is the implication that any actions by Moscow create for the entire international economic, political and social system.

In the last part of June 2022, some authors presented the situation of one of the Baltic countries, Lithuania, which blocked the transport of various products to the territory of Kaliningrad.

The immediate response of the Moscow Administration, on June 21, 2022, was:

"... Lithuania will suffer "serious" consequences due to this blockage of

products to Kaliningrad – which is a Russian enclave and serves as a right

headquarters of the Russian Baltic Sea Fleet and has no land bridge for
the rest of the country".

Lithuania, which has been among Ukraine's strongest backers, has said it is implementing EU sanctions. which restricts supply lines in the region; this decision drew fierce condemnation from the Kremlin, which described the decision as "unprecedented" and "hostile".

The restrictions imposed refer to products including: coal, various metals and some metals intended for construction. Moscow's reaction came from a long-time collaborator and adviser to President Putin, Nikolai Patrushev - Secretary of the Russian Security Council after a visit to Kaliningrad, saying:

"...immediate measures will be taken that will have a negative impact on the Lithuanian population (but did not give any details).

In response to Patrushev's threatening statement, EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell responded, rejecting Russia's claims regarding Lithuania's position, showing that the transit between Kaliningrad and other areas of Russia was not "stopped or banned by Lithuania, but Lithuania applied the sanctions imposed by the E.U."[3] At the same time, the Lithuanian railway operator confirmed that the movement of passengers and goods not subject to EU sanctions will continue.

An essential conclusion that must be remembered is that after which:

" … If Russia challenges the territorial integrity of these countries and NATO fails to honor its security guarantees (according to Article 5), it would it meant the end of the international security order established after the World War II.

More recently (in the summer of 2022), more aggressive Russian approaches have been manifested towards Sweden and Finland; thus, trying to apply a practice and strategy to surround them and then impose Russian foreign policy on them.

At one point it was Erdoğan who opposed the acceptance of these countries' NATO entry and Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, stated that Sweden and Finland cannot join NATO unless the Ankara Parliament ratifies their applications for the status of members of the Alliance. The main issue regarding admission to NATO was to oppose the actions of terrorist groups operating in Turkey.

The two NATO candidate countries were to update their anti-terrorism legislation and develop their own defense industry. The memorandum of understanding signed by the two countries and Turkey was considered to be very

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[3] *Russia threatens Lithuania for enforcing E.U. sanctions/ by: Ellen Francis & Rachel Pannett, The Washington Post, June 12, 2022, A16)*

beneficial for these countries. Sweden and Finland were committed to full cooperation with Turkey in the fight against terrorism.

The representatives of the two countries had stated:

"...propaganda is free until a terrorist attack occurs, but the two countries will have to prevent the PKK[4] from recruiting people; this plan is also a commitment to lift the embargo and restrictions on their defense industry and to increase the cooperation of the three countries".

As it follows from the official documents of the joint meeting, the agreement signed with Finland and Sweden to lift Turkey's veto on NATO membership applications it is not the end of the problem, Turkish President Erdoğan said. This agreement obliges the Nordic states to keep their promises, including by extraditing 73 "terrorists".

The agreement by which Turkey decided not to block the NATO accession of Sweden and Finland was obtained after 11 hours of negotiations and weeks of "political wrestling" in European capitals, to which the involvement of the United States was added.

Norway escaped the risk of these aggressive actions (by Russia - n.n.), becoming a member of NATO since 1949, but this fact does not prevent President Putin from finding some "reasons" (more or less plausible - n.n.), to approach this country as well.

Only time, depending on the role that Putin will have in the not-too-distant future, will be able to provide an answer regarding the manifestation of Russian policy in this direction.

3. The Black Sea – a key objective for Russian policy

The unique geography of the Black Sea area, as presented by geographers and military experts, gives it special significance to Russia for several reasons:

First of all, it is an important crossroads and a strategic intersection for the entire region. Access to the Black Sea is vital for all littoral and neighboring states and greatly enhances power projection in several adjacent regions.

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[4] PKK - Kurdistan Workers' Party - Kurdish separatist organization fighting for independence territory of the Kurds in Turkey, in order to create an independent Kurdistan. Turkey, along with The United States and many other European states consider the PKK a terrorist group, negotiations to solve the Kurdish problem.

Secondly, the region is an important transit corridor for various goods, energy and various military products.

Thirdly, the entire Black Sea area is rich in cultural and ethnic diversity, and due to geographical proximity, Russians believe that they thus share historical ties with Russia (but no one has agreed on whether these ties are desirable and whether they are good or bad! – n.n.).

The Black Sea Fleet is considered by Russian strategists as an operational-strategic command of the Russian Navy, and includes existing Russian ships in the Sea of Azov.

The geostrategic significance of the Black Sea Fleet is further enhanced by the ability to access the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, which may allow Russia to send its naval forces into a warm water sea. This fact is one of the most important features of the Black Sea Fleet, which explains how and why this fleet has survived for several centuries and why the Crimean Peninsula was, is and will be so important for Russia in the future.

As the physical map of the Black Sea shows, in addition to Russia, the other country that has coastlines on the Black Sea are: Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia and Turkey. Securing and protecting the coastlines of various countries has determined the deployment of military forces in these areas.
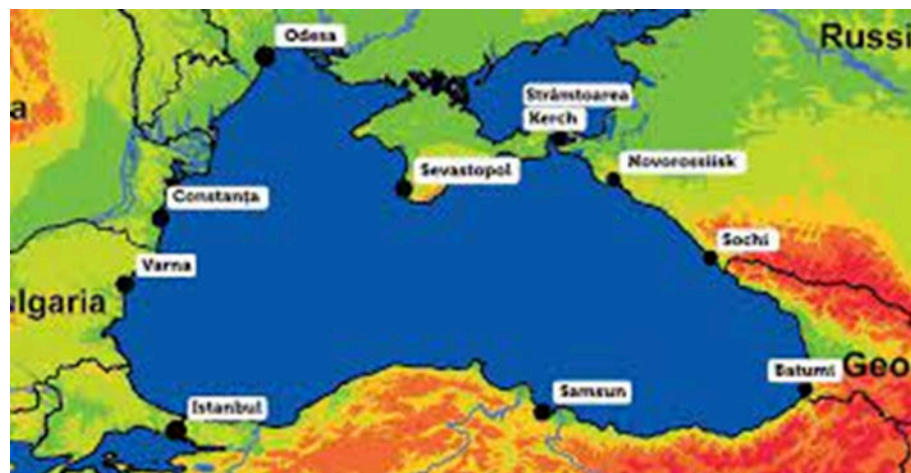
For example:

- The Ukrainian Navy currently has around: 6,000-7,000 military personnel based in Odessa

- The Romanian navy has about 7,000 soldiers (a part of the navy operates on the coast the Black Sea, the other on the Danube).

- The Bulgarian Navy has approximately 3,500 military personnel based in Varna,

- The Georgian Navy, whose force merged with the Coast Guard in 2009 under the jurisdiction of the Border Guards and the Ministry of Internal Affairs has about 5,000 soldiers based in Poti.

- The Turkish Navy which has the longest coastline and controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Strait. has about 50,000 soldiers (of which: 15,000 active and 35,000 recruits) with the command for the North Sea Area in Istanbul and the command for the South Sea Area, in Izmir.

Although Turkey has the longest coastline on the Black Sea, Turkey's main naval objectives are focused on the two straits that connect the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. The two straits have a huge impact on all naval forces in the Black Sea, as well as trade with Turkey and other countries in the region. The significance of these straits can be seen, among other things, in the daily transportation of oil which reaches about 3 million barrels per day.

Although Turkey has sovereignty over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, closing these straits to any navy would be considered an act of aggression.

What should be remembered by geopolitical analysts is the fact that the Russian fleet in the Black Sea area is really an asset of Russia, especially after the annexation of Crimea. Also, the strength of this fleet can be further enhanced by the existing Caspian Sea flotilla which is connected to the Black Sea through the Volga-Don Canal.

As I mentioned before, of the six littoral states of the Black Sea, three: Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey - are members of NATO, and the other two - Ukraine and Georgia - prefer, according to the opinion of the Kyiv administration, to carry out their activities in - a close connection with this "Alliance".

4. Russia's position and relations with the Black Sea littoral countries

Due to the fact that some of the littoral states are members of NATO, through the advantages they can offer to Russia, each of these countries receives as rewards certain advantages from Russia.

4.1. Russia's relationship with Turkey

Russia maintains particularly cordial relations with Turkey knowing that this country controls the Bosphorus and Dardanelles which is for Russia, as I mentioned, a vital passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The reality of Russian-Turkish relations, known by military experts and geopolitical analysts, proves the existence of interests on both sides. Russia has strategic interests, and Turkey economic interests.

If Ankara ever decides to close these straits, it could block the Black Sea Fleet and limit Russia's ability to project its power abroad.

In the event of a political crisis, Moscow's priority must be to ensure that Turkey remains at least neutral, allowing Russia to continue supplying the military forces it would need in the Mediterranean. If the passage were closed by an openly hostile Turkey, Russia would find her forces in the Mediterranean in great danger.

Turkey has the offensive capabilities to threaten Russia's isolated forces. A defeat would deal a major blow to Russia's prestige and status as a military power. Therefore, Moscow must continue to maintain good relations with Ankara, strengthening bilateral ties, while seeking ways to find a compromise on some differences that exist or may arise between them.

From Turkey's point of view, the diplomatic game that it plays as a member of NATO and the relationship with the United States is quite difficult. Turkey agreed to the US bringing some of its nuclear weapons to their country and as such dozens of them are there; at the same time, after the end of the Cold War and especially after 1987, Turkey started importing natural gas from Russia and thus it became Turkey's main gas supplier

The international press has at various times provided information about the Turkish-Russian economic ties that have strengthened even more after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia has become a much smaller military threat than during the Soviet period, and even more so (in 2008), Turkey's second largest economic partner after the EU.

In 2010, the press also mentioned that an agreement was signed between the two countries, waiving travel visas between these countries.

Relations between President Erdogan and President Putin had become even closer and strengthened as Erdogan became an increasingly autocratic leader, especially after the failed coup in 2016.

Moreover, a number of Western countries-imposed sanctions and reduced cooperation with Ankara after Turkey bought air defense systems from Russia[5]. with which the Russians had invaded northern Syria and launched military operations against the Kurds.

Unfortunately, geopolitical analysts confirm that Russia is building more nuclear reactors for the Turks, and in an interview, Erdogan refused to declare that he will no longer buy Russian military equipment in the future.

At the same time, Turkey supports the idea of NATO's presence in the Black Sea "to deter Russian aggression, but does not want the excessive militarization of the region.

"What the Turks do not want is for the deployment of American troops in the area to cause a crisis in which the straits are closed and major fighting breaks out along their territorial waters."

4.2. Russia's relationship with Bulgaria

Bulgaria's foreign relations can be seen in two directions: on the one hand there are historical and cultural ties with Russia. In recent decades it has been directly dependent on obtaining fossil fuels from Russia, and on the other hand it is protected by being a member of the EU and NATO.

This situation is not too easy for him to unfold. Although he does not have a particularly pro-Russian note, he managed to reject several projects for the construction of Russian pipelines.

As political analysts describe it, in order to maintain some comfortable relations with Russia, he asserted his position by claiming that the sanctions applied to Russia are too harsh; as such, with this position, he does not want to create obstacles in the economic life of the Bulgarian population.

Over the past few decades, Bulgaria has seen a significant transformation moving from a highly centralized, planned, communist-type economy to an open, market-based, upper-middle-income economy, anchored in the security provided by its relationship with the European Union. In its initial transition to a market economy, the country went through a decade of restructuring with positive effects on economic growth and gradually removing sluggish growth, high debt and economic losses.

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[5]S-400-type systems with surface-to-air missiles

In foreign relations, a deep penetration of Russian interests into the Bulgarian economy is still evident.

Bulgaria's relationship with Russia is best described by analysts as an "under-the-radar supporter", where concerns are tempered by historical relations and local context, and thereby aimed at avoiding criticism of the war in Ukraine.

Internal political tensions in Bulgaria between pro-Russian and pro-Western factions have sometimes contributed to a less coherent message about the role of Russian influence in Bulgaria.

A particularly confusing role in Bulgaria's foreign policy is maintained by the current president of Bulgaria, Rumen Georgiev Radev (1963 -), who is serving as president in his second term (in 2021).

4.3. Russia's relationship with Romania

The politician Petre P. Carp, (1837-1919), had stated at a certain moment:*"Romania is too lucky to need politicians anymore"*

From the point of view of relations with the Russian Federation and especially with Vladimir Putin, Carp's idea is fully confirmed. Romania was more fortunate when it was accepted into the EU and became a member of NATO. Romania also currently has elements of the anti-missile shield (received from the United States), which led the Putin administration to declare that Romania is "**a clear threat to Russia".**

From the point of view of the Black Sea coast, Romania has proven its desire to ensure the presence of NATO in the country (in general and in the Black Sea in particular - n.n.). This desire of Romania is in contradiction with the long-term objectives of the Putin administration.

The Snake Island

Source: Google images

Source: The lighthouse on The Snake Island / PHOTO "Annals of Dobrogei" magazine

According to the descriptions presented by the various means of the international media, a fact perhaps less known is that of the attack of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea (through the action of the Russian cruiser Moskva), which bombarded Snake Island after an unsuccessful attempt to disembark the Russian army and following an equally unsuccessful missile attack.

The question posed to some military analysts was: "... how is it possible that a rock with a surface of only 0.17 Km.p. no drinking water and on which about 100 soldiers live, to play such an important role in the context of the invasion of Ukraine"?

The answer is as follows:

"... in the context of the Russian invasion against Ukraine, this small island (which can be crossed on foot in about 40 minutes-n.n.), becomes an important strategic objective for the Russian army as the modernized Russian Fleet in the Black Sea is nearby.

In other words, after the annexation of Crimea, this island (on which it can place a small military base - n.n.), allows Russia to dominate some larger portions of the Black Sea.

The opinion of some Romanian and Ukrainian military experts (who retained the attention of both governments, even a year before the invasion of Ukraine), referred to Russia's attempts to block as much as possible Ukraine's access to the ports of Mariupol and Berdeansk. The Russians know that for Ukraine these ports are vital in Ukraine's wheat and metal exports as well as consumer goods imported from China.

The reality that Russia knows is determined by two particularly important factors:

• on the one hand, without a viable sea route to give it access to global markets, the Ukrainian economy may enter a moment of economic crisis of proportions.

• on the other hand, in the context of the invasion, the loss of this sea route means the loss of a way that is vital for securing the supply of armaments, ammunition and military equipment.

At the same time, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine specified, in a press release, that the Russian Army has concentrated a group of ships in the Black Sea near the shores of Ukraine. This group of ships would be in a state of preparation for carrying out new missile attacks on the territory of Ukraine.

In addition, this military entity reported that the Russian military is intensifying its sabotage activities on the routes of humanitarian and military aid transport convoys.Such information proves, as expressed by some journalists, "a total delirium of Russian propaganda", stating:

- on the one hand, the celebration of 8 years since the victory of Russian troops in the conquest of Crimea it took place concurrently with the actions of the Russian army, which killed the Ukrainian civilian population with particular cruelty, destroyed homes, children's hospitals, schools, theaters, etc.,

 - on the other hand, the publication of extensive information on the Internet in response to all the images presented by the international media and revealing the Ukrainian policy against the Russian population in the two areas of eastern Ukraine (Donets and Luhansk).

According to some political analysts, the current Russian-Ukrainian war is not only a war between these two countries, it is a confrontation on the one hand between the United States and the West, and on the other hand between Russia (behind which is China, and Korea North).

As is well known in any military conflict, large or small, there are also many casualties. In this conflict. one can note the ambition of each side manifested by the idea that none of the warring parties can afford to lose this war, and the ravages committed are of the order of thousands of human losses and the destruction of tens or hundreds of thousands of homes, destruction of schools, hospitals, universities, theaters, etc.

The opinion of these analysts is that according to which: if Russia loses this war, we may witness its dismemberment,- if the United States and the West lose the war, the prestige of democracy, independence and of humanism lose their prestige; we will witness anarchy, the introduction of the concept, and the effects of the dictatorial system throughout the world, and the process of globalization will reach on a declining slope.

There is one more aspect that is more than scary. In order not to lose this war, Putin is able to press the "red button" and trigger a nuclear war.

Years ago, Mrs. Madeleine Albright - former Secretary of State in the USA, referring to Vladimir Putin, said:*...* *"Putin won the war, but lost the trust."* Unfortunately, many of those who had heard this statement did not take it seriously, and today we wonder how it is possible for such a war to take place before our eyes, with such effects and with multiple long-term consequences.

American strategists believe that this war must continue to become a war of attrition and increasingly limiting the military power of the Russian Federation.

The current Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, claims that Russia will have to reach the moment when it will exhaust all its military resources and as

such will no longer be able to launch such invasions and wars against one (or some) country.

President Biden changed his point of view by which he initially considered that the aid that the United States would have given to Ukraine *~would be of little value~*; in recent months he has come to the conclusion that Ukraine must be helped and together with the EU has sent billions of dollars and modern weaponry. He claims that Ukraine can and must win this war against Russia.

For his part, the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, urges the Ukrainian army to fight, to defend the country against those who have forcibly kept Ukraine in the middle of the communist world.

As a result of all these points of view and following the indications of President Putin, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov, in a recent speech specifically mentioned:

"... the risk of provoking the third world war and he did not rule it out
the possibility of such a war becoming nuclear".

The main question that analysts ask themselves and that was answered by an OECD Report is the following: What if the war in Ukraine does not end? How does this war affect the world economy?

The organization expressed its point of view referring to the reduction of the prospects for global growth, concomitant with the projection of inflation and with the risks of worldwide aggravation of the effects of this war.

The Report presents the opinion of some analysts that the world economy will pay a "big price" because of this (Russian-Ukrainian) war, which has caused a large increase in inflation and with potential long-term damage to supply chains.

The OECD cut its outlook for global growth this year to 3% from 4.5% it had forecast in December 2021 and doubled its inflation projection to almost 9% for European countries; and according to some forecasts for 2023, global growth is estimated to show a further reduction of up to 2.8%. The price of war, OECD experts estimate, could be "even higher", they present a list of risks, including:

- a sudden interruption of Russian supply to Europe to the vulnerabilities
of financial markets due to high debts and high prices of various assets.

In recent months, "there have been several significant changes in the global economic environment," including the worldwide spread of the Omicron variant (of Covid) and the greater-than-expected persistence of inflationary

pressures." The biggest change was and continues to be driven by the economic impact of the war in Ukraine.

The assessment, which echoes a similar warning from the World Bank, points to a deeper and broader economic consequence of Russia's invasion, which will make it difficult to establish sound fiscal and monetary policies. This is the first detailed view from the OECD, which in April 2022 preferred not to issue full forecasts due to prevailing uncertainties. The immediate effects of rising prices forced central banks to modify their monetary policies.

The US Federal Reserve Department, for example, raised interest rates at an accelerated rate of 50 basis points; meanwhile, the governments of EU and NATO member countries are rethinking spending plans while trying as much as possible not to affect the daily lives of households too much.

Although OECD representatives believe that it is justified for all monetary authorities to reduce stimulus, it called for caution especially in the euro area, where rising prices mainly reflect supply pressures.

The OECD also drew attention to "Central banks ensuring a balance between keeping inflation under control and ensuring post-pandemic economic recovery, especially where the recovery is not yet complete". It is worth noting that the OECD has noted that inflation is affecting living standards and reducing consumer spending across the globe, and various activities and investments are becoming less optimistic about future output. Crucially, this impact on the loss of confidence discourages investment, which in turn threatens to affect supply "for years to come".

There is also a sense of caution as the global economy teeters on the brink of stagflation, despite similarities to the oil shock of the 1970s. Compared to that time, major economies are now consuming less energy, central banks have more robust frameworks and a more independence, and consumers have a stockpile of excess savings left over from the Covid pandemic.

"Nevertheless, the OECD Report mentions, it should also be noted that there are clear risks that the economic growth process will manifest itself in a slower than expected slowdown, and inflationary pressures could intensify even more."

The OECD report that was recently presented to the 38 member countries mentions several important points including:
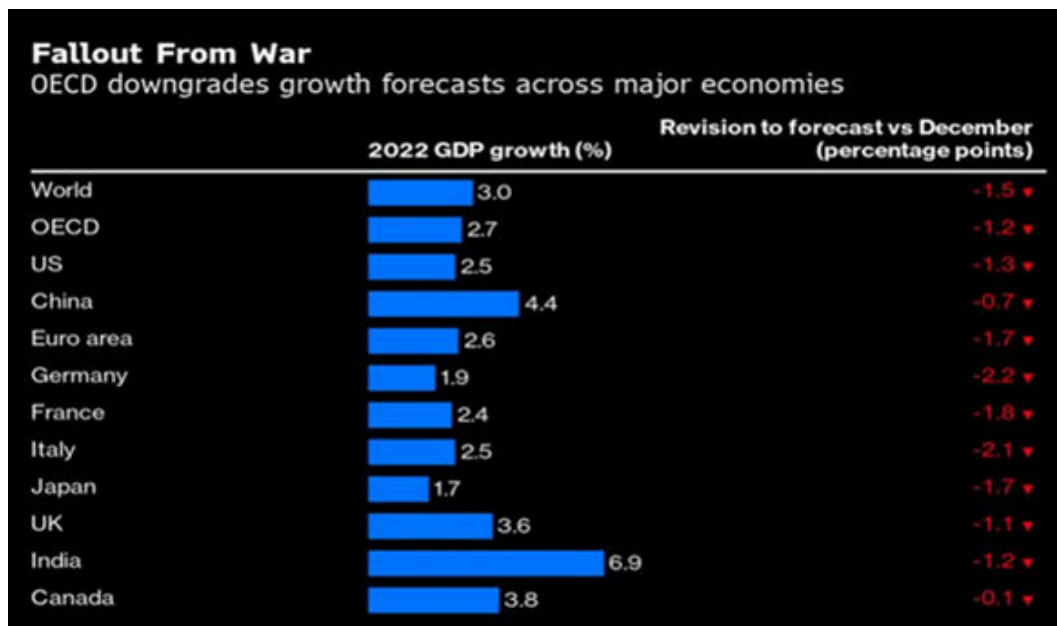
• Europe is one of the region's most at risk should the war in Ukraine prolong or escalate, as its economies struggle to move away from Russian fuel•
Low-income economies are also at risk from rising food and basic energy prices

• Sharp increases in interest rates could slow economic growth more than expected
• China's "Covid Zero" policy continues to affect global outlook.
 Regarding this situation, the OECD also made some recommendations
Here are some of them:
• More aid and global cooperation in logistics to prevent a food crisis
• Targeted government support for households hardest hit by the rising cost of living
• Signals from the central banks that they will not allow the expansion of the inflationary phenomenon
• US monetary policy may tighten faster as prices continue to be driven by excess demand
• More solidarity in Europe on defense spending, and energy
• Maintaining open trade to ensure diverse value chains for ecological transition.

Here is how the situation of the reduction in growth forecasts is presented graphically major savings due to the war in Ukraine; GDP growth in 2022 (in %), and the changes in these forecasts compared to December 2021 (in percentage points).

Fallout From War
OECD downgrades growth forecasts across major economies

	2022 GDP growth (%)	Revision to forecast vs December (percentage points)
World	3.0	-1.5 ▼
OECD	2.7	-1.2 ▼
US	2.5	-1.3 ▼
China	4.4	-0.7 ▼
Euro area	2.6	-1.7 ▼
Germany	1.9	-2.2 ▼
France	2.4	-1.8 ▼
Italy	2.5	-2.1 ▼
Japan	1.7	-1.7 ▼
UK	3.6	-1.1 ▼
India	6.9	-1.2 ▼
Canada	3.8	-0.1 ▼

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2022

Another graphic shows how the price evolution of various products, food and non-food, of short, medium or long-term use, which have changed following inflation, influences the decrease in average income in some areas such as: USA, Europe, South Africa, India, Australia, China and the Middle East.
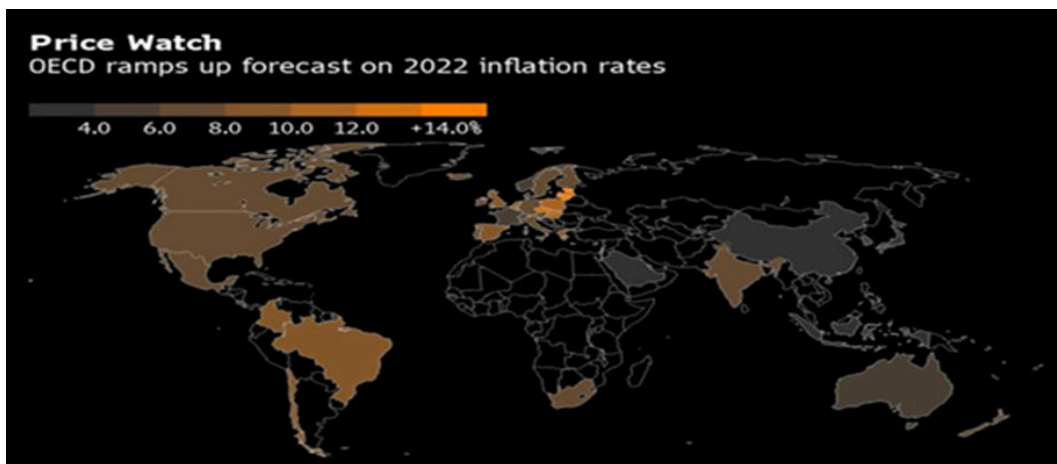
Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2022
Note: Map shows inflation rates for distinct economies

The effect of the inflationary shock was manifested by a decrease in income compared to 2021, in most countries of the world.
(The Information is based from the information: Russia-Ukraine war threatens prolonged effect on global economy, presented by Bloomberg under the signature of William Horobin according to Al Jazeera. June 8, 2022).

Wage Pain
Global inflation shock is squeezing take-home pay in real terms

■ Change in wages vs 2021

Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,2022
          Change in wages vs 2021

*

In the last days of July 2022, the international press presented a very important information regarding the decision to transfer grain, food and fertilizers from Ukraine to millions of hungry people around the world.

On this occasion, the point of view of the UN Security Council was also presented, which appreciated the agreement established in terms of ensuring the grains of food products and fertilizers that had been blocked for months, more precisely, immediately after the Russian invasion, in the ships and silos of the Black Sea area.

From the information presented by the AP, the congratulations to Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the government of Turkey for the key roles they played in ensuring the signing of agreements by Russia and Ukraine emerged.

"At the same time, the action of Norway and Mexico was mentioned, which tried countless times to reach an understanding and unification of the UN Council in order to resume the exports of grain, food and fertilizers that had been blocked in the Black Sea".Norway's ambassador to the UN, Ms. Mona Juul, stated in an interview for the Associated Press:*"**We regret that for months this was not possible.**"*

Russia and Ukraine have signed separate agreements with Turkey and the UN, clearing the way for Ukraine - one of the world's keys "agricultural baskets" - to export 22 million tons of grain and other agricultural products that have long been stuck in sea ports Black because of the political position and the invasion of Russia, for over six months. The agreements provide for ensuring that food, wheat and agricultural fertilizers have unrestricted access to world markets.

António Manuel de Oliveira Guterres (1949 -), - The Secretary-General of the United Nations described these agreements as "unprecedented" between two sides involved in a bloody conflict and called it "a beacon of hope" for millions of starving people who they faced huge increases in the price of food.

Unfortunately, the very day after the signing of the agreements, Russia launched airstrikes and long-range missiles on the Ukrainian port of Odesa (one of the ports) and Mykolaiv mentioned in the grain export agreements. Under these agreements, Kiev and Moscow agreed not to target ships and port facilities involved in this initiative.

In the Mykolaiv area, the port infrastructure was the target of the Russian attack despite the signed agreements.

A few hours after the attack, Moscow officially installed a representative of Russia, who after the installation stated that the two ports will soon be "liberated" by the Russian military forces, as happened with the Kherson area (according to information transmitted by the RIA Novosti [6]Agency.

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[6] RIA Novosti - a Russian state-owned domestic news agency. On 9 December 2013 by a decree of Vladimir Putin it was liquidated and its assets and workforce were transferred to the newly created Rossiya Segodnya agency. On 8 April 2014 RIA Novosti was registered as part of the new agency. RIA Novosti is headquartered in Moscow. The chief editor is Anna Gavrilova.

To be sure that the implementation of the agreements signed in Istanbul will be carried out in good conditions, President Volodymyr Zelensky, together with several ambassadors from various countries and UN officials, visited the port of Chornomork (near the city of Odesa) on July 29, 2022.

The initiative of the president of Ukraine was considered as a particularly humanitarian act, aiming for these grains to reach as soon as possible millions of poor people facing hunger around the world. Despite all these acts not considered by Ukraine, nor by the government in Istanbul, some Russian diplomats have stated on several occasions that Moscow is ready for dialogues with Ukraine regarding the end of the war. Knowing the Russian strategy, Ukraine's allies advised President Zelensky to oppose this Russian intention.

We never refuse to discuss because everyone knows (?!!),that any hostilities end at the negotiation table", stated the Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in a speech held in Uganda, where he had arrived on his way to different countries in Africa.

The British Foreign Secretary stated:"Ukraine, sees the use of mass attack againstvUkrainian ports as a limitation of the Black Sea fleet. This significantly undermined the overall plan of invasion because Russia cannot realistically attempt one amphibious assault to occupy Odessa. Russia will continue to

prioritize efforts to degrade and destroy Ukraine's anti-ship capability." Institute for the Study of War (based in Washington D.C.), reported that Moscow uses mercenaries from the Wagner group to capture the Vuhledar power station on the northern outskirts of the Bakhmut region on Novoluhanske.[7]

At the same time, Guterres condemned "unequivocally" the Russian attacks on the city of Odesa. He invoked the commitments made by Russia and Ukraine at the signing ceremony of the agreements by the representatives of the two countries, which took place in Istanbul.

Some of the diplomats from the UN Council claimed that Russia objected to the last point of the statement on the grain deal, as Guterres noted:

"Condemnation of the air attack (on Odesa), from July 23, 2022".

This statement, received and subsequently transmitted to all UN member countries by the PA, includes congratulations to Secretary-General Guterres and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who called for the swift implementation of the commitments made in Istanbul.

AP also presented the idea supported by the representative of Norway, from which it emerged: " Norway believes that the Secretary General's personal efforts and commitment, were essential in facilitating the negotiations between the parties";

"..."these efforts are more important than ever because the effects of war continue to be felt by the people of Ukraine and by many peoples around the globe."[8]

5. Unfortunately, nothing was learned from history!

A history teacher said ". although history often repeats itself, the world has not learned nothing from history"!

Even if years ago, such a statement was circulating among the ideas of the intellectuals of the era of the Second World War and continued for many years after that, it came to be the date of forgetting and even not taking into account a such statement. What was the history of this idea? To an international Convention aimed at establishing a definition! That of AGGRESSION!

On July 3, 1933, for the first time in history, aggression was officially defined in a treaty signed at the Soviet Embassy in London. Among the

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[7] Associated Press, July 27, 2022
[8] AP, July 29, 2022

signatories were the representatives of the Baltic states, along with those of the USSR. Article II defined the forms of aggression as follows:

"The State that will be the first will be recognized as the aggressor who will commit one of the following acts:

The first – a declaration of war against another State;

The second - an invasion carried out by armed forces on the territory of another state even without a declaration of war;

The third – to attack with land, sea or air forces, even without a declaration of war, the territory, vessels or apparatus of flight of another State;

Fourth – to launch a blockade of another's coasts or ports state;

Fifth – to support the armed gangs that are organized in the territory his and who will attack the territory of another State, or to refuse, despite the requests of the invaded state, to take everything on its territory the measures in his power to deprive him of all aid or the protection of the aforementioned bandits.

It is worth mentioning that between 1940 and 1945 the USSR signed a series of conventions, becoming a member of the *Atlantic Charter* on August 14, 1941, the accession resolution being signed in London on September 24, 1941.

• The seeding states do not seek any territorial or other expansion;

• They do not support territorial changes that do not correspond to free wishes expressions of the targeted peoples;

• They respect the right of all peoples to choose their form of government.

• The signatory states wish to see sovereign rights restored and

the independence of those peoples who were forcibly attached to them.

It should be noted that Stalin himself reaffirmed the principles of the Atlantic Charter on November 6, 1941: He had stated:

"We do not have and cannot have such war objectives as the occupation of foreign territories and the subjugation of foreign peoples, regardless of whether they are peoples and territories of Europe or peoples and territories of Asia...

We do not and cannot have such war aims as imposing our will and regime on the Slavs or other occupied peoples of Europe who seek our help. Our help consists in supporting these peoples in their struggle for liberation from Hitler's tyranny, followed by giving them the freedom to rule their homelands as they wish. We will not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations."

Shortly after this, the Soviet Union signed the United Nations Declaration (January 1, 1942), by which the accession to the Atlantic Charter is reaffirmed.

The Soviet Union signed the "Declaration on a Liberated Europe" at the end of the Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945), in which Stalin, Churchill, and

Roosevelt agreed to restore order in Europe in accordance with the principles of the Atlantic Charter, which stated:

"... all peoples have the right to choose the form of government under which they will live, the restoration of the sovereign rights and self-government of these peoples who have been forcibly deprived of them, by the aggressor nations".

The Yalta declaration also stated that "in order to ensure the conditions under which the liberated peoples can exercise these rights, the three governments will undertake ... among other things to facilitate, where necessary, the organization of free elections".

Finally, the USSR signed the United Nations charter on October 24, 1945, which in Articles 1 and 2 stated that "... one of the "purposes of the UN is the development of friendly relations between nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights of peoples' and self-determination".

Human losses in the Baltic region during World War II were some of the highest in the European theater of war. Estimates of population losses went as high as 25% in Estonia, 30% in Latvia and 15% in Lithuania. Losses from the war and occupation were estimated at around 90,000 Estonians, 180,000 Latvians and 250,000 Lithuanians. These figures also included people deported by the Soviet authorities in 1941 and victims of the Holocaust.

At the Yalta Conference, the USA and the United Kingdom, allies of the USSR in the war against Nazi Germany, recognized the de facto occupation of the three Baltic states by the Soviets, but, in the post-war period, both the Americans and the British and the other Western democracies did not recognize de jure the USSR occupation of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia.

As a result, Western democracies recognized diplomats from these three countries who continued to function in numerous countries on behalf of their former governments. I think the question is natural:

Does the current Administration in Moscow not have access to such documents, existing in the archive of the Kremlin?
If so, the answer is YES! Maybe it wouldn't hurt to revisit and apply them further in this century too!

Conclusions

I began my essay by recalling the point of view of a great American thinker, Robert Kogan:

"... we are in a moment of the end of dreams, and the return to history".

And, my last subsection of this intervention I referred to the idea:

Unfortunately, humanity has not learned anything from history!

I don't think any geopolitical analyst could find and explain which one were, and are the real causes of the current conception of the two powers (Russia and the United States of America), which instead of developing their social-economic conditions and ensuring better living for their own populations, and those of other corners of the world, they squander the wealth obtained through the efforts of their own peoples, they create increasingly sophisticated weapons designed to destroy everything that has been built and kill tens of thousands of people.

The peace that existed for several decades is once again put under a big question mark, since in this short time both of the world's powers have continued to allocate more and more funds for militarization.

Is this dementia to call it "philosophical" based on the idea of the existence on our little blue planet of too many people?Or, it is simply a sick conception of justice to hold the first place in the world through crime and destruction, and not through creations, in various fields of science, art, and culture, offering the future generations that will follow new horizons of development,
Or, it is the manifestation of a real megalomania, of gathering millions of people and new territories under the same leadership. How sick and wrong can this megalomanic manifestation be in the minds of leaders who hoped to be appreciated for what they do and do not think that their lives and those of these "empires" are short-lived and no one will be able to appreciate them for what they do or have done in their time, instead of lifting up their own nation or other backward nations.

History has known and described the evolution of empires and it also allowed us to know their fall. It is easy to conquer countries by force and subjugate peoples but it is extremely difficult to keep these peoples under a criminal heel.

Sooner than these rulers imagine possible, the peoples will reclaim their rights to exist freely and to choose the rulers they deserve. Today we are experiencing one of the many events where instead of peace and collaboration, military conflicts are again taking place with all the worst effects. Moscow and Washington have forgotten or do not want to remember the joint efforts they carried out during the Second World War to liquidate the crimes committed by the fascist "philosophy". A moment of peace followed - across the globe, but today again instead of collaboration they brought out their old and new weapons of all kinds and confronted each other: Why?

What do the current leaders lack to collaborate instead of military confrontations? Whatever one says, the nations do not want to confront each other, neither the Russians nor the Americans, they do not want to fight and kill each other; on the contrary, both peoples are really peaceful, willing to cooperate, willing to get to know each other better, willing to travel and see all that is most beautiful and interesting in the other country.

Those who are guilty and have the obsessions of gains from the hope of victories in these wars, are the leaders of these peoples, who have the decision-making power to start wars but do not have the power of understanding and the wisdom to stop them before they start.

Each of the leaders chose their so-called "advisors who sing to them, do not contradict them and tell them everything the leader want to hear; and if any of them comes up with an idea that does not suit the leader (who is a dictator or a so-called democrat), he is (at best) removed or even physically liquidated.

The current conflict in the areas of the Baltic and the Black Seas are only examples of the way of thinking and misunderstanding of the existing realities and the multiple advantages that peace instead of wars could offer to Russia and the countries in the mentioned areas.

Having behind them (each of the two forces), the support of a third power (such as China, for example), or of member countries of an organization created to ensure their peace (NATO), the leaders are always ready to press the "red button", to present the force at their disposal and taking into account the global catastrophic risk that they would cause by using nuclear force.

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NATO's Nordic Enlargement with Finland and Sweden
in the Context of the Ukraine War

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Keywords: NATO, Russia aggression, Ukraine, Sweden, Finland, security, war

Abstract: *This paper aims to analyze the differences between the previous NATO enlargement rounds that took place between 1999-2020 and the current process involving Finland and Sweden in several key aspects. Firstly, the candidate countries' status differs significantly. Unlike many of the countries that joined NATO in the past 25 years, Finland and Sweden are distinguished by their high level of security and a very efficient, well-organized, and technologically advanced armed forces sector. This suggests that their accession process may proceed more smoothly, given their already robust military capabilities and stability. Another important difference lies in the historical context surrounding this enlargement. While previous rounds of Eastern Europe NATO's enlargement occurred in the aftermath of geopolitical shifts such as the end of the Cold War, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO is a response to the Kremlin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. For Finland and Sweden, both non-aligned countries with long borders with Russia, the conflict in Ukraine has served as a stark reminder of their vulnerability to external aggression and the need for robust defense capabilities. The war in Ukraine led Sweden and Finland to seek membership within NATO, a membership accession process that, given the severe geopolitical and military crisis, will swiftly end.*

I.   Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, a decade after the end of the Cold War, two major developments led to the transformation of European security architecture. The first seismic shift came with the enlargement of NATO toward

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Central and Eastern Europe, marking a profound increase in the Alliance's reach and influence. In the 1990s, in light of the transformed parameters of the security landscape in Europe and globally following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO embarked on a strategic realignment, extending its membership to include former Soviet bloc nations. This enlargement not only reinforced NATO's defensive capabilities but also signaled a strategic pivot towards safeguarding the security interests of Eastern European nations. Each of the five rounds of NATO enlargement since the end of the Cold War (1999, 2004, 2009, 2017 and 2020) has prompted similar questions and dilemmas regarding the role, purpose, and future of the transatlantic organization. Additionally, each round has been met with increasingly vocal objections from Russia, asserting that NATO's expansion poses a threat to its national security.[2] The redefinition of NATO's role from a purely defensive alliance to a proactive guarantor of stability across the European continent was a defining feature of this evolution. Moreover, in June 1992 NATO's decision to support peacekeeping operations conducted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) represented a turning point in European security cooperation. By lending its resources and expertise to the OSCE, NATO provided the European organization with a robust framework for addressing regional conflicts and promoting peace and stability. This collaborative approach highlighted NATO's commitment to multilateralism and collective security, laying the groundwork for a more integrated and cohesive European security architecture.[3]

In December 1992, NATO declared that the organization was also prepared to support peacekeeping operations under the authority of the United Nations (UN), including in the former Yugoslavia.[4] This doctrine of liberal

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[2] Tuomas Forsberg and Tapani Vaahtoranta, *Post-neutral or pre-allied? Finnish and Swedish Policies on the EU and NATO as Security Organisations*, 2000, in
https://ciaonet.org/catalog?f%5Bauthor%5D%5B%5D=&f%5Bcontent_type%5D%5B%5D=&f%5Binstitution%5D%5B%5D=Finnish+Institute+of+International+Affairs&f%5Blocation%5D%5B%5D=Kosovo&f%5Btopic%5D%5B%5D=Defense+Policy

[3] For more information, see Jonathan Dean, *OSCE and NATO: Complementary or Competitive Security Providers for Europe? A Long Range Perspective* in OSCE Yearbook 1999, Baden-Baden 2000, pp. 429-434.

[4] United Nations, *United Nations Protection Force,* September 1992 in https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unprof_b.htm

interventionism was translated into a new strategic concept of the Alliance, which was later applied in NATO's unilateral war against Yugoslavia in 1999 when Europe proved unable to stop an ethnic cleansing war without American intervention.[5]

The second evolution involved the enlargement of the European Union and the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), commonly known as the CFSP, introduced in 1992 through the Maastricht Treaty and later nuanced by the Lisbon Treaty, which came into effect in 2009. The Lisbon Treaty added a defense component, namely the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Several modifications have been made, with the key difference being that from that point, the European Union would have been in closer contact with the Atlantic Alliance. Perhaps the most significant development was that the European Union was to act as a security provider. Through the CSDP, the EU seeks to complement and reinforce the efforts of NATO and other international organizations in promoting security and stability.[6]

Since 2004, significant European interventions have occurred in the Western Balkans, exemplified by the Althea military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This operation, conducted under the auspices of the European Union as EUFOR, marked a pivotal transition from the previous peacekeeping mission, SFOR, led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization since 1996. The transition from SFOR to EUFOR - Operation Althea - reflected a strategic shift in the international community's approach to stabilizing Bosnia and Herzegovina. While SFOR was primarily a NATO-led mission, EUFOR represented a broader international effort with a significant European Union component. This change underscored the growing role of the EU in regional security affairs and its willingness to take on greater responsibilities in conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations. It encompassed a broad spectrum of objectives,

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[5] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The Alliance's Strategic Concept (1999),* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_27433.htm; For more information, see Paul Latawski, Martin Smith, The Kosovo crisis and the evolution of ost-Cold War European security, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2003.
[6] European Union, *Common security and defense policy,* https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/159/common-security-and-defence-policy

including maintaining security and stability, supporting the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, fostering reconciliation and dialogue among ethnic communities, and assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina's security institutions reform. Despite the formal transition from SFOR to EUFOR, NATO remained closely involved in providing logistical and operational support to the EU-led mission, demonstrating the alliance's ongoing engagement in the region's peacebuilding efforts.[7] Within this new framework of common foreign policy, the EU has initiated and conducted 37 operations and missions. Currently, there are 21 ongoing CSDP missions and operations, comprising 12 civilian and 9 military endeavors.[8] As a result, each country in Europe has been compelled to outline its interests and stance regarding these two developments.

Finland and Sweden have remained non-aligned countries, even though both countries had positively viewed the North Atlantic Alliance as a collective defense organization. Their accession to the European Union in 1995 led to the erosion of the neutral status applied to these two Nordic states, as both Sweden and Finland participated in the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and advocated for a stronger role for the European Union in issues related to international security. On May 18, 2022, Finland and Sweden jointly submitted their application for NATO membership. Their ambassadors to NATO, Klaus Korhonen for Finland and Axel Wernhoff for Sweden, personally handed this historic document to the Secretary-General of the Alliance, Jens Stoltenberg, at the NATO headquarters in Brussels. The official request received immediate widespread appreciation, not only from the Secretary-General but also from all allies, except for Turkey. Turkey's objections included issues raised by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, such as the alleged support provided by Stockholm and Helsinki to Kurdish groups that Ankara considers threats to its security, classifying them as terrorist organizations. Turkey's objections were thus

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[7] European Union, *EUFOR BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA Military Operation ALTHEA,* https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eufor-althea/eufor-bosnia-herzegovina-military-operation-althea_und_en?s=324
[8] European Union, *Missions and operations,* https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations_en#9620

more focused on Sweden, with its substantial Kurdish diaspora, and to a lesser extent, on Finland.[9]

This major change was largely unexpected because until 2022, the two countries were not considered potential allies, and the Nato member status was not a priority on national political agendas. This accelerated request was triggered by Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its threats to neighboring countries, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Alliance. In this context, the public perception in the two countries has dramatically shifted towards the perspective that the current war signals a massive threat to regional security, possibly even a broader Moscow expansionist agenda aimed at neighboring countries of the Russian Federation.[10]

II.   NATO's Nordic Enlargement: Finland and Sweden's Distinct Path from NATO's Problematic Enlargement toward Central and Eastern European Countries

The differences between the previous NATO enlargement rounds that took place between 1999-2020 and the actual process involving Finland and Sweden, from the perspective of the candidate countries' status, as well as the historical context are multifaceted.

Unlike the Eastern European countries that joined NATO, Finland and Sweden are two politically and institutionally stable countries with very strong democratic institutions. They have not undergone problematic processes of political transition in their recent history and are not shaken by internal conflicts. Therefore, their accession does not pertain to securing internal political structures through stronger integration into the international environment but rather involves participation in an international alliance. For the Eastern European

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[9] David Mac Dougall & Kamuran Samar, *L'adesione di Finlandia e Svezia alla Nato: il "Sì" turco come merce di scambio,* in Euronews, 20 May 2022, https://it.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/05/20/l-adesione-di-finlandia-e-svezia-alla-nato-il-si-turco-come-merce-di-scambio

[10] The Guardian, *Sweden and Finland agree to submit Nato applications, say reports,* 25 April 2022, in https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/25/sweden-and-finland-agree-to-submit-nato-applications

states, NATO accession represented not only a guarantee of territorial integrity but also confirmation of political reform efforts and democracy consolidation. In the latter case, it served as a strong incentive for EU membership.

Finland and Sweden are not countries that belonged to the former Soviet bloc and the Warsaw Pact. On the contrary, even during the Cold War era, beyond their policies of neutrality, both countries gravitated towards the Western geopolitical orbit. Since 1995, they have been members of the European Union. Therefore, their entry into the North Atlantic Alliance would not result from a reversal of international alliances. For NATO, it is not an admission of former enemy countries, but rather the consolidation of a long history of close political and military cooperation.[11]

The joining of Finland and Sweden into NATO, compared to previous enlargement waves, represents a different geopolitical direction of the Alliance's policy. It is not an enlargement towards the eastern part of the continent but towards the North. The accession of these two countries would include also the so-called *High North zone*, which - compared to Eastern Europe - holds crucial importance, especially in the Arctic region, a region that, as a result of climate predictions, will prove to be extremely competitive commercially in the future. Moreover, with the enlargement of NATO to include Sweden and Finland, both NATO and Russia must adjust to the new realities of the NATO land and air bridge along NATO's eastern flank to the north, creating a 1,340-kilometer border with Russia. This will impact military planning, particularly concerning Russia's strategic bases in the Kola Peninsula, home to its advanced fleet, the Northern Fleet. Elevating the fleet's status to that of a military district underscores its critical role in Russia's national security, nuclear deterrence, power projection, and Arctic dominance. The shift from the "High North, low tension" adage to "High North, high tension" is evident. Russia aims to compensate for military losses in Ukraine, heightening the likelihood of tensions and suspicions in the short term. However, a strong NATO presence in the High North could enhance

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[11] The first report of the Swedish government on the collaboration of this Nordic country with the Atlantic Alliance, starting from the 1950s, through the two Nordic allies of NATO, Norway and Denmark, see Robert Dalsjö, *Life-line Lost: The Rise and Fall of "Neutral" Sweden´s Secret Reserve Option of Wartime Help from the West*, Stockholm, Santérus Academic Press, 2006.

overall deterrence and mitigate the risk of escalation in the longer term. Collaboration with Russia may become feasible as perceptions of offensive advantage diminish. NATO's strategic planning should account for these dynamics, balancing the need for security cooperation and development with mechanisms to reduce tensions and deconflict with Russia.[12]

Finally, Finland and Sweden, unlike the countries that have joined NATO in the last 25 years, stand out for their high level of security and a very efficient, well-organized, and technologically advanced armed forces sector. The entry of these two countries could rely on a very high degree of integration into the existing military systems of the Alliance, which would occur immediately, and on a very high level of interoperability with NATO forces. As members of the Partnership for Peace, Sweden and Finland have been more security providers than consumers.[13]

The examination of historical events to identify potential parallels can shed light on the implications of this enlargement. One significant period to consider is the years following 1949, marked by the Berlin Crisis and the onset of the Cold War. During this time, NATO's enlargement and the establishment of military alliances played a crucial role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Europe. Similarly, the year 1955, following the failure of the Pleven Plan amidst the Korean War, witnessed significant developments, particularly in Germany, where the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and its integration into NATO had profound implications for European security. Drawing parallels with these historical moments allows for a deeper understanding of the potential implications of Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. Just as NATO's enlargement in the aftermath of the Berlin Crisis and the Korean War reshaped the security dynamics of Europe, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden, after the Russian aggression on Ukraine, could have far-reaching consequences for the Nordic geopolitical space and the broader security

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[12] Cmdr. Rachael Gosnell, U.S. Navy, Dr. Katrin Bastian, *Arctic Dynamics In An Evolving World,* in "per Concordiam Journal of European Security and Defense Issues!, 29 June 2023 https://perconcordiam.com/arctic-dynamics-in-an-evolving-world/
[13] Andrew Dorman, *Sweden brings benefits for NATO but accession delay raises difficult questions* https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/02/sweden-brings-benefits-nato-accession-delay-raises-difficult-questions

architecture. It may lead to enhanced cooperation and coordination within NATO, as well as a reconfiguration of strategic interests and alliances in the region.

Therefore, a preliminary conclusion would be that the current enlargement represents a different one than the recent past of the Alliance. Based on these premises, and following some already made statements, it is believed that the admission process for the two countries could be concluded more quickly than usual (the last admission to the Alliance, that of North Macedonia in 2020, took about two years, but shorter negotiation times are expected for Finland and Sweden).

B. The implications for the Nordic geopolitical region, for NATO, and the entire security architecture.

The first issue, naturally, concerns the new relations with Russia. NATO's enlargement has inevitably led to friction with Russia since 1990. These tensions began modestly during the Yeltsin administration, intensified under Vladimir Putin, and may persist beyond the current Russian president's political exit. In the case of this new enlargement, although the Russian president stated that it does not represent a "direct threat" to Russia's security and that only the enhancement of NATO's military infrastructure in these countries would provoke a response from Russia (such as deploying ballistic missiles or establishing permanent bases in the two countries), the new geostrategic situation created should be noted.[14]

The full integration of these two "security providers" would profoundly change the balance of power in the Baltic Sea. In other words, it would lead not only to the entire Scandinavian Peninsula entering NATO but also to the Baltic Sea becoming de facto a "NATO lake." Russia's actions would be significantly hindered, and the naval base in Kaliningrad, where the Russian Baltic Fleet is stationed, would be monitored by a third NATO member, Sweden, in addition to

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[14] *Putin explains how Finland, Sweden membership in NATO different from Ukraine's* , 30 June 2022, in https://www.aa.com.tr/en/russia-ukraine-war/putin-explains-how-finland-sweden-membership-in-nato-different-from-ukraines/2627019

Poland and Lithuania, already NATO members. Moreover, a new NATO frontier would oblige Russia to deploy substantial military resources, in line with its self-assumed status and narrative as a "besieged fortress."[15]

After the war in Ukraine is over, a serious and pragmatic perspective on international relations cannot ignore Russia's displayed security paranoia. Real or simulated, Russia's suspicions about the deployment of military forces near its borders have already led to a major international crisis. It is already a question, following this uncomfortable logical line, whether the accession of Finland and Sweden might somehow provide Russia with additional legitimacy for more pronounced anti-Western discourse and/or actions. We should avoid giving Russia pretexts for future aggression or understand that by pursuing an expansionist policy, the Russian state will find them anyway, that's why Europe needs a strong and united alliance. This seems to be one of the dilemmas animating the international analysis scene.

At least at the theoretical level, one can argue that all alliances in history—regardless of their offensive or defensive nature, democratic or non-democratic—have generated security for allies and insecurity for those outside the alliance. Russia, so far, has pushed this type of logic to its limits, and other adversaries and international competitors of the West (such as China and Iran) have supported and adopted this rhetoric. In our opinion, NATO has managed to be the most powerful and credible alliance in history precisely because it knew how to remain firm in the face of challenges and accept cooperation on its terms. Why should NATO be more timid now, in the face of Russia, than it was against the Soviet Union?

The enlargement of NATO with Finland and Sweden will enhance security, both for the North Atlantic Pact as a whole and for the two states that will formally fall under the NATO security umbrella. However, at the same time, these two states and the Alliance will be exposed to an unprecedented situation. In other words, NATO's Nordic enlargement will intensify the already existing

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[15] Jean-Sylvestre Mongrenier, *The Baltic as a Western Sea* in "Baltic Rim Economies, 1/2023, https://www.centrumbalticum.org/en/publications/baltic_rim_economies/baltic_rim_economies_1_2023/jean-sylvestre_mongrenier_the_baltic_as_a_western_sea

tension between NATO and Russia, an escalation that risks not limited to Eastern Europe, destined to open a new front of hostilities in Northern Europe.[16]

As for the benefits to NATO, it is clear, first and foremost, that the Alliance will undoubtedly be strengthened politically and militarily, with Finland and Sweden as members with significant military capabilities. Before the Ukrainian crisis, NATO was perceived as an inefficient and insecure organization, being in a deep crisis (this sentiment was officially articulated by prominent figures, such as President Trump in 2017 and French President Emmanuel Macron, who described NATO as an alliance in a state of "brain death" in 2019).[17] The North-Atlantic alliance should accept these memberships at a very brisk pace precisely because it is a historic moment, a direct threat to European security, and an attempt to redefine the characteristics of the international environment, bringing it back to a tragic past where the rule of force prevails over the force of law. In the past, NATO has been respected by its competitors and adversaries because it was strong through the solidarity of its members and because it used this formidable military capacity not for aggression but for defending the values of democracy and international stability.

The rapid admission of Finland and Sweden would send a clear message to Russia and other international actors that NATO is a strong and united alliance, capable of responding quickly and decisively to challenges to European security. Furthermore, the joining of these two states would consolidate NATO's position in the Baltic Sea region and strengthen the alliance's northern flank. This would enhance NATO's ability to deter any aggressive actions by Russia in this area and consolidate the security of the entire alliance. At the same time, the swift acceptance of Finland and Sweden's accession would reflect NATO's firm commitment to democratic principles and the rule of law, providing a concrete response to threats against these values in Europe. It is important to note that any decision regarding the accession of new members to NATO must be made with

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[16] Henri Vanhanen, *NATO and Northern Europe: No longer the forgotten flank* in "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace", 19 December 2023 https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/12/19/nato-and-northern-europe-no-longer-forgotten-flank-pub-91297

[17] ***BBC, *Nato alliance experiencing brain death, says Macron*, 7 November 2019, in https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50335257

caution and take into account all geopolitical, military, and security aspects. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that new member states contribute appropriately to the goals and values of the alliance.

III. Similarities and differences between Finland and Sweden, as potential candidate countries for NATO

Finland and Sweden, in their decision to join the North Atlantic Alliance, exhibit some significant similarities but also some differences. The two countries are alike in terms of geographical positioning, political culture, Western orientation, and a similar degree of socio-economic development. However, we consider that the most similar aspects in their accession dossier are two issues: their historical neutrality and their cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance after the end of the Cold War. Both countries, through their NATO membership applications, put an end to a long tradition of military neutrality after the Second World War (in Sweden's case, the policy of neutrality has lasted for over 200 years and has become an element of its national identity). Neutrality during the Cold War and non-alignment in the post-Cold War period were the result of a strategic approach aimed at maintaining cooperation and formal equidistance between the Western bloc and the communist bloc first and then between the West and the Russian Federation. Although with different sensitivities, Finland and Sweden perceived non-alignment as a prerequisite for maintaining friendly relations and avoiding potential disputes with the Russian Federation. This strategic political choice was accompanied by broad popular consensus in favor of neutrality and, therefore, non-participation in the Atlantic Alliance (in the case of former communist states, the political choice was massively supported by public opinion).

Until a few years ago, according to various opinion polls, the majority of Finns and Swedes were against their country's entry into NATO. Public opinion began to shift partially with the war in Georgia in 2008, the crisis in Ukraine, and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and even more so in the current context of the war in Ukraine. From this perspective, for the foreign and security policies of both countries, the prospect of joining NATO represents a radical discontinuity, a

revolution in terms of the role and level of involvement in international affairs that NATO membership entails.[18]

The second aspect linking Finland to Sweden and strengthening the idea that this round of enlargement targets both states concerns their previous military cooperation with NATO. Since the 1990s, both countries have engaged in a process of modernization and transformation of security policies and defense structures, making military cooperation with the United States (at a bilateral level) and NATO (at a multilateral level) more accessible. Despite the official policy of military non-alignment, collaboration with NATO has progressively increased since the end of the Cold War for both Finland and Sweden. Both countries have been members of the Partnership for Peace since its launch in 1994. They have participated in peacekeeping missions conducted by NATO in the Balkans and Afghanistan. For example, Finland assumed the role of a lead nation in the KFOR mission in Kosovo, the highest role granted to a non-member country. Similarly, Sweden was the only European non-NATO country to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), established after the American invasion in 2001 and maintained until 2014, which later transformed into the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). Sweden was involved from the beginning until the end of May 2021 when the last Swedish troops left Afghanistan.[19]

Furthermore, among various individual cooperation initiatives, Finland and Sweden in 1995 joined the Partnership for Peace Planning and Review Process (PARP), a program through which NATO identifies the military capability standards of the Alliance and shares them with partners within the Partnership for Peace. PARP has served as a forum where NATO and the two

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[18] A Gallup poll released in the Summer of 2022 confirmed that 81% of Finns and 74% of Swedes approve of the alliance's leadership, while their approval of Russian leadership dipped to a miserly 6% in Finland and 2% in Sweden in Voa news, *Finns, Swedes Overwhelmingly Back NATO, Poll Shows*, in https://www.voanews.com/a/finns-swedes-overwhelmingly-back-nato-poll-shows-/6751376.html Petra Karlsen Stangvik, *Sweden's road to NATO. A case study of systemic, regional, and domestic drivers of Sweden's NATO bid,* University of Oslo, 2023.

[19] Juha Pyykönen, *Nordic Partners of NATO How similar are Finland and Sweden within NATO cooperation?*, p. 49, https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/report48_finland_sweden_nato.pdf

countries have shared common planning models, developed similar military structures, and facilitated socialization and familiarization between officers and institutions in NATO's defense sector and partner countries, establishing common operational standards. These two common elements discussed - the similar transformation path in the defense sector and the history of neutrality - have contributed to solidifying the perspective of a joint accession to NATO.[20]

The joint accession of the two states is currently considered the best solution as it enjoys the highest popularity among both nations, as indicated by opinion polls. Finnish authorities have hinted that accepting only Sweden into the Alliance would turn Finland into the sole buffer state between NATO and the Russian Federation, with associated risks. Similarly, Sweden explains that if Finland alone joins NATO would create a situation of territorial discontinuity among NATO members, leading to unnatural isolation of Sweden (as well as difficulties in communication channels, supply lines between member countries, etc.). For these reasons, Finland and Sweden, despite not being NATO members, have been defined throughout the Alliance's history as "virtual allies."[21]

Upon a swift examination of security agreements, treaties, and guarantees, it appears that while Finland and Sweden possess certain differences, these variances do not appear to exert a notable influence on the accession dossier. Firstly, coming from a long tradition of neutrality, both countries feared Russia's reactions to the decision to join NATO, but Finland's fears were greater than those of Sweden. Swedish neutrality and non-alignment were determined by political considerations, unlike Finland, where they resulted from geopolitical necessity.

Finland

Finland has a border of over 1,300 km with Russia, and a significant part of Finnish trade was with Russia until the implementation of European sanctions.

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[20] Tuomas Forsberg and Tapani Vaahtoranta, *op.cit*, p. 16.

[21] Eric Adamson, Minna Ålander, *What would happen if Sweden and Finland split up their NATO bids?*, in "Atlantic Council", February 7, 2023 in
https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-would-happen-if-sweden-and-finland-split-up-their-nato-bids/

In February 2022, Finland, like many other EU countries, was highly dependent on Russian energy, Russian gas supplied represented approximately 6% of the country's energy consumption until the cessation of supplies by Gazprom.[22]

The historical memory reminds the drama of the Soviet invasion in 1939-40, making Finland more exposed to potential countermeasures Moscow might take in response to its NATO accession compared to Sweden. Sweden does not share a territorial border with Russia, has a smaller economic-commercial exposure, an extraordinarily long history of peace and neutrality (the collective perception sees Russian aggression as much more improbable), and geopolitically, it is less exposed (Sweden's major concern in a confrontation with Russia is the possibility of an attack on the island of Gotland in the Kaliningrad enclave, which would give Russia an advantage in controlling the Baltic Sea).

Secondly, Finnish military preparedness and its military capability surpass those of Sweden. Finland has never abandoned compulsory conscription (18-year-old males with a military service period of 6-12 months) and has continued to invest heavily and efficiently in its defense capabilities. Moreover, Finland has effectively modernized its armed forces in the last two decades, relying on top-notch technologically advanced military capabilities and making significant investments in new military equipment (in December 2021, Finland purchased 64 F-35 Lightning II fighter jets from the United States). This is, if you will, the strong point of Finland's entry into NATO: the military sector it brings to the Alliance represents a notable contribution. Finland's membership is perceived even by NATO as particularly attractive since the country is undoubtedly classified more as a security provider than a security consumer. The military budget amounts to $5.8 billion, which is 2.15% of the GDP, thus meeting NATO's objective for member states to allocate at least 2% for defense. With a population of 5.5 million, Finland has military personnel of 280,000 and 870,000 trained

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[22] Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen, *The Finnish "Ruxit"* in "Debt Management Annual Review 2022"
https://www.treasuryfinland.fi/annualreview2022/the-finnish-ruxit-decoupling-from-russian-energy-speeds-up-energy-transition/

reservists (the high number is explained by the inclusion of individuals with military training up to the age of 60).[23]

While Sweden has reformed and modernized its defense sector, it has a lower military potential compared to Finland, although it should be noted that Sweden possesses a high-tech arms industry. In line with a longer tradition of neutrality, an anti-war culture, and a less acute perception of threats from Russia to its national security, Sweden has invested proportionally less in the military than Finland. Specifically, it allocates 1.1% of its GDP to defense, with a military budget of around $7.2 billion. Sweden has a military force of approximately 60,000 soldiers (half of whom are in reserve) - a number that, according to recent government statements, is expected to increase to 90,000 by 2025. The Swedish army relies on voluntary military service for individuals between 18-47 years old, with a military service period lasting 11 months. In an exceptional case, it may have a potentially larger human military capacity compared to Finland, even though with a lower level of training.[24]

On the other hand, Sweden provides the NATO alliance with a significant contribution in terms of high-tech military industry. Despite the small size of its armed forces, Sweden has advanced military capabilities supported by a globally recognized national arms industry. Examples include the Gripen fighter jets, submarines, and infantry fighting vehicles (CV90, considered one of the best in the world). Additionally, the Swedish government has acquired robust military capabilities through the purchase of sophisticated equipment such as

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[23] HELJÄ OSSA AND TOMMI KOIVULA, *WHAT WOULD FINLAND BRING TO THE TABLE FOR NATO?* 9 May 2022, in
https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/what-would-finland-bring-to-the-table-for-nato/; High North News, *Finland is Ready to Fight Russia if Attacked, Says Defense Chief* 23 June 2022 in
https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/finland-ready-fight-russia-if-attacked-says-defense-chief;
Essi Lehto and Mike Stone, *Finland orders 64 Lockheed F-35 fighter jets for $9.4 bln, 10 December 2021* in Reuters,https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/lockheed-f-35-jet-wins-finnish-fighter-competition-source-2021-12-10/

[24] Mina Ålander, Michael Paul, *Moscow Threatens the Balance in the High North*
In Light of Russia's War in Ukraine, Finland and Sweden Are Moving Closer to NATO, in "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" 31.03. 2022, doi:10.18449/2022C24,
https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C24/

German-made Leopard tanks and the recently acquired Patriot anti-aircraft defense system.[25]

It should be noted that Sweden has consistently increased its defense budget, with the pace accelerating significantly in 2020 when the Parliament approved a 40% increase. The budget is thus scheduled to grow from the current $7.2 billion to $11 billion by 2025, marking the largest increase in the past 70 years.[26] Although allocating less than the NATO target of 2%, the center-left government has recently announced its intention to immediately increase defense spending by $318 million to reach the 2% goal earlier than 2028.[27]

Sweden and Finland took separate paths during the NATO Unified Protector mission in Libya in 2011. While Sweden, as the only European non-NATO member, primarily fulfilled surveillance tasks and a no-fly zone with a group of JAS-39 Gripen fighter planes, Finland, mainly for internal reasons, chose to stay away from the conflict despite enhancing its air capabilities precisely for such missions. The strongest opposition came from the country's president at the time, who effectively blocked Finnish participation in that mission.[28]

Ultimately, the two countries differ in their political will. Before the war in Ukraine, the issue of Sweden joining NATO would have faced not only political opposition but also opposition from public opinion. The speed with which Sweden's NATO membership request materialized surprised many NATO allies. In the country, NATO membership has never enjoyed a majority popular consensus, and even the main political parties (except for the small Liberal Party)

[25] Robin Forsberg, Aku-M. Kähkönen & Janna Öberg, *Implications of a Finnish and Swedish NATO Membership for Security in the Baltic Sea Region*, in Wilson Center, June 29, 2022, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/implications-finnish-and-swedish-nato-membership-security-baltic-sea-region

[26] Aljazeera, *Sweden's gov't proposes a 40% increase in defence spending*, 15 October 2020 in https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2020/10/15/swedens-govt-proposes-a-40-increase-in-defense-spending

[27] Johan Ahlander, *Sweden plans to up defence budget to 2% of GDP as Russia threat looms*, in " Reuters", 10 March 2022, https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/sweden-finland-further-strengthen-security-cooperation-2022-03-05/

[28] Fredrik Doeser, *Finland, Sweden and Operation Unified Protector: The impact of strategic culture*, in "Comparative Strategy", 35:4, pp. 284-297, DOI: 10.1080/01495933.2016.1222842

have never considered NATO membership a short-term priority. Even when Sweden participated in NATO missions, it emphasized the UN mandate (in Afghanistan and the Balkans), framing its military engagement more as a contribution to the collective intervention of the international community than as participation in NATO missions. Generally, Sweden has often preferred a political orientation that does not jeopardize neutrality and avoids involving the country in conflicts provoked by others, where national security is at stake. NATO and cooperation with the United States have been predominantly interpreted in this light.[29]

Unlike Sweden, Finland's approach to NATO has been more robust. The internal debate has focused on the formal integration into the alliance, not on whether the country needs to establish active military cooperation with NATO, which has never been questioned. Furthermore, Finland, unlike Sweden, has been concerned with substantially investing in its defense policy. Therefore, NATO membership seems more like a consolidation of its defense policy rather than a political association where national interests might be absorbed by NATO imperatives.[30] Finland and Sweden have acted in concert so far, but if Sweden's candidacy is delayed due to Turkey, as it seems, Finland would have the opportunity to continue the accession process on its own. Currently, except for some speculations proposed by some analysts, there has been no concrete discussion about decoupling the two accession applications. Many experts consider it a "failure" if Finland proceeds without Sweden in the NATO accession process. However, there are also public voices stating that Finnish national security, currently threatened by Russia, should become a priority, and Finland should quickly enter under the security umbrella of the North Atlantic Alliance.

Conclusions

Today, NATO is recognized as the most powerful multilateral security organization in the international system (deterrence). This status is also

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[29]Richard Milne, *Unlike Finland, Sweden inches reluctantly towards NATO* in "Financial Times"25 April 2022, https://www.ft.com/content/992c18d8-ab1e-4ef1-bd87-89527374f38b
[30] Ibidem.

attributed to its ability to attract new members. This aspect is essential for an alliance because NATO (like all alliances in history) is based on a promise of future military assistance, and therefore, its credibility is a crucial ingredient for its attracting power. Attracting new members to the alliance, especially if they have traditionally been reluctant to join any military groups, is precisely due to confidence in the collective defense that NATO still guarantees. However, NATO's enlargement rounds after the end of the Cold War have not been without criticism. The potential accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, after decades of non-alignment status, if it were to occur, cannot escape attention regarding issues highlighted after 1999 and the emergence of completely new ones. The first issue, highlighted by a series of commentators and international affairs experts since the 1990s, pertains to the effectiveness of the alliance's decision-making process and the internal tension between cohesion and the "open-door policy."

On one hand, the admission of new members confirms the alliance's well-being and expands its resources and geopolitical horizon. On the other hand, it increases the level of heterogeneity, which complicates decision-making processes and raises the risk of strategic inconsistency. This tension is reflected between Article 5 of the Atlantic Pact (which guarantees the unity of collective security among allies) and Article 10 (which establishes the "open-door policy"). This dilemma manifested within the Alliance during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, where divisions between the "old Europe" (the established member countries) and the "new Europe" (the new members from Eastern Europe) created internal tensions and misunderstandings regarding NATO's objectives and operational horizon. Therefore, the accession of Finland and Sweden to a military alliance where decisions continue to be made by unanimity could involve different sensitivities and potentially further complicate decision-making processes.

In comparison with candidate states from previous accession processes, the rapid pace of this enlargement reflects the urgency of adapting to the shifting security landscape, particularly in response to the heightened threat posed by Russia. This current accession process will swiftly integrate only two states, both of which boast superior military preparedness compared to NATO's candidates from previous accession rounds.

The Security of the Pontic-Baltic Region and Russia's Great Power Status

Mihail Dobre[1]

Keywords: Russian expansionism; Pontic-Baltic isthmus; post-Cold War status quo; Great Power status; Russian commitments to the UN and the OSCE.

Abstract: *Russia became a great power fighting for supremacy in the area between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea; the USSR met its objectives at the end of WW2; post-Cold War Russia looked initially as a normal state, but started to act aggressively after 2000; Russia did so neglecting its obligations in accordance with the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act; Moscow's 2022 aggression on Ukraine calls into question even Russia's great power status.*

Russia's interests and the fragility of state structures in the Pontic-Baltic region.

The Pontic-Baltic Isthmus - a form of buffer zone between two great centres of power, the German and the Russian ones - has been the target of Russian expansionism throughout the modern times. Having escaped Tatar-Mongolian domination, the Tsarist Empire was practically born with its eyes on the West, and the first obstacle for it to overcome was the region linking the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. This strategic orientation was persistently followed

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by the Russian state leadership regardless the type of political regime existing in St Petersburg or Moscow.

Having made steady territorial acquisitions on its western frontier in the 18th-19th centuries[2], the Russian Empire had a troubled history in the 20th century, but this strategic objective was still pursued with perseverance. During World War II, the USSR leadership followed two lines of action to achieve this goal:

- the first, by securing its neighbourhood with Soviet-ruled states (the so-called *glacis*);

- the second, by creating a security belt on its western border, initially through mutual assistance pacts and the installation of military bases, and then through territorial annexations[3].

Moscow did so despite the fact that its participation in the United Nations coalition implied taking over, through adherence to the January 1st, 1942 *United Nations Declaration*, the set of principles contained in the *Atlantic Charter* (14 August 1941). That is why, despite the fact that the Atlantic Charter repudiated the idea of territorial acquisition by force, the USSR retained in 1945 the territorial acquisitions (half of Poland, all three Baltic States, and Bessarabia) it had obtained during its collaboration with Nazi Germany under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact (23 August 1939). As a result, Moscow's lines of action had been fully implemented by the end of the Second World War. [4]

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[2] In few decades, the Czarist Empire occupied Crimea (1783), participated in the division of Poland (1795) and forced the Sublime Porte to cede Bessarabia (through the treaty of Bucharest, 1812).

[3] Florin Constantiniu, *Doi ori doi fac şaisprezece. A început Războiul Rece în România? [Two times two is sixteen. Has the Cold War started in Romania?]*, Eurosong & Book, 1997, p. 27.

[4] Idem, *De la Carta Atlanticului la «Brâul de securitate» al URSS [From the Atlantic Charter to the USSR's «Security Belt»]*, in „Revista istorică", VIII, 3-4, March-April 1997, p. 189.

Post-Soviet Russia and the temptation of „abnormality".

After the end of the Cold War, and especially after the collapse of the USSR, the new post-communist Russia seemed to accept what the other major players in the international scene expected of it: that it should behave <u>normally</u>, according to the rules of the international system to which the Russian state was and still is a party.

These rules - which made the post-1945 international system unique in history – have been based on the principles enshrined in the *United Nations Charter*, and were reinforced, specifically for the European area, in the *Helsinki Final Act* of the 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In fact, the initial signals from Moscow have raised hopes that the Soviet/Russian leaders were adopting a normal behaviour in international relations. On the one hand, the Gorbachev government supported the authorization of the use of force in the first Gulf War (by the UNSC Resolution 678 of 29 November 1990) and agreed to the unification of Germany (by the *Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany*, signed in Moscow on 12 September 1990).

On the other hand, the post-1991 Yeltsin government accepted the withdrawal of Russian (formerly Soviet) troops from the Baltic states (in 1993 from Lithuania, and in 1994 from Estonia and Latvia), and accommodated itself to a certain extent to NATO's eastward expansion against the background of the development of an institutionalised relationship with the North Atlantic Alliance (Russia participated since 1991 in the work of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and after 1994 in the Partnership for Peace initiative).

Furthermore, Russia joined the Council of Europe (in 1996) and began a partnership with the European Union (in 1997). In particular, Russia was a party – together with Ukraine, the US, and the UK – to the agreement (*Budapest Memorandum,* December 5th, 1994) that paved the way for Ukraine's transformation into a non-nuclear state, an agreement that guaranteed „the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine"[5].

However, Russia's normal behavior was only an illusion. From the time of Boris Yeltsyn's rule (1991-1999), Russian decision-makers did not hesitate to develop concepts that reverted to the logic of Tsarist/Soviet expansionism by denying the set of commitments and principles to which the Russian state had subscribed. The most relevant case in point is the formulation of the theory of Russia's special interests within what Moscow defined as its „Near Abroad"[6].

This formula, which was launched as early as 1992, was intended to designate the states that had been previously part of the USSR since the entire geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union was defined as a sphere of vital interests for Russia. Clearly, from a territorial point of view, *Near Abroad* was mainly aimed at the Pontic-Baltic isthmus. It might be useful to add that one of the promoters of this theory, Sergei Karaganov, then Deputy Director of the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, considered that the aim of Russia's *Near Abroad* policy was to protect ethnic Russians by any means, including by force („we must restore the role of force as a settlement instrument")[7].

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[5] *Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, A/49/765, S/1994/1399, 19 December 1994.

[6] Valentin Stan, *Rusia între „străinătatea apropiată" și politica mondială [Russia: Near Abroad and World Policy]*, in „Sfera Politicii", no. 25, February 1995, p. 20-21.

[7] „Nous devons rétablir le rôle de la force en tant qu'instrument de règlement", apud Gerhard

After the resignation of President Yeltsin in December 1999, and the rise to power of his last prime minister, Vladimir Putin, Moscow's approach has become increasingly rigid. The framework the post-Soviet Russia had accepted during the Yeltsin Era in the CSCE (and since 1995 in the OSCE), in terms of respecting all the organisation's commitments and principles, began to be denied by the new leadership, with the Russian side practically blocking the activity of that organization. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first OSCE Ministerial Council meeting that ended without the adoption of a general policy document was held in Vienna in November 2000, the first year of Putin's leadership. The reason for that behaviour? Russia was no more ready to accept decisions on regional conflicts on the OSCE agenda that would confirm Moscow's non-compliance with earlier decisions, in particular the decisions of the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit.

Furthermore, Russia's participation in cooperation mechanisms with NATO, based on the 1997 *Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation*, and the 2002 Rome Declaration on *NATO-Russia relations: a new quality*, gradually lost its consistency, initially after the 1999 Kosovo crisis and especially after the 2008 Georgia war. These forms of Russia-NATO dialogue were almost completely blocked in the second decade of the new millennium[8].

Perhaps significantly, after the illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014, Russia began a process of abandoning international treaties that provided for

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Simon, *La Russie: une hégémonie eurasienne?*, in „Politique étrangère", 59ᵉ année, n°1, 1994, p. 38.

[8] NATO suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia in April 2014, while keeping open channels of political and military communication. See NATO website, „Relations with Russia", 14 July 2022 (https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50090.htm).

arms control and ensured the transparency of their use, those treaties being the foundations of European stability through the confidence and security-building measures they promoted. That was the case of Russia's 2015 decision to suspend its participation in the „*Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty*", an agreement concluded in November 1990 in Paris, in force since 1992, and further adapted at the Istanbul OSCE Summit in November 1999[9]. Similarly, the „*Open Skies Treaty*", concluded in 1992 within the OSCE, with the aim of ensuring transparency regarding the possession and positioning of military forces by European states on their national territory, was abandoned by Russia in 2021[10].

Without fear of being wrong, one can even credit the idea that in doing so Russia wanted to have its hands free of any international commitments when settling by any means its strategic objectives on its western border. However, even by removing the obligations arising from the various international security treaties, Moscow can only proceed in the sense of protecting the security of other states, including the states of the Pontic-Baltic isthmus, since such an obligation derives from the treaty that Russia has not left - and is not interested in leaving - namely the *United Nations Charter*. The military aggression implemented in 2022 against Ukraine, no matter how this military aggression is called by Moscow, is in total contradiction with Russia's status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

The challenges deriving from Russia's post-World War II great power status.

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[9] Ian Anthony, *Death of the CFE Treaty: The need to move arms control back to the centre of security policy*, SIPRI, 12 March 2015.
[10] Hollis Rammer, *Russia Officially Leaves Open Skies Treaty*, Arms Control Association, July/August 2021.

In fact, Russia's actions under Putin benefit from the fact that Moscow's empire has a great power status enshrined in the very founding document of the post-war political order, *i.e.* the United Nations Charter. Whereas of all the elements that could contribute to justifying Russia's aspiration to great power status („population, the extent of territory, industrial resources, social organisation, historical tradition and will to greatness", for just quoting the list advanced time ago by Martin Wight[11]), the most consistent Russian great power feature is given by the fact that this country is a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Since 1992, the Russian Federation has occupied the place originally allocated to the USSR, through a tacit recognition within the world organisation that the Russian state is the successor to the Soviet state in the UN hierarchy of power, although there is no formal decision by the Security Council or the General Assembly on this matter.

In fact, the UN Charter enshrines the essential role of the permanent members in the work of the organisation, and therefore they are vested with exceptional prerogative. Thus, Article 24 states that „*In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf*"[12]. Within the Security Council, decision-making power is vested in the permanent members, as stated in Article 27: „*Decisions of the Security Council on all other matters shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the*

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[11] Cf. Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, Royal Institute of International Affairs/Continuum, New York and London, 2004, p. 49.

[12] *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of International Court of Justice*, San Francisco, 1945, Art. 24.

concurring votes of the permanent members..."[13]. Simply put, a permanent member has the power to decide the course of the UN action in a given crisis situation, as Russia did on 24 February 2022 when, by voting against it, it prevented the Security Council from acting on the situation in Ukraine.

It is interesting that there is no provision in the UN Charter that explicitly states what obligations are incumbent on States that are permanent members of the Security Council, obligations that should be commensurate with their privileged status. However, the absence of an explicit provision on the obligations of permanent members should not entail the discretionary use of the veto power[14].

More than that, the permanent members of the Security Council have an obligation to ensure the functioning of this institution, not to block its work, as they are expected to behave in a mature, rational, and responsible manner. This is the conclusion that derives from Article 1 of the UN Charter itself, which states that the primary purpose of the United Nations is „*To maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace...*"[15].

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[13] *Ibidem*, Art. 27.

[14] An account of the 1944-1945 debates relating to the use of veto power, in *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1944*, General, Volume I, Washington, 1966, doc. 419-510, și *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945*, General, Volume 1, Washington, 1967, doc. 1-320. See as well, Constantin Bușe, Nicoale Dascălu, *Diplomație în vreme de război. De la Carta Atlanticului la Carta O.N.U. [Wartime diplomacy. From the Atlantic Charter to the United Nations Charter]*, București, 1995, p. 126-130, 143-146, 153-155, 181-183.

[15] *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of International Court of Justice*, San Francisco, 1945, Art. 1.

The UN Charter practically prohibits the use of offensive force, as long as Article 2 states that „*All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered*", and that „*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations*"[16].

In accordance with the UN Charter, force may be used only for defensive purposes and in a limited and conditional form, as this is clearly enshrined in Article 51: „*Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security*".

Not only the UN Charter prohibits the use of force. In the same spirit, the *Helsinki Final Act* (1975), includes in the „*Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States*" (or briefly the „*Helsinki Decalogue*"), equally strong formulations on refraining from the threat or use of force, inviolability of borders, territorial integrity of states or peaceful settlement of disputes. Specifically, in the first principle of the „*Decalogue*", which refers to „*Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty*", it is stressed that „*Within the framework of international law, all the participating States have equal rights and duties. They will*

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[16] *Ibidem*, Art. 2.

respect each other's right to define and conduct as it wishes its relations with other States in accordance with international law and in the spirit of the present Declaration. They consider that their frontiers can be changed, in accordance with international law, by peaceful means, and by agreement. They also have the right to belong or not to belong to international organizations, to be or not to be a party to bilateral or multilateral treaties including the right to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance; they also have the right to neutrality"[17].

A simple reading of this principle is able to highlight an essential feature of the contemporary international system, namely that no state can develop its security policies by preventing other states from exercising their inherent sovereign rights. Moreover, it is easy to see that both the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the war Russia started against Ukraine in February 2022 are in contradiction with Russia's freely assumed obligations.

Regardless the way the provisions of the UN Charter or the Helsinki Final Act may be read and interpreted, it is by nature obvious that by its actions the Russian Federation has done exactly the opposite of what it was obliged to do in the current international system. Acting in that manner, Russia generated mistrust and insecurity. The Russian side has not only undermined the functioning of both the World organisation and the Pan-European forum but has also undermined its own position in the process, calling into question its own status in the international community and consequently its status as a great power.

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[17] *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Final Act*, Helsinki, 1975.

BOOK REVIEW

Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*, **New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 248.**

In March 2014, the international community faced one of the most serious crises since the end of the Cold War. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that Crimea, which had been part of Ukraine, was now part of the Russian Federation territory. Shortly after, Russia's unexpected invasion of the Crimean Peninsula was followed by an armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine between pro-Russia separatist rebels and the Ukrainian forces. The actions were condemned by the Western states, Russia being sanctioned for breaching international law. The conflict that emerged seemed to be a turning point for Russia's relations with the West and a reminder of how fragile the peace could be. The crisis not only isolated Russia on the international scene but also raised the political temperature across Europe, causing NATO to look to its own preparedness for war and the need to shore up deterrence.

Lawrence Freedman, Emeritus Professor of War Studies at King's College London and author of *Strategy: A History* (2013), *The Future of War: A History* (2017), presents in his new book, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy,* the Ukraine conflict through the lens of political and military strategy. He provides a brief history of the Ukraine conflict in the context of the various tensions that have developed in and around the former Soviet Union region since the end of the Cold War. Exploring the problems of strategy, Freedman has tried to discover

how the actors involved in the conflict identified their objectives, how they sought to achieve them, and to what extent were they successful.

The book opened with a theoretical discussion about the main strategic concepts developed during the 1950s and 1960s that continue to influence the strategic discourse nowadays. Concepts like „crisis management", „deterrence", „coercive diplomacy", „limited wars" and „economic sanctions" are analyzed in the first chapter. This overview of the theory of strategy sets the tone for the case study of the Ukraine conflict that is examined in the next three chapters. Beginning with the origins of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Freedman explores the triggers of the conflict, the battles that erupted in Donbas, how the Western powers reacted after President Putin annexed Crimea, and the broader international context that influenced the dynamic of war from late 2015.

After the apparent successful annexation of Crimea, President Putin was seen as a strategic thinker who was prepared to use the military as well as diplomatic and economic means to pursue his agenda. Before the crisis in Ukraine, Putin seemed to have the upper hand in relations with the West. In 2013, when U.S. President Barack Obama held back after Bashar al-Assad crossed a prior „red line" by using chemical weapons against the Syrian population, Putin came up with the idea of cooperation between the U.S. and Russia to remove Syria's chemical weapons peacefully. Russian President made it clear that he could get Assad to cooperate, but the U.S. had to refrain from bombing Syria. The diplomatic way-out proposed by Moscow allowed the Kremlin to show off its coveted great power status, strengthen its position in the Middle East, and portray Obama as an indecisive leader who draws „red lines" and does not respect them.

At the same time, as Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was about to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, Putin used economic coercion toward Kyiv and applied extensive customs controls to all imports from Ukraine. His threats convinced the Ukrainian President to suspend the preparations for signing the Association Agreement with the EU and move toward Russia's sphere of influence. When the Euromaidan protests erupted and Yanukovych fled from Ukraine, Russia looked at what was left in its toolbox. Support for an armed attack and the fragmentation of Ukraine seemed to be the last resort in stopping Ukraine's Westward shift.

Freedman questions the idea that Putin was a „first-class strategist" who managed successfully the Ukrainian crisis. According to the author, the Russo-Ukraine conflict is a story of situations made worse, with moves that failed to achieve what was intended or else resulted in unintended and damaging consequences.[1] For Putin, the most striking evidence is that he couldn't change the political trajectory of Ukraine. On the contrary, Ukraine continued its Western aspirations. Besides that, Putin's actions led to Russia's isolation on the international scene and harmed the economy. These outcomes showed that Russia didn't have a long-term strategy. Instead of playing „geopolitical chess" and thinking several moves ahead of the opponent, Putin was playing „geopolitical judo" which is about immediate tactics, not a long-term strategy.

Trying to understand if the Russian strategy was innovative and successful, the author looked at the whole range of instruments applied by Moscow in its pursuit of maintaining Ukraine in Russia's security orbit. As was

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[1] Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 164.

seen throughout the crisis, Russia acted out of a sense of threat. Its hasty decisions and the apparent lack of strategy created a prolonged conflict in Eastern Ukraine in which Russia gained hardly an advantage.

The conflict in Ukraine has been seen as a test for modern warfare. The information campaign and cyber-attacks that were used as coercive practices by Russia reflected the new features of the war. In his book, Freedman describes the moments in which Moscow used modern technologies not only against Ukraine but also against Western democracies. From spreading fake news in Europe through its media outlets like *Russia Today* and *Sputnik* to the interference in the American presidential elections in 2016, Russia tried to undermine Western governments and expose their vulnerabilities. However, these practices didn't outweigh the use of regular forces on the battlefield. As a result, the conflict over Ukraine is a reminder that hard power never quite goes away and that the use of force is still critical when setting borders and changing political regimes.

Founded on three pieces of articles about the crisis in Ukraine written by Freedman while the fighting was going on in the Donbas region, the book is a compelling and concise analysis of the Russian-Ukraine war. Although the author doesn't claim expertise in either Russia or Ukraine, his knowledge of the history of strategy and his ample research on the subject made „*Ukraine and the Art of Strategy"* an essential book for those who want to understand the impact of the strategy in a conflict that seems to change the post-Cold War international order.

Ștefania-Teodora Cocor

Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War,* **Cambridge, Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2010, pp. 287.**

Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War by Richard Ned Lebow was published for the first time in 2010 at Cambridge University Press, and it is a scholarly work made up of 295 pages on the subject of international relations. It deals with the frequency and characteristics of the wars that occurred in the last four centuries and analyses the reasons and risks taken by the combative parts, in relation to the realist theory of war, the rationalist theory, and the theory of the transition of power, using as arguments multiple historical examples. The book is divided into three parts: the previous literature's analysis and critical remarks referring to war and its causes; a short review of the author's international relations theory and six claims about the type of states that are more likely to start a war, using as an example an analytic table of the causes, participants and outcome of the wars that occurred since the seventeenth century up to that date; and the probability of war in the future, taking into account fundamental underlying motives like fear, interest, honor or standing. In the end, an *Appendix* states the original data used in the book, and there is also a bibliographical list and an *Index* of names and keywords.

Richard Ned Lebow is an American Professor of International Political Theory in the War Studies Department of King's College London, born in France on the 24th of April 1942 and raised in New York. He studied at the Universities of Chicago, Yale, and New York, where received a Ph.D. diploma in Political Science in 1968. He is also a Bye-Fellow of Pembroke College, University of Cambridge,

and James O. Freedman Presidential Professor Emeritus at Dartmouth College, a Fellow of the British Academy, and a recipient of honorary degrees in France, Greece, and the U.S. During his over sixty years-long academic activity he has written 40 books and over 400 scholarly articles, enriching with his studies the fields of international relations, comparative politics, political theory, political psychology, history, and philosophy of science.[2]

The original contribution that this book brings to the area of political studies is exactly this analysis of the emotional reasons for war, the author proving through his statistics that the main causes of conflict are neither the realist fight for security, nor the antagonism between two great powers advocated by the transition of power theory, or the rationalist material interests. Instead, in most cases, all of these aspects fall second to more temperamental reasons like the fight for standing or seeking revenge which scholars almost completely ignore.

When it comes to the definition of war, international law distinguishes between civil war, fought between two parties inside the borders of the same state, and interstate war, waged between the governments of two independent countries. Nevertheless, this classification does not include conflicts without a declaration of war or fights between political units that haven't been recognized as states by their adversary or by other actors. However, war is different from other forms of violence because of its political aims and its organized form. Modern war is based on the state as a sovereign political unit that holds a monopoly over the use of force on its territory. So, we cannot speak about modern war before the seventeenth century when the concept of a sovereign state

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[2] Richard Ned Lebow's website, URL: Richard Ned Lebow, accessed: 12.07.2022.

was established, the difference between intra - and interstate violence was made, and war and peace were legally defined as such. Lebow adds to this the condition that one of the parties should have suffered more than 1000 battle deaths in a war.

Historically speaking, combat is less frequent nowadays due to "the advanced economic development, the increasing destructiveness of war, the spread of democracy, growing trade and interdependence among developed economies, international institutions and norms and widespread disgust with war as a practice". [3] Nevertheless, the best reason to still go to war and win the support of public opinion is national security. Such a decision triggers people's feelings: the fear of an aggressor, the seeking for revenge, defending, or gaining honor. For example, American public opinion, otherwise strongly anti-war, considered the American interventions in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, or Iraq precisely on behalf of national security. Here we can also include the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine.

One of the most common reasons for which states went to war over time was to seek territory as a guarantee of security, certain economic interests, or standing. Following the steps of ancient philosophers like Plato or Aristotle, Lebow deems spirit, appetite, and reason as the fundamental drives of human behavior. To all of these, the author adds three fundamental emotional reasons that proved over time to be a basis for war: fear, interest, and honor. However, we must bear in mind that in the real world, all of these elements are present and mixed, and the degree of these variations gives the original character of every

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[3] Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 6.

conflict. Lebow believes that spiritual reasons are too little taken into account by contemporary philosophy or social science, although they are always present, being the basis of the human lust for power, affirmation, and prestige. While it is true that states or governmental institutions lack reason or emotions, the people who run them often project their psychological needs or personal ambitions onto their political units and influence their performance from this point of view.

The author defines spirit as "an innate human drive, with self-esteem its goal, and honor and standing the means by which it is achieved."[4] At the same time, rank is the position that somebody has in a hierarchical order of statuses, which should be proportional to the amount of honor, privileges, and responsibilities that it brings. Appetite is the lust for material possessions, with cooperation being the path to meeting these interests. In an ideal liberal modern world, the possible conflicts that would appear would be nonviolent and based on the general mutually agreed rules. The reason should be the element that educates and tempers passions, which determines the actors to choose cooperation in foreign policy and compromise for a partial mutual win, rather than a full one-sided victory. Fear is rather emotional than spiritual, it is a feeling hard to control, born out of imaginative exaggeration and imbalance, which creates an immediate need for security that could lead to irrational actions. A world based on fear is extremely irrational, suspicious, conflicting, and full of situations that can easily go out of control.

Contrary to the previously discussed theories of war, the propositions that Lebow makes at the end of his argumentation are meant to summarize the most important factors that would determine a state to resort to military

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[4] *Ibidem*, p. 69.

confrontation: the most aggressive states are "rising powers seeking recognition as great powers and dominant great powers seeking hegemony"[5] (for example, France under Napoleon I or Nazi Germany) which rarely go to war against each other, but when they do, they ally with at least another great power (Seven Years War, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905); rising powers usually target a declining great power, a weaker third party or another great power which is perceived as temporarily weak (Russia's eighteenth-century victories against the Ottoman Empire or Prussia's successful challenge of Austria in 1866); "hegemonic wars are almost all accidental and the result of unintended escalation" [6] (First World War), miscalculation of chances having most of the time deeper causes than insufficient information; weak and declining powers quite often initiate wars against great powers in order to avenge themselves and almost inevitably lose (the nineteenth-century Ottoman attacks on Russia).

To conclude, from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, war has gotten to a peak of destructive potential due to the invention of nuclear technology, but is currently less occurring. Beginning as a way of social practice for kings or aristocracy, war became a subject of concern for the whole population after the development of the modern nation-states, but it was still economically and technically limited throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Beginning with the nineteenth century, public opinion disagreed more and more with the idea of war and foreign occupation over a local population. However, it took us two world wars with tens of millions of victims, acute cultural and intellectual consequences, as well as other decades of Cold War, full

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[5] *Ibidem*, p. 92.
[6] *Ibidem*, p. 95.

of ideological international tension that burst into armed conflict only in a few isolated regions of the world, to accept the idea that it takes more than the absence of war to preserve peace and security. Although, as Lebow says, "throughout the twentieth century and into the current one, honor, resentment, vengeance, and sheer malice were – and remain – powerful motives in international affairs,"[7] the destructiveness of war and the general disagreement with this practice led to a general drop in their number nowadays. The book ends on an optimistic note for the future, taking into account the growing development and understanding of security as a concept and all of the lessons that humanity should have learned from its tragic past experiences.

Roșoga Cristina

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[7] *Ibidem*, p. 26.

Daniel Tudor, *Coreea de Sud: povestea unui fenomen economic, politic și cultural,* **București, Editura Corint, 2022, pp. 440**

Daniel Tudor is a writer, entrepreneur, and former journalist from Manchester, U.K. He worked for *The Economist* from 2010 to 2013 as Korea Correspondent, writing about North and South Korea. Tudor graduated with a BA in philosophy, politics, and economics from Oxford University and acquired an MBA from the University of Manchester`s Business School. Among his writings, the most controversial book is *North Korea Confidential* published in 2015 and translated into Romanian in 2020, a book which ultimately brought him threats from North Korea`s regime. Among other papers, he wrote *Korea: The Impossible Country* (2012), *A Geek in Korea* (2014) and *Ask a North Korean* (2018). He worked as an advisor to the international press to the Moon Jae-In administration between 2017-2018.

 Korea: The Impossible Country represents the latest book translated into Romanian and published by the British author. After 10 years since printing, *Korea: The Impossible Country* has been translated for Corint Books by Sorin Șerb. This book is about "the poorest, most impossible country on the planet" upon its foundation, according to an advisor to its third president. It is about "*the second Asian miracle*" and the "Han River miracle", the unknown Republic of Korea overshadowed by its brother, the so-called Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Divided into five parts, plus an introduction and an epilogue to shape and conclude his ideas, Daniel Tudor's book explains the mentality of a nation and

the contemplative nature of Korean people. He begins with a short introduction, basically *a brief history of Korea*, from Antiquity to the present, and goes on with the first part. Every part has 6 chapters, each of them debating a principal subject. For instance, in *Part I: Foundations*, the main theme is the belief system, starting from shamanism thinking, Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, and proceeding with political views, capitalism and democracy. In the second part, *Cultural codes*, the key issue is the Korean terminology, fundamentally some words in the Korean language like *Jeong, Chemyon, han and heung*, and, of course, some archetypes like competition, "from Clan to Nuclear family" and Neophilia. In the third part, *Hyun-shil: cold reality*, the accent is on the true face of the world and the politics of dictatorial and democratic regimes, from the Korean War to the present. In the fourth part, *In the hours not spent working*, the leading term resides in the everyday activities, the living space and divertissement. The last part, *More of "us", and less of "them"* is about the awareness of self, nationalism and modernization at the core of Korean thinking. To sum up his conclusions, in the *epilogue*, Daniel Tudor points out some negative aspects about South Korea, like the tragic rate of suicide and depression, or the rank on the "Satisfaction with Life".

Tudor is a *maestro* in writing down ideas about society, mentality, and human acts. In his book, South Korea becomes an important actor on the international scene and is a part of a bigger puzzle in Asia. Today, the Republic of Korea is not only a *dragon* but also a force within East Asia. It is the counterpart of Japan and China, and its supremacy is still ascending. The author explains *why* Korean people are acting like *aliens*, permanently active and working, without rest. They have few hobbies, and their vacations will last a few

days rather than weeks. Despite their wealth, Koreans are never satisfied and happy. Having overcome civil war and starvation and gone from a defeated land and colony to an advanced, modern, and democratic country through determination and stubbornness, South Koreans are worthy of sitting back and resting. But this seems to be, in a Korean manner, impossible.

From the 1950s onwards, the Korean mindset changed. In a world full of poverty, the main theme became *competition.* It was necessary to be competitive as a child, as a parent, as a politician, or even as a whole country. To survive, Koreans needed to focus on developing human skills and then put them to endless use. To dig themselves out of their horrific situation, the nation`s youth had to be educated as well as possible, and as adults, they had to work as hard as possible. Even General Park Chung-Hee, the dictator of South Korea between 1961 and 1979, was obsessed with statistics: the export volume, inflation data and the rate of education. Everything must be compared. Even today, journalists and politicians make constant reference to the position of South Korea in world GDP ranking tables. Though it may seem strange, South Korea as a country must own the first place in everything. To a greater extent, children too are very competitive. In an elitist country, even in their first years of existence, a child must be the first in their class, and the first in their school. Education is the only way to be successful in life. And this is, ironically or not, the real cause of unhappiness, mental problems, and suicide.

The author Daniel Tudor considered it mandatory to illustrate both the internal and external political life of South Korea and the impact of political events on Korean people. The structure of the book makes it accessible for an unknowing reader to enter the world of Korean culture and to understand some

valuable Korean paradigms. Thus, the book *South Korea: The Impossible Country* or *Coreea de Sud: povestea unui fenomen economic, politic și cultural* becomes an agent in shaping some precious judgements about The Republic of Korea as an independent and wealthy country.

Maria-Magdalena Viorean

Pierre-Jean Luizard, *Le piège Daech. L'État islamique ou le retour de l'Histoire*, **Éditeur La Découverte, Paris, 2015, pp. 187**

Written in 2014, released at the publishing house from Paris, *La Découverte,* the book *Le piège Daech. L'État islamique ou le retour de l'Histoire* stands as an elucidatory reading not only on the terrorism and Islamic State issues but also on the contemporary history of the Arab states. The author of this book is Pierre-Jean Luizard, a French historian and researcher specialized in the religious and political problems in the Middle East. Currently, he holds the position of research director at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Paris. Aside from *Le piège Daech*, Luizard published works like *La Question irakienne* (2002) and *Laïcités autoritaires en terres d'islam* (2008), as well as articles for the French press.

The book *Le piège Daech* (full title in English: *The Daesh Trap. The Islamic State or the Return of History*) is Luizard's best-known work and was awarded *Prix Brienne du livre géopolitique* in 2015, a prize given for the books that succeed in explaining complex and topical subjects. Therefore, this is a popular history book, even though its arguments are backed up with scientific evidence such as historical documents.

Le piège Daech was translated and published in Romania at Polirom in 2016 as part of the Hexagon collection. It can be found under the title *Capcana Daesh. Statul Islamic sau reîntoarcerea Istoriei* and it is available both printed and electronic.

The book is structured into six chapters, two dedicated to the Islamic State, one to the contemporary history of the Middle East starting with the

Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the remaining three were kept for a few Muslim countries. Among those countries, the attention falls mostly on Iraq and Syria, while Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are approached in relation to the evolution of the first two. Iraq and Syria are treated separately, each with their own chapter, because at that time they were directly threatened by the IS which even conquered strategic points from both.

To prove that the success of Daesh is not based just on strategic reasons, the author presented a brief version of the contemporary history of the Middle East. The memory of betrayal from Sykes-Picot is exploited by radical Islamic propaganda in sending anti-Western messages. This way, Arab nationalism and unity are promoted in spite that Pan-Arabism is a pipe dream, as the author shows. Due to political and especially religious and ethnic factors, the Middle East will never be able to provide a unified Arab state. Moreover, those weak points make the perfect instruments through which the IS secures its power.

The author's hypothesis according to which Daesh feeds on the weakness of the Arab states has two dimensions: political and religious. Both are strongly connected and that caused problems throughout the past. For example, the British made sure that Iraq would be led by the Sunni Muslims who represent the religious minority in the country, and so, the majority, the Shia Muslims, were led by the minority. Because of this, the Sunnis were not supported inside the country, but outside of it by the British. The strategy of the United Kingdom to empower the minority worked well: the authority of the Iraqi leaders depended on foreign will. The power balance changed after the 2003 invasion when Saddam Hussein was overthrown and the old political class was replaced with Shia Muslims. The majority took hold of the power and so the West lost its

loyalties. In addition, the Shia revenged the Sunni for the long time in which their political rights were taken away. The Shia government implemented repressive policies and crushed the Arab Spring uprisings. This is the background in which the IS, whose members are Sunni, popularized its ideology and persuaded the Iraqi Muslim minority to fight on their side. The state lost its citizens to extremist movements.

I think the explanation given for the quick rise of the Islamic State in 2013 is founded on solid grounds as it regards the history of Iraqi society's problems. The corruption and social inequality (in human rights, and living standards) based on religious differences affected the security of Iraq, especially in confrontation with the radical movements that promise a better future to those persecuted.

Although the years following the book's release proved there are limits to the Daesh forces and that the author's pessimistic prognosis did not become reality, the question about the meaning behind Western actions still stands. Aside from the stalemate and the impossibility of self-governing in the last centuries, the Middle Eastern states became the subjects of Western missions that lack political objectives. The author sees frailty and hostility in the Western coalition's actions in relation to the Middle Eastern people, considering the radical Islamic propaganda too.

Muslim states are also condemned. This is the case for Turkey led by Erdogan who did not take measures against the IS, in fact, he even encouraged the threat. He hoped that if Daesh expanded in Syria, the country would be weakened and Bashar al-Assad would lose his power. The Kurds, one of Erdogan's targets, would have been affected too by the Islamic State's actions.

But the winner from this strategy turned out to be the IS, while Turkey entered into a time of isolation from both Arab and Western states.

I agree the book *Le piège Daech. L'État islamique ou le retour de l'Histoire* by Pierre-Jean Luizard accomplished its goal: it shed light on the context in which Daesh assured its quick rise. The author succeeds through accessible writing to introduce the reader to the history of the Middle East and its political, religious, and ethnic aspects. Together, they build the main hypothesis of the book: the Islamic State could obtain victories due to the Arab states' failures.

Alexandra Veronica Moldovan

Mihai Manea, *Consiliul Europei. Politică și predarea istoriei în Europa,* **București, Editura Nomina, 2018, 176 pp.**

Since its creation in 1949, the Council of Europe has promoted human rights and freedoms, the consolidation of democracy, political dialogue, and cooperation between states in the social, economic, and cultural sectors. Intending to have a united Europe, in which the inclusion and acceptance of diversity are some of the key elements in the growth of the individual, the Council of Europe has been involved throughout the second half of the 20th century, continuing until now, in the development of different levels of education in Europe, especially in teaching history.

The importance that the Council of Europe has given to history as a subject in European schools is motivated by history's potential to influence the masses. Depending on its nuances, history can be a tool for division or unity among nations and peoples. Considering this feature of history, the Council of Europe understood that, to have a society that knows the European identity and finds itself in it, history becomes a mandatory discipline within the education systems and fundamental for the development of European citizens.

Mihai Manea, professor of history, Ph.D. in the history of international relations and European studies, member of the National History Commission, and president of the Romanian History Teachers Association (APIR - Clio), is the author of scientific, methodical works and articles in periodicals dealing with various aspects of history. His work, "*Council of Europe. Politics and the teaching of history in Europe"* aims to identify and highlight the Council of Europe's notable

efforts in teaching history at the European level. Reiterating the need for history, a field that has become vast following its constant research, to be studied in order for people to acquire knowledge and understanding about themselves and others, the author appeals to all the meetings, seminars, projects, and symposiums supported by the Council of Europe during the 20th century and until now. The paper investigates the evolution of the requirements of history teaching according to time and social, political, economic, etc. circumstances, observing the adaptability to which the discipline of history has been subjected during seven decades. Thus, starting from the transnational and international character of history, it becomes a priority factor in developing young people who get historical and civic education through it.

In the book's first part, the author analyzes the connection between history and political science, demonstrating that, in its interdisciplinarity, history defines political science. At the same time, in an interdependent relationship, history takes shape and meaning thanks to political sciences. History creates a broad palette of study, and through its connection with the other social sciences, there is an interest in researching fields such as economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, etc. The author continues by presenting the constant concern of the Council of Europe about the way history is taught in schools, stemming from history teachers' propensity for subjectivism.

Until 1989, the Council of Europe was concerned with transforming history into a discipline that led to uniting people, developing inclusive mindsets, and being open to diversity and understanding. By creating joint working groups between pre-university and university education teachers, researchers, and specialists, the Council of Europe led to the rapprochement of different cultures

and ways of seeing history to reduce subjectivism, capable of arousing animosity among young people. With the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the Council of Europe saw the need to teach history with the aim of spreading and consolidating democracy in the states now on this path.

The 1990s are described as focusing on the concept of national and European identity, aiming to make a connection between the two. That is why, during this period, through its meetings, the Council of Europe aims to treat sensitive or controversial topics of history and popularise the idea of European history and the role of the history teacher to preserve truthfulness and objectivity in the reporting of facts. At the same time, in the understanding of historical events, it is proposed to use a multiperspective approach, a method by which students are familiar with multiple perspectives by analyzing historical sources and including them in the historical narrative.

The teaching of history is divided in these years by strictly chronological themes, such as the Bolshevik Revolution or the Holocaust, with the aim of aligning the information and teaching methods of these events without being radicalized by subjective factors. Also, the Council of Europe facilitates the transformation and integration of former communist states into the democratic vision. It gets involved in regulating the study of history (especially in textbooks) - from a deeply ideologized discipline to one of the multiple perspectives.

In the last part of the work, the author Mihai Manea reviews the documents issued by the Council of Europe as a result of its projects, which also include the views on education and history teaching in the 21st century.

The 3rd millennium brings new challenges to the topic under discussion - the intensification of globalization and interdependence, terrorism and radicalism, migrations, and digitalisation. All this leads to the need to readjust the history teaching process according to the necessitate for intercultural dialogue, moving towards studying history from a social and cultural point of view.

The history teacher is thus seen as an "agent of the formation of the young generation", people with an analytical spirit and critical thinking, inclusive and open to diversity. In the 21st century, such training becomes possible thanks to new technologies and the multiplication of sources of analysis, a broadening of the spectrum of history, interest is developing in the study of the role of women in history, the history of diversity in which cultural differences are also promoted. After 2010, the attention of the Council of Europe focused on history taught as a sum of changes and interactions between people and cultures. History is seen as a discipline of thinking rather than memorisation.

Even though the evolution of history in European schools has been transformative and adapted to the requirements, the author mentions that, in some respects, the Council of Europe has maintained its position on some ideas. National history can only be studied within European and universal history. The discipline must present events from all points of view (even social, economic, and cultural). Moreover, history is also essential in direct relation with democratic citizenship, respectively with the development of an inclusive mentality, and promotes, above all the debate, the exchange of ideas between people.

Maria-Corina Preda

Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine,* **Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2022, pp. 384**

To comprehend the brutal war initiated by Russia against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Mark Galeotti published, shortly after the outbreak of the conflict, a comprehensive and insightful analysis of Vladimir Putin's military campaigns. The author is a British scholar and expert in Russian and European security affairs. He has written extensively on topics related to Russian politics, organized crime, intelligence, and military affairs. Mark Galeotti is known for his insightful analyses and commentary on Putin's regime, and he has authored numerous books and articles on the subject.

In the 1990s, Russia confronted a myriad of daunting challenges. Its economy was plagued by inefficiency, endemic corruption, widespread alcoholism, and pervasive apathy. Moreover, the nation was confronted with a series of pressing security issues. In this turbulent context, Russia was haunted by a deep-seated fear of insecurity that harkened back to its historical struggles. Moreover, when the Soviet Union disappeared and was replaced by the Russian Federation, the status of a great power vanished. The humiliation of the USSR's collapse and the feeling of encirclement were exacerbated by the Eastern enlargement of NATO, aggravating even more Russia's sense of insecurity.

Putin regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union and was resolute in his determination to reverse it by expanding Russia's borders, prioritizing the nation's survival and territorial integrity. In response, Vladimir Putin focused on strengthening Russia's military capabilities and implementing reforms within its

armed forces, viewing these actions as essential for ensuring the country's security and reinstating its stature as a global power. This initiative was predominantly funded through revenue generated by Russian fossil fuel exports. Through a militarized foreign policy, an expanding security apparatus, and ongoing modernization efforts within the military, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has thrust the Kremlin into the forefront of global geopolitics. Putin saw the restoration of military power as a cornerstone of national security, with the strategy of emphasizing national identity playing a pivotal role.

Moscow's strategy has been to instigate and perpetuate frozen conflicts, beginning with Transnistria in the 1990s, followed by Chechnya, then Georgia in 2008, and extending to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions—collectively referred to as the Donbas—in eastern Ukraine, near the Russian border. These conflicts have allowed Russia to station armed forces in the post-Soviet region, known as the "near abroad," and assert its influence. This region serves as a key arena for pursuing Russia's vested interests and is effectively under the control of the Russian Federation, showcasing the pivotal role of the Russian military as a tool of foreign policy. Russia's objectives include maintaining economic and political dominance in the region, as well as ensuring control over its military potential.

Russia perceives itself as perpetually under threat, facing challenges both domestically and internationally. Consequently, Russia believes it has the right to respond to these perceived threats, whether they originate from internal or external sources. The narrative emphasizes the importance of unity among Russians to confront these challenges effectively.

The author emphasizes that there is no **Gerasimov Doctrine** in Russia and Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed

Forces, is not a war theorist. He is credited by the West as the architect of Russian "hybrid warfare," a strategy that integrates traditional military tactics with non-military methods such as disinformation and cyberattacks to create favorable conditions for military operations. This approach has been colloquially termed the "Gerasimov doctrine." While the term "Gerasimov Doctrine" is widely used in Western discourse, in Russia Gerasimov himself has stated that there is no official doctrine bearing his name.

Mark Galleotti pointed out that in Ukraine, Russia overestimated its military power and underestimated the evolving nature of modern warfare. The traditional approach of relying on sheer numbers of troops and outdated equipment proved inadequate in the face of precision munitions and advanced technologies. The adaptability of armed forces to the changing landscape of warfare, characterized by advancements in technology, will ultimately determine success in future conflicts.

Putin's aggressive military actions have tried to project Russia's military power into its strategic neighborhood. From interventions in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine to military involvement in Syria, these actions have demonstrated Russia's willingness to assert its influence and protect what it perceives as its sphere of interest. However, while these ventures have bolstered Russia's image as a military player, the full cost and consequences of these actions have yet to be fully realized. The immediate gains in terms of territorial control or political influence have been accompanied by significant long-term challenges and potential ramifications. One key aspect is the economic burden associated with sustaining military operations and supporting annexed territories. The costs of maintaining a military presence, providing economic

assistance, and addressing infrastructure needs in these regions can strain Russia's already struggling economy, especially when combined with international sanctions imposed in response to its actions. Moreover, Putin's wars have exacerbated tensions with neighboring countries and strained Russia's relations with the West. This has led to increased isolation diplomatically and economically, limiting opportunities for cooperation and development. Additionally, there are internal implications to consider. Military engagements and geopolitical ambitions may distract from pressing domestic issues, such as economic reform, social welfare, and political stability. Furthermore, the glorification of military prowess and expansionist policies can foster a sense of nationalism and militarism within Russian society, potentially perpetuating a cycle of conflict and aggression. In sum, while Putin's wars have demonstrated Russia's military capabilities and temporarily advanced its strategic interests, the full costs and consequences of these actions have yet to be fully realized. The bill for these endeavors, in terms of economic strain, diplomatic isolation, and domestic challenges, may come due in the future, posing significant risks to Russia's long-term security and stability.

Mihaela Mustățea