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„THE DECLINE OF DEMOCRACY IN EASTERN EUROPE:
Focus on Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova“

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ABSTRACT (English)

The title of my thesis is “The decline of democracy in Eastern Europe”, the goal of the thesis is trying to understand in which of these countries the democracy is having a slight decline and try to make a comparison between them. Obviously the biggest focus will be about the rise of the government and the power of Vladimir Putin in Russia and the last Ukrainian issues which followed the Yanukovich’s regime. Putin from the beginning of his presidency made his power every year more authoritarian, based on the reinforcement of his person, the control of the mass-media and trying to interfere the opposition in any possible way. In Ukraine the situation fell in the last two years due to protest of the population against the filo-Russian government of Yanukovich’s regime and after because of the war in the eastern part of the country.

However a decline of democracy started already few years before with the fail of the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, where the attempts of democratization were not democratic enough, betraying the expectation of the citizens.

To introduce the topic of decline of democracy I made a comparison between different articles, which talk about the democratic situation of the world, and took and commented some score of 2014, taken by the Freedom House’s webpage.

In the conclusion I will make a comment and comparison about the scores of 2015, and try to explain where the thesis about decline of democracy have been in line with expectations and where not.

ABSTRACT (German)

Der Verfall der Demokratie in Osteuropa:

Schwerpunkt Russland, Ukraine, Georgien und Moldawien

Der Titel meiner These lautet: "Der Verfall der Demokratie in Osteuropa". Ihr Ziel ist der Versuch nachzuvollziehen, in welchen dieser Länder die Demokratie einen leichten Rückgang erlebt sowie einen Vergleich zwischen diesen anzustellen. Der Aufstieg der Regierung und die Macht Vladimir Putins in Russland als auch die letzteren Probleme in der Ukraine, die auf das Regime Yanukovichs folgten, werden offensichtlich den Hauptfokus bilden.

Durch die Verstärkung seiner eigenen Person, die Kontrolle der Massenmedien und zahlreiche Versuche, die Opposition zu beeinträchtigen, wurde Putins Führungsstil von Beginn seiner Präsidentschaft an von Jahr zu Jahr autoritärer.

In der Ukraine verschlechterte sich die Situation in den letzten

zwei Jahren aufgrund der Proteste der Bevölkerung gegen Russlands Tochterregierung des Regimes Yanukovichs und später wegen des Krieges im Osten des Landes.

Allerdings begann der Verfall der Demokratie bereits ein paar Jahre zuvor mit dem Scheitern der Farbrevolutionen in Georgien und der Ukraine, wo die Unternehmungen zur Demokratisierung nicht demokratisch genug waren und die Interessen der Bürger und Bürgerinnen verrieten.

Um eine Einführung in das Thema des Verfalls der Demokratie zu erstellen, habe ich verschiedene Artikel verglichen, die sich mit der demokratischen Situation der Welt befassen, und manche Werte aus dem Jahre 2014 kommentiert, die ich der Webseite von „Freedom House“ entnommen habe.

Im Fazit werde ich einen Kommentar und einen Vergleich zu den Werten von 2015 erstellen und versuchen zu erklären, in welchen Punkten die Arbeit über den Verfall der Demokratie mit den Erwartungen übereinstimmt und in welchen nicht.

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1. Introduction

In my master thesis I'll try to analyse some aspects of democracy focusing the Eastern European region, this part of the world that lived deep changes after 1989 and faced a period of westernization and a new possibility of freedom after the Soviet period. The analysis is mainly developed in four countries: Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, all of them, after the year 2000, lived particular periods that deserve mentions because strictly connected with the concept of democracy. Russia slowly passed from a "fake democracy" during Yeltsin to a new regime under Putin; Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova passed several times government's changes, which approached them once to the West and once again to the East, *Colour revolutions* included.

The analysis is based on some important points, which a good democracy required: fight of corruption, freedom of information, national and local democratic governance, with important case studies that try to explain how the situation involved in the countries. The murders of Anna Politkovskaja and Boris Nemtsov in Russia, the autocratic rise of Putin, the cases of corruption in Ukraine during Euro 2012 and more recently, the disappearance of one billion of euro in Moldova, are anti-democratic examples.

Is then democracy in decline? This is one of the questions I'll try to answer in my thesis, to do so, I'll use the help of some data from *Nation in Transit*, a research of the American NGO *Freedom*

House, which records democratic scores of 29 countries includes Eastern European, Balkan and ex-Yugoslavian states.

To introduce the concept of decline of democracy, the first chapter is based on a comparison of two articles taken by the *Journal of democracy*, which analyse the democratic situation all around the world, a comparison between nowadays and the earlier post-Soviet period.

The attempts of democratization of the Eastern Europe by the West materialized in the so-called “Colour revolutions”: the second chapter explains how and why these peaceful revolutions born in countries with the desire of westernization like Ukraine and Georgia, and explains the reasons of its fail.

But the biggest part of this thesis is dedicated to the most important and influential country of the region: Russia. With its strong leader Vladimir Putin, Russia is living a new period of re-born nationalism and rising authoritarianism: lack of freedom of information, opposition repression and ineffective fight to corruption. If Eastern Europe is living a new period of decline of democracy, is mostly because of Putin? How this character made a slight but continuous increase of power?

Before conclusion, it is important to research some consequences of these changes: if Russia became again an important pawn of the world's chessboard, with will of enlarge its sphere of economic and military influence, it is impossible not mention an old and probably unexpected concept: the *Cold War*. The last chapter is dedicated to a possible world scenario of the next years. With a

return of authoritarianism in the East, will we attend a new Cold War?

For a correct development of this master thesis it was necessary to be everyday informed about the international politics and the international events. Some important facts happened during the last period, when my thesis was almost done, but without doubts still worth a mention in order to increase the quantity and quality of my case studies, for example the case of corruption in Moldova exploded in the early September 2015.

In general finding in politics an objective source of information is not easy, in this special case, talking about issues regarding western and eastern blocks, is even more difficult. The *Journal of Democracy* and the website of *Freedom House* are American sources, which undoubtedly attack harder the position of Putin and his governments. For a correct development I tried to use also Russian sources, avoiding the most propagandistic one (for example *Sputnik* or *RT*), the most interesting and reliable were *Russia Beyond the Headlines* and *Valdai*. Other sources I used (in English language but also in Italian) were *Europe-Asia Studies*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Foreign Policy*, *New Eastern Europe*, *East Journal*, *East on-line*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Internazionale* and *BBC News*.

2. Is democracy in decline?

Originated from the Greek *demos* (people) and *krátos* (power), the word “democracy” literally means “rule of the people”; it is in contrast with all the authoritarian governments and dictatorships, it is universally recognized as the best form of government for its ability to offer freedom, equality and power to the population, and it is the goal that all the countries are pursuing, and it provides prosperity and effective governance in the long term.

“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.” Democracy has probably many gaps, but is the best we have for now, as Winston Churchill used to say.

The comparison of two articles from the *Journal of Democracy*, published in January 2015 (“Is democracy in decline?” and “The myth of democratic recession”) helps to clarify and analyse the trend of the democracy in the world: before the year 2000, especially after the fall of Soviet Union, the expectations were big and probably too optimistic, but afterwards, the rise of democracy in the world had to face some unexpected issues, including the attempts of democracy-building after the American invasion of Iraq and the increase of authoritarianism in Russian politics.

Marc F. Plattner in his article makes a list of three possible causes of democratic decline that we can simply summarize as: economical crisis, rise and new power of some authoritarian countries and change of world’s geopolitical scenario.

The crisis started in 2008 and brought with it several financial and social problems in the Western countries: a lot of small and me-

dium enterprises had to close their business leaving a big unemployment specially among young people, countries like Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Ireland suffered the worst consequence of this crisis and put the European Union in serious difficulty like never before. After seven years the situation in Europe is stabilized but is not truly improved, fault of democratic governments, which could not find a real solution and even worse, Greece, Spain and Italy suffer political instability, changing their governments and prime ministers more than once.

It was different situation for some authoritarian countries and China is the most significant example: without introducing democratic reforms the Chinese government was able to create a massive economical growth, as E. Gyimah-Boadi said, China “is providing African governments with alternative non-Western markets, trade partners, and sources of military and development aid”.¹ Other countries are following this non-democratic route, like Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, which have found as source of strength the “Soft power” in international organizations, the same where Western democracies are becoming weaker year by year. But it is not just the Soft power posing¹ as a problem for the West; also in the “Hard power” there is some example of weakness. In the last years the American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan didn’t bring the desired effects, and even more, the numerous civil wars, which have followed the Arab spring, prove that the attempt to spread democracy in Middle East is, for the moment, an hard road. On the other hand we at-

¹ Marc F. Plattner, *Is democracy in decline?*, “Journal of democracy”, 5-10, January 2015

tend of a military growing of China in the South East Seas but above all to the power of Russia, with the stealth annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine, without an effective intervention from the West. This means that the international rules are not anymore in the hands of democracies.

Another article, which states the problematic situation of world's democracy, is "The great democracy meltdown" by Joshua Kurlantzick on June 9th 2011. In the year 2005 more than half of the population of the world was living under democracy and during the rise of Arab Spring there was a very optimistic atmosphere, indeed was the best demonstration of freedom against authoritarianism since the end of the Cold war. But probably this thought was too optimistic: the Middle East countries had to face turmoil and civil wars and only Tunisia seems to have found its political stability. Meanwhile in other parts of the world like Cambodia, Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova, Moscow and Beijing intervened before a possible rise of democracy, conscious of the problems that 'colour revolutions' brought them.

But it is not just a problem of international politics, after an analysis of some surveys, also the conscience of the population is not going towards a democratic affirmation: from a study of Program on International Policy Attitudes, only 16% of the Russian population said that democracy is "very important", while studies in some countries of Central and South America says that only a small proportion of people prefer democracy over all other forms

of government.²

TABLE 1—MEAN DEMOCRACY SCORE FOR THE WORLD ACCORDING TO FOUR SURVEYS

	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Freedom House	0.53	0.59	0.59	0.61	0.61	0.62	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.61	0.62
Polity IV	0.53	0.65	0.66	0.66	0.67	0.67	0.68	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.70	0.70	0.71
Economist Intelligence Unit	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.55	—	0.55	—	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.55
Bertelsmann Index	—	—	—	—	—	—	0.53	—	0.54	—	0.54	—	0.53	—	0.53

The article “The myth of democratic recession” by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way is going in the opposite direction. It is true that the democracy in the world is not growing like in the first years after the Cold War, but we are not facing a democratic recession as many people think. It is necessary to observe the Table 1: we don’t have a significant rise between 2000 and 2014 and there is a slight decrease since 2006-2007, but this is not enough to say that the world’s scenario is losing democracy.

TABLE 2—PERCENTAGE AND ABSOLUTE NUMBER OF DEMOCRACIES ACCORDING TO FOUR SURVEYS

	1990	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Freedom House	39%	45%	44%	46%	46%	46%	46%	47%	47%	46%	46%	45%	45%	46%	45%
	65	86	85	89	88	89	89	90	90	89	89	87	87	90	88
Polity IV	39%	50%	52%	53%	53%	56%	58%	58%	57%	58%	57%	57%	59%	58%	57%
	56	80	83	85	84	90	93	95	92	95	93	93	96	94	94
Economist Intelligence Unit	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	49%	—	48%	—	47%	47%	47%	47%
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	82	—	80	—	79	78	79	78
Bertelsmann Index	—	—	—	—	—	—	55%	—	64%	—	62%	—	61%	—	59%
	—	—	—	—	—	—	65	—	76	—	74	—	72	—	70

Also the Table 2 shows the absolute number and percentage in

² Joshua Kurlantzick, *The great democracy meltdown*, “New Republic”, 19 May 2011, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/world/magazine/88632/failing-democracy-venezuela-arab-spring>

the world, and after an important increase in the 90's, the number of democratic states did not change significantly in the last 15 years.³

One question arises in this context: analysing these empirical numbers, why still many people think that democracy is in recession? The answer needs to be searched during the post-Cold War and it is bound with an excessive optimism after the fall of Communism and the Berlin's Wall. People often confuse the crisis of authoritarianism with a rise of democracy but these two aspects are not necessarily connected: a fall of an authoritarian regime does not mean a settlement of a new democracy, on the contrary it is normal to have political instability or even civil wars. Another point of discussion of democratic recession is made because people focus too much in the absence of progress of democracy: in the *Journal of Democracy* in 2009 Puddington says "perhaps the most disappointing development [...] the failure of China to enact significant democratic reforms [...] during its year as host of the Olympic Games." In 2009 about some liberal reforms failures in Kazakhstan and Cuba he talks about "continued erosion of freedom worldwide." In essence, for Puddington when democracy is not rising means that we face a democratic recession and a decrease of freedom. In contrast Levitsky and Way in their articles say that some failures of democratization in China, Middle East or Central Asia does not have to be considered as

³ Steven Levitsky, Lucan Way, *The myth of democratic recession*, "Journal of democracy", 45-58, January 2015

examples of democratic recession.

In general, according several bodies of research, a settlement of stable democratization is difficult in very poor countries, for example in Central Africa and Sub-Saharan countries, and it is also unlikely in dynastic monarchies with oil like Middle East and single-party regimes with strong states and high growth rates (China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore). If we follow these researches the conclusion is that only in a very few number of countries it is possible for a democratic maintenance. The pessimistic and gloomy scenario described in some articles, for Levitsky and Way is then far from the reality and too rough.

Nevertheless some people can criticize the fact that it is not right to describe and try to explain the decline of democracy just showing some tables with data. First of all it is too difficult to have a right opinion, because the absolute truth in politics doesn't exist, but also it is important to know from where and from which side these data are coming from. The data from Freedom House, an American NGO's with the centre in Washington D.C., is surely reliable and made by professionals but we can always find someone who does not agree with it. A politician from Russia or China surely would find these data not totally objective. It is important then to bear in mind that these data doesn't show a real and only truth, but they want to show us an opinion, a point of view that can be shared or criticized.

2.1 Russia, the best example of “new authoritarianism”

To continue the topic about the growing of authoritarian regimes in the world, it is important a special mention of Vladimir Putin and his government. I will talk more in detail in the next chapters (especially chapter 7), but for now it is the right example to explain the concept of “new authoritarianism”. The reasons why Russia fits with this concept are different, first of all this is the country where the history repeats, after a period in the 90s with democratic expectations, recently in the year 2000 an authoritarian regime is coming back slowly. But this regime is much softer than two decades ago, and different from other countries in the world: for example people can feel relatively free, the borders are not closed and they have the opportunity to travel abroad, internet sites are not banned and controlled like other countries (Iran or China). There is repression, but only a selective one against the best organized opposition groups.

Perhaps some may think that this kind of authoritarianism is not stable and can collapse whenever, but also many people thought that USSR was powerful and indestructible and they were wrong. In Russia, Putin invented the model of the leader elected democratically, with fair elections but few alternatives, and started projects of counter-revolutions among young people in case of need.⁴ And he needed between 2011 and 2013.

⁴ Melik Kaylan, *How Putin invented the new authoritarianism*, “Forbes”, 28 January 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2014/01/28/how-putin-invented-the-new-authoritarianism/>

The personalization of power, the need of the Kremlin to claim the right of being a super-power, the fusion between power and property, remind some of the aspects that characterizing the Soviet Union, but Vladimir Putin has been able to shape it and produce something modern.⁵

As Krastev says, in Russia there is a conscience among elites and citizens that this model is not perfectly working, and this is different from China for example, where an authoritarian regime is normally perceived as successful. It could be considered a paradox for an authoritarianism, but this contradiction it is also explains why this regime is able to survive in a era of democratization.⁶

3. Why the Colour Revolutions failed?

The most known *Colour revolutions* broke out at the beginning of the new century, after the attempts of the Western countries to weaken the last post-Soviet regimes, which are considered with no democracy and still with good relations with Russia. The Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in

⁵ Giovanni Mafodda, *L'autoritarismo di Putin, senza veli* (*The Putin's authoritarianism, without veils*), "Aspenia online", 4 December 2013

⁶ Ivan Krastev, *Paradoxes of the new authoritarianism*, "Journal of democracy", 7-15, April 2011

Ukraine (2004) and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005), with no violence and no use of force, overthrew their dictatorships bringing a new optimistic wind of democracy, destined to last in time. Or at least these have been the westerns expectations. In all the three countries there were manifestations against pro-Russians governments, accused of election cheats, supporting instead other governments pro-West, and in all three cases several days of turmoil brought new elections that decreed the defeat of the old ones. Every revolution had a colour (or flower) and was supported by organized group of students and NGO's financed by western countries. For the population there was a promise of democracy, fight to corruption and a new opening to western countries: a promise to see their country finally modern and developed.

Why then, already after few years we can say that the Colour revolutions failed? The answer is not so difficult to find if we analyse the domestic policy of these countries: first of all the rule of law never took root. Remove the dictators is not enough if you don't follow democratic reforms as promised.⁷ The Colour revolutions were considered as the apogee of democracy but after that, no more important steps were made: while Saakashvili in Georgia tried to open his country as much as possible to a western influence, the corruption was spreading without stops. In Ukraine the government of Viktor Juschenko, with the powerful ally Julija Tymoshenko, was so vicious that couldn't stop the new rise of the enemy of the Orange Revolution, the old and known Viktor

⁷ Melinda Haring, Michael Cecire, *Why the color revolution failed*, "Foreign Policy", 18 March 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/03/18/why-the-color-revolutions-failed/>

Yanukovich which became prime minister in 2006 and President (after democratic and fair elections) just four years later. Among the three countries Georgia was the one who had the best improvement toward modernity, but some wrong and not democratic choice were made by the president Saakashvili which compromised forever his international and local reputation. One of the most significant examples was the attack to South Ossetia in 2008, when Georgia declared war to Russia. It was a disaster, because Russian army could defeat the Georgian forces in few days of war, Saakashvili and his government lost a lot of money and this undemocratic choice declined his consensus without remedy. In 2012 he was strongly defeated by the new party “Georgian dream” guided by the billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili.⁸

But why exactly in Georgia, after an initial enthusiasm, it spread the opinion that the Rose Revolution was just a continuation of the old system? Was not the Rose Revolution a great example of democracy and a radical change from the past?

It is necessary to come back to the past and explain the historical context of the Rose Revolution. Between 1993 and 2003 the ex-president Eduard Shevardnadze tried to promote without success some democratic reforms, he couldn’t overhang the old regulations and the results were instead massive corruption and crimes within legal institutions. He was also accused of personal enrichment. In 2003, the election of 2nd of November were considered manipulated by domestic and international observers, and after

⁸ Paolo Stefanini, *Rivoluzione delle rose addio, la Georgia cede al suo Berlusconi (Goodbye rose revolution: Georgia surrender to its Berlusconi)*, “Linkiesta”, 2 February 2012, <http://www.linkiesta.it/georgia-voto>

more than one week of pacific manifestations in Tbilisi and in other cities, Saakashvili auto-declare himself as the winner.

Here the promises of the new Georgian president: using French and American models as examples to follow, get as far as possible from the authoritarianism government and strength the relations with Western countries.

A lot of democratic rhetorical but in reality Saakashvili did not respect the agreements and reinforced the concept of “patron Presidentialism”: the power was more in the hand of the President, who could dissolve the parliament and calls for new elections any time. The President was able to choose his own prime minister and for the parliament was now impossible to proceed against him.⁹

As in Georgia, also in Ukraine the Colour revolution disappointed the expectations and the deep division between the two heroes of 2004 (Viktor Yushchenko and Julija Tymoshenko) permitted in 2010 to Viktor Yanukovich to take the power and win the election after the first attempt in 2004.

Six years before Yanukovich was accused of electoral cheats after winning the first round. The heavy campaign, supported also by Vladimir Putin, started six months before and the opponent Yushchenko, was almost totally banished from the domestic press, and even suffered an attempt on his life, having been found positive to dioxin after a strong illness. During the day November 22nd, the affluence in the eastern regions, where

⁹ Michael Dobbins, *The Post-Rose Revolution Reforms as a Case of Misguided Policy Transfer and Accidental Democratisation*, “Europe-Asia Studies”, 16 June 2014

Yanukovich had the biggest consensus, was calculated around 78-80 %, and rose strongly in few hours. It was totally defined an abnormal results and a lot of people started pacific manifestations in Kiev and after five days the court called for new election, this time favorable for the opponent Yushchenko, who finally closed the old order willing to start a new and modern democratic state: “We are free, The old era is over. We are a new country now”.¹⁰

But like in Georgia the Colour revolution didn’t work and the promises of modernizations were not accomplished by a total incapacity of coexistence between Yushchenko and Julija Tymoshenko, which led Ukraine in political paralysis and a fall of GDP. Yushchenko accused in public Tymoshenko to will an establishment of an authoritarian regime for herself, in these situation it was downhill road for a back of the old Yanukovich. He did in 2010 a wise and more moderate electoral campaign with promises of democracy and improving relations with both sides, West and Russia. It was a prelude for a new success, this time regular and without cheats.

What’s happening recently is history that we all know after the fact of Euromaidan in Kiev, but for sure between 2010 and 2013 it is important to add that the Yanukovich’s government did not accomplish the promises, as probably it was reasonable to expect. First of all he couldn’t follow any democratic line, placing in the parliament people from his region without a big knowledge of politic, instead of democratic experts. Other reforms about him

¹⁰ Adrian Karatnycky, Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, “Foreign Affairs”, March-April 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2005-03-01/ukraines-orange-revolution>

and his allies' interests were just useful to reinforce the figure of the President and moreover he criticized the Yushchenko's attempt to reunify the Ukrainian culture. In Yanukovich's opinion the western part of the country was too close to European and American culture to be defined Ukrainian, so he exposed several times an anti-Ukrainian view talking about discriminations against Russian speakers.¹¹

Today it is time already to draw some conclusion saying that Colour revolutions failed, as it failed the myth where in post-Soviet countries the democracy guided and controlled by the West could efficiently oppose to the corrupt oligarchies of the Eastern countries. These oligarchs are definitely too rich and too powerful to hold off and the situation in Ukraine after Euromaidan made vain the last hopes: everything is even worse than people could expect. The American journalist Anne Applebaum published an article for *Slate* where explains this negative scenario: nowadays US and Europe are not important anymore in the East like before, despite the efforts to maintain relations, a big anti-Western campaign made from Russia made believe to the Ukrainian and other countries that for them Europe is the enemy and there's need to stay away and come back to the roots.¹²

Georgia, but even more Ukraine are the most important example that how western countries are not able anymore to control these

¹¹ Alexander J. Motyl, *Ukrainian Blues*, "Foreign Affairs", July-August 2010, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2010-06-17/ukrainian-blues>

¹² Anne Applebaum, *The End of the Color Revolutions*, "Slate", 24 January 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/01/ukraine_s_autoritarianism_events_in_kiev_signal_the_end_of_the_color_revolutions.html

part of the globe and probably are not able any other part if they don't change strategy. The goal of the new government in Georgia (Georgian dream, 2012) was the return to have good relations with Russia after the 2008's war and this is just one small example this removal from the western block to get close again with the past.

The Applebaum's article shows the point of view of Western countries about the situation after Colour Revolutions, but what is the Eastern point of view? Why for Russia Colour Revolutions were a problem and even a menace for the future? In the opinion of Sergey Lavrov (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russian Republic) and the Army General Valery Geresimov, the will of Western countries is bringing their democratic values through Colour revolutions, which actually just bring civil wars and instability in the countries and left the situation even worse than before. Their goal is a change of power through manipulation of the protest joint with other political, economical and humanitarian measures. The Colour revolutions try to overthrow an authority, not a lifestyle, so Russians prefer to call them as their real meanings: putsch.¹¹ The Russians critics are specified in the last attempt of a new Colour revolution in Ukraine between 2013 and 2014, where USA and EU tried to overthrow the Yanukovich's regime by Euromaidan protests: in this case western countries are accused to incite the manifestation by the insertion of neo-Nazis groups. For Lavrov the West lost the opportunity to work and collaborate with Russia, and after the manifestations in Kiev western countries used the Ukrainian national army and other military private

corps to control the situation in the Eastern part of the country. This is not a way of collaboration even because the government in charge won after fair and democratic elections: any cooperation between Russia and NATO were suspended.¹³ Vladimir Putin affirms that it is important prevent new Colour revolutions even if some experts tell that for now is unlikely that this going to happen in Russia.¹⁴

That's a reason of Colour revolutions' failure: western countries are not able to impose their hegemony over these countries while Russia is trying to keep the situation under control and avoiding new Colour revolutions. In Ukraine the protest was able to drop the Yanukovich's government but not to control the Eastern part of the country.

In Ukraine a new Colour revolution didn't work and if this is not a definitive decline it's at least a screeching halt. From a western point of view this failed attempt to improve democracy in the world could be interpreted as a decline of democracy.

¹³ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Russia and the "Color Revolution"*, "CSIS - Centre for strategic and international studies", 28 May 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/russia-and-color-revolution>

¹⁴ Galija Ibragimova, *Rivoluzioni "colorate" sotto controllo (Colours revolutions under control)*, "Russia beyond the headlines", 25 November 2014, http://it.rbth.com/politica/2014/11/25/rivoluzioni_colorate_sotto_controllo_33563.html

4. Democratic scores: the cases of Ukraine, Russia, Georgia and Moldova

The Euromaidan's effects in Ukraine, the Putin's authoritarian turn in Russia, the fall of Saakashvili in Georgia are the most important events happened in the Eastern Europe in the last years and it's interesting to analyse the changes that we have seen in terms of democracy: why and where democracy is in decline and why and where it is in slight increase. As we have seen already in the first chapter, some data are taken by the "Nation in transit" in the website of *Freedom House* and are divided in different areas (Electoral process, Civil society, Independent media, National democratic governance, Local democratic governance,

Judicial framework and independence and corruption), each of them with a score from 1 to 7, where 1 is the best and 7 the worst. The data showed reflect the opinion expressed by the authors and academic advisers of Freedom House. We always need to take in count that Freedom House is an NGO from Washington DC, and these data, as reliable, can be conditioned by geopolitical reasons, for example the view of Colour revolution from the West is surely different from opinions that we can have from Eastern experts.

It's worth to start the analysis with Ukraine, a country that has seen a lot of events in the last two years and it's a battleground between West and East, where USA and EU want to keep Kiev faraway from Russian hegemony. Euromaidan, the fall of Yanukovich and the start of the war in Donbass are interesting elements for a democratic analysis: the Colour revolution is over, in which direction Ukraine is going now?

In the data of 2014 Ukraine is in a slightly down, from 4.86 to 4.93, but the data is more relevant if we compare with the year 2006, when the score was 4.21. The government of the ex President Yanukovich, who has tried to establish an authoritarian government more centred in his person, have decreased the national democratic governance score's from 5.75 to 6.00.¹² After the clashes of November-December 2013 there was no attempt of a dialogue with the protester, and also no policeman have been punished for their brutality during the turmoil. Yanukovich enjoyed of the support of Vladimir Putin, who is realizing a similar course in Russia: from the year of his election in 2000, Putin im-

proved his authoritarian position, worked to remove every possible form of opposition with intimidation against political enemies trying as much as possible to get them not involved in politics, even before their entrance. Putin also used a strategy to support the rural classes of the population, normally more “ignorant” and more vulnerable to propaganda, and isolating the urban class, more educated and healthier, especially after the protests of 2011-2012. On June 30th 2013 the Kremlin approved two law which banned the “propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations” and blasphemy. The first one, known in the West as “anti-gay law”, formally made impossible the equality between homosexual relationships and “normal” relationships, and instigates the violence against these groups, while the second one was referred to the punk band *Pussy Riot*, accused of “offending religious feelings” and “express a clear lack of respect for the society”. The figure of the president it is strengthened and improves his consensus defending religious and conservative values. The score of National democratic governance in Russia remains deeply red with 6.50.¹³ Also regarding Independent media Russia and Ukraine have some common points, while in Russia the score is already very low (6.25), the situation in Ukraine deteriorated in 2013 (from 4.00 to 4.25): repeated violence against reporters during Euromaidan, where at least 51 reporters where attacked and the assailants not punished, and many journalist of independent TV had to resign because of a controversial change of the ownership at the Ukrain-

ian Media Holding (UMH).¹⁵ Over the control on television, the Russian government is now focused on Internet media because more and more people in the country get access to an Internet connection. The Kremlin increased its ability to ban any form of on-line opposition, blocking anti-Putin and Islamist websites and making pressure to other on-line newspaper or web TV which have the possibility to show also other political sides which do not appear in national media and television: for example Navalny, one of the main critics of president Putin, often appears in the web TV Dozhd (Rain).¹⁶

One difference between the two countries is Civil society: in Russia a law of 2012 put under control the NGO's which are involved in politics and receive international funds: one thousand of them were inspected with the goal of intimidation, preventing any attempt of opposition to the government or relations with other countries without permit. Other activist or political opponents were forced to leave the country and the Kremlin continue its nationalist and xenophobic propaganda. The Civil society's score in Russia decrease from 5.50 to 5.75, the opposite of Ukraine, where it registered an increase from 2.75 to 2.50. The Euromaidan facts strengthened the power of civic activist, the protest in November made a new generation of people who can fight together for the freedom of the country. Even if general democracy score is in decline there are still glimmers of opti-

¹⁵ *Ukraine, Nations in transit 2014*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/ukraine#.VXqRTabvRyk>

¹⁶ *Russia, Nation in transit 2014*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/russia#.VXqSw6bvRyk>

mism, at least in Ukraine. Not everybody is resigned to submit to an authoritarian regime.

Other signals of democratic recovery are coming from Georgia, the only country among the four which has a rise of the score, from 4.75 to 4.68, a slight improvement due to the Electoral process and Independent media. The Electoral process increase for a fair and regular election in October 2013, this was the result monitored by the ISFED (International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy)¹⁷, based in Tbilisi, which counted the decrease of case of violations (intimidations or physical attacks) from 300 to 60¹⁸, compared to the previous year elections. The score increases from 4.75 to 4.50. About Independent media, Georgia, as most of the Eastern countries but not only, had historically a political influence on the media, especially television, which reach 97 % of the population.¹⁹ However, after a monitor during the presidential election in October 2013, this connection between politics and private media (Rustavi-2 and Imedi TV) seems not so close anymore²⁰, the score of Independent media rises from 4.25 to 4.00.

Last country taken for our analysis is Moldova, that I'll analyse more in detail in this chapter, where the democracy score had a small decline from 4.82 to 4.86, specially due to the decrease of Judicial framework and independence, while the biggest problem

¹⁷ *ISFED's fifth interim report*, International Society for Fair Election and Society, 15 October 2013, <http://www.isfed.ge/main/472/eng/>

¹⁸ *Assessment of Pre-Election Environment*, Transparency International Georgia, 26 October 2013, <http://transparency.ge/en/node/3509>

¹⁹ *Georgia National Study*, International Republican Institute, 17 May-2 June 2013, http://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2013_August_6_Survey_of_Georgian_Public_Opinion_May_17_June_2_2013.pdf

²⁰ *Media Environment Ahead of the October 27 Presidential Elections*, Transparency International Georgia, 25 October 2013, <http://transparency.ge/en/node/3509>

of the country remains the corruption, the score of 5.75 is in line with the trend of the other Eastern countries and deserve a special review.

4.1 In between authoritarianism and colour revolution: the political situation of Moldova

I will write about the very recent situation of Moldova in 2015 in Chapter 6, for now it is important to concentrate the topic about level of democracy, and to do so, I will explain the Moldovan political situation of last fifteen years.

Differently from Georgia and Ukraine, there is this particular case of this small country which was able to stay away to consolidate authoritarianism and colour revolutions. Always in between the two parts, and with attempts from both sides especially in 2009, Moldova could maintain along the years a better level of democracy and pluralism if we compare it with the other post-Soviet countries (excluding Baltic states). A good example of that are the political election, that always have been regular and without fraud, as opposed to other neighbour nations.

There were two attempts of establish an authoritarian regime in the country, the first one in 1999 with the President Lucinschi, and the second one during the period of government of the

Communist party, between 2001 and 2009, where the President Voronin concentrated the power on himself restricting the presence of the opposition parties in the mass media.

The 2009 was the last year of government for the Communists, and the political situation for Moldova at that time was very lively: after a very aggressive electoral campaign the Communist gained the 49,5% of the votes on the 6 of April, only one seat less to the necessary to elect a new President. It was probably the beginning of a political deadlock, while in the streets started a mass protest violently repressed. Few months later instead, in the election on July 29th, the coalition of the oppositions parties gain the majority of the votes and was able to form a new government, ending the Voronin's era.

With the new government there was a rapprochement with the western countries and a new dialogue with EU.

As I said Moldova was able to maintain a decent level of pluralism during all these years, there are also geographical reasons: first of all Moldova is a land with scarce resources, unlike Russia or Azerbaijan, and its geopolitical position is not strategic as the one of Ukraine or Georgia. These reasons have led Moldova to stay away of power play and high levels of corruption, and also the region of Transnistria, with desires of independence, haven't brought so many problems like in other places (Crimea, Abkhazia) and didn't damage so much the level of democracy in the country.²¹

²¹ Nicu Popescu, *Moldova's Fragile Pluralism*, "Russian Politics & Law", 50:4, 37-50, 2012

5. A threat for democracy: Corruption

A common point for all the four countries is undoubtedly the problem of corruption. The score of corruption is almost everywhere one of the worst and especially in Russia and Ukraine there was a strong decline in the last ten years. Corruption is also for sure one of the biggest threats for democracy: a democratic country is that one which is able to fight corruption properly and avoid this mafia system that often control the highest levels of the government.

The causes of corruption in Eastern countries are multiple: first of all there is a lack of strategy to avoid corruption, politicians are not prepared or motivated to fight this problem, also the social problem is important, when the wages are low and often paid with delay there is an individual interest of survival. In a more general view there is more corruption in a society with lower ethical values and where it is underestimated by mass media and politicians, if there's no a correct education and information against such a phenomenon it's impossible that the society would fight

against it. But probably is just a will of a group of people who wants to restore a totalitarian regime. The consequences of corruption could be devastating for the society: there is a direct relation between poverty and corruption because the latter can absorb funds normally for education and health. A corrupted oligarchy is only interested to its own needs and not to the ones of the society, with a consequence of a growth of a state debts and a paralysis of the institutions. This is the will of earning money quickly without thinking of the long-term social consequences: if the economy is governed by corruption the individuals will be discouraged to new investments with following decrease of competitiveness. Not only the lower classes but everybody will be affected by this sick economic situation.²²

The Russian score declined from 5.75 in 2005 till 6.75 in 2014, hardly this score could be worse, and the reasons of that are coming from a not serious fight of corruption by the Putin's government. The last report by Transparency International (2014) says that Russia lost other nine positions from 2013 and now is in the position number 136 out of 175.²³ At the same time the Kremlin announced another measures against corruption, as they often do, but the main target is hold off the population and the opposition. In this case the Ministry of Labour proposed to make psychological tests to public officials, trying to understand their predisposi-

²² Lilia Carasciuc, *Corruption and quality of governance: the case of Moldova*, „Transparency International – Moldova“, 6-9

²³ *Corruption perception index 2014: results*, “Transparency International Georgia“, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>

tions to corruption.²⁴ It is also forbidden for them to own assets and bank accounts in a foreign country. But this can't be enough, the fight of corruption in the country is perceived as something reluctantly, it proved by another law approved by Putin on March 10th 2015, which provides a clean cut of the penalties for those who commit the crime of corruption. This decision arrives in a delicate moment for Putin, occupied with the end of the Ukraine's war and to pull out from the Nemtsov case and has the target to induce more people to pay the sanctions, but with the risk to increase corruption offences.²⁵ Moreover, the corruption score of 2014 decreased from 6.50 of 2013 to 6.75 of 2014, the most important reason are the Sochi Olympic Games where corruption cost around 50 billions of dollars, the most expensive Olympic Games of the history had several construction considered overpriced, and the worry is also about the possible unprecedented corruption that could well in the next Russian football World Cup in 2018. But if Russia had Sochi 2014, Ukraine had Euro Cup 2012, where four cities (Kiev, Lviv, Kharkiv and Donetsk) were involved and also here there was uncontrollable corruption. The opposition member Julija Tymoshenko collected documents which prove, that the expenses for the organization of the European football have increased ten times compared to

²⁴ Ekaterina Sinelshchikova, *La difficile lotta alla corruzione (The difficult fight to corruption)*, „Russia Beyond the Headlines“, 25 October 2013, http://it.rbth.com/economia/2015/01/12/la_difficile_lotta_alla_corruzione_34109.html

²⁵ Maurizio Costa, *Russia, Putin riduce le sanzioni contro la corruzione (Russia, Putin reduces the anti-corruption sanctions)*, „Noi contro la corruzione“, 18 March 2015, <http://anticorruzione.eu/2015/03/russia-putin-riduce-le-sanzioni-contro-la-corruzione/>

what was planned in 2007. In all, as many as 8 billion euro, 40% of which was spent on corruption.²⁶ For sure the President Viktor Yanukovich was individual concerned, as he handed out some project linked with the Euro Cup, taking decision which made the Ukrainian government paying around the double of what really needed.

To have other examples of Yanukovich involvement in corruption, just think about the enrichment of some of his friends and family, for example his son Oleksandr, whose estimated fortune almost tripled between 2012 and 2013. But also all the billionaire houses owned by the President were not exactly the example of humbleness and complete non-involvement with the crime. Moreover, the current Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, accused the Yanukovich government of stolen 37 billions of dollars, considered one fifth of the total Ukrainian GDP. We have an important and dreadful data if we compare the Ukrainian GDP with the one of Poland and Russia, in 1989 it was almost equal, now it's one third of them, and Ukraine is one of the five ex USSR countries which produce less GDP after the fall of Soviet Union.

The Ukrainian's score of corruption decreased from 5.75 of 2005 to 6.25 of 2014 (6.00 in 2013). It keeps making damages for the Ukrainian economy and it is impossible making businesses without paying bribes. Also in Ukraine like in Russia, the government is not able to approve proper measures against corruption: on

²⁶ Redazione, *Euro 2012, Tymoschenko denuncia: „Miliardi di euro in corruzione“* (Tymoschenko denounces: billions of euro in corruption), „Today“, 28 May 2012 <http://www.today.it/mondo/euro-2012-ucraina-timoshenko.html>

May 2013 was rejected an anti-corruption legislation from the opposition. But this could be also a proof of how the corruption is included in politics, it's impossible in fact to be elected without paying a lot of money in advertisement and then, need to be prepared to this corrupted politic game. This state of things regards Ukraine as well as Russia, and the two countries were connected especially during the Yanukovich's government, who was encouraged by the Kremlin to be more authoritarian while they allowed him to be as corrupted as he wanted.²⁷

We do have some signs of recovery from Georgia and Moldova, where corruption still plagues every social and political level but at least the score increased in the last ten years. In Georgia we still have corruption between politicians, some of them were involved in non-transparent businesses and got richer, however the Saakashvili's government fought corruption and made some real improvements, and the score improved in fact from 5.75 of 2005 till 4.50 on 2014.²⁸ Same for Moldova, where the governments approved an anti-corruption package in 2013, too early to give to the population a feeling of increase of honesty in the country and among the politics. For sure the situation got better in the last 10 years: the score increase from 6.25 (2005) to 5.75 (2014)²⁹, but other problems came very recently, and we are going to analyse it in the following paragraph.

²⁷ Anders Aslund, *Oligarchs, Corruption and European Integration*, "Journal of Democracy", July 2014

²⁸ Georgia, *Nations in transit 2014*, „Freedom House“, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/georgia#.VXqfhabvRyk>

²⁹ Moldova, *Nations in transit 2014*, „Freedom House“, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/moldova#.VXqfyKbvRyk>

5.1 The recent case of corruption in Moldova

The recent case of alleged corruption in Moldova is an interesting example of how complicated and delicate is the situation in Eastern Europe. In September 2015 around 40,000 people took to the streets in the Capital Chisinau and started a protest against the current pro-European government. The accuse is based of the disappearance of one billion of Euro from the home state. In a country which count a population of 3,5 million, 40,000 people is an important number, while one billion of Euro, is an huge amount of money, about an eighth of the Moldovan GDP (the average wage is around 300 Euro per month).

The protest is guided by the lawyer Stanislav Pavlovschi, who gathered all the opposition forces in a civic platform called *Dignity and Truth*, and asks for the resignation of the President of the Republic Nicolae Timofti. Pavlovschi since years is fighting for a proper reform of the Moldovan judicial system, which have to introduce strict rules against corruption. In the manifestation there are all together jurists, political activists, communists, socialists, old politicians and young hopefuls.³⁰ Somebody already compared

³⁰ Matteo Zola, *Moldavia: tende in piazza, continua la protesta. Ma chi sono i leader?*, (Moldova: tent in the square, the protest is going on: but who are the leaders?) "East Journal" (Italian), 10 September 2015. <http://www.eastjournal.net/archives/65083>

the situation with the Ukrainian one, calling the protest in Chisinau as a new Maidan³¹, but is not sure if it's a correct statement, in fact a part of the protesters want to go to the opposite direction of Kiev, leaving the European side and going back, closer to Moscow. Others still want a pro-Western government, but just not corrupted. It's more correct to say that the protest brought together different movements, which see the occasion to go back to the power.

In the Western media the Chisinau's facts are almost unnoticed. The reason is not only because Moldova is a very small and irrelevant country and the protest involved "only" 40,000 people. If all the GDP disappeared and one million of people would join the protest the feeling is the same, maybe we wouldn't hear about Moldova either. There are behind political reason: from 2009, after eleven years of Communist government, a pro-European coalition won the elections and took the power, moving away from Russian sphere and approaching to West. In 2014 was signed and Association Agreement which step even closer Moldova and EU, even if due to Transnistrian's issue is difficult to see Moldova joining the European Union in the next years.³² Of course it wouldn't be a nice advertising for the West spreading the news that one of the government established few years ago in the Eastern Europe is actually becoming very corrupted and it's stealing money to the poor people. The truth about the billion of Euro is

³¹ Matteo Zola, *Moldavia: in piazza contro il governo europeista: una Maidan moldava? (Moldova: in the street against the pro-european government: a Moldavian Maidan?)*, "East Journal" (Italian), 7 September 2015. <http://www.eastjournal.net/archives/64944>

³² *Moldova – Country update*, "European forum for democracy and solidarity", 7 September 2015 (last update). <http://www.europeanforum.net/country/moldova>

still a mystery, but it's sure the incompetence of the government, which is asked for resignation by the protester.

Surely could be some confusion about the information, in the article of BBC on September 13th 2015 (Moldova: huge anti-corruption protest in Chisinau) the author Rayhan Demytrie says: "Thousand of demonstrators joined the ongoing anti-government protest in Chisinau's central square. Many were holding Moldovan and EU flags."³³ A huge protest is described but there's no mention of a manifestation against the present pro-European government, on the contrary is written about European flags among the manifestation (which is true, by the pictures) that can confuses the reader about the real aim of the turmoil. The real enemy is only corruption.

³³ Rayhan Demytrie, *Moldova: huge anti-corruption protest in Chisinau*, "BBC News", 13 September 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34237078>

6. Manipulation of information and Russian propaganda

The Russian elections of December 2011 were characterized by a mystery: there was a suspect of electoral fraud favourable to the Putin's political party, suspects that soon became manifestation and protest along the street of many Russian cities. The December 10th after one week of small protests, Russia attended the biggest manifestations in Moscow since the end of USSR. As the situation started to be dangerous for the government, were also organized counter-manifestations pro-Kremlin.

In this scenario it is interesting to analyse the reasons of the two groups and which are the mass-media used by them: the article "Mind the gaps: Media use and mass action in Russia" by Regina Smith and Sarah Oates shows surveys which explain the differences of the sources used by the protesters. It is obvious that the two groups use the sources with the opposite purpose: the pro-regimes use basically only the television as information media, the Russian television which is almost totally controlled by the government and shows only one way of thinking, populist and always optimistic and right. The Russian television, as politically controlled, it cannot be considered free, but it's just a propagandistic way to plagiarize the population.

In the opposite direction there are the anti-Kremlin protester, normally younger and with an easier access to an Internet connection. And “Internet” is the answer: among the websites the users can be always informed about the news, compare different ideas and making their own opinion and interpretations avoiding the regime propaganda.

Russian people always loved television, but in the last years this media started a decline, like in the rest of the world, and we can say that during the protest of 2011-2012 the information was not monolithic, including on-line television like *Dobryi (Rain)* and the liberal newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, over others opposition blogger as Alexei Navalny and the coalition *Solidarnost*, which continued to spread information and ideas not adhered to the regime. These new information forms became manifestations among the streets: studies obviously confirm that most of Internet users normally vote for opposition parties.

In this scenario of increasing opposition, Vladimir Putin tried different ways to control the new media and limiting their development at least where there was suspicion of extreme opposition. At the expense of this situation are especially the journalists, over the most important example of the murder of Anna Politkovskaja, who was writing about the war in Chechnya in 2006, the Freedom House reports that the Committee to Protect Journalists estimates the killing of 56 Russian journalists between 1992 and 2013 and with a tax of impunity close to 90%. A bad treatment that for sure does not start with the came of Internet but represent an horrible data: the Freedom House also reports that Russia

is in the position 176 out of 197 regarding freedom of information, due to the protest of 2011-2012 but also for the manipulation of the information and the tightening of standards during the annexation of Crimea and Ukrainian crisis in 2014.³⁴ The opposition's media have to pay attention to criticize the government: after three warnings, due to have broken the law, the newspapers, websites or Tv channel are closed. It is also prohibited to talk about separatism or ethnic and linguistic minorities. In 2012, Sergey Sokolov, editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, who made an investigation about corruption of some policemen, was death threats, while in 2014 Lev Shlosberg, journalist of *Pskovskaya Gubernia*, was physically assaulted because of some inconvenient researches about the war in Donbass.

During an interview, Anastasia Kirilenko, a Russian freelance journalist who works for *Radio Svoboda*, admit that is normal to be worried about this situation, but it's also impossible to work trying to mystify the reality. Russian independent medias don't exist anymore, because *Radio Eco* from Moscow and *Novaya Gazeta* are quite reliable but the first one was bought by Gazprom and the second one suffer a continuous pressure by the Kremlin. Also Radio Svoboda after the Putin re-election of 2012 changed, and often they have to make a self-censorship because Putin has too much power and he can not be contradicted. Anastasia in 2010 has conducted and published a major investigation into the past of the leader of the Kremlin by highlighting its links with international organized crime. A report that has caused a sensation;

³⁴ Regina Smith & Sarah Oates, *Mind the gaps: media use and mass action in Russia*, „Europe-Asia studies“, 25 February 2015

without the investigation of the courageous reporter everything would remain buried by time. She also says that Russian propaganda nowadays is at the maximum of its potential: in the television there are documentaries which propose a distorted view of reality, the news are completely aligned with the Kremlin. People is informed only in this way, they do not watch foreign channels and don't read anything else. Putin was able to convince them that all the others are liars.³⁵ The 80 percent of Russians, however, according to many polls, supports the Kremlin and its policy.³⁶

After an analysis about the mass-media and information, it is interesting to understand the trend of the Russian political opposition in the last ten-fifteen years. The article "Political opposition in Russia: A troubled transformation" by Vladimir Gel'man explains quite well the situation.

The "party of power" United Russia during the years 2000s became stronger and the unique possible alternative for the government. In this scenario one question arises, where were the opposition parties? From the mid 2000s the situation was really hard for them, the few representatives in the Parliament almost didn't have any influence in decision making and at a social level it was very difficult to see public demonstration and manifestation anti-regime, it was very difficult to recruit people with a desire of change.

³⁵ Sophie Tavernese, *Russia: la scure dell'autocensura sui media indipendenti (Russia: the censorship on the independent media)*, „East Journal“, 11 June 2015, <http://www.eastjournal.net/archives/62951>

³⁶ Sophie Tavernese, *Russia: l'informazione libera emigra all'estero o trasmette da casa (Russia: the free information emigrates abroad or broadcast from home)*, „East Journal“, 1 June 2015, <http://www.eastjournal.net/archives/59925>

After almost ten years during the 2011-2012 started a brief period where the opposition get again involved and Moscow sees together hundreds of thousand of participants in manifestations against Putin's government. The motivations of this new "explosion" have to be analysed. First of all it is politically proven that in a period of economic growth the lower and middle classes try to organize themselves and ask for more democracy and equality. But another important reason was the so-called "Medvedev's modernisation program" which had the aim of the economical, political and social complete innovation of the country: an article called "Go Russia", published in September 2009 criticised the obsolete Russian economical strategy, which only depends on oil and raw materials and defined the Russian society as "archaic" and "paternalistic"³⁷. This attempt of liberalisation (chaotic and inefficient) seemed to give some chances for the oppositions, who believed in a real dialogue and a decrease of authorities pressure. In that precise moment activist were forced to enter in the political arena, giving a birth to a variety of new independents movements like media (Dohzd) and Internet based community. Thus the opposition parties finally found a new political strategy aimed at a resistance against the regime and its rules: the young politician Alexei Navalny and other activists launched several anti-corruption campaigns.

But the success and the high-scale involvement of the Russian population in the period 2011-2012 it was not going to last for a

³⁷ Steven Eke, *Medvedev sets out ambitious vision*, "BBC News", 12 November 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8357619.stm>

long time. There are some motivations of this unsuccessful continuation of the events: a poor organization, a poor strategy and a lack of experience are the most important. The plan was basically only to maximize the number of participants and involve more people as possible to the protest but that's was all: there wasn't a real program for a credible opposition, and the Kremlin was strong enough and didn't have to find any compromise with them.

It was a big failure after a great beginning, and the biggest problem was the recruitment of people *via* Internet and social media: it was efficient at the very first period but it exhausted quickly, and also this is not even a good way to find a real program and a functioning organization. Internet is just too chaotic and most of the people is simply not used to it yet. The number of protesters in Moscow declined from 210,000 in December 2011 to 5,000 of July 2013. Despite an extraordinary success of the leader of opposition Alexei Navalny, who gained more than 600,000 votes in the capital, the opposition parties are not anymore a big threat for the Kremlin since 2013.³⁸

6.1 The concept of Soft Power: a new way to found an empire

³⁸ Vladimir Gel'man, *Political opposition in Russia: a troubled transformation*, “, Europe-Asia Studies”, 67:2, 177-191, 2015

For a country with an imperialistic appetite for sure the “Hard power” is important. The need to create a sphere of influence and have a military control to most of the neighbour countries to increase its strength and prevents external attacks, it’s part of the strategy of great empires since forever. But in the recent years, with the development of information and the advent of globalization, for a super-power also “Soft power” shouldn’t be underestimated. The term, coined for the first time by Joseph Nye in the 90s, means that a country should capture and protect its hegemony not only with its army and weapons but also try to use “intangible resources like culture, values and institution of politics”.³⁹

The article of Joanna Szostek “Russia and the News Media in Ukraine: A Case of Soft Power?”, which was completed in October 2013, before the Ukrainian facts of Euromaidan, gives us an important example of how a huge and powerful country as Russia takes advantages of Mass Media to increase its international consensus.

Nye also says “information is power”, in fact the Mass Media are strictly related with Soft Power because with them it’s possible to influence the public opinion and generate general feelings in the desired direction. In 2011 Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that it is “impossible to defend national interest

³⁹ Joseph Nye, “Soft Power”, Chapter 1, page 9, April 2005

without proper use of solid soft power resources”⁴⁰, same idea for Vladimir Putin which defines the Soft Power as “indispensable component of modern international relations”, in particular some important points are included in the Russian strategy: the development and spread abroad of Russian language, Russian NGOs and Russian mass-media.

In the recent years the principal Ukrainian television channels belonged by some “oligarchs”, like gas tycoon or multimillionaire, which is known are used to switch from a side to another depending on the best offer. That’s why it’s correct to say that in the past two decades the Ukrainian TV has been everything but far from transparent.⁴¹

In the case of Russia it is possible to see the influence in the Ukrainian media, the ones with partners or Russian shareholders are normally less harsh in criticism against Moscow politics. And this data is even more important if we take in count a survey of November 2011, which found that 94% of Ukrainian watch television everyday and it’s for them the main (or the only) source of information. Another important survey of 2011⁴² found that the three biggest Russian TV channels controlled by the state (Pervyy Kanal, RTR Planeta, and NTV Mir), were viewed weekly by 32.8 per cent, 24.9 per cent, and 19.8 per cent of the Ukrainian popu-

⁴⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 12 December 2011, www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newsline/88EDE46B7ED6659044257964005D6EB9.

⁴¹ Joanna Szostek, *Russia and the news media in Ukraine: a case of „Soft Power“?*, „East European politics and societies“, August 2014

⁴² Broadcasting Board of Governors and InterMedia, *International Broadcasting in Ukraine* (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2011). Questionnaire survey carried out for the BBG by Intermedia in partnership with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS);

lation. Briefly, it easy to shape the mind of million of Ukrainian just controlling part of the Ukrainian information.

But the Soft Power of Russia is not only limited to post-Soviet countries, after the Ukrainian war in fact the image of Putin and Russia from abroad was not the best and to regain an international trust and prestige, and to re-launch its image in the world they opened in November 2014 a new platform called *Sputnik*. *Sputnik* is open in 130 cities in 34 different countries with the slogan “Telling the untold”⁴³, they want to spread a different point of view from the western one, going against anti-Russian propaganda that made decrease the Putin popularity. The platform operates in over 30 languages and it can be called a “little sister” of the more famous *Russia Today*.

7. The figure of Vladimir Putin

⁴³ Leonardo Coen, *Putin lancia “Sputnik” in Occidente: è la neo-guerra fredda dell’informazione (Putin starts “Sputnik” in the west: the new Cold-War of information)*, 15 November 2014, Il Fatto Quotidiano, <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2014/11/15/putin-lancia-sputnik-neoguerra-fredda-dellinformazione/1211105/>

For a right development of the thesis it's mandatory to analyse the most important character of the East in the last 15-20 years: Vladimir Vladimirovic Putin. The current President of the Russian Federation was born in Saint Petersburg in 1952 and has a past in KGB from 1975 to 1991. In 2007 the *TIME* chose him as the most influent person in the world, and according to *Forbes* he is nowadays the most powerful person, even ahead the US president Barack Obama. In the motherland they call him the "last Tsar", the "strong man", or even the "president with balls" (by his supporters), the father who saved Russia from bankruptcy, gave them new dignity and put their country in a strategic place of the world's checkerboard.

The character of the President Putin is for sure one of the most important and discussed of recent years, he managed to keep an autocratic control of a huge and significant country like Russia, reaching unthinkable goals in 1999, the year of his first election. Putin has never been a puppet and he will never be, he has never came to terms with anyone and maybe this is his big mistake or limit: the lack of adequate dialogue with the West.

But one of the most important aspect of the Putin's government in these years is its evolution: from a flexible president open to the dialogue with the parts, he changed in a less tolerant and unscrupulous one, ready to everything for reaching his goals.⁴⁴

In the recent years he developed his government making it more autocratic as possible, where the Kremlin controls, guides and corrects the democratic processes making believe to the Russian

⁴⁴ Fyodor Lukyanov, *Putin, Russia and West: Beyond stereotypes*, "Russia and beyond", 10 February 2012

citizens to be sheltered by corruption but in the other hand showing a lack of attention of the protection of civil rights and freedom of speech. A sort of “democracy with a bit of authoritarianism” or “masquerade dictatorship” depends who’s speaking, the supporters or the opponents. A kind of iron fist invisible from outside but able to be tenacious with anyone wants to go against him.

The list of opponents which have been removed or silenced during the years is very long, for example the political expert Stanislav Belkovskij, famous abroad with his books of complaint but unknown in Russia, or the chess ex-champion Garry Kasparov, one of the leader of the coalition of opposition “The Other Russia”, and another mention to the mysterious murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaja. Because Putin loves to be surrounded by loyal employees, does not accept critics and like most of people noticed he chose already his successor. The exasperated patriotism and the obsessive attention dedicated to build a public image, created a cult of personality which never happened before with anyone, pushing the masses to superimpose the figure of the Prime Minister and former president of the identity of the country itself. Criticize Putin means offend Russia, in short: a great way to increase consensus and avoid the risk of new colour revolutions.

Who don’t agree with him, like I already said, he’s going to be removed. Another example are the oligarchs and businessmen during the Yeltsin era, who influenced the public life in Moscow. Once Putin got the power, removed them all intimating to be out

of the political decision. And if some of them decided for a golden exile, for example Roman Abramovich who went to London and bought the football team Chelsea, other have been trying to challenge the President, like Mikhail Khodorkovskij, who paid this competition with the jail.

Putin showed to be able to hold off enemies of every faction and political party, placing at the same time loyal employees in the government, these reason permitted him to maintain a steady control of the power.⁴⁵

But another of Putin's successes, as I already said, is the centralization of the power in his hands. The secret police, the hydrocarbon sector, the mass media, the regions are all under his personal control, so as to create statements like: "if there is no Putin, there is no Russia" or as the expert Stanislav Belkovsky said: "the search for Russia's national idea, which began after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, is finally over. Now, it is evident that Russia's national idea is Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin."⁴⁶ And after more than fifteen years of governments the end of Putin doesn't seem so close, and after Stalin, who governed for around thirty years and Brezhnev, two decades, Vladimir Putin goes right to the modern history of the country. All this power never obtained with striking blows but little by little, day by day, with small or invisible steps, sometimes dirty.

⁴⁵ Valentina Natale, *La democrazia "guidata" di Putin* (*The Putin's "guided" democracy*, "Storie", <http://www.storie.it/numero/i-compromessi/la-democrazia-guidata-di-putin/>

⁴⁶ Stephen Kotkin, *The resistible rise of Vladimir Putin*, "Foreign Affairs", March-April 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/2015-02-16/resistible-rise-vladimir-putin>

This evolution was made also thanks to the surprising economic boom in Russia. Between 1999 and 2008 Russian economy grew 7% every year and unemployment from 12,9% to 6,3%. The grow of GDP made a new medium class able to buy more material goods impossible to reach before, for example the use of mobile phones grew from 0% to 100%.

The experts attribute this economic boom mostly of a luck due to a big amount of fossil fuels, but undoubtedly also Putin was at least partly responsible of this growth.

With the figure of Putin, grows silently also a new type of government and order, the so-called “Putinism”. The new Putin’s system is based on control and manual management of the political process, and it is able to change the idea of pro-Western people, very important in the following years after the fall of Berlin’s wall. His idea is a modern socialism far away from the West, which takes elements from the left and the right political parties, it’s a construction of a new social order, a strange mix between different components, which it’s possible in Russia due to the various number of ethnicity that vie for supremacy.⁴⁷

The Putinism was destined to spread out of the Russian borders to reach other countries, the first example is Hungary, where a controversial speech of the prime minister Viktor Orban was judged by the influential Indian-American pundit Fareed Zakaria as “illiberal democracy”, reflecting crucial elements of the Russian governments like nationalism, religion, social conservatism and control of mass-media. The same we can say about the leadership

⁴⁷ Richard Sakwa, *Questioning control and contestation in late Putinite Russia*, “Europe-Asia Studies”, 192-207, February 2015

of Erdogan in Turkey, all three have embraced an anti-West philosophy to reinforce their personal leadership talking about past imperial (czarism in Russia, xenophobia in Hungary and fundamentalist Muslim traditions in Turkey). And this topic reminds the problem addressed in the first chapter: what is better, the liberal democracies of the West, or political system that make the countries richer but forget about freedom of expression and civil rights? Interesting question, because after the economical crisis of 2008 the confidence for the liberal system failed, but at the same time a country like Hungary can't suddenly cut all realtions with the West.⁴⁸

7.1 The Putin's government in detail

7.1.1 The survival

Vladimir Putin and his allies are trying the best for the Kremlin's survival. After the fall of Soviet Union, Russia passed a period of faking adherence to liberal standards, then Putin's government changed it to a slow but inexorable authoritarian regime. Now is the moment to keep the control: a "conservative revolution" at home, a revanchist power able to preserve the internal *status quo*, and keeping the distance to Europe and USA, working

⁴⁸ Gabor Stier, *Can "Putinism" compete as political system*, "Valdai", 10 September 2014, http://valdaiclub.com/opinion/highlights/can_putinism_compete_as_a_political_system/?sphrase_id=915

for an internal education anti-West. These are the points of the Russian strategy analysed by Lilia Shevtsova in her article “The Authoritarian Resurgence – Forward to the past in Russia” published in *Journal of Democracy*, where she makes an harsh criticism against the Putin’s politics. Surely her point of view is slightly different by Boris Shmelyov’s one (who goes a bit more cautious), which in an interview for *Russia Beyond the Headlines* says: “We have an authoritarian regime even if a soft one; a system of checks and balances has not formed; the parliament does not work – it's just a voting machine; there is no stable party system, a lot of corruption”⁴⁹. Shmelyov also tries to analyse the first 25 years of the Russian government, the first 25 after the fall of Soviet Union: Boris Yeltsin started the experiment of genuine democracy which in reality was the first attempt of “soft authoritarianism”, inherited by Putin. The President of the National Strategy Institute, Mikhail Remizov wants to emphasize this system, which has advantages in terms of consolidation of power and it’s also efficient during a period of crisis.

More in line with Shevtsova’s opinion is Mikhail Vinogradov, president of the St. Petersburg Politics Foundation, which defines the Russia today as a country nostalgic of the USSR era for its political stability, a country that looks behind to the past instead of trying to be innovative and modern.

The Putin ideology is based of a mix of ingredients taken from Soviet to Russian Orthodox fundamentalism, passing through military patriotism. He also likes to cite the Russian philosopher

⁴⁹ Lilia Shevtsova, *The authoritarian resurgence - Forward to the past in Russia*, “Journal of Democracy”, 22-25, April 2015

Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954) who described in 1948 the fascism as an “healthy phenomenon”, referring to Francisco Franco in Spain and Antonio Salazar in Portugal.

A recent survey made by Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) asked to Russian citizens what is their feeling about democracy, and the most surprising data is that the 34% of them wasn't able to explain what democracy is.⁵⁰ Only 2% of them said that there's no democracy in Russia and the 43% actually gave the “correct” answer saying that there is democracy when there are democratic rights and freedom (transparency, freedom of speech, thoughts and choice). This percentage is anyway falling if compared of the one of 2007, when 55% of people gave this answer. (survey made by All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre - VTsIOM)

The “Putin Doctrine” is summarized in the words of Lilia Shevtsova: “He prepped in the KGB; he likes hands-on control, shady deals, and mafia-style loyalty; he hates the idea of anything like a *color revolution* in Russia; and he is hostile to the West and the rule of law.” The wish of a return of this Soviet style is also justified by the Ukrainian issues of Euromaidan, where the new/old doctrine has the occasion to be tested: with the support to Viktor Yanukovich and the Eastern Ukrainian separatists, and the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin had the excuse to use the power and the military forces to preserve the national interest. Also the Russian citizens are called to support the government, everything the Kremlin does, it does for the good and the prestige of the country, the Crimea's annexation was seen as a success, but ac-

⁵⁰ Darya Lyubinskaya, *What is democracy? A third of Russians don't know*, “Russia Beyond The Headlines”, 8 October 2014

According to a survey of October 2014 they don't have a precise idea of what is happening: 60% of them think that the country is starting an economical crisis, while 64% think that Russia is going to the right direction.⁵¹ The manipulation of the media (and minds) strikes again.

Also about the foreign policy of the Kremlin there is this feeling of looking back to the past, trying to recreate the "Soviet influence" with neighbor countries. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, is an attempt of coalition anti-West, with Moscow acting as a leader and its aim is trying to develop political and economical strategies.

For the Kremlin being powerful inside its own border is not enough anymore, Russian government thinks about a new super-power era with imperial ambitions and expansion to new spheres of influence. To realize this project the problem is still the same as before: the West. That's why Putin studied a strategy of containment, keeping the west as far as possible to the sphere of influence of Eurasia and aloof the Russian borders. But a new Cold War is still far because the Kremlin is not prepared yet to solve all the relations with Europe and America: Russia still depends on Western technologies investments and loans, while it sells its hydrocarbons to several European countries. Russia and the West need then to keep a dialogue. It is not clear which are the western demands, but it's more or less known which are the Russian one,

⁵¹ Alexey Timofeychev, *25 years of post-Soviet Russia: how far the country come?*, "Russia Beyond The Headlines", 12 June 2015

and between them there are: West has to accept the Russian domestic policy and not interfere with it, they have to accept the Russian sphere of influence, halt NATO expansion through Russian borders and accept Gazprom monopoly. And even if most of these points have been already accepted the Kremlin didn't always curb its aggressiveness, Putin learnt how manage the West but not only, for now he was successful on stopping the movement towards East in Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.⁵²

And what about "Putinism"? It will survive after Putin? We need to search the answer in the past, few years ago, to this "democratic" period that Russia lived in the 90's, and had a weak and instable economy. They don't want anymore, they want to look forward to someone who will be able to follow his steps and be loyal to him and to the country. Whoever will succeed to Putin won't be democratic.⁵³

7.1.2 A government based on oil and luck

Before we mentioned that the raise of Putin's power was mainly because of an economic luck. That's true, and it is also true to state that the rise of Putin's power and his authoritarianism it is due to the rise of the oil prices, that made Russia a "petrostate" hostile to democracy. Between 2000 and 2008 the increase of oil prices gave to the companies an exceed of profit of

⁵² Lilia Shevtsova, *The authoritarian resurgence - Forward to the past in Russia*, "Journal of Democracy" (April 2015), 25-29

⁵³ Walter Laqueur, *Why Putinism will survive Putin*, "Politico Magazine", 13 September 2015

650 billion of dollars more than the eight years before.¹ In short, the government of Boris Yeltsin couldn't take advantage of this earning, almost everything was for Putin.

Then, as remarks Ivan Krastev in his article "The rules of survival" (published in April 2009), couple of question come out from this situation: if the Putin's power is based only of the oil prices, is the economical crisis of 2008 the beginning of the end of Putinism?

This crisis was also compared with the one of 1998, ten years before, which was a crisis of Russian capitalism and its fake democracy. Now the situation is very different, Russian is in crisis again but as the rest of the world, the crisis is global and the question now is to check who is more in danger: the Russian authoritarianism or the western democracies?⁵⁴

As mentioned the article was published in April 2009 and it is interesting to control if and how the argument of Krastev were right: he writes about the Russian ideology, the Putin's generation at that time wasn't nostalgic of the Soviet period but recognized Russia as his motherland, and the Putin's government wasn't focus on economical and political reforms but on the strength of Russian nationalism. The idea of Russia as super-power was very important for the citizen population, and thanks to this special reason Putin was able to maintain the majority inside and outside of the parliament. Thanks to this reason he was able to maintain his authoritarian regime also because the western democracies

⁵⁴ Ivan Krastev, *The rules of survival*, "Journal of democracy", April 2009

demonstrated their fragility in front of the economical crisis. That's why is possible to talk about "decline of democracy".

7.1.3 The "managed democracy"

I already mentioned more than once that the Putin's government all over the years became a mix between authoritarianism and a kind of fake democracy. This fake democracy is also better known as "managed democracy". But what is exactly a managed democracy and how Putin and his government applied it in the Russian Federation?

First of all a managed democracy bases its power in a strong presidency, in this case the cult personality of Vladimir Putin and his appear in public, but not only, because a stronger central power leads to a weaker institutions and a weaker regional power. The institutions are now controlled by the president, as well as the regions that now have the interest to obey to the central power rather than operate inside their own territory, with a decrease of effectiveness and quality of the services for the population.

It has been said about state control of the media and propaganda that is obviously another central point of the managed democracy. The control over election is also not less important: the kremenlin has the legal power to exclude any candidate from the election, and the regional president are now not anymore democratically elected but chosen. This is far away from what we called democracy and is going to penalize the civil society, but indirectly

it is strengthening it: Nikolai Petrov wrote it in 2005, about the situation of civil society which can lead to organized protests.⁵⁵

And during 2011-2013, after the elections, it happened almost exactly what he said.

Also interesting is the relation between managed democracy and youth, with the latter tried to turn away from politics and filled by nationalist, patriotic and orthodox propaganda. Even the Kremlin in 2005 made counter-revolution organizations among young people, to use in case of need.

The managed democracy is in short, a way to make effectiveness in the short period without thinking about the consequences in the long period. This system not only lacks of effectiveness and democracy and it is bad for the citizens, it is bad also for the political class which have to found a new and more democratic framework.

7.2 The cases of Anna Politkovskaja and Boris Nemtsov

“People sometimes pay with their lives for saying aloud what they think. In fact, one can even get killed for giving me information. I am not the only one in danger. I have examples

⁵⁵ Nikolai Petrov, Michael Mcfaul, *The essence of Putin's managed democracy*, “Carnegie – Endowment for international peace”, 18 October 2005, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2005/10/18/essence-of-putin-s-managed-democracy/2a3>

that prove it.” With this sentence the famous journalist Anna Politkovskaya wanted to explain the risk that everyday threat her life and the people around her, and she wasn’t wrong. Her murder is just the most famous example of the Russian situation, where the freedom of information is repressed since years and a lot of events cover up. On February 2015 another murder is going to the same way of the one of the journalist, the Boris Nemtsov’s murder, one of the leader of the opposition to Kremlin, political enemy of Vladimir Putin. After some months also here the case is not solved. Anna Politkovskaya and Boris Nemtsov were two inconvenient people for the power: if Putin was or not accomplice of the case probably we will never know. For sure the doubt remains.

The journalist Anna Politkovskaya worked since 1999 in the *Novaya Gazeta*, a liberal newspaper financed by George Soros and Michail Gorbačëv, where she was following as freelance the Russian-Chechen conflict. Her way of writing was absolutely original, in fact she refused to be covered by the Russian army and Chechen militias, preferring to risk her life for moving independently and discovering the truth of the war as much as possible. Her articles then, didn’t contain her thoughts and opinions of journalist and woman, but they were focused on what she was really seeing with her eyes, being a witness more unique than rare of the brutality of this war.

Anna Politkovskaja in her articles and books (most famous, “A small corner of Hell: dispatch from Chechnya” of 2003 and “Putin’s Russia” of 2004) never hidden her opposition to Putin’s

governments and also never stopped her fight to the freedom of information and revelation of truth, conscious of the risk for her own life. In 2003 she defines Russia as a neo-Soviet state that under Putin is becoming totally without civil rights, and after seventy years of socialism and ten years of fake democracy, is ready to go back in time and restart a new czarist era.⁵⁶

In the September 2004 she was poisoned in a plane before the attempt to find an agreement with the Chechen terrorist in Beslan, where hundreds of people were impounded: she couldn't reach the city and she was forced to go back to Moscow, in Beslan died 331 people, between them 186 children. But Anna Politkovskaja was an inconvenient presence, and the October 7th of 2007 was killed in the elevator of her house, the day of Putin's birthday. Anna Politkovskaja received a lot of honors and awards from famous international organizations like Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, becoming an international landmark not only as journalist but also as human rights defender, giving voice to Chechens people and explaining that for this population, exhausted by ten years of war and decades of Stalin's deportation, was needed something more than a written constitution from Moscow, to declare their belonging to Russian Federation.

The investigations after her murder were long and difficult, in the August 2007 ten suspects were arrested by the police for the involvement in the murder of the journalist.⁴ The April 4th 2008, the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, where the journalist worked, reports in an article that all the suspects for the case were

⁵⁶ Anna Politkovskaja, *Cecenia: Il disonore russo (Chechnya: the Russian dishonor)*, pg 49-50, 2003.

members of the Russian secret services and someone in the government was covering them, spreading openly secret materials of the investigation.

The murder of the journalist generated in the following days a lot of reactions in Russia and abroad, specially because, as states the vice-director of the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* Vitalij Yaroshevskij to the press agency Reuters “The first thing come up on mind is that Anna was killed for his professional activities, we do not see any other motivations for this horrible crime.”. Also the attorney in Moscow Vyacheslav Rosinsky declared to the Russian agency *Itar-tass* that the investigators are considering the link between the death of the journalist and her job: “We think that one of the protagonist of the intentional murder of Politkovskaja was her sense of public duty”.⁵⁷ Michail Gorbacëv declared to the Russian press agency *Interfax*: “It’s a wild crime against a serious and professional journalist, and a brave woman. It’s a blow for all the independent and democratic press. It is a serious crime against the country, against all of us.”⁵⁸

Vladimir Putin, speaking in a meeting with representatives of leaders of European countries, which took place in Dresden the October 10th 2006, declared about the murder of the journalist: “With regards to the murder of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya, then I have already said and I can say once again that this is a disgusting crime.

To kill not only a journalist but also a woman and a mother. And

⁵⁷ *Chechen war reporter found dead*, BBC News, 7 October 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5416218.stm>

⁵⁸ David Holley, *Acclaimed reporter killed in Russia*, Los Angeles Times, 8 October 2006, <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/oct/08/world/fg-anna8>

the experts know well – Ms Chaplin is sitting here and I think that she will confirm this as well – that perhaps because Ms Politkovskaja held very radical views she did not have a serious influence on the political mood in our country. But she was very well-known in journalistic circles and in human rights circles. And in my opinion murdering such a person certainly does much greater damage from the authorities' point of view, authorities that she strongly criticized, than her publications ever did. Moreover, we have reliable, consistent information that many people who are hiding from Russian justice have been harbouring the idea that they will use somebody as a victim to create a wave of anti-Russian sentiment in the world. I do not know who has carried out this crime. But whoever they were and whatever their motives, they are criminals. They must be found, brought to justice and punished. The Russian authorities will do everything they can to ensure that this takes place”⁵⁹.

In his speech Putin, underlining the fact that Anna Politkovskaja didn't have a big political influence, declared that the criminals of such a brutal murder have to be found and punished, and Russian authorities will make all the possible efforts to make it.

Messages of solidarity and justice came from Angela Merkel, Jacques Chirac and in particular George W. Bush “We ask to the Russian government to conduct a strong and depth investigation, to ensure justice for the responsible of the murder”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ *Meetings with representatives of various communities*, „President of Russia“, 10 October 2006, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2006/10/10/2138_type82914type84779_112411.shtml

⁶⁰ *Statement of the Murder of Russian Journalist Anna Politkovskaya*, The White House Press Office, 8 October 2006

Very different is the declaration of the Chechen premier (at that time) Ramzan Kadyrov, for his opinion the Chechen involvement in the murder has to be excluded, that's about an information received by a correspondent of the Russian agency Regnum the October 9th 2006, from the Chechen press office. The Chechen Prime Minister would have also added that "Speculating about this bloody crime without any real proof or motivation, means speaking just plumping gossip, without any reliable news." Also, killing a journalist means try to abolish the freedom of information. "Although the material of the journalist about Chechnya were not always objective, I feel really sorry for the conclusion of the events."

From journalism to politics, another Putin's "enemy" got killed the night of February 27th 2015 in the center of the Russian capital. Also in this case the mandatory is still unknown. Boris Nemtsov was a Russian politician and even if was not in the Parliament anymore was still one of the most important person of the opposition to the Kremlin. As Anna Politkovskaja he wrote several white papers trying to explain his opposition to Putin's government. His death remains shrouded in mystery and also the reasons are unknown: maybe to intimidate the other members of the opposition, or for his disagree with the Ukrainian war, or even to incite a mass rebellion against the power. The reaction of the Nemtsov death was really strong from his political party, where the leader Alexei Navalny said (in Russian) "I believe that Nemtsov was murdered by members of a government (special services) or pro-government organisation on the order of the

country's political leadership (including Vladimir Putin)." Another opinion says that Boris Nemtsov was killed because he wanted to organize an anti-Kremlin rally against the war in Ukraine, and according to the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Nemtsov had "some persuasive evidence about the involvement of Russian armed forces in Ukraine"⁶¹. But these are not the only possibilities, because another hypothesis comes from religious motivation: Zaur Dadayev and Beslan Shavanov would act independently to avenge some declaration of Nemtsov about the facts of Charlie Hebdo, where he defended the newspaper. By the way Ilia Iashin, one of the leader of the Russian opposition, absolutely rejects this possibility: "This no-sense theory of the Islamic, followed by the Russian investigators, is good for Putin because it takes him out of the line of fire"⁶²

According to Aleksander Nekrassov, former Kremlin and government adviser, who wrote an article for Al Jazeera, it is impossible the involvement of Putin and his government in the murder. At that moment the Russian leader had about the 80% of popularity rating and it would have been stupid for him to search for problems, killing a member of the opposition party who was not very important and influent anymore, and also the murder hap-

⁶¹ Patrick Jackson, *Who killed Russian opposition politician Boris Nemtsov?*, 7 March 2015, BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31693234>

⁶² Claudio Salvalaggio, *Omicidio Nemtsov: per fonte indagini omicidio "senza mandanti"* (Nemtsov's murder: the investigators state "murder without mandator"), "Ansa", 10 March 2015, http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/mondo/europa/2015/03/07/nemtsov-arrestati-2-sospettitaucasici_289ad484-a295-4479-a49c-c6315859fd1b.html

pened at Moskvoretsky Bridge, just few hundreds meters far from the Red Square.⁶³

The two murders are very similar because they hit this part of the population, which want to go against the strong power and want to fight for the freedom of the information and for the freedom of express their political opposition. The murders are similar and not solved yet.

8. The threat of a new Cold War

The word “Cold War” it has been already mentioned, and it would be interesting to examine this concept and see if it makes sense to talk about it again in 2015, after more than 25 years. Something it has been already said about the Russian gas exportation, which constitutes the 50% Moscow’s GDP, for now it’s impossible to think about an ending of these trades mostly because Europe represents its biggest clients. But it’s also true that this situation is very similar to the USSR one, at least from the 60s or 70s, when gas and oil were sold in change of foreign currency able to support Soviet economy. This dependence didn’t stop the extension of the Cold War at that time and why it should stop it now?

⁶³ Alexander Nekrassov, *The not-so-simple murder of Boris Nemtsov*, „Aljazeera“, 2 March 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/03/simple-murder-boris-nemtsov-150302081839658.html>

Another comparison between Russia today and Soviet Union it's about the geopolitical power, during the Cold War, Soviet Union divided its supremacy with USA. It's not possible to say the same about Russia, which has more a regional supremacy than global. It is also true that Russia is a rising power, and even if now it's not able to give problem to USA it's for sure able to worry its leadership. Also the President Barack Obama compared Russia to Ebola or Isis, because he sees them as a possible future menace.⁶⁴ The Russia of Putin doesn't represent any ideology today, it doesn't bring any alternative to the Western democracies, different by the Soviet Union, which was defending the communism and fighting against the materialistic American capitalism. Nevertheless, also even if we don't define the "Putinism" an ideology, something is moving: the patriotism, the traditional values, the presence of Orthodox church are not unconnected between each other, but they are bringing a kind of reborn national proudness, a kind of Russian superiority against the American one.

In a military point of view is not comparable the situation of today with the one of few decades ago, when a menace of a nuclear war was always discussed at political table.⁶⁵ Today, Russia is not dangerous like the Soviet Union at its times, and its revanchism is limited at a regional scale. However the war in Georgia in 2008

⁶⁴ Danilo Elia, *Guerra Fredda – parte seconda: I 5 motivi per cui presto potrebbe avere senso parlarne (Cold War – part two: 5 reasons why it makes sense to talk about it)*, "East Online", 20 October 2014, <http://www.eastonline.eu/it/opinioni/montagne-russe/guerra-fredda-parte-seconda-i-5-motivi-per-cui-presto-potrebbe-avere-senso-parlarne>

⁶⁵ Danilo Elia, *Guerra Fredda – parte prima: I 5 motivi per cui non ha senso parlarne (Cold War – part one: 5 reasons why it doesn't make to talk about it)*, "East online", 15 October 2014, <http://www.eastonline.eu/it/opinioni/montagne-russe/guerra-fredda-i-5-motivi-per-cui-non-ha-senso-parlarne-parte-prima>

and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 have had repercussions far beyond the regional scale. The NATO, which seemed pointless after the end of Warsaw pact, now has a new life and motivations and had a will of an Eastern extension to prevent future problems.

Also about international relations it seems untimely to talk about Cold War, because Russia is part of several international organizations like Council of Europe and International Monetary Fund, and an isolation would be dangerous for Russia. Putin and his Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov know perfectly. But if we said that the world is not divided anymore in two blocks, means that there may be multiple possible alliances. A recent gas agreement between Russia and China is an emblem of this situation. An opening to Asia doesn't mean isolation.

After an analysis of the possible developments between Russia and USA, let's see what is actually happening between the two blocks and how much a new Cold War is really close to the reality. First of all is important to say that none of them has any interest to start a new period of difficult relations, there are too many cooperation around the world where they need each other, for example in Iran, in the civil war in Russia and in the fight to terrorism in Middle East against ISIS. In the other hand is also true that for now is difficult to think that one of the parts will retreat, to solve this kind of tension somebody should make a step back, waiting for the other side to make the same. For example, Russia should renounce to the Crimea and NATO should recognize as

neutral the post-Soviet countries, removing them from its sphere of influence. This scenario is too far from the reality. On the contrary in this sense the situation is getting worse, Putin in fact recently announced to have added 40 long-range ballistic missiles to his arsenal. The answer didn't come very late with Gen Philip Breedlove, a NATO military commander, who said: "We need to be ready because of provocation."⁶⁶

NATO became operative again, it is calculated that at the end of 2015 they will have conducted more than 300 military exercises, 100 more than 2014, and started the delivery of weapons to Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Baltic states, moreover they have recently opened a new training camp in Georgia, and it is known how this country is delicate after the war of 2008. All of this because the Eastern European countries feel vulnerable having borders with Russia and ask for help to Washington, especially Poland, with its difficult history in twentieth Century. It is the first time since the fall of Berlin's wall that USA put kind of war machines in the post-Soviet states.

But this situation confirms the worries of Putin and Russians, convinced that USA wants to encircle Moscow bringing NATO to all its southern and western borders. This situation will strength the nationalists' paranoia, the Putin's power and the political freezing imposed by the Kremlin, silencing any form of opposition. This American move is also useless, because Russia is sure that USA will never start a war in Europe just because of a

⁶⁶ Jonathan Beale, *Moving ever closer to a new Cold War*, 24 June 2015, "BBC News", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33237439>

region and some countries (France and Germany first of all) will refuse the NATO enlargement to the East.⁶⁷

The Ukrainian crisis brought a kind of never ending stalemate, which everyone would like to solve but no-one would like to make the first step, so some political experts say that a new Cold War is inevitable. Michail Gorbacev, the last President of Soviet Union, in occasion of the 25th anniversary of the fall of Berlin's wall, said: "We are on the brink of a new Cold War. Somebody said is already started". But all the motivation already listed would confirmed the contrary, and militarily speaking it is true that Russian troops occupy some territories not controlled by NATO like Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Crimea or Donetsk, but they don't dare to go forward.⁶⁸

One thing is sure, Russia and USA will not start a war to decide the future of Ukraine.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Bernard Guetta, *Come prevenire una nuova Guerra Fredda (How to prevent a new Cold War)*, "Internazionale", 28 August 2015, <http://www.internazionale.it/opinione/bernard-guetta/2015/08/28/russia-europa-guerra-fredda>

⁶⁸ Gwynne Dyer, *Non ci sarà un'altra Guerra Fredda (There won't be a new Cold War)*, "Internazionale", 10 November 2014, <http://www.internazionale.it/opinione/gwynne-dyer/2014/11/10/non-ci-sara-un-altra-guerra-fredda>

⁶⁹ Andrej Krickovic and Yuval Weber, *Why a new Cold War with Russia is inevitable*, „Brookings“, 30 September 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2015/09/30-new-cold-war-with-russia-krickovic-weber>

9. Conclusions

To determine the level of democracy it is necessary to analyse the expectations and the grade of optimism around it. After big changes in Eastern Europe (after Soviet times) and in Middle East (after Arab Spring), the extreme optimism for a new period of democratic rise left the place to the disappointment of a missed opportunity. This situation doesn't mean a decline of democracy but simply a non-increase, which sets off a big discussion about the fate of the world.

The comparison between the two articles of Journal of Democracy in the Chapter 1 highlights this trend: in general it is simply impossible to determine if democracy in the world is in decline even if some tables prove that the number of democratic countries in the world is in decrease or vice versa. It is necessary to analyse the individual cases and specific area of the world, then it's possible to draw conclusion.

However, the centre of this thesis is the analysis of the democratic development in Eastern Europe since the year 2000 in four specific countries: Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and obviously Russia. The first three countries are important because of their geographical (and geopolitical) position, always in between West and

East with a change of government once closer to US-EU block, once closer to Russia, and being so a fertile soil for corruption, manipulation of information and political propaganda.

The fail of “colour revolutions” has brought the sense of decline of democracy in Eastern Europe, the attempt of establishing a pro-West government in Georgia and Ukraine lasted only few years, to leave space and come back to autocratic governments closer to Russia.

If colours revolutions failed it's all because of Russian influence on its geopolitical sphere, and if Russia became again autocratic it's mostly because one important character, the most important and influential character of the entire world: Vladimir Putin. From the year of his establishment in the Kremlin he made small but continuous steps towards an autocratic regime based on his person: the cult of personality, a weak fight against corruption, which favored his friends oligarchs, the repression of every form of opposition through manipulation of information and political persecution. All of this, joined with a new revanchism and a re-born Russian nationalism, in the last fifteen years maximized Putin's power making him untouchable and unreachable. A sort of religious icon; to offend Putin means to offend Russia.

Russia is a country that probably never knows democracy. During the 90's, directly after the fall of Soviet Union, there was an attempt, probably a “fake” one, but the hope of not seeing anymore a regime like in the Communist time vanished soon. But those who don't want democracy are first of all the Russian citizens: with Yeltsin, they had a period of economical crisis; with

Putin they have a new hope of being a super-power and being an important country of the world's chessboard. They don't want democracy and they don't need democracy.

The power of Putin made a new ideology called "Putinism". The Putinism will survive even after Putin's term, because he left a mark in his country that's difficult to delete: the next Russian government will not be democratic, rather, it will follow the Putin's road and it will be fair and honest with its predecessor.

After a significant scan of the Russian's return to a regime, it is worthwhile to complete the thesis with the reaction of Europe and USA in front of this scenario. The West is obviously worried about the possible consequences of the return of the two blocks like in the Cold War after the World War II, but is still unlikely to attend something similar. None of the two parties has the interest and the motivation to go back in the past: USA and Russia still need each other in other parts of the world (for example Syria, and even more after the terroristic attack in Paris) and it would be a no-sense to terminate everything only for a quarrel in some corner of the world like in Crimea. The Ukrainian situation is still delicate but none of them want to make a step further, worried about the consequences. A new Cold War is still too far, moreover, Europe is the most important buyer of gas from Russia, and Putin will not renounce it.

Before drawing a final conclusion it's important to remember that in general Russia has never been a real democracy, so it wouldn't

be very correct to say that a decline of democracy is present. It would be more correct affirming that after the fall of Soviet Union, after the year 2000 Russia betrayed the democratic expectation and came back to the past, dragging in a similar situation other post-Soviet countries (as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova), which although the desire of westernization of the majority of the population, didn't yet find a political stability.

I left at the end of the conclusions the democratic scores from the Nation in transit, because even if they are relevant and reliable, I wouldn't like to summarize all the topic of democracy with some numbers, besides the fact that here only the American point of view is considered.

However, the scores highlight clearly that Russia and Ukraine attended an important fall: especially Russia, its democracy declining from 5.61 in year 2005 to 6.29 in 2014, mostly due to corruption, national democratic governance and electoral process. In Ukraine this fall is lower but still important, with a decrease from 4.50 to 4.93, with a relevant decrease between 2010 and 2014 with Yanukovich in charge, while from 2005 to 2010 (after Orange revolution) the country reached a peak of democracy of 4.21. More stable the scores of Georgia and Moldova in the last ten years, with a slight increase in terms of democracy especially due to a fair electoral process. It's also interesting to check the recent scores of 2015, because the slight and (almost) imperceptible rise of Putin's power strikes also in the last twelve months, Russian score decrease from 6.29 to 6.46, due to a new fall regarding

civil society, independent media, local and national democratic governance. Russia is then in an authoritarian never ending vortex, while the same is not happening to the neighbour Ukraine, which although all the issues in Crimea and Eastern regions has seen increased its democratic score from 4.93 to 4.75, thanks to a rise of civil society, corruption, independent media and electoral process.

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