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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the sources of Russian conduct in Ukraine, focusing on whether the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine was part of a Kremlin masterplan, or merely a reaction of Putin's Russia to contingencies. In doing so, the writer reflects on the frameworks of the major school of thought within international relations theory, and analyzes to what extent they explain the rationale underpinning Russia's Ukraine policy from 2013 to 2016. The hypothesis is that the Kremlin acted rationally when deciding to intervene through hard power tools in Ukraine, faced with the threat of losing Russian strategic influence over that country and mindful of its geopolitical and geo-economic significance. Moreover, the Kremlin correctly anticipated the limits of economic sanctions and the European Union's lack of willingness to intervene militarily. This hypothesis is in line with the framework proposed by the realist theory of international relations, which assumes that the conduct of states is mainly driven by national interest and strategic considerations. Moreover, the Kremlin largely took advantage of the sense of Russian territorial identity in Crimea in order to justify the annexation. However, even if domestic factors and identity questions contributed partially to the Kremlin's chosen foreign policy course in Ukraine, they play a secondary role in explaining the sources of Russian conduct. In fact, this thesis finds that the rapprochement between Ukraine and the EU, with the corollary of the Trade and Association Agreement, caused Russia to feel threatened in an area of its core strategic interest in the Post-Soviet space. Following Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, the already fragile relations between Russia, the European Union and the Western Community in general were severely damaged. Indeed - despite the best efforts of diplomatic forums such as the Trilateral Contact Group and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in maintaining a dialogue between the parties of the conflict - a long-term resolution to the crisis remains elusive.

ABSTRAKT

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Hintergründe russischer Handlungen in der Ukraine, mit Fokus auf die Frage ob die Annektierung der Krim und der Krieg in der Ostukraine Teil eines „Masterplans“ des Kremlins waren, oder ob sie lediglich als Reaktion von Putin's Russland auf die Ereignisse zu verstehen sind. Um dieser Frage nachzugehen, beziehe ich mich zuerst auf die Hauptschulen der Theorien der internationalen Beziehung, und analysiere, inwieweit sie die Gründe für Russlands Ukraine-Politik von 2013 bis 2016 erklären können. Der Hypothese nach war die Entscheidung des Kremlins, mittels „hard power tools“ in der Ukraine zu intervenieren, rational bedingt, in Anbetracht des drohenden Verlustes strategischen Einflusses über die Ukraine und im vollen Bewusstsein der geopolitischen und geostrategischen Bedeutung dieses Landes. Des Weiteren antizipierte der Kremlin korrekt die Limitationen der wirtschaftlichen Sanktionen einerseits sowie den mangelnden Willen der Europäischen Union zur militärischen Intervention andererseits. Diese Hypothese passt in den Rahmen der Realismus-Theorie in den internationalen Beziehungen, die davon ausgeht, dass das Handeln von Staaten hauptsächlich von nationalen Interessen und strategischen Überlegungen bestimmt wird. Weiters nutzte der Kremlin das Gefühl russischer Identität auf der Krim, um die Annektierung zu rechtfertigen. Obgleich aber diese internen Identitätsfragen teilweise zur russischen Außenpolitik die Ukraine betreffend beitrugen, spielen sie nur eine sekundäre Rolle in der Erklärung der russischen Handlungen. Tatsächlich stellt diese Masterarbeit fest, dass die Annäherung der Ukraine an die EU, inklusive des Trade and Association Agreements, dazu führte, dass sich Russland in einem Kerngebiet seiner strategischen Interessen im post-sowjetischen Raum bedroht fühlte. Die folgende russische Aggression in der Ostukraine sowie die Annektierung der Krim beschädigten die bereits davor zerbrechlichen Beziehungen zwischen Russland, der Europäischen Union und der westlichen Gemeinschaft im Allgemeinen. Trotz großer Anstrengungen auf Seiten des diplomatischen Forums - wie der Trilateralen Kontaktgruppe und der Organisation für Sicherheit und Kooperation in Europa – einen Dialog aufrechtzuerhalten, ist die Krise weit entfernt davon, gelöst zu werden.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine as a country has always been within the orbit of the Russian Federation, which has tried to influence the government of Kiev by maintaining a certain element of control over its decision-making. Since then, bilateral relations between Ukraine and Russia have been characterized by alternating periods of cooperation and confrontation, depending on the willingness of the government of Kiev to collaborate with the Kremlin on a number of policy-issues.¹ Over the following two decades, Russia has continued to exert pressure on the Ukrainian government each time its policy-making has followed a direction which does not suit Russian strategic interests in the region. Nonetheless, following its declaration of independence, Ukraine started to follow a pattern of gradual rapprochement with some Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union.² As one could expect, the Kremlin did not remain indifferent to these developments. As a consequence, the relations between Ukraine, the Western Community and Russia began to deteriorate, with matters being brought to a head in the Euromaidan protests, the outbreak of armed conflict in Ukrainian territory, and the annexation of Crimea.

The outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis left many questions unanswered about the sources and the causes of Kremlin aggressive foreign policy toward Ukraine.³ In fact, statesmen and experts of international relations worldwide sought to divine the source of Russia's Ukraine Policy and find the main driving forces of Putin's foreign policy actions since he became President of the Russian Federation in 2000. This thesis investigates the dynamics at play in the Euromaidan protests, as well as during the ensuing events both within and outside the borders of Ukraine from 2013 to 2016. In particular, the main drivers and the sources of Russian policy during the crisis will form the focus of the analysis. Indeed, one of the main objectives of this thesis is to understand why and how the Russian Federation decided to shift from soft power to hard power tools in order to keep Ukraine in what the Kremlin considers to be its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space. For this reason, the

¹ Mironowicz, Eugeniusz. "Russia – Ukraine. 25 Years Between "Limited Cooperation and Limited Confrontation"." *Confrontation and Cooperation: 1000 Years of Polish-German-Russian Relations*2, no. 2 (2015): 27.

² For Western Community, I refer to Western Europe and Nord America (US and Canada).

³ Kimberly Marten, "Putins Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine," *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 189.

thesis deals with many perspective of international relations such as geopolitics, economics, domestic factors, historical claims, diplomatic wrongdoings and the question of prestige and identity.

The outbreak of this conflict had a negative impact on the already fragile relations between the West and Russia, propelling them toward conflict.⁴ Not only will this thesis analyze the Ukrainian crisis from the point of view of the involvement of the Russian Federation, but it will also focus on those actions undertaken by Western diplomacy before and during the crisis. In particular, the relationship between the European Union and Ukraine will be considered, and the impact which this crisis with Russia will have on the EU and the US in terms of their relations with Russia. Furthermore, the factors that led Yanukovych to turn his back to the European Union at the summit of Vilnius in 2013, in order not to compromise the relations of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, will be considered in detail.

Moreover, it can be argued that the Western Community also contributed to the outbreak and the escalation of the crisis because of its lack of vision in trying to find a diplomatic solution, and because of the many weaknesses of the instruments of crisis-management which were adopted and implemented later, such as the Minsk Agreement and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Indeed, despite the fact that such diplomatic ties guaranteed a minimum of continued dialogue between the parties, they could not engineer a durable solution to the conflict.

The aim of this thesis is to try to find an answer to the following research-question: What lies behind Russia's Ukraine Policy? What are the sources and the main drivers of Putin's Policy toward Ukraine? Is Russia's Ukraine policy a part of a masterplan to re-assert the country as a world power or is it just a series of reaction to contingencies?

⁴ Cristian Nitoiu, "Towards conflict or cooperation? The Ukraine crisis and EU-Russia relations," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 3 (2016): 375.

This broad research-question will lead me to address a set of other more specific questions that are related to this topic:

- ❖ Is Russia's aggressive foreign policy toward Ukraine really unique and case-specific? Or is it simply an attempt by a great power to maintain a sphere of interest in the face of increasing foreign pressure on its borders?
- ❖ What explains Russia's twists and turns when it comes to its Ukraine Policy? Is there a link between the degree of external pressure and the level of coercion in Kremlin policy?
- ❖ What are the sources of the conduct of the Kremlin and what is the essence of the crisis in Ukraine for Russia?
- ❖ To what extent did the asymmetric economic relationship between these two countries influence foreign-policy choices of their governments? How much of a motivating factor was the issue of gas transportation through Ukraine for the Kremlin in maintaining a good degree of influence on the government of this country?
- ❖ How can the annexation of Crimea be explained in this context? Is it a means by which the Russian government is attempting to divert public attention from internal problems?
- ❖ In terms of Russia's Ukraine Policy, what was the role of Russian informal networks? To what extent did internal power dynamics in the Russian Federation allow an aggressive foreign policy course toward Ukraine?
- ❖ What does the Ukrainian Crisis mean in terms of Russia's relations with the West? Will the warfare in Eastern Ukraine become another frozen conflict in the post-Soviet space? Is there a future for Ukraine in Europe?
- ❖ How do we explain the blinkered vision of the West in dealing with the crisis in Ukraine? Why did the US position diverge from that of the European Union when it came to adopting a common line of action of the Western Community? And why did the German position diverge from that of the European Union?

The hypothesis that is defended by this thesis it is that the actions of Putin's Russia before and after Maidan, in the context of the crisis in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, are not part of a masterplan of the Kremlin in order to re-establish a sphere of interest in the post-Soviet space, but rather the result of a cost-benefit calculation in reaction to contingencies. In order to conduct my analysis, the neorealist theory is used as a framework to understand the foundations of Russia's Ukraine policy. Furthermore, this thesis argues that Putin used the argument of Russian identity in order to justify the Russian intervention in Ukraine and the subsequent annexation of Crimea. In order to have a complete picture of the crisis both the standpoints and the policy-drivers of Ukraine, the Western Community and the Russian Federation are analyzed. Throughout this thesis the hypothesis tested is that Putin acted rationally when he decided to intervene through hard power tools in Ukraine, because of his aversion to losing Russian influence on the government of Kiev. Furthermore, strategic and economic considerations and the fear of losing his political power at home contributed to a high degree to his risk-acceptant decision to annex Crimea and employ hybrid warfare in Eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin reacted rationally to circumstances, correctly anticipating the limits of the economic sanctions and of the military response by the West and acquiring the strategically indispensable port of Sevastopol. Thus, he undermined the expansion of Western Institutions in Ukraine and boosted his approval ratings at home.

On the other hand, the West underestimated the geopolitical and strategic importance of Eastern Ukraine to Russia, and thus Putin was willing to take a risk in order to establish a higher degree of control on the Crimean Peninsula and on the industrial region of the Donbass. Moreover, the Western Community overestimated the impact of economic sanctions as a countermeasure to the violation of international law committed by Russia when annexing the Crimean Peninsula and supporting separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. While Putin did not hesitate to use his political leverage over president Yanukovich when he was negotiating the Association Agreement with the European Union, Brussels and Washington were

shortsighted and overconfident in the negotiations which resulted in a failure for Germany first and foremost, and of Western diplomacy in general.⁵

For the purposes of this research, the West is defined as the press, public opinion and political leadership of Western countries, ie. the United States, Western Europe and all politically-aligned organizations and countries. Within this framework, the writer includes countries which normally align themselves with the transatlantic community such as Canada, and international organizations such as NATO.

There are many approaches and theories that try to explain Russia's recent foreign policy course. According to some experts, the aggressiveness of the Kremlin's foreign policy toward Ukraine is mainly a result of internal factors such as Putin's worldview, the influence of his closest advisors that have KGB background, and the logics of Russian internal informal networks.⁶ The influence of internal factors surely cannot be excluded from an analysis of recent Russian foreign policy. Nonetheless, in this thesis the analysis will be based on the realist approach in order to provide the most persuasive explanation Russia's foreign policy choices towards Ukraine.

According to this to this theory it is not factors internal to Russia that drive the Kremlin's Ukraine Policy, but mainly geopolitical considerations.⁷ In fact, Russia is simply defending its strategic interest from growing external pressure emanating from NATO and the European Union.⁸ In this thesis, the writer considers neorealist arguments in the context of Russia's Ukraine Policy and verifies their degree of explanatory power as far as Putin's policy-course is concerned. While identity factors and imperial nostalgia cannot be excluded from the analysis, it can be argued that these are not the main motivations that led the Kremlin to intervene militarily in Ukraine, since they are more a corollary of strategic and economic considerations. According to the realist theory, major powers use both soft-power and hard-power

⁵ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton, *Everyone loses: the Ukraine crisis and the ruinous contest for post-Soviet Eurasia* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017), 114.

⁶ Kimberly Marten, "Putins Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine," *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 193.

⁷ Elias Götz, "Neorealism and Russia's Ukraine policy, 1991–present," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 301

⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, January 28, 2016, accessed November 28, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

tools in order to maintain control over their sphere of influence. The level of external pressure will then determine which one of this tools the major power will decide to use.⁹

Table 1. External pressure and hard/soft-power tools.

		Diplomatic	Economic	Military
External pressure	High	• Break-off of diplomatic relations • Promotion of opposition groups	• Economic blockades • Trade restrictions	• Armed interventions • Punitive raids
	Medium	• Interference in elections and leadership transitions • Political pressure (e.g. diplomatic protest notes, recall of ambassadors)	• Acquisition of strategic economic assets • Conditional loans and credits	• Fomenting internal unrest • Military manoeuvres in border areas
	Low	• Enmeshing nearby states in regional institutional arrangements • Establishing close ties with high-ranking government officials	• Trade concessions • Economic aid	• Intelligence assistance and training of security forces • Arms transfers

Figure 1. Source: Elias Götz, "Neorealism and Russia's Ukraine policy, 1991–present," *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 306.

Therefore, according to neorealist thinking, it is not surprising that Russia's Ukraine policy became increasingly aggressive whenever Western institutions tried to establish closer ties with the Ukrainian government. In fact, Ukraine is of strategic importance to Russia since it provides a buffer zone and a route to Central Europe and because of Russia's military facilities in the Black Sea region. In the course of this analysis, the theories of constructivism and liberalism will also be mentioned in the context of the dynamics and the developments of the Ukrainian crisis and its outcomes in term of the relations between the West and the Russian Federation.

This thesis will approach the Ukraine Crisis through a comprehensive approach, focusing on an historical analysis but combining it political science and international relations. In the course of this analysis economic arguments will also be

⁹ Elias Götz (2016): 302.

touched upon, since considerations related to trade in oil and gas cannot be forgotten when analyzing developments in Russo-Ukrainian bilateral relations.

For the purposes of this analysis, this thesis relies on a number of primary sources, such as Putin's speeches, as well as secondary sources, such as articles, books and publications by experts in the field of Russian internal and foreign policy and Russia- West relations. Considering the fact that the writer does not have access to official internal governmental documents of the Russian Federation, the analysis on the extensive amount of data, reports and documents provided by international organizations, the European Union and scholars specialized on Russian foreign policy and the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, the writer analyzed a number of OSCE reports on the crisis and on the steps undertaken by diplomatic formats such as the Trilateral Contact Group, which provide a neutral overview on the different stages of the crisis in the timeframe analyzed by this thesis.

The analysis is divided in three parts, corresponding to three different stages in the relations among the two countries.

The first part concentrates on the events of the Euromaidan and its aftermath, with a focus on the events taking place during 2013 and 2014. This period of time includes the outbreak of armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia and the start of the hybrid warfare in the Donbass. In this part the writer investigates the dynamics of the negotiation of the trade and association agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, and seeks to analyze its implications both for the Western Community and Russia. Moreover, the thesis concentrates on the shift of Russia from soft-power to hard-power tactics from a neorealist perspective, focusing on the annexation of Crimea and its implications.

The second part considers the period extending from the beginning of the presidency of Putin in 1991, to the onset of Euromaidan in 2013. In this part of this thesis the writer analyzes the contribution of Vladimir Putin to the change of course in relations between Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, the internal factors in the Russian Federation at the state level that could explain the choice of the Kremlin to intervene militarily in Ukraine form the object of further reflection. The crisis of identity in the Russian Federation in the post-Cold War era will, additionally, be investigated, as well as aspects in the confrontational relations between Russia and

the transatlantic community which shaped the perception of threat. In this part, the issue of economic interdependence between Ukraine and Russia will also be addressed, especially when it comes to energy trade.

In the third part, this thesis concentrates on the events of the Ukrainian Crisis during the years 2014, 2015 and 2016, with a focus on the war in the separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine. In this context, the analysis focuses on the events both from the perspective of the actions undertaken by the Kremlin and of those taken by the Western Community on the other hand, which led to the outbreak of warfare. Therefore, this thesis aims to find out which factors led to the perpetration of what now is defined by many scholars as another frozen conflict in the post-Soviet space. Lastly, the implications of the conflict both in terms of the relations among Ukraine and the European Union and among the Transatlantic community and Russia are considered.

In the conclusions, the outcomes of the analysis and the implications for the future are exposed, bearing in mind that the crisis in and around Ukraine is still ongoing at the time of writing.

PART I - THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS AND THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA

1. YANUKOVYCH'S CHOICE AND THE FACTS OF MAIDAN

❖ **The Negotiation of the Trade and Association Agreement with the European Union: Ukraine contended among Russia and the EU**

In this chapter, the negotiation of the Trade and Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine is going to be closely analyzed. In fact, it is the rapprochement in between the EU and Ukraine that ultimately caused Russia to shift from soft to hard power tools in order to maintain a high degree of control on the government of Kiev. Therefore, the different stages of the EU-Ukraine relations will be take into closer consideration, as well as the impact that this process has had on the threat perception of the Kremlin. The focus will be on the negotiation of the agreement in 2013, highlighting the main problems that arose in the process as well as the possible gains and losses that both parties could have undergone if the final signature and ratification had been completed.

First of all, one should analyze the reasons why the European Union decided to engage in establishing a closer economic and political partnership with Ukraine. What are the rationales underpinning the EU's willingness to sign a Trade and Association Agreement with Ukraine? In this context, it is worth pointing out that the EU started to seek closer collaboration and cooperation with post-Soviet states in the aftermath of the Georgian War.¹⁰ The first policy focusing on the region was the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), finalized in 2004, which had the objective of establishing good relationships among the EU and the relevant post-Soviet states with the aim of ensuring a maximum of democracy, peace, security and demilitarization.¹¹ The basic idea was to offer to the EU's neighbors favorable and preferential access to trade with the EU, in exchange for providing proof of shared values and the implementation of economic, political and institutional reforms that would ultimately lead to an alignment of the legislation of post-Soviet countries to the *acquis* of the EU. As soon as this policy was launched, the relations among some

¹⁰ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 95.

¹¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication From the Commission: European Neighborhood Policy* (Strategy Paper, 2004). https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf

post-Soviet countries and the EU grew closer, in particular Ukraine. It was in this context that in Brussels the instrument of Association Agreements (AAs) was extended as a framework to draw closer ties with those states that seek a closer relation to the EU. Indeed, this instrument served in essence as an alternative to full EU-membership, which Brussels did not want and was not (and still is not) within its capacity to offer.¹² Nonetheless, according to Brussels the AAs served as a first step in the perspective of a future EU membership. Therefore, the AAs are indeed nothing more than a step of post-Soviet countries into the EU's geo-economic space.

The AAs also included a form of preliminary geopolitical cooperation, creating a ministerial Association Council.¹³ Interestingly, within the context of this analysis, the signing of an AA with the EU precludes the party from being part of any other custom union. As one can imagine, this logic undermined the Kremlin's plan to create a regional economic cooperation in the framework of the Eurasian Union. In fact, the main weakness of this approach is that it prevented post-Soviet states from seeking closer economic ties simultaneously with Russia and the EU. On the contrary, in this context these states had to make a choice: either one or the other.

Another step that the European Union took in order to improve its relations with post-Soviet countries is the Eastern Partnership. The final goal of this project was to improve the overall prosperity and stability of these countries, which from the perspective of European diplomacy would have led to improved security and prosperity for the EU itself.¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, this was perceived by Moscow as another step taken by the European Union towards establishing a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet area, which was and still is considered an area of key strategic significance for the Russian Federation. This perception of threat emerges clearly in the speech that the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov held in 2009, when he declared that: "We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern

¹² Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 97.

¹³ Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part, Official Journal of the European Union (L 161/3, 2004).
http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/november/tradoc_155103.pdf

¹⁴ "Eastern Partnership." *EU Trade Agreements - Consilium*. Council of the EU, October 23, 2017. Last modified October 23, 2017. Accessed June 8, 2018.
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>.

Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence, including Belarus?"¹⁵

After providing an overview of the process of closer relations and diplomatic ties among the European Union and the post-Soviet countries, it is necessary for the sakes of this thesis to focus on the negotiation of the Association Agreement specifically within the Ukrainian context, and how this led to the Maidan protests of 2013. Indeed, negotiations for the 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement' started in 2008. The drafting process proceeded at full pace when the imprisonment of Yulia Tymoshenko in 2011 jeopardized the process because of the EU's disapproval on the detention of the politician.¹⁶ The Tymoshenkos' Affair rang alarm bells for the EU, with the strong sense that Ukraine was not yet ready to closely collaborate with the EU. For these reasons, the EU started to stipulate an extensive list of conditions (involving a set of judicial, electoral and constitutional reforms) for Ukraine to fulfil in order to be ready to sign the AA with the EU at the Vilnius Summit for the Eastern Partnership program in November 2013. Among the others, one of the main demands of the EU was the freeing of Tymoschenko.¹⁷

At this point, it has to be mentioned that it was not just the EU which undermined the negotiations by considerably increasing the conditions for signing the agreement. In fact, with Russia threatening to sabotage the Ukrainian economy, Kiev started to claim more and more money in order to implement the necessary reforms and conform to the required standards, and to compensate for the losses caused by the worsening of the economic relations with Russia.¹⁸

Even if the negotiations and the terms for the signature of the TTA agreement were becoming increasingly controversial, it would still have come as a surprise to many diplomats participating to the Vilnius Summit in 2013 that Yanukovych would

¹⁵ "EU Expanding Its 'sphere of Influence,' Russia Says," EUobserver, , accessed April 08, 2018, <https://euobserver.com/foreign/27827>.

¹⁶ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 63.

¹⁷ "Summit of Failure: How the EU Lost Russia over Ukraine - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International," SPIEGEL ONLINE, November 24, 2014, , accessed April 08, 2018, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/war-in-ukraine-a-result-of-misunderstandings-between-europe-and-russia-a-1004706.html>.

¹⁸ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 65.

drop the agreement.¹⁹ Moreover, once it became clear that the efforts to sign the TTA among the EU and Ukraine were in vain, nobody would have expected the consequences of the bigger picture: the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the war in the Donbass and the first hybrid war in the heart of Europe since the end of the First World War.

¹⁹ "Summit of Failure: How the EU Lost Russia over Ukraine - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International," SPIEGEL ONLINE, November 24, 2014, , accessed May 01, 2018,

❖ **Euromaidan: Yanukovych turns his back to the EU**

During the negotiation of the TTA with the EU and before the Summit at Vilnius, Ukraine and its President Yanukovych found themselves confronted by a choice. Two different and competing regional powers were vying to include the country in their respective spheres of influence. The European Union, on the one hand, tried to show that, despite doubts over its project of enlargement and the enduring financial crisis, it was nonetheless still a driver of democratization and economic prosperity in the post-Soviet area. The Russian Federation, on the other hand, aimed to reassert itself as a regional power in Eastern Europe and Central Asia through the Eurasian project.

The Euromaidan protests started on the 21st of November 2013, when in Vilnius Yanukovych decided not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, after months of prolonged negotiations. It should, however, be pointed out that well before the final decision of the Ukrainian President to drop the agreement, growing discontentment had developed among Ukrainians over the general status of the country and the unfulfilled achievements of the government in charge.²⁰ Therefore, it was just not the perceived loss of the European dream that led the Ukrainians to protest on the Maidan Square, but also a sense of general disillusionment and frustration about the political landscape of the country along with the high corruption and inequality that characterizes its society.

But why and how is it that Yanukovych decided to turn his back to the EU? In the context of this analysis, it can be argued that the main factors that contributed to Yanukovych's choice were the following: firstly, the increasing requests and demands of compliance made by the EU in order to welcome Ukraine as a partner. Secondly, the increasing economic pressure and the threats that the government of Kiev was receiving by the Kremlin.

Apart from analyzing which factors led Yanukovych not to sign the TTA with the EU, one should also investigate what led the Ukrainians to react through the protest of Maidan to the choice of their President. For the Ukrainians, Yanukovych dropping the TTA negotiation with Europe meant the vanishing of every hope of a

²⁰ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 66.

different future for Ukraine. In fact, when if the election of Yanukovych in 2010 clearly meant a rapprochement with Russia, the newly elected president always promoted through his rhetoric and actions deeper integration with the European Union.²¹ In particular, he insisted on removing trade barriers and in adopting a visa-free regime with the European Union, which brought extensive advantages for the Ukrainian citizens.

Moreover, for the Ukrainians, these steps meant not only some gains in practical terms, but they had also a highly symbolic value. In fact, the TTA with the European Union meant for the Ukrainians that their country would stop being a puppet of Russia, and would also have left behind some aspect of the Russian and post-Soviet mentality and lifestyle in order to acquire the European one. In truth, Ukrainians had never really experienced life in a country where Western values such as the rule of law, transparent democracy and meritocracy are the founding principles of the state.²² At the times of Euromaidan, Ukrainians saw the chance to build a future for Ukraine - based on these principles - disappear at the Summit of Vilnius. Even if the TTA never promised EU membership itself, in the eyes of Ukrainians it was a first step towards reforms, toward less corruption and more transparency in the judicial and democratic process.

One other aspect that should be mentioned in the context of this chapter is that the Euromaidan protests was a peaceful one when it started in November 2013.²³ It was when the government responded in a more and more repressive way, that the situation eventually escalated into a violent protest. In fact, according to Andrew Wilson, there were three main factors that led the protest to escalate and become more radical: the succession of repressive laws passed by the government in January 2014, the increasing violence means employed by the government in order to repress the protests, and the ineffectiveness of the protest to change or impact the agenda of the parliament.²⁴

In February 2014, the clashes between the protestors and the police became gradually more violent.²⁵ As special police units were diverted against the protestors

²¹ Marci Shore. *The Ukrainian night: an intimate history of revolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017, 31.

²² Marci Shore (2017), 30.

²³ Andrew Wilson (2014), 86.

²⁴ Andrew Wilson (2014), 86.

²⁵ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 124.

to counter the protest, and the situation increasingly escalated both in Kiev as well as in other cities of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government started a series of negotiations with the protestors. During these negotiations, Yanukovych, the leaders of the opposition Tyahnybok, Klitchko and Yatsenyuk and the leaders of the pro-European movement concluded a deal.²⁶ The deal was mediated by the foreign ministers of France, Poland and Germany and by a Russian presidential representative. This deal included some amendments of the constitution to limit the presidential powers, the reform of electoral laws; in exchange the occupation of governmental buildings would end. However, the deal collapsed almost immediately, the streets of Kiev broke into protest and at this point Yanukovych realized there was no guarantee for him of staying in Russia. Yanukovych fled Ukraine to Russia at the end of February, and the Ukrainian Parliament voted to remove him from office.

New elections were called in Ukraine, and the pro-European politician Yatsenyuk became the new leader of the government. The new authorities gathered the support of Western leaders, including the US. At this point, the Russian Ambassador to Ukraine was withdrawn and protests of separatist groups in the Crimean Peninsula started to attract the attention of the international community.²⁷

²⁶ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 125.

²⁷ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 126.

2. RUSSIA SHIFTS FROM SOFT-POWER TO HARD POWER TACTICS: A NEOREALIST STRATEGY?

In this section, the shift made by Russia from soft- power tactics to hard power ones will be taken into closer consideration. The focus will be on the facts in 2014 after the protest of Euromaidan in Kiev, which signed the moment in which Russia decided to invade the Ukrainian territory militarily and take control firstly of Crimea, and later of the Donbass. Nonetheless, the war in the Donbass will be object of closer consideration in Part III of this thesis.

The hypothesis that needs to be tested is that Russia decided to shift from soft to hard power policy tools as a result of the increasing pressure coming both from the Western institutions and from the Ukrainian citizens. When the Euromaidan protests broke out in Kiev, it was the final signal for the Kremlin that it had to take the situation in Ukraine back under its control. If economic pressure and informal networks among Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs were not enough, then military power had to be deployed.

Following this reasoning, Russia chose the policy tool to use in Ukraine according to the level of external pressure. As a result, one can argue that Russia's Ukraine policy is a good example of neorealist strategy. In fact, Russia defended its strategic interest in Ukraine and its sphere of influence on the Black Sea region because of very practical and common-sense considerations of economic and strategic nature. As it will be pointed out in the conclusions to this first part, the military intervention of Russia in Ukraine in 2014 can be best explained by neorealist theories, in opposition to liberal and constructivist theories.

❖ The Annexation of Crimea: the coup and the referendum

When analyzing the Ukraine Crisis, it is necessary to closely analyze and take into consideration the annexation of Crimea by Russia, as it marked one of the most contested and tragic episodes of the Post-Cold War era. The annexation of Crimea marked a breaking point not only when it comes to the relations in between the government of Kiev and the Kremlin, but also in the dynamic of Russia-West relations. In fact, this action was perceived by the West as an irredeemable break of international law and as evidence that Russia had trampled on every principle of good-faith conduct in the international system. In fact, the annexation violated the sovereign rights of Ukraine within its own territory, and the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs of a state.

Firstly, it should be remembered that Crimea has, historically, long been the object of Russian domination, and this clearly had an impact on the inhabitants of the peninsula, which belong to different ethnic groups. In fact, in Crimea the majority of the population, which is of ethnic Russian origin, has to coexist with the Crimean Tatars and the Ukrainians. Nonetheless, it has never been a peaceful and equal coexistence, since the Tatars often suffered from discriminatory treatment, even if the Rada tried to pass laws in order to protect them more than once.²⁸ An historical episode that has to be mentioned in the context of this thesis is the mass deportation of the Tatars at the times of the Soviet Union in 1944 on the basis of their supposed collaboration with the Nazi German government.²⁹ The Tatars were not allowed to return home even in 1956 by President Khrushchev, when other ethnic minorities were doing so. They were eventually able to return to their lands just after 1989. After the return of the Tatars, ethnic Russians constituted the majority (58%) of the population. Ukrainians comprised a mere 24% per cent of the population, and the remainder were Crimean Tatars.

After a brief introduction, the facts of the annexation of Crimea by Russia, including the referendum and its consequences on the international stage will be taken into closer consideration. It was reported by some experts on the crisis that the Kremlin had already orchestrated the plan for the annexation of Crimea by the time

²⁸ Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa, *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2016), 73.

²⁹ Andrew Wilson (2014), 103.

of the Olympic Games in Sochi.³⁰ It has to be mentioned that neither the Russian government nor the Russian population ever accepted Crimea as being formally a part of the Ukrainian territory. As a consequence, it is not hard to guess that at the first signal of weakness of the central government of Kiev led by Yanukovych, the Kremlin would have taken advantage of the situation in order to take back what it considered its land by right. In fact, Crimea was conquered by Russia during the times of Catherine the Great in 1783, and it also had been part of the Soviet Union until Nikita Khrushchev decided to give it to the Soviet Republic of Ukraine in 1954.³¹ In this context, it is important to point out that Crimea has always been the port of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, a fact of great importance in order to analyze the strategic rationale behind Russia's interest in keeping an influence on the peninsula.

Coming to the facts of the annexation of Crimea, one can say it started at the end of February 2014. In fact, around the 20th of February the political climate started heating up, with the beginning of pro-Russian demonstrations. In this context, it has to be mentioned that on the 20th of February the Russian Ministry of Defense granted a medal to many civilians and servicemen for helping and favoring the return of the Crimean Peninsula to Russia.³² This gesture fomented protests and political agitation in Sevastopol and other Crimean cities, and marked the start of the first pro-Russian rallies on the peninsula as well as the increase of the Russian forces wearing a green uniform.

The next date that has to be mentioned is the 27th of February, when a group of armed officials, whose uniforms did not belong to any specific country, broke into and took control of the Crimean Parliament, raising a Russian flag on it.³³ At the same time, the border between Crimean and the mainland of Ukraine was closed, and the airport of Simferopol was blocked. During the same days, the idea of conducting a referendum on the status of Crimea started to be discussed by the deputies of the parliament and among the inhabitants of the peninsula. The referendum was to decide if Crimea should remain part of Ukraine under the government of Kiev, or

³⁰ Jutta Sommerbauer, *Die Ukraine Im Krieg: Hinter Den Frontlinien Eines Europäischen Konflikts* (Wien: K & S, Kremayr & Scheriau, 2016), 44.

³¹ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2014), 99.

³² "Chronology of the Annexation of Crimea -." Source Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Euromaidan Press. March 08, 2015. Accessed April 13, 2018.
<http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/05/chronology-of-the-annexation-of-crimea/>.

³³ Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 44.

secede from it, reverting to being part of the Russian Federation. From this moment on, the number of Russian soldiers present on the border skyrocketed, as well as the presence of the so called “green men”, the officials in green uniforms without any governmental symbol, later recognized as Moscow-backed military forces.³⁴

Two weeks later the referendum that changed the fate of Crimea took place. The regional referendum under Russian control happened on the 16th of March 2014, when 97% of the inhabitants of Crimea, it was reported, voted in favor of annexation to the Russian Federation.³⁵ After the endorsement of the President of the Russian Federation Putin and the one of the Russian Parliament, Crimea was proclaimed to be a new region of the Russian Federation. This event was spectacularized during the patriotic speech of Putin in front of the state Duma, when he stated:

[...]

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.

[...]

In people’s hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th century.

*After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine.*³⁶

When analyzing the annexation of Crimea by Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, it is also interesting to investigate the legal, economic and historical rhetoric that were used by the Kremlin in order to justify the annexation in the international scenario, which was in principle a violation of international law. In fact,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Andrew Wilson (2014), 113.

³⁶ "Address By President of the Russian Federation." President Of Russia. March 18, 2014. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

Russia tried to justify the facts in Crimea using a legal language, in order to give the appearance that it acted as a lawful actor well of the principles and obligations provided by international law, justifying its action through legal arguments.³⁷

The first principle that was used by Russia in order to justify the annexation was that of self-determination, arguing that the inhabitants of Crimea had the right to choose the government that would have a jurisdiction on the peninsula and to which state they feel part of. This argument was used by the Kremlin with the clear aim of dividing the international community and creating doubts on the legal basis of the international systems itself: the principles of international law. Thereby, Russia cleverly exploited the grey areas within the international legal system, using the same liberal discourse that the Western community used on more than one occasion to condemn the policies of the Kremlin regarding minorities and separatist movements.³⁸ Additionally, the steps taken in order to incorporate Crimea such as the referendum were orchestrated by Moscow very carefully in order to give the image that a democratic and lawful process was taking place, without any ulterior motive, agenda or any pressure from the outside. Moscow wanted to demonstrate to the international community that the Crimean people were choosing freely and democratically where they wanted to belong to.

The vote of the 16th March coincided with the first sanctions of the international community against Russian officials that took part in the seizure of the peninsula.³⁹ Internationally, the annexation of Crimea by Russia was condemned and the referendum was declared as unconstitutional both by Ukraine and by the Western community. Moreover, many international organizations, NGOs as well as other state-actors declared that the results of the referendum were faked and that the vote was conducted under deliberately non-transparent and non-impartial circumstances. Unfortunately, even though the annexation has been condemned by the international community and remains unrecognised, there is an increasing acceptance that the situation will not be reversed in the foreseeable future.⁴⁰

³⁷ Allison Roy. "Russian 'deniable' intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules." *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (2014): 1258.

³⁸ Allison Roy (2014), 1259.

³⁹ "Chronology of the Annexation of Crimea -." Source Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Euromaidan Press. March 08, 2015. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://euromaidanpress.com/2015/03/05/chronology-of-the-annexation-of-crimea/>.

⁴⁰ Gwendolyn Sasse. "Revisiting the 2014 Annexation of Crimea." Carnegie Europe. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/03/15/revisiting-2014-annexation-of-crimea-pub-68423>.

This brief overview of the annexation of Crimea by Russia in the context of the extremely diverse cultural and ethnical composition of the Crimean Peninsula leads this analysis to pose a question: what has the annexation of Crimean by Russia meant for the Crimean people? In fact, whilst extensive literature exists on the legal, economic, geopolitical and international relations consequences of this act by the Russian Federation, not so much is to be found on the consequences it had on the inhabitants of Crimea.

As in every story there are many versions according to personal orientations and ideas. The Russian language press in general reported the changes in Crimea after the annexation by Russia as positive.⁴¹ This includes higher living standards for the population, including an improved level of welfare measures provided by the state, such as higher pensions and lower public transport fares. Moreover, despite the new legal uncertainty, steady levels of business growth in Crimea have been reported, leading to increasing interest from investors in the peninsula.

Nonetheless, divides among ethnical lines are hard to reconcile. In fact, despite the assurances of President Putin on the status and the protection of the Crimean Tatars, there is still international concern for their freedom and human rights status. As reported by Human Rights Watch, Crimean Tatars are still discriminated against and persecuted in many cases by Russian authorities and by the Russian majority in general.⁴² The discrimination towards the Tatars in Crimea includes arbitrary arrests of members of the Muslim community under false charges of collaboration with radical Islamist terrorist groups, and accusations of fomenting separatist movements. The main targets are activists, bloggers, journalists that can undermine the idyllic image that Russia is trying to construct on the status of Crimea after the annexation. Human rights NGOs are not the only group concerned about the status of Crimean Tatars in the Peninsula. Concerns about the discrimination of this minority are also being raised in international forums like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is the main international actor involved in the resolution of the Ukrainian Crisis since its outbreak in 2013. In fact, the OSCE member states have expressed concern for the status of Crimean Tatars one more

⁴¹Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa, *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives* (Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing, 2016), 73.

⁴²"Crimea: Persecution of Crimean Tatars Intensifies." Human Rights Watch. April 04, 2018. Accessed April 13, 2018. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/14/crimea-persecution-crimean-tatars-intensifies>.

than one occasion during the meetings of the Permanent Council as well as in reports of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.⁴³

⁴³ Thematic Report: Conflict-related Displacement in Ukraine: Increased Vulnerabilities of Affected Populations and Triggers of Tension within Communities”. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Accessed April 13, 2018. <https://www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/261176?download=true>

❖ The strategic importance of having a port on the Black Sea

This chapter will focus on the importance for Russia of having a port on the Black Sea, and thereby the effective strategic significance of exerting its influence on the Crimean Peninsula. Through this analysis, the aim is to evaluate to what extent strategic considerations have explanatory power when it comes to the annexation of Crimea by Russia.

After the fall of the Soviet-Union, the Russian Federation lacked the capabilities to foster its strategic interest in the region because it was at that time preoccupied with the process of the economic and political reorganization of its own country. It lacked the economic, military and political capabilities to pursue a great-power policy in the Black Sea region. Nonetheless, as soon as Russia was able to internally reorganize and partially recover from the implosion of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin resurrected its project of establishing a sphere of influence in the Black Sea Region.⁴⁴

The first step in this direction was taken through the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership with Ukraine, signed in 1997. In the framework of this agreement, Russia committed to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for cooperation in strategic matters in the region.⁴⁵ Moreover, in the same year the two countries signed the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Ukraine. In the context of this agreement the two countries agreed that the Crimean Peninsula would function as the port of two independent national fleets, the Ukrainian national fleet, and the Russian Black Sea fleet. This strategic partnership between the Kremlin and the government of Kiev will be the focus of closer study in a dedicated chapter later on in this thesis.

On the 2nd of April Putin signed a law in which Russia officially abandoned the Black Sea Fleet Agreement and the Kharkiv Agreement of 2010.⁴⁶ This agreement stated that the size of the Russian Black Sea Fleet as well as any change in the military capabilities had to be approved by the Ukrainian government. Putin himself

⁴⁴ "The Role of the Black Sea in Russia's Strategic Calculus." Center for International Maritime Security. April 02, 2017. Accessed April 15, 2018. <http://cimsec.org/role-black-sea-russias-strategic-calculus/31805>.

⁴⁵ "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine." Family Code of Ukraine. Accessed June 08, 2018. <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=4181>.

⁴⁶ Andrew Wilson (2014), 116.

explained the strategic importance for Russia of Crimea and of having a part on the Black Sea during his speech in occasion of the results of the referendum and of the subsequent annexation. Quoting from Putin's speech:

[...]

Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian. Otherwise, dear friends (I am addressing both Ukraine and Russia), you and we – the Russians and the Ukrainians – could lose Crimea completely, and that could happen in the near historical perspective. Please think about it.

Let me note too that we have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would have meant that NATO's navy would be right there in this city of Russia's military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia. These are things that could have become reality were it not for the choice the Crimean people made, and I want to say thank you to them for this.⁴⁷

[...]

But what does it mean for Russia to have a port on the Black Sea? What are the strategic implications of controlling the Crimean Peninsula for Russia? Why is the Black Sea region so important for Russia in order to counter the expansion of the Western Institutions eastwards?

First and foremost, it has to be mentioned that the Black Sea is an important point of intersection for the entire region. In fact, for the entire coastline and the neighboring states, having access to the Black Sea means being able to control several adjacent regions such as the Eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, the northern Middle East, the South Caucasus and some parts of mainland Europe.⁴⁸ Therefore, having a fleet stationed on the Black Sea for Russia is of vital strategic importance in order to be able to intervene promptly in the case of a threat coming from one of these adjacent regions. A good example of this is the defense of Russian interest in Syria. In fact, the military operations were supported by the naval presence

⁴⁷ "Address By President Of the Russian Federation." President Of Russia. March 18, 2014. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

⁴⁸ "The Role of the Black Sea in Russia's Strategic Calculus." Center for International Maritime Security. April 02, 2017. Accessed April 15, 2018. <http://cimsec.org/role-black-sea-russias-strategic-calculus/31805>.

that Syria maintained in the Mediterranean also through the Black Sea Fleet.⁴⁹ Moreover, Russia mainly supplies its military forces in Syria through a route that runs through the Black Sea, via the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles to the Eastern Mediterranean.⁵⁰

Moreover, having an access or a base on the Black Sea fleet also ensures the possibility to keep an eye on developments in conflicts taking place in the region, such as the one between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, or the one between Georgia and the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁵¹ In fact, it is well known that many international powers do have special interests to defend in the context of these conflicts, Russia first among them. This was witnessed in the intervention of Russia during the conflict between Georgia and the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008.⁵²

Another point that has to be made is that the Black Sea region and Central Asia are characterised to a great extent by their unstable governments. This leads to the frequent outbreak of civil wars that potentially could lead to regime changes, such as the one in Tajikistan in the 1990s. In this context, Russia has an interest in ensuring that these regime changes are not influenced by the West, and that the new governments will not decide to follow a pro-Western course that could undermine Russia's strategic control of its Eurasian sphere of influence.⁵³

The Black Sea region is not only of geo-strategic importance to Russia. In fact, the Kremlin also has vital geo-economic interests to promote through the control of the region.⁵⁴ The Black Sea region contains major reserves of natural gas and crude oil and it serves as an energy transport corridor for Eurasian resources to the European Union. Therefore, the Black Sea region is crucial also when it comes to the

⁴⁹ "The Role of the Black Sea in Russia's Strategic Calculus." Center for International Maritime Security. April 02, 2017. Accessed April 15, 2018. <http://cimsec.org/role-black-sea-russias-strategic-calculus/31805>.

⁵⁰ "Why the Black Sea?" Foreign Policy Research Institute. Black Sea Strategy Papers. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/01/why-the-black-sea/>.

⁵¹ "Why the Black Sea?" Foreign Policy Research Institute. Black Sea Strategy Papers. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/01/why-the-black-sea/>.

⁵² "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History." The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History | Center for Strategic and International Studies. March 29, 2018. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>.

⁵³ "Why the Black Sea?" Foreign Policy Research Institute. Accessed April 15, 2018. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/01/why-the-black-sea/>.

⁵⁴ Mariana Papatulica, "Black Sea Area at the Crossroad of the Biggest Global Energy Players' Interests. The Impact on Romania," *Procedia Economics and Finance* 22 (2015): 471.

perspective of energy security both for Russia but also for the post-Soviet republics and for the European Union. Therefore, keeping control on this region presents Russia with the means to exert pressure on the European Union through threats linked to energy security. These kind of geo-economic considerations by Russia will be closely taken into consideration in a dedicated chapter in the coming part of this thesis. Nonetheless, in the context of this chapter it is important to mention that it is of high strategic importance for the Kremlin to keep control of the pipeline supplies running through the Caspian Basin, in order to promote its energy-delivery projects with states like Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.⁵⁵

One last point that should be made at this stage is that the Black Sea region shares important historical and cultural ties with Russia. For this reason, it is an important area to control also in the perspective of the Eurasian project of reuniting all areas with Russian speakers into one regional block. Nonetheless, it can be argued that this is rather a justification of secondary relevance for Russia when it comes to the strategic importance of the Black Sea, in line with the hypothesis and the other arguments defended in the context of this thesis.

⁵⁵ "The Role of the Black Sea in Russia's Strategic Calculus." Center for International Maritime Security. April 02, 2017. Accessed April 15, 2018. <http://cimsec.org/role-black-sea-russias-strategic-calculus/31805>.

3. INSIGHTS INTO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES

Having analyzed in the first part of my thesis the outbreak of the Euromaidan protests and subsequent Russian aggression in the Crimean Peninsula, in this last chapter I will link this historical reconstruction to international relations theories. The following questions emerge: how do the policy actions and the tactics used by Russia in the first chapter of this thesis fit within the arguments of neorealist theories of international relations? Why and how it can be stated that Russia can be considered a neorealist player, its foreign policy being driven mainly by the willingness to defend its national strategic interest? Is there any other theory of international relations that could explain Russia's Ukraine policy?

Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union has tried to reassert itself as a major world power, capable of influencing the policies of the ex-Soviet countries and capable of intervening in major conflicts around the world in order to pursue its national interest. As has already been mentioned, whenever Russia has felt threatened by European expansion westwards, it has not hesitated to violate international law and the common accepted norms of the international system in order to reestablish stability in the territories of its former empire⁵⁶. Therefore, one could argue that the Kremlin is constructing the identity of post-Soviet Russia through great power narratives, creating a common goal for the nation which is to reassert itself as a major world power. Nonetheless, these narratives are constructed in order to provide a justification to Russian aggressive foreign policy, which is mainly driven by strategic and economic considerations.

A good example of this logic is the annexation of Crimea by Russia. In fact, Russia justified its violation of international law on the basis of the principle of self-determination, claiming that it was protecting the rights of ethnic Russians living in the region who were suffering discrimination. The constructivist approach points to the exploitation of Russian identity being used to create a justification for violations of international law committed by the Russian Federation, which are nonetheless driven by strategic considerations more than identity-linked reasons, such as the

⁵⁶ David Esmati. "Putin's Latest Oblast: A Constructivist Perspective." *Journal of Political Inquiry*. March 31, 2015. Accessed February 19, 2018. <http://jpinyu.com/2015/03/31/putins-latest-oblast-a-constructivist-perspective/>.

expansion of NATO westwards and the need to keep control over the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. The constructivist argument as foreign policy driver will in any case be the object of closer consideration in the second part of this thesis.

Coming back to the neorealist perspective, if Moscow tolerated a certain amount of steps taken by Western institutions to expand their influence in the post-Soviet area, the potential loss of control over Ukraine would have meant an enormous threat from the perspective of Russian geopolitical and strategic interest. If Western institutions would have been able to expand their control on Ukraine, which shares a 2000 kilometer-long border with Russia, and on the Black Sea, what would have happened next? It was a challenge that Moscow could not afford to dismiss for any reason whatsoever. In fact, from a Russian perspective, Ukraine is not only a buffer zone, but also a route to Central Europe, and this is an important consideration especially from the perspective of the energy market.⁵⁷

The takeover of the Crimean Peninsula from a neorealist point of view may easily be explained from the perspective of strategic considerations, as analyzed in the chapter on the importance of Russia of having a port on the Black Sea. Shortly after annexing the Peninsula, Russia announced that it would reinforce its military capabilities on the Black Sea region to demonstrate that the Kremlin was ready to defend its sphere of influence at whatever cost.⁵⁸

Moreover, it is proof that liberal theories of international relations, arguing that economic and institutional ties among members of the international community serve to prevent them from going to war between each other, do not apply in practice. If it might have explanatory power as far as the members of the Transatlantic community are concerned; it cannot, however, be applicable in explaining Russian foreign policy, especially in the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

⁵⁷ Elias Götz. (2016), 307.

⁵⁸ Natalia Buba. "Russo-Ukrainian Relations: Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet." Russo-Ukrainian Relations: Sevastopol and the Black Sea Fleet | International Affairs Review. Accessed April 30, 2018. <http://www.iar-gwu.org/node/183>.

PART II - PUTIN'S PRESIDENCY AND THE ROAD TO MAIDAN

1. PUTIN THE UNPREDICTABLE AND THE END OF THE COLD PEACE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST

In order to better understand Russia's Ukraine Policy, it is necessary to have an overview on certain dynamics which have developed in the Russian Federation at the state level. With this in mind, this part of this thesis investigates the emergence of variables in the domestic setting of Russia which have arguably influenced foreign policy decisions. Within this context, domestic factors such as the growing authoritarianism under Putin, the role of key political and economic elites, the role of the population, and that of the Orthodox Church, are key. The final goal of this analysis is to find out which role informal networks in the Russian Federation played in shaping the foreign policy of the Kremlin.

Moreover, it will be investigated to what extent the need for a diversion from domestic problems (such as decreasing value of the Russian Ruble and decreasing rate of Putin's approval among the population) motivated Putin to adopt an aggressive foreign policy course towards Ukraine. In this context, it is important to mention that Putin employed a discourse emphasizing national identity, which heightened nationalism among the Russian population, in order legitimize the intervention in Ukraine and Russia's claims to Crimea.⁵⁹ On this point, it will be emphasized that it was more considerations of political and strategic necessity that motivated Putin to intervene in Ukraine, rather than the legacy of mutual ties between Russia and Ukraine.⁶⁰

Moreover, when analyzing Russia's Ukraine Policy, the figure of President Putin cannot be overlooked. In fact, in Russia - for historical and constitutional reasons - much of the decisional power (especially as far as foreign policy is concerned) is in the hands of a single man: the President. Putin therefore exerts considerable personal power, not least because of the fact that he commands the trust and respect of ordinary Russians, who widely support the policies of the president and entertain the belief that through Putin's leadership they may, once again, take

⁵⁹ Yuri Teper, "Official Russian identity discourse in light of the annexation of Crimea: national or imperial?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 4 (2015): 349.

⁶⁰ Marlene Laruelle. "Russia as a "Divided Nation," from Compatriots to Crimea: A Contribution to the Discussion on Nationalism and Foreign Policy." *Problems of Post-Communism* 62, no. 2 (2015): 88.

pride in the actions of their country on the international stage. Of course, part of the reason why Putin is pursuing a certain foreign policy course at the moment is that he is committed to preserving his rule. Therefore, he exploited the emotional resonance that the issue of Crimea and taking a confrontational stance towards the West has on the Russian population in order to protect his regime.

❖ **Post-Cold War identity crisis, imperial nostalgia and foreign policy in the Russian Federation**

It is a well-known fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union and its aftermath had a great impact on the subsequent reorganization of the Russian Federation, both in an internal context and in its reaffirmation as an international actor. In fact, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a vacuum on three different levels. First of all, the political system imploded, with the periphery seceding from the central authority, and the Soviet system itself ceasing to exist.⁶¹

Secondly, the economic system also emerged as dysfunctional and unsustainable. But more than anything, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused a deep identity crisis for Russians, since they felt like the entire basis of their lifestyle and ideology ceased to exist. This caused a sense of disappointment and a siege mentality among the Russian population, that became easily exploitable by future national leaders in order to construct a power narrative to reaffirm Russia as a powerful international actor, eventually crystallizing resentment and frustration against multiple external enemies.⁶² Therefore, historical events and identity-related issues, became a fertile ground for manipulation by political leaders in post-Soviet Russia.

While some Post-Soviet countries, such as the Baltic states and Central Asian states, have found some success in rationalizing the Soviet past while constructing a new national identity for themselves; this process in Russia remained ambivalent and confused.⁶³ In fact, the Soviet past was simultaneously demonized and yet also the object of nostalgia from different segments of the population. In fact, while some Russians remembered the Soviet past with fondness, the new business community and the younger layers of the population already enjoyed the advantages and the opportunities that the capitalist system offered.

Vladimir Putin understood this mentality when he assumed the leadership of the Russian Federation, as Shaun Walker states in his book *The Long Hangover*;

⁶¹ Shaun Walker. *The long hangover: Putins new Russia and the ghosts of the past*. New York, NY, United States of American: Oxford University Press (2018): 7.

⁶² Glenn Chafetz, "The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia," *Political Science Quarterly* 111, no. 4 (1996): 688.

⁶³ Walker, Shaun (2018), 18.

*Putin's New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past.*⁶⁴ In fact, he made it his mission to forge a new national identity for the Russian Federation, using for this purpose some historical narratives, glorifying some specific events in order to unite Russians around a patriotic myth. A good example of the glorification of a historical past in order to re-affirm the Russian sense of identity, is the elevation of victory in the Second World War to the status of a founding event for the Russian nation.⁶⁵ This myth is indeed annually evoked during the Victory Day in Moscow, when thousands of Russians go on the streets of Moscow to commemorate and celebrate the victory in World War II. Every year, this event causes a surge of patriotism among Russians citizens, and this emerges clearly when walking the streets of Moscow, as one can observe Russians crying and singing in remembrance of the casualties and as a manifestation of pride for the Russian role in the defeat of Nazism.

This historical discourse based on national identity can partially explain some of the events that occurred in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014, and the rationales of Russia's Ukraine policy. Indeed, throughout his presidency Putin more than once manipulated a sense of imperial nostalgia towards the Russian Federation to garner support from amongst the population for his aggressive foreign policy. But more than anything foreign policy was – and still is – used by the Kremlin as a tool to unite the population for a cause, and gain support for the government. An example of this logic is the wars that Putin conducted against the separatist movements in Chechnya, whose victory caused a boost in his approval ratings domestically.

There are many other examples of how Putin tried to provide a replacement for the former Soviet identity for Russian citizens. Now that the revolutionary heroes and the communist ideology are no longer applicable as founding pillars of the Russian identity, Putin is substituting them with the Orthodox church and its founding values as an essential element of Russian identity, to create a new moral code and a sense of purpose. This discourse soon became linked with the demonization of Western values.⁶⁶ In fact, as the Kremlin's discourse around identity became more and more conservative and aggressive in its application of foreign policy, the West was depicted as a force trying to impose its liberal values on

⁶⁴ Shaun Walker (2018).

⁶⁵ Ibid: 9.

⁶⁶ "The West through the Eyes of Russians." Intersection, 24 Mar. 2016, intersectionproject.eu/article/society/west-through-eyes-russians.

the Russian society, values which are, according to this discourse, at odds with the Russian mindset and ideology.

In this context, the annexation of Crimea is often justified by the Kremlin as well as by Russians on the grounds that it is the land of the Orthodox Church's founding. For these reasons, Crimea and the city of Sevastopol are seen by the Russians as a fundamental part of their religious and cultural heritage.⁶⁷ This argument was also employed in many instances as a justification by the Kremlin for the annexation of Crimea, asserting that it is legitimately a historical part of Russia, one which had, for unfortunate reasons, been given to Ukraine during the early Soviet era.

Moreover, one could argue that Putin is trying to pursue a project of a Eurasian Union in order to gain the votes and the support of those who are nostalgic towards the Soviet era and the imperial glory of Russia, especially nationalists and Russian elites.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, most of the Russian population is more concerned about domestic economic issues and the need for reforms in order to improve social welfare, than reviving the imperial dream.⁶⁹ This is one of the other reasons why it may be stated that, despite the fact that imperial nostalgia goes a long way towards explaining the logic behind the aggressive Russian foreign policy actions during the Putin presidency, especially in the Ukrainian context, it cannot fully account for it; nor indeed should it be considered one of its primary motivations.

⁶⁷ Paul Coyer. "The Patriarch, The Pope, Ukraine And The Disintegration Of 'The Russian World'." *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 23 Mar. 2016, www.forbes.com/sites/paulcoyer/2016/03/20/the-patriarch-the-pope-ukraine-and-the-disintegration-of-the-russian-world/#10471ebd2530.

⁶⁸ Andrej Krickovic, "Imperial Nostalgia or Prudent Geopolitics? Russias Efforts to Reintegrate the Post-Soviet Space in Geopolitical Perspective," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30, no. 6 (2014): 510.

⁶⁹ Peter Shearman. "Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics. By Jeffrey Mankoff. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009. Xi, 359 Pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95, Paper." *Slavic Review* 69, no. 04 (2010): 1042-043. doi:10.1017/s0037677900010482.

❖ **Putin's worldview and Russian foreign policy: a masterplan?**

Looking back at the history of Russia, it emerges clearly that it has consistently struggled to achieve its goal of being recognized as one of the main poles in the international system. During the Cold War Era, Russia sought to be the opposing pole to the United States. Later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia is still determined to be considered one of the poles of power in a multipolar international system. In this context, one can state that Russia is determined to maintain the status quo in the world power system, whatever the international scenario might look like.

In the recent years, many scholars and statesmen have sought to analyze the conduct of the Russian Federation as an actor of the international system in order to understand which are the main drivers of its foreign policy and its formative ideology. One of the explanations that has gained traction is the that the Kremlin is seeking to reconstruct an empire in the post-Soviet area. This school of thought is represented by scholars such as Tsygankov, who argue that Russia is trying to preserve its influence as a world power through a master plan to establish a Eurasian Union, with Russia as leader, with the ultimate goal of countering the Transatlantic block of allied countries.⁷⁰

According to Andrej Krikovic for example the first attempt by the Kremlin to reassert Russian status as a regional power is witnessed as early as the time of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, membership of which was extended to all the republics of the former Soviet Union.⁷¹ When it became clear that the CIS project was a failure, the Kremlin attempted a more pragmatic approach through an economic customs union, the Eurasian Economic Union.⁷² This approach resembles to a certain extent the initial phase of the European Union, when economic integration was used as a building block towards deeper future political integration. Ukraine, from the Russian government's point of view, is a fundamental and unalienable part of Russia's sphere of influence, and as such it needs to be a part of the Eurasian regional block. As a consequence of this trend, Ukraine has found itself in the middle of a confrontation between the transatlantic community and the

⁷⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov. "Preserving Influence in a Changing World." *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 2 (2011): 28-44.

⁷¹ Andrej Krickovic (2014), 506.

⁷² Paul Kubicek. "The Commonwealth of Independent States: An Example of Failed Regionalism?" *Review of International Studies* 35, no. S1 (2009): 23

Russian Federation, both trying to dominate the international system through the expansion of their own sphere of influence.

Furthermore, Russia inherited from the Soviet times the need of the government to construct narratives that could keep the elites and the masses aligned in the pursuit of a shared objective. The continuous presence of an enemy and something to fight for provides the government with a powerful tool to foster a national identity and distract the population from other issues. A good example of this logic is Putin's battle against the Russian oligarchs in 2003 and 2004.⁷³ Equally along these lines, when his approval ratings were sinking in 2011 and part of the population started protesting against his rule, Putin had to find a useful diversion in order to distract public attention of and regain their support in order to push Russians towards a common goal.

It is in this context that Putin elaborated his 'conservative values campaign' to redefine Russian identity and give the population a boost of nationalism.⁷⁴ Thereby, Putin made it his mission to defend Russia and its people in their vicinity, and save them from the scourge of Western liberalism. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the crisis in Ukraine neatly fulfilled Putin's purpose of uniting Russians against an external enemy and in this way stimulating the patriotic consciousness of the population, which as a consequence would boost his approval ratings. Therefore, this diversionary explanation reduces the attribution of foreign policy actions of the Kremlin to considerations of a domestic nature, using such actions as a tool to increase internal stability.

The imperialist argument as an explanation for Russian foreign policy became very popular especially after the publication of the book of Alexander Dugin, a Russian extreme-right thinker that argues that Russia should aim at re-establishing an empire in the post-Soviet area including all the territories in which Russian speakers and ethnic Russians reside. Dugin's books became very popular especially within the ranks of the FSB officials. The next chapter will focus on the relations among Putin and the FSB as a driver of foreign policy.

⁷³ Andrew Wilson (2014), 21.

⁷⁴ Walker Shaun (2018), 107.

❖ The Operation of Informal Networks in the Russian Federation in shaping geo-strategic interests (include FSB background of Putin)

When analyzing Russian foreign policy, a study of international relations has to take into account many factors and situations that can account for the choices of the main decision-makers. In the context of Russian decision-making, the role played by informal networks and power politics at the domestic level cannot be overlooked. Even if the main hypothesis of this thesis is that the Kremlin's foreign policy is mainly driven by geo-economic and geo-strategic considerations, the domestic dynamic is also worth considering as a part of the bigger picture. But how do domestic and internal politics in Russia influence the course of foreign policy-making? What are informal networks and how do they work in the Russian Federation? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions, and will also investigate to what extent factors such as informal networks and internal interest groups influenced the Kremlin in its Ukraine policy.

In the Russian Federation, the best way for an individual to ensure his or her own well-being or to successfully achieve business or personal goals is by association with a powerful patron.⁷⁵ Political scientists and analysts describe this system as *patron-client networks*. These networks compete for control over resources, cash flows and political power, collaborating or fighting each other depending on the circumstances. Since the beginning of Putin's presidency these patrons started to be called *siloviki*. The *siloviki* are considered the 'inner circle' and the closest advisors to Vladimir Putin, and are ex-KGB men who share the same Russian security background as the president.⁷⁶ This network of KGB and FSB officials replaced the ruling elite of the Yeltsin era, the oligarchs such as Berezovsky and Khodorkovsky who in the eyes of Putin posed a threat to the political establishment and were therefore ruled out of the power game.⁷⁷ For the oligarchs that still wanted to stay in the Russian Federation and capitalize from its rent-based

⁷⁵ Kimberly Marten. "A New Explanation for Russian Foreign Policy: The Power of Informal Patronage Networks." PonarsEurasia - Policy Memos. September 18, 2013. Accessed April 17, 2018. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/new-explanation-russian-foreign-policy-power-informal-patronage-networks>.

⁷⁶ William Safire. "Siloviki Versus Oligarchy." The New York Times. November 05, 2003. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/05/opinion/siloviki-versus-oligarchy.html>.

⁷⁷ Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlins Men - inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (Ingram Publisher Services Us, 2017), 51.

economy the choice was clear: they had to stay out of politics and let the siloviki rule.

But whereas the oligarchs were and still are more positively disposed towards the West, the siloviki are mostly anti-Western and anti-American in ideology, partly because of their strategic intelligence and security background.⁷⁸ This new elite, together with the President are considered responsible for creating the most recent version of Russian patriotism.⁷⁹ The basis of this ideology is the feeling of humiliation for the break-up of the Soviet Union and the willingness of make Russia a world power capable of competing with the United States again. Therefore, this elite is very prone to revive the old zero-sum anti-Western strategic thinking that ultimately resulted in an open confrontation on the Ukrainian territory.

According to many scholars, the KGB background of Vladimir Putin has had a major influence on his personality and on his worldview, teaching him how to identify enemies and harness all available forces against them.⁸⁰ Putin and his elite, as analyzed in other chapters of this thesis, are well versed in shaping the perception of the public when it comes to their actions and their targets. Therefore, in the framework of this anti-American and anti-Western discourse surrounding the strategic interests of Russia, it was not hard for Putin and the siloviki to characterise the pro-Western Euromaidan revolt as a threat, to identify it as a future target for action, and divert all necessary military means to that end. This sentiment emerges in his speech after the annexation of Crimea, when he states:

*They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.*⁸¹

In this context, Putin described the issue of Ukraine and Crimea as the next necessary step to take in order to secure Russia's strategic interests, even through

⁷⁸ "Putin's People." The Economist. August 25, 2007. Accessed April 17, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/node/9687285>.

⁷⁹ Trenin, Dmitri Trenin. "Russia's New Anti-Americanism." Carnegie Europe. Accessed April 17, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/51894>.

⁸⁰ Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 14.

⁸¹ "Address By President Of the Russian Federation." President Of Russia. March 18, 2014. Accessed April 13, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

opportunistic actions such as the annexation of Crimea, just as the US has done with the aim of furthering its own interests within its respective area of interest.⁸² But how much did powerful individuals and informal networks contribute to the decision to intervene militarily in Ukraine? Of course, the role played by the oligarchs ruling the energy sector in Russia is relevant in this context. Indeed, Ukraine and the Black Sea region are of considerable strategic relevance for the transportation of natural gas and oil. For this reason, energy elites in Russia have plenty of incentives to promote interest groups and pressure the Kremlin to keep the region under its control. This specific aspect will be the object of closer consideration in a dedicated section in this part of my thesis.

To conclude, while the explanation linked to the FSB background of the ruling elite in Russia can partly account for the aggressive pursuit of Russian foreign policy interest in Ukraine, this thesis supports the hypothesis that the influence of the siloviki as a policy-driver is in fact exaggerated. Rather, as previously mentioned, informal networks in Russia are too divided and too beset by in-fighting to be able to present a coherent political agenda. Even if they do partly share a worldview that Putin made part of the ideological foundation of the Kremlin foreign policy, it is definitely an overstatement to assert that these dynamics accounted for the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the hybrid warfare in the Donbass. Moreover, the obvious question remains: even if the siloviki have managed to stay in power for the last decade; how long will this continue? In fact, if a political-power transition from the oligarchs to the siloviki were possible, a further transition is not to be excluded from possible future scenarios. This could well become a topic of further analysis in future research focusing on Russian foreign policy.

⁸² Heidi Reisinger and Aleksandr Golts, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defense," Research Paper, NATO Defense College, Rome no. 105 (2014): 11, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=426> .

2. UKRAINIAN DOMESTIC POLICIES AS A SOURCE OF RUSSIA-WEST CONFRONTATION

❖ **Russia starts a soft-power campaign in Ukraine: the “strategic partnership”**

In order to fully understand the current crisis in Ukraine, it is necessary to briefly return to Russia's Ukraine policy during the 1990s, right after the fall of the Soviet Union. In fact, once the ex-Soviet republics declared themselves independent, Moscow came up with a new institutional instrument to keep their new governments under control: the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁸³ Ukraine nonetheless did not show much interest in signing the agreement and proposed many amendments to the accession treaty before becoming a member of the CIS.⁸⁴ Another sign of the initial unwillingness of Ukraine to become a satellite of Moscow was the initiative of President Kravchuk in 1994 to seek a closer collaboration with NATO by joining the program NATO's Partnership for Peace (FDP). This trend of the Ukrainian government under the leadership of Kravchuk alarmed the Kremlin, which decided to support the opposition leader Leonid Kuchma in the presidential elections of 1994.

The beginning of the presidency of Kuchma marked the beginning of a period of rapprochement and cooperation between Ukraine and Moscow. The first step that was taken by Kuchma and Yeltsin towards improved Russo-Ukrainian relations was the conclusion of an agreement on the status of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, a topic of very much strategic importance for the Kremlin.⁸⁵ However, the treaty was not signed until 1997. In fact, because of the particular sensitivity of the issue for both parties from a strategic and military perspectives, many points were the object of contradictory interest and were not easy to agree upon. Coming to an agreement was nonetheless in the interest of both Ukraine and Russia. Russia needed to have a port on the Black Sea for strategic reasons, as mentioned previously in this thesis. Ukraine, on the other hand, needed Russia as far as its energy supply was concerned. A closer collaboration with Russia meant for Ukraine mainly discounted prices for

⁸³ Elias Götz (2016), 307.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Eugeniusz Mironowicz. "Russia – Ukraine. 25 Years Between “Limited Cooperation and Limited Confrontation”." *Confrontation and Cooperation: 1000 Years of Polish-German-Russian Relations*, no. 2 (2015): 30.

gas and oil, which Ukraine needed to develop the economy of the country and manage its public debt, the state of which in the 1990s was dire.

In 1997 Kuchma and Yeltsin signed the 'Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership' in which Ukraine and Russia committed to respect each other's territorial integrity, provide instruments for peaceful problem-solving without resorting to economic pressure.⁸⁶ The treaty also included guarantees and the conditions for the presence of the Russian Black Sea fleet in Sebastopol. This agreement marked the high point of the so called 'strategic partnership' among the Kremlin and the government of Kiev. Nonetheless, the honeymoon was not destined to last long, since Ukraine was already then participating in NATO's project of enlargement in Eastern Europe. In 1997 Ukraine further strengthened its relations with NATO by signing the Charter on A Distinctive Partnership, which established a NATO-Ukraine Commission with the goal of further enhancing the partnership.⁸⁷ As one can imagine, all these steps set alarm bells ringing in Moscow, which began fearing even greater loss of control over Ukraine, with all of the consequences which that entailed, from the perspective of security and economy.

Kuchma was then re-elected in 1999, but many doubts were raised over the transparency and the fairness of the elections.⁸⁸ Moreover, it is worth mentioning here that it was Kuchma in 2002 who nominated the governor of the Donetsk Oblast Viktor Yanukovych as Prime Minister. Both personalities were keen on maintaining good relationships with Moscow, seeking a pro-Russian foreign policy.

The period of relative cooperation between Russia and Ukraine progressed, with high and low points, until the Orange Revolution, when the population of Ukraine for the first time raised its voice against corruption and lack of transparency in the political process, as well as against the persistent influence of Russia over the government of Kiev. This breaking point will be the object of the next section of this thesis.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ NATO. "Relations with Ukraine." NATO. Accessed April 22, 2018. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm.

⁸⁸ John Pike. "1994-2004 - President Leonid Kuchma." 1994-2004 - President Leonid Kuchma. Accessed April 22, 2018. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/ukraine/kuchma.htm>.

❖ From Yanukovych to Yushchenko: the Orange Revolution

When analyzing the ongoing crisis in and around Ukraine, it is important to make reference to its peaceful precursor: the Orange Revolution of 2004. In fact, in the course of the year 2002, Yushchenko became the leader of the opposition to Yanukovych, the former governor of Donetsk who served as Kuchma's Prime Minister and gained the support of Putin's Russia. When Yanukovych represented the elites of the Ukrainian oligarchs and the most conservative parts of the population, Yushchenko in whom more modernist and pro-reformist Ukrainians placed their hopes.⁸⁹

In the context of this thesis, the historical case of the Orange revolution serves as a comparison to the Euromaidan revolution in 2014. In fact, making a comparative analysis of the two revolutions, one has to find an answer to the following questions: why did the Orange revolution happen without violence? Why did Russia let it happen without engaging in hard power tools as it did in the 2014 Euromaidan protests? What changed in the ten years in between the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan? Why didn't Moscow respond assertively?

In October 2004, when Ukrainians went to the polls in the presidential elections, Yushchenko obtained very positive results and appeared to be in the lead according to exit polls. Nonetheless, when the government announced the official results, Ukrainians discovered with great disappointment that the winner was Yanukovych. It became soon clear enough that the results had been falsified. Yushchenko voters reacted with outrage and frustration, motivating them to go out onto the streets and unite on the Maidan Square in Kiev to protest against the false results.

Once the movement started, more and more people joined from throughout the country, and the movement grew to a sufficiently large extent to gain the attention of Europeans. In fact, before that precise moment, Ukraine appeared to most Europeans as a far country still within the orbit of the Russian Federation. It was in the moment that Ukrainian citizens began to protest for freedom, rule of law and justice that the European diplomacy decided that the case needed more attention and Europe had to

⁸⁹ Serhii Plokhyy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2017): 333.

play a part in the resolution of the crisis. In particular, the former President of Poland Aleksander Kwasniewski acted as a mediator between the Ukraine, the EU and the pressure exerted by the Kremlin.⁹⁰ In this context, in December 2004 elections were reorganized in Ukraine, and this time Yushchenko clearly won with the 52% of the votes.⁹¹ In the eyes of many Ukrainians, this was the first step towards the European Union.

From the very start of his presidency Yushchenko followed a pro-European policy course, taking advantage of the support obtained by Europe in the course of the Orange Revolution. The new Ukrainian President was indeed determined to make Ukraine a part of the EU enlargement policy that started in 2004, through which many post-Soviet countries became part of the European Union. However, the European Commission was and still is not convinced about an accession procedure for Ukraine, and therefore it went in the direction of a plan for closer cooperation.

Nonetheless, perhaps the most plausible line of speculation is that at this point Russia did not feel threatened enough by the European projects of Yushchenko to engage in a military intervention. In fact, at the time of the Orange Revolution, the project of European Enlargement was still in its initial phase, and Russia correctly forecasted that it would have taken a long time before Ukraine could realistically be part of it both for internal reasons and for external ones. Therefore, nor the internal situation in Ukraine neither the geopolitical scenario in Eastern Europe were the object of sufficient concern for Moscow in order to break the cold peace between Russia and the West. This situation was however transformed in 2013, when the protests of Euromaidan broke out and Yanukovych's regime fell.⁹² At this point, in Russian eyes the final safeguard against the expansion of Western Institutions towards Russia's borders was falling apart.

⁹⁰ Andrew Wilson (2014),44.

⁹¹ Serhii Plokhyy (2017),334.

⁹² Haukkala, Hiski. "From Cooperative to Contested Europe? The Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-Term Crisis in EU–Russia Relations." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*23, no. 1 (2015): 34.

3. IMPORTANCE OF GEO-ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS: UKRAINE AS A GAS BRIDGE TO EUROPE.

The goal of this chapter is to determine to what extent economic considerations linked to the energy sector motivated the Kremlin to maintain its influence over Ukraine, even through the use of hard-power tools. In fact, if during the Cold War Russia barely used energy security as an instrument to threaten and exert pressure on the Western community, this situation had by and large transformed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and especially after Putin became President of the Russian Federation. In fact, it can be argued that Russia is using energy as a political weapon in order to pursue its geopolitical agenda in the post-Soviet area. Once more, relations among Russia and the West emerge as a zero-sum battle for control of geopolitical resources in Eastern Europe, in which none of the involved actors can secure its interest without causing a major loss in the security perception of its counterpart.

The final result of the energy wars among Russia and Ukraine, in which the EU is highly involved, which will be analyzed in this chapter, is that Ukraine – and Europe in general— has considerable interest in diversifying its energy supply in order to be less dependent from Russia. Russia's interest, on the other side has, is in establishing a monopoly over the market in order to drive prices as high as possible. In both of these scenarios, there is a winner and a loser, and this will eventually cause the EU-Russia relationship to deteriorate even further. Therefore, in the context of this analysis it is very important to consider the geo-economic considerations behind Russia's willingness to maintain a high degree of influence over the government of Kiev. The Kremlin used the asymmetrical relation of economic dependency of Ukraine to Russia in order to influence Kiev, first in the form of highly subsidized oil prices at the time of the Kuchma presidency, and later punishing the government of Kiev through supply disruptions and price increases during the more European-oriented presidency of Yushchenko.⁹³ Therefore, Russia was literally buying out the loyalty of the Ukrainian government through subsidized oil and gas prices until the Orange Revolution took place.

⁹³ Randall Newnham, "Oil, Carrots, and Sticks: Russia's Energy Resources as a Foreign Policy Tool," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 134.

First of all, it has to be mentioned that among the post-Soviet countries Ukraine is one of the most vulnerable to Russian economic pressure. In fact, throughout the post-communist period Ukraine barely had enough internal reserves to finance any reform program by the government, and its economy was particularly susceptible to external shocks.⁹⁴ Moreover, Ukraine does not have the resources that commodity economies like Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan can rely on. Lastly, on top of these issues, Ukraine did not re-orientate much of its trade towards Europe, exporting mainly to Russia and to the CIS states.

The main dynamics of economic interdependence in the energy sector among these countries are that Ukraine depends heavily on Russia as far as the supply of oil and gas to the country is concerned, whilst Russia depends heavily on Ukraine because of the transportation of oil and gas passing through Ukrainian territory in order to reach Europe.⁹⁵ For example, in 2013 Russia was providing the EU with more than 35% of its crude oil imports and 30% of its natural gas imports.

But when it comes to relations in the energy sector among Russia and Europe, the interdependence is more symmetrical, because both parties would suffer considerable costs in the event of this energy relationship being disrupted. In fact, Russia's energy trade relations with the EU is the most profitable foreign economic relationship, and given the relative lack of diversification within the Russian economy, the economic sustainability of the country heavily depends on oil and gas exports. This logic was witnessed during oil shocks in the last few decades, when Russia suffered heavily from the decline in oil and gas prices, with accompanying falls in the value of the ruble - this also forming part of a general recession within economy as a whole. Overall, 78% of Russian crude oil exports and over 70% of Russian natural gas exports are transported to the EU, and this constitutes 25% of Russian GDP and almost half of the revenues of the Russian government.⁹⁶

Nonetheless, among the two parties the European Union is much more concerned about the possible security considerations inherent to such an interdependence on the energy sector than is its Russian counterpart. Therefore, Europe engaged in a series of projects of pipelined in order to bypass Russia trading

⁹⁴ Andrew Wilson (2014), 12.

⁹⁵ Nolan Peterson. "Long at War with Each Other, Ukraine and Russia Trade on | Opinion." Newsweek. January 28, 2018. Accessed June 09, 2018. <http://www.newsweek.com/long-war-each-other-ukraine-and-russia-trade-793142>.

⁹⁶ Andrew Wilson (2014), 9.

oil and gas directly with Central Asian and Caucasus countries, triggering strong reactions by Russia that felt discriminated against and mistreated as a trading partner. Nonetheless, when Europe expanded its membership to the states of the former Soviet Bloc, the states that joined were, if not completely, very dependent on Russian gas imports, and this caused an overall increase in the dependency of Europe to Russia for its gas supplies. For instance, in 2007, Russian gas accounted for the 100% of gas supplies in the Baltic states.⁹⁷

In this context, in the years following the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia often granted favorable gas and oil rates to Ukraine, in exchange for loyalty and a cooperative attitude, especially regarding foreign policy issues.⁹⁸ A good example of this is the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership, signed by president Kuchma in 1997. By contrast, whenever the policy-course of the Ukrainian government developed in a way that was perceived as undermining Russian influence in the region, Russia punished Ukraine by raising prices or even by imposing oil and gas embargos. A good example of this is the reaction of Russia to the Orange Revolution when it tried to increase gas prices almost fivefold.⁹⁹

Another aspect that has to be taken into consideration is that Ukraine structural dependency on Russia is not limited to the energy sector. In fact, during the period prior to the crisis in 2013, one-third of Ukraine's total exports went to Russia.¹⁰⁰ This matters especially given the fact that many enterprises had an exclusively Russian clientele before the crisis, and after the event were only able to remain afloat with the help of government subsidies.

A point that has to be mentioned in this chapter on the subject of geo-economic considerations underlying the Ukraine crisis, is that also during the negotiation stage of the Trade and Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, Russia largely made use of its economic leverage over Kiev in order to impede the signature of the agreement with the EU. In fact, Russia actively threatened to cause serious damage to the Ukrainian economy by closing its border to Ukrainian exports.¹⁰¹ This measure

⁹⁷ Kataryna Wolczuk, "Managing the flows of gas and rules: Ukraine between the EU and Russia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 1 (2016):125.

⁹⁸ Newnham, Randall. "Oil, carrots, and sticks: Russia's energy resources as a foreign policy tool." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 2 (2011): 135.

⁹⁹ Kataryna Wolczuk (2016), 120.

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Charap and Timothy J. Colton (2017), 155.

¹⁰¹ Andrew Wilson (2014),64.

targeted heavy industry in Eastern Ukraine, mainly exports to and has close business ties with Russia. Moreover, these measures also aimed at threatening the Ukrainian oligarchs which have consistently benefitted from economic ties with their Russian counterparts. Of course, this course of strategy adopted by Russia caused many Ukrainian interest groups to lobby and exert pressure on the Ukrainian government not to sign the agreement with the European Union, fearing the possible worsening of economic relations with the Russian Federation as a consequence.

Therefore, we may conclude this chapter by saying that Russian pressure on foreign governments through punitive oil pricing has had a hugely detrimental effect on many weaker post-Soviet states including Georgia, Moldova and, as has been shown, Ukraine. These are the countries which Russia considers to be its ‘near abroad’, and it therefore feels entitled to exert a high degree of control over them, as they constitute its main sphere of influence in the post-Soviet era. Nonetheless, it is equally important to bear in mind that the impact of Russia’s actions in the context of the energy sector extend far beyond Russia’s neighboring countries. In fact, they also have a considerable impact on the energy security of the European Union and cause the threat perception of the EU to skyrocket each time Moscow tries to exert pressure by ‘playing’ the oil and gas ‘card’.

❖ Russia plays the “oil and gas” card to exert pressure on Ukraine (2006, 2009): the security dilemma

In the history of Russo-Ukrainian relations there are many examples of Russia using oil and gas exports to Ukraine as a tool in order to exert pressure on Kiev. One of the most revealing episodes is the reaction of Russia to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. In fact, after the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin had to find a strategy to regain influence over the new Ukrainian authorities, and the easiest way to go about it was to ‘play’ the energy security ‘card’ in order to threaten both the Ukrainian and European authorities.¹⁰²

The new government of Viktor Yushchenko made the first step in the wrong direction by dismissing Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister, who had considerable experience with gas negotiations and had business links to Gazprom. To the Kremlin, this was a proof of the incompetency of the new government concerning gas and trade-related issues. As a consequence, when the commission from Ukraine travelled to Moscow in order to make an agreement on gas prices and the amount to be exported as well as transported to Europe through Ukraine, Putin warned them that they should accept whatever price Gazprom proposed, otherwise the following day the price would rise.¹⁰³ And this is exactly what happened, after the Ukrainian officers refused the first offer, the price rose threefold the next day. As Ukraine was not able to pay this price, at the end of 2005 Russia began to cut the supply of gas.

¹⁰² Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremains Men - inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (Ingram Publisher Services Us, 2017), 125.

¹⁰³ Mikhail Zygar, (2017), 126.



Figure 1: Sputnik. "The Structure of Russian Gas Imports." Sputnik International. January 17, 2012. Accessed June 12, 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/infographics/20120117170800440/>

This triggered the so called 'security dilemma' situation in which both Ukrainian and European gas companies began warning the public that they were close to facing a gas shortage. By behaving this way Putin was simply flexing his muscles and demonstrating to Ukraine, but more than anything Europe, that their energy security depended on Russia, and that Ukraine was thereby an unreliable transit country. In this context, according to Putin the most convenient solution for Europe would be to bypass Ukraine as a transit country, circumventing it by building the North and the South Stream Pipelines.

As a consequence of the cutting of gas supplies at the beginning of 2006 by Russia, many European counties such as Austria, Hungary and Slovakia saw a dramatic decrease in the amount of gas delivered (around 40% less). This crisis resulted in Putin and Gazprom being able to demonstrate to the world that energy security was an important tool of political leverage in the hands of Russia, one which could be used by Russian leaders and oligarchs whenever they to exert political pressure on post-Soviet countries and Europe. This crisis also signaled the birth of

the Nabucco Pipeline project, running from Azerbaijan to Europe, bypassing Russia, which however was soon abandoned.

4. INSIGHTS INTO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORIES: THE CONSOLIDATION OF GEO-POLITICS AND GEO-IDEA

In the second part of this thesis, it has been shown that since the time of the Soviet Union, but also after its collapse, the values, interests and the model of leadership of the Russian Federation have been depicted as in contrast and competition with the ones of the transatlantic community.¹⁰⁴ Following this logic, the post-Soviet states had to make a choice: either follow the Western model and try to enter the orbit of the European Union, or remain within the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. In other words, when a post-Soviet country started seeking closer relationship with the West, possibly getting closer to NATO or the EU, it was turning its back on Russia. In this context, the process of strengthening the ties with Western Institutions and remaining in the orbit of the Russian Federation were mutually exclusive.

Moreover, it should to be underscored that Ukraine was treated during the whole crisis as an object of dispute and as a potential sphere of influence by both the European Union and the Russian Federation. Treating Ukraine as an object of international relations rather than as a subject was seriously detrimental in term of Ukraine's legitimacy on the international arena. Therefore, one could argue that this lack of legitimacy of the Ukrainian government encouraged Putin to act aggressively in Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine, without much fear of the possible consequences. In this context the question of identity shall be considered in detail. It is important in this context to mention that both Ukraine and Russia are struggling to affirm themselves in the international system of actors.

On the one hand, it is questionable if after 1991 Ukraine managed to establish itself as an independent actor of international relations or not. Indeed, Ukrainian identity has always been shaped to some extent by the Russian identity. Additionally, the interaction between Ukraine and the other actors in the international community have always been highly influenced by Russia which retained a high degree of control over Ukrainian policy-making.

With the Orange revolution it seemed that Ukraine was choosing the path of establishing itself as an international actor independently from Russian influence,

¹⁰⁴ Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's Last Stand: The Sources of Russia's Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 4 (2015): 288,

managing its own interactions with other members of the international community.¹⁰⁵ An example of this is that Ukraine in this period also acquired membership of several international organizations. In the eyes of the Kremlin, Yushchenko turned his back on Russia's values and interest as soon as he started to negotiate Ukraine's membership of NATO. Adding to this trend, Yushchenko's rehabilitation of the name of Stephan Bandera, considered by many Russian and Ukrainian a Nazi criminal at the times of the Second World War. From the Russian perspective, this was a way of denying and undermining the historical and cultural bond with Russia and the common struggle against Nazism. In fact, as will be considered in detail later in this thesis, this was presented as a milestone in the history of Russian national identity by the Kremlin after the fall of the Soviet Union.

But despite these facts, in Ukraine there were always problems in the establishment of a unitary and independent Ukrainian identity because of the somewhat lacking sense of community among the population.¹⁰⁶ In fact, the government was always in the hands of oligarchs who were pursuing their own interests instead of those of the nation, and the population was always divided into different groups (such as the division with the ethnic Russians). This situation resulted in a lack of cooperation among the different social and ethnic groups of the populations which ultimately caused an unwillingness to cooperate and in the impossibility to develop common goals for all Ukrainians. A good example of this is the action of the separatists in Eastern Ukraine, which fight for their own goals which are in contrast to that of the central government in Kiev. Therefore, it can be argued when considering Ukrainian history since the fall of the Soviet Union to the present day that there is still a need to construct a unitary Ukrainian identity and a common goal.

Another issue which will be considered is that the European Union also threatened Ukraine more as an object of its desire to establish a sphere of influence rather than an equal ally and partner.¹⁰⁷ In fact, despite the fact that Ukrainians looked at the European Union as a dream for their future, Europe never really considered Ukraine joining the EU as a real option. Instead, it fostered the trade and

¹⁰⁵ Shore Marci (2017): 126.

¹⁰⁶ Shaun Walker (2018): 118.

¹⁰⁷ "Ukraine Is Not the Only Battlefield Between Russia and the West," Carnegie Europe, , accessed May 04, 2018, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/55049>.

partnership agreement, still imposing high constraints on Ukraine in terms of the reforms to be carried out by the country in order to meet the standards imposed by the EU. Even once Yanukovych decided not to sign the agreement and outbreak of the crisis, the European Union as a whole did not countenance involving itself in order to help the part of the population that was protesting against the regime for a European future.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it can be argued that, had the EU treated Ukraine as an equal partner during the negotiations of the agreement and later supported the protestors during the Maidan crisis, Russia might have thought twice before violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine invading Crimea and later supporting the separatist groups in Eastern Ukraine.

It was within this context, that the Euromaidan protests in 2013 broke out in Ukraine, when part of the Ukrainian population did not agree with Yanukovych's moves towards continuing along a more pro-Russian path. Nonetheless, is there really a causal link between the desire of Russia to form a regional block in the Eurasian geopolitical area, and the aggressiveness of the Russian conduct in Ukraine following the Euromaidan protests? If this were the case, it might be asked why Russia decided to intervene aggressively in Ukraine - annexing Crimea and supporting separatist groups in the Donbass - only in 2014, and not considerably before. In fact, if Ukraine was an unalienable part of Russia's masterplan to re-establish a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, the Kremlin could have acted coercively well before 2013.

Therefore, the explanations depicting the aggressive Russian foreign policy in Ukraine as part of a masterplan of the Kremlin to create a new regional order can offer some insight into the motivations of the Kremlin when it comes to the Ukraine crisis, but do not go very far in providing a complete explanation of it. From a more realist point of view, Russia decided to shift from soft to hard power tools in Ukraine when the Kremlin felt that Western institutions were encroaching ever more on its eastern borders, threatening its core strategic interests. It is at this point that the Kremlin decided to react and flex its muscles in order to demonstrate to the international community that no further expansions eastwards of the western institutions would be tolerated without severe consequences.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Snyder, "Opinion: What the West owes Ukraine," CNN, February 25, 2014, accessed February 19, 2018 <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/24/opinion/snyder-what-west-owes-ukraine/index.html>.

The liberal theory of international relations, on the other hand, argues that economic, legal and political interdependence mean a high cost for states going to war with each other, because this in turn causes an interruption in commercial, economic and other types of cooperation between them. But in reality Russia's decision to intervene through hard power tools in Ukraine was clear to all, because the Kremlin considered that the benefits of an aggressive policy course would largely outweigh the costs. Therefore, Russia was ready to suffer the economic cost of sanctions as well as the costs in terms of its international reputation in order to defend its core strategic interest in Ukraine and boost the domestic sense of national identity linked with the annexation of Crimea. For this reason, it can be argued that liberal theories fail to provide a good explanation of the dynamics in the interaction between international actors in the case of the Ukrainian crisis.

Making some concluding remarks on the geo-economic considerations underpinning the Ukraine crisis, it is also important to consider the negotiation of the Trade and Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine. Russia largely made use of its economic leverage over Kiev in order to impede the signature of the agreement with the EU. In fact, Russia literally threatened to undermine the Ukrainian economy by closing its border to Ukrainian exports.¹⁰⁹

The issue of asymmetric economic interdependence between Ukraine and Russia in the energy sector offers us a perspective on certain topics in international relations theories. In fact, the Ukrainian conflict challenges the liberal theory of international relations which argues that economic interdependence among countries decreases the risk of conflict.¹¹⁰

As discussed, this asymmetric energy interdependence was – and still is—exploited by Russia to increase its influence in its so called 'near abroad'. This dimension of Russo-Ukrainian relations is also particularly significant because it has a huge impact on the European Union as well, which is dependent on imports of oil and gas from Russia through Ukraine. The gas wars among Ukraine and Russia which greatly influenced Europe as well prove that liberal theories of international

¹¹⁰ Andrej Krickovic, "When Interdependence Produces Conflict: EU–Russia Energy Relations as a Security Dilemma," *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 1 (2015): 5.

relations of economic interdependence as an instrument of peace and security among countries are not accurate and surely not applicable to this case study. In fact, economic interdependence is considered by liberal theorists as a creator of a bond between countries for collaboration and cooperation, which restricts them from going to war with each other and suffering the costs in terms of interruption of economic relations. This has clearly not been the case when it comes to Russia and Ukraine and the EU, because the economic interdependence is asymmetrical, meaning that in the energy sector Ukraine and Europe are much more dependent on their Russian counterpart than the other way round, and this created the well-founded fear that Russia could take advantage of this weakness in order to achieve its own political, strategic and economic goals.¹¹¹

As a result, the relations between these countries are a classical security dilemma, where neither country is able to improve its own security situation without damaging the security of the other. The build-up of tensions caused by the energy security problem, together with the competing regional integration projects of the Russian Federation and the EU in the post-Soviet area, resulted in a complete destabilization of Ukraine which ultimately precipitated a civil war and in what today can be called another frozen country in Eastern Europe.

It is worth underlining that it might make sense to conclude that, since this imperialist theory is particularly popular among FSB officers - those surrounding Putin in his inner advisory circle - this will have had some degree of impact on the foreign policy choices made by the President. Nonetheless, stating that the involvement of Russia in the Ukraine crisis is part of an imperialistic masterplan of the Kremlin would certainly constitute an oversimplification of the facts, and of the foundations of Russia's foreign policy, including Ukraine policy.¹¹² In fact, as analyzed in the previous chapters of this thesis, Russia's approach to the government of Kiev and its relations with the West in general have evolved through different stages, and the situation only escalated every time Western Institutions moved towards establishing ties in what is considered a sphere of Russia's core strategic interest. Therefore, it can be argued that the rationales of Russia's Ukraine Policy represent the pursuit of a defensive logic against the expansion of Western

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putins Last Stand: The Sources of Russias Ukraine Policy," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 4 (2015): 296.

Institutions Westwards, rather than an imperialistic one, as Mearsheimer argues in his famous article “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault”.¹¹³ The same logic can be applied in evaluating the diversionary argument; that is to say, even though this can offer some insights on why and how the Kremlin decided to engage in military terms Ukraine, it cannot fully provide a framework to explain the foundations of Russia’s Ukraine policy.

¹¹³ John J. Mearsheimer. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs*. January 28, 2016. Accessed November 28, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

PART III – THE PERPETRATION OF HYBRID WARFARE IN EASTERN UKRAINE AND THE RESPONSE OF THE WESTERN COMMUNITY

In the first part of this thesis, the dynamics of the Euromaidan protests and the annexation of Crimea were closely taken into consideration. In the second part, the background of the crisis has been the main focus of the analysis, investigating both the factors in the international scenario that led to the Euromaidan, as well as the internal factors at the domestic level of the Russia Federation that caused the Kremlin to adopt an aggressive foreign policy course. In this last part of this thesis, the crisis in the Donbass will be analyzed in further details, as well as the international implications of the Ukrainian crisis both in terms of Russo-Western relations, and in terms of the future perspective for Ukraine of a closer integration with the European Union.

1. WAR IN THE SEPARATISTS' REGIONS AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE KREMLIN

On the 6th of April 2014 two regions of Ukraine declared themselves independent: the People's Republic of Donetsk and the People's Republic of Luhansk. This date was marked by the seizure of many governmental buildings in the Donbass by the separatist forces.¹¹⁴

According to NATO and American sources, Russian military troops had already been in the region since February 2014.¹¹⁵ The Russian troops on the ground served at that time mainly as a symbolic threat to the government of Kiev, rather than serving an actual military purpose. In fact, the government of Kiev most probably also restrained itself from intervening militarily in the separatist regions and reestablishing order out of fear of causing an actual invasion by Russia.

But taking a step back, what motivated the separatist movements to fight for their secession from the central government of Kiev? What are the root causes of separatism in the Donbass, and what were the triggers of the war in 2014?

As will be seen in detail further on in this part of this thesis, the Donbass is a region of Ukraine historically inhabited by Russian speakers and so-called ethnic Russians. Despite this fact, according to many experts, before the declaration of independence of the People's Republic in April 2014, the separatist movements were on the political fringes.¹¹⁶ It was only after the 6th of April that the support for the separatist movements in Ukraine started to grow, surely also as a consequence of the weakened capacity of the central government of Kiev to maintain its territorial integrity and for the loss in legitimacy caused by the events occurred during and after the Maidan. Moreover, if initially a low percentage of the population of the People's Republics actually supported the pro-Russian cause of the separatist movements, an increasing number of inhabitants started to support the succession from the central government of Kiev if it was only way to achieve some peace and stability in the region.¹¹⁷ Probably the violence that was perpetrated in

¹¹⁴ Report of the Chief Monitor for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, to the OSCE Permanent Council, 14 May 2014.

¹¹⁵ Andrew Wilson (2014), 128.

¹¹⁶ Elise Giuliano. "The Origins of Separatism: Popular Grievances in Donetsk and Luhansk." PonarsEurasia - Policy Memos. October 28, 2015. Accessed April 17, 2018. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/origins-separatism-popular-grievances-donetsk-and-luhansk>.

¹¹⁷ "The Two Parts of Ukraine's Donbas." Carnegie Europe. Accessed June 09, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/69979>.

the region and the Russian military presence partly contributed to a climate of fear in which locals are less keen to speak out against or oppose the movements.

When one wants to analyze separatist movements in Ukraine, the feeling of alienation and of being mistreated from the central government are key. In fact, the Donbass is described by any authors and experts as an industrial region at the very East of the country, very different from the green culturally-rich provincial regions of Lviv or Volyn in the East.¹¹⁸ A former part of the Habsburg Empire, western Ukraine is considered much more European by many, for instance because of the landscape, the architecture, the mentality and the culture. The Donbass and its inhabitants, by contrast, have always been in close contact with the Eastern part of the country, presenting definitely more similarities with the Russian civilization, especially the Soviet mentality and way of living. Moreover, being the industrial heart of the country, the inhabitants of the Donbass felt always that they should be given more attention and support from the central government, given the fact that they were the lungs of the economy of the country.¹¹⁹

Another motivation that has to be mentioned in the analysis is the fear of the economic industrial elite of the Donbass that a rapprochement with the EU could lead to a deterioration of the local industry, given that a good amount of the exports went to Russia.¹²⁰ Indeed, as mentioned above in this thesis, the signing of the Trade and Association Agreement would have precluded the possibility for Ukraine to be part of a custom union with the Eurasian Union.¹²¹ This meant a significant loss of economic benefits for the industrial area of the Donbass of a closer association to the Russian-led economic block. Moreover, one has to mention that many Ukrainian oligarchs like Rinat Achmetov were supporting this separatist movements, because they have all the economic interest to keep the status quo in the region and seek a closer collaboration with Russia, instead of a further integration with the European Union (with all the rule of law standards and the anti-corruption measures that it would have brought about).¹²²

¹¹⁸ Andrew Wilson (2014): 118.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 122.

¹²⁰ Yuri Zhukov. "The Economics of Rebellion in Eastern Ukraine." VoxUkraine. Last modified March 17, 2017. <https://voxukraine.org/en/the-economics-of-rebellion-in-eastern-ukraine/>.

¹²¹ Giuliano, Elise. "The Origins of Separatism: Popular Grievances in Donetsk and Luhansk." PonarsEurasia - Policy Memos. October 28, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2018.

<http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/origins-separatism-popular-grievances-donetsk-and-luhansk>.

¹²² Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 48.

But was the war in the separatist region of Ukraine really a civil unrest of the People's Republic against the government of Kiev? Or was it a Russian-supported movement followed by a foreign invasion by the Russian Federation?

In order to answer this questions, I want to quote the words of Nolan Patterson, a former pilot veteran of the Afghanistan and Iraq war, The Daily Signal's foreign correspondent in Ukraine:

The war in Ukraine is not a civil war. It is, and has always been, a Russian invasion.

[...] As Russia's proxy war in eastern Ukraine nears its fifth calendar year, soldiers and civilians are still dying on both sides of the front lines in Ukraine's southeastern Donbas region.

Nolan Patterson personally gave his testimony during a panel discussion at the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution which I attended on the 19th of April 2018. In this occasion, he reported his experience as a foreign correspondent in the Donbass, directly on the front line. Mr. Patterson showed a video of the ongoing warfare on the front, and also reported the testimony of Ukrainian soldiers that were fighting and still fight in the area against Russian troops, separatist forces and mercenaries.

But why is the war in the Donbass considered a hybrid war? It was defined as such by journalists and experts because aside from the conventional warfare on the front line, there have been several cyber-attacks and targeted killings directed at the Ukrainian forces. Moreover, Russia has been disseminating fake news among the population regarding who is responsible for the bombings and the shootings.¹²³ Indeed, Nolan Patterson reported furthermore that locals are literally brainwashed by the fake news spread by the Russian television and media.¹²⁴ Even some social media outlets are part of this hybrid warfare, since the most popular one in Russia and in the Post-Soviet area – VK—has been already banned by the separatist forces and Russian intelligence.

¹²³ "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare." Institute for the Study of War. Accessed April 20, 2018. <http://www.understandingwar.org/report/putins-information-warfare-ukraine-soviet-origins-russias-hybrid-warfare>.

¹²⁴ Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 179.

As a consequence of the afore-mentioned testimonies, and in line with hundreds of reports made other non-governmental organizations present on the ground, this thesis supports the hypothesis that the war in Eastern Ukraine is mainly caused and still ongoing because of the intervention of Russian military forces. In this context, pro-Russian separatists, who as mentioned before represented just a small percentage of the inhabitants of the Donbass, exploited a climate of general disorder and political unrest in the country generated the Euromaidan protests in order to disrupt the political situation in the region. The support of local pro-Russian oligarchs and of the Kremlin itself was crucial in this context, since the presence of such separatist groups was exploited by Russia in order to destabilize the region and invade it with military troops, with the final goal of irreparably damaging the central government in Kiev after the annexation of Crimea.

❖ The main developments of the war in the Donbass and the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 as a game changer

In the context of this thesis I will not go now into deep explanations of all the stages of the war in the Donbass, but I will try to give the reader an overview of the most crucial events for the purposes of this analysis.

In April the central government of Kiev launched an Anti-Terrorist Operation in response to the destabilizing actions undertaken by the separatist groups.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, the operation was not very successful and the performance of the forces was far from satisfactory.¹²⁶ In fact, the military force was not properly trained and not armed enough, not to mention that the morale was very low after the annexation of Crimea. Only in May was the central government of Kiev able to put together a more structured and organized counter-attack, but as mentioned above, Kiev most likely always feared a massive invasion by Russian troops as a response.

In the months before the shooting down of flight MH17, the separatist forces gained a number of successes in the fight against the governmental forces, also thanks to the growing financial and military support obtained from Russia.¹²⁷ In June, the united 'Federated Republic of Novorossiia' was declared by the two parliaments of Donetsk and Luhansk. This act was the precursor to the declaration of the 'transitional state of Malorossiia' made by Alexandr Zakharchenko, the leader of the separatist movement of the Donetsk.¹²⁸ After this, the Russian military presence in Eastern Ukraine considerably increased, with many additional military vehicles crossing the border together with extra fighters.¹²⁹ The presence of heavy artillery such as multi-rocket launchers, cannons, shoulder-fires rocket launchers, radars, grenades, mines and automatic weapons caused the conflict to further escalate.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Report of the Chief Monitor for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, to the OSCE Permanent Council, 14 May 2014.

¹²⁶ Andrew Wilson (2014), 136.

¹²⁷ Andrew Wilson (2014), 140.

¹²⁸ Ukrainian Crisis Media Center. "From "Novorossiia" to "Malorossiia": What Alexandr Zakharchenko's Statement Means." Ukraine Crisis Media Center. July 21, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2018. <http://uacrisis.org/58719-declaration-zakhartchenko>.

¹²⁹ Andrew Wilson (2014), 140.

¹³⁰ Address by the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini to the OSCE Permanent Council. Vienna, 20 November 2014.



Figure 2: Ukraine: Who Controls What." Israeli–Palestinian Conflict | Al Jazeera. Accessed June 12, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/02/ukraine-map-170205081953296.html>

Without doubt, the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 on the 17th of July 2014 was one of the most tragic episodes of the war and it signalled a high point and a significant escalation of the conflict. Indeed, the airplane disappeared from the radars exactly while flying over the separatist controlled are of the Donbass, with 298 civilians on board that had nothing to do with the war on the ground.¹³¹ After the incident, an international Joint Team of Investigation was appointed, which determined that the crash was caused by a Russian-made Buk missile.¹³² This episode caused indignation within the international community.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² "MH17 Ukraine Plane Crash: What We Know." BBC News. September 28, 2016. Accessed April 22, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28357880>.

On the one hand, Ukraine was accused of keeping the airspace open despite the presence of fighting and heavy artillery in the area.¹³³ Here is the declaration of the Russian political analyst *Vladimir Ardayev*, written in an article for RIA Novosti:

*"Focusing on the search for those who downed the plane, the investigation deviated from the study of the main question: how could it happen that the flights of civil aircraft continued over the zone of hostilities?"*¹³⁴

Moreover, to further complicate the situation, the fact that the Buk was Russian-made initially did not help much in determining who in effect shot it, since it could have been in the hands of any of the groups fighting in the area. After a series of investigations by different American and European intelligence agencies, the truth about who shot the airplane still cannot be inferred.¹³⁵ In fact, Russia denies any responsibility of the incident, and after years of investigation the truth is still far from being ascertained, also as a consequence of the misinformation and the existence of fake news in the context of this war.¹³⁶

However, in the eyes of the Western community Russia remains in any case responsible to a high degree for this incident, first and foremost for bringing heavy artillery and weapons into the conflict zone, thereby causing an escalation of the conflict.¹³⁷ As a consequence, the United States strengthened the economic sanctions regime against the Kremlin, while the European Union hesitated to follow this hard line in the fear of further escalation, being more keen on a diplomatic solution.¹³⁸

In light of these facts, one can argue that the shooting down of the MH17 marked a turning point in the crisis for several reasons. Firstly, it diverted more international attention to the conflict in the Donbass and especially to its brutality. Secondly, the incident made clear that Russia was supplying heavy weapons to the

¹³³ Mary Dejevsky. "Whoever Shot down Flight MH17, Russia's Reputation Is in Tatters | Mary Dejevsky." *The Guardian*. October 13, 2015. Accessed April 22, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/13/shot-down-flight-mh17-russia-malaysia-airlines-ukraine-rebels>.

¹³⁵ Sputnik. "Three Years Since MH17 Crash: What Is Stopping the Truth From Coming to Light." *Sputnik International*. July 17, 2017. Accessed April 22, 2018. <https://sputniknews.com/world/201707171055612291-mh-17-plane-crash-investigation-results/>.

¹³⁷ Marcus Jonathan. "Malaysia Plane MH17: Game-changer in Ukraine Crisis?" *BBC News*. July 17, 2014. Accessed April 22, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28357665>.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

separatist forces and that it would possibly continue to do so. Thirdly, it showed the weakness and lack of preparation of the Ukrainian government in maintaining control and security in the country, given the fact that it should have closed the airspace long before the incident. Lastly, it proved once more the lack of homogeneity and agreement in the response of the Western Community since once more there was no common line on how to respond to Russia.

This episode was followed by three years of fluctuating intensity in the conflict, with periods of heavy fighting and consequently a high number of casualties, followed by periods of relative calm, with a lower number of casualties and a de-escalation in the level of the confrontation.¹³⁹ This reflects the status of the war even nowadays, and this is the reason why the Donbass can be considered another frozen conflict in Eastern Europe, with a low level of conflict but a never-ending level of confrontation on the ground.

¹³⁹ “The Ukraine Crisis Timeline.” The Ukraine Crisis Timeline. Accessed May 29, 2018. <http://ukraine.csis.org/>.

❖ Building blocks of a future New Russia?

As already mentioned in the previous chapters of this thesis, one of the explanations offered by experts and scholars for the aggressive conduct of the Kremlin in the post-Soviet area is linked to imperial nostalgia. The core of this argument is that the Kremlin's final goal is to reconstruct an empire including all its 'historic' lands, and to absorb any territory where Russian speakers live.¹⁴⁰ In this chapter, this explanation will be applied to the case of the Donbass, to analyze to what extent it explains the involvement of the Kremlin in the separatist regions of Eastern Ukraine.

In Russian historiography, the Donbass was *terra incognita* before it was conquered by Catherine the Great in the late 18th century. After that, Russians settled in the Donbass and Russia began industrializing in the area. After the Bolshevik Revolution, part of the South of Russia was added to Ukraine, according to President Putin - without taking into consideration the ethnic makeup of the region.¹⁴¹ The former Russian territories of Eastern and Southern Ukraine were therefore given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. The President of the Russian Federation later argued that what he calls New Russia, in the tsarist days was not part of Ukraine. In his perspective New Russia includes the regions of Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa.¹⁴² The center of this territory is considered to be a region called Novorossiia, 400 miles south east of Donetsk. For this reason, the Kremlin argues that Russia lost these territories due to a series of historical reasons, yet the people there remained bound to Russia in their hearts and in their blood. This is way Putin often refers to Eastern and Southern Ukraine as a part of 'New Russia'.

The Donbass is a very isolated area where the industrial production of Ukraine is concentrated. The industry is based mainly on coal, steel and chemicals, and in the

¹⁴⁰ Andrei Tsygankov (2015), 294.

¹⁴¹ 'Address of the President of the Russian Federation', President of Russia website, 18 March 2014; <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>

¹⁴² Nechepurenko, Ivan. "Donbass' Roots of Violent Division: Geography, History, Culture." The Moscow Times. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/donbass-roots-of-violent-division-geography-history-culture-34285>.

region there are also several mines. Until the tsarist era the region was barely controlled by any state authority and the civil society was almost non-existent.¹⁴³

But the region of the Donbass is also divided internally, and this was one of the reasons why for the separatist groups it was extremely difficult to organize themselves.¹⁴⁴ In the center of the region there is the coal-mining belt, where also Viktor Yanukovych is from.¹⁴⁵ In the north there are the industrial towns where the proletariat is based and working. Moreover, the coastal area of Mariupol, in comparison to the other areas, is quite inhabited. In the region of the Donbass, local elites found it quite easy to develop partnerships and cooperation based on the expectation of mutual protection. In fact, it is since the 1990s that Yanukovych is closely allied with the local oligarch Akhmetov, thereby forming a political and business alliance.¹⁴⁶

Even if the citizens of the Donbass like to depict it as the heart of the former Soviet economy and as the motor of Ukrainian economy nowadays, it has to be pointed out the industrial complex and the fixed capital in the area is outdated and not that competitive any longer. The fact that the population in the region has fallen considerably in the last decade is also a very bad sign. Moreover, the economic model of the Donbass depends heavily on the subsidies received by local oligarchs and by the central government of Kiev, more than relying on its competitiveness on the internal and international market.¹⁴⁷

Therefore, it is more the Donbass which depends on Kiev for its survival than vice versa. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that the industry in the Donbass is highly dependent on Russia for two reasons: it needs Russian gas in order to function, and Russia constitutes a considerable part of the demand. In fact, the exports from the region mainly went to Russia before the breakdown in relations in 2013.

¹⁴³ Andrew Wilson (2014), 121.

¹⁴⁴ Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 78.

¹⁴⁵ Nechepurenko, Ivan. "Donbass' Roots of Violent Division: Geography, History, Culture." *The Moscow Times*. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/donbass-roots-of-violent-division-geography-history-culture-34285>.

¹⁴⁶ Kaylan, Melik. "Oligarchs, Russia and Ukraine: What Magnitsky, Akhmetov And Kiev's Elections Bode." *Forbes*. May 21, 2014. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melikkaylan/2014/05/21/oligarchs-russia-and-ukraine-what-magnitsky-akhmetov-and-kievs-elections-bode/#6e62614842a7>.

¹⁴⁷ Andrew Wilson (2014), 122.

2. THE RESPONSE OF THE WESTERN COMMUNITY: WISHFUL THINKING AND DIPLOMATIC INATTENTION

Another object of analysis of Part III of this thesis is the response of the West to the Ukrainian Crisis. In fact, many experts argue that the ongoing war in Ukraine is not just a result of the aggressive foreign policy of the Russian Federation, but also a product of the mistakes of American and European diplomacy before and during the crisis.¹⁴⁸ This chapter aims therefore at providing an overview on the contribution of the Western diplomacy to the crisis, and at evaluating the actions taken as well as their consequences.

Firstly, it has to be considered that, as is well known, the European Union cannot rely on a common army, and has therefore barely any military capacity whatsoever, especially vis a vis Russia, one of the states with the most military capabilities in the world.¹⁴⁹ For this reason, European diplomacy designed its strategy as far as the Ukraine crisis is concerned by mostly relying on soft power tools, such as forums for negotiations of agreements and the adoption of sanctions. These measures aim ultimately at making Russia comply with international law norms without directly confronting it militarily.

The EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM) was the first action of engagement of the European Union in the crisis, launched in December 2014. Its main aim was to provide advisory support to the Ukrainian authorities.¹⁵⁰ The second instrument – and maybe the most discussed one – used by European diplomacy to react to the Russian aggression is sanctions. In the context of this thesis, I will not discuss in detail the debate on the efficacy of sanctions in containing and punishing the breach of international law committed by the Russian Federation. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned that on the one hand some experts think that sanctions were indeed effective in containing to a certain degree the aggressiveness of the Kremlin's foreign policy, because of the fear of further worsening the Russian economic situations in times of economic crises. In fact, in 2014 the economic situation of the Russian Federation considerably worsened because of the weakness

¹⁴⁸ John J. Mearsheimer "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs*. January 28, 2016. Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

¹⁴⁹ Niklas I.m. Nováky. "Why so Soft? The European Union in Ukraine." *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 2 (2015): 244-66. doi:10.1080/13523260.2015.1061767.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of the ruble and the fall of the world price in primary commodities, which accounts for a large share of Russian exports. On the other hand, some other analysts argue that sanctions are easy to be circumvented by Russia and that they were not effective either in containing the aggression of the Russian Federation in the Donbass, or in punishing Russia for its repeated breaches of international law.

On top of sanctions, the other milestone of Western diplomacy when it comes to its engagement in the Ukrainian Crisis was the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group which led to the signature of the Minsk Agreements. It has to be mentioned that these two missions and diplomatic forums are separate, even if they mutually contribute to each other's work. This aspect of the strategy of the Western diplomacy will be evaluated in further detail in the coming sections of this thesis. In fact, the effectiveness and the impact of these instruments in contributing to the solution of the crisis is also the object of a huge international debate.

However, if on the one hand it can be argued that the European diplomacy failed in correctly forecasting and anticipating Russia's moves, it cannot definitely be held responsible for them. One can state that European diplomacy failed in preventing the crisis to happen and in providing sufficient support to Ukraine, but it has to be also said that the steps taken by the Western diplomacy prevented to some degree the crisis to escalate even further. Moreover, despite the attempt to negotiate the TAA with Ukraine constituting potentially a provocation for the Kremlin by the Western Institutions, it also has to be reported that Moscow was asked more than once for an opinion during the negotiation of the agreements.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, the Kremlin did not pay much attention to the negotiation of the agreement until the parties were about to sign it. Even after the agreements were signed in 2014, the European Commission, along with the government of Kiev, decided that they would have waited for the implementation in order not to further provoke Moscow.

Arguably, the main shortcomings of the Western diplomacy in dealing with Russia in this context are two. First and foremost, the Western community failed to forecast Russia's willingness to engage in a risk-acceptant foreign policy in order to foster its interest in Eastern Europe and maintain its sphere of influence, and counter

¹⁵¹ "Is the EU to Blame for the Crisis in Ukraine?" Centre for European Reform. Accessed April 24, 2018. <http://www.cer.eu/insights/eu-blame-crisis-ukraine>.

the expansion of western institutions in the area.¹⁵² Secondly, it overestimated the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a deterrent for a further Russian aggression after the annexation of Crimea. Thirdly, it overestimated the effectiveness of diplomatic instruments such as the Minsk Agreement and the Normandy Format in reaching a ceasefire and a settlement to the conflict. Lastly, the transatlantic community was unable to emerge with a unitary, strong and cohesive response to Russia's wrongful international actions, showing once more the fragility of western institutions in preventing and dealing with international crisis. In fact, there was much disagreement between the European Union and the United States on the line to adopt to counter Russia, and on top of that there was disagreement among the members of the EU themselves. These problems will be object of further investigation in the coming chapters of this thesis.

¹⁵²Ibid.

❖ Germany vs. the United States and Germany vs. the rest of the EU

The main question in the context is: can we talk about a unitary response from the West? In fact, taking into consideration the responses of the European Union on the one side and of the United States on the other, huge disagreement over how and when the international community should have reacted to the events of Maidan and later to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation emerges. Even between Member States of the European Union itself, there were contrasting opinions on the line to adopt toward the crisis in Ukraine both before and after the events of Maidan.¹⁵³

This was already noticeable during the negotiations of the Trade and Association Agreement, starting from the issue of Tymoshenko's liberation, but then even more evident when it came to the enforcement of sanctions against the Russian Federation and whether they should still be in place or rather be lifted. In particular, a clear leadership effort by the German Chancellor Angela Merkel must be noted.

Merkel took up the role of representative of Western diplomacy in the Ukrainian Crisis, a role that President Obama was not willing to play at the time of the outbreak of the protest of Maidan.¹⁵⁴ In fact, the German Chancellor first gained the acceptance of the local lobbies to sanctions, and then convinced the other Member States of the European Union to do the same.¹⁵⁵ More than anything, Germany tried to be a mediator between the United States and the Russian Federation once the crisis escalated. Despite this, there was no common line between the United States and the European Union on how to react to developments in Ukraine, as witnessed by the recording of the phone call in between the US Assistant State Secretary Victoria Nuland and the US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, in which Nuland clearly disagrees with the position of the EU towards Ukraine.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ See Annexes of this thesis; Briefing Paper on the different responses of EU Member States.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Pond, and Hans Kundnani. "Germany's Real Role in the Ukraine Crisis." *Foreign Affairs*. February 17, 2015. Accessed January 23, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/germany-s-real-role-ukraine-crisis>.

¹⁵⁵ Hans Kundnani. "Leaving the West Behind." *Foreign Affairs*. January 07, 2015. Accessed January 23, 2018. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/western-europe/leaving-west-behind>.

¹⁵⁶ "Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call." *BBC News*. February 07, 2014. Accessed January 23, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957>.

In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, it has to be pointed out that Germany, with its Chancellor Angela Merkel, has been at the leadership of both the negotiation of the agreement, and then of the diplomatic and mediation process when the situation in Ukraine escalated following the events of Maidan. In fact, on the one hand, Merkel has always tried to mediate between different opinions and approaches on how to deal firstly with the negotiation and then with its failure and the subsequent crisis with Russia. Nonetheless, it has to be mentioned that the Chancellor proved to be rather shortsighted in foreseeing the consequences of events and in predicting the reactions by Russia.¹⁵⁷ In fact, it may be argued that the main failure of Merkel's approach was to demand too much for Ukraine during the negotiations, and not to forecast the reaction by Russia underestimating its willingness to intervene military to maintain its influence on the Ukrainian territory.

¹⁵⁷"Summit of Failure: How the EU Lost Russia over Ukraine", Spiegel Online, November 24, 2014, accessed Mai 01, 2018.

❖ The Minsk Process and the Trilateral Contact Group

Three years have now passed by since the signature of the Minsk II Agreement. When analyzing the structure of the documents, one has to mention that there was not just Minsk I and II, but 7 agreements which were concluded between 2014 and 2016 for the ceasefire and settlement of the conflict. Despite the fact that the agreement is not respected by all parties and it is not going to bring an end to the conflict, western governments as well as the OSCE continue to insist that its conditions should be fulfilled.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, there is little room for its implementation because the parties are not especially enthusiastic in complying with its conditions.¹⁵⁹

But taking a step back, the Minsk Agreement is the final product of the negotiations of the so called Trilateral Contact Group and of the Normandy Format.¹⁶⁰ The Trilateral Contact Group is composed by representatives of Ukraine, Russia and of the OSCE. The Normandy Format is the diplomatic initiative of Chancellor Merkel and the French President Holland aiming at bringing Ukraine and Russia together to solve the crisis between them. This contact group was created when the leaders of the afore-mentioned four countries met in Normandy on the occasion of the commemoration of the D-Day, and it operates mainly through telephone calls between the participating heads of state.¹⁶¹ One of the strengths of the Trilateral Contact Group is that it carries out a number of consultations directly with the rebels. The TCG divides its operations between four working groups: the WG on Security, the WG on Humanitarian Issues, the WG on Socio-Economic Issues and the WG on Political Issues.¹⁶²

The negotiation of the Minsk Agreement started in 2014, but as the crisis escalated, especially after the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, the meetings started to include not only the representatives of the Trilateral Contact

¹⁵⁸ Gwendolyn Sasse. "To Be or Not to Be? Ukraine's Minsk Process." Carnegie Europe. Accessed April 27, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/62939>.

¹⁵⁹ Pifer, Steven. "Minsk II at Two Years." Brookings. February 15, 2017. Accessed April 27, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/02/15/minsk-ii-at-two-years/>.

¹⁶⁰ Address by the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini to the OSCE Permanent Council. Vienna, 20 November 2014.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Press Statement of Special Representative of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Sajdik after Meeting of Trilateral Contact Group on 18 April 2018.

Group, but also the representatives of the separatist groups of the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, to listen their requests and convince them to implement the conditions of the ceasefire.¹⁶³

Without going into details in the content of the Minsk Agreement, it is sufficient for the purposes of this analysis to mention that it provides 12 provisions for the ceasefire and the de-escalation of the conflict on the contact line. In this context, the parties agreed to an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of all heavy weapons from the contact zone, the monitoring of the ceasefire by the OSCE, a decentralization of power in Ukraine, amnesty for the soldiers involved in the fighting, the release of all hostages, the provision of humanitarian aid, scheduling of local elections in the separatist republics, withdrawal of 'illegal militant groups' from the Ukrainian territory and a program of economic reconstruction for Eastern Ukraine as well as constitutional reform.¹⁶⁴

Many of these points nonetheless proved to be very difficult to implement in practice. In fact, there were and there still are continued violations of the ceasefire and the mission has several difficulties in monitoring the situation on the front line.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the terms and the stipulations of the carrying out of elections in the separatist republics are highly disputed, and there is a high risk of jeopardizing the already fragile position of the central government in Kiev. Furthermore, also concerning the withdrawal of heavy-weapons and illegal fighting groups, it proved to be difficult in practice to define and identify who is perpetrating the violations of the ceasefire, with which weapons and to which faction the fighters belong.¹⁶⁶

The violations of the terms of the agreement have emerged from both the Ukrainian, the separatist and the Russian forces present on the Donbass. When analyzing why the violations are happening it has to be pointed out that, on the one hand, a ceasefire is not necessarily the best option for the parties involved in the conflict. In fact, for Russia, an end to the fighting in Eastern Ukraine would take

¹⁶³ Address by the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini to the OSCE Permanent Council. Vienna, 20 November 2014.

¹⁶⁴ "Ukraine and the Minsk II Agreement: On a Frozen Path to Peace?". European Parliament Briefing, January 2016.

¹⁶⁵ EU statement in Response to Briefings by the Special Representative in Ukraine of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and in the TCG, Ambassador Martin Sajdik and the Chief Monitor of the SMM, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 26 April 2018.

¹⁶⁶ Report of the Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM to Ukraine Alexander Hug, "Civilian Monitors in a Hot Conflict", Institute of International Peace, Vienna. 23 April 2018.

away a means, currently in the Kremlin's hands, of exerting pressure on the government of Kiev. On the other hand, if Russia respected the ceasefire, and the Ukrainian did not, the blame for not being able to implement the Minsk agreement would shift from Moscow to Kiev.¹⁶⁷

To conclude this brief overview on the Minsk Agreement and on the diplomatic process behind it, as has been shown there are weaknesses in its practical application. Nonetheless, one can still argue that as long as every party is still prepared to meet in Minsk to negotiate a possible solution, the process still has its purpose. In fact, even if logistically and on the ground the issues connected to its implementation are numerous and complex, the fact that the parties of the conflict still interact in some kind of dialogue is better the total breakdown of all negotiations altogether and a total disengagement from a diplomatic solution.

¹⁶⁷ Steven Pifer, "Minsk II at Two Years." Brookings. February 15, 2017. Accessed April 28, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/02/15/minsk-ii-at-two-years/>.

❖ The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine

The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine of the OSCE was deployed as a consequence of the events of Euromaidan in 2013, after a request of the Ukrainian government and the consent of all the 57 OSCE participating states.¹⁶⁸ When presenting the OSCE mission in Ukraine there are several aspects that should be taken into consideration. The main ones that should be touched upon are the following: the mandate and the deployment, the dimension of the conflict covered, the situation on the ground, the challenges encountered by the mission during its unfolding, as well as its limits.

It has now been four years since the mission was deployed to Ukrainian territory. As far as its mandate is concerned, it has to be underlined that it does not stem from the Minsk Agreement but from the 57 participating states of the OSCE. The Minsk Agreement works in tandem with the SMM mission as far as the provision of information from the line of contact is concerned, but it is not the legal basis of the mission itself. Moreover, the initial mandate was rather limited in its scope but it was soon clear that an extension was needed as the crisis continued escalating. According to Alexander Hug, the Principal Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM Mission to Ukraine, as time passed more and more resources were diverted to the mission, in the form of technology, budget and personnel deployed.¹⁶⁹ Despite the various ‘low points’ in the crisis such as the shooting of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 and the kidnappings of SMM officers, the mission always tried to fulfill its mandate.

The pillars of the mission are two: monitor and report the facts on the front line of the conflict, and facilitate dialogue between the parties.¹⁷⁰ But what are the dimensions of the conflict covered by the mission? Firstly, the front line is 500 km long, with an insecure border with the Russian Federation of 408 km. The area of

¹⁶⁸ "Conflict Prevention and Resolution." Conflict Prevention and Resolution | OSCE. Accessed April 24, 2018. <https://www.osce.org/special-monitoring-mission-to-ukraine/conflict-prevention-and-resolution>.

¹⁶⁹ Report of the Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM to Ukraine Alexander Hug, "Civilian Monitors in a Hot Conflict", Institute of International Peace, Vienna. 23 April 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Report of the Chief Monitor for the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, to the OSCE Permanent Council, 14 May 2014.

insecure maritime area is more or less 70 km long.¹⁷¹ Obviously, this area is very large and difficult to monitor logistically for the mission. The issues that should be monitored by the SMMs for compliance are: the non-use of heavy weapons, the disengagement from hardware positions, the issue of de-mining and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. These are also the issues regulated by the Minsk Agreement, which is nonetheless the object of continuous violations by both parties of the conflict. This situation implied many operational challenges for the mission; in fact the SMMs have struggled to establish their presence and are also considerably limited in their capacity to monitor due to restrictions to their freedom of movement.¹⁷² The mission is nonetheless trying to overcome this problem by employing the latest technology to maintain control over even those areas that cannot be physically accessed.

But what is the situation in Eastern Ukraine now that the SMM mission has operated there for four years? According to the OSCE reports, civilians living within the area of the front line still suffer many hardships. These are, primarily: the devastation caused to infrastructure, the lack of transportation, the lack of public services such as the provision of pensions and other welfare measures; the presence of mines in many fields.¹⁷³

The ceasefire violations take place mainly in the area of Donetsk rather than in Luhansk. The reports of the SMM have proved that the parties can engage in a ceasefire and respect it, once the political and diplomatic leaders recommit to it.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, according to Alexander Hug, the problem is that the fighting resumes every time that a calmer period is achieved, because the parties take advantage of it to reorganize their strategies.¹⁷⁵ But what could be done in order to prevent the parties from organizing? Which stabilizing solutions could be offered in this context? First and foremost, the proximity between the parties should be decreased. This is to say that the actual distance on the ground between the fighting groups should be

¹⁷¹ Report of the Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM to Ukraine Alexander Hug, “Civilian Monitors in a Hot Conflict”, Institute of International Peace, Vienna. 23 April 2018.

¹⁷² EU statement in Response to Briefings by the Special Representative in Ukraine of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and in the TCG, Ambassador Martin Sajdik and the Chief Monitor of the SMM, Ambassador Ertugrul Apakan, OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 26 April 2018.

¹⁷³ Press Statement of Special Representative of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Sajdik after Meeting of the TCG on 18 April 2018.

¹⁷⁵ Report of the Principal Deputy Chief Monitor of the OSCE SMM to Ukraine Alexander Hug, “Civilian Monitors in a Hot Conflict”, Institute of International Peace, Vienna. 23 April 2018.

increased. Moreover, the withdrawal of heavy weapons is the starting point for every further step, because it would definitely decrease the intensity of the conflict. This is the reason why this point is underlined and re-discussed during each meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE, in the premises of its Vienna headquarters.

Coming to the challenges that the SMM mission is facing at the moment, first on the list are the political challenges.¹⁷⁶ In fact, as time goes by the mission risks becoming part of the problem. In fact, it is not a mission deployed as a watchdog of the Minsk Agreement and the mandate of the mission itself is too broad and it does not deal with many important aspects of the conflict. This relates to the problem of possible overlaps and matters of compliance with the Minsk Agreement which has no follow-up instrument for the moment.

Moreover, the civilians living in the conflict zone are becoming always more and more skeptical about the mission, because when the OSCE SMMs arrive, they expect them to be able to solve the situation, and when they are not, the civilians become frustrated. Moreover, civilians also expect the mission to deliver humanitarian help, which is nonetheless not part of their mandate.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, the mission is often demonized by the separatist groups and the pro-Russian fighters through fake news and misleading propaganda.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

❖ Another frozen conflict at the gates of Europe

This subchapter of this thesis draws upon a quote from an article of Nolan Peterson:

*It is a frozen war, which so far has killed more than 10,100 Ukrainians and created a long-term humanitarian catastrophe affecting millions more. Despite a February 2015 cease-fire, known as Minsk II, the war is not over. It's a low intensity conflict, mainly fought from trenches and ad hoc forts along a 250-mile-long, static front line in the Donbas region. Fighting is mostly done at a distance, using indirect fire weapons like artillery, mortars, and rockets.*¹⁷⁸

In Eastern Ukraine, after years of fighting and repeated attempts by the international community to find a solution to bring peace to the conflict zone, we can observe a situation of stalemate of the conflict. In fact, no progress has been made in the direction of a mutually acceptable solution to re-establish security in the Donbass; therefore now the situation nowadays manifests many of the characteristics of a frozen conflict in Eastern Europe, much like the one in Moldova or between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the year 2015 at least there were some steps taken concerning the armistice on the front line and in the conflict zone. In fact, the parties agreed to withdraw heavy weapons from the conflict zone. Nonetheless it has to be mentioned that several violations of this agreement were reported in the framework of the OSCE, both from the officers of the Special Monitoring Mission and from the representative of both Ukraine and Russia, in the context of the meetings of the Permanent Council. Unfortunately, in the forum of the OSCE both parties of the conflict report constant violations of the Minsk Agreement and of the conditions agreed during multilateral meetings, causing a situation of mistrust and instability. Therefore, the conflict area in Eastern Ukraine is still not secure and the shelling and mining continue to happen

¹⁷⁸ Nolan Peterson. "Russia's Hybrid War Against the West Began on the Battlefields of Ukraine." The Daily Signal. November 17, 2017. Accessed April 20, 2018. <https://www.dailysignal.com/2017/11/17/russias-hybrid-war-west-began-battlefields-ukraine/>.

and to threaten civilians and cause humanitarian emergencies. Both parties feel the pressure of the international community that urges them to find a compromise and enforce an armistice. In fact, Ukraine urgently needs the support of the international community in terms of economic aid in order to recover from the war and the turmoil of the last years and eventually rebuild the country.¹⁷⁹ On the other hand, Russia would like sanctions to be lifted and hopes that relations with the Western community will improve in the near future.

When it comes to the terms agreed in the Minks II Agreement, it is difficult to foresee when the parties will really be able to fulfil the promises which have been made. For Ukraine, it is now vital that the Donbas be demilitarized so that the government of Kiev can regain the control of its outer borders and reestablish sovereignty in the territory now in the hand of the pro-Russian armed separatist parties.¹⁸⁰

It is now clear that one of the necessary steps that needs to be undertaken by the central government in order to establish peace and security in the Donbass is a constitutional democratic reform, that will devolve more decisional power to the regions through a federalist system. This alternative is also seen as viable by Moscow, since from their perspective it would mean a weakening of the central government and more autonomy for the Russian-speaking regions. But on the other side, Kiev has declared itself not to be willing to accept any deal that is going to weaken Ukraine as a nation and that could be the first step toward possible further annexations of Ukrainian territory by the Russian Federation. Therefore, since both parties are not keen on finding a compromise, a political solution is not viable in the foreseeable future.

At the moment, Moscow is in a state of international isolation and therefore is not really motivated to leave the Donbass without any further concessions from the international community. On this note, a possible future scenario is that Russia will retreat and leave the area to a third party: local pro-Russian separatists elites, such as the oligarch Achmetov.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 196.

¹⁸⁰ Oleg Ignatov. "Ukraine at a Crossroads: Scenarios for the Reintegration of Donbas." Carnegie Moscow Center. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75761>.

¹⁸¹ Jutta Sommerbauer (2016), 198.

One point that has to be mentioned is the condition of civilians in the context of the frozen conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In fact, the Donbass is the industrial heart of Ukraine, and therefore this area is home to the country's workers in its factories and mines. These people now live between two armed antagonists and no longer know which side to take. When asked, locals simply report to journalists and NGOs that they do not care who is going to win the conflict and eventually rule the region, as long as there is peace and they be able to go back to their normal lives.¹⁸²

Indeed, in the region the infrastructure has been severely damaged or even completely destroyed as a consequence of the shelling and the fighting. Moreover, the population is in a situation now in which it cannot count on either party to receive assistance at any time, be it health, education or pensions for elderly people.¹⁸³ Moreover, after the tensions and the actions of the separatist groups, now the citizens of the Donbass are seen with suspicion by other Ukrainians from the Western regions. In other words, there is an urgent need for signs of deescalation in the current situation, and of tensions from both sides, in order for normal relations among the Donbas and the rest of Ukraine to resume. For instance, less stringent controls at the check points could be a first sign of deescalation and of normalization.

The war in Ukraine was definitely the greatest challenge and crisis that the European Union has had to face since the end of the Cold War. In fact, it has meant a conflict at the gates of Europe that constitutes a threat to peace and security of the whole continent. For Europe, the Ukrainian conflict does not mean only a challenge when it comes to finding a compromise for peace, but it also means a test on how Europe can remain coherent to its founding values and principles. In fact, the way in which the EU responded to Russia's actions and the extent to which it supported – or did not support—the Euromaidan protests, is proof of the extent the EU is willing to risk in order to defend its founding values such as democracy, rule of law and human rights.

If at the beginning of the war in Eastern Ukraine it could be defined as hybrid warfare, now it has turned into a full-scale conventional war, even if of low-intensity. The Ukrainian government recruits its military forces mainly from its youth, and

¹⁸² Emilie Rouvroy.. "Ukraine at War: 'People Feel Abandoned' | Emilie Rouvroy." The Guardian. January 26, 2015. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/26/ukraine-war-people-abandoned-medecins-sans-frontieres>.

¹⁸³ "The Two Parts of Ukraine's Donbas." Carnegie Europe. Accessed June 09, 2018. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/69979>.

sending them to the battlefield without even proper training. In fact, young Ukrainian troops are supposed to learn how to fight directly on the ground, being told that war will decide who lives and who dies.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Report by Nolan Peterson, Institute for International Peace,

❖ The perspective of a UN peacekeeping operation: a viable option?

“Peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers, but only soldiers can do it”.

- Former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld

Recently statesmen and experts of the international community have been coming up with the idea that a United Nations-led peacekeeping mission might be the only solution to provide peace and security in Eastern Ukraine and re-establish government control in the separatist regions. Both the president of Ukraine Poroshenko and the administration of Donald Trump have reacted positively towards this, to the extent that it might be the only realistic way of monitoring and enforcing the ceasefire and providing security as well as humanitarian aid to the population in the region of the Donbass.¹⁸⁵ In this chapter, I will analyze the positive as well as the negative sides of a possible UN-mandated mission in Eastern Ukraine.

First and foremost, it is very unlikely that any agreement will be reached concerning the scope of the mission. In fact, if Ukraine requests an heavy force on the ground in order to enforce the ceasefire and prevent the parties from fighting each other, Russia is more for a minor mission with the aim of surveilling and reporting.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, also when talking about this option a political solution seems hardly possible, since Russia will probably never approve a UN mission with such an extended mandate as that which Ukraine is asking for.

In the report “Could the United Nations Unite Ukraine?”, Richards Gowan analyzes all the possible implications and logistical problems of deploying a UN mission in the Donbass, such as planning, the scope of the mandate, resorting to use of force, and the underlying political implications.¹⁸⁷ The main problem that emerges from his analysis is defining who would eventually be in charge of the mission once it is decided that this would be the best option.

¹⁸⁵ Ambassador Muhamed Sacirbey, "Can UN Peacekeepers Bring Ukraine Peace?" The Huffington Post, February 19, 2015, , accessed March 26, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ambassador-muhamed-sacirbey/can-un-peacekeepers-bring_b_6713686.html.

¹⁸⁶ Richard Gowan. "Analysis | Could U.N. Peacekeepers Help End the War in Ukraine?" The Washington Post. March 01, 2018. Accessed March 26, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/03/01/would-a-u-n-peacekeeping-force-in-eastern-ukraine-make-sense/?utm_term=.8a96cefc4b1e.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Moreover, Gowan correctly points out in his report that even once the peacekeeping mission had pacified the fighting parties, it would still be very difficult to ensure a long-lasting peace in the region. In fact, there are many civilian and socioeconomic issues that still need to be solved. First and foremost, organizing fair and democratic elections in the region, without undermining the authority of Kiev.

Which role should the peacekeepers play in the organization and monitoring of the elections? Should the monitoring be organized by the UN or rather by the OSCE? And moreover, there is also the issue of federalism, ie. how much decisional autonomy should these regions have, in order to avoid further separatist movements and clashes with the government of Kiev in the future, allowing this way for a durable and sustainable peace in Ukraine. Even if the elections could successfully be organized, the period right after will be a very sensitive one for stabilization and decisive in proving whether the solution is viable and peace after the peacekeeping mission can be guaranteed, or whether the conditions are still not there and the region will descend once more into conflict.

All in all, Gowan points out that it would be possible to organize a successful peacekeeping mission in the Donbass, but for this to happen it would be necessary that the force remain to monitor the elections that would follow and even more so in the months thereafter to avoid the development of another conflict in the short-term. The main challenge to overcome in order to establish a mission would be finding a political compromise among Ukraine and Russia when it comes to the mandate and to bring together a credible police and military force in order to accomplish it.¹⁸⁸

Other experts, however, believe that a UN operation in the Donbass could have a negative impact on the central government in Kiev. In fact, there is a fear that if the UN intervenes, the conflict will become even more internationalized and the separatist groups will gain even more international visibility and legitimization.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁸ Oleg Ignatov. "Ukraine at a Crossroads: Scenarios for the Reintegration of Donbas." Carnegie Moscow Center. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/75761>.

¹⁸⁹ Ambassador Muhamed Sacirbey.. "Can UN Peacekeepers Bring Ukraine Peace?" The Huffington Post. December 07, 2017. Accessed March 27, 2018.

❖ **The Implications of the crisis in terms of the relations between the western community and the Russian Federation**

As pointed out before in this thesis, the Ukrainian crisis brought about a major breakdown in the relationships between the Russian Federation and the Western community, first and foremost because pacts have been broken and facts denied, which cause each party in the conflict to see its counterpart as unreliable. In this context, the priority has to be the path to the reconstruction of relations among Ukraine, Russia and the Western Community by large.

As witnessed by the last two years, the Minsk agreement and its implementation is not the right way to re-establish peace among Ukraine and Russia. In fact, good intentions (if they exist), were not enough to implement a ceasefire at the contact line and to avoid further fighting. In fact, the mistrust of the parties acted as a deterrent to any scaling back of arms and to the re-establishment of a communicative relation between the separatist groups and the government of Kiev. The mediation of France and Germany through the Normandy format or the Trilateral Contact Group did not produce any major result to ensure a durable peace in Eastern Ukraine neither.

Some experts therefore proposed that re-establishing and normalizing economic ties between Russia, Ukraine and the Western Community might be a first step in the direction of normalizing relations and reconstructing trust among the parties.¹⁹⁰ In this context, Ukraine should be allowed to foster deeper economic integration both with the EU as with the EEU, without too many rules or limitations.¹⁹¹ In fact, it can be argued that deeper economic integration of Ukraine with Russia and with the EU are not mutually exclusive.¹⁹² In fact, as many theories of international economics prove, economic integration is not a zero-sum game but a positive-sum one through specialization and better distribution of capital and labor capabilities among countries. Having said this, before making any major agreement on the regional institutional and political architecture, the parties should re-establish

¹⁹⁰ Nolan Peterson, "Long at War with Each Other, Ukraine and Russia Trade on | Opinion." Newsweek. January 28, 2018. Accessed June 09, 2018. <http://www.newsweek.com/long-war-each-other-ukraine-and-russia-trade-793142>.

¹⁹¹ Ivo Oliveira et al., "How the EU Broke Ukraine (with Help from Russia)," POLITICO, November 27, 2017, , accessed June 09, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-broke-ukraine-with-help-from-russia/>.

¹⁹² Ibid.

trust - and I believe one viable way is re-establishing economic ties. This will also have a positive impact on the populations of both Ukraine and Russia which have lost the most in this conflict.

Moreover, in order to re-establish trust between Ukraine and Russia and the Western Community it is vital that the parties commit once again to respecting each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁹³ The first step in this direction should probably be Russia's commitment to withdrawing its forces from the Donbas. Nonetheless, probably it would be up to the West to take the first step in the context of the confrontation with Russia. In fact, the Kremlin feels highly threatened by the expansion of NATO and the EU eastwards, and until the Western community takes a step back, Russia will not commit itself in any way.¹⁹⁴

When Trump became President of the United States, many experts of international relations and scholars thought that due to good relations between him and President Putin, the relations between Russia and the United States would improve. Nonetheless, Putin never had a concrete strategy on how to improve relations to Russia and the American post-election scandal involving the Kremlin did not help in this regard.¹⁹⁵ There are some areas in which cooperation between the United States and Russia could cooperate, trying to overcome resentment and mistrust, and would this happen the general improvement of the diplomatic relations between the countries would definitely have a good impact on the tensions in Ukraine.¹⁹⁶

First of all, both parties should resume talks on legally binding agreements on arms control.¹⁹⁷ In fact, both the US and Russia are modernizing their military complexes, including nuclear weapons, and this could lead to another arms race.¹⁹⁸ Nonetheless, an agreement is far from being reached on this point since neither

¹⁹³ Allison Graham, Shimon Arad, and Daniel R. DePetrus. "How to Solve the Ukraine Crisis." *The National Interest*. Accessed June 09, 2018. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-solve-the-ukraine-crisis-10612>.

¹⁹⁴ Lukasz Kulesa, "Russia and the West," *Harvard International Review*, January 03, 2017, , accessed May 04, 2018, <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=14205>.

¹⁹⁵ Gerhard Mangott. "Next Stop: Dead End. Russian-Western Relations. Where Do We Stand? What to Expect?" Univ. prof. dr. Gerhard Mangott. Accessed March 27, 2018. <http://www.gerhard-mangott.at/?p=4309>.

¹⁹⁶ Tom Sauer, "The Origins of the Ukraine Crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West," *Global Policy* 8, no. 1 (2016): , doi:10.1111/1758-5899.12374.

¹⁹⁷ Lukasz Kulesa (2017).

¹⁹⁸ Gerhard Mangott (2018).

parties is willing to take the first step back for the moment. Hopefully, enough further steps in this direction will be taken in the upcoming years.

Coming to the core investigation of this thesis, one has to mention the future of the Ukrainian crisis as one of the main tensions that need to be solved in order to see an improvement in Russia-US relations. Minsk II was quite ineffective and there is no common ground yet for a UN-led peacekeeping mission because of the disagreement of Russia. So there seems to be no way out of the conflict in the foreseeable future, at least not through a political solution. Therefore, one could legitimately claim that only once economic relations resume between Ukraine and Russia, and a level of trust is rebuilt, will a political solution again become a viable option.

In this picture, where does the EU stand? The EU is taking barely any concrete step in any direction since it is too concerned with internal problems in order to play the role of the foreign pacifier.¹⁹⁹ The only firm reaction was sanctions, which as we aimed at punishing Russia for the annexation of Crimean and for having militias on the Donbass. France and Germany tried to play a more decisive role through their involvement in the negotiations between the parties for the peace agreement, which nonetheless has had little success in guaranteeing peace and security in Ukraine, as has been analyzed above.

¹⁹⁹ Ginger Hervey et al., "How the EU Broke Ukraine (with Help from Russia)," POLITICO, November 27, 2017, , accessed May 04, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-eu-broke-ukraine-with-help-from-russia/>.

❖ Is there a future for Ukraine in Europe?

When talking to young Ukrainian students in Kiev and in Western Ukraine, it is striking to notice that for them joining the European Union means a dream coming true. For the Ukrainian youth, Europe means rights, freedom, the rule of law, job opportunities, meritocracy, internationalism, travel, multiculturalism and openness to the world. Now, how far does the picture Ukrainians have about the EU correspond to reality? And how realistic is a future membership for Ukraine in the European Union? These are questions I will try to give an answer to in the chapter, even if any future development is surely hard to forecast given the current situation.

As reported in Marci Shore's book "The Ukrainian Night", the Euromaidan demonstrations became for the Ukrainians a choice about civilization.²⁰⁰ It was the expression of the fact that many Ukrainians wanted to be a part of Europe and wanted the era of Russian domination to be over. For many Ukrainians, Euromaidan meant the end of being a vassal to Russia, choosing a future shaped by European values of rule of law, democracy, human rights, meritocracy and equality of opportunity. This is the side of the story that many scholars of strategic studies and statesmen tend to forget, one which needs to be underlined and brought to the attention of the whole Western community. Ukraine must stop being treated as the locus of confrontation between Russia and the West, and the international community must start listening to the voice of the Ukrainians, who during the protest of the Maidan merely sought to decide the fate of their own country.

If many Ukrainians dream about a European future, it is not clear yet if the European Union is ready to welcome Ukraine among its members, which does not seem to be the case at least in the short- and medium term.²⁰¹ In fact, during the crisis, the European Union involved itself only through application of soft power without really taking any further steps in the direction of protecting Ukraine from its foreign aggressor.

The planned visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine is definitely a step toward a deeper cooperation and integration, but there is still a long way to go before

²⁰⁰ Marci Shore (2017), 188.

²⁰¹ Kachka, Taras, and Volodymyr Yermolenko. "What Might Be next in EU-Ukraine Relations?" EUobserver. Accessed June 09, 2018. <https://euobserver.com/opinion/141133>.

even considering a future full membership for Ukraine in the EU.²⁰² At this point of his analysis, the reader might ask himself: what are the major obstacles of a future Ukrainian membership to the European Union? How could these obstacles be overcome? If before 2013 the worries were mainly focused on economic and political consequences of an accession of Ukraine to the EU, nowadays the consequences for the relationships between Russia and the EU play arguably an even bigger role.

In this context, where the prospects of a real full-fledged membership for Ukraine into the EU are still far from realistic, the better means of avoiding a deadlock in the process of integration is to proceed with small, tangible steps.²⁰³ A good start would be aligning the legal framework of some economic sectors of Ukraine to that of the EU, in order to allow more economic cooperation and to facilitate trade.²⁰⁴ Moreover, more efforts should be made in enhancing cooperation in the fields of infrastructure-building and education, with the EU providing support to small and medium business, and innovation.²⁰⁵

In this context, I want to finish this chapter with an optimistic quotation by the Head of the EU delegation to Ukraine:

*“We have initiated a nationwide communication campaign aiming to illustrate benefits of EU-Ukraine cooperation for Ukrainians today. We want citizens in this country to be aware of the support that the EU provides Ukraine and use the many opportunities that it provides, including youth, businesses and culture and education institutions of this country. In partnership with the Ukrainian government, this cooperation will result in positive changes and improvement of lives of Ukrainian citizens”.*²⁰⁶

²⁰² "EU-Ukraine Relations, Factsheet - EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission." EEAS - European External Action Service. September 06, 2018. Accessed June 09, 2018. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4081/eu-ukraine-relations-factsheet_en.

²⁰³ Kachka, Taras, and Volodymyr Yermolenko. (2018).

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ "EU Delegation Launches All-Ukrainian "Moving Forward Together" Communication Campaign - EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission." EEAS - European External Action Service. September 06, 2018. Accessed June 09, 2018. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/41139/eu-delegation-launches-all-ukrainian-moving-forward-together-communication-campaign_en.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has investigated the main developments in the Ukraine crisis from 2013 to 2016, focusing on the Euromaidan protests as well as the ensuing events, such as the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the outbreak of the hybrid war in the Donbass. This analysis was conducted with the purpose of finding the sources and the determinants of Russian Foreign Policy, and in particular of the conduct of the Kremlin during the course of the crisis.

Part of the findings of this thesis are mirrored by this quote of the former US Ambassador to Russia during an interview for Fresh Air:

[...] My best guess is that he himself doesn't know, and let me explain that: I think that this was not some master plan that Putin's been plotting for decades — annex Crimea and go in to take Novorossiia. In fact, I've been digging through old Putin speeches. I've never seen him devote a speech to the necessity of reuniting Crimea with Russia. That came only recently.

*This phrase "Novorossiia," New Russia, which is [used] to describe these eastern Ukrainian regions — I think he used that for the first time just a couple of weeks ago. So that actually gives me hope, because that means it's not some grand plan, master design that he feels he is now empowered to execute, but that this is more contingent. He's making it up as he goes, and he's calculating about the cost of direct military intervention and then occupation in Ukraine. And Putin is a smart person. He's not doing it a vacuum, and he, I think and I hope, he knows how costly that would be. [...].*²⁰⁷

One of the main findings of this analysis is that when analyzing Russo-Ukrainian relations before and after the events of Maidan, this aspect of Russia's confrontational relations to the West cannot be overlooked. Indeed, Ukraine is perceived by Russia as an area of core strategic interest, directly in crosshairs of NATO enlargement eastwards. In this context, Russia adopted a more aggressive foreign policy course toward Ukraine to counterbalance the increasing Western

²⁰⁷ "Former Ambassador To Russia: Putin Has No Master Plan For Ukraine." NPR. May 15, 2014. Accessed January 25, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2014/05/15/312822551/former-ambassador-to-russia-putin-has-no-master-plan-for-ukraine>.

influence in the post-Soviet space, also in the context of EU enlargement.²⁰⁸ This perspective on Russia's Ukraine policy is in line with the framework of the neorealist theory of international relations, which argues that the foreign policy of states is linked to the pursuit of national interest by securing access to strategic important locations near its borders and preventing any form of external pressure from other major world powers. Furthermore, Putin's choices concerning Russia's Ukraine policy are merely the product of a rational utility calculation for the sake of national interest.

The outcome of the Maidan crisis, including the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the war in Eastern Ukraine, challenge the liberal theory that growing interdependence among modern actors of international relations decreases the risk of war between them. These findings are the product of the analysis conducted in Part I of this thesis, which focused on the negotiation of the TAA between the European Union and Ukraine, and on the reaction that this process caused from the side of the Kremlin. Geopolitical considerations linked to the willingness to maintain control over the Black Sea, due to the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, emerged as key determinants of the Kremlin's adoption of an aggressive foreign policy during the Ukrainian crisis.

Part II of this thesis focused more on identity questions and on domestic factors present within the Russian Federation as possible foreign policy drivers. Topics such as the identity crisis stemming from the fall of the Soviet Union, and the imperial nostalgia this created, were taken into consideration as possible contributors to the Kremlin's foreign policy choices. Moreover, the impact of Putin's leadership and his worldview as possible foreign policy influencers were also taken into consideration. The topic of the use of foreign policy in the Russian Federation as a diversion for the public opinion from domestic problems was also a focus of investigation.

Based on the literature and on the reflections on internal dynamics within the Russian Federation, this thesis recognizes a possible impact of such variables on the foreign policy course adopted by the Kremlin as far as the Ukraine crisis is concerned, especially when it comes to the annexation of Crimea. Nonetheless, these factors cannot be mentioned as policy determinants and, despite forming part of an understanding of the bigger picture, they do not provide the whole explanation for

²⁰⁸ Elias Götze (2016), 253.

the conduct of Russia toward Ukraine from 2013 to 2016. Having said that, it may be argued that President Putin and his inner circle of advisors cleverly exploited the emotional resonance of the Russian imperial past in Crimea among ordinary Russians in order to justify and to a certain extent glorify the annexation of the Peninsula. Of course, this caused an increased appreciation and approval of the Putin-led establishment by the population and some Russian nationalist elites.

In light of the analysis conducted in this thesis, the assertion that it was the Kremlin's goal to promote the project of the Eurasian Union as a counterweight to the transatlantic community in the international arena cannot account for or explain Russian conduct in Ukraine. In fact, depicting the annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Eastern Ukraine as part of a masterplan of the Kremlin to create a regional order does not offer an explanation for the timing in which the Kremlin decided to act.

Geo-economic considerations instead surely played an important role in determining the foreign policy decisions of the Kremlin as far as Ukraine is concerned. As analyzed, one can state that the issue of energy security and the economic leverage that Russia has in the post-Soviet space were undoubtedly used by the Kremlin as policy tool in order to foster its interests in Ukraine and by extension also in the European Union.

In Part III of this thesis, the hybrid war in the separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine was closely analyzed. The reader was provided with an overview on the main developments of the crisis as well as on the patterns of the Russian involvement in it. Moreover, the response of the Western community was evaluated along with the impact of different diplomatic formats involved in crisis management such as the Trilateral Contact Group, which produced the Minsk Agreement. Furthermore, the operation of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine was also analyzed, including its mandate, the implementation of its objectives and the challenges encountered on the ground. From this analysis emerged a lack of a unitary and coherent response by the members of the transatlantic community of how to react to the Russian military engagement in supporting the separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, despite the fact that these forums kept a channel of communication open between the parties, the lack of political will sterilized and

crystallized the effectiveness of such discussions in improving the actual situation on the ground in terms of actual disengagement.

Finally, this thesis reflected on the implications of the crisis in terms of the relations between the transatlantic community and the Russian Federation, as well on the future possible developments in Ukraine given the fact that even a ceasefire between the parties remains far from achievable. In this context, two scenarios for the future were analyzed: the necessity and viability of a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation in order to achieve a ceasefire and restore security and peace in the country; and the future path of European integration of Ukraine.

From this investigation it has emerged that, despite being a UN-mandated body - that organisation being the most likely path towards a durable and stable peace in Ukraine - there is a lack of political will on the part of the parties involved in coming to an agreement on the conditions of the mandate, and on the scope of the mission. This fact unfortunately gives considerable cause to doubt the viability in practice of this solution. Nonetheless, the terms of a UN peacekeeping mission in Ukraine can form the focus of future academic research in the field of international relations.

As for Ukraine's further integration in the European community, the analysis underlined is that there is still a long way to go. First and foremost, it may be stated that, before proceeding with any further step, the efforts of the government of Kiev and of the international community should be focused on achieving a ceasefire and implementing reforms for a durable peace and security situation in the region. Even then, integration should most likely proceed only gradually, for instance through a reinforced collaboration in the fields of infrastructure development, economic stimulation and educational advancement.

To conclude, this thesis has revealed that there is an urgent need on the part of the international community to rethink the 'zero-sum' model of establishing spheres of geopolitical and geo-economic influence in the Post-Soviet space. In fact, the roots of the current crisis in and around Ukraine are to be found in the perception of the transatlantic community, on the one hand, and of Russia, on the other, that Ukraine has to develop further ties either in one direction or the other, and that these directions are mutually exclusive. This logic has already caused the outbreak of a number of frozen conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space, and the current crisis in and around Ukraine can be considered one of those. The members of the international

community therefore urgently need to reconsider the logic of regional integration as a source of confrontation and competition between them, and should divert their energies towards establishing more inclusive patterns of mutual understanding and cooperation.

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ANNEXES

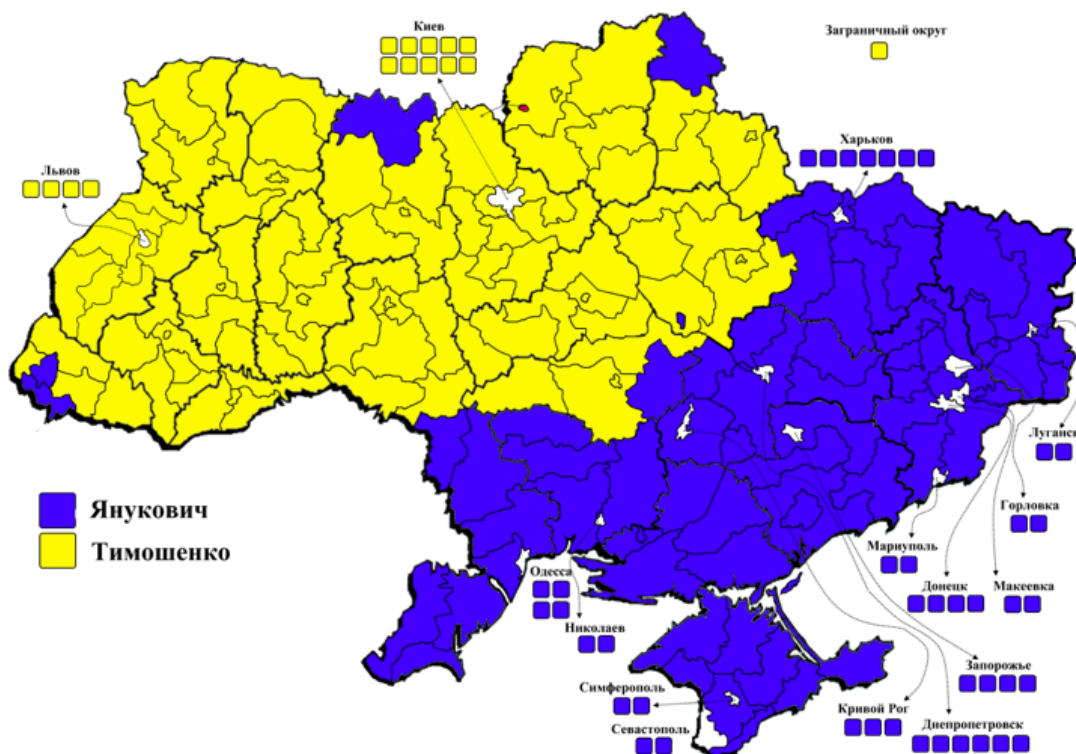
1. MAPS



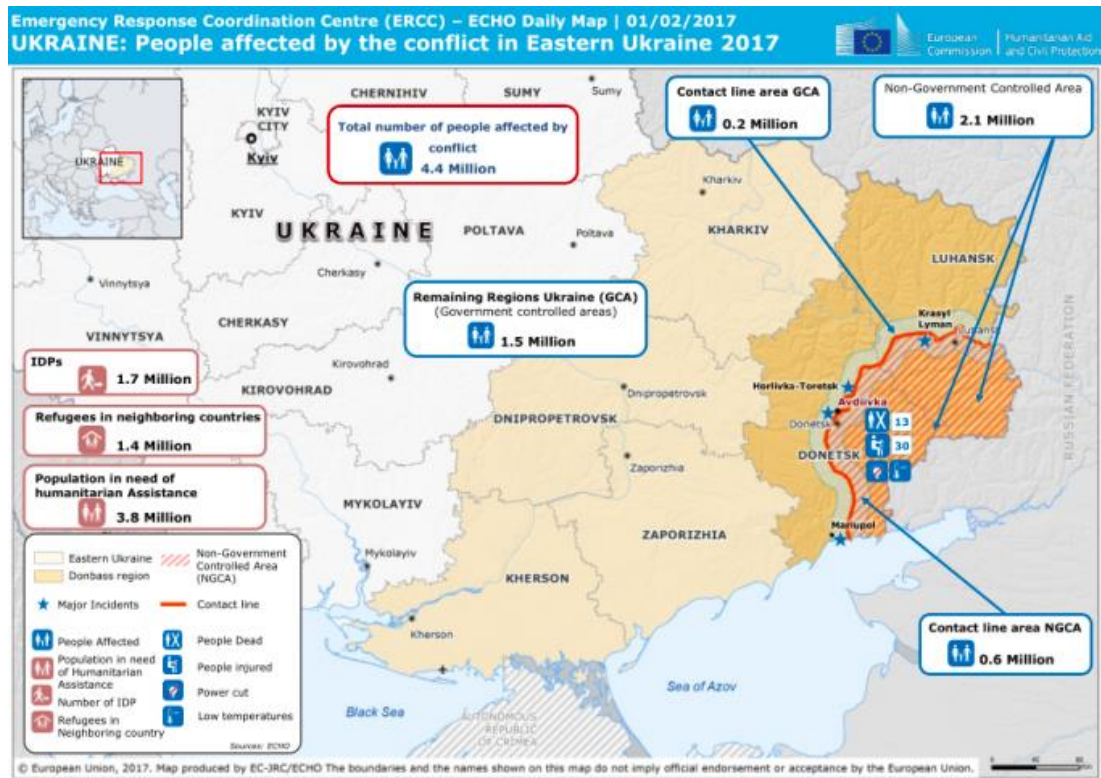
Source: <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-new-map-of-the-ukraine-conflict-is-alarming-2014-9>



Source:: <http://theglobalstate.com/geopolitics/the-ukrainian-conflict-explained-in-5-maps/>



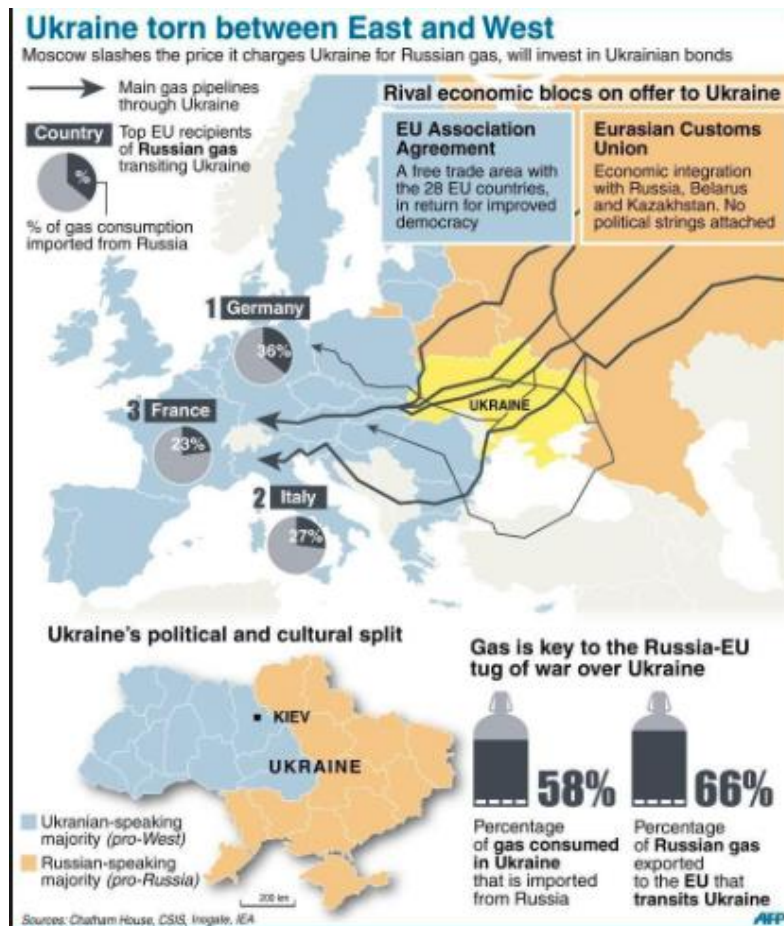
Source: Ukraine's 2010 Presidential Elections Result, <http://theglobalstate.com/geopolitics/the-ukrainian-conflict-explained-in-5-maps/>



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OSCE responses to the crisis in and around Ukraine



OSCE Chairmanship

The OSCE Chairperson-in-Office has been active throughout the crisis, intervening at the presidential and ministerial levels with the aim of reaching a diplomatic solution. His Special Representative to the Trilateral Contact Group facilitates the negotiation process.



OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM)

The SMM gathers information and provides impartial fact-based reports on the security situation on the ground (including specific incidents), monitors and supports respect for human rights commitments, and works to establish contacts and facilitate dialogue, with the aim of reducing tensions. Facilitating the implementation of the Minsk agreements is a major part of its work.



OSCE Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints Gukovo and Donetsk

The Observer Mission monitors and reports on movements across the border at the two checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk in the Russian Federation.



OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media

The Representative warned of the deteriorating media freedom situation in Ukraine ahead of the crisis. Systematically raising violations of free media, in particular journalists' safety and restrictions to media plurality, she has addressed over 200 attacks of journalists, and also issued a report on the media freedom situation in Ukraine.



OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities has consistently advocated for balanced and inclusive policies that would strengthen social cohesion in Ukraine, including in the fields of language and national minority rights. He also closely monitors the situation of Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians in Crimea.



OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The OSCE PA President engages with political leaders in Ukraine and Russia, while the Assembly has hosted some of the only meetings between the countries' lawmakers since the crisis began. The Assembly has held debates on the situation and parliamentarians have led the OSCE's short-term election observation activities in Ukraine.



OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

ODIHR has deployed thousands of observers as part of observation missions for Ukrainian presidential, parliamentary and local elections, and actively monitors the human rights situation, including in Roma communities. It works with civil society and governmental partners to build capacity in the area of freedom of religion or belief and in addressing hate crime.



OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine

The Project Co-ordinator supports Ukraine's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and practices, including in elections and governance; fosters legal, judicial and police reforms; and reinforces the fight against trafficking, terrorism, money-laundering and cybercrime. It also promotes national dialogue, enhances demining capacities, and supports protection of human rights and the safety of journalists.



OSCE Secretariat

The OSCE Secretary General is at the forefront of the Organization's response to the crisis, engaging in diplomatic dialogue and traveling to the region to meet with affected communities. The Conflict Prevention Center established and supports field missions on the ground, promotes arms control and supports national dialogue. The Gender Section supports the inclusion of women in all phases of conflict resolution processes in Ukraine.

Figure 3: Souce: "The Crisis in and around Ukraine." Women and Political Participation in Malta | OSCE. Accessed June 13, 2018. <https://www.osce.org/ukrainecrisis>.

2. CHRONOLOGY

Chronology of Key Events in Russo-Ukrainian Relations before Maidan

1991	Ukraine declares independence from the Soviet Union: 90% vote for independence after nationwide referendum. Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States.
1994	Leonid Kuchma is elected President after elections. December. Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances.
1996	New democratic constitution adopted.
1997	Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet.
2000	Vladimir Putin is elected President of the Russian Federation.
2002	Ukraine decides to launch formal bid to join NATO
2004	November. Orange Revolution: opposition Leader Viktor Yushchenko launches campaign against rigged elections that gave victory to pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich. The Supreme Court annuls poll results.
2004	December. Viktor Yushchenko becomes president after new elections.
2007	Global financial crisis.
2008	Dimitry Medvedev is elected President of the Russian Federation; Putin is appointed Prime Minister.
2010	February. Yanukovich wins presidential elections. November. Parliaments voted to abandon NATO membership aspirations.

2012	Putin is elected President of the Russian Federation, Medvedev is appointed Prime Minister.
2013	November. Viktor Yanukovich's government abandons the Association and Trade agreement with the EU in favor of stronger ties with Russia.
	December. Ukrainian police break up student protest camp in Kiev's Independence Square over president Viktor Yanukovich's failure to sign trade deal with EU.

Chronology of Key Events in Russo-Ukrainian Relations after Maidan.

2014	February. Security forces kill at least 77 protesters in Kiev. Yanukovych flees to Russia, opposition takes over.
	March. Russian forces annex Crimea. US and European Union impose harsh sanctions on Russia.
	April. Pro-Russian armed groups seize part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on Russian border. Kiev launches military operation response.
	March. Deployment of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.
	May. The Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics declare independence after referendum.
	May. Petro Poroshenko wins presidential elections.
	July. Poroshenko signs delayed EU association accord.
	July. Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 shot down when flying over eastern Ukraine.
	July. EU agrees on punishing economic sanctions, restricting access of Russian banks and oil companies to long-term western financing.
	September. The rebels, Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe sign a peace deal in Minsk. Meanwhile, Russian troops and heavy military equipment are entering Eastern Ukraine.
	October. Parliamentary elections in Ukraine. Majority for pro-Western parties.

	November. Donetsk and Luhansk pro-Russian groups hold elections not provided for by Minsk plan. Ukraine rescinds pledge for regional autonomy in response.
2015	After failed attempts at reviving the peace process, the leader of the separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine says his forces are going on the offensive.
	February. Germany and France broker new ceasefire deal at talks in Minsk. The deal also includes weapon withdrawals and prisoner exchanges, but key issues remain to be settled.
	March. United Nations warns that an estimated 6,000 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine since April 2014, as violence continues despite ceasefire The OSCE Monitoring Mission in Ukraine is doubled under Russian approval.
	May. Putin meets US Secretary of State Kerry to discuss Minsk II ceasefire regime. Ukraine Annuls Military Agreement with Russia.
2017	Cyberattacks on Ukraine.
	July. Ukraine's association agreement with the EU is ratified by all signatories, to enter into force on 1 September.

Events in Post-Soviet History significant in the perspective of Russo-Ukrainian Economic Interdependence in the Energy Sector

1992 - 1994	After non-payment of gas debts by Ukraine, Russia suspends gas exports several times.
1994	A Ukrainian deputy prime minister agrees with Russia that Gazprom could acquire a 51% stake in the pipeline system.
1995	Russia and Ukraine agree to create Gaztransit, a joint company to operate Ukraine's natural gas transit infrastructure.
2006	Russia cuts off gas shipments to Ukraine as a consequence of failed agreement over gas prices. European Union starts to be concerned about consequences on own gas supply.
2007	Gazprom threatens to cut gas supply to Ukraine because of an unpaid debt.
2008	Gazprom cuts again gas shipments to Ukraine because of failed agreement on payment of debts.
2008	Global financial crisis causes decline in the demand of steel, causing a decline in Ukraine's exports. IMF offers a loan to the country to handle the crisis.

2009	Gas crisis following the failure to reach an agreement for gas prices in 2009. January. Russia hosts international gas conference in Moscow.
2010	Agreement between Medvedev and Yanukovich: Russia agreed to drop in the price of gas exported to Ukraine in exchange for permission to extend Russia's lease of Black Sea Fleet.
2011	Jailing former prime minister Tymoshenko because of abuse of power over a gas deal with Russia in 2009. Europe warned Ukraine of profound implications.
2014	Gas supplies to Ukraine cut off. The European Union tries to mediate the disputes.
2015	Gazprom halts exports of natural gas supply to Ukraine.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Ukraine profile - Timeline." BBC News. August 03, 2017. Accessed November 29, 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18010123>.

3. DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Leonid Kravchuk

First president of independent Ukraine, served from 1991 to 1994. He had to resign from the presidency because of a political crisis. He ran again during the elections in 1994 but was defeated by Kuchma.

Leonid Kuchma

He was the second president of independent Ukraine from 1994 to 2005. His presidency is characterized by many corruption scandals that eventually weakened his public image and rates of approval in the country. During his presidency, the Ukrainian economy suffered from a steep decline until year 2000.

He is well known for being very prone to collaborate and create good ties with Moscow, in fact he signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership” with Russia. Moreover, he endorsed a round of talks with the CIS and recognized Russian to be an official language of the country. Nonetheless, he also signed a special partnership agreement with NATO, raising the possibility of the country to become a member of the alliance.

The role Kuchma has in the Orange Revolution and in the related presidential elections remains unclear. Nowadays, he is involved as Ukraine’s representative at the semi-official peace talks regarding the ongoing conflict in the Donbass.

Viktor Yanukovich

He served as Prime Minister of Ukraine from 2002 to 2004, under President Kuchma. He first ran as a President in 2004, but the election was not accepted by citizens because of suspects of fraud and voter intimidation. The protests related to this election are known as Orange Revolution. The Ukrainian Supreme Court declared the runoff election invalid. After this episode, Viktor Yushchenko was elected, and Yanukovich served as Prime Minister from 2006 to 2007.

Then, he was elected 4th President of Ukraine in 2010, defeating Yulia Tymoshenko.

Yulia Tymoshenko. In 2013, the events of Maidan led to his ousting as President. In fact, he refused to sign the EU association agreement, choosing to have closer ties with Russia instead. The protests of some Ukrainian citizens to this decision, brought the country on the brink of civil war. On February 2014, Yanukovich fled the country. He is now in exile in Russia and wanted in Ukraine for high treason.

Viktor Yushchenko

He was elected 3rd President of Ukraine from 2005 to 2010. He was leader of the opposition to Yanukovich during the 2004 presidential elections. After the facts of the Orange Revolutions, he took the presidency. However, during his presidency his rates of approval among the population decreased dramatically, leading to his defeat at the presidential elections in 2010.

During the Orange Revolution, he fired his government led by Yulia Tymoshenko because of issues of corruption and abuse of power. In 2006, he appointed his opponent Viktor Yanukovich as Prime Minister. In 2007, He dissolved the parliament and called for early elections. He also dismissed illegally three members of the Constitutional Court, preventing it to vote on the constitutionality of his dismissal of the parliament. In 2008, he tried to dismiss the parliament again. In 2010, as outgoing president of Ukraine he rehabilitated one of the most controversial WWII era figures, Stepan Bandera and awarded him Hero of Ukraine. Being Bandera guilty of fascists crimes, his rehabilitation was condemned by the EU, Russia, Poland and Jewish organizations.

Later, he supported the Euromaidan revolution and opposed the Russian intervention in Crimea. Moreover, he advocates NATO membership for Ukraine.

Yulia Tymoshenko

Is Ukrainian politician and was one of the leaders of the Orange Revolution. Moreover, she was the first woman appointed Prime Minister of Ukraine, first in 2005 and then from 2007 to 2010. She is the leader to the party All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland”. She run for the presidency as well, but was defeated both in 2010 and in 2014.

After the election of 2010 a number of criminal cases were brought under court against her. She was accused of abuse of power and sentenced to ten years of jail. However, her persecution and conviction was seen as politically biased by the European Union, which called for her release as a condition to sign the EU association agreement with Ukraine. She was released in 2014 during the Euromaidan revolution. YT supports Ukraine's integration with the European Union as well as NATO membership.

Petro Poroshenko

Is the incumbent president of Ukraine, in office since year 2014. He is a prominent Ukrainian oligarch, owning Roshen – a confectionery company— and a TV channel 5 Kanal. Due to his position in the Ukrainian industry he had many contacts with governmental actors well before becoming president, making him very influential.

Poroshenko actively supported the 2014 Euromaidan protest, including with financial support. He run for president at the elections of 2014 after the removal of Yanukovych. As president elect, he decided to travel to the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk and promised to return Crimea to Ukraine. He is a supporter of NATO membership for Ukraine, and of a deeper integration of the country with the European Union. Domestically he is engaging in the peace plan for Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, he launched the process of amending the Ukrainian constitution to enhance the decentralization of power. Moreover, he is engaging in the fight against corruption at the state level in Ukraine. In fact, he signed a decree to create the new National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin

He is the incumbent president of the Russian Federation since 2012. Previously he was serving as president from 2000 until 2008. Putin was born in Leningrad and started his career as a KGB foreign intelligence officer.

During his first presidency the Russian economy recorded an incredible growth due to high commodities prices. In 2008 he was ineligible to run for a third term

according to the constitution, so the elections were won by Medvedev, who appointed Putin as prime minister. In March 2012 he won again the presidential elections. In this period, Russia entered a period of recession due to falling oil prices and as a consequence of sanctions imposed by the west after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. New presidential elections will be held in Russia in March 2018.

Dmitry Medvedev

He served as president of Russia from 2008 to 2012, and he is the incumbent prime minister. He worked as the Chairman of Gazprom Board of Directors until 2008. He did not run for a second term as a president in 2012, and therefore he was appointed by Putin prime minister and leader of the party United Russia.

As president he launched a program of modernization of the country aiming at decreasing the dependency of Russian economy to oil and gas exports. During his office, Russia won the Russo-Georgian war and signed the New START treaty with the United States. He also increased the cooperation of Russia with the BRICS and gained Russian admission to the WTO. He was the first Russian leader to visit Crimea in 2014 after the annexation by the Russian Federation of the peninsula.

Catherine Ashton

Ashton was the Vice President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy during the times of Maidan and the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis. She supported the determination of Ukrainians to demonstrate for an European perspective and blamed the central government in Kiev for fighting the people demonstrating using force. She also condemned the actions of the members of the political party Right Sector during the crisis.

Viktor Medvedchuk

He is an Ukrainian politician, lawyer and oligarch. Before and after the Orange Revolution he played a role in Ukrainian politics in the opposition to the candidate president Viktor Yushchenko. He is a personal friend of Vladimir Putin and during

the crisis in 2014 he served as a mediator in between the transition government in Kiev and the rebels in Eastern Ukraine. For his involvement in the annexation of Crimea, in March 2014 he was sanctioned by the US and Canada.

Dmytro Yarosh

He is a member of the Parliament of Ukraine (elected in 2014), an activist and the main commander of the Ukrainian Volunteer Army. He was also a leader of the far-right factions Right Sector, from which he withdrew in 2015, founding in 2016 a new organization called Governmental Initiative of Yarosh.

Stepan Bandera (1909-1959)

He was an Ukrainian political activist and a leader of the nationalist and independence movement in Ukraine. He aligned himself with the Nazis when they invaded the Soviet Union, but right after he attempted to proclaim an independent Ukrainian state. In 1956, he was assassinated by a KGB agent in Munich for his collaboration with the Nazis during World War II. In 2010, he was a object of a big scandal in Ukraine because Viktor Yushchenko awarded him the title of Hero of Ukraine. This action was condemned by the European Parliament as well as Russian, Polish and Jewish civil society organizations. Yanukovych later proclaimed the award illegal because of Bandera's collaboration with the Nazi's.

Tetiana Chornovol

Ukrainian activist and journalist that lead the Euromaidan protest campaign. She conducted several corruption reports in Ukraine. During the protest she was victim of many beatings. In 2014, she was elected to the Verkhovna Rada, and she is now a member of the parliamentary faction People's Front and a member of the Committee on national security and defense.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk

He is an Ukrainian politician that served as Prime Minister from February 2014 to April 2016. He was one of the leaders of Ukraine's second biggest parties: All-Ukrainian Union "Fatherland". In 2014 he founded a new party People's Front. In 2014 he was forced to resign as a Prime Minister from the President Poroshenko.

Vitali Klitschko

Ukrainian politician, currently incumbent mayor of Kiev since 2014. He is a former leader of the Poroshenko's bloc. In 2010, he founded the party Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform and was elected for the parliament in 2012. He also was a leading figure of the Euromaidan protest. In 2015, UDAR merged into Poroshenko's bloc and Klitschko became the new party leader.

Vitaliy Zakharchenko

Ukrainian and Russia politician and consultant at Russia's Rostec state corporation. He served as Ukraine's minister of Internal Affairs, but was suspended from duties from the parliament in 2014. As a minister of Internal Affairs he was the head of the Ukrainian national police service during Euromaidan, and he was accused of violence against the protesters.

Vadym Novynsky

Russo-Ukrainian oligarch who made his fortune during the 90s through the privatization of many Ukrainian enterprises. He supports Russian interests in Ukraine, especially supporting the Ukrainian branch of the Orthodox Church. As an independent candidate he participated in the elections in Sevastopol in 2013. In 2013 he joined the Party of Regions. In 2014, he was banned from entering the Crimean Peninsula, after the annexation by Russia.

Mykola Azarov

Ukrainian politician, Prime Minister of Ukraine from 2010 to 2014. Following the victory of Yanukovich in the 2010 presidential elections, Azarov succeeded him as a leader of the Party of Regions and after that appointed PM. He resigned after the upraise of Euromaidan. Now, he is internationally wanted for abuse of power.

Serhiy Arbuzov

Became interim prime minister after the resignation of Azarov in 2014. He is now wanted by the general prosecutor of Ukraine.

Victoria Nuland

Former assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the US State Department. She was the US point person for the Ukrainian crisis. She was a key figure in establishing loan guarantees to Ukraine as well as the provision of assistance to the Ukrainian military and border guard. She was a supporter of a harsher line toward Russia and on this note she was the protagonist of a scandal because of a phone call with Goeffrey Pyatt, in which she affirmed “Fuck the EU”.

Stefan Füle

Served as European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy from 2010 to 2014. He has been a negotiator during the summit in Vilnius in November 2013 of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, witnessing the last moment drop out of Yanukovych.

Angela Merkel

Chancellor of Germany, played a significant role in the Ukraine crisis as a leader of the position of the European Union. She insisted on the liberation of Timoshenko as a condition to go ahead with the Association Agreement with Ukraine. She also acted as a mediator with Putin as she can speak Russian and because of the connections of Germany to Russia during the Cold War. She was the main supporter of imposing financial sanctions to Russia as a reaction of its annexation of Crimea, and she convinced both the German business as other more skeptical European countries that that was the best reaction possible. Merkel also initiated talk in Geneva in order to de-escalate the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, she was also part of the so called Normandy Contact Group (France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine), of which talks aimed at resolving the situation in Eastern Ukraine.

Sergei Glazyev

Russian politician and economist, advisor to Vladimir Putin on regional and economic integration policy.

In an interview with the *National Interest*, Glazyev said:

"The entire crisis in Ukraine was orchestrated, provoked, and financed by American institutions in cooperation with their European partners. They financed neo-Nazis. For fifteen years, the U.S. and Europeans financed neo-Nazis' training, their camps, and preparation. By U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland's acknowledgement, the State Department spent \$5 billion on the creation of an anti-Russian political and paramilitary elite. This work led to the sad situation that now in Ukraine neo-Nazi and neo-fascists ideas prevail, as does admiration for, more than anything, Stepan Bandera's associates who in their time murdered Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, and whomever they wanted, burning or otherwise killing them under Nazi leadership."

He was one of the main opposers of Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU and he warned Ukraine about its possible economic consequences. Nowadays, he argues that Ukraine is just an occupied territory with no legitimate power, following instructions from the American Embassy.

Geoffrey Pyatt

US Ambassador to Ukraine from 2013 to 2016. He supported the 2014 revolution against President Yanukovich and defined as terrorist pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. He was also in the middle of a scandal because of his phone conversation with Victoria Nuland.

Oleksandr Motysk

He is a Ukrainian diplomat, Ambassador of Ukraine to the US from 2010 to 2015.

Christof Weil

Ambassador of Germany to Ukraine from 2012 to 2016.

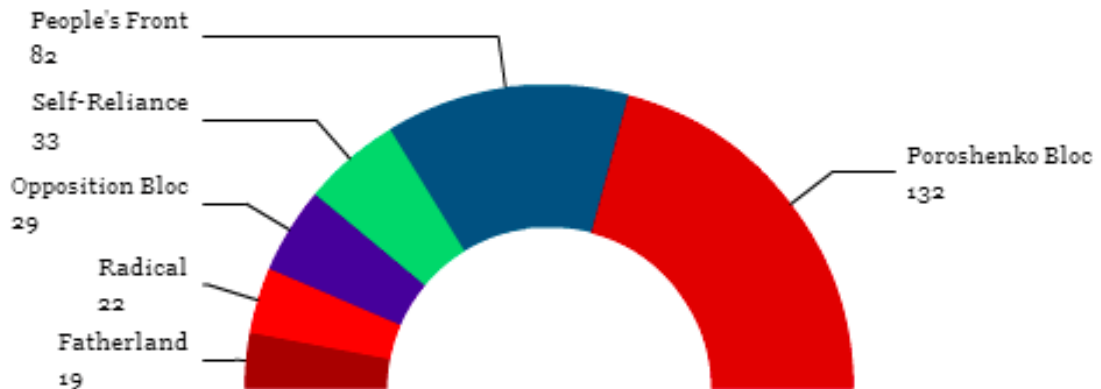
Michael McFaul

US ambassador to Russia from 2012 to 2014.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ "Ukraine Crisis: Key Players in Eastern Unrest." BBC News. August 28, 2014. Accessed June 14, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27211501>.

Political factions in Ukraine (2014 elections)

Ukraine: Verkhovna Rada



Poroshenko Bloc “Solidarity”: formed in August 2014, has its roots in the parliamentary group Solidarity formed in 2000. Political position: center-right. The leader is Vitali Klitschko. The founding ideologies are liberal conservatism and pro-Europeanism.

People’s Front: founded by Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Oleksandr Turchynov in March 2014 from the split from All-Ukrainian Union “Fatherland”. It’s a right wing party and the founding ideologies are Ukrainian nationalism, populism, economic liberalism, national conservatism and pro-Europeanism.

Self-Reliance: founded by Andriy Sadovyi in December 2012, it is a center-right party. the founding ideologies are Christian Wikipedia. June 11, 2018. Accessed June 14, 2018. <https://www.wikipedia.org/>.

Democracy, Conservatism and Pro-Europeanism.

Opposition Bloc: led by Yuriy Boyko, was founded in April 2010 and it’s a centre-left party. It included the Party of Development of Ukraine, All-Ukrainian Union Center, Ukraine—Forward!, Labour Ukraine, New Politics, State Neutrality. It was

preceded by the Party of Regions and its founding ideologies are social liberalism, multilingualism, regionalism and Euroscepticism.

Radical Party: founded in 2010 and led by Oleh Lyashko. The main ideologies are Ukrainian nationalism, civic nationalism, radicalism, right-wing nationalism, left-wing populism, agrarianism and soft Euroscepticism.

Fatherland: led by Yulia Tymoshenko it was found in 1999. It is a center-right party and its ideologies are conservatism, liberal democracy and pro-Europeanism.²¹¹

²¹¹ "List of Political Parties in Ukraine." Wikipedia. June 13, 2018. Accessed June 14, 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Ukraine.

Positions of European Countries on the Ukrainian crisis

Germany

Acted as a mediator between the EU, the US and Russia, arguing that the Cold War is over. Chancellor Merkel was one of the main supporters of the Trade and Association Agreement of the EU with Ukraine and particularly insisted on the need to free Tymoshenko by the Ukrainian government as a condition for a successful agreement. Germany was also one of the countries taking part to the Normandy Format, a series of talks to de-escalate the situation in the Donbass. Germany condemned the use of violence against demonstrators in Kiev and supports a rapprochement of Ukraine to the EU. Germany was on the forefront of European diplomacy on the Ukrainian crisis, and in many occasions had to push forward the EU to engage more in the management and the resolution of the crisis.

France

France, with Germany participated to the drafting and the signing of the Minsk Agreement as well as to the talks of the Normandy format. France adopted also a policy of firmness and dialogue in order to reach an agreement between Russia and Ukraine which was mutually acceptable. Moreover, France provided assistance to Ukraine in a number of areas, both with economic aids as through projects (such as the food security project in the Donbass). France remains fully committed to the Minks Agreement and also during meeting at the OSCE concerning the situation in Ukraine, France demonstrates a high degree of solidarity toward the country and calls for the implementation of the ceasefire.

The UK

Even if the UK was involved to a lower degree in the direct negotiations of the ceasefire as well as in the management of the crisis then France and Germany; it condemned the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian soil and it supported the Minsk Agreement.

Poland

Shared many times its concerns of having again a common border with Russia and also supported a closer association between the EU and Ukraine. Nonetheless, it was one of the countries that were somehow skeptical when it came to imposing sanctions to Russia.

Italy

Italy was more skeptical than Germany and France on the signature of a trade and association agreement between the EU and Ukraine. In fact, representatives of the Italian diplomacy affirmed in more than one occasion that the process of rapprochement between Ukraine and some Western Institutions such as NATO and the EU was a bit accelerated, and this causes a reaction from the side of the Kremlin. Moreover, Italy always distinguished itself for having a “special relationship” with Moscow, that also the Italian Ambassador to Moscow Cesare Maria Regolini defines as “privileged”. Italy is therefore opened to a dialogue with Russia and does not want to sacrifice the good diplomatic relations reached overtime.²¹²

²¹² "Friend or Foe? Mapping the Positions of EU Member States on Russia Sanctions." European Leadership Network. Accessed June 14, 2018.
<https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/friend-or-foe-mapping-the-positions-of-eu-member-states-on-russia-sanctions/>.

PLEDGE OF HONESTY

“On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in a good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.”

Maddalena Dalla Mora

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Maddalena Dalla Mora". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Maddalena" written in a more compact, stylized manner and the last name "Dalla Mora" written in a more extended, flowing style.

VITA

Maddalena Dalla Mora obtained her bachelor's degree at the University of Bologna in International Relations and Diplomatic Affairs - a challenging interdisciplinary program which includes legal, economic, historical and political aspects of international relations. Maddalena continued her studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna where she pursued a master's degree in Advanced International Studies, which included an exchange semester at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations MGIMO. Her research focuses on crisis management and security issues in Eastern Europe and in the Post-Soviet space, as well as on EU-Russia relations and Russian Foreign policy. Maddalena gained practical experience in the field of international relations, by working in governmental, international, non-governmental and private-sector institutions. For instance, she accomplished a six-month internship at the Permanent Mission of Malta to the International Organizations in Vienna during the period of Maltese Presidency of the European Union. Maddalena has a passion for foreign languages and has thus far attained fluency in Italian, Spanish, German, English, in addition to intermediate proficiency in French and Russian.