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THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS - AN UNPREDICTABLE EVENT?

Ana Maria COSTEA (GHIMIS)*

Abstract: *For years Ukraine tried to balance between the EU and Russia. The strategy proved to be inefficient due to the fact that Ukraine did not hold the required leverage for this kind of strategy and the consequence was observed in the current instability from the Ukrainian state. At the same time, these events are the effect of an announced Russia's change of strategy. Crimea's annexation and the violent acts from Donbas put under question mark the security and stability of the entire European continent. The EU's legitimacy vis-à-vis its global power status given its inability to act regionally in an efficient manner. Additionally, Russia was perceived as a revisionist state that did not follow the international rules anymore. To a certain point the events from Ukraine were viewed as a new type of war in terms of tactics. The present article aims to analyse the degree to which the events from Ukraine were predictable. The main research question of the study revolves around the following: Taking into account Russia's perceptions over itself, Ukraine and the EU, was the Ukrainian crisis a predictable event? Regarding the methodology, the article will concentrate on document analysis (primary and secondary sources), in order to emphasize the correlation between the different/similar meanings that are displayed within the strategic, official documents and the discourse level, to see if there were some hints regarding the events that were to be developed.*

Keywords: EU; perceptions; predictability; Russia; Ukraine

JEL classification: F51

Introduction

"Nothing in politics happens by accident. If something does happen, it was planned that way."

- Franklin Roosevelt.

In August 2008, the demarcation between the East and the West was clearly established. It was a pivotal moment for the Russian foreign policy towards the West as it highlighted the change of paradigm from cooperation towards competition. The Georgian war proved both the Russian power and readiness for unilateralism when considered a suitable option, but also its limitations in terms of interdependence between it and the Western powers. Although Medvedev might have been perceived as a more pro- Western leader since his discourse was based on emphasizing the readiness of Moscow to cooperate with the West, the Georgian war proved the contrary. After 2008, the United State (US)

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and the European Union (EU) implemented the reset policy and tried to rebuild a predictable relationship with Russia. Simultaneously the EU developed the Eastern Partnership which was perceived as a competitive program against the Russian influence in the area by the latter. The program was designed to offer intensives for six Eastern States (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) in order for them to reach the European standards for economic benefits like the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) and the Association Agreements (AA), but without the final political advantage, namely the membership perspectives. In response, using the direct proportionality method, the Russian Federation implemented what was to be called the Eurasian Union project. Since the Russian frustration against the Eastern states like Moldova and Ukraine pivoting towards the West was evident, Moscow's behaviour may be seen as predictable. Using the stick strategy of cutting the energy exports towards these states or increasing the prices per 1000 cubic metres in terms of natural gas, banning their imports of good (ex. the Moldovan wines) on the Russian markets, etc. were traditional foreign policy tools for Putin. But, what was to be called the game changer came in March 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea, breaking the provisions of the international principles, laws and the provisions of the Budapest Memorandum from 1994. However, if we analyse the Russian behaviour and the discourse of Vladimir Putin since he came to power in the 2000s, we may acknowledge the fact that maybe the events from Ukraine were not a surprise and that the Russian authorities may have taken into consideration a war in Ukraine as a viable option. We may also realise that the EU, especially, should have acted differently, or at least it should have reacted sooner. The present article aims to analyse the degree to which the events from Ukraine were predictable, in the sense that the West might have expected the Russian reactions given its behaviour since especially the Georgian war, but also the way it defines itself. Regarding the research questions that I intend to answer to within this article, they are the following: taking into account Russia's perceptions over itself, Ukraine and the EU, was the Ukrainian crisis a predictable event? Is Ukraine a grantable cost for Russia to become the unilateralist power of the system? Regarding the methodology, the article is part of a larger research regarding the predictability of the Ukrainian events, taking into consideration the strategic documents of the Russian Federation since Putin came into power and his discourses regarding the EU, NATO, US and Eastern Europe. The present article will concentrate on the document analysis (primary and secondary sources) in order to emphasize the correlation between the different/similar meanings that are displayed within the strategic, official documents and the discourse level, and nevertheless to see if there were some hints regarding the events that were to be developed. From a theoretical point of view, I will use the neo-realist paradigm proposed by Mearsheimer (2001) in

which the international system is anarchic, states are rational and act on offensive manner in order to protect themselves and even to survive.

1. Return to the Russian exceptionalism and competition

After the end of the Cold War through the disbandment of USSR, Russia, the official follower, lost its status of a great power that was equal among the group of states that influenced the international relations scene. From this status of being a previous global power that lost even its regional influence, Russia succeeded in emerging itself as a great power that has the capabilities to defend its international interests and prestige by using its military and economic instruments. In order to understand the Russian recent unilateral behaviour and the Ukrainian crisis we must firstly analyse the Russian behaviour over the years, in relation with other players, be them great powers or not, thus, the emphasise will be on resuming and highlighting the main Russian behaviour patterns in relation to the West. Also, we have to take into consideration some constant elements when defining the Russian foreign policy and its perceptions over itself: Russia was and still is the largest country in the world, with no natural borders. This lack of natural protection against the outside may give instability in terms of national security, hence over the years the Russian borders expanded and contracted periodically. This need to find secure frontiers generated in Moscow an expansion need based strategy which can be seen during the First World War in its attempts to seize Dardanelles and Poland and during the Second World War with Eastern Europe. This expansion based strategy had its limits in 1917, in the case of the Russian Empire, and in 1989 with the Soviet Union when the system could no longer sustain itself (Mankoff, 2012, pp. 265-266). The Russian desire and perceived need to be a great power remained constant over the years and it can be seen even today with some variations. Although the disbandment of USSR is seen as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (cited in Bigg, 2005) in the eyes of Russian leaders, nowadays a return to that status quo is unlikely and even irrational from the costs-benefits point of view.

On the one hand, this permanent perceived need of the authorities to secure the Russian borders by expanding them, has generated a fundamental need to be a regional hegemon with no challenger in its region. On the other hand, the current need to protect its developed influence beyond the Russian national borders can be explained also by the fact that Moscow has two neighbours with an expanding influence, at the West the EU and NATO and at the East China. Apart from this need, we must also keep in mind other constant elements: the fact that Russia has huge energy resources and infrastructure in order to export them, possesses a nuclear arsenal that is comparable with only that

of US, is a permanent member of the Security Council within the UN, and is part of BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Hence, Russia had and still has the means to be an important player at international level.

In terms of behavioural pattern, I will relate to Andrei Tsygankov's classification of Russian behaviour throughout history. He identified mainly three patterns of behaviour in terms of foreign policy: cooperation, defensiveness and assertiveness. In the case of the first pattern we can recall the following examples: the Holy Alliance (1815-1853), the Soviet effort to stop Hitler and the war on terror (2001-2005). Russia proved patterns of defensiveness in its trying to contain the NATO's expansion after the Cold War (1995-2000) and became assertive in the case of the Cold War period, the Georgian War (Tsygankov, 2012, pp. 8-9) and I will add the current Ukrainian crisis. These episodes coincide with the perceived external pressures that may change the power of Russia at its external borders, the case of the latter being the 2008 Bucharest Summit and the mentioning of Georgia (thus the expansion of NATO), the 2013 Vilnius Summit and the signing of the AA between Ukraine and the EU (thus the expansion of the EU's influence and possible of NATO's).

The Near Abroad territories had a special place in the Russian foreign policy since the '90s in the sense that they were perceived as being the Russian right and responsibility in terms of projecting its interests in the immediate neighbourhood especially after the EU and NATO expansion in Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, the Baltic States, etc.). Feeling the constant need to protect its borders, and keeping in mind the Russian capabilities and its status over the years, the Russian foreign policy proved itself to be rather constant and did not witness a fundamental change over the years. Rather than that, it faced fluctuations in terms of power and not in terms of interests (Mankoff, 2012, p.265). Taking into consideration these fluctuations, Russia almost obsessively felt the need to demand its right to have an independent policy first from the Holy Roman Empire (Tsygankov, 2012, p.31) and nowadays from the West. This is a constant also in Putin Speech from the 2007 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy:

“Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today. At the same time, we are well aware of how the world has changed and we have a realistic sense of our own opportunities and potential” (President of Russia website, 2007).

Therefore, we can see a country that perceives exceptional in itself, comprising two continents, the largest state in the world that is claiming its right to be independent. For Putin the international

balance of power should change as it comprised only one superpower that was creating a unipolar world and this order was not suitable for Russia's interests since the American power represented the traditional competitor since the Cold War. More likely, Putin was in favour of creating a system of great powers that resembled with the Concert of Europe from the nineteenth century, hence a multipolar system in which Russia is part of the group and has its influence, interests and security protected by this balance of power. In his view, Russia had the right; therefore it had the legitimacy to conduct a foreign policy that was independent, thus distinct from the one of the sole superpower. Taking this aspect into consideration this policy was different, if not divergent from the others. This aspect was seen one year later when Moscow proved that it must be taken into account by the Western powers especially when conducting politics in its area of influence (ex: Eastern Europe-the Georgian war from August 2008). For Putin this was the potential that Russia had and he had to regain Russia's former status. According to the discourse, this demand is seen as a moral duty (Costea, 2015, pp. 78-79).

Referring to the domestic level in the early 2000 before Putin came to power, the lack of external power projection was partly explained by the fact that Russia faced some international changes that needed time in order to produce positive results. The president at that time, Boris Eltin proposed a domestic policy that emphasised the liberalisation of the market and the external cooperation with other states, players like US and the EU. The economic policy of what was called the "shock therapy" had negative outcomes for the Russian society that was already passing through the loss of international prestige once the Cold War ended. The unemployment rate increased, the national currency depreciated thus decreasing the life quality of the Russian citizens. Additionally, the political climate from Russia was facing large contradictions due to numerous misunderstandings between the executive and the legislative bodies (Hill and Gaddy, 2013, p. 18). All these aspects generated discontent among the Russian voters for Eltin's reforms and prepared the ground for a more traditional assertive president. The new elected leader of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, won the elections from 2000s and came to power as a man "from nowhere" (Hill and Gaddy, 2013, p.3) in particular, with little known personal history. Unlike his predecessor, Putin emphasised Russia's role at international level through cooperation, as it was in the case of war on terror, but at the same time, when referring to Russia's area of influence he sustained Russia's natural right to defend it and to imply its own interests upon it, regardless of the fact that it may be in contradiction or in competition with other regional powers. He reaffirmed the Eurasian distinct identity of the Russian Federation, emphasizing its national exceptionality in one of his famous quotes, immediately after he became the country's president: "*Russia has always seen itself as a Eurasian country*" (Dughin, 2014, p.20), thus

not solely a European state, nor an Asian one. The reestablishment of this distinct identity from the West was strongly political grounded and reminded the Western decision makers of the classic geopolitics (Costea, 2015, pp. 75-80). Moreover, as Russia approached the assertiveness status and saw Europe as a threat in terms of identity it stopped defining itself as being European. One example in this case is the draft Foundations of the Russian Cultural Policy from spring 2014 developed by the Russian Ministry of Culture, where the statement “Russia is not Europe” was introduced. One month after the statement was deleted, but the strategic relationship towards the West remained clear (Lipman, 2016).

Russia’s main competition in its area of influence according to Russia’s perceptions is the European Union’s and NATO’s expansion towards East. Apart from the elements that pertain to Russia as a great power and thus of its natural area of influence (Eastern Europe), Ukraine is a quintessential element for the Russian European identity and the Russian language. For many years the Russian Federation tried to rebuild the so-called “Russian-Soviet identity”. According to this belief, the Ukrainian people are presented as “*Russian people that speak one of the dialects of the Russian language*”, therefore in Russian mind-set, Ukraine was seen as a natural part of Russia, and not as an independent and autonomous state with its own national exceptionalism (Perepelytsia, 2010, p.105). Therefore, when Ukraine started to develop a closer bilateral relation with NATO in 2008, after the Bucharest summit, Moscow reacted very strongly and declared that it intended to “*aim nuclear missiles at Ukraine if its neighbour and former fraternal republic in the Soviet Union joins the NATO alliance (...)*” (Finn, 2008). At the same time, the Russian logic and philosophy regarding itself generated an assertive behaviour, since Russia felt threatened and needed a defensive response to an expanding West towards Russia’s own backyard.

Therefore, in order to understand Moscow’s behaviour, we must look through Russian lens, thus we must understand how Russia is defining itself. In this sense, I would cite Emile Durkheim “*As long as there are States, so there will be national pride, and nothing can be more warranted*” (Durkheim, 1992, p. 75). But in order to develop a glibly analysis over the predictability or unpredictability of the Ukrainian crisis, simultaneously we must analyse the policies that the EU implemented in the Eastern European region since it is perceived as being a challenger to Russia’s regional hegemonic position.

2. The European Union and its Eastern Neighbourhood

After the big bang enlargement, the EU transformed itself from an international organization that had 15 member states mainly Western powers to a 27 members international organization that comprised central and eastern European states. At the same time, we must take into account the fact that the EU saw itself as a global power (EU Security Strategy, 2003, p.1.), hence, as Russia it had the legitimacy, capabilities and responsibility to act beyond its territory. As Russia may seem dependent on its own geographical location, the interests the new EU member states were predictably mainly located at the Eastern frontier of the EU, namely, Ukraine in the case of Poland, the Republic of Moldova in the case of Romania, and the Eastern frontier in the case of the Baltic States. The EU decision makers saw this change since 2004, when the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched. The policy aimed at creating a neighbourhood characterized by a high level of stability and security and encompassed three distinct regions: the Mediterranean region (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia), the Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and Eastern Europe (the Republic of Moldova, Belarus, Ukraine). Although the Russian Federation was invited to be part of the policy's programs, it denied. The choice is rather predictable if we think of the Russian aforementioned logic and almost obsessive demand of equality with other international powers. Being part of the ENP would have meant in the Russian eyes the acknowledgement of the fact that the European soft model was a better model than the Russian one. This would be a clear message for the non EU eastern states that orbited around Russia: the Western model is the one that should be adopted in the detriment of the Russian one which being built in antithesis with the Western one loses its meaning. Additionally, being put on the same position as Libya for example was not something that would be acceptable for Moscow since as an auto-defined Eurasian power (Sengupta, 2009, p. 38), Russia is not just a neighbour of the EU, it is already a great power.

From a political, security grounded point of view, the ENP can be interpreted as an alternative to the enlargement policy, given the fact that the EU faced the biggest wave of enlargement till present and needed time to adjust to those changes. Although some countries that are part of the ENP do not want or cannot be part of the EU due to the geographical reasons, not being part of the European continent, the Eastern states like Ukraine and Moldova expressed their choice for membership perspectives and their disapproval of being part of a policy that comprised the EU neighbourhood although they were European states. Nevertheless the ENP was an opportunity for these states since it represented a first step towards the EU. After implementation, the policy faced large criticism due

to the fact that it mainly used “a one size fits all” policy although the neighbouring states were too different to be possibly treated in the same manner. Therefore, the ENP’s success was and still is questionable, given the Syrian and Ukrainian current dynamics and the program’s objective of creating a peaceful neighbouring area.

In 2008, facing with major security challenges, the EU needed to respond accordingly especially after the Georgian war erupted. Thus, Poland together with Sweden launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program, which is a more focused version of the ENP. It encompassed only 6 countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). The middle way offered by the EaP proved to work counterproductively for both the EU and its external partners. If we correlate the perceived needs of the partners with the activities and the purpose of the program we will see that often they do not converge, being rather a middle way in which the EU was trying to implement an incremental method in order to develop an economic and political relationship with six Eastern European states without giving clear perspectives. On one hand we can identify: states that wanted to become EU member states like Moldova, Georgia and to a certain extend Ukraine, states that did not want to develop a closer relationship towards the EU like Belarus and Armenia, states that wanted to balance both the EU and Russia like Azerbaijan, states that presented domestic vulnerabilities like frozen conflicts: Moldova-Transnistria, Georgia-South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Armenia and Azerbaijan-Nagorno Karabach; states that presented themselves with a large number of Russian speaking minorities: Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia; and states that had foreign military presence on their territories: Moldova, Georgia. (Costea, 2015, p. 93)

At the same time, although dysfunctional, the EaP came with two threatening elements in the Russian view, the AA and the DCFTA. Regardless of the fact that they did not offer the membership perspectives that Ukraine hoped for, in its case they emphasized a rapprochement of Kiev towards the Western model and a balancing action against the Russian one.

Given these regional dynamics, I will further refer to the Ukrainian crisis, developing a two level analysis: domestic and external level.

3. Ukraine within the Cold War logic

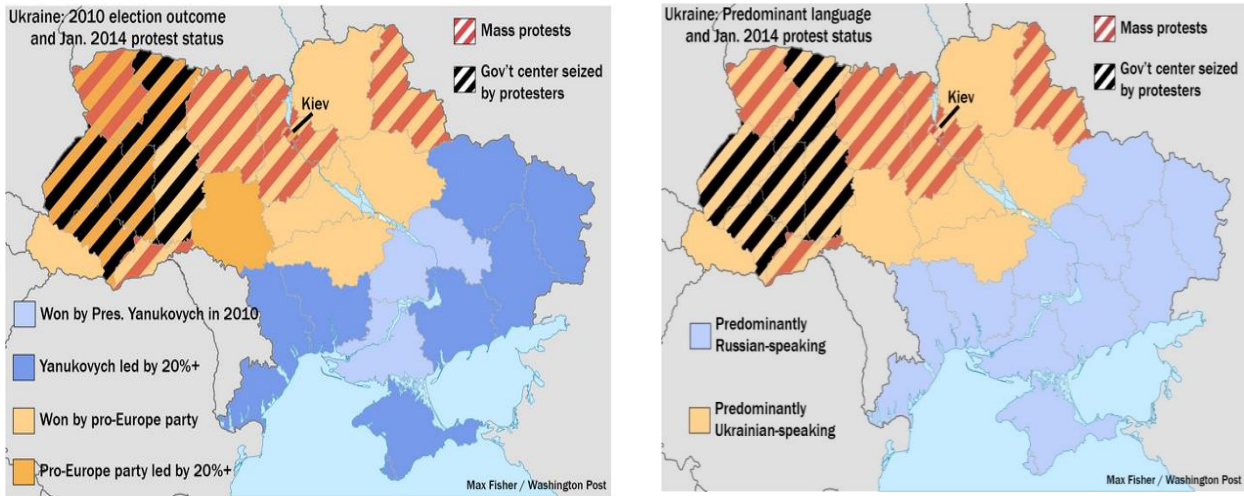
Before the Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit in 2013 Ukraine was considered to be the preferred state to sign an AA, but two weeks before the meeting the ex-President from Kiev, Viktor Yanukovich, announced that his state will not sign it due to the economic problems that the Ukrainian state was facing. Simultaneously, it was invited to enter the Russian led Custom Union, but an

essential condition was to be exclusively part of the latter structures. This position was not a novelty for the authorities from Kiev since for years it tried to balance between the two regional powers that surrounded it, the Russian Federation and the EU. This balancing based strategy proved to be counterproductive for the Ukrainian economy and security since it proved to remain blocked in this position, a position that ultimately generated a doubtful status quo at the regional level. At the same time, in order to work, this strategy implies a relatively stable political and economic system and a limited dependency of the player vis-à-vis the powers it tries to balance, factors that are not present in the case of Ukraine as we will further see.

Yanukovich's refusal to sign the AA generated what was known the Euromaidan and the change of the Ukrainian Prime Minister, Nikolai Azarov (ITAR TASS, 2014) and ultimately of the President. At the regional level, the regional power, the EU, sustained the democratic civil moves and tried intervene and to control the already escalating acts of violence through the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland. The other part of the negotiations was the Russian Federation, which perceived the change of Yanukovich as a threat to its interests especially in relation with its military base in Crimea. The support of the Euromaidan towards the West generated fears in Moscow that Crimea may become a NATO military base (Mearsheimer, 2014), thus losing one of its strategic points in the Black Sea. As predictably, it refused to sign the agreement as it clearly did not follow its interests in the region since the current status-quo worked more in its favour because an unstable, uncontrollable and unsecure Ukraine would be unable to join the EU and approach NATO. Additionally Moscow's perceptions were that the EU was too divided so it could not have offered Kiev the needed support. Within this framework Russia offered its financial support and tried to keep Ukraine on its desired path (Oliphant and Strange, 2014), using the carrot strategy.

At the same time, I will add to the analysis the internal level. The fragmented domestic situation from Ukraine generated centrifugal behaviour patterns at the Eastern part of the state due to the fact that there lived a large part of the Russian minority that preferred the Russian led international structures. This domestic situation created a vulnerable position for the national security of Ukraine, fact that was present for years in the Ukrainian society. The following maps for example illustrate the results of the 2010 and 2014 election coupled with the places where the protests erupted adding the map of ethnicity on the Ukrainian territory.

Figure 1 – Ukraine's protests linked with the 2010 election results



Source: Fisher, 2014

After the protests erupted and the state was divided once again between the East and the West, the Russian pressures increased. Although not designed to be implemented, Vladimir Putin asked the approval of the Russian Rada to deploy military forces to protect the ethnic Russians from Crimea (The Moscow Times, 2014) since the security of the Russian citizens that live abroad is one of the main elements of Russian's right to act beyond its borders according to the Russian laws. Within its Constitution, the article 61, "the Russian Federation shall guarantee to its citizens protection and patronage abroad" (The Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993). This was the justification in the case of the Georgian intervention and was used also in the case of Crimea. This article offered the Russian leaders the legitimacy to act having the legal support and ensured the domestic approval of the Russian voters. Additionally, this article is in accordance with the Russian philosophy of protecting itself and its people from external threats. Using this argument the actions of Moscow were not perceived by the domestic level as being assertive, but rather based on defensive grounds and more like a moral responsibility of the Russian state to protect all its citizens, not only those that live within its national borders. This element from the Russian Constitution can also be interpreted as a declaration of being a regional power that has the right, legitimacy, capability and the moral duty to act beyond its territory. Thus in Russian perception this kind of action, although defined at international level as being offensive, can and would take the form of a defensive action against an outside threat. Although it creates the suitable environment for the authorities from Moscow to act in order to protect, the annexation of Crimea can hardly be defined as a defensive act and a democratic result since the Crimean citizens were hardly persecuted and although their rights were limited, they were not vitally threatened. Thus, although the referendum results were relatively expected, 93% of

the respondents wanted to join Russia, when referring to the questions of the referendum to which the Crimean citizens had to respond to, they were the following: “*Are you in favour of unifying Crimea with Russia as a part of the Russian Federation?*” and “*Are you in favour of restoring the 1992 constitution and the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine?*” (Euronews, 2014) In terms of available choices, they rather did not exist, since the Constitution from 1992 offered a special status of Crimea. Therefore, ultimately the return of this peninsula to the previous ante Vilnius status quo was not possible. Apart from the annexation, the south-eastern part of Ukraine witnessed series of protests and even violent acts between the pro-Russian rebels and the Ukrainian authorities, leaving the Ukrainian state in a situation in which its territorial integrity and its domestic security are questioned by a frozen conflict building scenario.

Seen at the regional level, taking into consideration the competition between the regional players, the events from Ukraine can be explained by the EU’s lack of unity and clear perspectives over Eastern Europe. At the level of implemented programs, although it created incentives for Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, etc. to make reforms and to reach the European standards through the EaP, the membership desiderate remained unspoken. Additionally, although EaP was designed to answer the specific issues of the Eastern European states, the six countries present themselves with different vulnerabilities and opportunities (frozen conflicts: Transnistria- the Republic of Moldova; Nagorno Karabakh - Armenia and Azerbaijan; energy importers- Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova; transit states- Ukraine, Belarus; energy exporters-Azerbaijan; countries that want to become EU member states- the Republic of Moldova; countries for which the EU membership is not a national objective- Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia; states that want to pertain a balancing position between Russia and the EU- Azerbaijan, etc.). Therefore, the program did not reach from its inception the Eastern countries’ needs and even more importantly, it did not take into consideration Russia’s reactions. (Costea, 2015, pp. 154-155) On the other hand, at the level of politics, as already mentioned, the EU defines itself as a global power that sustains its soft power model through its normative character to which other actors can relate. Thus, from EU’s perspective Ukraine events after the Vilnius Summit were the expression of the Ukrainian people democratic will towards the West and the actions of Russia were aggressive in their nature and represented the Russian unilateral expression of breaking the international norms like the territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers and the right of a state to conduct its own independent foreign policy.

At the same time, taking into consideration the Russian already implemented actions and following the above-mentioned logic and Russian philosophy over Eastern European region, Putin acted in a defensive manner. Since the accession of the Baltic States both to NATO and the EU,

Russia made it clear that it would not allow a further expansion (Mearsheimer, 2014) of its two competitors in its own neighbourhood and would not accept a direct border with them if Ukraine would become a part of the Western organizations, transforming it from an orbit of Russia and a space where the Russian Federation expressed its influence, into a contestant of its regional power. Moreover, Ukraine is not only part of its area of influence, but is a strategic, core interest of Russia since it is defined as being part of the Russian identity. Although the main threat is represented by NATO and there were no membership perspectives for Ukraine neither in NATO, nor in the EU, the trend was quintessential for Russia since signing an AA with the EU would have been the first step in extracting Ukraine from the Russian orbit. Moreover, the general pattern is for a state to firstly become part of the EU and afterwards part of NATO and the nature of Russia's actions were mainly targeting NATO possible expansion, annexing Crimea thus maintaining its influence in the Black Sea and creating the precondition of a frozen conflict in the south eastern part of Ukraine making it impossible for Kiev to comply with the main NATO accession conditions regarding the conflicts with its neighbours and the presence of foreign troops within its national border. All these elements should have been considered factors of predictability and should have been envisioned by the West. Moreover, another factor of predictability should have been the neo-realist aspect of the Russian behaviour patterns, elements that years after years the West has denied to be able to explain the international dynamics. Another element is the role of perceptions upon itself and the other. The entire political philosophy of Putin was and is still based on the antithesis towards the West and the right of Russia to be an equal power that has an independent, thus different policy and liberty to develop a different model. Given the Russian neo-realist behaviour, and the soft power of its neighbour, it developed itself as a military power. Following the logic of this kind of power, it would try to impose itself as a hegemon rather than a leader with a desirable model to be followed.

Conclusions

The Russian Federation proves itself to be rather constant in its behaviour towards the West, especially since after Putin came to power the EU started to be perceived as a threat and NATO redefined itself and developed into a more powerful organization. After 2000 the expansion of both organizations was seen as a threat by the Russian authorities that already felt the almost obsessive need of parity with the West. These elements generated the need to protect itself from the outside, need that ultimately proved assertive in Ukraine. The events from Ukraine do not pose themselves as a surprise since almost all the elements that were developed or were already present there are

predictable. Firstly, in Ukraine the domestic fragmented situation between the voters created huge discrepancies in terms of political choices and ultimately centrifugal behaviours. Secondly, Ukraine never pursued a constant pro-Western strategy towards the West, being more than once hesitant. Thirdly, it was and remained dependent on the Russian energy exports although it was a transit state for the European importers. To all these domestic elements there added the Georgian scenario, the Russian neo-realist strategy, its constant antagonism vis-à-vis the West and the expansion of the EU and NATO in Russia's own backyard. All the aforementioned information created the preconditions of a war that would lead to a frozen conflict on the Ukrainian territory that ultimately would freeze Kiev in a grey zone in which is neither with Russia, nor with the EU/NATO. Taking all these into consideration, we should acknowledge also the West's responsibility in playing in the Russian backyard and not reacting sooner and in a more constant manner.

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