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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Perceptions of Changing Power, Dyadic Rivalries and Security Dilemma Mechanisms in the Wider Black Sea Area

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The main research question of this study concerns the possibility to understand the contemporary "Cold War"-like relations between Russian Federation and some EU/NATO countries as the emergence of a "zero-sum game" based on power and security calculations and on domestic political narratives. Are these strategic players domestically and externally coherent in building their strategies and actions? What kind of power tools do they use? Also one must ask itself if the rivalry-based visions are due to the personal feelings, psychologies and experiences of national leaders, to collective cultural issues or more to structural factors like the systemic polarity (the global distribution of power) and patterns of national security at the regional level. Because if the problem lies with the sub-state level – leader personality and regime type –, all could change if the leaders/regime would be replaced at some time, but if the supra-state structural factors based on power distribution and the cultural patterns prevail, thus the conflict between the West and Russian Federation will continue for a long time.

Certainly, there are a lot of studies trying to emphasize the Russia versus West conflict and their actions/strategies in the Black Sea area[1], but our goal is to focus on the parallel between real power capabilities of the involved nations and their perceived strength and weakness, as seen by political and military elites. We combine the analysis of (quantifiable) material elements such as weapons possession, defense investments, oil and gas assets with perceptions of strength and vulnerability and the need to accomplish the collective needs of each nation. Security dilemma mechanisms and the offense-defence balance, as some favorite instruments used by structural neo-realists, will be used for explaining the ongoing crisis and tensions between Moscow

[1] Examples: Mitat Çelikpala, Dimitrios Triantaphyllou, "The Changing Face of Black Sea Security", *Ponars Eurasia*, 31 May 2016; J. Bugajski, P.B. Doran, "Black Sea Rising. Russia's Strategy in Southeast Europe", Black Sea Strategic Report No.1, Center for European Policy Analysis, February 2016; G. Flikke (ed.), *The Shifting Geopolitics of Black Sea Region*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2011.

and the EU-NATO countries which perceive its policies as a threat to European security. But the instruments of cognitive psychology are also interesting and help diminishing the extreme reliance on material factors when explaining the foreign policy behaviour of state leaders.

Of course, the first question one should ask before trying to understand the power and security "games" in the Black Sea region is why this issue is important? Nobody could say that the Black Sea area is at the core of the struggle among word powers for future systemic hegemony, since it is far remote from the Asia-Pacific zone (main area of rivalry between USA and China, the first and second military and economic powers in the world) and it has only one state with a population more than 100 million (Russia) and no economy worthing at least 2 trillion USD by year. But the Black Sea is nevertheless important for European and Euro-Atlantic security since it allows NATO/EU countries to interact with the states of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, with the Middle East area, and to prevent revisionist challangers from contesters of the *status quo* inherited from the end of the Cold War. It is a turbulent area, experiencing civil wars, frozen conflicts, terrorism and immigration, also with the risk of becoming a real frontline between NATO states and Russia or a coalition of Eurasian powers. The BS region was defined as a geopolitical region after the Cold War, when the West tried to block a Russian attempt to come back and recreate its empire and also wanted to avoid the "jugoslavization" of the post-communist states.

Nowadays, the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union is developing in the opposition with the European Union common market. Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia have to chose and can be sanctionned by the losing side. Maybe some optimists dream at a cooperative and complementary framework among these economic blocks but we see more rivalry and competitive gains than cooperation, especially after Russia annexed Crimea (2014) and was targeted by western economic sanctions. EU abandoned talks on a new EU-Russia Strategic Partnership Agreement and suspended discussions on visa-free regime for Moscow**.**

The Black Sea region (or "wider Black Sea Area" – WBSA – if one includes also the Southern Caucasus' states) must be defined as a "security complex"[2], whose security architecture is made by the interaction of the various state and non-state actors, or as a geopolitical region, but this kind of decoupage take into account especially the visions and interests of regional and great powers. The riparian states are very heterogenous, they greatly differ in

[2] The British IR expert Barry Buzan defined the s.c. as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another". See Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London 1991, p. 90.

territory, population, economy and strategic affilitions[3]. The problem is that these countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine and Turkey, plus the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan – do not have the same strategic culture, or similar national interests, they do not perceive themselves, at the level of political and economic elites, as being part of the same area and having a common Black Sea identity. Even their collective norms and values are different: NATO countries are democracies and liberal systems (even Turkey which now experiences a strong authoritarian derive, one which was greatly enhanced after the failed coup d'Etat from July 2016), Russia is a psuedo-democracy, while the former Soviet states are either incipient democracies or authoritarian regimes. There is no collective security structure, no big security organisation to ensure cooperation and dialogue. The Black Sea region does not have a mini-NATO, no EU-like institution, no common court of justice and the OSCE which cover all the wider Black Sea Area (WBSA) is too diluted and too vast to be called a Black Sea organisation. The NATO-Russian Council is still paralyzed after Russia annexed Crimea. While the Turkish-initiated organisation Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is more a diplomatic tool and a forum for dialogue but lacks a strategic dimension. If the local countries could have perfectly complementary economies, free trade, transnational strong links, people to people contacts and visa-free regimes, this could bring in the end the emergence of a regional identity and maybe also the birth of a similar strategic culture. The truth is that for small states like Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan, the main players in the region – NATO, EU and Russian Federation are simply too big and too strong to deal with. They cannot freely chose their allies, they are not allowed to change their preferences by deciding between NATO and Russia, or between EU and Eurasian Economic Union, and they see that NATO and EU as a whole do not ask them to integrate and show their loialty, on the contrary the West keep them at its gates, as simple security and economic partners. Also their public opinions are heavily divided on which big power and protector to choose.

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[3] Vladimir Ryabtsev, "Why Is There No 'Security Complex' in the Black Sea-Caucasus Region?", https://ifsh.de/file-CORE/documents/yearbook/english/06/Ryabtsev-en.pdf, accessed on May 24, 2016. The author rejects the idea that the WBSA could be a real security complex: "When we speak about a security complex, what we mean is a special regulatory mechanism. This regulatory mechanism is characterized by a quality of interstate interactions within a specific zone of the world (thus it is important that the states belong to single geographic zone), when the conditions conducive to the emergence of dissension, disputes, and conflicts between the states are reduced to the achievable minimum. At the same time, the complex provides a framework within which a sophisticated, efficient, and effective system of procedures, instruments, and mechanisms for managing crisis and conflict situations exists. This is based on a system of monitoring that uses a scale applicable to situations in all countries of the region, 'tied' with one organizational and conceptual 'knot'". See p. 98.

Russia is the biggest state in the region (and in the world), connecting the Pacific Ocean and the Black Sea, it has by far the biggest military budget in the WBSA and is the only riparian state to have a U.N. Security Council permanent seat and also the biggest number of nuclear weapons. No other Black Sea states has its own nuclear weapons. Together with Turkey, they are the inheritors of two former land-empires which in the past has been based on militant religions: Christian Ortodoxy and Sunni Islam. Moscow dreamed at being the "Third Rome" and to be the leader of the Slav populations of Eastern Europe (Panslavism and Orthodox solidarity)[4], then leader of communist world, while Istanbul aspired at ruling all the (Sunni) muslim world using the Caliphate institutions and pretige, then at being the ruler of all Turks (Pan-Turkism) in Eurasia[5]. During the Cold War they were situated in opposing camps, with Russia trying to force its access to the Turkish straits (consequently being deterred by the USA) and Ankara taking part in the US-led containment strategy (later assumed by NATO as a whole) and controlling the access to the sea for non-riparian countries by invoking the Montreux Convention of 1936. Without Washington standing by its side, Ankara would probably not have been able to ensure the respect of international law via Montreux, if confronted by a very assertive Soviet Russia. If Turkey will decide during a polical crisis to block Russia's access through the Straits invoking the Montreux privisions (which stated that Turkey may deny access to states with which it is at war or in iminent risk of war), this would mean for Moscow a lack of maritime communication between the bases in Mediterranean (Tartus, Latakia etc) and those in the Black Sea (Sevastopol etc)[6]. Since Putin and Erdogan are both strong carismatic and risk-seeking leaders who do not like taking steps back for not losing popularity and domestically risk regime change, since they accept the brinkmanship strategy, most annalysts supposed it would have been very difficult to find an agreement among them[7]. (It seems they were wrong since in

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4 Vladislav B. Sotirović, "Russia's Balkan Politics: From the Politics of Pan-Slavic Reciprocity of the Tsarist Russia to the 'Realpolitic' of the Republic of Gazprom Russia", http://global-politics.eu/2016/10/18/russias-balkan-politics-politics-pan-slavic-reciprocity-tsarist-russia-realpolitic-republic-gazprom-russia/, 18 October 2010.

5 Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, I.B. Tauris, third edition, 2004, p. 11.

6 Area experts assess that, in order to defend the Straits, Turkey could suppress the effectiveness of Russian missiles S-400 by using the radio-electronic systems Koral, the Turkish F16 are more numerous on the common border than Russia's SU 30 and SU 27, but if provoked Russia could react by sending strategic bombers including with nuclear weapons. See Armand Goşu, *Euro-Falia*, Curtea Veche, București, 2016, p. 254.

7 Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea", Foreign Affairs, May/June 2016 issue, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/why-putin-took-crimea. An opposite point of view is that of Cristian Unteanu, a Romanian foreign policy specialized journalist, who claims that Turkish president Erdogan and prime minister Binali Yldirin have sent letters of reconciliation to Russian leadership on the occasion on Russia's national day on June 2016. In his letter Erdogan said: "On behalf of the Turkish people, I

November 2016 Erdogan mentioned again the possibility that Turkey become a full fledged member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while giving up candidacy for EU integration.) NATO states' leaders are anxious of possible Turkish initiatives to block the Black Sea access since it could prompt a strong Russian response[8]. But at the same time they can hardly let alone Turkey if in a vital "zero-sum game" with Russia, because a defeated Ankara would mean the fall of NATO's south-eastern flank.

However, since the Turkish economy was strongly hit by Russian sanctions and after Moscow gave up the plans for a new gas pipeline to Turkey (Turkish Stream), Turkish president took advantage of the failed coup of July 2016 and thanked Russian president for his warm support (at the same time Turkish officials often blamed US government for not allowing the extradition of the famous cleric Fethulah Gülen, a resident of Pennsylvania, who is accused by Erdogan and his government to have been behind the coup attempt), then Erdogan apologized for the destroyed Russian jet and the dead pilot. Then, on August 9, Erdogan traveled to Moscow and managed to partially rebuild the relations with Russia, at the level of trade and energy projects[9]. Of course, this "honey-moon" between the two nations could end abruptly because of their contrary interests in Syria and Ukraine.

Currently, the western shore of the Black Sea belongs to the West, via EU and NATO, while the East and North-East belong to Russian Federation, which sees itself more and more as NATO and EU's main military and ideological adversary[10]. In between, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova try to make themselves accepted by the EU/NATO while trying to avoid open conflict with Moscow. Ukraine also wants to recover the lost territory of Crimea but its chances are dim as nobody in NATO/EU would risk a military conflict with Moscow for supporting Kyiv's legitimate claims. Moldova and Georgia are splited between Russian Eurasian project and the West. The "orange" revolutions which brought pro-western governments in these three former

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celebrate the National Day of the Russian people. I also hope that relations between Russia and Turkey reach the level they deserve in the near future". "Turkish PM, President Congratulate Russian Counterparts for National Day: Report", http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com /turkish-pm-president-congratulate-russian-counterparts-for-national-day-report.aspx? pageID=238&nID=100473&NewsCatID=510, accessed on June 16, 2016. See also Cristian Unteanu, "Ce nu ştiu ai noştri: se resetează jocurile în Marea Neagră!", http://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/ce-nu-stiu-nostri-sereseteaza-jocurile-marea-neagra-1_576503895ab6550cb80fc7e7/index.html, 18 June 2016.

8 *Ibidem*.

9 "Erdogan travels to Russia to reset relations", http://www.aljazeera.com/news/ 2016/08/ erdogan-travels-russia-reset-relations-160809032238975.html, accessed on September 10, 2016.

10 "Putin's War on the West", http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21643189-ukraine-suffers-it-time-recognise-gravity-russian-threatand-counter, accessed on 14 February 2015.

Soviet states were presented by Russia's propaganda as Western (US)-backed subversion against Moscow's sphere of influence.

One could analyse the security environment using the main dyadic rivalries: Russia vs Ukraine, Russia vs Turkey, plus the secondary ones: Russia vs Georgia, Azerbaijan vs Armenia, Turkey vs Armenia. There is a security competition between Russia and NATO also in the WBSA. Alliances, defence pacts, and dyadic rivalries theoretically indicate the biggest likelihood of an open conflict in the future.

Status quo, *Revisionism and Deterrence Strategies*

One basic question is: which are the *status quo* powers and which are the revisionist ones? There are theories stating that Russia is a *status quo* power at the global level and a revisionist one at the regional level[11]. This is not really true. At the systemic level, Russia seeks China partnership to change the world and put an end to US power preponderence (the so called "unipolarity"), to the political liberal and democratic system. Some authors states that there is a Russian obsession with changing the systemic polarity, more than it is with stopping the western-led human rights propaganda and the democracy promotion via the coloured revolutions[12]. Putin and its close counselors seems afraid that the West uses democratic ideology and sponsored movements to promote regime change in the "buffer" area of the Black Sea, then will try to force a regime change in Russia itself. So, no wonder that Moscow constantly asks Beijing to challenge the US supremacy and change the status quo from unipolarity to multipolarity[13]. When in June 2008, former Russian president and current prime minister D. Medvedev proposed a new European security architecture, "from Vancouver to Vladivostok", based on a new Helsinki-like treaty, most of the European states rejected it as they thought Russia wanted to control all the European security organizations while not giving up its bad practices demonstrated by the 2008 war with Georgia. Why accept a new OSCE-like entity when Russia did not respect the basic rule that the European borders are inviolable and military force is not a legitimate tool to change them? After the annexation of Crimea and the obvious lack of respect for the Helsinki

[11] See the debate in Gleb Pavlovsky, "How the West Misunderstands Russia", in Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard, Andrew Wilson (eds), *What Does Russia Think?*, The European Council on Foreign Relations, London, 2009, pp. 73-85.

[12] Timofey Bordachev, "Multipolarity, Anarchy and Security", in Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard, Andrew Wilson (eds), *What Does Russia Think?*, cit., pp. 61-66.

[13] Joseph Nye Jr, *S-a sfârşit oare secolul Americii?*, transl. by Ondine Dăscăliţa, Ed. Comunicare.ro, Bucuresti, 2016, p. 50. Original title – *Is the American Century Over?*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.

Final Act, it is certain that in the Black Sea area Russian Federation is a revisionist power. Since the second half of the 2000s the Russian revisionism towards the post-Soviet states intensified[14], while the attempt to split the EU is also a revisionist activity. Only in the Barents Sea, on the border with China and in its conflictual relations with Japan – for the fate of Kurile Islands in the Pacific Ocean – is Moscow a *status quo* player. Russia tries to make neutral Finland and Sweden not to adhere to NATO by using threats and intimidation instead of using soft power and incentives[15]. So, it acts for the status quo but with coercive means.

Deterring Russia from further agression means estimating first its power and resolve. Measuring power is not an easy task. It requires putting together the size of territory and population, amount of resources, human capital, armed forces, industry, agriculture, but also soft power sources like ideology and cultural patterns. Russia has an economy worthing about 1,8 trillion by year (the GDP was about 1860.60 billion US dollars in 2014)[16], compared with 3,3 trillion USD for Germany and 2,4 trillion for France. Two thirds of Russian exports are made up of oil and gas, meaning 20% of the GDP and 50% of the state's revenues[17].

Russian economy is bigger than that of each other Black Sea state. It spent 51,6 billion USD for defence in 2015 (4,1% of the GDP), while Turkey spent under 10 billion, according to London based International Institute for Strategic Studies[18]. But Stockholm International Peace Research Institute **(**SIPRI) gave Russia 66,4 billion USD, meaning 5,4% of the GDP and an 91% increase comparing with the year 2006[19]. In 2015 Moscow was forced to cut budgetary spendings, including 3% for defence, and in 2016 the reduction for military spending is about 5%. The elections of September 18, 2016, showed the strong popular support for V. Putin, whose United Russia party won about

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[14] Ingmar Oldberg, "Is Russia a *status quo* Power?", Swedish Institute of International Affairs, No. 1/2016, http://www.ui.se/eng/upl/files/126932.pdf, accessed on May 26, 2016. See p. 14. He stated that "To conclude, Russian foreign policy in most of the regions under review has become mainly revisionist, posing a challenge especially to the surrounding states" (p. 15).

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 15.

[16] See the statistics offered by Joseph Nye Jr, *S-a sfârşit oare secolul Americii?*, cit., p. 48. The author gave the figure 2,5 trillion USD but specialized economic sites mention a figure between 1860 and 2000 billion USD. See "Russia GDP (1989-2016)", http://www.tradingeconomics.com/russia/gdp, accessed on June 7, 2016.

[17] Joseph Nye Jr, *S-a sfârşit oare secolul Americii?*, cit., p. 48.

[18] *The Military Balance 2015*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Routledge, London, 2015.

[19] "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2015" (PDF). Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Retrieved 5 April 2016, http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/ SIPRIFS 1604.pdf, p. 2.

54% of the votes, and the other satellites parties 33%, crushing the real pro-democracy opposition.

With 87,2 billion USD allocated for defense (13% of the GDP)[20], Saudi Arabia for the first time overpassed Russia in 2015 and the trend continues in 2016. Thus, with a military expense of about 5% of the GDP one can see that the sum spent by Russia on defence is bigger than that of UK (55,5 billion USD) or Germany (39,4 billion USD)[21].

Table 1

The World Biggest Defense Spenders[22]

Country	Spending 2015 (bil. USD)	World share %	Spending as share of GDP 2015	Spending as share of GDP 2016 (estimation)
USA	596	36	3,3	3,8
China	215	13	1,9	2,0
Saudi Arabia	87,2	5,2	13,7	7,8
Russia	66.4	4,0	5,4	3,5
UK	55,5	3,3	2,0	2,2

Russia produces itself most of its military basic equipment and is one of the two biggest world exporters, almost on equal foot with the USA, but for advanced electronic techology it depends on imports from Western states like France, Germany, UK. Now the economic sanctions/embargo let Moscow in a limbo. The failure of the Mistral aquisition from France was a big blow for the Russian military, added to the fact that Ukraine ceased to produce important military equipment for Russian tanks and helicopters. The big Antonov planes-producer stop its cooperation with Russian firms but was forced to halt the aircraft production as it lacked foreign market to sell them.

On the other side, Turkey, since the middle of the 80's (previous century), began an ambitious program to develop a modern defence industry and engage in cooperative agreements with other NATO states such as USA and Germany. An example: Turkish frigates were build in cooperation with Germany using the MEKO 200 Frigate program, which helped it develop modern anti-submarine, anti-air, and anti-surface ship capabilities[23]. Ankara even tried to import technology from China for its missile systems.

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[20] http://www.economist.com/news/economic-and-financial-indicators/21692877-defence-budgets, accessed on May 17, 2016.

[21] Julien Lindley French, "Russia Parades its Weakness", http://lindleyfrench.blogspot.ro/, published on 11 May 2016.

[22] Draw from the table given by SIPRI: http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1604.pdf, accessed on September 20, 2016.

[23] "Turkey Domestic Arms Industry", http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/tu-industry.htm, accesed on May 12, 2016.

Ukraine, the country which suffered the recent covert Russian invasion and lost the territory of Crimea, because of which NATO states bolstered their defense, has a military budget of 4 billion USD in 2016 (113 billion Hrivnas, that is 5% of the GDP), an increase of 1,6 billion compared with the previous year when it was 3,6 billion USD[24]. Since 2006, Ukraine's military spending rouse by 61% and compared with 2013 the increase was 31%[25]. The explanation is that the former Iuschenko and Yanucovich regimes had largely ignored this necessary action. But its national economy is in recession and needs bailout funds from foreign institutions like IMF and WB. In September 2016, the IMF allowed Ukraine to receive one billion USD.

While Russia hardly maintains the current defence budget, USA decided in February 2016 to allocate 3,4 billion USD for the defense of European allies, and, as president Obama stated, "that is why my Administration has announced a fourfold increase in the funding of the European initiative identity defense support for the continent at the 2017 fiscal year". The NATO three Black Sea states will also benefit from this fund. Romania and Bulgaria decided to increase their defense expenditures to comply with NATO requirements. Romania in 2015 increased this level by 11% to 2,5 billion USD and by 2017 it will reach 2% of the GDP. Globally, Central-European states increased by 13% their defence expenses in 2015 and the trend continues[26]. In the Caucasus area, because its long-lasting conflict with Armenia, "Azerbaijan increased its arms imports by 217 per cent between 2006–10 and 2011–15"[27].

Concerning the military power distribution in the WBSA, the rankings seem obvious and difficult to change on the short term. On paper, Russia has the second largest land armed forces in the world after P.R. China, with an active military and civilian personnel of about 766.000 people (and available manpower of about 70 million)[28], followed in the Black Sea region by Turkey which has the second largest standing military force in NATO, only after the U.S. Armed Forces, with an estimated strength of 639.551 military, civilian and paramilitary personnel in 2015 (roughly a million with the reserves). According to SIPRI, its defence budget in 2015 was 41.546 billion Lira, that is 12.870

[24] "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2015" (PDF). Stockholm International Peace Research Institute quoted by http://www.ibtimes.com/ukraine-military-defense-budget-seeks-4b-2016-help-fight-east-ukraine-war-2077291, accesed on May 20, 2016.

[25] http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=196612, accessed on May 20, 2016.

[26] *Ibidem*.

[27] http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2016/at-feb-2016, accessed on May 20, 2016.

[28] "Russia Military Strength", http://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=russia, accesed on May 12, 2016.

billion Euro, a small increase from the previous year when the spending was about 38.891 Lira[29].

The big difference is that Ankara is part of the strongest military alliance in the world, NATO, while Russia, one of the two strongest nuclear states, is supported by the comparatively small Collective Security Treaty Organization, a defense structure in which Moscow is by far the leading power. Also this structure, which was based on the former Tashkent Treaty, has been weakened by the fact that some former Soviet countries refused the membership or accepted it but later exited – Ukraine (never a member), Moldova (never a member), Georgia (exit), also Uzbekistan (exit). It is obvious that Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are extremely junior partners for Russia and do not really increase its military power capabilities, only the access to natural resources.

One should remember that Moscow was not able to convince even its closest ally, Belarus, to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign states. After Crimea was annexed by Russia, only Armenia (through its president Serzh Sarkisian) immediately recognized this fact[30], while Belarus and other CSTO states avoided making explicit statements on this topic and insisting only on the need to preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity. Thus, the CSTO could not be seen as a really united and coherent block of states. Excepting Russia who controls the rules of the game, the other members are there to benefit from money, resources and protection from their big neighbour, but they do not fully subordinates their national interests to those of Moscow.

The countries of the South Caucasus and Black Sea have to decide between choosing economic integration with EU via Association Agreements plus DCFTAs or preferring Russia's led Custom Union (Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan) and Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Armenia). Moscow, in spite of its hard power and coercive diplomacy, in spite of using natural gas as a strategic asset, was not able to prevent Ukraine and Moldova from signing association agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area pacts (DCFTA) with the EU. Kyiv and Chișinău aim at greatly reducing their dependence on Russian gas and Russian market, while Moscow also restricted their access to its market as a punishment for preferring the EU association.

[29] SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database (see the Expenditures for NATO members 1949-2015)

[30] Ukraine Recalls Ambassador to Armenia over Crimea Recognition, http://asbarez.com/120951/ukraine-recalls-ambassador-to-armenia-over-crimea-recognition/, published on March 21, 2014.

Defence Investments, Demographics and (Not So) Healty Economics

Meanwhile, Russia, even if forced to diminish the money for the armed forces in 2016 with about 5%, still extracts more money for defence than each big European western state taken separately, in spite of its crumbling economy. In 2016 the defence budget reduction is logical since the oil price remains the same and the sanctions in place. Russian economy is smaller than that of France, UK or Germany and now tends to become more inward-oriented. The obvious explanation is that Russian leadership, especially president Putin, managed to solve the butter vs. guns dilemma by clearly favoring defence and sacrifying the needs of the population. Putin's calculus is that the Russians like him so much and are so nationalistic/patriotic that they will accept this sacrifice for years to come. But the future will not be so easy to determine, not so linear and previsible. Foreign investors are not attracted by Russian economy after the sanctions were establised and maintained for more than two years. The Russian Ruble lost at least 50% of its value, compared with the US dollar and the Euro, since 2014 mainly because of the economic sanctions and decline of world oil price, thus the planned defence spendings will be reduced for a longer period. Moscow announced some years ago its intention to spend about 700 billion USD for a period of 10 years to catch with the more advanced NATO states (and implicitely with China's spectacular progress), about 23 trillion Rubles by 2020, but it is likely that the spending will be at a maximum level of 400 billion USD for the same period, if Putin does not want to risk huge popular protests. The Russian economy diminished by 3,7% in 2015[31] and will probably loss 1-2% this year.

The embargo is erroding the basis of ordinary Russians' living standard. Since the relations with Turkey broke in November 2015, Moscow had decided not to take agricultural food from this country, thus being forced to buy it from Africa and Latin America, in direct competition with states such as China and India. Of course, the August 2016 deal between Erdogan and Putin allowed Russians to buy again Turkish food products. Russian economy was also hit by downgrading by biggest "ratings and rankings organizations (RROs)": in 2015 Standard&Poor and Moody's downgraded the country below investment grade after western capitals began to depart as consequence of Crimea's annexation and downing of oil price, plus legislative changes by the Russian government. On March 17, 2016, "Moody's ratings agency announced Friday it has officially

[31] "Russia Will Cut Defense Budget by 5 Percent in 2016", RIA reports, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-defense-budget-idUSKCN0W80TL, retrieved on May 5, 2016.

stopped issuing local credit ratings for Russian companies"[32]. These agencies are US-based but they have big international credibility, so their decision affected Russian economy. Russia has a poor position on many global ranking: human development, quality of life, freedom and democracy, business, environment, economic freedom, civil society. It has also been expelled from G7 after Crimea's annexation. Over the last decade, president Putin has openly criticized the ranking agencies, especially western-based Freedom House, calling them American pawns which interfere in Russian sovereignty[33]. This did not prevent these agencies from doing very negative reports on Russian performances, a fact which also diminished its soft power at least from the western point of view. On 7 May 2012, after his re-election, Putin stated that he wants to make Russian economy a modern one, taking it from its position as 120th on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (DBI) to 50th by the year 2015[34]. Of course, he failed and never recognized that. Annexing Crimea and supporting a civil war in Ukraine was very detrimental to this goal. The "Partnership for Modernization" between Russia and the EU, launched in June 2010, did not produce benefits for Russian economy and society because Moscow was reluctant to agree with the needed reforms.

The likelihood that the price of oil barrel would soon increase over the 50 USD which is the minimum level where Russia could have a small profit is low for the next three years, since the Gulf states have the interest to increase the global output and Moscow did not manage to convince OPEC states to reduce their production, during the Doha negotiations on April 18, 2016. Ryad asked Moscow to determine Iran to limit its huge exportations of oil but that was not possible, since Russia does not have such a leverage on Tehran which, escaping the western embargo, is eager to get more cash. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia produced about 10.2 million barrels per say, the highest level since 1981, while Russia produced 10,88 million barrels a day, also a record level. Economic factors prevented a global deal on freezing oil production and Russia, which is not an OPEC country, did not have enough leverage to push towards such a positive result[35].

NATO member Turkey has a GDP of about 717 billion USD in 2015, less than in 2011 – 772. Its decline is much more supportable than Russia's one because its economy is a modernizing one. If Russia will at some moment close

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[32] "Moody's Withdraws Domestic Ratings in Russia", https://www.rt.com/business/336086-moodys-russia-local-ratings/, 18 March 2016.

[33] Alexander Cooley, Jack Snyder, *Ranking the World*, Cambridge University Press, UK, 2015, p. 8.

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 1.

[35] Anjli Raval, David Sheppard, "Oil Price Tumbles on Doha Deal Stalemate", http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/7584b5e4-045c-11e6-a70d-4e39ac32c284.html#axzz48RF0aBvc, published on April 18, 2016.

the Blue Stream gas pipelines it will severely impact both their economies, so the likelihood of such a development is small, since China is not ready to absorb the Russian available gas via the Power of Siberia pipeline (Yakutia–Khabarovsk–Vladivostok pipeline**)**, under construction.

In the demographic realm, Russia keeps slowly declining[36] (it lost 5 million people in 25 years) while Turkey has an small increase in population each year, about 1,2 – 1,7% (between 2011 and 2015 the population rose from 74,2 to 77,7 million)[37]. Smaller Azerbaijan benefits from high fertility rates and some analysts forecasted that in 2030, the population of Azerbaijan will reach 10.7 million, which means an increase of 11.9% from 2015[38]. Neighboring Armenia's population will probably increased by 10.973 people and reach 3.033.839 in the beginning of 2017[39]. EU-members Romania and Bulgaria experience a slow population decline and are wary of not artificially increasing the populations through massive immigration from Africa and Middle East. Ukraine had a slow decline in population in 2015, with negative natural increase and the number of deaths was bigger than that of births by 192 479. Of course, it had also lost 2 million people from Crimea, in the benefit of Russia. Ukraine is still a country at war. In 2016, "Ukraine population is projected to decreased by -155.127 people and reach 42 462 218 in the beginning of 2017[40]. Finally, Rep. of Moldova and Georgia suffer from depopulation and aging process (declining birth rate), increased by the huge migration to EU states[41].

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[36] Joseph Chamie, Barry Mirkin**,** Russian Demographics: The Perfect Storm, 2014, http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/russian-demographics-perfect-storm, accesed on May 2, 2016. "High rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, drug use, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, obesity, heart disease, violence, suicide and environmental pollution contribute to Russians' poor health. Russia's current male life expectancy at birth of 64 years is 15 years lower than male life expectancies in Germany, Italy and Sweden."…" if fertility remained essentially constant, not an unreasonable assumption, the Russian population would fall to around 111 million by mid-century and 67 million by 2100. Such an outcome would mean that the Russian population would be less than half of its current size by the close of the 21st century."

[37] http://www.indexmundi.com/turkey/demographics_profile.html, accesed on May 12, 2016. See also http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/turkey-population/, accesed on 12 May 2016. For Turkey's situation see http://www.focus-economics.com /countries/turkey, accessed on June 14, 2016.

[38] Azerbaijan in 2030: The Future Demographic, http://www.euromonitor.com/azerbaijan-in-2030-the-future-demographic/report, accessed on July 20, 2015.

[39] Armenia, http://countrymeters.info/en/Armenia, accessed on May 20, 2016.

[40] Ukraine population clock, http://countrymeters.info/en/Ukraine, accesed on May 12, 2016.

[41] Georgia demographic Profile 2014, http://www.indexmundi.com/georgia/demographics_ profile.html. Concerning the situation in the Rep. of Moldova see Situația demografică în Rep. Moldova 2014, http://www.statistica.md/newsview.php?l=ro&idc=168&id=4787, accesed on May 10 2016.

Power: Reality and Perception

Above all it is important how power is perceived by other actors, how the others assess the resove of the Black Sea countries? Does Russia think that NATO will move to defend its three Balck Sea members? Do the NATO states think that Russia could do an aggression and that it must be deterred? At what price? Power alone is not enough to correctly predict the behaviour of states. Other factors must be taken into account. One important element is resilience: if a state is under attack, if he is economically hit and strategically encircled will it be apt to survive alone? The elements which allow assesing intentions are at the state level – the capabilities, the interests, the alliances and the regyme type, and at the leader level – the gender, the experience, the personality and the "time in office"[42]. A state which highly vales the prestige and wants to signal its huge resolve will be more willing to pay the costs of fighting and suffering retaliation than a normal state.

A good example is Turkey whose military decision-makers in 2015 decided to down a Russian Suhoi jet entering its air space, while other NATO states like UK, Norway, Romania prefered to avoid such actions fearing a Russian harsh reaction. For nine months, Turkey payed a big economic price after Russia broke up a lot of economic ties with Ankara. Russian leaders perceive NATO states as being weakened by their democratic regime, with sometimes different national agendas and with the alliance as a whole obliged to take the lesser common denominator in many crisis situation to avoid members using their veto in the North Atlantic Council (NAC). They perceive the leaders of European states as being either unexperienced (Poland and Romania have presidents in their first mandates) or under heavy pressures by countries such as Germany, which is seen in Moscow as an indispensable economic partner and dependent on Russian gas. Or they see the public opinions putting strong pressures on the decsion-makers to avoid confronting Russia, like is the case in NATO-countries Czech Republik, Slovakia, Greece etc. Even the German ruling coalition is divided between those who want Russian sanction to be maintained (ex: Angela Merkel) and those who are in favor of relaxing and then aboloshing them (Sigmar Gabriel, the Economy Minister).

In case of a an EU big structural failure, it is likely that Russian leader anticipates Germany as willing to seek bandwagoning with Russia even against the USA[43]. Russia counts on the radical leaders of populist and nationalist parties such as Jobbik (Hungary), Front National (France) or Alternative for

[42] Joshua Kertzer, Jonathan Renshon, Keren Yarhi Milo, "How do Observers assess Resolve?", http://people.fas.harvard.edu/~jkertzer/Research_files/KertzerRenshonYarhi-Milo021415.pdf, 18 March 2015, p. 4.

[43] George Friedman, *Puncte de presiune*, transl. by Corina Hădăreanu, Editura Litera, Bucureşti, 2016, p. 241.

Germany (AFD) which received money or political support from Moscow and thus are Russian interests supportive[44]. In the Black Sea states, the Russian penetration of political class, economy and intelligence structures seems very serious in the former Soviet area. This could help Moscow use hybrid warfare tactics also in the future. But Russian lobbies certainly exists and are strong in the economies of Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, and even Romania. These economic bussiness networks probably have strong connections with Russian intelligence agencies. On the other side, Germany is not ready to give up the building of another Nord Stream gas pipeline (N.S.2) and to reduce the size of Russian lobby in its economy.

Moscow was amazed by the multiple and serious crises that the EU is confronted with (Euro crisis, Greece's economic quasi-collapse, immigration, Brexit, terrorism, territorial revisionism, emergence of nationalist-populist and anti-integration strong movements) and decided to use them in its benefit. Russia is not an EU state, it does not aim at being one, they compete for the "buffer" area of the Black Sea region former soviet states, thus the idea that EU could soon desintegrate is not something that makes Moscow anxious. On the contrary, Russia would prefer to deal separately with all the rich and big European states. Historian Timothy Snyder (Yale University) stated that Putin's Russia wanted the desintegration of the EU and separation of European nations. Each nation should be led by a strong leader, similar to fascist rulers of the past[45]. This could be seen as a punishment for not recognizing Russia as a great power, again and to recognize its sphere of influence, in a unanimous way. He mention the fact that V. Putin is fascinated by White Russian philosopher Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954) who was seduced by Hitler and Mussolini, an anti-communist thinker who believed that Russia always fought wars in self-defence "against encirclement by Europe" and that its historic "soul" survived through Orthodox Christendom and strong rulers[46]. Eurasianism, fascist-like ideas, the cult of strong leaders, the organicism and anti-liberalism could be the main doctrinary elements of the Russian regime whose main liability is the fact it does not have a clear principle for the succession of leadership[47].

Thus, the fact that Putin' Russia financed and supported nationalist and radical political forces in EU states, taking advantage of western democracy tolerance towards foreign interferences, may be seen according to such a theory

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[44] Melanie Amann, Pavel Lokshin, "German Populists Forge Ties with Russia", http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populists-forge-deeper-ties-with-russia-a-1089562.html, accessed on 27 April 2016.

[45] Timothy Snyder, "Ukraine and Russia in a Fracturing Europe", https://www.youtube.com /watch?v=dfduV68C1Jk&feature=youtu.be.

[46] See Alexandra Wiktorek Sarlo, "Russian Foreign Policy in the Putin Era: A Conference Report", http://www.fpri.org/article/2016/05/russian-foreign-policy-putin-era/, May 2016.

[47] Anton Barbashin, Hannah Thoburn, "Putin's Philosopher", https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ articles/russian-federation/2015-09-20/putins-philosopher, accessed on May 2, 2016.

as a logical step for dislodging the EU and supporting the emergence of strong nationalist leaders in Western states. But domestically, all NGOs with foreign finance were banned by the Putin regime. At the same time, we think no NATO/EU responsible leader really envisages playing a symetrical game against Russia, that is by supporting separtist Chechens and other Muslims guerillas/terrorists in Southern Russia, not only for fear of Russian strong retaliation but especially since a Russian state collapse and rise of radical Islam would be seen as a worse scenario that current Putin's Russia. Who would be ready to send tens of thousands of peace-keepers to separate rival forces there, in a tremendoulsy huge territory if the state collapses? Who is ready for peace-enforcement on the territory of a state which has the veto power in the UNSC? Or accept that China could end by controling the Primorsky Krai territory? The US already did that in Afghanistan against the USSR in the '80s and we all know the story of Bin Ladern and Al Qaida... But would it perhaps be legitimate to threaten Russia with such a scenario in case it still supports extreme right forces in EU states? In this case, the threat must be credible and proportional to the grief, of course.

One cannot say that professor Snyder is certainly right. But nowadays Putin's Russia is a most revisionist power in the Black Sea and in the Europe: taking Crimea (and extending Russian 200 miles Economic Exclusive Zone in Northern Black Sea area, while reducing at half the Ukrainian coastline)[48], destabilizing Ukraine in the East, possibly preparing for absorbing South Ossetia but pressuring Turkey to keep the Montreux statute unchanged. Moscow also helps radical populist and nationalist forces win power againt democratic leaders in the EU but no one, except Putin's close advisers, knows the real extend of this support. On the other side, Moscow is a *status quo* power in the Middle East, and this explains its support for the Assad regime in Syria. President Putin is the opposite of Tsar Nicolas I which helped crush national-liberal rebellions in central-western Europe but in the Balkans fought agains the Ottomans by assuming the role of an Orthodox crusader and Greek nation's liberator after 1825. Both may be seen as genuine Russian nationalists. Putin believes it has a moral obligation to help brethren Orthodox Russians from Ukraine just like Tsar Nikolas I thought he had a moral obligation towards Orthodox Greeks. They both used Russian hard power and constantly threaten their targets – Ukraine and the Turkish Empire. In my opinion, Russia likes to be seen as a threatening power, to agitate its hard power capabilities in order to provoke submission and bandwagon effects, it likes to be feared by smaller neighbors and force them to stay in its sphere of influence. It seems delighted to be considered by US leaders and planning factors as an almost un-deterrable

[48] See J. Bugajski, P.B. Doran, "Black Sea Rising…cit.", p. 6.

and not so rational actor, which could use even the nuclear assets to defend its vital interests.

One useful instrument to use for establishing connections between V. Putin's beliefs and his actions, present and future ones, is the "operational code", a paradigm of the Foreign Policy Analysis. Framed by Nathan Leites and Alexander George[49], the o.c. presents the main ideas and beliefs of a leader about the world, the adversary and the friends/allies and allows some possibility to predict his future behavior. The core of a leader's beliefs generally stays unchanged during his life but some peripheral elements could change in time, as the leader learns lessons from the events and from the entourage. His main beliefs concerning the West which is seen as engaged in a zero-sum competition with Russia and tries to reduce its sphere of influence and even provoke regime change, remained constant between 2014-2016, but in spite of this, some flexibility in foreign policy was seen, as a proof that he may accept some kind of compromise in the end, if this compromise do not oblige him to trade off national values and expectations[50].

Moscow harshly criticizes US-build anti-missile shield but for a long time, since the USSR time, it relied on such a system on its territory in order to keep equilibrium in the offence-defence balance[51]. When invited by NATO states to contribute to NATO shield, Moscow asked a veto-right, knowing that the allied states could not accept such a thing and especially the US Congress did not allow for granting special guarantees to Russia that the shield will not be used against it. In the end, Russia decided in 2012 to invest in its own "shield", to upgrade the old A 135 Amur by the new A-235, which will be mobile and rely on conventional high-explosive and kinetic-energy warheads, not on nuclear missiles[52]. And NATO states, contrary to Moscow, did not protest against this plan.

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[49] A. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 2, Jun. 1969, pp. 190-222.

[50] Jyri Joonas Lavikainen, "The Operational Code of Vladimir Putin in the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014", https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/163809/Lavikainen_poliittinen%20historia.pdf, May 2016.

[51] Valentin Naumescu, "Scutul antirachetă, Rusia şi ordinea europeană. O tensiune insolubilă?", http://www.contributors.ro/global-europa/scutul-antiracheta-rusia-si-ordinea-europeana-o-tensiune-insolubila/, accesed on 21 May 2016. "From more than 200 years, Russia in its Tsarist, Soviet and Capitalist shapes, made the same error of wanting itself to be feared. In Moscow leaders' vision, yesterday and today, Russian power does not materializes in its attractiveness for other states and nations, but in its capacity to inspire terror around it and to make other submit to its will."

[52] According to experts, the new Russian missile system will use multiple types of missiles: "The A-235 will have missiles capable of operating at three different ranges: long-range, based on the 51T6 and capable of destroying targets at distances up to 1500 km (930 miles), at altitudes up to 800.000 m; medium-range, an update of the 58R6, designed to

As some analysts remarked, after the big success of the 1815 Vienna Congress, Russia proved unable to peacefully integrate the European and later Euro-Atlantic Westphalian system of states and also unable to accept liberal orders guaranteed by the concert of powers[53]. It was unable to accept being an equal among the pairs. To distance itself more from the West, Russian leaders invoked different cultural models (the communism one, the Eurasianist doctrine etc.) and different political models (totalitarianism, followed by illiberal or "sovereign" democracy). Thus, its hard power tends to be seen as a threat by the western liberal states, in spite of lucrative energy deals with some of them – Germany, Hungary etc. Many western experts see Russia as a military great power but a weak economy and a decadent society. At the same time, Russian pro-government analysts tend to depict the West as decadent and weak, having lost the direction and the loyalty of its populations. As Sergei Karaganov stated, the West is a "directionless gaggle, beset with economic insecurities and losing sight of its moral convictions"[54].

Security Dilemmas and the Main Risks

Geographically speaking, there are some classical dyadic rivalries in the area, and the current changes in the power structures could lead to security dilemma mechanisms since the challangers would prefer to risk and the dominant power to strike back.

Of course, Russia knows that NATO is commited to defend the western and southern shore of the Black Sea. Together, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania have enough small and medium-sized military boats and submarines to surpass Russia, which is superior only in missiles, tanks and in huge military vessels. But decision-makers in Moscow seem to count on the idea that Russia is still able to create internal divisions/splits within NATO, to speculate some lack of coordination and intra-alliance rivalries or difficult burder-sharing to prevent greater allied cohesion. Moscow managed to convince Paris and London in 2008 to block Ukraine' and Georgia's bid for NATO's MAP, but nor could it

hit targets at distances up to 1000 km (620 miles), at altitudes up to 120.000 m; and short-range (the 53T6M or 45T6 [based on the 53T6]), with an operating range of 350 km (215 miles) and a flight ceiling of 40.000-50.000 m." See Andrei Akulov, "Russia Successfully Tests Short-Range Anti-Missile System", http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/06/29/russia-successfully-tests-short-range-anti-missile-system.html, 29 June 2016.

53 Valentin Naumescu, "Scutul antirachetă...cit.".

54 Sergei Karaganov, "Western Delusions Triggered Conflict and Russians Will not Yield", *The Financial Times*, 14 September 2014, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/05770494-3a93-11e4-bd08-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3cAtHIjq9, accessed on April 15, 2015.

anticipate that the EU would be so intransigent on Ukraine and neither its insistence on the Association Agreement signature with Kiev and Chișinău[55].

By using its natural energy stimuli and providing cheap gas, investments in nuclear energy, by threatening some member states, Russia expects NATO/EU members to be victims of the phenomenon of "underbalancing". A decade ago, neorealist thinker Randall Schweller explained this phenomenon which occurs when "a state does not balance or does so inefficiently in response to a dangerous and unappeasable aggressor, and the state's efforts are essential to deter or defeat it"[56]. Examples: Moscow capitalizes on Germany's need for gas, on Hungary's need for nuclear energy and gas, and on Czech and Slovak reluctance to be involved in managing Ukraine's crisis and accept NATO bases on their territories. Underbalancing, according to Schweller, is based on domestic policies' sensitive issues: lack of elite consensus, fragmentation of the societies, societal tensions and regime's instability[57].

All Black Sea states must openly deal with the risks of underbalancing but at the same time this is not a reason for suppressing democratic rules and preferring "illiberal democracies". Turkey, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia have domestic ethno-religious and societal-political cleavages which diminish their capacity to act as strong and coherent actors in their strategic game with Russia. Looking more in detail, Ankara is again in a law intensity war against the PKK forces, while also facing bloody Daesh terrorist attacks and having send military forces in Northern Syria to help local militias against Daesh and the Kurds, its political class is divided by president Erdogan's attempt to change the constitutional regime and to be very repressive towards the opposition; Ukraine is confronted with Russian separatism in the East and lack of cohesion among the political class concerning the future of the country and the issue of federalism and implementing the Minsk II stipulations; Georgia and Moldova are divided between pro-western and pro-Eurasian adepts and weakened by their long-lasting frozen conflicts and turbulent ethnic minorities. Romania and Bulgaria seem more stable and in a better economic shape, but they do not lack some political and societal tensions (like the ethnic militantism of Hungarians, Szeklers, Turks) and also uncertainty about the EU's future and migration issues. The NATO Warsaw summit (July 2016) showed declarative cohesiveness among allies, promises to send 4 multinational battalions on the Eastern flank, but at the same time the Bulgarian government opposed a

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55 Arkadi Moshes, "The Troubled Partnership. The EU and Russia", http://www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Strategic-Partnership-Workshop-Report-final.pdf, accessed on May 28, 2016.

56 Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2006, p. 10.

57 *Ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

Turkish-Romanian proposal to create a Black Sea NATO flotilla, as the Bulgarian prime minister did not want to provoke Russian ire and Sophia had tensed relations with Ankara over the immigrants readmission process.

Using its hybrid warfare tactics, Russia will likely continue to use these aspects to diminish the effectiveness of NATO in case of crisis. This goes in the same direction with the strategic effects of underbalancing. Moscow knows that in military and economic fields NATO as a whole is clearly superior, with the USA alone clearly overpassing Russia, on the long term. Estimating capabilities is not a difficult task but assesing the resolve is a much more difficult one. Capabilities, intentions and resolve are the three main elements that Russia and the NATO-Black Sea states try to assess in order to predict their strategic behaviour. NATO needs to use a stick and carrot strategy towards Russia but the coercive diplomacy should be based on commitment and deterrence, also on assurance.

Russia sees NATO's resistance as an axis connecting the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea and the North Sea but one made up of heterogenous states – some of them powerful and with unified elites and populations, other being weaker and with internal divisions. It will not dare to attack a member state but will use covert and hybrid (non-linear) tactics so as its actions stay under the article 5 activation threshold. Probably it will try to isolate some NATO members and make them accept Russian views and interests by using intimidation, bribes and promises. We see that Russia, as an authoriarian state, had an advantage over NATO regarding propaganda, desinformation and intimidation-psychological warfare[58]. NATO Strategic Centre of Excellence (StratCom COE) recognized some Russian "potential asymetrical advantage over the West", since Putin's regime is a centralized one and able to carry up an information warfare by controliong the mass media without constraints from the public opinion[59]. *The West must be able to counter the Russian narratives based on historical memory, nationalism, myth of Russian world (based on Russian Slavic Orthodox Civilization opposing a decadent and materialist West), Eurasianism, militant religion, diasporas, as part of the information warfare.* The power struggle will be not only a military one but more focused on psychological and information skills. The cyber-warfare capabilities and the quality of Special Operation Forces will also be important. The Black Sea area cannot escape this general pattern.

It is difficult to deny that when Russia took Crimea it significantly improved its power position and projection with the Black Sea. Ideologically,

[58] James K. Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare", *Connections*, no. 2, 2016, pp. 73-87, http://connections-qj.org/article/making-sense-hybrid-warfare. See p. 84.

[59] *Ibidem*. The authors refers to the following NATO document: "Analysis of Russia' s Information Campaign against Ukraine", http://www.stratcomcoe.org/analysis-russias-information-campaign-against-ukraine, accessed on May 20, 2016.

Russian leader Putin saw Crimea "as the ancient Korsun or Chersonesus, and Sevastopol have invaluable civilisational and even sacral importance for Russia, like the Temple Mount in Jerusalem for the followers of Islam and Judaism"[60]. The inheritance of the Byzantine Empire and classical Greece was "saved" from the Turks then from the "traitors" Ukrainians. Nationalism and religious images were combined to legitimate the regime and make the Russians accept the isolation of their country by the West[61].

Crimea brought about 27.000 sqm and 2500 kms of new borders plus about 1,8 million ethnic Russians. From there, by installing land to sea and sea to land missiles (Bastion anti-ship missile systems, coastal defense missile systems BAL (SSC-6 Sennight), Club-K cruise missile systems, possibly Iskander missiles, also preparing a deployment of Tu-22M3 strategic bomber with Kh-22 cruise missiles that can fly to 500 km at 4.000 km/h) submarines and huge military boats[62], Russia is able to deny access to NATO forces into the Black Sea in case of a conflict and even force Turkey to carefully respect the Montreux Convention or to use a more restrictive approach on this. Moscow brought more than 20.000 soldiers in Crimea since 2014. Russian short-range missiles from Crimea could hit Romania's Dobrogea, Bulgaria's coast and Turkish straits but also Istanbul, its biggest city. The possibility that Russia would also deploy nuclear warheads should be taken into account. Crimea and Kaliningrad are the two powerful military platforms that Russia has on the NATO's flanks. The question is if now, when the missile shield facility "Aegis Ashore" from Deveselu has been declared operational, followed by other land-based interceptors installed in Poland by 2018, when Turkey hosts the radar facility, Romania and its NATO neighbors must still accept this strategic vulnerability and the possibility that Russia could decide to act pre-emptively against these S.M. 3 missiles Block 1B interceptors. Or should they think that

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60 Vladimir Putin, "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly", December 4, 2014, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47173, accesed on March 3, 2015.

61 A. Kolesnikov, "Russian Ideology after Crimea", http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/09/22/russian-ideology-after-crimea/ii3q, 22 September 2015.

62 According to Ukrainian sources: "Since the first days of its military aggression in eastern Ukraine, Russia has been deliberately 'stuffing' the peninsula with personnel and military equipment. While at the end of 2013 the Russian Federation had some 14.000 military personnel, over 30 warships and vessels moored at leased berths, 20 Su-24M and Su-24MR and An-26 aircraft and up to a dozen Ka-27 helicopters (based at Kacha and Hvardiyske airbases) deployed in the Crimean peninsula, those numbers increased to 24.500 military personnel, 30 MBTs, 260 armored fighting vehicles, 80 aircraft; 40 helicopters; 80 cannon artillery systems (both self-propelled and towed); 40 MLRS launcher units and 24 S-300 SAM systems as of August 2015, according to data from the Information Resistance volunteer group". See "The Threat from Crimea", http://defence-ua.com/index.php/en/publications/defense-express-publications/619-the-threat-from-crimea, 14 March 2016.

the deterrence will perfectly work against Russia in spite of the fact that officially NATO anti-missile shield was not designed against Russia's threat[63]?

Moscow plans to quickly develop its Black Sea Fleet by adding 80 new ships and other types of vessels by 2020 at a price of about 2,3 billion USD in the words of Admiral Chirkov, the Russian navy commander. Between 2017-2018 the Black Sea fleet will probably receive six Admiral Grigorovich class frigates and six new Vershavyanka class submarines (improved Kilo class)[64]. These are area-denial weapons for deterring NATO activities in the Black Sea, especially if Romania could convince the other NATO states of the usufulness of a Black Sea allied fleet[65]. Since Russia does not have any more high power marine turbines imported from Ukraine, it will be obliged to take them from China or build them internally[66]. In 2014 Russia installed in Crimea Bastion P anti-ship missiles systems

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[63] In their Warsaw Summit communiqué, on July 9, the NATO leaders agreed to call Russia a threat: "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force, are a source of regional instability, fundamentally challenge the Alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace". See http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm, 9 July 2016.

[64] O. Manea, G. Vișan, A. Goșu, V. Gusilov, "Black Sea in Access Denial Age", Romanian Energy Centre, *ROEC Special Report*, January 2016, p. 17

[65] On June 16, after the meeting of the presidents of Romania and Bulgaria in Sofia, who both supported the idea of a NATO Black Sea fleet, the Bulgarian prime minister B. Borisov bluntly and unexpectedly rejected that idea and stated that Russia would not attack Bulgaria and is not a danger for his country, taking into account the cultural and religious linkages. "I want to see sailboats, yachts, tourists, peace and love in our Black Sea resorts, I do not want frigates crisscrossing the sea. We can have Bulgarian-Romanian exercises any time we want, but that other thing would be opting for a military conflict", stated Borissov. (http://www.bta.bg/en/c/DF/id/1358234, accessed on June 16) At the same time between June 16-27, 2016, a pan-Orthodox council took place in Crete (Greece) under the authority of the Constantinople Patriarch Bartholomeu, with the aim of preparing the harmonization and spiritual unity of the orthodox Christian different churches. The Russian Patriarch together with the Bulgarian one refused to take part in this event. This council was the first such event in 1000 years. The conference initially was planned to take place in Istanbul, where is the seat of the Ecumenical Patriarch, but Russia asked for Crete because of its political conflict with Turkey. In the end Russian patriarch refused to take part in it and showed that synodality is still a battlefield. The Bulgarian heads of the orthodox church are heavy influenced by the Russian Patriarch. One could see a possible linkage between the two events. Bulgaria has a strong pro-Russian lobby with economic activities and different threat perceptions than Romania, Poland etc. In November 2016 a pro-Russian Socialist, Mr. Rumen Radev, was elected president of the republic. See "Bulgarian Orthodox Church withdraws from Pan-Orthodox Council in Crete", http://sofiaglobe.com/2016/06/01/bulgarian-orthodox-church-withdraws-from-pan-orthodox-council-in-crete/, accessed on June 21, 2016.

[66] *Ibidem*, p. 10.

On the other side, after its annexation, most of western capitals, technology and investments fled from Crimea and let it in a state of poverty. The Western sanctions which affects the military, banking and energy sector of Russia will expire in July – they could be prolonged or not. They do not aim at weakening Russia in order to let it vulnerable to aggression. Their role is to make Moscow change its behaviour, to abandon its territorial revisionism. The EU and Russia had negotiated since 2008 a strategic partnership but now the negotiations are postponed. The lack of such a document increases the uncertainty and lack of trust, thus favoring the security dilemma mechanisms.

The economic sanctions are erroding the basis of ordinary Russians' living standard. They act together with the world decline of oil price and the diversification of gas supply via the more frequent use of shale gas. Russian economy is no more really attractive for foreign investors and a lot of investments left that country after 2014. In 2012, about 75% of foreign investments in Russia were from EU states[67]. Now Russian banks are cut from access to western European capital markets and the trade with EU sharpely declined. Capital flight from Russia could have been about 250 billion USD in 2014-2016. Only in 2014 about 151 billion USD left Russia accordiong to Russia Central Bank[68]. The access to western technology has also been diminished, one good example being the gas and oil extracting technology were Russia depends on foreign partners. Of course some EU states also suffered heavy loses because of the Russian embargo on their products. The BRICS states alone are not able to immediately compensate Russia for the lost of western markets, capitals and technology[69]. Anyway, Crimea was not such a radical departure from what Moscow used to do in that area. The Summer 2008 war between Russia and Georgia was the fist major change of territorial *status quo* in the Black Sea area, producing two separatist republics recognized only by Russia and some second-rate Latino-American states (Venezuela, Nicaragua).

The so-called "Medvedev Doctrine" plays against the sovereignty of Russia's small neighbors and it is contrary to UN Charter which protects states' sovereignty. This doctrine was formulated by Dmitri Medvedev, the prime minister of Russia and former president, and refers to so-called "right" of Russia to help Russian minorities abroad, including by using the force to

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67 Elina Kyselchuk, "What Effect Have Sanctions Had so Far?, The Sanctions on Russia", a Report of the Bow Group, August 2015, http://www.bowgroup.org/sites/ bowgroup.uat. pleasetest.co.uk/files/Bow%20Group%20-%20Sanctions%20on%20Russia%20-%20 Adriel%20Kasonta.pdf, pp. 8-9, accessed on May 29, 2016.

68 "$110 Billion Expected to Flee Russia This Year as Sanctions Bite", http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/110-billion-expected-to-flee-russia-this-year-as-sanctions-bite/522575.html, 28 May 2015.

69 *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

prevent genocide. The strategy to protect Russian minorities ("diasporas") abroad existed even before the beginning of Putin's era – Moscow offered its diasporas financial incentives, Russian passports and political support against their states since the years '90s. This (in)famous Medvedev doctrine allows Russia to use its national power to coerce smaller and weaker states which in the past belonged to the USSR. That means that diasporas are and will be used by Moscow as an element of national power on the international arena. The model already existed. China often used the leverage on its immigration in Southern Asia, India recently announced that the Roma population in Europe could receive also its citizenship. Russia is using the presence of ethnic Russians in the Baltic states to put pressures on these states and on NATO. In eastern Ukraine, Moscow used the Russian minority to launch a civil war and then keep it alive, also blocking Ukraine's possible NATO membership. It is possible that it would use a local Russian rebellion in a NATO member to see if NATO states are able to reach the article 5 consensus within the NAC or not. If NATO proves to be decided, Russia could withdraw its support for the local rebels and pretend not having any connection with them[70]. As we mentioned before, Medvedev also proposed in 2008 to the West a new European security organization based on common decision by consensus and on the respect of spheres of interests for all powers. Most of NATO states rejected it because they did not trust Russian honesty and the fact that the Alliance's decision could be subject to a Russian veto. But would the acceptance by the West of that organization have made Russia give up its doctrine for aggressively supporting its ethnic-kin diasporas in neighboring post-Soviet states? Nobody could say for sure, but recognizing its great power status, the Black Sea area buffer zone and limiting EU/NATO's capacity to expand to the East might have contributed to a diminution of Russia's territorial revisionism.

The WBSA security subcomplex is also interlinked with the Midle East security subcomplex: Russia and Turkey are rival for more power and influence in Sirya and Irak, they support oposing camps accross the Sunni/Shia and Arab/Turkoman/Kurd divide, and this multiple rivalry is translated also in the Black Sea with Turkey trying to involve NATO allies in its competition against Russia. Turkey is more and more closer to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other sunni Gulf states, creating together a block to counter Russia wich is a de facto ally of

[70] Douglas Mastriano, "Putin's Conundrum: The Baltic Region, Unconventional Threats and a Rising Russia", http://www.fpri.org/article/2016/04/putins-conundrum-baltic-region-unconventional-threats-rising-russia/, 20 April 2016. US Army colonel Mastriano insists that this scenario is a real possibility. "Hiding behind the veil of ambiguity, the unrest would appear local. In such a context it would be difficult to convince all twenty-eight NATO nations to agree to implement Article V. If NATO dithers in responding and the security situation deteriorates, then Moscow has the initiative. In a simple stroke, the Kremlin could announce that it will 'temporarily' deploy forces to the troubled area for humanitarian reasons, and promise to withdrawal once order is restored."

Iran and Hizbollah. The Ankara's war against radical Kurdish guerillas will certainly impact on the Black Sea area security while ISIS activities could reach also other Black Sea states beginning with Russia: at least 3000 ISIS fighters are from Russian Federation and some of them will try to come back at some moment. The Syrian migration could affect also other Black Sea states, not only Turkey. Some Syrian Circassians already relocated in Russian Federation, fleeing the war in their country. Syrian circassians are about 100.000 and their ancestors have been expelled by the Czarist Empire from North-West Caucasus in the 19th century, a land they still consider as "historic homeland"[71]. Moscow is also supporting the Syrian Kurds as a tool for pressuring Turkey and in February this year announced its will to open a Syrian Kurd representative office in Moscow[72]. The USA also supports Syrian Kurds as the only strong local force to fight against ISIS.

What we are seeing now in the WBSA is a competition for power and security, in a self-help pattern, which translated into mechanisms of *security dilemma*[73]. Both Russia and NATO states are caught in an arms race since they don't trust each other and interpret their speeches and actions as mutually hostile. NATO states prepare for the Warsaw Summit very soon and all of them are eager to increase military spending at the level of 2% GDP while acquiring new weapons like F16 jets, corvettes, submarines, helicopters, anti-air defences etc. Turkey was caught in a dangerous security pattern with Russia at the end of 2015, with Kurdish extremisms and ISIS as direct foes, thus being forced to increase the size and endowment of its armed forces. Romania and Bulgaria do increase their spendings on defence and try to implement the "smart defence" concept with NATO, plus "pooling and sharing" with the EU, because of the Russian threat. SIPRI Trends in Military Expenditures 2016 asserted that in Central Europe increased the military budget with 13% "largely prompted by fears of Russian aggression following the Ukraine crisis"[74].

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[71] Fred Weir, "Russia as Safe Zone for Syrian Refugees? It's Not as Odd as You'd Think", http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2015/0916/Russia-as-safe-zone-for-Syrian-refugees-It-s-not-as-odd-as-you-d-think, posted on 16 September 2015.

[72] Serghei Demidenko, "Why Moscow Supports Syrian Kurdistan", http://in.rbth.com/opinion/2016/03/25/why-moscow-supports-syrian-kurdistan_579021, 26 March 2016.

[73] A well-known mechanism explaining the escalation to military conflict in the relations between two or more states which perceive themselves as rival ones, the security dilemma is at a centre of a rich literature of the Realist and Neorealist schools in IR. See John Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1950, pp. 171-201 and Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics*, vol. 30, no. 2, January 1978, pp. 167-174; also *Idem*, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1978, pp. 58-113.

[74] Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Retrieved 5 April 2016, http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1604.pdf, p. 1.

Ukraine, confronted with a low intensity war in the East (the Minsk II agreement is frequently violated) asked and received non-lethal equippment from NATO states and will probably buy lethal equipment from other sources like Pakistan, India or African states, also increasing the defence budget in spite of the poor economic situation. Only Moldova and Georgia are likely to keep almost the same level of defence expenses because of their economic weakness and cleavages among their populations concerning the behaviour towards Russia.

Security dilemma pits a revisionist state against *status quo* ones but also two or more revisionist states who want to improve their power levels. Accidentally, even two satisfied states could be engulfed in it, but the likelihood of misperceptions and misteps is lower. MIT Political Science professor Stephen Van Evera stated that:

> ''States mobilize or attack because they see a first-move advantage, and they fear attack by another because they think the other fears their own attack and may move to forestall it"[75].

As some neorealist authors teach us (Charles Glaser is a good example) even satisfied countries could act in an aggresive way, enlarging their territories or their allies number to protect themselves, to control a territory which is seen as a cordon sanitaire against an aggresor[76]. Greed-led states and security-seeking states may interact in non-predictable patterns, as each of them calculate the other's material forces and intentions or motivation. Offensive neorealist John Mearsheimer insisted on the fact that satisfied states who are afraid of reckless one will become "first movers" and the only way to be protected from an aggressor's attack is to be powerful and be able to inflict a great damage on the aggressor. It could be more easy to use the internal balance than to create a coalition because of the risk of cheating and because of the fact that some great powers "are prone to act in a foolish way"[77]. Thus, satisfied states which feel threatened could sometimes go on the offensive knowing the risk to enter an open conflict with an aggressive revisionist state but without other security alternative.

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[75] S. Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1999, p. 44.

[76] Ch. Glaser, *Rational Theory of International Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, and Oxford, 2010, p. 36. He stated that: "Expansion could increase a state's security in a variety of ways, including increasing its resources and resource autonomy; decreasing its adversary's resources and in extreme cases eliminating its adversary as a sovereign state; and improving its ability to employ its resources effectively by, for example, providing a buffer zone against invasion, strategic depth, or more defensible borders. Similarly, even if it did not desire additional territory, a security seeker might start a war to weaken its adversary, thereby increasing its own security".

[77] John J. Mearsheimer, "Realists as Idealists", *Security Studies*, vol. 20, 2011, pp. 424-430. See especially pp. 429-430.

It is possible that Russia is acting defensively and sees NATO and EU as western intruders in its space of interest but it is perceived in the West as an aggresive and revisionist state which violates international law with impunity. The West and especially the USA are not ready to recognize a Russian sphere of interest the way that Mr. Putin would like it. Even if the German foreign affairs minister W. Steinmeier asked NATO states to avoid provoking Russia stating that "what we shouldn't do now is to inflame the situation by loud sabre-rattling and shrill war cries", and "whoever believes that symbolic tank parades on the alliance's eastern border will bring more security is mistaken", the fact is that at least from the NATO's eastern members the requirements for new allied forces to be deployed there are more and more vocal[78]. Ukraine and Syria has been *de facto* connected by Russian military involvement, catching NATO state Turkey in a strategic encirclement and puting an end to Ankara's doctrine of "strategic depth" and "zero conflicts with the neighbors". Security dilemmas could be avoided only by dialogue, transparency and confidence building measures. Former foes like Germany and France became partners and friendly states after World War II. Unfortunately, in the Black Sea area these elements are not really present in the NATO-Russian relations. On the contrary, arms races are visible while threats and intimidations are frequent. Both NATO states and Russia think they act defensively and depict the other one as being reckless.

The *offense-defence balance* theory (ODBT)[79] could give us a better prediction on future behavior of the strongest Black Sea states, Russia and Turkey. In our time, defensive and offensives military postures are not easy to differentiate and with the advancing missile shield technology (which is by definition a defensive platform), the ultimate defence (based on nuclear weapons) could become less dominant, thus enhancing the security dilemma

[78] German Foreign Minister Warns NATO of 'Sabre-Rattling' against Russia", http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-19/german-minister-warns-nato-of-sabre-rattling-against-russia/7523520, accessed on June 18, 2016. Germany, France and Italy seem more favorable to Russia's geopolitical interests in the East. Berlin has big economic interests in Russia: about 20 billion USD foreign direct investments in Russian economy and 45 billion annual trade. Not to mention North Stream I and II (to be built). In june, NATO defence ministers agreed that 4 batallions will be deployed in the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, about 4000 soldiers.

[79] The Offense-Defense Balance Theory was developed by some structural Realist thinkers (Robert Jervis) and military strategists (S. van Evera) about two decades ago and postulates that when defence weapons and strategies are more effective than offensive ones, major wars could be avoided and the *status quo* would be more easily preserved. The two kind of weapons must be differentiated and calculated by the antagonists. In reality this kind of perception could be erroneous and the calculations are difficult to make. As an example see Charles Glaser, Chaim Kaufmann, "What is The Offense-Defense Balance and can We Measure It", *International Security*, vol. 22, no. 4, Spring 1998, pp. 44-82.

mechanisms[80]. Giving up nuclear weapons, then missile shields and adopting defensive postures could help solve this problem.

Currently, no Black Sea NATO member could be seen by Russia as a dangerous ennemy, able to destroy its military capabilities and invade its territory. But they are seen as allies of USA and possibly of Japan, "trojan horses" taking part in the containment game against Russian interests. Russia seems anxious that it is gradually losing its capacity to be able to threaten neighboring states. On the other hand, Russia is indeed seen as a palpable danger by these NATO Black Sea states. They must assume the worst, in the logic of Offensive Realism, since the zero-sum game is considered the dominant power logic in the area. Since V. Putin suspended and had frozen Russia's legal obligations under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, in 2007, the arms race began to affect also the Black Sea region. Arms control agreements are important in preventing spirals of escalating conflicts, they must be based on trust[81]. Or in the Black Sea area, increased military power is not based on trust and mutual norms. It is based on fear and negative emotions/images.

There is a lack of an effective regional organization to deal with such spirals of conflict: BSEC is mainly economic, OSCE is not effective in conflict resolution, Eurasian Economic Union is the tool of Russia, while EU and NATO are not accepted by Russia. There are two possibilities: in spite of the defensive nature of missile shield and its claimed ineffectiveness when dealing with long range missiles Russian elites around president Putin may feel that the strategic balance in Europe is changing at the expense of Russian nuclear deterrent, or Russian elites know that the shield is not a real threat for their nuclear deterrent but for domestic reasons prefer to present it as a threat and a legitimate target for a future war.

Of course, the debate on so-called NATO's broken promises not to enlarge to the East, supposedly made by US president G.H.W. Bush to Gorbachev at the beginning of the '90s still continues – it is not clear that the West made such promises or simply Russian leaders had the impression of a gentlemen agreement on non-enlargement, but "U.S. and allied policymakers should refrain from treating Russian accusations of a broken non-expansion pledge as deceptive"[82]. The truth may be that Russia felt betrayed and

[80] See as examples: Charles Glaser, "Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models", *World Politics*, vol. 44, no.4, 1992, pp. 503-505, 508-510, 528-532; also *Idem*, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help", *Security Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1996, pp.133-143.

[81] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, pp. 81-82.

[82] Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, "Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion", *International Security*, vol. 40, no. 4, Spring 2016, pp. 7-44, doi: 10.1162/ISEC_a_00236. The author stated that: "There are numerous

considered USA (the West) as a situational manipulator which broke its commitments when the opportunity arouse[83]. Of course, it would be difficult for NATO states to withdraw the promise they made in April 2008, at the Bucharest NAC Summit, that Georgia and Ukraine will be accepted as members in the future. At the same time, Russia is not ready to withdraw its forces from these countries to ease NATO's decision on possible enlargement.

Conclusions

The competition between NATO states and Russia in the Black Sea area is based both on cultural and psychological factors like the western need to promote democracy and freedom in the neighborhood and Russian obsession with western complots aiming at subverting its buffer region and even changing the regime, also Moscow's strong desire to shape a multipolar world system by working with China against the USA, while sabotaging the EU and favoring the coming back of European nation-states. It is also based on structural and material features such as the security dilemma mechanisms, arms races, the decline of Russian and other ex-Soviet states' economies and decline/aging of populations, failure of socio-economic modernization, together with the global low oil prices which reduced Russian available funds. The personal views and perceptions of leaders also shape their decision-making process. All these elements push towards a dangerous zero-sum competition and a difficult dialogue, since the level of mutual trust is reduced.

Hard power may be necessary for ensuring the respect of national interests but one needs also soft power. Russia tried to convince the other states that it has legitimate claims over Crimea but failed. But hard power in not enough. As Joseph Nye stated "a smart power strategy" must be based on "a liberal realist strategy emphasizing a just understanding of the limits of one's power", "developing an integrated grand strategy that combines hard power

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reasons to condemn Russian behavior in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as against states in Eastern Europe, but Russia's leaders may be telling the truth when they claim that Russian actions are driven by mistrust. This possibility has largely been obscured by discussion of whether an explicit, codified deal constrained NATO's future. Because absence of a deal is not evidence that a deal was absent, NATO's eastward march may have left Russia feeling isolated by upending the informal arrangement of 1990" (p. 43).

83 Shifrinson mentions the meetings in Moscow on February 7-9, 1990, between U.S. officials, led by James Baker and the Soviet officials led by Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, regarding German unification – Baker clearly stated that if the Soviets allowed Germany for reunification and being a NATO member, "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east if Germany reunified within NATO by Secretary of State Baker, and their Soviet counterparts". *Ibidem*, p. 23.

with soft attractive power into smart power of the sort that won the Cold War"[84]. In the Black Sea region Russia has more hard power than necessary and some soft power by using networks of supporters and bribe-receiving politicians in the West, but lacks the cultural attractiveness. Moscow is deficient in what Nye calls calculating the "probability of success in achieving its objectives"[85], having a geopolitical and mythological imaginary based on the ideas of being a special nation with a special political and religious mission. Turkey has a lot of hard power and some degree of smart power by using the attractiveness of its movies industry and cultural models, the force of its economy plus its diasporas in the West, but this soft power is generally limited to Turk/Muslim populations in Europe and had severely diminished by its declining democracy and rule of law standards (the abuses against mass media), by the huge ethno-religious tensions at home (the Kurdish agitation) and its subversive involvement in Syrian conflict. Ukraine is deficient in both type of power, but recently it won the Eurovision musical contest against Russia, benefiting from collective emotions of European public opinion regarding the fate of the Tatars from Crimea. So, its soft power improved a little. Moldova and Georgia are even in the worse situation, poorly performing in both types of power. Finally, Romania and Bulgaria have medium-hard power capabilities and a small amount of soft power (cultural models – music, movies, theater, economic lobby etc), via EU membership. At the continental level, after United Kingdom would exit the EU, Germany will become the economically and politically dominant power without a peer[86]. UK is seen in Russia as a potential adversary, Germany is seen much more as a partner. The NATO Black Sea states like Romania would have an interest in keeping UK and USA involved in eastern flank defence, and avoid a too close partnership between Moscow and Berlin. The Great Britain's future exit from the EU will complicate the situation of the European security, as London will remain a NATO member and during the process of exiting the Union, about 2 years, it will likely block any Franco-German attempt to create a European common standing army, with its own Headquarters, seen as an attempt to separate EU from NATO and to distance Europe from USA. These intra-EU and intra-NATO tensions could be beneficial for Russia, able to use its gas-leverage to try to enhance the split.

The balance of power in the WBSA seems in a process of rapid change and the material data like economy, military, demographics are accompanied by the specific perceptions of the actors. Those actors which perceive their national power as weakening could have the tendency to act more assertively to prevent this trend. This could led some revisionist states to try to act forcefully and take

[84] J.S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, pp. 231-232.
[85] *Ibidem*, p. 299.
[86] See the interview of George Eaton with conservative politician Michael Heseltine, "They Have Swallowed Their Own Propaganda", *New Statesman*, 29 May 2016, p. 26.

more risks to stop or slower these trends. EU and NATO must help their Black Sea members keep a stable and predictable security environment, remain true democracies and preserve the regional *status quo*. And also try to diminish the impact of security dilemmas and arms race with Russian Federation by using dialogue, incentives and good deterrence means.