

EASTERN EUROPE, A REGION OF INSECURITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S VICINITY

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Abstract: *During Cold War, the region of Eastern Europe was formed by European states that were behind the Iron Curtain. Once the communism has fallen and former Warsaw's Pact members have joined EU in 2004 and 2007 along with the Baltic republics, a New Eastern Europe comprising Ukraine, Republic of Moldova and the Caucasian Republics emerged at the border of EU. The north, west and south maritime frontiers of European Union are opposite with Eastern territorial one that are more difficult to control and defend against asymmetrical threats as: organized crime, drugs traffic, arms proliferation and illegal immigration. This paper aims to demonstrate that EU's policies initiated in the framework of Eastern Partnership (EaP) that wanted to bring peace in the Eastern neighborhood did not succeed to fulfill the desired goals. One explanation is that EU did not take in consideration the Russian dream of redesigning its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. Another one is that the cultural, political and social differences between EU and its EaP partners led to the failure of the project. Thus, European Union's actions toward Eastern vicinity led to a clash between two civilizations: East and West as well as to a geopolitical competition between Russian Federation and EU over their shared neighborhood.*

Keywords: security; European Union; Eastern Partnership; Ukraine; Russian Federation; soft power; hard power.

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union, an ambitious supra-state project, born from the ashes of World War Two was initially designed for protecting the Old Continent from a new devastating World War. Nowadays, EU has become an important international actor, which “conquers” new territories, not through military means, but by “attracting” its neighboring countries through its soft power instruments. After the collapse of USSR and the fall of Iron Curtain, the Warsaw Pact members and the three Baltic soviet republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) sought an alternative for their national security and interests. Joining European Union, the entity that was promoting the four fundamental free of movements: of people, goods, services and capital, became an immediate aim for the ex-communist countries, ravaged after more than 50 years of bankrupt planned economy, precarious social services and violation of human rights and freedoms. That is why in 2004 Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Malta, Cyprus and Slovenia and three years later, in 2007, Romania and Bulgaria embraced the European policies and values and became members of the European Union.

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Being the greatest economy of the world, having the values of Gross Domestic Product – GDP (12280.6 millions of euro) one of the highest in the world, the life expectancy at birth averaged at 79.2 (*The 2012 Ageing Report, 2011*), European Union is seen as a territory of wealth, great social services and attracts people all over the planet. The threats to the security of EU are perceived as not being traditional (as are for example the military one), but asymmetric such as: organized crime, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal immigration and Cross Border criminality. Therefore, the European Union sought measures for maintaining its borders safely and keeping a favorable climate in its vicinity. That is why in 2003, the European Union launched the first European Security Strategy, where it was “in European interests that countries on European border to be well-governed. Neighbors who are engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on its borders all pose problems for Europe”. Subsequently, in 2008, with the emergence of new challenges to European security like globalization, cyber-terrorism, climate change, energy security (*Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy, Providing Security in a Changing World, 2008*), the European Security Strategy has been modified and completed. Also, after the new dynamic of the International System in the southern neighborhood, like the Arab Spring and the continuously political changes in North Africa and in the eastern neighborhood, before and after the Vilnius Summit, it is admitted that European Union needs a different security strategy, which have to be able to cope with the new International geopolitical changes.

1. EASTERN PARTNERSHIP (EAP) EVOLUTION AND CONSEQUENCES

In 2003, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was launched. Its aims was to support a pro-European orientation, democratization and liberalization within the 16 partner members (*Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Republic of Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine*), the countries that lie to the South and East of the European Union. Furthermore, ENP was created in order to assure an individual partnership between the EU and each individual neighbor through a single policy that promotes strong commitment to the human rights and freedoms, democracy and the rule of law (*Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions, 2013*). Also, ENP had two dimensions, first is Euro-Mediterranean Partnership- EUROMED and second, Eastern Partnership.

“EUROMED, formerly known as the Barcelona Process, was re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), with the goal of developing concrete regional and sub-regional projects in the economic, energetic, migration and environmental fields. The Union for the Mediterranean promotes economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbors (Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey) to the EU’s south in North Africa and the Middle East” (Source, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm).

The other dimension of the ENP addresses to the eastern neighborhood of the EU, more specifically to the six ex-Soviet republics: Belarus, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. In this regard, the area that today is known as “the New Eastern Europe” (due to the fact that ex-members of Warsaw Pact have joined EU), became in the foreground of foreign European agenda in the last years.

The Eastern Partnership was launched by the EU in 2009, at the Prague Summit. The EaP was created in order to test the EU’s ability to exist as an important international actor. Also it was designed by EU with the aim to act as a regional normative power, being able to make changes in the politic, economic and social fields of its neighbors and to implement European norms and values. EaP was perceived to reduce the economic and political differences between EU and EaP countries, through implementation of several European norms and reforms. The platforms of the EaP promote energy security, visa liberalization, developing financial investments and have created political and civic dialogue among the sides involved. Furthermore, EU adopted a “more and more” strategy, where more reforms were implemented resulted in more benefits that were offered and additional financial support (*for the period 2011-2013 1.9 billion were available for bilateral and regional cooperation, including 350 milion euro of additional resources*) was given for implementing political and economic reforms. All this efforts would eventually lead to the signing of Association Agreements (AA), including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) at the Eastern Partnership meetings. The last one took place on the 28-29 November 2013 in Vilnius (Kuznecova, Potjomkina and Vargulis, 2013).

1.1 Consequences of the Vilnius Summit

The continuously expansion of NATO and EU in the former soviet sphere of influence, attracted the attention of Russian Federation, which perceived EaP as a threat to its own national interests. No more interested in maintaining a sphere of influence in Europe, but defending its borders and immediately vicinity, Russia imposed aggressive measures against EaP partners such as economic embargoes (the import of wines from Republic of Moldova), sustaining territorial secession in independent countries (Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria and Gagauzia in Republic of Moldova) or getting involved in the domestic affairs of the EaP countries through Russophile parties (in Republic of Moldova and Ukraine). These measures were seen as hard power actions, where military threats and energetic blackmail became the means of the Russian foreign policy.

Also, the Russian hard power was in contrast with the European Union soft power, understood as “the ability to affect others through positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes and consequently, the types of resources associated with it include intangible factors such as institutions, ideas, values, culture and the perceived legitimacy of policies. (Nye, 2012)

The Security Dilemma in a multipolar system alliance formations underlined that small states tend to choose the more powerful alliance and the risk of defection is very probably in the case of a better emerging alternative (*Snyder, 1984*). Being aware of this, EU adopted a different approach in the case of EaP, a process known as Europeanization. A broad definition of the Europeanization suggests the emergence of a belonging sentiment to the European identity, which is complementary to the national and regional identities. Furthermore, this concept is used for the European Union and its action of spreading the European norms, policies and values towards other states. Also, Europeanization is seen as a process through which the states and the societies are modeled after the EU established standards. Having neighboring states, where societies adopted the European norms and values and feeling that they belong to the European civilization, in theory, the risk of defection shrinks.

However, in practice the EaP have failed. Four of the EaP partners renounced to their European approach, and just Republic of Moldova and Georgia still maintain their European aspirations and subsequently initialed the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit.

Belarus, considered the last European dictatorship and member of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), was perceived hopeless in implementing the EaP norms (*A Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit, 2012*).

The relations between EU and Azerbaijan were mostly oriented to the energy agenda. Azerbaijan, a rich oil resources country had never intended to join EU and even if it was a EaP partner and the negotiations to sign an AA were put in discussion, implementing the norms of EU in terms of human rights and the rule of law were in contrast with the authoritarian style of governance, based on a social pyramid that sustains the interest of ruling family and oligarchic clans (Kuznecova, Potjomkina and Vargulis, 2013a, pp 8-9). Perceived as a champion of the negotiation process among the EaP countries, Armenia has succeeded in July 2013 to establish a DCFTA with the EU. But the decision taken by this country, on 3 September 2013, to join the Russia-led Customs Union was a major blow to the future of Eastern Partnership and a victory for Russian Federation, which once more, after the military intervention in 2008, in Georgia, has shown to the West that Caucasus will remain in their sphere of influence.

In my opinion, the biggest stake of the EaP was Ukraine, the largest European continental country after Russia, with more than 50 million people and a country that has a huge agricultural and economic potential. But Ukraine (which literary means „at the border”) is a country between two civilizations, the West and the East and also the birth place of the Russian nation. A Russia without Ukraine is a country, but a Russia with Ukraine is an empire. Due to this consideration, any attempt of Ukraine to join the Western part became a threat to the national Russian interests.

2.EASTERN EUROPE, EUROPE’S NEW POWDER KEG?

2.1 EU and Russia – different ways of understanding security

The eastern border of European Union is also its largest territorial one and is the buffer zone between EU and Russian Federation. For Russian Federation this area represents its west European border and also an ex-soviet territory, that once had the capital at Moscow. In this regard, it is obvious that the two great European actors are looking for maintaining their influence over their common neighboring countries, in order to protect their own security.

But the European approach in understanding security is different than the Russia’s one. On the one hand, from the European perspective, the military conflicts are long gone, and the asymmetrical threats are more relevant in threatening the Union’s security. On the other hand, in a conventional war, European Union depends of the NATO’s military capabilities due to the fact that the Union does not have a united and single European army. A particular situation is found regarding cooperation between the European’s intelligence services. Therefore, Berne Club reunites

the secret services of the member states in order to have a common fight against international European Union's security threats. But the concept of "need to share" remains at a low level between the European Union's secret services, focusing more on sharing secret intelligence products regarding Organized Crime, Terrorism, arms proliferation or cyber-terrorism. As referring to the traditional military threat, it seems that this one remains in the responsibility of each European state to deal with it.

In opposite, the notion of security for Russian Federation is perceived different. Firstly, Russia remains a military power with nuclear capabilities. Also Russia uses military threatens in its foreign policy in order to deter the former soviet republics and to renounce to their European path. Nowadays, Russia is awakening from their national nightmare from the beginning of the 90's, namely the dissolution of USS, and tries to reestablish its influence in Europe by changing the post-soviet order in the Eastern Europe. The larger is the territory that Russian controls outside its borders, the higher is the security for their own frontiers. This Russian conception of security has its roots from the beginning of the Russian nation. Being a lowland people, with no natural fortress to defend their cities, the old medieval Kievan Rus' were almost brought to extinction by the ferocious Mongol raids during 1237-1240. All Russian medieval and pre-modern history concentrates in the Great East European Plain, an immense insecurity lowland zone. This can be an explanation why Russian sought to control a large territory, in order to be able to protect their own citadels.

In my opinion, all present Russian actions are related with their history and with their national psychology, influenced by a tumultuous past. On the one hand, the Russian millennial dream is wrote in the Peter's the Great Testament. It reminds about the duty of the Tsar's descendants to bring Russia to the shores of the "warm seas" and also underlines the dominance of Russia over its Christian neighboring states, due to the fact that Moscow, also entitled "the Third Rome" carries the Byzantine legacy. On the other hand, Russia's power to regenerate itself determined the analogy with a phoenix bird, which has the capacity to rise from its ashes more powerful than initially had been, examples of this events being obvious in Russian history. After the almost collapse of the medieval Russian states, Russia became an empire conquering vast territories of its previous enemies. After the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, withdrawal from the First World War and the nearby Nazi conquer, Russian Empire became USSR, incorporating 1/6 from the total world continental territory. After the dissolution of the USSR, the expectations are higher and perspectives brighter.

2.2 Ukraine between European soft power and Russian hard power

Where two civilizations clash, two diplomatic approaches collide too. In this regard, Ukraine is in the middle of great geopolitical interests and became the key piece on an international chess table. Through its hard power measures, such as giving a low gas price in exchange of a Russian oriented direction or maintaining its military troops in Sevastopol (where is located the entire Black Sea Russian fleet), Russia successfully “hijacked” Ukraine from the European approach, first in 2008 when Ukraine did not join NATO, and five years later at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, when Ukraine did not sign AA.

But the process of Europeanization had a great impact over the Ukrainian society. Immediately after the Vilnius Summit, people went out in the streets and protested against the decision taken by the politicians and demanded the resignation of the president, Viktor Yanukovich. These protests degenerated into ferocious street fights and had finally led to the president's fleeing to Russia and the establishment of a pro-Occidental government.

However, in Ukraine has appeared an unexpected turn of events that destabilized the country and also the whole European region. Moscow accused and characterized the new Western oriented political class by being a real threat for the rights and liberties of the Russian minority. In this regard, the Russian Federation supported the proclamation of independence of the people from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (with a Russian ethnic majority), which after a referendum, contested and unrecognized by the Western states, voted for the separation from Ukraine and annexation to the Russian Federation. From the Russian perspective, the annexation of Crimea was in accordance with the right of every ethnic majority group to the self-determination, but the International Law stipulates that an annexation should be an act of will of the people from the country that will lose its sovereignty. Due to the fact that Crimea was just an Autonomous Region which belonged *de jure* to the Ukraine's national territory and not a sovereign state, the act of annexation can be considered illegitimate.

What initially was designed to bring peace in the European neighborhood, in my opinion did exactly the contrary. With a difficult situation in Ukraine, where the Russian military intervention in the Eastern provinces, after the continuous riots of the Russian ethnic majority became a real scenario, with the probability of appearing a similar situation in Belarus, in order to change the dictatorial Lukashenko's regime and with the possibility that the “frozen conflicts” (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh region, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) to become “hot”, Europe is facing a difficult and dangerous situation. Therefore, the Eastern neighborhood of the EU became vulnerable

and could be perceived more and more as a region of insecurity and could have a destructive effect even over the EU, due to the fact that this situation would encourage the secessionist movements in entities like Scotland, Catalonia, Basque Region, North Cyprus, Southern Tyrol or in the Szeklerland in Romania.

CONCLUSIONS

The present geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe is characterized by many variables and no one can predict exactly what would happen within this territory. There are many predictions, but in these circumstances, in my opinion, Europe has just opened the Pandora's box of the post-soviet order. The two major European actors, Russia and European Union, are now in direct competition and like in the Security Dilemma, increasing one's security means threatening the other's one. The interconnected relations between this two actors are complex and it seems that the two powers depends one of each other, but none of them renounce to their policy of exploiting the other's vulnerabilities. Russian's dream to become again a world power raised concerns among the EU's member states and I personally consider that the annexation of Crimea brought Russian Federation back in Europe after 20 years of losing its ex-soviet sphere of influence.

In conclusion, I believe that NATO, as a political and military alliance that has the fundamental objective of protecting the member states against military threats, became legitimate in the face of the new challenges that shrink the European security.

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