

RUSSIA AND ITS NEAR ABROAD AFTER THE SOVIET UNION DISSOLUTION

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Abstract. *This paper analyses the Russia's foreign policy in its Near Abroad after the Soviet Union dissolution. It is argued that even though Russia has lost its geopolitical hegemony after the collapse of the soviet "empire" it retained the tendency to regain its influence in the former Soviet space.*

Keywords: *Russia, Near Abroad, NATO, EU, Russia-Georgia War.*

After the collapse of the USSR, Russian foreign policy went through several phases that are relatively easy to perceive. The immediate reaction of the Moscow after the dissolution of the Soviet Union "empire" was one of confusion that held throughout the initial phase of consolidation of the new Russian state. Indeed, Russia had to define itself before making any other approach to its policy towards its former area of influence. In the Russian political thinking there was no consensus on this development. Formally, Moscow paid little attention to the former Soviet Union and play all their cards with the Western; however, opposition to this policy developed rapidly.

Initial Western Orientation and Its Critics

The body which had prerogative powers in shaping Russian foreign policy in the immediate period after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the Russian Foreign Ministry. If initially he had only a "decorative function" afterwards it became a body founded in competition between the Boris Yeltsin Russian leadership and Gorbachev's Soviet leadership.¹

Moreover, scholars have emphasized the idea that in the competition between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, the Soviet Union platform became the main *weapon* on which Yeltsin staked his political future. According to this, the price that Yeltsin had to pay to overthrow Gorbachev was "weakening" the Union's institutions

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¹ L. Tiouline, 'Russian Diplomacy: the Problems of Transition' in M., Mozaffari (editor), *Security Politics in the Commonwealth of Independent States*, MacMillan, Basingtoke, 1997, p. 35.

towards the republics and finally breaking down the Union. Without the Soviet Union, Gorbachev's power would become non-existent; and if the Soviet Union had been transformed into a free federation as was the plan before the August 1991 putsch, the activity of the "union" authorities would have been much weakened in favour of other Russian and republics institutions.²

After its own declaration of sovereignty, Russia began formulating its own foreign policy, distinct in many ways from the Soviet Union's one. Two months after the Declaration of Sovereignty the Russian Foreign Ministry was reorganized – in fact, its consistence and structure only then were created. At this point, Andrei Kozyrev had already been appointed Russian foreign minister.³

Russian leaders had spoken against the 'foreign' institutions (especially NATO) that operated in the former Soviet area, while being convinced of the importance of institutions in which Russia had a prominent status. The Russian government saw the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) as an important element of the European security. Still, the Kremlin team, led by President Boris Yeltsin announced that foreign policy goals were "full participation in international economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund, integration into the democratic community of states and even NATO membership."⁴ On December 21, 1991, Yeltsin in a letter to the Allies surprisingly assert: "Today we wonder if Russia's admission to NATO could be a long-term political goal."⁵

During the period between 1990 and 1991, the Russian Foreign Ministry has established international contacts. First, the Soviet Union signed some bilateral treaties with other republics of the Soviet Union; furthermore, Russian officials have travelled frequently in Western European countries and institutions. Gennadiy Burbulis, Yeltsin's adviser on foreign policy emphasized in April 1991, that the assimilation of knowledge from the European experience was crucial in solving Russia's pressing domestic issues.⁶ From this picture of the early '90s new Russia – unlike the Soviet one – it seems clearly that their foreign policies was shaped by a number of anti-Soviet priorities, pro –Western, mainly domestic ones and lack too much consideration on the peripheral republics of the Union. This does not mean in any case that the Russian leaders pursue a complete dissolution of the USSR. However, Kozyrev said in an interview that he didn't "dreamed" the dissolution of the Soviet Union but has considered the idea of a "republic or an integrated structure of states more or less independent" instead of the Soviet Union.⁷

To some extent, the Russian leadership underestimated at the time the centrifugal forces of the non-Russian republics of the Union. Moreover, Yeltsin

² L. Roman, 'How Yeltsin's Exploitation of Ethnic Nationalism Brought Down an Empire', *Transition*, 12 January 1996.

³ H. Adomeit, 'Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality', *International Affairs*, vol. 71, no. 1, 1995, p.43.

⁴ L. Ponsard, *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security*, Routledge, 2006, p. 16.

⁵ B. Johnson, 'History Turns Inside Out as Russia Asks to Join NATO', *Daily Telegraph*, 21 December 1991.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ 'An interview with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol. 3, no. 28, 15 July 1994, p. 36.

“played with fire” on several occasions by encouraging autonomous republics within the Russian Federation to declare their sovereignty. Yeltsin’s words spoken in Kazan in 1991 were ironically reused later, especially during the Chechen war: “take as much sovereignty as you can swallow”. Similar statements were made on many occasions and in other circumstances and Yeltsin seemed to suggest that Russia should become a confederation of autonomous entities that will be entitled with the right to secede.⁸ The gradual process of the transformation of the Union (no matter how realistic it was) was emphasized by the August 1991 putsch triggered due to the seizure of power by some of the members of Gorbachev’s office the day before signing the New Union Treaty and all together determined the end of the USSR in its traditional structure.

The failure of the disorganizing putsch which aimed was to preserve the Union in its old structure just sealed his fate by cancelling all the chances of any reform projects. Meanwhile several leaders of the Union and autonomous republics have condemned the putsch, Yeltsin was prepared for the Moscow’s confrontation while the army has changed its stand and therefore opposed the *coup d’état* initiators and the coup was crushed in three days.

As Yeltsin coming to Moscow was victorious, Gorbachev was returning with an extremely low legitimacy. A couple of weeks after the coup the Union republics (except Russia and Kazakhstan) declared its full independence from the USSR. While some leaders still believed in the possibility of reforming the union, both Ukraine and Russia declared their independence from the USSR and the only state left was Kazakhstan. Finally, in 1991’s late December, Kazakhstan has declared, without great enthusiasm, its independence.

The Russian state that was created after these actions has been in the 1991 – 1992 years in full process of building its institutions and strengthening control over its territory. Its foreign policy was dominated by one or two main currents of thought of that time, namely, the reformer school called “Euro-Atlantist” by Mohiaddin Meshabi in an article since 1993⁹ opposite to the “Neo-Eurasianist” school, a far more imperialist thought school. In the process defining the principles of euro-Atlantist stream Meshabi argued that his main philosophical foundation is the dominance of domestic factors in shaping foreign policy. Consequently, the success of Russian economic reforms was a decisive factor in the formulation of Russian foreign policy.

A good example in this regard, as Meshabi mentioned are the words of the Russian Foreign Minister which stated in January 1992 that the greatness of the country [...] is determined not by the size of their empire, but above all by the welfare of its citizens.¹⁰ In line with this way of thinking, the priority of Russia must be the integration into the Western structures of the developed world – hence its interest to be accepted in G7 economic group; only western development model would make Russia a “great but normal power.” In the political line, Kozyrev

⁸ L. Roman, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁹ M. Meshabi, ‘Russian Foreign Policy and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus’, *Central Asia Survey*, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 181-215.

¹⁰ A. Kozyrev, ‘Preobrazhennaya Rossiya v novom mire’, *Izvestia*, 2 January 1992.

has actively sustained the U.S. military actions against Iraq, U.S. sanctions against Libya, the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel (which had been frozen since 1967) and supported the American-led peace initiatives in the Middle East. The only exception to this picture was the Russian policy concerning Iran which was different from the USA.¹¹

Small-scale military conflicts have never been a priority of Soviet military strategy¹², and this can be noticed even from the location of Soviet military infrastructure which corresponded to the main strategic offensive. By the end of 1991, in the ex-Soviet space, were located seven air bases, the naval infantry had a marine division and four marine brigades. The main problem related to their locations outside Russia, and therefore the permanently pressure of its withdrawal.

The pro-western attitude was driven by Russia's responsibility required by its nuclear weapons possessions and by its permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Also, we could notice a giving up of global hegemonic ambitions of the former USSR. Due to its geographical position and extent Russia was able to build a bridge between Europe and Asia and has gained a global strategic importance. This is an explanation why the Euro-Atlanticism perspective perceives Russia as a mediator of changes that would bring Central Asian "less mature" nation-states in the West family. The school adopts the vision of a European Russia, economically integrated in the Euro-Atlantic states and at the same level with its Western partners; certainly, this vision would be seen as an attractive prospect by the "less developed" former Soviet Union states. The perspective, in which Russia would be seen as a natural leader by the Central Asian states and particularly by the Caucasians ones, is preferable to the idea of constraining these republics to be back under Russian influence.

Meshabi summarizes these policy implications: "a defence relationship much closer with the West and a policy of cooperation in the Persian Gulf / Southwest Asia. The domination of the US in the Persian Gulf will not be questioned, Iran will be kept under a watchful eye, while the role of Turkey as a Western model for the region will be with some reserve accepted. No controversial and "inappropriate" position which could jeopardize Russia's strategic direction for its inclusion in the "civilized club" will be adopted."¹³

As for the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, the new Russian policy has sharply changed by diminishing the priority given to them. As a result, those regions were dealing with a complete vacuum power. In reality, the Russian leadership forgot all about these regions: American Foreign Minister James Baker visited the region before Kozyrev and the U.S., Turkey and Iran have immediately established their embassies in the region. From military point of view, the Russian troops were withdrawn on several occasions and the North Caucasus has become the front line. Initially, Kozyrev found the presence of other countries in the region as normal, despite that most Moscow's analysts were not of the same opinion.

¹¹ R.O. Freedman, 'Russia and Iran: A Tactical Alliance', *SAIS Review*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1997, p. 94.

¹² P. K. Baev, *The Russian Army in a Time of Troubles*, PRIO, Oslo, p. 127.

¹³ M. Meshabi, *op. cit.*, p. 184-185.

The main problem of this policy was the weak foundation it was built on. Although there was no consensus among the political forces in Russia most of them saw its foreign policy as a capitulation to the West and especially to the United States. In fact, this policy has remained dominant as long as the Russian Foreign Minister played a significant role in formulating foreign policy. As Matz noted that in the fall of 1991, the Russian Foreign Minister found itself in a position where its relative influence concerning the making of foreign policy that had reached an unprecedented size. Rival bureaucratic organizations that used to fight with the Russian Foreign Ministry to influence foreign policy vanished and thus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has enjoyed a position whereby its officials were more or less free to establish the elements of a new post-Soviet expression.¹⁴

Shortly, the opposition's dominant attitude concerning the policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has accentuated. In April 1992, the Parliament sharply rebuked the Ministry for what was considered to be his inability to formulate a policy regarding the Russian Diaspora in the New Independent States. The Ministry of Defence became much more critical with the foreign ministry. While non-Russian republics "grab their part" from the military forces within their territory (particularly Ukraine), Soviet Army was actually dismantled, seemingly without Foreign Affairs opposition. The Military and defence ministry saw the Ukrainian claims regarding Black Sea Fleet and its consequences as a humiliation for the Russian army.

Meanwhile, the Atlanticism policy arguments were not sustained. Russia's economic decline raised, structural reorganization was slow, the international public aid was inefficient and private investment was insignificant. Russia's debt grew and obvious failure of the government to create a new "Occidentalized" Russia, which could have been an economic power, has led to enhanced popularity of those who were calling the "restoration of the importance of that political state instrument which was prominent in both tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union: military power."¹⁵

The Liberal-Westernized group lost much of the initial confidence, while conservative forces have become increasingly popular and powerful. As a result, conservative forces have begun to restore its foreign policy influence putting pressure on the president. Conservative forces included the Army, the military industrial complex and security services, as was unreformed KGB.¹⁶

The main critics made to Kozyrev were linked to the so-called worship of the West and his "defeatism". The more conservative Eurasianists argued, contrary to Kozyrev's claim, that the West is not necessarily Russia's friend, there are no permanent friends and only permanent interests. This argument, with strong similarities to the neo-realist school of international relations, argues that the

¹⁴ J. Matz, *Constructing a post-Soviet international political reality: Russian foreign policy towards the newly independent states 1990-95*, Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2001, p. 26.

¹⁵ H. Adomeit, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁶ J. B. Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 297-301.

West is not interested for Russia to be strong, but instigates Russia to become this what Meshabi, called “an enlarged Switzerland” – something that definitely is not in Russia’s interests.¹⁷ The West was seen as a promoter of a unipolar world instead of a multipolar, a concept that the Atlanticism model have accepted without worrying about the imbalance that would follow and negatively influence Russia. At the same time, the U.S. would try to replace Russia in Central Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. The role of Russia as a great power must be strengthened and alliances must be established to deal with such “destabilizing factors”. According to conservatives, the period of “romantic illusions” lasted too long and run to an unacceptable misleading of normative goals such as democracy and human rights with national interests. This has led to a significant prejudice of the latter.¹⁸

The fundamental assumptions, on which the conservative thinking underlies, neo-Eurasianism, as it’s called by Meshabi, are therefore very different from those of the Atlanticist school. First of all, the Eurasianists think that the success of Russia’s transition depends on restoring Russia’s role in the world. The focus put on the relationship with the West and consequently neglecting of the Newly Independent States, the Middle East and Asia is a unacceptable forsaken policy. The Neo-Eurasianism disagrees with the Atlantist way of seeing the foreign policy as based on internal factors; instead, for them, there are both interdependent, none definitely superior to the other. Better than that, the survival of geopolitics as a definitive factor in international relations is emphasized: Kozyrev’s claims to a new international quality environment are rejected. Among the supporters of this current was Yevgeny Primakov, at that time head of the KGB security agency, which not necessarily saw the relations with the West as antagonistic, but certainly not euphoric also.¹⁹

Therefore, the Kremlin interest about Western efforts to include Russia in the Western European powers *club* quickly proved to be a disappointment. The Russia’s spirit of cooperation was considered by Moscow as a concession made to NATO and therefore expected from the Alliance a reward for this appropriate behaviour.²⁰ In a letter to the leaders of western European countries, Yeltsin stated that:

“We favour a situation where the relationship between our country and NATO will be far more amiable than those of the Alliance and Eastern Europe. The rapprochement between NATO and Russia, including the interaction in the peace making area should develop much faster.”²¹

Actually, NATO’s lacks of response associated with the new kind of Moscow’s leadership oriented towards western European values have created problems in

¹⁷ M. Meshabi, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

¹⁸ P. W. Schulze, ‘Die außenpolitische Debatte in Rußland un der Unstrukturierte post-sowjetische Raum’, *International Politik und Gesellschaft*, no. 4, 1995, p. 368.

¹⁹ M. Meshabi, *op.cit.*, p. 187-188.

²⁰ O. Simion, ‘Relația Rusia-NATO după destrămarea URSS: De la Războiul Rece la Parteneriatul pentru Pace’, *Revista de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale*, no. 3, 2009, p. 117-129.

²¹ *Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s letter to US President Bill Clinton*, SIPRI Yearbook 1994, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 249-250.

relation to neo-communist and nationalist forces. The period between the end of 1991 and the autumn of 1993 was called by the historians “honeymoon” or “period of romantic idealism.”²²

Near Abroad in Putin's Agenda

Since Putin came to power in the early 2000s, Russia began to impose itself as a leader in the post-Soviet space and to rebuild its sphere of influence.²³ Besides the obvious economic, political, security and so on, the Russia's interests for the near abroad is also due to the existence of a historical and cultural identities based on the generalization of the Russian language, the large number of Russian minorities living in the region and to the unitary nature of the Orthodox Church.²⁴ In addition, Russia has seen democratic revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine as a result of the involvement of Western countries, motivated by the desire to weaken Russian influence in the region. Moreover, while Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, he insisted to get a NATO invitation, Russia has opposed and continues to oppose this goal. Meanwhile, Russia leads a more intense campaign to try to keep Ukraine, a state higher and much closer to the Russians away from being a potential candidates to the NATO Alliance.

Russian leaders had repeatedly underlined that the EU and NATO manner of approaching to its neighbours represents a plan meant to forcedly promote a particular type of democracy in an attempt to globalize the region.²⁵ This kind of Russian rhetoric entailed more legitimacy to the claims of being the leader in this region.²⁶ His speech was put into practice by providing various incentives for the nearby states in a discrete but continuous manner. It provided to its neighbours cheap gas and energy-related agreements in exchange for the energy infrastructure control or other political or symbolic advantages, such as the appointment of pro-Russian people in high positions.²⁷ In these cases, “Russian

²² A. Pushkov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, www.ng.ru/politics/2000-07-18/3_dream.html, 18 July 2000.

²³ O. Pavliuk, ‘Russia's integration with the West and the states ‘in between’ in A.J. Motyl & Ruble BA, *Russia's engagement with the West: Transformation and integration in the twenty-first century*, M.E. Sharp, London, 2005.; N. Popescu & A. Wilson, *The limits of enlargement-lite: European and Russian power in the troubled neighbourhood*, European Council on Foreign Relations, London, 2009, p. 42, www.tinyurl.com/camdzwe; J. Nichol, *Russia-Georgia conflict in August 2008: Context and implications for US interests*, 2009, www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34618.pdf.; L. Najšlová, ‘The EU in the wider Black Sea region: Clumsy but attractive?’ in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *The Black Sea region and EU policy: The challenge of divergent agendas*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2010, p. 29-44.

²⁴ O. Simion, ‘Relația strategică UE – Rusia: limitări și perspective’, in D. Dungaciu, C. Vohn (Coord.), *UE după Tratatul de la Lisabona. Evoluții și tendințe posibile*, ISPRI Publishing House, 2012, p. 153.

²⁵ H. Haukkala, ‘Lost in translation? Why the EU has failed to influence Russia's development’ *Europe-Asia studies*, vol. 61, no. 10, 2009, p.162.

²⁶ M. Cichocki, ‘European Neighbourhood Policy or neighbourhood policies?’ in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *The Black Sea region and EU policy: The challenge of divergent agendas*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2010, p. 12.

²⁷ L. Delcour, ‘The European Union, a security provider in the eastern neighbourhood?’, *European security*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2010, p. 535–549; D. Sammut, ‘The European Union's increased engagement with the South Caucasus’ in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *The Black Sea region and EU policy: The challenge of divergent agendas*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2010; A. Agh, ‘Regionalisation as a driving force of EU widening: Recovering from the EU ‘carrot crisis’ in the ‘East’ *Europe-Asia studies*, vol. 62, no. 8, 2010; H. Haukkala, *op.cit.*

rewards were not cheap”: in most of the times, states have had to surrender resources, making them overwhelmingly dependent on Russian influence.²⁸

Even though most of the states in the Near Abroad are aware of Russia’s unilateral approach, in recent years – after the global economic crisis – they have been willing to overcome their concerns in order to benefit from the short-term solutions offered by Moscow to their pressing problems. This attitude could prove to be very dangerous for these countries as Russia has shown the ability to reconfigure the political stability in the region according to their own interests.²⁹ In practice, Russia has not hesitated to exercise his aggressive policy in its Near Abroad.

The campaign pursued by Moscow against Georgia is a prime example of how the interests of Near Abroad states are disregarded: for example, it undermined security energy of states like Azerbaijan and Armenia, countries heavily dependent on the Georgia’s infrastructure and used the Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory without its consent.³⁰ Its troop presence in many of these countries puts more pressure on their leaders. For example, Ukraine houses 15,000 troops, Armenia and Azerbaijan 5000 and the Republic of Moldova about 1,000.³¹ Moscow also used different tariffs to energy prices, oil and gas to project its aggressive policy.

The position adopted by Russia in its relations with neighbouring states as well as actions in many parts of the world are difficult to reconcile with Western democratic views. Following the Russia-NATO Council from April 2008, Vladimir Putin said that NATO enlargement is perceived by the Russian people as a threat. Putin also said that NATO expansion does not automatically mean a democratization of the territory the Alliance towards whom:

“Here is the example of the Baltic countries. In Latvia there are hundreds of thousands of people without citizenship. [...] Obviously, it is a undemocratic situation in that society. But NATO membership has not brought anything for this hundreds of thousands people. This is why the idea of democratization in the countries accepted in NATO is so exaggerated.”³²

During the same conference, asked what will be Russia’s reaction when the topic of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine and Georgia will be resumed by the Allies Vladimir Putin ironically said:

“Thank God, for the time being Russia doesn’t claim a MAP. In terms of national security, we are a country that doesn’t need support. And we’re not going to sacrifice some of our sovereignty for the illusion of strengthening security. But we are going to cooperate with NATO.”³³

²⁸ *EU neighbours are "mafia states"*, *US cables indicate*, EUObserver.com, 2010, www.euobserver.com/9/31406

²⁹ S. Kux, ‘European-Union-Russia relations: Transformation through integration’, in AJ. Motyl & Ruble BA., *op.cit.*; N. Popescu & Wilson A., *op.cit.*, p. 17; A. Rahr, ‘*Germany and Russia: A special relationship*’, *The Washington quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2007, p. 137-45; M. Leonard & Grant C. *Georgia and the EU: Can Europe’s Neighbourhood Policy deliver?*, Centre for European Reform, London, 2007.

³⁰ C. Nițoiu, ‘Reconceptualizing ‘Cooperation’ in EU-Russia Relations’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2011 p. 467.

³¹ N. Popescu & Wilson A., *op. cit.*

³² M. Metaxa, ‘Concluziile Consiliului Rusia – NATO’, 04.04.2008, http://www.bbc.co.uk/romanian/news/story/2008/04/080404_putin_nato.shtml.

³³ M. Metaxa, *op. cit.*

Lately, analysts have emphasized the increasingly larger problems that exists in Russia and the EU relationship, especially in their common neighbourhood – Ukraine, Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Southern Caucasus countries – in a time in which growing interdependence on political, social, economic and security matters links the comprehensive Europe’s more than ever.³⁴

Not at all surprisingly, this approach lies in the fact that Russia has the tendency to perceive the EU’s eastern neighbourhood in competitive terms. Such a perspective is primary/foreground even in the post-Soviet space: Transnistrian former leader Igor Smirnov once stated that “people understand that the EU and Russia competing for the region and if you choose Russia as a strategic partner you will perceive the EU as a threat.”³⁵ As Christou³⁶ noted, this behaviour can be explained by the attachment to a limited Westphalian interpretation on sovereignty in which there is no room for talks on governance and multilateralism. In the case of multilateralism, the Russians have argued that cooperation can be effective only if states and international organizations follow/comply with a positive interpretation of international law where/in which the interests of the nation state have priority in relations with Russia.

In its relation with the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU has developed a “Russia –first”³⁷ policy type. This meant that the EU had to stay withdrawn in areas where Russia had declared interests in order to keep the good relations. At the same time EU cooperation with Moscow was adjusted so as not to disturb the internal order of the latter. It is believed that Germany and France have developed the pattern that other EU countries have it applied in their relationships.³⁸ Meanwhile, the participatory cooperation that seems to influence the behaviour of most EU Member States legitimizes in fact Russia’s attempt to have/to take the EU’s eastern neighbourhood under its sphere of influence.³⁹ Better than that, such approaches blocked any concrete promotion of EU norms and values both in Russia and in its Eastern neighbourhood. This happened even though rhetorically states like France and Germany are still using an extremely normative speech about the role of the EU in its eastern neighbourhood.⁴⁰

In practice, they managed to undermine the possible enlargement actions of the EU in states like Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. The Germany attitude was also justified by Chancellor Merkel concerns that an ambitious normative agenda towards the former Soviet states would impede not just Germany’s economic

³⁴ H. Haukkala, *op.cit.*, p.1.

³⁵ *Transnistrian people stake their future on Russia, not EU*, EUObserver, 2011, www.tinyurl.com/cijceqj.

³⁶ G. Christou, ‘European Union security logics to the east: The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership’ *European security*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2010., p. 424; L. Delcour, *op.cit.*; V. Kononenko, ‘Boundaries of sovereignty, frontiers of integration: Rethinking ‘conflict’ between Russia and the EU” in T. Hopf, editor, *Russia’s European choice*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

³⁷ S. Biscop, ‘The ENP, security and democracy in the context of the European Security Strategy’ in RG. Whitman & Wolff S. (editors), *The European Neighbourhood Policy in perspective: Context, implementation and impact*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 84.

³⁸ C. Nițoiu, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ A. Rahr, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

cooperation with Russia but also the Moscow support for the Western actions to Afghanistan, Iran or the Middle East.⁴¹

*The Georgia War, Russia's First Post-Soviet Attack
on a Sovereign State*

Several months after President Vladimir Putin held statements within the Russia-NATO Council in April 2008, the Russian army attacked Georgia invoking the Tbilisi assault on the separatist republic of South Ossetia. Following the conflict, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia provinces. NATO supported Georgia in the conflict and strongly criticized Russia's actions. Moreover, this Russian-Georgian war triggered the suspension of high-level contacts between Moscow and NATO and thus the freezing of NATO-Russia Council for almost a year. In June 2009, within the first Ministerial meeting of the Council after the conflict in Georgia, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the General Secretary of NATO said that "fundamental differences" still exist between NATO's Member States and Russia regarding Georgia, but the relationships will be restored mainly with regards to the situation in Afghanistan, drug trafficking and the fight against piracy.

On the other hand, as regards the enhanced bilateral relations between EU Member States and Russia, the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 is a turning point.⁴² First, it removed all the doubts about Russia's intention of becoming the hegemony of the post-Soviet area. It pointed out that in time of crisis, Russia were willing use its military power in order to defend his own interests. The Russians presence in all EU Eastern Neighbourhood states made their safety to be a matter of national interest for the Moscow. Although the August 2008 war was a public manifestation of its "hard power", Moscow was involved in a more quietly background attack. Since 2004, many non – Russian citizens of the Member European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) were rewarded with Russian passports giving Moscow a legitimate right to protect them. It is estimated that at the time of the Russian-Georgian war (August 2008), approximately 170,000 people from Georgia had Russian passports.⁴³ However, Russia gave the West

⁴¹ O. Simion, 'Relația strategică UE – Rusia: limitări și perspective', p. 155.

⁴² S. Rynning & Jensen CP., 'The ENP and Transatlantic relations' in RG. Whitman & Wolff S, editors, *op. cit.*, p. 142; A. Agh, *op. cit.*, p. 1239-66; M. Baun & Marek D., 'Czech foreign policy and EU integration: European and domestic sources', *Perspectives on European politics and society*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2010, p. 2-21; G. Christou, *op. cit.*, p. 413-430; S. Biscop, 'The ENP, security and democracy in the context of the European Security Strategy' in *The European Neighbourhood Policy in perspective: Context, implementation and impact*, in RG. Whitman & Wolff S, editors, *op. cit.*, p. 73-88; M. Cichocki, 'European Neighbourhood Policy or neighbourhood policies?' in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 9-28; H. Haukkala, *op. cit.*, p. 1757-1775; L. Najšlová, 'The EU in the wider Black Sea region: Clumsy but attractive?' in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 29-44; D. Sammut, 'The European Union's increased engagement with the South Caucasus' in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 79-105; K. Wolczuk, 'Convergence without finalité: EU strategy towards post-Soviet states in the wider Black Sea region' in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 45-63; S. Vasilyan, 'A cacophony: The EU's Security Policy towards the South Caucasus' in K. Henderson & C. Weaver, *op. cit.*, p. 87-105.

⁴³ N. Popescu & Wilson A., *op. cit.*, p. 42.

an important signal and managed to show its authority beyond the EU. France, Germany and Italy sought to temper the EU official reaction as regards the Russian intervention into Georgia. Their way of seeing things was sustained by almost all other Member States, except the Baltic States and the United Kingdom that have proposed the suspension of all forms of cooperation with Russia and official use of hostile public statements. We can say that the gentle reaction on the 2008 war was a rather mutual agreement between the largest EU member states – excluding the Great Britain – which happened to be in a process of developing enhanced relationships with Moscow and therefore have lobbied for a friendly settlement with it.

This conflict was considered by the international community as a proof of the Russia's "anger" as it constantly criticized NATO expansion to the East and its intention to integrate Ukraine and Georgia into its structures. Kremlin always expressed its claim over the "privileged interests" that has in these two former Soviet republics.⁴⁴ Moscow has centralized power, has set new restrictions regarding the NGO (Non-Governmental Organisations)⁴⁵ activities, has increased state control over the economy particularly in the energy sector and uses energy leverage derived from its vast reserves of oil and gas to try to achieve its foreign policy goals. Russia sought to use, in a more subtle way, these levers also in Western Europe but it was far more direct and forceful to members of the CIS and Eastern Europe.⁴⁶

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