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**Intersections between Russian military
engagement in Frozen Conflict
and Political Discourse of
President Vladimir Putin**

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INDEX

Riassunto	6
Abstract	11
1. Introduction.....	12
Frozen Conflicts: Definition of the Term.....	12
Russia's past approach to Frozen Conflicts.....	13
Wordsmith Tools	16
2. Intersections between Discourse and Conflict Engagement: a Qualitative Analysis	19
3. Ukraine: Crimea and Donbass Conflict Analysis	30
Crimea's Historical Background	30
Crimea in the Post-Soviet Republics' scenario	31
The Orange Revolution of 2004	33
External Factors in the Orange Revolution	38
From the Orange Revolution to the Crimean Crisis	40
Western support for Euromaidan	42
The Annexation of Crimea	43
Ukraine in Putin's speeches.....	52
Conclusion	63
4. Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia Conflict Analysis.....	66
The Aftermaths of the Rose Revolution of 2003	70
The Russian-Georgian War	75
Relations between Russia and Georgia after the War	80
Georgia in Putin's speeches.....	85
Conclusion	98

5. Moldova: Transnistria Conflict Analysis	100
The conflict.....	104
Mediation Attempts.....	106
The Kozak Memorandum.....	108
Moldova and Russia in the aftermath of the Kozak Memorandum	111
International Reactions to Transnistria Situation.....	115
Present Situation	121
Moldova in Putin’s speeches	125
Conclusion.....	135
6. Comparative and Quantitative Discourse Analysis Concerning Frozen Conflicts ...	139
WordLists	140
Statistic Lists.....	146
KeyWords.....	149
Collocation Lists	158
Conclusion.....	166
7. General Conclusion	167
8. Bibliography	171
Presidential Speeches: Videos and Speech Transcripts	171
Academic Works.....	178
International Memorandums/Reports and Official Documents.....	189

Riassunto

Questa tesi mira a esaminare la storia dei nuovi stati formatisi dopo la dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica, specificamente in Europa orientale, dove sono stati creati i cosiddetti "Stati indipendenti" come l'Ucraina, la Moldavia e la Georgia. Di quest'ultimi verranno analizzati vari aspetti, tra cui la redistribuzione del potere a livello internazionale, il loro consolidamento come attori geo-politici e le loro relazioni, a volte complicate, con la Russia. A tal proposito lo studio verterà su un'analisi del discorso avvalendosi del software "Wordsmith", un software noto a livello internazionale che viene utilizzato principalmente per scopi linguistici, in particolare nel campo della linguistica dei *corpora*. L'obiettivo sarà quello di comprendere la correlazione tra gli interventi militari russi nelle regioni separatiste e i discorsi politici del Presidente Putin alla nazione e/o gli incontri con i Presidenti di Crimea, Donbass, Transnistria, Ossezia del Sud e Abkhazia avvenuti negli ultimi decenni.

L'analisi linguistica sarà sia quantitativa che qualitativa. La prima si concentrerà sulla ricerca di termini specifici presenti nei discorsi presidenziali e sulla loro frequenza, per identificare somiglianze e contrasti nei discorsi politici riguardanti le regioni secessioniste, le loro relazioni con la Russia e i tipi di interventi militari adottati nei loro confronti. Sulla base di quanto ottenuto, l'analisi qualitativa utilizza l'esame questi termini come supporto o conferma degli eventi storici quali interventi militari e le loro conseguenze a livello nazionale ed internazionale. L'obbiettivo di tale lavoro è fornire un contributo storico-scientifico alla complessa questione dei "frozen conflicts" e un nuovo approccio di studio, concentrandosi maggiormente sui discorsi e incontri politici, confrontandoli e analizzandoli linguisticamente, e contestualizzandoli nel quadro degli interventi militari e delle relazioni internazionali.

Il termine "frozen conflict" indica una situazione in cui un conflitto armato attivo è terminato, ma la cui ripresa - alternata appunto a fasi di stallo - risulta possibile sulla base del delicato intreccio di equilibri in continua evoluzione all'interno dei territori contesi. Essendo spesso un prodotto degli interessi della politica estera russa dopo la dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica nel 1991, l'espressione fa la sua comparsa soprattutto ai conflitti post-sovietici. Questi, però, non sono le uniche aree definite tali. Infatti, tali conflitti si verificano tipicamente in regioni in cui il controllo del governo centrale è venuto meno, il che indebolisce la posizione dello Stato sovrano e spinge altri Stati a sostenere le fazioni separatiste, direttamente o indirettamente.

Questo termine si riferisce spesso a cinque regioni specifiche dell'ex Unione Sovietica: Transnistria in Moldavia, Ossezia del Sud e l'Abkhazia in Georgia, la Crimea e il Donbass in

Ucraina. Questi conflitti rendono difficile lo sviluppo di relazioni internazionali in Europa orientale e Caucaso meridionale a causa della presenza di alcune caratteristiche comuni, come una maggioranza o una minoranza russofona, gruppi o individui fedeli alla “Madrepatria” e la presenza di basi militari russe. Si tratta infatti di territori governati da separatisti con l'aiuto di uno Stato straniero sponsor (in questo caso la Russia) contro la volontà del governo sovrano. Non avendo però il controllo completo delle loro aree, le nazioni coinvolte si vedono impossibilitate nel perseguire una politica estera indipendente senza l'assistenza della Russia, che spesso impone ai “proto-stati” le sue politiche per evitare che aderiscano a organizzazioni come NATO e UE.

L'approccio russo verso le regioni secessioniste è un tema complesso e articolato. L'uso del software Wordsmith ha permesso di raccogliere dati statistici sull'intero corpus di discorsi raccolti, che includono le cosiddette Wordlist, le parole chiave, la grammatica, le correlazioni tra le parole e la distribuzione di specifiche parole nel tempo. Questo ha permesso di sviluppare un approccio specifico che apre nuove prospettive, spesso trascurate negli studi di conflitti geopolitici: l'aspetto linguistico. WordSmith Tools organizza i tre moduli principali del pacchetto software nel seguente modo: WordList, fornisce un elenco di tutte le parole presenti nel corpus scelto, ordinato in base al numero di occorrenze e informazioni statistiche sulla percentuale di distribuzione delle stesse nei testi; Concord, invece, è uno strumento che crea concordanze utilizzando file di testo semplice o di testo web, al fine di consentire agli utenti di visualizzare le occorrenze di una parola o di un sintagma in varie situazioni, per comprendere al meglio il suo utilizzo, nonché creare diagrammi di collocazione e dispersione; infine, KeyWord crea un elenco di tutte le parole che appaiono raramente o frequentemente nel corpus testuale.

Le trascrizioni prese in esame, sono state selezionate innanzitutto per il loro contenuto, in quanto riguardano il coinvolgimento delle truppe militari russe nelle regioni separatiste di Moldavia, Georgia, e Ucraina, ma anche perché, essendo distribuite lungo un periodo di 22 anni, offrono una copertura che pone l'accento sull'evoluzione nel tempo della propaganda, degli aiuti di varia natura e dell'intervento militare.

L'analisi di questi discorsi consente di rilevare quando certe espressioni, e quindi certi temi, sono stati sollevati e discussi, consentendo di tracciare una linea temporale basata sull'effettiva aggressione verbale (o meno) nei confronti delle regioni separatiste.

È altresì importante sottolineare, però, che attraverso un'analisi approfondita degli eventi storici, si possono evidenziare alcuni aspetti comuni tra gli interventi Russi nelle diverse zone di conflitto. La prima questione che emerge in modo chiaro è che l'approccio del Cremlino nei confronti dell'Ucraina, della Georgia e della Moldavia è caratterizzato da un'evidente sorta di regolare schema che precede l'intervento militare. Nello specifico, a partire dai primi anni Novanta, è stata riscontrata una reazione pressoché immediata da parte della Russia in risposta alle dichiarazioni di indipendenza da parte di regioni post-sovietiche. La prima manovra attuata è stata fornire ai residenti dei territori secessionisti un passaporto russo con lo scopo preventivo di proteggere le minoranze nazionali in una nazione vicina. Ciò consente alla popolazione locale di accedere ad alcuni privilegi che non sarebbero garantiti dai loro Stati, come l'accesso ad una pensione russa (la quale – è doveroso tenere conto- è sempre più alta di quella offerta dal Paese natale), la libertà di viaggiare (impossibilitata se con un passaporto di una regione separatista) e la condizione di rinunciare al servizio militare o di completarlo in Russia. In questo modo, la Russia può rinforzare la sua concezione di sicurezza nazionale acquisendo il potere di difendere i propri cittadini in qualsiasi parte del mondo e con qualsiasi mezzo necessario, basandosi sulla sua costituzione. Inoltre, Mosca offre loro l'accesso all'istruzione russa e a un mercato più ampio in cui competere, grazie a un significativo sostegno finanziario, e invia personale militare e politico in queste regioni per "addestrarle" o, se osservato sotto un altro punto di vista, per esercitare un qualche tipo di controllo sulle alte sfere decisionali.

Questo tipo di “schema”, tuttavia, non è seguito da una strategia altrettanto invariata nell'affrontare militarmente il conflitto in quelle regioni. Dall'analisi del discorso, così come dai meri interventi militari, è infatti possibile rintracciare differenze tra le varie situazioni.

Il conflitto in Ucraina è stato quello maggiormente caratterizzato da una leva politica e culturale messa in atto dalla Russia. L'indipendenza della Crimea è diventata infatti un fattore cruciale per il Cremlino al fine di impedire un avvicinamento dell'Ucraina alla NATO e all'UE, che sarebbe potuto diventare una certezza grazie al potere di veto di Donetsk e Luhansk. L'intera regione si è trasformata così in una sorta di scacchiera tra l'Occidente e la Russia, in cui in gioco c'era la salvaguardia della sicurezza nazionale per quest'ultima. Inoltre, un potenziale ritiro dell'Ucraina dal progetto dell'Unione Eurasiatica (una delle principali fonti di preoccupazione per la Russia) ha sollevato un altro punto di controversia con Kiev. Secondo il Cremlino, il progetto non sarebbe sopravvissuto a questo indietreggiamento, non tanto per ragioni finanziarie quanto per questioni legate alla politica interna, all'identità e al suo piano di proiezione globale.

In Georgia, invece, il conflitto è stato quello più caratterizzato da una natura militare. Poiché l'Ossezia del Sud e l'Abkhazia possedevano entrambe significative formazioni paramilitari, Tbilisi riteneva che il mantenimento di forti forze armate, fosse essenziale per risolvere le controversie con queste regioni oltre a migliorare la propria posizione negoziativa e quindi il suo peso politico sulla bilancia internazionale. Di conseguenza, rispetto agli altri conflitti, sia militarmente che politicamente, la risposta russa fu la più violenta e denigratoria. Infatti, durante la "guerra dei cinque giorni" tra Georgia e Russia nell'agosto del 2008, quest'ultima si è mossa per rinforzare e aumentare la sua presenza militare a sostegno dell'Ossezia del Sud e dell'Abkhazia, portando le ostilità a un'escalation. A seguito dell'incapacità di contrastare militarmente la presenza russa in Abkhazia e Ossezia del Sud, però, il governo georgiano ha puntato sul rafforzamento di una percezione negativa della Russia da parte dell'opinione pubblica, facendo abilmente leva su fattori psico-sociali quali preoccupazioni, fobie e persino sul radicamento del sentimento anti-russo in Occidente.

Infine, il conflitto in Moldavia è quello in cui è evidente in maniera più significativa un'ostilità di natura economica. Gli interessi economici delle autorità locali in Transnistria si vedevano infatti scontrarsi con le aspirazioni nazionalistiche della Moldavia e con i principi dell'Unione Sovietica. Nell'ambito dei piani di crescita sovietici, la Transnistria è stata per l'appunto il luogo di costruzione della maggior parte delle infrastrutture industriali in Moldavia. Pertanto, nonostante la scarsa riuscita del Cremlino nel convincere l'opinione pubblica internazionale che le politiche adottate non fossero una vendetta economica contro la posizione politica della regione separatista, l'aspetto economico del conflitto è sempre stato al centro delle dichiarazioni del Presidente Putin e dell'impegno russo. Mosca mirava infatti a sminuire l'influenza dell'Occidente sulle repubbliche post-sovietiche e le loro ambizioni ad aderire all'UE e alla NATO.

In sintesi, questa tesi stabilisce una connessione tra gli eventi storici e i discorsi politici utilizzando il software Wordsmith, supportata da analisi quantitativa e qualitativa dei discorsi presidenziali. Mostra che il discorso politico non si allontana dalla realtà degli eventi, ma anzi li rappresenta fedelmente. Tuttavia, l'indagine ha anche evidenziato interessanti parallelismi tra i diversi scenari geopolitici. Si può affermare che, nonostante gli avvenimenti storici vengano presentati in modo veritiero, la violenza usata nelle azioni militari non corrisponde a quella enunciata nei discorsi politici. I dati linguistici raccolti sembrano infatti suggerire questa mancata corrispondenza tra ciò che viene affermato a livello discorsivo e l'effettiva escalation

di aggressività a livello di azione militare. Basandosi sui dati raccolti, a conclusione di tale studio, è possibile affermare che l'analisi linguistica dei discorsi politici preannunciava effettivamente un'azione anche a livello militare, senza però trovare una corrispondenza che giustifichi una tale violenza e mobilitazione a livello fattuale.

Abstract

The relations between Russia and the so-called “frozen conflicts” is a long and complicated one. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, due to the resulting partition of the Republics, Eastern Europe was characterized by the birth and creation of new independent states, among which Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

This Master Thesis has the aim to analyze the history of the separatist regions of the above-mentioned States, their relations with Russia (including the response at the international level to their establishment), as well as a comparative analysis between them. Moreover, by applying the software “Wordsmith”, the analysis will be also focused on a discourse analysis, with the goal of understanding the correlation between Russian military interventions in separatist regions and political speeches to the public and/or meetings between President Putin and the Presidents of Crimea, Donbass, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The research will be structured as follows: at first a political context to the situations developing since 1990’s in Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia will be given. Secondly, a qualitative discourse analysis will be presented with a distinction between each case of investigation. Lastly, a comparative quantitative analysis will be displayed, making the attempt to highlight similarities and contradictions in the political speeches that occurred around the breakaway regions, as well as between their relations with Russia and between the type of interventions that the latter deployed.

The desirable result is to give to the complicated question of “frozen conflicts” a new perspective of study, focusing more on political speeches and meetings and their linguistic comparison and analysis, while contextualizing them in the setting of military interventions and international relations.

1. Introduction

Frozen Conflicts: Definition of the Term

A “Frozen conflict” is a situation in which active armed conflict has been brought to an end, although it might easily become a “hot” one once again. Being often a product of the Russian Foreign Policy interests since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the term “frozen conflict” is mostly applied for the Post-Soviet conflicts, although not merely to territorial disputes of those regions. As a matter of fact, they typically occur in areas of a country that are no longer under the control of the central government. While disputes are doomed to stay unsolved, however, the lack of nonviolent remedies to the problem does not lead to greater armed activities. This situation weakens the central government's position, as well as inciting other states that support the separatists to intervene in their affairs, either directly or indirectly. Frozen conflicts in the former Soviet republics' territory make developing international ties in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus difficult. The disputed territories, moreover, usually have some common characteristics like a Russian speaking majority or minority, groups or individuals loyal to the Motherland, and Russian military bases.¹

The terms frozen conflict frequently refers to five specific regions. Transnistria (in Moldova), Nagorno-Karabakh (in Azerbaijan), South Ossetia and Abkhazia (both in Georgia), and Crimea and Donbass in Ukraine.

These are territories where separatists, with the help of a foreign state sponsor, acted as local governments against the will of the ruling state. The Kremlin's objective in these areas is to undermine other post-Soviet republics on their border and widen Russia's sphere of influence. Since they do not have complete control over their areas, nations like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are unable to pursue an independent foreign policy. The sole exception is the scenario in Nagorno-Karabakh, an interesting illustration of a frozen conflict without Moscow's direct involvement. They are all governed by "proto-states" put in charge of adhering to Russian-

¹ Candiago, Luca. Russia's approach to Frozen Conflicts, studying the past to prevent the future. Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development. August 28, 2022.

imposed policies to prevent these states from rapprochement with Western military and political frameworks.²³

Russia's past approach to Frozen Conflicts

In order grasp these situations in their entirety, it is also crucial to make a distinction between words like leadership, hegemony, and supremacy when discussing Russia's strategy towards these de facto governments. Leadership has a positive connotation as it is associated with growth, prosperity, and advancement. It is the capacity to persuade individuals, groups, and institutions to fulfill specific goals that are advantageous to both the person and the collective. Despite their similarities, hegemony and leadership are distinct concepts since the former fosters the common good while the latter does the opposite. Hegemony is the leadership or dominance of a nation or social group over others. It serves as a tool for those in positions of authority to some extent in order to keep such positions. One of the most important strategies for maintaining hegemony is to create environments where people are forced to adhere to such views, whether or not they agree with them. Finally, the desire to impose control over others is referred to as dominance.

Moscow is equipped with a variety of tools to sway its neighbors' political, economic, social, and foreign policy decisions; as a result, it pursues a hegemony strategy more so than a leadership one.⁴

When dealing with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, Russia's ways of intervention in such areas have been remarkably analogous. The path set in motion with Russia's lighter tactics of control, such as an appeal to shared values and affiliation to the Russian Orthodox Church,

² Ivi.

³ Lynch, Dov. Frozen Conflicts. *The World Today*. Vol. 57, Issue. 8/9. Royal Institute of International Affairs. August 2001. Pages 36- 38. See also: Candiago, Luca. Russia's approach to Frozen Conflicts, studying the past to prevent the future. Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development. August 28, 2022.

⁴ Estradi, Sandra. Empire, Hegemony, and Leadership: Developing a Research Framework for the Study of Regional Powers. German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA). June 2008. Pages 8-11. See also: Candiago, Luca. Russia's approach to Frozen Conflicts, studying the past to prevent the future. Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development. August 28, 2022.

linguistic and cultural assistance, as described in "Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire". Subsequently, the kremlin applied policies of humanitarianism and patriotism, supporting national institutions and organizations as well as providing assistance to Russian-speaking minorities. Giving these residents Russian nationality marked a significant turning point. As a result, people who obtained a Russian citizenship could now demand to the Russian Federation for protection. At the same time, Russia launched its propaganda effort, claiming that it was urgently necessary to defend its people from different dangers varying from national security to the denial of the right to self-determination. Moreover, as in the Donbas and Crimea, where "little green man" or Russian special forces and infantry operated surreptitiously without bearing their insignia, direct but covert Russian military engagement verified, characterized by Russian direct support to separatist and/or militias forces. The final result was an armed combat akin to "hybrid warfare," or a military strategy that smoothly combines normal military techniques with unconventional ones, such as public participation, guerrilla warfare, and modern technology, in order to gain an edge both on land and in cyberspace.⁵ Moscow typically justified these activities as a measure to protect ethnic Russians, Russian speakers, or even other minorities that are not Russian, like the Ossetians or Abkhazians.⁶

However, each military conflict had unique circumstances and characteristics. For Moscow, the Ukraine crisis was the apogee of a larger conflict with the West over what principles, laws, and players should control the post-Soviet states' orientation, called "near abroad" in Russia. Although Russia violated its own commitments to protect Ukraine's territorial integrity according to the Budapest Memorandum⁷ (in 1994) and the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership⁸ (in 1997), Moscow's assertion of its right to intervene in Ukraine was justified precisely because it believed it had a privileged sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space.⁹ On the contrary, in Georgia, Russian forces were stationed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to

⁵ Grigas, Agnia. Russian Reimperialization: From Soft Power to Annexation. *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*. Pages 25-40. February 16, 2016. Pages 25-40.

⁶ Greenberg Research, Inc. Country report Georgia/Abkhazia: ICRC worldwide consultation on the rules of war. *People on War*. November 1999. <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/georgia.pdf>

⁷ The Budapest Memorandum. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52241.pdf>

⁸ The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume 3007/Part/volume-3007-I-52240.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52240.pdf)

⁹ Op. cit. Candiago, Luca.

alleviate tensions between the central government and the separatists after the 1992 agreement between Tskhinvali and Tbilisi¹⁰ and the 1994 ceasefire agreement between Sukhumi and Tbilisi¹¹. Russian peace-keeper forces persisted stationed in the region up until the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, after foreign policy attempts in a more pro-Western direction following the triumph of the Rose Revolution in 2003.

Ultimately, during the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria, the Russian army supported the residents to defend Moldova's Russian-speaking population. Moscow's sphere of influence would actually have been most at risk from Romanian annexation of Moldova, with Transnistria acting as a political pressure point on Moldovan leaders to block the country's accession to NATO and the EU. Moscow continued a peace negotiation (the so-called Kozak Memorandum¹²) with Tiraspol's leaders under its political and military supervision in an effort to maintain political control over Transnistria and Moldova. However, Russia did not perform any tasks intended to recognize Transnistria's sovereignty or annex the region from Moldova despite the Kozak Memorandum's failure and Moldova's subsequent withdrawal from the plan, demonstrating that it is still interested in maintaining the conflict.¹³

As a result, in addition to using regional organizations, Russia also employed additional soft power tools in its relations with post-Soviet nations. The main mechanisms of Moscow's influence are its relationships with the energy sector, loan agreements, and migrant status. These issues are central to many of the Duma's bilateral foreign relations, but they also serve as significant negotiating chips in Moscow's attempts to force post-Soviet states to conform to its governance within institutions like the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, in addition to employing bilateral soft power tools to persuade them to join and follow its mission and strategies. In terms of security, the EEU is composed by Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, whilst the CSTO comprises those

¹⁰ OCHA. Georgia: Ex-President Shevardnadze discusses 1992 South Ossetia agreement. February 23, 2006. <https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/georgia-ex-president-shevardnadze-discusses-1992-south-ossetia-agreement>

¹¹ Ceasefire agreement between Sukhumi and Tbilisi of 1994. <https://www.peaceagreements.org/generateAgreementPDF/990>

¹² Russian Draft Memorandum on the basic principles of the state structure of a united state in Moldova (Kozak Memorandum). November 17, 2003. <http://stefanwolff.com/files/Kozak-Memorandum.pdf>

¹³ Op. cit. Candiago, Luca.

same countries plus Tajikistan. Additionally, the CSTO formed a Collective Operational Reaction Forces¹⁴ in 2009 with the aim of quickly deploying against external threats while also preserving a peacekeeping capability. This force was largely designed after NATO's Response Force^{15, 16}.

By protecting post-Soviet states from outside scrutiny and promoting anti-Western sentiment, Moscow also intentionally undermines Western actors, their liberal ideas, institutions, and standards. These encompass notions which include "cultural variety" (embodied in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's charter¹⁷), the primacy of sovereignty, security in the fight against extremism, and a restoration of "traditional values" in response to the moral crisis facing the West. In fact, Moscow's main concern is probably the West's promotion of human rights and democracy in Russia and in the post-Soviet region as a whole. Western requests for broader political deregulation went from being considered as political irritants to a national security issue following the mid-2000s color revolutions in Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004-2005), which removed representatives from force and supplanted them with actors more keen to reconcile with the West.¹⁸

Wordsmith Tools

The final step in developing a thorough grasp of the factors that led Russia and the aforementioned regions to interact was to conduct a quantitative discourse analysis, with the expectation of uncovering some possible intersections between political speeches and military interventions, as well as hopefully some clue regarding the relationship between factual aggressiveness and the tones employed to address any given scenario from a linguistic

¹⁴ Collective Operational Reaction Forces of the CSTO. <https://jscsto.odkb-csto.org/en/voennaya-sostavlyauschaya-odkb/ksorodkb.php>

¹⁵ NATO. NATO Response Force. July 11, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm

¹⁶ Op. Cit. Candiago, Luca.

¹⁷ Shanghai Cooperation Organization's charter. Page 1. https://discoversocialsciences.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/charter_of_the_shanghai_cooperation_organization.pdf

¹⁸ Op. cit. Candiago, Luca.

perspective. Given that it uses numerical data and tables in which the most crucial terms will be analyzed, the investigation that will concentrate on Wordsmith will be a quantitative one. The qualitative study (which will be discussed in the chapters 4 to 7) that was made possible by this quantitative analysis can aid in a better understanding of the historical backdrop that characterized each of the break-away regions by providing segments of Presidential speeches. These excerpts make it clear that President Putin acknowledged historical events and reported on them precisely as they happened. By examining the discourses and their comparative analysis, it is in fact conceivable to claim, as a result of the qualitative analysis, that the historical circumstances (that is, the nature of Russian approaches and their timing) were relatively anticipated.

WordSmith Tools is an internationally well-known software for the work based on corpus-linguistic technique, along with a number of additional software products of a same sort. Thanks to its characteristics, it is mainly used for linguistics purposes, and to be more specific particularly in the field of corpus linguistics, that helps at searching patterns in a language.

The software package's three main modules are as follows:

Concord is a tool that creates concordances, using plain text or web text files. A concordance's purpose is to allow users to view numerous examples of a word or phrase in various situations, which will enable to gain a far better understanding of how to employ it;

WordList provides a list of every word or word form found in the chosen corpus, making a list ordered on the number of occurrences, as well as statistical information regarding the percentage of distribution of the aforementioned in the texts.

KeyWord compiles a list of all the words and word forms that significantly appear rarely or frequently in the text corpus based on a set of statistical criteria.

Depending on the corpus or text that is being studied, each of the modules provides a variety of additional features. Thus, for instance, concordance search is used to compute collocation and dispersion plots. There are also a few other modules that are helpful for setting up, organizing, and formatting the corpus.

The corpus that was selected for the research are transcripts of meetings between the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the heads of state of the separatist provinces of the post-Soviet regions (Transnistria in Moldova, Crimea and Donbass in Ukraine, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia), as well as declarations of Mr. Putin to the UN congress or to the foreign and Russian press. These transcripts were selected first of all due to their content, given that they

deal with the past and current involvement of Russian troops and different kinds of Russian aids to these regions, but also because, spanning over a 22-year period, they can give a useful outlook at how the propaganda and military intervention evolved over time.

The specific object of the analysis was to use WordSmith as a tool that could help making a qualitative analysis rather than a quantitative one. The main aspect of this research was to look at the presence and at the correlation of some words that are mostly used in propagandas or in the military field. To be more specific, within the corpus, 108 specific words were selected, ranging from *war* to *peace*, passing through *reunification*, *independence*, *law*, and *expansion*, *treaty*, *liberation*, *economy* and so on.

The queries for these specific terms helped to understand how often (and in which year) these words were used, making it possible to trace a temporal line based on the actual verbal aggression (or not) towards the separatist regions.

In the following chapter the results of the work will be presented and analyzed.

2. Intersections between Discourse and Conflict Engagement: a Qualitative Analysis

Analyzing the history of Russia and the Soviet Union, it is doubtless observable, from the way that the argument was (and still is) dealt, to the emotions that some specific topics arouse in President Putin, that the whole problem with separatist regions in the former Soviet republics and their relations with the West was sped up by two main factors: NATO's expansion towards Eastern Europe, and the non-compliance of Western Countries to the "gentlemen agreement" signed between the former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker, George H. W. Bush, Helmut Josef Michael Kohl, Gates, Margaret Thatcher (between others), regarding the non-expansion of NATO.

The meeting that took place on the 9th of February 1990, was in fact concluded by the famous declaration of the U.S. Secretary of State James Baker "not one inch eastward".¹⁹ According to declassified U.S., Soviet, German, British, and French papers, these guarantees about Soviet security were offered to Gorbachev and other Soviet officials during the unification of Germany in 1990 and into 1991. However, the records also reveal that numerous Western state leaders were denying NATO membership to Eastern and Central European states in that two-years period, that discussions about German unification negotiations with NATO in 1990 were not strictly limited to the question of East German territory, and subsequent Soviet and Russian complaints about NATO expansion being misdirected had its origins in written memcons and telcons at that point. These documents, in fact, support former CIA Director Robert Gates' criticism of advancing NATO's eastward expansion in the 1990s²⁰, who declared:

*Pressing ahead with **expansion of NATO eastward**, when Gorbachev and others were led to believe that wouldn't happen, at least in no time soon, I think probably has not only aggravated the relationship between the United States and Russia but **made it much more difficult to do constructive business with them.***²¹

¹⁹ Record of conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and James Baker in Moscow. (Excerpts). National Security Archive. Page 5. February 9, 1990.
<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/documents/4325680/Document-06-Record-of-conversation-between.pdf>

²⁰ Savranskaya, Svetlana and Blanton, Tom. NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard. National Security Archive. December 12, 2017.

²¹ Wilson, Jane Rafal. George W. Transcript: Interview with Robert M. Gates. Bush Oral History Project. Miller Center. July 23-24, 2000. Page 101.

That last one is the starting point of many of Putin's arguments when dealing with Russian security concerns: NATO enlargement was unjust, unjustified, a threat to Russia, and so it will receive an aggressive response. To give some excerpts from two 2021 interviews to the Russian President will be displayed.²²

*The global military and political situation remain complicated. In some regions, the possibility of a conflict has grown, new methods of tension have emerged. **The build-up of the United States and NATO's forces next to the Russian borders is of great concern, as well as a of large-scale military drills, including those unscheduled.** We are extremely worried about deploying the United States' global missile defense system near Russia. If those infrastructures move on further, if the United States and NATO's missile system appear in Ukraine, it will reduce their flight time to Moscow from seven to ten minutes. And in case of deployment of hypersonic weapons, up to five. For us, this is the most serious challenge, the challenge to our security [...]*²³

In addition, President Putin declared that:

It appears to me that the US government will continue to interfere in political processes in other countries. First of all, Ukraine itself. It kept bringing personnel and military equipment to the conflict area in the southeast of Ukraine: Donbass. [...] Gorbachev [...] got a promise, a verbal promise, that there wouldn't be NATO expansion to the east. Where are those promises? Of course, everything should be sealed and written on paper, but what was the point of expanding NATO to the east and bringing this infrastructure to our borders? [...] You [...] crossed an ocean, brought thousands of personnel and thousands of units of military equipment close to our

²² The excerpts that will be presented in the following chapters, except for the ones in the section "Comparative and Quantitative Discourse Analysis Concerning Frozen Conflicts", are the results of a qualitative analysis rather than a quantitative one. In other words, they are used as illustrations to support or validate historical occurrences (namely military interventions and repercussions on internal and international arenas), but no in-depth research has been done on the terms that will be discussed. Contrarily, the study will pay close attention to the terms used and their frequency of occurrence in the discourses when the quantitative analysis of the discourse will be provided.

²³ Global News. Russia's Putin blames West for tensions since end of Cold War. YouTube. December 21, 2021. (Last visited September 15, 2022).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCGeG9QCTro&list=TLPQMDUwNDIwMjJlUHBRJgtVSg&index=3>

*borders, and yet you believe that we are acting aggressively. [...] Pot calling the kettle black.*²⁴

In order to give a better understanding of this expansion of NATO members that is being discussed, some data regarding it will be presented.

On January 31, 1990, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher made it clear that the adjustments in Eastern Europe and the German unification process must not result in a "impairment of Soviet security interests," which marked the beginning of assurances from Western leaders regarding NATO enlargement.²⁵

Later, Margaret Thatcher, James Baker, George H.W. Bush, Helmut Kohl, Francois Mitterrand, and Douglas Hurd, all reaffirmed this commitment. At the 1990 NATO summit in London, Margaret Thatcher told Mikhail Gorbachev "We must find ways to give the Soviet Union confidence that its security would be assured. ...CSCE could be an umbrella for all this, as well as being the forum which brought the Soviet Union fully into a discussion about the future of Europe".²⁶ President Bush and later my British PM John Major repeated this pledge. As late as March 1991, moreover, Gorbachev was given a personal assurance by John Major, who said: "We are not talking about the strengthening of NATO".²⁷ Then, when questioned by Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Dmitri Yazov regarding the interest of East European leaders in joining NATO, he reiterated, "Nothing of the sort would happen".²⁸

The first hint of NATO enlargement from a Western perspective came with Secretary-General Manfred Wörner's declaration that the alliance's doors were open in March 1992. At least a few renowned Russian analysts understood that the Baltic states, eager to reclaim their European

²⁴ NBC News. Exclusive: Full Interview With Russian President Vladimir Putin. [Video]. YouTube. June 15, 2021. (Last visited October 20, 2022).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pJd6O_NT0

²⁵ Genscher stated in a speech at the Tutzing Protestant Academy on 31 January 1990: "What NATO must do is state unequivocally that whatever happens in the Warsaw Pact there will be no expansion of NATO territory eastwards, that is to say closer to the borders of the Soviet Union." Szabo, Stephen F. The diplomacy of German unification. New York: St Martin's. Page 58. 1992.

²⁶ Letter from Mr. Powell (N. 10) to Mr. Wall: Thatcher-Gorbachev memorandum of conversation. National Security Archive. June 8, 1990. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16136-document-22-letter-mr-powell-n-10-mr>

²⁷ Ambassador Rodric Braithwaite diary. National Security Archive. March 5, 1991. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/16142-document-28-ambassador-rodric-braithwaite-diary>

²⁸ Op. cit. Savranskaya, Svetlana and Blanton, Tom.

identity and cast off the Soviet yoke, would be welcomed into NATO as soon as it began to expand.²⁹

In January 1994, Clinton during a speech in Prague stated: “The question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members, but when and how.”³⁰ By 1995, the process seemed unavoidable: The North Atlantic Council scheduled a meeting in Madrid in July 1997, which voted to determine the Alliance's direction for moving towards the 21st Century, reinforcing Euro Atlantic security.³¹ Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic were invited by NATO to submit membership applications during the Madrid summit. It was anticipated that the first stage of the enlargement process would take two years, and, as a matter of fact, by 1999 NATO was prepared for new members: Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.³²

In 2002, Putin himself remarked that their joining would not be a problem, provided that no additional military facilities were built there. They did, however, enable NATO to increase its presence along Russia's borders, encircling the heavily fortified Russian province of Kaliningrad. In two other post-Soviet states, the 2003 Georgian "Rose Revolution" and the 2004 Ukrainian "Orange Revolution," local civil society groups were leading revolutionary political endeavors that ousted leaders who had been more friendly to Moscow. Government-funded Western organizations also provided advisory and financial support to these groups.³³

The invitation of additional central European members, as well as the Baltic states that made up the Soviet Union, to join NATO in 2004 marked the beginning of the second phase of the organization's enlargement. During this era, NATO welcomed Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Due to the hostility between the United States and Russia following the second phase of NATO enlargement and the so-called "colour

²⁹ Kortunov, Andrei. NATO Enlargement and Russia: In Search of an Adequate Response. Will NATO Go East? The Debate over Enlarging the Atlantic Alliance. Queen's University Centre for International Relations. 1996. Pages 71-72.

³⁰ Goldgeier, James. Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO. Brookings Institution Press. 1999. Page 57.

³¹ Trenin-Straussov, Peter. The NATO–Russia Permanent Joint Council in 1997–1999: anatomy of a failure. Berliner Informationszentrum für Transatlantische Sicherheit. July 1999. Pages 1–8.

³² Smith, Julianne. 2008. The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà vu? CSIS Report “Europe, Russia, and the United States: Finding a New Balance”. November 14, 2008.

³³ Marten, Kimberly. The Growth of NATO-Russia Tensions. Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO Report. Council on Foreign Relations. March 1, 2017. Pages 11-12.

revolutions" that shook Russia's neighborhood at the same time, ties with Russia soon deteriorated. Additionally, throughout this time, Russian military doctrines altered, and the country continued to oppose future NATO territory expansion. As a result, Russian political discourse and military doctrines reflected this shift in perception.

Right before ties with Russia irrevocably deteriorated and Russia engaged in conflict with another sovereign state in Europe for the first time since the Second World War, the third and last phase of NATO enlargement took place. This time around, the Alliance was joined by Macedonia, Croatia, and Albania.³⁴

With regards to NATO military drills and operations, moreover, NATO forces began to deploy for Operation Atlantic Resolve in January 2014. A total of 6,000 US soldiers took part. On August 2015, Obama gave the go-ahead for the transfer of American assets and troops to Germany. Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, and Estonia, all hosted the exercise.³⁵ It was characterized by the superior use of tanks and other heavy vehicles compared to earlier military actions, justified by the fact that NATO has been considering war since the February 2014 revolution in Kiev. In fact, the Atlantic Council document by General David Barno and Nora Bensahel, presents the recreation of heavy cavalry units, armored divisions, and combat units for conventional battles in light of the fight with "great powers" (Russia and China).³⁶

Operation Anaconda in 2016 and Operation Dragoon Ride, on top of several other drills from March to May 2015, were the two significant drills in Eastern Europe that came before Operation Atlantic Resolve in 2017.

In Drawsko Pomorskie, north of Warsaw, 31,000 soldiers from 19 member nations of the alliance and five non-member nations participated in Operation Anaconda, one of the largest exercises ever conducted by NATO. Three thousand vehicles, one hundred aircraft and helicopters, and twelve battleships were also part of the deployment force. Its aim was to provide for "multinational airborne assault missions" and other operations in the Baltic region near Russian borders. Marek Tomaszycski, a Polish general, was in charge of the forces from

³⁴ Sumantra, Maitra. NATO Enlargement, Russia, and Balance of Threat. Canadian Military Journal, Dept. of Defence. October 20, 2021.

³⁵ U.S. European Command. OPERATION ATLANTIC RESOLVE (AUGUST 2015). Communication and Engagement Directorate. 2015. Page 2.
https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/features/2014/0514_atlanticresolve/docs/operation_atlantic_resolve_fact_sheet_21_aug_2015.pdf

³⁶ Sprenger, Sebastian. Operation Atlantic Resolve to expand: Army Envisions New European Deployments As Show Of Force To Moscow. Inside the Army, Vol. 27, No. 9. March 6, 2015.

the United States, Poland, and other NATO nations. As a result, the exercise was officially led by Poles. However, in fact, it is under the direction of U.S. Army Europe (given that it deploys the greater number of troops and people), which manages an "area of responsibility" comprising 51 nations (including Ukraine, Georgia, and Poland), and has the formal objective of "supporting U.S. strategic interests in Europe and Eurasia". With the deployment of 41,000 U.S. Army Soldiers and 80,000 international participants, it conducts more than 60 exercises annually with participants from more than 75 nations.

The United States and NATO have also increased their anti-Russian drills. Operation Baltops began in the Baltic Sea just two days before Operation Anaconda, on June 5. This military activity, which began in the Baltic Sea, disposed 60 warplanes, 45 ships, and more than 6000 troops, coming from 17 different countries (comprising Italy) all under the direct control of U.S. command. Lastly, the operation, which was carried out around 100 miles from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, also included US B-52 strategic bombers.³⁷

After a months-long drill in the Baltic following the battle in Donbass, Operation Dragoon Ride (a NATO march that took place in late March 2015) started from Estonia and brought American troops back to the Vilseck base in Germany. The purpose of the 1700-kilometer trip over major roadways through Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech Republic was reportedly to acclimate the locals to the presence of American forces serving in an anti-Russian function. Three battalions of the Ukrainian National Guard were being trained by members of the 173rd Airborne Brigade concurrently (fascist troops in Ukraine joined the Ukrainian National Guard on September 5, 2014, well before the Minsk Agreement³⁸, eliminating the need for the Kiev coup government to disarm them as stipulated in the same Agreement).

In addition, other significant military movements and asset placements in 2015 occurred in Eastern Europe (Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and Estonia), as well as in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, from March 10 to May 25.³⁹

³⁷ Sprenger, Sebastian. U.S. Army Europe chief seeks symbolic upgrade for 'Atlantic Resolve' mission. Cit.

³⁸ Financial Times. Full text of the Minsk agreement: Translation of Russian document produced after 16 hours of talks. February 12, 2015. <https://www.ft.com/content/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de>

³⁹ Gramer, Robbie. Operation Dragoon Ride. The Promise—And Pitfalls—of the U.S. Strategy in the Baltics. Foreign Affairs. May 13, 2015.

The aim of this research is not to assess whether the deployment of NATO forces and the military trainings of them were justified or not by some previous Russian actions; it is simply to reckon that they happened, causing an obvious Russian reaction. It is no coincidence that these operations were described as a “threat to national security” by President Putin, causing a change in the national security strategy approved and signed by the same president. This document, which guides the nation's foreign policy, is updated every six years. It describes the expansion of NATO forces along Russia's borders as a violation of the rules regulating international law.

The report stated that the United States and its allies, who are interested in maintaining their control in the field of international affairs, have reacted to Russia's independence on the world chessboard. It also emphasized that Russia's national priority is to be recognized as a major international force. Regarding this point, moreover, President Putin declared in 2020 that:

*I wholly agree with what was said about the Constitutional Court's right to decide whether to enforce or not to enforce international court rulings in Russia. You are right; this is directly related to upholding our sovereignty and suppressing attempts to interfere in our domestic affairs.*⁴⁰

Furthermore, following the changes in the Russian constitution of 2021:

*This does not mean that we, say, are trying to avoid the situation when an international agreement prevails over other laws of the Russian Federation, but not the Constitution. If an agreement contradicts the Constitution, it should not be signed, and if it was signed and we found that it contradicts our main law, it will not be valid on the territory of the Russian Federation.*⁴¹

Finally, concerning the protection of Russian people and the sovereignty of Russia:

⁴⁰ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting with members of the working group on drafting proposals for amendments to the Constitution. February 26, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62862>

⁴¹ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting with members of the working group on drafting proposals for amendments to the Constitution. January 16, 2020. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62592>

*Everyone is Russian outside of Russia, and everyone who speaks Russian and is steeped in Russian culture is entitled to call themselves that. So, we must protect them and keep in touch with them.*⁴²

The strategy that Russia began to implement in the early 1990s is evident from these excerpts: by extending the definition of "Russian" to a variety of people, including those in the breakaway regions, the Kremlin has the legal right to intervene for their security and, as a result, to militarily intervene in other nations and regions.

Getting back to NATO's enlargement, the response, as stated before, has always been declared to be an aggressive one that wouldn't answer to no one:

In the case of continuation of a clear aggressive course of actions from our Western colleagues, we will take appropriate military technical measures. And I want to emphasize, that we have the full right to take actions to guarantee the security and sovereignty of Russia.

*What is happening now, the increasing of tensions in Europe, it is their fault. And so today we are in such a situation where **we are forced to decide something**. We cannot allow the development of the situation I mentioned before to happen.*⁴³

It must be emphasized that these excerpts are cited not as a justification of Russia's military actions towards the Post-Soviet Republic and to what Russia considers his sphere of influence, neither as an excuse for their foreign policy towards the West. Nevertheless, it must be noticed that reactions like the ones that we sadly saw this year were not at all unexpected, and that probably arouse from a long-standing sentiment of frustration and security precariousness.

What is, however, interesting and intriguing to understand at this point, is how far back can this type of thinking be traced in the political discourse of President Putin; what has a greater

⁴² Putin, Vladimir. Meeting with members of the working group on drafting proposals for amendments to the Constitution. February 26, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62862>

⁴³ Global News. Russia's Putin blames West for tensions since end of Cold War. YouTube. December 21, 2021. (Last visited September 15, 2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCGeG9QCTro&list=TLPQMDUwNDIwMjJlUHBRJgtVSg&index=3>

burden in the verification of tense situations in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, are they the political speeches and agendas, or the military interventions themselves?

When dealing with those Republics, Russia's approach seems to follow a specific scheme: first thing first, Moscow provides the citizens of the separatists Regions a Russian passport. This helps the population to get access to specific privileges that are not guaranteed by their homelands: a Russian pension (which is always higher than the ones provided by their birth nation), freedom to travel (something that wouldn't be possible for them with their separatist region's passport), and the possibility to avoid military service or to conduct it in Russia. Secondly, Moscow gives them the possibility to access Russian education, as well as a wider market to deal with, thanks to a substantial economic support. Finally, the Kremlin often provides these regions military and political representatives to "train" them, or when viewed from the other side, to access some kind of control in those regions' high decisional spheres. Looking at proofs of this type of assist, a clear example is shown by a declaration that dates back to 2012 where President Putin was discussing the topic of South Ossetia:

*The republic has a great number of economic and social problems. **Russia's help was at hand, as in the most difficult moments of South Ossetia's modern history.** We will continue to support South Ossetia in the peacetime, when there is great need to accelerate economic and social recovery.*⁴⁴

Moreover, in 2016 talking about Moldova, President Putin said:

*[...] During a recent meeting, the bilateral intergovernmental commission has adopted a joint action plan for 2016-2017, which includes **practical steps to bolster mutual investments and trade, including in industry, high technologies and agriculture.** Incidentally, Russia is not opposed to Moldova developing relations with its partners anywhere, including Europe. However, we would like this joint work to proceed in a coordinated manner, so as not to damage what we have created but to help us move*

⁴⁴ Putin, Vladimir. Talks with President of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov: The meeting focused on bilateral cooperation and South Ossetia's socio-economic recovery and development [speech transcript]. Sochi. May 12, 2012. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15324>

*forward, improving our economies, the social sector and the quality of life for our people.*⁴⁵

All these factors of course often tempt both the regions and the population to voluntarily enter in the so-called Russian sphere of influence, with all the due consequences. But it is not always like that. Sometimes political or physical clashes occur. The most significant example of these rebellions is the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004, which was caused due to the winning of the elections by the Communist Party, a declared pro-European faction, as well as a convinced anti-Russian one. Nevertheless, in all the former Soviet Republics that are dealt with in this dissertation, clashes of different dimensions occurred.

It is interesting to note, however, that the idea concerning the right of a population to become independent from the state they are in, is well supported when it regards territories outside Russia, and not so well when it relates to territories inside the Russian Federation, where the main aim of the Duma is to maintain solidarity and a united population under its control. Clear examples are these declaration from 2020 and 2021:

*There isn't a more meaningful goal in my life than the strengthening of Russia.*⁴⁶
*Suffice it to mention Vladimir Mashkov's initiative to outlaw alienation of territory. This amendment should be as strong as "reinforced concrete" and in honor of Article 67 of the Constitution, which stipulates this procedure, this provision, installed a memorial sign made of reinforced concrete. I must say that this concerns more than a couple of territories. This applies to a much greater number of sensitive territories in Russia.*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Putin, Vladimir & Dodon, Igor. Joint news conference with President of Moldova Igor Dodon [speech transcript]. Moscow. January 17, 2017. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>

⁴⁶ NBC News. Exclusive: Full Interview With Russian President Vladimir Putin. [Video]. YouTube. June 15, 2021. (Last visited October 20, 2022).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pJd6O_NT0

⁴⁷ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting with the working group on drafting proposals for amendments to the Constitution. [speech transcript] Global Security. Novo-Ogaryovo. July 3, 2020.
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63599>

Another crucial factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the perpetual anti-Western propaganda undertaken by the Kremlin when it comes to “defend” the separatist regions. It is not only about criticizing NATO’s expansion towards East, is mostly about dismantling and belittling European ideals and customs. An example can be found in this 2017 declaration of President Putin when question about a scandal with respect to Mr. Trump and some prostitutes in Moscow⁴⁸:

*People who order these kinds of fabrications, which are now being used to smear the US President-elect and use it to advance their political agenda are worse than prostitutes. **They have no moral constraints at all. [...] This indicates the significant level of degradation among political elites in the West, including the United States.***⁴⁹

In order to give a more detailed analysis based on the different scenarios, in the following chapters the situation will be presented with reference to every single separatist province of the former-Soviet Republics.

⁴⁸ NBC news. Trump Bodyguard Keith Schiller Testifies Russian Offered Trump Women, Was Turned Down. November 9, 2017. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/trump-bodyguard-testifies-russian-offered-trump-women-was-turned-down-n819386>

⁴⁹ Putin, Vladimir & Dodon, Igor. Joint news conference with President of Moldova Igor Dodon [speech transcript]. Moscow. January 17, 2017. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>

3. Ukraine: Crimea and Donbass Conflict Analysis

Crimea's Historical Background

The entire territory of Crimea, or portions of it, has been ruled by numerous other states and empires since antiquity and up until 2014, including the Greeks, Bulgars, Scythians, Romans, Kievan Rus, the Byzantine Empire, Venice, Genoa, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, the Soviet Union, and the Nazi Germany. It eventually became a colony of the Russian Empire in the late XVIIIth century, following Russian victories in wars with the Ottoman Empire. In other words, Crimea has only ever been an autonomous state for less than 40 years throughout its lengthy history. Since then, various battles, the Russian imperial period, and subsequent Soviet administration have significantly altered Crimea's population, culture, economy, and politics. The massive resettlement of ethnic Russians and already-russified subjects from central and northern Russia, public schools and administration, mandatory military service, conversion to Orthodoxy, and later Russian mass media under the control of the Soviet communist regime, were all methods used to russify the Crimean population in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁵⁰

By 1945, the Crimean population had almost entirely become Slavic and primarily Russian after the entire Tatar, Greek, and Bulgarian minority had been violently evacuated in May 1944. At that point, the Crimean Oblast was transferred from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian SSR by a decree issued in February 1954 by the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. The transfer was portrayed in official communist propaganda as a symbolic act of brotherly love to commemorate 300 years since Ukraine joined the Russian Empire. The next shift in Crimea's status took place in 1990–1991 when the Soviet Union was being dismantled. The Crimean Oblast was again given the status of an autonomous republic, this time within Ukraine, following a nationwide referendum in February 1991. On December 8, 1991, the leaders of the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Belarus met to dissolve the Soviet Union. At that meeting, Boris Yeltsin, the leader of Russia, neglected to ask his Ukrainian counterpart Leonid Kravchuk for the restoration of Crimea to mother Russia. The first constitution of Crimea was adopted, and the declaration of independence made on May 5, 1992, by the Crimean parliament. However, due to pressure from Kiev, this declaration was changed

⁵⁰ Kizilov, Mikhail and Prokhorov, Dmitry. The Development of Crimean studies in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and Ukraine. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*. Vol. 64, Issue.4. December 2011. Pages 437-440.

on May 6, 1992, to include a sentence referring to Crimea as a part of Ukraine. Additionally, the Ukrainian Supreme Rada nullified the declaration of independence of Crimea on May 19, even though Kyiv consented to enhance Crimea's autonomy.

On March 17, 1995, nearly three years later, however, the Ukrainian parliament overturned the constitution of Crimea, deposed President Yuriy Meshkov, and abolished his position. The President was accused of engaging in anti-state actions and advocating for Crimea's annexation by the Russian Federation and separation from Ukraine.⁵¹

Crimea in the Post-Soviet Republics' scenario

Despite the avowed internationalism of Marxism and its belief that nationalism will diminish as class solidarity grows, the Soviet Union allotted many of its territorial units to specific ethnic groups. Joseph Stalin was largely responsible for this system. The People's Commissariat for Nationality Affairs, a Soviet bureaucracy established in 1917 to deal with people of non-Russian descent, was headed precisely by him in the early years following the Bolshevik Revolution. Under its leadership, several territorial entities with distinct ethnic identities were created. The 15 Soviet socialist republics, for instance, which became independent states in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, were created by Moscow from 1922 to 1940 from the largest of these units. The 15 republics each had its own minorities, despite being intended as homelands for their titular nationalities. These minorities included Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia, Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, Armenians in Azerbaijan, Azeris in Armenia, and Karakalpaks in Uzbekistan, as well as Russians distributed throughout the non-Russian Republics. Such variety was intended by Stalin. He defined borders across the historical domains of ethnic groups and included more compact autonomous enclaves within various Soviet republics.⁵²

⁵¹ Bebler, Anton. Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict. Romanian Journal of European Affairs. Page 17. March 1, 2015.

⁵² Martin, Terry. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939. The Wilder House Series in Politics, History and Culture. Pages 31-56. 2001. Pages 31-56.

With already considerable Jewish and Russian populations, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic gained a sizable, territorially concentrated Russian minority in 1954 as a result of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's decision to grant the republic the Crimean Peninsula. In fact, a 2001 census revealed that ethnic Russians made up around 58 percent of Crimea's population, followed by Ukrainians with a 24 percent share and Crimean Tatars with a 12 percent share. Belarusians and a few other minorities made up the remaining 6% of the population. Many of these differences led to intercommunal violence as the Soviet Union broke up, and Moscow used them to keep a foothold in the emerging post-Soviet governments.⁵³

Between 1991 and 1992, in four of the five cases of separatist regions, the Russian Armed Forces' presence on the soil of a legally independent successor state, provided separatists with not just psychological solace but also, when necessary or feared, actual physical security. The parastates were able to conduct unauthorized referendums, declare their secession, and afterwards defend it because of this protection. Following the collapse of communism, as a matter of fact, ethnic conflicts in the Balkans, Caucasus, and other regions of the world have led to a widespread perception that nationalism is inherently antagonistic to the growth of democracy.⁵⁴ That is one of the possible reasons why, since 1991, a conflict in and over Crimea has been escalating between two young successor states to the Soviet Union (other than the Russian Federation) along a porous racial, linguistic, and cultural border. This border in Ukraine has divided the titular country's majority from a sizeable portion of the country's significant Russian-speaking minority.

However, in some regions of that successor state, like Eastern and Southern Ukraine and Crimea, this "Russian" population has been a significant local minority or regional majority. As a consequence, since at least two decades ago, Russian annexation of Crimea backup plans have likely been created and are routinely updated. Sevastopol was declared a Russian city by a resolution passed by the Russian State Duma in June 1993. Four years later, eminent Russian geostrategic Sergei Karaganov talked on the possibility of Ukraine's breakup and Russia absorbing its constituent pieces.⁵⁵

⁵³ Mankoff, Jeffrey. Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3. May/June 2014. Pages 61-64.

⁵⁴ Kuzio, Taras. Nationalism, identity and civil society in Ukraine: Understanding the Orange Revolution. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 3. September 2010. Page 286.

⁵⁵ Ivi, Pages 285-286, 289-290.

Moreover, the former Ukrainian prime minister, Yulia Timoshenko, publicly alerted the West in 2007 of Russia's strategy of undermining the Ukrainian government, particularly in Crimea. The wholesale distribution of Russian passports on Crimea was denounced by the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry as a "serious concern" in 2008, along with Russia's stated intention to use armed force if necessary to defend its expatriate nationals. Subsequently, anti-Ukrainian protests erupted in Crimea in August 2009, with calls for Russia to behave similarly to how it did in Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia during the 2008 war against Georgia. Finally, soon after NATO's Bucharest summit established a commitment to Ukraine (and Georgia) regarding future membership in the Alliance, the decision to annex Crimea at a convenient time was likely made in that same year.⁵⁶

The Orange Revolution of 2004

The Orange Revolution was the most numerous, in terms of participants, and longest-lasting democratic uprising on the streets, but it also had the most regionally biased split in who backed and who opposed the protests. Color revolutions in general across the post-Soviet Republics were essentially the result of a popular desire to build a stronger state and defeat corruption and social injustice. As a matter of fact, as Dubrovin stated, national integrity (intended as the unity of nation and state, fighting separatism and regionalism of 'local chiefs'), social justice (restoration of social justice principles, overcoming of society's monstrous material polarization), and, finally, anti-corruption society (getting rid of the established system of nepotism and clan affiliations), are the main slogan of those colour Revolutions.⁵⁷

The Ukrainian protests, the biggest in the second wave of democratic breakthroughs and revolutions in former communist states - Romania (1996), Bulgaria (1997), Slovakia (1998), Croatia and Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2004)⁵⁸ - came to a head in the 2004

⁵⁶ Op. cit. Bebler, Anton. Pages 39-40.

⁵⁷ Dubrovin, Boris. President With His Own Vision. Turkmenistan (magazine). February 17, 2005. Page 34.

⁵⁸ The first wave of democratic revolutions and advances occurred between 1989 and 1991, during what is now referred to as the fourth wave of democratization. Because communist successor parties continued to

elections, which saw widespread massive corruption, voter intimidation and electoral fraud. The Orange Revolution had a larger turnout (one in five Ukrainians participated), and its 17 days of nonviolent protests lasted much longer than past democratic successes and revolutions.⁵⁹ At the time, many within Ukraine, as well as many more in the West, saw in the Ukrainian's Orange Revolution a breakthrough with the past: a positive and modern change able to lead the Ukrainian population towards a liberal democracy, a greater economic well-being, and a political shift towards the euro-Atlantic alliances. Several acts of civil disobedience, sit-ins, and general strikes led by the opposition movement characterized the revolution across the country.⁶⁰

After the presidential election's first round on October 31, 2004, the second round of Ukraine's fiercely contested presidential elections was held on November 21. The following day, it emerged that the existing dictatorship of President Leonid Kuchma had blatantly stolen the elections in favor of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. The opponent, former prime minister Viktor Yushchenko, stated the win had been snatched from him without any hesitation and asked residents to assemble at "Maidan," Kyiv's Independence Square in the city center. The following day, each presidential candidate declared himself President by right (although public opinion polls indicated Yushenko as the favorite one), making the Revolution a concrete reality.

Foreign mediators (among which Russian State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov) were successful in facilitating a dialogue between opposing forces and preventing either side from retaliating violently, but they were unable to end the standoff. In the following month protests (both violent and non-violent) arose on a daily basis around the capital. People supporting Yushenko were demanding a new round of elections, following the Ukrainian Supreme Court's decision to evaluate as null the second ones. After some legal trials, it was decided to schedule a rerun on December 26, 2004. Following the umpteenth protest by the candidate Yanukovich, on January 23, 2005, the Supreme Court officially recognized the results, and Yushchenko took the oath of office before being sworn in at Maidan and in Parliament. Following its most intense

hold power, the fall of communism in certain communist regimes in 1989–1991 did not result in democratization. Between 1996 and 2004, democratic victories and revolutions led to the demise of these communist successor parties (Kuzio, 2008).

⁵⁹ Op. cit. Kuzio, Taras. Page 286.

⁶⁰ Wilson, Andrew. Can Ukraine Save Its Revolution? *Current History*, Vol. 114, No. 774, Russia and Eurasia. October 2015. Page 261.

phase from November 22 to December 8, the Orange Revolution's active phase was finally over.⁶¹

But which consequences had the Orange Revolution for Ukraine in terms of its foreign relations? NATO countries as well as the United States and Russia became divided on the topic of Ukraine's NATO membership. George Bush aggressively backed Ukraine's inclusion in this alliance both during his visit to the country just before the NATO summit in Bucharest and at the summit that was held in April 2008. He justified this action by pointing to the democratic, pro-Western "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine (Peter Baker in *The Washington Post*, April 2, 2005). Vladimir Putin, however, aggressively opposed such a move, believing it would represent an unacceptable threat to Russia's security and could cause Ukraine to fragment along regional lines.⁶²

Even though the Orange Revolution is associated with the word "revolution", Studies question whether a revolution actually occurred in Ukraine. They observe that the "Orange Revolution" fell short of comprehensiveness and depth of change in a number of sectors, aside from large-scale, nonviolent movements of popular protest. Nevertheless, a series of democratic revolts, including the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia and the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan, are seen as a continuum with the "Orange Revolution".

What is, however, clear and puts all the scholars together, is the fact that it did bring changes to Ukraine with respect to its relations with Russia and the West. Moreover, considering the fact that it replaced a semi-authoritarian or semi-democratic government with one that established free and fair elections, has almost unanimously been hailed as a democratic breakthrough in earlier studies.⁶³

It must be reminded that before the "Orange Revolution," Ukraine's political system was referred to as a competitive authoritarianism, a virtual democracy, or a semi-democracy.⁶⁴ As

⁶¹ Kolstø, Pål and Blakkisrud, Helge. *Russia as an anti-liberal European civilisation. The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000–2015*. 2016. Pages 287-290.

⁶² Dzerkalo, Tyzhnia. *To shcho skazav Volodymyr Putin u Bukharesti*. April 18, 2008.

⁶³ Katchanovski, Ivan. *The Orange Evolution? The "Orange Revolution" and Political Changes in Ukraine*. *Post-Soviet Affairs* 24(4). October 2008. Pages 355-357.

⁶⁴ Way, Lucan. *Kuchma's Failed Authoritarianism*. *Journal of Democracy*, 16, Issue 2. April 2005. Pages 131–145.

a matter of fact, while the majority of the oligarchs supported the periodic parliamentary and presidential elections in Ukraine, the Kuchma-led administration employed administrative tools and various forms of persuasion to sway the results. Pro-Kuchma parties gained a legislative majority after the 2002 parliamentary elections, despite receiving a minority of the vote, by luring and forcing independent MPs and legislators from other parties to support the majority. The chairman of the presidential administration, Volodymyr Lytvyn, was pushed into becoming speaker of parliament by Leonid Kuchma.

In an effort to strengthen the already substantial presidential powers he already possessed and to curtail the authority of parliament, Mr. Kuchma called for a national referendum in 2000. He planned to establish an upper house of parliament, largely made up of regional lawmakers, many of whom would be president-appointed. This not so democratic habit was to some extent carried on with the result that Orange Revolution brought after 2004.⁶⁵

Pro-Western "Orange Revolution" is a term that is frequently used to describe Viktor Yushchenko's win and the widespread protests that occurred during the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. Studies, however, reveal that changes to political parties, leaders, institutions, and values were not revolutionary. Several of the major figures in the Orange camp were in fact former top officials in powerful Soviet-era governments. The "Orange Revolution" aftermath did not herald political inertia or a total return to the previous order. Nevertheless, the defeat of Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich as well as the departure of the Kuchma political machine from office altered the country's political landscape. At that time, membership in NATO and the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as improved relations with the West, became feasible options. Concurrently, it appeared as though Russia's attempts to rule Ukraine had been soundly rebuffed. As stated by Ivan Katchanovski, Ukraine has advanced toward democracy since Kuchma's semi-authoritarian rule. This stance, in his opinion, is shown by the largely free and fair final phase of the 2004 presidential election and the 2006 legislative election. Internal political problems, however, were not yet fully solved.⁶⁶

After the March 2006 elections, the Orange coalition's parties reached an agreement to appoint Tymoshenko as prime minister, only for that deal to collapse at the last minute due to the

⁶⁵ Op. cit. Katchanovski, Ivan. Pages 358-360.

⁶⁶ Op. cit. Katchanovski, Ivan. Pages 355-357.

dissertation of Oleksandr Moroz, the leader of the Socialist Party. Consequently, Yanukovych was able to profit from these conflicts and take over as prime minister. This led into a situation in which the prime minister and the president were from opposing parties and so frequently clashing. When Tymoshenko backed Yanukovych in overcoming Yushchenko's veto of the "Law on the Cabinet of Ministers," which reduced the authority of the president, in the winter of 2007, their mutual animosity severely damaged Yushchenko. Finally, Tymoshenko's election as prime minister in late 2007 nearly failed due to conflicts and mistrust within the Orange camp.⁶⁷

When relations between President Yushchenko and Yanukovych, who served as prime minister from 2006 to 2007, were characterized by a constant struggle for power between the presidential and governmental branches of the executive, the detrimental effects of such divisions and impasse became especially clear. These divides were particularly unsafe in late May 2007, when government forces loyal to Yushchenko and interior ministry troops loyal to Yanukovich were on the verge of an open clash. In addition, tensions have persisted in Ukrainian politics since Tymoshenko was re-elected as prime minister in late 2007. Finally, the 2007 decision of Viktor Yushchenko to dissolve parliament without sufficient legal justification, his intentions to use force to overcome the parliamentary majority's opposition to dissolving Rada and holding early elections, and the anti-Orange coalition's plans to change the constitution and recruit lawmakers from the Orange blocs in order to overturn the results of the 2004 presidential elections, all demonstrate that political institutions in Ukraine did not improve.⁶⁸ President Viktor Yushchenko and his staff, in essence, were unable to get beyond a significant challenge during his five-year term (2005–2010). Little attempt was made by the "Orange" leadership to firmly establish the rule of law. Instead, President Yushchenko misused his power over the judiciary, even going so far as to disband the court that had sided with his political rivals.⁶⁹ Politicians in both the ruling and opposition parties continued to bribe judges, dismiss them without cause, and even enter courthouses. In conclusion, Ukraine was more

⁶⁷ Ivi. Pages 351-355.

⁶⁸ Op. cit. Katchanovski, Ivan. 365-370.

⁶⁹ World Report. Human Rights Watch 2008. Pages 447-451

susceptible to returning to authoritarian rule as a result of the general inability to establish a clear division of authority and a functional system of checks and balances.⁷⁰

External Factors in the Orange Revolution

Possible explanations for the less-than-pleasant results of Ukraine's democratic breakthrough in 2004 have received a lot of attention from the scholarly community. Both internal and external influences were the subject of the study. Some authors⁷¹ highlighted errors made by the new ruling class as well as those of specific leaders; others emphasized the frailty of Ukrainian civil society and its absence from the political process following the revolution⁷²; others concentrated on Russia as a "hostile" external actor, believing that its policies undermined Ukrainian democracy⁷³; finally, some researchers planned their studies to show how EU and Russian impacts overlapped⁷⁴.

Surprisingly, not much attention has been paid to US actions and how they have affected the consolidation of democracy in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. Such an omission is puzzling given that the Orange Revolution was believed to have been greatly influenced by the actions of US donors. Before the Orange Revolution, in fact, US donors gave the following five areas priority: electoral assistance, political party growth, legislative support, NGO

⁷⁰ Trochev, Alexei. *Suing Putin: Patterns of Anti-Government Litigation in Russia, 2000-2008*. University of Wisconsin Law School, Legal Studies Research Paper Series Paper No. 1134. September 3, 2010. Pages 4-14.

⁷¹ Kalandadze, Katia and Orenstein, Mitchell A. *Electoral Protests and Democratization Beyond the Color Revolutions*. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(11): 1403–25. 2009.

⁷² Tudoroiu, Theodor. *Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The failed post-Soviet revolutions*. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Vol. 40, No. 3. Pages 315-342. September 2007. See also: Laverty, Nicklaus. *The Problem of Lasting Change Civil Society and the Colored Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine*. *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-soviet Democratization*. 2008.

⁷³ Vanderhill, Rachel. *The EU and Non-Accession States: The Cases of Belarus and Ukraine*. *Perspectives* Vol. 16, No. 2. Pages. 53-76. 2008. See also: Tolstrup, Jakob. *Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the 'Near Abroad'*. Aarhus University. June 22, 2009.

⁷⁴ Jonavicius, Laurynas. *Why Ukraine and Georgia have not used the "Window of Opportunity"? Neo-Institutional Analysis of Transformational Stagnation in Georgia and Ukraine*. UNISCI Discussion Papers. January 2009. See also: Petrov, Romand and Serdyuk, Oleksander. *Ukraine: The quest for democratization between Europe and Russia*. *International Actors, Democratization and the Rule of Law*. 2009. Pages 189-224.

development, and bolstering of independent media. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated over \$1.5 million for election-related activities at the programmatic level.⁷⁵ Moreover, Ukrainian NGOs were given enough funding to conduct impartial exit polls, create television ads urging voters to cast ballots, publish and distribute literature outlining citizens' rights, and supervise abuses of those rights. It was the relationship between security objectives (keeping the US-friendly administration) and democratic goals (consolidating victories of the Orange Revolution) that established the necessary conditions for a political bias in US-funded democracy aid initiatives in Ukraine.⁷⁶

After the Orange Revolution, funding for electoral assistance programs in Ukraine could be terminated or drastically reduced by the US. Since Yanukovich and his Party of Regions were not in power by the time of the 2006 parliamentary elections, at the very least, this theory should hold true. However, every US aid provider interviewed stated that, even though US government funders did change their focus to avoid bolstering Yushchenko's political adversaries, electoral help upon request continued to be given.⁷⁷

In Ukraine, a few political groups could be viewed as being opposed to US interests. The Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), which predominated the Verkhovna Rada in the 1990s, is the first factor. CPU underwent little reforms following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and kept its mostly traditional philosophy, in contrast to certain other communist successor parties in the post-communist region. Additionally, the Party of Regions (PoR) supported ideologies opposed to US security interests. As evidence for that, in the 2004 presidential elections, the leader of the PoR, Yanukovich, emerged as Yushchenko's pro-Western rival who was backed by Russia. Yanukovich's campaign benefited from Russian public relations consultants, and Russian President Vladimir Putin directly showed his support for the leader of the PoR. After taking office as prime minister in 2006, in fact, Yanukovich ought to have enraged the Bush administration by stopping Ukraine's accession to NATO.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Sushko, Oleksandr. and Prystayko, Olena. Western influence. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 2014. Pages 125–144.

⁷⁶ Žielys, Povilas and Rudinskaitė, Rūta. US democracy assistance programs in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1. March 2014. Pages 82-83.

⁷⁷ Ivi. Pages 83-85.

⁷⁸ Ivi. Pages 85-86

At that point in time, the independent and pro-Western stance of Ukraine after the Orange Revolution, as well as US support and influence into Ukrainian political process, became the key security concern for the Russian Federation. Moscow perceived the victory of the pro-Western forces in the post-velvet revolution era of Ukraine as a victory for nationalists in Kiev. Therefore, in order to meddle in these nations' internal and external affairs, Moscow securitized the Russian community in Eastern Ukraine. The conflict between "sovereign democracy" and "Color Revolution" models for the future of post-Soviet states was an expression of the changes in these countries' internal politics and, as a consequence, they were translated into the international battle between Russia and the EU/US. In essence, this was an exercise in Western power values throughout the Former Soviet Union (FSU), supported by the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EP) programs, on the one hand, and the maintenance tools of Russian influence on the other. The fundamental purpose for Russia at the time, in order to contrast this wave of Europeanization, was to establish buffer zones between its territory and the structures of the EU and NATO, and that goal could be accomplished by inciting frozen conflicts in Ukraine (in Crimea and Donbass respectively).⁷⁹

From the Orange Revolution to the Crimean Crisis

Although the war in Donetsk and Lugansk - regions known as the Donbass - has become the focus of international attention, it should be remembered that the conflict does not begin with the separatist insurrections, not even with the previous annexation of Crimea by Russia. The current problem begins to brew in Kiev, in the Euromaidan protests from November 2013.

As a matter of fact, the long-standing political and socio-cultural rift between Ukraine and Russia—which first manifested with the fall of the Soviet Union and has been simmering covertly since the mid-1990s—has (re)emerged as one of the most contentious aspects in the wake of the 2013–2014 Euromaidan protests in Ukraine. (Hanna Shelest, 2014)

More than an existential confrontation between two value systems, this crisis arises from a competition for power, where Russia, the EU and the US have all maneuvered to draw Ukraine into their respective areas of influence. The need to justify its own interests has, however, given

⁷⁹ Matsaberidze, David. Russia vs. EU/US through Georgia and Ukraine. *Connections*, Vol. 14, No. 2. 2015. Pages 77-78.

rise to an idealistic discourse that presents this rivalry under another type of argument. Russia has used its historical and cultural ties with Ukraine to try to legitimize its intervention, while the West has set itself up as a defender of Ukrainian sovereignty in the face of external aggression.⁸⁰

The events of 2013-14 demonstrate, however, abundant contradictions between this rhetoric and reality. First, the EU was less respectful of Ukraine's sovereignty when Ukraine - through its president Viktor Yanukovich - paralyzed the signing of the projected Partnership Agreement. This contrasted with the European attitude in the previous months, when the president was recognized as a legitimate interlocutor despite its widespread corruption and authoritarian tendencies, while negotiations on the future agreement were taking place. The government, on the other hand, could not be considered dictatorial as it had emerged from a democratic election certified by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and a strong opposition with the capacity to win the next elections.

Of course, Russia was no stranger to the pressures on Kiev either. Moscow knew how to use the crisis of the Ukrainian economy to impose its will, by means of a financial rescue (without the condition of any institutional reform) and a significant discount in the price of gas. The EU's mistake in its negotiations was to underestimate the counteroffer that the Kremlin was willing to make, without offering a comparable compensation as Yanukovich himself demanded; this would have attenuated the negative impact on the Ukrainian economy of opening its market to EU exports, which would displace a scarcely competitive local industry, oriented towards exporting to Russia. The commercial interests of European companies pushed an increasingly interventionist EU position to force a change in Ukraine.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Morales, Javier. *Ucrania y Rusia: lecciones aprendidas, opciones de futuro*. *Política Exterior*, Vol. 29, No. 164. 2015. Pages 28-31.

⁸¹ Grant, Thomas D. *The Annexation of Crimea*. *The American Journal of International Law*. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 109, No. 1. January 2015. Pages 68-71.

Western support for Euromaidan

The main instrument for reversing Yanukovich's decision on the Association Agreement would be an endorsement that went far beyond mere solidarity with the protesters' demands, which initially centered on the end of corruption and the improvement of their living conditions, linked to a hypothetical accession to the EU. The visits of the then European High Representative Catherine Ashton, US Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland or US Senator John McCain to the rally in Independence Square in 2013, encouraged unfounded hopes among many Ukrainians: The West was taking their side against the government, supporting the "European sovereignty" - which would not only include the trade agreement, but also full EU membership - that they longed for.

Thus, the EU started to treat it as a representative of all the Ukrainian people to those camped out in Kiev, ignoring the split between the western regions - nationalist and hostile to Russia - favorable to the protesters, and those such as the Donbass or Crimea, where Yanukovich had his electoral base. A poll by the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives and the Razumkov Center in Kiev, conducted in late December 2013, noted this division: 80 percent of Ukrainians in the west of the country supported Euromaidan, while in the east and south support was down to 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively.⁸²

This reckless European posturing became even less justifiable as the rallies became more radical, evolving - even before the bloody police repression - into violent struggle, with far-right groups confronting the police with sticks, Molotov cocktails and firearms, as well as occupying various public buildings. Radical nationalism, symbolized by the red and black flags, became increasingly present, leading these fights. But the contradiction between violent extremism and pro-European demands, as well as the real danger of the violence turning into civil war, were ignored by the EU, which had no problem meeting also with the leader of the Svoboda party, a party condemned by the European Parliament for its xenophobic ideology.⁸³

The last step in the loss of European credibility was the agreement of 21 February 2014, in which Yanukovich accepted early elections at the end of autumn and undertook, together with the opposition, to form a government of national concentration until then. The EU considered

⁸² Ivi. Pages 69

⁸³ Diuk, Nadia. EUROMAIDAN: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution. World Affairs, Vol. 176, No. 6. April 2014. Pages 12-14.

its mediating role fulfilled, while the Maidan announced that it would not stop until it forced the president out, and Russia warned of the risk that the text would remain a dead letter if the street violence did not cease. And so it was: faced with the danger to his life and abandoned by many of his allies, Yanukovich fled from the capital to the east of the country. The Euromaidan protests in Kyiv reached their peak in late February 2014 after deadly clashes with security forces. Being initiated by Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich's decision to reject an association agreement with the European Union in November 2013 in favor of closer economic ties with Russia, after facing increasing pressure from the demonstrations, Yanukovich was forced to escape for Russia on February 21, 2014. At that point, the Supreme Rada (The Ukrainian parliament), in contravention of the impeachment procedure outlined in Article 111 of the Ukrainian Constitution⁸⁴, promptly removed him and installed a temporary leader, leading a new government coalition that supported the Euromaidan demands.

An almost perfect opportunity presented itself for the Kremlin to carry out the most recent iteration of its backup plans for annexing Crimea as a result of the state being taken over by anti-Russian nationalist organizations that were openly supported by the West and the general disarray. However, the military side of these plans was extremely efficiently carried out, but the political side was less so.⁸⁵

The Annexation of Crimea

When dealing with the term “frozen conflict”, it should be borne in mind that Russia has either actively aided or assisted in the creation of the four separatist ethnic regions in Eurasia during the early 1990s: the self-declared state in Moldova, Transnistria; Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia; and, to a lesser extent, Nagorno-Karabakh, a landlocked mountainous region that, after a brutal civil war, declared its independence from Azerbaijan under Armenian protection. Due to Moscow's interference, these states now have "frozen conflicts" situations, in which the splinter territories are still independent of the central governments and the local de facto rulers

⁸⁴ Constitution of Ukraine.

https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/11/08/constitution_14.pdf

⁸⁵ Adomeit, Hannes. Russlands imperialer Irrweg: Von der Stagnation in den Niedergang. Osteuropa, Vol. 65, No. 3, Entfremdet: Russland und der Westen. Pages 81-85. 2015

are supported and influenced by Russia. Before Moscow's annexation of Crimea, the situation on the peninsula had followed a well-known pattern: Moscow would take advantage of ethnic tensions and use minimal force during political turbulence before endorsing territorial revisions that would allow it to maintain a foothold in the contested region.

Nevertheless, Russia abandoned these outdated strategies with the annexation of Crimea, dramatically raising the stakes. Russia's willingness to go further in the Crimea than in previous instances seems to be motivated by both the strategic importance of Ukraine to Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin's newly discovered determination to escalate his confrontation with a West that Russian elites increasingly view as duplicitous and antagonistic to their interests.⁸⁶

For Russia, Ukraine represented a red line in terms of its national and regional, but above all military, interests. To ensure respect for these interests, it tried to develop a "friendly" relationship with Ukraine, according to which Ukraine should be subordinate to the Kremlin. Prior to the Crimean crisis developments, Russia and Ukraine had already been engaged in a process of forming a common economic space. As a matter of fact, Ukraine's strategy since 1992 has been to maneuver between Russia, the EU, and the US. Even though Yanukovich came from the more Russia-friendly Eastern Ukrainian oligarch clan, he continued to negotiate the association agreement with the EU because of the deep economic crisis.

Since 1992, Russian and Ukrainian governments signed a free trade agreement within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and bilateral trade was built on that basis. In 2013, this bilateral agreement was eventually replaced by a multilateral free trade agreement, also within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In addition, it should be noted that a priority for Vladimir Putin's third presidential term was the attempt to create the Eurasian Union Project, consisting of a new integration in the former Soviet space. As a matter of fact, in an edition of the Direct Line program in April 2015, President Putin indicated that "Ukraine is an independent state [...] We are not going to resurrect the empire, we do not have that goal". But two different things are mixed here: territorial domination and strategic subjugation. Russia was prepared to accept the de jure independence of Ukraine and the rest of the republics (that is precisely the legal nuance of the term "nezavisimyy" used by the Russian leader) but not necessarily de facto independence

⁸⁶ Op. cit. Mankoff, Jeffrey. Pages 64-68.

(which is better expressed by the term “samostoyatel'nyy”) that is, that it can stand on its own feet.⁸⁷

The change of government in Kiev, nevertheless, meant the failure of the Russian project to draw Ukraine into the Eurasian Union, whose main purpose was to compete with the EU. The reasons for the Kremlin's justification for annexing Crimea, however, are far distant from any kind of friendly justifications: first, Crimea has been the base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet for more than 250 years. An anti-Russian government could have cancelled the agreement that would allow it to remain on the peninsula; and secondly, the Russians considered that Crimea ceased to be territorially Russian because of a historical mistake, when it was handed over to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954.

The annexation of Crimea must be understood both externally and internally. Externally, it amounts to a clear message to the West: 1) for Russia, Ukraine represents a red line that no foreign power should cross, because it is its "natural" zone of influence; and 2) Russia was ready, as a "great power", to compete with the US in its backyard. Conversely, domestically: 1) it served to divert public attention from the economic and political problems that used to plague Russia; and 2) it was a message to the separatist movements in the Caucasus that any attempt to break up the Russian Federation would not be tolerated.⁸⁸

It should be borne in mind that the purported motivations of the early 1990s - protecting national minorities in a nearby country - were solidified into the notion of national security upon being granted passports: Russia would defend its citizens all over the world by whatever means necessary. The similar approach was taken with regard to Ukraine and Crimea. President Putin started making adjustments to the Russian Federation's security concept note in order to achieve this. Therefore, the EU's options for helping its allies in the FSU (former Soviet Union) region were limited by Russia's actions in its near abroad. Russia's intervention in Ukraine exemplified how easily it may switch from using soft power to using hard power to secure its foreign policy interests. Moscow showed that it was ready and capable of employing both soft power and physical strength to uphold its influence in the former Soviet Union. In

⁸⁷ Milosevich, Mira. Rusia y el nuevo (des)orden Europeo. Cuadernos de Pensamiento Político. April 2015. Pages 59-61.

⁸⁸ Ivi. Pages 59-61

fact, it showed this through the gas war with Ukraine that followed the 2004 velvet revolutions (soft power) and across the 2014 military actions (hard power).⁸⁹

Despite the historical justifications for the annexation of Crimea and the supposedly moral justifications for economic and military aid to the separatists in Donbas, Russia's intervention in Ukraine was judged illegal and illegitimate.⁹⁰ However, it must be recognized that it successfully applied the use of force to secure what it considered to be its primary national interest: securing the zone of influence.

Russia's attitude towards Ukraine had been influenced by all the above-mentioned factors, but there was an even more decisive one: Russia's perception that the West was severely weakened by the economic crisis, by the international retreat of the US under President Obama and, above all, by the conviction that it would not intervene militarily in Ukraine for lack of will and means. Moreover, successive cuts by EU countries in their defense budgets since the end of the Cold War (a process that did not occur in Russia) did not exactly served as a deterrent signal to Russian governments.⁹¹

Starting on February 28, 2014, regular Russian forces with the help of neighborhood "self-defense" militias quickly seized the strategically significant Perekop Isthmus⁹², cut off or blocked the majority of land, sea, and air connections between Crimea and mainland Ukraine, took control of all Crimean ports, airports, radio stations, and TV stations, blocked and occupied all Ukrainian Army and Navy installations, and expropriated nearly all of their stocks of weapons and ammunition. Additionally, they supported and shielded illegal operations carried out by Russian separatists, enabling the Republic of Ukraine to annex Crimea. It is clear that the military invasion of Crimea was skillfully planned, practiced in advance, and carried out. The three-week long operation ended successfully and without a shot fired. The 190 military installations and nearly all the equipment were simply surrendered because the Ukrainian military personnel stationed in Crimea were not given orders to fight back with

⁸⁹ Ivi. Pages 56-58

⁹⁰ United Nations. General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region. Sixty-eighth General Assembly. Plenary Session. 80th Meeting. March 27, 2014. <https://press.un.org/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>

⁹¹ Op. Cit. Milosevich, Mira. Page 60.

⁹² The 5-7 km broad strip of land that connects Ukraine's mainland to the Crimean Peninsula.

weapons. Only a few of the Ukrainian Navy's flyable aircraft managed to elude capture. Moreover, the Crimean police either did nothing or collaborated with the Russian Special Forces and the insurgents.

Eventually, on February 27, 2014, a referendum about Crimea's rejoining the Russian Federation was announced. According to reports, it was peaceful and orderly, but it fell short of high democratic standards in a few crucial ways. Indeed, there were two questions on the ballot, and only a yes vote was accepted:

1. Do you support rejoining Crimea with Russia as a subject of the Russian Federation?
2. Do you support restoration of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Crimea and Crimea's status as a part of Ukraine?

The option to remain a part of Ukraine under the current constitutional framework or to declare Crimea an independent state was not included on the poll. Moreover, it was conducted under irregular circumstances of a Russian military occupation, as well as under Russian Armed Force presence in public areas, which undoubtedly intimidated Opponents of Crimea's secession. That is the reason why, based on constitutional concerns, the Ukrainian government refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the referendum and its results., and several EU and NATO member states as well as the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe concurred with this viewpoint.⁹³

On March 17, 2014, Crimea formally proclaimed its independence and requested membership in the Russian Federation, and the following day a treaty embracing Crimea and Sevastopol was signed in Moscow. Lastly, the "Constitutional Law on Admitting the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation and Establishing Within the Russian Federation the New Constituent Entities the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Importance Sevastopol" was swiftly railroaded through the Russian Federal Assembly, signed by the Russian President, and became effective in just five days. The Ukrainian government charged the Russian Federation with flagrant aggression, breaking the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and multiple other international treaties and agreements. President Vladimir Putin, conversely, claimed the right of the Crimean people to self-determination in the form of independence as the primary justification and legitimacy for the annexation⁹⁴.

⁹³ Burke-White, Williams. Crimea and the International Legal Order. Public Law and Legal Theory Research Paper Series, Research Paper No. #14-24. 2014. Pages 1-10.

⁹⁴ N.B. Art. 5 of the Russian Constitution contains a provision for the right of the peoples to self-determination but, likewise, does not confer to them the right to secede from the Russian Federation.

Russian-speaking separatists in Eastern and Southern Ukraine were emboldened by the annexation of Crimea and reportedly believed that Moscow would replicate the same scenario. In April 2014, several Ukrainian cities saw widespread unrest, anti-Kyiv protests, the destruction of Ukrainian state symbols and the flying of Russian flags, as well as the breaking into and occupation of various government facilities. The "People's Republics" of Kharkov, Donetsk, Lugansk, and Odessa were established. However, a somewhat different cause contributed to the recent uptick in instability and bloodshed in the Donbass region. It aired regional complaints against Kyiv centralism, defended the rights of the Russian language, which Ukrainian nationalists had assaulted, and voiced vehement opposition to the "fascists" who "organized a coup" in the city.

In sharp contrast to the situation in Crimea, the disturbance eventually turned into a full-fledged civil war, during which the insurgents benefited from much needed support coming from across the country's extensive and unmarked border with the Russian Federation. Numerous civilians died as a result of the indiscriminate huge shelling and rocket attacks on Donetsk and other towns and communities. Grave violations of international humanitarian law were committed during these attacks, initially only and then more frequently by the Ukrainian side than by the separatists.⁹⁵

The occupation and annexation of Crimea provoked a strong response from the international community, manifested among other things in diplomatic objections, statements, and resolutions adopted by international organizations. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution on Ukraine's territorial integrity on March 27, 2014.⁹⁶ It called for the international community to refrain from recognizing changes in Crimea's status, denounced the annexation of Crimea, and deemed the referendum "invalid." One hundred UN members voted in favor of the resolution, with only 11 voting against it, highlighting a Russian Federation's severe diplomatic isolation. Several EU and NATO countries, notably those from Eastern Europe, actively condemned Russia's move in the strongest terms possible. It was also shared by many non-aligned nations who, on principle, condemn any violation of member states' territorial

⁹⁵ Op. cit. Bebler, Anton. Pages 47-49.

⁹⁶ United Nations. General Assembly Adopts Resolution Calling upon States Not to Recognize Changes in Status of Crimea Region. Sixty-eighth General Assembly. Plenary Session. 80th Meeting. March 27, 2014. <https://press.un.org/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>

integrity. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea was denounced and labeled as unlawful and illegitimate by the foreign ministers of NATO member nations on April 1, 2014.

The ministers also decided to strengthen NATO's collective defense posture through demonstrative deployments of its assets in land, air, and sea configurations within the North Atlantic Treaty Area that is physically close to Ukraine and the Russian Federation. They also decided to provide Ukraine with advising teams supporting Ukraine's defense reforms. Economic and political sanctions targeting, among others, several well-known Russian and Crimean individuals were eventually added to these measures by the United States and the European Union.⁹⁷

Fears of a hot war between Ukraine and the Russian Federation increased as a result of the struggle over Crimea and the linked conflict in Southeastern Ukraine, while the probability of de-escalation in other "frozen" wars on the former Soviet periphery, such as the Transnistria conflict, decreased as a result of the Crimean incident. Moreover, the goals, efficiency, and effects of EU and US sanctions were questioned as a result of their application. The sanctions' actual goals have never been made apparent. These include: a) returning Crimea to Ukraine; b) ending Moscow's support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine; c) pressuring them to stop fighting and return to Kyiv's rule; d) forcing Moscow to consent to additional EU and NATO expansion into the post-Soviet space; and e) bringing about a Kremlin regime change and "shackling" the disobedient Russian "bear." Vladimir Putin, the president, appears to have a strong belief in the latter^{98,99} (John J. Mearsheimer, 2014)

A dispute concerning rightful sovereignty over Crimea has (re)emerged as one of the most heated points of contention between Ukraine and Russia following the Euromaidan protests and Russia's subsequent annexation of the region in March 2014. Both sides in this dispute have relied upon particular national narratives of Crimea to argue for its inherent "belonging" to either Ukraine or Russia, and these narratives have largely shaped popular understandings of Crimean identities. Frequently neglected in these discussions is the strength of regional identities among Crimeans of all ethnic backgrounds.

⁹⁷ Ivi. <https://press.un.org/en/2014/ga11493.doc.htm>

⁹⁸ News conference of Vladimir Putin. Moscow. December 18, 2014.
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/47250>

⁹⁹ Mearsheimer, John J. Faulty Powers: Who Started the Ukraine Crisis? *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 6. November 2014. Pages 167-178.

Concerning this theme, the chorus of the prominent Russian rock band Undervud's song "Krym" (Crimea), which was released in the summer of 2015, gets to the heart of discussions over Crimea and its geopolitical identities in light of Russia's occupation and annexation of the Ukrainian region in March 2014.

*Скажи мне, чей Крым,
И я тебе скажу, кто ты.*

*Скажи мне, чей Крым,
И я тебе скажу, кто ты.*

*Скажи мне, чей Крым,
И я тебе скажу, кто ты.*

*Скажи мне, чей Крым,
И я тебе скажу, и я тебе скажу,
и я тебе скажу,
Кто ты.*

*Tell me whose Crimea
And I will tell you who you are.*

*Tell me whose Crimea
And I will tell you who you are.*

*Tell me whose Crimea
And I will tell you who you are.*

*Tell me whose Crimea
And I will tell you, and I will tell you
And I will tell you,
Who you are*

Undervud, "Krym" (2015)

According to Russia's perception, the Ukrainian crisis, which saw Ukraine join the Western camp (according to Russia, not without subversive assistance from the West), compelled Moscow to take some action in order to prevent a serious decline in its international standing and serious damage to its plans to rebuild the "empire," for which Ukraine was essential. Therefore, Russia's evident objective was to return to the pre-crisis situation. That is, to keep Ukraine from allying with the West and bring it under its control. Russia's and the West's different and opposing perceptions of the demonstrations against Viktor Yanukovich's government, the Ukrainian president's subsequent flight to Russia and his ouster by the Kiev parliament are the background to the Ukrainian crisis.¹⁰⁰

From the very beginning of the domestic opposition to Yanukovich, the Kremlin accused the West of having provoked him to overthrow the democratically elected government in 2010 after it refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. Yanukovich's flight to Russia (21 February 2014) and the creation of an interim government were defined by Russia as a

¹⁰⁰ Trenin, Dimitri. The Ukraine Crisis and the Resumption of Great-Power Rivalry. Carnegie, Moscow Centre. July 9, 2014. Pages 1-4.

coup d'état. The subsequent annexation of Crimea (March 2014) and the economic and military support to the pro-Russians in the Donbas area have been justified by the Russian government with three arguments: 1) Yanukovich's replacement was illegal. Therefore, the new interim government lacked legitimacy. (2) The Kremlin considered that the interim government was composed of xenophobic extremists, which seriously threatened the security of Russian citizens in Ukraine (the new government's first measure was to ban the teaching and use of the Russian language: although this ban was never implemented, it served as the main argument for Russian intervention). Putin's government claimed that its moral duty was to protect the Russian minority, because their basic rights had been violated. 3) Russia considered that Westerners had betrayed the agreement that was signed between President Yanukovich, representatives of the opposition parties and three EU foreign ministers (from Germany, France and Poland) which provided for the creation of a coalition government and early elections.¹⁰¹

Feeling itself negatively impacted by the outcomes of the Ukrainian unrest, Russia decided to annex the Crimean Peninsula as a response. However, it might be assessed that, given the difficulty it faced from the continued trend of the West's "eastward expansion" toward the regions that were formerly a part of the Soviet Union, its responses to these changes were reactionary. In this sense, the action in the Crimean Peninsula was not only aimed at restoring "historical justice" by returning it to Russia; it was also meant to exert pressure on Ukraine by threatening to divide the nation and annex other parts of it.¹⁰²

Through a series of very quick actions, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, disregarding international condemnation. Early in March, a nonviolent military invasion began the annexation. Shortly afterward, a declaration of independence ostensibly from the local population was issued. A popular referendum on joining Russia was supported by nearly 95% of voters a few days later (March 16, 2014). With the approval of the majority of Russian citizens, the official annexation took place on March 18, 2014. The immediate context of the annexation, however, was marked by more than three months of violent protests in Ukraine, which came to an end on February 21 leading to a coup, President Yanukovich's flight, and the installation of a transitional administration that would be in power until elections in May.

¹⁰¹ Ivi. Pages 4-9.

¹⁰² Magen, Zvi et. al. The Annexation of Crimea: International Ramifications. Institute for National Security Studies. March 24, 2014.

Nevertheless, rather than calming the unrest in Ukraine, Russia's acquisition of Crimea has intensified the issue. This is especially true given the numerous consequences this has had on the world stage, where a power struggle between Russia and the West started taking place. As a matter of fact, for Westerners, the annexation of Crimea and the military and economic aid to pro-Russian separatists was not only a reprehensible violation of international law. Above all, it demonstrated the nature of Russia: a revisionist power that entered a process of 're-imperialization' with the aim of regaining Soviet territories and spheres of influence.¹⁰³

Ukraine in Putin's speeches

The Ukraine crisis - which directly involved Russia following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has disintegrated the European order that emerged after the end of the Cold War and deepened the geopolitical rivalry between the West (the EU, the US, and NATO) and Russia. A study published by the Robert Schuman Foundation explains that the Russian intervention in Ukraine has involved the violation of ten international norms to which the Soviet Union and later Russia, as its legitimate heir, committed itself: several articles of the UN Charter (Chapter I)¹⁰⁴; two UN resolutions (2625¹⁰⁵; 3314¹⁰⁶); the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference (1975)¹⁰⁷; the Budapest Memorandum (1994)¹⁰⁸; a Council of Europe resolution (1996)¹⁰⁹ and several particular treaties signed between Russia and neighboring, former

¹⁰³ Ivi.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Charter. Chapter 1. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1>

¹⁰⁵ UN Resolution 2625. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/202170>

¹⁰⁶ UN Resolution 3314. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/190983?ln=en>

¹⁰⁷ Final Act of the Helsinki Conference. <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>

¹⁰⁸ The Budapest Memorandum. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52241.pdf>

¹⁰⁹ The Council of Europe. Texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/090000168091d5ba>

members of the Soviet Union (1991¹¹⁰-1997¹¹¹). All these infringements by Russia stem from its disregard for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, along with NATO's conduct in Eastern Europe.

The European response, which has consisted of condemning these events, exerting political pressure on Moscow, and imposing economic sanctions aimed at isolating Russia internationally, has not been sufficient to effectively uphold international law and preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity.

The Ukraine crisis could hardly be considered the main cause of the friction between the West and Russia. Although the Russian intervention in Crimea came as a surprise to Westerners, as several analyses show, including a House of Lords report that compares the European attitude to the crisis to that of sleepwalkers (an allusion to the title of the book written by Australian historian Christopher Clark, who identifies the 'sleepwalking' of European governments as the necessary condition for the Great War). The fact is that the Ukraine crisis was not a cause but a consequence of two processes that date back to the end of the Cold War: the first one is that of the evolution of relations between Russia and the West between 1989 and 2014, marked by the enlargement of the European Union and NATO, by the bombing of Serbia by NATO air forces (1999) and by the recognition of Kosovo as an independent state in 2008 by the US and 25 of the 28 NATO member states.¹¹²

This point is perpetually stressed in every speech of President Putin. An example can be traced in one of his latest addresses prior to the military intervention in Crimea:

Further expansion of the infrastructure of the North Atlantic Alliance, into territories of Ukraine are unacceptable to us. It's certainly not about NATO itself – it's just an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us – in our own historical territories – a hostile "anti-Russia" is being created, intensively

¹¹⁰Treaty on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. 1991.
<https://www.lawmix.ru/expertlaw/241541>

¹¹¹ Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. 1997.
https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41036701.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ae87251588cd086eb525761331fbd8100&ab_segments=&origin=

¹¹² Op. Cit. Milosevich, Mira. Pages 49-50.

*settled by the **armed forces of NATO** countries and pumped with the most modern weapons. For **the United States** and its allies, this is the so-called **policy of containing Russia**. And for our country, it is ultimately **a matter of life and death**, a question of our historical future as a people. This is **a real threat** not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. This is **the very red line** that has been repeatedly talked about. They crossed it.*¹¹³

The second process that dates to the end of the Cold War is that increased tensions between Russia and the former USSR republics, due to Russia's claim to a "natural" right to exert its influence on neighboring countries, mutual economic and energy dependence, and finally the subsequent creation of independent states.¹¹⁴

Ukraine is the longest standing case involving Russia between the separatist regions.

Tensions first escalated back in 2004, following the Orange Revolution and are sadly continuing in the present due to the recent events that saw Russia's aggressive invasion in order to ensure Crimea and the Donbass as territories under their sphere of influence.

When mentioning Crimea, President Vladimir Putin always considered it as integral part of Russia, due to a shared past and shared effort in battle to bring Crimea back into Russia in former times. On December 19, 2019, for example, when dealing with the annual parade of the Russian Army, he stated that:

I regret that there is no Soviet Union anymore. As for their participation in the parade, it is their choice. But if someone misses the event due to some interstate relations, I think they will make a big mistake. Because it will mean that they do not show respect for the people who fought and gave their lives for the independence of their Motherland.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Putin, Vladimir. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. [speech transcript]. Moscow. February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

¹¹⁴ Op. Cit. Milosevich, Mira. Pages 49-50.

¹¹⁵ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin's annual news conference: The news conference was broadcast live by Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24, Channel One, NTV television channels, as well as radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii [speech transcript]. Moscow. December 19, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>

During a speech that dates back to 18th March 2014, moreover, Mr. Putin once again reiterated the important value of a shared past between Crimea and Russia. This is the longest and most ancient discourse strategy ever applied by the President. It is conceivable that President Putin wants to instill in the residents of the separatist territories a sense of community pride and responsibility by bringing to light this shared past and the shared fatigue to safeguard the common territories. In this manner, a Russian military intervention would appear to be a defensive measure rather than an act of external aggression:

*Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. **The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea.** This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. **Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.**¹¹⁶*

Additionally, to defend the idea that every country should be free to decide under which State or Organization to be, President Putin also stressed how in the past, Russia always supported the free desire of a population to express its willing of annexation, even when dealing with European Countries like Germany. By doing so, he took the occasion to ask German people to support them in return with the Crimean situation. This is another clear tactic used by President Putin to win over the world community: highlighting what Russia has done for others (particularly, the Europeans and Ukrainians) in order to instill a sense of debt in them.

I believe that the Europeans, first and foremost, the Germans, will also understand me. In the course of political consultations on the unification of East and West Germany, some nations that were then and are now Germany’s allies did not support the idea of unification. Our nation, however, unequivocally supported the sincere, unstoppable

¹¹⁶Putin, Vladimir. Address by President of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin. [speech transcript] Moscow. March 18, 2014. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

*desire of the Germans for national unity. I expect that the citizens of Germany will also support the **aspiration of the Russians, of historical Russia, to restore unity.***¹¹⁷

This strategy repeated itself also in 2020. When President Putin was asked about the positions of other countries with respect to Crimea's referendum, he didn't hesitate to portray them as the ones damaging the country and punishing the victims without any fair justification, namely the people of Crimea who freely voted for their independence:

*Europe and the United States claim to be true dyed-in-the-wool democrats, but they do not even want to hear about the people of Crimea voting for their future in a referendum, which is **the highest form of direct democracy.** They adopted sanctions against the Crimean people. If Crimea was annexed, then they are the victims. Why are sanctions adopted against the victims? If they voted freely, it was democracy in action, so why are they being punished for democracy?*¹¹⁸

When dealing with the Donbass, President Putin declared on the 24 of February this year (the day that the invasion started) that the fault of Russian menace to security is a product of NATO's enlargement. However, this time he went further by directly accusing the West of using "cynical deception and lies or attempts at pressure and blackmail" in response to Russian willingness to cooperate with them in order to achieve an "equal and indivisible security in Europe". The difference between the common speeches related to security concerns is clear: it is not just about Russian security, it is about European security in general. And the only guarantor of this process, following the words of President Putin, seems to be Russia.

We are talking about what causes us particular concern and alarm, about the fundamental threats that from year to year are rudely and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West towards our country. I am referring to the expansion of NATO to the east and the approximation of its military infrastructure to Russia's borders.

¹¹⁷ Ivi. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

¹¹⁸ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club: Vladimir Putin took part, via videoconference, in the final plenary session of the 17th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. [speech transcript]. Novo-Ogaryovo. October 22, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64261>

*For 30 years we have persistently and patiently tried to agree with the leading NATO countries on the principles of **equal and indivisible security in Europe**. In response to our proposals, we have constantly faced either **cynical deception and lies, or attempts at pressure and blackmail**, and the North Atlantic Alliance, meanwhile, is steadily expanding.¹¹⁹*

The speech continues:

*Russia after the collapse of the USSR accepted new geopolitical realities. We respect and will continue to treat all newly formed countries in the post-Soviet space in the same way. [...] But **Russia cannot feel safe, develop, exist with a constant threat emanating from the territory of modern Ukraine**.¹²⁰*

President Putin was about to reveal the only option available to him after the Donbass crisis: a military intervention (“It was simply impossible to tolerate all this”). Once more, he painted Russia as some sort of savior who will enable the Ukrainian people to enjoy lives that are safer and even more democratic. In fact, following his words, the political climate in Ukraine is not following a democratic path, as the ruling party was chosen through "decorative electoral procedures". Therefore, it is not just about Russian security; the Kremlin is stepping in to protect these people and provide for their improvement of life conditions.

*The forces that carried out a coup d'état in Ukraine in 2014 seized power and are holding it with the help of, in fact, **decorative electoral procedures**, have finally abandoned the peaceful settlement of the conflict. For eight years we have been doing everything possible to resolve the situation by peaceful and political means. All in vain. [...] **It was simply impossible to tolerate all this**. It was necessary to immediately stop this nightmare – the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, rely only on you and me. It was these aspirations,*

¹¹⁹ Putin, Vladimir. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. [speech transcript]. Moscow. February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

¹²⁰ Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

*feelings, and pain of people that were the main motive for us to make the decision to recognize the people's republics of Donbass.*¹²¹

President Putin then continued by stating that the military intervention was about to happen (“I decided to conduct a special military operation”). However, he stated it by using the UN charter, the treaties of friendship stipulated with the Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, and the approval of the Federation Council of Russia as guarantee and justification of his actions. The intervention was hence legal according to him. Not only that, it was also a sort of liberation for the Ukrainian government’s tyranny, defined as a “denazification”:

*You and I have simply not been left with any other opportunity to protect Russia and our people, except for the one that we will have to use today. **Circumstances require us to act decisively and immediately.** The People's Republics of Donbass appealed to Russia for help. In accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, with the approval of the Federation Council of Russia and in pursuance of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Federal Assembly on February 22 of this year with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, **I decided to conduct a special military operation** to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. We will strive for the demilitarization and **denazification** of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.*¹²²

It is increasingly clear that the debate protracted by the Duma over Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia is based on two fixed points that, however, clash when putted together. The first one is that tensions and difficulties arouse because of NATO and the West expansions, hence it is necessary to stop it to preserve not only “the protection of Russia itself”, but also the entire Eurasian one. Russia however portrays itself as the nation that always tried to establish cooperation and dialogue to solve this problem, something that, however, was not accepted for some reason by the West (“they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs,

¹²¹ Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

¹²² Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

placed us before an accomplished fact”). This idea is often remarked in President Putin’s speeches, and a prove to that is this excerpt from an address of this year:

*Today's events are not connected with the desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They are connected with **the protection of Russia itself** from those who took Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and its people.¹²³*

*These actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against **Eurasian integration**. And all this while Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West. We are constantly proposing cooperation on all key issues; we want to strengthen our level of trust and for our relations to be equal, open and fair. But we saw no reciprocal steps.*

*On the contrary, **they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact.**¹²⁴*

*We have already heard declarations from Kiev about Ukraine soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? That NATO’s navy would be right there in this city of Russia’s military glory, and this would create not an illusory but **a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia.**¹²⁵*

Moreover, President Putin, when dealing with NATO expansion, always recall it as an unfair move by the West, who in addition accuses Russia of being an aggressive country without no justification. According to President Putin, in fact, when it was Russia’s turn to guarantee stability and security for Europe, “voluntarily withdrew its troops”, contrarily to what NATO is doing:

¹²³ Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

¹²⁴ Putin, Vladimir. Address by President of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin. [speech transcript] Moscow. March 18, 2014. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

¹²⁵ Ivi. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

*Did Russia, after the USSR collapsed, present any threat to the United States or European countries? **We voluntarily withdrew our troops** from eastern Europe, leaving them just on empty land.¹²⁶*

In order to show to the Eastern population that the West is the one to blame when dealing with lack of security concerns for the Russian people, talks often have the aim to resuscitate some kind of pride and emotional attachment to a great and better past, the Soviet Union era and its protection and preservation:

*Your fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis, defending **our common homeland**, so that today's neo-Nazis would seize power in Ukraine. You swore an oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people, not to the anti-people junta that is robbing Ukraine and mocking that very people.¹²⁷*

*Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and people of other ethnic groups have **lived side by side in Crimea, retaining their own identity, traditions, languages and faith**. Incidentally, the total population of the Crimean Peninsula today is 2.2 million people, of whom almost 1.5 million are Russians, 350,000 are Ukrainians who predominantly consider Russian their native language, and about 290,000-300,000 are Crimean Tatars, who, as the referendum has shown, also lean towards Russia.¹²⁸*

***I will do everything in the interests of the Russian Federation. This applies to Crimea returning to the Russian Federation. This is how the people expressed their will.**¹²⁹*

¹²⁶ NBC News. Exclusive: Full Interview With Russian President Vladimir Putin. [Video]. YouTube. June 15, 2021. (Last visited October 20, 2022).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pJd6O_NT0

¹²⁷ Putin, Vladimir. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. [speech transcript]. Moscow. February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

¹²⁸ Putin, Vladimir. Address by President of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin. [speech transcript] Moscow. March 18, 2014. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

¹²⁹ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin's annual news conference: The President of Russia held his annual news conference. Novo-Ogaryovo [speech transcript]. December 17, 2020.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64671>

In 2019, moreover, President Putin stated that “*I regret that there is no Soviet Union anymore*”.¹³⁰

The second remarked point is based on the idea that every country and population from the former Soviet Republics has the right to freely decide their own future, even if it does not imply being with Russia. This concept, however, is often re-shaped depending on the situation it is dealt with. In brief, it seems like the Duma needs to find pretexts to convince local populations that even though they are free to choose whatever State or Organization they want to be part of, Russia will always be the best choice if compared with the “corrupt and criminal” West. In fact, President Putin used words like “obliged to protect” when dealing with Russia’s actions towards Ukraine and “they just couldn’t have done otherwise” when dealing with Crimeans choice to be part of Russia. It's also noteworthy to note that President Putin blames Ukrainian residents of calling the new forms of administration "Nats" in this excerpt of 2022, despite the fact that this term has only ever been used by Russia:

At the heart of our policy is freedom of choice for all to independently determine their future and the future of their children. And we consider it important that this right to choose can be used by all peoples living on the territory of today's Ukraine, by all who want it.

*In 2014, Russia was **obliged to protect** the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol from what you call "Nats." Crimeans and Sevastopol residents made their choice – to be with their historical Motherland, with Russia, and we supported this. Again, **they just couldn't have done otherwise.***¹³¹

Moreover, President Putin goes on by portraying the EU as a negative and nearly evil entity, which caused an unrest and hence a coup d'état in Ukraine due to the unfair conditions of the agreement that was proposed to Kiev. Following Putin’s speech, it seems that the new

¹³⁰ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference: The news conference was broadcast live by Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24, Channel One, NTV television channels, as well as radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii [speech transcript]. Moscow. December 19, 2019.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>

¹³¹ Putin, Vladimir. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. [speech transcript]. Moscow. February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

authorities of Ukraine follow the same path of the EU. Luckily, however, people of the eastern and southeastern regions realize that the new government “wanted to invalidate some of the ethnic minorities’ rights” and rebelled.

*President Yanukovich said that he could not sign it on the EU conditions, **because it would dramatically worsen the socioeconomic situation in Ukraine and affect Ukrainians.** This provoked public unrest that eventually culminated in an unconstitutional coup, an armed seizure of power.*

*People in eastern and southeastern regions of Ukraine were worried because they saw a rapid growth of nationalist sentiments, heard threats and saw that [the new authorities] **wanted to invalidate some of the ethnic minorities’ rights**, including the rights of the Russian minority. This description is relative, because Russians are native persons in Ukraine. But **an attempt was made to invalidate all decisions regarding the use of the native language.** This alarmed people, of course.¹³²*

Russian President also frequently stressed the fact that the situation in Ukraine, as well as the preservation of its security (along with the Russian one) is nobody’s business but Russian. The international community shall not interfere with it, otherwise “response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences that you have never faced in your history”.

All responsibility for possible bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the ruling regime in Ukraine.

*Now, whoever tries to prevent us, and even more so to create threats to our country, to our people, should know that Russia's **response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences that you have never faced in your history.** We are ready for any eventuality. All the necessary decisions have been taken in this regard.¹³³*

¹³² Putin, Vladimir. Direct Line with Vladimir Putin. [speech transcript]. Moscow. April 17, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>

¹³³ Putin, Vladimir. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. [speech transcript]. Moscow. February 24, 2022. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

Conclusion

The best way to explain Russia's attitude to the Ukrainian crisis is to: (1) to understand the traditional principles and objectives of Russian national security policy, which have not changed since the 13th century; (2) to analyze the current Russian perception of the causes of the Ukraine crisis and its reasons or justification for the annexation of Crimea; and (3) to find out to what extent the traditional principles and actions in Ukraine coincide with the concepts of "national security", "military doctrine" and "foreign policy" contained in official Kremlin documents since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. Subsequently, it has been possible to maintain the diplomatic fiction that the framework set out in the Minsk Agreement could provide the basis for a lasting political settlement. It will however not do so and, foreseeably, the attempts to pacify Ukraine will continue to run aground because what the Kremlin is demanding is precisely the recognition of this alleged right of tutelage over Kiev. The key does not lie, or at least not exclusively, in the position of the EU or NATO, but in the Ukrainian determination to reject this tutelage. Hence, what has been settled for eight years with weapons on its territory has to do with Ukraine but goes beyond that. It is the European security model and the rules of the geopolitical game that are at stake. Issues that are key to guaranteeing peace and stability on the continent.

Minsk agreement was acceptable, up until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to both Kiev and Moscow, because it allowed competing interpretations of both the final outcome of its implementation and the sequence for achieving that end.

In this respect, the key issue is the return of the approximately 400 kilometers of Ukrainian border controlled by Russia.¹³⁴ Kiev will not take any steps as long as it does not fully control its border (which allows Russia to escalate the conflict whenever it wishes) and Moscow will not return it as long as it does not feel its objectives are guaranteed.

With respect to these objectives, it is worth stressing that what worries the Kremlin is neither Ukrainian decentralization (its absence was really never a problem as long as Kiev remained in Moscow's orbit), nor the linguistic rights of the Russian speakers of Donbas (which have never been threatened), but the veto power of Donetsk and Luhansk over the whole of Ukrainian foreign policy. That is to say, to have a lever to block any attempt of rapprochement towards the EU and NATO. As observable from the past, the Kremlin, which facilitates (if not

¹³⁴ Share America. World recognizes Ukraine's legitimate borders [infographic]. February 22, 2022. <https://share.america.gov/world-recognizes-ukraine-legitimate-borders-infographic/>

maintains) a constant supply of fighters, weapons and ammunition and, in several occasions, has intervened in a devastating way with its regular forces, has been able to block any attempt at rapprochement with the EU and NATO so far.

However, and this is the paradox, the Russian position is much more compromised in the medium and long term. Ukraine's immediate future might be in Russia's hands, but the Kremlin has irretrievably lost the Ukrainians. As a result of the war, a distinctly Ukrainian political identity has crystallized that flatly rejects any hint of integration with Russia. Moscow was comfortable dealing with the old Ukrainian oligarchy that largely used to dominate politics in Kiev, but a retrieve of Ukraine from the Eurasian Union project was unthinkable. According to the Kremlin, the project could not afford this absence, not so much for economic reasons as for questions of internal politics, identity and related to its global projection agenda. This raised another point of friction not only with Kiev but also with the other members (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) for whom, despite the meagre results, the project was exclusively economic in nature.¹³⁵

In the short term it remains to be seen, on the one hand, what the proclamation by the Russian insurgency in Donetsk and Luhansk of a so-called independent state called "*Malorossiya*" will entail. This term, when applied to the present Ukrainian nation, its language, culture, etc., is now out of date. One common interpretation of this usage is that it conveys the imperialist idea that "one, indivisible Russia" encompasses the territory and people of Ukraine (also known as "Little Russians").¹³⁶

Many Ukrainians today find the phrase derogatory and symptomatic of the repression of Ukrainian identity and language by imperial Russian (and Soviet) governments. It is still employed, however, in Russian nationalist rhetoric, where contemporary Ukrainians are depicted as a single ethnic group within a single Russian country. Some Ukrainians are now more hostile against the phrase as a result of this.

What remains to be seen on the other hand is the outcome of the supply by the new US special envoy, as well as by some European countries, of weapons to Kiev. Barring a sudden change

¹³⁵ Putin, Vladimir. *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*. July 12, 2021.

¹³⁶ Ivi.

of context, everything indicates that this unshared neighborhood will remain agitated and with it, Russia itself.

To conclude, an article written by the scholar Javier Morales back in 2015 highlighted the real essence of the problematic around the Ukrainian crisis and its management from the international community. What was emphasized in it is that the debate in the United States and the European Union on the convenience or not of arming Ukraine back in 2014 highlighted the disparity of views on the best strategy for dealing with the conflict, which is still crucial today. The crisis could only be resolved by first acknowledging the mistakes that have led to that situation; understanding the perceptions of each of the parties (including Russia) beyond stereotypes; and accepting that Ukraine's future depended both on its sovereign will and on its real capabilities to defend it, which will necessarily condition the options available to it in its foreign policy.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Op. Cit. Morales, Javier. Page 28.

4. Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia Conflict Analysis

The hostilities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia stem from Georgia's quest for independence in the late 1980s and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were semi-autonomous subdivisions of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic, among the 15 constituent republics of the Soviet Union, under the arcane federal structure of the Soviet Union. This structure only sporadically led to ethnic and elite tension over the majority of the Soviet era. But as the Soviet Union started to break apart in the late 1980s, Tbilisi pushed for ever-increasing Georgian sovereignty. As Abkhaz and South Ossetians fought to stay a part of the collapsing Soviet Union, Georgians came to view them as pro-Soviet "fifth columns."¹³⁸ Up until 1991, their struggle was expressed through a "war of legislation" (in which the autonomies and Tbilisi passed laws to overturn one other's), public outcry, and sporadic episodes of low-intensity combat.¹³⁹

A year before the Soviet Union's dissolution, in January 1991, an armed conflict broke out in South Ossetia. The previous month, in reaction to South Ossetia's own proclamation of "sovereignty" from the authorities in Tbilisi who were pushing toward independence, the first post-Communist Georgian government led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia terminated South Ossetia's status as a "independent province" of Georgia.¹⁴⁰ Later on, when Tbilisi ordered troops to retake control of South Ossetia, war broke out. The South Ossetian conflict was actually a series of brief clashes, mostly between unofficial forces. It continued during the closing days of the Soviet Union and the brief civil war in Georgia, which resulted in the overthrow of Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the rise to power of Eduard Shevardnadze, the former first party secretary of Georgia. In 1992, the violences escalated and the Russian Federation's North Ossetia became embroiled in the conflict. In June 1992, Shevardnadze was under pressure from Russian President Boris Yeltsin to reach a settlement with the South Ossetians. The fighting resulted in some 1,000 deaths, and many more people—including Ossetians living in other regions of Georgia—fled their homes.

¹³⁸ Any group of people that subvert a bigger organization or nation from inside, typically in favor of an enemy group or another nation, is known as a fifth column. "Fifth columns" are "internal players who try to damage the national interest, in concert with exterior rivals of the state," according to Harris Mylonas and Scott Radnitz.

¹³⁹ Charap, Samuel and Welt, Cory. A More Proactive U.S. Approach to the Georgia Conflicts. Centre for American Progress. February 2011. Page 6-7.

¹⁴⁰ Saparov, Arséne. From Conflict to Autonomy: The Making of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region 1918-1922. *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 62, No. 1. January 2010. Page 100.

In contrast to the fighting in South Ossetia, the conflict in Abkhazia was entirely a post-independence war. A power-sharing agreement reached under Gamsakhurdia helped to lessen tensions between Georgians and Abkhaz after the bloodshed of July 1989. The Abkhaz desired a loose confederal structure after Georgia gained independence, but Tbilisi ignored it and, when the Abkhaz prepared to implement their plan unilaterally, the power-sharing agreement with Abkhazia crumbled. August 1992 marked the official start of the war.

Sukhumi was under the control of Georgian forces for most of the conflict, despite attempts by Abkhaz forces and Russian allies to reclaim the city from the north. However, in September 1993, Sukhumi was retaken by Abkhaz forces.¹⁴¹

In conflicts marked by a series of human rights abuses, Abkhazian fighters supported by the Confederation of the Peoples of the North Caucasus Organization successfully ousted Georgian troops from Abkhazia in September 1993. The UN presided over the talks, which were also attended by the OSCE and the Group of Friends of Georgia, a group composed by Russia, the US, France, Germany, and the UK that was founded in 1993. Russia served as a mediator. Nearly the entire ethnic Georgian population of Abkhazia (around 220,000 people) was compelled to migrate as the Georgian army withdrew. Georgia grudgingly ascended to membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an organization founded by Russia due to the threat of additional turmoil in Mingrelia. In order to prevent a resumption of hostilities, Russia went on to control the peacekeeping organizations. A joint peacekeeping force of 1,500 Russians, Ossetians, and Georgians was established as part of the South Ossetian ceasefire agreement. The treaty was put into effect in Abkhazia by a CIS peacekeeping force made up primarily of Russians, followed by two minor foreign missions from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in South Ossetia, and the United Nations in Abkhazia.¹⁴²

The Abkhaz and Georgian authorities, eventually, agreed to a ceasefire in December 1993, which was negotiated by the UN. Eventually, the "Declaration on Measures for a Political Settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian Conflict"¹⁴³, often known as the "Moscow Ceasefire

¹⁴¹ Op. cit. Charap, Samuel and Welt, Cory. Page 6-7.

¹⁴² United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia.
<https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unomig/background.html>

¹⁴³ Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces, signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994
http://abkhazworld.com/aw/Pdf/GE_940514_AgreementCeasefireSeparationOfForces.pdf

Agreement", was signed in Moscow in April 1994 with the participation of both parties. In 1994, the fighting ended, after the Russian troops were deployed as part of the Agreement.¹⁴⁴

In the beginning, this method of conflict resolution, which involved peacekeeping groups dominated by Russian troops and some international monitors, was thought to yield results. However, the structures that developed resulted in deadlocks rather than movement toward resolution, giving these conflicts the label "frozen." In this setting, the parties typically refrained from escalating the violence and occasionally came to an understanding regarding trade, transportation, and the repatriation of a small number of internally displaced people.¹⁴⁵ Georgia, however, criticized the issuance of Russian passports to citizens of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the practice of "seconding" Russian government officials to their governments, and the rise in Russian investment in both as creeping annexations.¹⁴⁶

After allegedly massively fraudulent parliamentary elections in November 2003, tens of thousands of Georgians took to the streets of Tbilisi in a peaceful protest that lasted twenty days. As a result, President Eduard Shevardnadze resigned, and new presidential and parliamentary elections were held in early 2004. Mikheil Saakashvili won these elections with a landslide of support from the country (97% of the popular vote)¹⁴⁷, ushering in a parliament dominated by his coalition of parties.¹⁴⁸ Although the Rose Revolution is viewed as a democratic one from the majority of the countries worldwide, In Russia's opinion it was quite the opposite. Igor Ivanov, the former Russian foreign minister, who was present at the "events" in Tbilisi, argued the following in the days that followed:

Various definitions are now being given to the events that have occurred. Some call this is democratic bloodless revolution, others a "velvet revolution". It seems to me that

¹⁴⁴ Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization (UNPO). Member profile: Abkhazia. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Abkhazia. February 16, 2015. <https://unpo.org/downloads/2344.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Peace Agreement Database. The University of Edinburgh. <https://www.peaceagreements.org/generateAgreementPDF/1707>

¹⁴⁶ Op. cit. Charap, Samuel and Welt, Cory. Page 6-7.

¹⁴⁷ Georgia's Strategic Vision and Urgent Financing Priorities, 2004-2006. The Donor's Conference, Brussels. 16-17 June 2004.

¹⁴⁸ Lynch, Dov. The Rose Revolution and after. Cit.

*neither this nor that description is suitable here. Actually, **what happened – I assert this as a witness – was the forced removal of the current lawful President from office.***¹⁴⁹

According to the Russian perspective, the so-called "Rose Revolution" was an anti-constitutional revolution that was carefully planned out by outside forces. Ivanov specifically referenced the Soros Foundation and the US ambassador in Tbilisi. Igor Ivanov, then the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, argued a year later, asking:

*Do you think a change in government in Georgia by popular vote constitutes democracy? **Do you believe that this method of changing administration is consistent with the values and tenets outlined in the Council of Europe and OSCE documents? Russia most definitely doesn't.***¹⁵⁰

In addition, On 27 November, Putin's advisor on EU affairs, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, declared:

*There was Belgrade, there was Tbilisi; we can see the same hand, probably the same resources, the same puppet masters and the scenarios are very similar. So, **the Rose Revolution was no revolution at all, but foreign intervention, violating Georgia's constitutional order and international norms.***¹⁵¹

Despite Russians beliefs, events were not under foreign control. Although certain Georgian civil society activists had received backing and training in Europe and the US, generally speaking, both countries were taken off guard by the events that took place. According to Giorgi Kandelaki, external actors were actually more "detrimental" than beneficial during the revolution. Following the author's opinion, There were few predetermined outcomes in the Rose Revolution, which was essentially a spontaneous and skillfully created political event.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ivanov Igor. Interview given to Komsomolskaya Pravda. 4-6 December 2004.

¹⁵⁰ Civil Georgia. Igor Ivanov: Georgia's Rose Revolution "against Values and Principles" of CoE, OSCE. February 24, 2005.

¹⁵¹ Yastrzhembsky, Sergei. RTR, Russia TV. Interview. November 27, 2004.

¹⁵² Kandelaki, Giorgi. Georgia's Rose Revolution: A Participant's Perspective. US Institute of Peace. 2006.

The Aftermaths of the Rose Revolution of 2003

The new administration has concentrated on five areas since taking office in January 2004: reinstating the rule of law; carrying out political and institutional changes; reestablishing national government control; beginning economic reforms; and restructuring the security sector. The establishment of the rule of law and the eradication of the pervasive sense of impunity that characterized the conduct of public affairs were Georgia's new authorities' top priorities. A massive wave of arrests of public and private people on charges of corruption and non-tax payment signaled the beginning of the process. Most often, these individuals were allowed to walk free after pledging to return money to the Georgian government or turn over property. These public arrests, however, signaled symbolically that impunity would no longer be tolerated and were carried out with much ceremony.¹⁵³

The second focus after the revolution has been political and institutional reform. In the first instance, the Georgian constitution was amended to fit the needs of the coalition of political forces that led the revolution. In addition, there was a heavy turnover of personnel at the top layers of the government and political establishment. In the image of the young new President, Georgia's government became led by dynamic thirty-somethings, many of whom speak English, having spent time abroad for training and education. Of twenty ministers and state ministers in 2004, eight had worked for NGOs.¹⁵⁴

Regarding the emphasis on economic reforms, in the middle of 2004, Saakashvili nominated the Georgian billionaire Kakha Bendukidze, to be in charge of a massive privatization scheme. In July 2005, the government announced that 10% of the business had been sold off, with the most lucrative companies making up this portion, representing a major increase in government revenue. The number of taxes was also reduced, and the complexity of the tax code was improved. The result has been a significant reduction in social and income taxes. To encourage entrepreneurship and improve the climate for capital investment, finally, new licensing laws were put into place.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Wheatley, Jonathan. Georgia from the National Awakening to the Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union. Ashgate. October 6, 2005. Page 203.

¹⁵⁴ Ivi. Page 200

¹⁵⁵ Corso, Molly. Privatisation in Georgia: Solving the Sensitive Issues. EurasiaNet Report. July 19, 2005.

Reforming the security sector has been a top goal. Modernizing Georgia's "power ministries" was seen by the new administration as a crucial component of the state-building process. A strong military was also considered as a method for Georgia to support international peacekeeping missions and dispel the notion that it posed a security risk to the worldwide community. The Georgian government in fact contributed to the NATO-led war in Afghanistan and, in 2005¹⁵⁶, gave support to US operations in Iraq with about 2000 troops (the largest coalition contribution per capita)¹⁵⁷. Additionally, Tbilisi viewed robust armed forces as an essential component of the process of resolving disputes with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of whom had sizeable paramilitary formations of their own. More importantly, Tbilisi believed that having strong armed forces will improve its negotiating position. In February 2004, Goga Bezhuashvili, the country's then-defense minister, said: "We do not threaten anyone, but in order to hold successful peace talks, we will need an effective and professional army".¹⁵⁸

Additionally, the new administration finalized two documents that Shevardnadze had previously hesitated to undertake. A National Security Concept¹⁵⁹ draft was produced in May 2005, whereas in late 2005 the government unveiled its National Military Strategy.¹⁶⁰ The future of Georgia now lied in Europe and in its integration into Euro-Atlantic frameworks, according to the two new agreements. Based on these two drafts, moreover, the greatest concerns to Georgian security were those that put Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty in jeopardy. These dangers included organized crime, global terrorism, foreign military involvement, and the presence of Russian military installations on Georgian soil. In other words, Chechnya, Georgia's northern neighbor, and its involvement in separatist regions posed a threat to the country's security.

¹⁵⁶ Lomsadze, Giorgi. Georgia and its two Afghan wars. Eurasianet. September 9, 2021.

¹⁵⁷ Radio Free Europe. Iraq: As Third-Largest Contingent, Georgia Hopes to Show Its Worth. September 10, 2007.

¹⁵⁸ Civil Georgia. Georgian Cabinet Approved. February 17, 2004. <https://civil.ge/archives/105250>

¹⁵⁹ National Security Concept of Georgia. May 15, 2005. <https://mod.gov.ge/uploads/2018/pdf/NSC-ENG.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ National Military Strategy of 2014 (update of the 2005 version, which is not anymore available). <https://nsc.gov.ge/pdf/5fe59eeb7ca91.pdf/National%20Military%20Strategy.pdf>

Significant foreign policy consequences resulted from the military strategy's and the national security concept's foreign policy emphasis. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation became clearer, increasing support from allies in Europe and the US.¹⁶¹

Despite such a solid beginning, the new government showed limitations. First, the revolutionary spirit that permeated government action resulted in criticism from inside and outside the Governmental structures. Levan Berdzenishvili, a Georgian member of parliament, uttered these words in despair one year after the revolution: "The time has come to stop the revolution, to finish it"¹⁶². A similar remark was made in a report from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in December 2004:

*A year later, it is time to normalize the situation and bring the political process firmly back to the country's institutions. The post-revolutionary syndrome should not become an alibi for hasty decisions and neglect for democracy and human rights standards.*¹⁶³

The "revolutionary syndrome" of the administration was openly criticized by well-known members of Georgian civil society and the NGO sector as well. The government received criticism for its intolerance of any form of opposition and its refusal to engage in conversation with opposition figures.¹⁶⁴

There have been issues with the constitutional reforms as well. While comprehensive judicial reform did not begin, the changes of February 2004 strengthened the executive branch over a weak parliament. "We have a president with huge authority and almost without responsibilities"¹⁶⁵, argued legal scholar and well-known civil society leader Tinatin

¹⁶¹ Lynch, Dov. The Rose Revolution and after. Cit.

¹⁶² Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). The Rose Revolution loses Key Backers. Issue 260. November 4, 2004. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/rose-revolution-loses-key-backers>

¹⁶³ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Georgia. Document 10383. December 21, 2004. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4305f2674.html>

¹⁶⁴ Nodia, Ghia. Georgia: Heading for a New Revolution? Radio Free Europe. September 8, 2005. See also: Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). The Rose Revolution loses Key Backers. Issue 260. November 4, 2004. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/rose-revolution-loses-key-backers>

¹⁶⁵ Civil Georgia Report. New Constitution Boosts Presidential Powers. February 7, 2004. <https://civil.ge/archives/105193>

Khidasheli. Concerns that pluralism was eroding in Georgia were made worse by Saakashvili's National Movement's resounding victory in the early 2004 parliamentary elections.

Also PACE and the Venice Commission, two European organizations that have raised awareness of the risks posed by Georgia's constitutional reforms, have expressed frustration with the government's failure to accept professional advice¹⁶⁶. According to the PACE Report:

*Today, Georgia has a semi-presidential system with very strong powers to the President, basically no parliamentary opposition, a weaker civil society, a judicial system that is not yet sufficiently independent and functioning, undeveloped or non-existing local democracy, a self-censored media and an inadequate model of autonomy in Ajaria.*¹⁶⁷

Given the potential precedent they may create for the future status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia inside Georgia, the modifications to Ajara's autonomy status were especially concerning. The ordinance of July 30, 2004¹⁶⁸, essentially limited the autonomous rights of the territory of Ajara to symbolic powers.

Due to the distinctions between South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Georgian authorities declared that the Ajara case did not establish a precedent for those two regions. The Ajara precedent and Saakashvili's comments about the situation of Georgia's future, however, rang a troubling tone. Saakashvili's primary motivation was his dream of uniting Georgia: "I will do my best to strengthen our country and restore its territorial integrity. This is the supreme goal of my life. The Georgian nation deserves a better future"¹⁶⁹. Saakashvili's emphasis was understandable considering the shattered state he inherited. It was concerning, nevertheless, that the Georgian country and the Georgian state were often confused. Georgia is a multi-national nation in the

¹⁶⁶ Council of Europe: The Venice Commission. Resolution 188 on local and regional democracy in Georgia. 2004. <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680718e06>

¹⁶⁷ Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly. Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Georgia. Document 10383. December 21, 2004. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4305f2674.html>

¹⁶⁸ Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Report of the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Georgia. July 30, 2004. <https://pace.coe.int/pdf/4a575e8df04d31d16e1167048f8a25b22e2c39ca6c76009b8574586059e684f3/doc.%2012554.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ Civil Georgia. New Leader Vows to hold next Inauguration in Abkhazia. January 24, 2004. <https://civil.ge/archives/105114>

classical sense, home to a number of significant national minorities, such as Armenians and Azerbaijanis, some of whom, like the Abkhaz and the Ossetians, have declared independence from Tbilisi.¹⁷⁰

This might be a reason why conflicts entered a new phase after President Mikheil Saakashvili was elected in Georgia, following the Rose Revolution of 2003. When he took office, President Saakashvili made it plain that he wanted to peacefully reestablish Georgia's territorial integrity. His remarks were supported by a soft power assault that included new suggestions for resolving disputes. However, his anti-smuggling operation in South Ossetia in the summer of 2004¹⁷¹ persuaded many people there and in Moscow that his true goal was to seek reunification by toppling the local regimes. As a matter of fact, all the ethnic Georgian-populated settlements in the area were eventually under Georgian government control as a result of the low-intensity conflict that ensued.

Additionally, this reality reinforced the suspicions of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian authorities regarding the objectives of the Georgian government, hampered economic and social interaction across conflict lines and among villages, and created worries of a new war. Furthermore, it sped up Moscow's efforts to stop Georgia from establishing its rule over the two territories. Two years after this change in the status quo, Georgia seized the inaccessible and ungoverned Upper Kodori Gorge from Abkhazia, putting an end to negotiations between the government and the Abkhazian authorities.¹⁷²

Tensions were rising in and around South Ossetia and Abkhazia. But over the summer of 2008, shootings and roadside bombings in South Ossetia exacerbated tensions to a degree not seen since 2004.

¹⁷⁰ Lynch, Dov. The Rose Revolution and after. Cit.

¹⁷¹ Vilanishvili, Nana. Smuggling Row Hits Georgian Town. Institute for War & Peace Reporting. Special Report. April 21, 2005.

¹⁷² Op. cit. Charap, Samuel and Welt, Cory. Page 6-7.

The Russian-Georgian War

As highlighted by Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, prior to the war, Moscow was planning a land invasion of Georgia and that it had been doing so for at least two and a half years (if not longer). Expelling Georgian forces and effectively ending Georgian sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia were among these objectives. Russia laid the foundation for these separatist territories' independence and potential future annexation. The second objective, according to the two scholars, was preventing Georgia from enlisting in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and making it clear to Ukraine that insisting on joining NATO could result in war and/or the breakup of that country.¹⁷³

After a protracted period of steadily increasing tensions and incidents, major fighting broke out in and around the South Ossetian town of Tskhinvali on the night of August 7 to 8, 2008. The conflict raged for five days and quickly spread to other regions of Georgia.

Before the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, ties between Russia and Georgia were already tense. Russia's situation was made worse in 2004 when pro-Western Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia. As a matter of fact, Georgia has decided to join NATO and has continued to embrace pro-Western political ideas under Mikheil's direction. Even though South Ossetia is part of Georgia, however, it is predominantly governed by separatists with help from the Russian military, whose aim is to "... undermine Georgia's independence and assert Russia's control over the strategically important South Caucasus."¹⁷⁴

As highlighted by Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, "Russia launched the war against Georgia in August 2008 for highly valued strategic and geopolitical objectives, which included de facto annexation of Abkhazia, weakening or toppling the Mikheil Saakashvili regime, and preventing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement."¹⁷⁵

An effort to reestablish constitutional order in South Ossetia's separatist region served as the official Georgian reason for armed intervention there. The official explanation provided by Moscow, in turn, was the need to save Russian nationals and military stationed in the conflict zone, and to stop the genocide of the South Ossetians.

¹⁷³ Cohen, Ariel and Hamilton, Robert E. THE RUSSIAN MILITARY AND THE GEORGIA WAR: LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College. 2011. Pages 1-2.

¹⁷⁴ Ivi. Page 4.

¹⁷⁵ Ivi. Page 7.

Russian military operations in the North Caucasus, which had spread to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were causing Tbilisi alarm already in the spring of 2008. Consequently, in an effort to evaluate the military operations occurring on the northern side of the Great Caucasus Range, with a focus on Abkhazia, Georgia launched a series of drone surveillance flights.

The first of three major factors that caused Tbilisi immediate anxiety between April and June 2008 was the expansion of the Russian peacekeeping detachment in Abkhazia to a maximum of 3,000 personnel. Second, without Georgia's knowledge or consent, a group of 400 Russian railway engineers and troops was sent to Abkhazia at the end of May to repair 50 kilometers of track between Sukhumi and Ochamchire.¹⁷⁶

A third sign of impending problems was the illegal transit of weapons and explosives by Russian peacekeeping forces in the Georgian province of Zugdidi and their subsequent detention by local law enforcement.¹⁷⁷ The likelihood that Ochamchire would be utilized as a base for the BSF and Gazprom's announcement of offshore oil and gas drilling in the Black Sea along the Abkhaz coastline were other issues that caused Georgia longer-term anxiety.¹⁷⁸

On July 15, the "Kavkaz-2008"¹⁷⁹ exercise's active phase got underway. On the same day, the other side of the Great Caucasus Range saw the start of the exercise "Immediate Response"¹⁸⁰, in which 600 Georgian troops and 1,000 American service members took part. The exercises, according to Lieutenant General Yuriy Netkachev, would span nearly all of the Great Caucasus Range's Mountain routes along the Russian-Georgian border, including the Rokskiy pass (Roki tunnel) and the Mamisonkiy pass further to the West. The General Staff indicated that Russian servicemen taking part in "Kavkaz-2008" would be given exercise-combat objectives of "blokirovaniye," identifying, isolating, and destroying bandit formations, on the passes deemed to be "problematical" from a security standpoint.¹⁸¹ Additionally, authoritative sources in

¹⁷⁶ Blandy, C.W. Georgia and Russia: A Further Deterioration in Relations. ARAG. Caucasus Series 08/22. July 2008. Page 2.

¹⁷⁷ Felgengauer, Pavel. Конфликт дальнего следования: зачем российские Железнодорожные войска вошли в Абхазию. Novaya Gazeta No 40. 5 June 5, 2008.

¹⁷⁸ Socor, Vladimir. Gazprom's move on Abkhazia: more reasons for Georgia to block Russia's WTO accession. Eurasia Daily Monitor. Volume 5, Issue 119. June 23, 2008.

¹⁷⁹ Johnson, David. ZAPAD 2017 and Euro-Atlantic security. NATO review. December 14, 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Georgia National Guard. "Immediate Response" underway in Republic of Georgia. U.S. Army. July 15, 2008.

¹⁸¹ Mukhin, Vladimir. Воинствующие миротворцы: вступили в активную фазу крупномасштабные российские учения "Кавказ-2008" у границы с Грузией. Nezavisimaya Gazeta. July 18, 2008.

Abkhazia were speculating about an upcoming assault on Georgian forces in the upper Kodori Gorge, the last area still under Tbilisi's control. Others went further and provided specific details regarding who, where, and when Georgian components would be assaulted. Some gave a time period for the attack as the middle of August 2008, but others went further.¹⁸²

On the evening of August 1, the South Ossetians and Georgians exchanged small-arms fire before switching to mortar and grenade launchers, and the unofficial warfare continued until August 6.

The South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoyty appeared to have left the country's capital early on August 7 and was preparing to oversee extensive combat operations from Dzhava, where Russian volunteers were already beginning to gather. President Saakashvili gave the order to start an artillery attack on Tskhinvali at 1150 hours. Later, the Georgian president was seen on television committing to negotiations under any format and offering Russia a guarantee that would grant South Ossetia the greatest amount of autonomy within Georgia. Consequently, although Marat Kulakhmetov, the commander of the combined peacekeeping forces, declared that shooting had stopped, it had not. At 23:30 hours, Georgian artillery once more began firing heavily and heavily on Tskhinvali. The Georgian government justified their actions, in light of information that a Russian force had penetrated the Roki tunnel, at the border between South and North Ossetia.¹⁸³

Regardless of who provoked whom, the Russians moved swiftly to send a sizable force into South Ossetia. Examining the forces deployed by both sides reveals one obvious fact: Russia was able to quickly put up a force that was numerically much superior to its Georgian adversary. In the end, according to the majority of analysts, Russia deployed between 35,000 and 40,000 troops in total, compared to Georgia's 12,000–15,000 troops. These troops moved swiftly and thoroughly into South Ossetia, eventually reaching the capital, Tskhinvali, by the afternoon of August 8 and capturing it early on August 10. On August 12, two days later, Russia declared a cease-fire that brought the war to an end. Throughout the entire conflict, moreover, both sides employed a variety of IO methods. These strategies included electronic warfare (EW) techniques like spying on and jamming Russian communications as well as computer network operations (CNO) techniques like deploying computers to block Georgian websites.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Simonyan, Yuriy Karlenovich. Войны не будет. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. July 28, 2008.

¹⁸³ Blandy, C. W. *Provocation, Deception, Entrapment: The Russo-Georgian Five-Day War*. Cit.

¹⁸⁴ Tarleton, Alice. *Georgia Conflict: Day-by-Day Timeline*. Channel 4 News. August 19, 2008.

South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoity pledged to a clearout when Georgian forces occupied crucial vital heights¹⁸⁵; this promise was followed by fierce fighting. The provincial capital of Tskhinvali was shelled by Georgian artillery on the evening of August 7, and the following morning, Georgian troops and tanks launched a military invasion that captured the city. Russian tanks stormed Tskhinvali the same day, and Russian planes began a four-day bombing campaign. The South Ossetian militia, Georgian, and Russian soldiers engaged in a two-day battle for control of the city, but the Georgian forces eventually lost. On August 10, they turned around, and the Russian army chased them. In the meantime, a second front in Abkhazia was opened by Russian and Abkhaz forces. Additionally, Russian forces entered Mingrelia from Abkhazia and took over Poti, the largest port in Georgia, creating a route to Tbilisi.¹⁸⁶

Eventually, on August 12, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was presiding over the rotating EU chair at the time, took a flight to Moscow to conduct cease-fire talks. All parties to the agreement signed it in somewhat different formats, and on August 18, the Russian leadership proclaimed the start of the troop withdrawal. On August 26, President Dmitri Medvedev said that Russia had recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as sovereign nations.¹⁸⁷ On September 1, 2008, the EU Council reaffirmed its commitment to support all efforts to find a peaceful and long-lasting resolution to the crisis in Georgia in light of the ongoing ambiguity and lack of stability in the situation¹⁸⁸. It also stated that its willing to support confidence-building actions.

The Georgian army, which had mostly dispersed, mainly complied with the order to return to its regular positions, although Russia continued to take towns in the country's west and center. President Sarkozy was compelled to go back to Moscow as a result, and on September 8th, a

¹⁸⁵ Dzugayev, Kosta. South Ossetia's President Clamps Down: A purge in South Ossetia redraws the political landscape. Institute for War and Peace Reporting. July 4, 2008.

¹⁸⁶ Kofman, Michael. The August War, Ten years on: A Retrospective on The Russo-Georgian War. Texas National Security Review. August 17, 2018.

¹⁸⁷ Crow, Alexis. Georgia-Russia Conflict Timeline (includes South Ossetia and Abkhazia). The Royal United Services Institute. August 11, 2008.

¹⁸⁸ European Union regulations: European Encyclopedia of law. European Neighbourhood Policy: recommendations for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and for Egypt and Lebanon. 2008. <https://europeanlaw.lawlegal.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy-recommendations-for-armenia-azerbaijan-and-georgia-and-for-egypt-and-lebanon/>

second agreement was reached outlining the parameters of the ceasefire's execution. The EU Council of Ministers then decided to establish an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia on December 2, 2008. (IIFFMCG)¹⁸⁹. The goals of its terms of reference would be:

*Investigate the origins and the course of the conflict in Georgia, including with regard to international law (footnote: including the Helsinki Final Act), humanitarian law and human rights, and the accusations made in that context (footnote: including allegations of war crimes).*¹⁹⁰

In the history of the EU, IIFFMCG is the first fact-finding mission of its type. The EU Council of Ministers resolution of December 2, 2008, served as the impetus for the Fact-Finding Mission to begin its work.

International public opinion, however, had changed by September 15. Since then, Georgia's hostility has frequently been highlighted in foreign media. Moreover, according to Hillary Clinton, a junior US senator at the time:

Washington is beginning to suspect that Saakashvili, a friend and ally, could in fact be a gambler – someone who triggered the bloody five day war and then told the West bold-faced lies.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ European Union: Council of the European Union. Council Decision 2008/901/CFSP of 2 December 2008 concerning an independent international fact-finding mission on the conflict in Georgia. December 2, 2008. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ac45cd22.html>

¹⁹⁰ Ivi. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ac45cd22.html>

¹⁹¹ Von SPIEGEL Staff. Did Saakashvili Lie? The West Begins to Doubt Georgian Leader. Spiegel International. September 15, 2008.

Relations between Russia and Georgia after the War

Deep mistrust prevailed between Georgia and Russia as a result of the August 2008 war and Moscow's subsequent recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. A ceasefire agreement that called for the cessation of hostilities, a retreat to pre-war lines, and access for monitoring and humanitarian missions to conflict zones brought the Georgia-Russia war to an end, while the security situation on the ground persisted.

The Georgian foreign policy's pro-American and North Atlantic strand was bolstered and given momentum by the country's military and political setback in August 2008. Georgia and the US agreed to a Strategic Partnership Charter in January 2009¹⁹². Georgia was listed as a special partner of Washington outside of NATO in this agreement. The West did not view Russia's actions to recognize the independence of the two former autonomous regions of the Georgian SSR as backing for two republics that had been de facto operating outside of Georgia for years, but rather as Russian territorial expansion. Russia as a matter of fact strengthened its foothold in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since August 2008 despite receiving very little international condemnation. As required by the 12 August six-point plan¹⁹³, it did not restore its military presence to pre-war levels and positions, and in April 2009, it dispatched more troops to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moreover, it barred the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) from carrying out pre-war activities in South Ossetia, including monitoring and carrying out a rehabilitation and reconstruction program, in violation of its 7-8 September agreement with the EU¹⁹⁴. Since it recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence declarations in August and reached bilateral security agreements, Russia defended its positions by claiming that "new realities" suddenly prevailed. Additionally, President Medvedev made it plain that Georgia's signature of a "non-aggression deal" with South Ossetia and Abkhazia was a need for Russia to withdraw its forces. In addition, it went a step further by opposing not just the UN mission operating in Abkhazia but also a renewal of the mandate for the OSCE mission operating in Georgia and South Ossetia.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² U.S. Department of State. U.S. - Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership. January 20, 2009. <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/10/149084.htm#:~:text=The%20U.S.-Georgia%20Charter%20on%20Strategic%20Partnership%20was%20signed,Vashadze%20in%20Washington%2C%20DC%2C%20on%20January%209%2C%202009.>

¹⁹³ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Background: Six-point peace plan for the Georgia-Russia conflict. August 15, 2008. <https://reliefweb.int/report/georgia/background-six-point-peace-plan-georgia-russia-conflict>

¹⁹⁴ Harding, Luke. Russia to leave Georgia after EU deal. The Guardian. September 9, 2008.

The refusal of the Abkhaz to discuss the fate of ethnic Georgian IDPs from the region, as well as Russia's failure to abide by the 2008 ceasefire agreement signed by then-President Medvedev and then-French President Sarkozy while Paris held the EU Presidency, pose significant barriers to any consideration of recognition by most states in the case of the Abkhaz.¹⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the declaration of Abkhazian independence began a new chapter in the conflict's history. A precedent was established for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union for the recognition of a former Soviet autonomous entity as an independent state. The "Geneva discussions" on security and stability in the South Caucasus¹⁹⁷ (which started on October 15, 2008) were also opened to Abkhazia, albeit the Abkhaz officials did not yet have official diplomatic status; instead, they participate as "experts." Nevertheless, their participation in multilateral discussions on humanitarian issues and efforts to stop such crises helped to partially reaffirm the recognition of Abkhazia as a distinct political body.¹⁹⁸

An agreement creating coordinated efforts for the security of Abkhazia's state border was signed by Moscow and Sukhumi on April 30, 2009, as a result of which the Federal Security Service (FSB) of Russia established a special Office for the Protection of the Border of the Republic of Abkhazia.¹⁹⁹ On the other side, nevertheless, Georgia's desire to join the Euro-Atlantic institutions was heightened by the Ukrainian conflict and concerns over Moscow's true intentions. Georgia's concerns appeared to be reinforced by the developments in Abkhazia, where secessionists cited the conflict in Ukraine as justification for further secession from Georgia. As a result, Tbilisi and the EU concluded an association agreement in 2014²⁰⁰. NATO reaffirmed its commitment to Georgia's membership at the Wales summit in September 2014

¹⁹⁵ International Crisis Group. Georgia-Russia: Still Insecure and Dangerous. Europe Briefing N°53. June 22, 2009. <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/b53-georgia-russia-still-insecure-and-dangerous.pdf>

¹⁹⁶ International Crisis Group. Abkhazia: The Long Road to Reconciliation Europe. Report N°224. April 10, 2013. Page 1. <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/224%20Abkhazia%20-%20The%20Long%20Road%20to%20Reconciliation.pdf>

¹⁹⁷ Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). Abkhazia: Geneva Discussions On Security And Stability In The South Caucasus. November 08, 2013. <https://unpo.org/article/16567#:~:text=During%20the%2025th%20Round%20of%20Discussions%20on%20Security,of%20fostering%20peaceful%20negotiations%20with%20the%20Georgian%20representatives.>

¹⁹⁸ Markedonov, Sergey. "Frozen conflicts" in Europe: The conflict in and over Abkhazia. Anton Bebler. 2015. Page 98.

¹⁹⁹ Ivi. Page 100.

²⁰⁰ The European Commission. EU-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. [EU-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area | Access2Markets \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-georgia-deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-area/)

and delivered a sizable package of aid to strengthen Georgia's defense capability and its interoperability with the Alliance.²⁰¹

Meanwhile in Abkhazia, a coup against President Alexander Ankvab took place in May 2014, which was blamed on public outrage over his treatment of the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia. The fact that this policy enabled ethnic Georgians to enlist as voters and get Abkhazian passports contributed to the widespread perception that it was overly permissive. Following A. Ankvab's resignations, Raul Khadzhimba, who supported closer political and military connections to Russia and the complete halt of all relations along the breakaway region's border with Georgia, took over as president of Abkhazia. A new bilateral agreement with the Russian Federation named "Alliance and Strategic Partnership", which entailed further deregulation and more economic cooperation along the de facto border between Russia and Abkhazia, was inked in November 2014²⁰². In March 2015, furthermore, the agreement on "Alliance and Integration" was signed with South Ossetia²⁰³.

As stated by Thomas Ambrosio and Lange A. William, "these agreements are exactly the same, with the only differences being that the respective names of these territories are changed in the text"²⁰⁴. As a matter of fact, these two agreements focus on main pillars: historical one, economic one, military one, and a political one. Regarding the first, the text rested upon "the historically strong ties, the traditions of friendship and good communication of their [respective] peoples". Moreover, the document aimed at "raising their relations to a qualitatively new level"²⁰⁵. In the following articles, both sides made a joint commitment to "cooperate closely with each other in the [mutual] protection of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and security." If either was under "threat of attack," they would "consult without delay ... in order to ensure their joint defense, peace, and mutual security." Moreover, they oath

²⁰¹ NATO. Relations with Georgia. December 14, 2022. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm

²⁰² Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). New Russian-Abkhaz Treaty on 'Alliance and Strategic Partnership' Not a Threat to Abkhazia's De Facto Independence. December 18, 2014. <https://unpo.org/article/17796> See also: Draft Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on Alliance and Integration (Russian Version). The Kremlin. November 24, 2014. <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/4783>

²⁰³ TASS: Russian News Agency. Russia and South Ossetia to sign treaty on alliance and integration. March 18, 2015. <https://tass.com/russia/783474> See also: Draft Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on Alliance and Integration (Russian Version). The Kremlin. March 18, 2015. <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/4819>

²⁰⁴ Ambrosio, Thomas and Lange, William A. The architecture of annexation? Russia's bilateral agreements with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Routledge. December 3, 2015. Page 679.

²⁰⁵ Ivi. Page 679.

to "jointly take all available measures to address the threat to the peace, breach of the peace, and to counter acts of aggression against them ... and provide each other with the necessary assistance" for self-protection²⁰⁶. The borders between the two parties' geographical boundaries and their citizens were also meant to be loosened by these agreements. "Free entry of citizens" across their shared border were allowed and the border protection of both territories would be "carried out jointly." Nonetheless, Russia would be the one to safeguard these borders and play a leading but non-controlling role in border and customs enforcement²⁰⁷.

Regarding the military aspect of the accords, within Article 10 the parties were provided with the the rightfulness to "protect the rights of its citizens living on the territory of the other Contracting Party and to provide them with protection and assistance in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law"²⁰⁸. Being the majority of residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia Russian citizens, this article effectively gave the Russian Federation the right to interfere in these territories' affairs under the pretense of defending its citizens: a claim that was used by Russia in the 2008 August War, as well as in the Crimean one in March 2014.

Concerning economic aspects, Economic barriers were removed. To give an example, Article 15 had the aim to provide "economic integration, promoting the social and economic development of the Republics", and to actively "integrate energy and transport systems ... and telecommunications". Additionally, the law governing social protections, pensions, civil and tax law, and economic activities was to be harmonized. Finally, In a number of sectors, including health, social and humanitarian domains, education, research, and technology, the two sides pledged to cooperate.²⁰⁹

Nevertheless, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia found certain aspects in the Russian draft to be objectionable, as well as the entire tone of the document The two Republics submitted a counteroffer that tried to increase their level of domestic autonomy and independence from Russia. The Russian draft's opening line, "Alliance and Integration," suggested that Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's eventual integration into the Russian Federation was likely this agreement's

²⁰⁶ Ivi. Page 679.

²⁰⁷ Ivi. Page 680.

²⁰⁸ Ivi. Page 680.

²⁰⁹ Ivi. Page 680.

ultimate purpose. However, it should be emphasized that the word "integration" wasn't the same as the word "admission," which was applied to Crimea. Even in the Russian draft, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were to maintain its legal independence from Russia. The following two drafts that modified the original one committed the three parties to adopt a coordinated foreign policy, but the final drafts slightly altered the basis of this cooperation. Later versions hinted that the sides might have different interests that should be taken into account and that, where their interests were mutual, the three sides would respectively work together and communicate their individual policies.²¹⁰

Finally, concerning the case of aggression against the two Republics, a joint defense force was outlined in the first version of the drafts. This, however, was altered from a force that was clearly intended to be a single military command led by a Russian appointee, to one that was more of a coalition of two different forces. The Abkhazian and South Ossetian final drafts mandated that the deputy of this joint force be chosen by the respective presidents, even though it would still be led by a Russian official.²¹¹

To conclude, given the examples showed by the Agreements that have been signed after the Georgian War, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia shouldn't be seen as little more than extensions of Russia. Despite being ruled by Russia, both regions have internal political and identity-based processes that Moscow does not completely control. During the discussions over the "Alliance and Strategic Partnership" and "Alliance and Integration" agreements, Abkhazia and South Ossetia showed a real level of agency. Both areas' independence would have been significantly reduced under the Russian-proposed papers, but local governments opposed parts of these transfers in both instances, and Russia made major concessions as a result.

Although both seemed reasonably content to follow Moscow's lead on interstate problems and have their "external" borders guarded by Russian soldiers, this autonomy is obviously weakest in the area of foreign policy. This appears to be an admission that Russian protection is necessary for them to continue existing as political entities independent from Georgia. Both are also economically and financially dependent on Russia, giving Moscow enormous influence over them. This is especially true in South Ossetia, where Russia performed a number of important government tasks. On the contrary, there is a greater will and ability to create an

²¹⁰ Zedgenidze, George. Почему Абхазия боится нового договора с Россией. Slon Magazine. 2014.

²¹¹ Op. cit. Ambrosio, Thomas and Lange, William A. Page 684.

independent state in Abkhazia, but without international recognition and non-Russian foreign investment, this too would have limited success.²¹²

Georgia in Putin's speeches

The first thing that stands out once analyzing the political speeches and discourses of President Vladimir Putin concerning the situation in Georgia, is that in the official site of the Kremlin²¹³ the access to all the meetings between the Russian President and the ones of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from 2014 onwards are restricted. Moreover, even the annual greetings, a common custom of President Putin towards the former Soviet Republics, are inaccessible.

Looking at the data provided in the previous chapters, where an historical background of the relations between the two countries was presented, it is noticeable that from that year on the relationship between Russia and Georgia were to some extent worsened by the effects of the Crimean crisis, as well as by the blockage by the Kremlin to all the humanitarian international missions in Georgia. Nevertheless, since the Russian official site does not provide a clear explanation for this decision of restriction of access, and since this chapter is not dedicated to an analysis of this problematic, this section will be focused only the accessible data (from 2000 to 2013).

The first thing that is always remarked in the majority of speeches of President Putin when dealing with post-soviet Republics, is always the common past, which is highlighted in a nostalgic way:

It is my great wish that the former ties in the territory of the former USSR, the personal ties between people, industrial cooperation, links in the fields of culture,

²¹² Ivi. Page 688.

²¹³ The Kremlin. <http://en.kremlin.ru/>

*science and education – that all this should not be lost and, on the contrary, should be restored.*²¹⁴

*I regret that there is no Soviet Union anymore.*²¹⁵

On October 25, 2006, President Putin remarked this concept, stating however that even though “this is not important now”, Ossetia and Abkhazia historically did not pertain to Georgia once it became part of the Russian empire. When analyzing the historical facts that happened in the region, this phrase is however everything but not important. It already advanced President Putin’s ideas with regards to the separatist regions:

*The Georgian people were always closest to Russia. Georgia voluntarily became a part of the Russian empire. At that time, it did not include the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. But **this is not important now**. What is important is that we have immense respect for the Georgian people. This really is the case, and it is borne out by the entire history of our existence together.*²¹⁶

Also, in 2007 and 2019 he reaffirmed the importance of a shared past using WWII (an example which is often evoked) as an example that unites the people, brought together by “tremendous sacrifices” that however led them to a “common and invaluable heritage” that eventually led to “save their land and the entire world from fascism”. It is already observable from this excerpt, how the efforts made by Russia and their past fellow republics are essential not only to them, but to the world as a whole:

²¹⁴ Putin, Vladimir. Excerpts from an Interview Granted to the Mass Media in the Krasnodar Region [speech transcript]. Dagomys. September 17, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21722>

²¹⁵ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference: The news conference was broadcast live by Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24, Channel One, NTV television channels, as well as radio stations Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii [speech transcript]. Moscow. December 19, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62366>

²¹⁶ Putin, Vladimir. Transcript of the Hot Line with President of Russia Vladimir Putin [speech transcript]. October 25, 2006. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23864>

*The memory of the fraternal battle in the fight against Nazism and for freedom and life on Earth remains one of the many powerful historical factors that unite our peoples.*²¹⁷

*Victory in the Great Patriotic War is a **common and invaluable heritage** of the people of Russia and Georgia who fought side by side against a cruel enemy and made **tremendous sacrifices** in order to **save their land and the entire world from fascism.***²¹⁸

In the year 2000, before the situation with Georgia worsened as a consequence of the 2008 war, it is noticeable how the tones of President Vladimir Putin were friendly and enthusiastic while congratulating with President Eduard Shevardnadze on his election to a second term as president of Georgia. The same tones, however, already presented the Russian necessity of maintaining a secure neighborhood as one of the main guarantees for Russia, its safeguard, and its people:

*I believe that Georgia will make further headway in democratising its society, enhancing its statehood and facilitating an economic recovery under your guidance. The successful accomplishment of these objectives would promote both the aspirations of the Georgian people and **the interests of Russia**, which is invariably committed to friendship with Georgia.*²¹⁹

This necessity was also remarked a month after, during the congratulation of President Putin for the national Georgian holidays:

²¹⁷ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin sent the President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, a message of congratulations for Victory Day [speech transcription]. May 8, 2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/39317>

²¹⁸ Putin, Vladimir. Congratulations to Great Patriotic War veterans and the people of Georgia: Vladimir Putin congratulated Great Patriotic War veterans and the people of Georgia on Victory Day [speech transcript]. May 8, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60484>

²¹⁹ Putin, Vladimir. Acting Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated Eduard Shevardnadze on his election to a second term as president of Georgia [speech transcript]. April 11, 2000. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/37555>

*I am convinced that the peoples of Russia and Georgia will strengthen and develop their great common achievements: centuries-old friendship, traditions of spiritual kinship, and close cooperation **in the interests of peace, stability, and prosperity in the Caucasus.***²²⁰

In the following year, on October 12, while answering to questions regarding the Russian-Georgian relations, some contradictions arose in the president's speech. First of all, regarding the border security. It is observable that, when dealing with "Georgia's internal political problems", President Putin is not at all indifferent to them, however only due to the fact that they cause worries regarding the safety of Russia. To the extent that Russian troops were present in the territory. Their withdrawal, however, albeit declared, would not occur (in contradiction to Pacts with the international community and the Georgian nation as highlighted in the first part of this work). It is also interesting to highlight the contradiction of the first two phrases of this excerpt: "Russia does not intend to be drawn into a resolution of conflicts on the territory of third countries. At the same time, what happens on our borders cannot be a matter of indifference to us". It is rarely clear, in actuality, where the line between external and domestic problems of Russia is traced:

*We regard the complex relations between Abkhazia and Georgia as **an internal political problem of Georgia ... Russia does not intend to be drawn into a resolution of conflicts on the territory of third countries. At the same time, what happens on our borders cannot be a matter of indifference to us ... The Georgian authorities have also tried to get rid of some groups and terrorist units and militants in the Pankissi Gorge... The fact that these groups surface on other stretches of the Russian-Georgian border is **hardly welcome to us and cannot but give cause for concern. In spite of any Georgian internal political problems connected with Abkhazia, we will abide by our commitments to withdraw our troops from our base in Abkhazia. The troops will be withdrawn.*****²²¹

²²⁰ Putin, Vladimir .President Vladimir Putin sent a message to Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze on the occasion of a Georgian national holiday, Restoration of State Independence Day [speech transcript]. May 26, 2000. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38233>

²²¹ Putin, Vladimir. Answer to a Question about Russian-Georgian Relations [speech transcript]. Moscow. October 12, 2001. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21362>

Moreover, regarding peace-keeping Russian forces, in this excerpt, in just three-phrases-time, the President contradicted himself by firstly announcing that the peacekeeping forces are not Russian, and then called them “our” peacekeepers. Being them Russians or not, however, is of relative importance. What is significant to notice is again that after promising that “If Georgia believes there is no need for them... we will remove our peacekeepers”, those troops were not removed at all:

*They are not our peacekeepers. They are CIS peacekeepers. They are there at Georgia’s request. **If Georgia believes there is no need for them**, if the Georgian leadership assumes responsibility before the international community and its own people –it is their choice, **we will remove our peacekeepers.***²²²

Furthermore, concerning the Commonwealth of Independent States, it seems that if participation in it is not compulsory following the words of the Russian President (“if there is no such interest...we have no problems with that”), thus it is to some extent a necessity for the economic survival of the former Soviet Republics who alone cannot count on a developed economy. It also appears strange that for Russia the willing of these nations to take part in it is considered as a “burden”, given the multi-times demarcations of the security that the CIS brings for the Kremlin.

*The CIS, it is not a Russian, but an international organization. If there is an interest in maintaining special relationships and gaining certain advantages, including economic advantages, we are ready to go on working together. **If there is no such interest**, if you feel that the entire range of problems, including in the economic sphere, can be tackled effectively by other means and using other resources in a different international configuration, **we have no problem with that**, and it is not going to be a signal to us to downgrade bilateral relations. But for Russia it would diminish the **burden** that the special relationship implies in the political sphere.*²²³

²²² Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21362>

²²³ Ivi. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21362>

This “burden” is recalled also during an interview in 2002, hence this time as a social one. It is also interesting to note that in this excerpt the “fast-track procedure” to obtain Russian citizenship (hence passport) is brought up. This is one of the major aspects of the protracted scheme carried out by Russia when dealing with separatists regions before the escalation of aggression:

*If a person wants to live in Russia and has chosen this country for permanent residence, let him come and work here and pay taxes. Up until now everyone could come and acquire citizenship under a **fast-track procedure**. Half a million people obtained Russian citizenship but none of them actually moved to Russia for permanent residence. And the flow is swelling, while the social **burden** rests on the Russian budget, including the payment of pensions, for example.*²²⁴

In 2002, during some statement to the press following a meeting with President Shevardnadze, President Putin talked about the situation regarding the counterterrorism in Abkhazia. He expressed his concerns regarding first the situation itself, which might bring consequences to Russia as well. Secondly, he showed himself worried with regards to foreign aid given to Georgia to counter this situation.

Especially this second point is a lifelong concern that Russia always showed in every Frozen conflict area analyzed in this work. It appears to be that, when foreign nations (the US in particular) interact with post-soviet Republics, the safety of Russia and its citizens are immediately at risk (“this is what worries Russia and the Russian public”). The only possible solution, taking the words of the Russian president, is to “not only intensify the contacts of special services but make them more substantive”:

*There is the problem connected with the training of Georgian special counterterrorist units... **several American experts** have arrived in Georgia and, by agreement with the Georgian authorities, they **will train the special forces to fight terrorism**.*

*When we speak about such regions as the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia... it is practically on our border... **The bandits and terrorists who committed bloody crimes in Russia and, from our information, are preparing more such crimes, are there**. How will*

²²⁴ Putin, Vladimir. Excerpts from an Interview Granted to the Mass Media in the Krasnodar Region [speech transcript]. Dagomys. September 17, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21722>

*they change their plans after troops from other countries have appeared there, and if the Georgian side intends to act vigorously? What will happen in Russia? **That is what worries Russia and the Russian public.** We have agreed with the President of Georgia that we will **not only intensify the contacts of our special services but will make them more substantive.***²²⁵

Proof of this is also this excerpt from a meeting with CIS members that occurred on the same day. Here again, after stating that every country “every country has the right to pursue its own security policy”, President Putin declared how the direct intervention of Russia (being it in the economic, political or military sphere) is and will always be the best option for former-soviet Regions, since “the quality of that work depends on us”:

***Every country has the right to pursue its own security policy.** And Russia recognizes that. We have been in very close contact with our Central Asian partners in the context of the international anti-terrorist coalition. This is not to say that anybody is asking Russia’s permission to do this or that, but because **the quality of that work depends on us** and since **what is happening in these regions impacts our internal life**, we thought we should coordinate our actions.*²²⁶

President Putin made this point ever clearer and more direct in a news conference for Russian and Foreign Journalists of June 24, 2002. “A solution is possible, and it cannot be separated from cooperation with Russia”, contrarily to the help provided by the American or Georgian special forces (“no one, neither the American special forces nor the special units trained in Georgia, can resolve the problem”). The discontinuity and the contradictions are more and more evident: any country can adopt the solution that better fits them, however, to solve their internal problems, Russian help is the only possible solution to them.

Terrorists have indeed made a haven on part of Georgian territory in the Pankisi Gorge. It is a regrettable fact that ruins not only the bilateral relations between

²²⁵ Putin, Vladimir. Statement to the Press following Talks with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze [speech transcription]. Almaty. March 1, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21518>

²²⁶ Putin, Vladimir. Press Opportunity Following a Meeting of the CIS Heads of State [speech transcription]. Almaty. March 1, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21517>

*Russia and Georgia, it is destroying the Georgian state itself. A **solution is possible, and it cannot be separated from cooperation with Russia.** No one, neither the American special forces nor the special units trained in Georgia, **can resolve the problem of terrorism in the Pankisi Gorge without the direct and active involvement of the Russian special services and Russian army units.***²²⁷

On July 1st of the same year, moreover, President Putin declared that the Russian help is not only essential to Georgia or Russia, but to the international community as well:

*Under current conditions, the united actions of Russia and Georgia in the fight against international terrorism, which is fraught with **a real danger not only to our states but to the entire international community,** are of special importance.*²²⁸

Furthermore, in May 2012, President Putin, during a congratulation speech to South Ossetia's President Leonid Tibilov, took advantage of the situation to reiterate the indispensability of Russian help to solve the Georgian conflict. This assistance extends beyond the military to include all realms of influence, including the political, economic, and military ones. However, the assistance is not even restricted to times of conflict because Russia "will continue to support South Ossetia in the peacetime, when there is great need to accelerate economic and social recovery " demonstrating the long-term assurance that comes with Moscow's assistance:

*The republic has a great number of economic and social problems. Russia's help was at hand, as in the most difficult moments of South Ossetia's modern history. We **will continue to support South Ossetia in the peacetime, when there is great need to accelerate economic and social recovery.***²²⁹

²²⁷ Putin Vladimir. Excerpts from a Transcript of the News Conference for Russian and Foreign Journalists. Moscow. June 24, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21651>

²²⁸ Putin, Vladimir. President Vladimir Putin congratulated Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Georgia [speech transcript]. July 1, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27158>

²²⁹ Putin, Vladimir. Talks with President of South Ossetia Leonid Tibilov: The meeting focused on bilateral cooperation and South Ossetia's socio-economic recovery and development [speech transcript]. Sochi. May 12, 2012. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15324>

The Russian President then expresses his concern about the fact that Georgia failed to inform Russia that American personnel were present to assist Tbilisi because it has an impact on the security of Russian citizens at home. What is striking to notice is that President Putin seems to be more upset about the fact that the Americans informed him before Georgia, rather the delay of communications from Tbilisi itself (“We had received information from the American side, but unfortunately, our Georgian colleagues were rather slow in providing the information”). This is another illustration of the Kremlin's expectation that post-Soviet Republics inform Russia of every international decision made, making it clear that in President Putin’s head they have a sort of due to do so:

*What is happening on the domestic political scene in Russia in connection with the appearance of the American force in Georgia? The question is that in this case we have not been told anything about it. A misunderstanding of what is going on has provoked the reaction. **We had received information from the American side, but unfortunately, our Georgian colleagues were rather slow in providing the information.***²³⁰

As a possible reason behind Georgian non-communication, President Putin in 2002, accusing the Georgian authorities, declared that “Georgia is not only collaborating with terrorists but seems to be interested in perpetuating this situation”:

*Over time more and more information came which confirmed that the Georgian authorities, far from cooperating with us, are cooperating with the terrorists. And there is more and more evidence to this effect... **But Georgia is not only collaborating with terrorists but seems to be interested in perpetuating this situation.** There can be only one explanation: **perhaps some quarters inside the country want to take advantage of this factor to pursue their internal political ends? If that is so (I am not asserting it, but it very much looks to be the case) then it is a mistake.***²³¹

²³⁰ Putin, Vladimir. Press Opportunity Following a Meeting of the CIS Heads of State [speech transcription]. Almaty. March 1, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21517>

²³¹ Putin, Vladimir. Excerpts from an Interview Granted to the Mass Media in the Krasnodar Region [speech transcript]. Dagomys. September 17, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21722>

In 2015, President Putin also declared that the whole fault for the situation in Georgia was not on us, but Georgians by stating that “we (Russia) are not to blame for the deterioration in relations... This is their fault, their historical fault. They are fully to blame for this”:

*As for the events in 2008 and the subsequent decline in our relations, **we are not to blame for the deterioration in relations.** The former Georgian leaders and the then President Saakashvili should not have made the adventurist decisions that triggered Georgia’s territorial disintegration. **This is their fault, their historical fault. They are fully to blame for this.***²³²

In 2019, moreover, President Putin declared that Georgia’s fault is not just circumscribed to the events of 2008. In actuality, it dates from the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia “this is a grim legacy that one of the first Georgian presidents simply ignored when he took Adjara and Abkhazia’s autonomy”:

*During the Soviet era, it was decided to establish the Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia, which included today’s Georgia. It wasn’t even Georgia. **The Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia** was established during Stalin’s time, and Abkhazia was included. However, on Stalin’s orders, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs took very harsh measures on Abkhazians in order for Georgia to absorb this territory and the Abkhazians. **This is a grim legacy that one of the first Georgian presidents simply ignored when he took Adjara and Abkhazia’s autonomy.** All of this resulted in an explosive and fratricidal war.*²³³

An excerpt of March 30, 2002, from the Meeting with the Secretaries of the Security Councils of the States of the “Caucasian Four”²³⁴, shows that as a justification to the right or

²³² Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference: The President’s news conference was broadcast live by Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24 and Channel One, as well as Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii radio stations [speech transcript]. December 17, 2015. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50971>

²³³ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting with Russian journalists: Following the II Global Manufacturing and Industrialisation Summit, Vladimir Putin met with Russian journalists and answered their questions [speech transcript]. Yekaterinburg. July 9, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60962>

²³⁴ Group composed by parliaments heads of Azerbaijan, Russia, Georgia and Armenia.

due of intervention by Russian forces, ethnic Russians are always cited. “Russia cannot remain indifferent to the fate of more than 50,000 Russian citizens living in Abkhazia”:

*...We are of course worried about the aggravation of the situation in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict zone... Naturally this applies to Russia because the region is in the immediate proximity of our borders. We will seek in every way to bring about a final resolution of the conflict... **Russia cannot remain indifferent to the fate of more than 50,000 Russian citizens living in Abkhazia.***²³⁵

Also, in 2006, 2013, and 2018, other explanations for the Russian military intervention was given, namely the “military buildup” and “President Saakashvili’s acts and doings” which summed up together brought Georgia to an internal war, aside from the fact that “the worsening in relations between Russia and Georgia is linked precisely to this issue”. He later goes on by stating that “any unbiased observer would agree that Russia had nothing to do with this”, reiterating whose fault for the war is. The only available option left for Russia, following President Putin’s reasoning, was a military intervention and the recognition of the break-away Republics:

*People in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia are very worried by **the military buildup in Georgia, and we in Russia are also very worried by this. The worsening in relations between Russia and Georgia is linked precisely to this issue**, we are very worried by the Georgian leadership’s current policy of trying to resolve its territorial problems of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by the use of force, and **we must prevent this from happening.***²³⁶

President Saakashvili made a big mistake. I used to tell him, “Mr Saakashvili, whatever you do, please make sure there is no bloodshed.” To which he would always respond, “Of course not!” Unfortunately, it all ended up in a war. Many of your

²³⁵ Putin, Vladimir. Introductory Remarks at a Meeting with the Secretaries of the Security Councils of the States of the “Caucasian Four” [speech transcript]. Sochi. March 30, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21546>

²³⁶ Putin, Vladimir. Transcript of the Hot Line with President of Russia Vladimir Putin [speech transcript]. October 25, 2006. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23864>

*colleagues, especially in Europe, the US, and Georgia itself, often blame Russia. But any unbiased observer would agree that **Russia had nothing to do with this**. Russia reacted to what was going on at the time, and eventually this response led us to recognizing independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.*²³⁷

*As a result of its openly criminal actions, Georgia has lost vast territories, which was precisely the consequence of **Saakashvili's acts and doings**.*²³⁸

On March 7, 2003, President Putin, for the first time during a meeting, gave his concrete and practical opinion regarding the possible way to solve the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia. All these solutions outline a sort of return to a past (often remarked in a nostalgic way) in which politics, economy and society as a whole are under the same “umbrella” of influence:

*The problems that divide Tbilisi and Sukhumi **must be tackled in a way that will preserve the territorial integrity of Georgia and ensure the legitimate rights and interests of multi-national Abkhazia**. It is our shared opinion that one of the first steps towards settlement should be the **secure and dignified return of refugees**. Next in line is the **restoration of the economic infrastructure in the conflict zone**. I would particularly like to note the importance of **recreating a common economic space**.*²³⁹

The importance of the economic help given directly or indirectly by Russia to Georgia is often repeated in President Putin's speeches. These are four (out of many examples) from 2002, 2006, 2014, and 2015 which show this point: namely, that Russian help (in any possible form that it might come) is and will always be essential, if not the only option

²³⁷ Putin, Vladimir. Visit to Russia Today television channel: Vladimir Putin visited the new Russia Today broadcasting centre and met with the channel's leadership and correspondents [speech transcript]. Moscow. June 11, 2013. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18319>

²³⁸ Putin, Vladimir. Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club: Vladimir Putin took part in the plenary session of the 15th anniversary meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club [speech transcript]. October 18, 2018. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58848>

²³⁹ Putin, Vladimir. Joint News Conference with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze following tripartite Russo-Georgian-Abkhazian Talks [speech transcript]. Sochi. March 7, 2003. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21934>

available. To highlight this point, President Putin brought to the public attention the wealthy condition of the Georgians living in Russia, making it even more clear that Georgia needs Russia even when it comes to money sent back to the Georgian families by stating “this is a lot more than any assistance from third countries”. Not only that, by his speech it looks like Russia is the only actor taking care of these people “the Georgian Government should also think about their fate”). Lastly, another crucial point brought up was the fact that Russia also provides Georgian students with scholarships, showing that even in the cultural sphere Moscow is an essential partner not only for the present, but also for the future.

*The number of Georgians in Russia is estimated between 700,000 and 1 million. We have ordinary Georgians who work here and send about \$200 a month to their families back home every month. We are creating favourable conditions for these people. **The Georgian Government should also think about their fate.***²⁴⁰

*Georgian citizens living and working in Russia send home from \$1.5 million to \$2 billion dollars a year. **This is a lot more than any assistance from third countries.***²⁴¹

*Russia is in solid first place among Abkhazia’s economic partners. Over 30 Russian regions have signed agreements with Abkhazia. We have a high level of **cooperation in the culture and humanitarian sector**. We have allocated 290 spots for **Abkhazian students** at Russian universities this school year. We are holding regular **Russian-Abkhazian humanitarian forums.***²⁴²

*Today Russia accounts for two thirds of **Georgia’s wine and wine stock exports**. They are coming to the Russian market not to some other market abroad. We are importing these products as well as others and **our trade has increased.***²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Putin, Vladimir. Excerpts from an Interview Granted to the Mass Media in the Krasnodar Region [speech transcript]. Sochi. September 17, 2002. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21722>

²⁴¹ Putin, Vladimir. Press Conference Following Talks with President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili [speech transcript]. St. Petersburg. June 14, 2006. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/page/385>

²⁴² Putin, Vladimir. Press statements following Russian-Abkhazian talks [speech transcript]. Sochi. November 24, 2014. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/47059>

²⁴³ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin’s annual news conference: The President’s news conference was broadcast live by Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24 and Channel One, as well as Mayak, Vesti FM and Radio Rossii radio stations [speech transcript]. December 17, 2015. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50971>

Conclusion

The ongoing hostility between Georgia and Russia is another issue that caused a subtle but significant shift in the regional balance of power. More specifically, as a result of Georgia and Russia's "Five-Day War" in August 2008, Russia took steps to strengthen and expand its military presence in support of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which eventually led to an escalation in tension. However, by establishing two military bases in the republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia strengthened its position. Additionally, since January 2009, Russia assumed responsibility for border security in conformance with negotiations with the governments of the two separatist regions. This responsibility was later expanded with an agreement on April 30, 2009²⁴⁴, that allowed the deployment of border patrolling Russian troops with the between the perimeter of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia. The unification of the armed forces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia into a single, Russian-dominated force posture was probably the overall objective in this situation. These events demonstrate Moscow's readiness to extend its military might in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, regarding these countries not only as a base for power projection but also as a resource to expand its political influence across the entire region.

In contrast, the Georgian side concentrated on using hostile perceptions of Russia in the public eye and deftly exploiting anxieties, phobias, and even ingrained anti-Russian feeling in the West, once unable to respond to Russian actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia militarily. This Georgian rhetoric served as a component of Georgian foreign policy in addition to being addressed to an internal audience. The "five-day war" inertia was the primary narrative discourse on foreign policy and the foundation of threat feeling in Georgia. Although the somewhat alarming rhetoric of the Georgian authorities gradually lost some of its impact, it nevertheless successfully encouraged the Saakashvili government's strengthening during the most critical post-war era, as far as 2010.²⁴⁵

The Georgian case presents many similarities to the other cases analyzed in this work. As a matter of fact, from the military, economic and political point of view to the repercussion at

²⁴⁴ CIS Legislation. The agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on common efforts in protection of frontier of the Republic of Abkhazia. April 30, 2009. <https://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=28517>

²⁴⁵ Giragosian, Richard and Minasyan, Sergey. Recent Trends in Security and Stability in the South Caucasus. Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. Connections, Vol. 11, Issue 1. Pages 73-74.

the international level, Russia's approach to it seems to follow a scheme (as it has been discussed in previous chapters). The element that, however, differentiates this subject from the others, is the discourses that have been done with regards to it.

From the excerpts presented in this chapter, it is observable how President Putin spent more time and dedication to this subject. The tones themselves are somehow more on the defensive side. It is in fact noticeable that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are the conflict for which the Russian President spent more time in blaming the Georgian government for the crisis that developed with the two separatist regions following the circumstances of 1920. Tbilisi has been criticized multiple times for its aggressive policy towards Abkhazia and for its negligence in not resolving the whole situation in a peaceful way, putting the population and its safeguard in first place (including the Russian one that lives there). Moreover, Georgia is also the scenario in which the economic and military aid that Russia gave has been highlighted the most, making it seem almost as if Russia was trying to prove to the international arena that it has done everything it was capable of for the two Republics (something that was never highlighted at this scope for the other frozen conflicts).

It is also very intriguing the fact that the official website of the Kremlin has restricted the access to the transcripts of the discussions and forums that deals with the two separatist regions from 2014 onwards, which, again, hasn't happened for Ukraine and Moldova.

5. Moldova: Transnistria Conflict Analysis

Transnistria, whose name means "across the Dneestr River", has always been a special watch since Russia's war against Kiev began. Moreover, during the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the area has been mentioned among the possible regions at risk of a Moscow attack if the ladder wished to continue the offensive and not limit itself to the Donbass and Crimea territories.

Relations between Transnistria and the Kremlin have always been very close, although Russia (like other countries) has never recognized the republic, which has considered itself independent since 1990. At that time, after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, there was a full-fledged war between separatist and Moldovan troops, which also saw the involvement of the Russian army in support of the separatists and Romanian volunteers in support of the Moldovans.²⁴⁶

After the Ottoman Empire was overthrown in the 1800s, Russia expanded its influence into what is now Moldova. Bessarabia (the historical region bounded by the Dniester River on the east and the Prut river on the west) was the Russian empire's designation for the West bank of the Nistru throughout the nineteenth century. However, the East bank (what is now Transnistria) had not yet been combined into a single entity. Instead, it had been split into two halves and absorbed into two separate Russian provinces. The twentieth century saw the continuation of this division. While Bessarabia/Moldova belonged to Romania, Transnistria was a member of the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1940. When Soviet troops defeated German forces and their Romanian allies in the 1940s (first in August 1940 and again in April 1944 as the battle lines moved back and forth), the two regions were combined. The two Nistru banks were therefore included in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova. Since that moment, Moldovans highlighted their shared Soviet history, whereas Transnistrians emphasized their pre-Soviet history as a rationale for their split from Moldova. As a result, diverse historical perspectives exist, but actual ethnic, religious, or linguistic disparities.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Haynes, Rebecca. *Moldova, Bessarabia, Transnistria*. School of Slavonic and East European Studies. 2003. Page 183.

²⁴⁷ King, Charles. *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture*. Studies of Nationalities. 2000. Pages 420-424.

The toppling of the Ceaușescu regime in Romania in December 1989 and re-opening the border between Romania and Moldova on 6 May 1990 led many in Transnistria and Moldova to believe that a union between Moldova and Romania was inevitable.²⁴⁸ With the fall of Communist Party rule, Romania appeared much more attractive. This, unfortunately, alarmed the Russian-speaking population, spawned secessionist movements in Gagauzia and Transnistria. Once Moldova's government took a fiercely pro-Romanian course prior to and shortly after the country's independence in 1991, pro-Moscow elites in Transnistria declared their own independence as the 'Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic' (PMR). Transnistria²⁴⁹ thus became one of numerous “unrecognised republics” in the USSR, alongside Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. After nominating its capital in Tiraspol, it formally announced its secession from the newly established Republic of Moldova. The Moldovan Popular Front, which was elected in February 1990, sought political unification with Romania whereas militants preferred the Romanian language and an orientation towards Romania. The goal of the Moldovan Popular Front, which operated in an environment of extreme nationalism and intolerance, was to expel Russian speakers from leadership positions. This helped conservatives in Transnistria, a small region of Moldova to the east of the Nistru river: it gave support to those seeking assistance from Russian forces present in Transnistria as well as to anyone seeking a separate state that was connected to but not a part of Russia.²⁵⁰

As a result, a relatively brief but bloody conflict broke out, in which Transnistrian militia collaborated closely with the Soviet and later Russian military to defeat Moldova's meager armed forces and maintain control over the majority of left-bank Moldova and the city of Bender on the right bank of the Nistru. The dispute came to a conclusion on July 21, 1992 after a protracted conflict-settlement procedure under the auspices of the OSCE and a standoff supervised by Russian "peacekeepers." From that moment on, Russia has tightly controlled Transnistria and given it political, economic, and military backing, to the point where the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has concluded that Russia effectively controlled the Transnistrian government. Since the fighting, moreover, mistrust (especially at elite levels) has

²⁴⁸ Ivi. Pages 419-422.

²⁴⁹ The name of the region used in this article is "Transnistria," which is taken from the Romanian language; Transnistrians refer to it as "Pridnestrovia," using a Russian term. Other authors, instead, use the term "left bank" when mentioning Transnistria, given its geographical location east side of the river Nistru.

²⁵⁰ Beyer, John. Transnistria: In Search of a Settlement for Moldova's Breakaway Region. *St Antony's International Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Secession, Sovereignty, and the Quest for Legitimacy. May 2010. Pages 160-165.

grown and hindered settlement efforts. Russian-Moldavian bilateral negotiations have alternated with or operated concurrently with a formal process under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Both tracks, nevertheless, have yielded no results.²⁵¹

Under the guidance of a negotiation mechanism (that until the end of 2005, included Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE) the Transnistrian administration in Tiraspol and the Moldovan government in Chişinău made efforts to find a diplomatic resolution to conclude the settlement of the armed conflict. The leadership of Moldova rejected a plan to that effect put forth by Russia in 2003. As a result, Moscow imposed a series of political and financial sanctions. The 2005 political changes, however, have given the talks on resolving the Transnistrian conflict a new impetus. The grounds for a resolution have been dramatically altered by the developments in Georgia and Ukraine as well as the revitalization of GUAM (Organization for Democracy and Economic Development), while the European Union and the United States have switched to the role of observers in the negotiation process. The chances of resolving the Transnistria issue, however, were no longer that promising as of the end of 2007. The 2008 negotiation process has resulted less and less effective. The frozen conflicts of the former USSR were moving away from being as important as they once were as a result of developments in Kosovo, pertinent to the issue of Transnistria.²⁵²

The Russian Federation's desire to retain its strategic interests in Transnistria has been a significant external element; Russian troops stationed there effectively prevented the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from expanding to the east. Concurrently, Ukraine had major interests to resolve the conflict, as well as the power to do so (not the least because of their shared border with Transnistria). The Transnistrian case stands out for its low intensity, if not outright passivity, when compared to the parallel conflicts in Georgia and Armenia/Azerbaijan, whose causes also stem from the fall of the Soviet Union. Since there is no ongoing violence or ethnic or religious tension, it is rightly considered the case that is most amenable to resolution. Furthermore, the Transnistria conflict, following Romania's 2007 membership to the EU, has been directly on the EU's borders. Although there is much that may be done to enhance relations between the conflicting parties, external actors play a critical role.

²⁵¹ Ivi. Pages 165-167.

²⁵² Urse, Christian. Solving Transnistria: Any Optimists Left? *Connections*. Vol. 7, No. 1. 2008. Pages 57-75.

The EU has had the motivation and, increasingly, the resources to influence the main players, but cooperation with Russia, which depended on the overall relationship between the EU and Moscow, was essential for the success.²⁵³

Concerned experts remain divided on what really defines a conflict. At its most basic level, conflict analysis can divide conflict types into four primary categories: at one extreme of the spectrum there are the so called non conflicts; whereas at the other side the open ones; in between are latent conflicts (where conflicts have a potential for violence but stay below the surface); and surface conflicts (where neither real roots nor structural causes exist). While there have been clashes and standoffs in the case of Transnistria, there haven't been any fatalities since 1992. In this regard, it is permissible to use the term "frozen," which has been unjustly attributed to the bloodier conflicts in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. In light of this, the Transnistrian issue is best regarded as a simmering dispute that could flare up in response to outside pressure.²⁵⁴

Moreover, there are no ethnic, religious, or linguistic components to the conflict in Transnistria, in contrast to other post-communist conflicts like those in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and Armenia/Azerbaijan (including Nagorno-Karabagh). The language mix is not as straightforward as the formulaic cliché "Transnistrians speak Russian, Moldovans speak Romanian" suggests, notwithstanding the rhetoric of the early 1990s (which is frequently revived). In Transnistria, 32% of the population identify as "Moldovan," 29% as Ukrainian, and 38% as Russian, according to the 2004 Moldovan census. At that time in Transnistria, almost 200,000 individuals identify as Russian, and Chisinau, the capital, has about 100,000. In terms of religion, the majority of people in Transnistria and the Republic of Moldova look to the Moscow Patriarch for spiritual guidance. Another difference between the circumstances of Georgia and Armenia/Azerbaijan is the freedom of mobility. There are fees for visitors to Transnistria, but there are no actual restrictions on how people can move about the country.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Khachaturian, Rafael. The Specter of Russian Nationalism. *Dissent* 56, no. 1. 2009. Pages 19-24.

²⁵⁴ Fisher, Simon et. al, *Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*. August 1, 2000. Pages 25-28.

²⁵⁵ NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA.
https://statistica.gov.md/en/demographic-national-language-and-cultural-characteristics-52_3669.html
(Last access 09/10/2022)

The conflict

The case of Moldova demonstrates how the prospect of ethnic warfare was produced by ethnic mobilization driven by a dominant majority (the Moldovan side) that was rising, and how an effective deterrence policy (by the Soviet government) managed to avert the conflict. Additionally, it provides a case study of a mobilization driven by a marginalized minority and shows how subsequent outside meddling (from Moscow) contributed to the start of the conflict (on the Dniestrian side). Both instances demonstrate how security concern, elite outbidding, and widespread hostility, all contribute to escalating conflicts.

Other factors beyond pure ethnicity, however, seem to have played a larger role in the outbreak of the conflict. The nationalist ambition of Moldova collided in Transnistria with the local authorities' economic interests and the ideologies of the Soviet Union. Most of Moldova's industrial infrastructure was created in Transnistria as part of Soviet development ambitions. Therefore, to retain complete control of the region's economic resources, it was advantageous for its authorities to make an attempt at secession.

As stated by the author Charles King in 2001: “War is the engine of state building, but it is also good for business”²⁵⁶.

Transnistria has consistently been regarded by the Moldovan Communist Party as a trustworthy supply of cadres since the conclusion of World War II. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Transnistrian Communists were seen as being more devoted to the USSR than their counterparts from the recently united province of Bessarabia in the immediate post-World War II period. Therefore, Chişinău's party leaders during the early postwar years typically originated from Tiraspol. However, after a few decades, things started to shift. By 1989, the leaders of the Moldovan Party, who played a significant role in advancing perestroika and the national awakening movement that was then emerging, were frequently from Bessarabia. Although Tiraspol continued to be a significant economic hub for the republic, its authorities were concerned that the reforming movement would force them out of power. Leaders of Transnistrian thus struggled against perestroika and later the Moldovan national movement in an effort to uphold their historic values.

The Moldovan Supreme Soviet adopted a decree of sovereignty in June 1990. Transnistrians responded in September by declaring the Dniester Moldovan Autonomous Republic (RMN). Even though the Moldovan Supreme Soviet responded by proclaiming this act as invalid,

²⁵⁶ King, Charles. *The benefits of ethnic war: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States*. Cit.

it was unable to put this ruling into action: Chişinău was losing authority over Transnistria while seeking its own route to independence²⁵⁷.

Two months after the PMR's independence declaration on September 2, 1990, the first fatalities in the escalating conflict happened on November 2, 1990. To divide Transnistria into two halves, Moldovan forces reached Dubăsari, but the city's residents blocked them by occupying the Dniester bridge. The first president of Moldova, Mircea Snegur, and the Moldovan government opposed the conspirators during the Moscow coup attempt in August 1991. On the other hand, the Transnistrian administration cheered the coup, declared that the Soviet Union needed to be rescued, and offered the conspirators troops. After the failure of the coup, Transnistrians hurried to establish their self-declared state. The first significant skirmishes between RMN paramilitary units and the Moldovan police occurred in Transnistria, in Dubăsari, in December 1991 over control of government structures. According to reports, the Transnistrian soldiers used equipment from the 14th Soviet Army's stockpiles. On December 13, 1991, a second attempt by a Moldovan to cross the Lunga bridge occurred. There was a break in military activity following this second unsuccessful effort until 2 March 1992, which is regarded as the start of the War of Transnistria. Fighting broke out in Dubăsari once more in March 1992, and it subsequently spread to neighboring areas. Snegur, the president of Moldova, responded by announcing a national emergency. One of the main players in the fight was the Soviet 14th Army.²⁵⁸

Early in 1992, the president of Moldova attempted to take control of this organization by issuing a decree that allocated all former Soviet military personnel and assets to the newly formed Moldovan Defense Forces. The 14th Army was formally handed to the command of the Russian Federation on April 1 by President Yeltsin, although that proclamation remained little more than a basic piece of paperwork. Attacks by the 14th Army against Moldovan soldiers in May resulted in the expulsion of some settlements on the left bank of the Dniester. The deadliest fighting took place in June when the 14th Army once more intervened (this time openly) on behalf of separatists who had been fleeing the city of Tighina (Bender), forcing out the Moldovan army.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Op. cit. Urse, Christian. Solving Transnistria: Any Optimists Left? Pages 58-59.

²⁵⁸ Gribincea, Mihai. The Russian Policy on Military Bases: Georgia and Moldova. Editura Cogita. 2001. Pages 170-171.

²⁵⁹ Ivi. Pages 171-172.

On July 21, a cease-fire agreement was reached. Boris Yeltsin (the Russian President) and Mircea Snegur (the Moldovan one) signed this official treaty, which was mostly dictated by Moscow. According to the agreement, peacekeeping forces would respect the Russian, Moldovan, and PMR battalions' cease-fire on the direction of a joint military command organization called the Joint Control Commission (JCC). Nearly a thousand individuals are thought to have died overall, while numerous others were injured. IDPs (internally displaced persons) did not proliferate in significant numbers during the War of Transnistria, in contrast to many other post-Soviet conflicts. On the side of Transnistria, there were volunteers from Russia and Ukraine, including Don and Kuban Cossacks. Although there is no universally accepted interpretation of the precise number of volunteers or the precise military function, they performed during the Transnistrian conflict, these militias probably numbered in the several thousand range.²⁶⁰

Mediation Attempts

Even though efforts to reach a settlement have been underway for almost 20 years, focusing on the five basic stages is instructive. Following the Snegur-Yeltsin ceasefire deal in July 1992, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, precursor of the OSCE) sponsored the initial attempt²⁶¹. Proposals for a settlement centered on a single state with Transnistrian autonomy. Then, on May 7, 1997, the Presidents of Transnistria, Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia, as well as the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, signed the "Primakov" agreement (in honor of the Russian Foreign Minister), which established a five-party discussion with Russia and Ukraine serving as guarantors²⁶². Under Ukrainian sponsorship, a

²⁶⁰ Haynes, Rebecca. *Moldova: A History*. Cit.

²⁶¹ CSCE. Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Report No. 13 by the CSCE Mission to Moldova. November 13, 1993.

²⁶² The CSCE Report No. 13 had envisaged Transnistria as having a special status in the Republic of Moldova. Subsequent OSCE negotiations have therefore refused any idea of recognition of Transnistria as a separate state

second round (the "Kiev" round) started and once more suggested a federal state²⁶³. The Transnistrians, nevertheless, advocated on a confederal system with two equal "republics"²⁶⁴. President Voronin unveiled a third initiative in 2001 after an election that put the Communist Party in power. Transnistrians and Moldovans would collaborate to design a new constitution, according to Chisinau's planned negotiations. Although this strategy directly addressed the status issue, it was ultimately unsuccessful due to modifications made by Moldova to the Transnistria customs regime shortly after²⁶⁵. The fourth attempt was made in 2003 when Dmitri Kozak, a presidential adviser for Russia, drafted a memo based on bilateral talks between Russia and Moldova that was prepared separately from the "five-sided" negotiating process. However, even the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had only a hazy understanding of Kozak's offer, which caught the OSCE negotiators off guard²⁶⁶.

Following Putin's announcement of a breakthrough, plans were being made for a large signature ceremony with Presidents. Nevertheless, the night before the event, on November 25, 2003, President Voronin called the Kremlin to inform them that the deal had fallen through. The most plausible explanation was that the former Moldovan president had grown concerned that large-scale protests might degenerate (the post-communists were being driven out of Georgia by the Rose Revolution, which began on November 23 with President Shevardnadze's resignation). The removal of Russian military was one of the demands of the Georgian Rose Revolution, and Chisinau keenly monitored the developments in Tbilisi. Acceptance of Russian soldiers by Moldova would have meant "Host Nation Consent," nullifying Russia's pledge to withdraw its military from Moldova made at the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit.²⁶⁷

The US and the EU's member states initially had mixed feelings about the Kozak plan. Nevertheless, after further consideration, they came to the conclusion that the program was flawed because it left Moldova in a dysfunctional state and did not offer a long-term solution.

²⁶³ OSCE. Joint Statement of Participants in the Kiev Meeting on Issues of Normalisation of Relations between the Republic of Moldova and Transdniestria. 1999.

²⁶⁴ International Crisis Group. Report focused on background of the conflict and its resolving. August 12, 2003.

²⁶⁵ BBC. Moldovan-Dniester settlement process. Background briefing. BBC Monitoring. October 5, 2008

²⁶⁶ Russian Draft Memorandum on the basic principles of the state structure of a united state in Moldova (Kozak Memorandum). November 17, 2003. <http://stefanwolff.com/files/Kozak-Memorandum.pdf>

²⁶⁷ Löwenhardt, John. The OSCE, Moldova and Russian diplomacy in 2003. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*. Volume 20, Issue 4. August 6, 2006. Pages 103-105.

The EU and the US believed that this could prevent Moldova from joining the EU or NATO in the future, and most importantly, there was an unpublished addendum that enabled Russian forces to continue to stay in Moldova for additional 20 years. That is why on November 23, the OSCE declared its opposition to the Memorandum, and on that same day, the EU High Representative called Voronin to urge him not to sign.

After 2003, initiatives were made to revive the OSCE-sponsored peace negotiations. President Voronin tried to increase the influence of the EU (and the US) on settlement negotiations after the Kozak failure. Besides five parties (Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE), two observers (the EU and the US) were annexed in October 2005 to create the “5+2” format²⁶⁸. Eventually, after Yushchenko was elected president of Ukraine in 2005, a fifth round was initially scheduled, but it fizzled out as the Orange alliance broke up. The inability of the Transnistrians to give up their de facto independence and missteps made by Moldova caused the talks to inevitably break down.

The deadlock persists despite formal and informal discussions held under OSCE supervision and on a bilateral basis between Moldova and Russia.²⁶⁹

The Kozak Memorandum

Following early elections in 2001, the Party of Moldovan Communists (PC) took advantage of a backlash against the reformist coalition that had constituted the previous administration by winning the majority of the vote. On the basis of a pro-Russian program, the Communists won the elections. They supported a number of maneuvers, including Moldova's inclusion in the Russia-Belarus Union, a plan that never happened. However, their political discourse was driven by close ties to Russia and an anti-Western ideological position.

The president of the country was now chosen by the parliament in accordance with the new provisions of the Moldovan Constitution. The Communists had no trouble voting Vladimir

²⁶⁸ US Department of State. Background Note: Moldova. Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. February 2009.

²⁶⁹ International Crisis Group. Moldova's Uncertain Future. Report 175/Europe & Central Asia. August 17, 2006.

Voronin, their leader, as the president of the nation with 71 seats (out of 101). The Party of Moldovan Communists and its leader Voronin appeared to be confident about the possibility to subjugate Transnistria to Chişinău's rule. The Chişinău government thought that its tight ties to Moscow would secure a peaceful resolution to the war, with Voronin emerging as a capable and effective leader who could bring the nation together. Unfortunately for them, those hopes turned out to be nothing more than fantasy. A proposal of an agreement between Chişinău and Tiraspol was presented in 2002 by officials of Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE. In the envisaged federalization of the nation, territorial entities (Transnistria first) were to retain control over a broad range of matters. In order to achieve a legal and peaceful takeover of the left bank of the Dniester, President Voronin proclaimed his intention to hold elections throughout the entire republic, including Transnistria. However, by the middle of 2003, negotiations had once more stagnated.²⁷⁰

President Voronin engaged in direct talks with Moscow, setting aside the OSCE and Ukraine in order to remain true to Moldova's relationship with Russia. President Putin assigned Dmitri Kozak, the Russian deputy director of the Presidential Administration, the responsibility of brokering a deal between Tiraspol and Chişinău and Tiraspol on constitutional issues. By October 2003, a document outlining the fundamentals of a federal system that supported Tiraspol had been created thanks to Kozak's diplomatic negotiations. As a result, Moldova was going to become an asymmetrical federation with Transnistria as its sole clearly defined unit. The latter had a de facto veto due to way the upper house of the parliament was meant to vote on significant issues (such organic legislation), which required a three-fourths majority.²⁷¹

Russia delivered the agreement to Ukraine and the OSCE (the other parties guaranteeing the negotiation process) after it had reportedly been reached in both Tiraspol and Chişinău. The OSCE attempted to participate in 2003, conscious of the underpinning Russian-Moldovan discussions, yet Russia repeatedly refused to grant it a role. In contrast, Moldovan popular opinion put tremendous pressure on the government to prevent the signing of the deal. The Kozak Memorandum was perceived as a scandalous concession made by the Communist leadership to Russia and as a chain keeping Moldova hostage to Russian stakes in future years. The Kozak memorandum was released at the end of a year in which the opposition had

²⁷⁰ Spânu, Vlad. Conflict in Moldova's Eastern Region of Transnistria: What is the Way Out? European Integration Studies Centre and Institute for Development and Social Initiatives "Viitorul". 2007.

²⁷¹ Roper, Steven D. Federalization and Constitution-Making as an Instrument of Conflict Resolution. *Demokratizatsya* 12:4. October 1, 2004. Pages 535-537.

been protesting the government's language policies for several weeks. This was because 2003 was the year that the Communist government attempted to elevate the status of Russian, making it nearly the second official language of the nation, while also questioning the use of Romanian language and history in schoolbooks. Thus, the Memorandum provided the opposition with a great chance to organize additional public protests, actually tangling circumstances even more for the Moldovan administration.

Last but not least, it emerged that the document's final version had a few sections that displeased President Voronin and his administration. To be more exact, the Russian side denied the Moldovan party's claim that the document's final draft was not the version that had been previously agreed to. No mention of the situation involving the Russian troops in Transnistria was made in the memo's initial draft. However, Russia agreed to provide guarantees that its forces would stay in the area for an additional 20 years upon Tiraspol's demand.²⁷²

Even though he had countersigned the agreement, Voronin understood that his major goal (taking control of Transnistria and becoming a saviour to his electorate) was impossible to attain. The idea of a peaceful transition of Tiraspol's political elite, which was already playing a part in Chişinău's decision-making, was destroyed by the Russian troops' continuing presence. In essence, Tiraspol and Moscow would have taken control of the entire Republic of Moldova. President Voronin decided not to sign the document given that there was no obvious political gain, there was no backing from the international community, and the document was opposed by the public. He also called off the ceremony in Chişinău that Russian President Vladimir Putin was scheduled to attend on November 2003 because of this. The severe response from Russia clearly signaled the end of its ties with Chişinău, given that the Kozak Memorandum incident was a crushing diplomatic setback for Russia, and Tiraspol was given the opportunity to argue that Voronin was unreliable. The entire project instead of applying pressure to Moldova forced Moscow to seek OSCE backing after months of opposing any substantive discussion of Transnistria with the Dutch chairmanship. Moscow had to deal with Western criticism for breaking the terms she had agreed to when the extension for the evacuation of the Russian troops from Moldova had been given one year earlier.

²⁷² Lynch, Dov et al; Engaging Eurasia's Separatist States, Managing Conflict. Cit.

As a logical result of how the negotiations turned out, Voronin was the target of a political attack by Russia. The subsequent events bolstered the Moldovan leadership's distancing from its former Russian allies.²⁷³

Moldova and Russia in the aftermath of the Kozak Memorandum

Following the Kozak Memorandum's failure, Russia made an effort to harm Moldova's reputation abroad. The politicians in Chişinău, according to Russian officials, couldn't be trusted since they abruptly changed their positions about the agreement with Russia. Moreover, as Russia attempted to disregard its 1999 Istanbul pledges, the OSCE ministerial conference in 2003 was the first to fall short of establishing a consensus on the issue of Russian forces in Transnistria. The closing statement at the 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul²⁷⁴, as a matter of fact, highlighted the sorrow of the Allies over Russia's failure to adhere to the conditions of the departure of its forces from Transnistria. Most significantly, a judgment issued in July 2004 by the European Court of Human Rights found that Russia had made a significant contribution to the establishment of the Transnistrian regime. Moreover, the Council of Europe closely examined Moldova for its track record in the areas of human rights and democratization, which led to some beneficial developments in those sectors. President Voronin made an interesting political turn as a result of the unique international political backdrop, and of the serious degradation of his relations with Moscow. After the general elections in March 2005, he and his party adopted a pro-European posture as there was no chance of reaching a peace agreement with Moscow. The Communist Party easily won the elections, receiving support from the electorate for both its stronger stance toward Moscow and its pro-European agenda.

Moldova was forced to endure painful 2+3 negotiations over Transnistria, which started occurring once a month from April 2004. There was frequently a four-against-one framework of discussion, with the OSCE mission in Chisinau and Ukraine consistently aligning with

²⁷³ Op. cit. Löwenhardt, John. Pages 109-112.

²⁷⁴ NATO. Chairman's statement: Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the Level of Heads and State and Government held in Istanbul, Turkey. June 29, 2004.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_21019.htm?selectedLocale=en

Moscow and Tiraspol. It was challenging for Chisinau to persuade the world community of the legitimacy of its viewpoint being frequently marginalized in the debates. The situation took a shift in early 2005 when Kiev also made a pro-European decision that made the government more inclined to pay attention to the Western approach to Transnistria.²⁷⁵

The Moldovan government's response to the Transnistrian issue was as a matter of fact greatly influenced by the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. First, it altered the negotiating mechanism's equilibrium since Ukraine started making subtle adjustments to its stance on the conflict as it sought deeper ties with the EU and NATO, no longer accepting all Russian proposals. Second, and perhaps more significantly, the developments in Kiev prompted Moldova to review its whole foreign policy strategy. Given that the events in Ukraine occurred one year later the Georgian Revolution, the Moldovan elections in March 2005 were viewed by many in the West as a chance for "the next colored revolution" in the former Soviet region.

Voronin and the Communist Party had given up on attempts to normalize relations with Moscow. Worse yet, some political circles in Russia hinted that they would back a coalition of the center in the elections in Moldova. As a result, the Chisinau government chose the sole workable choice for its electoral agenda, the European integration program. A deal with an opposition party ensured that President Voronin would be re-elected by the Communist Party, which still held an absolute majority of the parliament's seats. The strong pro-European position of all political parties represented in the parliament was however the most significant political result of the elections in March 2005.²⁷⁶

This provided the foundation for a more assertive approach to Transnistria policy. The new Moldovan Parliament approved three documents discussing the future status of Transnistria on June 10, 2005, following a settlement plan earlier provided by the Ukrainian President Yushchenko. The texts emphasized the need to provide Transnistrian Moldova a high degree of autonomy while also demilitarizing, democratizing, and decriminalizing it. Nevertheless, as Transnistrian authorities did not lose their own agenda regarding the presence of Russian troops in the region, the move by the parliament had no immediate practical ramifications. It nevertheless had a powerful symbolic effect, demonstrating that Moldova was no longer defending the Transnistrian issue at the international level. On the contrary, Moscow

²⁷⁵ Socor, Vladimir. Unedifying Debut to 5+2 Negotiations on Moldova. Cit.

²⁷⁶ Op. cit. Urse, Christian. Solving Transnistria: Any Optimists Left? Pages 70-75.

and Tiraspol were expected to respond to Moldova's requests. As it might have been foreseeable, however, Transnistria consistently expressed its resistance to what it saw as an "asymmetric federation," asserting equal standing with Chisinau in any future political arrangement and holding a distinct opinion regarding the long-term involvement of Russian forces. By the end of 2005, Moldova made it clear that she thought the negotiation structure was outdated and that, in view of lack of modifications, she would relinquish it. As a result, Moscow and Tiraspol concurred that the US and EU should participate in the negotiation process as observers. The new equilibrium did not advance the discussions; rather, it reinforced Moldova's ability to dissent from Moscow's and Tiraspol's standpoints, hence diminishing the chances of finding a resolution within this frame.²⁷⁷

The revival of GUAM was another impact of Ukraine's orientation change. GUAM emerged as a suitable structure to resolve these issues as Russian-supported territorial separatism became a problem for Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan as well, raising international pressure on Russia. The GUAM Summit in Kiev²⁷⁸ voted on May 23, 2006, to institutionalize the group, rename it The GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development, and set up its secretariat there. The Summit Resolution explicitly made reference to the unresolved disputes in Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan when it denounced the use of force to occupy a country's territory, noting that "territorial annexations and the formation of enclaves can never become legal." The leaders of Azerbaijan and Moldova were even more direct in their individual statements in addressing the secessionist movements on their respective countries' soil and urging improved coordination of GUAM members in international bodies on issues pertaining to those disputes.²⁷⁹

Starting from April 2005, Moldova encountered a new issue: the Russian government's import blockade of meat goods, fruits, and vegetables, were seen as a form of pressure applied by Moscow to Chisinau over its behavior in international relations. This action did not encourage compliance; rather, it strengthened Chisinau's resolve. Russian economic sanctions against his nation, according to President Voronin, were the price for independence,

²⁷⁷ Rodkiewicz, Witold. *Transnistrian Conflict After 20 Years*. Centre for Eastern Studies. Institute for Development and Social Initiatives "Vittorul". 2011. Pages 10-12.

²⁷⁸ GUAM summit in Kyev. <https://guam-organization.org/en/guam-summit-communique-23-may-2006-kyiv/>

²⁷⁹ Nantoi, Oazu. *The Plan for the Transnistrian Conflict Settlement Proposed by Ukraine - pros and cons*. Institute for Public Policy. June 8, 2005.

sovereignty, and territorial integrity that the people would keep paying. Even though the Kremlin cited rules and standards that the Moldovan (and Georgian) products violated (regarding heavy metals, levels of pesticides, etc.), Russia had little success persuading the world's opinion that the policies were anything other than economic retaliation against the political stance of the two countries.

Georgia and Moldova hinted in 2006 that they could doubt Russia's WTO membership if the export embargo on agricultural products was upheld, since the ban imposed by Russia on two WTO members was perceived as an unjustified unilateral action against them. The resistance to Russia's WTO participation from Georgia and Moldova raises yet another political issue for Moscow, even if it was unclear how much weight that resistance may have had.

Acting regardless of the limitations imposed by the negotiation structure, the active foreign policy of Moldova during the years 2005–2006 constituted a significant departure from that of the earlier years. First, a set of resolutions and laws addressing the issue of Transnistria's status were approved by the Moldovan Parliament; second, Moldova threatened to leave the negotiations if its format composition was not changed (supporting the EU and US offer to participate as observers). Third, Moldova increased its bilateral collaboration with Kiev by capitalizing on the new political situation in Ukraine. By using GUAM on the world stage, Moldova was able to guarantee the implementation of the border deal with Ukraine, which was criticized by Moscow and Tiraspol as an "economic blockade." In conclusion, Moldova has shown that it was willing to act independently of the negotiation process if necessary.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰ Socor, Vladimir. Moldova Law Completely Changes the Logic of Settlement on Transnistria. Cit.

International Reactions to Transnistria Situation

The "hot" conflict in Transnistria came to an end in 1992, with a process of conflict settlement mediated by Russian "peacekeepers" and under the auspices of the OSCE. Since that time, Russia has tightly controlled Transnistria and given it political, economic, and military backing, to the point where the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has found that Russia effectively controlled the Transnistrian government²⁸¹. In the case of *Catan and others vs Moldova and Russia* (October 19, 2012), for example, at paragraph 122 it is reported that:

The Court, therefore, maintains its findings in the Ilașcu judgment (cited above), that during the period 2002-2004 the "MRT" was able to continue in existence, resisting Moldovan and international efforts to resolve the conflict and bring democracy and the rule of law to the region, only because of Russian military, economic and political support. In these circumstances, the MRT 's high level of dependency on Russian support provides a strong indication that Russia exercised effective control and decisive influence over the "MRT" administration.

Russian influence is most readily apparent when its military and security forces are present. As part of the 1992 ceasefire deal, Russia has deployed about 800 peacekeepers to Transnistria in addition to reformatting the 14th Army into an "Operational Group of Russian Forces" (OGRF) with about 1,500 soldiers²⁸². It would be wrong to characterize these soldiers as fully "Russian," however, as only a very small number originate in the Russian Federation, while an estimated 90% of these soldiers are Transnistrian citizens with Russian passports. In fact, the same soldiers frequently switch between the Transnistrian security forces (also known as the "PMR militia"), the OGRF, the peacekeeping force with higher pay, and then the PMR militia again²⁸³.

²⁸¹ Case of *Catan and others v. Moldova and Russia*, European Court of Human Rights, Applications nos. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06 (October 19, 2012).
<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22fulltext%22:%7B%22Case%20of%20Catan%20and%20others%20v.%20Moldova%20and%20Russia%22%7D%22%22documentcollectionid%22:%7B%22GRANDCHAMBER%22%22CHAMBER%22%7D%22%22itemid%22:%7B%22001-114082%22%7D%22%7D%7D>

²⁸² Torz, Michael. *Transnistria, What's going on there?* Warsaw Institute Romania Monitor, May 18, 2022.

²⁸³ Clingendael policy interviews. *Walking the tightrope towards the EU Moldova's vulnerabilities amid war in Ukraine*. June 2022. Page 28.

However, Russia, while delegitimized through its war in Ukraine, is still the key political, economic and security actor in Transnistria – and has significant leverage over both Tiraspol and Chişinău. It has in fact been acknowledged as the principal defender of the separatists on the left bank for the entirety of the Transnistrian conflict. Some contended that since Russia is a participant to the dispute, it was unable to serve as an unbiased mediator and "guarantor." These opinions are not entirely unsupported. On 8 July 2004, in the case of "Iliascu and Others v. Moldova and Russia" (no. 48787/99), the European Court of Human Rights came to a resolution stating:

"The Russian authorities had therefore contributed both militarily and politically to the creation of a separatist regime in the region of Transdnistria, part of the territory of the Republic of Moldova. Even after the ceasefire agreement of 21 July 1992 Russia had continued to provide military, political and economic support to the separatist regime, thus enabling it to survive by strengthening itself and by acquiring a certain amount of autonomy vis-à-vis Moldova. In the Court's opinion, all of the acts committed by Russian soldiers with regard to the applicants, including their transfer into the charge of the separatist regime, in the context of the Russian authorities' collaboration with that illegal regime, were capable of engaging responsibility for the consequences of the acts of that regime.

The Russian army was still stationed in Moldovan territory in breach of the undertakings to withdraw them completely given by Russia at the OSCE summits in 1999 and 2001. Both before and after 5 May 1998, when the Convention came into force with regard to Russia, in the security zone controlled by the Russian peacekeeping forces the "MRT" regime continued to deploy its troops illegally and to manufacture and sell weapons in breach of the agreement of 21 July 1992. All of the above proved that the "MRT" remained under the effective authority, or at the very least under the decisive influence, of Russia, and in any event that it survived by virtue of the military, economic, financial and political support that Russia gave it".²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴ Grand Chamber Judgement in the Case of Iliascu and Others v. Moldova and Russia. <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng/pages/search.aspx?i=001-61886>.

The right to defend Russian nationals and business abroad, as well as the right to privileged interests in particular areas, were among President Medvedev's five new foreign policy tenets in 2008. After opening a liaison office in Tiraspol in 2006 to offer administrative support, Russia started issuing passports, which led to an increase in the number of Russian passport owners in Transnistria. In a country with a population of 550,000 in 2006, there were reportedly 100,000 people with Russian passports. Furthermore, in August 2008, Transnistria requested further Russian security during the Georgian hostilities, and there were allegations of a little Russian reaction.

Russia has made it plain that it would not recognize Transnistria, despite the fact that it has recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Aleksey Ostrovsky, the chairman of the Russian Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States affairs, declared on May 29, 2008 that neither Kosovo nor an independent Transnistria would be recognized by Russia. He added, "We do not understand the Transnistrian people's wish to see Russia as a guarantor of the region's independence. We support the territorial integrity of all states"²⁸⁵. This stance was reaffirmed by Russia after the clashes between Georgia and Russia. As long as the status of the territory remains unclear, Russia has leverage over Chisinau and will not acknowledge Transnistrian independence since it benefits its interests. As a matter of fact, bringing Moldova closer would be a major win for Russia. Moscow concluded that Moldova should not join NATO, but there is greater disagreement on its accession to the EU²⁸⁶. Additionally, Russia did not want to promote independence as a general idea after making its point regarding Georgia, fearing that Chechnya and other republics may feel uneasy.²⁸⁷

With respect to Ukrainian reaction, the latter is the sole nation that borders Transnistria beside Moldova. It therefore had a compelling motivation to end this conflict. Particularly given that Ukraine directly suffered its detrimental effects during the deadly conflicts in the spring of 1992, when tens of thousands of Moldovans escaped the troubled region to Ukraine. Consequently, they received the designation of asylum seekers. Additionally, a sizeable Ukrainian minority exists in Transnistria, making up almost 30% of the total population.

²⁸⁵ TV Channel One (Tiraspol), 17:40 GMT, May 30, 2008, cited in BBC Monitoring, May 30, 2008.

²⁸⁶ According to the chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Andrei Kokoshin, Moldova didn't have many options: "If Moldova continues to count on integration into EU institutions, it will risk its status as a strategic partner of Russia"; Infotag News Agency, November 26, 2005.

²⁸⁷ Popescu, Nicu. 'Outsourcing' De Facto Statehood: Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova. Centre for European Policy Studies Policy Brief no. 109. 2006. Pages 2-5.

Clearly, Ukraine was concerned about their condition. It was in fact worried about this unrecognized area given its strategic interest in having secure borders and stable neighbors.

As a mediator and "guarantor," Ukraine was formally brought into the negotiations in 1995. In 1998, ten Ukrainian military inspectors joined the Russians and Moldovans. However, for a considerable amount of time after this operation, Ukraine's role was minimal, and its position was hardly distinct from the Kremlin one. In December 2004, nevertheless, one of Yushchenko's key foreign policy endeavors upon taking office on the "Orange" power wave was to put up a Transnistria peace plan. Eventually, however, as disputes within the Orange coalition grew increasingly pronounced in the months leading up to the March 2006 parliamentary elections, progress on the plan stalled.

An independent Transnistria would probably hardly be recognized by Ukraine since it would jeopardize the status of the Crimea, where Russian-speaking residents have a greater affinity for Moscow than for Kiev. In 2013 additional measures were anticipated given Ukraine's comprehensive understanding of the Transnistrian situation and its keen desire in finding a lasting solution. These hopes, regrettably, never materialized.²⁸⁸

To conclude, with the opening of a European Commission delegation office in Chisinau that focused on the Transnistrian dispute at the beginning of 2003, the Republic of Moldova attracted much more attention from across the world. The OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) established an office in Tiraspol on February 13 of that year but wasn't able to come to a conflict resolution despite claiming that its "main mission" was to assist in achieving a comprehensive, long-lasting political resolution to the Transdnistria conflict.

A wide range of other human rights issues, including democracy, minority rights, and media freedom, were also covered under the mission. These negotiations appeared to be moving in the right direction until the adoption of the customs laws in 2006, year in which the established an office in Chisinau. Additionally, in 2005, the European Council Secretariat designated an EU Special Representative to support democratic transformation in Moldova, interact with Transnistria, and take part in the "5+2" discussions²⁸⁹. 17 members of the Transnistrian

²⁸⁸ Protsyk, Oleh. *Moldova's Dilemmas in Democratizing and Reintegrating Transnistria*. *Problems of Post-Communism* 53(4). July 2006. Pages 29-41.

²⁸⁹ European Council. *Appointment of an EU Special Representative for Moldova*. 7023/05 (Presse 53). March 23, 2005.

leadership were already subject to an EU visa restriction for impeding settlement attempts in 2003, and the US joined this move²⁹⁰.

Cross-border trafficking became somewhat more transparent after the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) was established in Moldova and Ukraine in December 2005. EUBAM functions through training and advising, however lacking an executive authority. Nevertheless, it lessened the potential for smuggling along the Transnistrian portion of the Ukrainian border. EUBAM has mostly been successful in assisting the Moldovan and Ukrainian governments in managing trade into and out of Transnistria. Thus, it has forced Transnistrian enterprises to turn their attention to Chisinau, influencing both the political environment and the commercial climate.²⁹¹

After Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the Republic of Moldova became the EU's closest neighbor, making it difficult to ignore the Transnistrian issue any longer. From that moment on, the European Union has engaged in conflict resolution in many ways. A few of these actions have aided in the "economic interdependence" of between Transnistria and Moldova. On the political front, on the contrary, there hasn't been much development; the only forms of collaboration with the EU that Transnistria's government had previously accepted were those involving humanitarian aid, social security, healthcare, and the environment. In response, the EU exercised caution and shied away from all political issues in order to avoid upsetting the Tiraspol authorities.

Nevertheless, the European Union has made a significant contribution to conflict resolution through its financial backing of numerous programs and initiatives. By promoting and sponsoring initiatives on Confidence Building Measures (CBM), which include social and humanitarian programs, corporate growth, public and civil society capacity-building, the European Union has actively promoted a gradual rapprochement of the two parties in the war.²⁹² (Natalya Belitser, 2015)

Moreover, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which the EU Commission started in 2004 involving 16 partner countries in the east and south, was later renamed the Eastern

²⁹⁰ European Council. *Moldova: Council Adopts Restrictive Measures against the Transnistrian Leadership*. 6679/03 (Presse 56). February 27, 2003.

²⁹¹ Kurowska, Xymena and Tallis, Benjamin. *EU Border Assistance Mission: Beyond Border Monitoring?* *European Foreign Affairs Review* 14, no. 1. February 1, 2009. Pages 47–54.

²⁹² Belitser, Natalia. "Frozen conflicts" in Europe. *The Transnistrian conflict*. 2015. Pages 48-51.

Partnership in 2009 to include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The ENP's major goal was to encourage a ring of allies surrounding the EU by advocating for security through European democratic principles and ideals that appeared to be driven by a moral and philanthropic vision in response to expansion fatigue and growing absorption incapacity within the union. The six post-communist partner states would not be eligible for membership in the ENP, but the strategic partnership would still provide integration and cooperation, protecting regional democracy and security²⁹³.

By negotiating association agreements under the ENP framework, three of the six ENP states (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) have increased their level of integration with the EU in 2015. The ENP might be viewed as a huge success from that perspective. The results obtained by the ENP do have a few issues, though. First, promoting democracy in the neighborhood was one of the ENP's main goals. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, in contrast hand, have not witnessed democratic advancement since the middle of the 2000s, and the remaining partner states are authoritarian in nature. Second, the EU's inability to support democratization in the three partner states described above has escalated security concerns with Russia as well as left the three states' security issues unresolved. In addition to the EU's failure to address the cold and hot conflicts with separatist regions in partner countries, the simultaneous push for ENP has also harmed security ties with Moscow and the pro-Russian breakaway regions. The dispute between the government of Moldova and the separatist province of Transnistria in Moldova doesn't appear to have an immediate resolution; in fact, Transnistria may end up becoming the next region that Russia annexes. In conclusion, the EU's goal of promoting security through democracy in the areas around it has not been successful. The security situation is worse now than it was prior to the commencement of the ENP, despite the fact that the eastern neighborhood has made virtually little democratic progress. Because of this, one can also doubt the EU's capacity to act as a normative force in the region.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ European Union. Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) – 2017-2020: Single Support Framework for EU support to Moldova (2017-2020).

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/moldova_c_2017_6091_annex_en.pdf (last access November 25, 2022)

²⁹⁴ Habdank-Kończowska, Sylvana. Nations in Transit 2015: Democracy on the Defensive in Europe and Eurasia. Freedom House. June 22, 2015.

Present Situation

In an effort to advance conflict management, every effort failed by 2015. An unpleasant consequence like this has a wide range of causes. Among them, the European Union's focus was diverted from this specific issue by the financial and economic crisis, particularly in the Euro zone. As a matter of fact, between 2004 and 2005, when all action plans were developed, and 2013 and 2014, when association agreements were signed, there were several years of EU democracy promotion under the ENP, yet there were little indications of institutional progress toward democracy. (i.e., regarding elections, civil society, local and democratic governance, free media, the fight against corruption, and judicial independence). The three partner nations that have ratified association agreements with the EU (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia) have actually been designated as hybrid or transitional regimes by the Freedom House. Furthermore, none of the hybrid or transitional states have come near to qualifying as fully or partially consolidated democracies²⁹⁵. This pattern indicates that the ENP's democratic goals for the EU were unsuccessful. This is not to say that the EU has not supported democratic reforms in the region. In fact, if the EU had not implemented the ENP, the democratic situation might have gotten worse, but rather that the EU has fallen short of the ENP's stated goals for democratization. It also indicates that the EU's attempt to establish itself as a dominant normative force in the region's east has been unsuccessful.

Although the EU attempted to end the Transnistria conflict by integrating it into Moldova instead, the ENP has not resulted in any advancement. On the other hand, a new round of controversy has been sparked by the new ENP association agreement with Moldova. The EU, Moldova, and Russia have been at odds over Transnistria ever since the EU and Moldova signed their association agreement, which triggered Russian responses against Moldova's decision to pursue deeper EU integration. It also provoked echoes from Transnistria, who looked for closer relations with Russia.²⁹⁶

As a demonstration to that, in the 2013 progress report, it was stated that

Little development was seen in the Transnistrian conflict resolution process. Overall, tensions increased on the ground, while the continuation of regular talks in the 5 + 2

²⁹⁵ Freedom House, "Nations in transit data". <https://www.freedomhouse.org/reporttypes/nations-transit#.VV3Shfmgrxp>. (Accessed November 25, 2022).

²⁹⁶ Nilsson, Martin and Silander, Daniel. Democracy and Security in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood? Assessing the ENP in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. *Democracy and Security*. Vol. 12, No. 1. March 2016. Pages 44-61.

*format, which followed the 'small steps' tactics, failed to tangibly improve the situation for people caught in the conflict.*²⁹⁷

The likelihood of a concerted effort supported by the EU and US was significantly reduced by the political unrest in Ukraine and the political crisis in the Republic of Moldova between February and May 2013. The Ukrainian unrest from 2013 to 2015 raised new worries regarding Transnistria. There were hopes that recognition of an independent Transnistria would come after Russia's takeover of Crimea. However, no actions were taken in this direction. The main reason for anxiety about Transnistria was the suspected presumptive goal of Moscow to establish a broad belt of Russian-controlled regions in Southern and Eastern Ukraine bordering the Transnistrian section of the Ukraine-Moldova border. If this belt had been put into place, Transnistria would have become an essential component of the wider geopolitical project known as "Novorossia." Transnistrian responses to the Ukrainian crisis, however, turned out to be considerably more prudent and realistic than expected. Despite their formal requests, Donetsk, and Lugansk's two self-declared republics were not recognized by Tiraspol. Additionally, certain former Transnistrian officials were not permitted to join the Ukrainian insurgents. Tiraspol also vehemently objected to the Ukrainian media's portrayal of Transnistria as Ukraine's enemy. The international efforts to end the Transnistrian conflict came to a standstill as a result of the occurrences in neighboring Moldova and Ukraine's connections with the European Union, which made Transnistria's situation even more precarious than ever before.²⁹⁸

In addition, Russia increased financial and humanitarian aid to Transnistria's destitute population and faltering economy, apart from a considerable political support previously provided. For Transnistria to survive, Russia's assistance proved crucial, and it also advanced the cause of Eurasian integration on the right bank of the Nistru River. In contrast to a decline in support for integration with the European Union, which was pushed by the

²⁹⁷ European Union. Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) – 2017-2020: Single Support Framework for EU support to Moldova (2017-2020).

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/moldova_c_2017_6091_annex_en.pdf (last access November 25, 2022)

²⁹⁸ Belitser, Natalya. Молдавський сепаратизм кремлівської закваски. GLAVCOM. June 30, 2014.

Moldovan government and political elites, there has been a rise in support for joining the Russia-led Customs Union and, in view, the Eurasian Economic Union.

Transnistria was understood widely as a burden that prevented Moldova from "Europeanizing" and eventually joining the EU. Numerous "unionist" groups and campaigns for the union of Moldova with Romania were especially harmful to the prospects for reintegration. These attempts sparked fierce opposition in Transnistria and served as a compelling justification against reintegration. Younger generations of Transnistrians in particular perceived reintegration as a natural solution to ongoing suspicions, uncertainty, and perceived threats rather than as something imposed or dangerous through horizontal "people-to-people" contacts, if NGOs, professionals, economic, and cultural agents help would have been implemented.²⁹⁹

The EU Council responded by issuing its conclusions on Moldova on February 15, 2016, outlining a number of unresolved issues and important reform priorities that needed to be addressed, including combating systemic corruption and the politization of governmental institutions as well as improving financial sector regulation. The administration created a roadmap of key reform activities to solve those problems. While some of the legislative actions outlined in the roadmap have been implemented, the reform process ought to have continued, with an emphasis on the genuine implementation of laws and policies meant to improve the lives of individuals. A national plan for implementing the Association Agreement/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement 2017–2019 was agreed by the government in December 2016. The 2017–2019 Association Agenda's priority actions were linked to the priorities and indicative financial support allocations that were meant to be part of the Single Support Framework (SSF)³⁰⁰.

After a decade of EU democracy promotion toward the six post-communist partner states, there are few signs of democratic progress in the neighboring region. Since the ENP was launched, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine have seen very limited democratic progress, while the

²⁹⁹ Socor, Vladimir. Russia Trips up Ukraine's OSCE Chairmanship in Transnistria. Cit.

³⁰⁰ European Union. Programming of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) – 2017-2020: Single Support Framework for EU support to Moldova (2017-2020).

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/moldova_c_2017_6091_annex_en.pdf (last access November 25, 2022)

democratic record in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus has reversed under growing authoritarianism. Although it is possible that the democratic trajectory of these countries could have been even worse without the EU partnership, it is argued that the EU has failed to achieve the democratic objective as set out in the ENP, and that the ENP on democratization has had limited impact, if any. Second, it is also argued that the EU's policy to promote security and integration through democratization, has resulted in destabilization in three partner states that has jeopardized European security. The military conflicts in Ukraine and Georgia and the political tension in Moldova of the 1990s and 2000 are a consequence of the EU's push for democracy in the region and Russia's reactions and striving for regional hegemonic influence. The EU's ambition to expand its democratic peace zone has contributed to, from an EU perspective, unexpected regional hegemonic reactions from Russia and from pro-Russian interests within partner states. The EU failed to foresee how the ENP would lead to Russian reactions and to predict the upcoming security situation. Overall, while the ENP has aimed for security through democracy in neighboring states, the EU now faces an undemocratized and insecure eastern neighborhood, which raises concerns over its ability to achieve democratic peace in greater Europe.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ Gower, Jackie and Timmins, Graham. The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood. *Europe-Asia Studies*. Vol. 61, Issue. 10. December 2009. Pages 1685-1687.

Moldova in Putin's speeches

Besides its military influence, as Transnistria's principal benefactor and an advocate for a special status within Moldova, Russia has a second, and more political lever over the region. Russia sees itself as the primary defender of Transnistria's interests both in relation to Chisinau and on the global political scene, despite being an official mediator within the 5+2 process. For Tiraspol, which has frequently but ineffectively pleaded with Russia to recognize its independence and even to someday incorporate with the Russian Federation, this support is by no means absolute and at times discouraging³⁰². However, Russia was unlikely able to ultimately prevent Transnistria's reintegration with Moldova through political means alone, despite its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, its function as a 5+2 mediator, and its control over the de facto Transnistrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its chief negotiator Ignatieff.³⁰³

Starting from the early 2000s, President Putin has consistently dealt with the former Soviet area, emphasizing a shared past as something that will provide the foundation for continued and stronger ties that will enable Russia and the former Soviet Union to develop together, indirectly highlighting the fact that the proper road to take is the one related to Russia and not to the European Union. An example is given through this excerpt of a speech that Russian President addressed to the Moldovan one Petru Lucinschi, during the commemoration of the 55th anniversary of the CIS group:

*I am convinced that **the memory of the military feats and heroism of the defenders of our fatherland** will forever serve as a solid foundation for furthering friendly ties between the peoples of Russia and Moldova. I know for sure that the consistent development of multi-faceted and mutually beneficial Russian-Moldovan relations will*

³⁰² Transnistria held an unrecognized referendum in 2006 in which 98% voted for independence and 'potential future integration' with the Russian Federation. Transnistrian 'Minister of Foreign Affairs' Ignatieff reaffirmed this 'external vector' in a statement on 22 July 2022, which got a lukewarm response from Kremlin spokesperson Peskov. See <https://Odesa-journal.com/transnistria-announced-plans-to-becomepart-of-russia-how-moldova-and-russia-reacted/>

³⁰³ Deen, Bob and Zweers, Wouter. Walking the tightrope towards the EU Report: Moldova's vulnerabilities amid war in Ukraine Report. Clingendael Institute. September 2022. Pages 27-29.

*embody the aspirations of our fathers and grandfathers who gave their lives in the struggle against Nazism.*³⁰⁴

However, although an alliance with Moscow was always presented as the wisest course of action, Russia was never merely portrayed as a savior by President Putin. Moscow is repeatedly described as a nation that is protecting and caring when dealing with the former Soviet Union. However, it also pretends active collaboration and a stable political, social, and military organization in exchange for assistance. In the year 2000, when questioned about the Istanbul Summit's decision to withdraw Russian troops from Transdniestria (a decision that should have been implemented by 2003 but that Russia never observed³⁰⁵) and the presence of Russian bases in Moldova in that same year, President Putin provided the following response:

*It is in the national interests of Russia to see Moldova as a self-sufficient, territorially integral, and independent state. We will work toward that end because Russia needs such a Moldova. Russia expects that region to be stable. It meets the economic and political interests of the Russian state.*³⁰⁶.

Presidents of the break-away regions never missed the chance to underline the value of Russian support in handling the resolution of complex crises that impact their country when given the opportunity to do so (both during interviews and during direct meeting with President Putin). One of the various examples of this gratitude towards Moscow is given by a President Voronin's answer to a question that was posed to him in 2001 during a double interview.

We see Russia as a guarantor of the process of political settlement of the Transdnestr problem. We appreciate Russia's position on the issue whereby the settlement can only be based on the principles of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova. The Russian position is extremely important for us.

³⁰⁴ President Vladimir Putin congratulated CIS heads of state on the 55th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War. May 9, 2000. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38136>

³⁰⁵ The Kennan Institute: The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Occasional Paper #284 The 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit Decisions on Moldova and Georgia: Prospects for Implementation. Page 6. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/19098/OP284.pdf>

³⁰⁶ News Conference on the Results of the Russian-Moldovan Talks. June 17, 2000. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24217>

*The Treaty seals an important provision confirming the right of our citizens to freely choose the language of communication, the right to education and training in accordance with international standards.*³⁰⁷

In 2003, following the Transnistria situation, Russia advanced a memorandum (the Kozak memorandum) in order to solve the dispute. This summit, following President Putin's speech, is not only crucial for Georgia, it is crucial for Russia as well: "Political regulation of the Transdnester conflict would also remove the final obstacles to Russia fulfilling its international commitments". In a meeting with the Government Members in November, in fact, President Putin introduced the initiative in this way:

*On my instructions, the Russian Foreign Ministry officially proposed a Russian plan for regulating the situation in Transdnester. We think that this will give a serious impulse to approving a new constitution for Moldova that would really reunite the state and end the many years of confrontation that have brought suffering to ordinary people, including the tens of thousands of Russian citizens living there. **Political regulation of the Transdnester conflict would also remove the final obstacles to Russia fulfilling its international commitments.***³⁰⁸.

According to this excerpt, President Putin's position on the issue is rather obvious: stabilizing the situation is the key objective, not so much for the break-away regions or Moldova itself, but for Russian people and Russia's foreign affairs. Indeed, as it will be outlined during this chapter, President Putin never mentioned the Moldovan people while dealing with security or stabilization concerns. He limits itself to deal with the relations with Moldova and Russia or with the Russian people/population, meaning the ones from the separatist regions that received a Russian passport. Giving them this type of document is in fact the first step that the Kremlin follows while dealing with frozen conflict situation. In this way, Russia feels responsible for the safeguard of its nationals and has, hence, a kind of excuse to intervene.

³⁰⁷ Excerpts from the Transcript of a Joint Press Conference with President Vladimir Voronin of Moldova. November 19, 2001. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21405>

³⁰⁸ Opening Remarks at a Meeting with the Government Members. November 17, 2003. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22208>

While emphasizing his predilection for the people leaving in Transnistria, however, President Putin repeatedly emphasized the significance of relations between Moldova and Russia, as well as the need to maintain them. This need is, however, emphasized more for the Moldovan part “we should certainly act as guarantors of the agreements that can and should eventually emerge in order to resolve this problem”. In October 2017, during a meeting with Moldovan President Igor Dodon for the celebration of the 25th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Moscow and Chisinau, for example, President Putin stated:

*We can see that the process is not smooth, but both the people of Moldova and the people of the Russian Federation are interested in a positive outcome. This was done not preemptively, so to speak, but to support your efforts to normalize Russian-Moldovan relations. In the future, we will definitely be building our economic ties proceeding from the level of our political engagement. As of now, for our part, we will also do our best to resolve the Transnistria conflict; **we should certainly act as guarantors of the agreements that can and should eventually emerge in order to resolve this problem once and for all in the interest of the people living on that territory**³⁰⁹.*

Few months later, in January, President Putin also underlined once again, with a slightly intimidatory manner, the necessity of Moldova to uphold its commitments to continue receiving assistance from Russia. It did so, by emphasizing that the guilt for the cessation of the settlement of the conflict was all Moldovans fault: “the Moldovan authorities abruptly changed their mind then, and the plan drafted by all the parties to this process fell through”. The only solution, once again, seems to rely on Russian aid.

*In 2003, we came as close as ever to reaching a final settlement to this issue. Unfortunately, **the Moldovan authorities abruptly changed their mind then, and the plan drafted by all the parties to this process fell through**. I hope very much that we will find a compromise solution taking into account the interests of all the people who live in that region. If such a compromise is found – and it can be found only among*

³⁰⁹ Vladimir Putin meeting with President of Moldova Igor Dodon in Sochi. October 10, 2017. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55812>

*Moldova and Transnistria – we will definitely act as guarantors of the fulfilment of all agreements that are made*³¹⁰.

This excerpt makes clear that Moscow still didn't manage to get past the events of 2003. The Kremlin responded directly by imposing a number of economic and political sanctions that put the harmony of the two nations' relations in jeopardy. As a result, the Kozak memorandum was created that same year in a bid to resolve the issue, although it had limited success. Additionally, during the same meeting, President Putin reminded President Dodon that Moldova's movement toward Europe presents a serious issue for Russia (“there are certain risks for us, similar to the risks that we faced after a similar document was signed between Ukraine and the European Union”). The Kremlin has consistently emphasized how dangerous this issue is for the security of Russia and its people:

Much will depend on how Moldova will build its relations with the European Union. There are certain risks for us, similar to the risks that we faced after a similar document was signed between Ukraine and the European Union.

*Needless to say, we in Russia are not indifferent to the future Moldovan Parliament because it forms the country's Government and **the future development of Russia-Moldova relations will largely depend on this**, as well as the future Government's support of the initiatives made by the President of Moldova on the development of our bilateral ties*³¹¹.

During a SCO Heads of State Council meeting, as a matter of fact, President Putin expressed the danger represented by Western interventions into the economy or politics of the SCO countries. Dealing with the situation in Belarus, he openly stated that “We regard this as unacceptable that external forces are trying to enforce any decisions”, making it clear that “foreign interference” is a severe menace for Russia. Reading between the lines, it may be argued that Moscow will deal with this threat with an active response, leaving room for a possible threat to Moldova and Western nations:

³¹⁰ Joint news conference with President of Moldova Igor Dodon. January 17, 2017. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>

³¹¹ Joint news conference with President of Moldova Igor Dodon. January 17, 2017. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>

*One more open challenge to our common security is the increased number of attempts of direct **foreign interference** in the internal affairs of states that are involved in SCO activities. I am referring to the blatant infringement on sovereignty, attempts to split societies, change the countries' path of development and sever the existing political, economic and humanitarian ties that took centuries to develop. **We regard this as unacceptable that external forces are trying to enforce any decisions on the Belarusian people. The same is true of the recent developments in Kyrgyzstan and the unfolding internal political fighting in Moldova**³¹².*

In December 2020, in reference to the detrimental effects that Western nations could have on the post-Soviet region, President Putin let the before mentioned possible menace become less veiled stating “this problem must be resolved”. Before saying that, however, the Russian President underlined once again that the settlement in Transnistria didn't become reality solely by fault of Western countries (“at the last moment, representatives of Western countries put pressure on him, too, and he refused, and withdrew from the previous agreements, and the solution of the Transnistrian issue was postponed indefinitely”):

*We have heard representatives of Western countries tell us we need to pull out. We support this, and we were already very close to that with former President Voronin, but **at the last moment, representatives of Western countries put pressure on him, too, and he refused, and withdrew from the previous agreements, and the solution of the Transnistrian issue was postponed indefinitely.** We do not know why. Later, I asked my colleagues from the European Union, “Why did you do this?” – “Well, it just happened.”*

*I suggest we do not go into detail now, but sooner or later, **this problem must be resolved***³¹³.

³¹² Vladimir Putin chaired a videoconference meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Heads of State Council. November 10, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64385>

³¹³ Putin, Vladimir. Vladimir Putin's annual news conference: The President of Russia held his annual news conference. Novo-Ogaryovo [speech transcript]. December 17, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64671>

Concerning the political aspect, in November 2020, after the election of President Maia Sandu, President Putin took the chance to reiterate the need (if not to some extent the necessity for Moldova) to maintain a stable cooperation between the two countries in a somewhat aggressive manner by saying “I expect that your service as the head of state will contribute to the constructive development of relations between our two countries”.

“I expect that your service as the head of state will contribute to the constructive development of relations between our two countries. This would undoubtedly meet the fundamental interests of the peoples of both Russia and Moldova”³¹⁴.

The third, still significant but rapidly waning impact of Russia is its crucial involvement in the economy of Transnistria through its direct and indirect subsidies. Natural gas, which Russia again delivers to Transnistria at a very modest price, is the main source of leverage (“between 2007 and 2016, the separatist region received a USD 6 billion “gas subsidy,” out of which USD 1.3 billion was converted into budgetary funds”³¹⁵). Transnistria runs its heavy, potentially noncompetitive industries, including the MMZ metallurgical plant in Rîbnița, on this inexpensive gas. In addition, Russia directly finances Tiraspol's security forces and law enforcement organizations as humanitarian aid. Without Russian assistance, Transnistria's aided economy would probably collapse, making it difficult for the de facto authorities to balance their budget.³¹⁶

In relation to this, in 2006, during a joint conference with President Voronin, President Putin discussed “the terms” under which Moldovan exports could enter the Russian market. In fact, after some economic limitations and the (failure of the) Kozak Memorandum, Moldovan products were outlawed as a result of the latter government's unexpectedly quick swift (see the relative chapter, page 104). Russian market was now once again open, but with specific controls that needed to be implemented, alluding to the fact that thanks to these restrictions “no counterfeit produce enters the market”, almost accusing the Moldovan government of

³¹⁴ Vladimir Putin congratulated Maia Sandu on her victory in the presidential election in the Republic of Moldova. November 16, 2020. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64423>

³¹⁵ Tofilat, Sergiu and Parlicov, Victor. Russian gas and the financing of separatism in Moldovan economy. Free Russia. The Kremlin's Influence Quarterly, Issue 2. August 14, 2020. Page 4.

³¹⁶ Calus, Kamil. An aided economy. The characteristics of the Transnistrian economic model. Centre for Eastern Studies. Report number 108. May 16, 2013. Pages 4-5.

fraudulent actions. Once again, nevertheless, Mr. Putin didn't miss the chance to make Russian assistance look as something necessary for the prosperity of the Moldovan government:

*Regarding agricultural produce, specialists in both countries, Moldovan and Russian experts, have carried out a great amount of work together on **quality controls and certifying produce**. We have agreed to resume imports of meat and wine from Moldova. As a first step in organising imports of Moldovan wine on the Russian market, we have agreed to follow **the one-window principle**, that is, imports will come through a **specialised warehouse**, through **specialised companies**, in order to follow the product from start to finish and ensure that **no counterfeit produce enters the market**³¹⁷.*

During a 2017 meeting, moreover, even when dealing with economy deals and assistance, President Putin didn't lose the opportunity to emphasize that Moscow does not support Moldova's European tendency ("Moldova's mutually beneficial ties with Russia deteriorated due to attempts to boost the republic's rapprochement with the European Union"). Nevertheless, Moscow showed itself prepared to address the negative effects that the rapprochement (unavoidably) brought about: "the bilateral intergovernmental commission is now working to remedy this situation":

Moldova's mutually beneficial ties with Russia deteriorated due to attempts to boost the republic's rapprochement with the European Union. As a result, Moldovan goods have almost lost their traditional place in Russia and have not gained a foothold in other markets. The bilateral intergovernmental commission is now working to remedy this situation.³¹⁸

Once Moldova moved towards a greater collaboration with Russia the following year, in fact, President Putin emphasized the upturns for Moldovan economy, thanks to the vitalness of Russian help:

³¹⁷ Press Statements following Meeting with President of Moldova Vladimir Voronin. November 28, 2006. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23926>

³¹⁸ Joint news conference with President of Moldova Igor Dodon. January 17, 2017 <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53744>

*Thanks to our personal efforts, the situation has been improving recently, especially in terms of trade and economic relations. Many new winemaking and agricultural companies work specifically in the Russian market*³¹⁹.

Few months later, Mr. Putin gave the data supporting these improvements during a meeting with President Dodon:

*In just 11 months of 2018, our trade grew by almost 29.5 percent, reaching a total of \$1.38 billion – more than in the whole of 2017. At your request, we took additional decisions concerning fruit and vegetable and wine products. We also took another decision concerning labor migration to support those who never seriously violated Russia’s migration laws*³²⁰.

Eventually, in 2020, President Putin dealt with Russian assistance to Moldova, an assistance that Moldova specifically asked (“at your request, we have allocated the required funds”). It is clearer and clearer, looking at the example provided by this and the other transcripts, how Mr. Putin urges to exhibit and prove the necessity of Moldova to maintain a bilateral relation with Russia, which is the only option that would make its economy grow (contrary to the West).

*We know that this year Moldova has faced economic problems, not to mention the coronavirus. At your request, we have allocated the required funds, up to a total of half a billion rubles, as humanitarian aid with a view to supplying the hardest hit companies with diesel fuel as you asked us. We expect you to send us a list of companies that need this support in the first place. With regard to the coronavirus, as you may be aware, we supplied Moldova, also at your request, with 15,000 test kits. We are prepared to continue to work together to support you and the citizens of Moldova who are facing this pandemic.*³²¹

³¹⁹ Vladimir Putin met with President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon who arrived in Russia on an official visit, to discuss Russia-Moldova interaction in trade, the economy and culture, as well as important regional issues. October 31, 2018. <http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59006>

³²⁰ Vladimir Putin met in the Kremlin with President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon, who is in Russia on a working visit. January 30, 2019. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59752>

³²¹ Vladimir Putin had a videoconference meeting with President of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon. September 28, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64102>

The following month, supporting this stance, when dealing with Moldovan exports, he added that “other sectors of the economy are so closely tied to Russia that they simply cannot exist without it”.

*We can see the developments related to Moldova, and we know the Moldovan people’s needs for promoting democracy and economy. But who is buying Moldovan wine? Will France buy Moldovan wine? Who needs it in the European markets? They have more than enough of their own. This is not just about wine. **Other sectors of the economy are so closely tied to Russia that they simply cannot exist without it, at least for now. They can only sell their products in Russia.***³²².

³²² Putin, Vladimir. Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club: Vladimir Putin took part, via videoconference, in the final plenary session of the 17th Annual Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club. [speech transcript]. Novo-Ogaryovo. October 22, 2020. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64261>

Conclusion

Since 1989, Moldova's fight for independence has been centered on geopolitics and national identity. It got involved in a separatist war between 1990 and 1992, rejected the notion of joining Romania in 1994, and ultimately found itself on the dividing line between Southeast Europe and the post-Soviet region. Today, Moldova is a country with a limited sense of national identity that is more of a power-political construct than an ethnocultural reality³²³. Transnistria is not an exception to this rule. It has been independent for thirty years, although it has not yet been reintegrated into Moldova, which lacks the required allure in terms of politics, economy, or culture, which sustains the conflict. Despite the latter generally being more tolerant of Transnistria than other parent states in a separatist dispute (giving it greater room for maneuver), its internal issues are evident in the absence of a clear, cohesive strategy for reintegrating Transnistria.³²⁴

The Russian Federation's partnership with the parastatal Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic has numerous benefits for Russia's standing in geopolitics, but it also presents a challenge for future regional security. While Transnistrians look to Russia for support and have a parallel legal system based on the Russian one, the Republic of Moldova has an Association Agreement with the EU and has harmonized several laws with EU standards. Moscow supports the development of this entity's statehood on a number of fronts, including by providing significant financial support and stationing Russian Army forces there.³²⁵

As a matter of fact, due to historical, cultural, and educational ties, the prevalence of Russian media, and the fact that the majority of people living in the PMR have Russian passports, Russia does have a "soft power" lever on Transnistria and its inhabitants. The majority of Transnistrians attend schools that are recognized by Russia and include substantial portions of the Russian curriculum. As a consequence, young Transnistrian school and university graduates struggled for years to obtain employment and further their education in Moldova or western Europe, in part because their diplomas were not officially recognized. Although some

³²³ Baar, Vladimir and Jakubek, Daniel. Divided National Identity in Moldova. *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*. Volume 11, Issue 1. 2017. Pages 88-90.

³²⁴ Berg, Eiki and Vits, Kristel. Transnistria's European Drive: A Means to What End? *Geopolitics* 2022. Vol. 27, Issue. 3. 2020. Pages 854-857.

³²⁵ Miarka, Agnieszka Aleksandra. Para-states as an instrument for strengthening Russia's position - the case of Transnistria. *Journal of Strategic Security*. Vol. 13, No. 2. 2020. Pages 1-18.

of these challenges have been somewhat overcome, for many people, Russia continues to be the "default option" allowing Transnistrians to work and study without restriction. Russia has a long-lasting and occasionally underappreciated impact over the people of Transnistria thanks to its "soft power" and particularly its control over the country's educational system.

In fact, after a meeting with President Voronin of Moldova in 2001, the two presidents signed a bilateral agreement on friendship and collaboration. Regarding Moldova's territorial integrity and sovereignty, the parties backed a political solution to the Transdnestr conflict. The agreement upheld the residents of Russia and Moldova's freedom to communicate and receive an education in their native tongues, or to choose the other if willing to do so. The Moldovan party was required by national law to establish circumstances for Russian instruction in Moldova, taking into account the significance and role of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space³²⁶. Moreover, the EU's visa liberalization process, which began in 2014, somewhat offsets this influence by allowing Transnistrian citizens, many of whom hold Moldovan passports, to enter the EU.³²⁷

Due to the aid given, the people of Transnistria are uneasy about reintegrating the parastatal state into Moldova, which furthers Russia's political line of maintaining Moldova inside its influence sphere. Therefore, every effort is made to reduce Western participation in this region, which poses a threat to the Russian Federation's strategic interests. One tool for downplaying the significance of Western civilization and diminishing the aspirations of post-Soviet republics to join the EU and NATO is fostering cordial relations with Transnistria. These interventions are a facet of the geopolitical power struggle between the West and Russia.³²⁸

Moreover, Russia's recognition of the "People's Republics" in Donetsk in February 2022, along with the invasion that followed, which at first moved swiftly west along the southern coast of Ukraine in the direction of Odesa, sparked intense feelings in both the right-bank Moldova and the breakaway region of Transnistria. There was widespread speculation that Russia may attempt to link its so-called "land bridge" from Transnistria to Crimea and utilize its substantial military force there to invade and annex certain regions of Ukraine. These rumors were initially

³²⁶ President Vladimir Putin held talks with Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin. November 19, 2001. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/41534>

³²⁷ Devyatkov, Andrey. Never Sans Sheriff: Consolidating Power in Transdnestria. Carnegie Moscow: Eurasia in Transition. August 7, 2017.

³²⁸Op. cit. Miarka, Agnieszka Aleksandra. Pages 1-18.

sparked by westward arrows on a Russian military map that Belarusian ruler Lukashenko displayed, but they were further stoked by comments made to this extent by the Russian general Minnekayev in April³²⁹. This served as a reminder that one of Europe's longest-running conflicts is far from "frozen," that there continue to be Russian troops stationed on Moldovan soil, and that Transnistria poses a security threat to both Ukraine and Moldova.³³⁰

As Friesendorf and Wolff highlight, almost everyone agrees that the current geopolitical environment makes it unlikely that the 5+2 negotiations will result in meaningful outcomes any time soon. The OSCE is going through an existential crisis as it grapples with the more general issue of Russia's place within the organization, while Ukraine and Russia, two of the mediators, are effectively at war with one another. Though it is widely believed that the format is "dead," very few people believe that a viable alternative is on the horizon for multilateral negotiations³³¹.

All of this suggests that it might be hard for the EU to attract Transnistrians, especially given that its initiatives currently mostly benefit the corporate elites, whose support is essential for the regime, while the general public does not fully enjoy the benefits. The traditional function of Transnistria as a "bridgehead" for controlling Moldova and preventing it from advancing closer to the European Union may now be slightly adopting the form of a "bridge," which might put Russia in an uncomfortable position.³³²

As a matter of fact, the majority of exports from the "Left Bank," as Moldovans refer to Transnistria, are delivered to the EU, not the Eurasian Economic Union, which is dominated by Russia. This is so that Transnistria can take advantage of the conditions of Chisinau's 2014 Association Agreement with the EU³³³, provided that Transnistrian businesses register in

³²⁹ BBC News. Ukraine war: Russia aiming for full control of south, commander says. April 23, 2022.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61188943>

See also: The Guardian. Russian commander suggests plan is for permanent occupation of south Ukraine. April 22, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/apr/22/ukraine-south-occupation-russian-military-chief-rustam-minnekayev>

³³⁰ Op. cit. Deen, Bob and Zweers, Wouter. Page 21.

³³¹ Cornelius Friesendorf and Stefan Wolff, "Options for Dealing with Russia in the OSCE," Security and Human Rights Monitor, May 11, 2022.

³³² Berg, Eiki and Vits, Kristel. Transnistria's European Drive: A Means to What End? Geopolitics 2022. Vol. 27, Issue. 3. 2020. Pages 866–867.

³³³ Official Journal of the European Union. ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova,

Chisinau. The manner in which Transnistria might gain from access to EU markets while avoiding acceptance of EU rules in areas like human rights are highlighted by this selective recognition of Moldovan sovereignty. In spite of the fact that it harms regular people on both banks, maintaining the status quo is in the economic interests of some political and business elites on both sides. The conflict is unlikely to turn violent as long as these interests persist and Russia continues to support the separatist administration, but stability and peace are also out of reach.³³⁴

of the other part. Articles 28, 43, 203. Pages 12, 15, 59-60. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(01\)&from=en](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(01)&from=en)

³³⁴ Boduszynski, P. Mieczyslaw and Lamont, K. Christopher. Why Ukraine's Future Could Look a Lot Like Moldova: Corruption, Stagnation, and Division. Foreign Affairs. November 27, 2017

6. Comparative and Quantitative Discourse Analysis Concerning Frozen Conflicts

In this chapter a comparative and quantitative discourse analysis between the Frozen Conflicts situation will be presented. Firstly, an outlook of the most important words that have been selected will be presented. Secondly, schemes regarding keywords, their frequency and dispersion throughout the corpus of texts, their collocation through time, as well as correlation of specific words will be analyzed. Moreover, a quick analysis will also be provided concerning a more specific aspect for each individual case, namely the quantity of words that are composed of a number of letters ranging from 1 to 12. This will help us understand how complex the discourses have been to explain each conflict situation to the public or to Presidents of the separatist regions. Lastly, it should be noted that this research work has been possible thanks to the employment of the software Wordsmith, which has been presented in chapter 3.

The aim of this section is to trace some differences between the political speeches that have been collected from early 2000's to 2022 across Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Thus, it will be possible to understand in which manner the Presidential speeches and meetings have changed through time and across contexts. Actually, this section and the relative tables were the starting point of the linguistic analysis. Thanks to this quantitative analysis, a qualitative one (that has already been presented and discussed in chapters 4 to 7) was possible.

What is interesting to notice in the first instance is that all the texts that have been collected are in English language. The reason behind this decision is that the official site of the Kremlin³³⁵ provides translation of all the speeches and meetings in English, whereas not all the text are presented in the original language, Russian. This issue gives us already an important information regarding the possible aim of these data: the Kremlin itself might want the international community to have direct accessibility to the data, using it as some sort of propaganda itself.

³³⁵ <http://en.kremlin.ru/>

WordLists

In this introductory section, all the most intriguing words for the analysis will be presented in four lists: one general, one Ukrainian, one Moldovan, and one Georgian. For this linguistic analysis a total of 108 tokens out of 7732 (which in their turn are sorted in 5.253 types) has been chosen because of their nature and significance. By doing this, the analysis will be more concentrated on terms that are connected to conflict situations, both positively and negatively. Moreover, they are listed in the tables below together with information about their frequency in the general corpus, the percentage of occurrence related to each term, and their dispersion ratio. Considering the dispersion ratio, for a word list or for clusters computed from a WordList index, dispersion is calculated using the same formula as for a dispersion plot in Concord. It divides the corpus into a series of divisions (the default is 8), and for each word, it calculates how the term is distributed over the entire collection of texts. As it operates, it must allot some memory to the divisions.³³⁶

In order to make the reading of this section clearer and simpler, the words that are common to every former-soviet republic will be presented in black, whereas the ones that are characteristic of either one or just two conflict situations will be presented in blue. Additionally, for the same reason, only the words with a frequency of more than 10 will be displayed. As already mentioned above, when looking at these tables it is important to understand that the whole linguistic investigation, including the qualitative one of the previous chapters, started from them:

General WordList			
Word	Frequency	%	Dispersion
RUSSIA	325	0,57	0,76
PEOPLE	290	0,510824	0,750763118
RUSSIAN	271	0,477356	0,724045932
UKRAINE	196	0,345247	0,657496631
GEORGIA	144	0,253651	0,495230675
CRIMEA	142	0,250128	0,559570909
GEORGIAN(S)	99	0,174385	0,887017548
UKRAINIAN(S)	96	0,1691	0,106396257
LAW	90	0,158532	0,576364338
MOLDOVA	72	0,126825	0,521244049
INTEREST(S)	62	0,1262728	1,884637211
SOVIET	59	0,103926	0,62503624

³³⁶ WordSmith Tools Manual. https://lexically.net/downloads/version7/HTML/dispersion_in_wordlist.html

GOVERNMENT	55	0,09688	0,707569778
MILITARY	55	0,09688	0,64227289
ABKHAZIA	52	0,091596	0,579229712
CITIZENS	50	0,088073	0,676206708
COOPERATION	50	0,088073	0,586033285
MOLDOVAN	48	0,079459	0,446304291
KREMLIN	45	0,079337	0,746527281
SECURITY	45	0,079325	0,573829821
WAR	45	0,079266	0,562777996
AUTHORITIES	44	0,079253	0,561589438
SUPPORT	41	0,078382	0,561427211
PARTNERS	40	0,077843	0,561416383
WESTERN	37	0,065174	0,554129481
SEVASTOPOL	35	0,061651	0,536742032
CONFLICT(S)	35	0,061651	0,536742032
KIEV	34	0,05989	0,524598897
CRIMEAN	33	0,058128	0,498154789
BILATERAL	29	0,362131	0,487282568
ECONOMY	28	0,049321	0,485844111
HISTORICAL	28	0,049321	0,485844111
LANGUAGE	28	0,049321	0,485844111
AGREEMENTS	27	0,047559	0,646484911
STATE	27	0,047559	0,546311232
OSSETIA	27	0,047559	0,546311232
POWER	26	0,0364732	0,946583921
EUROPEAN	25	0,0349276	0,936573816
MOSCOW	25	0,0349276	0,936573816
ETHNIC	24	0,23485873	0,936473816
SETTLEMENT	24	0,23485873	0,936473816
FEDERATION	24	0,23485873	0,936473816
EUROPE	24	0,23485873	0,936473816
LEGAL	24	0,23485873	0,936473816
NATO	23	0,040514	0,926574848
USSR	23	0,040514	0,926574848
BORDERS	22	0,038752	0,915396843
ARMED	22	0,038752	0,915396843
CONCERN(S)	22	0,038752	0,915396843
UN	22	0,038752	0,915396843
PEACE	21	0,037629	1,635458492
FORCE	21	0,037321	0,485844111
INDEPENDENCE	21	0,037321	0,485844111
ENERGY	20	0,154362	0,9723764
TERRITORIAL	20	0,1543528	0,217382813
ENSURE	19	0,1264732	1,568738219
TROOPS	19	0,1839201	0,994762811
INTEGRITY	19	0,13648292	1,625478299
REPUBLICS	18	0,031706	0,597764552
TERRORISM	17	0,029945	0,45166266
UNITS	17	0,0976462	0,217482901
LEGITIMATE	16	0,0743621	0,783621711

PREVENT	16	0,0864872	0,13648391
ELECTION	15	0,026422	0,591036141
REFERENDUM	15	0,026422	0,498540133
SOVEREIGNTY	15	0,026422	0,55804795
CAUCASUS	14	0,02466	0,610834181
COMPLICATED	14	0,0743621	1,19346271
FRIENDS	13	0,022899	0,642232597
DEMOCRACY	13	0,1045628	0,817637371
FRIENDSHIP	13	0,022899	0,385881871
TRANSNISTRIA	13	0,022899	0,385881871
EMPIRE	12	0,0445902	0,254728911
RESPONSIBILITY	12	0,021138	0,649561703
TERRORISTS	12	0,021138	0,495633096
NAZIS	11	0,019376	0,347437888
TATARS	11	0,019376	0,433039576
VICTORY	11	0,019376	0,593977511

The word list regarding Ukraine, which has 3889 distinct tokens, is the most extensive in terms of the number of tokens. This information already reveals which conflict President Putin has devoted the most time and attention to. However, only the words specified by a frequency indicator of more than 10 (60 words in total) are shown in the list below for this section of the thesis:

WordList UKRAINE			
Word	Freq.	%	Dispersion
UKRAINE	190	0,68	0,73
PEOPLE(S)	190	0,67	1,38
RUSSIA	158	0,56	0,74
RUSSIAN(S)	158	0,56	1,37
CRIMEA	138	0,49	0,67
UKRAINIAN(S)	96	0,34	1,28
ISSUE(S)	39	0,40	1,26
POLITICAL	39	0,14	0,70
SOVIET	37	0,13	0,53
MILITARY	34	0,12	0,66
RIGHT	34	0,12	0,71
SEVASTOPOL	34	0,12	0,65
REPUBLIC(S)	33	0,12	1,22
AGAINST	33	0,12	0,72
CRIMEAN	33	0,12	0,57
KIEV	33	0,12	0,65
WESTERN	33	0,12	0,69

GOVERNMENT	30	0,11	0,65
WAR	30	0,11	0,60
AUTHORITIES	28	0,10	0,65
RELATIONS	28	0,10	0,60
RESIDENTS	28	0,10	0,65
COMMON	26	0,09	0,76
PROBLEM(S)	25	0,09	1,19
AGREEMENT(S)	25	0,09	1,12
HISTORICAL	25	0,09	0,69
INTERESTS	25	0,09	0,63
CITIZENS	24	0,09	0,64
LAW	23	0,08	0,64
SUPPORT	22	0,12	0,68
BORDERS	22	0,08	0,59
TERRITORY	22	0,08	0,59
FUTURE	21	0,07	0,62
LANGUAGE	20	0,07	0,55
POWER	20	0,07	0,63
SECURITY	19	0,07	0,61
DEVELOPMENT	18	0,06	0,63
ECONOMIC	18	0,06	0,48
PARTNERS	19	0,07	0,64
POLICY	17	0,06	0,65
PRESIDENT	17	0,06	0,63
ETHNIC	17	0,06	0,56
HISTORY	17	0,06	0,56
USSR	17	0,06	0,58
REFERENDUM	15	0,05	0,60
RESPECT	15	0,05	0,57
EUROPE	14	0,05	0,67
EUROPEAN	14	0,05	0,51
INDEPENDENCE	14	0,05	0,54
MOSCOW	14	0,05	0,54
NATO	14	0,05	0,51
HOPE	14	0,05	0,49
REGION(S)	13	0,05	0,52
DIALOGUE	12	0,04	0,56
EMPIRE	12	0,04	0,25
LEGITIMATE	12	0,04	0,56
UN	12	0,04	0,57
ARMED	11	0,04	0,36
TATARS	11	0,04	0,36

The list of words pertaining to Georgia, which has a total of 2293 words (40 have been selected for the table), is in second position. However, it is crucial to note that, as mentioned in the relevant chapter, access to discussions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been restricted since 2014:

WordList GEORGIA			
Word	Freq.	%	Dispersion
GEORGIA	143	0,94	0,72
GEORGIAN(S)	97	0,64	1,26
RUSSIA	93	0,61	0,75
PRESIDENT	74	0,49	0,74
RUSSIAN	73	0,48	0,75
PEOPLE(S)	72	0,48	1,30
PROBLEM(S)	64	0,42	1,26
RELATIONS	63	0,42	0,74
ABKHAZIA	53	0,35	0,71
KREMLIN	43	0,28	0,74
ISSUE(S)	42	0,28	1,27
OSSETIA	28	0,18	0,58
COOPERATION	27	0,18	0,69
ECONOMIC	27	0,18	0,67
REGION(S)	24	0,16	1,16
HOPE	22	0,15	0,55
SECURITY	21	0,14	0,67
CONFLICT(S)	20	0,14	1,16
AGAINST	20	0,13	0,64
LAW	19	0,13	0,55
BORDER(S)	18	0,12	0,97
SHEVARDNADZE	18	0,12	0,53
AGREEMENT(S)	17	0,11	1,03
INTERESTS	16	0,11	0,65
SOVIET	16	0,11	0,67
BILATERAL	14	0,09	0,54
FEDERATION	13	0,09	0,49
RIGHT	13	0,09	0,51
STATE	13	0,09	0,61
AUTHORITIES	12	0,08	0,56
ENERGY	12	0,08	0,57
LEADERSHIP	12	0,08	0,61
POLITICAL	12	0,08	0,53
RESPECT	12	0,08	0,59
TERRITORY	12	0,08	0,57
TERRORISM	12	0,08	0,59
TROOPS	12	0,08	0,59
CITIZENS	11	0,07	0,55

PARTNERS	11	0,07	0,64
TERRITORIAL	11	0,07	0,72

Lastly, the Wordlist of Moldova is the one in which are present the fewer number of words. As a matter of fact, only 1550 tokens are presented in the list provided by Wordlist. For this section, however, following the criteria of presenting only the ones that have a frequency indicator of more than 10, 24 words have been chosen:

WordList MOLDOVA			
Word	Freq.	%	Dispersion
MOLDOVA	71	0,93	0,73
RUSSIA	51	0,67	0,74
RELATIONS	48	0,63	0,69
RUSSIAN	48	0,63	0,70
MOLDOVAN(S)	44	0,57	0,93
PRESIDENT	32	0,42	0,68
PEOPLE	29	0,38	0,67
ISSUE(S)	28	0,37	1,29
INTERESTS	21	0,27	0,60
POLITICAL	21	0,27	0,67
PROBLEM(S)	19	0,25	1,22
COOPERATION	17	0,22	0,65
ECONOMIC	17	0,22	0,68
HOPE	16	0,21	0,55
STATE	14	0,18	0,65
TIES	14	0,18	0,60
BILATERAL	13	0,17	0,58
SETTLEMENT	13	0,17	0,52
TRANSNISTRIA	13	0,17	0,52
EUROPEAN	12	0,16	0,54
FUTURE	11	0,14	0,59
COMMON	11	0,14	0,09
SUPPORT	11	0,14	0,52
UKRAINE	11	0,14	0,40

From these WordLists it is interesting to note that Ukraine is the only name that appears in each of the four lists. Contrarily, "Moldova" and "Moldovan" are mentioned in conversations about Ukraine but not Georgia. On the other hand, "Georgia" and "Georgian" are reported in the Wordlists of Ukraine and Georgia, but not in the Moldovan one. These data reveal that the Ukrainian war is the one that, at least in terms of speeches, unites all the other frozen conflicts.

Data regarding the statistics, keywords, and collocation will be dealt with in the following sections.

Statistic Lists

The statistic list regarding a grammatical aspect presents itself as follows. It is noticeable how the majority of the words that have been used in the speeches are composed by rather two or three letters. In order to make the table more comprehensible, a quick explanation of all the indicators will be given.

The number of words in a text is often referred to as the number of tokens, whereas the relationship between the number of types of words and the number of tokens is known as the type-token ratio (TTR). The length of the text or corpus of texts under study affects the type/token ratio (TTR) in a significant way. To give some numerical examples, a 1,000 word article may have a TTR of 40%; a shorter one may approach 70%; a 4 million word article will likely have a type/token ratio of around 2%; and so forth.

The Standardized type/token ratio (STTR), on the contrary, is computed every n words as Wordlist goes through each text file. In Wordsmith, by default, n = 1,000. To put it another way, the ratio is determined for the first 1,000 running words, then again for the next 1,000, and so on until the end of the text or corpus. A running average is calculated, giving an average type/token ratio based on a series of 1,000-word text chunks. Texts under 1,000 words will receive a standard type/token ratio of 0.³³⁷

Finally, regarding the mean word length (in characters) and the standard deviation of word length, it is interesting to notice that the four lists include similar indicators, ranging from 4,76 and 4,79 for the former, and between 2,64 and 2,72 for the latter.

General Statistic list	
types (distinct words)	5.253
type/token ratio (TTR)	9,33
standardised TTR	41,56
mean word length (in characters)	4,77
word length std. dev.	2,68
sentences	3.024

³³⁷ WordSmith Tools Manual. https://lexically.net/downloads/version7/HTML/type_token_ratio_proc.html

headings	88
1-letter words	1.635
2-letter words	10.530
3-letter words	11.085
4-letter words	9.471
5-letter words	5.131
6-letter words	4.703
7-letter words	4.590
8-letter words	3.054
9-letter words	2.807
10-letter words	1.778
11-letter words	974
12-letter words	551

Ukraine Statistic list

types (distinct words)	3.889
type/token ratio (TTR)	13,96
standardised TTR	42,80
mean word length (in characters)	4,78
word length std.dev.	2,64
sentences	1.519
headings	21
1-letter words	704
2-letter words	5.140
3-letter words	5.483
4-letter words	4.686
5-letter words	2.681
6-letter words	2.537
7-letter words	2.288
8-letter words	1.456
9-letter words	1.332
10-letter words	892
11-letter words	440
12-letter words	264

Georgia Statistic list

types (distinct words)	2.293
type/token ratio (TTR)	15,31
standardised TTR	40,35
mean word length (in characters)	4,76
word length std.dev.	2,68
sentences	838
headings	91
1-letter words	480
2-letter words	2.874

3-letter words	2.835
4-letter words	2.606
5-letter words	1.329
6-letter words	1.178
7-letter words	1.274
8-letter words	881
9-letter words	758
10-letter words	396
11-letter words	305
12-letter words	126

Moldova Statistic list

types (distinct words)	1.550
type/token ratio (TTR)	20,44
standardised TTR	40,29
mean word length (in characters)	4,79
word length std.dev.	2,72
sentences	382
headings	20
1-letter words	242
2-letter words	1.433
3-letter words	1.477
4-letter words	1.299
5-letter words	614
6-letter words	571
7-letter words	651
8-letter words	426
9-letter words	432
10-letter words	229
11-letter words	127
12-letter words	87

KeyWords

KeyWord Lists can help us to better understand the nature of every single discourse related to conflicts. This tool enables to locate the "key" words, meaning those whose frequency is unusually high relative to some norm in one or more texts. A text or genre can be usefully described using this kind of research. The software compares two pre-existing word-lists, which must have been created using the WordList tool. It is assumed that one of these will be a sizable WordList that will serve as a reference file. The other is a WordList built around the study's target text, which is always presumed to be the shorter of the two texts. The larger one will offer context information for comparison as a benchmark.³³⁸ Moreover, in the case of text dispersion key words displays, the Freq. column shows the token frequency of each key word, whereas the % column gives the percentage of texts that KW was found in. On the contrary, the RC % column shows the percentage of the number of texts each KW was found in.

It should be communicated, however, that the tables reported underneath are just a fraction of the total key words found in every context. By doing so, the analysis will be clearer and more focused on terms related with military, political, social, or economic spheres. That is because the software Wordsmith, when using this specific function, provides also the statistic regarding function words (as articles, prepositions and conjunctions) which are inevitably the most frequent words in a text although not functional for this study.

Key word list UKRAINE (related to the general corpus)				
Key word	Freq.	%	RC. Freq.	RC. %
CRIMEA	138	0,49	150	0,83
RELATIONS	28	0,10	131	0,23
LAW	23	0,08	90	0,16
ECONOMIC	18	0,06	63	0,11
PRESIDENT	17	0,06	78	0,14
HOPE	14	0,05	48	0,08
SOUTH	10	0,04	36	0,06
MOLDOVA	10	0,04	72	0,13
GEORGIA	10	0,04	144	0,25
DONBASS	9	0,03	76	0,56
TIES	7	0,02	34	0,06
SETTLEMENT	5	0,02	23	0,04
PARLIAMENT	3	0,01	16	0,03

³³⁸ WordSmith Tools Manual. <https://lexically.net/downloads/version7/HTML/keywords2.html>

GEORGIAN	3	0,01	86	0,15
FRIENDSHIP	2	0,01	13	0,02
LAWS	2	0,01	14	0,02
TRADE	2	0,01	19	0,03
BILATERAL	2	0,01	28	0,05

Key word list GEORGIA (related to the general corpus)				
Key word	Freq.	%	RC. Freq.	RC. %
GEORGIA	143	0,94	144	0,253651
GEORGIAN	84	0,55	86	0,151486
ABKHAZIA	53	0,35	52	0,091596
KREMLIN	43	0,28	2	0,003523
OSSETIA	28	0,18	15	0,0456372
SHEVARDNADZE	18	0,12	18	0,031706
STATE	13	0,09	108	0,190238
POLITICAL	12	0,08	75	0,13211
UKRAINE	9	0,06	196	0,345247
ARMED	9	0,06	196	0,345247
SUPPORT	8	0,05	58	0,102165
GOVERNMENT	6	0,04	55	0,09688
DEVELOPMENT	5	0,03	48	0,08455
CRIMEA	4	0,03	142	0,250128
UKRAINIAN	4	0,03	80	0,140917
HISTORICAL	3	0,02	31	0,054605
USSR	2	0,01	23	0,040514

Key word list MOLDOVA (related to the general corpus)				
Key word	Freq.	%	RC. Freq.	RC. %
MOLDOVA	71	0,93	72	0,13
MOLDOVAN	40	0,52	40	0,07
TRANSNESTER	11	0,17	13	0,02
UKRAINE	11	0,14	196	0,35
LAW	3	0,04	90	0,16
RIGHT	2	0,03	54	0,095118985

Four methods that distinguish between the words employed by macro argument and nature will be provided in order to help to better understand the tone of the Presidential speeches. The words presented in these tables were chosen from the general list and divided into four

categories: words linked to the economy, words related to the military, words related to politics, and lastly words related to culture.

The first table contains words with an economic character. This way it will be possible to understand which conflict (again, based on the data utilized) has more an economic nature, which might indicate that the reason for its escalation, or the aims that brought to its settlement (a temporary one for most of the cases) was a financial one:

Words Related with Economy			
	Ukraine	Moldova	Georgia
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
ECONOMY		8	6
AGRICULTURAL	3	10	
TRADE		10	3
GAS	2	10	2
TIES	4	12	14
TREATY	3	2	10
ENERGY	2	6	12
BILATERAL	2	13	14
INTEREST(S)	25	21	16
PARTNERS	19	10	11
SUPPORT	22	11	8
COOPERATION	2	17	27
AGREEMENTS	25	10	17
POWER	20	8	4
FREQUENCY TOTAL	140	150	144

This table shows that discussions on Moldova gained the most attention in the area of economics. When looking at the total amount of words related with economy that have been employed, the number revealed is not so astonishing (when dealing with Ukraine President Putin didn't employ the words "trade" and "economy", whereas for Georgia only "agricultural"). However, when looking at the frequency of the terms that have been employed, Moldova is characterized by a frequency of 150, Ukraine of 140 and lastly Georgia of 138. This information is helpful when compared to the historical context of the conflict. Indeed, as underlined in the respective chapter, the Soviet Union's ideals and the nationalist aspirations of Moldova clashed with the economic interests of the local authorities in Transnistria. The latter served as the site of the majority of Moldova's industrial infrastructure construction as part of Soviet development plans. Although Tiraspol remained the republic's major economic center,

its leaders feared that the reform movement would drive them from office. Therefore, it was desirable for the region's authorities to try secession in order to maintain full control of the region's economic resources.

When considering Russia's approach to Transnistria (hence the speeches that have regarded it), the Kremlin had little success convincing the world that the policies were anything other than economic retaliation against the political stance of the two countries. Indeed, in 1992, a process of conflict resolution mediated by Russian "peacekeepers" and carried out under the auspices of the OSCE brought the "hot" conflict in Transnistria to a conclusion. Since then, however, Russia has maintained tight political, economic, and military control over Transnistria, supporting it to the extent that the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) determined that Russia essentially controlled the Transnistrian government.³³⁹

The second table is related with a military sphere:

Words Related with Military			
	Ukraine	Moldova	Georgia
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
MILITARY	34		10
WAR	30		8
FORCE	8	4	9
TERRORISTS	3		9
VICTORY	2	2	8
UNITS	10		7
PREVENT	3		9
RESOLVE			9
TROOPS	2		12
BLOODSHED	2		7
RESOLUTION(S)			8
ENFORCEMENT			7
SOLVE			9
INTEGRITY	3	3	10
SETTLEMENT	5	13	10
SUPPORT	22	11	8
CONFLICT	6	6	20
SECURITY	19	5	21
ARMED	11	2	9

³³⁹ Case of Catan and others v. Moldova and Russia, European Court of Human Rights, Applications nos. 43370/04, 8252/05 and 18454/06 (October 19, 2012).

<https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22fulltext%22:%7B%22Case%20of%20Catan%20and%20others%20v.%20Moldova%20and%20Russia%22%7D%2C%22documentcollectionid%22:%7B%22GRANDCHAMBER%22%2C%22CHAMBER%22%7D%2C%22itemid%22:%7B%22001-114082%22%7D%7D>

AUTHORITIES	28	4	12
PEACE	4	5	10
ENSURE	3	3	8
POWER	20	8	4
FREQUENCY TOTAL	216	60	228

In the above chart, Georgia is the one who has more data about the armed forces or military intervention both in terms of different words deployed (25 out of 25) and in terms of frequency (228). Once again, the scheme reflects the nature of the conflict.

From 2005 onwards, the new Georgian administration saw the modernization of Georgia's "power ministries" as an essential step in the establishment of the state. The nation was also thought to be able to help international peacekeeping efforts and remove the idea that it constituted a security risk to the international community by building up its military. Georgia's government, in fact, made a commitment to the NATO-led war in Afghanistan, and in 2005, it sent roughly 2000 troops to support US operations in Iraq (the greatest coalition contribution per capita). Tbilisi also believed that having strong armed forces was crucial to settling problems with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which had sizable paramilitary formations of their own. As a matter of fact, the Georgian government thought that having powerful military forces would strengthen its negotiation position. Significant foreign policy consequences resulted from the military strategy's and the national security concept's foreign policy emphasis. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic orientation became clearer, increasing support from allies in Europe and the US.³⁴⁰

As a result, Russian response was placing its military at disposal of the separatists that governed South Ossetia, whose aim was to "... undermine Georgia's independence and assert Russia's control over the strategically important South Caucasus."³⁴¹ Additionally, as highlighted by Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, "Russia launched the war against Georgia in August 2008 for highly valued strategic and geopolitical objectives, which included de facto annexation of Abkhazia, weakening or toppling the Mikheil Saakashvili regime, and preventing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement."³⁴²

³⁴⁰ Lynch, Dov. The Rose Revolution and after. Cit.

³⁴¹ Ivi. Page 4.

³⁴² Ivi. Page 7.

Given the intensity of the armed conflict that occurred in Georgia, as well as the critics that the Tbilisi's government received from President Putin who in several occasions called them "Nazis" and "terrorists", it is therefore no surprise that the discourses around Georgia are the ones characterized by a higher military nature.

The third table presents words with a political nature:

Words Related with Politics			
	Ukraine	Moldova	Georgia
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
LAW	23	5	19
GOVERNMENT	30	8	6
COOPERATION	6	17	27
AGREEMENTS	25	10	17
LEGAL	8		5
CONCERN(S)	7	2	6
ELECTION	10	7	5
REFERENDUM	15		
SOVEREIGNTY	9		
FRIENDSHIP	2	4	6
RESPONSIBILITY	5		
TERRORISTS	3		9
CITIZENSHIP			10
MOTHERLAND	10		
PATRIOTIC	7		
BORDERS	22		
LANGUAGE	20	6	
ETHNIC	17		5
INDEPENDENCE	14		7
NATO	14		
EMPIRE	12		
LEGITIMATE	12		4
UN	12		
TATARS	11		
NAZIS	10		1
TERRITORIAL	9		11
SOVEREIGNTY	9		
TRADITIONS	8		
UNITY	8		
PATRIOTIC	7		
COMPLICATED	6		8
RECOGNISE	6	4	
COOPERATION	6	17	16

RESPONSIBILITY	5		
DIFFICULTIES	4		3
STATE		14	13
FEDERATION		9	13
SOVIET	37	9	16
CIS		8	7
POSITIVE		6	8
CONSTITUTION		4	
IMPROVE		3	6
KREMLIN	2		43
BORDER(S)	22		18
LEADERSHIP			12
PREVENT	3		9
RESOLVE			9
HISTORICAL	25		3
DEMOCRACY	8		5
TIES	7	12	14
TREATY	7	2	10
RESTORE	6	2	8
EFFORT(S)	6	10	10
INTEGRITY	3	3	10
FREQUENCY TOTAL	498	162	379

Ukraine is the situation for which the majority of words related to politics, as well as the major frequency indicator, have been deployed. The actual conflict situation is reflected once more in the chart.

As already discussed, throughout its lengthy history, Crimea has only ever existed as an independent state for a total of less than 40 years. The population, culture, economics, and politics of Crimea have seen tremendous change since then as a result of many battles, the Russian imperial era, and the subsequent Soviet rule. The Crimean population was russified in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through a variety of means, including the massive resettlement of ethnic Russians and already-russified subjects from central and northern Russia, public schools and administration, mandatory military service, conversion to Orthodoxy, and later Russian mass media under the Soviet communist regime.

Additionally, in light of the Orange Revolution era, the US backing for and influence over the Ukrainian political process, as well as the autonomous and pro-Western position of Ukraine after the uprising, became the Russian Federation's top security worry. Moscow interpreted Kiev's nationalists' success in the post-velvet revolution era of Ukraine as a victory for pro-Western forces. President Putin therefore securitized the Russian community in Eastern Ukraine in order to exert influence in these countries' internal and external affairs. The clash

between "sovereign democracy" and "Color Revolution" models for post-Soviet states' fates was a reflection of the changes in these nations' internal politics, and as a result, these changes were translated into the global confrontation between Russia and the EU/US. In essence, this was a demonstration of Western power values throughout the Former Soviet Union (FSU), supported on the one hand by the Eastern Partnership (EP) and European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) programs and on the other by the instruments used to maintain Russian influence.³⁴³ Clearly, the pervasive presence and impact of Russian forces necessitated extensive discussion and deliberation, which is illustrated by the heavy influx of policy-related terms used to address this battle.

The fourth and final table reports the presence of culture-related words:

Words Related with Culture			
	Ukraine	Moldova	Georgia
	Frequency	Frequency	Frequency
LANGUAGE	20	6	
RUSSIAN	158	48	73
GEORGIAN(S)	3		97
UKRAINIAN(S)	96	1	5
SOVIET	37	9	16
MOLDOVAN	4	44	
CRIMEAN	33		
EUROPEAN	14	12	3
ETHNIC	17		5
USSR	17	1	2
REPUBLICS	33	9	7
AMERICAN		2	6
MOTHERLAND	10		
TRADITIONS	8		
UNITY	8		
TIES	7	14	12
FREQUENCY TOTAL	456	146	226

³⁴³ Op. cit. Matsaberidze, David. Pages 77-78.

Compared to the other two conflict zones, Ukraine has the greatest variety of words connected to culture. Once again, when considering the speeches that have addressed this Nation, the evidence is hardly remarkable. Indeed, when discussing both Crimea and Donbass, culture has been emphasized frequently to provide the public an explanation for both the annexation of the first one and the military action in both zones.

Following Russian victories in wars with the Ottoman Empire, Crimea was made a colony of the Russian Empire in the late 18th century. This aspect was emphasized also by the words of President Putin in various occasions. An example is a declaration that dates back to 2014:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Crimea is a unique blend of different peoples' cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole, where not a single ethnic group has been lost over the centuries. Russians and Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and people of other ethnic groups have lived side by side in Crimea, retaining their own identity, traditions, languages and faith.³⁴⁴

Notable is also the declaration of "Malorossiia," a purported autonomous state, by the Russian insurgency in Donetsk and Luhansk. The imperialist notion that Ukraine's territory and people are part of "one, indivisible Russia" (also known as "Little Russians") is one prevalent interpretation of this use.³⁴⁵ Lastly, after Yanukovich's escape to Russia (on February 21, 2014) and the installation of an interim administration, which Russia saw as a coup d'état, cultural conflicts broke out in 2014. The Russian government has justified the annexation of Crimea (which took place in March 2014) as a response to the interim government, which Russia believed to be made up of xenophobic extremists and that seriously threatened the security of Russian citizens in Ukraine. The new government's first measure was in fact to ban

³⁴⁴ Putin, Vladimir. Address by President of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin. [speech transcript] Moscow. March 18, 2014. <https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/address-president-russian-federation>

³⁴⁵ Putin, Vladimir. *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*. July 12, 2021.

the teaching and use of the Russian language. Although this ban was never implemented, it served as the main argument for Russian intervention.

All of these events were undoubtedly discussed in public dialogues and meetings with the presidents of the breakaway republics, which explains why Ukraine received more references to culture than Georgia and Moldova.

Collocation Lists

Ukraine has been chosen as the case study for this final section of the linguistic analysis since it is the conflict for which more speeches (and words) have been spent among the three analyzed regions. Furthermore, being the most contemporary conflict, it has been deemed appropriate for a deeper investigation.

Collocates are the words that are found close to the searched term. The goal of this type of research is to identify the "friends" that words often hang out with in order to develop distinctive lexical patterns. This method of looking at collocations allows one to spot common lexical and grammatical co-occurrence patterns. Additionally, since the general corpus was organized according to the years in which the speeches were delivered in ascending order and the collocation tool also provides information regarding the sentence and paragraph's position within it, it will be possible to understand and analyze when the terms have been used most frequently. This will make it possible to follow a temporal line that provides crucial information on, say, the development of violence over time.

The number of collocates that Concord will find to the left and right of the searched phrase, as well as the distance used by KeyWords when looking for plot-links, are indicated by the collocate horizons. The default is 5L, 5R (5 to the left and 5 to the right), but a selection of 7 words have been made for this study. This decision is supported by the fact that the corpus is quite discursive and extensive, and increasing the word count to seven will facilitate a more thorough understanding of the context in which the searched lemma has been employed.

The words for which the collocation has been looked for are Crimea, War, and Peace. It is important to note however, that the lists reported are not entirely the original ones; a selection was made from the information provided by Wordsmith. This selection was made because many high frequency collocates, particularly grammar words, were reported when the

collocation tool was used. These grammar words are the ones that collocate most frequently thanks to the grammatical composition of the language, but for the same reason they do so with practically all searched terms. What is intriguing to learn, however, is which terms are connected to the one searched in a way that is also helpful for the analysis itself (meaning in an economical, military, political, and/or cultural way). Moreover, “breaks” are another specific characteristic of the Collocation tool. By using this function, when the collocates are computed, if the setting is to stop at sentence breaks (which is the case of this analysis), collocates will be counted within the above horizons but taking sentence breaks into account. Last but not least, the sentence and paragraph position-data are helpful to comprehend the temporal context in which these specific words have been employed. By doing so, the comprehension of the context will be more extensive, making it possible to trace a timeframe that facilitates the understanding of the reason behind the usage of each term in correlation with the historical events.

In the following table, the correlation analysis of Crimea is represented:

Concordance	Sent. #	Sent. Pos.	Para. #	Para. Pos.	%
to know the history of Crimea and what Russia and Crimea have always meant for each other.	23	109	8	109	1
have always meant for each other. Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride.	24	14	9	14	1
graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in	27	53	9	367	2
collapse was legalised, everyone forgot about Crimea and Sevastopol -the main base of the Black	63	58	19	191	4
leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would	113	71	28	71	8
yet. Russia's Armed Forces never entered Crimea ; they were there already in line with an	122	36	30	306	9
They keep talking of some Russian intervention in Crimea , some sort of aggression. This is	157	50	36	98	11

always considered the situation in Ukraine and Crimea taking into account the full historical	205	191	48	191	14
Russia, shouting that other regions will follow Crimea. We do not want to divide Ukraine; we do	219	90	51	619	15
to divide Ukraine; we do not need that. As for Crimea, it was and remains a Russian, Ukrainian,	221	7	51	689	15
never be and do is follow in Bandera's footsteps! Crimea is our common historical legacy and a	224	1	53	1	15
soon joining NATO. What would this have meant for Crimea and Sevastopol in the future? It would	229	31	54	130	16
and members of other ethnic groups living in Crimea -95 percent of our citizens. More than 83	273	199	64	199	19
the treaty on admitting to the Russian Federation Crimea and Sevastopol, which is already ready	279	434	67	434	20
in Ukraine should respect the choice made by Crimean residents. This is the first thing.	360	59	85	294	25
benefits of joining Russia, not to mention Crimea's economy, infrastructure development in the	390	134	90	134	27
more than 20,000 well-armed soldiers stationed in Crimea. In addition, there were 38 S-300	435	86	97	210	29
way we are planning to establish more schools in Crimea, including cadet schools. Thank you. Is	486	56	109	797	33
to Ukraine in the mid-1920s, and in 1954, Crimea was annexed to Ukraine for some reason as	525	94	115	333	35
of Transnistria, of course. Russia did not annex Crimea by force. Russia created conditions	544	21	119	21	36
expression of the will of the people living in Crimea and Sevastopol. It was the people	545	182	119	220	36
arena without using this power. The events in Crimea themselves have nothing to do with this.	551	14	121	14	37
By the way, immediately after the annexation of Crimea to Russia, in 1783, I believe, forgive	718	48	157	48	46
because the agreement for our fleet staying in Crimea is valid until 2017. Nevertheless, we	755	134	165	580	49

As I said, they adopted sanctions against the Crimean people . If Crimea was annexed, then they	926	46	199	46	58
adopted sanctions against the Crimean people. If Crimea was annexed, then they are the victims.	927	3	199	65	58
so do not have any doubt. This concerns not just Crimea, though it is the hardest hit area. I	990	23	212	495	62
with the accusations against Russia of annexing Crimea. We have heard representatives of	1.027	200	220	346	64
wars with the Ottoman Empire, Russia incorporated Crimea and the lands of the Black Sea region,	1.161	104	249	104	73
wars with the Ottoman Empire, Russia incorporated Crimea and the lands of the Black Sea region,	1.161	104	249	104	73

In the table are presented the sentences that, out of the total number of the ones provided by the Concordance Tool, have the main important meaning in relation of this thesis.

Looking at the data concerning the dispersion of the term into the corpus of texts analyzed and calculating it from the overall list provided by the Collocation Tool, the word “Crimea” has been mostly used in 2014. In terms of numbers, just 28 of the 174 total instances in which the phrases "Crimea" and "Crimean" were used were in years other than 2014. This statistical data was in some ways predictable given the historical context of the Crimean issue. However, the information on the words that have been connected to it in a range of seven words before to seven words after it is surprising. Aggressive terms like “Annexation” were used 6 times, “annexed” 3 times, “incorporated” only once, “military” once as well, whereas “soldier” twice. On the contrary, terms like “people” have been used 29 times, “freedom” 8 times, “rights” 11 times, “Tatars” 12 times, “Ukrainians” 10 times. This data is rather intriguing and unexpected because it shows that, in contrast to what could be the general perception given the nature of the events in the region, the words associated to Crimea were primarily non-violent. This applies to a range of other terms like “inclusion” and “referendum” (6 times), “legitimate” 5 times, as opposite to “aggression” (onCE).

In order to give some other examples concerning this new revelation, the second list provides the data with regard to the term “War”:

Concordance	Sent.	Sent.	Para.	Para.	%
	#	Pos.	#	Pos.	
of Bandera, Hitler's accomplice during World War II . It is also obvious that there is no	105	124	25	715	7
For example, still during the times of the Cold War , the US and subsequently other nations	193	48	44	207	13
this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is	204	81	47	81	14
continuity. As is known, during the First World War the Bolsheviks also wanted the Russian	518	36	114	224	34
only during World War II and the Great Patriotic War, but also over the previous centuries. We	1.002	157	214	598	62
they contributed to history not only during World War II and the Great Patriotic War, but also	1.002	126	214	567	62
a lot to be proud of. As for the Great Patriotic War, you know that we are unlocking archives	1.004	27	215	27	62
happening now at our southern borders: there is a war game defender Europe 40 000 personnel, 15	1.045	58	223	788	65
we're threatening to somebody? We're conducting war games on a regular basis including	1.060	17	224	304	66
send our armed formations anywhere? We conducted war games in our territory, how can this not	1.064	13	225	90	66
that. We did it in our territory. You conducted war games in Alaska. God bless you, but you had	1.072	14	226	166	66
people. Over the course of the protracted war between the Russian state and the	1.138	34	244	34	71
or Turkey. But, again, for the people, that was a war of liberation. It ended with the Truce of	1.139	39	244	284	71
and had the same faith. During the Great Northern War with Sweden, the people in Malorossia were	1.151	26	247	26	72
pro-Muscovite sentiments in Galicia. During World War I, Vienna played a role in the formation	1.190	13	255	210	75

collapse of European empires, the fierce civil war that broke out across the vast territory of	1.192	87	256	87	75
former Russian Empire at the time of the Civil War and turbulence were inherently unstable.	1.214	147	264	147	77
and traditions suppressed. Later, during World War II , radical groups of Ukrainian nationalists	1.226	20	266	519	78
and torchlit processions in honor of remaining war criminals from the SS units take place under	1.356	55	298	226	88
the Great Patriotic War was indeed a patriotic war because they were defending their home,	1.359	113	299	113	88
Red Army, in partisan units, the Great Patriotic War was indeed a patriotic war because they	1.359	86	299	86	88
inevitably provoked confrontation and civil war. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights	1.375	111	301	111	89
War, or with the so-called victory of the Cold War . And due to the incorrect, wrongful	1.458	106	322	106	94
the euphoria of victory in the so-called Cold War , or with the so-called victory of the Cold	1.458	59	322	59	94
will also go to Crimea, just like Donbass, with a war in order to kill, just as punishers from	1.479	66	330	66	95
Hitler's accomplices during the Great Patriotic War , killed defenseless people. They also	1.479	192	330	192	95
regime, consolidating the results of World War II , should no longer be implemented. Well,	1.502	174	337	314	97
what's the answer to that? The results of World War II , as well as the sacrifices made by our	1.504	21	338	21	97
that have developed today over all the post-war decades . It also does not abolish the right of	1.505	142	338	265	97
creation of the USSR, nor after the Second World War , people who lived in certain territories	1.507	91	339	91	97

As observable from the table, the term “War” was used in Ukraine-related speeches only 7 times (the red-highlighted sentences) out of 30 to refer to a present war. Moreover, out of these 7 times, the term was applied to the situation in Crimea only 3 times. This is another interesting

data that provides us with information regarding the tone that speeches with regards to Crimea were given. Contrary to the common belief, these tones were most of the time non-violent.

Finally, this last list presents the Collocation List in reference to the term “Peace(s)”, which includes the words Peace, Peaceful, and Peacefully:

Concordance	Sent. #	Sent. Pos.	Para . #	Para. Pos.	%
Our peoples managed to attain a long-awaited peace through their tremendous sacrifice. I am	2	45	1	45	0
I understand those who came out on Maidan with peaceful slogans against corruption, inefficient	94	78	24	78	7
state management and poverty. The right to peaceful protest, democratic procedures and	95	13	24	170	7
Crimea for the first time in history were able to peacefully express their free will regarding	115	115	29	115	8
current difficulties. Most importantly, we want peace and harmony to reign in Ukraine, and we	248	26	58	286	17
countries telling us that we need to withdraw our peacekeeping contingent. And Maia Sandu is the	941	111	202	287	59
Moldova, as soon as they are on the path towards peace and reconciliation. We support this, and	943	304	203	304	59
Moldova, as soon as they are on the path towards peace and reconciliation. We support this, and	1.028	304	221	304	64
outcome was sealed by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1686. The Russian state incorporated the	1.141	56	244	405	71
historic choice. And people in the southeast peacefully tried to defend their stance. Yet, all	1.366	28	300	174	88
stop fratricide. The Minsk agreements aimed at a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbas	1.380	32	302	79	89
Minsk-1 and Minsk-2 which give a real chance to peacefully restore the territorial integrity of	1.391	82	304	341	90

and enmity with Russia would remain. Reaching peace was the main election slogan of the	1.404	9	307	247	91
electoral procedures, have finally abandoned the peaceful settlement of the conflict. For eight	1.470	192	327	253	94
everything possible to resolve the situation by peaceful and political means. All in vain. As I	1.471	101	327	391	95

In the same vein, the term "peace(s)" refers to the situation in Ukraine and the fightings in Crimea in an almost wishful and desirable manner, as seen from the table above. In actuality, words like "reconciliation," "protest," "long-awaited," "democratic procedures," "against corruption," "harmony," and others have been used to describe it. This is just another indicator of the fact that the discussion around Ukraine was not done in an aggressive manner, at least in political speeches and meetings concerns.

Conclusion

President Putin's political discourses over the former Soviet republics of Crimea, Donbass, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria have been extensively analyzed linguistically using the Wordsmith software. This program has made it feasible to collect information on the general corpus, producing Wordlists, Keywords, statistical grammar-connected data, associations between words, and the distribution of particular words over time. As a result, the software assisted in looking at specific aspects that are typically not taken into account in study works that address geopolitical conflicts: namely, the linguistic aspect itself. In actuality, publications frequently concentrate on the conflicts' solely historical, political, and military aspects. Only rarely do they go beyond these specific features analyzing the legal side in order to examine the legality of military events and determine whether they violate any international laws or perhaps the constitution of the country being invaded, and never do they dig into a pure linguistic aspect.

Additionally, Wordsmith Tool has allowed to compare the various speeches among them and in relation to actual historical events. The most significant findings derived from this research are two. The first is that, when discussing historical events, discourses did not veer off topic. In reality, Moldova was the conflict that had the most significant and comprehensive data in relation to the economic area. This evidence illustrates the actual nature of the conflict, in which the economic sector most likely played a leading role. Contrarily, when it came to the military, Georgia was the country that was most impacted by this element in terms of both reality and political debate. Last but not least, based on the same logic, Ukraine was the nation where the crisis was mostly marked by a political and cultural nature, a feature that was once more reflected in the conversations as well as in actual Russian intervention in the breakaway Republics of Crimea and Donbass.

The second important finding of the research based on Wordsmith Tool is that, despite the speeches accurately report the intrinsic nature of each conflict, there is no relationship between factual aggressiveness and the tones employed to address any given scenario from a linguistic perspective. When considering the general perception of these conflicts and Russia's engagement, this component is nothing short of astounding. It informs us that, when examining the data gathered for this investigation, a potential association between the escalation of aggressiveness between discourse analysis and military involvement cannot be traced.

7. General Conclusion

Russian approach towards break-away regions is a complex and articulated theme. However, thanks to the implementation of Wordsmith, it was possible to gather statistical data on the overall collected corpus of speeches, including Wordlists, Keywords, statistical grammar-related data, correlations between words, and the distribution of specific words over time. As a result, the program aided in looking at particular features, especially the linguistic aspect itself, that are often not taken into account in study works that handle geopolitical conflicts. As a result, the software's enabled the development of a distinct, fresh and unique perspective.

In the first place, however, it is important to underline that after a deep analysis of the historical events, some communalities can be highlighted. The first thing that emerges in a clear way is that Kremlin's approach towards Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova is evidently characterized by a sort of common scheme when dealing with those Republics prior to the military intervention. As previously highlighted, in fact, the first move undertaken by Russia as soon as a post-soviet region decides to proclaim its independence, is to provide the citizens of the breakaway territories with Russian passports. This enables the local population to access certain privileges that are not guaranteed by their native countries, such as a Russian pension (which is always higher than those offered by their birth country), the freedom to travel (something they wouldn't be able to do with a passport from a separatist region), and the option to forego military service or to complete it in Russia. This particular component of the strategy, which entails safeguarding national minorities in a neighboring nation, has been in force since the early 1990s. After granting them passports, Russia can further its understanding of national security by acquiring the power to defend its citizens anywhere in the globe using any necessary means. In addition, Moscow offers them access to Russian education and a larger market to compete in, thanks to a significant financial support. Finally, the Kremlin frequently sends military and political personnel to these regions in order to "train" them or, seen from another angle, to exert some type of control over high decision-making spheres in those regions.

This sort of scheme, however, is not followed by an equally unvaried strategy when dealing with the actual conflict in those regions. From the discourse analysis, as well as from the mere military interventions, it is in fact possible to trace differences between each situation. The conflict in Ukraine was the one most defined by a political and cultural lever implemented by Russia. The independence of Crimea became in fact a crucial aspect for the Kremlin in order

to prevent a rapprochement of Ukraine towards NATO and the EU, which might have become a certainty thanks to the veto power of Donetsk and Luhansk. Moreover, constant references to a shared and common historical past were brought up during Presidential speeches and addresses to the nation. The entire region turned into a kind of chessboard between the West and Russia, at stake to which there was a concern of national security for the latter. Furthermore, a potential withdrawal of Ukraine from the Eurasian Union project, which was a major source of concern for Russia, brought up another point of dispute with Kiev. The project could not survive this departure, according to the Kremlin, not so much for financial reasons as for issues relating to internal politics, identity, and its plan for global projection.

Georgia was, on the contrary, the conflict the more characterized by a military nature. Since South Ossetia and Abkhazia both possessed significant paramilitary formations of their own, Tbilisi actually considered that maintaining strong armed forces was essential to resolving disputes with them, apart from improving its negotiating position. The emphasis on foreign policy in the military strategy and the national security doctrine had hence significant effects on international relations. As a result, compared to the other conflicts, both militarily and politically, the Russian response was the most violent and denigrating. Indeed, during the "Five-Day War" between Georgia and Russia in August 2008, Russia moved to bolster and increase its military presence in support of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which eventually sparked an escalation in hostilities. Following its inability to militarily counteract Russian activities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Georgian side focused on using negative public's perception of Russia, skillfully leveraging on worries, phobias, and even rooting anti-Russian sentiment in the West.

Ultimately, the war in Moldova is the one where, as opposed to the ones in Ukraine and Georgia, a more significant economic conflict is evident. The economic interests of the local authorities in Transnistria conflicted with the nationalist aspirations of Moldova and the principles of the Soviet Union. In fact, as part of Soviet growth plans, the latter served as the location for the construction of the majority of Moldova's industrial infrastructure. Moreover, Moscow aids in the establishment of Transnistria's statehood in a number of ways, notably by substantially contributing by financial means. As a result, notwithstanding the Kremlin's limited success in persuading the world that the policies were anything other than economic revenge against the political position of the breakaway province, the economic aspect of the conflict was always the main emphasis of President Putin's statements and Russian engagement. By this mean, Moscow aimed to downplay the influence of Western civilization

and belittle the post-Soviet republics' ambitions to join the EU and NATO, and since the initiatives of EU to attract Transnistrians mostly benefitted (economically) the corporate elites, it might be argued that Russia managed to use its economic influence in a successful way when dealing with this break-away region.

In conclusion, this study was able to establish a link between political discourses and historical occurrences using the Software Wordsmith, supporting it with quantitative and qualitative presidential speeches excerpts. Consequently, it demonstrated that the political discourse does not distance itself from factual events; rather, it accurately conveys them. Nevertheless, the investigation also uncovered noteworthy information regarding parallels between the various war scenarios. In fact, it was feasible to draw the conclusion that while historical events were respected and recorded exactly as they occurred, the aggression shown in military acts did not line up with that of political speeches. On the other hand, it appears as though there are absolutely no signs of a similar intensification in the data acquired. This is perhaps the key conclusion of this thesis: although the historical circumstances, meaning the nature of the approaches and their timing, were somewhat predictable by looking at the discourses and their relative analysis, the actual methods and manners in which they were employed were not.

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