A CRITIQUE OF EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY: THE CASE OF RUSSIAN INTERVENTION IN UKRAINE

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Abstract

This study attempts to evaluate European Neighbourhood Policy by analysing the European Union's foreign policy during the international crisis in Crimea. With respect to the basic neo-realist premises, this paper argues that the activities of EU within the neighbourhood of Russia have negatively contributed to the process of annexation of Crimea. Based upon the parallel structure of NATO and EU enlargements, this study contends that the EU has failed to differentiate its approach to Russia from that of the US. It could be argued a more inclusive approach by the EU, particularly in its Eastern neighbourhood, could lead Moscow to follow a more moderate foreign policy in the region. Starting with the US policies shaping NATO's expansion in Europe, this paper outlines EU's active regional policies under the European Neighbourhood Policy, which have been perceived by Russia as a security threat.

Keywords: European Neighbourhood Policy, Russia, Crimean Crisis, EU Enlargement

AVRUPA KOMŞULUK POLİTİKASI ÜZERİNE BİR ELEŞTİRİ: RUSYA'NIN UKRAYNA MÜDAHALESİ ÖRNEĞİ

Öz

Bu çalışmada Kırım'da yaşanan uluslararası kriz süresince Avrupa Birliği'nin izlediği dış politika analiz edilerek, Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası değerlendirilmeye çalışılacaktır. Neorealist bir yaklaşım çerçevesinde, bu çalışma AB'nin Rusya ile paylaştığı komşuluk bölgesinde yürüttüğü faaliyetlerin Kırım'ın Rusya tarafından ilhak edilmesi sürecini olumsuz etkilediğini ileri sürmektedir. NATO ve AB'nin genişlemesindeki parallel süreçten yola çıkarak bu çalışma AB'nin Rusya'ya yaklaşımının ABD'nin politikalarından yeterince farklı olamadığını iddia etmektedir. AB'nin özellikle Doğu Komşuluğu alanı olmak üzere Rusya'yı daha çok

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içine alan bir yaklaşım sergilemesi, Moskova'nın bölgede daha ılımlı bir politika izlemesine yol açabilirdi. NATO'nun Avrupa'da yayılmasını hedefleyen ABD politikaları ile başlayan çalışmada, Rusya'nın güvenlik tehdit olarak algıladığı Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası çerçevesindeki AB politikaları neo-realist bir perspektifle ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası, Rusya, Kırım Krizi, AB Genişlemesi*

Introduction

The current international crisis between Russia and Ukraine which was followed by the sudden annexation of the Crimean Peninsula has once more proved one of the basic realist arguments. International conflict becomes inevitable when a major international actor intensifies its political activity in an area where the vital interests of others are at stake. Although Moscow was aware of the severe economic and political implications of the current situation before the operation, the former superpower did not hesitate to respond firmly to the developments that took place in Ukraine. The enlargements of NATO in 1999 and 2004 were somehow tolerated by Russia since those new members were, at that time, also in the process of European Union (EU) membership. However, Russia has always had vital interests in those countries, which are encompassed by the Eastern Partnership. In other words, any intensification in political activity particularly in Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia by any major international actor would be likely to prompt a serious response from Russia.

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) aims to provide a more prosperous, secure and peaceful zone in the close neighbourhood of Europe by signing association agreements with Southern and Eastern neighbours of the EU. Those bilateral agreements promote European standards in the market economy for the EU's closest neighbours and, furthermore, help to improve the values of democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Until recently, the Russian reaction to the ENP was moderate and Moscow in one way or another conceded European impact on the buffer states between the Union and Russia.

The increasing political influence of the EU on Ukraine -particularly after the association agreement negotiations dominated the political agenda in EU-Ukraine relations- attracted much attention in Russia. By late 2013, the EU's intensive effort to convince Ukraine on the issues of the European normative agenda has given rise to tension in Kiev. The then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych pulled out of the association deal and, in turn, caused the biggest wave of public protests in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution. In other words, instruments of ENP have somehow contributed to the recent crisis in Ukraine.

This paper argues that although the ENP has been an effective policy in establishing a peaceful environment around Europe, implementation of its

instruments should take into account expectations of other major actors that have vital interests in that specific region. Recalling the developments that paved way to the February 22 Coup, this paper partly ascribes certain factors that caused anxiety among Russian political circles. Furthermore, the EU's engagement in Ukrainian politics is criticised as a negative impact on the escalation of tension in the region, which in turn hamper ENP's performance. This study in the way of a conclusion contends that the liberal approaches pioneered by the United States in the Black Sea region should be revised following the Crimean Crisis and that the EU should follow a more realistic approach in its relations with the Russian Federation.

In order to clarify the main argument, this paper initially discusses the roles of the major powers with respect to their roles in the changing international system. Their contest for regional hegemony should be taken into consideration for a clearer understanding of Russian operations in Ukraine. The second part of the paper examines liberal policies followed by the western countries which have negatively contributed to the political escalation in Ukraine. The differences among EU members as well as the influence of the US on EU's foreign policy is also examined. The concluding section evaluates from a neo-realist perspective the failure of EU's ENP initiatives.

Great Powers and Regional Hegemony

The civil unrest of February 2014 that took place in Ukraine should be viewed as a consequence of political struggle among international actors. Certain policies and actions of major international actors -including the United States, Russian Federation and the EU- prior to the Euromaidan demonstrations should be taken into consideration in order to find a peaceful solution. In other words, solely attributing blame to the Russian President Vladimir Putin for the annexation of Crimea does not help bring peace to the EU's eastern neighbourhood. Therefore, it is necessary to underline the events that have triggered Russia's reaction, for a long-term solution to the most critical security question of the EU since the end of the Cold War. Thus, NATO expansions and EU enlargement processes are also critically important. After the end of the Cold War Russia did not directly oppose these developments, yet expansion of its former enemies towards its western borders has always been a threat for Russia.

It should be borne in mind that great powers who perceive threat to national security are inclined to follow harsh policies at international level. Powerful actors in international politics are inclined to search for regional dominance in order to survive in an anarchic structure. Snyder (1993) and Mearsheimer (2001) examined great power reaction with reference to historical cases. The historical examples confirm that major actors search for regional hegemony with various intentions since "statesmen and strategists have recurrently created situations in which expansion and war have seemed unavoidable" (Snyder, 1993: p.2).

Under these conditions Mearsheimer argued that global hegemony is impossible under current conditions and the best outcome for a major actor is to become a

regional hegemon, without being threatened by any other powerful actor in any other regional setting (Mearsheimer, 2001: p. 40-41). According to Mearsheimer (2014a: p.176) "great powers always worry about the balance of power in their neighbourhood and push back when other great powers march up to their doorsteps". This argument can also be supported by two historical examples that the American leadership previously employed. First, the Monroe Doctrine, adopted by the United States in order to dominate the American Continent, is an example of this policy. The second example is the missile crisis in Cuba during the Cold War period. In both cases, the US was motivated by security fears and was trying to prohibit the threats against its regional hegemony.

Mearsheimer contends that "great powers are not mindless aggressors so bent on gaining power that they charge headlong into losing wars or pursue Pyrrhic victories" (2001: p.37). This argument is also relevant for Russia's behaviour today. Unlike some arguments (Sestanovich, 2007; McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2008; Rifkind, 2012; Krauthammer, 2014) based on personal ambitions of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia is not simply following individual policies of its leader, who is indulged in maximizing power (McFaul, 2014; Sestanovich, 2014). Moreover, there are arguments that neo-Eurasianism, which is pioneered by Russian ideologist Alexander Dugin, provides theoretical basis for Putin's activism in world politics (Barbashin and Thoburn, 2014). Different from previous Eurasianist approach this new version is constructed on a rivalry between Russia and the United States while European countries could be included among Russia's allies. According to Dugin (2014) as long as those who oppose Atlanticism worldwide work together with a strong Russia, a multipolar order could be secured. Indeed, Putin's foreign policy choices may be in conformity with Dugin's arguments. However, regardless of the neo-Eurasianist arguments, this study mainly discusses that Russian proactive stance during the case of its intervention in Crimea can be explained by reactions of a great power that came under threat by its rivals in an emerging multipolarity. Therefore, in order to determine whether Russia's annexation of Crimea can be attributed to Western powers or can be considered to be a result of Putin's domestic political ambitions, one should clearly examine the steps that cause 2014 events in Ukraine.

The Way to Euromaidan: Expansion of Western Institutions in Eastern Europe

The public protests in Ukraine known as Euromaidan were not simply a consequence of social network activity mobilized by some pro-European politicians in order to pushback government's decision to suspend the preparations of an association agreement with the EU. The protests which turned the country into a battleground and increased instability in the region resulted from a series of decisions taken by major international actors since the end of the Cold War.

The end of bipolar structure raised questions about the future of NATO. For the former Soviet leadership NATO was perceived as a guarantee against the potential

aggressiveness of a reunified Germany. The Russians expected that NATO would remain intact without changing of any its borders (Mearsheimer, 2014b, p.2). However, liberal ideas were dominant in the Western world and the leaders of the United States and major European countries neither shared Russia's expectations nor understood its security concerns.

The first enlargement of NATO after the end of Cold War was in 1999 with the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. While Blank and Huessy (2015) restated the then Russian President Boris Yeltsin's confirmation about the right of former Soviet countries to join NATO, Szyszlo (2003) clearly put forth the negative impact of NATO activity in Eastern Europe on Russia and Belarus during the second half of the 1990s. Szyszlo (2003) analysed reassessment of strategic imperatives of Russia and Belarus from the mid-1990s to the NATO's military campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999, and concluded that rapid cooperation of Belarus and Russia against NATO expansion, which might present complex challenges for European enlargement, is worth mentioning (p.32).

Simultaneously, the EU was in a new phase of enlargement after the end of the Cold War. Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995 as a result of a relatively smooth enlargement process. The economic development level of those new three member states was very similar to the other 12 members and politically they were quite familiar with the EU norms. Most importantly, these newcomers were not former Warsaw Pact member states. Therefore, the 1995 enlargement was acceptable for the Russians.

Although most of the former Warsaw Pact member states were inclined to develop intensive political and economic relations with the Western camp, there were voices of reason like the last President of Czechoslovakia Vaclav Havel. In his address to NATO ministers in 1991 Havel reiterated the importance of Russia's role in the stability and security of Europe (Dobrovsky, 2002):

> "I have already mentioned the disquieting signals which are coming from the Soviet Union and the threat which instability in that country may pose to Europe. Neither our concern about the future developments in the Soviet Union nor our interest in intensifying security links with Western Europe mean, in any way, that we would wish to isolate the Soviet Union from Europe and move the Iron Curtain to its borders. On the contrary: the future security structure of a democratic Europe is unimaginable without the participation of the democratic community of the nations of the present Soviet Union. If we support their quest for self-determination, democracy and prosperity, we are doing so, inter alia, because we wish to live, cooperate and develop good neighbourly relations with these nations in a shared expanse of democracy. Their isolation from Europe and the world is, on the contrary, the goal of those in the Soviet Union who long for the restoration of the old order." (p.30)

Despite the common sense among some prominent figures in Europe, the Western countries were indifferent to the Russian strategic security concerns. Russia's early reaction was limited with some criticism of the United States and its allies. Boris Yeltsin repeatedly warned the West about the dire consequences of NATO expansion and maintained that expansion of NATO borders to the East was

a direct security threat for Russia (On invasion's anniversary, 1996; Mearsheimer, 2014b).

By the turn of the millennium further NATO enlargement coincided with the historical enlargement of the EU in 2004. At the 2002 Prague Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government confirmed their commitments to transform NATO into a new world order and invited new members to the alliance. The accession talks with three former Soviet states –Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania– and four Eastern European states –Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Romania– were expected to finalize their membership no later than May 2004. It was clearly stated that "those invitees would not be the last countries invited to join the alliance" (The Prague Summit, 2003: p. 12). It was a clear message of NATO's future enlargement towards the East. In that sense, this can be considered as a striking point in NATO-Ukraine relations:

> "At the Prague Summit, the NATO-Ukraine Commission adopted a new NATO-Ukraine Action Plan. This provides for intensified consultations and cooperation on political, economic and defence issues, with a view to raising the relationship to a qualitatively new level, building on the NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership.
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> Since the signing of the 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, cooperation between NATO and Ukraine, in political, military, economic, scientific, civil emergency and other fields, has been a significant factor in consolidating overall regional stability and security. It has also reinforced Ukraine's standing as a key player in the Euro-Atlantic area. The Charter reflects Ukraine's declared strategy of increasing its integration in European and transatlantic structures and is the basis for NATO and Ukraine consultations in areas of Euro-Atlantic security and stability such as conflict prevention, crisis management, peace support and humanitarian operations." (The Prague Summit, 2003: p. 43)

It was a tacit declaration by the leaders of NATO members that further enlargement of the alliance could even include Ukraine. As had been defined at the Prague Summit in 2003, those candidates joined the alliance shortly before the Istanbul Summit in 2004. The attendance of the Russian President Putin at the Istanbul Summit raised serious questions prior to the event taking place, and could also be evaluated as a reaction to NATO's policies against Russian interests (Socor, 2004).

In parallel with NATO's expansion, the EU's enlargement in 2004 encompassed 10 new members, which included the former Soviet Union states as well as Warsaw Pact members. Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the Union in 2004 as the fifth enlargement of the EU. This was followed by the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The EU's enlargement process was not as disturbing for Russia when compared to NATO expansion (DeBardeleben, 2013). However, it should be kept in mind that since the end of the Cold War Russian leadership perceived its relations with the Western Europe to be on an equal footing in terms of great power politics. In other words, Russia expected the major EU states to respect "a binary system, with Western Europe and Russia each maintaining a sphere of influence

and acting together as co-arbitrators on issues of importance to the continent as a whole – a modern day Concert of Europe" (Greene, 2012: 3).

Contrary to this perception, however, the Western World has continued to spread towards Russia's western borders, thereby causing Russia to naturally perceive any great power activity as intrinsically hostile behaviour that threatened its security. These fragile regions in Russia's neighbourhood not only include Ukraine and South Caucasus, but also the Balkans as well as Central and Eastern Europe.

Obstinate Advocacy of Expansion

The 2008 Bucharest Summit of NATO was another milestone because the enlargement paved the way for new geographical areas. The NATO Heads of State and Government confirmed the capacity of two Western Balkan Countries, namely Albania and Croatia, to join the Alliance. Although its efforts to join NATO were appreciated, an invitation for the accession talks with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were postponed until a mutually acceptable solution to the country's name question was found. More importantly the summit declaration paved the way to another enlargement prospect for a further geographical area (Bucharest Summit Declaration, 2008):

> "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore, we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications" (Para. 23).

Although the Alliance did not start a formal process for the accession of Ukraine and Georgia, boldly declaring their capacity to become member states in the future was sufficiently terrifying for the Russian leadership. Indeed, Russia's concerns about its Western borders security were highlighted by the US missile shields plans in Poland and the Czech Republic (Russia threatening new cold war over missile defence, 2007). NATO's enlargement message after the Bucharest Summit aggravated Russia's concerns.

President George W. Bush of the United States put mounting pressure on NATO members to invite Ukraine and Georgia to the Alliance. Most of the Eastern European Countries as well as Canada and the United Kingdom supported the United States in terms of eastern enlargement. However, Germany and France angled for a compromise and convinced other NATO members for a smooth declaration with regards to these two states. The primary concern of German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nikolas Sarkozy was an unnecessary provocation of Russia, who had insistently warned Western countries regarding NATO expansion towards its borders (NATO Expansion Defeat, 2008).

Even before the summit President Putin told Chancellor Merkel during her visit to Moscow that "unending expansion of a military-political block in a world in which there is no longer an antagonistic enemy is not only nonsensical, but also damaging and counter-productive" and warned that the Alliance should "not play the role of the United States" (Klußmann, 2008).

Makarychev (2008) premised Russian opposition to NATO on two mutually exclusive definitions: The first argument was that NATO was a seriously threatening military bloc while the second argument questioned NATO's capacity as a guarantor of security in a completely altered international setting after the end of the Cold War. Regardless of the underlying reason of opposition to NATO, after the Bucharest Summit the Russian administration increased the frequency of its opposition to the enlargement of Western institutional structures in its periphery. Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko immediately defined the NATO membership prospects of Ukraine and Georgia as a "strategic mistake" and warned his western counterparts about the "most serious consequences for pan-European security" (Nato denies Georgia and Ukraine, 2008). Moreover, Dmitri Medvedev, the then President of Russia, warned Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili that "Georgia's joining NATO would deepen the conflict between the former Soviet States" and "would not help resolve the simmering tensions in the separatist Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia" (Kishkovsky, 2008). In short, before and after the Bucharest Summit, Russia displayed many indications of disquiet. Malek (2009: 247-249) listed various reactions from Russia against the NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia. From Russia's President Vladimir Putin to Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and to Chief of the Russian General Staff Yurii Baluevskii, Russian high level officials as well as the media harshly criticized Western efforts in the Black Sea and South Caucasus.

European Role in Russia's Fear of Western Expansion

Similarly, the EU engaged in active policy in Russia's South East neighbourhood. Despite the fact that the EU has never explicitly voiced the possibility of membership for Eastern Partnership countries, intensive engagement with Ukraine through the employment of different policy tools has had a disturbing effect on Russia. For the EU, "Ukraine is a priority country within the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. The EU is committed to a policy of sequenced engagement with Ukraine and to a close relationship that encompasses political association and economic integration" (The EU's relations with Ukraine, 2015). EU's statements about the importance of cooperation with Ukraine can also be affirmed by its unprecedented economic support to help Ukraine launch a reform process. European financial institutions have committed more than 11 billion Euro for the political, economic and social stabilization of the country (How the EU is supporting Ukraine, 2015).

The ambiguous nature of the ENP has always been a factor that has made Russia suspicious about the real intentions of the Europeans. Smith (2005)

discussed the problems of ENP and argued that "when the geographical definition of 'Europe' has become as fuzzy as it now is, setting limits to EU membership is consequently problematic" (p.757) and "the EU should try to resolve the hardest dilemma of all: where its borders will stop moving outwards" (p.773). It was clear before the 2004 enlargement that some other countries geographically located between Europe and Russia could ask for EU membership. Even before the formal introduction of the ENP, Zielonka (2002) refers to the words of Christopher Hill:

> "If the contrast becomes too marked between a large, inclusive and increasingly prosperous EU and a stagnant Russia, then the scenario of revived nationalism leading to disputes with the Baltic States and possibly other Western neighbours will not seem so remote. In these circumstances it will not take much for the EU and Russia to start looking like security threats to each other, and the old realist game will have recommenced." (p. 12)

There are several benefits of EU membership that attract political groups in neighbouring countries who ask for a process of EU accession. One of the most obvious benefits of EU membership is economic prosperity for a new member state. Once a European country become a member state, then it is possible to access various funds available to spend on developing infrastructure. In other words, new member states can get funding which outweighs their contribution to the EU budget. A second economic advantage of EU membership relates to foreign investment and market opportunities. A vast European market can be considered to be an attractive opportunity for new member states. Furthermore, a new member state may attract the attention of FDI –particularly from other developed countries– as long as they achieve stability in political and economic realms. Another advantage of EU membership is in the sphere of national security. Being a part of European integration process binds member states politically to each other. While foreign and security issues are left to the discretion of member states, the EU has developed various political tools and cooperated with NATO in terms of territorial defence. All the factors mentioned above make the EU an attractive regional integration project for non-EU member European states.

By concluding bilateral association agreements with the ENP countries, the EU has embarked on institutionalized relations with the countries in the MENA region, Eastern Europe and Southern Caucasus. Membership to the EU for MENA countries is clearly impossible with the current EU structure since the Acquis only enables European states to become a member. However, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have a different status because their geographical status cannot be clearly specified as "non-European state". Therefore, despite the overt messages of the EU about the limits to enlargement, the six eastern neighbours of the EU may have a chance to become a member state in the future. This possibility has always been considered by the Russian leadership. Indeed, Russia's concerns about the EU's enlargement plans was a secondary issue during the late 2000s, because Russia's primary foreign policy threat was NATO expansion. From a realist perspective, it is possible to argue that how Russia perceived the ENP was different from the actual purpose of the EU. Furthermore,

an active ENP followed by the Union after 2004 in Eastern Europe was contradictory to the reasons why German and French leadership object to NATO enlargement. The major powers of the EU probably misperceived Russia's acceptance of ENP in its periphery. They were also divided on how to react against Russia after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and could not even influence Russia to halt any huge scale projects including the North Stream (Antonenko, 2008: 29). It is also possible to argue that the then French President Sarkozy's ambitious role caused the EU to fail in 2008 conflict. Holding the presidency of the EU Council, Nicolas Sarkozy reacted in an active manner to the crisis without taking into account the procedures of the EU foreign policy. Sarkozy was proactive policy was considered to be an action particularly for presenting the EU as a major actor able to affect global affairs as well as a step to strengthen his position politically (Aver, 2011).

Impact of the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy

The Black Sea Synergy[1] (BSS) was formally launched by the partner countries in February 2008. This initiative was proposed as a complementary forum for other EU policies including ENP, the pre-accession strategy with Turkey and the Strategic Partnership with Russia (European Commission, 2007). Therefore, BSS was not a direct threat to the Russia since the initiative also included the former superpower. However, the EU's activity within the BSS was perceived by Moscow as an intrusion around the Black Sea (Delcour, 2011: 144). Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the EU Ambassador Vladimir Chizhov defined the BSS is an unnecessary additional structure, where littoral states of the Black Sea have cooperation platforms, i.e. the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and the Black Sea Forum (Rettman, 2007). Months after this initiative, an armed conflict between Georgia, Russia, and the Russian-backed self-proclaimed republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia damaged the stability in the Black Sea region. The 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia also had a negative impact on the BSS and the EU subsequently adopted another initiative; Eastern Partnership for its eastern neighbourhood. Based on a personal interview with a high level EU official, Açıkmeşe (2012) argued that "the establishment and evolution of the Eastern Partnership has led to the informal demise of the BSS" (p. 20).

Eastern Partnership[2] is an initiative of Poland in collaboration with Sweden started in 2008. The main purpose of this initiative was to form a platform of intensified relations with six Eastern European and Southern Caucasus states. While the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt adopted a democratisation stance for the eastern neighbourhood -maybe because of geographical concerns- his Polish counterpart Radoslav Sikorski defined the initiative as a tailored process "practically" and "ideologically" strengthening ENP "towards that could eventually

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[1] For the details of Black Sea Synergy, see Black Sea Synergy (2015).
[2] For the details of Eastern Partnership of the EU, see EU Relations with Eastern Partnership (2015).

become EU members, but are held back by the enlargement fatigue within the bloc" (Goldirova, 2008: Para. 3).

It is plausible to argue that Russia's reaction to the EU's increased presence in Ukraine was particularly highlighted after the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership initiative of the Union in 2009. Even though the EU has officially disregarded EU membership demands requested by these countries, the Eastern Partnership has intensified EU's efforts to be more active in Southern Caucasus and Eastern Europe countries. Furthermore, many of the Eastern European members of the EU can be viewed as being positive about membership perspective for the Eastern partners. The Association Agreements, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area by these countries are potential factors that can increase the inclinations of those countries towards closer relations with the West.

Furthermore, closer relations with the Western institutions could pave the way to NATO and/or EU membership. When compared with EU's financial assistance to other countries under the ENP, excessive EU support may be regarded by Russia as a sign of positive discrimination for Ukraine, which could even finalise membership. Therefore, increased European activity in the countries bordering Russia has negatively contributed to the crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

Amanda Paul (2015) examined European efforts in the eastern neighbourhood as well as Russia's reaction to the western efforts being dominant in the region. Paul argued that different foreign policy choices of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan confirm that EU's "one size fits all approach" does not work. According to Paul (2015) Yerevan's U-turn to join the Russia's Euroasian Economic Union obviously demonstrated "Moscow's new assertive policy of pushing back against EU enlargement in the former Soviet space" (pp. 5-6). After the Eurasian Customs Union entered into force in 2010, Russia intensified its pressure over Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova to join the new bloc. It can be viewed as a political project rather than an economic integration process (Dreyer and Popescu, 2014: 3). As a result of intensive Russian efforts, the customs union turned into an international organization formed by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Armenia joined the Union immediately after its inauguration. The Eurasian Economic Union, therefore, can be viewed as a political reaction of Russia to the EU's efforts in the region. However, it is possible to argue that EU leaders did not take into consideration similar messages previously espoused by the Russian leadership prior to the Crimean crisis unlike their cautious stance adopted against US insistence for NATO enlargement to the Southern Caucasus.

The Crimean crisis made it clear that European efforts to provide stability and security in the Eastern neighbourhood have had different implications in neighbouring countries. ENP and other similar initiatives developed strong pro-European inclinations in countries like Georgia and Ukraine whilst Western presence in the region irritated some other countries including Russia. As Mearsheimer (2014b: 3) contends, "in the eyes of Russian leaders, EU expansion is a stalking horse for NATO expansion". Stephen Walt (2015) also argues that "the

Ukraine crisis … begun when the United States and European Union tried to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and into the West's sphere of influence" (para. 10).

Appeasement or Empathy

The colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and in Kyrgyzstan changed the political preferences of major actors over the issues relating post-Soviet states. The US and Western European Countries read the colour revolutions completely different from Russia. While the former accepted the revolutions as a step towards democratic norms and values, the latter viewed the colour revolutions as transfers of Russia's influence and power in the region to the US. In other words, Russia perceived the developments started by the colour revolutions as a unique strategy to form a new anti-Russia alliance replacing the former anti-Soviet alliance. (Mitchell, 2012: 98-103).

Russia's annexation of Crimea, which is an internationally recognized part of another sovereign state, confirms a primary realist axiom that "great powers will develop and mobilize military capabilities sufficient to constraint the most powerful among them" (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008: 22). In more concrete terms, Russia reacted harshly to the efforts of western countries that were likely to achieve prevalence in Russia's neighbourhood. However, until recently, a tough policy for taming Russia has not worked as a part of western foreign policy.

The EU termed Russia's Crimean operation as an "illegal annexation" and "deliberate destabilization of a neighbouring country", and imposed restrictive measures against Russia (EU sanctions against Russia over Ukraine crisis, 2015). The European Council decided to impose its initial diplomatic measures against Russia immediately after its intervention in February 2014. Travel bans and the freezing of assets for those involved in actions against stability in Ukraine began in March 2014. These sanctions were reinforced in July and September 2014. A set of measures were also directed at Crimea and Sevastopol. First of all, all imports of goods originating in Russian controlled Crimea were banned. Secondly, investment in Crimea was prohibited for EU based corporations, including real estate investments and contracting agreements. Thirdly, prohibition of a touristic nature aimed at the Crimea was introduced. Another ban was also imposed on the transfer of technology for transport, telecommunications and energy sectors, including the exploration of oil, gas and mineral resources. According to western policy makers, these restrictions for the Crimea were not sufficient enough to be effective on Russia; therefore additional measures were imposed directly on Russia.

Comprehensive restrictions on Russia were mainly imposed on the Russian financial sector, which resulted in the prohibition of transactions with five major state owned Russian banks, three major Russian energy companies and three major Russian defence companies. Secondly, arms embargo were introduced on Russian products in addition to a ban on export of military equipment to Russia, including

dual use[3] goods. Another critical restriction in terms of exports was from EU members to Russian Federation is in the area of energy production technologies. Particularly, oil exploration and production technologies in offshore waters as well as technologies used for the exploitation of shale forms also underwent restriction. These restrictions in question were of critical importance for the Russian energy industry due to the fact that Russia's economy was and still is primarily based on the export of energy resources.

In addition to the embargo on trade with Russia, the European Council asked the European Investment Bank not to engage in new agreements with the institutions operating in the Russian Federation. Furthermore, bilateral and regional cooperation programmes between EU and Russia were widely frozen. One of the most striking points worthy of mention in relation to the EU sanctions against Russia is that the measures were adopted by the CFSP Council decision with unanimity. Furthermore, the Council declared the following (EU Restrictive Measures, 2014):

> "EU sanctions are not punitive, but designed to bring about a change in policy or activity by the target country, entities or individuals. Measures are therefore always targeted at such policies or activities, the means to conduct them and those responsible for them." (para. 2)

The European Council's unanimous decision confirms that the EU could unite to respond together and firmly against Russia's foreign policy. However, the Council also noted that its decision did not directly target Russia, but its foreign policy. Therefore, the normative nature of the EU was clearly demonstrated by the European Council at the beginning of the crisis. However, as Manners (2002: 244) contends "accepting the normative basis of the EU does not make it a normative power". The argument of Hedley Bull made during the Cold War years is still relevant today. The normative "power and influence" of the EU is "conditional upon a strategic environment provided by the military power of states," which is out of the control of civilian actors (Bull, 1982: 151). Therefore, from a neo-realist perspective, exerting international pressure on Russia has not been functional in solving the Crimean dispute. Indeed, the western restrictions have had specific effects on Russia. However, it could be argued that Russia has not been seriously affected by the sanctions imposed by the West. This is because Moscow could insist that its foreign policy has not deviated from its course because of EU sanctions.

In short, it could be stated that containment and deterrence is not a suitable policy for the EU concerning its relations with Russia. Contrary to the arguments about the dangers of appeasement (Traynor and MacAskill, 2014) the case of Crimea is totally different from Nazi Germany. In Europe the nature of the current international political system may be described as being a balanced multipolarity with five major powers in Europe including the US, Russia, Germany, France and Britain as key actors. Despite the fact that the US has superiority in terms of

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[3] Dual use goods include software and technology that can be used for both civilian and military purposes. Dual use goods can contribute to the production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

military and economic power, it is not a regional hegemon but *primus inter pares* (Hyde-Price, 2006: 230). In that sense, a balanced relationship with Russia that does not result in the escalation of tension in the region would increase EU security. Thanks to the "stopping power of water" the United States can be considered to be geographically less threatened against the Russian threat when compared to Europe (Mearsheimer, 2001: 44). Thus, a military confrontation with Russia entails more security risks for the EU member states in comparison to the US. Therefore, the EU should somehow differentiate its policy towards Russia. The EU has the capacity to include Russia into the European security system and to refrain from confrontation with Russia by highlighting cooperation in areas where conflicting interests cause problems between Europe and Russia.

Conclusion

The current structure of the international system has a changing nature and international actors should be extremely careful during this transitional period for the sake of national security. From a neo-realist perspective, the EU would do well to differentiate its stance from that of the United States in order to alleviate Russian anxiety. Several reasons as discussed rendered the EU vulnerable against Russia. Therefore, tough liberal idealist policies targeting Russia may end up harming European security. Among the European drawbacks, geographical proximity comes first. The United States is geographically further from Russia and there is no immediate threat perceived for the US and its citizens. Conversely, most of the Eastern EU members share borders with Russia or they are in the same neighbourhood. Their citizens living in close proximity to Russia and renders the geographical proximity a serious threat.

Secondly, European security heavily relies on NATO capabilities. In a potential transatlantic drift European security would be in serious danger against neighbouring powers. Since the US would potentially lose interests in Europe, its military commitments to the continent would be reduced. "If great power security competition increases in a multipolar Europe, EU member states are likely to pursue a variety of strategies towards America, from balancing to bandwagoning" (Hyde-Price, 2006: 231). Furthermore, it would also be hard for the EU members to take decisions on the basis of the lowest common denominator. Therefore, the deterioration of relations with Russia is a serious problem not only for the Eastern European countries but also for all EU members.

Thirdly, EU-Russia relations are extremely interdependent particularly in terms of trade and economy. Russia ranks third among the trade partners of the EU while the EU is still the primary trading partner of Russia. The primary EU exports to Russia are industrial products, chemicals, medicines and agricultural products. On the other hand, Russia's exports to the EU are dominated by natural gas, oil and its derivatives (Countries and Regions: Russia, 2015). When compared to the US, deteriorating economic relations with Russia may be extremely harmful to European interests.

It is clear that countries of the Eastern Partnership are of significant importance for the EU. Developing and maintaining special relations with such countries is critical for stability in the EU's neighbourhood. Moreover, energy security concerns of the EU render these countries significant actors. For instance, the status of Georgia in carrying natural gas and oil from Azerbaijan is vitally important for Western interests. (Paul, 2015: 4). In addition, Ukraine has a specific role in carrying gas and oil to European countries. However, there are important risks in following close relations with these countries. Lynch (2005: 36) contends that Eastern neighbours of the EU are weak states with limited capacity to implement reforms. Lynch also perceives them as divided states with foreign orientation between Europe and Russia. Moreover, these countries are key actors for Russia in terms of national security. Intensified relations between Western powers and the Eastern European countries in question render Russia insecure within its neighbourhood regardless of the actual purpose of the EU. In more concrete terms, a resulting form of the Partnership of Peace process adopted by the NATO and the Partnership and Association Agreements completed by the EU, the Western economic and political systems have enlarged geographically to the detriment of Russia particularly during the past two decades.

In 2008, the EU's major powers could have persuaded the US not to issue a membership invitation to Ukraine and Georgia. In that sense, a display of tolerance by Europe could have prevented Russia from engaging in a war in Ukraine despite Moscow having launched a large-scale military operation in Georgia. Examples of similar nature illustrate that other major actors may indeed misinterpret some external actions of the EU. As a concluding remark, a tailor-made design of ENP may be useful in terms of increasing European security as long as it takes into account the interests of other major powers.

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