

THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS SEEN FROM A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE: ISOLATED CONFLICT OR DRIVING AGENT FOR REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS?

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Abstract

Ever since last year's refusal of former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the EU Association Agreement, there has rapidly been unfolded a series of events leading to an ongoing internal crisis and regional security issue. The growing trend of this development has revealed the lack of rapid and effective structured response by the West to deal with the continuing crisis. What are the reasons for which the Trans-Atlantic community's efforts have not met the expected results? The current paper seeks to show that the Ukrainian crisis is linked to other regional security issues, which, as consequence of their inter-connectivity, attract the Wider Black Sea cluster of states into a process of regionness based on security matters. In order to provide evidence in this regard, the paper will look through the Regional Security Complex Theory's reference factors' lenses to analyze the reactions of the regional states based on patterns of amity-enmity, "weak"- "strong" typology of states, and the modalities through which the conflict has reverberated across the region enabling security dynamics. The employed methodology is partly based on content analysis and partly on discourse analysis. The findings of the paper reveal that the Ukrainian crisis influences and is influenced by the overall security dynamics in the region, and the inter-state relations, respecting a pattern of long-lasting relations of amity-enmity, and power relations.

Key words

Amity-enmity, crisis, power relations, Regional Security Complex, Ukraine, Wider Black Sea

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 21st of November 2014, the former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich sparked mass protests on Kiev's Independence Square due to the former president's decision to halt negotiations with the EU on signing the Association Agreement and to strengthen the trade ties with Moscow (Gotev 2013; The Guardian 2014a). The Ukrainian crisis is soon to have lasted for one year. What at the end of last year's November seemed to be solely public protests shaking the domestic political stability, the March 2014's annexation of Crimea by Russia followed by the action of sending Russian troops into Eastern Ukraine, supported enough evidence to show that the domestic protests have reached regional consequences. At the same time, this development showed the formation of a crack in the Russia and the transatlantic community's relationship. The West has one more time had to face the cold reality that Russia is not a trustworthy partner¹. The fact that the latter not only stated but also acted upon promoting its regional interests by any means necessary gave evidence in this regard, and generated the perception that it might similarly pursue territorial expansion further to neighbouring countries. The relationship with Russia was hoped to turn a positive direction after the Obama administration initiated the Reset policy (The White House 2010), however the Ukrainian crisis undermines all efforts pursued in this regard. Ever since the Georgian war there have not been any other issues with such vexing power on the relationship between the two great powers.

The counteractions pursued by the West in determining Russia to step back and bring stability in Ukraine, mainly in the form of travel bans and asset freezes (BBC News 2014), have had limited results. A ceasefire agreement to put an end to the war in the Donbass region has been reached on the 5th of September 2014, when the Minsk protocol was signed between the two belligerent parties and the Donetsk and Lungansk post-Euromaidan separatist regions. Apart from stopping the military conflict, the agreement also offered

¹ When annexing Crimea, Russia broke the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, signed by the US, UK and Russia, in which it promised to guarantee Ukraine's security in exchange for its dismantling of its nuclear arsenal.

the breakaway regions special status provided by the law “On the special procedure for local self-government in separate districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions”, which practically made Kyiv give up its political jurisdiction over them (Brzezinski 2014, 2). In spite of strong concessions having been made to Russia’s benefit, currently the status quo is far from being stable. New allegations of Russian interventions in the Eastern part of Ukraine made by Kyiv and Moscow’s accusations of Ukraine not sticking to the peace process prove its resilience (RT 2014). The agreement has only managed to stop intense military conflict to take place, however, the war is only temporarily frozen and the battle still continues in the political and diplomatic spheres, with strategic facilities such as the Donetsk International Airport being on the line (Brzezinski 2014, 1). The newly elected pro-Western government is seen with good eyes by the Western community and by locals. However, its unity and stability will be put to test, as it will have to face very difficult challenges, such as frozen conflict in Donbass, economic crisis, gas crisis, domestic social tensions, and strained relations with Russia (Wojciech 2014).

Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the remaining challenges sought to be avoided by the Western community, however any attempts made could not inflict change in the course of the events led by Russia, in spite of strong expectations from the EU-oriented and EU member regional states. Why have the West’s efforts not met the expected results? The present paper seeks to show that the Ukrainian crisis is not an isolated conflict. It influences and it is influenced by other security issues in the region, which, as consequence of their inter-connectivity, enable a process of regionness between the Wider Black Sea cluster of states, based on security matters. The main inter-related security issues are connected to the transit of energy, the sea-based missile defence system in the Black Sea, and the unsolved conflicts. The hypothesis of this paper is that the Wider Black Sea Region (WBSR) is defined as a macroregion in its own right, namely a distinct geographical area or regions in which common challenges which states are facing with, or specific set of practices and patterns of interaction, lead to the formation of a process of regionness (Konończuk 2014).

The methodological apparatus of the present paper consists of content analysis and partly of discourse analysis, supported by empirical evidence. The former analyzes official documents and reports, while the latter takes into

consideration speeches of heads of states and declarations by analyzing frames of reference through which decision makers have interpreted the events in Ukraine and the actions pursued by Russia. The two methods have been combined for depicting the patterns of interactions between states and the extent to which the states' reactions to the Ukrainian crisis have been influenced by socially constructed images of the "self" and the "other".

The analytical framework is supported by the conceptual framework of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), as defined by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever (2003). RSCT is a theory at the crossroad between neorealism and constructivism, for it includes both system and subsystem levels of analysis (domestic political processes) and includes the examination of patterns of amity-enmity as independent variable, when explaining the formation or development of a regional security complex (RSC). In *Regions and Powers - The Structure of International Security*, Buzan and Weaver have provided evidence of the fact that the post-Soviet space is a regional security complex (Buzan and Weaver 2003, chap V), in which "strong instances of interregional dynamics may be indicators of an external transformation (merger) of RSCs" (Buzan and Weaver 2003, 49).

According to Buzan and Weaver, security complexes are constituted in deeply intertwined security interdependent relations, which due to the fact that they are more likely to travel over short than over long distances, they take the form of regional coagulants and determine the formation of regional security complexes. On this account, security issues automatically involve or influence the actors in the region and the non-regional actors who have a constant role in influencing the security status of the specific area. Identity factors are downplayed by security issues, therefore regardless of the fact that the states do or not have common identity, they can nevertheless be attracted into a process of regionness if they share common or inter-related security concerns. According to the theory, "a security complex is defined as a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another" (Buzan 1983, 105). In spite of a concrete degree of autonomy over security developments within a region, the dynamics of RSCs are however not solely dependent on what happens on the ground, but they can also be influenced by outside actors, more often interested great powers (such as, in our case, the EU and the US). The WBSR is composed of small, medium and strong powers, but

it is mainly dominated by a great power, namely Russia, and it is at the crossroad between global (international great powers) and system level powers, and regional security interdependences. According to the RSCT, great powers have the capacity to penetrate RSCs by taking advantage of regional rivalries and establishing security alignments with individual states (Buzan and Weaver 2003, 3-4).

As required by the theory, the paper investigates whether the regional states' reactions to the crisis have occurred respecting a pattern of amity-enmity (historically driven, or showed by a long-term policy), and power relations (between the countries within the region, and in relation to the interplay of international great powers, such as the US, the EU and Russia). These points of analysis show which are the patterns and driving agents of interaction between the states in the region. The theory uses a four dimension framework of analysis, taking into account the domestic vulnerabilities (categorizing countries according to the weak-strong typology of states)¹, security concerns, inter-state relations, and the role global powers play in the region (Buzan and Weaver 2003, 51). For this reason, the policies pursued by the US, NATO and the EU will also be touched upon in this paper.

2. DOMESTIC VULNERABILITIES AND PATTERNS OF AMITY-ENMITY

2.1. The Less Vulnerable Regional Power: Russia

According to the Freedom House's most recent report in 2009, Russia is an "authoritarianism that rests on selectively capitalist kleptocracy², the dominance of informal influence groups, a decorative democracy that is often described as managed" (Kimmage 2009, 49), for the state has a strong hold on

¹ According to Buzan and Weaver, weak states are internally fragmented and more vulnerable to external threats. The weak states are usually more preoccupied with domestic politics and the clash divergent interests and of different actors trying to capture the state, while the strong powers are more focused with foreign policy and external threats.

² The term "kleptocracy" refers to a feature of political corruption usually characteristic to authoritarian regimes, namely the perpetual practice of the government to ensure person wealth to its officials from state budget.

power and control over the state institutions. The Constitution assigns strong powers to the executive and rather limited powers for the legislative (Kozina 2010, 81). The political composition forms a one party system, which due to no opposition, condenses all the power around the president. As such, there is no fragmentation in the political sphere. Also, in the recent years there has not been any significant popular protest in Russia. According to a survey conducted by the Research Centre for East European Studies, there is a popular support for autocracy, and little willingness for political action among citizens (Carnaghan 2012, 1-14). Taking this into account and the fact that the annexation of Crimea has reached an unprecedented hike in popularity of President Vladimir Putin (Greene and Robertson 2014), we may rightfully state that there is no or very minimal state-citizenry fragmentation.

Russia's security concerns are mainly directed at outside threats. Both the 2010 Military Doctrine and the "Strategy for Russia's National Security to 2020" identify the Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS) as security threat (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010). In addition, the deployment of NATO military infrastructure to "member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation, including by expanding the bloc" is also defined as a national security threat (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010, II, 8 a). The former text provides reference also to the frozen conflicts as security threats, stating also that "territorial claims against the Russian Federation and its allies and interference in their internal affairs" threaten its security (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010, II, 8 e).

Taking all these into account, we may conclude that Russia has strong features of "strong state" typology: there is no or very minimal political fragmentation, the leadership benefits from strong citizenry support, and the security policy is particularly focused on outside threats. These features provide Russia with enough strength to hold its grip on power within the region. In addition, the repetitive reference made to the NATO troops or facilities, to which Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey are member states, shows a pattern of enmity constructed due to a long period of time during which the Alliance has been perceived as security threat.

2.2. The Most Vulnerable states: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia

Apart from the common feature of the three countries as having a concrete European orientation, there is a series of common/similar security issues which they are facing with, such as unstable political system, strong opposition, separatist autonomous regions within their territories, economic problems and dependencies on trade ties with Russia, gas dependencies on Moscow, and Russian military troops stationed in the breakaway regions. These issues make them greatly vulnerable on both domestic and regional scale.

Ukraine is currently the most unstable in terms of political and economic situation. After November last year, there has been created an almost absolute division in the country between the Western Oriented Western part of the country and the Eastern Russian oriented side (ESAI Energy Security Analysis 2014). In terms of economy, Ukraine is heavily indebted (\$35bn), and a large chunk of the whole amount of debt must go to Russia (\$1.9bn) (Freedom House 2014). In terms of security concerns, Ukraine's Military Doctrine and National Security Strategy which were adopted in June 2012, make reference to the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF)¹ seen as a threat if Russian troops are deployed to Ukraine without prior approval from Kyiv, and to the Transnistrian Moldovan unsolved conflict (Global Security 2014).

Moldova is the next in line, having ended in 2012 a political deadlock which lasted for three years during which the post of president has been vacant. As in the case of Ukraine, the parameters of political division are also between the West and the East. In addition, Moldova's economy is also dependent on trade to Russia though at a lower scale. The Transnistrian conflict is a magnet for organized crime, human and drug trafficking, manufacturing and illicit in-country and cross-border trade of weapons, and has impeded Moldova's efforts for state edification, economic development, and political consolidation (Popescu 2003, 12). In terms of security threats, in the National Security Concept, Moldova lists "the Transnistrian conflict and foreign military presence on the territory of the Republic of Moldova" (with reference to the Russian peace-keeping forces), and "external negative developments and

¹ The Russian Black Sea Fleet is located in Crimea, now under the *de-facto* jurisdiction of Russia.

international crises” (specifying the other regional unsolved conflicts) (National Security Concept of the Republic of Moldova 2008).

Georgia is better situated, having gone in 2013 through the first peaceful handover of power (Freedom House 2013). Currently Georgia’s vulnerability is mainly caused by a lack of control over the country’s entire territory, namely including the break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, feature which is present also in Ukraine and Moldova. Regarding security threats, in Georgia’s National Security Concept the top-ranked listed threats are: “occupation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation”, “the risk of renewed military aggression from Russia”, and “conflicts in the Caucasus” (BTI 2014).

Making a brief overview of the domestic vulnerabilities and security threats of the three analyzed states, we may conclude that they are good candidates to fit the “weak state” typology. They have a wide range of political, economic and security challenges at home which makes them very prone to instability and vulnerable to outside threats. The most pressing security threats are seen to be within their borders, and the other unsolved conflicts whose dynamics may have negative repercussions at home due to their similarity and shared link to Russia. In addition, the common reference to Russia shows clear vulnerabilities towards Moscow and a pattern of enmity determined by long-lasting threat posed to the security of the three states.

3. REPERCUSSIONS OF THE CRIMEAN CRISIS ON THE REGIONAL FROZEN CONFLICTS

The Russian annexation of Crimea has reverberated across the whole region having a noteworthy impact on the unsolved conflicts, particularly on Abkhazia¹ and Transnistria. All regional frozen conflicts have been threatening the security of the region ever since the collapse of the USSR, with multiple ups and downs in the negotiations for reaching settlements. The Russian widely contested move is seen by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova as a precedent, who perceive to be a thin line between the current status quo and a

¹ Secessionist autonomous region in Georgia.

situation similar to the Crimean crisis on their territories. In addition, Putin's March declaration stating that solely the people residing in the autonomous regions have the right to self-determination, further nurtured a sense of imminent threat of instability, unrest or foreign military occupation. Regions from within Moldova, namely Transnistria and Gagauzia, have already handed in official requests to Russia to also include them under its jurisdiction - a move less understandable for Gagauzia which is mainly occupied by Turks (EurActiv 2014). These developments are clear proof of the fact that the Ukrainian crisis is not an isolated conflict, rather affecting the region as a whole. Being a security issue which has occurred within the Black Sea regional security complex, the conflict has reverberated across the whole region affecting particularly the countries with similar unsettled disputes.

The Abkhazian conflict seemed to have reached a positive turning point in 2012 when the newly elected Georgian government publicly stated its willingness to restart the railway links to Russia, linking it to Armenia's railway (Babayeva 2014). The railway links via Abkhazia have been closed down ever since 1992, and the railway links with Russia and Armenia have been out of service since the 2008 war between the two belligerent parties. This policy had a strong effect on the Armenian economy, because its trade from Russia is transited through Georgia (Hendenskog and Larsson 2007, 65). Understandably, the decision to restart railway connections has been strongly supported by Russia, Armenia, and Turkey and vehemently opposed by Azerbaijan. Baku is worried that if this policy is implemented, Russia can easily transport armament to Armenia, and strengthen the former's power when defending its claims over Nagorno Karabach. It is thus of high national interest for Azerbaijan to stop this from becoming reality. Until the March annexation of Crimea this issue was still on the agenda being under consideration, but since then it seems that it is no longer perceived as priority. In June 2014 the head of the Russian Railways, Vladimir Yakunin, said that it is time to "focus on the question of opening the railroad communication through Abkhazia and Georgia to Armenia". In a much less optimistic light, the Georgian State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Paata Zakareishvili, said that restoring the rail link via Abkhazia is not being under discussion yet (Babayeva2014).The developments in Georgia show that the Ukrainian crisis has put an imprint on the Georgian orientation towards Russia. Its decision to halt preparations to resume railway connections with

Russia shows a change of heart and lack of trust in its Eastern partner. In addition, Georgia's move also affected Armenia, which was hoping for improved economic and military stability facilitated by the railway connection to Russia.

In the aftermath of the Crimean annexation, political unrest emerged in Abkhazia at the end of May 2014, and protesters took over the presidential administration building in efforts to seek the resignation of the pro-Russian region's leader, Alexander Ankvab (Waal 2014). In spite of the fact that allegedly the causes of the unrest were however not linked to the Crimean case, but to the high corruption of the Abkhazian leader, the timing of the uprising which occurred during the Ukrainian crisis cannot be turned a blind eye on to (Vartanyan 2014). The momentum of civil unrest against the country's leadership occurring in the region may have had a spill-over effect. But no matter the president's step down, the elected leadership in Abkhazia cannot possibly be less Russian oriented, proof of this being provided by the fact that the newly elected president is the opposition leader Raul Khadzhimba, former KGB chief for Abkhazia.

On the 27th of June 2014 Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova signed the Association Agreements with the EU including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), in spite of the Russian ongoing political, economic, and military (in the case of Ukraine) pressure. This outcome signifies the willingness of the three states to deepen ties with the EU on both political and economic levels (European Union External Action 2014). The Crimean annexation seems to have influenced the regional Eastern Partnership states to have a more concrete European path. However, the breakaway regions have been more convinced to strengthen ties with Moscow. In Abkhazia's case this can be shown by the draft alliance treaty, so called "*Treaty between the Russian Federation and Abkhazia on the alliance and integration*", signed on October 13th between the two parties. This treaty formalizes joint efforts for "introduction of a coordinated foreign policy, formation of a common space of security and defence, creation of a united social and economic space, preservation of the common cultural and humanitarian space" as the main areas of cooperation, integration and partnership (Mehdiyev 2014). For reasons related to the outcome of the Ukrainian crisis and to Moscow's insistence for the Abkhazia-Russia rail links to be restarted, Georgia raised concerns over this treaty. As stated by the Georgian Foreign Minister Senior Deputy Davit Zalkaliani

during a meeting with the OSCE's Special Representative and Co-Chair of the Geneva talks, Angelo Gnaedinger, "Russia's such actions will be regarded as the next step to annex Georgia's territory" (Mehdiyev 2014). The meeting attendees also noted the fact that this draft can have possible threats to the security of Georgia and the whole region. This is not a far-fetched statement, considering the fact that, as stated by the RSCT, the frozen conflicts create security interdependencies between states, and any security dynamics in any of them may have a spillover effect to the other breakaway regions.

4. REACTIONS OF REGIONAL STATES

Romania, Moldova, and Georgia have had the strongest opposing position to Russia's move in Ukraine. The Romanian president, Traian Băsescu, declared that "Kyiv and Chişinău are a priority for Vladimir Putin who wants to rebuild the Soviet Union" (EurActiv 2014). Being a bordering country with Ukraine, Romania is understandably worried about the last year's unfolding of events in Ukraine. Moreover, it acknowledges the influence the crisis can have on the Transnistrian conflict, which is particularly of concern for Bucharest due to its close proximity, and close historical ties between Moldova and Romania¹. Bucharest's view over the regional repercussions of this event is clearly portrayed in the official declaration of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, according to which Romania "considers that the reality which the unilateral attempts today are meant to build, in violation of international law, is deeply worrisome and dangerous since it may generate destabilizing effects throughout the region" (Euromaidan Press 2014). Romania's acknowledgement of the Ukrainian crisis as source of instability for the whole WBSR provides evidence that the conflict is not considered to be an isolated event, but a destabilizing force for the entire regional security complex. Consequently, also during a meeting between the Moldovan president and Romania's foreign minister, both parties agreed that the Crimean crisis,

¹ Moldova and Romania constituted a unified state between 1918 and 1940, when it was annexed by the USSR.

referred to as “the context of the difficult regional situation”, presented a danger for the WBS region (Presidency of the Republic of Moldova 2014).

During his presidency, Băsescu did not hide his opinion about Russia as rather a source for regional insecurity, and his strong preference and support for reunification between his country of rule and Moldova under the aegis of the EU, declaring that “the European Union will not accept a troubled country with territorial problems or occupation troops on its territory” and a solution would be unification with Romania (Băsescu 2014). Similarly to the former soviet countries now member of the EU, in Romania there is a noteworthy Russophobic attitude, the highest from the WBSR.¹ Taking this into account, understandably, Romania made strong official statements condemning Russia for its actions, and also initiated a draft statement in this sense, to which South Eastern European countries were also parties. The statement was finally not made official because it was blocked by Greece’s rejection (Serbia Independent News 2014). Greece did not have a too strong position against Russia due to strong energy and economic cooperation between the two, arms supply for Greece, and most importantly because Russia supports the Greek position in the Cyprus issue, against Turkey. This lack of common position between the EU regional states shows that the conflict can have the power to divide the countries in spite of their membership in the North-Atlantic structures. However, the positions of the EU member states also reflect patterns of amity-enmity which have been constructed through historical ties, such as Romania being in an enmity relation to Russia, and Greece to Turkey, and Romania having an amity relation to Moldova.

Moldova has had a concrete opposing position to Russia’s actions in Ukraine, and made clear its European path by signing the Association Agreement with the EU. This direction however may not be sustainable, as in the upcoming parliamentary elections, which are due to take place in November, the pro-Russian communist party may gain majority of votes, currently favoured by 47.2% of the electorate. This party has made public statements that its priority is the annulment of the Association Agreement (Inayah *et al.* 2014, 1-5). Moldova shows signs of deep domestic political fragmentation, with

¹ According to Matei Udrea, a Romanian historian, these attitudes emerged in 1877, when Romania was occupied by Russian forces during the Russia-Turkey war, and reappeared during the 1940s interwar period.

substantial consequences on the foreign policy and relations of the country. Also, it shows that Moldova is easily affected by the regional security dynamics and the power play between the West and Russia.

Bulgaria, another EU member state regional actor, also expressed its concerns over the effects the crisis may have on the security of the region. In an official declaration elaborated by the president's cabinet, Bulgaria's President Plevneliev calls on Russia "for stopping all provocative actions that may lead to irreparable consequences not only for the region, but also for the international order" (President of the Republic of Bulgaria 2014). Georgia went even further on this line, by adopting a resolution to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and by officially stating that "the recent aggressive acts of the Russian Federation against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, including the use of military units on the territory of Ukraine in violation of provisions of the bilateral agreements and the threat of large scale military aggression, pose a serious threat not only to friendly Ukraine, but also to Georgia and the entire Europe" (Tabula 2014). Georgia's position reflects the state's perception of the inter-connectivity of the security dynamics occurring in the WBSR, presenting the Ukrainian crisis as being a factor for instability within the whole region.

Turkey is a strong regional state, NATO ally and EU candidate country, with ambitions of becoming a regional leader; however its reaction was far from being firm. This is particularly due to deep economic and energy ties to Russia, and the current challenging intervention in Syria which it has been drawn into. As such, even if Turkey presented the annexation of Crimea as a worrying precedent in the region, it has nevertheless sought to maintain its good relations with Russia while declaring that it will not provide any financial support to Ukraine. Even if the large Tatar community in Crimea has pushed Turkey into taking a restrained stance and express concern over their security, Turkey's position was nevertheless soft. The Ukrainian crisis has been used as an opportunity for Turkey to get benefits from Russia in the form of cheaper gas and increased bilateral trade up to \$100 billion, and to reduce the uprising risk at home by projecting the idea of domestic demonstrations as posing threats to the national security (Elman 2014). Even if the Tatar community is of interest to Turkey, the lack of significant political fragmentation and domestic vulnerabilities allow Turkey to be in the position of benefiting from the current situation.

Azerbaijan has seen the Crimean crisis as a threat to the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, reason for which it has made clear its position in support for Ukraine and of condemnation to Russia's actions. For this purpose, the Azerbaijani delegation to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe supported and became party to the latter's declaration according to which "the use of military force by Russia to redraw national boundaries is unacceptable. The Congress therefore condemns Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sebastopol in violation of international law. The occupation of territories of independent states, as we saw in 2008 in Georgia and are facing now in Ukraine is unacceptable in international law and should not be tolerated" (Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe 2014). Azerbaijan is more Western-oriented than Turkey, and it has a frozen conflict within its borders for which Russia is a main mediator in the settlement negotiations. For the purpose of preventing the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict from re-escalating, Azerbaijan has taken a strong position with regards to the Ukraine crisis.

At the opposite pole, Belarus, often referred to as the last dictatorship in Europe and long-time ally of Russia in the region, strongly supported Moscow in its invading endeavour and condemned the actions pursued by the Western oriented Ukrainians, describing them as "radical and unlawful methods of settling domestic disputes" (Ford 2014). On a similar note, Armenia, who later this year will become member of the Eurasian Customs Union, officially declared that the Crimean referendum is an example of peoples' right to self-determination, and refused to recognize the legitimacy of Ukraine's current government (Hayrumyan 2014). This also shows that by taking into account the patterns of amity-enmity as stipulated by the RSCT, the pro-Russian regional states did not diverge from their historical bonds or animosities. Since the collapse of the USSR, Belarus and Armenia have been strong allies of Russia within the region.

5. WEST-EAST CLASH OF INTERESTS: FROM BOTH REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

From a regional perspective, Russia's interest is to have a status of domination over its near abroad¹, similar to the one held by the USSR during the Cold War era. Its interests are closely tied to its perception of itself as one of the world's great powers, status which can only be assured if it maintains its grip on the neighbouring countries. In this equation, Ukraine is the highest ranked in Russia's interests due to its geostrategic position at the heart of Europe, due to being the largest country in the Eastern Europe with over 45.49 million people, and due to long-standing good relations between the two. To put it shortly, as has previously been stated by Zbigniew Brzezinski, "[w]ithout Ukraine, Russia ceases to be Empire" (Brzezinski 2014, 5). In order to maintain its control and avoid Ukraine from taking a Western turn, Moscow has taken a series of measures along the way, from incentives to threats, which have ultimately determined the escalation of the Ukrainian conflict.

The EU is interested in Ukraine and the current crisis from the standpoint of its threatened security. Being a border country with the EU, and transit country of Russian petrol into the Union, Ukraine has benefitted from a lot of attention ever since the 2004 enlargement. In the current context, the EU is naturally only interested in stabilizing the country in order to reinsure the safety of its borders and of its energy transit. For security reasons, Ukraine is of great interest for NATO as well, reason for which it took strong measures to protect the allied territories.

Being at the cross-road of divergent interests, the Ukrainian crisis has been triggered by both domestic and international West-East clash of interests. Ukraine's decision to halt negotiations with the EU ahead of the summit, and to join the EURASIA Union was a move taken under Russian influence in the power play with the EU, and has brought about domestic clashes between the pro-western and pro-Eastern population. The West-East division has fuelled the Ukrainian crisis, but it has also triggered the other side of the coin to

¹ The term "near abroad" was firstly conceptualized by the Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Kozrev (1990-1996) at the beginning of the 1990s to denote special rights held by Russia in the states pertaining to the former territory of the USSR (see Martinsen 2002, 38).

manifest. Ever since last year's November, the relations between the North-Atlantic community and Russia have gone from bad to worse, with both-ways sanctions being increasingly implemented.

The US has had 5 rounds of sanctions on individuals and companies in the form of assets freezes and travel bans, starting with the 19th of March and until the 12th of September, while the EU has had 7 rounds in the same timeframe. The sanctions also target the Russian state banks which are prohibited from raising long-term loans, the military sector which cannot import dual-use equipment and which cannot benefit anymore from the EU-Russia arms deals, and the oil sector which is not allowed to import oil industry technology and services from the EU and the US (BBC News 2014). But yet another move which was particularly bothersome for Russia was the decision made by the seven nations¹, members of the G8 group to suspend Moscow's membership to the Group of Eight. As stated in the official declaration of the G8 seven members, "we also strongly condemn Russia's illegal attempt to annex Crimea in contravention of international law and specific international obligations. We do not recognize either."² In addition, the G8 also withdrew from a meeting which was scheduled to be held in Sochi, Russia, in June. Russia however has downplayed the significance of this manoeuvre, turning its focus on the G20 which has stated to be of highest interest (Zmeyev 2014). But in spite of Putin's expectations neither the G20 summit in Brisbane November 15, was not an easy task. The Western leaders confronted Putin and threatened him with more sanctions. The fact that Russia's leader left the summit earlier than scheduled may show that he was not content with the posture he was placed in (Anishchuk 2014)

But Russia nevertheless managed to cut back from EU's successful Western re-orientation of Ukraine, by facilitating the conditions for the EU to postpone the coming into effect of the EU-Moscow free trade zone as prospected under the Association Agreement, until 2016. More specifically, the Title IV, "Trade and Trade-Related Matters", has been postponed for the time being, along with Ukraine's requested commitment to make a series of reforms in the economic sector which is not in line with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) rules.

¹ The U.S., Canada, Japan, Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France.

² Official Declaration of the U.S., Canada, Japan and Europe's four strongest economies in The Moscow Times 2014.

Even if the EU has abolished customs duties on Ukrainian products in March, the legal and institutional procedures which should have been made to meet European standards have thus been called off (Brzezinski 2014, 4).

In broad terms, Russia has adopted a tit-for-tat manoeuvre. It hit back at the EU and the US with sanctions of its own, such as embargos on a broad range of farm products and stated to include embargoes on imports of consumer goods and second-hand cars on the list (The Guardian 2014b). In addition, as expected, Russia also used its gas lever to determine the trans-Atlantic community to back down. For Poland the gas exports dropped down by 45%, to Slovakia by 11% (Rettman 2014), and to Romania by 10% the same week the EU implemented the sanctions, in the middle of September (Popescu and Dan 2014). The underlying reason for this manoeuvre regarding the former two countries is that they have been engaged in shipping “reverse-flow” gas to Ukraine in the aftermath of complete gas flow-cut from Russia. Romania is involved in the NATO European BMDS project by hosting Standard Missile-3 interceptors of the Block IB variant at the Deveselu Air Base, which on the 10th of October has been taken over by the US naval forces. The BMDS construction and development plans in Romania are to be due in 2015, as part of the second phase of the European BMDS project. Soon after the US take-over event, Russia’s Ambassador to NATO Alexander Grushko threatened NATO and more specifically Romania that it aims to take counteractions to ensure its security because it is being undermined by the Deveselu BMDS interceptions (Batu 2014). This is not the first threat of this kind which has been made by Russian high ranked officials. However, on the backdrop of intensified NATO troops’ deployments and military exercises at its doorstep, and worsening relations with the West, Russia’s rhetoric has become fiercer.

Moreover, a series of new sanctions were put on the agenda by Rosneft, Russia’s largest oil producer. According to the proposed list, Russia will request 100% prepayment provision for gas deliverable to the EU. In addition, among the proposed restrictions are South Stream project’s suspension, a ban on the radioactive waste from the EU and the US, restrictions on the use of modules made by Russia for the International Space Station, and a ban on repayment loans for the Russian oil and gas companies to EU and US banks without prior approval of the Bank of Russia. The proposed sanctions are to be decided by the Russian president. They were elaborated as response to the EU and US’s decision to sanction Russia’s oil companies, such as Rosneft,

Transneft and Gazprom Neft (RAPSI 2014). If approved, these sanctions will put to a hard test the European economies, and will further worsen the relations between the West and Russia. In spite of the fact that Russia's economy has received a heavy blow from the EU sanctions, being nevertheless already struggling to get back on track, Russia seems to be even more determined to use political, financial, and security resources to get its way in Ukraine and the region. The newly concluded trilateral energy deal (Ukraine, Russia, the EU) according to which Russia has committed to resume gas supplies to Ukraine in return for payments partly funded by Western creditors, gives some hope that the gas lever will not be used to the EU's great disadvantage during this winter (Macdonald and Blenkinsop 2014). But sole existence of this possibility shows the effects of the Ukraine crisis over the EU member states from within the region.

NATO has also reacted to the Ukrainian crisis which has further fuelled more tension with Moscow. In the aftermath of the annexation of Crimea and initiation of military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, NATO took a series of measures to reinforce the security of its allies at the Black and Baltic seas, such as air defence and surveillance, maritime deployments and military exercises. For air defence, NATO has deployed 12 fighter jets to the Baltic Air Policing mission and to Romania, and for surveillance it has run flights over Poland and Romania. The maritime deployments include ships transported to the Baltic, Mediterranean and Black seas and interoperability exercises. All the troops have only been deployed temporally, and will be withdrawn as soon as the situation cools off in the region, and the relations with Russia take a positive turn. The military exercises have been conducted on consecutive basis in Central and Eastern Europe, including a major exercise in Ukraine in September (Belkin *et al.* 2014). NATO's actions show that the Ukraine crisis has been threatening the security throughout the entire WBSR, reason for which the transatlantic allies have boosted their defences.

As expected, the NATO military build-up at the Black Sea has been met with similar actions from the opponent's side. Russia has taken counteractive measures to ensure not only its security but also a stronger position within the region. It pursued with arms build-up by deploying seven submarines carrying cruise missiles of 1,500 km range each, to the Novorossiysk port, as part of its Black Sea Fleet (Turkish Weekly 2014).

These developments show a worrying trend within the WBSR, with both West and East powers building up their military capabilities at the Black Sea. This shows not only that the Ukrainian crisis has had regional repercussions, but also that the lack of trust between the two parties grows deeper, with little room for near future positive prospects.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account the security dynamics which have occurred in the region on the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, the RSCT has provided the theoretical grounds for understanding the inter-relation between security issues within the region. The dynamics affecting the status quo or settlement of regional frozen conflicts reveal that the Ukrainian crisis, due to its geographical proximity and similar context, has affected the security of the WBSR as a whole. This is made evident from the fact that Russia's actions have been met with strong divergent reactions following patterns of amity-enmity in the inter-state relations in line with the historical relations between states. The official documents on security of the states and their foreign policy positions with regards to the conflict provide further evidence in this regard. Romania, Moldova and Georgia have been the most virulent critics of Russia, while Belarus, and Armenia being strong supporters for Moscow. In addition, the Ukrainian crisis has raised security concerns for the states sharing long-term enmity relations with Russia, particularly Moldova and Georgia who find themselves in potentially similar situation to pre-conflict Ukraine. The crisis has resurrected to a limited extent the frozen conflicts on their territories, with Transnistria and Gagauzia pushing for unification with Russia, and Abkhazia having gone through region-wide protests. The Ukrainian crisis and the regional security have influenced and have been influenced also by the power play and counteractions between West and East great powers, establishing an international system level interaction perturbing into the region. Having all these into account, the findings show concrete evidence of the fact that the Ukraine crisis has had regional repercussions. For this reason, any means of approaching it without involving all actors in the region or without regards to deeply rooted relations of enmity and clash of divergent interests between

regional and international powers, will not have significant long-term results leading to its settlement.

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