

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL STUDIES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL IN POLITICAL SCIENCES**

**PhD THESIS SUMMARY  
THE GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION BETWEEN THE RUSSIAN  
FEDERATION AND THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE  
COMMON NEIGHBOURHOOD**

**PhD supervisor:**

**Prof. Univ. Dr. Adrian Pop**

**PhD Student:**

**Sabina Strîmbovschi**

**Bucharest**

**2018**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: ANALYSIS OF THE INTERDEPENDENCE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION</b>	
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>I.1. Theory of complex interdependence in the context of the European Union and the Russian Federation relations .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>I. 2. Defining Russia’s foreign policy priorities in the first decade since the collapse of the URSS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>I. 3. The historical evolution of the institutional partnership between the EU and Russia.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>I. 3.1 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>I. 3.2 Common EU Strategy for the Russian Federation .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>I. 3.3 Russia's medium-term strategy for developing the relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000 - 2010) .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>I. 3.4 The Four Common Spaces - the opportunity to develop a complex interdependence relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>I. 4. The role of energy in the development of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>I. 4.1. The causes and effects generated by the energy crisis.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>I. 4.2. Energy security – a catalyst for the recovery of asymmetric interdependence between the EU and Russia.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>I. 4.3. The impact of bilateral policy at the expense of the multilateral approach in the energy sector.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>I. 4.4. Elements of vulnerability of the Russian Federation in relation to the European Union.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>56</b>

**CHAPTER II: THE INFLUENCE OF UNSOLVED CONFLICTS IN THE FORMER SOVIET SPACE ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>II. 1. The relevance of leverage and linkage theory for solving frozen conflicts.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>II. 2. Genesis and evolution of unresolved conflicts in the former Soviet space .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>II.2.1 Nagorno-Karabakh .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>II.2.1.1. The role of leverages and linkages in the evolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>II.2.1.2. The influence of external leverages and linkages on the Armenian capacity to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>II. 2.1.3 The impact of external leverages and linkages on the Azerbaijani capacity to solve the conflict.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>II.2.2. Abkhazia and South Osetia.....</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>II.2.2.1. The role of linkages and leverages developed between Georgia and international actors in the evolution of internal conflicts .....</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>II. 2.3. Transnistria .....</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>II.2.3.1. The role of post-conflict agreements on the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.....</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>II.2.3.2. The influence of international leverages and linkages on the evolution of Transnistrian conflict .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>II. 2.4. Crimea and the Donbas region .....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>II. 2.4.1. The role of foreign linkages and leverages in generating internal conflicts in Ukraine.....</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>II. 3. The setting up of the conflicts in the former Soviet space. The goals and objectives of "freezing" and "defrosting" them.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>II. 4. The role of international organizations in managing unsolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>II. 4. 1. Abkhazia and South Osetia.....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>II. 4. 2. Nagorno-Karabakh.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>II. 4. 3. Transnistria.....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>II. 4. 4. Crimea and Donbas.....</b>	<b>109</b>

<b>II. 5. The impact of unresolved conflicts in the post-Soviet space on the EU-Russian Federation interaction in the common neighbourhood.....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>118</b>

**CHAPTER III: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION**

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>III.1. Conceptualizing the process of Europeanization.....</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>III.2. Tools and mechanisms of Europeanization applied to the former Soviet republics.....</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>III.3 Europeanization projects of the European Union in the post-soviet space.....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>III.3.1. Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>III.3.2. TACIS Program.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>III.3.3. European Neighbourhood Policy.....</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>III.3.4. Tools of institutional building.....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>III.3.5 Eastern Partnership – Europeanization without concrete prospects of integration.....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>III.4. The evolution of the six former Soviet republics under the Eastern Partnership’s umbrella.....</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>III.4.1. Ukraine .....</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>III.4.2. Moldova .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>III.4.3. Belarus .....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>III.4.4. Georgia .....</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>III.4.5. Armenia .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>III.4.6. Azerbaijan .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>III.5. The evolution of integration projects promoted by the Russian Federation in the Eurasian space.....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>III.5.1. Integration projects of political, economic and security nature.....</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>III.5.2. Eurasian Economic Union – the Eurasian integration alternative for the former Soviet republics.....</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>III.5.3. Russia’s perception towards the Eastern Partnership.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>III.6 The dilemma of the states in the common neighborhood constrained by the European Union’s external governance model and the Eurasian Economic Union .....</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>III.6.1 EU efforts to integrate the New Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus into the context of the Eastern Partnership .....</b>	<b>181</b>

<b>III.6.2. New Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus – at the intersection of two integration models .....</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>FINAL CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>193</b>

### **Research theme description**

After the end of the Cold War, the bipolar world as it had been known at that time came to an end, thus becoming, according to Samuel P. Huntington, one single-multipolar world, and once it moved to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has turned into a truly multipolar world. Thus, the existence of several power centers at the global level has become a reality. One such multipolar world means the existence of several international actors each with its own interests and ambitions, with methods and models for their distinct and authentic external policies enforcement, which fact has led to a certain competition in terms of the amendment of the old traditional influence. Thus, in Europe, once the Iron Curtain has been dropped, this has been the onset of some notable geo-political re-settlements under the aegis of these big actors, among which: the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation.

The European Union, by its democratic values, as well as by the way it acts in view of defending human fundamental rights and freedoms, or so as to promote and enhance democracy and world economy has attracted the former members of the Warsaw pact on its side, as the latter were tormented by social inequality and by the large number of restrictions and injustice back in the communism time. 27 years after the Iron Curtain has fallen, the EU has 28 members, including three former Soviet states. Given such circumstances, the second big European actor, namely the Russian Federation, duly accustomed to hold the rank of a big world power had to reconsider its position, getting to be considered as only a regional power. Baffled by a strong economic crisis and by social distress, all caused by a corrupted political category, Russia just found it impossible to maintain the reputation it once had, and its influence got lower and lower. At the same time with solving its internal issues, Russia has also started to reconsider its external policy, particularly during the time when president and prime-minister Vladimir Putin has ruled the country. As a consequence, the geo-strategic position of this particular state and its geo-economic advantages have turned into key external policy instruments, and the ace of being an important provider of oil and natural gas for Central and Eastern Europe has played its part in the rebirth of the Russian Federation on the international relations stage.

The defining events occurring within the recent years at the level of the common neighborhood of the European Union and the Russian Federation, namely the Russian – Georgian War in 2008, the establishment of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the illegal attachment of Crimea in 2014, the initiation of the conflict in the Eastern part of Ukraine and the launching of the Eurasian Economic Union stood for the critical times that transposed the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation within the context of the common neighborhood on a geopolitical chess table.

### **PhD thesis structure**

The PhD thesis duly entitled “Geopolitical competition between the Russian Federation and the European Union in the context of the common neighborhood” is made up of three chapters whose aim is that of showing the causes and defining contexts having shaped up the current competitive relations between Russia and the EU, and the related common neighborhood – from one subject matter of cooperation into one subject matter of confrontation.

The first chapter called “Review on the interdependence relation between the European Union and the Russian Federation” describes the evolution of the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation after the 90s, as of the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, up until 2010 when the Modernization Partnership has been initiated, while also considering the current geo-political challenges. Starting from the assumption that international conflicts won’t just vanish into thin air when the inter-dependence in one single field shall prevail, quite the contrary, the conflict can escalate and take new forms, I have analyzed the mechanisms developed the EU, and as transcribed in agreements and strategies, by which one has aimed at expanding the fields of cooperation with the Russian Federation, way beyond the energy sector which somehow forces one to keep such an asymmetrical interdependence relation, where EU is vulnerable, and where Russia is literally manipulating this type of cooperation in view of reaching its own political, economic external security goals.

A special attention is paid to the initiative regarding the development of cooperation at the level of the Four Common Spaces, given the unique opportunity to balance the interdependence level in-between the two actors, by extending the cooperation sectors, while the X-ray performed on the cooperation existing the energy sector is mainly conducted by manipulating the asymmetries existing in such an interdependence relation.

The end purpose is that of revealing the real intentions of the European Union in terms of Moscow and of assessing the Russian Federation reactions to the cooperation policies forwarded by the EU, both in terms of the Russian availability to comply with and strengthen its connections with the European Union, and in terms of denying the proposals that could have contributed to the

development of complex and symmetrical interdependence relation.

The relevance of this chapter resides in the fact that it has enabled me to both identify and explain the reasons why the configuration of the relations between the two actors, particularly after the year 2000, has led to the development of one fragile cooperation model, which has used to be operational as long as the economic interests of Russia have been duly satisfied. When the European Union made the proposal to expand the fields of cooperation with the Russian Federation, including in the external security field, Moscow reacted by one assertive external policy, turning the relation with the EU from cooperation to competition.

In the second chapter duly entitled “Impact of non-settled conflicts at the level of the former Soviet space on the relation between the European Union and Russia” one reviews the circumstances under which the conflicts from the former Soviet space have actually occurred, as well as how the same have developed, turning into some frozen conflicts. From this perspective, one investigates the role played by the Russian Federation in dealing with the conflicts from the former Soviet space, as well as the purpose of the latter’s being “frozen” and “defrosted”. One also conducts an evaluation of the role played by international organizations in the management of such conflicts, describing both the efficiency and the limited effects given the lack of one full commitment and sometimes the hesitation to get immediately and constructively involved. From the perspective of the theory of leverages and linkages, the aim has been to prove three essential assumptions for the elucidation of the PhD thesis subject, namely which is the impact of Soviet conflicts lacking settlement on the EU – Russian Federation interaction at the common neighborhood level.

Given such circumstances, the second chapter aims at bringing proof to the fact that by diversifying and strengthening the economic, geo-political and social connections between the European Union, on the one hand and the Republic of Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the other hand, one shall enhance the chances for the democratization of government and, implicitly, for the due settlement of frozen conflicts. One also brings arguments to the fact that the separatist enclaves Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Osetia shall focus on either getting their independence or on their being integrated within the Russian Federation, whereas Luhansk and Donetsk shall attempt to achieve their autonomy, based on the international law principles relating to self-determination, Crimea shall become a frozen conflict and Nagorno-Karabakh shall stand for one hot conflict, that can restart at any time whatsoever. If the European Union shall fail to enhance its leverages given by its economic power over the PaE stages, by diversifying the connections with these countries, then the likelihood of such pessimistic scenario materialization shall be high.

And last but not least, one brings arguments to the fact that given the intensification of the competition between the West and Russia, there are bigger chances for Moscow to enhance its

military position at the level of the separatist enclaves from the Independent State Community area, so as to prove its capacity of a dominant actor in the settling of these conflicts. While the European Union leverages are triggered by the latter's economic power, the leverages of the Russian Federation are mainly triggered by its military power. Since such leverages prove to be efficiency when accompanied by some extended connections one shall also analyze the connections developed so far by the two competitive powers in the region with the governments from their common neighborhood, in view of conducting one critical analysis of the evolution of the conflicts that have not been settled.

The third chapter called "Countries of the Eastern Partnership in-between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union" consists of the study and assessment of the impact exercised by the instruments developed by the European Union in view of the due modernization and, namely the Europeanization of the governments from the Eastern neighborhood, mainly the Eastern Partnership (PaE) states. Moreover, one also analyzes the transformational power of the European Union in the former Soviet space from the perspective of the Europeanization projects and the conditionality and stimulation mechanisms, as duly applied. Given the historical background of the former Soviet republics, one analyzes the evolution of the six countries under the Eastern Partnership. Given that the Russian Federation is a strong influential actor in the area, one studies the integrationist projects promoted by Moscow as of the termination of the Russian Federation and up to the present times. Based upon the projects it has developed, one assesses the behavioral change undergone by the Russian Federation, which somehow tends to act as the most significant regional actor, as the strongest slav state which believes it has the moral responsibility to promote pan-Slavism and to free the slav countries from the West, as well as from the common neighborhood with the EU. From the perspectives of the effects caused by the Europeanization mechanisms, the attractivity degree of the European Union on the one hand and of the Eurasian Economic Union, on the other hand, as well as from the perspective of the etherogenous integration models one classifies the former Soviet states that make up the subject matter of this particular chapter of the present paper.

Moreover, given that the states from Russia's common neighborhood with the European Union stand for an actual stake for the projects developed by the two actors one shall also analyze the geopolitical configuration triggered by the competition between the European Union and the Euroasian Economic Union.

### **Methodological framework**

In view of getting some accurate results, which shall display the critical reality and to bring proof as to the main reseach assumption, namely that the nature of the relations between the European Union and the Russian Federation has been and shall keep on being prone to competition, one has

used the qualitative research method.

The research theme has been investigated by help of a series of study techniques and instruments which allowed me to conduct one comprehensive and objective analysis. To this end, one has duly analyzed a series of primary documents, such as: strategies, agreements, common statements, reports, memoranda, external policy concepts, both from the PaE stages and from the EU and Russian Federation.

The discourse analysis has been used so as to provide an as objective as reasonably possible presentation of the intentions, goals and expectations of the two international actors making up the subject matter of the present paper. To this end, one has analyzed and interpreted the statements made by the most equally important politically decisional parties in Russia and in Europe, namely: Vladimir Putin – president of Russia (2000-2008; 2012-present), Dmitri Medvedev – Russian prime minister (2012-present), Serghei Lavrov – Russian minister of foreign affairs (2004-present), Vladimir Chizhov - ambassador, Permanent Representative Office of the Russian Federation attached to the European Union (2005-present), Günther Oettinger – former European commissary for energy (2010-2014), Jose Manuel Barroso – former European Commission president (2004-2014), Catherine Ashton – former High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Business and Security Policy (2010-2014) and Herman Van Rompuy – former European Council president (2009-2014) .

Given the particularities that distinguish the Azer state from the other partner states, namely the privileged relation that it has with the European Union, one has applied the participative observation and the independent interview. In January – April 2015, the undersigned author have benefited of a research scholarship in Azerbaijan, which was granted by the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research in Romania. This research visit enabled the undersigned to conduct a series of semi – structured interviews in Baku, which proved to be really useful for the carrying out of some objective analyses on the political and economic evolution of the Azerbaijan republic back in the 90s and up to the present moment. The details I have got from such interviews proved very useful in explaining how the actions conducted by the Russian Federation and by the European Union in the said region are perceived by this former Soviet state. Moreover, the information acquired following the conducting of the semi-structured interviews with Azer experts, on the one hand and the free conversations held with the Azer citizens, on the other hand, enabled me to better understand the approach practiced by the Azer government in terms of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Last but not least, the conversations held with the Azer experts helped me provide a detailed explanation of the role played by energy resources in the shaping up of the external policy of the Azer state. The people I have interviewed act in various fields, among which: foreign policy and energy policy experts holding management positions within the Center for Strategic Studies under the aegis of the President

of Azerbaijan Republic; members of the National Academy of Science in Azerbaijan, specialists from the energy sector working for the government oil company – SOCAR and experts working in the private sector, namely for the British oil company – British Petroleum, academic environment representatives, as well as deputies from the Azerbaijan Republic Parliament.

The empirical research is also based upon the comparative study technique, which proved its usefulness in order to provide detailed and parallel explanations, as related to two or several situations or events. To this end, the comparative analysis of the evolution of the six PaE states under the incidence of the Europeanization process has helped me provide explanations as to the limits of this European initiative, the differences between the six member states and implicitly, the need to adopt some varied policies, duly adjusted to the very needs of each member state. This particular methodology has also been applied in the case of genesis and evolution of the conflicts lacking settlement in the former – Soviet space, in view of underlining the heterogeneous character of the region, as well as to be able to explain the relevance and efficacy of adopting a differentiated treatment.

### **Theoretical framework**

The assumptions laying the foundation of the three chapters of the PhD thesis have been proven by help of three essential theories, namely: the theory of complex interdependence, the leverage and linkages theory and last but not least, the Europeanization.

Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye have developed the **theory of complex interdependence**, starting from the assumption that after the Second World War, governments' orientation was towards the development of mutually beneficial relations, which in time have become more and more inter-connected from an economic perspective and which are currently based upon cooperation and economic interaction, and not on military or security cooperation<sup>1</sup>.

The theory of complex interdependence perceives actors as being multiple actors with various objectives and a wide range of motivational forces<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the inter-state relations agenda consists of multiple issues which are not arranged in a consistent hierarchical order, and the absence of any such pyramidal structure of issues (hierarchy of issues) is translated by the fact that military security does not prevail over the agenda, as it happens in the real policy. Consequently, the theory of complex

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Fourth Edition, Longman, 2012, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Paul D'Anieri, *International Politics. Power and Purpose in Global Affairs*, Second International Edition, Boston, 2012, 79.

interdependence is not conflicting, and military force is avoided when interdependence prevails, since consequences would be much too expensive<sup>3</sup>.

A very significant matter in the equation of the interdependence relations relates to the actors' level of inter-connection. If both parties are equally dependant, this means that the relation between them is a *symmetrical interdependence*<sup>4</sup>. In any such case, if the parties' relation deteriorates, they shall be more determined to reach a consensus, since otherwise they would both have the same amount of suffering to endure. When one of the actors is considerably more dependant than the other one, the relation between the states is characterized by *asymmetry*, and in the event of such relation deterioration, the dependant actor shall be considerably more prejudiced as compared to the other one<sup>5</sup>. However, pure dependence or inder-dependence between governments is very rarely seen, on which ground it's very little likely that one can identify two states being dependant one upon another in an equal amount or any such case when one of the parties is totally dependant upon the other one<sup>6</sup>. A country's commercial dependency on a certain partner can influence the internal policy or it can even change the national interests to the benefit of the state that such country depends upon, just as Russia took advantage of its commercial benefits in its relation with the Ukraine in an attempt to change the country's perception, to influence the internal policy of the Ukraine to Russia's benefit<sup>7</sup>. As a result, Moscow took advantage of the Kiev dependency on energy and used this quite asymmetrical interdependance in order to force Ukraine on certain interal policy matters<sup>8</sup>.

Another very important indicator in analyzing the relations between governments refers to the valences that can turn such asymmetrical interdependence in the economic sector in a political instrument, so that the costs of consequences shall go beyond the costs for compliance purposes, in case of any such cooperation relation<sup>9</sup>. To this end, there are several conditions that one has to meet. Most investments in a state should be under the control of another state, just as Gazprom aims at investing in the natural gas sector in Europe by purchasing European companies, while the Russian law forbids European companies to do the same in Russia<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, the government which is dependant upon certain key resources shall be incapable of identifying other diversification sources, and the most significant political effect, as wished for, shall be the one triggered by the terminationf

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, Third Edition, Longman, Cambridge, 2001, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Andrej Krickovic, "When Interdependence Produces Conflict: EU-Russia Energy Relations as a Security Dilemma", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 36, 1, 2015, (2015): 3-23, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> Øistein Harsem, Dag Harald Claes, "The interdependence of European–Russian energy relations", *Energy Policy* 59, (2013): 784–791, 785-786.

<sup>7</sup> Harsem, Claes, "The interdependence of European–Russian energy relations", 786.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, 785-786.

of economic relations, the vulnerability that acts efficiently in the process of influencing the decisions taken by the decisional factors from the dependant countries,<sup>11</sup> and this was an instrument that Russia used in 2006 and in 2009 so as to pressure Ukraine, and the consequences of such act have been felt by even the European citizens.

It's this theory that enabled to conduct one objective analysis for the relations between the EU and Russia as well as to explain, on the one hand, the grounds for which Moscow has avoided the enhancement of the cooperation with Brussels, in the political, economic and social fields, and on the other hand, the arguments that have made it take the monopol over the energy sector in its relation with the EU.

Another theory known in the field of international relations, which has proven its relevance in bringing proof to the assumptions described in the second chapter of the PhD thesis, is represented by the **theory of leverages and linkages** which theory has been conceived and developed by Lucan A. Way and by Steven Levitsky. According to its authors, a *leverage* stands for governments vulnerability to external pressure for democratization, and the *linkage* consists in the density of economic, political, organizational, social and communicational connections with the external actors<sup>12</sup>, which can bring their contribution to the changes of regime in non – democratic countries. Although this theory is mainly used in view of analyzing the evolution of political regime in transitional states, I have extended this theory applicability to cover the settlement of frozen conflicts.

Such theory of leverages and linkages is based upon six dimensions that influence the connections: economic, inter-governmental, social, information, civil society and geographic proximity to Western Europe or to the US<sup>13</sup>. The most relevant dimension of linkages is represented by geographic proximity, since neighborhood contributes to the increase of interdependence between governments<sup>14</sup> and triggers several cooperation opportunities in the economic, inter-governmental, social, information field or at the civil society level. Developing the linkages with the West in these particular fields stands for the way to enhancing democracy and since there is a close connection between peace and democracy, the western actors have aimed at increasing both such linkages, and the leverages in the relation with the former Soviet states. Based upon this particular assumption, one may claim that the Eastern Partnership has been established so as to aim at providing for a security climate in the region, as well as for democratic stability and economic development by political association and economic integration, and the geographic proximity between the partner states and

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem,786.

<sup>12</sup> Lucan A. Way and Steven Levitsky, "Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide", *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2007): 48-66, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Way, Levitsky, "Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide", 53.

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, 54.

the EU shall enhance the likelihood of an external intervention in those governments which are to generate and disseminate insecurity.

Leverages express themselves by the enforcement of various instruments: political conditionality, sanctions, diplomatic pressure and military intervention<sup>15</sup>. The impact of such leverages is significant when linkages are also strong. The latter's level of influence is determined by the economic and military power, which may be undermined by the existence of some competitive subjects on the external policy agendas<sup>16</sup>. Those governments whose economy and military capacity are under-developed are much more vulnerable to external pressure than those having a development potential<sup>17</sup>. Leverages are also low in countries where the government benefits of political, economic or military support from some regional powers, just as Russia does in the former Soviet space.

From the perspective of the theory of leverages and linkages, Levitsky and Way have developed four scenarios regarding any given state democratization<sup>18</sup>, and such scenarios can be treated as potential contexts for the settlement of conflicts in the PaE states. The first such scenario refers to the fact that the intense connections with the West and the strong leverages contribute to the relevant state democratization even when the internal conditions are not favorable to such an end. The second scenario refers to strong linkages, and yet leverages – relatively poor, that lead to a diffuse, slow and indirect democratization, which however, on the average and long run can prove to be substantial. The third scenario claims that strong leverages and poor linkages shall trigger one intermittent and partially efficient democratization. The fourth scenario and the least favorable one stipulates that when leverages and linkages are poor, the international pressure on democratization is reduced. As a consequence, leverages and linkages act differently on every single government, subject to the latter's density and diversity.

After the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the fourth scenario was the one characterizing the relation between the former Soviet states and the West, and the presence of the Russian Federation has contributed to the lowering of the number of external constraints on the autocratic leaders in view of the democratization and consolidation of the new governments<sup>19</sup>. In the absence of some close linkages with the West, the autocrats have enjoyed a larger amount of freedom in terms of governing in a non – democratic manner, by eliminating the internal pressure and the opposition<sup>20</sup>, and given such grounds the democratization occurred only partly or not at all, and the consequences have

---

<sup>15</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "International linkage and democratization", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (July 2005): 20-34, 21.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 21 – 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, 26-27.

<sup>19</sup> Way, Levitsky, "Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide", 48.

<sup>20</sup> Levitsky, Way, "International linkage and democratization", 31.

influenced negatively and directly the very perspectives of settling the internal conflicts. A country facing government issues becomes vulnerable and it can be attacked than one independent, democratic and sovereign government. Gwendolyn Sasse states that the government issues defined as the tensions that occur due to the incompatibility between the government and the relevant nation<sup>21</sup> stand for a serious constraint as far as democratization is concerned. By the spring of 2014, four of the six European Union partner states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova) were facing government issues, and yet after the illegal attachment of Crimea and the war in Donbas region, the latter's number has increased. Belarus is the only state party of the Eastern partnership which is safe from suffering from an internal conflict, and this is due to the Russian leverages and close linkages between the authority leaders in Minsk and Moscow.

Given the establishment and purpose of the Eastern Partnership, there are real perspectives for the development of the second scenario, mainly at the level of partner countries, which have chosen to enhance their political and economic relations with the European Union, by signing the Association Agreement and the Enhanced and Comprehensive Free Exchange Agreement. According to the expert Gwendolyn Sasse, the more diverse the linkages of a country are the more likely shall be for the latter to contribute to the regime becoming more open<sup>22</sup>. The more compressed the linkages are, the more likely it shall be for the same not to bear any effects or for them to just shadow the democratization process. Thus, the geographic proximity, the more and more intense and diverse linkages in-between the PaE states and the EU shall increase the efficiency of the European Union leverages and the perspectives for governments democratization, which fact shall be able to positively influence the actions taken for the internal conflicts settlement.

Although it is claimed that the politically decisional factors tend to focus on the leverages mechanism, such as conditionality and the diplomatic pressure, Levitsky and Way claim that they have rarely proven their efficiency in terms of democratic change<sup>23</sup>, stating that leverages trigger pressure in terms of democratization, proving to be less efficient than the punitive measures adopted by the Western power<sup>24</sup>. Thus, the integration policies adopted by the EU in terms of the Eastern Partnership states, particularly in terms of the three countries having signed the Association and Free Exchange Agreement shall contribute to the enhancement of linkages which, in the average and long run shall trigger results from the democratization related perspective<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, the Western

---

<sup>21</sup> Gwendolyn Sasse, "Linkages and the promotion of democracy: The EU's eastern neighbourhood", *Democratization*, Vol. 20, (2013): 553 – 591, 554.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Levitsky, Way, "International linkage and democratization", 33.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem.

policies regarding the development of various complex commitments with the states pending democratization have proven more efficient, in the average and long run, than the policies relating to isolation and sanctioning<sup>26</sup>. Thus, by virtue of the commitments duly concluded with the PaE countries, the European Union shall manage to achieve democratization in the partner states involved in the process of economic integration and political association with the EU, which effects shall also trigger a positive impact on the procedures for the settlement of frozen conflicts.

In order to adjust the description of the effects caused by the Eastern Partnership on the partner states from the perspective of the theory of leverages and linkages, I underline the way in which PaE has contributed to the Europeanization of these governments while also underlining the impediments making it more difficult for such process to be duly implemented. According to the specific literature, the **concept of Europeanization** stands for a process by which one accomplishes the know – how transfer and by which one establishes a series of procedures, political paradigms, values and norms, from the supra-national level of the European Union to the national level of the candidate or partner states. Borzel and Risse have proven that European integration and Europeanization stand for a process involving two implementation mechanisms: top-down and bottom-up. Thus, according to the reasoning of rationalist institutionalism, *Europeanization triggers internal level changes by a differentiated responsabilization / empowerment of the actors, which fact derives out of the re - allotment of resources at the national level*<sup>27</sup>, whereas the sociologic institutionalism suggests that *Europeanization causes internal changes by a collective learning and socialization process, whose outcome is represented by norms internalization and the development of new identities*<sup>28</sup>. Summarizing, the top down approach aims at promoting democracy by high level political dialogue, in view of influencing the way how the elite thinks and, namely the foreign policy orientation of the governments, and the bottom up approach is aimed at making the institutions and non – governmental actors become responsible, as well as the responsabilization of the civil society, the educational system and mass-media<sup>29</sup>.

Radaelli claims that Europeanization consists of few important processes: *a) development, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of rules, procedures, political paradigms, norms and common beliefs which are foremost defined and duly enhanced in the political process of the Union and then subsequently integrated in the logics of the internal discourse from the level of political structures*

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, "When Europe Hits Home: Europeanization and Domestic Change", *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)* Vol. 4, No.15, (2000): 1-24, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Andrea Gawrich, Inna Melnykovska and Rainer Schweickert, "Neighbourhood Europeanization through ENP: The Case of Ukraine" *Journal of Common Markets Studies*, Volume 48, No. 5, (2010): 1212.

and public policies<sup>30</sup>. Thus, the Europeanization process route is represented by the development of some applied instruments, the latter's dissemination and promotion at the national level and, later on, their adoption by adjusting the internal level policies to the community policies.

Schimmelfennig claims that Europeanization does not end at the European Union borders, quite the contrary, the EU triggers some external effects by means of four mechanisms, namely: conditionality, socialization, outsourcing and imitation<sup>31</sup>. Thus, by means of the external initiatives that the EU develops, the latter aims at designing its own model and own rules of governance, which while successfully implemented, shall bring their due contribution to the Europeanization of the national and international governance beyond its formal borders<sup>32</sup>. By the very way it has been established, the Eastern Partnership stands for the main political framework and set of instruments that contributes to the transformation of the governments in the Eastern region, while Europeanization stands for one of the legal and possible methods for the European Union to modernize this region. Since by this very initiative, one shall transcribe some parts of the community acquis in the partner states, the external governance is duly achieved, and this is a mechanism that can open some alternative routes for the integration with the European Union<sup>33</sup>.

However, the effects of Europeanization varies from one government to another, subject to the will and political, economic and social openness of each such state. Europeanization exercises an influence on the partnerstates to a smaller or larger extent, from the fortification of the already existing structures, to the enhancement of resistance to formal incorporation and adjustments, without however amending the existing structures, up to the highest level – of fundamental transformation – which shall deeply change the internal structures<sup>34</sup>. Thus, the major goal of the Europeanization process is that of triggering changes at the internal level, which changes shall be in line with the European Union policies. To this end, the harmonization of the national legislation with the European law shall duly increase the political and economic integration process in-between the actors, as concerned, by finally contributing to the development of one interdependence relation. Summarizing,

---

<sup>30</sup> Claudio M. Radaelli and Simon J. Bulmer, "The Europeanisation of National Policy?", *Queen's Papers on Europeanisation* 1 (2004): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Schimmelfennig, "Europeanization beyond the member states", *Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften* 2010, 1, accessed 17.04.2015, [https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/european-politics-dam/documents/People/Publications/Europeanization/Member\\_.pdf](https://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/european-politics-dam/documents/People/Publications/Europeanization/Member_.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig, "EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics", *Journal of European Public Policy*, (2009): 795.

<sup>33</sup> Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, "EU rules beyond EU borders", 796.

<sup>34</sup> Aldis Austers, "From the EU's economic presence to successful europeanisation: theoretical insights" in *Dilemmas of Europeanisation: Political Choices and Economic Transformations in the Eastern Partnership Countries*, edited by Aldis Austers, Ilvija Bruge, Andris Spruds, 13-39 (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2016), 23-24.

the Europeanization is that action by which European rules and mechanisms interact with the internal structures<sup>35</sup>.

The Europeanization process, the mechanisms used by the EU and the stimuli provided to the PaE states are different from those granted to the governments candidating to joining the European Union. If in the case of candidate states the process is completed by the granting of the status of a European Union member country enjoying full rights, in the case of PaE member states, Europeanization is duly accomplished in the absence of any such crucial stimulus. However, the EU has developed a series of instruments which have turned Europeanization into one attractive process for the Eastern neighborhood countries, and a strong commitment on the latter's part might determine the European Union propose the adherence of such PaE member states to the EU.

Two of the four Europeanization mechanisms, as proposed by Schimmelfennig have also been applied in the case of the Eastern Partnership countries, namely *conditionality* and *socialization*. The first one stands for a direct mechanisms of Europeanization, whose purpose is to promote the good governance model of the European Union, by imposing a set of rules that the external actors shall be due to fulfill, in view of getting several rewards, on the one hand and also on the other hand, for the purpose of avoiding sanctions that may be enforced by the EU<sup>36</sup>. The most obvious rewards provided by the EU consist of the benefits resulting as a consequence of the signing of various agreements, such as the commercial agreements, the association agreements and the financial aid agreements, and the sanctions consist of the suspending of any such rewards<sup>37</sup>.

The *socialization* mechanism refers to the efforts made by the EU within the process of European governance promotion and dissemination. The European Union teaches the external actors about the European governance principles and rules, thus motivating the latter to adopt such model of governance<sup>38</sup>. Also, the socialization mechanisms relies on the logics of appropriateness. Thus, the external actors adopt the European Union rules only if they shall be truly convinced of the legitimate and opportune character of the same, as well as if they shall agree upon the European Union's authority in terms of the occurrence of internal changes<sup>39</sup>.

However, the efficiency of conditionality is largely dependant upon the possibility of Europeanization by socialization. Social learning is more likely when the European norms shall

---

<sup>35</sup> Gergana Noutcheva, Nathalie Tocci, Bruno Coppieters, Michael Emerson and Michel Huisseune, "Europeanization and secessionist conflicts: concepts and theories", in *Europeanization and Conflict Resolution. Case Studies from the European Periphery*, edited by Bruno Coppieters, Michael Emerson, Michel Huisseune, Tamara Kovziridze, Gernana Noutcheva, Nathalie Tocci, Marius Vahl, 13-56 (Gent: Academia Press, 2004), 20.

<sup>36</sup> Schimmelfennig, "Europeanization beyond the member states", 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibidem, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Schimmelfennig, "Europeanization beyond the member states", 9.

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.

resonate with the internal level practices and ideas<sup>40</sup>. In some conflicting situations, conditionality and socialization can become complementary and they can contribute to the settlement of divergences. In other events, applying conditionality can lower the socialization perspectives<sup>41</sup>. This becomes possible when the reformation process is perceived by the political class as being difficult, and the latter's results shall have the potential to impair the stability and continuity of political governance.

As a consequence, although the attractiveness for the market economy, the sustainable development and the security provided by the state's appurtenance to the European Union or to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) stands for a strong incentive for the countries from the Eastern neighborhood that aim at becoming members of the aforementioned organizations, yet a considerable part of the political elite in these countries choose for a pragmatic type cooperation, aiming at reaching some short term interests to the detriment of structural changes – which have long term benefits. And thus, the heterogenous character of this particular region and, moreover, of the presence of the Russian Federation which is so eager to control these countries contribute to making the Europeanization process more and more difficult to be accomplished.

## **Final conclusions**

As of the decay of the Soviet Union, the European Union's aim was at development one strong and long-term relation with the Russian Federation, which was to be based on common values and interests, in the attempt to support the Russian State's becoming a similar partner as the EU member states. If at the beginning of the 90s, Russia agreed upon undergoing a rigorous reformation process, as proposed by the European Community, ten years later Russia has changed its approach, stating that government sovereignty stands for a national priority, and that the EC interference with its internal business is not to be accepted. Moscow intended to stand out on the international stage as one influential actor which shall enjoy equal treatment by the European Union and by the United States of America, and this goal could only be reached by a full integration or by exercising monopoly over the near-by foreign countries – namely the Slavic compatriots outside the Russian Federation, by means of one duly functional Euroasian Union. Moreover, the Russian Federation perceived its integrationist projects, namely the Euroasian Economic Union as the right formula for cooperation and for the enhancement of the relation with the European Union in view of developing one Greater and more unite Europe, from Lisabon to Vladivostok, yet at the same time this also meant the

---

<sup>40</sup> Noutcheva, Tocci, Coppieters, Emerson and Huysseune, "Europeanization and secessionist conflicts", 40.

<sup>41</sup> Ibidem, 35.

termination of the Eastern Partnership and of any other European initiatives designed for the development of the Eastern neighborhood countries.

This paradigm shift has coincided with the period of time when Russian economy recovered due to the support provided by the EU and the opening of the European markets for Russian hydrocarbons, which facts enabled Russia to cut down on financial dependence on the West and to enhance its freedom to handle its Relation with the West.

Despite all these changes, EU's reply was the development of one cooperation framework in Four Common Spaces, with the intention to expand the collaboration and interest fields beyond the energy sector and to enhance the interdependence relation with the Russian Federation. This initiative had the real potential to bring Russia and the EU closer to the ideal model of collaboration and relation, in compliance with the complex interdependence theory, where military force is avoided since the consequences of using the same become too high. However, Moscow reluctance to collaborate in view of developing the Four Common Spaces, to ratify the Energy Charter Treaty, by adopting a selective policy as related to the EU proposal, shows Russia's interest to maintain one asymmetrical inter-dependence relation with Brussels mainly based on their cooperation in the energy field, in view of manipulating the asymmetrical interdependence relation so as to reach its geopolitical and geo-economic interests. On the other hand, Russia's selective approach based upon political realism has also been triggered by some historical decisions made by Western leaders and which in time have contributed to Russia's paradigm shift. To this end, the unwritten agreement between Mihail Gorbaciov, NATO general Secretary and the US officials, a little before the Berlin Wall falling, as related to the limitation of the expanding of the North – Atlantic Alliance to the Eastern border has been breached upon by the West by subsequent adherence to the EU and NATO of the baltic states and of former countries under the Warsaw Pact. Moreover the EU member states' denial of the European Security Treaty proposed by Dmitri Medvedev, in 2008 stands for another argument used by Russia in view of rendering a legitimate character to its aggressive and competitive approach against the European Union.

The treacherous approach of Kremlin in terms of reaching its European level interests by strengthening the bilateral relations with the EU member states, to the detriment of a direct negotiation with the European Union from the very early period when the two actors considered themselves to be strategic partners, shows that the Russian Federation has treated the European Union from the very start as one potential competitor, preferring rather to develop one asymmetrical relation, where the Union needed Russia more than Russia needed the EU. This pragmatic approach on Russia's part to the detriment of the European Union enabled it to move forward with its strategic projects and to enhance its bilateral relations with member states that are part of the hard core of the

EU, such as Germany, France, Italy and Austria.

The divergence between the two actors increased given the disagreements on external security, namely the unilateral strategies and policies what have been developed by the EU for the common neighborhood. The European actions for the support of the Eastern Partnership states in view of the latter's democratization and economic development have disturbed Moscow's plans, since this region is crucial for Russia's re-establishment as an international actor. Moreover, the Union's actions in the common neighborhood have been deemed as attempts by which one aimed at enhancing the European influence over the former Soviet states, and Moscow's reply to that was an aggressive re-imperialization policy. However, Moscow's inability to integrate the former Soviet states under the aegis of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as its ambition to develop a series of Eurasian integration projects from the very ashes of CSI, in the absence of some consolidated institutions, show the vulnerabilities of this particular actor, which acts particularly in view of countering the European Union actions in the Eastern neighborhoods and less for the purpose of providing a real alternative for the sustainable development of the countries in that specific region. Thus, Russia's approach in the nearby, post-URSS neighborhood, highlights on the one hand the latter's failure to act as one leader incapable of efficiently handling this region and on the other hand, the relevance of the CSI space for its due transformation in an influential actor.

In Russian terms, the cooperation in the external security field, had to be accomplished by a clear-cut delimitation of the fields of interest and influence, with the acceptance to collaborate with Europe only in the event the Eurasian Union project were to be a success, and the Eastern Partnership countries became members of this specific project. It's only in this ideal scenario for Russia that the cooperation with the European Union in the field of external security would be possible, and this would also favor the achievement of the Russian ideal – namely a larger Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

As a counter-balance for the European actions conducted in the common neighborhood region, Moscow focused on enhancing its leverages over the EU member states. Thus, the asymmetry between the energy interdependence relations is used by Moscow in view of manipulating the EU member states, for the purpose of the due fragmentation of the Union and the dilution of the European energy and external policy pending development.

The dynamics of the events from the region of the common EU-Russia neighborhood, the increase of instability and insecurity at the European Union borders, as resulting given the Union being deemed by the Russian Federation as a competitive power in the former Soviet space, have triggered a series of frictions in the internal policy of the PaE partner states, lots of dissensions in the separatist regions, and the most serious effects on regional and European stability and security have

stood for the result of the illegal attachment of Crimea, and later on for the consequence of the initiation of the conflict in Luhansk and Doneţk.

The relevance of settling these conflicts, called “grey zones” is due to the fact that the latter trigger insecurity and stand for a real threat for the international community, given the possibility of the occurrence at any time whatsoever of an open conflict, and because of the development in these particular enclaves, of the crime groups and the increase in number of the illegal business in the money laundry, people and ammunition traffic field, and the latter’s geographic proximity to the EU requires the intervention on the part of the European actors for settling these conflicts.

Conflicts internationalization, the geographic proximity of the PaE states which have chosen to enhance their economic integration and political association with the EU, as well as the diplomatic pressure of the economic sanctions on Russia facilitate the context for the amendment of the peace format, in view of settling these conflicts.

Although Russia is not to give up on these territories, since maintaining the military presence in Donbas, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Osetia provides Moscow with some strong leverage over the Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and the support for the conflict from Nagorno-Karabakh grants it a significant position in the Caucasus area, an increase and due enhancement of the economic, political and social linkages between the PaE states and the European Union shall duly increase the likelihood of a more active involvement of the European actors when things shall aggravate. Moreover, whereas the linkages with the Western actors contribute to the liberalization of competition in terms of internal policy and the opening of the political regime towards democracy, the increase of prosperity level and the enhancement of economic cooperation with the separatist enclaves shall make these regions enhance their own linkages with the states de jure that they are part of, to the detriment of the linkages with a certain one given actor, which becomes more and more aggressive and more and more vulnerable, and that is the Russian Federation. However, as long as Russia shall keep on being part of the conflicts regulation formats (5+2, Minsk and Normandy Group) and it shall keep on maintaining its armed forces in the region, to the detriment of some neutral armed forces, the chances for such conflicts settlement shall be pretty low.

If the Western actors shall not get involved in the settlement of these frozen conflicts, then Russia shall go on enhancing its dominant position so as to use such conflicts as main leverages, by which it shall keep on maintaining its influence, interfering in the internal policy of the CSI states, making sure that no such country as EU partner shall stand any real chance in adhering to the Euro-Atlantic structures.

Given the current circumstances, the EU – Russia relation resembles more and more to a dilemma of security, where no actor can enhance security without this representing a threat to the other

actor, and the illegal attachment of Crimea continued with the initiation of the Donbas region war, has stood for the key moment for the regression of the relation between the Russian Federation and the European Union from cooperation in mutual fields of interest to competition and stagnation.

Moreover, the unfavorable global context, the radical change of the US external policy as promoted by president Donald Trump brings a high prejudice of image not only to the Trans-Atlantic community, but also the security of the two big powers (EU and US) as related to such actors as the Russian Federation or China. Moreover, one European Union lacking the US support shall become vulnerable to a revisionist Russia which, in view of reaching its own interests and the ideal of becoming a big power, is wilfully breaching upon the principles laying the foundation of the international system architecture. One extra argument regarding the risks of the current situation at the EU level is the event which occurred in 2014, namely the attachment of Crimea and the initiation of the war at the Western borders.

Also, quite contrary to the populist with a nationalist tinge discourse in the Central and Eastern Europe States – as victims of the hybrid war and of some illiberal leaders – whose intent is to promote Euro-skepticism among citizens, the European institutions leaders, as well as those in the hard core of the European Union should aim at consolidating the European project, the cohesion between the member states to the detriment of a Europe of several speeds, a Europe of concentric circles, which risks to get this integration project so fragile, although it has been the most successful one so far. In the essence, one such weak and divided European Union is what Kremlin wants, since this would enable it to achieve its imperialist projects to the Union's detriment.