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**Peer- Reviewed Article**

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**Tvorba globální bezpečnostní strategie EU**

Výzvy plynoucí ze zamrzlých konfliktů ve východním sousedství EU

**Drafting EU Global Security Strategy**

Challenges Arisen by Frozen Conflicts in its Eastern Neighbourhood

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**Abstrakt:** Přestože *Bezpečnostní strategie EU* se zaměřuje na několik úrovní a domén, článek se věnuje problémům, které mají svůj původ ve východních oblastech Unie. Argumentace uvedená v článku prezentuje teoretické aspekty Strategie a charakterizuje bezpečnostní prostředí v oblasti Černého moře, představuje trendy vývoje v oblastech „zamrzlých“ konfliktů a postoj EU k těmto problémům v celém kontextu. Autorka dospěla k závěru, že EU dnes čelí z východu vážným hrozbám, vyplývajícím z historie jejich vzniku a vývoje a z absence jejich dosavadního řešení ze strany EU. Tato situace vyžaduje řešení a existuje riziko, že nově vytvářena Bezpečnostní strategie EU je dostatečně nezohledněná a že nový bude mít jen obecnou povahu, s malou praktickou hodnotou.

**Abstract:** Although the EU global security strategy has to offer orientation on multiple levels and domains, the present paper approaches the challenges emerging from the Union's eastern neighbourhood. The argumentation includes theoretical aspects of strategy, main characteristics of the Black Sea security environment, trends of frozen conflict evolution, and the EU's approach in this entire context. The study concludes that the serious challenges the EU faces nowadays in its eastern vicinity are the result of phenomena with a consistent history and deficient management by the EU. In our opinion, this train of events makes the project of a new EU security strategy so challenging that it could become a new document of an over-general character, with little practical value.

**Klíčová slova:** Bezpečnostní strategie; zamrzlé konflikty; strategická samostatnost; politika východního sousedství.

**Keywords:** Security Strategy; Grand Strategy; Frozen Conflicts; Strategic Autonomy; European Neighbourhood Policy.

## INTRODUCTION

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is expected to provide a European Global Strategy by the end of June 2016. A new security strategy has never been more necessary and, at the same, it has never been so challenging to be drafted. The dynamic of international security environment, the changes occurred within the European security environment and within the EU itself are unbeatable arguments standing for the necessity of a new strategic document at this level.

### 1. THE OVERALL CONTEXT

The latest EU strategic document dates from 2003. Ever since, the number of EU member states has increased from 15 to 28, and a new Treaty on the Functioning of the EU has been issued, including new institutions in the area of security and defence. European actors passed through a disconcerting economic and financial crisis with serious economic, political, and social repercussions. It was also the moment when the EU's main strategic partner - the US - announced its strategic interests pivoted to Asia-Pacific region, meaning that as long as its European partners would not face a vital threat, its resources will be focused on that area. It was also the period of the "Arab spring", which was not only an opportunity for the EU to prove its ability of acting as a security provider in its southern vicinity, but also revealed its limits in this respect.

Nevertheless, the most self-evident token that the EU had to forge a new strategic approach, based on a realistic assessment of the security evolution and of its own interests and resources was the Ukrainian crisis. During 2013, Brussels and Moscow were engaged in a process of attracting states in their common vicinity to enhanced integration formulas - the EU through the Association Agreements and Russia to the Eurasian Union. The subsequent events, culminating with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the separatist war in eastern Ukraine stand as a proof that the European way of acting on the international arena, based on idealist rhetoric, on its normative power, focusing on promoting European values and standards can determine geopolitical effects.

Even more, the same events revealed that the EU's idealist rhetoric, based on the promotion of human rights, liberal democracy, free market, economic welfare is not an adequate manner of approaching international relations. In our opinion, this characteristic of the EU's vision on foreign affairs turned out to have two major deficiencies. Firstly, beyond its liberal discourse, there is also a lack of realism, of adapting its approach to the specific of the other actors of the international arena and, secondly, it also served as one of the justifications for putting security and defence matters on the lower places of Brussels' priorities.

In fact, there are opinions in the academia according to which the EU lived, until the Ukrainian crisis, in a "post-historical" moment,<sup>1</sup> acting on the international arena taking

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<sup>1</sup> Russell Walter Mead: The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of Revisionist Powers. *Foreign Affairs* [online]. May/June 2014 [cit. 2016-05-20]. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2014-04-17/return-geopolitics>.

as a premise F. Fukuyama's thesis published in "The End of History and the Last Man". However, states in the EU's eastern neighbourhood, the former Soviet states, still live in an era marked by geopolitical calculi, in an era where the illegal annexation of Crimea, the separatist war in Donbass are only the latest in a list of events including the preservation of frozen conflicts and the Russian-Georgian war (2008). In other words, Brussels, like most of western actors, acted as if geopolitics and power politics had ceased to exist,<sup>2</sup> trying to approach international relations beyond the geopolitical issue of territory and beyond military power. All of these also turn out the failure of the EU's security strategy and, especially, of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Beyond this unexpected awakening to a realistic paradigm of thinking international relations, clashing with the EU's idealist manner of approaching international affairs and security matters, there is a more ample and significant shock. The US strategic shift toward Asia-Pacific also implies the need for the European allies to get involved and to invest more in the security of their immediate vicinity, to develop "strategic autonomy", a term mentioned by Catherine Ashton in 2013, referring to the EU's need of becoming a security provider especially and firstly in its own neighbourhood.<sup>3</sup> Strategic autonomy supposes the capacity of initiating actions, of taking the initiative, at least, at regional level, with the support of the US, but not relying on its major contribution.

It is also noteworthy that strategic autonomy hasn't been thought exclusively in relation with the European Union, but with European states. In this respect, one shall only consider the following series of events: US announcing the pivot of its strategic interests to Asia-Pacific (2011/2012) - the launch of "pooling and sharing" (EU) and "smart defence" (NATO) initiatives (2012) regarding the increase of European states' financial contribution to their defence through these mechanisms - the reactions to the "Arab spring" (2012).

The main idea emerging from all these facts was that Europeans had to increase their responsibilities for their own defence, emphasizing the importance of guaranteeing stability and security in their neighbourhood, namely of that space whose major destabilization could directly and seriously reverberate on the European security environment. In this line of thought, the conclusion could only be that the chosen institutional framework to reach this objective - NATO or EU - wasn't as important as the responsible engagement in meeting this request, respectively in developing the necessary capacity of acting as a security provider in the neighbourhood.

Therefore, acting under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) aegis was just one of the available roads opening for the European states in this context. Nevertheless, developing strategic autonomy at the EU's level has raised in Brussels' top priorities, especially in the context of the acute political and military crisis in its Eastern borders.

The need for strategic autonomy had been acknowledged even before the Ukrainian crisis, which demonstrated, beyond any doubt, the failure of ENP. This means that

<sup>2</sup> Sven Biscop: *Geopolitics with European Characteristics. An Essay on Pragmatic Idealism, Equality and Strategy*. Egmont Paper 82. Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels, March 2016, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Preparing the December 2013 European Council on Security and Defence. Final Report by the High Representative/Head of the EDA on the Common Security and Defence Policy. Brussels, October, 15, 2013 [cit. 2016-05-18], p. 2. Available at: [http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131015\\_02\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131015_02_en.pdf).

currently, the EU is in course of projecting a new strategic document, under the need of developing its strategic autonomy (also including the military dimension), in the context of a proved failure in approaching security in its neighbourhood and of a still undergoing political-military crisis at its borders. Along with all these, there should be also considered the significant political, diplomatic, and economic degradation of its relations with its most notable neighbour in the east - the Russian Federation - as a consequence of the EU's reaction to Moscow's decision to annex Crimea and get involved in the separatist movement in Ukraine. All of these make it hard to imagine a more challenging context for the drafting of a new strategic document.

## 2. EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD SPECIFIC: FROZEN CONFLICTS AND EU'S APPROACH

Broadly speaking, frozen conflicts refer to situations in which, despite overcoming the highest point of escalation, conflicts cannot be considered resolved because peace negotiations haven't led to a solution acceptable for all the parties involved. The causes of these conflicts are apparently situated in ethnic, ethnic-territorial and even identity domains. Even if they usually carry such dimensions, their specific lays in their geopolitical and geoeconomic value. Actually, frozen conflicts in Eastern Europe take place in former Soviet republics and have at their roots minority communities' claims of independence. Usually, these minorities are Russian, pro-Russian or Russian supported.<sup>4</sup>

The frozen conflict's geostrategic and geoeconomic valence can be clearly understood in a parallel analysis of the map of these conflicts and of the main pipelines ensuring hydrocarbon transport from Russia to Europe. Countries experiencing such conflicts carry a high importance both for Europe's energy security and for the maintenance of Russia's energy monopoly. Even more, the Russian Federation plays a major role in most of these conflicts, usually by supporting separatists and by keeping military presence on the territory of the countries marked by such conflicts.

In EU's eastern neighbourhood, there are four main frozen conflicts as follows: Transdnister (the Republic of Moldova), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), and Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan - Armenia). To all of these, Ukraine's Donbass region can be added. Even though it is not frozen yet, the conflict between Kiev and Donbass separatists is much similar to the other conflicts in the region if considering the following aspects: ethnic dimension, geopolitical and geoeconomic value, Russian involvement on the separatists' side,<sup>5</sup> resulting in new political entities aspiring to gain autonomy and independence in relation to central authorities of the state. Even more,

<sup>4</sup> Alexandru Grumaz: La Marea Neagră este liniște (?!). *Adevărul* [online]. April, 12, 2016 [cit. 2016-05-09]. Available at: [http://adevarul.ro/international/europa/la-marea-neagra-liniste--1\\_570c79215ab6550cb8e479e2/index.html](http://adevarul.ro/international/europa/la-marea-neagra-liniste--1_570c79215ab6550cb8e479e2/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> Although the Russian Federation denies its involvement in the separatist war in eastern Ukraine, most of western references to these events call for Russia to cease offering support to separatists in Ukraine across the border. For instance, see: Office of the Spokesperson: *Russia's Continuing Support for Armed Separatists in Ukraine and Ukraine's Efforts Toward Peace, Unity, and Stability*, Fact Sheet [online]. July 14, 2014 [cit. 2015-12-16]. Washington. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/229270.htm>; *Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales* [online]. 5 September 2014 [cit. 2015-12-06]. Available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm?mode=pressrelease](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm?mode=pressrelease)

the consequences of the future Kiev's foreign political trajectory foreshadow to be similar to the other states experiencing frozen conflicts - continuous instability, economic stagnation, and paralysis in developing viable institutions, impossibility of implementing reforms necessary for the integration in the Euro-Atlantic security structures.

Additionally, one shall also take into account that frozen conflicts can be defined as those having reached a fragile "no peace, no war" state, as a result of the military victory of separatists, with foreign support<sup>6</sup>. However, their independence is not internationally recognized, remaining the subject of the international law infringement<sup>7</sup>. This manner of defining frozen conflicts reveals one of their main characteristics: they do not consist necessarily in a conflict's freeze, but especially in freezing the peace processes. This even more as the history of these conflicts reveals a tendency to unfreeze, to melt down on a periodic basis.

As far as Ukraine is concerned, it is eloquent in this respect that ever since the Minsk II Agreement was signed (February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015), its provisions have been repeatedly broken on an almost daily rate, as there are sources according to which there are at least 400 killed since the parties assumed to implement its conditions<sup>8</sup>.

Failure to implement the Minsk II Agreement also equals to one of the greatest challenges the EU faces when drafting a new security strategy - establishing the guiding lines for the relations with the Russian Federation. As mentioned before, after the illegal annexation of Crimean Peninsula, the EU imposed economic and diplomatic sanctions on Russia. Lifting those sanctions is conditioned by the compliance with the provisions of the Minsk II Agreement. In December 2015, the EU Council decided to extend these sanctions until July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016.<sup>9</sup> In our opinion, the chances for this to happen in the near future are even shallower as the Russian Federation denies the accusations that they have sent troops and weapons to support separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The document the EU is set to draft is the European equivalent of a grand strategy. A grand strategy is usually considered to be the attribute of great powers, with extended vital economic, political and military interests. Having a grand strategy supposes keeping in mind long-term objectives, while continuously adapting to present difficulties.<sup>10</sup> Also, having a grand strategy is an assertion of one actor's status as a major power in the international arena.

Setting guiding lines for future relations with Russia is both of major importance and extremely challenging. The diplomatic crisis following the Ukrainian crisis is just one

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<sup>6</sup> Natalie Tocci: *The EU and conflict resolution. Promoting peace in the backyard*. Routledge Publishing, New York, 2007, pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Carla Babb: Pentagon: Despite Minsk II, More Than 400 Ukraine Troops Killed. *VOA News* [online]. March, 2, 2016 [cit. 2016-05-15]. Available at: <http://www.voanews.com/content/pentagon-ukraine-russia-minsk/3217502.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Russia: EU prolongs economic sanctions by six months, Press release [online]. December, 21, 2015 [cit. 2016-05-15]. Available at: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/12/21-russia-sanctions>

<sup>10</sup> Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, James Lacey (eds.): *The Shaping of Grand Strategy. Policy, Diplomacy, and War*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2011, pp. 1-7.

side of the problem. Another important component of this equation lies in the issue of EU's and Russia's common neighbourhood. The EU's approach was mostly based on the economic, social and political dimensions, being oriented toward the development of the self-governance capacity of states in this region, toward their long-term stabilization (Table no. 1). ENP, Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy included these components to a large extent.<sup>11</sup> Regarding the financial support of the ENP countries, we choose to focus on the data for the 2007-2013 timeline, when this support was granted through the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument - ENPI (2007-2013). Afterwards, a new program was scheduled: European Neighbourhood Instrument: 2014-2020. However, given the fact that the present paper is focused on the flaws of the EU's approach in its neighbourhood and the change of this approach in the light of the Ukrainian crisis and of the new EU's strategy, the data is considered relevant for the purpose of this approach.

**Table Nr. 1:** Comparative table of the EU's actions in the states in its eastern neighbourhood experiencing frozen conflicts

	<b>The Republic of Moldova</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Armenia</b>	<b>Azerbaijan</b>
<b>Programs benefitting from bilateral EU financial assistance through ENPI, 2007-2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of democracy;</li> <li>- Development of the rule of law;</li> <li>- Respect for fundamental human rights;</li> <li>- Economic reform and improvement of living conditions;</li> <li>- Increasing the mutual trust between Kishinev and Tiraspol.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening the rule of law;</li> <li>- Respect for fundamental human rights;</li> <li>- Sustainable economic development;</li> <li>- Development of legal system;</li> <li>- Resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons;</li> <li>- Building trust between the government in Tbilisi and the two breakaway republics.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reform of judicial area;</li> <li>- Modernization of public finances;</li> <li>- Trading reform plan;</li> <li>- Educational reform.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Energy policy reform;</li> <li>- Rural development and agriculture;</li> <li>- Financial sector management ;</li> <li>- Legal system reform.</li> </ul>
<b>Financial support (2007-2013) in relation with the population of the beneficiary state<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>EUR 560.9 mil. / 3,546,847 inhabitants</b>	<b>EUR 452.1 mil. / 4,931,226 inhabitants</b>	<b>EUR 281.5 mil. / 3,056,382 inhabitants</b>	<b>EUR 143.5 mil. / 9,780,780 inhabitants</b>
<b>EU CSDP Missions</b>	EUBAM	EUJUST Themis EUMM	-	-

<sup>11</sup> For an extended analysis of the efficiency of the EU's actions in its neighborhood, see: Cristina Bogzeanu: *Rolul UE în gestionarea conflictelor înghețate din vecinătatea sa*. "Carol I" National Defence University Publishing house, Bucharest, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The identification of the estimated number of the population for July 2015 used the data provided by CIA World Factbook [online] [cit. 2016-04-30]. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>.

	The Republic of Moldova	Georgia	Armenia	Azerbaijan
<b>EU status within peace negotiations</b>	Observer in “5+2” negotiations	- Main negotiator of the Agreement in 6 points - Co-chair of Geneva Talks	-	-
<b>Mandate of the Special Representative</b>	<p><b>EU Special Representative for the Republic of Moldova</b></p> <p>a) Contribution to the peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and the implementation of a viable solution, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders;</p> <p>b) Contribution to strengthening democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights for all citizens of Moldova;</p> <p>c) Promoting good relations between Moldova and the EU based on common values and interests;</p> <p>d) Supporting the fight against trafficking in human beings, arms and other goods from and through Moldova;</p> <p>e) Contribution to strengthening stability and security in the region;</p> <p>f) Enhancing the efficiency and visibility of the EU in the region.</p>	<p><b>EU Special Representative for South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia:</b></p> <p>a) Contribution to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, including the crises in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh;</p> <p>b) Encouraging regional cooperation;</p> <p>c) Enhancing the efficiency and visibility of the EU in the region;</p> <p>d) Contributing to strengthening stability and security in the region.</p>		
<b>AA/DCFTA</b>	2014	2014	-	-

Even though they were included in areas of cooperation between the EU and the states experiencing protracted conflicts, frozen conflicts haven’t played a central role in these frameworks, even though the economic, political, social, technocratic measures undertaken by the EU verged toward providing stability and security, which, in the case of these states, also means, in the long term, the resolution of protracted conflicts. One of the most important reason for this being the difficulty of approaching Russia’s major interests in the region.

In fact, this was one of the major reasons for the ENP failure - the focus on “low politics” (economic and technical cooperation) instead on “high politics” (diplomacy and military), due to the difficulty of negotiating relations with Russia in this respect.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sven Biscop: *Game of Zones - The quest for influence in Europe’s neighborhood*. Egmont Paper 67, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Academia Press, June 2014, p. 7

Even in these conditions, Moscow's vision on western, including the EU, politics in its common vicinity is marked by a competitive attitude. Therefore, finding a middle way, on the basis of a farsighted win-win approach is one of the most concerning issues which should be approached within the new European strategic document.

### 3. FROZEN CONFLICTS: RECENT TRENDS

As mentioned before, one of the distinctive characteristics of frozen conflicts is the fact that they have the tendency of re-bursting regularly. The formation of a new frozen conflict in the eastern neighbourhood has a high potential of destabilizing the fragile stability in the region. Equally relevant in this respect is the Russian Federation's role in the context of these conflicts. Moscow's special interest in maintaining influence in this area has already become a cliché in specialty studies. Presently, Russia has a 3,300 personnel military basis in Gyumri (Armenia), 1,500 peacekeepers in Transdníester (Republic of Moldova), and 7,000 militaries in Georgia (a military base in Gaudata, Abkhazia and another one in Djava/Tskinvali, South Ossetia)<sup>14</sup>. Given its success in Ukraine, there were many analyses arguing that "Kremlin may be inspired (...) to repeat the venture in other post-Soviet states".<sup>15</sup>

Beyond Russia's play in maintaining instability in this space, there are also serious endemic vulnerabilities, shared by all the states experiencing protracted conflicts - separatist movement on ethnic basis, endemic corruption, economic and social instability, etc. Hostile relations between the majority and minority communities already have a consistent history dating back to the end of the Cold War. Therefore, frozen conflicts involve an inherent great complexity as they imply various issues to be taken into account: internal economic, social, political problems and the overlapping interests of major regional actors.

One of the most recent reminders of the conflict-prone character of the actors in the Black Sea region are the violent clashes with major strategic relevance that happened this year in Nagorno-Karabakh. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, there were reports of resuming military activities between Armenian and Azeri military forces on the Line of Contact (Nagorno-Karabakh's border), resulting in the death of dozens of military and civilians. During the confrontation, Azeri military forces occupied a series of strategic locations. Hostilities ended on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, as sides agreed to a ceasefire, although clashes continued on the Line of Contact. This area has been often described as the most dangerous militarized area in Europe. The major strategic importance of the violent events happened in early April 2016 is also related to Russian Federation's role in the frozen conflict context. Nagorno-Karabakh is the only protracted conflict in South Caucasus with no direct Russian involvement, having as main parties not a state and a separatist entity within the state, but two distinct national actors - Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, Moscow has close relations with both Erevan and Baku. In 2013, Armenia renounced to the Association Agreement with the EU just after completing negotiations in this respect for joining the Customs Union. Also, Russia is Armenia's main strategic partner and the modernization and maintenance of its military forces is highly dependent on Moscow. At the same time, Russia sold military equipment worth

<sup>14</sup> According to The Military Balance 2015, Routledge Publishing house, UK, pp. 175, 180, 184.

<sup>15</sup> H. Reisinger and A. Golts: *Russia's Hybrid Warfare. Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence*. Research Paper no. 105. November 2014. Research Division - NATO Defence College, Rome, p. 10



4 billion \$ to Baku only in 2012.

Despite the ceasefire, the situation remains extremely volatile and presents a high risk of destabilizing the entire region. Russia's key relations both with Baku and Erevan, Turkey's support for the Azeri, the reported use of heavy weapons, artillery and rockets, Iran's economic and social ties with the parties involved, as well as Azerbaijan's energy relevance can be listed as important arguments in this respect.

Stability and security in the entire region can be characterized by highly volatile and inflammable hostility as, Armenia aside, all former Soviet states enhanced their partnership with the EU. Despite Russia's pressures to attract them to its own consolidated integration formulas and given the overlapping Russian and western interests in the region, the diplomatic crisis between Russia and western actors, the economic sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia, the reassurance measures undertaken at the NATO's level, the security equation in the region shapes as of extreme complexity, with multiple variables to be taken into account.

Although in the last two years attention has been focused on the Ukrainian crisis and, recently, the resumption of violent clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh, we should not forget the recent evolutions of the other frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area, especially those in Transdniester, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While all eyes were on Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova went through one of the most serious political crises, determined by extended endemic corruption.<sup>16</sup>

A special relevance can also be attached to the strategic partnership agreed between Russia and Abkhazia (November 2014) providing a closer social, economic, humanitarian, as well as foreign, security and defence cooperation between the two entities. Also, in South Ossetia there is a referendum on the course of organization of joining the Russian Federation. The referendum was supposed to take place no later than August 2016, but on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016 it was postponed for 2017. This political measure is considered thoroughly illegal as not only was the majority of Georgians in South Ossetia ethnically cleansed by separatists in 1991-1992, but also, after the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the province has been hosting thousands of Russian troops, which gives Moscow a high leverage of influence.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, the EU's approach to its eastern neighbourhood has also begun to change. The political-military crisis experienced by Kiev was also the first time the EU's actions based on liberal principles determined such a crisis with serious military implications. In this line of thought it is useful to recall that the first stages of this crisis consisted in massive street protests against the Ukrainian political decision to suspend the negotiations about the Association Agreement with the EU. The authorities' attempt to put an end to the peaceful protests in a violent manner and the flight of the Ukrainian president were followed by Moscow's decision

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<sup>16</sup> "Corruption Index reflects Moldova's disappointing response to corruption", Transparency International, 27 January 2016, URL: [http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/corruption\\_index\\_reflects\\_moldovas\\_disappointing\\_response\\_to\\_corruption](http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/corruption_index_reflects_moldovas_disappointing_response_to_corruption), retrieved at 10 May 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Vasili Rukhaze, "Is Russia Preparing the Annexation of South Ossetia?", in Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 13, Issue 74, 15 April 2016, URL: [http://www.jamestown.org/regions/thecaucasus/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=45326&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=641&cHash=d3faa24a03deed7b9dea1827fa7bd73c#.V065mfl97Dc](http://www.jamestown.org/regions/thecaucasus/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=45326&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=641&cHash=d3faa24a03deed7b9dea1827fa7bd73c#.V065mfl97Dc), retrieved at 20 May 2016.

to annex Crimea, under the pretext of protecting the Russian population in Ukraine.

Consequently, the EU repeatedly condemned and called for the immediate cease of the Russian actions in Ukraine and adopted a series of measures of coercion aimed at making the Russian Federation cease the destabilizing actions in Ukraine: economic sanctions and diplomatic measures such as the suspension bilateral talks with the Russian Federation on visa matters and discussions on the new (EU-Russia) agreement as well as preparations for participation at the G8 Summit in Sochi.

At the same time, Brussels continued to support political and economic reforms that are necessary to consolidate a democratic, independent, united and prosperous Ukraine. There were undertaken measures to contribute to this state's economic and political stabilization, including a 11 billion EUR financial support. Also, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014, European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine formally began operations from its headquarters in Kyiv. This civilian mission is aimed at assisting the Ukrainian authorities in a sustainable reform of the civilian security sector through strategic advice and hands-on support for specific reform measures based on EU standards and international principles of good governance and human rights.<sup>18</sup>

Briefing up, the EU's role in the Ukrainian crisis context presents a range of peculiarities, differentiating it from the role plaid within the resolution of the other frozen conflicts in the area. Firstly, there can be identified a direct role in triggering the crisis: Association Agreement negotiations with Kyiv - the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend these negotiations under Moscow's pressures in this respect<sup>19</sup> - popular protests - Ukrainian president's flight - Crimea's annexation by Russia - war in Donbas. Secondly, the EU reacted to this crisis, with serious implications for its own security and for the manner in which security is perceived, by combining a set of soft power measures (the support granted to the Ukrainian government) with coercion measures envisaging Russia (economic and diplomatic sanctions).

Relations with the other states in the area experiencing frozen conflicts develop approximately on the same coordinates, the main exception consisting in the implementation of the Association Agreements with Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Nevertheless, Brussels continues its long term approach to frozen conflicts resolution, focusing on enhancing these states' self-governance capacity by supporting political, economic, social, and even military reforms.

## CONCLUSION

The highest incentive for a new EU security strategy - rising instability in its neighbourhood - is also making this project a challenge in itself. It is also notable that even though instability in the Black Sea region has been attracting international and, especially, European attention in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, its dynamics isn't a new one. Frozen conflicts have been constant in these states' evolution ever since the end of the Cold War. Their multiplication (Ukraine) and their high risk of re-ignition reveal not only their constancy, but also the EU's lack of efficiency in this respect. As far

<sup>18</sup> European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine [online] [cit. 2016-06-03]. Available at: <http://www.euam-ukraine.eu/en/what-we-do/our-mission>

<sup>19</sup> For details, see: Cristina Bogzeanu: Political-military Crises in the Black Sea Area: From Chronic to Acute. *Strategic Impact*, no. 4[53]/2014, pp. 7-17.

as its eastern neighbourhood is concerned, there are several aspects shaping or supposed to shape EU's strategy:

- a) ENP failure in reaching its objective of fostering a ring of stable, secure, prosperous and well governed states around EU's borders;
- b) The emergence of the conflict prospect in the European security environment and the disclosure of the geopolitical and geostrategic calculi leading international actors' behaviour on the international arena as opposed to the EU's mostly idealist rhetoric in this respect;
- c) The acute degradation of West-Russia relations;
- d) The need for the European actors to assume strategic autonomy, especially in their neighbourhood.

If the scope of the future EU security strategy is the one of a grand strategy, than we shall expect this document to stand as a source of all sectorial strategies, guiding the manner in which the EU will promote and defend its interests on the world arena. Therefore, the main challenge for the project of drafting a new EU security strategy emanating from its eastern neighbourhood could be briefed as developing strategic autonomy in the neighbourhood in times when its stability and security are at the lowest level ever since the end of the Cold War.

There are two main aspects giving the real image of the challenge of approaching security in the EU's vicinity. The first one relates to the approach of complex, evolving crises which also involve taking into account setting the grounds for a win-win approach with an increasingly hostile neighbour. Additionally, there is also the need of building and preserving security and stability in the neighbourhood it shares with Russia, on different grounds than the ones proved inefficient by the Ukrainian crisis.

The EU's reaction to the Ukrainian crisis can be already assessed as showing a first step toward the further development and adaptation of its foreign and security policy to the specific of the security environment dynamics, as this reaction revealed a combination of hard power and soft power measures, in accordance with the present EU's capabilities and specifics. Nevertheless, the current trend of security evolutions at regional and international levels requires further development of the EU's capabilities, including the military ones, to promote its interests. Given the overall security context, both the internal and the external one, this fact could turn in a serious challenge for the efficiency of the new EU security strategy.

Concerning the available resources necessary to put these objectives into practice, there are two main issues to be approached: the institutional framework and the available capabilities. As far as the institutional framework is concerned, the first challenge could be seen in the relatively new institutional and conceptual framework created through the Treaty of Lisbon. The 2003 European Security Strategy was designed before the European External Action Service and even before major developments in the area of crisis and conflict management. Institutions need time to prove their efficiency. So, there is a justifiable degree of reticence regarding the current ability of CFSP/CSDP structures and capabilities to function as an efficient leverage for the EU to act as a relevant international actor, capable of efficiently contributing to regional and international security.

Also, recent events in the EU's eastern neighbourhood could lay at the basis of an upgrade of this region in Brussels' security priorities and even the enhancement of cooperation with these states under the Common Security and Defence Policy.

The preservation and the flare of instability and insecurity in this area could function as an incentive for the delineation of a coherent, strong vision and strategy of the EU's member states for this region. Nevertheless, in our opinion, one shall also keep a circumspect view on this due to the numerous security challenges the EU has to address not only externally, but also internally.

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