

# **Why Stabilization Outweighed Democratization:**

## **The Case of the EU Policy Change in the Eastern Neighborhood**

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to explain why the narrative of the EU policy changed in the EaP policy field; more specifically - what role has been played in the change of the narrative by the intra-EU dynamics and by the strategy of / on Russia. The study uses a process-tracing method, to follow the EU's drift from normative to security narrative in its policy goals regarding the Eastern Neighborhood countries. The analysis demonstrates that the EU is inclined to provide stability, but unable to contribute to substantial reforms on the ground due to the divergent interests and existing vulnerabilities of the individual member states regarding Russia factor activated after the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. Thus, this study tries to contribute to the understanding of a formulation of the EU common foreign and security policy in the Eastern European region.

*Key words:* European Union, European Neighborhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, Ukrainian Crisis, Russia.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Introduction

In 2019 the Eastern Partnership (EaP) celebrates its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>1</sup> under the slogan “Stronger together”<sup>2</sup> which remained the same from the EaP Summit in 2017 and reflects the four key areas of cooperation between the EU member states and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine: Stronger Governance, Stronger Economy, Stronger Society and Stronger Connectivity. However, it must not be neglected that during the last decade, the debates among political elites of the EU member states and the EU officials about the EU strategic goals in the region were primarily organized around the dilemma whether to democratize or to stabilize the Neighborhood. Moreover, after the Revolution in Ukraine in 2014 the significant changes have occurred. It became clear that the importance of the security-stability nexus enhanced dramatically. This focus on the security dimension is the result of Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine, annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Kerch Strait incident between the Russian Federal Security Service coast guard and Ukrainian Navy vessels in 2018. These events have had an impact on the political agenda in the entire Eastern Neighborhood region, especially, with regard to the EU’s policy goals and means. On the basis of the official EU documents<sup>3</sup> one can say that the EaP is drifting towards placing greater emphasis on differentiation and stabilization than on reforms<sup>4</sup>. This initiative

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<sup>1</sup> Celebrating 10 years of the Eastern Partnership (10/05/2019). Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/news/celebrating-10-years-eastern-partnership\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/celebrating-10-years-eastern-partnership_en)

<sup>2</sup> Eastern Partnership. Source: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/eu-in-action/eap10>

<sup>3</sup> The EU’s European Neighborhood Policy Review and the Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (from 2016) are two main documents which emphasize a shift from promoting democracy to more concrete and narrow objectives, based on the new concept of “resilience”, which sees security as a precondition for democracy and prosperity.

<sup>4</sup> Crombois, J. (2019). The Eastern Partnership: Geopolitics and policy inertia. *European View*, p. 1-8. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1781685819836562>

was launched in 2009 as a response to Russian invasion in Georgia in 2008, but since then one can observe a contrast with the transformative ambitions displayed by the EU. Particularly, after Riga Summit in 2015, when no further steps were offered to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia who expected to deepen their integration with the EU, the policy inertia in the EU actions seems to have prevailed. This turn in the EU's policy preferences could throw into question a fundamental aspect of its foreign policy identity and the added value of its foreign policy, the EU's role as a transformative power.

What is also notable is that the EU's relations with its Eastern partners have become increasingly "geopoliticized"<sup>5</sup>. One can observe it from the varied reactions by the member states of the EU: the numerous debates in which European Union leaders failed to reach a consensus concerning how strongly to respond to Russian aggression revealed that actors within the EU may pursue potentially conflicting objectives. The flip side of this coin is the inconsistent attitudes of the EU member states to establishing of closer political and economic ties with Ukraine: the results of Dutch referendum in 2016<sup>6</sup> is a good evidence for that. These dynamics shows that even almost ten years after the inception of the EaP, the member states of the EU still share relatively different views as for the goals, necessity and importance of the EaP. This lack of the EU states' unanimity and plurality of their interests concerning the Eastern Neighborhood undermine the strategic character of the EaP instrument and lead to the incomprehensible strategic message of the EU's external action in this region.

Disagreements between the EU member-states cast doubt on the feasibility of a joined-up EU strategy in the Eastern Neighborhood and thus its transformative power. Actually, this

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<sup>5</sup> According to D. Cadier, the term "geopoliticisation of the EaP" disclose the features of the EaP as a "geopolitical problem" connected with Russia's actions in Ukraine which reinforced the exogenous dynamics within the EU. Source: Cadier, D. (2019). The geopoliticisation of the EU's Eastern Partnership. *Geopolitics*, 24 (1). pp. 71-99.

<sup>6</sup> 61.1 percent of Dutch voters voted "No" rejecting the association agreement between the European Union and Ukraine. Source: Dutch reject EU-Ukraine treaty in referendum (7 April 2016). Retrieved from: <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/132955>

problem is not new and was described by researchers as a tension between identity and solidarity in the actions of the EU members<sup>7</sup> and even as a foreign-policy solidarity gap. The “enlargement fatigue”<sup>8</sup> in the early 2000s was the first signal of doubts about the desirability of the Eastern Enlargement, but now these controversies became even stronger and put the stress no longer on the desirability, but capability of the EU to promote democracy in the Eastern Partnership countries effectively. Stressing that “policy-making in the EU is a shared enterprise between the EU and its member state governments”<sup>9</sup>, scholars admit that the EU can never speak with only one voice<sup>10</sup>. Given the fact that Russia uses the bilateral relations with the EU states to influence the EaP agenda (as it knows that on various occasions the EU member-states fail to build a consensus on Russia-related issues), the future and effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership policy becomes questionable. Considering these potential factors, this thesis is aimed to answer the following questions: Why did the narrative of the EU change in the EaP policy field? More specifically: what role has been played in the change of the narrative by the intra-EU dynamics and by the strategy of / on Russia?

## *1.2. Research Design and Hypothesis*

There are key components of the issue that the existing scholarship misses. Namely, if inconsistency in interests and preferences of the EU member states always existed, why dramatic change in the Eastern Partnership policy have occurred right now? Several explanatory variables proposed by researches - namely, geostrategic interests of nation-states,

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<sup>7</sup> Tulmets, E. (2011). Introduction: Identity and Solidarity in the Foreign Policy of East Central European EU Members: Renewing the Research Agenda. *Perspectives* Vol. 19, No. 2, pp. 5-25.

<sup>8</sup> Szoulcha, A. (2010). The EU and Enlargement Fatigue: Why Has the European Union Not Been Able to Counter Enlargement Fatigue. *Contemporary European Research*, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Winn, N. (2017). Between soft power, neo-Westphalianism and transnationalism: the European Union, (trans)national interests and the politics of strategy. *International Politics*. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/126052/>

<sup>10</sup> Rasmussen, S. (2009). Discourse Analysis of EU Public Diplomacy Messages and Practices. *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations “Clingendael”, 41 p.

priorities in foreign policy of the member states, vulnerabilities to Russia factor - are not unique to the current time period. My research project remedies this challenge through the analysis of additional explanatory variable - the vulnerabilities to Russia factor which were triggered (activated) due to the Ukrainian crisis of 2014<sup>11</sup> and how this affected the EaP strategic policy goals. Further, I use a process-tracing to focus on dependent variable, i.e. why the EU policy approach in the Eastern Neighborhood changed from democratization and reforming to stabilization and securitization.

I begin with exploring EU's ability to speak with a common voice and how this (in-) coherence affects policy implementation, including possible impediments to efficiency such as different internal motivations of nation-states and actor constellations, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the EU level and the national level. I then explain the methodology for my analysis of vulnerabilities to Russia factor which were triggered (activated) due to the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and present the results. The research question to be examined is how the intra-EU dynamics affects the EU narrative and approach in the EaP policy field? The Ukrainian case will be a litmus test to find out the causal change.

My assumption is that the intra-EU dynamics concerning the Eastern Neighborhood can be explained by the extent to which the EU member states are vulnerable to possible and factual actions of Russia. This research is framed by a realist-constructivist approach<sup>12</sup> focusing on discourses and practices pursued by the individual EU member states and the EU as a whole

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<sup>11</sup> The detailed analysis on this issue in the literature is provided in Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Fierke, K. M. (2001). Critical methodology and constructivism. In: K. M. Fierke & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds) *Constructing International Relations: The next generation*, pp. 115-135.

Jeandesboz, J. (2007). Labelling the "neighbourhood": Towards a genesis of the European neighbourhood policy. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 10(4), pp. 387-416.

Laffey, M., Weldes, J. (1997). Beyond belief: Ideas and symbolic technologies in the study of international relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 3(2), pp. 193-237.

Zehfuss, M. (2001). Constructivisms in international relations: Wendt, Onuf and Kratochwil. In: K. M. Fierke & K. E. Jorgensen (Eds) *Constructing International Relations: The next generation*, pp. 54-75.

entity. Within this framework, the Ukrainian crisis is understood as a trigger of changes of political goals in the region, which makes it possible to demonstrate the “transformational challenge” faced by the EU.

Underlying assumptions:

- There is a change in the EU narrative and proclaimed goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood.
- The EU strategic goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood may be affected by the intra-EU dynamics.
- The intra-EU dynamics can be explained by the vulnerabilities of the EU member states to possible Russia actions and inconsistency of their attitudes to Russia.
- These vulnerabilities and inconsistency in attitudes have always existed, but something has changed after the crisis in Ukraine in 2014.

Aim of the study: to show the change in the EU narrative and proclaimed goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood on the axis “before and after” the Ukrainian crisis mapping interests and vulnerabilities of the individual member states regarding Russia factor.

Given the outlined above the two hypotheses will be derived:

**H1:** the EU narrative and proclaimed goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood may and do change as the Union becomes less united with respect to the Russia factor.

**H2:** the EU narrative and proclaimed goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood may and do change as the Union’s preferences are shifting towards prioritizing other regions as more important and / or challenging.

Variables used in the study:

Variable	Meaning
<i>Dependent variable:</i>	the EU strategic policy goal in the Eastern Partnership countries (predominantly with regard to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine)
<i>Independent variables:</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. foreign policy goals pursued by the EU member states regarding Russia</li> <li>2. vulnerabilities (both passively preexisted, but also in the form of active use of leverage by Russia) experienced by the EU member states with connection to Russia</li> </ol>

For the purposes of the study the key concepts are defined and operationalized as follows:

Concept	Definition	Operationalization
<i>EU Neighborhood Policy</i>	A capability and will of the EU to induce neighboring countries to reform, become more democratic, and to open economically	EU policy approach and goals in the Eastern Neighborhood
<i>EU Policy Output in the Eastern Neighborhood</i>	Not to be confused with outcome (which is more complex and influenced by numerous domestic factors)	EaP policy goals and corresponding actions before and after Ukrainian crisis of 2014
<i>Intra-EU dynamics</i>	Disagreements / differences between EU member states which stem from different national interests	The extent of divergence in foreign policy priorities of the individual EU member states in comparison to the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy framework
<i>Vulnerabilities of the EU member states to the Russia factor (both passively preexisted, but also in the form of active use of leverage by Russia)</i>	What avenues Russia may have at its disposal to harm the EU member states on various levels (militarily, economically, politically), and how the EU members perceive the Russia threat	Traditional security concerns (i.e. military vulnerabilities), Russia's propaganda (as a tool to influence the domestic politics of the EU member states, i.e. political vulnerabilities), trade (i.e. economic vulnerabilities), and energy concerns (i.e. the EU members' energy vulnerabilities) in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis
<i>Attitudes of the EU member states towards Russia</i>	Different perceptions of Russia within the EU member states	Perceptions of Russia in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis

In order to delve into the above-identified aspects, the EU policies towards the Eastern Neighborhood throughout ten-year period from 2010 until 2019 will be examined with the aim to illustrate the pattern of how and why the EU's approaches and goals have been changed.

The case study proposition in this respect will be the following: the EU's approaches and goals towards the Eastern Neighborhood have been changed due to the intra-EU dynamics triggered by Russia factor in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis.

The main focus here will be on the member-states (units of analysis are vulnerabilities of the EU member states to possible and factual Russia factor and attitudes of the EU member states towards Russia), while the output of the EU policy will be observed predominantly with respect to Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine (all three countries have Association Agreements with the EU as well as experience the continued presence of Russian military in their territories, thus can provide evidences for clear change in the EU policy approach and goals with respect to the activated Russia factor after 2014). In this respect, the logic linking data collected to propositions will be outlined through the exploring the role of the Revolution of Dignity and subsequent events in Ukraine in triggering vulnerabilities of the EU member states to possible and factual Russia's actions. Therefor this will be a typical case study in order to explore the causal mechanisms of a policy change.

### *1.3. Methodology: Strengths and Limitations*

This study will use an explaining-outcome process tracing. The effect under investigation, as already noted above, will be the change of the EU narrative and strategic goals in the Eastern Neighborhood. The hypothesized cause is intra-EU dynamics triggered by Russia factor. The processes and events that link the hypothesized cause and the effect are actions of the EU under EaP instrument before and after the revolution in Ukraine in 2014.

The model of explaining-outcome process tracing in this study is the following:

- We know that there is a change in the EU policy goals in the Eastern Neighborhood (an outcome that we want to investigate). But we do not know what causes are.

- We are interested in fully explaining why shift from democratizing to stabilization in the EU policy paradigm happened – working out all the various factors that contributed to it in order to craft a minimally sufficient explanation for this change.

The process tracing in this study will be conducted in five steps:

Step 1. Developing a hypothesized causal mechanism. Firstly, the process tracing mechanism to be tested will be elaborated. This will involve revising existing theories outlined in the theoretical background section. As a result, all the steps between A (the hypothesized cause: intra-EU dynamics triggered by Russia factor) and B (the outcome of interest: shift from democratizing to stabilization in the EU policy paradigm towards the Eastern Neighborhood) will be specified with indication of actors (i.e., groups of interests, individuals, organizations) and activities conducted by these actors (for example, advocating, banning, etc.). Each part of the mechanism will therefore be framed as a hypothesis.

Step 2. Operationalizing the causal mechanism. This step will involve understanding of what each part of the hypothesized mechanism looks like in practice. This step will include identifying empirical evidences (observable manifestations). The type of evidences we will be looking for is sequence evidences (i.e. the chronology of temporal and spatial events in the framework of the EaP instrument from 2009 to 2019 and corresponding intra-EU dynamics). Potential sources and evidences, which will be possible to collect in order to determine whether each part of the mechanism happened or did not happen, will also be identified on this stage.

Step 3. Collecting evidence. This stage will involve gathering evidences for each observable manifestation of each part of the causal mechanism of the EU policy change in the Eastern Neighborhood. We will consider thoroughly the reliability of each source and its potential limitations. We will try to take needed steps to avoid biases and maximize the validity of the evidence used.

Step 4. Assessing the inferential weight of evidence. For each part of the causal mechanism elaborated the evidence that gives a reasonable degree of confidence will be identified. This will be done acknowledging the complexity of the issue examined (many actors and many secondary factors involved in the EU policy change).

Step 5. Drawing conclusions of a process tracing. On this stage we are going to admit which evidences are the weakest / strongest ones. Conducting this exercise, we will be able to either accept or reject the mechanism as a whole.

The methodology of mapping the EU member states' positions on Russia is built on utilizing media sources, policy reviews and expert commentaries. Each member state has a set of vulnerabilities which define how their relationship with Russia is developed. When mapping positions and vulnerabilities, the following elements / parameters were considered: historical background and geographical proximity to Russia; energy and trade issues; impact of counter-sanctions on domestic economy. Of course, with respect to Russia, one can name also the other factors which are significant like Syria and migration issues, Euro-skepticism, military tensions and cooperation, but with regard to the Eastern Partnership policy these factors are considered as irrelevant. It is noteworthy that not all vulnerabilities may be applicable for every country, as every member state has its own peculiarities, as well as different reasons to oppose or to cooperate with Russia. Looking at post-2008 and post-2014 positions of the EU member states allows to observe changes in stance on Russia and position on the EaP policy after the conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively. A 10-year time period like this allows to identify gradual shifts in the EU's policy towards the Eastern Neighborhood that occurred in the past decade.

There are several advantages of using process tracing method to explore the topic of concern. The first one is the opportunity for a close investigation of a causal mechanism, hence

this study applies this method to understand and visualize the process of change in the EaP narrative and goals over time presuming that the mechanism is not a linear one, but there are several variables involved that are closely interconnected and affect each other in different ways<sup>13</sup>. Another advantage of applying the process tracing analysis is an opportunity to detect alternative explanations more clearly and developing “alternative hypothesis that other scholars, policy experts, and historians have proposed”<sup>14</sup>. Particularly, in this study the criticism of the Eastern Partnership Policy Instrument is used to elaborate the alternative explanations. In this respect the following questions are used while analyzing the empirical material:

- In which way is the change in the EaP narrative and goals mentioned in the material?
- Are there other indications of a shift in the EaP strategic objectives mentioned in the material?
- Is the conflict between Russia and Ukraine mentioned? In what way? And to what effect?
- Are there passages in the official documents where change in the EaP approach is mentioned, but its preconditions are not?

Taking into account the above mentioned, this study is designed to model the interplay of two groups of factors (intra-EU dynamics and Russia factor) which contributed to the change in the EaP narrative and goal. It also expands the scope of the literature on the EU-Russia relations in the light of the Ukrainian crisis which puts into question the structural prerequisites to the viability of the EaP policy in general. In addition, it contributes to the literature on strategic priorities of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. It investigates the puzzle

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<sup>13</sup> Checkel, J. T. (2006). Tracing Causal Mechanisms. *International Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 262-264.

<sup>14</sup> George, A. L., Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, p. 217.

of the persisting ambiguity of EU approach to the Eastern Neighborhood, contributing to area studies.

This thesis also overcomes the limitations of the empirical observations which on their own may be descriptive, as well as insufficient utility of theoretical models solely. Moreover, most of current researches overlook an agent's role, overestimating structural factors, which in turn does not allow for predictions and formulation of sophisticated inferences. It also compensates for issue of fragmented explanations of a change in the EaP narrative, given area-specific challenges. The empirical analysis outlines why the narrative and goals of the EU changed in the EaP policy field, while the formal model constructs the role played by the intra-EU dynamics and by the strategy of / on Russia for the changes in the EU foreign policy goals.

Talking about limitations, it must be admitted that it is not feasible for one single study to grasp the whole variety of factors led to the paradigm shift in the EaP policy. In this respect it is important to stress that my project does not focus on the external challenges (which derived from specific political contexts in the Eastern Neighborhood) faced by the EU in advancing a more effective EaP, it rather treats internal challenges.

#### *1.4. Disposition: Overview of the Next Chapters*

Thesis investigates how the EU's internal dissonance among the member states and vulnerabilities to Russia's factor shape and affect shift in the EaP policy goals. Looking at the EU states' susceptibility to Russia's factor, the thesis addresses the question of how differences in domestic interests contribute to the formation of divisions and alliances between member states which in turn weaken the EU's decision-making power regarding the Eastern Neighborhood. This thesis aims to explore the internal dynamics within the European Union towards the prolongation or rolling back the EaP initiative. Analyzing Crimea / Eastern Ukraine

case in comparison to Abkhazia and South Ossetia case, this thesis investigates the question of why the EU decided to prioritize stabilization over democratization in the EaP region.

This thesis is structured in three substantial chapters, an introduction and a conclusion.

To investigate the Eastern Partnership Policy from the interdependence perspective, the second chapter of this study is devoted to exploring the place of the EaP in the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. The chapter then continues towards bringing a new perspective of understanding the Eastern Europe as a sphere of contested interests between the EU and Russia. The second chapter concludes with some criticism that the EaP instrument has received since its launching.

The third chapter provides the methodological basis for the thesis, by elaborating an analytical model and tracing the EU narrative and goals lying behind the EaP before and after revolution in Ukraine in 2014. By tracing the shift this study wishes to visualize how the EU's policy goals in the Eastern Neighborhood in 2019 are different from those in 2009 when the EaP was launched.

The forth chapter gives an understanding of the role of Russia factor in splitting the EU member states over the depth and necessity of the EaP instrument and provides a basis for the fifth chapter in which the whole picture of a shift in the EU narrative and proclaimed goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood on the axis “before and after” the Ukrainian crisis is provided. The chapter concludes with also some policy implications to this.

The fifth (final) chapter summarize the study, makes some concluding remarks and prospects for future studies.

## Chapter 2. Conceptualizing the Eastern Partnership Policy in Interdependence Terms

### 2.1. Theoretical Concerns: Situating Study in the Field

Most scholarship on the EU policy in the Eastern Neighborhood examines political change in the post-Soviet Eastern Neighborhood countries through the prism of well-known theoretical model of linkage and leverage<sup>15</sup> and the notion of “interdependence”<sup>16</sup>. But the significant limitation of this perspective is that it does not fully address the interest-based policy-making of intra-EU actors which have partisan and domestic political priorities. However, both approaches can still be translated into the interest-based arguments and provide a realist basis for thesis approach. The linkage argument might be translated into the following assumption: the more fruitful economic, political, social, etc. linkages the political actors have, the bigger might be their interest to keep them. The leverage argument in turn might be transformed as follows: the bigger is the leverage of the other side on the actor, the bigger is their interest to take the interests of this other side into account. The interdependence argument in an interest-based manner says that the more actor’s gains and pains depend on gains and pains of the other, the more there is a reason to have an interest in caring about the welfare of the other.

Also, the wavering between value-based policy-making and simple “realpolitik”<sup>17</sup> is often emphasized within the EU foreign policy studies, most frequently with a special attention to the EU-Russia relations. Among typical research questions of these studies are: will the lack

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<sup>15</sup> Levitsky, S., Way, L. A. (2006). Linkage versus leverage. Rethinking the international dimension of regime change. *Comparative Politics*, 38 (4), pp. 379-400.

<sup>16</sup> Keohane, R.O., Nye, J. S. (2001). *Power & Interdependence*. Longman Classics in Political Science, 368 p.

<sup>17</sup> For instance: Winn, N. (2017). Between soft power, neo-Westphalianism and transnationalism: the European Union, (trans)national interests and the politics of strategy. *International Politics*. Retrieved from: <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/126052/>

of clear EU membership perspective (even a remote one) for countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, lead to the opportunity for a change of the situation in the region? Will Russia-Ukraine conflict (and “Russia and the West” relations in a broad sense<sup>18</sup>) result in the EU being pushed out of the region and enable Russia to reintegrate the post-Soviet space? Was the recent 2015 Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga the beginning of the end of the policy? Generally, such studies constitute an outline of particular problems which the EU and Eastern Partnership countries are faced with. Additionally, many scholars have explored the recent rise of traditional aspects of geopolitics in the EU foreign policy with a focus on the region on its Eastern borders (that the EU has identified as its Eastern Neighborhood). Contributors in this field evaluate the way recent events in the international arena (such as the Ukrainian crisis, the Arab Spring or the rise of ISIS) influenced the need for the EU to be engaged with traditional aspects of geopolitics and strategic thinking in foreign policy.

In this respect the three research areas which are of interest for this study were identified. The first area is about the potential of the EU’s transformative power in the Eastern Neighborhood<sup>19</sup>. Among the main problems considered by researchers are: impact of the EU enlargement fatigue on the democratization processes and Eastern Neighborhood region as an arena of geopolitical contestation between Russia and the EU<sup>20</sup>. The problem is that these issues are rarely considered in reference to the events in Ukraine 2014-2019. The second group of sources is about the dynamics of a progressive fragmentation within the EU: typically, this

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<sup>18</sup> For example: Casier, T. (2012). Are the policies of Russia and the EU in their shared neighbourhood doomed to clash? In: R. Kanet & M. R. Freire (Eds) *Competing for Influence: The EU and Russia in post-Soviet Eurasia*, pp. 31-53.

<sup>19</sup> Börzel, T. A., Risse, T. (2009). The Transformative Power of Europe: The European Union and the Diffusion of Ideas. Retrieved from: [https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/international/atasp/publikationen/4\\_artikel\\_papiere/2010\\_TR\\_the\\_transformative\\_power\\_of\\_europe/WP\\_01\\_Juni\\_Boerzel\\_Risse.pdf](https://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/polwiss/forschung/international/atasp/publikationen/4_artikel_papiere/2010_TR_the_transformative_power_of_europe/WP_01_Juni_Boerzel_Risse.pdf)

Grabbe, H. (2006). *The EU’s Transformative Power: Europeanization Through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan UK, 231 p.

<sup>20</sup> For instance: Tolstrup, J. (2009). Studying a negative external actor: Russia’s management of stability and instability in the “Near Abroad”. *Democratization*, 16, pp. 922-944.

issue is presented in “Europeanization” - “de-Europeanization” nexus<sup>21</sup>. This group of sources suffers from an over-concentration on the European-level institutional mechanisms or political interests of the EU Member States<sup>22</sup>, without drawing enough attention to the interplay between these interests and changing discourse dynamics within the EU. The third group of sources is about the attitudes of the EU member states to Ukraine and Russia in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and is represented mostly by reports prepared by international think-tanks like RAND, Centrum Balticum, The Oxford Institute For Energy Studies, etc., highlighting the EU vulnerabilities to Russian pressure in the field of military, trade, energy and challenge of maintaining European unity on Russia policy. With regard to what has been already mentioned above, this issue can be understood as typical interdependence argument and also can be said to be an inverse leverage argument: when formulating their preferences, the EU member states that are most exposed to the Russian leverage become more cautious about their policy goals, especially in the Russian sphere of interest. Concerning this, policy analysts stress that the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 has exposed several fault lines on Russia policy across Europe: between Northern and Central Europe, in Southern Europe, and in Western Europe<sup>23</sup>, but they

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<sup>21</sup> Börzel, T. A., Risse, T., (2000). When Europe hits home: Europeanization and domestic change. *European Integration online Papers* (EIoP), 4 (15).

Graziano, P. R., Vink, M. P., eds. (2006). *Europeanization: new research agendas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vollaard, H. (2014). Explaining European disintegration. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52 (5), p. 1142-1159.

Webber, D. (2014). How likely is it that the European Union will disintegrate? A critical analysis of competing theoretical perspectives. *European Journal of International Relations*, 20 (2), p. 341-365.

<sup>22</sup> Alpan, B., Diez, T. (2014). The devil is in the “domestic”? European integration studies and the limits of Europeanization in Turkey. *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 16 (1), p. 1-10.

<sup>23</sup> Larrabee, F. S., Pezard, S. (2017). *Russia and the West After the Ukrainian Crisis: European Vulnerabilities to Russian Pressures*. Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif. Retrieved from: [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1300/RR1305/RAND\\_RR1305.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1300/RR1305/RAND_RR1305.pdf)

Pezard, S., Radin, A., Szayna, Th., Larrabee F. (2017). *European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies*. Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif. Retrieved from: [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1500/RR1579/RAND\\_RR1579.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1579/RAND_RR1579.pdf)

do not provide a link to its implications for the effectiveness of the EU Eastern Partnership Instrument.

Thus, a theoretical focus of this study is to bridge all three in order to elaborate a coherent framework which will allow for a triangulation of the EU policy goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood and intra-EU dynamics with regard to the crisis in Ukraine and Russia factor, grasping how these issues interrelate and are mutually affected.

There is relatively little scholarship on the independent variables causing the shift from democratization to stabilization approach in the EU's policy goals with regard to the Eastern Neighborhood. The only fairly comprehensive analyses treat this issue within the traditional contradictions between member-states concerning common European foreign policy, which is an intergovernmental co-operation area. Thus, respective studies outline the following: there is no unanimity on foreign affairs between member-states. Some members (for example Lithuania and Poland) are devoted to cooperating with the Eastern Partners, treat the democratization in this region as an important geopolitical project, supported offering to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova an Association Agreement and a liberalization of visa regime. But the majority of the EU states (among them were major players such as France and the UK) pretended not to be interested in the Eastern Neighborhood region and hamper further cooperation. There are also uninterested in EaP initiative countries (such as Bulgaria) which prefer not to damage their business and political relations with Russia. Others (like Italy, France, and Spain) prioritize the Southern Neighborhood and may simply not want the Eastern Neighborhood to receive more funds than the Southern neighbors, or again do not want to provoke any negative responses from Russia. Importantly, the longer the migration crisis lasts, the more attention of the EU policy-makers are turned to the Mediterranean basin, ignoring Eastern Europe, which is also in need of decisive and fast support. Although such a perspective on the EaP describes the limitations for its advancing within the EU common foreign policy

framework, it does not provide an answer of why the EaP narrative has changed in recent years, given that controversies concerning the common foreign policy priorities have always been existing between the member states, including the period when the EaP was launched.

Summing up the overall argument, it is possible to say that member states of the European Union have non-identical views of the EaP, its goals and importance relatively to other EU policies. Due to a series of internal crises, one can observe the re-nationalization of common approaches and this pattern has intensified over the past few years, which means that national politics is likely to play an increasing role in shaping EU external policies. Therefore, research questions which are investigated by scholars within this thematic track are the following: how convergent and / or divergent the approaches of the member states in EaP affairs are? how significant the EU internal challenges to the development of the EaP policy are? how the internal cohesion of the EaP approach with respect to its goals and means relative to other EU policies are? However, the existing scholarship still misses an explanation of why dramatic change in the Eastern Partnership policy have occurred right now, given that inconsistency in interests and preferences of the EU member states always existed.

## *2.2. The Eastern Partnership as One of the Directions of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy*

Although the EaP has become an important pillar of the EU external action, theory building in this field remained underdeveloped. A literature review shows that two main theoretical strands can be distinguished in the study of the Eastern Partnership Policy of the EU:

1. Studies drawing on general theories of international relations or integration which attempt to capture the nature of the EU as an international actor and use dichotomy “values VS interests” trying to explain the comprehensive nature of the EaP. Thus, the

EaP is understood as a combination of cost-benefit calculations and policy-learning, socialization and deliberation. The often shortcoming of this kind of sources is that they tend to prioritize either the logic of appropriateness, or the logic of consequences in the attempt to explain the development of the EaP, but still there are group of studies which admit that the EU's maximizing-utility strategy is compatible with its norm-based approach. In parallel, there is a limited scope of the EaP reviews, even at times directly affecting the EaP, which can be defined as critical junctures.

2. Researches using concepts of the EU external relations and analyses that can be located in the foreign policy track. These studies can be classified as EU-centric and range from the rational choice-based models of decision-making to bureaucratic politics models, i.e. are based strongly on the power-related and institutionalist theories. In this respect, an important attention is given to the role of individual member-states in shaping the EU foreign policy under which their interests and identities are reconciled. Nonetheless, the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine, the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia as well as Armenia turn against signing the Association Agreement with the EU caught many analysts of the Eastern Partnership policy by surprise and many important factors are still neglected which leads to the necessity of more refined cause-effect models of the EaP development.

Taking into account the shortcomings of both theoretical strands, the Eastern Partnership policy of the EU is conceptualized in the thesis within the interest-based framework basing on the linkage / leverage and interdependence arguments reformulated in the previous section of the thesis. It must be noted that in its foreign policy the EU gives priority to bilateral (typically asymmetrical) relationships between itself and third countries where the projection of norms

and values can be direct<sup>24</sup>. However, since membership perspective was not on the table for the six EaP countries, the EU traditional bilateral approach appeared to be inefficient in Eastern Europe. Moreover, when the Eurasian Economic Union was launched by Russia in 2015, the EaP has acquired the features of geopolitical project of the EU, not only the economic one.

Since then the EaP manifests itself in double narrative which has led to in many cases ineffective practices, thus constraining the achievements of the main aims of this policy. Although initially the EaP was constructed to ensure prosperity and stability in the region, over time delivering integration without membership has got trapped by increasingly politicized and securitized logics. These failures can be explained as follows: 1) there is a constant trade-off and tension between the EaP normative narrative and its security narrative; 2) there is an imbalance between these two narratives because of the EU internal dynamics; 3) contradictions and inconsistency of the EU goals concerning the Eastern Neighborhood consequences for achieving change on the ground and contribute to a loss of EU credibility.

Trying to find an explanation to the existence of these two narratives, it can be assumed that the EaP was a natural aftermath not just of the EU's internal lack of capacity to form a consensus on any way forward for the Eastern neighbors, but also of the individual states' increased perception of insecurity, risk and threat resulting from events such as the Russia-Georgia war (2008), the violence during elections in Moldova (2009) and the Russia-Ukraine gas crisis (2009). Thus, from its launching in 2009, the EaP as a direction of the EU Common Foreign and Security policy retained the same trade-offs between the normative narrative (i.e. creation of "ring of friends" founded on common values) and security narrative.

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<sup>24</sup> Haukkala, H. (2010). Explaining Russian Reaction to the European Neighbourhood Policy. In R. G. Whitman and S. Worlff, eds. *The European Neighbourhood Policy in Perspective: Context, Implementation and Impact*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 161.

For the purposes of this study, I am not going to focus on how these two narratives have been constructed by the EU within the EaP dimension or how these narratives have played out on the ground in the targeted countries, but rather to address the question of what has been the implications in terms of practice for the policy change in the EaP field.

### *2.3. The Eastern Europe as a Sphere of Contested Interests Between the EU and Russia*

There is no doubt that the EaP did have a geopolitical dimension from the very start. The positions of individual member states are the prominent indication of this. For example, the Baltic States and Poland saw the EaP as constituting a buffer zone between them and Russia. Other member states, including Germany and France, viewed it as a possible bridge with Russia. In this respect, it can be said that the relevance of the EaP policy was always determined by the geopolitical realities, in particular by the competing foreign policy goals of Russia and the EU and its member states. Under these circumstances the Russia factor represents a crucial challenge for the EaP. As indicated in the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy from 2016<sup>25</sup>, managing the relations with Russia is a key strategic affair for the EU. The position of Russia can be described as an opposition to the EaP countries' closer cooperation and integration with the EU: as from Russia's perspective, the EU's policy in the Eastern Neighborhood is considered as being in direct competition with Russian interests in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, the position of the EU can be described not only as a matter of interests, but also of values and security at its Eastern borders.

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<sup>25</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. (2016). Retrieved from: [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top\\_stories/pdf/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf)

In this regard, the Eastern Partnership initiative can be perceived as region-building project<sup>26</sup> for the EU with the anticipated impact of developing capacity of the third countries to set strategies and prioritize convergence of their regional policies with those of the EU<sup>27</sup>. This allows for understanding the EaP in linkage / leverage terms for the EU perspective and in interdependence terms for the Russia perspective which inclined to apply a hegemonic approach with its Western neighbors. It can be said that Russia treats the EaP policy of the EU as a zero-sum game for geopolitical dominance.

Hence, the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine presumed closer political and economic integration with the EU, it has led to adverse reaction by Russia, resulting in colliding of two region-building projects in Eastern Europe and to the continuing instability in the region. The Russian pressure has played out as follows regarding the three EaP states that have made progress on their integration track with the EU:

- Georgia: attempts to revise the Russo-Abkhaz treaty; threatening Georgian territorial integrity; undermining Georgia efforts to build more cooperative relations with the EU.
- Moldova: deportation of Moldovan workers; affecting the Moldovan economy via import bans; manipulations and threatening to cause damage by cutting gas supplies.
- Ukraine: occupation and annexation of Crimea; the creation of de facto republics in Donetsk and Luhansk regions; trade sanctions.

It is argued in the literature that it was Russia who gave impetus to the EaP (particularly, as a result of Russia-Georgia war in 2008), however it is not clear why ten years ago, in 2009, Russia factor appeared to be uniting for the EU member states and contributed to launching a

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<sup>26</sup> van den Boom, B. (2017). EU Region-Building in the Neighbourhood: The Eastern Partnership's Contribution in the South Caucasus. *EU Diplomacy Papers*, 34 p.

<sup>27</sup> Regional Development and Cohesion Policy beyond 2020: Questions and Answers. (29 May 2018). European Commission Press Release Database. Retrieved from: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-18-3866\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-18-3866_en.htm)

specific EU initiative of gradual involvement of Eastern Europe in the EU market, while in 2019 it pushed the EU member-states to slow down the EaP instrument and limit it to the stabilization agenda. If before the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the EU officials ignored Russia's concerns regarding the EaP initiative and encouraged the partner states to sign the Association Agreements with the EU, after the year 2014 it seems that the EU priorities have changed and underlining objectives of the EaP initiative remained unclear for now. This dilemma will be discussed in the subsequent thesis sections.

## Chapter 3. The Eastern Partnership Instrument Before and After 2014: Building the Analytical Model

### *3.1. Introduction*

Speaking about the change in the EU policy goals regarding the Eastern Neighborhood, it is useful to reflect on the role two wars – one in Georgia in 2008 and the other one in Ukraine in 2014 (till now) – have played in how the EU sees its possible strategic engagement with the region where Russia unambiguously expresses its geopolitical claims.

In August 2008, Russia's military intervention in Georgia which came as a shock not only for the post-Soviet space, but also for the EU<sup>28</sup>, was not the only disturbing incident. In January 2009, the Russo-Ukrainian gas crisis erupted. Together these two situations launched a new dynamic in the Eastern European region: on the one hand, Russia started to increase its influence in Eurasia, and, on the other hand, the EU introduced an instrument of political association and economic integration for six states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine). This instrument which was launched officially on the 7th of May, 2009 as a part of the EU Neighborhood Policy, is known now as the Eastern Partnership initiative. The EaP has become a multilateral platform for establishing more intense relationship between the EU and its Neighborhood, bridging stability in the region to its economic prosperity and providing a link to obtaining regional security which the EU has a strong desire to maintain. During the decade, the EU policy regarding the Eastern Neighborhood has been showing more continuity than innovation, which was justifiable before the exacerbating the situation between Ukraine and Russia in 2014, but not after. Following the logic of the EU in 2008, new security

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<sup>28</sup> Asmus, R. (2010). *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*. St. Martin's Press; 1 edition, 272 p.

threats posed by Russia in 2014 should have resulted in further positive developments and changes under the EaP instrument. However, it was not the case: the EaP Summit in 2015<sup>29</sup> did not bring a new perspective on reforms in the Eastern Neighborhood countries, even more so, most of the expectations of these countries were subverted. Thus, the aim of explaining why the EU and its member states followed different rationales in 2008 and in 2014 provides the framework of the current chapter.

### *3.2. The Eastern Partnership Instrument After War in Georgia and After War in Ukraine: Similar Contexts / Different Outputs*

Ideally, such conflicts as five-day Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and Russia's invasion in Ukraine in 2014 were precisely an instance of the instabilities that the Eastern Partnership policy was supposed to prevent focusing on maintaining policy triangle of cooperation, stability, and norm-driven transformation.

While reflecting on year 2008 and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is important to stress that at that time Russia's actions resulted in the decision of the EU to ask the European Commission to hasten the preparation of the Eastern Partnership. Launching the EaP demonstrated the willingness of the EU to increasingly depart from the "Russia first" approach and to apply principle of cooperation with the Eastern European region in its political practice<sup>30</sup>. By initiating the Eastern dimension of the ENP, the EU recognized – although, initially hesitantly – the importance of bringing the Eastern European countries normatively, economically, and politically closer by supporting socio-economic and institutional transformations, even if it presupposed prioritizing cooperation with direct neighbors over

<sup>29</sup> Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015). Retrieved from: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21526/riga-declaration-220515-final.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> Valasek, T. (August 2008). What does the war in Georgia mean for EU foreign policy?. The Centre for European Reform. Retrieved from: [https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/briefing\\_georgia\\_15aug08\\_tv-1136.pdf](https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/briefing_georgia_15aug08_tv-1136.pdf)

relations with Russia. This logic was driven by the determination of generating stability and convergence and preserving the “ring of friends”<sup>31</sup> in the EU Neighborhood and was based on clear European values and principles such as: rule of law, respecting human rights, protecting civil freedoms, promoting democracy, developing market economy in the countries of the Eastern European region.

At the same time it must be stressed that although the Russo-Georgian conflict generated some activism within the EU, it did not impact the traditional EU approach to security in the Eastern European region, which brought about the EU’s incapacity to respond properly to Russia aggression five years after, when the Ukrainian crisis occurred. Both in year 2008 and in year 2014, the EU took part in developing stabilization and confidence-building measures for countries affected by the corresponding conflict, sent a strong message of condemnation of Russia’s violation of international law, and made a commitment to stepping up cooperation with the affected countries, but the ultimate outputs of the EU policy differ in the context of these two wars. From the very beginning the EaP was modernization-stimulating and reform-friendly, in order to guide Eastern neighboring states towards pluralist democratic models, market economy, and better governance. The reinforcement of the eastern dimension of the ENP, however, was based on the vision to preserve security in the region together with Russia, not against Russia (for example: although the cooperation negotiations with Russia were temporarily suspended, this decision was revoked already in 2009).

Perhaps, the most direct lesson of the Georgian crisis for EU foreign policy was to analyze and predict Russia’s actions in the security domain, but it has not been done in a timely manner. Yet, the Ukrainian crisis has led to the re-calibration of the EU approach which has

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<sup>31</sup> A Wider Europe - A Proximity Policy as the key to stability. (Brussels, 5-6 December 2002). Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. Retrieved from: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-02-619\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm)

become more sophisticated now: according to the “Global Strategy for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy” of 2016<sup>32</sup> which replaced the earlier EU Security Strategy of 2003, the EU would base its conduct on “principled pragmatism”. This implies a change in EU’s perception of Russia: while before the Ukrainian crisis Russia was perceived by the EU as candidate for a modernization partnership, after the illegal annexation of Crimea and armed aggression in Eastern Ukraine, Russia turned out to be a geopolitical rival (but rather symbolically). On practice the EU continues following the strategy of cooperative confrontation with Russia.

Thus, the conflict over and in Ukraine revealed that the EaP lacks strategic depth, specific measures, and well-defined goals regarding the Eastern Neighborhood. Moreover, the EU member states found themselves confronted with a qualitatively new Russian threat. The military escalation in Ukraine in 2014 have immersed the EU into permanent crisis management mode, with security concerns and the search for diplomatic compromise dominating its agenda. In this regard, the EU has demonstrated rather different conduct to that in 2009 when it chose to guard its interests and objectives in the Eastern Neighborhood.

### *3.3. What the Ukrainian Crisis Has Changed: Visible and Invisible Implications*

The Ukrainian crisis has become the most significant challenge to the EaP, and it demonstrated that in Ukraine, the EU and Russia the initiative is evaluated primarily in geopolitical terms.

Obvious implications:

- Limitations of the EU’s traditional foreign policy approach characterized by an emphasis on international law, shared values and norms, and a technocratic

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<sup>32</sup> A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. (2016). Retrieved from: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf)

methodology to reform have been brought to the fore. The aim of the EaP was clear: to consequently support pro-democratic changes in the Eastern European neighboring countries and to bring them closer to the EU. The events of 2014 – signing of the Association Agreements by Georgia and Moldova, on the one hand, and civic awakening and the tragic situation in Ukraine later on, on the other, – resulted in the need of summarizing the current EU policy towards the region and formulating crucial new strategic objectives in this matter.

- The EU member states turned out to be forced to address the geostrategic implications of the Eastern Partnership initiative and Russia's assertiveness and pressure. The EU found itself not the only actor defining the rules in the region. The issue of national security ended up in the top of the member states governments' priority lists, while democratization have been pushed further down the rank of importance. The EU has gotten into the false dilemma of prioritizing stability over democracy. Thus, although the EU has become directly involved in the Ukrainian crisis and seeking to prevent further deterioration of the situation, it also tries to insulate itself from the effects of the stand-off between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

#### Non-obvious implications:

- The Ukrainian crisis has important repercussions in the entire Eastern Neighborhood, affecting not only a security domain, but also blurring the prospects for democracy in the EaP region. The Ukrainian crisis contributed to the enhancing the region's portrayal as a constant source of instability, further diminishing the willingness of individual EU member-states to support the EaP policy in the near future. This has led to the inconsistency in the views of the EU members concerning a strategy for unleashing the potential of Eastern Neighborhood as a stable partner, trade route, and energy supplier.

- While the political attention has been concentrated mostly on Ukraine, the EU has overlooked to focus its attention on member states and division between them, which in turn prevented the EU from developing a coherent regional perspective that fosters stability as well as democracy. In addition, the EU member states remain vulnerable, albeit to varying degrees, to Russia's actions within the EU's borders.

### *3.4. The Analytical Model*

The coherence and impact of the European Union's policy measures to preserve the economic modernization, political transformation, and stabilization of its Eastern neighbors depend on several factors (variables) which are external to the Eastern Partnership policy itself. The following factors (variables) are taken into account in order to build the analytical model and formulate hypothesis of this study:

- First, the willingness of the EU member states to undertake a consistent long-term strategy in the Eastern Neighborhood region. The cohesiveness of the EU's policy towards its East, in this regard, is a matter of balancing between commitment of the Union to principles and values that have driven the EU integration project and desire to pursue well-defined and concerted approach towards Russia. That is why it is important for the thesis research question to explore the issue of split between the member states regarding the Eastern Neighborhood policy and to find out how this solidarity gap (as it was indicated in previous chapters, EU member states often cannot reach consensus in common foreign and security policy issues) has been changing since times the EaP was launched.
- Second, particular interests of the individual EU member states regarding Russia. For the time being, the EU members demonstrate diverge nature of relationship with Russia:

from preserving Russia-friendly external and domestic policy or trying to maintain a balance between the EU's interests and Russia to keeping distance from Russia. This incoherence (which manifested itself already in 2008, during and right after the Russian-Georgian war) resulted in the EU's failure to develop any substantial strategy for deterring Russia's military aggression which the EU has to face nowadays, after the eruption of Ukrainian crisis. At a time when different kind of sanctions against Russia were approved on the EU level, the individual member states are still engaged in negotiations with Russia regarding number of infrastructural or economic projects. Such a double standard policy undermines the capacity of the EU to react properly and consistently to Russia factor and poses the question about how the EU can contain Russia while preserving its initial policy goals in the Eastern neighborhood region.

- Third, vulnerabilities of the individual EU member states to Russia factor. These vulnerabilities which differ across member states and time can be economically and/or culturally pre-existed as well as politically constructed and activated by Russia. Today, after the eruption of Ukrainian crisis, the EU and its member states are confronted with the Russia's destabilization efforts and its interference not only in the domestic politics of the EaP countries, but the internal EU politics. It stands to reason that these potential (passive) vulnerabilities activated by Russia may have resulted in the current shape of the Eastern Neighborhood policy as well its influence over the longer term. As long as the individual member states are for now more focused on their vulnerabilities to Russia factor, the EU community remains unable to counter Russia's geopolitical challenge in its Eastern neighborhood and elaborate effective democratization strategy towards EaP countries.
- Fourth, Russia's attempts to widen the breach between those EU member states which support the EaP and those which oppose it. Due to Ukrainian crisis, number of the EU

member states have become sensitive to Russia's actions which resulted in them becoming increasingly diverse in their views of how to cooperate with Russia. Without a clear understanding of what the EU common voice should be and what effort can be done in order to match the interests of both sides (member states and the Union), it is feasible at best to deliver only limited results in the EaP field. As long as Russia is proactively using its leverage on the EU member states, the EU's approach towards its East is dependent on the resilience of the member states to diverse pressure posed by Russia.

### *3.5. Building Hypothesis from the Model*

The posed goals of the EaP are not in compliance with the actuality. The Ukrainian crisis became an event which transformed the EaP from a broadly technocratic initiative into a geopolitical exercise between the EU (and the wider West) and Russia. Building on the context and factors explained above, the hypothesis to explain the gradual move of the EU from democracy promotion towards interest-based functional co-operation with the EaP countries is the following:

“The willingness of the EU member states to undertake a consistent long-term strategy in the Eastern Neighborhood region and the particular interests of the individual EU member states regarding Russia have remained to some extent the same after the war in Georgia in 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. What has changed is vulnerabilities of the individual EU member states to Russia factor and how Russia started using its leverage to trigger those vulnerabilities widening the breach between those EU member states which support the EaP and those which oppose it”.

In order to test this hypothesis and to explain why the EU approach towards the EaP countries has become increasingly pragmatic, the subsequent chapter will examine the following questions: what the disposition of the EU member states regarding Russia policy was; what the interests of the individual member states regarding Russia are and whether preferences identified in 2008 have changed in 2014-2019; what their vulnerabilities to Russian interference are and whether they changed since 2008; whether Russia has undertaken specific measures after the Ukrainian crisis in order to aggravate the split between the EU member states in their attitude to the EaP policy.

## Chapter 4. The Eastern Partnership Instrument from Democratization to Stabilization: Why After 2014?

### *4.1. Disunity of the EU Member-States Regarding Russia Policy*

As it was shown in the previous Chapters, the EaP policy is shaped around the geostrategic caution over the Russia factor rather than around other foreign policy priorities of the EU or challenges originating from the EaP countries themselves. This makes the EaP policy goals a derivative from the EU-Russia geopolitical rivalry in the Eastern Neighborhood and brings to the fore a question about consistency of the EU member states' views regarding Russia policy. There are several reasons why this inconsistency is taking place and why it matters: first, some member states are waiting to see how the Ukrainian crisis evolves before undertaking decisive steps towards Russia and the EaP region; secondly, some member states are afraid to disrupt a fragile balance with Russia taking into account the political and economic turbulence of the last several years; third, the Ukrainian crisis has revealed that Russia is able to complicate the smooth implementation of the EaP policy, that is why it is important for the EU member states to take greater heed of likely Russian actions to member states themselves. In addition, traditionally the EU member states have very different understanding of foreign policy due to differences in their historical backgrounds and geographical location which define the interests and agenda of each member state.

As an output of the EaP policy could demonstrate, the Europe's main challenges lie within its borders: more precisely, intra-EU dynamics can explain why Russia has a clearer vision for the EaP region than the EU does. Thus, the objective of this subsection is to think systematically about pathways for European foreign policy regarding Russia, especially as it might be influenced by different possible trajectories of the EU's internal developments. Under

the current circumstances, a further commitment to the EaP policy by the EU and its member states might contribute to more confrontation with Russia. However, this does not necessarily mean that the member states are ready to align their positions on Russia more closely than in previous years.

It must be noted that positions on Russia among the EU member states have always been diverse. Some of them, - in particular, Italy, Germany, and France (although to a lesser, but growing, extent), - retain strong economic relations (i.e. interests) with Russia, while others are more skeptical and pursue a relatively tough policy on Russia (like, the United Kingdom, Poland, and the Baltic States), especially those member states which perceive a geopolitical struggle with Russia over the Eastern Neighborhood.

The German leadership in the EU is one of the reasons why the EU often could not reach consensus on Russia. Russia has traditionally been a vital trade partner for Germany, especially in gas sector. However, the position of Germany has changed significantly in the context of Ukrainian crisis: if before the crisis the German government pursued the “partnership for modernization” strategy (assuming that political transformation toward democracy in Russia could be achieved through closer economic cooperation with the democratic EU), in recent years Germany has become more critical. After the tragic events in Ukraine in 2014, Germany openly supported Ukraine and expressed the belief that it would intensify relations with the EU. The position of Germany is an example of balancing between trying to keep Russia as a strategic partner with which Germany (and, consequently, the EU, because the German position is likely to affect the EU’s position on Russia) wants to cooperate and opposing the Russia’s growing pressure on Western countries. It all together prevented at least particular EU members from being pro-active in fostering the EaP.

In a similar vein, it is to be noted that different EU member states adopted different political strategies towards Russia. For instance, countries like Poland which are trying to sustain partnership with the East, have chosen to oppose Russia, while member states like the Czech Republic and Hungary frequently keep their distance from the Eastern issues and in this regard seek to maintain friendly relations with Russia. This circumstance underlines that the EU turned out to be surprisingly divided even between Central European members. This casts considerable doubt on Central Europe's declared ambition to act as an internal EU advocate of a stable and democratic neighborhood.

Unexpectedly the EU's members were not able to find a joint response to the Ukrainian crisis and the broader challenge generated by Russia. It makes sense if to acknowledge that the Central European region is geographically close to the zone of conflict and other potential crises that might occur in the Eastern Neighborhood. In addition, those member states which have a direct border with Ukraine or Russia share a common history of being occupied by the Soviet Union in the 20th century. These deep historical ties and legacies, on the one hand, explain a natural interest of the Central European members to the developments in the EaP region, but also shed light on why they are sensitive to any turbulence in this region. In this respect, unanimous response of the Central European members to Russia's actions would be expected. However, that was not the case<sup>33</sup>.

Instead, diverse positions have emerged: straightforward stance was articulated by Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland who denounced the military aggression by Russia against Eastern Ukraine. Exacerbation of crisis in the form of Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the subsequent military invasion in Donbass led to the more voices from the Northern part of Central Europe being heard regarding their own vulnerability in the

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<sup>33</sup> Forbrig, J. (February 2015). A Region Disunited? Central European Responses to the Russia-Ukraine Crisis. The German Marshall Fund of the United States.

face of Russia. By contrast, responses from member states from the southern part of the Central Europe - i.e. Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Romania - were much more discreet. They can be characterized as lukewarm condemnation of Russia's actions, quiet pragmatism, and even distancing respectively. At the same time the Czech Republic and Hungary took a pro-Russian stand. Across this region, hopes to return to the status quo prevailed over the challenges posed by Russia potentially. As a result, although all Central European countries eventually supported sanction measures against Russia, these differences across the region continue to be in place<sup>34</sup>: moreover, the EU-level discussion about extension or partial lifting of sanctions has fueled a new round of disagreements.

In summary, Russia issue generates considerable controversy among and within the member states. The divisions between EU member states regarding Russia affect the ability of the EU to elaborate a common foreign policy approach: in other words, its internal dynamic creates complications in the EaP policy. Due to the complexity and internal diversity of the EU, one can observe different postures towards Russia in Western, Central and Eastern regions of the EU as well as sometimes diverse national discourses within these regions which results from different needs and interests of the individual member states. The diversity of these needs and interests is of particular importance, because the EaP policy is a product of the actions undertaken not only by the EU institutions (mainly the European Commission and a mechanism created over the position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy<sup>35</sup>), but also by the individual countries. Acknowledging that goals of the EaP policy are formulated within the frames of different analytical and political circles in Western, Southern, Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, the interests and vulnerabilities of those states which are the most active in this field (like: Poland, Germany, France, the Baltic States,

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Detailed information about the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is provided here: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/high\\_representative\\_cfsp.html](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/high_representative_cfsp.html)

Sweden, and Finland) should be considered. This has assumed a new importance in the context of Russia demonstrating growing determination to strategically compete with the EU.

#### *4.2. Mapping Interests and Vulnerabilities of the Individual Member States Regarding Russia: Before and After 2014*

As it is demonstrated in the previous subsection, after 2014 the national debates in the EU member states have undergone changes: different conceptualizations of Russia have found their way into differences in domestic discourses on Russia. In addition, the Ukrainian crisis has revealed serious vulnerabilities to Russia's interference in the politics of almost all EU member states. The current (i.e. after 2014) positions of the EU member states on the EaP issue and consequently regarding Russia are determined by a wider number of factors which create sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the member states, including:

- diverge perceptions of the effectiveness of the sanctions regime and the economic harm of (counter)-sanctions<sup>36</sup> due to interdependent economic relations with Russia. Geopolitical concerns lead some members to support strict sanctions, while other states manifest themselves as moderate supporters of the restrictive measures or even actively oppose the prolongation of sanctions. There are also two group of countries: one includes those with internal split, and the other is formed by countries with more or less indifferent position. The detailed mapping is provided in the Table.
- security concerns due to a combination of negative historical experiences and/or geographic proximity to Russia. Thus, the Central and Eastern European members are

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<sup>36</sup> Before the crisis in Ukraine, Russia and the EU maintained a so called "strategic partnership" that covered different fields, from energy and trade to culture and climate change. In March 2014, because of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, the EU imposed sanctions on Russia. In turn, Russia imposed restrictive measures on imports of food and agricultural products from the EU. Source: The European Union and the Russian Federation. (30 May 2019). European Union External Action Portal. Retrieved from: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35939/european-union-and-russian-federation\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35939/european-union-and-russian-federation_en)

anxious about the instability that Russia's actions might create, while Southern EU members are more concerned about the risks derived from the challenge of mass migration in the Mediterranean region and insecurity in the Middle East.

- level of dependency from Russia's energy supplies. For instance, the Nord Stream pipeline project revealed a cacophony of conflicting European narratives. Thus, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Croatia – all highly dependent on Russia's energy – signed a petition against “Nord Stream 2” in 2016<sup>37</sup>, stressing the risks for energy security in the CEE region.
- (historic and current) political ties between their governments and Russia. There is a group of member states who have traditionally been most influential in the EU-Russia relations (like Germany, France, the United Kingdom), but they do not share the same historical experience with Russia as the rest. Notably, even within this group of leading members, relationship with Russia is very different because of not only historical, but first of all domestic and economic reasons. The same is true for the rest of the EU member states: different responses to Russia are the product of distinct constraints and incentives. This results in an uneven member states' effort regarding the EaP.

The vulnerabilities and interests mentioned above can either facilitate or constrain the member states' preferences regarding the EaP policy, depending on whether they are associated with their sensitivity or vulnerability to Russia's policies. A systematic mapping of the EU member states positions which are based on their vulnerabilities in such key sectors as trade, social / cultural issues, energy and security is provided in the Table. In the next subsection Russia's use of these vulnerabilities and attempts to manipulate with linkages issues are explored. Understanding sensitivities and vulnerabilities of the EU member states to Russia

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<sup>37</sup> De Maio, G. (22 April 2019). Nord Stream 2: A failed test for EU unity and trans-Atlantic coordination. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/04/22/nord-stream-2-a-failed-test-for-eu-unity-and-trans-atlantic-coordination/>

factor allow to identify the conditions under which Russia's policies effectively incentivize or disincentivize the political elites in the member states to engage with the Russia's and the EaP policies.

Table. The EU Member States' positions on Russia policy in 2008 and in 2014.

The EU Member States' positions <sup>38</sup>	2008	2014
Russia-hawks	The United Kingdom, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania <sup>39</sup> , Estonia <sup>40</sup> showed clear support for Georgia and advocated for sanctions. Denmark engaged in a diplomatic fallout with Russia.	The United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, the Baltic States, Poland, Denmark, and Finland act as the hard-liners advocating sanctions against Russia in order to resolve the situation in Eastern Ukraine.
Frosty pragmatists	The Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Romania did not put Russia's concerns above a common EU Eastern neighborhood policy despite very strong economic relationship with Russia. Sweden turned out to be an active supporter of the EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy along with former Soviet states.	–
Lukewarm supporters	Croatia, Finland, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Slovenia put their economic interests above political goals.	Spain, France, Croatia, and the Netherlands are not strong supporters of sanctions regime, but they never questioned the feasibility of restrictive measures as an instrument of the EU policy.
Divided from within	–	The Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria are divided from within and send ambiguous signals about Russia policy.
Russia's friends	Germany and France considered not to blame Russia solely because Georgia has started the war. Friendly pragmatist Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary. Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain openly defended Russia's position in the Eastern Neighborhood.	Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Hungary, and Austria openly advocate for the lifting of sanctions against Russia.
Bystanders	Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Portugal did not maintain significant economic or political relations with Russia.	Luxemburg, Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, and Malta demonstrate neither support nor objections regarding the EU policy on Russia.

<sup>38</sup> This classification is based on the findings provided in: Shagina, M. (28 June 2017). Friend or Foe? Mapping the positions of EU Member States on Russia sanctions. European Leadership Network. Retrieved from: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/friend-or-foe-mapping-the-positions-of-eu-member-states-on-russia-sanctions/>

<sup>39</sup> The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry called for cancellation of talks with Russia on simplifying applications for EU visas.

<sup>40</sup> Estonian President called for a suspension of the EU-Russia partnership negotiations. He was supported by the British Foreign Minister.

As it is seen in the Table, EU policy-making towards Russia both in Georgian case and Ukrainian case is a result of diverse domestic constraints: geography still matters, and threat perceptions, economic interests and social linkages differ greatly across the EU member states. It is important to note that dissenting national priorities and also uneven power between the member states have resulted in disagreements concerning the most appropriate Russia strategy, and consequently the EaP. In this respect it is important which countries take the lead on the EaP issue, what the state of their bilateral relations with Russia is, and whether and how their interests converge with positions of other member states. In this regard, presence of actually two parallel policy dimensions, one followed by the EU and the other by member states, undermines the consistency of the EaP initiative. Thus, the greatest threat for the EU lies within the EU borders: when twenty-eight individual members pursue their Russia policies in parallel with the EU's course of actions regarding Russia, it makes the Union vulnerable and decreases its ability to capitalize on its strengths.

The comparison of the EU responses in two cases show the EU internal dynamics have some similarities regarding Russia's factor. Firstly, in both cases the EU member states appeared to be split up into the Russia-friendly or Russia-hostile camps. In both cases, the coalition of Russia-hawks was represented by the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Baltic states, and Poland, whereas the camp of Russia supporters included Italy, France, Spain and to some extent Germany. Secondly, the EU responses to Russia's military activities in Georgia and Ukraine followed similar trajectory: in both cases the EU brought mixed messages being internally divided from within and its reaction appeared to be somewhat weak, driven by pragmatic approach (considering the EU's member states vulnerabilities to Russia actions) and one that manifested largely in symbolic sanctions.

At the same time, despite the abovementioned similarities, there are also the differences – within the EU and from the Russia’s side – that contributed to a different output regarding the EaP policy. These factors are examined in the next subsection.

#### *4.3. Russia Activating the Split Between the EU Member States: Disinformation and Economic Means After 2014*

Although Russia had regularly pursued a divide-and-rule policy towards the EU, deliberately driving a split between the member states, such an approach has become even more pervasive after the events in Ukraine in 2014. As it was demonstrated in the previous subsections, the member states’ bilateral economic and political relations with Russia weaken the EU’s common foreign and security policy, but it is not the only issue: on the other hand, Russia acts deliberately to undermine the effectiveness of EU policies, particularly the EaP, to its own benefit. Russia is trying to take advantage of EU’s internal divisions by obtaining concessions from some member states that are able to put pressure on EU decision-makers<sup>41</sup>.

Russia’s actions to activate the rift between EU members regarding the EaP and to trigger vulnerabilities of the individual member states:

- support for certain far-right and also far-left political parties and clienteles of political groups and campaigns in the EU member states. According to the study of the European Council on Foreign Relations<sup>42</sup>, despite the differences between “insurgent” parties in the EU, a majority of them are inclined to pursue policies which promote Russia’s agenda in the EU, pushing a skepticism towards the EU, destabilizing European

<sup>41</sup> Schmidt-Felzmann, A. (2014). Is the EU’s failed relationship with Russia the member states’ fault?. *L’Europe en Formation*, 374(4), pp. 40-60.

<sup>42</sup> Dennison, S., Pardijs, D. (27 June 2016). The world according to Europe’s insurgent parties: Putin, migration and people power. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR\\_181\\_-\\_THE\\_WORLD\\_ACCORDING\\_TO\\_EUROPE'S\\_INSURGENT\\_PARTIES\\_NEW.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_181_-_THE_WORLD_ACCORDING_TO_EUROPE'S_INSURGENT_PARTIES_NEW.pdf)

politics, shifting EU's domestic debates in Kremlin's favor. In this respect, amplification of Russia's disinformation, spreading its narrative and propaganda and legitimization of Russia's policies within the EU become an easier task for Moscow. Talking about political parties that are pro-Russian and of a significant size, one should mention on the far-right wing: Alternative für Deutschland (AfD, Germany), Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs (FPÖ, Austria), Jobbik (Hungary), Golden Dawn (Greece), Front National (France), Vlaams Belang (VB, Belgium), Northern League (Italy), and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP). On the far-left wing, among the most pro-Russian parties can be named AKEL (Cyprus), KSCM (the Czech Republic), Die Linke (Germany), Podemos (Spain), and Syriza (Greece)<sup>43</sup>. Pro-Russian position of aforementioned political forces can be observed on the voting patterns in the European Parliament on issues such as EU sanctions on Russia<sup>44</sup>, the human rights violation in Russia, referendum in Crimea in March 2014<sup>45</sup>, full implementation of the DCFTA with Ukraine and association agreements with Georgia, Ukraine<sup>46</sup>, and Moldova. Although there is little solid evidence in the public domain about Russia providing financial support to sympathetic parties in the EU, one should not pretend that it is not happening<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Wesslau, F. (19 October 2016). Putin's friends in Europe. The European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_putins\\_friends\\_in\\_europe7153](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_friends_in_europe7153)

<sup>44</sup> For instance, Nicolas Sarkozy, former president in France, called for lifting of sanctions against Russia during presidential elections in 2017.

<sup>45</sup> As FPÖ, FN, VB, Northern League, and Jobbik, sent their representatives to Crimea as observers during the referendum, it allowed Russia to claim that the referendum was internationally legitimized, although the OCSE did not send observers to Crimea. Source: Около 70 наблюдателей из 23 стран зарегистрировались для работы на референдуме в Крыму (15 March 2014). Retrieved from: <https://russian.rt.com/article/24293>

<sup>46</sup> The Dutch referendum on the EU's association agreement with Ukraine in April 2016 is a good example of how radical parties weaken the EU consensus, benefitting Russia.

<sup>47</sup> The loan to Front National in exchange for alignment with Russia on a range of issues is one of the most well-known case of the EU political party receiving financing from Russia. Source: Daley, S., de la Baume, M. (1 December 2014). French Far Right Gets Helping Hand With Russian Loan. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/europe/french-far-right-gets-helping-hand-with-russian-loan-.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/02/world/europe/french-far-right-gets-helping-hand-with-russian-loan-.html?_r=0)

- Russian business lobbies within the EU<sup>48</sup> and preying upon the energy dependency from Russia's gas supplies. According to a recent study<sup>49</sup>, 15 EU member states remain dependent on Russia for over half of their gas supplies. It is noteworthy that this vulnerability to Russia-factor<sup>50</sup> have discouraged some member states from supporting more rigorous EU sanctions on Russia's energy sector over its actions in Eastern Ukraine and the unrecognized annexation of Crimea.
- import bans. Besides Italy, Germany, and France which traditionally receive a favorable treatment from Russia, also Cyprus, Hungary, and Greece received increasingly positive economic and political attention by Russia. Strengthening trade and energy relations with Russia as well as active Russia's support of these countries in the aftermath of the financial crisis were offered to these countries. In addition, Russia declared its readiness to look into the "possibility of lifting the embargo on food and agricultural products"<sup>51</sup> for just these countries, but none of the other EU member states.

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<sup>48</sup> For instance, Russia's gas company "Gazprom" makes constantly an effort to lobby its interests in Austria, the UK, France, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Poland. In general, the Russian companies are actively building economic relations throughout the European Union. Source: Shumanov, I., Vvedenskaya, Y., Dobrovolskaya, L., and others. (2017). *Russian Corporate Lobbyism in the Countries of the European Union. A Research Report by Transparency International Russia*. Retrieved from: <https://transparency.org.ru/special/lobbying/docs/report-en.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Korteweg, R. (April 2018). Energy as a tool of foreign policy of authoritarian states, in particular Russia. *Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, Policy Department for External Relations*. Retrieved from: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO\\_STU\(2018\)603868\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/603868/EXPO_STU(2018)603868_EN.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> The "Nord Stream 2" project is a prominent example of making the EU vulnerable to Russia's energy coercion. Source: Wolfgang, B. (18 June 2018). Russia-to-Germany undersea pipeline unnerves U.S. *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jun/18/nord-stream-2-russia-germany-pipeline-unnerves-us/>

<sup>51</sup> Source: Сотников, И. (7 апреля 2015). РФ может снять продовольственное эмбарго с Греции, Кипра и Венгрии. Retrieved from: <https://www.dw.com/ru/рф-может-снять-продовольственное-эмбарго-с-греции-кипра-и-венгрии/a-18366241>

- establishing local propaganda outlets in France<sup>52</sup> and Germany<sup>53</sup>. Russia remains keen to apply massive resources into maintaining its media holdings across the EU member states in order to prevent further expansion of the EU. Generating opposing visions and disinformation and cultivating and nourishing stereotypes<sup>54</sup>, Russia affects current debates on the Ukrainian crisis. For instance, such Russia's state-controlled news media as "Sputnik", "Tass", and "RT" are used actively to foster and even engineer internal divisions within the EU. For example, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia<sup>55</sup>, among others, reported on numerous incidents of Russian misinformation and destabilization campaigns against them<sup>56</sup>. "RT" was also actively used in Sweden for spreading aggressive negative smear campaigns against Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and Sweden's Armed Forces. Using hybrid threats Russia seeks to undermine not only democratic discourse, but also existing security architecture in Europe. In this regard, the potential of the EaP policy is closely linked to the strengthening member states' resilience<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Number of attacks on Emmanuel Macron's campaign during the 2017 presidential elections spread by RT, Sputnik France, and a network of bots were detected. Source: Mohan, M. (9 May 2017). Macron Leaks: the anatomy of a hack. *The BBC Trending*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-39845105>

<sup>53</sup> During the 2017 German elections, Russia-affiliated media promoted polarizing issues, including with regards to Ukrainian politics. Three key constituencies were influenced: the left, the nationalist right, and the Russian-German community. Source: Applebaum, A., Pomerantsev, P., Smith, M., Colliver, C. (2017). Make Germany great again: Kremlin, alt-right and international influences in the 2017 German elections. *Institute for Strategic Dialogue*. Retrieved from: <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Make-Germany-Great-Again-ENG-061217.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Russia's strategies are shaped by local conditions, i.e. they are adapted to member state's audiences and narratives. That applies all the more to member states with traditionally closer cultural and linguistic ties with Russia. Source: Galeotti, M. (August 2017). Controlling chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe. *The European Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved from: [https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228\\_-\\_CONTROLLING\\_CHAOS1.pdf](https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> Notably, Estonia worked hard to protect all digital content relevant to stability, state security and normal functioning of the government in order to increase its resilience in the event of further Russia's cyberattacks. Source: The Economist (2015, 5 March). How to back up a country. Retrieved from: <https://www.economist.com/technology-quarterly/2015/03/05/how-to-back-up-a-country>

<sup>56</sup> Kristek, M. (2017). The nature of Russia's threat to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States, *Progressive Management*, pp.22-26.

<sup>57</sup> As outlined in the "Joint Communication to The European Parliament, The European Council and The Council: Increasing resilience and bolstering capabilities to address hybrid threats" (Brussels, 13 June 2018). Retrieved from:

- prioritizing key countries. In this field, Russia offers beneficial treatment regarding trade opportunities and more frequent political contacts to those member states which are of particular importance to Russia. Meanwhile, the states with little capacity to influence the EaP agenda receive only very limited attention from Russia at the economic and political level. All recent Russian Foreign Policy doctrines (2000, 2008 and 2013)<sup>58</sup> adopted since President Putin came to power allege that only a chosen group of EU member states, notably France, Germany, and Italy, are seen as a particular “resource for advancing Russia’s national interests in European and world affairs”<sup>59</sup> and that cooperation with these member states contributes to the growth and stabilization of Russia. The other side of the coin, however, is how Russia treats countries with the presence of significant Russian-speaking minorities and of Orthodox Christians<sup>60</sup>: for instance, after the recent conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Sea of Azov, the NATO decided to station battalions in the Baltic states in order to prevent not only Russia’s interference, but also destabilization by the hybrid means like fostering internal conflicts.

In so doing, Russia influences policy choices of the EU members, weakening the EU and increasing its own relative importance in the Eastern Neighborhood. Russia influences the EU capitalizing on internal weaknesses and issues that already exist. Range of tools used by Russia – from media manipulation and hacking to pressure in energy sector and bilateralizing relations with the EU member states – have a real opportunity to be converted into substantial influence

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[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint\\_communication\\_increasing\\_resilience\\_and\\_bolstering\\_capabilities\\_to\\_address\\_hybrid\\_threats.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/joint_communication_increasing_resilience_and_bolstering_capabilities_to_address_hybrid_threats.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> All documents can be found at <https://idsa.in/eurasia/resources>.

<sup>59</sup> Source: Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. Approved by President of the Russian Federation V. Putin on 12 February 2013. Retrieved from: [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/122186)

<sup>60</sup> In particular, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with 6%, 27%, and 25% of Russian-speaking minorities respectively are at a high risk.

on domestic politics of the EU member states, because these techniques make use of pre-existing internal shortcomings and cleavages: whether be they insufficient law enforcement, suppressed or neglected minorities, biased media outlets, threatened (by myths and propaganda) majorities, corruption of political class, domestic polarization, or irresponsibility of demagogic politicians. In this regard, the very problem lies within the member states and lack of their resilience – Russia can only amplify existing tensions and activate vulnerabilities which make member states more susceptible to external interference: it is also must be admitted that different member states have different “red lines” (thresholds) at which Russia’s factor is considered threatening. To this end, it is therefore impossible to speak of the EU internal immunity to Russia’s factor: moreover, focus on countering domestic vulnerabilities should receive due attention in the EU agenda.

In summary, the Russia’s tactic of affecting vulnerabilities of the EU member states and driving a wedge between them after 2014 includes both a strategy of discrediting and a strategy of intimidation of the member states which are critical about Russia’s multiple violations of international law and its strategy of providing tangible rewards and/or incentives to those member states which are ready to cooperate with Russia bilaterally. In doing so, Russia clearly understands the weak points of the each of the twenty-eight member states and adopts a “customized” strategies which accommodate differences between the EU’s member states. It allows Russia to increase disagreements about the effectiveness of the EU’s measures against Russia and appropriateness of the EaP policy, in particular relying on hybrid methods. In this regard, the main concern is in the ability of the EU to become more creative, proactive, and united in addressing the roots of the challenges posed by Russia, albeit this task is very complex.

## Chapter 5. Conclusions and Outlook

### *5.1. Summarizing the Study*

The Ukrainian crisis has displaced democratization from the list of the EU priorities in its policy regarding the Eastern Neighborhood: as a consequence, stabilization and securitization as the EU's policy goals have gained priority in the EaP agenda.

The previous chapters uncovered the factors, reasons and rationales underlying the often divergent and even sometimes opposing strategies of action taken by the individual EU member states regarding the Eastern Neighborhood and Russia since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. While the hypothesis of this study has been tested, considerable variations in political debates on the Ukrainian crisis and noteworthy differences in economic and political relationships with Russia were detected within the European Union. This intra-EU confusion is reflected by the lack of common determination of the EU member states to decide on security architecture for the Eastern European region, leaving it vulnerable to Russia's interference.

The following evidences were found to confirm the hypothesis:

- The willingness of the EU member states to undertake a consistent long-term strategy in the Eastern Neighborhood region remained to some extent the same after the war in Georgia in 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. But the EU member states' policies on Russia are politically interdependent with the EU position on the EaP: the thing is perceived threat posed by Russia has caused particular member states to turn away from a previously democratizing agenda for the Eastern Neighborhood in order not to irritate Russia.

- The particular interests of the individual EU member states regarding Russia (as they were defined in 2008, before the EaP was launched) have not changed too much after the Ukrainian crisis of 2014. At the same time European consensus over Russia policy continued to be undermined due to member states' disagreements around the sanctions and even the process of European integration. Thus, the Russia factor contributed to questioning not only European security order, but also the validity of the principles that uphold it.
- Vulnerabilities of the individual EU member states to Russia factor differ across member states and time. It is noteworthy that after political developments in Ukraine in 2014, those vulnerabilities that were economically and/or culturally pre-existed in the member states have been strategically activated by Russia.
- Russia's attempts to widen the breach between those EU member states which support the EaP and those which oppose it became more noticeable after 2014. Russia weakens the EaP by using soft and hard power to influence EU states and EU institutions. Russia's attempts (even if to varying degrees across member states) effectively undermined the EaP upgrade in those cases where policy alternatives were too costly for the incumbent elites. In addition, Russia's use of nexuses between different policy sectors have facilitated or even supported the slowing down the EaP when the member states were offered an affordable economic and political alternative from Russia.

Thus, the change in the EU policy goals regarding the Eastern Neighborhood can be explained as follows: Vulnerabilities of the individual EU member states to Russia factor and how Russia started using its leverage to trigger those vulnerabilities allow for widening the breach between those EU member states which support the EaP and those which oppose it. The presence of Russia inside the EU has not only clearly shaped member states' responses to the Ukraine crisis, but also has renewed an older controversy concerning the EaP policy goals.

These different perspectives of the EU member-states have resulted in prioritizing stabilization over democratization in a debate that is taking shape in the EaP field in the context of the Ukrainian crisis.

Thus, after 2014 Russia started increasingly exercise influence on the EaP policy (even adapting the EaP policy goals for its own purposes) through EU member states. Using the bilateral relations with EU member states to influence the EaP policy and differences among them on the EaP, Russia has succeeded in various occasions when the EU failed to build a consensus on Russia-related issues. This has led to the fragmentation of the EU focus which in turn undermined its ability to act not only strategically, but, first of all, pro-actively, taking into account Russia's changing role.

This inference can play out in following directions:

- As the Ukrainian crisis has revealed serious vulnerabilities to Russia's interference in the economies and politics of practically every EU member state, the further and deeper comprehension of Russia's impact on the intra-EU dynamics is needed. A particular attention should be paid to the Central European region where Russia has significant media power and financial investments in the region's politics and economies, and also to some Western European member states where Russia's predominance as an export market and energy supplier is traditionally important. In order to make the EU member states' fragility to Russia factor less tangible, it is necessary to think of how to reduce Russian leverage from within the EU, inter alia, by diversification of energy supplies and export markets.
- It has become clear over the last five years that pervasive and growing presence of Russia within the EU borders is posing a threat and creates a deficit in the EU arrangements for democratization, reforming, and resolving challenges to security in

the Eastern Europe. The emerging discussion should not only ask how the EU can influence the course of the Ukrainian crisis, but how the EU can effectively support the modernization developments of those states, which it considers its Eastern Neighborhood, notwithstanding the Russia's efforts to slow down the democratic transformation of the former post-Soviet space.

The internal cohesion of the EU member states is essential for the EU being politically effective vis-à-vis Russia, especially with regard to the Eastern Neighborhood. Only unified by a common strategy, the EU member states will be able to shape clear and unambiguous Russia's policy choices and to set democratizing environment in the EaP region. The Georgian crisis in 2008 showed that it was disunity among EU member states that resulted in the EU's failure to translate its strengths into coherent response to Russia's actions: in the strongest terms, one can say that the EU's lukewarm reaction to Russo-Georgian conflict in 2008 made the Russia's invasion in Ukraine possible. In turn, the Ukrainian crisis demonstrated, that, in comparison to the ten-years-ago period, now Russia has much stronger hand for sowing discord within the EU and playing its member states off against each other.

Findings of this thesis suggest that for now the EU lacks joint approach on Russia and this obstacle hampers its policymaking in the Eastern Neighborhood. The controversy of the past between Russia-friendly and Russia-hostile camps of the EU member states still affects the whole concept of the EU dialogue with Russia. In this respect, this legacy of the past divisions and worrisome pattern must be reversed, and a common strategy and clarity in policy goals must be developed in order to prevent junctures similar to the Ukrainian crisis in the future. In addition, solidarity should be prioritized over varying, although recognized, priorities of individual member states. The lesson here is that the EaP policy is a long-term instrument, and it must be developed in combination with other policies and on the basis of collective effort. In other words, governments of the EU member states need to complement policy on

Russia with development of their internal resilience. This internal capacity should be grounded on the presence of rational public discussions, high levels of trust to domestic political elites, credibility and independence of domestic political institutions, integration of minorities, transparency of political finances, and thorough tackling of pre-existing historical issues.

### *5.2. Prospects for Future Researches*

Looking at the previous studies, this thesis aims to contribute to the academic literature in the following ways. First, in contrast to most of the studies, it shifts the focus from the EaP policy itself towards the EU internal dynamics and its experience of overcoming interdependences and tensions with respect to Russia factor. From our point of view, the focus on the EU internal politics provides a deeper understanding of the EU as a foreign policy actor in the Eastern Neighborhood. Second, instead of looking at the EU member states' positions on Russia as the previous studies did, this thesis focuses on how these positions have changed due to the Ukrainian crisis.

The analysis conducted in this thesis has shown that political developments in 2014 provided a clear indication that internal divisions within the EU is an important factor with relatively large explanatory power. Although this factor can be considered as necessary, one can also argue that it is not sufficient to shed light on the EU's failure to address the fundamental crisis in its strategic partnership with Russia and to support democratization in the Eastern Neighborhood. Even greater unity of the EU cannot significantly affect how Russia is gradually building bilateral relations with individual member states and what approach Russia pursues to trigger sensitivities of the member states, exacerbating their vulnerability and EU's fragility in general. In this respect, further research is needed to explore how composition, structure and nature of the EU affect its ability to adopt and implement powerful and, primarily, fast responses to Russia factor and how quick decision-making in the field of the foreign policy (and the EaP in particular) can be ensured in the coming years. Inter alia, these responses should

include taking steps to counter Russia's actions to spread disinformation and to support populist parties within the EU.

### *5.3. Policy Implications*

Despite an intense search for alternatives, the Eastern Partnership policy should not be suspended. In light of the alarming spread of Russia's influence not only in the EU neighborhood, but also within the EU, the revised EaP in its enlarged version should become a long-term response to destabilization in the Eastern European region by supporting the pro-democratic political stakeholders in the EaP countries and maintaining the course on the reform agenda. In the context of the Ukrainian crisis, the Eastern Partnership should be grounded on two pillars: continuation of the democratizing policy within the scope of conventional instruments together with increased financial support from the EU and addressing intra-EU vulnerabilities to Russian interference systematically and jointly.

The first pillar implies that the EaP policy should have democracy at its core. Although the Ukrainian crisis has focused the attention of the EU on containing instability in the Eastern European region, it is important from the strategic perspective to go beyond the crisis management agenda and to develop a coherent vision for the Eastern Neighborhood that envisages not only security, but security through democratic development and economic prosperity. However, the new reality must not be neglected: taking into consideration the differences between the six EaP countries, the EaP policy approach should be tailored to address each EaP country needs on an individual basis with a healthy dose of realism in the form of a strategy of deterrence toward Russia.

The second pillar presupposes a serious work on the weak spots of the EU member states, especially those which experience a democratic backsliding and/or a rise of the far-right movements. Some of these vulnerabilities to Russian interference have long been known for

years (for instance, energy dependence), but have been addressed in an ad hoc manner, while the others (such as illiberal political forces) have been triggered and actualized due to Russia's pro-active actions. In this regard, it is important to take measures on countering all forms of Russia's propaganda and cyber-security threats and on developing a stronger EU action on energy interconnectors. Joint investments of the EU member states in addressing the hybrid threats should also be considered. To prevent the EaP being influenced by the intra-EU dynamics, it is necessary to strengthen pro-EaP political leadership in the EU: the Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the lack of such leadership, with member states pursuing their opportunistic and often ambiguous Russia policies. Thus, in order to establish an effective EU response to Russia, stronger unity of the EU member states is needed with internal advocates of the EaP project being heard in shaping the EU strategy and policy regarding the Eastern Neighborhood.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that neglecting Russia as a player in a region and lack of a truly structured and attractive strategic perspective for the EaP countries are not the only obstacles for democratization impact of the EU in the Eastern European region. It should also be admitted that in the near future, the results of the EU's parliamentary elections, reforms agenda, Brexit, migration issue, upcoming negotiations on the multiannual financial framework, and other internal affairs will continue to capture the attention of the individual member-states and EU institution, leaving the EaP instrument a secondary role in the EU external agenda. In this respect, it is important to find out how to ensure a greater consistency between the EaP as policy framework and the interwoven variety of political interests underpinning the EU's external policy in the Eastern Neighborhood; how much the EU's internal political agenda and the advancement of the EaP are linked; what should be changed in the EaP instrument to increase joint-ownership at the political rather than institutional level. In any way the EU must provide a more differentiated, pragmatic, and balanced narrative

concerning the Eastern Partnership policy, and thus process the engagement with the Eastern European countries with serious intentions to create a zone of stability, peace, and prosperity.

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## **Annex 1. Vulnerabilities of the EU Member States to Russia Factor (as of 2014-2019)**

### Group “Russia-hawks”

#### **Germany<sup>61</sup>**

*General trend:* Significantly shifted its concerns and policy approach after the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* spread of “fake news” by pro-Russian media and cyber-attacks. Russia is largest energy supplier. Cooperation on the “Nord Stream” project. Strong bilateral foreign direct investments. 23%<sup>62</sup> of Germans have a positive view of Russia.

#### **Sweden**

*General trend:* Significantly shifted its concerns and policy approach after the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Russian military activity in the Baltic region and Russian military probes in Swedish territorial waters and airspace. Russia is the biggest non-energy foreign investor. Russia is the biggest oil source.

#### **Finland**

*General trend:* Significantly shifted its concerns and policy approach after the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Russia is the third largest trading partner. Noteworthy activity of Russian secret services.

#### **The United Kingdom**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Russian invasions in the British territorial waters.

#### **Latvia**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* sharing a border with Russia. Sizeable Russian minority, including non-citizens. Dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Fake news and disinformation spread by Russia. Large percentages of the population are Russian speakers. Significant gap between ethnic

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<sup>61</sup> Here and throughout this Annex the presented data about existing vulnerabilities to Russia factor is built on the source: How do European democracies react to Russian aggression? Review of shifts in strategic & policy documents of EU28 following Russian aggression against Ukraine. (22.04.2017). Kremlin Watch Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/How-do-European-democracies-react-to-Russian-aggression.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> Here and throughout this Annex the results of the most recent Eurobarometer studies are used.

Latvians and ethnic Russians in terms of views on political issues. 43% of Latvians have a positive view of Russia.

### **Lithuania**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* threats posed by the Russian military (in Kaliningrad). Sizeable Russian minority. Dependence on Russian energy supplies. Russia's active disinformation campaigns and cyber-attacks. Noteworthy Russian security services activity.

### **Estonia**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Sizeable Russian ethnic minority. Russia is one of the biggest trade partners. Disputes concerning a national border with Russia. Anti-Estonian sentiment raised in pro-Russian media.

### **Poland**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Borders with the Russian Kaliningrad Oblast. High activity of Russian intelligence services. Russia is the most important trade partner from outside the EU. 27% of Poles have a positive view of Russia.

### **Denmark**

*General trend:* Principled defender of the Eastern Neighborhood and hardliner of the European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* environmental concerns connected with Russia building pipeline in the Baltic Sea.

### Group "Lukewarm supporters"

### **Spain**

*General trend:* trying to stay away from the Ukrainian crisis and other issues which presuppose economic and / or political confrontation with Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* skyrocketing number of Russian tourists.

### **France**

*General trend:* trying to stay away from the Ukrainian crisis and other issues which presuppose economic and / or political confrontation with Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* 26% of French had a positive view of Russia. Activity of pro-Russian political forces.

## Croatia

*General trend:* trying to stay away from the Ukrainian crisis and other issues which presuppose economic and / or political confrontation with Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* Russia's frequent joint military exercises with Serbia. Russian gas supply constitutes no less than 40% of the country's gas imports. 49% of Croatians have a positive view of Russia.

## The Netherlands

*General trend:* significantly shifted its concerns and policy approach after the Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* deep trade relations in the field of oil, gas and energy. Strong bilateral foreign direct investments. Spreading disinformation by Russia.

## Romania

*General trend:* below-radar supporter staying most of the time away from elaborating position on the Russian aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* question of Moldova (the status of Transnistria). Prices on Russian natural gas. 40% of Romanians have somewhat positive view of Russia

## Group "Divided from within"

### The Czech Republic

*General trend:* Significantly shifted its concerns after the Russia's aggression against Ukraine

*Vulnerabilities:* Russia is the largest non-EU trade partner. Significant Russian intelligence's presence. Considerable portion of population shares a pro-Russian sentiment. Activity of pro-Russian political forces. Russian gas supply constitutes no less than 70% of the country's gas imports. 39% of Czechs have a positive view of Russia.

### Slovenia

*General trend:* trying not to engage in economic and / or political confrontation with Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* Russia is one of the biggest investors in the country. Dependence on Russian energy imports (more than 40%). 45% of Slovenians had a positive view of Russia.

### Slovakia

*General trend:* using Russia-related issues for domestic political or economic reasons

*Vulnerabilities:* high energy dependence on Russia (more than 90% of gas and oil supplies are covered by Russia). presence of pro-Russian elements in politics. 49% of Slovaks have somewhat positive view of Russia. Strong bilateral economic relations. Dependence on Russian armaments.

### Bulgaria

*General trend:* trying not to engage in economic and / or political confrontation with Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* a country has deep historical and cultural ties with Russia. 90% of its natural gas consumption are from energy supply provided by Russia. Activity of pro-Russian political forces. 72% of Bulgarians have a positive view of Russia.

### Group “Russia’s friends”

#### **Greece**

*General trend:* advocating for better relations with Russia and stopping further sanctions against Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* aid from Russia during the financial crisis. Russia’ support to counterbalance Turkey in Cyprus. Purchasing of Russian military equipment. 66% of Greeks had a positive view of Russia.

#### **Cyprus**

*General trend:* advocating for better relations with Russia and stopping further sanctions against Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* Russia has provided territorial integrity of Cyprus since the Soviet era. Country is offshore for Russia. Significant Russian population. Russia provides up to 10% of country’s GDP. 76% of Cypriots had a positive view of Russia.

#### **Italy**

*General trend:* advocating for better relations with Russia and stopping further sanctions against Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* Activity of pro-Russian political forces. Russia supplies 47% of Italian gas imports. Deep connections between the Italian and Russian business. 47% of Italians had a positive view of Russia.

#### **Hungary**

*General trend:* advocating for better relations with Russia and stopping further sanctions against Russia

*Vulnerabilities:* right-wing and far-right elements which supported by Russia. Strong Russian financial ties. No less than 55% of its gas and 85% oil demand is provided by Russian imports. Russia is the third largest import partner. 37% of Hungarians have a positive view of Russia.

#### **Austria**

*General trend:* does not acknowledge the threat posed by Russia and does not feel threatened

*Vulnerabilities:* Russian gas supply constitutes more than 60% of the country’s gas imports. “Gazprom” is one of the key business partners, and the warm relations have not been affected by the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. 28% of Austrians had a positive view of Russia.

## Group “Bystanders”

### **Portugal**

*General trend:* have almost no interest in the Ukrainian crisis and related issues

*Vulnerabilities:* import of Russian oil. 26% of the Portuguese have a positive view of Russia.

### **Luxemburg**

*General trend:* trying to stay away from the Ukrainian crisis

*Vulnerabilities:* Strong bilateral foreign direct investments. 21% in Luxembourg had a positive view of Russia.

### **Belgium**

*General trend:* trying to stay away from the Ukrainian crisis

*Vulnerabilities:* Belgium imports approximately 8% of its gas from Russia. Russian secret services activities are not rare due to Brussels hosting international institutions of NATO and the EU. 26% of Belgians have a positive view of Russia.

### **Ireland**

*General trend:* have almost no interest in the Ukrainian crisis and related issues

*Vulnerabilities:* incidents in the UK’s and Ireland’s territorial waters with the participation of Russia’s forces.

### **Malta**

*General trend:* have almost no interest in the Ukrainian crisis and related issues

*Vulnerabilities:* extremely high dependency on energy imports from Russia. 37% of Maltese had a positive view of Russia.