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## **The Ukraine Crisis and New Security Challenges for Euro Atlantic Integrations**

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### **Abstract**

The Ukraine crisis which began in November 2013, provoked new geopolitical grouping on the international scene, which somehow gave rebirth to the debate about a new Cold war, and touched upon two important issues, the energy security of the European Union and by that the security of the NATO alliance and its countries, and the division of spheres of influence between the US and the EU through NATO, and Russia through the Eurasian Union. These new security challenges will influence and condition the ongoing trends and tendencies of the Euro Atlantic integrations.

**Keywords:** energy security; spheres of influence; enlargement; European Union; NATO; USA; Russia; Eurasian Union.

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## 1. Introduction

The altered international surrounding that originated from the Ukraine crisis, together with the new geopolitical momentum and grouping that occurred on the international scene, generated a wide debate about the possible return of the Cold war in the vest of a second Cold war or a continuation of the First, and opened the debate about new security challenges for Euroatlantic integrations.

The Ukraine crisis that began last November, touched upon two important questions that will have great influence over the Euro Atlantic agenda for integration. The first one is the energy security of the European Union, which automatically implies the security of NATO and its member states, and the second one is the actualizing the division of spheres of influence between the Russian federation and the Euro Atlantic partners, which by now was thought to be over with the end of the Cold war and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

## 2. Euro Atlantic integrations

Before going on explaining the abovementioned categories, it is worth mentioning two or three words about the process of European and North Atlantic integration and their present trends and tendencies.

Concerning the European Union, the process of European integration first of all, is led by the Union's enlargement policy, through which the EU carefully follows the process of internalization of the European *acquis* and the following accession of candidate and potential candidate countries, and secondly, the process is carried out through the Union's Neighborhood policy, founded in 2003 and meant to project EU's values and principles to countries of the near neighborhood, but which in reality does not explicitly contain the enlargement clause. The later could be easily acknowledged from the latest developments concerning the signature of the association agreements between the EU, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which deeply regulate their interrelations, but still do not advance their integration to the degree of membership. According to that, the enlargement policy refers to candidate and potential candidate countries of the near neighborhood that include, the Balkan states (Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro and Albania, in the role of candidate countries, and Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina as potential candidates), Turkey and Iceland as candidate countries, and Scotland almost could have entered the group, but the unsuccessful referendum held last September kept its position within the United Kingdom, and by that within the European Union.

For what matters the latest trends and developments in this policy, they speak about a delayed process of integration, based upon the absorption capacity of the European Union [1], and depicted through the Unions saturation from the last big enlargement in 2004, that was considerably aggravated by the economic crisis and recession that stroke the Union, and almost every country in the World. In spite of this, the enlargement process marks further stallment. To mention just a few cases, the first one refers to the frozen negotiations with Turkey, due to the refusal of the later to sign the Association agreement with Cyprus (as a response to what the Union opened the so called '*Positive agenda*' with Turkey, in order to give new boost to European – Turkish relations). The second case relates to the frozen negotiations with Iceland, because of the planned referendum for the future integration of Iceland into the EU, and of course the third case attributes to the frozen candidate status of

Republic of Macedonia on behalf of Greece's veto, because of the relative dispute about the name issue between the two countries (in this case likewise, the EU established a '*High Level Dialogue*' in order to give new dynamics between both sides).

Taking a closer look at the Neighborhood policy, it refers to the countries of the near neighborhood which include the ones from Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan), and the countries from the Mediterranean basin, comprising those from the Maghreb and Mashrek region. Nevertheless, the ambiguous character of the enlargement agenda of this policy, however does not affect the countries from the Mediterranean, since they do not fall under the auspices of article 49 of the consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union, which bounds future membership only to European states. Whilst, towards the rest of the countries from the Eastern partnership except Belarus, with whom the Union has suspended the signature of the Partnership and Collaboration agreement because of breach of the democratic standards inside the country, the European Union has already established economic, diplomatic and cultural relations.

For what concerns on the other hand NATO enlargement policy, it consists of the classical approach towards membership, managed through the Action plans for membership, a program which momentary includes the Republic of Macedonia (being active in the plan since 1999, and having received a formal invitation to join NATO in 2008, but consequently blocked by Greece's veto), Montenegro – invited to join NATO forces in 2009, and the last one that entered in the potential members circle was Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2010. A part from this official membership programme, NATO relies on the so called Partnership for peace programs, by which it maintains relations with third countries. However depending on the target country, actually this program has the attitude of an unofficial enlargement policy.

### **3. The Ukraine crisis and New Security Challenges**

Nevertheless, let's return to the Ukraine crisis and the new security challenges that arose from it. The crisis that was generated in Ukraine, not only reminded us of the bloody scenario that marked the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but also echoed the world media (The Guardian/The Observer, Le monde diplomatique, The New York Times, Washington post, etc..), and the scientific community [2,3,4,5], with the threat of a New Cold War, that as we speak impairs the long lasting *pax mundi* that rules these spaces. The crisis, on one side, originated along with the protests in Kiev's Maidan square, as a result of the stepping back from the signature of the European Association agreement by the then President Victor Yanukovich, and on the other side, was intensified by the proclamation of independence of the three Eastern Ukraine secessionist regions - Crimea, Donbas and Lugansk, and the following annexation of Crimea to the Russian federation. This newly formed scenario brought Ukraine to the verge of a civil war, and deteriorated the tight triad relations between the EU, the US and Russia.

In terms of the security challenges that opened with the Ukraine crisis, we already mentioned that one is relative to the energy security of the European Union and by that the security of NATO and its countries, and the other

one assimilated with the Cold war concerns, refers to the divisions of spheres of influence between the traditional rivals, NATO and Russia.

For what concerns the first issue, namely, the first security fears for the EU started growing as the energetic crisis stroke the Union in mid-winter 2006 and 2009, as a result of the dispute about gas delivery between Ukraine and Russia, where the later cut off gas supplies to Ukraine, and by doing that, involuntarily, it cut off supplies to the European market, which provoked drastic consequences not only to the functioning of the whole industrial sector but beyond [6]. Taking in consideration the history behind EU's energy security, which dates back with the introduction of the integrated approach for economic growth of the European Union also known as the Europe Strategy 2020 [7], that foresees the abandonment of high polluters from industry usage and introduction of low carbon technologies and alternative energy sources, and the decision of the German government to abandon its nuclear plants for safety reasons [8], as well as the fact that the Union is almost 40% dependent on import of Russian gas [9], we could say that energy supply represents one of the biggest security challenges for the European Union and for NATO members, and that behind it, stands, Ukraine's reliability as a transit route for Russian gas to the EU.

That is to say that, until recently, Russia had stopped pumping gas to Ukraine for a couple of months, because of Ukraine's unpaid debts towards Gazprom, and therefore had no intention to lift them up until obligations have been strived. This reality, together with the fact that, according to foreign estimations, Ukraine's gas reserves are half full of their total capacities, for which Ukraine, in case does not succeed to assure other energy supplies for the coming winter, most probably will end up using gas reserves meant for the European market, and by that could cause another gas crisis in Europe. Fortunately, for the moment this scenario has been prevented from happening, since Gazprom and Ukraine, signed an agreement this October, brokered by the European Union, where Russia agreed to resume gas supplies to Ukraine over the winter, for what in return will obtain payment of Ukraine's debts that will be subsidized by the International Monetary Fund and the European Union itself [10].

This win – win situation, nevertheless, in the long run, will surely not be the ultimate solution. On one hand, the relations between Russia and Ukraine will remain volatile, because of the ongoing civil war in Eastern Ukraine, and on the other, gas supply strategies are changing, whereby this year, Russia concluded a new gas deal with China for the upcoming years, for which it will deliver gas supplies in the amount of 400 billion of dollars. Moreover, the situation is being aggravated by the increasing unstable relations between Russia, the EU and NATO, due to the return of the Cold War rhetoric.

Now, taking this scenario as it is and reflecting it before all to European integrations, we could say that this will not change the tendencies of EU's Neighborhood policies, that is it will not change the policy's ambiguous character. This, because the European Union needs Ukraine as a stable gas transit country for the upcoming years, and by that it will not explicitly limit its policy to only neighborhood policy, so that the enlargement clause would represent an excellent carrot mechanism to assure Ukraine's gas route stability. For what concerns NATO integrations, these will follow the same EU's path, since they have accumulated and common interests.

As for the second security challenge that stands in the way of Euro Atlantic integrations, we said that this is relative to the actualizing of the division of spheres of influence between the West intended as the US, NATO and the EU and the East, personified by the Russian federation and the new Eurasian Union. More precisely, the question that arose from the Ukraine crisis and the events that followed refers to whether the Cold War really ended in '89, or did it persist until present time?

The answer is twofold. On one hand, it has to do with the continuous NATO expansion which followed the post-Cold War period, that registered enlargements such as the German reunification in the '90, the great Eastern enlargement to Czech republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999, and to Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Baltic states in 2004, and the enlargement to Albania and Croatia in 2009, by which NATO acquired territories that were traditionally under Russian sphere of influence. These enlargements, together with the establishment of the '*Intensified Dialogue*' between NATO and Ukraine in 2005, now substituted by the Partnership for peace program, and the invitation furthered to Georgia to become part of the Action plan for membership in 2008, have breached the gentlemen's agreement about further NATO enlargement to the East, and did not respect the only precondition that the USSR posed to NATO in order to end the War.

On the other hand, this question concerns directly the Russian federation and the establishment of the Eurasian Union, which even if not immediately but in due time, came as a response to the NATO expansion eastwards. This Union, constituted by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia and foreseen to take place from January 2015, is thought to be the equivalent to the European Union, with mainly two focuses. The first one is the consolidation of its economic sphere and relations with China, and its second one is the establishment of a political regime that would deepen and extend existing interrelations between member states.

This political union, seen on the long run, is going to actualize the division of spheres of influence between the East and the West, but also, it will try to conquer and gain new states like [11:24] Greece and Cyprus, who are already member states of the European Union, with whom the Eurasian Union would initially uphold deep economic relations, and progressively enlarge by testing the transition from the European Union to the Eurasian Union. As we speak, this division of spheres of influence is actually taking place. In example, we could mention the case of Armenia, a country which is part of NATO's program for Partnership for peace and which is also included in the EU's Neighborhood policy. In spite of that, Armenia last year, gave up on European integration process and instead is preparing itself to join the Eurasian Union by the end of this year.

*Summa summarum*, to give brief insight about whether the Cold War really ended in '89 or it persist until nowadays, we could conclude that The Cold War rhetoric never really ended. For NATO, it continued to be nursed by its enlargement policy towards East, as we had the opportunity to see, and for Russia, the Cold War rhetoric came back as a consequence to NATO's enlargement policies, and is actually taking place under the umbrella of the Eurasian Union.

#### 4. Conclusions

The new security challenges that arose with the Ukraine crisis, both in short term and especially in the long run, will have repercussion on the Euro Atlantic enlargement agenda and will condition not only future candidates but could possibly put at stake present membership.

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