

WHAT NEXT? THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY AFTER THE UKRAINE WAR AND THE NEW BALANCE OF WORLD POWER

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 undermined the post-Cold war European *acquis* in building peace, security, and economic growth and questioned the very foundation of the European Neighbourhood Policy - an aspect of the EU Foreign Policy - more specifically the Eastern Partnership. European Neighbourhood Policy was established in 2004 and was aimed at facilitating close cooperation between the EU and its neighbouring countries so called 'the ring of friends'¹. The ENP focused on security, stability, and democracy, essentially embracing 'the EU pursuit of interests (stability and security) and the [EU centred model of] values (democracy)'². Security issues were central. Its creation followed the European Security Policy adopted just a year before in 2003³. Alas, the ENP from its start presented some shortcomings that impeded its harmonious development.

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¹ L. DELCOUR, *Shaping The Post-Soviet Space? EU Strategies and Approaches to Region-Building*. London, Ashgate, 2011.

² A.K. CIANCIARA, *Stability, Security, Democracy: Explaining Shifts in the Narrative of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, in "Journal of European Integration", 39, no. 1, 2017, pp. 49-62. DOI:10.1080/07036337.2016.1256397.

³ E. BARBÉ, E. JOHANSSON-NOGUÉS, *The EU as a Modest 'Force for Good': The European Neighbourhood Policy*, International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 84, No. 1, in "Ethical Power Europe?", Jan. 2008, pp. 81-96.

Its fragmentation, poor coordination and a lack of coherence were the most problematic. Haukkala underlined in 2008 that it “suffers from a lack of legitimacy as a result of its inability to answer the neighbours’ calls for full political and institutional belonging in Europe”⁴. Shortly after its creation, it was generally understood that “the ENP needed to boost its political attractiveness by providing greater incentives for cooperation and to develop a clear set of political priorities” that should be translated in ‘deepening free trade area, strengthening cooperation in internal and external security, clarifying its financial assistance and boosting multilateral dialogue’⁵. Then, there was a crucial question of the position of Russia among the ‘ring of friends’⁶. In the early 2000s, Russia was perceived – perhaps erroneously - sympathetic to EU cooperation initiatives in the Eastern neighbouring states. There were some speculations about the possibility of Russia eventually becoming a member of the European Union, though the idea was never seriously pursued by either Russia or the EU. Nonetheless, the EU engaged in a strategic dialogue with Russia and concluded a number of partnership agreements. Russia was a ‘special partner’ outside of the ENP but committed to cooperate in many vital sectors for example, economy, security, research and many others. In particular, Russia engaged with the Common Spaces Initiative in 2003 that provided for four common spaces in areas such as economic cooperation, freedom, security, and justice, external security, and research and education⁷.

The EU stand towards the Russian conflicts in the region was ambivalent. As ‘a major security actor in the region, the EU limited itself in stabilising rather than solving the existing conflicts’, ignoring “the state-building activities of Russia in the two break-away

⁴ H. HAUKKALA, *The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy*. in “Europe-Asia Studies” 60, no. 9, 2008, pp. 1601-22. doi:10.1080/09668130802362342.

⁵ B. LIPPERT, *The Discussion on EU Neighbourhood Policy – Concepts, Reform Proposals and National Positions*, International Policy Analysis, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2007.

⁶ J. GOWER, G. TIMMINS (eds), *The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood*, Milton Park, Routledge, 2013.

⁷ EUROPEAN COMMISSION: EU/Russia: The four “Common Spaces”, MEMO/05/103, 2005 at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_05_103 .

regions”⁸. The EU justified its position sustaining that “the resolution of territorial conflicts has not been a direct focus of the EU”, even though the European Security Strategy of 2003 provided for an increased role of the EU in resolving conflicts⁹. In the Russian-Georgian war, the EU repeatedly ignored “the requests from the Georgian government for internationalization of the conflict’ through the deployment of an EU observation mission on the borders”¹⁰. In fact, some scholars attribute the creation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) partly in 2009 as a response to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war¹¹. The EU relied on political dialogue, diplomacy, assistance and monitoring missions to the conflict zones to solve the problem that was obviously insufficient¹². On the other side, Russia perceived the creation of the EaP as a threat and interference and used various means to destabilise the EaP countries¹³. The overarching question coming to one’s mind concerns the future of the ENP (EaP). Will it survive the turbulences of the war? If so, what should the future EaP contain? Can we learn from past mistakes? (Paragraph 1).

The war on Ukraine will end eventually but how it ends will inevitably have an impact on the balance of power in the global context. Certainly, Russia will be a partner of the EU given that both have common interests in cooperation. Another question would be what EU could do to prevent another escalation? Would Russia also learn the lesson? What will be future cooperation between the EU and Russia and how quickly will they overcome the consequences of the war, hostilities and sanctions? (Paragraph 2).

⁸ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015.

⁹ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, p. 26.

¹⁰ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, p. 26-27.

¹¹ S. MEISTER, I. NIĆ, I. KIROVA, T. BLOCKMANS, *Russia’s War in Ukraine: Rethinking the EU’s Eastern Enlargement and Neighborhood policy*, DGAP Report, 2023.1.

¹² T. DIEZ, S. STETTER, M. ALBERT, *The European Union and Border Conflicts: the Transformative Power of Integration*, in “International Organization”, 2006, 60(03): 563-593 in T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, p. 26.

¹³ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, pp. 26-27.

Furthermore, on the global arena, we cannot ignore a giant. China will certainly play a central role, economically and politically in the new emerging balance of power. For example, China might take the position in the conflict resolution and counteract the Russian's imperialistic appetite. It might play a catalyst role and reposition the priorities (Paragraph 3). Finally, Africa comes to the league table. Will it be able to balance the interests flowing from good relationship with Russia against the long lasting ties with the EU? (Paragraph 4).

1. *A new challenging test for the ENP (EaP) in the post war times*

1.1 *ENP at the crossroads*

The war on Ukraine is ongoing for more than 2 years but the end of hostilities does not seem to happen in the near future. All efforts to bring the conflict to an end failed: political dialogue, diplomacy, EU sanctions, threats, and condemnation did not bring any results. In this context, the future of the ENP (EaP) is more than a puzzle. It seems clear, however, that if the ENP (EaP) is to produce tangible results, it needs to be adapted to the new political context. In the first place, it will need to take into account the new geopolitical order that will emerge from the war. It is likely to influence the choices and interests. Inevitably, the new balance of power will impact on the way in which the EU engages with the neighbouring countries. Secondly, unless the end of the war is Russia's defeat (which seems unlikely by the time of this writing), the EU will need to seriously acknowledge the Russian presence in the region. Parmentier writing in 2013 stressed that "the EU must realise it is not the only one making rules in the region"¹⁴. Thirdly, among the six countries composing the EaP Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, two became the candidate countries for the accession to the EU in 2022, while three others for various reasons are far behind.

¹⁴ F. PARMENTIER, *Put to the Test: The EU and the Eastern Partnership: Perspectives on the Vilnius Summit (November 2013)*, Policy Paper 103, 2013 at <https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/easternpartnershipvilniussubmitflorentparmentierne-jdinov2013-1.pdf>.

The new objectives and the possible expansion of the EaP will depend on when and how the war ends, the peace conditions, potential threats of another conflict in the region, the EU Defence Policy materialising, and other political and economic factors that might drive the partner countries to engage with a closer cooperation with the EU. Also, the EU will have to normalise its relationship with Russia. From the end of the cold war, the Russia imperialist ambition ‘caused friction between the EU and Russia as well as within the countries themselves’¹⁵ Börzel and Lebanidze observe that the EU was ‘surprisingly over-optimistic about the development of the EaP, misreading the Russian intentions and not realising that the Russian position was to counter the EU engagement in the shared neighbourhood at any cost’¹⁶. Gromadzki observes that Russia was always against the EaP but saw it as ‘an empty project for a long time’ and reacted when the ‘the AAs became a realistic scenario’.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the EU’s efforts to promote its own interests and values in the eastern neighbourhood were confrontational for Russia, creating tensions and weakening any prospects for the success of the EaP. Parmentier observed that the Eastern Partnership was designed to export the EU legislative and political model to the Eastern neighbourhood, which was not particularly well perceived by Russia. Consequently, the tacit ‘fight’ for influence caused destabilisation in the partner countries. The pursuit of the EU objectives occurred “by fostering extensive political ties through association agreements; by enhancing economic integration through Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA); and by increasing mobility”¹⁸.

¹⁵ *Future of the Eastern Partnership: A New European Strategy for the East*, 11 November 2023, Young European Federalists, Submitted by Political Commission 3: External Affairs & Global Governance adopted by the Online Federal Committee on 26 June 2021. Re-adopted And Amended by the Federal Committee On 11 November 2023 in Madrid, Spain. At <https://Jef.Eu/Resolution/Eastern-Partnership/>.

¹⁶ Civil Georgia ‘Medvedev: August War Stopped Georgia’s Nato Membership’, 2011 available at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=24168> in T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, Working Paper 12, 2015, p. 27.

¹⁷ G. GROMADZKI, *Eastern Partnership Revisited: Associated Countries in Focus* (Fes.De), 2015, p. 14.

¹⁸ G. GROMADZKI, *Eastern Partnership Revisited: Associated Countries in Focus* (Fes.De), 2015, p. 14.

1.2 *Incontestable merits*

Yet, the realisation of the objectives of the ENP helped most of the new partner countries to engage with democratic reforms, technological progress, and commercial exchanges. The EU efforts concentrated on the democratisation of the institutions, the establishment of a democratic government, observance of the rule of law, good governance¹⁹ and human rights. Furthermore, the EU promoted mobility, trade, energy security and finally sustainability. The overarching goals consisted in strengthening security, peace and socio-economic stability in the region. The ENP (EaP) is generally considered not to be a great success in the EU Foreign Policy, gently described as lacking teeth to achieve visible results. In contrast, Gromadzki observes that given the starting point and the situation prior to the existence of the EaP, the partnership had some substantial merits. He mentions three areas where the EaP made a difference. First, the conclusion of AA and DCFTA between the EU and the three partners, second ‘visa liberalisation that constituted a radical improvement of mobility to the EU and third secured the partners - membership in the Energy Community created for the Western Balkan countries, to incorporate them into the EU gas and electricity markets’²⁰.

1.3 *Learning from the mistakes*

Overall, however, the EaP gets more criticised than praised. Zajączkowski points out that the Eastern partners lamented that the ENP (EaP) did not meet their expectations either in stimulating economic growth or their accession’s aspirations²¹.

In fact, the political and socioeconomic transition processes were complex and the progress rather slow²². The first to mention is uneven

¹⁹ S. GÄNZLE, *EU Governance and the European Neighbourhood Policy: A Framework for Analysis* in J. GOWER, G. TIMMINS (eds) *The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood*, 2011, Milton Park, Routledge, 184.

²⁰ G. GROMADZKI, *Eastern Partnership Revisited: Associated Countries in Focus* (Fes.De), 2015, p. 11

²¹ M. ZAJĄCZKOWSKI, *The European Neighborhood Policy: a Perspective of the Partner Countries*, in “The Central European Review of Economics and Management” (CEREM)”, WSB University of Wrocław, Wrocław, vol. 2, iss. 4, pp. 55-70, at 64 <https://doi.org/10.29015/cerem.510>.

²² G. KHARLAMOVA, *The European Union and the Eastern Partnership: Convergence of Economies* in “Procedia Economics and Finance”, vol. 27, 2015, pp. 29-41.

development in these six countries. Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia made the most of the EU programmes, its financial and technical support whereas other three partners did not take up the EU opportunities. A few years after the creation of the EaP Armenia and Belarus joined the Eurasian Economic Union - a Russian alternative in the region, whereas ‘for Azerbaijan the EU was one of its many trading partner’²³. Clearly, the case of Azerbaijan demonstrates that the EaP from the start was confronted with the diverse realities and aspirations and One-Size-Fits-All approach was a slip-up in the design of this policy. It compromised any possible success of the EaP from the very beginning. Uneven progress put the EU in front of the dilemma whether the EU should deepen the integration with these three countries or find a common denominator for all six²⁴. The opinion that prevailed was to accept the two-speed partnership and to accelerate the integration for these three countries according to the “more for more” principle²⁵. The latter proved to be very divisive. It deepened the division between partners and was often blamed for the EaP poor achievements rate.

The ‘more for more’ principle was introduced by the 2nd EaP Summit in 2011, becoming since a key component of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). This principle promised more support and benefits to the partner countries in proportion to their progress in implementing democratic reforms, rule of law, and human rights. Parmentier founds the approach very risky since “it may result in ‘less for less’, whereby both parties lose interest in the partnership; the weakened credibility of the EU if means are insufficient, or a need to impose sanctions, which the EU is often reluctant to do”²⁶. Increased EU support was often not enough to motivate governments to undergo substantial reforms and engage on the path of

²³ M. ZAJĄCZKOWSKI, *The European Neighborhood Policy: a Perspective of the Partners Countries*, in “The Central European Review of Economics and Management” (CEREM), WSB University in Wrocław, Wrocław, vol. 2, iss. 4, pp. 55-70, at 64 <https://doi.org/10.29015/cerem.510>.

²⁴ G. GROMADZKI, *Eastern Partnership Revisited: Associated Countries in Focus* (Fes.De), 2015, p. 13.

²⁵ G. GROMADZKI, *Eastern Partnership Revisited: Associated Countries in Focus* (Fes.De), 2015, p. 14.

²⁶ F. PARMENTIER, *Put to the Test: The EU and the Eastern Partnership: Perspectives on the Vilnius Summit (November 2013)*, Policy Paper 103, 2013 at <https://institutdelors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/easternpartnershipvilniussubmitflorentparmentierne-jdinov2013-1.pdf>, p. 7.

democratisation. Moreover, the “more for more” principle was also criticised for its inconsistent application favouring some partners to the detriment of the others, undermining the EU’s credibility.

The third, and probably the most important shortcoming to consider, strongly related to the first two points is the question of the EU membership. The first group (Trio) was very keen on future membership but the EaP lacked a clear membership perspective. Uncertainty about the membership was seen for years as a major drawback in the EaP, undermining motivation of the partner countries to embark on the path of democratisation. In fact, the EaP was not designed as a pre-accession policy but instead quite the opposite. Crombois strongly sustains that the EU ambiguous stance on the question of the EU membership was ‘in reality there to support a closed-door policy’²⁷.

As mentioned in the introduction, the lack of the exchange token was one of the reasons for the EaP’s stagnation. Three partners, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova undertook serious reforms to comply with the EU standards but the follow up of these reforms lacked incentives that the promise of the EU membership would provide. Instead, the EU committed itself to help with their reforms promoting democratic institutions, good governance and stability in the region. It also engaged to improve the prosperity of the partner countries, facilitating access to the EU internal market of goods and services, concluding agreements such as the AA and DCFTA. However, membership was not on offer. Crombois argues that “granting of candidate status for Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022, while postponing its decision on Georgia’s membership application, undermines the main rationale of the EaP: to keep the door to EU membership closed”²⁸. He believes that “the EU proved unable to resist the persistence of some of the EaP’s countries” in the matter of EU membership, departing in this way from the well-established rule²⁹.

The fourth gap in the EaP consists of the poor civil society engagement that impeded a profound social change. The EaP addressed mainly

²⁷ J.F. CROMBOIS, *The Ukraine war and the Future of the Eastern Partnership*, in “European View”, 22(1), pp. 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17816858231158238>.

²⁸ J.F. CROMBOIS, *The Ukraine war and the Future of the Eastern Partnership*, in “European View”, 22(1), pp. 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17816858231158238>.

²⁹ J.F. CROMBOIS, *The Ukraine war and the Future of the Eastern Partnership*, in “European View”, 22(1), pp. 103-110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17816858231158238>.

governments and the state institutions ignoring the non-state actors that otherwise would have contributed to the democratic reforms and later could secure durable solutions.

The problem of the poor implementation is closely related to the lack of instruments to ensure compliance. The EaP does not dispose effective enforcement mechanisms to implement the EU standards. The legal basis for the EaP is very general, for example, Article 8 TEU provides general context for the EU's external action, but there is no guidance on the implementation. The EU's ability is limited to address effectively issues such as democratic backsliding, human rights abuses, or rule of law. More general comment refers to the limits of the EU's Foreign Policy and the unanimity rule in the framework of the ENP, "which is too often constrained and paralysed by the conflicting positions of the Member States in the Council"³⁰.

The 2015 ENP Review provided many useful comments of the EaP's. One is particularly sharp stating that the EU misses the crucial point in its EaP given that it "falls short of providing a strategic long-term vision for the EU's relations with its neighbours"³¹.

1.4 *What does the future hold for EaP?*

The year 2024 marks the 15th anniversary of the creation of the EaP, and the partner countries except Belarus confirmed their commitment to further their cooperation with the EU. Similarly, in December 2022, the partner countries with exception of Belarus expressed their interests in strengthening the ENP, recognising however that reforms are needed to make the EaP policy more flexible and adapted to the needs of the EaP countries³².

³⁰ *Future of the Eastern Partnership: A New European Strategy for the East*, 11 November 2023, Young European Federalists, Submitted by Political Commission 3: External Affairs & Global Governance adopted by the Online Federal Committee on 26 June 2021. Re-adopted And Amended by the Federal Committee On 11 November 2023 in Madrid, Spain. At <https://Jef.Eu/Resolution/Eastern-Partnership/>.

³¹ H. KOSTANYAN (eds), *Assessing European Neighbourhood Policy, Perspectives from the Literature*, CEPS, Brussels, 2017 at 142.

³² S. MEISTER, I. NIĆ, I. KIROVA, T. BLOCKMANS, *Russia's War in Ukraine: Rethinking the EU's Eastern Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy*, DGAP Report, 2023.1. p. 9.

The EaP should ‘become attractive for these countries in order to further cooperation but also ‘for countering anti-EU and anti-democratic tendencies of others’³³. Undoubtedly, the argument that the EU must assert itself as a global actor is a valid one. The EU should convince partner countries that close relations with the EU can “guarantee them peace, stability, progress and respect for democracy and human rights”³⁴. Nonetheless, the EU was unable to assert its leadership in the current ongoing war. It failed in its diplomatic mission, embargos and the strong condemnation of the Russian’s invasion is not enough to secure its role as a global actor. The question is therefore if the EU in the post war times will manage to convince its partners or to attract new ones?

Undoubtedly, apart from the strategic misevaluation of the Russian intentions and its pretence for dominance in the region, the ENP (EaP) presented some serious flaws. Despite the fact that it underwent some reforms in 2015 and more recently was endowed with the new strategy ‘Beyond 2020’, the structural inconsistencies still remain. Truyens argues that the EaP launched after the adhesion of the CEE countries to the EU had a complementary role in stabilising democratic changes in the region³⁵.

While we cannot predict the future, we can however make some assumptions drawing on the loopholes in the ENP (EaP), which were often made responsible for the slow and uneven progress in the EaP countries. Nonetheless, its future will be shaped by the geopolitics in the region, and new emerging powers that would impact on the countries’ choices. The Russian invasion of Ukraine created also an opportunity for the EU to rethink, reshape and readapt the EaP to the current needs.

The EaP is already abandoning its ‘one fits all’ approach with two

³³ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, pp. 26-27; A. HUG, (ed) *Trouble in the Neighbourhood? The Future of The EU’s Eastern Partnership*, London, The Foreign Policy Centre, 2015.

³⁴ T.A. BÖRZEL, B. LEBANIDZE, *European Neighbourhood Policy at the crossroads. Evaluating the Past to shape the Future*, MAXCAP Working Paper No. 12, July 2015, pp. 26-27.

³⁵ A. TRUYENS, *The Eastern Partnership, Europe’s Eastern Neighborhood Policy*, Paper, University of Louven, 2015, S. KEUKELEIRE, T. DELREUX, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union, Basingstoke*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 2014, pp. 256-258 in A. TRUYENS, “The Eastern Partnership, Europe’s Eastern Neighborhood Policy”, Paper, University of Louven, 2015, T. GYLFASSON, M. WIJMAN, *Which conflicts can the European Neighbourhood Policy Help Resolve?* in Cesifo Working Paper, 3861, June 2012, pp. 14-15.

candidate countries following the pre-accession procedure. It will pursue different approaches recognising the specificities of each country and will adapt to the partner-country's progress.

Security will be the primary consideration. Some efforts will concentrate on border security cooperation and conflict resolution. Meister et al. underlined that the redefined EaP should have a 'comprehensive security dimension linking resilience, connectivity, and defense policy, as well as cooperation in the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy'³⁶. In addition, the question arises "How can the Eastern Partnership Instrument and other EU policy tools be used, to counteract Russian destabilisation efforts and promote sustainable peace in Europe and in the EaP region?"³⁷ Another suggestion is to include (Trio) in the cooperation with the European Defense Agency and allow them to participate in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects³⁸.

Further, improving connectivity, physical and digital, should be on the agenda. Better infrastructure, more effective trade, faster transactions, and potentially it would be easier to reach other countries if any expansion comes to play.

Democratization should not be placed on the second plan. In contrast, it is important to foster other reforms concentrated not only on human rights and the rule of law, but also on transparency and accountability.

One of the weaknesses of the EaP was no engagement with civil society. It seems that the EU will try to address this lacuna this time. The civil society actors could certainly make a difference. They can help with restoring stability in the region, defending democracy and human rights, fighting corruption, or in embarking on the path of a green transition³⁹.

³⁶ S. MEISTER, I. NIĆ, I. KIROVA, T. BLOCKMANS, *Russia's War in Ukraine: Rethinking the EU's Eastern Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy*, DGAP Report, 2023.1. p.9.

³⁷ *The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies*, Conference, 17-20th of September 2023, Wechange, Berlin "The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies" at https://civilsocietycooperation.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Dialogue-for-Future-2023_Program-7.pdf.

³⁸ S. MEISTER, I. NIĆ, I. KIROVA, T. BLOCKMANS, *Russia's War in Ukraine: Rethinking the EU's Eastern Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy*, DGAP Report, 2023.1. p. 9.

³⁹ *The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies*, Conference, 17-20th of September 2023, Wechange, Berlin "The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies" at https://civilsocietycooperation.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Dialogue-for-Future-2023_Program-7.pdf.

Another area of development is digital transformation. It was pointed out that digital tools could be very effective in fighting corruption. The EU assistance and technical support might become very useful to accelerate progress in this domain⁴⁰.

Promoting sustainable development and facilitating the green transition need to be included in the financial plans. In this perspective the new EaP should contain measures aiming at reducing climate change, addressing social and economic disparities and discrimination.

Furthermore, mobility could be strengthened even further by promoting cultural exchanges, youth mobility and educational cooperation such as academic exchanges, and cultural partnerships between the EU and partner countries. The cooperation must be enhanced in the areas of common interests such as security, counter-terrorism, energy and migration management. In conclusion, the EU has another opportunity to learn from its mistakes and to reshape the EaP to make it convincing for its partners, more tailored to their individual needs. In doing so, it cannot disregard evolving geopolitical dynamics.

2. *Can we talk about the future? Russia-Ukraine war in perspective*

2.1 *Can we talk about the future?*

It is not an overstatement to say that on the 24th of February 2022 the world has changed. The reaction of shock caused by the first large-scale war in Europe since World War II reshaped the global economy, and the political and diplomatic architecture – right in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic⁴¹. Dealing with these changes certainly will pose significant and fundamental challenges for the world in the years to come.

As much as the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine does not

⁴⁰ *The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies*, Conference, 17-20th of September 2023, Wechange, Berlin “The Future of Eastern Partnership: Empowering Democratic and Sustainable Civil Societies” at https://civilsocietycooperation.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Dialogue-for-Future-2023_Program-7.pdf.

⁴¹ A. QURESHI, M.S. RIZWAN, G. AHMAD, & D. ASHRAF, *Russia-Ukraine war and systemic risk: Who is taking the heat?* in “Finance Research Letters”, 2022, p. 48.

show much promise for peace anytime soon, still most wars end at the negotiating table – sooner or later. The question that at the first sight does not sound quite appropriate at this moment, but still must be asked already now because the answer requires thorough assessment: what then?

Putting all the efforts into stopping the violence and providing Ukraine with the necessary recovery means is the priority indeed, and such initiatives are already largely in place or being actively discussed for further implementation⁴². However, the short-term and long-term strategy of dealing with Russia and other former Soviet countries in the aftermath of the war is not something that can be decided upon quickly and without careful and possibly length assessment – regardless of the war’s outcome. Yet, the strategy is needed. Plenty of problematic issues will have to be at least addressed, if not resolved - preferably by the means supported by and based on objective academic analysis, to help assessing the situation, predict the possible outcomes. And, perhaps even more importantly, to avoid painful mistakes and miscalculations that at such high stakes can appear perilous for European security and prosperity – especially on the long run.

In this regard, the answer to the question, whether it is appropriate at all to discuss the outcomes and further strategies of dealing with Russia in the aftermath of the war is yes. Ignoring this elephant in the room now will serve a whole set of difficulties later. To address both, it is important to assess the current situation and to draw a few historical parallels to put the current dramatic situation into perspective to minimize the risk of falling into the trap of speculations and wishful thinking.

2.2 Between defeat and Pyrrhic victory

The state of things on the battlefields of the Russia-Ukraine war brings forth a lot of uncertainties, which makes any attempt of prediction a challenging task. It is hard to define what the ‘victory’ for either side would be in the given situation. The reason is not only the military

⁴² *Donors are already mulling a Marshall Plan for Ukraine*, in “The Economist”, November 8, 2022.

struggle itself, or the strong influence of external factors: for Ukraine in terms of dependency on vital military and financial aid provided by NATO and EU institutions⁴³, for Russia in terms of its attempts to dodge total isolation and still make profits from trade to ensure the stability of its regime and avoid existential dangers of economic collapse. The warring sides have opposite goals and the opposite motivations: Ukraine is protecting its territory from the invasion, and Russia seeks to assert dominance and establish influence through brute force⁴⁴, because it perceives the loss of influence in Ukraine as a vulnerability against the possible external threat or a necessity to maintain its status of superpower through holding sphere-of-influence⁴⁵. However, the popular support of the regimes in either country would wane once their leadership shows signs of weakness – both in terms of domestic narratives and on the battlefield. In other words, the desire to maintain the domestic stability of the regime in either country plays a major role in the way the war is being waged.

In that sense, the Russian regime might even have an upper hand in maintaining stability, because the censorship in Russia is stronger and its propaganda machine is well-oiled and has been rolled out to full velocity for years, but also because officially, Russian goals for the invasion are so vague that it would not pose a big challenge to claim ‘victory’ at this point, should the truce come now. However, the Ukrainian determination to defend its homeland from the invasion and reclaim the annexed territories is a major uniting factor counterbalancing that.

In any case, the actual victory on the battlefield followed by capitulation of the enemy for each side is unlikely. Russia, whose initial plan for a swift victory without much resistance expected has failed, now focuses on taking and holding the territories that were hastily annexed in September 2022, while Ukraine is determined to restore its territorial integrity⁴⁶, which includes taking back the annexed Crimea.

⁴³ *The US, the UK and EU-institutions are the largest suppliers in aid to Ukraine*, in “Statista” at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1303432/total-bilateral-aid-to-ukraine/>.

⁴⁴ E. KNOTT, *Existential nationalism: Russia’s war against Ukraine*, in “Nations and Nationalism”, v. 2, 2022.

⁴⁵ E. GÖTZ, & J. STAUN, *Why Russia attacked Ukraine: Strategic culture and radicalized narratives*. in “Contemporary Security Policy”, 43(3), 482-497: 485-486.

⁴⁶ Although further offensive from either side is not ruled out. A. CROCKER, *Endings and Surprises of the Russia-Ukraine War*, in “Survival”, 64:5, 2022, pp. 183-192: 185, 189.

Attempting to achieve these goals might cause the war to last for significant time more, possibly rendering it into a frozen conflict, which can potentially lead the economic collapse in both countries.

That said, despite higher morale and righteous ferocity of protecting the homeland, in practice Ukraine depends vitally on Western support, and will eventually succumb to crude but overwhelming Russian offensive should the West fail to provide support. In turn, The Western countries, despite steadily helping Ukraine, still have no interest in open confrontation with Russia and its world's largest nuclear arsenal, which Russia could be tempted to use should its territorial integrity become under threat. However, it is uncertain how Russia is intending to reinterpret its own defensive doctrine, provided that it now considers the annexed territories a part of its own. According to some analytics, such a line would be drawn not at the borders of freshly annexed territories, but rather at the Crimean Peninsula⁴⁷, because having control over its territory is perceived not only as a strategic but also as an ideological or spiritual focal point for Russia and its current regime^{48,49}.

The state of things at this point could render any victory pyrrhic: with sufficient aid, Ukraine could potentially regain its territorial integrity, and if the Ukrainian army pushed towards the Russian borders or even attempted to retaliate militarily on internationally recognized Russian soil will not trigger escalation which can swiftly turn the local conflict into the full-scale World War, it will still bear a heavy cost of incredible suffering of its people and the economic turmoil, recovering from which will be a lengthy and painful process. For Russia, in case it achieves the freezing of the conflict, holding successful negotiations to keeping currently annexed territories, or even manages to push its assault further, the increasing isolation and external economic pressure with potential loss of former allies and partners is inevitable, not to mention having to deal with guerrilla warfare around the annexed ter-

⁴⁷ S. WOLFE, T. MALYARENKO, *Ukraine war: why Moscow could go nuclear over Kyiv's 'threats' to Crimea*, in "The Conversation", July 20, 2022.

⁴⁸ T. KUZIO, *Russian nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian war: autocracy-orthodoxy-nationality*, Routledge, 2022, p. 241.

⁴⁹ M.H. MYHRE, A. AASLAND & J. HOLM-HANSEN, *Crimea will forever be Russian: dissenting Norwegian media discourses on Russia's annexation of Crimea*. in "European Politics and Society", Abingdon, 2022, pp. 1-24 at 18.

ritories for years to come, as those would not be much dependent on external support and will likely operate on their own.

Geopolitical and strategic endeavours aside, all sides of the conflict, including those directly or indirectly supporting one or another, are confronted with a moral dilemma: is stopping the war at this point, to prevent further bloodshed, destruction of the infrastructure, brutality, inevitable victims among the civilians, not to mention the risk of further escalation a right thing to do or does that mean accepting the unacceptable terms, and creating a dangerous historical precedent? If the question is put that way – and de-facto it is, then there can be no anyhow comfortable answer.

2.3 *Drawing the parallels*

Russia's invasion to Ukraine in 2022 is not the first war that Russia – and its predecessor Soviet Union were involved in since the WWII.

However, the Russia-Ukraine war does hit close to home as it is raging right at usually peaceful European doorsteps, and its nature is regarded by some scholars as the ideological stand-off between the current Russian regime and the Western civilization as the war “threatens values and institutions”⁵⁰, even though the open military confrontation with possible escalation seems to remain out of actual scope of Western interest⁵¹, despite particularly loud nuclear brinkmanship that has become prominent in Western social media⁵² and gets repeatedly brought up on Russian state TV⁵³.

In a sense, the state of things today revives a gloomy shadow of the Cold War, however comparisons to its deepest and the most dangerous points such as the Cuban Missile Crisis may not in all be fully accurate. As much as both seem to be equally dangerous in terms of

⁵⁰ D.H. ALLIN, E. JONES, *Sleepwalking to Solidarity? Russia, Ukraine and the European Dream*. In “Survival” (London), 64(3), 2022, pp. 213-222 at 218.

⁵¹ A. CARSON, *The Paradoxes of Escalation in Ukraine: Slowly but Surely, Russia and the West Are Drawing Their Redlines* in “Foreign Affairs”, 29 July, 2022.

⁵² S. SPEECE, *On Trolls and Nuclear Signaling: Strategic Stability in the Age of Memes*, in “Modern War Institute,” 3 September 2022.

⁵³ S. CHILDS, *‘It Is What It Is’: Russian State TV in Normal Discussion About Nuclear War*, In “VICE”, April 28, 2022.

potential escalation risks, Russia-Ukraine reminisces a far more likely historical parallel: the Soviet-Afghan war.

Obviously, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which led to the decade-long and not very successful war was very different from the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine. However, there are deep underlying similarities in social and political premises in Russia now and in Soviet Union then and in the state of society and the military.

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan coincided with the last years of L. Brezhnev's, known in Russia as Era of Stagnation. He was succeeded by Chernenko and Andropov – both at the post-pension age, both unsuccessfully attempting to give declining authoritarian regime a fresh breath by increasing the repressions. However, authoritarian regimes cannot survive long without economic prosperity, strong ideology, and fear – all three factors were on decline. Soviet people would ironically refer to these times as *Lafette Race*⁵⁴. The shadow economy eventually reached the same volume as its strictly regulated legal counterpart⁵⁵, the raise of corruption was slowly but inevitably driving the Soviet Empire towards the economic and social turbulence from which it would not recover. The disintegration of Soviet Union was the consequence of economic and social turmoil of the country suffering from the limitations of planned economy, still not having fully recovered from the massive trauma of the Second World War and having to deal with the new trauma of Afghanistan war, while having many of its resources routed towards the endless and largely meaningless confrontation with the “Capitalist West”.

That war was not the only catalyst but certainly one of the most important factors that led to a perfect storm that eventually caused the fall of Soviet empire, which, despite clear economic prerequisites still

⁵⁴ V. GOLTSOV, *Internet kak otrazhenije stereotipov massovogo istoricheskogo soznaniija*, in “Istoricheskij Almanah”, 2014, n. 5, pp. 147-172 at 58. Anecdotaly, L. Brezhnev's coffin was carried to the final resting place on a cannon carriage. As his successors were equally old, the Soviet leaders that time were dying of old age too frequently within a very short period of time, which sparked the popular folk joke that the Soviet leaders are “racing on cannon carriages [to their death]”. The joke was very prominent and is still quite broadly quoted in press and even in academic publications.

⁵⁵ I. MAMETJEV, Peculiarities of shadow economy in the USSR in the era of “stagnation”. In “Vestnik of Astrakhan” State Technical University, (1 (69)), pp. 65-70 at 68.

came as a significant geopolitical shock that nobody seemed to be prepared for⁵⁶.

2.4 Lessons of the past... (not yet) failed?

A consequence of looming economic decline in Russia following either possible outcome of the war could be reviewed through the prism of historical parallel with the Soviet Union during and after the Afghan war mentioned above. Here, I intentionally avoid the word ‘collapse’ yet because Russian economy is likely sufficiently resilient to prevent that, as the total isolation of Russia from the rest of the world is highly unlikely⁵⁷, not to mention that it is not clear for how long the pressure can be maintained as the systemic risk caused by the sanctions for European economy is very high, too⁵⁸. As much as sanctions did not seem to achieve immediate effect (albeit they were not really designed to), they still cause raising inflation, and with high probability they will achieve the desired long-term effects of limiting Russian capabilities for high-tech production⁵⁹ and thus limiting its capability to wage the war.

Despite that, the popular revolt against the regime is still highly unlikely. The people of the country that once experienced a civil war, and relatively recently went through the harsh period of wild capitalism after the economic shocks of Perestroika are not likely to be brought towards the idea of another violent regime change easily.

This, however, does not mean that the current regime will enjoy full support of the majority on a longer run or that it is absolutely stable.

⁵⁶ G. GROSSMAN, *The Soviet economy in Mid 1991: an overview*, in “Dilemmas of transition: in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe”, ed. G. BRESLAUWER, Berkley, University of California, 1991, 65.

⁵⁷ ‘Tis but a flesh wound Russia’s economy is back on its feet, in “The Economist”, 7th May 2022 at <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2022/05/07/russias-economy-is-back-on-its-feet>.

⁵⁸ A. QURESHI, M.S. RIZWAN, G. AHMAD, D. ASHRAF, *Russia-Ukraine war and systemic risk: Who is taking the heat?* in “Finance Research Letters”, vol. 48(C). 2022, p. 6.

⁵⁹ J. KLUGE, *Russia’s economy is much more than a “big gas station.” Under sanctions, that’s now its biggest problem*, in “Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists”, vol. 78(6), 2022, pp. 307-309.

More likely, Russia will go through the period of social evolution from even more authoritarian during the next few years, then to develop the urge for a change among the urban population in the larger cities, which then can be utilized by the attentive groups within the elites, in attempt to the change of the political course – much like it happened past the shocks of Afghanistan war followed by the disintegration of the Soviet Union and onwards into the 90ies. This period will be crucial for international powers to pay attention to and for the timely action.

At the end of Cold War and shortly after the disintegration of Soviet Union, many Western actors saw the window of opportunity – not only for trade and commerce, but also to build cultural and diplomatic bridges with the former ideological enemy.

However, as it seems now, the initiatives aimed at integration of that time reborn Russia into Western *modus operandi* were not sufficient or effective. Possibly, because domestic political will to integrate into Western style capitalism did not meet sufficient social support or understanding among the broad population, or because most of the initiatives were not executed with a necessary expertise or sufficiently deep understanding of the Russian social and cultural peculiarities⁶⁰. It was the moment of opportunity to groom and help that time young democracy of early post-soviet Russia developing the practice and the institutions of power and commerce regulations. The adoration for “Western” lifestyle often followed by unrealistically romanticized image of such was prominent among the Russian youth starting from as early as the 50ies of XX century⁶¹ and it grew ever stronger over the years, only to eventually clash against the major disappointment caused by economic and social turbulences of the 1990s. After the Soviet Union’s disintegration, a lack of functional regulating institutions, extreme levels of corruption and the problem of society confused by sudden change of political and economic course, threw Russia into the decade of wild capitalism state colloquially known in Russia as *Lihije Devjanostije* – The Wild/Evil Nineties, a period when Russian embryotic democracy turned out to be an *Infant Terrible*, discrediting the very

⁶⁰ R. SIMON, *Passive Revolution, Perestroika, and the Emergence of the New Russia*. In “Capital & Class”, vol. 34(3), 2010, pp. 429-448 at 444-445.

⁶¹ S. KOVALCHUK, *Socialnaya politika sovetского gosudarstva I neformalnije molodezhnije ob’edinenija (1945-1953)*, in “Simvol Nauki”, vol. (11-3) 2016, pp. 209-212.

idea of Western model of democracy for the Russians as it was the only the twisted image of it that they got immersed into⁶². The nostalgia for the USSR, and social demand for more authoritarian leadership has been conceived, and so the figure of Vladimir Putin as a strong leader was brought upon the political stage. The initial admiration towards the Western ideology turned into repulsion, amplified by rather extreme forms nationalism, fuelled by attitudes of slightly altered, “*radically revisionist*”⁶³ form of Eurasianism narrated by prominent state-backed intellectuals such as Alexander Dugin.

In the coming years, in the wake of the economic decline caused by sanctions and the social shocks caused by the Ukrainian war, the history might just repeat itself. Perhaps not directly and not immediately, but over the course of years we might witness Russia approaching the critical turning point upon which the change of regime could coincide with drastic transformation within its society and the political climate. Still, it is likely to get worse before it gets better, much as Brezhnev’s stagnation shifted towards somewhat more repressive and chaotic albeit short reigns of Andropov and Chernenko before the regime finally cracked at the seams.

Only afterwards, the political climate reached the stage of steady motion towards the first attempts of democracy. Europe and the Western world were not ready to react to such changes back then, largely because there was too little time to assess the situation carefully enough. If history can teach us a lesson, now it is the right time to learn, observe – and act accordingly.

In this scenario of change, Russia might either turn its back to the West for good or, which is more likely, will attempt to re-establish the cooperation. The latter would not only bring much needed relief to tensions with a big and uneasy neighbour: it will inevitably bring several critical challenges too.

Apart from all the ethical dilemmas of whether it is appropriate to do any business with the country with the reputation of an aggressor,

⁶² D. SHLAPENTOKH, *The Great Friendship: Geopolitical Fantasies About the Russia/Europe Alliance in the Early Putin Era (2000-2008) - The Case of Alexander Dugin*, in “Debatte” Oxford, England 22, no. 1, 2014, pp. 49-79 at 53.

⁶³ M. LARUELLE, *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields*, Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2019, p. 97.

and legal issues of seeking the new framework to make such dealings feasible, there are some domestic issues in Russia to start sharply manifesting in the coming years – and they will affect the European landscape too.

One of the most dangerous challenges Russia could face in the near future, is the raise of separatism and pursue for sovereignty in some of its regions – especially in those that are home for Russia’s cultural and ethnic minorities, such as Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Khakassia and North Caucasus. The ethnic tensions and separatist movements were prominent in Tatarstan, Chechnya, Dagestan, and Bashkortostan in the 1990s⁶⁴. The situation eventually diffused in most, but it still led to internal conflicts, perhaps most violent and infamous of which were the Chechenia wars. There is a realistic possibility for the separatist movements to rise again if the crisis gets deeper and there is no guarantee that the things will calm down as luckily as it happened before.

This poses an immediate security threat to Europe – firstly, because it might cause a migration crisis in Europe, should the separatism tensions turn into the internal military conflicts. Secondly, because it will cause economic contractions with unpredictable outcomes for Russia and consequently for other parts of the world.

Finally, because if the conflicts will affect regions deeper within the Russian territory, the fight between divided military forces within the country may cause loss of control of heavy weaponry or even of some assets of the nuclear arsenal.

Perhaps a less obvious but nevertheless important issue which needs to be addressed, is negative effects on future of diplomacy and cultural relations between Russia and the Western world caused by collateral effect of sanctions and the desire to punish Russia economically, not always targeting those responsible for Russia’s military aggression.

Many Russian cultural and sport organizations, artists and athletes that are not directly involved in the invasion on Ukraine or do not support the current regime openly (although some do depend on it being state organizations by nature), took hits or face bans from international

⁶⁴ V. STEPANOV, *Ethnic Tensions and Separatism in Russia*, in “Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies”, vol. 26, 2002 (2), pp. 305-332 at 323.

cooperation. The cancellation of Russian art⁶⁵, cut ties of international academic exchange carried by popular outrage in Western Europe pushes Russian intellectuals and intelligentsia to the repulsion towards the Western civilization as they perceive it. The cancellation of cultural events and targeting of artists and athletes are particularly quickly instrumentalised by Russian propaganda⁶⁶. Whether the approach of collective responsibility of all Russians towards the war crimes allegedly committed by the Russian army in Ukraine is justified or anyhow productive remains an open albeit a very sensitive issue⁶⁷. In any case, this does not only weaponise the Russian state propaganda against the West. It leaves the scar of mistrust on any further international relations in the future.

Naturally Russian intelligentsia is either apolitical at the least, or anti-establishment at the best⁶⁸. Many of the social and professional groups of people who were suffering from the fallout of the inaccurately aimed sanctions and bans will only see their pro-Russian narratives assured: that the Western world vilifies each and every Russian regardless of their political views. In other words, by inaccurate targeting, we push the Russian intelligentsia who could have been the spearhead of change – the role it historically always played - into the arms of the current state propaganda and beyond. This might sound harmless and unproblematic perhaps, for some even justified at this point, but in a few years instead of having the popular support for values much needed to promote the freedom and democracy during the potential change of political seasons in Russia, we will witness the emergence of a generation of radical, revanchist-oriented intellectuals – including those in the future political elites. Thus, instead of defusing the hostility and easing the tensions, we shall face the repeat of full cycle without any progress towards the peaceful cooperation. Solving this issue is only possibly by means of long-term

⁶⁵ See, for instance, *Disavow Some Russian Artists. Don't Cancel Russian Art; Back Story*. in “The Economist”, 2022.

⁶⁶ *Vladimir Putin thinks Russia is a victim of cancel culture*, in “National Review”, vol. 74(7), 2022, p. 6.

⁶⁷ P. BOULOGNE, B. DE MESEL, *Leve Oekraïne! Weg met Rusland? Morele verantwoordelijkheid, sancties en cultuur*, in “Rekto-verso”, 6 May 2022.

⁶⁸ S. VELICHKO, *Intellectuals, Perestroika and Democratic Transit in Russia (1985-1991)*, in “Intellegentsiya i Mir”, (2), 2012, pp. 42-49.

planning, carefully assessing and academically researching and implementing the instruments of cultural diplomacy and dialogue, with the support of much needed expertise of Eastern-European and Slavonic studies.

Considering and developing the initiatives that could be quickly deployed to support Russian society of the future in establishing their own way of peaceful rule, help it get integrated into the Western framework on terms of cooperation without being condescending, is not really a question of good-will, or showing weakness in desire to make deals with the aggressor, as it might be erroneously labelled now with the heat of the war at our doorsteps.

Rather, it is a question of long-term strategy for European and global security. The question on how it should be implemented lies within the area of relevant academic research and practical analytics, which needs to be heard. The expertise and investment into the relevant studies and know-how implementations of knowledge in practice can be crucial to put the world back on the stable tracks.

3. *A Chinese perspective on the Ukrainian war*

3.1 *Sino-Russian cooperation*

The security order that had been in place in Europe since the end of the Cold War is out of balance. “Today, the world is going through momentous changes, and humanity is entering a new era of rapid development and profound transformation.” These words from a Russia-China Joint Statement on the 4th of February 2022 put central the mutual support in Sino-Russian cooperation and the “rock-solid friendship without limits” that according to Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov is “at its best level ever”⁶⁹. Twenty days later when Russia violently invades Ukraine these words have a sinister ring to them⁷⁰. This instantly prompts questions for re-analyzing the nature and depth of Sino-

⁶⁹ S. LAVROV, *Russia-China Relations at Their Best Level Ever*, in “Moscow Times”, February 5, 2022.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China. China-Russia Joint Statement, February 4, 2022. Available at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China website.

Russian relations. Had Beijing priority been informed of the plan of Russia to invade? This is important because having been informed would technically constitute an accessory to murder before the fact. In other words, a person learns about the intended (mass) murder but fails to prevent it or inform the appropriate channels. The accessory before the fact does not need to participate or help in planning the murder or even be present at the crime scene at all. The assistance can even include facilitating movement to the crime scene, in this case arguably by guaranteeing a minimal amount of Russian troops required at the Sino-Russian border. The person may also assist in procuring objects such as weapons or cyber-security know-how, being aware that the offender intends to use them for the crime of murder. And if anyone would have known, would it not be China about the plans of its now best friend Russia? What makes this extremely relevant is that the world's top two authoritarians have teamed up and made their aspirations public of shaping a new world order to determine the global future. In the absence of hard evidence, this article however will present a case for a Chinese unawareness and unwillingness to support a Russian invasion by focusing on a deeper and elaborate diplomatic, economic, and geostrategic perspective.

3.2 Cultural bias: to see the water, sometimes the fish first needs to jump out of the bowl

Three months before the invasion, China was repeatedly warned by the US about the imminent threat of a Russian invasion of Ukraine⁷¹. China brushed the potential threat consistently under the carpet. The Chinese Embassy did not have an evacuation plan to rescue Chinese citizens until after the invasion. Just two days before the invasion international relations scholar Shen Yi of Fudan University (Shanghai) gave a talk about “a war that will never happen”⁷² while on the same day Prof. Jin Canrong at Renmin University (Beijing) the same day

⁷¹ U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Warnings to China Regarding Potential Russian Actions in Ukraine*, in “Press Statement”, February 2022.

⁷² Y. SHEN, Speech on *A War That Will Never Happen*, in “Fudan University”, Shanghai, January 2022.

spoke about the “impossibility of war”⁷³. But the war did happen. How could China have miscalculated the plans of their Russian trustee so badly? Was President Xi trying to buy President Putin time for an invasion that ought to be over in only three days? Already in 2015, American scholar Mearsheimer critically pointed fingers at Washington and Brussels arguing that the then-recent Russian Crimea annexation was also the West’s fault for trying to peel the Ukraine away from the Soviet orbit into the West⁷⁴. The deeper causes for the conflict would be overly aggressive NATO expansion (in January 2021 Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged the US to let Ukraine join NATO), EU expansion, and the fostering of an Orange revolution. Xi Jinping is no stranger to revolutions. During the Cultural Revolution as a child, he was kidnapped and forced into manual agricultural labour for six years⁷⁵. More recently, he stopped the Yellow Umbrella protests in Hong Kong without significant political concessions from Beijing.

During the Xi Jinping administration, a change in style took place towards more coercive diplomacy adopted by Chinese diplomats abroad. Such a style is in line with a Chinese military philosophy where winning without fighting is the ultimate art of war. According to Yun Sun from the Stimson Centre (Washington DC), assessing Russian plans mainly from a Chinese perspective is a textbook example of cultural bias in international relations⁷⁶. This is a known phenomenon that occurs when events are misinterpreted by hidden assumptions inherent to one’s own culture. In his book *The Art of War* ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu ranked four military operations in order of preference: Firstly, start with undermining the adversary’s plans, Secondly, if that does not work try diplomacy. Thirdly, try to defeat the enemy at the border. Your last and least desirable option is to consider an invasion of foreign lands. If coercion is considered elegant and effective in China, then the positioning of Russian troops already had Ukraine in a

⁷³ J. CANRONG, *Remarks on the “Impossibility of War”*, in “Renmin University”, Beijing, January 2022.

⁷⁴ J.J. MEARSHEIMER, *Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin*, in “Foreign Affairs”. September/October 2014.

⁷⁵ A. PANTSOV, S. LEVINE. *Xi Jinping: The Man who makes China*. Potomac Books, 2020.

⁷⁶ Y. SUN, *Cultural Bias in International Relations: A Chinese Perspective*, in “Stimson Center”, Washington, DC, 2022.

weak position, and allowed it to bargain from a position of strength. From a Chinese cultural perspective, it just did not make sense to invade when you already had the upper hand. The problem with this reasoning is that Putin is not Chinese.

Credit needs to be given where credit is due. Although the outcome of the Ukraine war is uncertain at this point, Putin did play a masterful opening chess move. Just twenty days before the invasion Putin made sure to shake hands in front of the entire world jointly declaring Russia and China's deepening cooperation and friendship. Imagine the uncomfortable Chinese position twenty days later having to explain to the rest of the world it did not know the car they were given a ride in was on its way to rob a Ukrainian bank. A simple Chinese "Wir haben es nicht gewußt (we had no clue)" without losing face to the rest of the world was not in the cards. The Chinese leadership was publicly put with its back against the wall fearing that its friendship with Russia could bring another era of global isolation. After jointly calling on all states to ensure peace, stability, and sustainable development across the world, there was an awkward Chinese silence of not supporting nor condemning the offensive attack resulting in the violent murdering of innocent Ukrainian women and children.

3.3 The Chinese foot in the Ukrainian door knocked down by the Russians

War in Ukraine is bad for Chinese business. In 2019, for a historic first time, China became Ukraine's biggest trading partner taking over that position from Russia. China needs to feed 18% of the world's population with only 6% of the land of which only one tenth is fit for agriculture. China needs to compensate this imbalance by being the world's largest agricultural importer (about twice the amount of food that it exports) to continue battling undernourishment (down to 9% in 2017). In general, Ukraine is a food factory for China and many other countries exporting a huge amount of basic agricultural food products. Its export to China (mainly consisting of seed oils, corn, and wheat) tripled in just 2 years from €3.6 billion in 2019 to €9.8 billion in 2021. China could increasingly turn to Russia, also one the world's largest food net exporters of comparable food products. Yet specific Ukrain-

ian food product exports such as sunflower oil and corn largely exceed Russia's.

Chinese companies for their part made direct investments in Ukraine. The Chinese telecom company Huawei had a foot in the door to develop Ukraine's mobile network after winning a bid to install a 4G network in the Kyiv subway in 2019. But what use is it for China to be on a good footing with Ukraine when your friend suddenly knocks down the front door? Today, Musk's digital lifeline Starlink highlights the importance of national Ukrainian security for informing both the military and the public. Also, in 2017 China Pacific Construction Group signed an agreement to build a subway line in the capital Kiev costing about €1.2bn, but in December 2022 a memorandum of understanding between the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Kiev city authorities was signed to invest €950 million in the Ukrainian capital's bomb sheltering metro system. Co-operation with Kyiv City would contribute to a faster reconstruction of the capital after the war and accelerate Ukraine's integration into the European Union. In both cases, China seems to have lost its opening wedge.

The war also does significant damage to China's flagship foreign policy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). A tremendous amount of Chinese resources and time have been invested in the build-up of this gigantic infrastructure development project. Although it has not always been easy to measure the impact of the BRI on the Chinese economy, it is safe to state that the timing to bring this gigantic project to fruition has been unfortunate⁷⁷. Approximately 60% of BRI projects were "seriously or somewhat affected" as of June 2020 as a result of travel restrictions and social isolation measures brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, China increased its efforts again to boost the development of BRI projects around the world⁷⁸. However, one of the most important components of the BRI is the Eurasian rail network, also known as the New Eurasian Land Bridge. Chinese trains travel across Eurasia, transporting Chinese goods to Europe with an important hub in Ukraine that has a free trade deal with the EU. In 2021, China ex-

⁷⁷ Chinese Government Official Report, Impact of COVID-19, Belt and Road Initiative, June 2020.

⁷⁸ R. HUDSON, *Geopolitical Shifts in Eurasia: The Impact of Russia's Actions in Ukraine on China's Belt and Road Initiative*, in "Journal of Eurasian Studies", Vol. 13, n. 1, 2022.

ported a staggering €70 billion of goods to Europe via freight trains while ocean shipping was still burdened by delays and high costs.

Nearly half of those train routes go through Russia. To save time for Chinese-German trade flows, border crossings were reduced, and the gauge was changed to St. Petersburg serving as a new hub for the China Railway Express. As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU imposed tough sanctions on Russia and countersanctions followed. Companies faced extra uncertainty and obstacles to transporting goods through Russia. Geopolitical unease, restrictions on the movement of goods across the new Eurasian land bridge, and rising energy prices on top of an ongoing container crisis, supply chain issues, and shipping issues negatively impact the massive global demand for Chinese exports. Also, the Chinese BRI can be considered a formidable competitor to the Russian Northern Sea Route (NSR) for trade transportation via the Arctic and its melting ice caps. For the past ten years, Russia has been actively pitching the NSR as an alternative to the traditional southern Suez Canal which is one third longer to connect Europe's largest markets and the Asia-Pacific region. EU sanctions on Russia affecting the BRI represented a massive blow to China and an opportunity for Russia to demolish the Chinese BRI and develop its own.

Consequently, in September 2022 Chinese President Xi Jinping decided to explore more depth in other friendships working with Turkey on developing the Middle Corridor elevating the Sino-Turkish strategic cooperative relationship to a higher level. In the grand scheme of things, this seems an appropriate and cunning decision as Russia has little to offer that is particularly valuable in reversing China's trend of slowing growth. Putin's assertiveness is attracting isolation from democracies that show more togetherness again and which are China's biggest customers. The choice for Turkey is a sagacious socio-economic signal for (literally) rebuilding the bridge with its export partners through an authoritarian regime with a globally appreciated mediating role in the conflict. In China's 100-year plan to become the world's dominant superpower, the conflict in Ukraine is merely a minor blip on the sidebar chart. Conveniently, it serves as the perfect masquerade for a Chinese proxy war in Ukraine with all its rivals dislocating each other allowing for more space for an American proxy war to surface. Sitting back and inflicting considerable psychological exhaustion on all its rivals at once is another perfect Art of War performance by China

ready to strike once Chinese economic growth allows to finally uphold their territorial claims to Taiwan.

3.4 *The start of ww3 in slow motion?*

Open nuclear blackmail by Putin left the world in 2022 wondering if World War III was about to start. Only eight years before, at a summit on nuclear security in The Hague, Obama stated that Russia would no longer be the United States' principal geopolitical foe. He described Russia as no more than a "regional power" whose annexation of Crimea was labelled an expression of weakness. However, Russia's rich nuclear arsenal is everything but just a regional danger.

Some comfort in uncertain times was ironically to be found in the idea that global media was barking up the wrong alley. Not Russia but China was the silent future top dog to keep your eyes on to avoid a more disastrous scenario. A total disaster had been avoided with Taiwan not being part of a coordinated effort of an invasion by the Chinese Mainland in the chaotic aftermath of the Russian ambush. A back-to-back Sino-Russian alliance and double invasion would have left NATO with very little space to respond in any other way that did not lead to ww3. More importantly, when adapting to this new spiralling violence the question became not if but when China would invade Taiwan and ww3 would start.

More and more US officials (including a CIA deputy director and a top naval officer) stated that Xi aims for his military to be capable of seizing Taiwan by 2027 and they expect that Washington and Beijing are headed for a test of strength in the next three to five years⁷⁹. A plethora of factors would play into this such as the accumulation of the necessary amphibious landing ships, a potential election of Taiwan independence worker William Lai, and the end of Xi Jinping's third term in 2027. Perhaps more realistically, according to Zhu Jianrong, a professor at Toyo Gakuen University in Tokyo, it makes little sense for China to embark on a lengthy battle over Taiwan draining China's cof-

⁷⁹ Z. JIANRONG, *China and Taiwan: Strategic Patience and Geopolitical Realities*, in "Asia-Pacific Journal of International Affairs", January 2023.

fers. Having been not ready to take a great opportunity to invade in the aftermath of the Russian invasion, China can be expected to prioritize catching up with the U.S. in overall national power while avoiding a full-front conflict until then. After that, it could coercively push for what it has wanted for a long time. In other words, the world should be fine until 2030, so to speak.

A January 2023 survey from the Atlantic Council indicates that almost half of top foreign policy experts think Russia will become a failed state or break up by 2033, but a majority also believe that by that time China will invade Taiwan. Prepare for the worst, and hope for the best then? In the meantime, it would be wise for Europe to increasingly use the togetherness momentum to continue to carefully address economic issues in a coordinated response to avoid having to sit around the table with an ever-stronger Chinese stranglehold around its neck.

4. *The Russo-Ukraine war: a dent to Africa's*

4.1 *Africa's vulnerable position*

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, marked a major escalation of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict which began earlier in 2014. The war sent aftershocks across the world and has since resulted in thousands of deaths on both sides, causing Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II. Moreover, both Russia and Ukraine play a major role both in the global agricultural market hence the conflict has placed wheat and other grains at the center of geopolitics and has further revealed Africa's intense dependence on grain and fertilizer from both Ukraine and Russia.

Within sub-Saharan Africa, the consequences of the war have derailed the region's promising recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in four key areas: post-COVID interventions, food security, trade in goods and services, and collection of government revenues. According to Ahunna Eziakonwa, Assistant Secretary General and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the combined aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the War has led to increased food and fuel prices and disruptions of trade in goods and services, subse-

quently tightening the fiscal space and constraining green transitions⁸⁰. This has further reduced trade and taxation revenues, subsequently reducing the flow of development finance for governments across the region, and forcing countries to spend more on social safety nets but with less income and increased public indebtedness.

Prior to the war, there were significant agricultural trade ties between African countries and both Russia and Ukraine. According to data on Russia-Africa trade exchanges compiled by the Ecofin Agency based on figures from TradeMap, the WTO database dedicated to international trade, Africa depends on Russia for 40 percent of its grain supplies, and imports seven times more goods than it exports to the country⁸¹. In 2020 for example, African countries imported agricultural products worth \$4 billion from Russia, comprised of 90 percent wheat and 6 percent sunflower oil. Major importing countries were Egypt, which accounted for nearly half of the imports, followed by Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Kenya, and South Africa. Similarly, Ukraine exported \$2.9 billion worth of agricultural products to the African continent in 2020. About 48 percent of this was wheat, 31 percent maize, while the rest included sunflower oil, barley, and soybeans.

According to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Food Price Index in January 2022, averaged 136 points up by one percent from December 2021, its highest since April 2011⁸². In 2021 for example, Kenya imported almost 30 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, meaning that supply disruption affected the production of bread, the third most consumed food item in the country. Likewise, in West Africa, the disruption of fertilizer supplies from Russia just close to the planting season, poses major food security concerns. Moreover, the Russia-Ukraine conflict coincided with a drought in South America, which further increased the demand for grains and oilseeds in India and China, subsequently adding more

⁸⁰ A. EZIAKONWA, Discussion with Regional Director and Assistant Secretary General for UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, Ms Ahunna Eziakonwa, 2022 at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/russias-war-ukraine-taking-toll-africa>.

⁸¹ Ecofin Agency (2022). *Africa imports seven times more Russian products than it exports to Moscow* <https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/0903-43450-africa-imports-seven-times-more-russian-products-than-it-exports-to-moscow>.

⁸² FAO (2022). Food Price Index: World Food Situation. Rome at <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>.

pressure on consumers in Africa, who have already experienced food price rises for two years. Conversely, Russia and Ukraine's agricultural imports from the continent are marginal, averaging only \$1,6 billion over the last three years, with the dominant products limited to fruits, tobacco, coffee, and beverages in both countries.

Beyond food and agricultural needs, African countries are likely to suffer from a shortage of building materials and fuel. For countries like Ghana which depend on Ukraine for 60 percent of their iron ore and steel needs, the construction industry is likely to face significant challenges.

4.2 When Europe sneezes, Africa catches the flu

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, African countries had managed to put into place some effective macroeconomic policies and had made strategic investments to boost COVID-19 vaccine production and rollout. By the end of 2021, Africa exceeded expectations recording 4 percent economic growth, subsequently showing resilience and determination to bounce back. Although the recovery was fragile, the continent appeared to be back on track toward attaining the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Besides, multilateralism appeared to have been expanding in Africa, while it was shrinking in the rest of the world.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, various development projects in African countries have either been postponed or cancelled, as some development partners are discouraged by increased costs while others are forced to divert funds, to meet the humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Europe. Meanwhile, downgraded credit ratings have increased borrowing costs for African countries. UNDP research shows that biased credit ratings could be costing six African countries \$13 billion in additional interest rate payments, meaning that Africa is borrowing at a much higher cost than the rest of the world. Examples are Tanzania, where overall inflation spiked by 34 percent between February and April 2022; Namibia, where transportation costs rose by 20 percent between March and April 2022; and Cameroon, where food prices increased by 26 percent between February and March in the same year⁸³. According

⁸³ <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/06/russias-war-ukraine-taking-toll-africa> (Accessed July 04, 2022).

to UN reports, imported inflation is one of the most pernicious effects of the war. Furthermore, there are signs of less funding towards Africa's development, hence countries in the region are likely to lag behind their counterparts in other parts of the world. To avert such a situation, African leaders need to redefine their relationship with their development partners towards purposeful cooperation rather than charity.

In 2021, Ukraine supplied grain to approximately 400 million people around the world. However, during the first five months of the war, Ukraine was unable to export its grain through its primary shipping routes through the Black Sea, subsequently disrupting food supply to several grain-receiving countries across the Middle East and Africa, which were already experiencing severe food insecurity due to conflict and climate change. In July 2022, Ukraine and Russia entered into separate deals which paved the way for Ukraine to resume its grain exports, a crucial step in providing relief to the growing global hunger crisis⁸⁴. After a temporary suspension by Russia, the International Red Cross (IRC) welcomed the extension of this deal by a further four months in November 2022, calling for more interventions by the international community to ensure that regular and predictable food shipments urgently reach those on the brink of starvation and to enable Ukraine's farmers to safely grow and transport crops to the ports.

4.3 *Multilateralism in crisis?*

In his famous work concerning paradigms, paradigm shifts, and scientific revolutions Thomas Kuhn (1922-96) suggested that 'no natural history can be interpreted in the absence of at least some implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief that permits selection, evaluation, and criticism'⁸⁵. History reminds us that multilateral arrangements born amidst post-war hopes of cooperation quickly learned to function in divided environments throughout the Cold War. Lessons drawn from past experiences show that democratic nations can address

⁸⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/22/ukraine-russia-sign-un-backed-deal-restart-grain-exports> (Accessed on July 30, 2022).

⁸⁵ T.S. KUHN, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 50th Anniversary Edition, 4th ed. 2022, Chicago, University Press.

increasing geopolitical challenges, by supporting measured collaboration on issues of mutual concern, strengthening avenues for averting conflict, and competing selectively within existing and new institutions to defend democratic values against authoritarian rivals. Unfortunately, competition among superpowers casts a shadow over current multilateral systems.

Against this backdrop, the war in Ukraine presents a clear danger to multilateralism. However, several African states hold a cynical view of a multilateral order whose rules were made and imposed by the West. They recall the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s when the subsequent break-up of the Soviet Union and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall marked a new shift in the West. In the absence of potential Soviet threats from Russia, Western support to Africa declined drastically, causing major setbacks in development planning. This skepticism is demonstrated by the manner in which African countries voted on March 02, 2022, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted, by an overwhelming majority of 141 against five, a resolution condemning Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, demanding the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces, and urging the Kremlin to adhere to the international law. For example, Djibouti endorsed the UN resolution for Russia to end its offensive, while Algeria, Tanzania, and South Africa underscored the importance of diplomacy without condemning Russia's actions. Although African States represented the highest number of the 35 abstentions, the votes revealed sharp divisions between countries. Nonetheless, this was widely interpreted as a sign of Russian influence and evidence of the growing anti-Westernism of African governments⁸⁶.

Multilateralism is essentially a set of rules and methods that international actors agree to follow and implement on the basis of shared principles that are binding to all, irrespective of one's power, and reflects a preference for norms over force. According to Mass and Le Drian, the multilateral order relies on robust trust and commitment within the framework of international cooperation, the quest for joint solutions, and strong and effective institutions⁸⁷. Over the years, mul-

⁸⁶ Paragraph 10 of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution of 2 March 2022.

⁸⁷ H. MAAS, J.-Y. LE DRIAN, 'Who, if not us?', Article by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and Jean-Yves Le Drian (France) at the Munich Security Conference. in the "Süddeutsche Zeitung" 14 February 2019. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/germany/events/article/who-if-not-us-15-02-19> (accessed 21/03/2020).

tilateralism has been operating through organizations, institutions, and bespoke mechanisms, often based in treaties and international law, grounded fundamentally, in the UN Charter, which has been crucial in preserving peace, fostering prosperity, addressing common threats, and defending democratic values.

It remains to be seen whether the actors in the current war will embrace multilateralism and diplomacy for peace. In his visit to the United States of America on December 22, 2022, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy sought direct seek help from Congress to assist Ukrainians to stop Europe's most brutal war since Adolf Hitler⁸⁸. Despite Zelenskyy's impassioned appeal, it is uncertain whether the US will intervene directly in the war.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine not only reshapes the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe but also poses significant challenges and opportunities for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), particularly the Eastern Partnership (EaP). As we navigate through these turbulent times, it becomes crucial to reassess the strategic objectives and operational frameworks of the ENP to ensure it remains relevant and effective in fostering stability, security, and prosperity in the region. Moreover, adverse spillover affects countries globally including those in Africa that cannot be underestimated.

The future of the ENP and its Eastern dimension (EaP) hinges on their ability to adapt to the emerging new balance of power and to address the inherent flaws that have historically undermined their efficacy. The inclusion of global actors such as China and Africa in the equation introduces additional dynamics that the European Union must consider to uphold its interests and values while promoting a collaborative and inclusive approach to regional security and development.

As the war potentially draws to a close, the lessons learned from past shortcomings must inform the redesign of the ENP. This involves

⁸⁸ J. RUPERT, Ukraine's Zelenskyy Asks: Can We Shorten This War?, December 22, 2022 at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/12/ukraines-zelenskyy-asks-can-we-shorten-war>.

embracing a more pragmatic and flexible approach, prioritizing direct benefits to the partner countries, and enhancing engagement with civil society to ensure that reforms are comprehensive and sustainable. Moreover, the EU must navigate its relationship with Russia with a clear strategy that balances deterrence with dialogue, ensuring that any future cooperation is grounded in a firm commitment to uphold international law and respect for sovereignty.

Ultimately, the ENP and its (EaP) stand at a crossroads, where strategic recalibration can transform these policies into more effective tools for peace and integration. By fostering greater regional cooperation and strengthening multilateral ties, the EU can not only secure its own borders but also contribute to a more stable and prosperous global order. The success of this endeavor will require a concerted effort from all stakeholders involved, guided by the lessons of the past and a clear vision for the future.

Riassunto - Il saggio tratta in primo luogo il futuro della politica europea di vicinato, e in particolare la sua dimensione orientale: la guerra in corso potrebbe infatti offrire l'opportunità di affrontare i problemi che fino a ora ne hanno limitato l'efficacia. L'invasione russa ha infatti messo in luce le debolezze strutturali della tale politica europea di vicinato in materia di sicurezza e cooperazione, rendendone necessaria una revisione per affrontare la mutevole realtà geopolitica, tenendo conto degli interessi strategici della Russia. In presenza di due paesi candidati all'adesione all'Unione, inoltre, l'unico approccio praticabile è quello differenziato, che cioè tenga conto dei bisogni e degli interessi dei partner. Vengono poi esaminati i nuovi obiettivi emergenti: connettività, digitalizzazione, transizione verde, oltre alle necessarie riforme democratiche. Vengono trattate successivamente le implicazioni dell'alleanza sino-russa dopo l'attacco all'Ucraina, con particolare riguardo all'interazione tra le tattiche aggressive russe e le ambizioni strategiche cinesi: viene esaminato inoltre il ruolo emergente dell'Africa nella strategia dell'Unione.

Quanto al conflitto ucraino, dal punto di vista della Russia questo potrebbe concludersi al tavolo dei negoziati, ma un approccio strategico a lungo termine è fondamentale per gestirne le conseguenze. La Russia cerca infatti stabilità e influenza adattando le alleanze e gestendo il sostegno interno per garantire i propri interessi geopolitici in un contesto globale in evoluzione. Inoltre, sempre analizzando le relazioni sino-russe, il saggio valuta l'atteggiamento cauto della Cina, caratterizzato dalla riluttanza a sostenere pienamente le azioni militari russe: gli interessi diplomatici, economici e geopolitici della Cina sono infatti influenzati negativamente dal conflitto, che pone sfide anche alla *Belt and Road Initiative* e alla crescente influenza della Cina in Africa. Infine, il conflitto ha interrotto le importazioni di alimentari e fertilizzanti in Africa, causando aumento dei prezzi e del debito pubblico, nonché battute d'arresto negli sforzi di ripresa economica. Le nazioni africane rimangono poi divise sul conflitto, enfatizzando la diplomazia e la cooperazione, mentre mostrano scetticismo verso un ordine multilaterale dominato dall'Occidente.