



**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
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**European Union - Russia relations after the annexation of  
Crimea**

**Confirmation of Neorealism?**

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## **1. Introduction**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the East-West conflict, the most influential theory of the International Relations in that time, the Realism theory, has come under pressure for failing to offer an explanation. It seems that the European states will primarily start to cooperate now, instead of having a political conflict running between them. "At least until the shock of September 11, 2001, the belief was widespread that the end of the Cold War had transformed international politics from a largely competitive arena to one of cooperation. Thus the realist stock-in-trade - the inevitability of conflict and war in an anarchic system - seemed hopelessly out of date" (Snyder, 2002, p. 168). On 26 December 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated and with it, a Global Player, which for a long time was acting as a regional hegemon. The new independent Russian Federation, which was the official heir of the Soviet Union, was ready to participate along the other countries in a new and peaceful European society. Examples for this kind of politics were the ideas of Mikhail Gorbachevs "Common European Home" or Boris Yeltsins "Bring Russia back to Europe" in order to integrate them again in the world (Mommsen 2008, p. 284). The new established peace settlement in Europe between old rivals started to destroy the old Realism theory and Neorealism beliefs. "Rapprochement between Britain and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and the success of the European Union in transforming Europe's geopolitical landscape both cast doubt on the notion that balancing and destructive rivalry are inescapable features of international life" (Kupchan, 2003, p. 751). Advocates and representatives of other major theories of International Relations, such as Liberalism and Institutionalism, saw that the Realistic approach is too pessimistic and fallen out of time. The fact is, that countries which were on brink of war with each other in the Cold War, work together now in institutions like e.g. the Council of Europe to bring peace and prosperity, which led to a major loss of Realism supporters.

However, the recent political developments in eastern Europe give the reason to assume, that the durability and stability of the European peace is overestimated. With the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation, the Ukraine crisis itself and the European economic sanctions against Russia after the annexation, these problems led to a new low in the relations between the European Union and Russia. Even the term

"Cold War" was used again by experts, showing how desperate the situation of the crisis really is (Markedonov, 2015, p. 3). Although this formulation is quite controversial and many analysts estimate the whole situation less dramatic, it is still clear that the Ukraine crisis is more than only a passing phase of diplomatic tension, but more a really low point in the European Union - Russia relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. To show how drastic the situation has become, the politicians in Brussels even started to punish and condemn the leadership in Moscow for the actions they took in Ukraine. The sanctions against Russia, both in terms of the addresses as well as in their complexity is unprecedented. Thus, the supporters of the school of Realism found to be right in their assumptions. The famous representative of the "offensive Realism", John Mearsheimer, wrote in a recent article the following thoughts: "Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of international politics" (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 77f.). In contradiction to the dominant European narratives, that claim that Russia has acted unpredictable aggressively in Ukraine, Mearsheimer provides the assertion that the annexation of the Crimea was not only foreseeable, but even provoked directly by the Western states over the years.

This lead to a very daring hypothesis, but also opens up a very interesting question. Did the "new orthodoxy" of Liberal and Constructivism blinded the European politics in the international system? Were wrong decisions made because it has neglected the Neorealist perspective, thus overseeing wrong doings and ignoring warning signs in EU relations with Russia? Can Neorealism offer a coherent and better interpretation of EU - Russian relation?

Mearsheimer writes in his essays about the Western powers, which in this case would be the NATO and EU states together. Russia sees the expansions of the NATO alliance as a threat to its own survivability, which is already know by the European states and the United States. NATO is a pure military alliance and dominated in its politics by the U.S. But can the relationship between Russia and the "peace power" European Union open up in the Realism perspective? Mearsheimer supports this and argues that the European Union with its steady expansions put more and more pressure on the sphere of

influence of Russia. "In May 2008, it unveiled its Eastern Partnership initiative, a program to foster prosperity in such countries as Ukraine and integrate them into the EU economy. Not surprisingly, Russian leaders view the plan as hostile to their country's interests" (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 79). This view seems not unfounded at all, after all, there was no action of NATO which led to the Ukraine crisis. Ultimately, it was the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine, which set up the chain of events in motion, that eventually led to the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the war in Donbass. The central question that arises is the following: Can the European Union - Russia relations be coherent explained, also in the 1990s, with the theory of Realism and had it foreseen such an open conflict?

In order to successfully achieve this work will be planned as following: it will analyze the whole history between Russia and EU chronologically. For practical purposes the thesis will choose "milestones" in the bilateral relationship, rather than analyzing each year. Deciding which events, contracts or agreements are to be considered in detail and which not, is indeed challenging, but poses no major problem to the study. In order to clarify if the Neorealism school can better explain the EU-Russia development than the other theories, it is more important to have an overall view, rather than analyzing specific events. Theories of the International Relations rarely reflect hundred percent the reality, thus making single events not confirming or denying the theory, but showing the necessity of a overall view. It is also important to see if the history of the relationship between EU and Russia resembles any basics of Neorealism.

After the fall of the Soviet Union on 31 December 1991, Russia became independent and could act as a sovereign state in the foreign affairs. Nevertheless, the challenges and problems of post communism transformation were the main focus of the Russian politicians. Because of this reason, the foreign policy in the first years after the transformation was not prioritized and thus not that many information are available. Because of this fact, the period of the nineties are going to be analyzed in only one chapter, due to its lack of happenings and information relevant to this project. The start of the cooperation between Russia and EU can be found in the year 1997 when a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was sign, which started the relationship between the two actors. The PCA has been considered one of the most important and extensive contract between the EU and the Russian Federation (Bastian, 2006, p. 78).

Therefore, we can predict to gain a high knowledge from this document, because this agreement holds the expectations of both sides and on how the collaboration should look like in the future. Furthermore the "Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia" (1999) and the "Medium-Term Strategy" (1999) will also be analyzed in the same chapter. Both papers are particularly interesting as they are seen as a direct response to the publications of the European strategy (Ibid., p. 121).

The next chapter will investigate the time period from 2000 until the end of 2004. This decision was made, mainly because the Orange Revolution in Ukraine clearly started the first integration contest for Ukraine between Moscow and Brussels. As a result, there was a turnaround from good cooperation to a more confrontational negotiating climate. After this point the relationship started to change, but until the year 2004, the main focus of the analysis will be on the concept of the "Four Common Spaces", the EU enlargement from 2004, the "European Neighborhood Policy" (ENP) and the Orange Revolution.

The following chapter represents the most quantitatively largest part, because it will show the most important stages of the EU - Russia relation from 2005 until the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Following important stages are going to be mentioned: the first Russian - Ukraine gas dispute, the war in Georgia in 2008, "The concept of the Eastern Partnership", the establishment of the Custom Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia in 2010 and the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in 2013. Thus, the chronological history is relatively well covered and allows a coherent judgment of the development.

The last substantive chapter is the escalation of the Ukraine conflict, which starts with the Euromaidan and the fall of Viktor Yanukovich. The question which is particularly interesting is, whether the actions of the two actors are coherent with their previous bilateral cooperation. Finally, in the last part, a summary will be made from the obtained information and a conclusion will be drawn with an outlook on the possible further developments.

## **1.1 Methodology / Theoretical approach (Neorealism)**

As the founder of the Neorealist paradigm, the U.S. political scientist Kenneth Waltz is typically named, who in the year 1979 published the book "Theory of International Politics", which developed the already known Realism theory. Since then, many writers have further developed and adapted the theory, so you can hardly speak of one pure "Neorealism Theory" but rather of a variety of theories. It can include the different aspects of Neorealism, such as defensive or offensive Neorealism. In this work the offensive Neorealism developed in the book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" by the US political scientist John Joseph Mearsheimer will be used as the main theory. This approach is particularly interesting in term of the research question, since in 2001 Mearsheimer spoke directly about Russia who would use military force if necessary: "Russia's actions in the breakaway republic of Chechnya make clear that it is willing to wage a brutal war if it thinks its vital interests are threatened" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 507).

Mearsheimer offensive Neorealism shares many of the fundamental and structuring assumptions of Waltz's model. The international system provides the framework in which all intergovernmental interactions take place. His most essential characteristic features is anarchy. This however must not necessarily cause conflict and contains no normative aspect: "By itself, however, the realist notion of anarchy has nothing to do with conflict; it is an ordering principle, which says that the system comprises independent states that have no central authority above them" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 57.). National states ensure the highest level of authority; there is no actor who could control and command them. Even modern projects, like the United Nations, serve only as a institutionalized form of communication and exchange between the states and has no authority over them.

A second essential Neorealist feature is the constant insecurity. The lack of a central world government means that states can be attacked and have no other measures to stop it. Thus, many states try to accumulate power in order to ensure their own survival ability and do not let other states attack them. "When all states have capabilities for doing each other harm, each is driven to amass as much power as it can to be secure as possible against attack" (Snyder, 2002, p. 151).



From this assumption, it ultimately results the classic security dilemma. Once a state increases its capabilities, it automatically worsens the relations to other states. Thus, the other states will try to gain more power of their own in order to increase their own security and protection. "The essence of the dilemma is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decreases the security of other states" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 64). This results in mostly in a continuous arms race, as it was for example between the NATO and the Warsaw Pact in the Cold War era. For the question which strategy is best to deal with this kind of arms race, Mearsheimer position and answer is different than Waltz.

Waltz assumes that the primary aim of all the states in the international community is to secure their own existence. Thus, their actions would be base on the cost-benefit result, with the result that they cannot have indefinitely more power, but they only seek enough power in order to secure the status quo in the international system. The argument was not accepted by Mearsheimer. States in offensive Realism are aggressive and imperialistic because their goal is to take a dominant position in the international community. The international community, which is uncertain to provide peace, drive the states to a competitive power race, in order to reduce the dangers (Hartmann, 2009, p. 33). But this does not mean that the countries have always to act aggressively. Also in Mearsheimer approach, the actual behavior of a state is always dependant on whether a state state can benefit from the aggressive behavior. Thus, small states are not eager to confront with big neighbours, knowing their weak army and economy could not face them on the long run. "Behavior is influenced not only by what the states want, but also by their capacity to realize these desire. Every state might want to be king of the hill, but not every state has the wherewithal to complete for that lofty position, much less achieve it" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 66). This means, the more power a state gains, the bigger is the probability to be aggressive and offensive in the international system.

However, it is also possible for a state in the offensive Realism theory to be peaceful and cooperative, as long as their primary goal of accumulating power is not interrupted by this policy. Mearsheimer writes, that states are always striving to improve their prosperity, as long as they do not contradict their own security interests. This means, that even states which see each other as threats can agree e.g. on a free trade agreement.

This will only happen though, if both actors believe that neither sides would gain a greater benefit from the agreement as themselves would.

In Europe after the end of the Cold War, there was no regional hegemon, thus making the situation here extremely complex. Mearsheimer declares that the regional stability was only manageable due to the fact that U.S. military forces were stationed on the European continent. "Mearsheimer shares the widespread belief that peace [...] is currently being sustained by the "American pacifier", the physical presence of U.S. troops" (Snyder, 2002, p. 168). Other writers claim that Russia, due to its resources, military presence and size should be the natural hegemon for this area (Hartmann, 2009, p. 34). Russia's nuclear armament is the decisive power resources that the country has in comparison to e.g. Germany, which has to ensure the help of the U.S. in order to achieve that much power. Mearsheimer claims that the western European states do not have the freedom of action in foreign policy required to achieve a hegemonic position, because: "America's allies have little maneuver room in their foreign policy, because of the presence of U.S. troops on their territory. The United States continues to occupy Western Europe and to dominate NATO decision making, much the way it did during the Cold War, not only making war amongst its members unlikely, but also making it difficult for any of those states (especially Germany) to cause trouble with Russia" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 511).

This would, according to the theory of the offensive Realism result in a bipolar system. However in this present work, this point would probably not be shared by Mearsheimer. The European Union will be seen as a state actor. Mearsheimer claims that the European Union lost most its relevance in the international system: "Although there are a handful of impressive institutions in Europe, such as NATO and the European Union, there is little evidence that they can compel member states to act against their strategic interests" (Ibid., p. 488). For the analysis of the EU - Russia relations, it would be practical to treat the EU as a single actor in order to better analyze the foreign policy. This matter can be justified also by the Russian side, since many agreements (PCA, EU enlargement etc.) were carried out with the blessing of the Russian government seeing the EU as a single actor.

One last point that must be mentioned, is that Mearsheimer assumptions concerning the behavior of a state that is wanting to expand with another actor that is being confronted,

meaning that an actor which is winning power puts the other actor in a defensive mode. In accordance to the offensive Realism, a defensive state has two counter strategies: "Balancing" and "Buck-passing". "Balancing means acting to preserve an existing distribution of power (e.g. by supporting a state that is challenged by a revisionist state). Buck-passing is to hold back and take no action, with the intent of shifting the burden of resistance onto an ally or some other state" (Snyder, 2002, p. 161). Buck-passing is at this point negligible in the relationship with Russia. The Russian Federation has no relevant allies in Europe, thus they cannot rely on an external support in a conflict. So the only remaining possibility is that of the balancing the scale of power in Europe, as they see their own position compromised. Balancing means that a state takes its fate into their own hand, so that the power shift will not expose them as a weak actor. This can be done in various ways: "First, they can send clear signals to the aggressor through diplomatic channels [...] that they are firmly committed to maintaining the balance of power, even if it means going to war. [...] Second, threatened states can work to create a defensive alliance to help them contain their dangerous opponent. [...] Third, threatened states can balance against an aggressor by mobilizing additional resources of their own" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 218). However, not all three procedures are realistic. Thus, Russian could not find in Europe any relevant actors for a defensive alliance, since all of them are already in the NATO or EU. The mobilization of local resources is always a possibility, but often is the effect limited. Which course of action is being used at the end, mostly depends of the situation and what the government thinks is the best strategy in that specific case.

Although the theory of the offensive Realism can be done on another hundreds of pages, the core message is clear. All countries are committed to maximize their own power and will use everything in order to obtain this, everything they consider realistic and would bring success. The more a country sees its own position in danger, the more likely it shall start using drastic measures in order to contain the threat.

## **1.2 Literature review**

As already mentioned, the nineties were dominated by Constructivism and Liberal theories. Thus, there was no expert opinion for a long time and no expertise on the

extent to which the relationship between the EU - Russia could have been explained by the Neorealist theory. During the East-West conflict, this was different. Hedley Bull, a well-known British professor of International Relations, explained in 1982 in his essay "Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" that the European community should form a military cooperation in order to oppose Moscow, without the support of the United States. Bull itself summarizes it together: "What I am advocating in a Western European military alliance, with appropriate machinery attached to it" (Bull, 1982, p. 164). This is an obvious Realistic assumptions based on the idea of a necessary balance of power between Russia and Western Europe.

Ian Manners analyzed the work of Bull and made a reference in the year 2002 in his essay "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms". The basic idea is following: "The concept on a normative power is an attempt to suggest that not only is the EU constructed on a normative basis, but importantly that this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics" (Manners, 2002, p. 252). The concept was a prime example of the at the time prevailing Constructivism and the importance of values and ideas for the international relations between states. The U.S. sociologist Jeremy Rifkin summed the approach in his popular book "The European Dream" with this words: "European foreign policy is build on spreading peace rather than amassing power" (Rifkin, 2004, p. 297).

With the increasing tensions between Brussels and Moscow, the Neorealist theory gain new importance. Richard Youngs, a British professor of International Relations stated: "Cosmopolitan liberalism has been squeezed form the analytical script by recrudescent conservative realism, on the one hand, and the rise of critical theory, on the other hand" (Youngs, 2010, p. 6). It was not a fast process. In many cases, the Neorealist theory was not completely took over, but filled with Constructivist or Liberal approaches in order to fill the gaps. Andrei Tsygankov, a U.S. professor of International Relations, writes in his book "Russia and the West form Alexander to Putin" the following: "This book does not neglect realist theories, but argues for combining both realism and constructivism" (Tsygankov, 2012, p. 7).

In the end, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation helped the Neorealist theory to a new renaissance in the analytical literature. The Romanian Florin Pasaroiu, who works at the Russian Foreign Ministry wrote in 2014 in the Romanian Journal of

European Affairs: "Hence it is our neorealist based argument that following closely on Russia foreign policy paradigm one could have predicted Russia potential moves, not being neutral while its strategic 'neighbour' turned into a Western bastion" (Pasaroiu, 2014, p. 22). He refers in particular to Mearsheimer and his offensive Realism theory.

The new articles which are packed with Neorealist thinking after the Ukraine crisis are found so far especially in short articles of journals. The following work will use and analyze them. The aim is to explain how much of the theory of Neorealism in the EU - Russia relations from the nineties until the Ukraine crisis was used and checked as being meaningful. This should explain and clarify if the reemergence of the theory is justified or not.

## **2. Political cooperation in the 1990s**

### **2.1 The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement**

The first important and basic agreement that was made between the EU and Russia, after the end of the Cold War was over, was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). This agreement was signed on 24 June 1994, but ratified only on the 1st January 1997 and came into force in December that same year. It was the crown jewel of agreements in that time in the international community (List, 2011, p. 227). In order to completely understand the agreement, the historical context has to be taken into consideration.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the situation in Europe changed dramatically. The European Union was technically more modern and had an economic superiority, which led to an unbalanced power relation between the two actors. The economically shattered and politically unstable Russia was inferior to the EU, NATO and the U.S. (Schulze, 2008, p. 139). The only remaining power of the Russians was that Europe was still dependent of their energy exports. According to data from 1999 the natural gas imports into the EU were at 41 percent and on oil at ca. 18 percent (Bastian, 2006, p. 74). This of course did not change the fact that Russia had the weaker bargaining position. Russia needed the money in order to modernize the industry and state, thus making these exports a necessity. However, due to the fact that the country still had a large amount of nuclear weapons, it was granted a special status in its relation with the

EU. Although Russia of the nineties could not negotiate eye to eye with the EU, it had still a more significant position than other post-Soviet states. The PCA reflects these conditions, as mostly everything what the EU suggested was accepted by Russian side, showing how imposing the EU was at that moment.

The agreement shows how the position of the actors also influenced the goals they had for each other. The European Union was driven by its strong normative power in the negotiations. The aim was to let Russia approach the West in its economy and political views (Bastian, 2006, p. 76). Russia should basically get the a European *acquis communautaire* membership, without able to decide or get a membership perspective for the EU. Article 55 of the PCA specifies that Russia should get its legislation to be in concordance with the Unions law. Although the agreement did not have any deadlines or binding measures to secure the imposed will, it still show how weak the position of the Russian Federation was in that agreement. It would be unthinkable e.g. that the EU would agree that the Russian law to be implemented on any point on their own, but seeing the necessity of doing it in order to get economic assistance provided by the EU, the Russian leadership agreed onto it. Yeltsin, the Russian President at that point, was interested in helping his own country, no matter the cost. In conclusion, both parties wanted to realize with the PCA their own goals at that moment.

The conditions are reflected in the PCA agreement in many articles. Most of them refer to economic cooperation or imposing Western values in Russia's law. In Article 3, a long-term goal was formulated, as the EU and Russia seek to establish a free trade area if the circumstances permit it (Council of the EU, 1997, p. 5). The establishment of a free trade zone would mean that Russia's economy would gain access to one of the largest economies in the world. This has been a central point in the negotiations for the Russian side. However, during the duration of the negotiation, the EU kept the Article 3 as their own decision to make, whenever Russia is permitted to have this privilege. "Initially, the EU had been reluctant to include even this reference and Moscow was very displeased to find itself being treated so much less generously than its former CMEA partners" (Webber, 2000, p. 74). This show how desperate Russia was and what of a great importance this article was for them. Russia manage to get some own goals into this economic cooperation treaty as well, e.g. agreeing for foreign investors to settle in Russia in order to bring prosperity or to eliminate tariff barriers in its exchange with

the EU. Thus, they are hoping for a technical modernization and diversification in order to start their economic growth.

Since most of the articles were of an economic measure, it seems likely that the EU just wanted to introduce its normative ideas in the agreement. In addition to the expectation that Russia can be on a long term a *acquis communautaire* member, the agreement shows even more ideas. Especially worth mentioning is the Article 107, which implies that the EU has the right to end their support if the moral and political values imposed by the EU are not hold on to by the Russians. Rights like accepting the human rights, particularly those of a minority or establishing a multiparty system with free and democratic elections are to be respected (Council of the EU, 1997, p. 4). Concrete measures or ideas of how these ambitions goals are to be achieved are missing, making it hard for Kremlin to be able to deal with them without support from outside (Sieg, 2012, p. 152).

Given the obvious focus of the EU on the persecution of normative objectives, the question arises if the PCA can be explained by the Neorealist theory. At least for the Russian side it seems to be the case. In the nineties, Russia had incredible military power, but was way behind the economy of the Western states. Indeed the offensive Realism emphasizes the importance of military power, but Mearsheimer recognizes that a state need a good economy in order to support it. "Wealth is important because a state cannot build a powerful military if it does not have the money and technology to equip, train and continually modernize its fighting force" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 93). For Russia it made sense to start revitalizing and modernizing its economy, even if the ideology has to be changed. The concession that Russia made in the PCA were not obligatory. Thus, it was soon obvious that the intern reforms designed by the leadership of the Russian Federation would not be made after an European model. "Moscow's reluctance stemmed from a desire to control the pace of reform and to protect certain sectors of the economy" (Lynch, 2005, p. 19). This indicates that the Russian leadership had not interest in changing its moral and political values. This behavior was confirmed by the first Chechen war. Europe tried to convince Russia to settle the conflict by dialogue, Moscow though used military force, which was the reason that the PCA was only ratified in 1997. The political elite in Russia saw in NATO the only threat to their own security, the EU was classified a less geopolitical importance. "The EU's status as a

European rather than a Euro-Atlantic institution has increasingly been seen as one of its more attractive features and there has been a clear differentiation in Russian attitudes towards the EU and NATO, especially with regards to enlargement" (Webber, 2000, p. 69). This reflects the Russian behavior in the negotiations on the PCA, which was a more Realistic cost-benefit consideration. In Moscow it was speculated that the economic advantages could be made without making ideological concessions, and if possible to be ignored.

The following question that arises is what was the EU's main motivation to do this PCA. In the Realistic theory, Europe would not want Russia to gain power that would put in danger the safety of the Western states. In fact, the negotiations were not made out of altruistic motives by Brussels.

For the EU there are two motives that can be identified. One the one hand, the security factor and on the other the economical. In security terms, Europe wanted to stabilize the Russian state. Having a failing state, or losing the control over its nuclear weapons are too big of a risk, thus securing Russia as a democratic state was a primary goal (Sieg, 2012, p. 150). In Brussels was therefore a self-interest in supporting Russia to achieve at least a minimum of political stability.

In the same time, there was a obvious interest in a economical cooperation with Russia. The Russian Federation had at the beginning of the nineties a large potential market for foreign investors, mostly of them from Western states, to invest and modernize the country. Due to this factor, the business relationship was asymmetrical between the EU and Russia: the Russian state exported mainly unprocessed raw materials in the EU, while the European states exported mainly finished products (Webber, 2000, p. 70). On the long term this would benefit by far the economy of the Western states.

Overall it can be said, that both sides have legitimate reasons to think that the economic cooperation would benefit them more than the other side. The Western states speculated on improving their own economy by having a new market to invest in, while in Moscow they were content with the modernization of their country and industry though the know-how of the EU states. Geostrategic both parties were interested in stabilizing Russia, in order to create a peaceful international community. The PCA reflects both



sides interest and try to implement as much as possible of their own ideology into this agreement.

## **2.2 The EU's Common Strategy on Russia in 1999**

On 4 July 1999 the European Council adopted in Cologne the so called "Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia". The paper was intended to expand on the already existing PCA and set new future goals for the EU - Russia relations. Four major points were discussed and are identified. The first point was to consolidate democracy and backing up the institutions in Russia which are respecting the law (European Council, 1999, p. 15). These are now really new goals, but more likely they confirmed the already existing normative goals of the PCA. The list of reforms for Russia was now though more extensive and specific. "The list of actions that Russia was required to carry out was dizzying" (Lynch, 2005, p. 20). To the list of planned reforms included the training of administrative staff, as well as tax and financial experts, increase transparency and helping the banks to be healthy (Timmermann, 1999, p. 3). This means that the political practices of the EU should be transferred into Russia; the Russian Federation would be reformed by the EU rather than by itself. Such reforms are mainly offered to states that are candidates to join the EU, however, Russia never received such a membership offer. Of course these were just non-binding offers from Brussels, but it is clear they did not look at Russia as an equal partner. "The tone of the Common Strategy was at once condescending and vapid". (Lynch, 2005, p. 20).

The second main objective of the Common Strategy was to integrate Russia into the European economic and social area (European Council, 1999, p. 16). There were no concrete goals, due to the fact, that economy was already the dominant theme in the PCA.

The third objective that was mentioned in the cooperation agreement is that, in order to increase the stability and security in Europe, the two actors should talk more to each other. (Ibid., p. 17). The political dialogue should be maintained, but it is not really an interesting point, due to the fact that the EU and Russia should always consult each other in order to have an understanding of what both parties want from each other.

The last point is rather a major interest for the EU as it is for Russia. It about common challenges on the European continent, e.g. organized crime, money laundering, illegal immigration, human trafficking and drugs (Ibid., p. 17). That people are going to illegally immigrate in Russia seems rather unlikely. Basically it show the fear of the EU of what could happen if the Russian Federation destabilizes, all facts that were already mentioned in the PCA years before.

Overall, the new Common Strategy did not have really a lot of new content for the two parties. Although new aspects were discussed, the basic agreement which was already used in the PCA is still dominant. And even if the this new agreement shows how important Russia is seen as an equal partner by the Western countries, it is the tone from Brussels that remained the same: seeing Russia as an object that has to be formed after the ideals of the EU. Most of the goals are form older agreements and the PCA contained a lot of these ideas already (Bastian, 2006, p. 119).

The adaptation of the Common Strategy on Russia was more a political signal, than a practical plan for the future cooperation. It stressed out the aim of the EU, which is applying democratic laws and new ideas in Russia. And this was necessary after the Kosovo War in spring 1999, because the relation was agitated between the West and Russia. The leadership in Kremlin should have no fear of being excluded out of Europe, that was the main focus of this "Common Strategy" paper (Fischer, 2006, p. 15).

### **2.3 The Medium-Term Europe Strategy of Russia from 1999**

Although the strategic papers of the EU offered few new information, it was now Russia's turn to submit a development paper between the two actors. At the Helsinki summit in December 1999, the new Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, presented a new paper called "Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010) (Russian Federation, 1999). The Russian side lays for the first time concrete expectations of their future cooperation with the EU.

Analyzing the document it shows that the mid-term objectives diverge a lot from each party. For example, in the whole paper, you cannot find any mentions about democratic

values that have to be implemented in Russia (Mommsen, 2008, p.285). The Medium-term Strategy paper emphasizes the Russian sovereignty and its position as a great power in Europe. Thus for instance, point 1.1 claims the following: "Russia should retain its freedom to determinate and implement its domestic and foreign policies, its status and advantages of an Euro-Asian state and the largest country of the CIS, independence of its position and activities at international organizations" (Russian Federation, 1999). Russia granted the EU that reforms are coming and will be done, but it will be done accordingly to Russian interest and ideas, not those of the EU. The Medium-term Strategy paper show a growing Russian self-confidence. While the Common Strategy was based on the idea that Russia has to adapt to the laws imposed by the EU, now Moscow tries to show that they are equal partners, for example in point 1.8: "On the basis of reciprocity and the existing potential, Russia could contribute to the solution of a number of problems facing the European Union" (Russian Federation, 1999). This shows that Russia's time seeking developing assistance is over, that now it should be a mutual support relation between the two actors.

Moscow made clear in its strategy, that they are open for a deeper cooperation with the EU, but they would still pursue their own interests. Russia focuses on a pragmatic partnership, that should focus on common interests (Sieg, 2012, p. 154). Thus, the Russia side urged the EU, that in future enlargements, they should be more involved in the process. In point 5.2 they declare: "Before the next expansion of the European Union to conduct consultations with it, individual members and candidates aimed at securing Russia's interests as the rules of the EU [...] are extended to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states" (Russian Federation, 1999). It was no fundamental rejections against a further expansion of the EU, but rather that the process would weaken the Russian position in Europe.

In the next point of the Strategic paper, the Russian leadership was eager to announce which was the political and economic influence sphere where Moscow should have a saying: "Efforts will continue to be made [...] opposing possible attempts to hamper the economic integration in the CIS, in particular, though maintaining 'special relations' with individual countries of the Commonwealth to the detriment of Russia's interests" (Ibid.). Basically, Russia claimed a kind of veto for the relations between the international community and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In Europe, this

related specifically to Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. The Realistic view of Russia is that the group of states should see Moscow as one of the poles in a multipolar world. This shows that Russia and the EU are competing with each other, CIS belongs to the sphere of influence of the Federation while the rest of Eastern Europe is a shared area of interest together with the EU (Mommsen, 2008, p. 203).

Although there was no shortage of ambition from the Russian side, it clearly does not correspond to the actual power relation. The Medium-term strategy also indicates further financial and economic aid from the EU, e.g. in point 4.1: "To press for an increased scope of the EU's programs of technical and other assistance to Russia" and point 4.2: "To achieve arrangements on partial writes-off or restructuring of Russia's debts to the EU member states" (Russian Federation, 1999). The aid for the Russian Federation was urgently needed, since in 1998 the country suffered a severe economic crisis and the Ruble was weak (Ibid.). Because of the dependence of the Russian state towards the EU, it resulted in a logically weaker bargaining position. Also, seeing Russia as a superpower by the other states lost its credibility fast.

According to Neorealist theory, a strong economy is mandatory in order to act as a powerful actor in the international community. Due to this, Russia wanted a bargaining position at the table with the new potential members of the EU. Because of the fact that the Eastern European states, especially the CIS countries, are import for Russia as a trading partner, and which each new country joining the EU, the dependence towards Brussels would be bigger and bigger. As a consequence of an EU enlargement, the balance of power would fall more and more towards the EU, undermining Russia's claim as a superpower. Therefore it is logical that this is perceived as a strategic threat for Moscow.

### **3. EU - Russia Relations from 2000 until 2004**

#### **3.1 Concept of "The Four Common Spaces"**

With the beginning of the new millennium, the Yeltsin era ended, after he resigned on 31 December 1999 from his position as a President. The former Prime Minister Vladimir Putin took over on 1 January 2000, and election where hold in March which

confirmed his new position. In the EU, Putin's election as a President was greeted with a positive echo, since the new man in power was linked to economic modernization and stabilization (Sieg, 2012, p. 154). Putin seemed as he would also want to continue the cooperation with the EU, which was noted by Brussels.

On the 17th Summit between the EU and Russia in Mai 2001, new cooperation agreements were set. The European Commission President, Romano Prodi, announced together with Putin the creation of a Common Economic Space (CES, later CEES) (European Commission, p. 7). However, this was already mentioned in the PCA as an objective for the future. In the joint statement it literary says the following: "We agree to establish a joint high-level group within the framework of the PCA to elaborate the concept of a common European economic space" (Ibid., p. 3).

This was not elaborated to what exactly it means. In the next negotiations however, it became quite transparent what both parties expected from this project. While the European Union wanted to especially to rise the norms to European standards, Moscow wanted to achieve being granted the four freedoms (goods, services, capital and persons) (Sieg, 2012, p. 155). Both parties were though not particularly sensitive of the demands from the other side. Russia had little interest to accept the new standards, which were also contrary of the interest of the big corporations of the Russian economy. Same skepticism prevailed in Brussels about the demanding of the Russian leadership. The EU had reservations towards the liberalization of passenger transport. Both sides tried to implement their goals in the discussion, but none were willing to make real concessions in order to achieve it.

Although the cooperation was difficult, both actors still worked on the agreement. At the EU - Russia Summit in Sankt Petersburg in May 2003, they declare in a joint statement the creating and improving of four policy areas: economy and environment; freedom, security and justice; external security and research and education (Council of the European Union, 2003). Thus was the concept of "The Four Common Spaces" launched, which would from now on organize the cooperation between the two actors. It was also done due to the fact that Russia wanted a direct cooperation with Brussels, and not being combined in the treaties with other Eastern European countries. "Russia felt that, because of its previous intense cooperation with the EU and its geoeconomic and geopolitical role in Europe, it deserved more that the position of just one of many

neighbours of the Union" (Sergunin, 2012, p. 20). Moscow remained to its own view, that the Russia Federation, in contrast to the other countries in Eastern Europe, still see eye to eye with Brussels.

The content though was again not filled with many information that could lead to a good result in the cooperation. "Nobody on either side seemed very sure about what these common spaces were going to be filled with" (Ferguson, 2015, p. 132). Unlike in previous partnership and cooperation agreements, Russia would not commit to accept any European values. The tone remained diplomatic, as its seen here: "We have agreed to have intensive discussions" (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 3). At the Moscow Summit in 2005, both sides agreed on what the roadmap of The Four Common Spaces should look like in the future.

Although the new plan was with approximately 47 pages significantly more detailed than the one from the joint statement form 2003, it remained pretty vague concerning the intentions of the agreement. In the sector of the Common Economic Space, which was the most quantitative of them all, the goal remained to create an open and integrated economy between the two actors (European Council, 2005). However, a free trade zone was now no longer mentioned. Both sides became more and more skeptical about the benefits such an agreement would bring to their interests. "Russian industrial lobbies are fiercely protectionist, and the EU lobbies are the same in the few industries where Russia has competitive strength, such as metallurgy and chemicals" (Emerson, 2015, p. 2).

In addition to this mutual self protectionism, the bargaining power of Russia improved significantly. The Russian economy complete overcome the financial crisis of the late nineties and was now growing. Since then, each year Russia registered an economic growth up to even 10%, a good foreign trade balance and many foreign investments were made in the last years in the Russian economy (Schulze, 2008, p. 148). Thus, the necessity of getting support from the EU decreased, while parallel the Russian leadership willingness of political concessions towards the EU sank. Surprisingly, the area of the Common Space on Freedom, Security and Justice was taken seriously from both sides. In the document, things like democracy, respecting the laws, independent judiciary system, respect of human rights and minority right were mentioned as a long-term goals in the cooperation that should be important to both sides (Council of the

European Union, 2005, p. 20). However, this does not mean that Moscow is ready to make concessions to the European Union. The leadership in Kremlin has begun to change their strategy, by filling the European values with their own abstract norms. Putin repeatedly claimed that the Russian culture and history allows only own values to be considered as relevant and that they are hard to be influenced by foreign powers (Timmerman, 2005, p. 3). Common values are only found in the roadmap, e.g. where there are technical questions or how to prevent and fight international terrorism. Wherever a normative aspect played a role, both side were unwilling to make concessions.

Ever since Putin introduced the Medium-term Strategy in 1999, the question arose how the EU should deal with the countries that are, in the sight of Kremlin at least, in the Russian sphere of power. In the preamble to the Common Space for Security following sentences are to be found: "The EU and Russia recognizes that processes of regional cooperation and integration in which they participate and which are based on the sovereign decisions of States, play an important role in strengthening security and stability. They agree to actively promote them in a mutually beneficial manner, through close results-oriented EU-Russia collaboration and dialogue" (European Council, 2005, p. 32). This formulation was obvious a compromise that should unite both negotiating parties. The European Union emphasizes the sovereignty of all states, which choose to get closer to Brussels. The leadership in Moscow however underlines that they need to agree on potential integration steps towards EU and must be in agreement involved to defend their own interest. This formulation shows the fear which predominates in Moscow, believing that the former CIS states would be alienated and this would undermine the power of the Russian Federation. "This language had been the subject of long and sensitive negotiations, the EU initially advancing the language of 'common neighbourhood', which was too much for Russia's proprietary attitude towards its 'near abroad' (Emerson, 2015, p. 2).

Overall, the negotiations on "The Four Common Spaces" showed an increasing tension between Brussels and Moscow. The EU continued their negotiations with Russia, and although they referred to them as equal partners, they are not treated like that. A serious recognition of Russia's sphere of influence is lacking and the main goal of the EU remained to imply its values. Russia however, was due to the economic growth more

confident and was less willing to make concessions as e.g. at the time of the PCA. At the same time, they try to show their geopolitical interest in the region and slow down EU's growing influence in Eastern Europe. This has the potential to grow into a conflict over time.

### **3.2 The 2004 EU enlargement**

On 16 April 2003 the EU decided to make its biggest enlargement so far. Ten countries (The Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia and the Slovak Republic) are to become the new members, as they accepted the invitation and changed their constitution to EU standards. All ten states become full members on 1 May 2004, after positive referendums, if they want to join or decline the invitation. This enlargement was primarily expanded to Eastern Europe, making now the EU having a considerably long border with Russia and making Kaliningrad an enclave within the Union. This expansion was perceived in Russia with mixed feelings. Since no countries of the CIS were involved in the enlargement, Moscow had no initial objection. But this position did not last long, as Kremlin had now a defensive position regarding the enlargement (Kempe, 2005, S. 26).

The first problem that arose in Russia was that Kaliningrad was now become an enclave within the European Union. "Its 950,000 inhabitants used to be able to travel freely to the Russian mainland and through Lithuania and Poland without having to wait for a visa. Enlargement changed all that" (Barysch, 2004, p. 47). With the EU membership of Lithuania and Poland, these countries had to adjust to Brussels visa standards, which mean they had to control the traffic between the EU and other countries. For Russia, this arose indeed as a big problem, since a piece of their own territory would be cut off. Seeing the problems, Brussels showed willingness to compromise in order to solve the problem. "An agreement was reached quite quickly, safeguarding major Russian interests. [...] Russian citizens could cross Lithuania or Poland with a special transit document adapted to the means of transport used" (Piccardo, 2010, p. 123). Although Moscow did not reach its objective of having a vise-free traveling for its population, they managed to protect the core interests of the Russian regime and population.



Furthermore, Russia feared now negative consequences in its trade relations with the Eastern European countries that are now member of the EU. Brussels insisted that the expansion would only benefit the Russian economy and the cooperation would continue even more intensive than before. "The EU apparently expected that Russia would automatically extend the PCA to all ten new members prior to the enlargement on 1 May 2004" (Light, 2006, p. 64). However the Russian side expressed great concerns about this subject. Due to the expansion, Russia will lose ten bilateral trade routes, which would make them miss more that 150 - 300 million income Euro per year (Schneider, 2005, p. 11). Due to the fact that these ten countries now apply the PCA standards, many problem were to be found regarding technical standards and environmental protection, which until the expansion, was neglected by Russia. The Russian government was afraid that in the near future, the European markets would become untouchable for the Russian products. Because of these arousing problems, the leadership in Kremlin decided to lay Brussels a list of compensations. They laid down a list of 14 concerns points related to the enlargement. Those included e.g. to increase the import quotes for steel and grain, more help in order to develop the Kaliningrad region and more right for the Russian minority in Estonia and Latvia (Mommsen, 2008, p. 288).

Whether this list was only made because of the economic concerns is questionable. In the explaining part of how this enlargement damages the economy of Russia, the diplomats were pretty vague. "Russian officials struggled to give concrete examples of how enlargement would damage Russian exports" (Barysch, 2004, p. 18). With the extension of the PCA on the countries of Eastern Europe, Moscow gained nevertheless a number of advantages. It therefore seems that the demands of Moscow were merely motivated by the fact they were insulted for not being involved in the enlargement process, although Brussels knew about the geostrategic interest of Russia in that area.

In the EU however, these accusations have been rejected, since the enlargement policy was only a formality and a question of time, and it does not have to be tolerated by Moscow (Mommsen, 2008, p. 288). The EU concluded with the message that the Eastern European countries are free to decide which path they choose and secondly, that Russia has nothing to fear about this expansion. Brussels was very clear, that it would have consequences for the Russian Federation, if they do not extend the PCA on the

new member states. "The EU [...] issued thinly veiled warning of trade sanctions" (Barysch, 2004, p. 2). This led to angry protests on the Russia side: "There was a furious reaction in Russia. Chizhov declared that Russia expected to participate in European affairs as an equal partner" (Light, 2006, p. 64). The dispute showed the basic differences in their perspective. While Russia sees itself as a regional superpower with legitimate geopolitical claims over Eastern Europe, the EU denies to accept such ideas.

Despite having arguments over the law regarding the PCA, Russia finally accepted couple of day before the enlargement that the law was valid. On 27 April 2004, a joint statement declared: "We take note of the Protocol to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), signed today, extending the PCA to the new Member States of the EU. Taking into account the substantial work which has already been done, we agree to step up our efforts to address a number of outstanding issues" (European Council, 2004, p. 1). Thus, the EU has initially won the dispute. Both sides made various concessions in order to achieve stability after the big enlargement. Brussels even supported the Russian accession to the WTO as soon as possible. Although both parties behaved diplomatically to each other, many saw just a temporary compromise in order to avoid confrontation. Also since neither side wanted to risk the closure of negotiations, they were both satisfied if minimum requirements were filled in the trade policy. The fact that the Russian side was not happy with this solution is quite obvious.

The EU often said that the enlargement is a zero-sum game and Russia would eventually benefit from it. However, in the end, the enlargement showed that Brussels had no intention of sharing its influence area with Moscow. "Whether intended or not, the accession of Russia's former allies to the EU contained an implicit message of Western superiority" (DeBardeleben, 2015, p. 48). Because of the late involvement of Russia in the process of the EU enlargement, the Russian leadership thought that the Western states want to consolidate their geopolitical interests. Although both sides accepted many compromises and Russia accepted the enlargement, the diplomatic relations will have to suffer in the future. The Russian leadership will be more and more skeptical about the European foreign policy and its will be shown in the cooperation agreements that are yet to come.

### **3.3 The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)**

On 12 May 2004, just couple of days after the completion of the enlargement, the EU adopted a new strategy paper called the "European Neighbourhood Policy" (ENP). This was primarily made due to the new expansion and having new borders defining the EU. Brussels understood the urge to explain the situation to the new and old neighbours (European Commission, 2004, p. 2).

The ENP was directly addressed towards the three new neighbours of the EU, in this case Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. Russia did not participate in the meetings, since they are already having a special agreement with the EU in the "Four Common Spaces" treaty. In addition to the three countries, the European Commission recommended the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in this actual project. There were bilateral action plans developed together with these states, except Belarus, which failed because Brussels insisted that the country must be democratic and have free elections before any further negotiations would continue (Gaedtke, 2009, p. 161). Since the Belarusian President Lukashenka had no interest of sharing his power, they excluded Belarus from any treaties and meetings.

The Neighbourhood Policy was a concept, that each country participating in the treaty would individually get an own bilateral plan with the EU. However, these guidelines were all based on the same strategy paper which has been established on 12th May 2004, the ENP Strategy Paper (European Commission, 2004, p. 9). According to the paper, the EU will offer help like technical assistance and twinning in order for the countries to achieve EU norms and standards. The President of the Commission at that point, Romano Prodi, even declared they should share everything, except the political institutions (Casier, 2010, p. 100).

On the one hand, this means that these states would have no prospect on a membership candidature. On the other hand, if they are to be seen as potential candidates, they already have all the standards and norms the EU requires in order to join. The approach of the EU in Ukraine and Moldova was extremely profound, which would clearly mean a further deterioration of the EU - Russia relations, due to the fact both countries are part of the CIS and in the sphere of power of Moscow. Given the new neighbourhood policy, the tension with Moscow would be inevitable (Mommsen, 2008, p. 290). This

was anticipated by the Brussels politicians, which would assure that the Russian Federation would also be involved in the cooperation. In the ENP paper was written, that the participation of the Kremlin leadership in this kind of regional projects should be encouraged, based on the mutual interest of the regions development (European Commission, 2004, p. 22).

The vague and unspecific formulation of the ENP was something that Moscow feared and took as a negative sign from the EU. They feared that Ukraine and Moldova are moving closer to the EU and that the Russia sphere of influence would withdraw permanently to its own borders. This fear was not absurd, since the EU mobilized respectable resources to implement their will. In the period of 2000 until 2003 Ukraine received 435 million Euro due to the "Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States" project, while in the same time period, Russia received almost 600 million Euro from the EU (Ibid., p. 32). Thus, Ukraine received considerably more support in comparison to Russia, due to the fact that Russia is a much bigger country with a much bigger population than Ukraine. Due to more bilateral projects of the EU with Ukraine, it could be expected that the support would even rise.

Relations between Brussels and the participating countries of the ENP were marked by strong inequalities, which allowed a strong influence to be exercised on those states. "Even if the process is formally bilateral, in terms of both agenda-setting and results achieved, the EU is the dominant power" (Casier, 2010, p. 105). From a Neorealist point of view, the ENP can be considered as an instrument of imperialist foreign policy. "There is a strategic use of norms (democracy promotion, human rights, market logic) and rhetoric of symmetric partnership, but very little that actually results in a restructuring of the present hierarchical pattern of interaction, suggesting the relevance of soft imperialism" (Hettne/Söderbaum, 2005, p. 550). This alone would not be an actual problem, since weaker states naturally rally to a regional pole, according to the Neorealist theory. The problem was that the EU and Russia were now direct competing to win over those states. "However, there is a complete overlap between Russia's near abroad and the EU's Eastern neighbourhood" (Khasson/Vasilyan/Vos, 2009, p. 234).

So it is understandable that the ENP was seen in Moscow as a geopolitical maneuver. The Russian politicians were accordingly upset and angry. Russia's Foreign Minister Vladimir Chizhov even compared the ENP with the expansion policy of the Soviet

Union after the Second World War and warned against repeating mistakes from the past (Allison, 2006, p. 86). The reaction of Moscow was relative moderate regarding the ENP. Both sides agreed earlier on making compromises and Russia did not want to risk it. And even if they saw in the ENP a threat, Russia believed that they still have more dominance and power in the post Soviet states as the EU, seeing for example that the ENP failed in Belarus. With Moldova and Ukraine, the Russian leadership felt confident, seeing they have a close economic, cultural and historical background. Also since these countries had no opportunity to join the EU, the Russian leadership had no time pressure and could calmly consider how to regain full power there.

Compared to the big expansion of the EU one year earlier and the problems that arose between the EU and Russia then, the ENP had not that much of an influence on the relationship. However, the Russian leadership still believed that Brussels want to expand their area of influence and this would come at the expense of Russia losing its sphere of geostrategic influence.

### **3.4 The Orange Revolution in Ukraine**

A few months after the negotiations between Brussels and Kiev started due to the ENP, Ukraine had a presidential election. On the 31 October 2004, a successor should be found to replace Leonid Kuchma. Many candidates were trying to get the job of the President, but realistic the chances of victory were given to only two candidates. "There was little doubt that the first round, scheduled for October 31, 2004, would produce a runoff between the two leading candidates, Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko" (Mitchell, 2012, p.49). To really understand the significance of the election for the EU - Russia relations, it is needed a closer look upon the two presidential candidates.

Viktor Yanukovich was the preferred candidate and protégé of the Russian government. "In the presidential elections of 2004, the Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, former governor of the Donetsk region, was chosen as 'Russia's candidate' and Kuchma's crown prince" (Hedeskog, 2014, p. 21). As an acting Prime Minister, he already had in the elections a head start. "Yanukovich [...] enjoyed all the administrative and financial support that came with the status" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 49). More important than his relations in the political scene of Ukraine was however the connection to Moscow.

Yanukovich campaign strategy was to achieve a closer relation and integration with the Russian Federation. "Yanukovich, encouraged by his Russian campaign advisors, placed greater emphasis on the issues of the state status for the Russian language and integration with Russia as key themes of his campaign" (Karatnycky, 2006, p. 38). The Russian influence on his campaign was indeed large. To fully understand the Russian interference in the campaign, it should be remembered that Kremlin was scared of the expansion policy of the EU and feared losing Ukraine to the West. The Russian leadership considered the presidential election in Ukraine to be the decisive election between Russia and the European Union. "The Kremlin's strategy [...] was based on the premise that the centerpiece of the upcoming election would be a struggle between proponents of a pro-Western and pro-Russian orientation for Ukraine" (Petrov, 2006, 148). From this point of view, it made sense, if not even necessary to help a candidate to victory, in order for Ukraine to remain loyal to Moscow.

Yanukovich seemed well suited for this job, not only because of his political position, but also because of his geographic origin. His political ascension was carried out in Donetsk, one of the cities in Eastern Ukraine, which is political pro-Russia. The population of East Ukraine supports mostly a pro-Russian course, in comparison to West Ukraine which is mostly pro-EU (Riabchuck, 2007, p. 78). Because of this, Yanukovich was mostly supported by the citizens of his hometown and local communities around it. It seemed if he wins, Ukraine will be a important partner of Russia, which would automatically mean a victory for Kremlin (Wilson, 2005, p. 12).

Kremlin backed up Yanukovich for many reasons. For example, many experts for Public Relations came to Ukraine from Russia in order to secure him a good campaign (Petrov, 2006, p. 148). Also, the Russian leadership made a big financial effort to help him secure the presidency. However, the amount of support is disputed between the experts, but its estimated at approximately 500 up to 600 million US Dollars (Ibid., p. 152). Even President Putin travelled to Ukraine to support him in this election. He praised the policy of the Prime Minister Yanukovich, which gave Ukraine stable economic growth (Schneider, 2008, p. 378). The Russian leadership definitely wanted a victory for their favorite candidate.

The challenger, Viktor Yushchenko, had therefore a lot of disadvantages. Still, he's winning chances were not that low. He had a good reputation in the country, since he

served as the director of the Ukrainian Central Bank and was Prime Minister in the previous years. He was the exact counterpoint of Yanukovich. "Yushchenko's base had naturally always been in western Ukraine. He was an economic liberal who believed in strong ties to the West" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 50). Although he already won a big number of votes, mostly in the West for his policy, he also had support from outside of the country. Many countries of the Western hemisphere had, likewise to Russia, an interest in the outcome of the presidential elections. Especially American politicians and diplomats wanted him to win, since in their opinion, the odds of Ukraine becoming a member of the EU and NATO will be decided at the polling stations in 2004 (Kempe, 2005, p. 4).

In fact, the support for Yushchenko was mainly perceived as being influenced and sponsored by the United States. His many ties with US consultants and companies brought him the nickname "Bushchenko" by the political opposition. The European Union was a lot more reticent. While the Western European states tried to avoid any influence in order to not trigger the Russian leadership, the Eastern member states supported him rather loudly (Sushko/Prystayko, 2006, p. 131). Accordingly, the support for Yushchenko was rather low in Brussels. There was no direct support e.g. cash or otherwise from Brussels. Also, since the chances of a win from Yushchenko were pretty high, there was no assistance needed and it would hardly be worth to risk a diplomatic crisis with Russia in doing so.

In fact, Yushchenko scored in the first round even a 0,5% better result than Yanukovich. However, since both candidates did not have a absolute majority of the votes, there was a runoff election on the 21 November 2004. In the second election, massive manipulations were carried out by the supporters of Yanukovich, since they feared that he may not win in a fair duel. The interventions in the election offices were obvious even for the general public. "After the second round, it was clear that the 2004 presidential election has been stolen. The fraud was widespread and rampant, although concentrated in eastern Ukraine" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 52). It soon became clear that Yanukovich would emerge victorious in this illegitimate election and the official announcement of his victory took place on 24 November. This sparked the massive protests that would later be known in history as the Orange Revolution. Up to couple of million citizens demonstrated in Kiev and in the Western parts of Ukraine in order to

demonstrate against the fraud and show their sympathy for Yushchenko (Simon, 2007, p. 43).

With the obvious election fraud and massive protest movement, the attitude of the European Union changed. At first, they tried at the EU - Russia Summit on 25 November 2004 to come to an agreement regarding the happenings in Ukraine. Moscow insisted that the victory of Yanukovich was fair, thus ending the meeting without any results. In the joint statement it was declared: "They also discussed a wide range of international issues and had an exchange of views on the current developments in Ukraine" (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 3). As a result of this failed meeting, the EU intensified its support for Yushchenko and it started negotiations with President Kuchma in order to repeat the elections.

Moscow insisted on the recognition of Yanukovich as the new President and ignored the political crisis in Ukraine. "This became obvious when Putin, prompted by Kremlin bureaucrats, congratulated Yanukovich upon his victory three times, although the political crisis was already evident" (Petrov, 2006, p. 158). Still they could not prevent a reelection. The Constitutional Court of Ukraine scheduled on 26 December 2004 a repetition of the runoff, this time with massive presence of international election observers. This time, Viktor Yushchenko was declared the winner of the results of the runoff election (Hedenskog, 2014, p. 21).

This was a shock for Moscow. The Russian leadership was firmly convinced they could influence the election. No one had foreseen the Orange Revolution. The Russian political scientists, who should secure the win for Yanukovich, declared their defeat to Putin due to a Western conspiracy. "They persuaded him that the Orange Revolution was not the work of Ukrainians, but a Western 'special operation' and a triumph of Western soft power, which to Putin is a form of state power" (Sherr, 2013, p. 57). This crisis made it clear to Kremlin, that their influence in the post-Soviet countries was less than expected. Since Russia had no clear policy of how to deal with these mass demonstrations, they had retreated from Ukraine.

From a Neorealist perspective, the election of Yushchenko was a big geopolitical defeat for Russia. Only few months after the EU enlargement in Eastern Europe and the start of the ENP, it looked that also Ukraine will be deprived from Russia's sphere of power.



"Russia's reversal in Ukraine was not just cultural and geopolitical. The Kremlin's biggest fear had to be that the Orange Revolution would succeed in making Ukraine's political and business culture 'more European'" (Wilson, 2005, p. 178). Without Ukraine, the Russian regional power would diminish. It can be therefore assumed, that from now on, Russia will try to push back the influenced of the EU by any means necessary.

## **4. Development of EU - Russia relations from 2005 until the Ukraine crisis**

### **4.1 The first Russian - Ukrainian gas dispute and the international implication**

After the pro-West candidate Yushchenko secured the election victory in 2004, the question came up, how Russia will react to the new situation in Ukraine. Immediately after the election, Kremlin pursued a "policy of damage limitation" (Timmermann, 2005, p. 249). It was cautiously calculated how the cooperation with the new president should look like. It turned out, that a cooperation between Ukraine and Russia was not prioritized anymore, since in Kiev, the main policy was to be integrated into the Western hemisphere as fast as possible. "Kiev now leaned visibly closer to Brussels (and even Washington) and further from Moscow. Throughout 2005, Ukraine agitated publicly on a pro-EU platform for membership of both NATO and the EU" (Hadfield, 2012, p. 454). Both Russia - Ukraine, as well as Russia - EU relations, were tense.

Due to this background, a major Russian energy company, Gazprom, received international attention, as they announced that the heavily subsidized gas price that Ukraine paid so far will be adjusted to the normal market price. Concrete, it corresponded to an increase from 50 US Dollars to 230 US Dollars per thousand cubic meters (Schneider-Deters, 2008, p. 379). In return, Gazprom would pay a slightly higher fee for the use of the Ukrainian pipelines, but this action would still damage severely the Ukrainian economy.

The adjustment of the gas prices was obvious not relevant to the international relations between Russia and Ukraine or EU. However, the EU understood, this was a reaction of the new Western orientation of Kiev, and some politicians even spoke of a "gas war"

(Ibid., p. 379). "Although there were sound market reasons for the price increase, the timing [...] and the politicization of the dispute (Putin himself became involved) suggest that the more pro-Western foreign policy pursued by President Yushchenko after the 'Orange Revolution' [...] played an important role" (Light, 2006, p. 66). The Russian Federation denied that there was any political background for this procedure. Especially since the EU had called for a long time, that the Russian economy should be adapted to the Western hemisphere. Many politician in Russia declared that Gazprom is not a charity foundation, but there to make money, thus increasing he prices is logical even if it's Central or Eastern Europe (Schneider-Deters, 2008, p. 381). Therefore, the raising of the gas price should be considered non-political.

However, there are a number of arguments, that Russia is using its status as an energy supplier as an actually geopolitical instrument. Since the start of Putin's second term as President, many energy companies were put under state control, undoing privatization. "A reorganization of ownership of key assets, through corporate prosecutions, forced asset sales, or state fiat, has left the Kremlin more firmly in command of the country's energy-resource development and exports" (Jaffe/Soligo, 2009, p. 123). As the beginning of this new political realignment, the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky is considered the to be the start. As a result of this trial, parts of the Yukos and Sibneft energy companies were transmitted to Gazprom, making it to a global energy giant. "This consolidates Gazprom's position as a global energy giant and provoked anxiety in Europe and the United State that the Russian government would attempt to use energy as a political lever" (Light, 2006, p. 66). By the time of 2005, Kremlin had a sufficient impact on the national energy export in order to instrumentalize the international relations with Europe.

In the nineties and at the beginning of Putin's first term as a President, Russia's economy was very dependent on economic aid and investments from the EU. This however, began to change. Since 2005, they started providing energy across the globe and stopped receiving aid from other countries. The global demand for energy resources drove the prices for gas and oil to new heights. The consequence was that the dependency of the EU towards Russia grew, and the balance of power slowly shifted to Moscow. Accordingly to the European Commission, 70% of the gas consumption must be imported in the EU by the year 2030 (Fröhlich, 2010, p. 321). Russia on the other

hand, will export more energy products, making its economy to stabilize and grow. "Experts agreed Russia needed the West less than in the 1990s, as economic growth was strong, debts were repaid and indeed reserves accumulated" (Youngs, 2009, p. 80). Even if Russia's energy exports did not have any strategic factor until then, this started to change as the prices went up. Kremlin became more confident as the balance of power changed. "Western energy dependence helped the Kremlin team to feel omnipotent" (Shevtsova, 2011, p. 58).

This feeling of strength made sure that Russia did not give up in the gas conflict. On 1 January 2006, Gazprom reduced its gas supply to Ukraine by 125 million cubic meter, which led to a no-confidence vote against President Yushchenko and to a government reshuffle (Jaffe/Soligo, 2009, p. 126). The leadership in Brussels feared that the energy supply directed for the EU states was also at risk. After all, the leadership in Kiev might decide to ensure its own supply by cutting the gas going westwards. It actually came to a temporary disruption: "The pipelines through Ukraine carry 80 per cent of the EU' supplies from Russia to Europe, and during the dispute supply to the EU was briefly disrupted, according to Gazprom, because Ukraine was siphoning off gas" (Light, 2006, p. 66).

The failure of the gas supply was short and not relevant considering the total gas consumption of the EU. However, the political message was clear. Brussels realized that Moscow had effective leverage and through this incident, it won significantly geopolitical strength. As a result, the European Union tried frantically to develop a strategy in order to reduce the dependence on Russia energy (Hadfield, 2012, p. 456). The possibilities were limited though. To replace the massive supplies was nearly impossible and Kremlin did not want any bilateral cooperation with specific countries. While the EU urged Russia to ratify the International Energy Charter Treaty and open its energy sector to foreign companies, Moscow denied it and demanded a purchase guarantee, if not, they can also supply China with it and have a good economic growth (Mommsen, 2008, p. 293). Energy became an important subject and was discussed at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007. There, Putin explained with reference to the gas dispute: "We signed separate contracts for the delivery of our gas to Ukraine and for delivering Russian gas to Europe for the next five years. You should thank us, both Russia and Ukraine, for this decision" (President of the Russian

Federation, 2007, p. 15). It is obvious that the Russian leadership, strengthened by the global prices, appears now more confident. Accordingly to the Neorealist theory, it is therefore to be expected, that Moscow will make fewer concessions to the EU in the future and it would pursue its own geopolitical interests, even if Brussels does not agree.

#### **4.2 The 2008 Russo-Georgian War**

The attack of Russian troops in Georgia on the 8 August 2008 came with a shock for the Western politicians. It seems that Russia would no longer stop using force in order to achieve its geopolitical goals. "Russia's military campaign against Georgia signally strongly Moscow's intent to re-establish by whatever means necessary its European sphere of influence and to resist the further spread of EU/transatlantic influence into its backyard" (Marsh/Rees, 2012, p. 164). Kremlin had however, a different explication of the use of the Russian Army. With the reference to the use of the Georgian military in the secessionist South Ossetia, the leadership in Moscow acted basically just as self-defense. "Without a UN Security Council mandate, or any UNSC debate on the campaign, Russia based its claims essentially on self-defence [...] President Medvedev accused Georgian troops of committing 'what amounts to an act of aggression against Russian peacekeepers located there and the civilian population of South Ossetia', the majority of whom were 'citizens of the Russian Federation'" (Allison, 2013, p. 151). In order to clarify the circumstances, it is necessary to have more details about this war.

The relationship between Russia and Georgia started to deteriorate years earlier. Since the election of the pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili and the Rose Revolution, Russia bilateral agreements with Georgia were burdened by economic sanctions imposed by Russia, even Visa restrictions were implemented for the Georgian population (Ghazaryan, 2010, p. 228). While it seemed rather impossible that Georgia could join the EU, the risk of having another pro-Western states at its borders made Russia anxious.

Georgia is of great strategic value to Russia, because of its geostrategic position and due to the fact it's a transit country for the energy exports: "Georgia is the only route for oil

and gas from the Caspian to reach Europe without going through Russia" (Bond, 2015, p. 15). Controlling the country would strengthen Russia's status as an energy giant.

The reason for the outbreak of the conflict was however different. Georgia had problems controlling all parts of its country since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Especially the two regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia rejected the central government and regarded themselves as independent states. However, all countries, including Russia, did not recognize them as independent, as they saw them as part of Georgia (Allison, 2013, p. 150). Abkhazia and South Ossetia were until that date internationally insignificant. The Russian attitude towards both regions started to change in 2008. Kremlin raised his penalties against the two regions and started deploying troops, which should ensure peace and start diplomatic relations with the local governments (Tsygankov, 2012, p. 240). Although there was still no official recognition from Moscow, the Georgian government in Tbilisi was afraid of the development that took place there. The actions made by the Russian Federation strengthened the position of the two regions, lowering the likelihood that territorial integrity could be reached in the near future.

At the same time, the skirmishes between the troops of the two regions and the soldiers of the Georgian army increased. Especially in South Ossetia the violence escalated in June 2008, with both sides accusing each other of being the aggressor (Ibid., p. 241). The Russian leadership declared their support for the two regions in this conflict. The Foreign Minister expressed Russia's determination to go to war, if Georgia will attack Abkhazia or South Ossetia, even in the case that Georgia asks NATO for support (Wipperfürth, 2011, p. 103). The government in Tbilisi faced a dilemma. They could either give up both region completely and defend their borders, or risk at going in an open war with Russia. Georgia ultimately decided for the second option. "On the night of August 8, 2008, Georgia attacked the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali in an attempt to restore control over the rebellious province" (Tsygankov, 2012, p. 241). It is likely that the Georgian leadership took the Russian threats as a bluff, since such a small country could not resist military against Russia. Moscow responded short afterwards with its own military operation which should bring peace to the region, but it quickly developed into an operation to punish and occupy its neighbour (Closson/Halbach, 2015, p. 2). Unsurprisingly, the Georgian military withdrew, leading to the end of the

war after just a couple of days. Russia did not only brought South Ossetia and Abkhazia under its direct control, but also large zones around them (Ibid., p. 2).

The international community was outraged about how deep the Russian troops advanced into the heartland of Georgia. If Russia only defended the two regions by sending its peacekeeping forces, it would have probably been accepted by the international community as a legitimate act. The Fact Finding Mission of the European Union came to the conclusion: "Although it should be admitted that it is not easy to decide where the line must be drawn, it seems, however, that much of the Russian military action went far beyond the reasonable limits of defence" (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 24). This raised the question why Moscow reacted so aggressive, being conscious that its relation with the EU will deteriorate. According to the Neorealist theory, this would only make sense if the leadership in Kremlin could assume that this conflict would help them expand their own power; thus overcompensating any negative diplomatic consequences. There are a number of fact which assumed that this is the case.

End of August 2008, Russia had officially recognized the two republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Wipperfürth, 2011, p. 105). This was important for Russia, as Georgia could now not be a member of NATO, since it had no territorial integrity anymore. Additional to that fact, the two regions were a good start in order for Kremlin to start influence the politics in Georgia. "In all the main conflicts (Moldova/Transnistria; Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia; Nagorno-Karabakh), Russia is backing separatists against the legitimate government of the state concerned. As long as the conflicts remain unresolved, Russia can exert some degree of influence in these countries" (Bond, 2015, p. 14). While the relations with Tbilisi were deteriorating, in a Neorealist zero-sum game this was a reasonable price, since Georgia had already distance themselves from Kremlin.

Another important consequence of the war was the strong signal sent to the international community. "Not least of all, it overturned Western complacency that Russia hard power could no longer counter Western influence. In Georgia, it not only countered the West's influence but discredited its policy" (Sherr, 2013, p. 58). The EU assumed that since the ending of the East-West conflict, a military action in former Soviet Union space could not be an option. The Russo-Georgian War revealed to Brussels the

problems with this policy, even if consequences were afterwards drawn. For example, the negotiations to a new PCA were dropped (List, 2011, p. 229).

Overall, the military campaign remained without major consequences for the Russian Federation. No radical statements were made, since many countries of the EU did not want a further deterioration of the relations with Russia (Bochorishvili, 2015, p. 71). Economic interests were prioritized over the support of Georgia. Although Russia was uncooperative and did not fulfill some clauses, a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement still started in November 2008 (Stewart, 2009, p. 1).

For Russia was the Russo-Georgian War a success. Kremlin secured its influence in the Georgia, while the Europeans saw the balance of power has been shifted even more in favor of Moscow. Brussels revealed that economic interest (and hence power interests) were without doubt more important than normative influence.

### **4.3 The Eastern Partnership**

The idea of the Eastern Partnership was actually not a direct response to the War in Georgia. The concept, which was essentially an intensification of cooperation with the Eastern neighbours, was a joint project of Poland and Sweden. The Russo-Georgian War gave the project momentum. It received a lot of appreciation from the EU, after the two republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia were recognized as independent by Russia. The intended targeted countries were Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus.

The cooperation with these countries would be nothing new, since a treaty was already signed in 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy. This however, would be more deep and extensive. On the one hand, the financial resources allocated to these countries should be higher. From 2010 until 2013, more than 350 million Euro should be invested (Sasse, 2010, p. 183). On the other hand, the objectives in this treaty were more ambitious than in the ENP. The new objectives were first presented by the European Commission in December 2008. Political association and economic integration were the main goals (Ibid., p. 3). The deepening of the relations with the Eastern neighbours was

necessary, because of the strategic importance and it should be seen as an political investment (Ibid., p. 18).

This new partnership should replace old agreements and establish a closer link to EU laws and standards (Ibid., p. 4). This should achieve a deeper economic integration and ultimately create a free trade area (Ibid., p. 5). Both political and economic cooperation are closely linked in this agreement. In fact, this fact makes this agreement so special, meaning also this would make the countries to distance themselves from the Russian sphere of influence (Bochorishvili, 2015, p. 79).

The Eastern Partnership was thus supporting more the economy and had more deeper goals than the ENP. This alone was enough to see the Russian skepticism grow towards the foreign policy of the EU. However, Brussels communicated clear, that the Eastern Partnership was not a direct response to the war in Georgia. It should make the Eastern countries to develop a strong affiliation with the EU and strengthen their position in Europe (European Commission, 2009, p. 2). The usual confessions for close cooperation with Russia, were however completely lacking in this document.

It is hardly surprising that Russia saw the Eastern Partnership as an attempt to integrate all the CIS countries in the EU. "Against this backdrop, the shift to hard-law integration under the Eastern Partnership has been perceived in Moscow as a bold move bearing potential regional integration effects" (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 3). Since Moscow still regards these countries as their own "backyard", it is only logical they perceived this strategy as a threat. President Medvedev doubted openly in the year 2009, if the initiative is not even addressed against Russia (Gretskiy/Treshchenkov/Golubev, 2014, p. 380). This grew the pressure in Kremlin of having to act against it. If Russia sees the implementation of the Eastern Partnership agreement, these states would continue to converge more to the EU, and the Russian influence will shrink. Moscow also knew, this project is much more attractive than any previous projects they initiated. "Of particular concern to Russian policy makers and experts was the fact that it had taken less than a year for the EU to develop a comprehensive document and reach consensus with all stakeholders, whereas Russia had spent almost twenty years and had not been able to achieve its goals" (Ibid., p. 380).



The first reaction to the Eastern Partnership was the resurgence of the Russian - Ukrainian gas dispute in 2009. Much like in 2006, the Russian state company Gazprom wanted to further increase the gas price, which Ukraine did not and could not pay. The Russian leadership used this in order to demonstrate Ukraine's dependence on Russia (Pleines, 2009, p.3). Since this procedure was successful after the Orange Revolution, it seemed logical to repeat it. Gazprom was the main beneficiary of this conflict and secured substantial revenues (Graätz/Westphal, 2009, p. 8). Nevertheless the overall effectiveness was lower than last time, especially in influencing the Ukrainian foreign policy. In Kiev, the politicians tried to establish by any means a tight connection to the EU, ignoring the actions done by the Russian Federation. Thus, the Kremlin leadership had to reevaluate what actions could they do in order to oppose the Eastern Partnership and not lose these countries to the EU.

#### **4.4 The Eurasian Customs Union**

The options for Russia how to react to the Eastern Partnership were limited. In the past, the export of energy resources and in the case of Georgia, military power was used in order to put pressure on the neighbouring countries. Both options seemed on a short term as relatively successful, but they were associated with high political costs. This exposure of power made sure that both Ukraine and Georgia would now seek a closer cooperation with the EU and thus distancing themselves from Moscow. Also the energy market was now a disadvantage for Russia, since the EU reduced year after year its energy imports and the gas and oil prices sank since 2008 slowly but steadily (Sherr, 2013, p. 86). Thus, using energy as a foreign policy tool became more difficult.

Because of this evolution, the Russian leadership seeks out new approaches in order to keep its neighbours in its sphere of influence. The Kremlin decided to create an own project for the CIS states in order to offer them an alternate way. Similar projects have already been done earlier, for example in the year 2000, when the Eurasian Economic Community of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was founded. These however, had hardly any effect and could be classified as failed (Polownikow, 2012, p. 4). After the start of the Eastern Partnership, Russia revitalized the efforts and

build a Custom Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan, which was already in the making since 2007. In the year 2009, it was made official by the Russian politicians (Ibid., p. 5).

The Custom Union was ratified and came in existence on the 1 January 2010. At first, it did not seem particularly impressive, since it had only three member states and both Belarus and Kazakhstan are not economic heavyweights. But the Eurasian Custom Union included more than three quarters of the post-Soviet space, almost 170 million citizens and about 80% of the former Soviet economic performance (Halbach, 2012, p. 217). Moreover, it soon became clear that Moscow is willing to invest massive resources in order to make it attractive to other countries as well. Although there were disputes between Russia and Belarus, Kremlin finally agree to abolish any duties on oil exports, which meant that Russia would lose 2 billion US Dollars every year (Wipperfürth, 2011, p. 117).

Due to such economic initiatives, the Custom Union could soon be expanded. In December 2010, the three member countries agree on expanding the Union to Common Economic Space. The content was actually quite extensive and explicit. Many documents were drawn that relate to the areas of economic policy, energy, free movement of capital and other areas (Polownikow, 2012, p. 6). This was significantly of a higher quality than the pure free trade zone. President Putin announced that his plan is even to evolve the Eurasian Union into one similar with the EU, with e.g. only one currency (Bochorishvili, 2015, p. 118).

In a way, Kremlin wanted to copy the Western ideas for themselves. The formation of a Eurasian Union would be a rival for the EU and would strengthen again Russia's influence in the area. "The formation of the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in 2010, and the ambition to rapidly develop it into a full-fledged Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015, should be interpreted as a move designed to counter the EU's growing presence in the post-Soviet space" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 32). There was no secret made that if a country will be member of the EEU, it would not be compatible with the economic association of the EU. Especially the Free Trade Agreement, which was part of the Eastern Partnership agreement, was considered an exclusion criterion. "This is primarily because membership of the Customs Union implies a loss of sovereignty of member countries over trade policy and sets common tariffs that are incompatible with the elimination of tariffs planned under the DCFTA

(Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area)" (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 5). Thus, new tension between Russia and the EU were inevitable, since the Free Trade Area agreement was the key objective for a Eastern Partnership membership. Any state which would prefer the EU agreement, even if they would not have an EU membership perspective, would not be accepted by the Russian leadership.

Through this approach, Moscow increased the pressure on the countries for which the EU and Russia competed for integration. The exclusivity of the EEU was openly debated, also for Ukraine. "In putting pressure on Ukraine not to sign the association agreement with the EU, Russia argued that Ukraine could not have free trade with the customs union once it had a 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement' with the EU (which is part of the association agreement)" (Bond, 2014, p. 5).

This approach worked for Belarus and Kazakhstan. Belarus did not want to integrate into the West and Kazakhstan would simply benefit from the agreement, since it was economically very closed linked to Russia's economy. The question however, was if the EEU was worth giving up the deal proposed by Brussels. Even the Russian leadership knew, the EEU was lacking some appeal in comparison to the Eastern Partnership project. Russian politicians knew that they still lack "Soft Power" and the European integration project was more attractive (Halbach, 2012, p. 221). The countries east of the Caspian Sea were less problematic, since they were not part of the Eastern Partnership program, making the states in Europe far more important. Especially Ukraine, since in the opinion of the Kremlin, it would be a central key in the ascension of the EEU and they would benefit from it far more than from the EU (Polownikow, 2012, p. 24).

Looking at all countries which are part of the Eastern Partnership, Ukraine was most significant of them all. They have more citizens than Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Belarus together and its economy is of a huge importance to Russia. If the EEU should become an influential international actor in a long term, Ukraine was vital that they would join. Therefore, it is logical that Moscow would do anything in the future in order to not let Ukraine join the EU or any projects sponsored by them.

#### **4.6 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, 2013**

After 2010, there were hardly any progressions in the Russia - EU relation, due to the rivalry parallel projects of the Eastern Partnership and the Eurasian Economic Union. Both sides were now in a direct geopolitical competition to win over the six countries by convincing them of their own projects. Although there were still some meetings and discussions, the overall result were not worth mentioning. "EU - Russia relations had already run out of steam and had turned into a source of mutual disappointment and disillusionment, even mounting tensions" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 33). In the year 2010, a new cooperation at a more pragmatic level was decided, a "Partnership for Modernization", in which low progress was achieved (Ibid., p. 32).

The time period from 2010 until the Vilnius Summit in November 2013 was dominated by a "tug of war" over the countries who could join the EP or the EEU (Zagorski, 2014, p. 586). This summit was of a great importance. In Vilnius many countries should sign the Eastern Partnership agreement, however Russia tried precisely to prevent this from happening. In order to understand this, it is worth looking at the situations of the six countries before the summit.

Belarus was already an integral part of the Eurasian Economic Union. The Lukashenko regime was obvious not interested to fulfill the normative requirements of the EU and wanted to be part of Moscow's sphere of influence. Minsk would remain in the orbit of Russia, as long as it regime stay politically isolated from the West and no alternatives are available (Ibid., p. 587). For this country there was no competition. Another country which had a very slim chance of an association agreement with the EU was Azerbaijan, though the government in Baku was neither interested in the EU, nor the EEU. Thus, they managed to withdraw from this "tug of war" for the time being (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 10).

The case of Armenia was more interesting. The small country in the Caucasus prepared itself to sign the Free Trade Agreement and the Association Agreement with the EU (Malygina, 2013, p. 3). The Summit in Vilnius should seal the deal between Brussels and Armenia. But because of the Russian influence, a few months before the Summit, the Armenia President decided to freeze all collaboration with the EU and instead go with the Russian proposal. Moscow could persuade Armenia to join the EEU (Zagorski,

2014, p. 591). This was a great success for the leadership in Kremlin, since it showed the other countries that the EEU is more attractive than they initially thought. De facto, Armenia change was caused, less because of the free choice, but more because of a mixture of threats and promises made by the Russia Federation (Stewart, 2014, p. 6). This strategy was based on the principle of carrots and sticks. Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan (Moscow had an contract of selling weapons to them) and the politically instrumentalized energy sector was enough for Armenia to join the EEU (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 6). On the one hand this was a great success, since it was the second country they integrated after Belarus. On the other, it was clear that Russia will use the EEU as a strategic toll of its foreign policy. Armenia was the prime example, that it was not a decision of a sovereign state, but more the will of Kremlin.

The two other states, Georgia and Moldova, were more Western orientated. Both countries signed at the summit the Association Agreement and were described by the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, as "the most far-reaching agreements towards political association and economic integration ever conducted by the European Union" (President of the European Council, 2013, p. 2).

The decision of Georgia to agree to the EU project was not at all surprising. Since the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, it was clear that they would not decide for Russia and would seek a stronger tie to the West. For Moldova was the choice not that clear, since the little country, same as Armenia, experienced a lot of pressure from Moscow. Kremlin specifically threatened to make it more difficult for Moldavian citizens to work in Russia and to provide aid to the rebels in Transnistria, if Moldova intensifies its relations with the EU (Stewart, 2014, p. 2). Also Moscow embargoed the Moldovan wine in September 2013 (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 6). Obviously, the government in Chisinau believed that an integration in the EU would be more beneficial, even if it deteriorates the relation with Russia. Having no border with Russia, and close ties to Romania, an EU member, the decision was reasonable. In conclusion, two states choose to side with Russia (Belarus and Armenia), two with the EU (Georgia and Moldova) and one choose neutrality (Azerbaijan).

More important for both sides, than any of those five states, was Ukraine. The importance for Russia's geopolitical ambitions towards Ukraine were known, a successful integration of Kiev in the Eastern Partnership emerged as a necessity.

"Ukraine was perceived as a frontrunner of the Eastern Partnership, and the first with whom the EU started talks on the AA. [...] Without Ukraine, the whole Eastern Partnership would be under threat" (Pastore, 2014, p. 6). Thus, it was not surprisingly that both Brussels, and Moscow, put so much effort into convincing them to join their own projects.

In the year 2010, Viktor Yanukovich became again President of Ukraine. This was a good sign for Kremlin, since he was once known as the "candidate of Russia". Unlike the former pro-Western politicians who steered the country since the Orange Revolution, many observers expected that Yanukovich will choose the Russian project. However, this expectation was refuted and he decided for a Free Trade Agreement with the EU and against joining the Customs Union of Russia (Schneider-Deters, 2014, p. 384). But from the start of negotiations until the agreement should be signed, there was still time to pass. The detention of former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Yulia Tymoshenko, upset the politicians in Brussels. "Subsequently, on the eve of the December 2011 EU-Ukraine Summit, the EU made it clear that signing of the AA depended on Tymoshenko's fate" (Pastore, 2014, p. 8). Thus, the hopes of Kremlin to integrate Ukraine in their project were still up. Negotiations between Kiev and Brussels continued for the time being. The EU wanted that the Association Agreement should be finalized by the year 2013, although more concessions for the Ukraine would be required: "In January 2013, EU politicians were trying to find a more flexible position toward Ukraine, realizing the risk of Ukraine turning towards Russia" (Ibid., p. 11). The more likely this perspective became, the more pressure was exerted from Moscow: "The frequency and intensity of Russia's rather crude attempts to prevent Ukraine from signing the AA/DCFTA prior to the Vilnius Summit [...] escalated before the Vilnius Summit" (Havlik, 2014, p. 23). Russia imposed economic sanctions of the government in Kiev, in order to remind them they were dependent on Moscow. Many Russian politicians declared that these sanctions were the consequence of Ukraine negotiating with the EU (Stewart, 2014, p. 2). Shortly before the start of the Summit, negotiations between President Yanukovich and the Russian government intensified. Moscow surprisingly achieved partial success. On 21 November 2013, the Ukrainian government announced that the negotiations with the EU for the Association Agreement should be canceled, due to national security. Also, the trade relation with Russia should continue without any problems (Pastore, 2014, p. 15). In order to achieve this U-turn, Russia

made Kiev generous concessions. The gas price should be reduced by one third and they would loan Kiev a cheap credit of 15 billion US Dollars in form of euro bonds (Zagorski, 2014, p. 592). However, this Russia victory was not really decisive, since Kiev neither ruled out a future association the EU, nor did it wish to join the Eurasian Customs Union.

The result after the end of the Summit in Vilnius was the following: Armenia and Belarus were in the influence sphere of Russia, Georgia and Moldova were associated with the EU and Azerbaijan and Ukraine remained "neutral". Since Azerbaijan was quite insignificant for both parties, the "tug of war" would only continue over Ukraine in the future. In fact, Herman Van Rompuy declared after the Summit: "We stand ready to sign with Ukraine once the benchmarks put forward by the European Union are met and we are really close" (The President of the European Council, 2013, p. 2). Basically this situation resulted in a classic security dilemma. Unless Ukraine decided itself to join one of the project, both sides fear that the country could decide against them. Because of this, both sides would intensify their efforts in order to prevent that scenario from happening. From a Neorealist perspective, it was clear the conflict over Ukraine could only intensify from now on.

## **5. The Ukraine Crisis**

### **5.1 Euromaidan and the fall of Yanukovich**

The decision of President Yanukovich to not sign the Association Agreement with the EU has been seen in Brussels as a political setback, but it was not enough to lead to a crisis. "Initially, it seemed clear that the EU resigned to 'losing' Ukraine to Russia" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 33). Ukraine had been a key member in the Eastern Partnership, but the EU always emphasized that Kiev has to decide the direction of its own foreign policy. Also, Ukraine did not signed the Eurasian Customs Union Agreement, meaning there was still a realistic chance to convince them later to join the EU project. Thus, for Brussels, there was no need to take unnecessary risk.

However, this all changed after the massive protests started in Ukraine, which were caused by the decision of Yanukovich. For many Ukrainians, the Association

Agreement would have been a symbol of modernization and progress for their country (Halling/Stewart, 2014, p. 6). Especially many West-Ukrainian saw the EU as their future, and their protests did not stop even after the government started using violence against them. "After three months of constant protests and repeated, deadly fights in Kyiv, between Maidanists and the Berkut riot police, which culminated in the shooting by snipers of more than a hundred protesters, Yanukovich was forced to seek an agreement with the political opposition, on 21 February 2014" (Hedenskog, 2014, p. 21).

The public perception of this conflict was different though, it became more and more a conflict between the pro-Russian government and its supporters in the east and the pro-Western opposition. This perception was that popular, due to the fact the EU member states were in accord with the opposition, even though they did not support them with goods or money. Some politicians even visited the Euromaidan protesters. Obviously, the Russian government took side with Yanukovich. Putin even declared that the protest were well prepared and look rather like a pogrom than a revolution (Malygina, 2013, p. 6). Moscow argued that the demonstrations were controlled by the West, in order to revise the decision of Yanukovich of not signing the Association Agreement. The Russian Duma declared that the Western politicians should not interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine. The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, put it even more clearly: "The main thing - what is the cause of these conflicts? The cause is that the government, acting fully within the framework of their authority and competence, made the decision not to sign or initiate the documents with the EU right now" (Lavrov, 2014). The EU suggested, in order to end the conflict, building up a new government, among other things: "A new and inclusive government, constitutional reform bringing back more balance of powers, and preparations for free and fair presidential elections would contribute to bringing Ukraine back on a sustainable path of reforms" (Council of the European Union, 2014, p. 1).

Both Russia and the EU involved more and more in the conflict, since they feared that their influence in Ukraine would be gone, if the other 'side' wins. The EU decided in February 2014 to sanction the regime of Viktor Yanukovich (Delcour/Kostanyan, 2014, p. 9). The sanctions came rather late, since the government was almost dissolving. However, this consolidated the Russia view of the EU acting illegitimate in Ukraine. On



21 February 2014, Yanukovich declared that early elections should be held, but then left the country and went into hiding in Russia (Hedenskog, 2014, p. 21). He gave up his function as President and cleared the way for a takeover of the Maidan movement. Due to this, the Russian Federation saw its defeat and was threatened to lose its influence completely in the whole country. Kremlin was very positive, that the EU had overthrown and replaced the Ukrainian government, in order to associate Ukraine with the Eastern Partnership project.

## **5.2 Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the war in Ukraine**

After Yanukovich fled the country, the new regime in Ukraine quickly showed that they had no interest in a cooperation with Russia. "Unfortunately, one of the new parliament majority's first decision was to withdraw a controversial language law from 2012, which had given the Russian language the status of a regional language in 13 of Ukraine's 27 regions" (Ibid., p. 21). The real impact of this decision was pretty low, but its significance was very important. It became clear for Moscow, that the new regime would not try to cooperate with them and would seek a rapid integration in the EU. The Russian response was swift and decisive. "In less than a week, the so-called little green men - soldiers without any identifying insignia [...] - appeared on the Crimean peninsula taking full military control of the area in a matter of days" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 34). For the first time, since 2008, the Russian Federation used its military to maintain its foreign interest, but this time in a more open and aggressive manner than in Georgia. Kremlin officially denied the involvement of Russian soldiers in Crimea, claiming they are local militia. President Putin declared in a speech on 18th March 2014, that they are "Crimean local self-defence units" (President of the Russian Federation, 2014). Although many locals supported the militia, the Western countries knew there were Russian soldiers involved. Because of this reason, Kremlin tried to deliver facts as soon as possible: "After a hastily organized referendum on 16 March Crimea was quickly incorporated into the Russian Federation and the loss of the territory became an irreversible fact" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 34).

Such an aggressive approach was associated with a high risk for Moscow, and it provoked harsh reaction from the Western states. Nevertheless, the strategy decided by

Kremlin appeared for them to be right, since they wanted to show strength and power. This was done due to the strategic importance of Ukraine which were early discussed in the project and due to the fact that other options were not available anymore for Russia. Now, that the new government in Kiev did not have any sanctions from by Brussels, they will try to integrate again into the West. The question also rises why the EU let Russia march in Crimea. The Russian Federation led a military action into Georgia just a few years ago, and there were no sharp sanctions imposed by the EU. Thus, the Russian leadership had two assumptions. First, it is highly unlikely that the EU will respond by a military action in Ukraine. Secondly, they speculated the sanctions against them would be very unimportant and limited. The EU remained dependent on the energy exports of Russia, meaning they would risk nothing. In addition, many member states were afraid of putting up sanction, in order to no destroy their economic trade with Russia (Bergstrand, 2014, p. 79). Thus, it was not completely absurd for the Russia government to assume that they would up winning more with the annexation of Crimea than they would lose due to the reactions of the West.

This seemed to be at first the case. The EU just condemned Russia by declaring: "The European Council does not recognize the illegal referendum in Crimea, which is in clear violation of the Ukrainian Constitution. It strongly condemns the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian Federation and will not recognize it" (European Council, 2014, p. 2). The sharp words from Brussels did not impress much the Russian leadership. Also, the EU response to the annexation has been very limited. Many Russian individuals were imposed an interdicion to travel to Europe and their bank accounts were freeze (Bergstrand, 2014, p. 79). This was hardly a factor in order to change their strategy. Through close cooperation with local rebels in the east of Ukraine, Moscow managed to emerge two new republics, Donetsk and Luhansk, thus inflicting more territorial loses to Ukraine (Ehrhart, 2014, p. 28). There were still no sharp sanctions from the EU, since it seemed a risk to destroy their economy by setting an embargo against Russia.

The situation changed in July. "It was not until the shooting down of Malaysian Airlines passenger flight MH-17 on 17 July 2014, however, that the EU was forced to take a tougher stand" (Haukkala, 2015, p. 35). Brussels was forced to take action, in order to not lose its credibility. "At the end of the month, the EU agreed to impose tier three

sanctions, a shift from a focus on sanctioning individuals to sanctioning key sectors in the economy" (Ibid., p. 35). This increased the confrontation level of the EU with Russia. For the first time, the member states of the EU were prepared to take economic setbacks in order to pressure Moscow and try to stabilize Ukraine again.

You could interpret this as the EU put their normative interest before of their economic. Brussels have to prove own strength in order to see eye to eye with an aggressive Russia. "Sanctions may therefore often become political statements [...] to assure a minimal consistency between words and actions in the context of the domestic as well as the international political debate" (Emerson, 2014, p. 1). The EU was still more powerful in the economic sector, except for the energy sector, thus having nothing to fear from any sanctions. "As regards Russia's counter-sanctions, the food imports restrictions are of marginal significance" (Ibid., p. 6). Therefore, the EU wanted to preserve their foreign policy credibility and continue with their strategy, even if the Russian sanctions were going to come.

On 19 September 2014, representatives of the OSCE, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk signed a ceasefire agreement, which would be later know as the Minks Protocol. Moscow did not want to play an active role in ending the civil war, and the document just claimed that the weapons usage should be terminated. Putin agreed to signed the document, due to the concessions made by Brussels. For that, the EU would not push forward the Free Trade Agreement with Ukraine. "[T]he Commission is ready, in the event that Ukraine ratifies the Association Agreement with the EU, to propose additional flexibility. Such flexibility will consist in delaying until 31 December 2015 the provisional application of the DCFTA" (European Commission, 2014, p. 1). The basic conflict was not resolved, but only delayed. The Russian Federation gained time in order to prevent Ukraine to join the West. The EU hoped, however, that the destabilization of Ukraine could be stopped or at least delayed. The European External Action Service praised the Minsk Protocol for reducing the violence in Ukraine.

It is no secret that the ceasefire was not respected by either side, and Russia did not make any effort to terminate the conflict. Instead of implementing the Minsk ceasefire agreement, the Russian leadership even escalated the conflict in January 2015. Also a follow up agreement in February 2015, "Minsk 2" was ineffective and was cementing

the Status Quo of Ukraine (Simon, 2015, p. 3). The course of the conflict depends on many factors. Obviously, Russia had the ability to end the crisis, due to its military superiority. The DFCTA was applied on the 1st January 2016. The Russian leadership will still try to undermine as long as possible a binding of Kiev to the EU as long as the sanctions do not have a heavy impact on the Russian Federation. Minor fights are still to be found on the territory, but until now, no more territorial changes occurred.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Result**

"After the Soviet Union collapsed, it was widely believed that Russia's new leaders would follow in Mikhail Gorbachev's footsteps and eschew the selfish pursuit of power, because they recognize that it made Russia less, not more, secure. [...] But this is not what has happened" (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 489).

During the analysis of this project, we can see that the Neorealist theory can still explain the behavior of the European actors. The phase of stability and cooperation between the EU and Russia in the nineties, misled many analysts in declaring Neorealism as a theory of the past. However, we can see this assessment was indeed premature.

Considering the nineties, there was no idealism in the EU - Russia relation. Kremlin just lack at that time simply Realistic options. The political instability of the country made it to focus on domestic policy. States, which were willing to ally with Russia in order to form a countervailing power to the EU and NATO, were not to be found. The economic crisis, which was first overcome in 1999, made Russia to be very dependant of the Western powers, especially EU. As a consequence, Moscow had to follow Brussels lead, even if they wanted it or not. Kremlin spared no effort in trying to restore the economic strength of the country and to secure its position of power in the international community once again.

The European Union, emphasized the principal of equal partnership, but de facto, they also just pursued a strategy to increase their own power. The rapid opening and liberalization of the Russian market, which was one of the essential points in the negotiation, would have led in a short period of time to a complete dependence of the

EU, since all the Western companies were technically superior to the Russian ones. The negotiations of the PCA and the EU's Common Strategy for Russia clearly showed they were not treating Russia as an equal. Moscow was due to this facts on a defensive stance, since there were no opportunities to balance the power scale.

With the economic growth that Russia experienced from the year 2000 onward, the balance changed slowly in favor of Kremlin. Even at the negotiations for the Four Common Spaces, Russia started to represent offensively their geopolitical interest. The EU ignored this fact. The competition between Moscow and Brussels intensified significantly during the year of 2004, due to several events. First, the EU expanded massively in Eastern Europe. Afterwards the Neighbourhood Policy came into life, which would bind the other Eastern European countries to the EU. And finally the Orange Revolution in Ukraine made Kiev into a pro-Western oriented country, making Russia lose its most important partner.

This was unacceptable for Russia, from a Neorealist point of view, since it meant a clear shift of power towards the West. Where previously a neutral buffer zone dominated between Russia and the EU, now they were either part of the EU or EU affiliated. The rapid expansion meant uncertainty for Russia. And uncertainty mean in return, that they had to expand their own sphere of influence, in order to be safe.

This threat, as it was perceived by the Russian leadership, had its own reaction. The energy prices started to rise, in order for Kremlin to have a countermeasure to the EU. The instrumentalization of the energy exports as an external political pressure in the year 2006 was the first step of success in Ukraine. In 2008, the military action in Georgia also succeeded in conquering back the sphere of influence in the Caucasus. Because the use of military force, the EU was threatened and started its Eastern Partnership project, which should gain the affiliation of the Eastern Europe countries and win the Caucasus. Moscow responded by establishing the Eurasian Customs Union, which should prevent the action planned by the EU. As a result, a 'tug of war' began in these neutral countries. This can be classified as a classic security dilemma. Both side felt threatened and therefore tried to extend their sphere of influence, which should give them strength and security.

Due to the integration competition from 2010 until 2013, it is not surprising that both sides got more aggressive, in order to win countries for their own cause. Ukraine became the focus of both actors. Because of the importance of the country, both sides fought intensively. Russia tried to prevent an affiliation of Ukraine with the West by any means possible. Without the Euromaidan and Yanukovich's overthrow, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass would possibly not have happened, but also that Ukraine could remain neutral, seems rather unrealistic. The Ukraine crisis is the result of a competition of the major powers in Europe and ultimately a decisive proof that the EU - Russia relations proceed accordingly to the Nonrealistic expectations.

## **6.2 Forecast**

Since it is now clear that the offensive Realism can explain the EU - Russia relations since the nineties, the question arises what future political developments we can expect. It seems clearly that both Moscow and Brussels will fight over Ukraine, as long as they are not forced to fight directly. Especially the Association Agreement, which was signed on the 1 January 2016, was a key event in the history. Russia still tries to fight for Ukraine, the question is now, what options are left for Kremlin in order to achieve a victory. From the analysis of the recent foreign policy behavior of the Russian Federation, it is clear that economic pressure and instrumentalization of energy exports are the most effective ones or even military aggression could be an option.

Both options are affordable for the Russian leadership. This would mean that Russia would suffer further economic sanctions, but they might obtain still enough revenue from energy exports. A forecast of the development of Russia's GDP lies between a decline of 1,8 percent and a growth of 2,5 percent. Which forecast would be ultimately the right one, depends on many factors. Especially the oil price and how good the Russian economy does compensate the sanctions of the West are of great importance.

In the end, Kremlin would still fight for Ukraine, as long as the danger of a collapse of its own economy is not in sight. Also the European Union is still dependent on the energy exports from Russia, meaning they are still not willing to risk it all, in order to fully integrate Ukraine in the West. The fights still continue in Eastern Ukraine,

although many ceasefires were discussed. Skirmishes are still to be found and many people still sacrifices their lives, in order to bring peace, if such thing is still possible.

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