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THE EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE AND GEORGIA

CONTEXT AND PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCES, AND PROSPECTS

ABSTRACT The article views the geographical area between the EU and Russian borders as a battle space of two, drastically different foreign policy and ideological approaches. The authors argue that in the years since the end of the Cold War, a unique surrogate of former clash of liberal and communist worlds emerged, leading to and underpinning current Hybrid Warfare, underway from Ukraine to Georgia. Its roots lay in the Russian interpretation of the Western attitude towards the East as Neo-colonialist. Relying on the income from its vast energy resources, Russia also tries to develop its version of so called “Soft Power”, used by the West in this region. Though in Russian hands, it is coupled with Moscow’s imperial experiences and resentments, and is becoming a mere element in Hybrid or “non-linear” war. Speaking retrospectively, the Eastern Partnership Initiative of the European Union can be seen as a response to Hybrid threats, posed by Russia against its Western and Southern neighbors. But the question is, whether EU foreign policy initiatives towards this area can and will be efficient and sufficient, if continued to be mostly defensive and limited within Soft Power mechanisms and philosophy, while Russia successfully combines those with traditional Hard Power know-how? The authors argue that in the long

run, European or Euro-Atlantic Soft Power tool-kits, spreading Human Rights-based culture farther in the East, will remain unmatched. But in order to prevail over the Russian revisionist policy here and now, the West, and, particularly, the EU need to re-evaluate traditional foreign policy options and come up with a more drastic combination of Soft/Hard Powers by itself. As the Georgian case shows, the European community should more efficiently use Conditionality and Coercive Diplomacy, combined with clearer messages about partners' membership perspectives.

Key words: Soft Power, Hybrid Warfare, Eastern Partnership, Europeanization, Russian Revisionism, Conditionality, Coercive Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION: LOGIC AND IDEATIONAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

The idea and objectives of Eastern Partnership Initiative are clearly indicated in official conceptual documents, adopted since the inception of this EU policy until the present time. Communication from the EU Commission to the European Parliament and the Council states that “the European Union has vital interest in seeing stability...at its Eastern borders”.¹ As stipulated by the joint declaration, adopted at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit just few months later, the initiative served “...the shared commitment to stability, security, and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent”. The Eastern partnership also carried “...a clear political message about the need to maintain and bolster the course towards reforms”, implying adherence to the fundamental values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to market economy, sustainable development, and good governance.²

The Eastern Partnership initiative has developed as a two-level endeavor, having parallel bi- and multi-lateral dimensions. For the latter one, the purpose was the promotion of cooperative policy culture in addressing common regional challenges. It was envisioned as a “...forum to share information and experience on the partner countries' steps towards transition, reform, and modernization and give the EU an additional instrument to accompany these processes.”³ Since June 2009, four so-called thematic platforms for practical multi-lateral cooperation have been established: On Democracy, Good Governance, and Stability; Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Sectoral Policies; Energy Security; and Contacts Between People. They were supported by panels in specific areas and flagship initiatives. While the substantive work had

¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Eastern Partnership*, Brussels, 3 December 2008, COM(2008) 823 final.

² Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May, 2009*, Brussels, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78).

³ Ibid.

to be done by governmental representatives and executive agencies, participatory flavor was added by the establishment of EU-Neighborhood East Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST PA) and Civil Society Forum.

In fact, through its multi-lateral dimension, the Eastern Partnership lined with the long-term trend of European and Euro-Atlantic political and academic thought, which was becoming influential since the Second World War. It implied the growing conviction of scholars, politicians, and diplomats, that overcoming narrow nationalistic approaches to state interests through the promotion of multi- or supra-national attitudes was fundamental for stability and prosperity in Europe. Despite the severity of the Cold War, unleashed between Western democracies and the Soviet Union, not only the project of the European community, but even the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, serving the defense interests of the USA and its allies, has been based on the international cooperative security approach. The NATO treaty stipulated for its members “to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.”⁴ With the so-called Harmel Report, adopted by the North Atlantic Council in 1967, NATO paved a road to lasting attempts of détente with the Eastern adversary, which eventually led to the end of the Cold War and East-West cooperative security architecture of the 1990s.⁵

The European community proved to be the champion of multilateralism and post-national approaches. From the inception of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 through the foundation of the EU in 1992, it successfully experimented with building supra-national institutions, as main remedies against nationalistic conflicts in the European area. Both those institutional developments of NATO and the EU have been envisioned and, at the same time, reflected in academic thought: the so called neo-functional social theory, in the words of one of its leading proponents, Ernst B. Haas, argued that the most effective promoters of supra-national integration processes were “expert-managers of functionally specific bureaucracies at the national level, joined together to meet a common need”.⁶ In Haas words personal loyalties of bureaucracies are driven by satisfaction with their agency’s performance of its functions: “Since actors can be loyal to several agencies simultaneously, a gradual transfer of loyalties to international organizations performing most of the crucial functions is likely”.⁷

Generally assessing the neo-functional approach to social and international interactions, one can see its roots in liberal thinking and notice its rather optimistic conviction that, first and foremost, national elites are interested in welfare. This is best provided by

⁴ Article 1, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *The North Atlantic Treaty*, Washington D.C., 4 April 1949, at <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm>.

⁵ S.R. Sloan, *Permanent Alliance? NATO and the Transatlantic Bargain from Truman to Obama*, New York 2013, pp. 49-53, 95-96.

⁶ E.B. Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State. Functionalism and International Organization*, Colchester 2008, p. 66.

⁷ Ibid.

efficiency and the security of the state apparatus. In the long run, however, these qualities can only be achieved through international cooperation. Emphasis on multi-lateral track in the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative was based on the same practical experience and academic thought and intended to mitigate deep-rooted alienation among Eastern partners, stemming from their internal troubles and historically developed survival culture.

Ernst B. Haas, however, also knew that national societies, which have not reached a sufficient level of the rational-legal model of polity, are too often overwhelmed by irrational sentiments.⁸ Under such circumstances, a block/regional approach, i.e. EaP's multilateral dimension, is not enough. Members of that imaginary block remain sovereign states with peculiar elites and diverse orientations. So far, these states lack professional public service, functional and socially oriented market economies, and the rule of law. Some of them experience serious problems with regards to democratic elections. There also are other, geopolitically influenced circumstances, which are given different meanings by each partner country of the EaP. All of that requires a tailor-made, bilateral approach, if the EU is to succeed in promoting stability within its neighborhood. Luckily, the EU does not lack either the desire or the mechanisms for such a purpose.

The bi-lateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership Initiative was designed to foster a closer relationship of the EU with each partner country individually. From the time of adoption of very initial documents, the Initiative envisioned prospects for the Association Agreements with partners, their economic integration through the establishment of a deep and comprehensive free trade area, and prospects for visa-liberalization for their citizens. To pursue these goals practically, the so-called More for More principle was eventually developed, implying phased and individualized approach of the EU to its partners and conditionality.⁹

Such an approach sometimes is seen as the narrow mindedness of the European bureaucracy, which intends to make partners and their policies look as similar to Brussels policy machinery, as possible. According to Liana Fix and her colleagues, analyzing the EU-Georgian relations within the Eastern Partnership umbrella, in various areas of the cooperation the EU exposes "patronizing asymmetrical partnership" and/or "external governance".¹⁰ First and foremost, it implies harmonization of Georgian laws with *Acquis Communautaire*. Elena Korosteleva goes even further: borrowing ideas of social theorist Michel Foucault, who argued that Western policies of prescribing norms to others ("normation") should be substituted by accepting different normalities

⁸ Ibid., pp. 66-67.

⁹ The More for More principle was adopted throughout the EU neighborhood in 2011, following the so-called events of the Arab Spring and implied that additional reform efforts by partner countries were to be rewarded with additional financial and other support. "European Neighborhood Policy (ENP)", *European Union External Action Service*, 21 December 2016, at <https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/northern-dimension/330/european-neighbourhood-policy-enp_en>.

¹⁰ L. Fix et al., "Out of the Shadow? Georgia's Emerging Strategies of Engagement in the Eastern Partnership: Between External Governance and Partnership Cooperation", *Caucasus Survey*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019), p. 19.

(“normalization”),¹¹ she advocates for the EU EaP to become less conditional. For Korosteleva, the EU-partner relationship “requires mutual recognition of their respective normalities for their subsequent reciprocal alignment.”¹² While any bureaucratization has its drawbacks and some of the EU’s trade-related regulations may seem too restrictive, one can question whether Korosteleva’s reading of Foucault implies the suggestion that the EU, for instance, should accept Donbas-like criminalized regimes, or corrupt practices of the post-communist societies.

Though as we see it, European conditionality or “external governance” is not driven just by the above mentioned neo-functionalism and/or bureaucratic bias of Brussels-based agencies, but by the Kantian logic, enshrined in a later liberalist vision of international relations that like-minded and similarly structured democracies are the best guarantees for peace and stability. Thus, if within the Eastern Partnership Initiative emphasis on joint ownership and inclusiveness gradually became side-lined by the conditionality principle,¹³ it is a logical result of European desire for Kantian “perpetual peace” – not just a Euro-centrism of bureaucratic or neo-imperial nature.

The prospect of an Association Agreement with the EU has been offered to each Eastern partner, given that they desired so and adhered to the reform agenda, promoted from Brussels. So far, not every capital of the six partner countries embraced such an opportunity. Their attitudes and pace of cooperation with the European community shows further divergence. In fact, they are divided: three of them – Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia – being relatively successful in their European integration attempts, and Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan lagging behind, though on differing levels and for different reasons. While, for instance, Belarusians have been kept at arm’s length by Europeans themselves, openly condemning President Lukashenko’s poor human rights and democracy record for years, Azerbaijan has been self-distancing: its interest in an Association agreement with the EU “was lukewarm at best.”¹⁴

Bilateralism, as much as multilateralism, in the Eastern Partnership policy of the EU is a dynamic one. We are currently witnessing renewed attempts with regard to setting a new relationship framework between the EU and Azerbaijan. In 2018, the sides agreed on so-called Partnership Priorities, which guides cooperation till 2020. In the meantime, negotiations over the New Partnership Agreement are intensifying, with 90 per cent of the issues already decided.¹⁵ This is happening due to various factors, which did not lack dynamism by themselves: firstly, the EU is attracted by Azerbaijan’s unique

¹¹ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-78*, ed. M. Senellart, transl. by G. Burchell, Basingstoke 2007.

¹² E. Korosteleva, “Eastern Partnership: Bringing ‘the Political’ Back In”, *East European Politics*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2017), p. 328.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

¹⁴ E. Rumer, R. Sokolsky, P. Stronski, “U.S. Policy Toward the South Caucasus: Take Three”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 31 May 2017, at <<https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/31/u.s.-policy-toward-south-caucasus-take-three-pub-70122>>.

¹⁵ I. Gurbanov, “Azerbaijan and the EU Prepare to Finalize a New Partnership Agreement”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 16, no. 51 (2019).

geopolitical location, making it an important part of the East-West transportation and energy corridor. The year 2019 brought a new high level “Transport Dialogue”, as well as progress in developing the Southern Gas Corridor, “strategic backbone of EU-Azerbaijani relations”.¹⁶ Though experts point out that renewed rapprochement between Brussels and Baku is also being preceded or accompanied by certain reforms of the Azerbaijani trade system and, especially by the presidential pardon of some prisoners, whose cases have been regarded by the EU as problematic.

The successful Europeanization of the Eastern Partnership area cannot be anything but a dynamic process, marked with unexpected break throughs and/or setbacks. When president Yanukovich of Ukraine suddenly refused to endorse the Association Agreement in Vilnius, 2013, the revolutionary process of his ousting followed, providing a second chance for EU-Ukrainian cooperation. This process was indigenous, independent of any external interference – revolutions are not imported, despite the fact that such prejudicial belief is being promoted by the Kremlin-linked propaganda machinery. The unexpected ascendance of Nikol Pashinian in 2018 revolutionary Armenia and his reform agenda also brought renewed hopes of deepening relations with the European community. At the same time, once a champion of European integration, Moldova, in recent years, has shown a worsening corruption record, as well as the continuous stalemate between pro-Western and pro-Russian forces.¹⁷

All of the above shows the limits imposed upon the EU neighborhood goals by local political circumstances, while the EU resources and the will to pursue the Eastern Partnership agenda cannot be limitless either. However, since 2014, European policy-makers have been paying increased attention to one of the main impediments of stability and prosperity in the Eastern area: Russian revisionism, which targets the European regional security architecture and emerges as the main role model or instigator for undemocratic tendencies in the neighborhood. In the following section addressing the hybrid warfare phenomenon, we will return to the nature of the Russian threat. As for now, it's worth mentioning, that EaP official statements are becoming more clearly outspoken about the necessity to defend main regional security principles and policies.

From the very beginning, the wording of the Eastern Partnership Initiative official documents was carefully crafted, indicating a very limited and cautious willingness to directly address such burning security issues, as Russian interference in partners' domestic affairs, conflicts, and violated territorial integrity. In the December 2008 communication of the EU Commission, while mentioning that the Eastern Partnership Initiative was a message of EU solidarity and support for “the consolidation of their (Partners') statehood and territorial integrity”, it was also emphasized that “the Eastern Partnership will be pursued in parallel with EU's strategic partnership with Russia”.¹⁸ In

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ M. Williams, “Election May Keep Moldova in ‘Gray Zone’ between West and Russia”, *Reuters*, 19 February 2019, at <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-election/election-may-keep-moldova-in-gray-zone-between-west-and-russia-idUSKCN1Q21S5>>.

¹⁸ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Eastern Partnership...*

the first declaration of the Eastern Partnership Initiative itself, all sides agreed, that the “third states will be eligible for the participation on a case-by-case basis in concrete projects, activities, and meetings of thematic platforms”. Basically it implied that room for Russian observation and even participation in particular EaP activities remained open, even though the language of the Europeans and partners later became more resistant towards unfriendly steps from the Russian side.

On November 24, 2017 a joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit once again reaffirmed their “shared commitment to this strategic and ambitious Partnership, based on common values”. In addition, the declaration indicated that “the European Union remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of all its partners. Full commitment, respect for, and adherence to the purposes and principles enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 OSCE Charter of Paris are fundamental to...shared vision for peaceful and undivided Europe”.¹⁹ Besides, renewed emphasis was put on the partnership within EU Common Security and Defence Policy, particularly through enabling partners to be “more resilient to hybrid threats”.²⁰

Particular emphasis on those international acts, which support legal security architecture in the European continent, was a new development, which started in 2015, during the Riga Summit. It can be seen as the concern of the EU over the clearly revisionist policy of the Russian Federation, violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine since 2014. The emergence of the notion of a “Hybrid Threat” in the Eastern Partnership documents is also attributable to practical forms of Russian aggressiveness towards its neighbors.

Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 in itself contributed to the increase in the interest and involvement of the EU in its Eastern frontiers. As the EU Commission’s initial communication states, the European Council requested the proposal on the Eastern Partnership back in June, 2008, though “the Extraordinary European Council of 1st September 2008” asked for this work to be accelerated, responding to the need for a clearer signal of the EU commitment following the conflict in Georgia and its broader repercussions”.²¹ Thus, from the very beginning, issues of regional and national security were triggered, as well as part of the Eastern Partnership agenda. Though, until the dramatic Ukrainian developments of 2014, linked to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the opening of armed clashes in Eastern Ukraine, security in its traditional understanding was a marginal topic for the EU’s Eastern policy.

Changes in the language of declarations, mentioned above, namely increased emphasis on territorial integrity of the partner countries, freedom of their foreign policy choices, and support for international law principles which underpin this, show where

¹⁹ Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 24 November 2017)*, Brussels, 24 November 2017, 14821/17, COEST 324.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Eastern Partnership...*

the threat to the overall undertaking lies. Through such or other official statements, the EU leadership shows the understanding of the current geopolitics in the Eastern neighborhood and the willingness to work against existing security risks. The question is, whether the precise nature of those is well-measured, efficient counter-mechanisms elaborated, and whether sufficient resources for adequate policy responses have been found.

SEARCHING FOR SECURITY DIMENSION OF THE EAP: CURRENT REGIONAL SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Since the introduction of the Eastern Partnership, the security environment in the EU's eastern neighborhood has profoundly changed, affecting policy priorities. The Russian aggression in Ukraine has fundamentally altered the situation at Europe's eastern borders. The annexation of Crimea and interventions in Donbas were preceded by Russian aggression against Georgia in August 2008. Events in Ukraine retrospectively demonstrated that the war in Georgia was not a one-time exception, but just a step in President Putin's long-planned campaign to restore the imperial grandeur of Russia. It implied challenging the existing European and Euro-Atlantic security architecture. But at that historical juncture, the West and, particularly the EU was not ready to call out such developments. With the case of Ukraine in 2014, this became obvious and intolerable.

The set of Russian actions behind such strategy is often described as hybrid warfare. In fact, the Russian Military Doctrine states that modern warfare is conducted by the integrated use of military force, as well as political, economic, informational, and other non-military measures.²² The doctrine provides no further elaboration on how to conduct hybrid warfare. However, in February 2013 the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, published an article in which he provided the military leadership's views on modern wars.²³ According to Gerasimov, the lines between peace and war are increasingly blurred; war is no longer formally declared, but the adversary rather operates using Special Forces, internal opposition, and informational actions. Gerasimov calls the new type of conflict "non-linear warfare", in which the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness. As a consequence, functioning states can suddenly collapse into chaos.

This concept may be especially confusing for the West to react to and deter, as Russia may not be conducting war in a classical sense but applying a wide set of confrontational

²² *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 25 December 2014, para. 15, at <<https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>>.

²³ В. Герасимов, "Ценность науки в предвидении", *ВПК*, 16 February 2013, at <<https://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>>. See also "Доктрина Герасимова", *Wikipedia*, at <https://uk.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%93%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0>.

instruments, which consists of a mix of non-military and military elements, applying both “soft power” and “hard power”. For a timely reaction to such threats, it is important to understand that the Russian concept of “soft power” is fundamentally different from the one in the West. In the Euro-American definition, it is a set of positive motivations to attract other countries, while the Russian “soft power” is to influence or destabilize countries by means that are not hard, i.e. short of direct military intervention.²⁴ The main objective of such a concept is to prevent the integration of the neighboring countries into Western institutions and to retain control over their decision-making ability.

It is noteworthy, that unlike linking Russia’s behavior with the notion of hybrid war, the Western expert community elaborated on the Kremlin’s “soft power” machinery long before the war in Georgia. The very term, coined by Joseph Nye and implying a state being able to attract others by culture, political values, and moral/legitimate foreign policies, has been initially associated with the global positioning of the US. Russia is hardly able to compete with its nature or global reach. However, according to Fiona Hill, by 2004, Russia was “well on its way to recovering the degree of soft power the USSR once enjoyed in its immediate sphere of influence.”²⁵

Fiona Hill pointed at the following elements of Russian “soft power”: the Russian language still as the *lingua franca* of the former Soviet Union area; pop culture and other consumer products, funded through increased energy revenues and the labor market, attractive for many impoverished citizens of ex-Soviet republics. She also pointed at increasing Russian domination in energy infrastructure and markets of its neighborhood. However, she emphasized that in order to make use of its soft power potential, Russia needed to develop a positive and successful regional policy. Hill cautiously mentioned that it was not clear, if that could have been the case. As the immediate aftermath showed, in practice, Russian “soft power” became amalgamated into hybrid warfare machinery, resulting in the promotion of anti-Western attitudes and the instigation of conflicts in the area. As Carl Bildt, former Swedish minister of foreign affairs said at Statesman Laureate Lecture in Washington DC in April 2015, “(the EUs) borders have become a ring of fire rather than a ring of friends.”²⁶ At least in the Eastern neighborhood, Russia remains a main source and manipulator of that “fire”.

As the cases of Georgia and Ukraine show, Russia has many tools at hand for implementing its revisionist agenda, employing “soft power” and other leverages. First and foremost, the Kremlin uses propaganda as an important tool to influence public opinion, both at home and abroad. A combination of nationalism and anti-Western propaganda, together with a doctrine that Russia is the main protector of traditional values,

²⁴ K. Giles, “Russia’s Toolkit”, in K. Giles et al., *The Russian Challenge. Chatham House Report*, London 2015.

²⁵ F. Hill, “Russia’s Newly Found ‘Soft Power’”, *Brookings Institution*, 26 August 2004, at <<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russias-newly-found-soft-power/>>.

²⁶ C. Bildt, *Europe Surrounded Not by a Ring of Friends but by a Ring of Fire*. Statesman Laureate Lecture, 29 April 2015, Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, cit. after: E. Korostelva, “Eastern Partnership...”, p. 321.

dominates in the state-controlled Russian media both inside and outside Russia. As Hanna Shelest points, in EaP countries, “besides the traditional arguments of having close connections (trade, cultural, linguistic, political, security), Russia expends significant efforts to ruin the EU image (posting fake information or employing stereotypes, like the necessity to adopt same sex marriage legislation for visa liberalization). The goal of this is to present the opinion that any protests in the area (such as EuroMaidan) are being incited by the US or the EU, and stability is more important than democracy. In some way, this is the promotion of the Russian concept of statehood.”²⁷ Spreading such images, Russian decision makers use not only proxy media outlets, but social networks, sabotage groups and so called “agents of influence” – local opinion-makers or “gossip-spreaders”.²⁸

Another non-military instrument is Russia’s gas and oil export power. In general, Russia is reluctant when it comes to interrupting energy flows to the EU countries, as the state’s income is largely dependent on gas and oil exports, however, Moscow has not hesitated to use energy as a political power tool to increase the pressure on Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, and other neighbors. In case of the further deterioration of relations with the West, gas and oil dependencies could also make other European countries vulnerable to Russian threats.²⁹

Russian “soft power” is also frequently used for the “protection of Russian citizens” living in neighboring countries. Russia first applied this concept in Georgia, when Moscow started the process of issuing Russian passports to inhabitants of separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia back in 2002, thereby creating a cluster of Russian citizens in Georgia³⁰ – the purpose of this policy became clear during the 2008 war, when the main argument defending aggression against Georgia was the protection of Russian citizens living there. Similar “passportisation” started in Crimea from 2007 and in 2019 Putin offered Russian passports to all citizens of Ukraine.³¹ It is clear that the argument of protecting its citizens or Russian-speaking minorities in general, is regularly used by Russia as a pretext for exerting hybrid pressure on its particular neighbors.

Of course, all these instruments are not new and hybrid warfare was not invented by Russia. Propaganda, economic blockades, manipulation of minority issues, and covert activities had been used in many international confrontations in combination with full-scale war. But an important conclusion is that Russia is very likely to apply it in one form or another in all future conflicts. Hybrid warfare offers the best option for Russia

²⁷ H. Shelest, “Hybrid War & the Eastern Partnership: Waiting for a Correlation”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2015), p. 48.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ M. Drend, R. Hendriks, D. Zandee, *New Threats, New EU and NATO Responses. Clingendael Report*, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 2015.

³⁰ M. Mackinnon, “Russian Passports Anger Georgia”, *The Globe and Mail*, 2 July 2002, at <<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/russian-passports-anger-georgia/article4137259>>.

³¹ “Putin Says Russia May Offer Fast-Tracked Passports to All Ukrainians”, *The Moscow Times*, 27 April 2019, at <<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2019/04/27/putin-says-russia-may-offer-fast-tracked-passports-to-all-ukrainians-a65413>>.

to influence its immediate neighborhood because of two main reasons – firstly, it is difficult for the concerned countries, as well as for the Western institutions in general to react timely and counter the multiplicity of means used; and secondly, it is also a less risky option for Russia itself, since open warfare will unavoidably bring the country into a large-scale confrontation with the entire international community, which would be very costly, to say the least.

As Hanna Shelest convincingly shows, while the main irritant for Russia is NATO's expansion, the targets of Russian hybrid warfare tactics are all active participants of the Eastern Partnership Initiative. "Russia has never separated NATO and the EU enlargements, presuming that one cannot come without the other. Despite Moldova's constitutionally neutral status, Ukraine's announced non-bloc status (dating back to 2010-14), and Armenia's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), their efforts to sign the Association Agreements with the EU have been seen in the same light as Ukraine and Georgia's aspirations of receiving a Membership Action Plan (MAP)".³² Thereby, it is very likely that the major security challenge for the EU's eastern neighborhood area for upcoming years will be how to respond to hybrid threats coming from Russia.

Such a fundamental change in Europe's security environment raises important questions regarding responses of the international organizations most concerned – firstly, the European Union but also NATO. The very nature of hybrid warfare and the blurred nature of military and non-military means make cooperation between these two major institutions absolutely essential. As confirmed at the NATO Summit in Wales, Article 5, as NATO's original core task, has retaken its central position. In addition, the hybrid nature of the new threats to the Alliance's East led to a whole set of new military responses taken under the Readiness Action Plan such as the establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). The EU, on the other hand, has non-military instruments at its disposal to deal with these threats: diplomatic-political measures; economic, trade, and energy policies; financial and economic sanctions, and last but not the least substantive potential for countering propaganda and disinformation. The complex cross-border and cross-sectoral nature of the current security challenges makes the EU potentially an organization that should be increasingly able to position itself as a security provider – the conflict in Ukraine has sharply laid out the expectations and responsibilities that rest on the EU as a security provider on its own continent.

Unfortunately, as mentioned above, the 2008 aggression against Georgia was not considered as sufficient ground for re-consideration of the EU attitude and responses to Russian revisionism. However, Ukraine left no doubts and the EU started preparing itself for this new security challenge after the annexation of Crimea. In the previous section, we analyzed the impact of Russia's expanding aggressiveness in the language of EaP statements. This is the appropriate place to mention practical actions.

The outline of the EU's response to the new security challenges has become clearer throughout 2014 and 2015: "The security situation in the EU's neighborhood has

³² H. Shelest, "Hybrid War & the Eastern Partnership...", p. 46.

deteriorated significantly,” stated High Representative (HR) Federica Mogherini in her report ahead of the June 2015 European Council.³³ Up to now, the main elements of the EU’s response to Russia’s aggressiveness has been economic and political sanctions,³⁴ establishing an Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform (EUAM Ukraine, July 2014), supporting the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (March 2014) and supporting Ukraine, as well as other partner countries in their democratic and economic reforms.

Apart from these policies and tools, the EU’s response box against hybrid threats also contains diplomatic efforts, cyber defense measures, strategic communication, the creation of an Energy Union, and a stronger security dimension in the Eastern Partnership. Already in June 2013, an Eastern Partnership Panel on cooperation in the area of Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) was created. The panel served as an important instrument to facilitate dialogue on political and practical aspects of participation in CSDP missions and operations, and provided a forum for sharing experience between the EU, its member states, and partner countries on engagement in international crisis management and peacekeeping activities, the development of national capabilities for those purposes, as well as overall security sector reforms. The EU and some of the Eastern Partners have started regular bilateral staff-to-staff consultations. Ukraine contributed a frigate to EUNAVFOR in 2015 and Georgia and the Republic of Moldova joined CSDP operations for the first time. They both took part in EUTM Mali and Georgia contributed one infantry company to EUFOR RCA with 156 troops, making it the second largest contributor to the operation. This new focus on the security aspects of the ENP was underlined by the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council: “ENP instruments should be used more widely to strengthen partner’s capacity to address security threats, notably through security sector reforms. Equally, the on-going ENP review should aim at closer coordination between ENP and wider CFSP/CSDP activities in a comprehensive manner.”³⁵

European security policy, as well as the EU-NATO partnership has been gradually affecting the EaP area, addressing its peculiar concerns, related to Russian destructive policies but not only. One has to mention that even without Russian interference, partner countries face generic problems related to security sector reform and general features of weak statehood, reflected in wide-spread corruption, authoritarian tendencies, the strength of the organized criminal networks, poverty, radicalization etc. From its inception, as mentioned above, the EaP has been dealing with the strengthening of the rule of law, promoting good governance, and human rights protection in the area,

³³ HRVP/Head of the Agency Report Ahead of the June 2015 EC, at <http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/documents/pdf/report-ahead_european-defence-agency.pdf>.

³⁴ The set of sanctions against Russia includes: asset freezes and visa bans; a suspension of preferential economic development loans to Russia by the European Bank; a ban on trading bonds for certain products; a ban on loans for state-owned banks; a two-way arms embargo; a ban on the export of goods that can be used for weaponry; and a ban on exporting certain energy equipment.

³⁵ Council of the European Union, *Conclusions on the Review of the European Neighborhood Policy*, Press release, 20 April 2015.

which are very basic fundamentals for national or regional security and stability. Recent years, however, showed more focused attention to ESDP within the Eastern Partnership Initiative. In 2015, the European Council mandated the creation of the East Stratcom Task Force to counter certain segments of hybrid threats related to the spread of Russian disinformation about EU intentions and policies. It also worked on strengthening the capabilities of strategic communications of the partner countries and “their resilience to disinformation”.³⁶ The EU also increased its focus on building capabilities and resilience in partner countries in the security sector... “by developing the security dimension of the revised European Neighborhood Policy”.³⁷

As for the EU-NATO partnership, it has never been without caveats, due to diverging attitudes of particular partner countries or organizational tensions. Though, liberal-democratic values and practices, underpinning both pillars of the European security architecture was a solid ground for eventual achievements in partnership and cooperation.³⁸ Hybrid warfare, stemming from the East, has been an additional stimulus for their joint efforts. An example of such cooperation is a technical arrangement, signed in February 2016 between NATO and the EU cyber defense institutions, aimed at a provision of a framework for exchanging information and sharing best practices between emergency response teams.³⁹ In April 2017, NATO and the EU established the European Center of Excellence for countering hybrid threats.⁴⁰ Obviously it had direct relevance to Eastern neighborhood security.

The question is whether all these steps are enough, given the seriousness of the security situation in the Eastern Partnership area. There is still a necessity for the EU to develop a comprehensive framework for addressing hybrid threats in the region.⁴¹ Hanna Shelest rightfully points that such threats are not narrowed to illegal cyber and/or disinformation activities. They also encompass “sabotage, (promotion of) dual citizenship, sponsoring of political parties and NGOs...use of blackmail over political leaders and their dependency on the corruption schemes, manipulation of the sentiments of national minorities”.⁴²

Hanna Shelest, representing the informed community from the East, understands that those threats, stemming from Russian revisionism of the post-Cold War

³⁶ European Commission, *Joint Report to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on the implementation of the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats from July 2017 to June 2018*, Brussels, 13 June 2018, JOIN(2018) 14 final.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ On that matter see, for instance: S.R. Sloan, *Permanent Alliance?...*

³⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO and the European Union Enhance Cyber Defense Cooperation*, 10 February 2016, at <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_127836.htm>.

⁴⁰ “EU and NATO inaugurate European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats”, *European Union External Action Service*, 2 October 2017, at <https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/33119/eu-and-nato-inaugurate-european-centre-excellence-countering-hybrid-threats_en>.

⁴¹ H. Shelest, “Hybrid War & the Eastern Partnership...”, pp. 52-53.

⁴² Ibid., p. 52.

politico-security landscape, cannot be countered by pure military means: the EU leadership, as well as NATO does not have the desire for this and the transformation of hybrid interaction into a large-scale military confrontation will unavoidably bring risks for everyone and enormous human suffering. But we agree that since the threats to the survival of liberal-democratic statehood in Eastern Europe do not diminish, room for the improvement of the Western security assistance to EaP countries remains open.

The main measurement of the EaP's success in curbing hybrid threats could be the Russian retreat from its destructive positions concerning the territorial integrity of Georgia, Ukraine, and the weakening of its interference into neighbors' domestic affairs. But given the political philosophy of the Russian ruling class, in the nearest perspective, it does not seem likely. For the Kremlin, everything NATO and the EU does in the East, is neo-colonialism and aims at encircling Russia. Democratic transformation, propagandized and supported by the Western community in the East, has been read by Russian influential personalities, like the above mentioned chief of general staff of the Russian armed forces, as non-linear/hybrid warfare, pursued against Moscow. Thus, Russia deems necessary "to fight back" and, like in the Cold War period, we are witnessing a paradigmatic stalemate between the East and West. Luckily, Russia is neither as strong as the USSR used to be, nor it has Soviet ideological robustness.

The EU, as much as NATO, can be understood as promoters of Cooperative Security – a model, which has been promoted by the Euro-Atlantic community at least since the 1990s.⁴³ Its essence can be seen in particular policies of NATO and the EU, respectively promoting the Partnership for Peace Program and the European Neighborhood Policy. Cooperative security implies a strong partnership with the outer ring of NATO and the EU, promoting not only and not so much national, but human/individual security philosophy, as well as liberal-democratic values and institutions, including the democratic transformation of national security sectors. The Eastern Partnership, given the further strengthening of its CSDP dimension, falls within the logic of cooperative security and serves the purpose of increasing internal "immunity" and resilience of the EaP countries against hybrid threats.

In the long run, Russian revisionism can hardly withstand cooperative security vision, backed by the NATO-EU partnership and projection of genuine Western "soft power". In general, we believe in Kant's following dictum, preceding all modern liberal-democratic foreign policy logic and machinery: *... if a powerful and enlightened people should form a republic... this would serve as a center of federal union for other states in accordance with the idea of the law of nations. Gradually, through different unions of this kind, the federation would extend further and further.* That is the best, though only general, remedy from the existing hybrid decease threat, causing turmoil in Eastern Europe. It does not exclude the necessity of strengthening security assistance, conditionality, but also more clear incentives, up to the membership prospects, from the EU and

⁴³ For better understanding of such security policy concept, see, for instance: R. Cohen, "Cooperative Security: From Individual Security to International stability", in idem, M. Mihalka, *Cooperative Security. New Horizons for International Order*, Garmisch-Partenkirchen 2001 (*The Marshall Center Papers*, no. 3).

NATO to partner countries. The rest, namely the concrete successes and failures of the EaP, should probably be assessed on a case-by-case basis, since it is not only Russia, that confronts the democratic and cooperative impulses from the West. As it was mentioned in the beginning, the partners themselves have troubles in adapting to modern democracy, rule of law, and human rights principles, which are the main ingredients for the success of cooperative security. Through failures in building robust democratic institutions the partners facilitate Russian revisionism.

GEORGIAN SUCCESSES AND FAILURES WITHIN THE EAP

The maintenance of strong liberal-democratic institutions and social cohesion among all groups of the population can be a crucial factor in defining whether hybrid warfare tactics can easily affect a target country or not. States whose governance and institutions are weak are more vulnerable to outside pressure and can create pretexts for hybrid warfare campaigns.⁴⁴ This means that the Eastern partners themselves have to deal effectively with their internal problems, inherited from undemocratic traditions. Otherwise no amount of EU support can be enough. Georgia presents an interesting case of being among the champions of the Eastern Partnership Initiative, while, at the same time, having troubles with respect to good governance and the rule of law. It is also a country, which has been experiencing hybrid pressure from the North, at least since 2006. In that year, thousands of Georgian citizens were expelled from Russia and a ban on Georgian products was introduced. In the beginning of 2008, the situation on the ground deteriorated up to armed hostilities in the conflict zones, which existed on Georgian soil since its independence. Russia started to openly back separatist enclaves politically and militarily, leading to an open armed clash and intervention, as a corollary of hybrid warfare.⁴⁵

At present, despite the fact that more than 20% of Georgian territory remains occupied by Russia and two countries do not have diplomatic relations, the occupier is fully able to project its “soft power” over the rest of Georgia. According to recent local media reports, Russian companies, including state monopoly energy giant Gazprom, are improving their positions in Georgia. Russian-speaking baby-sitters are again in demand among Georgian upper-middle class families and the so-called Alliance of Patriots – being effectively a sister party of the Ruling Georgian Dream – is demanding a referendum on the issue of declaring the country as a non-allied nation.⁴⁶

Luckily, for years the support for integration into both pillars of European security, NATO and the EU, has been around 70% among Georgian citizens. Although, like in

⁴⁴ P. Bernstein, *NDC Conference Report “Rethinking Deterrence and Assurance”*, NATO Defense College 2015

⁴⁵ On Hybrid nature of the war between Russia and Georgia, see: D. Darchiashvili, “Russo-Georgian War of August 2008: Clash of Ideologies and National Projects in the Era of Hybrid Warfare”, *Sõjateadlane* (Estonian Journal of Military Studies), no. 7 (2018), pp. 12-38.

⁴⁶ Rustavi 2, New Program “Dilis Kurieri”, 7 May 2019.

many, much more Europeanized countries, it does not preclude Moscow from covert encouragement of multiple anti-Western organizations, as, for instance, the “Georgian March”, or media outlets which continuously try to mock pro-Western political parties. While a pragmatic stance of most of the Georgian population does not allow for re-directing its loyalty from the European security architecture to isolationism, equaling to filling the security vacuum further by Russia, anti-liberal sentiments, deeply rooted in the public mindset should not be disregarded. Together with poverty, a Manichean political culture, the strong tradition of corruption and criminality, and hostility to modern liberalism are indigenous ingredients, on which Russian revisionist foreign policy relies.

In the given circumstances much depends on the political class, and particularly, on the governmental elite, whether not only democracy, but a very liberal value system will finally take over in Georgia: Europeanism and EU integration prospects are hardly attainable only by pragmatic security or economic calculations. As it has been mentioned, despite the increase of projection of ESDP within the Eastern Partnership area, the EU mostly relies on soft power mechanisms, stemming from its predominantly Civil/Normative Power nature.⁴⁷ That is important in the long run, but only if local recipients make maximum use of the EU’s offer. It could be telling in this respect, that while Georgia enjoys a deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, which already caused the growth of the Georgian export volume to the European market, it is still 21.7% of all of Georgia’s exports, while the share of the Commonwealth of Independent States, led by Russia, amounts 49.9%.⁴⁸

Still, Georgia remains on the right track in deepening its relations with the EU, which implies an approximation trajectory. While towards the end of the 1990s the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, exploring the possibilities to apply for membership, has been rebuffed,⁴⁹ in 2003-2004, EU-Georgia relations got a new impetus. Firstly, this was caused by the launch of the EU Neighborhood Policy, which later gave way to Mediterranean, as well as Eastern Partnership tracks. But no less important was the Georgian indigenous development, when in November 2003, young representatives of the pro-Western faction of the political class ended the corrupt and failing regime of the late Shevardnadze, ousting him from presidency through the peaceful “Rose Revolution”.

⁴⁷ Academic discussions about the nature of the EU as a supra-national entity led to such definitions as civilian, normative and market power Europe. See, for instance: I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2002), pp. 235-258; Ch. Damro, “Market Power Europe”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 19, no. 5 (2012), pp. 682-699.

⁴⁸ Balance of import shares is better in this respect, amounting to 28,8% and 29,6% respectively. National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2019. In: N. Chitadze, “Main Challenges on the Way of European Integration of Ukraine and Georgia. Comparative Analysis”, *The European Geopolitical Forum*, 17 April 2019, at <<http://gpf-europe.net/context/publications/?id=39541>>.

⁴⁹ K. Gogolashvili, *Georgia-EU Relations and Future Perspectives. Policy Paper*, Georgian Center for Security and Development, Tbilisi 2017, p. 5, at <<https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/pdf/English-2501.pdf>>.

In 2004, a new revolutionary government was invited to join the Neighborhood Policy and, given the regional/block based approach of the EU towards its neighbors, Georgia has been accompanied by other South Caucasian states. Entering the Eastern Partnership Initiative in 2009, a year later, Georgia started negotiations on the Association Agreement.⁵⁰

In November 2013, during the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, Georgia went ahead of its South Caucasian neighbors, endorsing the Association Agreement. This happened when, after the 2012 parliamentary elections, the revolutionary and modernization-minded Saakashvili government was no longer in power and Georgia was run by force, radically opposing everything done by the predecessors. The newly-formed government of Georgian billionaire Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in Russia, has not yet opposed the association with the EU. In June 2014, Georgia and the EU signed an Association Agreement, which came into force in July 1, 2016. Since March 2017, Georgian citizens started enjoying visa-free travel within the Schengen Zone for short-stay purposes. On October 11, 2017, Tbilisi hosted first EU-Georgia meeting of the high-level strategic dialogue on security matters.⁵¹

During all these years the European Union invested heavily in the transformation of the Georgian polity, as well as its economic structure into democratic and market-oriented ones. Together the bilateral cooperation with the European nations, as well as the no less crucial partnership with the United States, allowed Georgia to withstand lot of internal or external troubles. One example of the scope and importance of the EU-US assistance can be especially telling: after the war with Russia in August 2008, the EU co-hosted a high-level international donor conference. It was attended by 65 countries and promised USD 4.55 billion in aid for the war-ravaged country.⁵² Without that, the global economic down-turn, unleashing its full impact at the time, could have been much dramatic for Georgia's tiny and fragile economy.

No state can sustain itself in a turbulent region, unless it finds a strategic niche. Since the rule of Shevardnadze in 1992-2003, Georgia was increasingly perceived internationally and as a result by its elite, as a transportation hub. In the late 1990s, it played a role in East-West energy flow, attempting to compete with Russia in this respect. Currently, there are few gas, oil, and railroad projects running and linking Azerbaijan and further East with Europe via Georgia. The EU's role is seminal in this respect. Even in the early 1990s, when Georgia still lacked a comprehensive legal framework of its relations with the EU, the latter launched the TRACECA program, facilitating East-West transportation corridor development via the South Caucasus. It was then followed by the EU-funded INOGATE program, aimed at the development of gas and oil pipelines, running through Eastern Europe and Caucasus to the EU. Since July 2017, Georgia is a member of the EU-founded Energy Community, and is thus obliged to regulate and liberalize its internal energy market according to the EU standards. At present,

⁵⁰ *The Chronology of the Important Events of Georgia-EU Relations*, at <<http://mfa.gov.ge>>.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² K. Gogolashvili, *Georgia-EU Relations...*, p. 11.

Georgia's place in TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Pipeline) and TAP (Trans-Adriatic Pipeline) projects may dramatically increase the EU-NATO interest in accepting the country as their prospective member.⁵³

The normative power nature of the EU, understood as an ideational strength, projected inside and outside of its boundaries through the conditionality principle, was probably the most visible factor in the EU-Georgia relations. The concept of the normative power Europe rests on common principles, norms, which go beyond the Westphalian understanding of sovereignty and statehood and are being promoted in the neighborhood. This process is different from the relevant activity of historical empires, since the norms, disseminated by the EU stem from the human rights, not national/imperial interests.⁵⁴ Even successes in Georgia's integration in the EU Energy Community or the European Free Trade Area, which can be seen as a result of market power dimension of the EU,⁵⁵ is linked to the internalization of EU norms by Georgia.

Georgia would not have received visa liberalization and free trade opportunities if it took no step towards reforms: its criminal justice system, protection of personal data, border management, anti-corruption or anti-discrimination policies. Since its inception, the Eastern Partnership Initiative has been providing political framework, as well as financial instruments in these reformation processes. For instance, in 2014-2017, the EU allocated EUR 410 million for support of Georgian reforms, particularly in the areas of justice, agriculture, and public administration.⁵⁶ European experts point out Georgia's success in the management of public finances and in ensuring fiscal discipline. They had also been largely positive in their assessment of the Georgian justice system by 2014.⁵⁷

By and large, Georgia's success in aligning with the EU standards of governance have been caused by three factors. Since 2004, Saakashvili's government launched an unprecedented anti-corruption and anti-criminal campaign, which was mostly driven by indigenous circumstances: both the elite and the society realized that without such a fight, Georgia was sliding back into the chaos of early 1990s and failed state status. These campaigns have initially been praised by the EU, which dispatched the first CSDP mission, EU JUST THEMIS, to help Georgia design a criminal justice strategy. But later on, due to the libertarian economic reforms pursued by the revolutionary government, which deviated from the EU directives, Georgia started to lag behind Moldova and Ukraine in negotiations concerning free trade.⁵⁸ Since 2007, Georgia was also criticized in European capitals and internationally for heavy-handedness

⁵³ N. Chitadze, "Main Challenges..."

⁵⁴ I. Manners, "Normative Power Europe...", pp. 235-258.

⁵⁵ Some authors, like Chad Damro, see the EU as primarily market power, pointing that "The EU is a power that can use its market and regulatory strengths to externalize internal policies". Ch. Daamro, "Market Power Europe", p. 684.

⁵⁶ A.-M. Costea (coord.), *Structures of Interconnectivity in the EU's Neighborhood. Main Factors that Shaped the Implementation of the ENP – A Handbook*, Bucharest 2018, p. 153, 258.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 263-264.

⁵⁸ K. Gogolashvili, *Georgia-EU Relations...*, p. 9.

in anti-crime policies and for Weberian style state-building. After the August war with Russia, Saakashvili's government became open to the EU conditionality. These very conditions, set by Brussels, and incentives associated with their acceptance, were two additional factors of Georgian success.

The story of visa liberalization for Georgian citizens envisioned by the Eastern Partnership is one of the most telling examples in the above mentioned respect: Saakashvili's government started it and the successive one continued to work on Georgian travel document security, integrated border management, and migration management and asylum system. Visa liberalization also required additional attention to the legal protection of citizens' fundamental rights. Since 2013, the Georgian government harmonized 60 laws and 70 by-laws to reach the visa-free status within the Schengen Zone of the EU for its citizens.⁵⁹

But even if there were no geopolitical troubles associated with Russian residual imperialism, the extension of EU membership to Georgia remains a very distant possibility. The main reason for that is, that according to the Freedom House index, Georgia remains only a partly free nation. Moreover, in 2018, scores for judicial framework and general democracy showed deterioration.⁶⁰ Assessing democratic performance and the human rights situation in partner countries, the EU heavily relies on the reports of international non-governmental organizations, as well as on the Council of Europe and the OSCE. The latter critically estimated the presidential elections of 2018 in Georgia, pointing at heavy usage of so-called administrative resources by the government, as well as vote buying. European parliamentarians are especially critical of the lack of due investigation of particular criminal cases, where law enforcers and their superiors are suspected in perpetuating or even covering crime.

On December 29, 2016, the Georgian parliament adopted a bi-partisan resolution on foreign policy priorities, once again emphasizing that Georgia remains committed to the goal of Euro-Atlantic integration, implying possible membership in NATO and the EU. The government followed with issuing a communication strategy for the promotion of the idea of NATO/EU membership among the population in the years 2017-2020.⁶¹ However, the uneven democratic record of the country give to such pledges a declaratory flavor. Successes in particular aspects of so-called good governance and market economy also become secondary, and in the long run, may be undermined, unless Georgia endorses criteria defined for EU membership by the European Council. They encompass not only a market economy, which will remain hollow, unless backed by an independent judiciary, but institutions, guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, protection of human rights, and respect for minority groups. The very Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU serves this purpose, but its materialization requires dedication, which is frequently lacking in transitional regimes such as Georgia.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp 18-19.

⁶⁰ N. Chitadze, "Main Challenges...", pp. 13-14.

⁶¹ A.-M. Costea (coord.), *Structures of Interconnectivity in the EU's Neighborhood...*, pp. 153, 276-277.

Confronting the Kremlin's hybrid machinery is linked but not limited to the promotion of democracy. While the problem of occupation of Georgian territories by Russia remains by and large out of the EaP's scope of activities,⁶² acting beyond neighborhood policy options, the EU leadership played an important role in stopping Russian military aggression in 2008. At that moment, the activity of the EU presidency, as well as the extraordinary European Council on September 1 manifested the EU's ability to employ high politics in protection of its Eastern partners. High politics in the European sense is understood as a combination of diplomatic and other measures during a crisis. It belongs to the prerogative of member states, not the EU commission.⁶³ But in that historical juncture, the EU political leadership fell short of sanctioning Russia. In a way, here European coercive diplomacy ended here and high politics crisis management led the way to so-called low politics. This was manifested by the EU's co-chairmanship of so called Geneva talks on the conflict and the field presence of the monitoring mission – EUMM on the perimeter of the occupied territories.

Low politics is assessed as a special knowledge of the EU institutions, aimed at the de-escalation of geopolitical rivalries and taking on the form of rather routine, technical field work in and/or around conflicts. It is argued that such an approach may eventually bring a cumulative effect. The EU's main rival, Russia, while having influence on particular EU members, is less capable of thwarting purely supra-national bureaucracy driven missions.⁶⁴ In any case, results of the stabilization component of the EUMM's mandate are tangible. Its presence is important taking the nature of Russia's hybrid attack on Georgia back in 2008 into account. By gathering and disseminating neutral and objective information, EUMM is perceived by Georgia and the EU as an important contributor to safeguarding security and stability on the ground.

The EU-Georgian partnership is an illustrative case of EaP's capacities to achieve the long-term European goal of a stable and secure neighborhood. It can only materialize through the promotion of democratic reforms and the mitigation of conflicts. The EU does a lot in both directions using multi- and bi-lateral mechanisms. That definitely helps Georgia to float on the surface of troublesome internal and external currents. However, criticism of the effectiveness of the EaP, voiced in the European expert and diplomatic community since at least 2013, also deserves attention: there are questions regarding the exact meaning of political association of partner countries with the EU; on uneven usage of monitoring mechanisms and the "more for more" principle; on the efficiency of the EaP parliamentary assembly or other multilateral forums in encouragement of democratic reforms.⁶⁵ The EU responds to it. The EaP is undergoing revisions and remains a live process. The story of reconciliation within the West-East faultline is, however, not yet over.

⁶² L. Fix et al., "Out of the Shadow?...", p. 12.

⁶³ N. Popesku, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts. Stealth Intervention*, London 2011, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19.

⁶⁵ A. Duleba et al., *Visegrad 4 the Eastern Partnership. Towards the Vilnius Summit*, Bratislava 2013, pp. 33-34.

CONCLUSION

Given the hybrid war elements employed by Russia within the area of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative, experts from local, as well as the European community stress the necessity to endorse deeper and more consistent deterrent cooperation between NATO and the EU.⁶⁶ Further strategic prioritization of the Eastern Partnership Initiative is needed, among others measures.

Of course, the main mechanisms to pursue the European agenda in the East remain within the scope of soft power stemming from the nature of the EU, which has been variously defined as civilian, normative or market power. These mechanisms are relevant to the task, since they provide an opportunity to countries like Georgia in the “elimination of values which contradict those of the EU”.⁶⁷ This is important not only for the sake of the promotion of democracy, but also for resilience against hybrid threats in the entire region. However, since hybrid warfare also involves military means, as well as covert special operations, and Eastern partners are largely exposed to the Russian version of soft power, more has to be done.

Obviously, NATO and the EU, as two pillars of the Western security architecture should continue their work for the development of an early warning system and joint data base on the identification of countries most susceptible to hybrid risks. The elaboration of the anti-hybrid warfare doctrine and instructions are also on the agenda.⁶⁸ At the same time, however, like NATO, the EU should give a clear signal that those partners who succeed in democratic transformation as envisioned in the Association Agreements will eventually be invited to join the EU, if they so wish. Such a promise has to be accompanied with further sectoral integration and enhanced robustness of the conditionality principle. The EU should not shy away from coercion not only against revisionist Russia, but also targeting those Eastern partners whose reforms lack profoundness in terms of respect for basic rule of law and human rights principles.

The EU is not a lonely institution in the promotion of democracy in the neighborhood. But it is hardly matched by any other in ability, resources, and legal authority to implement, monitor, and maintain democratic institutions, good governance, and social cohesion both within its borders and beyond. Liberal-democratic values and institutions are the ideational, political, and social fundamentals against hybrid threats. The EU understands this and promotes them. The EaP is an example. What is needed – is an unequivocal belief in this course and additional energy and courage for its implementation.

⁶⁶ See for instance: P. Pernik, *EU and NATO. Enhancing Cooperation to Counter Hybrid Threats*, European Leadership Network 2015; K. Abbott, *Understanding and Countering Hybrid Warfare: Next Steps for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. University of Ottawa Papers*, 2016; K. Gogolashvili, *Georgia-EU Relations Future Perspectives...*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁸ K. Abbott, *Understanding and Countering Hybrid Warfare...*, p. 4.

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