

CHAPTER II

War in Ukraine and European security: reset, reverse or revoke?¹

Maria Raquel Freire*

Introduction

This chapter looks into Russian politics towards Ukraine, and how the use of soft and hard power has prompted serious challenges to European security. The mix in strategies and political moves shows how hybrid threats have become a new element, despite not being so new, of the so-called new wars (Kaldor 2007). This terminology points to a different approach to war from conventional ones, where there is a mix of war, organised crime, massive violations of human rights, involving global and local actors, public and private ones, informal criminalised economic networks, constituting thus both a military challenge and a political one, with the centrality of the state being many times questioned. In this way, Kaldor highlights how the new wars end up becoming more of a political challenge, about breaches of legitimacy and the need for distinct political responses, eventually more cosmopolitan in their nature and reach. The war in Ukraine, with all the ingredients that ended up making part of the complex recipe developing on the ground, points to a mix of “old” and “new” war features, where the hybrid nature of threats and responses to these seems to have gained a relevant place in the unfolding of events.

The annexation of Crimea and the lingering instability in Eastern Ukraine put pressure on EU-Russia relations, as well as on the European security regime. The violation of international law and of the borders’ regime and its normative implications are object of analysis. Looking into politics and procedures, including Russian foreign and security policy principles as well as instruments to pursue them, the chapter analyses Russian actions in Ukraine, unpacking the hybrid nature of the means and actions, and discussing the implications of these for European security. In fact, the neighbouring area to both the EU and Russia which became smaller with the successive EU enlargements, became a space of attrition between these two giants. Looking at this area differently but very similarly also, as a space of influence, both the EU and Russia have been developing policies towards these countries that seek to bring them closer to their own spheres of action. These contradictory projects have clashed and Ukraine became the prime example of this clash in many different ways that this chapter seeks to analyse.

The EU approach to Russian actions in Ukraine was slow to take shape and when sanctions were agreed among member states many criticised the EU for the lack of a strong common will and capacity to face the Russian muscled positioning in its vicinity. Besides in many instances facing cumbersome decision-making processes in face of divergence among its member states, the EU is not totally blocked by the disagreement of its members and might through different strategic approaches put forward alternative ways to approach new challenges, as well as take advantage from opportunities arising. The focus on preventive means and early warning is here a fundamental strategy where the EU has been investing time and resources. Preventive diplomacy, by promoting anticipated action towards what might be identified as focus of tension or friction, requiring the involvement of different human and material means, constitutes an area where the EU might play an advantageous role with positive results.

¹ Freire, Maria Raquel (2017), War in Ukraine and European Security: Reset, Reverse or Revoke?, in Giray Sadik (org.), Europe's Hybrid Threats: What Kinds of Power Does the EU Need in the 21st Century?. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

* The author acknowledges funding for research from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks (ITN-ETN) of the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, under grant agreement ‘CASPIAN - Around the Caspian: a Doctoral Training for Future Experts in Development and Cooperation with Focus on the Caspian Region’ (642709 – CASPIAN – H2020-MSCA-ITN-2014).

In this way, this chapter looks at the concept of hybrid threat and war and how new applications of old procedures have been challenging the European security regime. The implications for EU-Russia relations, as well as relations of Russia with the west, are immediate and the way the EU might reply to the new context might be framed in innovative contours. The chapter starts by looking into hybridity in this context and at what European security means, particularly for Russia and the EU. It then proceeds with Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine and what decisions made and actions taken mean for European security. The case of Ukraine illustrates the hybridity of challenges faced by Russia and the EU, and provides room for thinking ahead about a more proactive EU approach to hybrid challenges, through a tighter preventive approach.

Hybrid threats: ‘old wine in new bottles’?

The concept of hybrid threats and hybrid wars has been gaining attention in the literature as it points to a mix in procedures at both the decision-making/strategic and operational levels. This is not a new concept as such, as the term hybridity has been used to mean a combination of civilian and military means, or of global and local levels of analysis, or even of conventional or traditional means with more post-modern tools. Hybrid threats range from transnational terrorism to corruption, from inter-institutional cooperation among governmental and non-governmental agencies with the military to the combination of public and private spheres in operations, with governments, transnational actors and civilian populations deeply involved in the processes. The term was first worked out by two American military personnel, General James Mattis and retired Marine officer Frank Hoffman in 2005, who referred to the use of “irregular methods” to gain tactical advantage, such as “terrorism, insurgency and narco-crime”. In these officers’ words, “Irregular challengers seek to exploit tactical advantages at a time and place of their own choosing, rather than playing by our rules. They seek to accumulate a series of small tactical effects, magnify them through the media and by information warfare, to weaken US resolve”. To this “merger of different modes and means of war”, they called “Hybrid Warfare” (IISS 2014).

In this way, hybridity points to a complex mix of means spanning decision-making processes to implementation dynamics, and differentiated actors, such as governments or irregular groups. But the novelty of this concept lies not so much in the possible combinations it implies, but more in the new contexts where this hybridity has been applied. “[H]ybrid warfare (...) has emerged as one of the most innovative and popular instruments in contemporary international politics (...). Hybrid warfare is now used in a systematic, subtle, and refined way, backed by an official state discourse that denies it and supports it at the same time and to which the international community seems unable to respond” (Polese et al. 2016, 365). This complexity inherent to hybrid threats and wars renders clear the need for more complex responses as well as draws attention to the need for innovative takes. If the phenomenon is not new, as propaganda, mis(dis)information, subversion have been tactics applied for long, the contexts have changed. In fact, a highly technological environment, more advanced instruments in the digital and conventional dimensions, such as regarding social media, and the spaces for intervention, both territorially and transnationally defined, confer on these threats the need for new thinking.

The challenges associated to how hybrid threats are conceptualised in this encompassing manner, have a clear imprint in how security is understood and put to practice. The concept of security has been deepening and widening, particularly after the end of the Cold War, adjusting to a new context. More than just military security with a very territorialised dimension, human, societal, environmental, energy security became “new labels” for old concerns (Buzan et al. 1997). This meant these different dimensions of security became part of the political agendas, in face of a more complex international system where different actors coexist, with different natures. The individual dimension of security gained relevance, with considerations about individuals and communities becoming fundamental, and the responsibility and in some cases ability of states to assure their rights questioned. In fact, the discussion about state fragility or its incapacity to guarantee the security of its populations was discussed widely. The responsibility to protect agreement at the United Nations expressed the concern with major violations of human rights and this incapacity, inability or unwillingness from national governments to prevent these. Other dimensions of security gained increased relevance, such as energy security, with both a national, international and transnational dimension, involving states, but also private companies, and making of the dealings to ensure energy production, transit and supply a dynamic chain with many challenges. Spoilers have interrupted supplies, with consequences for specific countries and populations in terms of resources available, and in this way are being used as a security threat to a country’s stability. Or instead, in a reverse order, a reduction in supply demand putting pressure on the

producer country, as a way to achieve lower prices, for example, but with consequences at the upper level of the chain production. These are just brief examples to demonstrate how security widened and deepened, and how the challenges to security became so diverse. Security from what and for whom have become recurrent questions. And these demonstrate the ambiguities that have been characterising different understandings and interpretations of the concept. The territorialised nature of security is still relevant, but space was opened for non-territorialised challenges to security, both regarding the sectorial dimensions as identified above, and the nature of the actors involved – states, non-state actors, intra-state actors, transnational actors. The complexity arising out of this new mix feeds into the discussion about hybrid threats and how we might face and respond to them to enhance security.

(In)security readings in EU-Russia relations

The understanding of security in the EU and Russia has been distinct. These are two very different actors – one is a unitary state, the other an international organisation with 28 member states; one with a centralised decision-making process, the other following inter-governmental methods in matters of foreign, security and defense policies. The distinct nature of the actors defines their very own distinct understandings of security. The European Security Strategy (ESS) approved in 2003 sought to identify the main threats to the Union and defining the main strategic goals to achieve more security. The document goes through different threats to security, including terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure, and organised crime. It defines as an assumption the transnational and complex character of these threats as impeding countries on their own to address them, requiring therefore a concerted effort. Towards this goal, developing better means for preventing violence, was agreed, as well as it was understood that threats outside, and even far from the EU borders, could have fundamental impact in EU's security. In fact, this idea became a core principle of the Neighbourhood Policy (Prague Summit 2009) when the EU defined security at its borders and in its vicinity as importing security towards the Union. The “ring of well governed states” at the EU's neighbourhood would contribute to sustain this approach of security in the wider Europe. It also implied, even if in a timid way, the EU's affirmation as a global player, including in security matters.

As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world's Gross National Product (GNP), and with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, the European Union is inevitably a global player. (ESS 2003, 1)

This is a world of new dangers but also of new opportunities. The European Union has the potential to make a major contribution, both in dealing with the threats and in helping realise the opportunities. An active and capable European Union would make an impact on a global scale. In doing so, it would contribute to an effective multilateral system leading to a fairer, safer and more united world. (ESS 2003, 14)

This vision of the EU as a global player has consolidated with time, and becomes more evident in the new Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy (Global Strategy 2016). This document, approved in June 2016 acknowledges the changed international and internal context for the EU, and how new threats from energy, migration and climate change to hybrid warfare, need to be dealt with. The EU takes responsibility for its member states security in a volatile international context, as well as for its neighbouring areas. The so-called ‘Arab Spring’ to the South unleashed movements of resistance and opposition triggering violence that spread out and became persistent in countries such as Iraq and Syria, and the conflict in Ukraine to the East brought hybrid warfare to the EU borders. Once more the document underlines the need to combine resources and efforts as tackling these threats and addressing these conflicts cannot be a one state job. The Union assumes itself as a big player with responsibility to promote security internally for its citizens, but also externally, in its vicinity and further afield.

This Strategy is underpinned by the vision of and ambition for a stronger Union, willing and able to make a positive difference in the world. Our citizens deserve a true Union, which promotes our shared interests by engaging responsibly and in partnership with others. It is now up to us to translate this into action. (Global Strategy 2016, 11)

We will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield. We will act globally to address the root causes of conflict and poverty, and to champion the indivisibility and universality of human rights. (Global Strategy 2016, 17)

The wording of the new document points to an encompassing understanding of security, based on the need for a coherent, comprehensive and co-jointly owned approach to address threats and respond to ongoing crisis. The identification of hybrid threats that do not know borders (Global Strategy 2016, 50) points also to this complexity of actors, instruments and contexts that defy the international order. The approach to security from the EU has been informed by its very own constitution as a union of 28 states where the finding of common grounding is not always easy. Security and defense are one such area where much progress has been achieved, as evident in the number of CSDP missions agreed and deployed, but where consensus still lacks in many issues. However, it should be underlined how “terrorism, hybrid threats and organised crime (...) call for tighter institutional links between [the EU’s] external action and the internal area of freedom, security and justice” driving efforts and interests together. The coexistence of different visions on security and the broadly sketched strategy to address well identified threats, including of a hybrid nature, attest to the balances the EU continuously seeks within and among its member states.

In Russia, the various National Security Concepts make clear the direction of security understandings, starting from what are understood as the national priorities, and projecting these into the overall policies related to security. In the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020, it is clearly stated that:

The main directions of the national security policy of the Russian Federation are the [so-called] strategic national priorities, in the form of important social, political and economic transformations intended to create secure conditions for the realisation of Russian citizens’ constitutional rights and freedoms, the stable development of the country, and the preservation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state. (NSS2020 2009)

The issue of national sovereignty and the respect for the territorial integrity of states are a fundamental part of the security equation. Russia has affirmed itself as a sovereignist power, meaning that the sovereignty rule has been a pillar of its foreign policy, as evidenced at the United Nations Security Council, for example, where it has been aligning with China on matters infringing the sovereignty of countries; as well as regarding its domestic politics, where Russia wants to avoid any kind of external interference. Indeed, Moscow became a fierce critic of the ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space understanding these as promoted and financed by western interests, attempting at destabilising relations between Russia and these republics, by promoting a western-oriented change in these governments’ politics. Thus, security in Russia is very much interconnected with the preservation of sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs. The issue of Chechnya became the best example of how this principle should apply to Russian matters, in the sense that it was always carefully labeled as an internal issue, and that all measures taken to respond to it were the sole responsibility of the central government. This was an issue clearly framed within the domestic sphere, and as a matter of national security to avoid any attempts at secession from any part(s) of the territory within the Federation.

The overall security approach fits the foreign policy priorities of the Russian Federation and how the goal of regaining the status of a great power, including through international recognition by its peers, became so central in the Russian agenda (Freire 2011). Briefly put, the concentric circles of foreign policy are geographically organised (Freire 2012), identifying the post-Soviet space as the primary area of interest for Russia, and where it even attributes itself a *droit de regard*, followed by relations both with the west – meaning the EU, the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), etc. – and towards the east, including China and India, for example. The Middle East has been increasingly re-gaining a central place in Russian politics, with the Syrian war making it even more central. And Africa and Latin America have also been playing a bigger role in Russian politics, particularly in an unfavourable context regarding west-Russia relations, and the realignment of foreign policy through more attention to club diplomacy, for example, with the BRICS² becoming a relevant forum for Russian politics. In this foreign policy concentric geographic approach, the former Soviet space is an area of utmost primacy for Moscow which helps explaining the approach followed regarding Ukraine and the messages that were clearly sent from actions and reactions regarding this conflict and the lingering instability in the country. Moscow wants to have a saying about Ukrainian politics, and in particular its eventual integration into western institutions.

These two approaches to security point to a sharing in threats’ identification, though not really a sharing in threats’ perceptions. This means that if the issue is terrorism, for example, both the EU and Russia

² The acronym BRICS stands for Brasil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

share this as a security threat, sharing also the understanding that certain measures are needed to contain it. However, this does not mean the perception about terrorism and how to fight it is always shared, in the sense, for example, that some actors have been differently understood as promoters/fighters of terrorism, contributing to mismatches in policies and reducing the possibilities for cooperation. A simple illustration of distinct interpretations that might hamper closer collaboration. EU-Russia cooperation on security matters has been framed by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (signed 1994, ratified 1997), which states

the commitment of the Parties to promote international peace and security as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes and to cooperate to this end in the framework of the United Nations and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and other fora.

Thus, security was since the formalisation of the relationship a topic in the bilateral agenda, at the time broadly formulated. The Four Common Spaces agreement of 2004 further conferred on security a new place in the bilateral agenda, becoming more specific in its formulation and including the problems lingering in the post-Soviet space, such as the protracted conflicts, which constitute focuses of insecurity. The wording of the document is clear and already includes hybrid threats in its listing, despite not explicitly using the terminology:

The aim of work on this space is to intensify co-operation on security issues and crisis management, to address new threats such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), regional conflicts and state failure and to reinforce cooperation in responding to natural disasters. This cooperation will be based on the common values which underpin the external policies of both sides, as set out in the PCA. (EU-Russia Four Common Spaces 2004, 2)

However, and despite framing agreements, EU-Russia relations have been through many ups-and-downs due to misunderstandings in goals and procedures, as well as due to broader contextual factors. Sour relations between NATO and Russia, for example, have contributed to hamper EU-Russia relations. The same might be argued about the plan for a US missile defense shield involving some individual EU member states, which also did not contribute to a positive atmosphere in relations. EU enlargement, but clearly NATO enlargement – identified in Russia's military doctrine as the main external threat to the Russian Federation (Military Doctrine 2014) – have been high on the agenda of discord.

Adding to these differences, the readings about the neighbourhood that both the EU and Russia 'share', and that is shared and focus of contention with these two giants by Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine, have fostered distancing. As much as the EU project includes a stable and prosperous neighbourhood where security dynamics will positively impact in the Union's security, Russia also sees security and friendship at its borders as promoting its own security. The clashing projects of the EU and Russia towards this area of common interest, but where the projection of distinct interests is clear, led to a fundamental division. On the one hand, the EU vision based on democracy building and liberal market principles, based on a normative appeal seeking to attract these states to its orbit. On the other hand, Russia, promoting more centralised governing procedures and its own market arrangements, seeking also to bring these states to its sphere of influence. In the end, the initial rationale for approximation and development of close ties with these countries is not very different, but looking closely at objectives, instruments and politics developed, the difference is considerable and the proposals put forward irreconcilable. The wider Europe project put forward by the EU clearly clashed with the greater Europe project advanced by Russia (see Averre 2016, 3; Sakwa 2012, 315-316). It is at this intersection of EU and Russia competing goals over their close neighbors that the crisis in Ukraine ended up escalating into violence, leading to a situation of high instability and high insecurity that does not contribute to reinforce EU security. Indeed, the lingering violence in Eastern Ukraine has been understood by some as maintaining instability at the EU doors and in this way weakening its position before Russia.

The next section deals with the case of Ukraine in more detail, looking at how these distinct projects clashed and the implications the violence has had in Russia-west relations, and more broadly for European security.

Hybrid threats and war: which (re)actions in the case of Ukraine?

The developments in Ukraine, from the proposals to develop further economic integration to armed violence, demonstrate how quickly tensions and misunderstandings might escalate into armed conflict. The proposal of the EU for the signature of the Association Agreement and the counter-proposal of Russia to Ukraine to join the Customs Union ended up being more than technically non-reconcilable proposals. Having to make a choice between further integration with the EU or the Eurasian Union – which was the basic question then – pushed Ukraine into a choice it has always avoided. The multivectorial nature of Ukrainian foreign policy since 1991 had tried to play to the fullest its geographical location in-between Russia and the EU, seeking to bargain and balance benefits and concessions, in such a way as to allow manageable relations with both big neighbours. This need to choose between one or the other economic project pushed Ukraine into a difficult situation where balancing became no more a possible option. This points to the fact that the discussion on the signature of further cooperation with Russia or with the EU has to be framed in the ample context of relations between Russia and the EU, or more broadly, the west. In fact, in particular since 2008, when the war in Georgia seemed to be the culmination of a period of high tension between Russia and the west, cooperation between the EU and Russia has been haunted by misperceptions and misunderstandings.

Furthermore, the issue of NATO which has always been a difficult one in the agenda, only contributed to further sour relations. The demonization of the ‘other’ has become the daily recipe for differences. Although Ukraine was always cautious with regard to NATO’s integration prospects, the discussion about offering a NATO’s Membership Action Plan back in 2008 at the time of the Bucharest Summit of the Alliance (see Bucharest Summit 2008), created fears in Russia that this proposal could lead to a non-welcomed development by the Kremlin, meaning ‘intrusion’ of NATO in the post-Soviet space, besides the Baltic states. This has been several times underlined in Russian discourse as a development not welcomed or supported, as it is understood as a direct threat to Russian interests, and even more, Russian security. From the moment these combined issues became part of a security agenda, their treatment gained a differentiated dimension. This was very clear in Ukraine with the escalation of tension and the Russian direct intervention. Moscow made it clear that Ukraine is a too fundamental piece in the European security puzzle for it to let it go. The EU, differently, through the imposition of sanctions, ended up demonstrating the same approach in terms of how central Ukraine is in the European map.

The escalation of tension in Ukraine leading to unrest in the Eastern part of the country which persists in time and has made more than 9.500 casualties by 15 September 2016 (since the outbreak of armed violence in mid-April 2014) (UN Ukraine 2016), and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation demonstrate how the situation is volatile and remains insecure both within Ukraine and with impact in adjacent countries, as well as broadly with regard to European security. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, in a statement in mid-September 2016, “The escalation of hostilities along the contact line over the summer was a sharp reminder that the situation in eastern Ukraine deserves much more attention. Additional efforts are needed to find a lasting solution to this crisis and put an end to the suffering of the civilian population. Human rights and justice are what people need, not further deaths and more intense hatred and destruction” (UN Ukraine 2016). The dimension of the problem reports to both the techniques and instruments at play since the armed hostilities begun, as well as to the need for a comprehensive peacebuilding response.

When looking at violence in Ukraine, experts concur with the view that Russia has been combining traditional operation methods with other means, including propaganda and economic pressure, but also resorting to local armed groups, mercenaries, and proxy forces. In this way, Russia understands threats in Ukraine as hybrid, and has been responding to these also with hybrid means. Ukraine has become a case of traditional war between two states, namely Ukraine and Russia, with asymmetrical contours, and where hybrid elements have been interplaying. This means that the context where these hybrid methods are being employed makes it very complex in terms of responses, making of this conflict a test case for the EU’s ability to promoting security through diverse means. Nevertheless, this is not really new in terms of threats or war conduct, but more regarding the context. These mixed methods are in this case being used by the strongest side to make the most of all opportunities at hand, be them material or non-material. As Mark Galeotti puts it, “[t]he outcome is a form of ‘guerrilla geopolitics’, a would-be great power, aware that its ambitions outstrip its military resources, seeks to leverage the methodologies of an insurgent to maximize its capabilities” (Galeotti 2016, 283). The objective is to seize favourable circumstances to increase power and gain advantage. As Galeotti (2016, 288) adds, the fact that the west has been showing reluctance to directly getting involved in hostilities provides more space for Moscow’s maneuvering. Thus, “Russia’s ‘new way of war’

can be considered simply a recognition of the primacy of the political over the kinetic – and that if one side can disrupt the others' will and ability to resist, then the actual strength of their military forces becomes irrelevant" (Galeotti 2016, 288).

From the perspective of a western military official, this Russian hybrid approach is clear in the theatre of operations and demands innovative thinking from the west as how to counter this combined and more robust approach.

Traditional hybrid threats focus on the blending of various capabilities at the tactical and operational levels of warfare. Russia, however, is now employing not only the military Instrument of Power (IOP) of the modern state, but also the economic, informational, and diplomatic IOPs in its hybrid threat construct to exacerbate an already complex problem for NATO. (...) Russia is employing irregular forces and tactics with advanced conventional weapons and elite regular military special operations forces (Spetsnaz) synergistically for a common goal. Throughout contested areas in Ukraine, there are consistent reports of "little green men" along with Russian volunteers moving around the battlefield without Russian military insignia or affiliation. These fighters are linking up with, and then augmenting, local pro-Russian irregular units and criminal gangs to boost their numbers and capabilities. With increased capability, Spetsnaz can organize these soldiers to execute guerilla type operations. (Davis Jr. 2015)

Additionally, the role of propaganda and disinformation became clear in the information war that has been fought in the media, with contradictory reports, unverified facts, and the use of a war-oriented language that labels players and contexts, and exacerbates stereotypes and pre-constructed images of the 'other'. This 'othering' exercise, which has erected more walls in creating real and imaginary divides between the parties, has fueled contradictions and extreme violence on the ground. Calling demonstrators from "civilians" and "people in the streets" to "extremists", "terrorists" or "fascists" gives note of important twists in the background of reporting with obvious distinct impact on the overall content of the information that is disseminated. Despite not a central issue in this chapter, the power of language and narratives cannot be detached from the overall construct of the hybrid threat, as mentioned, as this is a component with heavy weight in the overall definition and composition of these hybrid constructs. This means that in addressing these complex hybrid threats, responses need to be proactive and attentive to the different dimensions of this hybridity, which might vary according to context.

When looking at the EU's role in Ukraine several questions arise as to the extent of its responses to the unfolding of events. The slow response of the Union has been focus of criticism, but the options were not many. The agreement reached among the 28 member states on the imposition of sanctions on Russia and its renovation ended up signaling EU's rejection and disapproval of Russian actions in Ukraine, in particular the annexation of Crimea understood as an illegal act according to international law. This has been a contested issue, as Russia justified the "reintegration" of Crimea, as it was called, on the basis of historical arguments and the conduct of a referendum locally on March 16, 2014, where the majority of the population voted in favour of 'secession' (The Guardian 2014).

This clash in understandings does not preclude the questioning of Russian actions as violating one of the fundamental principles of the European security regime – the integrity of borders, and the respect for the sovereignty of states. In fact, despite Russian historical claims, the juridical background points to a violation of fundamental principles of international law. This points to the ambiguity in Russian discourse and actions pertaining the sovereignist approach Russia has been pursuing in its foreign and domestic politics, as previously analysed, and the breaching of this principle in the case of Ukraine, a case at its borders and defined by its very own policy formulation as a strategic country sitting in its area of influence. The questioning of the borders' regime resulted from the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, signaling contestation to the prevailing regime within ambiguity. "On the one hand, contestation of political change in Ukraine as well as of Western interference in the post-Soviet space, as drivers for Russian aggressive behaviour in Ukraine; on the other hand, this contestation approach revealed contradictions in Russia's own terms, as it has traditionally been a sovereignist power, opposing foreign interventions as interference in internal affairs. The borders regime was part of Russia's socialised practices in its relations with the West, regarding which Moscow became a norm-diffuser. Crimea's annexation reversed the process and made of Russia a norm-contester of one of the dimensions it most valued regarding European security – respect for the principle of sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. But the ambivalence extends further, as it seems simultaneously Russia is accepting the sovereignty norm, as it always did, but also resisting this when it understands its interests are at stake, particularly in the post-Soviet space. What this

means for European security is that the security regime is under pressure – the annexation of Crimea and lingering instability in Eastern Ukraine have added to existing distrust between Russia and the West” (Freire, forthcoming).

The implications of this eventually “exceptional” behaviour from Russia are not simple or light. The events in Ukraine carved out a huge rift between Russia and the west that led to the suspension of cooperation and dialogue at different levels and in different formats, including the stalling of negotiations on a new agreement to replace the PCA with the EU, or activities of the NATO-Russia Council. Moreover, the consequences are not just for relations with the west, but also to a great extent what these moves have implied for Russia in terms of its positioning. Internally, Russia strengthened popular support towards what was understood as a show of force and power, and of how Russia has been regaining a powerful status in the international polycentric system, as Moscow describes it. Externally, the divisions, misunderstandings and lack of trust were only reinforced. The perverse effect this might have for Russia is exactly the one Moscow has been seeking to avoid – becoming isolated. In fact, “a weak Russia may be looking to use such methods to leverage its own strengths, and above all Western weaknesses, but this is by no means a ‘magic bullet’. As of this writing, Moscow is bogged down in the Donbass, politically isolated, economically sanctioned, and with few options to improve its lot. Alarmist rhetoric aside, the ‘new way of war’ may well prove to be more of a threat to Russia than to the West” (Galeotti 2016, 298). Facing economic recession at home, the war effort, particularly high in material terms with Syria on the agenda, has been putting pressure on Russia’s finances, pointing to the limited reach Russia’s options might lead to, with high political cost.

Concluding Thoughts

European security has been injured at its very core, with the war in Ukraine representing the most visible example of the inability of preventive mechanisms to recognise and address signs of tension. This recognition might be a first step for the further development of EU proactive responses, instead of maintaining a very reactive attitude towards crises. The Global Strategy points to the need for a coherent and cohesive response from the EU, building on partnerships, and projecting the Union’s power globally. The limited resources at the EU’s disposal and the delicate nature of defense matters within the Union press for further development of preventive measures, as a way of addressing tensions before they escalate, eventually preventing them from effectively escalating. The challenges are many, but the lessons from Ukraine show how relevant proactive measures are, to avoid massive violence, destructive physically and psychologically. And with implications which cross borders.

The divisions in Russia-EU/west relations are extreme and the war in Ukraine keeps feeding distance. The lack in agreement regarding the stabilisation of the situation in eastern Ukraine and a political rewind in terms of how far the Donbass area has gone from the central authorities in Kiev, keeps the situation in a protracted mood regarding attempts at signing and implementing a political deal. The hybrid nature of threats and war in the country only contributes to further complexity in terms of who is involved, who is responsible, and who is effectively capable of pushing forward towards a political settlement. In this context, what does Ukraine mean for European security? And for relations between the west and Russia? The extreme option of revoking agreements and the whole panoply of different instruments that have been institutionalised and that frame relations between the west and Russia seem not an option. Despite differences, the density of interdependence is huge and provides a window for new possibilities in terms of trying to advance beyond the current non-state of affairs. The EU and Russia are too close to afford to live too distantly. The option about reverting to the *status quo ante* seems also not possible. The violation of the borders’ regime in Europe, with the annexation of Crimea and the continuous support Russia has provided to Eastern Ukraine, point to illegal actions that cannot simply be erased and forgotten from the map of relations. In fact, the EU-Russia PCA seems to be dead. The option for a reset is not a new one, but might be the only feasible one if the goal is to find a basis for common understanding between Russia and the west. This will require a deep revision of the basics underlining bilateral and multilateral relations, and clearly assuming differences as well as points of convergence. Reset means much more than getting back to business as usual, as the persistent lack in trust and in understanding between Russia and the west needs to be fully addressed. Cooperation in difference is possible. Assuming this cooperation within the many existing differences is imperative if a new basis for relations is to be drawn and implemented.

References

- Averre, Derek. "The EU and Russia: managing the new security environment in the wider Europe." *European Policy Analysis*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, April 2016, accessed on October 27, 2016, http://www.sieps.se/sites/default/files/2016_5_epa_eng_0.pdf.
- Bucharest Summit. "Bucharest Summit Declaration. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008". Press Release (2008) 049, 3 April 2008, accessed October 27, 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.
- Buzan, Barry; Waeber, Ole and de Wilde, Jaap. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers (1997).
- Davis Jr., John. "Continued Evolution of Hybrid Threats. The Russian Hybrid Threat Construct and the Need for Innovation". *The Three Swords Magazine*, 28 May 2015, accessed on October 27, 2016, http://www.jwc.nato.int/images/stories/threeswords/JWC_Magazine_May2015_web_low.pdf.
- ESS. "A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy." Brussels, 12 December 2003, accessed October 27, 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.
- EU-Russia Four Common Spaces. MEMO/04/268 Brussels, 23 November 2004.
- Freire, Maria Raquel. "USSR/Russian Federation Major Power Status Inconsistencies" in Thomas Volgy, Renato Corbetta, Keith Grant e Ryan Baird (ed.). *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics: Global and Regional Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan (2011).
- Freire, Maria Raquel. "Russian Foreign Policy in the Making: The Linkage between Internal Dynamics and the External Context." *International Politics* 49, 4 (2012): 466-481.
- Freire, Maria Raquel. "Ukraine and the re-structuring of east-west relations" in Roger Kanet (ed.). *The Russian Challenge to the European Security Environment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan (forthcoming).
- Galeotti, Mark. "Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, 2 (2016): 282-301.
- IISS. "Countering hybrid threats: challenges for the West." *IISS Strategic Comments* 20,8 (2014), accessed October 27, 2016, www.iiss.org/stratcom.
- Kaldor, Mary. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*. 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press (2007).
- Military Doctrine. "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation", Approved by the President of the Russian Federation on December 25, 2014, No. Pr.-2976, accessed on October 27, 2016, <http://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.
- NSS2020. "National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020." By decree of the President of the Russian Federation N.537, 12 May 2009.
- PCA. Agreement on partnership and cooperation establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part - Protocol 1 on the establishment of a coal and steel contact group - Protocol 2 on mutual administrative assistance for the correct application of customs legislation - Final Act - Exchanges of letters - Minutes of signing Official Journal L 327, 28/11/1997 P. 0003 – 0069. 21997A1128(01) (1997), accessed October 27, 2016, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2003/november/tradoc_114138.pdf.
- Polese, Abel; Kevlihan, Rob, and Ó Beacháin, Donnacha. "Introduction: hybrid warfare in post-Soviet spaces, is there a logic behind?" *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 27, 3 (2016): 361-366.
- Prague Summit. "Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May 2009". Brussels, Council of the European Union, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78), accessed on October 27, 2016, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-09-78_en.htm.
- Sakwa, Richard. "Looking for a greater Europe: From mutual dependence to an international regime." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45 (2012): 315-325.
- The Guardian. "Crimea votes to secede from Ukraine in 'illegal' poll." 16 March 2014, accessed on October 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/16/ukraine-russia-truce-crimea-referendum>.

UN Ukraine. "Situation in eastern Ukraine worsening, says UN report." Geneva, Kyiv, United Nations, 15 September 2016, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://un.org.ua/en/information-centre/news/3948-situation-in-eastern-ukraine-worsening-says-un-report>.