

EU STRATEGIES AND POLICIES FOR NEIGHBOURING STATES: HOW RELIABLE IS A COOPERATION WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION?

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Abstract

Russia and the need to secure the eastern flank have been mentioned over time, and the subject has grown in complexity along with the development of international policies and, at the same time, Moscow's intentions to maintain its presence outside its borders. The recent military mobilizations on the border with Ukraine, as well as the Russian interference in the internal policies of the ex-communist states, significantly increase the need of the EU and NATO to bring new instruments of action in the face of the Russian threat, especially on the eastern flank. So, throughout the article we will see Russia's lines of action towards the Eastern Neighborhood and the European Union's rhetoric about them.

Keywords: Russian Federation, Eastern Neighbourhood, European mechanisms, Neighborhood Policy, regional security

Introduction

Since the years of EU enlargement to the eastern states, NATO's presence in the region and, in parallel, the intensification of the Russian Federation's rhetoric in relation to their presence on the eastern flank, the Eastern Neighbourhood has received increased attention from those studying international dynamics and especially European regional cooperation policies.

European Neighborhood / ENP Policy and the Eastern Partnership / EaP, projects developed at EU level for better cooperation with Eastern European states, provide a favorable context for the European Union's external relations and have the potential to support the economic development processes of neighbouring countries and strengthen regional stability and security. However, despite the existence of these cooperation mechanisms, the action policies of the Eastern Neighbourhood states are increasingly different due to the influence of the Russian factor, which makes it difficult for the European Union to anticipate developments

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in the region, as well as the need to readjust the instruments of action in relation to the new dynamics in the region. The conflict in Ukraine has called into question the foundations on which the EU's eastern policy has been built so far, especially in the context in which the conflict was not an isolated act, but a continuation of the 2008 events in Georgia. It has also been noted in recent years that Russia's integration process into the Eastern Partnership / EaP states has intensified, through its involvement in the political and economic sector of the Republic of Moldova, by carrying out military actions in Ukraine, as well as by positioning itself as a peacemaker in the political crisis in Belarus and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In this context, the aim of this article is to see, first of all, what are the instruments of action of the Russian Federation through which it manages to impose its presence in the neighboring states, what it pursues, and then what is the European Union's response to them. Connected, another main objective of the research is to answer the question of whether Russia's presence in the neighbouring states is the result of their permissiveness, in the absence of well-established EU mechanisms and policies to date. Another objective is also to identify new possible instruments at EU level to ensure the security of the eastern flank, such as rethinking the EU's position vis-à-vis Russia. In this context, we will raise the question of whether it is realistic and it is currently a solution for the EU to develop other projects for the EaP states or it is more efficient for the EU to turn its attention to a cooperation with Russia and not to policies against it. Why? Because a cooperation with Moscow means the development of mutual dependence, and in the event that Moscow intends to take action against the EU, negative effects on its own state will automatically be generated.

1. Lines of action of the Russian Federation

We know that The Russian Federation has always structured its foreign policy towards the former Soviet states through five main lines of action, namely: controlling domestic policy; influencing the economic and energy sector; perpetuating the presence in the region through military actions; involvement of Russian services in misinformation and propaganda campaigns and the use of institutions in order to influence the cultural environment (e.g. the Russian History Society, Rossotrudnicestvo Centre). Although it remained in place economically and socially, and the COVID-19 pandemic generated crises in these areas, which are difficult to manage, we still see that the Russian Federation relied on the theory of the clear objective, respectively, it has sought to disseminate its policies beyond its borders and to take advantage of the European Union's vulnerabilities regarding the implementation of effective policies, especially in the immediate vicinity, regardless of the context in which it is located. And here we refer to the fact that Moscow constantly pursues its goal, that of transmitting to its own citizens, but also to the whole world, the message that it is a power and has influence across its

borders, that it dominates the Russia-West relationship, and that it manages to have control over the other powers (US /NATO and EU).

Moscow's goal of showing the world that it is in control materialized at the time of the illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. The fact that NATO and the EU showed their helplessness in 2014 in the face of this moment shows the lack of a strengthened mechanism of action of the Western states and, implicitly, the level of action that the Russian Federation can reach even nowadays. According to Stephen F. Cohen, in his work *War with Russia: From Putin and Ukraine To Trump and Russia gate* (Cohen, 2018), Putin's Russia will not stop acting so until US-Russia relations are going to copy those from before the '89. Through these „surprise attacks”, Putin seeks precisely this fact, namely the restoration of the map of the „two powers” and the reestablishment of the global order, the reconfirmation of the leader, respectively of the Russian Federation. But, what is new compared to the period when the Kremlin asserted itself exclusively by conquering territories is the use of tools that rely on a policy of perpetuating its presence through the political, economic, social sector, as described above. Here we refer to the tools mentioned by Alan Henrikson in *What Public Diplomacy achieve?* (Henrikson, 2006), respectively public diplomacy, country branding, consolidation and transformation strategy, as well as partnerships of any kind, economic, political, even cultural, as well as deterrence strategy. All this is meant to create a tacit dependence of the states on Russia, in this case of those in the Eastern Neighborhood. Therefore, when we talk about Russia's toolbox, we can highlight some concrete examples, which can be included in the theory of the clear objective.

Involvement in the elections in the Republic of Moldova

Despite efforts to defraud the presidential elections in the Republic of Moldova (November 2020), through actions such as buying votes, using hybrid vectors, propaganda and misinformation campaigns, etc., the end result was a failure for Russia. The success of the Pro-European candidate Maia Sandu, with a score of 57.75% of the votes, compared to her pro-Russian opponent, Igor Dodon, who gathered 42.25% of the votes, makes it difficult for Moscow to implement its plans in the region and is a „negative example” for the other states that it wants to control. The Kremlin is alarmed by the growing decline in Russian visibility from the public space, which is why they continue to intervene in the domestic policy of the Republic of Moldova through various levers. In the context of the forthcoming early parliamentary elections (July 2021), the takeover of power by pro-Russian forces, by forming a consolidated parliamentary majority around the PSRM / Socialist Party and the „ŞOR” Political Party, is a priority for Moscow. That is why the Russian side continues to offer support, especially financial, to pro-Russian candidates. Through this possible majority, which acts in accordance with the directives from the Kremlin, Moscow could maintain control over the pro-European president, continue to influence the internal and foreign policy of the



Republic of Moldova and, at the same time, effectively implement its external policies to the region.

On the other hand, in the scenario of a pro-European government, Russia will have to move its instruments of action towards other sectors, perhaps less exploited or considered a priority so far, which has already been taken into account by the Russian side. And a signal in this regard is the establishment, at the level of the Russian Presidential Administration, of a commission for foreign policy, with the role of managing Moscow's relationship and actions in relation to and in Eastern European states, including Romania. Also, increasing the role of the Russian Centre *Rossotrudnicestvo*, which is linked to Russian services, by expanding branches in several regions of Eastern Europe, is another signal showing that Russia is trying to withdraw its forces of influence through new instruments of action.

Military presence on the border with Ukraine – instruments based on military intimidation and propaganda / misinformation

As of April 1, 2021, Russia has deployed troops (over 150,000) and military equipment along the border with Ukraine and Crimea, alerting the US and EU / NATO officials to the possibility of launching a Russian military offensive on the strategic south-west direction. Russia also closed the Kerch Strait on April 24 (until the end of October) for foreign warships, under the pretext of organizing military exercises. Through all this, the Kremlin wanted to send a message of force to the West, and to intimidate and show the ex-communist states, implicitly to Kiev that it is a much greater power than NATO, by using military transport to Crimea during the day, a practice atypical of Russia (usually all Russian military transport is performed at night).

Also, as a line of action, Moscow launched, in parallel, an information war (propaganda and misinformation) against the West, through which it managed to spread in the media and online public space that dialogue with the EU/NATO does not exist, and the Eastern -European states, including Romania, are „puppets” of the US, in order to achieve their own interests in the region.

The “clear objective” theory behind Russian influence, mentioned in the examples above, is supported by experts such as Valentin Naumescu and Dan Dungaciu, in *The European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood Today: Politics, Dynamics, Perspectives* (Naumescu *et al.*, 2015), which emphasizes on the one hand Russia's increasingly assertive policy in relation to the Eastern European states, and on the other hand the policy of discouragement in relation to the USA. Basically, the more things go in a bad direction in one country or another, the better for the Russian Federation, because it approaches the potential issues generating crises in a society and its imminent needs. In the United States, for example, it was not the Russian Federation that elected Donald Trump, but it used this opportunity to induce great tensions and confusion in American society. The

Russian Federation thus achieves its goals because it is all the more important the more it is feared by the Americans and the EU (Dungaciu, 2017). Using the same example, International Relations expert Angela Stent in the work *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (Stent, 2019) emphasizes President Putin's will to show to the European Union and the United States that the Cold War has taken on a new, more dangerous form, one in which Russia is a challenge to Americans in every corner of the globe. This was also one of Vladimir Putin's goals at the Biden-Putin Summit in Geneva (June 16, 2021), and to convey to the public and Americans that the new Cold War no longer relates to the economic sector, but to Russia's red lines. And these red lines can only be defined by Moscow, on each sector and depending on the international context / decisions taken internally / externally by it. Specifically, the reporting in the establishment thereof is about the threats and challenges against Russia, which will be answered according to their severity. Thus, the way in which Russia breaches any sanctions, which implicitly aims at securing Europe, and the lightness with which it ignores international and / or EU regulations, shows the vulnerability of US and EU legislative mechanisms, a vulnerability identified by the Kremlin leadership and from which they take advantage more and more.

On the other hand, there are certain specialists who deviate from the theory of the above, countering the ideas by seeing the Russian influence not as a backdated plan of Putin, developed more and more in recent years, but as a response to the presence of NATO and EU policies right up to the borders with Russia. An example in this respect is supported by the Eastern Partnership and the promoters of the European mechanism, as well as the NATO presence getting closer to the Eastern flank, which caused reactions from Moscow. Roger E. Kanet argues in the work *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century* that Putin had no alternatives, being forced to respond concretely and firmly, being driven by the perception that the US wants enlargement through the voice of the Union or NATO (Kanet, 2010). Also, in *Russia and the Former Soviet Space. Instrumentalizing Security, Legitimizing Intervention*, written by Vasile Rotaru and Miruna Troncotă, we find the previous idea, mentioning the claiming by Russia of NATO presence on the Eastern flank as a reason for intervention in Ukraine or Georgia (Rotaru *et al.*, 2018). In addition, the recent work published by Dan Dungaciu, *The Geopolitical Black Sea Encyclopaedia*, draws attention to the effects and results of increasingly securing Eastern Europe, especially in the fight for the Black Sea and Russia's relationship with the West (Dungaciu, 2020).

Thus, we can see that Russia's instruments and decisions nowadays manage to generate controversy on the international stage, in the media and in academia and results in various premises, some of which demonize Putin's policy, such as Douglas E. Schoen in *Putin's Master Plan: To Destroy Europe, Divide NATO, and Restore Russian Power and Global Influence Hardcover* (Schoen, 2016), and others to find explanations through references to Western actions.

The challenge of this paper starts precisely from the strong intuitive meaning. Specifically, from the fact that the Russian Federation has been, is and



will remain a threat to the West. In this context, efforts to find solutions to Russia's threats have developed more and more over time, but they have not adapted to the speed with which Moscow is acting. All EU instruments vis-à-vis Russia must be based, in essence, not only on its needs, those of the Member States or non-member / ex-community states, which it has „in its care”, but also on complex Russian techniques, in order for the answer to be effective. For this reason, the main topic of the paper also relates to the EU's current resources in the face of Russian threats, but also to new mechanisms that should be developed at EU and international community level.

2. The rhetoric of the EU and Eastern European states in relation to the Russian Federation

2.1. EU action tools and their effectiveness

Since the years of enlargement towards the East and the intensification of threats from Russia, the EU's foreign policy has given priority to creating an area of stability and security in the Eastern Neighborhood. Western countries have tried as much as possible to solidify this Union by developing policies and strategies, namely a wide range of regional cooperation instruments, such as: European Neighborhood Policy / ENP (2004); Eastern Partnership / EaP (2009), as a tool for implementing the ENP; The Association and Free Trade Agreements that followed; political agreements and dialogues on migration, security strengthening, environmental issues, visa facilitation. All this had one clear purpose, that of strengthening EU cooperation with neighbouring states and ensuring the security of the Union's borders.

Also, the experience of expanding and later of developing the policies mentioned above has considerably influenced not only the states of the European Union, but also those eager to join, which have oriented their openness towards a policy of inclusion: the transfer of European values to one's own state (democracy, rule of law, respect for human and minority rights, acquiring the principles of market economy, etc.). As we can find in the paper *The European Union and its Eastern Neighbours: Towards a More Ambitious Partnership?* (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 46), the need for a much stronger influence and presence of the Union was felt, even where it did not exist, namely in neighboring non-member states. In other words, the EU projects, materialized through ENP and EaP, have developed a new form of cooperation with the EU's neighbours, based on common property and common values, which could, in the vision of the EaP states (Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia), even replace the EU perspective on the need for enlargement to the east. As a concrete example, the most significant results of the Eastern Partnership, with immediate visible effect, came from the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, with the signing of the Association Agreements / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AA / DCFTA) and the



liberalization of the visa regime. In addition to these, we can add the concrete sectoral objectives undertaken through Agenda 2020 (adopted at the EaP Summit in Brussels in November 2017), aimed at involving Eastern partners in EU sectoral policies, access to the single market, connecting with European transport, energy and digital infrastructure, establishing a partnerships in the industrial area, as well as strengthening cooperative relations in the security sector (Kobzova and Jana, 2012, p. 211).

Confidence in the effectiveness of the EaP is expressed annually by citizens of EaP states through surveys conducted by means of the EU NEIGHBOURS east project, in collaboration with ACT LLC. Their result constantly shows a positive position towards the European Union and existing partnerships. For example, in 2017 and 2018 surveys showed that „almost half of the citizens in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, on average 44-46%, have a positive attitude in relation to the European Union, while on average 61-63% believe that the EU’s relations with their country are beneficial „ (EU Neighbours East, 2017).

However, in practice, the initiatives developed by the EU have only partially materialized, and a large part of the action instruments, intended to be generally applied in these projects, could not be applied in all Eastern European countries, hence the lack of results currently. From the very beginning, the EaP states were perceived as a unitary whole, being placed in the same pattern. For this reason, EU measures were also general, designed universally and not individually, for each state. While this technique has worked for Western states, it has been shown to be ineffective for Eastern European countries as they need tailor-made measures. Why? Because the presence and degree of Russian influence within them differs, and the power of change depends largely on Russian vectors of action.

For example, Moldova’s relationship with the Eastern Partnership has largely depended on periods of pro-European or pro-Russian political governance. Chisinau’s position was largely hesitant from the beginning, expressing its dissatisfaction regarding the lack of a clear perspective for the country’s integration into the European Union in this regional cooperation instrument. In 2009, former President Vladimir Voronin compared the EaP initiative with the CIS-2, stating that „why should we create another CIS under EU control?” (Kommersant, 2009). At the same time, it should be mentioned that during the intensification of Russian influence, the European Union had a prudent conduct in its relations with the executive of the Republic of Moldova, reevaluating the political, technical and financial support provided, despite the existence of EaP, which left more room for action to Moscow and discouraged the country’s opening/start to the EU. After Russian pressure on Ukraine not to ratify the Association Agreement with the EU in 2013, within the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius, the Republic of Moldova did not escape Russia’s punishment (Hasselbach, 2013). Thus, in 2014, Russia took care to impose an embargo on an important branch of the Moldovan export industry, that of wines, and continued with the embargo on fruits, vegetables, meat. All these actions weakened Chisinau’s ability to cope with Russia and to create its destiny together with Europe, and this is because Russia was the main market, it was the



main importer of Moldovan products (InfoPolitic, 2013). The lack of reaction from the European Union, given by the lack of effective measures to support partner countries, has kept away the Moldovan political class from the European perspective. The leaders of the time were Europeans at the declarative level, but the internal reforms, which should have been according to the Partnership, were replaced by measures and decisions that supported the oligarchy, respectively those who continued to „play the Moscow games”. This eventually upset Europe, which after the episode of non-validation of the mandate of Chisinau’s elected mayor, Andrei Nastase, by the pro-Russian political class, decided to „stop the direct budget support for the Republic of Moldova coming from the EU” (Balmforth, 2020). The cover-up of hidden relations with Russia, the episodes of corruption, the action against democratic principles and, therefore, the deviation from the reforms initially established between the EU and the Republic of Moldova, made Western countries come up with new conditions that removed not only the Moldovan political class, but also some Moldovan citizens, disappointed by the lack of efficiency of the European mechanism, which sold from the beginning only „illusions” (Antonopoulos, 2020).

Therefore, contrary to official expectations and what the polls express, the real vision of the six states, which are part of the Eastern Partnership, is currently predominantly skeptical, identifying a number of obstacles which stop the development of a successful policy. At the same time, states have felt a clear asymmetry of power in relation to their partnership policies. In other words, it is the eastern neighbours who have to shape their internal structure in line with the demands of Brussels and not the other way around, even if the internal policies of each state do not allow these changes, making EaP states subject to EU policy instead of employing them as equal partners (Korosteleva, 2012, p. 13). Moreover, all this occurs along with the real presence and threat of the Russian Federation, felt on the ground by the states concerned. Recent mobilizations of troops on the border with Ukraine, which have occurred along with disinformation and propaganda campaigns against the West, the involvement in Belarus’s domestic policy, by supporting Lukashenko with military forces, or the organization of large-scale military exercises, such as Zapad-2017, only raise questions about the effectiveness of the EU’s mechanisms for securing the eastern flank, which have been developed since 2004 and to date.

Therefore, the question of the present research brings to the fore the issue of the effectiveness, nowadays, of these European policies mentioned above, in the context in which we can observe that, as compared to Moscow, they no longer have an impact on influencing its actions, and moreover it can be currently seen that the projects do not comply to the characteristics and evolutions of each state.



Russia, a deliberate choice of Eastern European states?

Referring to how adaptable the EU mechanisms are in relation to the neighbouring states, we can see that there are many differences in the applicability thereof, as the needs of the states are different, which is why they do not have a concrete result or lose their efficiency. In other words, states often see imminent needs, especially in the economic sector, which automatically leads them to choose quick support and solutions. And we can see that Russia is now able to provide the promptness that Eastern European countries need. The EU's economic outlook plan, which contains first and foremost policies to adapt to Community values and internal legislative change mechanisms, is far too long to be chosen by the states concerned, to the detriment of Russia's „unconditional” and rapid aid. And here we can mention the opening of Russia to offer the loan to the Republic of Moldova worth 200 million euro at the beginning of 2020.

Therefore, the question of whether Russia's presence in the neighbouring states is the result of their permissiveness, in the context of the absence of well-established EU mechanisms and policies, could be answered affirmatively. Going through a brief analysis, we can see that we are referring to states that are still in a process of development, with major economic deficiencies, which causes a significant increase in their dependence on the external environment. Thus, these states let themselves be penetrated due to the need for support, especially economic, Russia increasingly using this vulnerability which, in fact, is a primary need. Moscow is well aware of the European Union's weaknesses and its bureaucratic / difficult mechanisms for providing concrete and rapid support to other developing countries. Although there are significant partnerships (ENP/ EaP), they are not rapid instruments at EU level, but are applicable in the long term due to the European legal framework, which on the one hand makes it difficult for these states to recover, and on the other hand, it leaves room for Russia's action. Moscow is acting through lightning strategies, and states choose to be economically supported by it, given the urgent need for survival (e.g. Republic of Moldova's response to Russian financial aid during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the response to the aid provided by the European Union; the Russian loan in Belarus and the one for the Republic of Moldova mentioned above).

An example is also the 2013 episode, when Ukraine canceled the ratification of the Association Agreement following Russian pressure on Ukraine's energy resources and supply with Russian gas. In this context, despite the existence of the EaP, the EU response was non-existent in terms of concrete action, the only one being the anti-Russian rhetoric in the public area. Thus, the apathy of Western countries to Russia's actions has caused Ukrainian political leaders to take a step back and stop any kind of pro-European communication. Ukraine has been, and continues to be, one of the six former communist republics that has been punished by Russia in the harshest way for its European aspirations, and this happened because it depends most on its energy resources. Dependent with Belarus on these Russian oil and energy resources, Ukraine could only choose to comply with



Moscow's policies, because an attack on the free trade agreement and the closure of borders for Ukrainian exports would have meant a great loss for its own country. We cannot forget that there were also delayed responses from Europe at multiple times, such as the creation by Russia of the Eurasian Union (2011) and its aggressive interference in Ukraine, Belarus and the rest of the former socialist countries, which provided even more room to Putin's policy. The lack of congruence of decisions, of effective reforms, of security tools and tactics, combined with the EU's rapid non-involvement in aggressive anti-European actions have determined Ukraine to continue to take advantage and listen to Russian threats, to the detriment of the provisions established by means of the Western partnerships.

As in the case of Ukraine or the Republic of Moldova, Moscow has launched a series of economic and political sanctions in Georgia. For example, at the protests organized in 2009 by the president's opponents, the Russian forces „carefully trained” were also active. Given these, we can say that for more than 10 years, since the establishment of the EaP, the fragility of these Eastern regions has not ended, but has intensified through the growing threats coming from Russia, which plays its cards to discourage the pro-European direction of the Eastern states and to renew their position in the territory. And any vulnerability in Eastern countries is a pretext for the Kremlin leader to expand, influence and control.

2.2. New EU strategies

In an effort to identify new possible instruments at EU level to ensure the security of the eastern flank, we mention two solutions that seem at first glance to be opposite, but they support and complement each other. One of these refers to the development or resumption of the European Union cooperation with the Russian Federation, in order to determine a mutual interdependence, which makes it difficult for Moscow to take action against Member States and those protected by the EU. In parallel, another measure is to continue the development of strategic projects with the role of „shield” against Russia, but they should be adapted to the needs and pace of evolution of the states for which they were launched.

Adapting EU policies to the dynamics of the region

As we noted in section 2.2. above, the Eastern Neighbourhood States, especially the EaP members, have developed a dynamic different from the EU and the projects it has developed since 2004 and until now. And this was determined by Russia's growing presence in states' domestic policies and by the lack of a clear and quick rhetoric on the part of the EU. In this context, taking into account what is described in this article, we can say that EU projects, such as the EaP, need more ambitious post-2021 goals, a strategic vision adapted to each state, which should be long-term and not with short-term efficiency. We find that the PaE is in a



complicated situation due to the events in Ukraine, Belarus or the Nagorno-Karabakh war. In other words, under current regional conditions, it is difficult to reach a consensus on the basis of current EU instruments.

Thus, a review of the EU's future targets for the Eastern Neighbourhood is needed, but especially of its frontline instruments. A solution in this respect could be the "breaking" of the EaP states into two blocs: i) the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, as these are states open to deeper cooperation with the EU; ii) Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, still strongly anchored in Russian policies. Connected, for an effective outcome, EU policies need to be addressed and reviewed within each separate bloc, for each state. Specifically, Ukraine's need at the moment is to ensure security cooperation, stability to the Black Sea offered by the EU and the West. Also, EU policies for Ukraine should focus on support for NATO membership as soon as possible and not just on the support through unitary messages from the community bloc at the declarative level. At the same time, what the Republic of Moldova needs is political support, through the EU's support for the pro-European party in power. Early parliamentary elections represent an opportunity for Moscow to re-engage in the country's domestic politics, by defrauding the elections in favour of a pro-Russian majority, but they can also be an opportunity for the EU to support the Republic of Moldova in securing fair and just elections, where pro-Europeans can bring the country closer to the democratic dream.

Rethinking the EU's position in relation to Russia

In addition to the strategy referred to in section (a), the EU needs in parallel to withdraw its direct strategy towards the Russian Federation. Specifically, the EU's focus could be less on projects developed for the EaP states (which antagonize Russia and are losing, as we see, efficiency), and more on cooperation projects with Russia. Through the development of a cooperation with Moscow, especially in economic terms, a mutual interdependence arises. The hypothesis underlying the identified policy is the theory of complex interdependence, developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, and which starts from the premise that after the World Wars, states became increasingly interconnected due to the need for economic development. Basically, the theory relies on actors who are equally dependent on each other, which determines cooperation and mutual support, called symmetrical interdependence by researchers.

Analyzing the above, we can see that there are currently levels that can be exploited towards this beneficial interdependence, such as the energy security sector, which generates fair, balanced and safe solutions for both parties to the new crises in other segments / areas. In the case of the Nord Stream 2 project, Russia may make EU countries vulnerable by blackmailing the functionality of the pipeline, but it cannot afford to do so as it would automatically affect its own economic interests. In other words, Russia is dependent both on European markets, but especially on European technologies. The symmetrical interdependence related



to the energy level is shown as follows: Russia can offer crude oil, Europe can offer the distribution market; Russia can provide gas, Europe can provide technology. Therefore, if there were several levels in which the two global actors would cooperate, a possible blackmail of Russia towards the EU and the states in the Eastern Neighborhood would automatically generate a blackmail towards their own country / interests.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we note that there is a phenomenon of great subtlety and a paradigm shift compared to the Cold War period, namely that the Russian Federation has moved from the tactic of playing transparently to one where the strengths are hidden. One fact to keep in mind is that Moscow is used to calculating its strategies as long-term plans, but developed individually for each sector. And even if at first glance they seem like swift actions, they are pre-established strategies, and the Eastern Neighbourhood and EU's concern for this region is a priority in this regard. On the other hand, it seems that, for the EU, relating to the Eastern Neighbourhood and the EaP countries on the ground did not mean a strategy based on specific targets for each state. One of the lessons learned from the policies adopted is that they cannot be viewed independently of each other (Korosteleva, 2012), and Russia must not be attacked / threatened in order to defend these states, as the result is an undesirable one, that of the opposite effect. In the dialogue with the EaP states, there is a need at EU level for a much firmer and more diverse approach, different for each state, and not for a unitary one, as the EU has used so far for crises in the region. In parallel, co-operation with Russia means greater control over its actions vis-à-vis EU member states and those in the Eastern Neighbourhood, especially in the context in which the EU will continue to dialogue with a more consolidated authoritarian regime and relate to an Eastern Neighbourhood more strongly embedded in Russia's geopolitical calculus.

Therefore, finding that one of the great vulnerabilities of the European Union is that it cannot currently have the same approach as Russia, due to its very complex structure in terms of the decision-making system, it is necessary to develop a much stronger legislation framework and well-established mechanisms, treated differently/privately for each level. In other words, the European Union as a whole can formulate a coherent and swift, harmonized response across all Member States to Russian influences, if it takes into account that current policies only make Russia more willing to act in the region as it wishes, in relation to their own interests.



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