

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES  
POLICY DEPARTMENT



**Facing Russia's  
strategic challenge:**

**Security developments  
from the Baltic Sea  
to the Black Sea**

AFET



## STUDY

# Facing Russia's strategic challenge: Security developments from the Baltic to the Black Sea

### ABSTRACT

The EU and NATO are facing an increasingly uncertain and complex situation on their eastern and south-eastern borders. In what the EU has traditionally conceived as its 'shared neighbourhood' with Russia and NATO its 'eastern flank', Moscow is exhibiting a growingly assertive military posture. The context of the Baltic and the Black Sea regions differs, but Russia's actions in both seem to be part of the same strategy aiming to transform the European security order and its sustaining principles. The Kremlin seems to follow similar policies and tactics, mainly through the militarisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast and Crimea as the centrepiece of its strategy of power projection vis-à-vis NATO and the EU. An all-out war remains an unlikely scenario, but frictions or accidents leading to an unwanted and uncontrolled escalation cannot be completely ruled out. Tensions and military developments take place in both the Baltic and Black seas, but are not only about them. Russia is testing the Euro-Atlantic response and resilience at large. To assess how far it might be willing to go, it is necessary to evaluate how Russia perceives the West and its actions, taking into account the deep and entrenched clash of perceptions between Brussels and Moscow, and the worldview of the latter.

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# 1 Introduction

The EU and NATO are facing an increasingly uncertain and complex situation on their eastern and south-eastern borders. Russia is exhibiting a growingly assertive military posture in what the EU has traditionally conceived as its 'shared neighbourhood' with Russia and NATO its 'eastern flank'. The contexts of the Baltic and Black Sea regions differ but present some similarities as well. In both appears a combination of members and non-members of the EU and NATO whose foreign and security policies are very much shaped by their mutual relationship and perceptions about Russia. In the Baltic Sea region, approaches of non-NATO members like Sweden and Finland have been progressively converging with NATO neighbours like Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia or Poland. Though, they are still receptive (or vulnerable) to Kremlin's sticks and carrots. In the Black Sea region, NATO members like Romania and non-members like Ukraine and Georgia are the more enthusiast supporters of an expanded NATO presence, while other members like Bulgaria or Turkey, for different reasons, are more accommodating with Russia. The balancing act played both by the EU and NATO is a reflection of fundamental disagreements on how to approach Russia and its place in the European security order.

Russian uneasiness with this security order is precisely the centrepiece of the tensions between Brussels and Moscow. The rift is not just about divergent interests in some specific hotspots but mainly about the fundamental principles that will hold an upcoming international system that, according to the prevalent view in Russia, will likely be forged by conflicts and military might. Russia sees an international landscape characterised by transformation, competition, uncertainty and confronting values. Furthermore, Russia appears to be convinced of being reactive to the West –from Ukraine to Syria- and using the same strategies and tactics applied against her. The most worrisome aspect from a European perspective is that the Kremlin seems convinced of being facing an existential threat and ready to implement a multidimensional political warfare vis-à-vis Brussels.

The EU and NATO, on its part, perceive that they are reacting in front of a growingly assertive and, to some extent, unpredictable Russia. In the case of the EU, its traditional paradigm to address transition, modernisation and steady integration into a shared European space to approach Russia became obsolete. The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy adopted in June 2016 perfectly reflects this change when it states that 'managing the relationship with Russia represents a key strategic challenge'. Nevertheless, as a reflection of the deep divisions among European member states concerning Russia, Brussels is still willing to 'engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when our interests overlap'. In other words, the EU is committed to a dual approach that intends to consolidate a strong position (*deterrence*) with open channels for meaningful dialogue (*diplomacy*). NATO is facing a similar, though perhaps less explicit, dilemma as Russia's aggressive actions have brought back deterrence and collective defence as NATO's core purposes.

This study analyses in depth Russian perspectives about the non-shared neighbourhood and policies towards the Baltic and Black Sea regions. The study pays particular attention to the ongoing militarisation of both regions, the question of the Russian minorities, the energy dimension and various forms of interparliamentary cooperation which have proliferated in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions, especially in the 1990s, linked to intergovernmental groupings and often driven by the EU itself. The importance of regional interparliamentary assemblies (RIAs) and fora rests on their ability to act as facilitators of political dialogue, raise awareness and influence their respective national policies.

## 2 Russia

Russia is uneasy with the so-called post-Cold War order in Europe. Russian leaders and analysts have been insistent over the years about what they consider to be the unfairness of this order. Since the dissolution of the USSR, Russian foreign policy has been dominated by security concerns, with NATO's enlargement and the EU's Neighbourhood Policy at the core of Moscow's narrative of grievances. In fact NATO's posture has always been perceived as the real strategic driver of the Western attitude towards Russia. Accordingly, the successive EU enlargements have been received reluctantly as a process that is inseparable from NATO's, a process in which EU-NATO relations have outweighed the potential benefits to Russia. Thus the EU and NATO enlargement revived in the Kremlin the old Soviet idea of encirclement in which the Baltic and Black Sea regions, plus the non-shared neighbourhood, play a prominent role and have many times set the tone in the bilateral relationship.

### 2.1 Russia's views, aims and means

As stated in the [Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation](#) (2016), the Kremlin sees a world which 'is currently going through *fundamental changes* related to the emergence of a multipolar international system. The structure of international relations is becoming increasingly complex. Globalization has led to the formation of new centres of economic and political power. [...] *Tensions are rising* due to disparities in global development, the widening prosperity gap between States and growing *competition* for resources, access to markets and control over transport arteries. This competition involves not only human, research and technological capabilities, but has been increasingly gaining a civilizational dimension in the form of *duelling values*. Against this backdrop, *attempts to impose values* on others can stoke [...] *conflict* in international relations, *leading ultimately to chaos* and an uncontrolled situation in international relations'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, Russia sees an international landscape characterised by transformation, competition, uncertainty, complexity, risks and confronting values.

The Russian reasoning goes even further, indicating that 'the attempts made by western powers to maintain their positions in the world, including by imposing their point of view on global processes and conducting a policy to contain alternative centres of power, leads to a *greater instability* in international relations and *growing turbulence* at the global and regional levels. The *struggle for dominance in shaping the key principles of the future international system* has become a key trend at the current stage of international development [and] *force* is becoming an increasingly important factor in international relations [...] Efforts to *expand and upgrade military capabilities* and to create and deploy new types of weapons undermine strategic stability'. Put simply, the West is blamed as a major destabilising factor and the rift is not just about divergent interests in some specific hotspots but mainly about the fundamental principles that will hold an upcoming international system that will likely be forged by conflicts and military might. Therefore, Russia's own assessment of the evolving context is a key point to take into account to understand the Kremlin's calculus of the risks, costs and benefits of any given move or policy. The 2016 Foreign Policy Concept reflects deeply entrenched beliefs and viewpoints in the Kremlin. The central and almost exclusive role of major powers in international relations is an underlying principle in this and other official documents like the military doctrines or the national security strategies that reflect Russia's strategic mindset.

Against this background, the clash of perceptions between Russia and the EU play a crucial role. Mutual strategic distrust runs deep, while misunderstandings and misconceptions are part of this new normal characterised by strained relations. In the last 25 years, two antagonistic narratives have been consolidated. The normally optimistic EU self-explanation of European integration lies in stark contrast to the

<sup>1</sup> Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016). All emphasis added.

predominant Russian view, mostly fed by frustrated expectations about its place in the post-Cold War order. From Moscow's point of view, the West has taken advantage of its *voluntary* dismantling of the Soviet empire, not to establish a mutually adequate situation of *equality*, but to extend Western rule to the borders of Russia.<sup>2</sup>

Russia regularly criticises the EU's role in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture as a subordinate one and has traditionally defended the OSCE, of which Russia is a full-member, as a privileged forum for true multipolarity in Europe. From Moscow's perspective, the maintenance of NATO, and more so its enlargement, are perceived as outdated vestiges of the Cold War that cannot hold another meaning other than to continue placing Russia beyond the dividing line of a potential enemy. Not even the signature in 1997 of the [Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security](#) with NATO has managed to mitigate effectively this perception that the intervention in the Kosovo war unleashed again. This explains why, in Moscow, an increasing disappointment has governed the official interpretation of the relationship with the West and terms like 'humiliation', 'deception' and 'betrayal' come forth recurrently. After the Kosovo intervention, other landmarks of this perceived disloyalty of the West followed: the expansions of the Alliance to include Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic in 1999 and the three Baltic republics (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) in 2004, and finally and specifically the 'colour revolutions' in the former Soviet space. The Kremlin appears to believe that the West enforces a strategy – disguised as democratic altruism – of changing regimes that, ultimately, seeks to break the power in Russia itself.<sup>3</sup> The sum of this is what the influential Russian political scientist Sergey Karaganov calls a 'Versailles with velvet gloves'.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that, unlike the EU and NATO, in its analysis of the last fifteen years Moscow approaches the east and south –from Kosovo to Libya, Syria or Iraq – within the same framework and narrative. This is relevant and helps explain why the Kremlin conceives of all of its movements (including Ukraine and Syria) as defensive in nature and it does not consider the scenario of being attacked by NATO to be completely unthinkable. This is in stark contrast, of course, to the perspective of the other side, which contemplates a full-scale war exclusively, if at all, as retaliation for a previous Russian attack against a NATO ally, but never as a first step.

It is worth mentioning that Moscow's certainty about the defensive nature of all of its movements encompasses all dimensions. This means that Russia appears to be convinced of being reactive to the West and using the same strategies and tactics applied against her. For instance, referring to alleged Russian meddling in the US presidential election, Fyodor Lukyanov, Editor-in-Chief of *Russia in Global Affairs*, considers that Putin is giving the United States [a taste of its own medicine](#). From his perspective, the interventions in Ukraine and Syria can be considered if not as purely defensive then as at least compensatory, as they aim to '[restore Russia's rightful place](#)'. And this points again to the very nature of the disagreement, as one analyst has put it: '[differences] involve very different understandings of fundamental concepts such as sovereignty and influence. Russia and Europe do not agree even on how to define 'interest', or the 'natural entitlement' and 'legitimate' freedom of action for countries, both big and small'.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the different understandings of 'equality' and their implications, see Kortunov, Andrey: 'Russia and the West: What Does 'Equality' Mean?', *Russian International Affairs Council*, November 2016, available at: <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-and-the-west-what-does-equality-mean/>

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Putin's references to 'political provocations' aiming to 'demolish and usurp Russian power' during his victory speech at the Red Square in March 2012 after the presidential election: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=30oMuEo4eDw>.

<sup>4</sup> S. Karaganov, 'Europe and Russia: Preventing a New Cold War', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 June 2014: <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Europe-and-Russia-Preventing-a-New-Cold-War-16701>.

<sup>5</sup> Kadri Liik, 'The Baltic States and Russia - On Diplomatic Dimensions of Security', in Andri Spruds and Māris Andžāns (eds.): *Security in the Baltic Sea Region: Realities and Prospects*, LIIA, 2017, p. 150. Available at: <http://liia.lv/en/publications/security-in-the-baltic-sea-region-realities-and-prospects-the-riga-conference-papers-2017-643>.

Therefore, despite not being explicitly formulated, what Russia is actually demanding from the EU and NATO is: i) to be acknowledged among the great powers who set the rules and the agenda in international politics; and ii) a recognition, implicit or explicit, of what it considers its 'sphere of influence' (which means control over the strategic orientation of the countries included).

Russia is aware of its structural disadvantages compared to the West, from economic capacity to conventional military capabilities. That is why Moscow confers utmost importance both on nuclear deterrence and asymmetric methods and instruments, i.e. the means of retaining strategic parity with the West. Even more so, as the Kremlin seems convinced – and this is the most worrisome aspect from a European perspective – that is facing an existential threat. Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, says that '[since February 2014, the Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has been acting as a wartime leader](#)'.

The 'hybrid' or, as they call it, 'non-linear' war Russia sees as the future of warfare consists of military and non-military elements united in an integrated all-encompassing strategy.<sup>6</sup> Propaganda, disinformation and control over information will be essential elements for securing the [success of military operations](#). Furthermore, Russian strategists have elaborated an approach – 'informational confrontation' (*informacionnoje protivoborstvo*)<sup>7</sup> – that renders Russian propaganda workable during both war and peace time, which reflects its 'permanent' nature. Thus, the issue of 'information operations' (frequently read in the West as 'cyber-operations') have become a central point of concern among Russian military planners and strategists since the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring – which, from their perspective, demonstrated the huge potential of the internet and social media. Russia's (dis)information campaign against the West (both the US and the EU countries)<sup>8</sup> and Ukraine<sup>9</sup> is a combination of three major elements: i) direct actions, ii) indirect actions, and iii) reflexive control.

Moscow identifies two key elements of information confrontation: a) information-psychological – characterised by its permanent nature; and b) information-technology warfare – designed to affect technical systems and applied during the time of military confrontation, which means that Russia perceives electronic warfare (EW) to be a part of information confrontation. Incidentally, both types have been tested in Ukraine at various stages, starting from the outbreak of the Euromaidan (when the Kremlin launched major (dis)information outlets), through to the illegal annexation of Crimea (followed by extensive use of reflexive control shown by Russia speculating on the possibility of using nuclear weapons and/or launching a full-scale military operation), and the outbreak of hostilities in the Ukrainian south-east which witnessed Russian tactics merging into an integrated strategy that included all these measures within one common framework (including mass use of EW capabilities,<sup>10</sup> [cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns](#)). Indeed, the Ukrainian crisis has become a decisive factor which articulated Russian disinformation efforts.

<sup>6</sup> See Герасимов В. В. Ценность науки в предвидении // Военно-промышленный курьер. 2013. № 8(476). 27 февр. Available at: <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

<sup>7</sup> Шушков Г.М., Сергеев И.В. Концептуальные основы информационной безопасности Российской Федерации // Актуальные вопросы научной и научно-педагогической деятельности молодых ученых: сборник научных трудов III Всероссийской заочной научно-практической конференции (23.11.2015 – 30.12.2015 г., Москва) / под общ. ред. Е.А. Певцовой; редколл.: Е.А. Куренкова и др. – М.: ИИУ МГОУ, 2016, pp. 69–76.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance M.N. Murphy, *Understanding Russia's Concept for Total War in Europe*, The Heritage Foundation, September 12, 2016: <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/understanding-russias-concept-total-war-europe>.

<sup>9</sup> Sam Jones, 'Ukraine: Russia's new art of war', *Financial Times*, August 28, 2014. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0>.

<sup>10</sup> Roger N. McDermott, *Russia's Electronic Warfare Capabilities to 2025*, International Centre for Defence and Security, September 2017. Available at: [https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/doc/ICDS\\_Report\\_Russias\\_Electronic\\_Warfare\\_to\\_2025.pdf](https://www.icds.ee/fileadmin/media/icds.ee/doc/ICDS_Report_Russias_Electronic_Warfare_to_2025.pdf).



Specifically, Russian use of information now boils down to implementation of the so-called 4D approach: dismiss, distort, distract and dismay.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 The non-shared neighbourhood

Russia ambiguously defines its former Soviet neighbours as its 'near abroad' (*blizhneye zarubezhnye*) and, therefore, Moscow rejects the EU's 'shared neighbourhood' formula. This neighbourhood is the main setting and a key factor in settling the conflictive tension between Russia and the EU and NATO.

Already in 1999, at the very beginning of his political career, the then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin presented at the December [Helsinki summit](#) a document entitled [Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union \(2000-2010\)](#)<sup>12</sup> which called on the EU to help Russia consolidate its 'role as a leading power in shaping up a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the CIS area'. This explains why Moscow reacts (or overreacts) to the strengthening of ties between the EU and any of the former Soviet republics by always interpreting it as a Western advance that, ultimately, questions its regionally dominant position and contributes to the construction of a containment barrier around Russia. To prevent this, President Putin has placed the idea of designing a new "[a modern, sound and sustainable security architecture](#)" (Berlin, September 2001) at the centre of the dialogue with both the EU and NATO, under the principle of the "[indivisible character of security](#)" and warned of the danger that "[serious provocations](#)" (for which read: Western policy) will produce an environment in which "[no one feels safe](#)" (Munich, February 2007). According to President Putin the time has come to choose between either [new rules or a game without rules](#) (Sochi, October 2014).

Thus, faced with the EU's launch of the so-called [Eastern Partnership](#) (June 2009), Moscow established the [Customs Union](#) (January 2010) with Belarus and Kazakhstan as the germ of a future [Eurasian Economic Union](#) (EAEU). According to the idea launched by Putin in October 2011, the project was inspired by other regional integration processes such as the EU, NAFTA, APEC and ASEAN and aspired to be '[an essential part of Greater Europe united by shared values of freedom, democracy, and market laws](#)'.

The [EAEU](#) is as much the response of its members to the global crisis of 2008 as an attempt by Russia to change its peripheral position in relation to the EU and China, with the underlying idea that Moscow leads one of the poles that will shape the emerging multipolar order. The EAEU is, as a result, strategic in nature for the Kremlin and the inclusion of Ukraine was crucial. But the Eurasian Union project has been seriously weakened not only by the loss of Ukraine: the Russian military intervention has raised very strong fears in the other two key members, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Armenia and Kyrgyzstan have marginal political and economic weight in the project). So, in the light of the war in Ukraine, the EAEU has acquired a neo-imperialist and ethnic dimension in the eyes of the other members which provokes in them uncertainty and fear. Hence the growing reluctance of Minsk and Astana to deepen the process of integration and their rejection of any step that includes a political dimension.

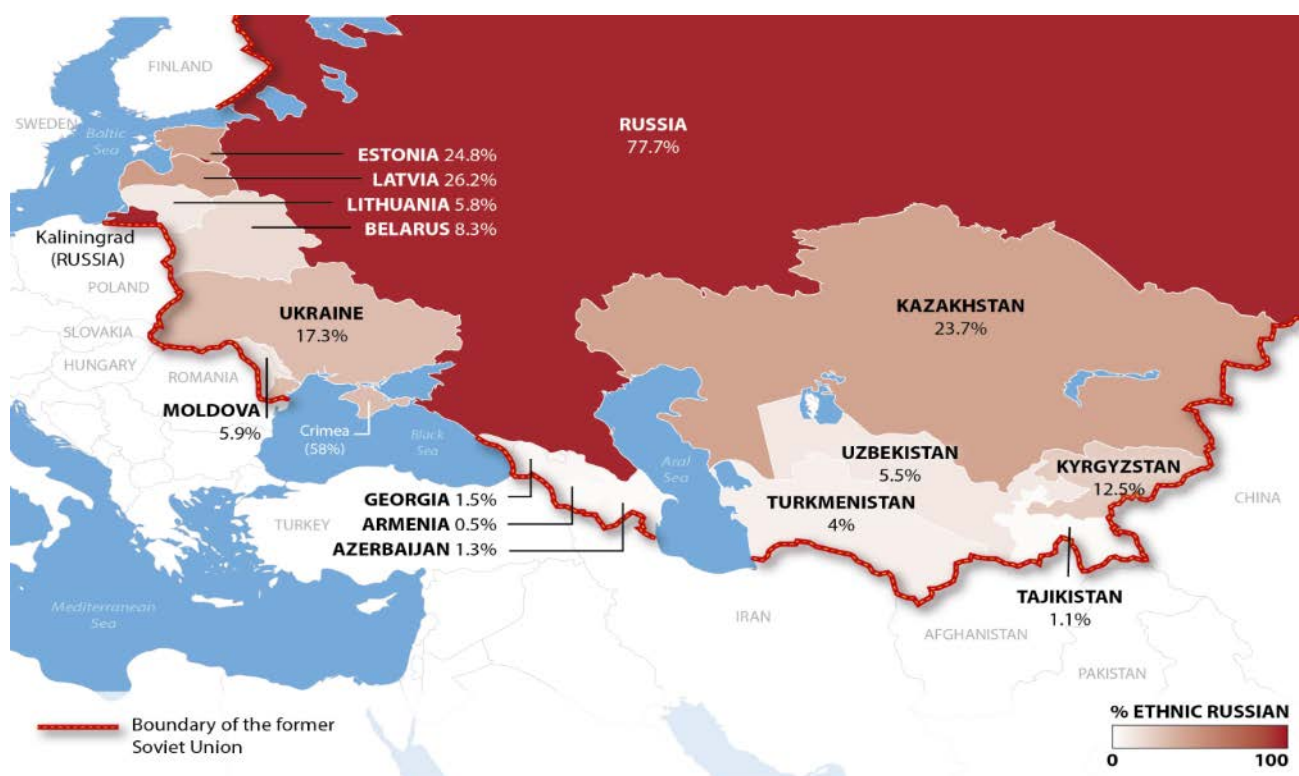
As in the previous versions in [2000](#), [2008](#) and [2013](#), the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Concept approved by President Putin in [November 2016](#) includes among its main objectives, 'to pursue neighbourly relations with adjacent States, assist them in eliminating the existing and preventing the emergence of the new hotbeds of tension and conflicts on their territory'. But in reality, Russian politics have been and still

<sup>11</sup> Maria Snegovaya, *Putin's information warfare in Ukraine. Soviet origins of Russia's hybrid warfare*, The Institute for the Study of War, Washington, DC, 2015. Available at: <https://www.stopfake.org/en/putin-s-information-warfare-in-ukraine-soviet-origins-of-russia-s-hybrid-warfare/>.

<sup>12</sup> 'Strategiya razvitiya otnoshenii Rossiiskoi Federatsii s Evropeiskim Soyuzom na srednesrochnuyu perspektivu (2000–2010)' [Medium-term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010)], *Diplomaticheskii vestnik*, n.11, pp: 20–28, 1999.

are not particularly friendly and cooperative. In the European part of the post-Soviet neighbourhood, the Kremlin plays with its neighbours' needs for economic support (Belarus), security (Armenia) and arms supply (Azerbaijan). And it does not hesitate to bet on two horses: Moscow sells arms to Armenia at lower prices and is a guarantor of its security as a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), while it is massively arming Azerbaijan at the same time. According to a 2015 study by the International Institute for Peace Research in Stockholm (SIPRI), Baku's arms imports between 2004 and 2014 increased by 249%, with 85% of such arms coming from Russia.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, where its direct control has been broken (Ukraine and Georgia and, until recently, Moldova) Moscow can use, as in Donbas, the argument of the alleged defence of the Russian minorities. Separating territories from a country (Georgia) or nurturing the aspiration for independence of non-Russian minorities in another (case of the Gagauz minority in Moldova) are other examples of its policies in the region. The Kremlin supports the status quo in the areas where this allows Russia to guarantee its final arbiter role. But wherever the latter is in danger, it does not hesitate to promote the creation of de facto states, such as Transnistria, South Ossetia or Abkhazia, which are cut off from the territory of neighbouring countries, or to use force to annex Crimea and instigate and provoke an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.



**Map 1: Ethnic Russian in the former Soviet Union.**

Source: CIA World Factbook | *The Washington Post*.

Russia has also frequently resorted to energy blackmail and commercial retaliation to force integration into its leading integration projects. For example, before the EU's Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013, Moscow, angered by the departure of Moldova and Ukraine from the orbit of the Eurasian Economic Union, decreed a veto of Moldovan wines and different Ukrainian food and industrial products, all accompanied by additional border controls that caused huge clogging and heavy monetary losses.

<sup>13</sup> N.Melvin and E. Klimenko. Shifting conflict and security dynamics in the Caucasus: The role of regional powers. SIPRI, 1 June 2016: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/blog/2016/shifting-conflict-and-security-dynamics-caucasus-role-regional-powers>.

Perhaps nothing better describes this situation and Russia's relations with its neighbours than the warning Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin sent to Moldovans in September 2013: ['energy supplies are important in the run-up to winter, I hope you won't freeze'](#).

## 2.3 Kaliningrad and the militarisation of Russian foreign policy towards the Baltic Sea region

The militarisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast reflects the Kremlin's desire to place the crisis with the EU in the military field, where, despite the risks, Moscow feels comfortable and has operational and political advantages over the EU states.



**Map 2: The Baltic Sea region**

Source: CIDOB

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union enjoyed a privileged position in the Baltic Sea, including full conventional superiority over NATO. At the end of World War II, Moscow annexed Kaliningrad and (re)occupied the three Baltic republics, which were forcefully integrated into the USSR, while Poland and East Germany became founding members of the Warsaw Pact in 1955. Kaliningrad Oblast became, for decades, one of the most militarised spots in Europe, with troops stationed there reaching 100,000 men. Combined with the de facto neutrality of Sweden and Finland this offered significant advantages to Moscow in the Baltic Sea. The Red Navy's chief, Admiral Kuznetsov, called it Russia's 'mare nostrum'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See Hanson W. Baldwin, *The Soviet Navy*, Foreign Affairs, July 1955 Issue.

The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up new possibilities for Russia's westernmost region. Though unfulfilled later on, expectations of a potential 'Russian Hong Kong' that would act as a bridge of cooperation with Europe were high in the early nineties.<sup>15</sup> However, since 1999 Kaliningrad has witnessed a gradual remilitarisation that reflects Moscow's growing uneasiness with the post-Cold War order in Europe. From 1999 until now, the oblast has co-hosted four strategic war games under the code name 'Zapad' ('West' in Russian), each of which surpasses the previous in both qualitative and quantitative terms.<sup>16</sup>

The Ukraine crisis – especially after March 2015, when Russia officially abandoned the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)<sup>17</sup> – triggered a new wave of militarisation of the entire western flank with a special role allocated to Kaliningrad. Deployment of the most up-to-date military hardware such as the 'Iskander-M', the S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft weapon system, the Bastion-P and the 3K60 Bal coastal defence missile systems equipped with nuclear capability, and the P-800 Oniks supersonic anti-ship cruise missile led to Kaliningrad regaining its status as Russia's 'militarised fortress' and its most sophisticated Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) 'bubble' to date.



**Map 3: Kaliningrad and major military installations in the Baltic Sea region.**

Source: IHS Markit <http://blog.ihs.com/zapad-2017-russian-sabre-rattling-towards-eastern-europe>

Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/1955-07-01/soviet-navy>.

<sup>15</sup> Sergey Sukhankin, *Special no more: Kaliningrad on life support*, European Council on Foreign Relations, November 7, 2016.

Available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_special\\_no\\_more\\_kaliningrad\\_on\\_life\\_support\\_7169](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_special_no_more_kaliningrad_on_life_support_7169).

<sup>16</sup> Liudas Zdanavičius and Matthew Czekaj (eds.), *Russia's Zapad 2013*

*Military Exercise*, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, December 2015.

Available at: <https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Zapad-2013-Full-online-final.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Russia suspended its membership of the treaty back in 2007.

Likewise, within the context of an intensified ideological confrontation with the West, Kaliningrad became not only a 'military fortress', but also Russia's '[ideological bastion](#)'. The main policies and activities can be summarised as follows:

- Uprooting German cultural and historical legacy. The work that was started by the Communists in 1945 is now continued by the Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill himself, who defined the German legacy as 'old stones'.<sup>18</sup>
- A vigorous campaign against so-called 'foreign agents' or a 'fifth column'. For instance, the cultural-educational centre 'German-Russian House' – the oldest and most reputable foreign NGO in the oblast – was declared a 'foreign agent' by the Kaliningrad Central Regional Court in April 2016.<sup>19</sup>
- Local media outlets and politicians (including the former governor, Nikolay Tsukanov) spreading disinformation and propaganda against Poland and Lithuania, underrating the level of economic development of the latter, depicting a supposed mass exodus of its population, which purportedly stems from this country's membership of the European Union.<sup>20</sup>

For the foreseeable future, Kaliningrad Oblast will remain a 'military fortress', intended to put pressure or intimidate the Baltic neighbours. As stated by Igor Nikolaychuk, head of the Department of Regional Security Problems at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, Kaliningrad will never become a demilitarised '[region of peace](#)'.

## 2.4 The question of the Russian minorities in the Baltic Sea region

The protracted period of forceful Soviet domination over the three Baltic republics has left a visible footprint on the ethnic composition of these countries and made them extremely susceptible to threats posed by Russia. The issue of the Russophone population – and particularly that of Russian origin – has been at the core of the Baltic countries' security concerns since their independence. This perception is much more acute in Latvia and Estonia, where the proportions of Russian-speaking minorities (25.6% and 25.1%, respectively, as of January 2017) are much larger than in Lithuania, which has 6.6%.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.4.1 Language, demography and perceptions

Russia appealed to the fate of Russian-speaking communities to justify its annexation of Crimea and its posture regarding the subsequent armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, this has reinforced concerns in the Baltics and those who perceive the Russian-speaking minorities as a potential Trojan horse in the heart of their societies. The results of an opinion poll conducted in late 2015 for the Bertelsmann Foundation show how attitudes regarding the responsibility for the events in Ukraine follow a clear language divide and could be interpreted as a worrying pattern of where the loyalties lie.<sup>22</sup> Russian-speaking respondents in Latvia laid the blame with Ukraine (67%), and only 4% with Moscow; the same goes for Estonia where the results were 68% versus 6%, respectively. In contrast, the support for the

<sup>18</sup> *Vystuplenie Svyateyshego Patriarkha Kirilla na I Kaliningradskom forume Vsemirnogo russkogo narodnogo sobora*, Russkaya Pravoslavnaya Tserkov, March 14, 2015. Available at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/4013160.html> (*Speech of the Holy Patriarch Kirill during the First Kaliningrad Forum of the Russian national Congress*)

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Armstrong. Kaliningrad Court Declares German-Russian House a 'Foreign Agent'. The Moscow Times, April 27, 2016. Available at: <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/kaliningrad-court-declares-german-russian-house-a-foreign-agent-52705>.

<sup>20</sup> Sergey Sukhankin. *Lithuania: The Old-New Target of Russian 'Hybrid Warfare?'* The Jamestown Foundation, Blog, January 27, 2017. Available at: <https://jamestown.org/lithuania-old-new-target-russian-hybrid-warfare/>.

<sup>21</sup> Latvia Demographics Profile 2017: [http://www.indexmundi.com/latvia/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/latvia/demographics_profile.html) and Statistics Estonia: <http://www.stat.ee/603927>.

<sup>22</sup> A. Łada. *All quiet in the Baltics? Estonians, Latvians and their Russian - speaking minorities: Different assessments of current European issues*. Bertelsmann Stiftung and Institute of Public Affairs (ISP). December 2015: [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/EZ\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_Study\\_All\\_quiet\\_in\\_the\\_Baltics\\_2015\\_EN.pdf](https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/EZ_Policy_Brief_Study_All_quiet_in_the_Baltics_2015_EN.pdf)

Ukrainian cause was clearly expressed by ethnic Latvians and Estonians who put the blame on Russia (66% and 78%, respectively). Similarly, when it comes to assessing the sense of a military threat from Russia, in Estonia it is at 80% among ethnic Estonians and only 7% among Russian-speakers, while in Latvia the divide is 69% among ethnic Latvians and 5% among Russian-speakers.

## 2.4.2 The citizenship issue

Against this backdrop, the critical issue for minorities is the naturalisation of the resident non-citizens, as they are called in Latvia, or residents of undefined citizenship, as they are labelled in Estonia. The three Baltic republics are States Parties to the [Framework for the Protection of National Minorities](#) (FCNM), which came into force in 1998 and underscores minority protection as a core value of the Council of Europe. But none of them has yet ratified the [European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages](#) (ECRML), which aims to protect and promote traditional regional and minority languages in Europe.

After the initial period of unwillingness to ease citizenship acquisition for former Soviet residents and thanks to EU and Western pressure for a clear and fair facilitation, the governments of both countries have evolved towards a more comprehensive integration policy. They have developed language-learning programmes and promoted the naturalisation to citizenship among non-citizens. The authorities in both countries have shown political will to advance the integration of ethnic minorities and the granting of citizenship to the non-citizen residents.

For instance, in 2014 the [Estonian Ministry of Culture](#) published a Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia '[Integrating Estonia 2020](#)' in which the acknowledgement of the problem appears very clearly stated: 'The feeling of unequal treatment reflects the feeling of exclusion among individuals with a native language different from Estonian. Acknowledging and implementing the principles of equal treatment help to avoid inequality and exclusion resulting from national and racial origin, which, in turn, supports the objective of creating a socially cohesive society'. The document also underscores the 'positive trend', according to the Estonian Integration Monitoring 2011, of 'the decreased number of persons not wishing to obtain any citizenship from 16% in 2008 to the current 6%'.<sup>23</sup>

These policies have clearly helped to better address and secure the loyalty issue – what Katrīna Pētersone, an expert from a Latvian think tank, has called the 'Baltic States' Struggle for Hearts and Minds'.<sup>24</sup> In Latvia, for instance, a 2014 public opinion survey amongst Latvia's various ethnic minority groups showed that about two-thirds of respondents (64%) either strongly (21%) or moderately (44%) considered themselves 'affiliated to Latvia', while a quarter of the respondents indicated 'strong affiliation' with Russia.<sup>25</sup> Estonia, for its part, is the only Baltic country governed by a coalition which includes a party (the Centre Party whose leader is prime minister) largely supported by a Russian-speaking electoral base. The Estonian Ministry of Culture carries out the Integration Monitoring Survey every three to four years in order 'to determine the attitudes and experiences dominant in the society in integrating people of different nationalities'.<sup>26</sup> The results of the 2015 survey indicate that the interaction between the different ethnic groups has increased compared to five years ago and that the Estonian language skills of the Russian-speaking population have improved.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Culture. Strategy of Integration and Social Cohesion in Estonia 'Integrating Estonia 2020'. 2014, p.11: [http://www.kul.ee/sites/kulminn/files/integrating\\_estonia\\_2020.pdf](http://www.kul.ee/sites/kulminn/files/integrating_estonia_2020.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> K.Pētersone, *The Baltic States' Struggle for Hearts and Minds*. Latvian Institute of International Affairs (LIIA), 01 April 2015: <http://liia.lv/en/analysis/the-baltic-states-struggle-for-hearts-and-minds-440>

<sup>25</sup> Latvian Public Broadcasting English-language service 'Two-thirds 'loyal' to Latvia in minority poll', August 26, 2014: <http://eng.lsm.lv/article/society/society/two-thirds-loyal-to-latvia-in-minority-poll.a96030/>

<sup>26</sup> *A Monitoring of integration in Estonian Society in 2015*. Estonian Ministry of Culture: <https://www.ibs.ee/en/publications/monitoring-of-integration-in-estonian-society/>

In sum, Estonia and Latvia are meeting EU standards regarding these matters, but the Kremlin's attempts to reach and have influence over the Russian-speaking communities must be taken into account.

### 2.4.3 Russia's game in the Baltic area

Moscow considers all Russian speakers living outside Russia in the former Soviet countries (approximately 25 million) as their *compatriots*, a concept not included in the [Russian Constitution](#).<sup>27</sup> Where the latter states that the Russian Federation 'shall guarantee its citizens protection and patronage abroad' (Article 61.2), the [Russian Foreign Policy Concept of February 2013](#) speaks of 'Russian citizens and compatriots residing abroad' and of 'Russia's approach to human rights issues'. During his speech in March 2014 announcing the annexation of Crimea, President Putin declared, referring to the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, that '[Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal means](#)'.<sup>28</sup> The logic of this approach is thus *where my countrymen are I am in my right* and makes it possible to activate, when convenient, a mechanism supported by what Moscow defines as its 'legitimate interests'. On this foundation was built the strategy of the annexation of Crimea. And in many respects, Ukraine has been a testing ground for the Kremlin's resort to the Russian minorities in the former Soviet neighbourhood.

The Kremlin has exerted its pressure – both explicit and covert – on the three Baltic republics in a variety of ways. A common one is the promotion of Soviet nostalgia as in the [episode of the removal of a World War II war memorial in Tallinn in 2007](#), and the spreading of Soviet icons (portraits of Stalin, Lenin, May 9<sup>th</sup> Victory Day celebrations) and Imperial Russian (Ribbon of St. George) symbols among ethnic Russians. The scope of the actions is wide:

In Estonia:

- Fostering 'soft power' through the 'Russian World' foundation (2007) and the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund (2010). Russian 'soft power' is also exercised through the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church, which promotes anti-Western and anti-Protestant/Catholic sentiments among the Russian-speaking minority.<sup>29</sup>
- Cyber operations in 2007 widely attributed to Kremlin-backed groups.
- Military pressure through the 'Zapad' (1999, 2009, 2013, 2017) strategic war games and the militarisation of the Western Military District (WMD).

In Latvia:

- Using infrastructure and logistical ties (dating back to the pre-1991 period) as means of economic pressure. One of the most recent episodes occurred in 2015, when Russia's decision to halt railway transportation with Latvia caused losses of €1.5 billion.<sup>30</sup>
- An information campaign waged by Russian mass media (including *Sputnik* and *Russia Today*), for instance, depicting the spreading poverty of Latvia as a sign of the country losing its independence to the EU and the US.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For the official version in Russian of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993, see: <http://constitution.kremlin.ru/>

<sup>28</sup> V. Putin, Address by President of the Russian Federation 18 March 2014, The Kremlin, Moscow: <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>

<sup>29</sup> Патриарх Кирилл о протестантах (Patriarch-Kirill-about-protestants) <http://familyofgod.by/mission/item/87-patriarch-kirill-about-protestants.html>

<sup>30</sup> 'Рельсовая война' на латвийском направлении' ('Railways War' in the Latvian direction'). Svobodnaya pressa, 25 September 2015: <http://svpressa.ru/economy/article/132564/>

<sup>31</sup> 'Латвийцы больше надеются на родственников, чем на государство' Latvians have more faith in their relatives than in the state. *Sputnik*, 26. 04.2017:

<https://ru.sputniknewslv.com/economy/20170426/4578147/latvija-opros-platezhi-poterja-dohoda-kredit.html>.

#### In Lithuania:

- With a Russian-speaking minority amounting to merely 4.8% of the overall population, the country did not become a prime target of Russian hybrid warfare until 2014 (although episodes occurred before this year). The Ukrainian crisis though had a dramatic effect.
- In 2015, a Facebook group with the name 'People's Republic of Vilnius' (*Wileńska Republika Ludowa/Виленская Народная Республика*) emerged.<sup>32</sup> It called for the deployment of 'the little green men' and the conducting of a referendum among ethnic Poles in the Vilnius region,<sup>33</sup> which clearly followed the example of Crimea and Donbas. Polish experts claimed that this was Russian provocation aimed at driving a wedge between Lithuanians and Poles residing in Lithuania.
- An information campaign launched against Lithuania (and partly Poland) by Kaliningrad-based mass media sources which were joined by local authorities.<sup>34</sup> Lithuania was presented as an impoverished state experiencing an exodus of tremendous scope. Meanwhile, Kaliningrad officials started to accuse external forces (Lithuania and Poland) of preparing a 'Maidan in the Kaliningrad Oblast'.
- At the end of 2016 the Russian embassy in Vilnius started to disseminate leaflets that vilified Lithuania, providing falsified information about its economic development and urging the locals to abandon their country.<sup>35</sup> The materials contained the names of Russian NGOs, TV channels and foundations that should be contacted for 'more information'.
- On February 20<sup>th</sup> 2017 Lithuania was subjected to cyber-attacks and an 'information war', as Lithuanian authorities put it,<sup>36</sup> which curiously coincided with the signing of the Defence Cooperation Agreement between Lithuania and the United States. Information was dispersed about a girl from an orphanage 'surrounded and raped by a crowd of drunken German-speaking uniformed soldiers' (which bitterly resembled the notorious fake 'Lisa case' in Germany) in January 2017.<sup>37</sup>
- Importance of Russian activities in the domain of pop culture as an essential part of Russian meddling in Lithuanian domestic affairs.<sup>38</sup>

However, it must be pointed out that several examples call into question the Kremlin's apparent confidence in the Russian-speaking communities as a potential Trojan horse. Many examples of successful integration put this confidence in jeopardy: for instance, in Estonia the minister of health and labour, Jevgeni Ossinovski, is a native Russian-speaker and leader of the Social Democratic Party sitting in the coalition government; in Latvia, Nils Ušakovs, the mayor of Riga, who has Russian origins, was initially considered a pro-Russian politician and is now held in very high regard. Instead of being an ardent supporter of the 'Russian World' ideology, Ušakovs presented an example of a very well-integrated Latvian

<sup>32</sup> *Internauci walczą z rosyjską propagandą. Usunęli „Wileńską Republikę Ludową” z Facebooka.* TVP INFO. Available at <http://www.tvp.info/18953268/internauci-walczą-z-rosyjską-propagandą-usunęli-wileńska-republika-ludowa-z-facebook>.

<sup>33</sup> *Wileńska Republika Ludowa / Виленская Народная Республика.* Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/Wileńska-Republika-Ludowa-Виленская-Народная-Республика-1017190118295964/>.

<sup>34</sup> 'Цуканов: спецслужбы Запада, к сожалению, не отменили задачу устроить «майдан» в Калининграде' ('Tsukanov: Western special services, unfortunately, did not give up on the task of organizing a 'Maidan' in Kaliningrad'): <http://www.freekaliningrad.ru/tsukanov-intelligence-services-of-the-west-unfortunately-did-not-cancel-the-task-to-make-a-maidan-in-articles/>.

<sup>35</sup> S. Sukhankin, 'Lithuania: The Old-New Target of Russian 'Hybrid Warfare?', Jamestown Foundation, *Commentaries*, January 27, 2017: <https://jamestown.org/lithuania-old-new-target-russian-hybrid-warfare/>.

<sup>36</sup> 'We know how to live next to Russia': Lithuania builds border fence with Kaliningrad', *The Guardian*, 24 August 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/24/russia-lithuania-border-fence-kaliningrad-estonia-eston-kohver>.

<sup>37</sup> D. Bankauskaitė, 'A curious fake: Lithuania encounters an echo from the 'Lisa case'', Center for European Policy Analysis, 20 February 2017. [http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Lt\\_20\\_Feb17](http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Lt_20_Feb17).

<sup>38</sup> D. Bankauskaitė, 'Using pop culture to achieve Russia's political goals', Center for European Policy Analysis, 13 March 2017: [http://infowar.cepa.org/briefs/Lt\\_13\\_March17](http://infowar.cepa.org/briefs/Lt_13_March17)



citizen of Russian ethnicity who rejects Russia's actions in Ukraine and at the same time fully supports democracy and European values.

## 2.5 Crimea and the militarisation of Russian foreign policy towards the Black Sea region

The illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 triggered condemnation and the imposition of sanctions on Russia by Western powers. The [EU sanctions](#) were expanded and are still in place due to the shooting down of the [flight MH17](#) and the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine. While these sanctions have clearly had an impact on Russian calculus and decision-making regarding Ukraine, they will not reverse the annexation in the foreseeable future. In January 2017, Ukraine filed a case against Russia at the UN International Court of Justice in The Hague, accusing Moscow of illegally annexing Crimea and illicitly funding separatist rebel groups in eastern Ukraine.

The symbol of the annexation of this historic peninsula is a bridge to connect Russia's Krasnodar region with Kerch to be completed in 2018. It has [an estimated cost of \\$3.2–\\$4.3 billion](#). In addition to this plan, Moscow promised to invest heavily in the peninsula's infrastructure. The Kremlin has [pledged to boost the Crimean economy with a 37.8 billion rouble](#) (\$593 million) subsidy in 2017. But the disruption of communication with the rest of Ukraine is damaging the local economy. Industries that relied on Ukraine as a primary market, such as fishing and winemaking, are experiencing difficulties. Crucial imports, including gasoline and food, must come from Russia via more expensive routes, increasing their prices. The [tourism industry has also suffered](#) while multinational companies have left the area and the banking sector is a near monopoly (RNKB is the only true financial institution). Despite some positive trends in wages, purchasing power has declined as incomes remain low and [prices have gone up](#). It appears that ambitious plans to attract huge investments through liberalisation of taxation and huge infrastructure projects have not materialised even in part.<sup>39</sup> On the contrary, empirical data suggest that the local population is becoming even more impoverished, whereas prices in the peninsula have skyrocketed, exceeding those in Ukraine.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond economic considerations, there are serious problems with the rule of law in Crimea. New citizenship rules prohibit legal and social access for non-Russian residents and impose [quotas on the employment of foreign citizens](#). Freedom of the media is heavily restricted, with media outlets unable to register, being outlawed and all independent media closed down. [According to Freedom House](#), in whose rankings zero is the best (free) and higher scores are worse, Crimea was evaluated at 30/30 for legal environment, 38/40 for political environment, and 94/100 for press freedom.

National minorities in Crimea have been subject to systematic violations of their rights since the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Such violations have occurred in the areas of freedom of expression, conscience and religion; the right to peaceful assembly and association; freedom of the media and access to information; the right to a fair trial and effective remedy; the right to education in one's native language; and linguistic and cultural rights ([European Parliament, 2016](#)). Only two political parties are represented in the regional parliament: United Russia and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (ultranationalist). Pro-Ukrainian parties or parties of minority groups such as Crimean Tatars are not allowed. According to Human Rights Watch, numerous incidents have affected Crimean Tatars, including political community leaders,

<sup>39</sup> Stroitel'stvo igornoj zony w Krymu mozhet obyitis' w 1 milliard dollarov ((Construction of the casino in Crimea might require 1 billion of US dollars)). *Gazeta.ru.*, 06.06.2014. Available at: [https://www.gazeta.ru/business/news/2014/06/06/n\\_6212413.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/business/news/2014/06/06/n_6212413.shtml).

<sup>40</sup> *Dorogoy Krym: kak w ukrainskikh gorodakh izmenilis' tseny na produkty* ((Precious Crimea: how prices in Ukrainian cities have grown)). *Krym Realiy*, 09.10.2017. Available at: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/28782229.html>.

social activists and advocates facing charges resulting in being banned from the region, sentenced to psychiatric treatment and prolonged detention or disappearance ([Human Rights Watch, 2017: 624](#)). According to Amnesty International, another issue of concern is kidnapping, with several reported cases of abductions in Crimea ([Amnesty International, 2015](#)). [Local human rights organisations and activists](#) claim that locals are being detained in huge numbers.<sup>41</sup> These actions are said to be conducted by the FSB and Russian security services under the pretext of an '[anti-terrorist operation](#)'.<sup>42</sup>

At some point, militarisation and violation of fundamental freedoms go hand-in-hand as Russia is using its electronic warfare capabilities to jam and block many local opposition channels and media outlets (at the same time precluding the local population from using Ukrainian information outlets), which makes it extremely difficult to obtain credible information about the most recent developments in Russian-occupied Crimea.

Crimea brought about a change in the military balance of the Black Sea area in favour of Russia with implications on the wider regional security complex. The transformation of Crimea into a military stronghold was accompanied by growth in the numbers and capabilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Prior to Crimea's annexation, the Russian Black Sea navy had 26 surface vessels, 2 submarines, 22 fixed-wing aircraft and 37 helicopters. These were outmatched by the naval forces of the NATO littoral states: Turkey (44 surface ships, 13 submersibles), the outdated navies of Romania (3 frigates, 4 corvettes, 4 missile patrol boats) and Bulgaria (4 frigates, 2 corvettes, 3 missile boats) ([New Strategy Center, 2017: 5](#)). Today, Russia has confiscated 70% of the Ukrainian navy and by the end of 2015 it had 41 surface vessels and 9 submarines in the Black Sea. By 2020, it is planned that the Russian Black Sea fleet will add 20 new missile corvettes and other craft. Air cover is now provided by 74 aircraft and 61 helicopters, plus 2 regiments of surface-to-air missiles ([New Strategy Center, 2017:5](#)).

The militarisation undertaken in Crimea appears to follow a similar pattern to that of the Kaliningrad Oblast. The following measures should be mentioned:

1. Proliferation of the local electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, reflected in the deployment of the most up-to-date EW equipment (such as the Voronezh radar system);<sup>43</sup>
2. Deployment of an additional number of S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile complexes;<sup>44</sup>
3. Accretion of the number of troops located on the peninsula;<sup>45</sup>
4. Deployment of the new units of tanks and other military equipment.<sup>46</sup>

These activities suggest that Russia is likely to start implementing its vision of the 'war of the future' concept in Crimea, thus [turning the area into an anti-NATO/EU bastion](#). This leads towards Russia's

<sup>41</sup> *W Bakhchisaraye massovye obyiski i zaderzhanie* ((In Bakhchisaraj massive searches and detentions are taking place)), Krymskaya Pravozashchitnaya Organizatsiya, 11.10.2017. Available at: <http://crimeahrg.org/v-bahchisarae-massovyye-obyiski-i-zaderzhanija/>.

<sup>42</sup> *W Krymu presechena dejatel'nost yacheyki zapreshennoy w RF gruppirovki „Khazb ut-Takhrir'* (In Crimea activity of the prohibited in Russia extremist group „Hazb ut-Takhrir' has been stopped), TASS, 11.10.2017. Available at: <http://tass.ru/proisshestviya/4635226>.

<sup>43</sup> *'Novaya radiolokatsionnaya stantsiya „Voronezh-CM' obezopasit Krym ot raketnogo napadeniya'* (The new radar „Voronezh' will protect Crimea against missile assault), *Novosti Kryma*, 18.08.2017. Available at: <http://crimea-news.com/other/2017/08/18/314231.html>.

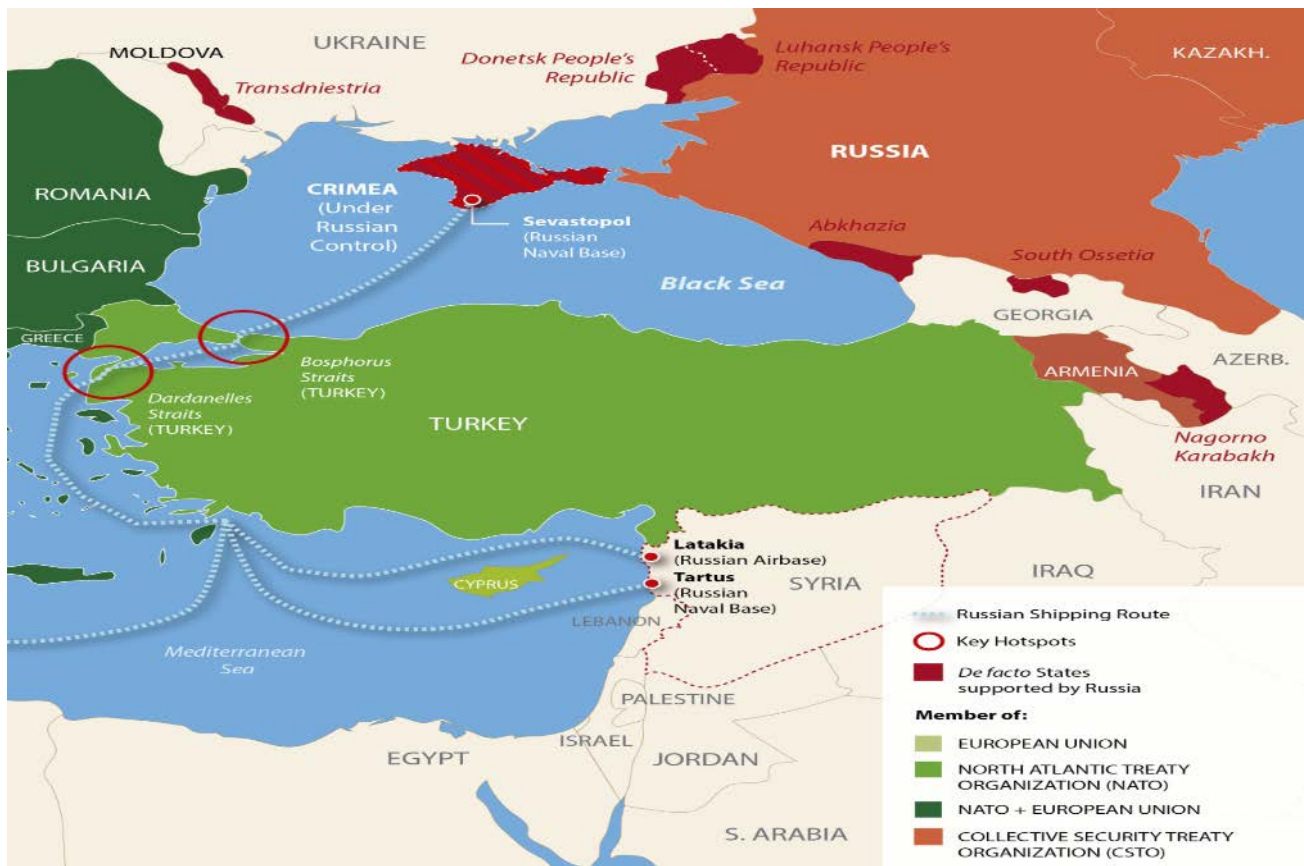
<sup>44</sup> *W Krym napravlyat dopolnitel'nye komplekсы C400* (Additional S400 complexes will be allocated in Crimea), RT, January 14, 2017. Available at: <https://russian.rt.com/russia/news/350291-v-krym-napravyat-dopolnitelnye-komplekсы-s-400>.

<sup>45</sup> *'W ozydaniy ataki': ekspert rasskazal, opasat'sya li nastupleniya rossiyskikh voysk iz Kryma'* ('Waiting for an attack': expert has revealed if military offence from Crimea should be anticipated), *Obozrevatel*, August 9, 2016. Available at: <https://www.obozrevatel.com/crime/63182-v-ozhidanii-ataki-ekspert-rasskazal-opasatsya-li-nastupleniya-voennoj-gruppirovki-v-krymu.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> *Cherez Kerch w Krym zavezli kolonny rossiyskoy voyennoy tekhniki* – video, foto (New columns of Russian military equipment are heading through Kertch to Crimea), Krymskaya Pravozashchitnaya Gruppya, August 7, 2017. Available at: <http://crimeahrg.org/cherez-kerch-zavezli-kolonny-rossiyskoy-voennoy-tehniki-video-foto/>.

southern flank becoming militarily much superior to locally stationed NATO forces, thus jeopardising regional stability.

The annexation of Crimea has destabilised the region and has created a new frozen conflict. Whereas Russia considers Crimea's status to be a 'closed' issue, the international community does not and may foreseeably refuse to recognise its incorporation into Russia. Nevertheless, the Crimean case should not be assessed independently from Russia's global security agenda. Russia's expanding presence in the Syrian conflict and its political and economic *démarches* in south-eastern Europe and the south Caucasus point to a geostrategic design meant to assert Russian supremacy in its periphery and beyond.



**Map 4: The Wider Black Sea region**

Source: CIDOB

Russia's involvement in the Syrian war since October 2015 has had (and will most certainly continue to have) a profound impact on the security environment in the region stretching between the Baltic and the Black Sea. This corollary may not be directly visible, but there are a number of factors that point to such a supposition. It would then be worthwhile outlining the [main 'lessons' the Russian side seems to have drawn](#) from its involvement in Syria: 1) The development of 'urban warfare' capabilities; 2) The key role of information security; 3) The essential nature of EW capabilities; and 4) The extensive use of Private Military Companies (PMCs).

Moreover, involvement in Syria witnessed Russia formally declaring the emergence of the Information Operations Troops widely known as '[cyber troops](#)' (under the umbrella of the Russian armed forces), which should be seen as a weapon of cyber-operations against parties the Russian side deems 'unfriendly'.

All these elements together with the traditional consideration of NATO as its main adversary will form the basis of Russia's future conceptualisation of war. Other key official documents point in the same direction:

- The [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation](#) (December 2014) identifies NATO as the main threat to Russian national security;

- The [Information Security Doctrine](#) (December 2016) openly names 'NATO, the US and foreign security services' as Russia's major adversaries. At the same time the document points to the 'discrimination' against the Russian mass media by 'Western' (read: European and North American) countries;
- The [Development of an Information Society for 2017–2030](#) (May 2017) points to the EU as a key hindrance to the development of the 'Russian World' ideology.

## 2.6 Ukraine and the undeclared war in Donbas

Ukraine, alongside Belarus, occupies a very special place in the Kremlin's worldview. It is central to Russian nationalism's narrative and its independence has been problematic from Moscow's perspective since the last days of the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian Orange Revolution (November 2004) marked a turning point in the bilateral relationship. Since then different initiatives aiming to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty and integrity have been launched from Russia. While not necessarily coordinated by the Kremlin, they clearly counted on some sort of sympathy from the Russian government.

The first explicit incident occurred in 2004 when, during a meeting in the city of Severodonetsk (Luhansk Oblast), members of the Party of Regions, actively supported by Russian politicians, demanded the secession of Donbas to establish the South-East Ukrainian Autonomous Republic (PSUAR).<sup>47</sup> In addition, the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) has its direct precedent in the so-called '[Donetsk Republic](#)' created in 2005/06.<sup>48</sup> On top of that, the Eurasian Youth Movement, the youth wing of the Eurasia Party headed by notorious far-right ideologist Aleksandr Dugin, had been carrying out all kinds of pro-Russian activities in Donbas.

At the highest official level it is worth recalling the clear red lines drawn by President Putin in his famous [speech at the Munich Security Conference](#) in Berlin (February 2007) and at the NATO summit in Bucharest (April 2008) when he put the focus on Georgia and Ukraine. The latter he categorised as a "[complicated state formation](#)" whose move closer to the Atlantic organisation could, according to the Russian leader, "[put the state on the verge of its existence](#)". In a similar vein, Putin questioned the legitimacy of Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea ("[there were not even any state procedures on transferring this territory](#)").<sup>49</sup> In August 2008, barely four months after the NATO Bucharest Summit, Russia intervened militarily in Georgia following Tbilisi's ill-conceived operation attempting to retake control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the regions on Georgian territory which seceded post-1991 with Russia's backing.

With the collapse of Yanukovich's regime in Ukraine, the Kremlin decided to annex Crimea and instigate an undeclared war in Donbas. The Kremlin either provides or permits a constant supply of fighters, armaments and ammunition. Since August 2014, [OSCE monitors](#) have recorded a transit of more than 33,000 people wearing military-style outfits crossing the border with Ukraine under the exclusive control of Moscow, but considering the size and the restrictions imposed on the [OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine](#), the actual figure might be even much higher. Furthermore, on at least two occasions, Russia has intervened devastatingly with its regular forces (the battles of Ilovaisk in August 2014 and Devaltseve in February 2015), supporting all the claims of the 'insurgency' except for its incorporation into the Russian Federation. The Donbas territory under Russia's control is of no use to it if it is not part of Ukraine. Therefore,

<sup>47</sup> 'Ziyizd w Severodonetstku ne stawit pytannya pro awtonomiyu. Poky shcho' (Assambley in Severodonetsk has not posed any questions about autonomy. Not yet), *Ukrainska Pravda*, November 28, 2004. Available at: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/11/28/4383383/>.

<sup>48</sup> 'Shcho take Novorossiya i jak z neyu buty' (What is Novorossiya and how to deal with it), *Ukrainska Pravda*, August 15, 2014. Available at: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2014/08/15/7034916/>.

<sup>49</sup> See the full text of the speech in Berlin at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>; and in Bucharest at: <https://www.unian.info/world/111033-text-of-putins-speech-at-nato-summit-bucharest-april-2-2008.html>.

despite the failure to defeat Kyiv, the 3% of territory it controls in Ukraine is sufficient to achieve its objectives in the short term (i.e. to block any attempt to move closer to the EU and NATO).<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, the paradox lies in the fact that the Russian position is in much greater danger in the medium and long term. The immediate future of Ukraine is in the hands of Russia, but the Kremlin seems to have irreversibly lost the Ukrainians. Partly as a result of the war, a purely Ukrainian political identity has crystallised that flatly rejects any hint of integration with Russia. Moscow is confident, and still feels comfortable, dealing with the old Ukrainian oligarchy that even now largely dominates politics in Kyiv. However, recovering Ukraine for the Eurasian Union project is unthinkable.

The war has reached some sort of strategic deadlock as neither side is able to achieve its ultimate goals without assuming heavy costs. However, the tougher line that Washington seems to be adopting might act as a game-changer and push Moscow to look for a way out. The new US special envoy to Ukraine, Kurt Wolker, has suggested the possibility of supplying defensive lethal weapons to Ukraine. Anticipating negative reactions from Russian and some European NATO allies towards such a move, Defense Secretary James Mattis has stated that 'defensive weapons are not provocative unless you are an aggressor, and clearly Ukraine is not an aggressor since it is their territory where the fighting is happening'.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, the Ukrainian president, Petro Poroshenko, has shown documents at the UNSC that prove that Russian soldiers are taking part in the conflict on the side of pro-Russian separatists. President Putin has quickly reacted to Wolker and Mattis's comments, proposing the deployment of a UN peacekeeping mission, something Moscow had rejected until then despite several proposals from Kyiv. The Russian proposal is tricky (e.g., it refers to the line of control but not to the border under exclusive Russian control), and it is highly unlikely that it will materialise in the near term, but it deserves to be explored as a way to reach at least a definite ceasefire in the area. According to Alexander Vershbow, deputy secretary general of NATO from 2012 to 2016 and former US ambassador to Russia and NATO, the peacekeeping force should ideally 'oversee the installation of an interim UN civilian administration that would restore effective governance, prepare the ground for elections, and facilitate the transition back to Ukrainian sovereignty [but] None of this will happen without steps to pressure Putin to negotiate seriously'.<sup>52</sup>

The humanitarian crisis in Donbas, with a total number of refugees and displaced persons reaching a staggering 1.8 million, may even be aggravated. Aside from armed clashes, available information from the region draws on the fact that Donbas is experiencing growing banditry, illegal and virtually uncontrollable redistribution of private property regulated by local strongmen.<sup>53</sup> At the current stage, it seems highly unlikely that Ukrainian unilateral initiatives pertaining to the 're-integration of the Donbas region' (using the Croatian experience as a model) would achieve their goal.<sup>54</sup> Unless there is significant external support for Kyiv, the situation in Donbas will remain heavily dependent on the position of Moscow. This fact has been admitted by President Poroshenko.<sup>55</sup> Moscow has the power (and military presence and capabilities) to influence local developments.

<sup>50</sup> 3% of territory excluding Crimea (7% if Crimea is included).

<sup>51</sup> See: M. R. Gordon. *Jim Mattis, in Ukraine, Says U.S. Is Thinking of Sending Weapons*, The New York Times, August 24, 2017. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/24/world/europe/mattis-ukraine-russia.html?mcubz=3>.

<sup>52</sup> Alexander Vershbow, 'How to End the War in Eastern Ukraine', *Atlantic Council*, October 30, 2017 <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/how-to-end-the-war-in-eastern-ukraine>

<sup>53</sup> *Kak rabotaet promyshlennost na nepodkontrolnoy territorii*, (How does the industry work on the uncontrollable territory), *Novosti Donbass*, October 14, 2017. Available at: <http://novosti.dn.ua/article/6877-kak-rabotaet-promyshlennost-na-nepodkontrolnoy-terrytoryy>.

<sup>54</sup> 'Rada priniiala zakon o Donbasse w pervom chtenii, priznav Rossiju agressorom', (Rada has adopted the law on the Donbas, having recognized Russia as an aggressor), *Novosti Donbass*, October 6, 2017. Available at: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/275088-rada-pryniala-zakon-o-donbasse-v-pervom-chtenny-pryznav-rossyyu-agressorom>.

<sup>55</sup> 'Poroshenko: vypolnienie zakona o Donbasse zavisit ot Rossii' (Poroshenko: fulfillment of the law on the Donbas depends on Russia), *Novosti Donbass*, October 9, 2017. Available at: <http://novosti.dn.ua/news/275149-poroshenko-vypolnenye-zakona-o-donbasse-zavysyt-ot-rossyy>.

## 3 NATO

### 3.1 NATO's views, aims and means

After two decades adapting to numerous out-of-area crisis management missions from Afghanistan to Libya, Russia's aggressive actions have brought back deterrence and collective defence as NATO's core purposes. Allies in Central and Nordic Europe, including the three Baltic republics and Poland, felt vulnerable and directly threatened by the new Russian posture on its Western border and its direct intervention in Ukraine. Therefore, there was a serious demand from these allies to move ahead from reassurance to actual deterrence. This adaptation took place from the Wales Summit (September 2014) to the Warsaw one (July 2016).

Since 2014, debates within both NATO and the EU – both in decision-making and among think tanks and the media – have revolved around two key questions: what does Russia want? How far is the Kremlin willing to go? And there is still no solid consensus on the answers. The disagreements range from the strategic and conceptual domains (*Is Russia a partner or a threat? And then what place should it occupy in the European Security Order?*) to the tactical and operational (*What is the best way to achieve what we want with/from Russia?*).

Those who are sceptical about the Russian threat hypothesis often consider European concerns exaggerated and argue that the validity of [NATO Article 5](#) (*an attack against one ally is an attack against all allies*) is still enough of a deterrent against the Kremlin. From this point of view, Russia would not risk having an open confrontation with NATO that can escalate to the nuclear threshold. And much less, when there are no clear reasons for it, since, as they argue, Russia also lacks territorial ambitions in bordering NATO member states (i.e. the three Baltic republics and Poland).

The hypothesis that Russia seeks or desires a large-scale open confrontation with NATO is indeed very unlikely. However, an excess of scepticism often leads to lose sight of some vital aspects. First of all, NATO's overall significant advantage over Moscow in terms of conventional military capabilities becomes blurred in regions bordering Russia. In order to prove credible, a deterrence policy requires capacities and a firm political will behind (and be perceived as such by the adversary to be dissuaded). And, since the breaches of 2014, both the EU and NATO show some weaknesses and vulnerabilities in both respects (capacities and will).

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the Russian approach to the use of force differs from the European one and contemplates a wide range of kinetic and non-kinetic instruments to weaken or subdue its geopolitical opponents. Both the EU and NATO are conceived as such in what Moscow considers its now contested "natural area of influence" (i.e. the former Soviet space). From Moscow's perspective, there is not a sharp and precise divide between peace and war particularly, as mentioned, when it comes to information as part of a multidimensional political warfare. Uncertainty, for instance, is an asset in the hands of the Kremlin vis-à-vis Brussels. In stark contrast to the Russian use (and abuse), NATO conceives transparency and predictability as a central element of its deterrence posture aiming to alleviate tensions and to prevent any incident or escalation.

Even more worrying is the Kremlin's apparent belief on Western plans to overthrow president Putin's regime, as it can provoke a harsh reaction based on a wrong understanding of NATO (or EU) moves and intentions. As one recent report by RAND states 'many Russian policymakers appear to believe that the prospects for a stable, long-term accommodation with NATO are limited. This perception, if not reversed, represents an unstable feature of the European security order that increases the risk of conflict, inadvertent or otherwise' ([Frederick, 2017:74](#)).

## 3.2 NATO's response in the Baltic Sea region

At NATO's Wales Summit in 2014 the [Readiness Action Plan](#) (RAP), including a 5000-strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) within the NATO Response Force (NRF) was agreed. NATO indicates that RAP is a response 'to the challenges posed by Russia' and 'includes increased military activity in the eastern part of the Alliance, which has been in place since May 2014 ('assurance measures'), and longer-term changes to NATO's force posture ('adaptation measures')'. However, its real deterrence value was questioned due to its size and its being based in western Europe. Thus, at the Warsaw Summit allies approved the [Enhanced Forward Presence](#) (EFP) composed of four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, on a rotational basis. These battlegroups are led in their first mission by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany and the United States, respectively, but they are formed of troops from Albania, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Romania.

The EFP strengthened the Alliance's cohesion in response to the new realities on the eastern flank and the validity of NATO's Article 5. Multinational composition is the most notable element of the four battalions and sends a powerful political message to any potential aggressor despite their size. The rotational nature reflects NATO's will to comply with the terms of the NATO-Russia Founding Act (May 1997) and keep it as the framework for its bilateral relations with Moscow. However, due to the significant costs short-term rotation might entail some experts expect 'pressure to move to a less expensive permanent stationing' ([Boulègue, 2017](#)).

Furthermore, in order to achieve consensus on the EFP, the Warsaw declaration leaves the door open for '[a meaningful dialogue with Russia](#)'. This reflects the different perspectives among allies on how to best approach Russia and settle the tensions in the eastern flank. This balancing act led NATO to adopt a dual approach towards Russia, combining deterrence and dialogue. This approach is similar to that of the EU, which combines sanctions with calls for dialogue. Nonetheless, differences among allies about the scope and ends of this dialogue remain. Some, particularly in western Europe, 'hope to achieve at least some degree of normalization of relations with Russia in the medium to long term. Other allies, particularly those in the East, accepted this dialogue as part of a trade-off for the EFP but don't expect it to be more than a largely technical dialogue focused on risk management' (Scheffler Corvaja, 2016.).

NATO's EFP contributed to mitigating the anxiety of the three Baltic republics and Poland, but not to scaling down the number of incidents in the Baltic airspace. Quite the contrary, the number of interceptions and incidents has multiplied from a few dozen in 2013 to hundreds in the last two years. Incidents have included potentially very risky ones, such as in April 2016, when two Russian Su-24 jets made numerous close-range and low altitude passes near the destroyer [USS Donald Cook](#) in the Baltic Sea.

Considering the current context, it is worth recalling that when the three Baltic republics acceded to [NATO in March 2004](#)<sup>56</sup>, despite some initial reactions aired by some Russian officials, president Putin said relations were '[developing positively \[and he had\] no concerns about the expansion of NATO \[as\] today's threats are such that the expansion of NATO will not remove them](#)'. In addition, the then minister of defence, Sergey Ivanov, speaking about the first contingent of four Belgian F-16s deployed to inaugurate the Baltic air policing, said that it 'did not pose a threat to Russia at present'. In fact, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer reached some agreements on not deploying nuclear weapons on the new NATO members' territory and their accession to the [Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe](#) (CFE) to dissipate Moscow's concerns.

<sup>56</sup> Alongside Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

### 3.3 NATO's partnership with Finland and Sweden

The allies work together with Finland and Sweden, countries that are not part of the Alliance and consequently not covered by NATO's collective defence clause. Still, NATO is currently engaged in projects with both countries in order to assess security concerns in the Baltic Sea region, to develop information channels, coordinate training, work on hybrid warfare and advance joint awareness. One of the main areas of concern is maritime security, which places Sweden (Gotland) and Finland (Åland Islands) at the centre of such a strategy. The Finnish islands hold demilitarised status under international law while Gotland has recently been remilitarised with 300 troops on its soil.

Even though some differences are still in place, the Nordic and Baltic security approaches, especially those of Finland and Estonia, have been converging in recent times due to the Ukraine crisis. On the one hand, Finland is willing to improve the defence plans it has in place in a direction that allows the country to reduce to a minimum the confrontation with Russia. On the other hand, the Baltic states have been striving to communicate to the allies in NATO and the European Union the real nature of Russia and the danger that it poses to the security order in Europe. However, from the Finnish point of view, this only adds an unnecessary amount of tension to the relations with its neighbour, which is seen as a source of risk that pushes Finland away from its involvement in broader regional defence. In order to reduce these differences, recognition on both sides is a must.

In November 2014, the reformed concept of [Nordic Defence Cooperation](#) (NORDEFECO), which should act as a platform that brings reinforced cooperation, was announced in order to add the three Baltic republics. NORDEFECO's development should see the increasing links with NATO as an opportunity to broaden the pool of expertise available for its own development. The Nordic political agenda on defence issues is clearly framed by a great emphasis on strengthening the cooperation between countries, as seen in January 2016 when Denmark and Sweden agreed to expand their defence cooperation.

Russia's growing assertiveness has generated more intense debates within Finland and Sweden regarding their military status and posture. Moscow has reacted to these debates warning both countries that they might become targets for Russian retaliation if they move closer to NATO. For instance, the Russian ambassador to Stockholm, Viktor Tatarintsev, pointed out in September 2015 that even though Sweden is not on the radar of the Russian armed forces, if the country moves closer to NATO or joins it, there would be 'consequences', highlighting the risk such a move poses to the country. This statement was backed by Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, and [triggered a protest](#) on the Swedish side. However, Russian exercises on the borders or even using European countries as battle scenarios have been increasing since then. In March 2016, 33,000 Russian troops wargamed offensive operations against Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. A year earlier, in June 2015, Russian bombers replicated a nuclear attack on Bornholm which corresponded with an annual festival when 90,000 guests and political leaders were on the Danish island.

Russia's main goal concerning Sweden and Finland is keeping these countries from joining NATO. Moscow realises that the potential accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO would lead toward a growing regional presence of US troops, which would affect the existing military balance of power. Thus, the Kremlin is most likely to use the 'stick and carrot' strategy, where brutal intimidation will be combined with much less aggressive and even reconciliatory notes. The Russian approach is also shaped by Moscow's strategic interest in the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, as Stockholm and Helsinki's positions are key to its accomplishment. Incidentally, on 21 February this year, Sweden's minister of foreign affairs, Margot Wallström, met with Sergey Lavrov in Moscow.



Given the range of topics discussed (from Crimea and Syria to the Arctic and the Barents region), the expert community started to speak about a 'thaw' in relations between the two countries. The most positive conclusion for the Russian side is that ['Ms Wallström confirmed that Sweden's non-participation in military alliances remains in place, that Sweden determines its own security policy'](#).

### 3.4 NATO's response in the Black Sea region

The security environment in the Black Sea region has been worsening over the past decade.<sup>57</sup> The annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014 and the Russia-Georgia War in August 2008 signalled a change in the strategic paradigm. A change that seemed to have caught the EU and NATO allies unprepared.

The West has reacted to the Russian *fait accompli* in Crimea in two ways. First, as mentioned above, by imposing economic and administrative sanctions on Russia and isolating it in international fora. As a result, relations between the West and Russia have reached the worst level since the end of the Cold War. Second, NATO and the EU have taken some steps to reinforce their Black Sea policy and presence (militarily, institutionally, economically) to halt Russian revisionism and provide security for their Black Sea Member States and allies.

The Black Sea first came onto the policy screen of NATO in the 1990s, though reluctantly, with the EU following several years later. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US took initiatives on Ukraine's statehood but the South Caucasus states were left outside its policy radar. The absence of a comprehensive regional Black Sea strategy from the Euro-Atlantic community throughout the 1990s has been attributed to three main factors (Asmus, 2006: 19). First, the region itself has been less well-known than central Europe or even the Balkans, being cut off from the European mainstream for most of the 20th century. Second, common aspirations across Black Sea nations and a sense of common regional purpose have been weak. Third, from a political point of view, the countries of the region have been slow to adopt a democratic model of governance compared to other parts of Europe. Nevertheless, both the EU and NATO opted to establish a network of institutional links with all littoral states under the pressure of geopolitical shifts and the war on terrorism that started in 2001 and in which the Black Sea states were considered key allies of the West.

NATO has long described the Black Sea region as important for Euro-Atlantic security, lately in the [final communiqué of the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit](#), which highlighted the importance of the Baltic and the Black Sea regions: 'We face evolving challenges in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, the North Atlantic, as well in the Mediterranean, which are of strategic importance to the Alliance and to our partners. Russia continues to strengthen its military posture, increase its military activities, deploy new high-end capabilities, and challenge regional security. These developments have resulted in increased unpredictability that could be mitigated through reciprocal transparency and risk reduction measures' (NATO, 2016: article 23).

Today, NATO's presence in the Black Sea region is stronger than at any previous time especially on the south and west coast with three Black Sea littoral countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) being full members and regional security and defence policies being reinforced since 2014. A [NATO-Ukraine Commission](#) (NUC) and a [NATO-Georgia Commission](#) (NGC) have been established, providing the framework for close political dialogue and cooperation in support of the countries' reform efforts and their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. In addition to the aforementioned and the Sea Breeze exercise, NATO helps Ukraine strengthen coastal defence and rebuild its Black Sea Fleet ([Margolin, 2017](#)), while Ukraine

<sup>57</sup> The definition of the Black Sea region varies. The narrow definition includes the six littoral states of the Black Sea basin (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey). The wider Black Sea region also includes Moldova, Greece, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. This paper adopts the wider Black Sea region definition.

contributes to NATO-led maritime missions. Georgia participates in NATO-led exercises and undertakes security sector reforms that would enable better interoperability between the Georgian military and NATO forces. Yet NATO still struggles to formulate a clear strategic vision for the whole region ([Toucas, 2017](#)) as its planned expansion with Georgia and Ukraine came to a halt at NATO's Bucharest Summit of 2008. Currently, [NATO's Tailored Forward Presence](#) (TFP) in the Black Sea, which was set up in July 2016, encompasses land, air, and sea domains. Romania is a key NATO littoral state and home to the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defence site in Deveselu, which became operational in August 2016 and constitutes a major part of NATO's missile defence (3 SM3 Block IB, 24 missiles). In February 2017, the NATO Defense Ministers focused on maritime measures and agreed to increase a naval presence in the Black Sea for enhanced training, exercises and situational awareness, and approved a maritime coordination function between NATO Standing Naval Forces and NATO allies in the Black Sea region to bolster NATO's presence in the region ([NATO Press Conference, 2017](#)). In October 2017, a [new multinational force](#) was built around a Romanian brigade of up to 4,000 soldiers supported by troops from nine other NATO allies, and complementing a separate deployment of 900 U.S. troops who are already in place. NATO's conflict prevention measures have been perceived by Moscow as intrusive moves that compromise its national security, thus it has responded with deployments of its own troops in the western part of Russia and the militarisation of Crimea.

However, NATO's forces in the Black Sea face the constraints set by the 1936 [Montreux Convention](#) Regarding the Regime of the Straits, which imposes limits on the naval presence of non-Black Sea nations, restricting the tonnage of warships as well as aggregate tonnage, number of vessels and duration of stay for any single nation. NATO has managed to partially circumvent such restrictions by building its fleet with ships from several nations and using force rotations while leaning more on Romania and Turkey – largely exempted from the convention's restrictions.

Nevertheless, not all Black Sea states strongly support a reinforced NATO presence. While Romania is the most enthusiastic supporter of an expanded NATO presence in the region, reluctance to antagonise Russia could mean less support from Bulgaria and Turkey ([Stratfor, 2016](#)). In Bulgaria, the idea of further tensions with Moscow is unpopular with political forces (such as the Bulgarian Socialist Party) that advocate for Bulgaria not joining an expanded NATO Black Sea naval force. Turkey is likely to be more reluctant about an enhanced NATO presence as it attempts to normalise its tense relations with Moscow and rebuild their strategic alliance (especially in view of the threats originating in the Middle East). In the past, it also favoured a more individual rather than collective NATO presence.

Georgia is also cooperating closely with NATO to implement the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package. A [Joint Training and Evaluation Centre](#) has been operating along with NATO-Georgia exercises. The 2008 Bucharest Summit declared that Georgia may become a NATO member, provided it meets all necessary requirements – this decision was reconfirmed at NATO Summits in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016. Following the Russia-Georgia crisis in August 2008, the allies continue to support Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty within its internationally recognised borders.

Following [Russia's recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia](#) as independent states, there has been a steady process of integrating them into the Russian state without officially annexing them. A 2015 Treaty between Russia and South Ossetia has abolished the border between them, creating a unified zone for customs, travel, and trade. As a result of the 'passportization' policy in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, nearly all inhabitants hold Russian passports. Another agreement of 'alliance and strategic partnership' in 2015 led to a joint Russian-Abkhaz military force (put under the Russian Defence Ministry in war times). The deal also envisaged \$270 million in subsidies over three years, and the equation of Abkhazian public sector pensions, healthcare, and salaries with those of Russia's Southern Federal District. Russia and Abkhazia also have an agreement guaranteeing a 49-year presence of the 7th Russian military base in Gudauta, which supports about 3,500 troops and an additional contingent of FSB border

patrols. A similar agreement provides a land guarantee for the 4th military base of the Russian army for 99 years, lease-free, in South Ossetia. Currently, there are an estimated 3,500 Russian soldiers based permanently in South Ossetia, with an additional 1,500 FSB agents patrolling the border ([Jackson, 2017](#)).

## 4 The European Union

### 4.1 The EU's views, aims and means

From the early nineties onwards, Brussels conceived of Russia as a strategic partner. The EU tended to see Russia mostly through the paradigm of transition, modernisation and steady integration into a shared European space. Perhaps Russia was too big to be integrated into the Union, but not too different to be adapted with time to the EU's standards and practices. However, in the light of the Ukraine war and serious tensions with the West, Brussels's traditional approach towards Russia became obsolete. The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy adopted in June 2016 perfectly reflects this change when it states that '[managing the relationship with Russia represents a key strategic challenge](#)'.<sup>58</sup>

The same paragraph addresses the challenge posed by the Kremlin's recent actions to the European security order based on the principles of the [Helsinki Final Act](#) (1975) and the [Charter of Paris for a New Europe](#) (1990). Faced with this, Brussels expressed its willingness to 'strengthen the EU, enhance the resilience of our eastern neighbours, and uphold their right to determine freely their approach towards the EU'. Nevertheless, and also as a reflection of the deep divisions among European member states about Russia, interdependence with Moscow is recalled and, therefore, Brussels 'will engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when our interests overlap'.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the EU is committed to a dual approach that intends to consolidate a strong position (*deterrence*) with open channels for meaningful dialogue (*diplomacy*). This Global Strategy is coherent and continuous with the approach made through the [five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations](#) agreed by the US foreign ministers with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, in March 2016.<sup>60</sup>

### 4.2 The EU's role in the Baltic Sea region

The Baltic Sea region came onto the EU's regional policies radar at a very early stage. In 1992, the European Commission helped establish the [Council of Baltic States](#) (CBSS), which is comprised of twelve members.<sup>61</sup> Culture, trade, energy and environmental issues are some of the dimensions where the different countries try to cooperate with each other. CBSS activities include every aspect of the Baltic Sea region's intergovernmental co-operation except military defence.

Focusing on subjects related to regional and international politics, the CBSS has been able to increase the visibility of the Baltic quadrant in the wider European context. However, for Brussels the CBSS, which brings together members from both inside and outside the EU, is a strategic platform for political debate. Since the CBSS has no defence dimension, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have carried out a number of joint military strategies on their own. Based on their common history and the developments of the last century, they do not view their security in isolation from each other and have extended and deepened their cooperation in defence matters. Cooperation on joint projects has been a useful experience for these three Baltic states, heightening their interoperability as part of a wider group of nations in NATO. When it comes to EU security, it must be pointed out that for the Baltic republics, the [European Defence Agency](#) (EDA) is

<sup>58</sup> Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, June 2016, p.33, available at:

[https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/pages/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_13.pdf](https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/pages/files/eugs_review_web_13.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> The five principles go as follows: full implementation of the Minsk agreements to settle the war in eastern Ukraine; closer ties with Russia's former Soviet neighbours; strengthening EU resilience to Russian threats; selective engagement with Russia on certain issues such as counter-terrorism; and support for people-to-people contacts. See:

[https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following-foreign\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/5490/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following-foreign_en).

<sup>61</sup> Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland (1995), Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the European Union.

an essential component of the [Common Security and Defence Policy](#) (CSDP). The decision to establish the European Defence Agency in 2004 emphasises the need to coordinate the intentions of member states in the development of defence capabilities; to coordinate the production and acquisition of arms; and to implement policies to develop the defence industry of the EU.

Against the context of the current strained EU-Russia relationship, it is worth recalling that since the early nineties the Kaliningrad Oblast has been supported by EU-funded projects. Russia, as a member of the CBSS and the [Northern Dimension](#) policy, has benefited from the EU's cross-border programmes and sectoral partnerships such as the ND Environmental Partnership. The EU pursued objectives such as the alleviation of painful transition from a planned, military-oriented economy to a market one and free trade, while at the same time providing expertise on restructuring the local economy towards small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); upgrading the level of environmental protection (neglected during the Soviet period); fostering and promoting cross-border ties, interregional cooperation and dialogue; and integration of the oblast into the Baltic Rim (one of the most rapidly developing macro-regions in the world). However, despite the resources allocated (around €132 million for the 2007–2014 period), few practical results were achieved.<sup>62</sup>

### 4.3 The EU's response in the Black Sea region

The Black Sea came onto the EU's regional policies radar in April 2007 when the Commission presented the [Black Sea Synergy](#) concept (EC, 2007), soon to be followed by the [Eastern Partnership](#) (EaP) policy as early as December 2008 (EC, 2008), which was perceived as the eastern leg of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Synergy aimed at building upon existing regional cooperation schemes while fostering new sectoral partnerships. Ten years since the launch of the Black Sea Synergy, this policy has made very limited progress (European Commission and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015) on a project basis in the field of 'Improving Environmental Monitoring' and on the Cooperation Programme for the Black Sea Basin (2007–2013 and 2014–2020). But beyond the above, the Synergy has been politically sidelined and undermined by the absence of political backing either from the coastal states or the EU itself, and by the resulting shortage of resources (Delcour and Manoli, 2010). By contrast, the EaP has developed as a comprehensive external policy of the EU ([Garcés de Los Fayos, 2013: 6](#)) but one with a bilateral, not strongly regional, scope. The analytical and conceptual approaches of the EaP have pointed to its external governance dimension and its role in extending the EU acquis beyond EU borders. Still, progress on the EaP is not linear. Some countries within the EaP have signed an Association Agreement with the EU while others have not. Two groups with different levels of integration with the EU also exist in terms of visa-free access to the Schengen zone: while citizens of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine enjoy visa-free travel to Schengen zone countries, citizens of Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan do not.

The evolution of the EU's eastern policy, especially the Eastern Partnership, may be described as reactive rather than proactive, and it has been somehow linked to the two major military conflicts in the Black Sea region. The five-day war of August 2008 between Russia and Georgia that led to the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Moscow and the expansion of Russia's military stronghold in the area accelerated the launch of EaP which was presented in December of the same year as a political response to Russia's revisionism. On the other hand, it was the refusal of Kyiv's government to proceed with the final signature of the Association Agreement with the EU that triggered mass protests in the Ukrainian capital and the subsequent unrest in the country that led to Russian military intervention and the annexation of Crimea. As both the Black Sea Synergy and the EaP lack strategic depth, the European Parliament in January 2011 called for the Commission and the newly established European External Action Service to draft an EU strategy for the Black Sea. Still, however, this request has not been answered due to

<sup>62</sup> [http://rugrad.eu/news\\_release/region\\_gov/245409/?sphrase\\_id=2321316](http://rugrad.eu/news_release/region_gov/245409/?sphrase_id=2321316).

the security complications of the Black Sea region as well as the EU's organisational choices ([Garcés de Los Fayos, 2013](#)). In a context of high geopolitical competition in the region, the EU has turned into a more modest approach towards its Eastern partners as presented in the joint working document published by the European External Action Service, [Eastern Partnership – 20 deliverables for 2020 focusing key priorities and tangible results](#). The document places emphasis on the 'second tier' countries of the Eastern Neighborhood (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Armenia) rather than the frontrunners of the EaP (Georgia).

Beyond these two cooperation policies – the Synergy and the EaP – the EU has observer status in two regional organisations, the [Black Sea Economic Cooperation](#) (BSEC) and the [Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution](#) (Black Sea Commission). However, beyond institutional dialogue and exchange of views, practical cooperation between the EU and the BSEC is at a standstill due to, among others, the divergent views of Moscow, which is a BSEC founding member, and Brussels on how and in which fields such cooperation could proceed. Nevertheless, the channels of institutional dialogue remain open through regular Joint BSEC-COEST Working Group meetings. Full membership of the EU in the Black Sea Commission has also been halted. Still, the Black Sea Commission and the European Commission have concluded a Grant Agreement for 'Support to the Black Sea Commission for the Implementation of the Marine Strategy'. To advance sustainable blue growth and to support the blue economy of the Black Sea, the Commission is carrying out various initiatives and projects in the context of the Integrated Maritime Policy.

The Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and Georgia which entered into force on July 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 constitutes a major step towards the integration of Georgia into the European space. The agreement requires Georgia to comply with the EU acquis in the areas of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. To support reforms in Georgia, the EU has pledged €100 million (\$107.8 million) per year. The EU and Georgia have also entered into an agreement on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), while Georgian citizens have benefitted from visa-free travel to the Schengen area since March 28<sup>th</sup> 2017. The 2016 EU Global Strategy acknowledged Georgia as an example of state and societal resilience in the eastern neighbourhood. The EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (deployed in line with the Agreement of August 12<sup>th</sup> 2008) and the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and Georgia embody the EU's engagement on conflict resolution.

Increasingly the EU's Black Sea policy is to be formulated within a new strategic framework shaped by the [Global Strategy for the EU Foreign and Security Policy](#) (presented in June 2016), the [EC White Paper on the Future of Europe](#) (2017) and the [Rome Declaration of the EU](#) leaders on the 60th anniversary of the union.

## 5 Regionalism in the Baltic and Black Sea regions

### 5.1 Key regional cooperation mechanisms

The Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions, which constitute a common space between the EU and Russia, have been harbouring regional cooperation mechanisms since the 1990s aimed at forging collective responses among local actors to key problems: economic development, the environment, energy and security. The [Council of the Baltic Sea States](#) (CBSS) and the [Black Sea Economic Cooperation](#) (BSEC) are two of the most advanced regional organisations in which Russia participates as a full member. The European Commission is a full member of the CBSS but plays no significant role in BSEC, where it holds observer status.<sup>63</sup> Power competition and historical legacies have conditioned the path of the development of regional cooperation in the Baltic-Black Sea areas but one common element of both processes is their abstention from addressing hard security issues. Baltic Sea cooperation has benefited from the existence of the [EU Baltic Sea Strategy](#) (a macro-regional strategy begun in 2009), while there has been no equivalent strategy for the Black Sea. Beyond that, another obstacle in turning the BSEC into a more active organisation has been the reluctance of EU Member States that are also Black Sea states and of the EU to engage in BSEC integration projects which might differ from the EU acquis ([Garcés de Los Fayos, 2013](#)).

Despite having lost the momentum it had in the 1990s, the BSEC and its related bodies – primarily the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank and its Parliamentary Assembly – constitute a unique platform for project-based cooperation, political dialogue and informal consultations between Black Sea countries, given their often conflicting interests and policies. The result is the creation of confidence-building effects which could provide a solid basis for future joint actions. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis has had a negative impact on regionalism as it kept Russia away from most countries in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions. In an effort to coordinate their policies and strengthen their ‘voice’ power on security issues, countries from the Baltics to the Black Sea have attempted to form a ‘north-south’ grouping, a Baltic-Black Sea alliance or union. The policy relevance of such a grouping should not be dismissed at once, as it could have an impact on decision-making in raising the bargaining power of the countries concerned.

Other indigenous cooperation mechanisms such as the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force have also been the victim of military conflicts between Russia and Georgia, Russia and Ukraine and most recently due to the Russian-Turkish hostility. Though Ankara has drawn closer to Moscow once again (e.g., Russia and Turkey held a series of joint naval exercises like the PASSEX in the Black Sea in 2017) the multilateral aspect of the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Force has collapsed.

Steadily, regional cooperation develops along two diverging paths. On the one hand, there are EU-centred processes increasingly focusing locally and on the civil society rather than at intergovernmental level. On the other hand, there is a Moscow-led Eurasian economic integration process which proposes an alternative model of regional governance. Thus, addressing governance challenges at the local level in the EaP region, in 2011 the EU initiated the [Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership](#) (CORLEAP) as a political forum for local and regional authorities from the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries. Cooperation at the societal level is also increasingly gaining ground amid unfavourable political conditions. The [Black Sea NGO Forum](#) launched in 2008 by FOND (Federation of Romanian NGOs for Development) is organised with the support of the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Commission (in the framework of the [Black Sea Synergy](#)). The forum aims at

<sup>63</sup> The other members of the CBSS are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and a representative from the European Union. The other members of the BSEC are Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

increasing the level of dialogue and cooperation among NGOs in the wider Black Sea region, strengthening the NGOs' capacity to influence regional and national policies and to increase the number and quality of regional partnerships and projects. Amidst a standstill in intergovernmental interaction and tensions between Russia and the West, cooperation at societal level becomes instrumental.

The [Eurasian Economic Union](#) (EAEU), on the other hand, might be presented as a replica of the EU structure but it falls a long way short of being a modern new regionalism tool because of inherent tensions within its internal structures. On the one hand, for Moscow, 'Eurasian integration is one of Russia's key strategies to re-build its status on the international stage' but on the other, given Moscow's post-2014 moves, 'Russia signalled that it is prepared to undermine the very organization through which it sought to reassert its regional power' ([Dragneva and Wolczuk, 2017](#)).

## 5.2 The experience of regional interparliamentary cooperation

In the Baltic and the Black Sea regions, regional interparliamentary assemblies (RIAs) and fora have proliferated in the last decades, linked to regional intergovernmental groupings and often driven by the EU itself. RIAs' expected impact can be summarised as follows:

- Parliamentarians can influence their respective national policies (or governmental policies) on matters dealt with in the regional schemes and can act as agenda setters.
- RIAs act as facilitators of political dialogue, raising awareness.
- RIAs keep co-operation possible when traditional diplomacy fails.
- RIAs strengthen the involvement of civil society and non-state actors, multidimensionality and comprehensiveness, as well as openness of regionalism.
- RIAs have a 'socialisation' impact as members engage in a learning process and the diffusion of norms and behaviours.

The Northern Dimension Parliamentary Forum is the newest inter-parliamentary body in the Baltic Sea region. It does not constitute a new institution, but rather a recurrent place for representatives of the different parliamentary bodies in northern Europe. Thus, at its first meeting in February 2009 in Brussels it comprised of members of the European Parliament, the Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference, the Conference of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the West Nordic Council and the network of Barents parliamentarians. Participants meet to discuss the development of the renewed Northern Dimension (ND) Policy and to coordinate the mainly unstructured overlapping competencies of the various parliamentary bodies in northern Europe (Czarny, 2015: 178). The Barents Parliamentary Conference is linked to the [Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation](#) (BEAC) and takes place once every other year. The participants can be elected members of local and regional as well as national and indigenous peoples' assemblies in the Barents region.

The [Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference](#) (BSPC) is one of the first inter-parliamentary fora in post-Cold War Europe which was established in 1991 as a forum for political dialogue gathering parliamentarians from 11 national parliaments, 11 regional parliaments and five parliamentary organisations around the Baltic Sea. It is peculiar in that it not only includes the participation of the European Parliament but also that of the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Its aim is to raise awareness and opinion on issues of political interest and relevance for the region involving the sustainable environmental, social and economic development of the Baltic Sea region, thus leaving hard security issues beyond its scope. In the Black Sea region, one of the oldest and most institutionalised interparliamentary bodies is the [Parliamentary Assembly of Black Sea Economic Cooperation](#) (PABSEC), whose work is



coordinated by a permanent international secretariat. The PABSEC, established in February 1993 as a related body of the [Black Sea Economic Cooperation](#) (BSEC), remains today the most inclusive interparliamentary body in the region. Just like in the BSPC, PABSEC's activities focus on issues of economic and social development, they also include wider issues of political and legal affairs (such as good governance) but they do not touch upon hard security. PABSEC's work has been sidelined by the [EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly](#) (EuroNest PA) which was included in the institutional architecture of the Eastern Partnership and was considered to be more policy relevant than the PABSEC by the EaP countries. While the first parliamentary body (PABSEC) reflects a locally conceived regional forum, where Russia and Turkey are key determinants of its agenda, the second (EuroNest PA) constitutes an EU-led, intraregional forum (Stavridis and Manoli, 2011).

EuroNest PA is composed of a delegation of the European Parliament (60 members) and five delegations from the Eastern Partnership member states (ten members per delegation). Its functioning has a normative dimension as it is expected to diffuse European rules and norms in EaP countries ([Kostanyan and Vandecasteele, 2013](#)). Thus, adopted resolutions have concentrated on democracy promotion and the empowerment of civil society, harmonisation of the EaP legislation with the EU economic legislation, energy and regional security among others. Unlike the PABSEC, EuroNest PA has adopted political and security related resolutions such as on Russian aggression in Ukraine. However, given the significant political differences among their members and the lack of strong commitment to implementing EuroNest PA or PABSEC resolutions, the conditions for meaningful socialisation and normative suasion are not fulfilled ([Kostanyan and Vandecasteele, 2013](#)). Interparliamentary cooperation has been facing constraints similar to those facing intergovernmental institutions in the region (such as regional conflicts that have undermined trust among participants, Moscow's undermining of EU-modelled integration) and other obstacles such as the lack of motivation by parliamentarians to participate in interparliamentary assemblies of relatively low visibility in their national constituencies. The paradox of interparliamentary dialogue in the BSPC and in particular the PABSEC is their abstention from political and security discussions (with the exception of some soft security issues such as fighting organised crime) and their focus on low politics issues despite the security problems in the regions and the very political nature of parliamentary institutions.

## 6 Regional implications of conflicts in the Black Sea area

The [EU's Global Strategy](#), introduced by Federica Mogherini in 2016, identifies protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region as a challenge 'to the European security order'. There are four pre-2014 cases of protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region, namely Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, while a new conflict has been added, that of Crimea. All these constitute legal 'black holes' from the perspective of human rights and the rule of law ([Racz, 2016](#)). Out of the five protracted conflicts, none constitutes an internationally recognised state entity. However, Abkhazia and South Ossetia's statehood has been recognised by Russia, which pursues a de facto economic and military integration of these regions into its own jurisdiction ([Pugsley and Wesslau, 2016](#)), while Crimea has been de jure annexed by Moscow. None of these conflicts is expected to be resolved anytime soon while their escalation seems more possible, as the 2015 upsurge in Nagorno-Karabakh showed. Deteriorating domestic conditions, societal polarisation, disinformation and the lack of the rule of law could prompt local leaders to resort to 'diversionary' wars. Other regional powers may also use the conflicts in a 'muscle-flexing' race. The preservation of these conflicts serves Russia's projection of power in the region as it allows it to use local proxies to bring its neighbours within its sphere of influence. Thus, instability inherent in these conflicts is a source of influence for Russia while it stalls local reforms and the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic institutions further east.

As a result of the protraction of the conflicts, relations between most Black Sea states have worsened in the last years. Thus, in addition to the 'frozen' bilateral relations between Armenia and Turkey, there has been a collapse of bilateral relations between Russia and Georgia (since 2008), and Ukraine and Russia (since 2014). The countries with conflicts on their territories (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) have been willing to strengthen their cooperation, as in the [GUAM](#) Organization through which a free-trade area (FTA) is forged. However, they have held back their engagement in Russia-inclusive institutions such as the BSEC. Instability and the lack of trust have also led to the militarisation of the Black Sea. Russia's military assets in the region, including the expansion of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD) capabilities, challenge NATO's ability to ensure effective defence in its eastern flank and raise concerns for Turkey too ([Kurt darcan and Kayaoğlu, 2017](#)), which needs to rebalance the Russian presence. Turkey, however, in a turn in its foreign policy away from its traditional Western allies, is leaning east, as indicated, among other signs, by its declared intent to purchase Russian S-400 anti-aircraft missiles. Beyond Crimea's militarisation, which has altered the military balance in the region, as discussed in the relevant section of this study, Russia has strengthened its military presence in the South Caucasus, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Azerbaijan has increased its military spending fivefold in the last years, from \$644 million in 2005 to \$3.583 billion in 2014 ([SIPRI, 2015](#)).

A turning point in the global security paradigm was Russian military intervention in Syria in September 2015. For the first time since the collapse of the Cold War, Russia projected its Black Sea Fleet power, deploying defensive (S300) and offensive (SS-260) systems in Syria. Moscow is now a key player on the military front on the side of Assad's regime, participating in peace talks, operating an air base in Latakia (to be kept deployed for half a century with the possibility of renewal) and expanding its naval base in Tartus. The fight against the Islamic State has forged an uneasy alliance between the US, Russia and Turkey, which have paired opposing military groups on the ground. The collaboration of Russia with Turkey, a NATO member, in coordinated military actions in Syria has raised concerns among NATO allies and it is viewed with caution. The Syrian war – in its sixth year now – has turned into a proxy war between the U.S., Russia and Turkey, which could escalate and turn into a global confrontation, as differences deepen on how the next day in Syria and the Middle East should be.

## 7 The energy security dimension

Russian oil exports clearly dominate the regional markets under review. At the EU level, Russian oil exports have been steadily expanding since 2000 from 120.165 Mton (million tonnes) in 2000 to 150.984 Mton in 2014, corresponding to 30% of total imports and 24.6% of final demand. At the same time Norwegian exports to the EU, the major alternative oil source for the Baltic and eastern EU Member States, almost halved during that same period dropping from 102.382 Mton to 67.131 Mton in 2014, covering just 11% of EU demand in 2014 compared to a share of 16.56% in 2000.<sup>64</sup>

Overall the region under review, which includes Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Sweden, is characterised by a net import dependency rate (88.5%) that is on a par with the EU average of 88.7%. But Russia's regional importance is twice as great as the EU average. Russian imports account for 30% of total EU imports but cover 61.49% of the imports necessary to cover the demand of the region under review. Russian oil exports account for (or are close to) 100% of total oil imports in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland, more than 80% of Polish imports, which is the biggest regional consumer, as well as 70% of Hungarian and 56% of Swedish imports. Only Greece, Romania and Estonia get less than 50% of their net oil imports from Russia. Given the region's very low indigenous oil production rates, Russian oil imports account for around 54% of the region's entire oil demand, a fact indicating a very high level of supply concentration.

However, in terms of energy security, while gas prices are regional, those of oil are global. That means that Russia cannot attempt to politically target or threaten specific EU states with an embargo without simultaneously hurting *all* EU member states, given the fact that prices will go up everywhere. It would be impossible for Russia to blackmail, for example, Lithuania or Poland with a cessation of supplies without also increasing the price of the oil it sells to Germany, Italy or France.

Moreover, the international oil market is much more flexible and the cost of transporting oil is a mere fraction of what it costs to transport gas. This means that in the case of a Russian oil embargo on the region alternative oil supplies can get to the affected markets far quicker and far more easily than gas supplies. More importantly, since 2009 all EU states under review are obliged to hold strategic emergency stocks of crude oil and/or oil products that will allow them to withstand the loss of their entire oil supply for a minimum period of 61 days or the loss of their entire oil imports for a minimum period of 90 days.<sup>65</sup>

In the case of a supply crisis, and even more so in the case of a politically motivated embargo, the affected Member State is not left to cope alone with the crisis. There is an EU emergency response mechanism, as well as an international – at the OECD level – security 'umbrella'. The European Commission (EC) coordinates the Union's emergency response which – depending on its gravity – could also tap into the far larger strategic petroleum reserves of the International Energy Agency (IEA), since all but five (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania) Member States under review are also members of the IEA. The latest available data from the EC (January 2013) and the IEA (June 2017) indicate that all the Member States under review fulfil the abovementioned obligation with relative ease and actually exceed the 90-day benchmark by approximately 30%.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> European Commission, *EU Energy in Figures Statistical Pocketbook 2016*, Brussels, (Eurostat: 2016), pp.63–64.

<sup>65</sup> Council Directive 2009/119/EC of 14 September 2009 imposing an obligation on Member States to maintain minimum stocks of crude oil and/or petroleum products, <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/imports-and-secure-supplies/eu-oil-stocks> (accessed 14/09/2017).

<sup>66</sup> For the EU, [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/2013\\_01\\_22\\_oil\\_stocks.xls](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/2013_01_22_oil_stocks.xls); for the IEA, *Closing Oil Stock Levels in Days of Net Imports*, OECD/IEA, June 2017, <http://www.iea.org/netimports/> (both accessed on 14/09/2017).

In 2015, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, 70% of Russian crude oil and condensates exports, close to 5.32 million barrels/day (mb/d), were directed to the EU and other European OECD states. Of these 5.32 mb/d only 0.732 mb/d, or merely 13.75% of total exports, were transited via the 54-year-old Druzhba oil pipelines to Poland (438,000 b/d), Slovakia (118,000 b/d), Hungary (98,000 b/d) and the Czech Republic (78,000 b/d). The Druzhba pipeline, Russia's principal oil export pipeline, is currently utilised at a rate of between 52%–61% of its existing transportation capacity of 1.2–1.4 mb/d.<sup>67</sup> The limited utilisation rate of the Druzhba pipeline does not necessarily pose a security risk for the four abovementioned eastern European states, which already have in place significant pipeline connections with alternative supplies in Germany through the IKL and Pomeranian pipelines to, respectively, the Czech Republic and Poland, as well as Croatia through the recently (2015) upgraded Janaf pipeline to Hungary and Slovakia.



**Map 5: The Soviet-era Druzhba Oil Pipeline System.**

Source: <https://file.ejatlac.org/img/Conflict/druzhba-adria-oil-pipeline-croatia/1.jpg>.

Janaf's capacity extension to its connecting point with Druzhba will increase the possibility of bidirectional oil trade, providing Hungary and Slovakia with alternative supplies of crude oil via the Croatian port terminal in Omišalj, which is open to both Russian and non-Russian supplies. The expansion (expected to be completed within 2017), the second since 2011, is supported by the Connect Europe Facility fund (CEF) as a Project of Common Interest (PCI). The expansion of the German-Polish Pomeranian pipeline to Gdansk and the construction of an oil terminal in Poland's largest port are also included in the abovementioned PCI, which will be revised at the end of the year.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> US Department of Energy, Energy Information Administration, *Country Analysis Brief: Russia*, (Washington D.C.: 25/10/2016), pp.10–12 and p.14. For Slovakian imports: <https://www.iea.org/media/news/20140304UkraineRussiaEuropegasoilfactsheet.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> European Commission, Technical information on Projects of Common Interest accompanying the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/89 of 18 November 2015 amending Regulation (EU) 347/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council on guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure as regards the Union list of projects of common interest, Brussels, 18/11/2015, p.43: [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/technical\\_docu.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/technical_docu.pdf).



**Map 6: Central and Eastern European Oil Interconnectors.**

Source: Janaf, 'Croatia's role as a supply and crude oil transit route: Strategic importance of Janaf oil pipeline', <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/resources/docs/croatias-role-in-supply-and-crude-oil-transit-route-20141114-fin.pdf>.

Although highly politicised after the energy crisis of 2009 and the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the issue of Russian gas exports to the region under review and the probability of their net import dependence being used by Moscow as a political 'weapon' may be slightly exaggerated if seen through the prism of the region's overall energy vulnerability. Overdependence on one gas supplier via one route, which has been the norm until very recently for most Member States in the Baltics, eastern and south-eastern EU, certainly poses significant challenges for the energy security of those states. These challenges are obviously accentuated by the fact that those states have experienced either limited (2006) or protracted (2009) loss of supply because of the breakdown in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Nevertheless, it no longer appears sensible to classify those challenges as a *vital* energy security threat for the area because of the following reasons:

(i) Natural gas plays and is likely to play a limited role in the region's energy mix. Contrary to the general EU average where natural gas covers 21.4% of the Union's gross inland consumption – the second most important primary energy resource after petroleum – the region is primarily an oil- and coal-based energy consumer. Natural gas ranks (and has ranked) fourth in terms of its comparative contribution to the region's energy mix, after oil, coal, and renewable energy sources, most notably hydroelectricity.

(ii) The region's dependence on Russian gas imports as a share of its net import dependency has been dropping since 2010 and will continue to drop sharply over the next 5 years as new sources of gas supply will find their way by the early 2020s into the erstwhile isolated markets of the region under review. In 2010 Russian gas exports to the region under review accounted for 90% of their total imports. Since then, significant improvements have been made which have increased the region's access to LNG supplies through the commissioning of two new regasification facilities in Poland and Lithuania and the expansion of pipeline interconnectivity within eastern European markets and between those markets and the core EU network in Germany and Austria.

The completion in 2014 of the 5 bcm/y import capacity Świnoujście LNG terminal in Poland and the 4 bcm/y regasification capacity of the Klaipėda FSRU in Lithuania are already eating away at Russian gas

exports in the region.<sup>69</sup> As a result of Świnoujście's commissioning, Poland's national oil and gas company PGNiG secured its first long-term LNG contract with Qatargas in the order of 1.5 bcm/y. Commercial level deliveries started in June 2016, and in March 2017 the two companies decided to double the volume of exports to 3 bcm/y starting from 2018. The new contract runs to mid-2034. In April 2017, Świnoujście's operators decided to expand the terminal's regasification, namely its import capacity, to 7.5 bcm – equal to almost half of Poland's current gas demand.<sup>70</sup>

In 2017, Poland also imported spot LNG from the US and is planning to build a 13 bcm/y capacity pipeline that will connect it to the Norwegian grid via Denmark and Sweden. The so-called Baltic Pipe, a major PCI project estimated to cost between €1.6–2.1 billion will export 3 bcm of Norwegian gas to Sweden and Denmark with the remaining 10 bcm/y transiting to Poland. Although the project is still at a relatively early stage, which makes it unclear whether it will be commissioned by 2022, it is very likely that the project will be completed before the mid-2020s enabling Poland to completely replace its gas imports from Russia.

In the case of Lithuania, the effects of supply diversification have been more immediate and impressive. In 2014 Lithuania's Transmission System Operator (TSO) signed a 10-year lease for a 4 bcm/y floating regasification terminal that allowed domestic buyers to buy from Statoil up to 0.54 bcm of LNG to Klaipėda, which corresponds to 27% of its present gas demand. In February 2016, LDT and Achema decided to expand their LNG imports to 1.08 bcm/y.<sup>71</sup>

Consequently, Lithuania was not only able to secure a 20% drop in Gazprom's prices for 2015 but from 2016, it cancelled its long-term supply contracts with Gazprom and is now buying Russian gas,<sup>72</sup> and from June 2017 US LNG, via spot market contracts at competitive prices. Within less than two years of Klaipėda's commissioning, Russian gas exports to Lithuania will drop to less than 50% of final demand. By the end of this decade, they may be eliminated altogether.<sup>73</sup>

Since Klaipėda's FSRU is able to regasify up to 4 bcm/y, *all* of the three Baltic republics should already have been able to diversify away from Russia. The reason this has not happened yet is related to the absence of adequate pipeline interconnectivity between the Baltic states and *primarily* between the three Baltic states and the rest of the region, most notably Poland and Finland. Despite the enhancement of the bidirectional transit capacity in the Soviet-era Lithuanian-Latvian interconnector in 2013 to 4.58 bcm/y there has been no analogous upgrading in the connection between Latvia and Estonia. More importantly, Finland is completely cut off from any connecting pipelines with other EU states.

In this regard, the extension of the Baltic Pipeline to the three Baltic republics and Finland is a precondition for securing alternative long-term gas exports to the eastern part of the Baltic Sea. These problems are expected to be rectified through the completion of the Polish-Lithuanian Gas Interconnector (PLGI) and the Estonia-Finland Gas Interconnector (Baltic Connector), both scheduled to be completed before 2022. PGLI, which has a transit capacity of 2.3–4.5 bcm/y, will act as a conduit for Norwegian gas supplies to the Baltic states and is expected to be commissioned in 2021. 60% of its €430 million construction cost is

<sup>69</sup> An FSRU (Floating Storage and Regasification Unit) is an offshore LNG import terminal that floats in a modified LNG cargo ship that is used to regasify the LNG and send it to the pipeline grid.

<sup>70</sup> PGNiG, 'PGNiG ready to receive larger amount of LNG from abroad', 29/08/2017: <http://en.pgnig.pl/news/-/news-list/id/pgnig-ready-to-receive-larger-amount-of-lng-from-abroad/newsGroupId/1910852>.

<sup>71</sup> Before 2010 all Baltic states imported 100% of their gas imports from Russia. Merle Maigre, *Energy Security Concerns of the Baltic States*, International Center for Defense Studies, Vilnius, (March 2010), pp.4–9.

<sup>72</sup> Ole Gunnar Austvik, *The EU Energy Union, Energy Security and Russian Gas*, Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Business and Government, Harvard School of Government, (Harvard: December 2015), p.2.

<sup>73</sup> Agnia Grigas, 'US Natural Gas Arrives in Lithuania: What it means for Russia and the Baltic Region', *Foreign Affairs*, 12/09/2017: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/baltics/2017-09-12/us-natural-gas-arrives-lithuania>

covered by the CEF fund.<sup>74</sup> Construction on the Baltic Connector, which has an initial capacity of 2.63 bcm/y, is expected to begin by late 2017 and is intended to end Finland's isolation from the expanding European grid. The project is scheduled to be completed by 2019 and through the CEF, the European Commission has funded 75% of the project's entire costs, estimated at €250 million.<sup>75</sup>

In sharp contrast to the other Member States of the region under review, Greece and Bulgaria remain in complete isolation from other European markets. Despite the fact that both of Bulgaria's interconnector projects with Romania and Greece have had the financial support of the European Commission since 2008, neither project has been completed. A series of regulatory hurdles related to existing long-term supply contracts between Gazprom and Bulgartransgaz,<sup>76</sup> the Bulgarian TSO, combined with bureaucratic inertia at the national level have plagued both projects for years. TAP's final investment decision in 2013, which is to benefit Bulgaria with 1 bcm/y of Azeri gas from 2020, necessitated the construction of the IGB project because the delivery of the abovementioned 1 bcm/y to Bulgaria is otherwise impossible.

TAP will allow Greece to reduce its Russian imports from a high of 66% of demand in 2016 to less than 50% in 2020, while Bulgaria will limit its own net import dependence on Russia by around a third. Future exports from Azerbaijan's existing field that are expected to come on stream by the mid-2020s will allow for the expansion of TAP's transportation capacity by another 10 bcm/y, which will further increase the region's import portfolio, potentially facilitating the gasification of west Balkan economies through the IAP (Ionian Adriatic Pipeline) project.

<sup>74</sup><https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility/cef-energy/projects-by-country/multi-country/8.5-0046-pllt-p-m-14>, (accessed 20/09/2017).

<sup>75</sup> <http://balticconnector.fi/en/the-project/>, (accessed 20/09/2017).

<sup>76</sup> Jonathan Stern and Katja Yafimava, The EU Competition investigation of Gazprom's sales in Central and Eastern Europe: A detailed analysis and the way forward, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies/OIES, (OIES: 2017), p.6.

## 8 Conclusions and policy recommendations

The countries in the Baltic and Black Sea regions experience a growing level of security vulnerability amidst tensed relations between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia. An array of developments and events connect these two regions which share common characteristics and constitute an interlinked strategic space. However, the context within which EU's Baltic Sea and Black Sea policies develop varies substantially. First, EU presence in the Black Sea is clearly more limited than in the Baltic Sea in all aspects. Although the Black Sea is definitely not a 'Russian lake' it constitutes a basin where the Europeanisation process has come to a standstill and where other processes such as the Eurasian Economic Union generate centrifugal forces away from Brussels. Second, the Black Sea still hosts longstanding protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia and new ones as in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine that have turned the region into the most unstable part of Europe, and whose conflict resolution intrudes into the relations of West and Russia. Third, the Black Sea neighbours immediately one of the most insecure regions, the Middle East, which breeds global terrorism and threatens home security in several Western countries. Fourth, the Black Sea is a zone of potential EU and NATO enlargement and this process affects the presence and policies of other global players, especially Russia, China and Turkey.

The EU so far has advanced a constructive and comprehensive approach in its Baltic and Black Sea regions to reduce security dilemma and ethnic tensions and to foster economic development and good governance. However, increased geopolitical competition, the militarisation of foreign policy, Russian revisionism and internal constraints of the EU itself coming from its own political and institutional development threaten the post-Cold War stability project as it has been devised since the early 1990s. Security developments in the Baltic and Black Sea regions have impacts not confined to the regions but they reflect wider challenges for the Euro-Atlantic security.

All countries in the Baltic and Black Sea regions would benefit from a cooperative rather than a confrontational relationship between the EU and Russia. Such a cooperative approach should be the guideline in EU's relations with its largest eastern neighbour. Nevertheless, the Euro-Atlantic community should stand firm on the unconditional respect of the post war European security principles and norms and reaffirm the strategic reassurance of NATO to its allies. Furthermore, minimizing the danger of a military confrontation in the Baltic and Black Sea region necessitates some new confidence and security building measures in the security sector, especially after the withdrawal of Russia from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

A relatively 'new' security challenge in the Baltic and Black Sea regions is that of cybersecurity and the so called 'weaponized information' which targets the heart of governance systems in the respective countries. The EU countries have recognised the threat of cyber war (i.e. Council decision of 19-20 March 2015 regarding the launching of a project to counteract Russian propaganda), but more coordination is needed at the national and regional level to bolster defence along a 'digital containment' Euro-Atlantic strategy.

With respect to the Baltic Sea region, the Euro-Atlantic Community should ensure deterrence through a firm visible commitment to the security of its Baltic member states and the advancement of Baltic-Nordic Defense Cooperation. The EU should complement this deterrence with assisting regional approaches to development and security at all levels of governance putting emphasis on civil society.

The Black Sea constitutes the weakest link of European security, while as a geopolitical bridge it plays a key role in global security policies. The high potential of a military confrontation in the South Caucasus and in Eastern Ukraine means that the Euro-Atlantic allies should maintain defense mechanisms for non-NATO countries too, whose security is vital for NATO's own interests. NATO should maintain a strong maritime, land and air presence in the region and additional training and exercises. In tandem with European countries it should support regional defense cooperation in the Black Sea and help reform and modernize security services of Black Sea states.



With specific reference to the Black Sea region, given that the Black Sea Synergy framework remains insufficiently developed, it should be replaced by a more comprehensive policy of a Black Sea macro-region. The models of EU Macro-Regional Strategies (MRS) for the Baltic Sea (in place since 2009) and the Danube River can provide policy experience. A Black Sea MRS could complement existing initiatives and EU policy frameworks as it does not require additional legislation, funding or institutions. It would require specific action rather than constitute a new policy initiative (European Commission, 2016).

The European Parliament has in a resolution of 2011 supported the idea of a Strategy for the Black Sea Region in the framework of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. The resolution called 'on the EC and the EEAS to draw up a strategy for the Black Sea Region in parallel with the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy' (European Parliament, 2011). The regional and global context as well as the transition period in which the European Union goes through since the Brexit process has been launched, do not favour the easy formulation of an agreement on external regional policies especially in geopolitically contested areas. Nevertheless, the EU should not step back from the Black Sea but it should rather reinvigorate cooperation mechanisms especially in priority areas identified in the Global Security Strategy, climate, maritime security, education, research and cross-border cooperation and societal ties. Given the diversity of relations of the EU with the Black Sea states, BSEC's inclusiveness could make it an instrumental partner of the EU in building 'cooperative regional orders' as put in EU's Global Security Strategy.

Interparliamentary cooperation in the Baltic and the Black Sea region has been facing constraints but its value in addressing democratic or governance deficits shouldn't be underestimated. Regional interparliamentary assemblies have no coercive or legislative authority but their role can be important in promoting ownership in regional intergovernmental institutions. They should better integrate in a formal way in regional policy making process through approval, scrutiny and monitoring mechanisms. In the Black Sea region, the PABSEC could acquire a new role if linked closer to the implementation of Black Sea Synergy.

In terms of energy security, the EU should complete as soon as possible its Energy Union that will break the isolation of the Union's most energy vulnerable states and fully integrate them into an emerging interconnected pan-European oil, gas and electricity grid. That would diminish Russia's ability to use energy power as a potential political weapon against EU member states. In this regard the EU should: a) prioritize the completion of the Baltic Pipeline and its connection with the Baltic Connector so as to open up the access of Poland, Finland and the three Baltic States to Norwegian pipeline gas, and b) reintegrate in the PCI and promote the construction of the Alexandroupolis LNG regasification facility in Northern Greece so as to allow new LNG supplies to reach the EU's Southeast European states via the soon to be completed interconnecting pipelines between Greece, Bulgaria and Romania.

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