

EU's Global Strategy and Russia: Seeking effective Foreign and Security Policies while balancing divergent member's States Interests

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Executive Summary

Last month, the European Union (EU)'s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), Federica Mogherini, officially released the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy. The document which aims at understanding the EU's environment presents a revised comprehensive foreign and security policy for a stronger and more efficient Union. It particularly recalls the numerous threats pending on the European security order in eastern Europe for which it voices for a consistent and a united approach towards Russia.

While building a united approach in countering Russian security initiatives is a major priority, it remains a challenging exercise that has yet to overcome the different geopolitical considerations of its member states in an environment where militarization gradually intensifies.

This paper argues that further militarization is likely to increase the regional security dilemmas and further disrupt European unity. Deterrence efforts have to be combined with increased cooperative relations between the Union and Russia to better define boundaries and avoid any impending confrontation.

Introduction

A threatened European security order in Eastern Europe. This is how the recent Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy assesses the result of the Crimea conflict in Ukraine. In a clear consensus, the European commission, the European Parliament, the EU member states and major local think tanks all recognised the active nature of this threat and reminded how a "consistent and united approach must remain the cornerstone of EU policy towards Russia" (Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe 2016, p.33).

Since the recognition of the armed Russian aggression on Ukrainian soil by the European Council (European Council, 2014) and the imposition of sanctions, including, but not limited to, asset freezes and travel bans, Russia has increasingly become a primary subject of defiance and concern within the EU. Although initial sanctions have not induced major divisions within the EU, their subsequent extensions have.

The fundamental point of contention in the EU's approach towards Russia is that some European member states have long considered Russia to be a threat, given their identity and antagonistic historical past with the Soviet Union, while other European member states do not share this vision. Poland and the Baltic states are the primary carriers of the adversarial view, which, after the conflict in Ukraine emerged as a dominant view within the EU leadership in Brussels. Some European member states, however, have either espoused a close strategic partnership with Russia in the recent past, or have expressed annoyance towards the Baltic states' noise, especially prior to the Ukrainian conflict. These divisions seem to have subdued in 2014 with the initial approval to implement sanctions against Russia. However, given different geopolitical and national aspirations of different EU member states, divisions are again resurfacing and might intensify as the security dilemma between the EU and Russia increases.

In light of these divisions, what is particularly striking, although expected, in Mogherini's framework is the need of the EU to enhance its 'hard power' capabilities vis-à-vis Russia, reflecting long-held realist perceptions of the Baltic states towards Russia. The EU framework in its essence thus reflects a very realist geopolitical orientation of the EU, despite its past liberal desires. Liberal desires in

the past have only established a set of expectations from Russia that were never fulfilled, such as that democracy or close economic ties would lead to a sustainable peace in the long run, given the assumption that a democratic Russia would abandon its regional ambitions. However, such expectations could not overcome essential geopolitical and security concerns of both Poland and the Baltic states on the one hand, and Russia on the other.

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Inevitably, espousing geopolitical understanding of EU-Russia bilateral relations would mean defining spheres of influence between major powers. It is within these spheres of influence where we see a competition over territory and resources (Deudney, 1997). As such, no state wedged between the EU and Russia, like Ukraine today, or the Baltic states in the past, could expect to closely associate itself both with the EU and Russia, militarily, politically or economically. The EU now officially recognizes and espouses the view that boundaries are inherently contestable. However, the main question that needs to be asked is, how successfully can the EU carry out its realist focus on hard power, given its internal divisions regarding Russia? A geopolitical analysis of the two groups, the adversarial and the Russia-friendly bloc, suggests that the EU must tread a fine line to create internal unity, which will be increasingly more difficult to do as security dilemmas of both Russia and the EU intensify.

The Adversarial Bloc

The adversarial bloc, or the countries that never truly experienced any thaw in their relations with Russia, have always in practice followed a very 'zero-sum' interpretation that Russia was fundamentally different from the European and Western civilization, and as such it had to be treated as 'the other' (Mälksoo, 2007). The main concern, however, was not this 'otherness' but rather the belief that Russia always presented a latent military threat and had expansionist objectives, a view that is inherent in a realist framework. This is not to say that liberal ideas never existed on paper, but rather that security dilemma in an anarchic international system still prevailed in practice. Following recent events in Ukraine, and as evident in the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, we can observe that realist geopolitical considerations have not only matured in Poland and the Baltic states, but also in Brussels itself. Geopolitical tradition and a realist point of view of Poland and the Baltic states can be seen in the recent statement of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, who recently stated that Poland will seek further NATO support if Russia continues to escalate tensions. He deems that a recent NATO decision to deploy four reinforced multinational battalions in the Baltic states and Poland is an important step forward to enhance its national security. This is, after all, the first forward NATO deployment on European soil since the end of the Cold War. Radek Sikorski, the former Polish foreign minister, also stated that recent adoptions will restore some of the vast military imbalance (Gera, 2016). Part of the solution to this imbalance is also the placement of an antiballistic missile shield in the north of the country. While justified in defensive terms, these recent actions do not negate Brzezinski's (1997) argument that Russian empire can only be dismantled by taking Ukraine out of its sphere of influence. As such, the competitive nature of the military build-up and zero-sum calculations are inherent both in the eyes of Poland, the Baltic states and Russia.

Views from Ukraine and their resonance across Eastern Europe only reinforce aforementioned views. Ukraine, more than the Baltic states or Poland, has a good reason to be concerned about Russia's intentions. At the beginning of last month, deputy prime minister of Ukraine, Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze, stated that once again Russia is escalating the conflict in the eastern region of Ukraine. Not surprisingly, in the recent NATO summit, support to Ukraine was also discussed. However,

Obama and Merkel agreed to stick to the peace process rather than shore up Ukraine's defence systems, reflecting a concern that NATO might end up engaging Russian forces directly. Ukraine, in response, stated that it will seek to acquire defensive and lethal weapons through bilateral agreements. Poland and the Baltic states are strongly in support of more direct Western support to Ukraine, especially through NATO membership. Again, although to a lesser degree than before, Poland and the Baltic states are pushing for a more assertive policy compared to the official policy in Brussels.

Although Poland and the Baltic states are at the forefront of a tough policy against Russia, they are certainly not isolated in their views. Sweden and Denmark also support Poland and the Baltic states. In response to Russian actions in Ukraine, Sweden, for example, has for the first time upped its defence posture by remilitarizing the remote island of Gotland. The primary aim of Swedish build-up is to focus on the Baltic region. Moreover, two years ago, Sweden, along with the United Kingdom (UK) and Poland, proposed a joint policing mission that would support the Ukrainian regime. The UK especially is committed to supporting Ukraine, having signed a defence cooperation agreement that will cover sharing of information on potential threats, participation in joint exercises, training of Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) personnel, and cooperation in the field of military equipment (UK Ministry of Defence, 2016). Not surprisingly, the UK was a key member which pushed the EU towards a tough stance on its relations with Moscow. With the referendum in the UK to leave the European Union resulting in victory of the 'leave' side, the adversarial bloc can be expected to weaken, giving a stronger voice to the Russia-friendly bloc.

Overall, the strategy of the adversarial bloc towards Russia is not a case of paranoia, but rather it reflects a typical realist security strategy of minor powers when facing a potentially hostile major power. Namely, the approach of Poland and the Baltic states reflects their use of the EU and NATO as "an instrument for pursuing their national interests, in particular with regard to Russia and other post-Soviet states" (Raik 2016, 241). With the EU membership secured, there was some acceptance of the EU's policies towards Russia, however, to a large extent Poland and the Baltic states also remained resistant to adaptive pressures from the EU, that is, they did not internalize the EU norms, preferring to keep their attachment to national sovereignty. The Baltic states also

pursued a more active policy in Ukraine and Belarus, especially when it came to signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, or lobbying to stop the EU's isolationist policy towards Belarus, which indicates that the motivation was primarily geopolitical and not based on shared norms with these neighbouring countries (Raik 2016; Kesa 2012). Specifically, the goal was to deny Russia to maintain its sphere of influence and thus enhance own security goals.

Russia-friendly Bloc

Although no EU member state is ardently pro-Russian, economics and cultural links play an important role in foreign policies of different EU member states, and as a consequence some EU member states depend more on Russia culturally or economically, than others. Some are simply exercising a different security approach. This group of states comprising the Russia-friendly bloc includes primarily Greece and Hungary, but the sentiment is also certainly felt in Italy, Spain, France, Austria, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Slovenia. There are also states such as Finland that have sour historical experiences with Russia, but whose leadership believes that Russia is not a threat.

Greece and Hungary have expressed the strongest desire to accommodate Russia, and are thus the most problematic states for the EU. Greece has recently flirted with Russia on several occasions (Casier, 2016). BBC, for instance, last year published a piece indicating that the EU could lose Greece to Russia, given Greece's financial troubles and Russia's increased investment in Greece (Christides, 2015). The investment in Greece's energy is particularly important for Moscow, given the potential to establish a gas network crossing the Balkans and Western Europe through Greece. Tourism should also not be neglected, with Greece being a top destination for Russian tourists. In terms of security, the Greek Syriza-led government was very vocal opposing the sanctions that were imposed on Russia by the EU Council, including an instance a few days ago when Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras called for a partnership with Russia during a NATO summit in Warsaw. In addition, the Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias allegedly has strong links with Russian nationalists, while Greek Minister of Defence, Panos Kammenos, is attempting to forge a new partnership with Russia to manufacture Kalashnikov rifles, in order to prevent the collapse of Greece's defence industry.

Hungary is often depicted in the same light as Greece, namely as being an "unlikely friend in the European Union" (Hockenos, 2016). Currently, Hungary has deep economic links with Russia, especially for developing its energy sector through Russian loans, particularly the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, while also cooperating with Gazprom. There are also opinions that Viktor Orban, the Hungarian Prime Minister, is seeking to remodel the Hungarian governance in the image of Russian "illiberal democracy" (International Business Publications USA, 2015, p.140). This might stem from his beliefs that the Western civilization has failed in its liberal democratic pursuit, and that the new dawn will come from the East (Bokros, 2015). Unlike Greece, Hungary has culturally little in common with Russia as there is an antagonistic past and a different religion. Similar to Greece, however, Hungary is using Russia primarily for instrumental purposes to gain leverage over Brussels (Lo, 2015).

Among other EU member states where some official conciliatory stance towards Russia is felt, there are a few notable events. Recently, Italy has attempted to delay the extension of the EU's economic sanctions against Russia, by demanding that Brussels review its policy later in 2016. The sanctions target Russia's banking and energy sectors, as well as some individuals. The Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is also more open to the Russian role in the future of Syrian governance. Similar to Italy, Spain is also against further actions that would provoke Russia. Likewise, in Bulgaria, NATO's plans to strengthen its deterrence against Russia by increasing its naval force in the Black Sea are not domestically popular. After all, last October, the Bulgarian parliament nearly passed a motion to abandon the EU sanctions against Russia. It is likely that in case of further EU measures against Russia that these three states will show further discord with Brussels and the adversarial bloc.

Where the heads of state are still reluctant to cede any ground to Russia-friendly views, there are other members of government or opposition which carry views sympathetic to Russia. For instance, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has a very tough stance on Russia's policy in Eastern Europe, while German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier is more friendly towards Russia, and has also sought the sanctions to be phased out, as has the national Economics Minister Sigmar Gabriel. Despite Germany having only a few ministers with Russia-friendly views, one can also consider how annoyed German government was when Poland called on its NATO allies to conduct a military exercise 'Anakonda' last month,

contributing only with 400 of its own troops. The Russia-friendly stance in Germany is in line with former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who had a very harmonious relationship with Putin. As such, Germany may emerge as divided on its Russia policy. If the Russia-friendly bloc within Germany emerges as more dominant, United States, as well as many Eastern European states, may deem this outcome as a threat to the western unity. France faces a similar situation. France's lower house of parliament passed a non-binding resolution in April 2016 to lift EU sanctions against Russia, a stance that opposes the policy of its Socialist government. Some sources even state that France's National Front received \$11.7 million loan from a Russian bank in 2014 (Foxall, 2016). Some other prominent Eurosceptic parties have been accused of similar operations, such as the Freedom Party of Austria, Alternative for Germany, National Democratic Party of Germany, Hungarian Jobbik, Bulgarian Attack (Ataka), People's Party of Slovakia and Latvian Russian Union. Allegedly, the key figures in delivering this support were Konstantin Rykov and Timur Prokopenko, two influential Kremlin officials (IBP 2015, 139). It is thus clear that many internal divisions within the EU can be easily exploited by Russia in order to reduce the impact of hawkish parties and movements in the EU and thus turn the EU foreign policy in Russia's favour. From Russia's perspective, in a very competitive, zero-sum environment, most means justify the ends, especially when those ends are clearly favourable to Russia's interests. That this policy is not mere speculation can be seen in that the national intelligence of United States is closely monitoring Russia's clandestine funding of European parties.

In some cases, even states sympathetic to views that depict Russia as threatening might be reluctant to join in on any manoeuvres that might be deemed as provocative by Russia. Finland, for instance, has been lamented as "the bear whisperer", being able to disagree with Russia without suffering any wrath. Timo Soini, Finnish Foreign Minister, prefers taking a more cooperative approach towards Russia and for the moment is not seeking to join NATO. He deems it to be simply "just good policy" to be in the audience when the big countries are fighting (Standish, 2016). Likewise, Alexander Stubb, Finland's finance minister, stated that the Finnish policy is to be a middle-ground country when it comes to Russia, meaning following own national economic interests while maintaining solidarity with the rest of the EU. Of particular relevance for this policy is the fact that Russia is the primary export destination of Finnish goods, while

Finland is dependent on Russian energy. Thus, it is in the interest of many Finnish businesses to maintain their exports, or to host flocking Russian shoppers.

The position of the Russia-friendly bloc is also rooted in geopolitics and a realist view of the world. Greece, for instance, is using Russia as a leverage against the European Commission over the austerity measures that must be implemented in exchange for more bailout funds. As long as Russia provides Greece with investment, and as long as Greece continues to flirt with Russia, Greece can present that it has room for maneuver. United States is aware of this, and can put pressure on the EU institutions to provide Greece with greater debt relief (Sourvanos, 2015). The Greek position thus places the European Commission in a competitive framework, and not a liberal one as Greece is primarily concerned with its own national interests. Similar reasoning applies to Hungary whose posture is Eurosceptic only insofar as it can use Russia to gain greater independence from Brussels. Other states are fearful that growing tensions between the EU and Russia will be domestically unpopular, hurt their economy or undermine their national security.

EU Policy Towards Russia

The analysis of the two blocs reveals their unique geopolitical posturing and desires to advance own national interests through lobbying in Brussels. As such, official EU-Russia relations, as well as relations between various European states and Russia, have rarely been stable, fluctuating due to dynamic geopolitical processes that have engulfed the two blocs. Still, the recent official policy of Brussels towards Moscow tended to find a middle-ground that would be inclusive of all EU member states. The EU, after all, is still largely a coalition of nation states. However, inclusivity meant that the EU foreign policy was never decisive, and as such boundaries remained ambiguous (Pasantou, 2014).

In the early 1990s, while intergovernmental in nature, the official policy of Brussels towards Moscow was initially one with a desire, perhaps even an expectation, to see democratic development in Russia (Orenstein, 2015). After all, similar expectations helped transform other central and eastern European states. However, such a desire towards Moscow was only "superficial and piecemeal" (Wetzel and Orbie, 2015). Nor did Moscow show much respect for the European political model, especially after the first wave of NATO enlargement. In

fact, as soon as the EU began to expand into the post-Soviet space it became a threat (Lo, 2015). Still, Russian and EU relations were quite pragmatic until their growing power dynamics began to clash in the shared neighbourhood, Ukraine in particular with the onset of the Orange revolution in 2004. Instead of established trade strengthening shared norms and institutions, it soon became a political tool to be used as a leverage in increasingly zero-sum negotiations.

While the adversarial bloc seeks to challenge the very notion of defining spheres of influence, and advances the view that national (and thus European) security can only be established by denying Russia its own sphere of influence, the Russia-friendly bloc is more willing to compromise on EU's regional aspirations for the sake of national ones

It was the EU's failure to support the fledgling Russian state in its transition, and subsequent Russian experimental economic, but also political models, that made it inevitable for Russia to seek an independent great power status with its own sphere of influence, and not one subsumed into the Western-led norms and institutions (Raik 2016; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2015). Even later on, it does not seem that the EU was keen on supporting Russia's own project of regional integration, given the lack of formal relations with the Eurasian Economic Union (Krastev and Leonard, 2015). Facing an independent, revisionist Russia that sought to limit EU enlargement, but also other threats such as terrorism, migration, as well as financial crisis, there is no doubt that the EU is now seeking to bolster its foreign and security policy. In the global strategy publication Mogherini calls for "full spectrum defence capabilities" and the need for the EU to be able to "act autonomously" (Snell, 2016).

Autonomy and independence, however, might not be easily achieved. Mogherini recognizes this since she recently stated that the EU's place in the world is being questioned. Keukeleire and Delreux (2015) argue that the EU is actually losing influence in its neighbourhood. As such, a more meaningful role for the EU is necessary. While issues such as counterterrorism and cybersecurity are generally issues widely recognized as a common threat, they are no longer seen as belonging to the 'soft power' sphere, but rather there is an increasing recognition for the need of 'hard power' tools. This does not mean that EU will have its own army, for any such duplication within NATO will likely be opposed by many European political figures. Moreover, while Brexit is taking place, Brussels will have limited resources to allocate to issues outside of the EU borders, such as Ukraine. This is a concern for Eastern European states fearful of Russia. Thus, for the time being, the Eastern Partnership program will be less active given the EU's limited capacity to conduct its own foreign and security policy.

The distinct bilateral relations that EU member states from the two blocs pursue towards Russia are perhaps the clearest indication that the EU is severely limited in pursuing a joint strategy (Pusatoui, 2014). While the adversarial bloc seeks to challenge the very notion of defining spheres of influence, but rather advances the view that national (and thus European) security can only be established by denying Russia its own sphere of influence, the Russia-friendly bloc is more willing to compromise on EU's regional aspirations for the sake of national ones.

Reflecting on the EU's internal obscurity, Buzan and Wæver (2003) identify the EU as a regional security complex which carries with it a deficit of foresight, for it has pursued a conditional policy on market liberalization and democratic societal transformations right in the sphere of Russia's core interests. From their view, Ukraine is not only one of the top trading partners for Russia, but it also critically conditions Russia's own energy security. Finally, Ukraine is geographically naturally placed as a strategic extension for Russian combat operations (Pusatoui, 2014). As such, the EU's foreign policy as a reflection of competing internal blocs and emphasis on norms have made a collision with Russia inevitable. This lack of 'vision' regarding its future relations with Russia, but also other parts of its neighbourhood, such as the Mediterranean, Keukeleire and Delreux (2015) attribute

to the fact that EU's foreign policy reflects EU's internal agenda, and not sensitivities of the region. In other words, the EU has been out of touch with some societal dynamics taking place in its neighbourhood.

Russia, in the meanwhile, will seek to lift the sanctions that were imposed on it by the European Union. The staunchest proponent of sanctions was the UK. Without the UK, Russia can expect less overall pressure from the EU. Not surprisingly, Polish president Andrzej Duda, stated that everything must be done to prevent other

countries from leaving the European Union (Foxall, 2016). In addition, Russia can exploit internal EU divisions, and it will certainly do so, if such a move will not backfire and strengthen the EU resolve. To that end, Russia's actions will be limited, especially if we take into account that Russia and the EU are still engaged in mutually beneficial economic and financial activities (STRATFOR, 2016).

Recommendations for Policy

The EU's Global Strategy states that Russia has recently undermined European security, but it refrains from the understanding that international politics can be a 'zero-sum' game, a typical realist interpretation of world politics. Yet the fact that there is a need for 'hard power' capabilities reflects the inherent fear of the EU leaders that there are serious limits of 'soft power' and liberal approaches. However, the mere engagement in a geopolitical battle with Russia might be equivalent to admitting that the EU has lost the ideational battle whereby liberal ideas on cooperative and norms-based international relations can no longer constitute the relations between the two major powers (Raik 2016). As such, the EU has entered a new period in its relations with Russia, one in which it will be increasingly difficult to balance between its normative legitimacy and the geopolitical reality.

Facing numerous challenges and potentially receding American commitments, the EU must at least consider the following policy options:

1. Maintain a policy that will not disproportionately affect either countries fearful of Russia or those more dependent on good EU-Russia relations, unless a compensation could be induced, especially in the energy sector.
2. Maintain commitment to current levels of deterrence, focusing especially on defensive capabilities. Reliance on offensive capabilities should be minimal.
3. Follow a realist policy of defining its own boundaries, sphere of influence, commit to them unequivocally, while also respecting the need for a clearly defined buffer zone.
4. Seek out confidence building measures pertaining to the European theater that will reduce the risk of war, such as arms control agreements.
5. Establish formal relations with the Eurasian Economic Union thereby giving some legitimacy to Russia's core sphere of influence.
6. Prioritize issues of terrorism, migration, Brexit, and financial risks before addressing other security threats.
7. Propose to lift the sanctions imposed on Russia in the near future even if the conflict in Ukraine remains 'frozen'.
8. Encourage the Russian elites to continue to invest and emulate Western standards and models.
9. Diversify its own energy supply sources while remaining open to Russian investment that will not be conditioned on shared governance norms.
10. Alternatively, push back the Russian influence in the European neighbourhood by giving an alternative choice to Russia-friendly EU member states, as well as by significantly stepping up in military commitments (be ready to go to war).

Conclusion for policy

Any approach taken towards Russia, however, is not only limited by EU's own weakness, but must account for the fact that the Russian economy is in trouble. This would not be so worrisome if Russia was not the most important, perhaps most influential, actor in the European neighbourhood (Casier, 2016). According to Edward W. Walker but also many other Russia experts, Kremlin's perceptions of Western hostility are only getting worse, and it is not clear how long Putin can keep Russia's expenditures afloat. That said, given the EU's light commitment to military expenditures and more important internal problems, such as terrorism, a worsening security dilemma carries with it little optimism. For better or worse, Russia's own deteriorating situation will play a vital role in European political and economic discussions.

Realist scholars see a potential for conflict among states that challenge the status-quo, perhaps even on a global level. For Schweller (1998), power is inherently linked with revisionism and the latter reflects a degree of (in) satisfaction with the prestige, resources, and principles of the system. We can observe revisionist behavior both with the EU and Russia, since they seek to remodel international relations, especially regional relations, that will reflect their own national aspirations and principles. Each is at least somewhat baked by another great power, the US or China. However, given the EU's and Russia's inherent weaknesses, yet strong aspirations, there is a sense that demonstration of power is a matter of prestige, for both the EU and Russia aspire to be great powers on their own (Morgenthau, 1948). Pasatoui (2014) describes that Russia, the US, and the EU as not wanting to give up their unilateralism or hegemonic ambitions. In their pursuit of influence, the latter two are bound to clash with Russia. In the classical situation reminiscent of the Cold War era, deterrence must remain one of the most important pillars of the EU strategy.

While deterrence is an important component of containing a revisionist Russia, what the EU needs, and should enhance through NATO, are arms control agreements and confidence building measures pertaining to the European theater that will reduce the risk of war. After all, deterrence could easily worsen the security dilemma. Russia certainly does not desire a direct confrontation, given its proposal to reduce the risk of air accidents over the Baltic Sea. The EU here can only work

through NATO to reach this strategic stability; it cannot work alone. Where the EU can work alone, to a degree, is at improving economic and political relations that will lead to eventual normalization. Both sides will need to make compromises on issues such as Ukrainian and Georgian security, as well as the status of Crimea. John Mearsheimer, the architect of the theory of offensive realism, believes that liberal delusions and lack of clear boundaries that established Western influence in Ukraine, are the cause of deteriorating relations with Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014). In other words, boundaries need to be defined pertaining to agreed-upon spheres of influence. As long as Russia is denied its own sphere of influence in Europe, it will deem the EU as a threat, and the EU will need to respond.

If the EU continues to defy traditional prescriptions of clearly defined spheres of influence, then it must take the alternative, costlier policy, one of pushing back the Russian influence

Moreover, the approach taken by the EU member states seems to reflect a typical security dilemma of small and middle powers. Namely, the EU and NATO frameworks are used primarily for collective bargaining and resource pooling purposes, such as when dealing with trans-boundary threats and other major powers' military capabilities, such as that of Russia. However, when it comes to issues of particular interest to some European member states, other mechanisms are invoked, particularly bilateral relations (Lo, 2015). This is why we are seeing some EU member states taking initiatives that challenge the image of a united EU. Victor Orban, for example, is noted as having stressed the primacy of national sovereignty (Schmidt, 2015). For the EU, spearheading a policy of opposing Russia while facing difficult domestic problems is in line with several theories on war, such as diversionary theory of war and desperation theory. Focusing on a more aggressive foreign policy to compensate for domestic weaknesses

has occasionally been successful in other cases, but is generally considered a risky strategy.

By insisting too intensively on a policy that confronts Russia, the EU can alienate and destabilize some of its member states that are close to Russia. However, the opposite is also true. Containing divergent interests within, the EU must maintain good relations both with its Western partners, the Baltic states, but also try and positively engage Russia. However, this will make the EU appear rather weak for it will appear to lack regional ambitions. Still, the EU, as long as it maintains its socio-economic model, will remain a source of inspiration for Russia. Despite Russian elite's rhetorical condemnation of the West, they still send their children to Europe and the US, they invest in Western companies and emulate successful Western models (Lo, 2015). In that sense, there is little reason to believe that Russia desires a direct conflict. While convergence and integration may not be on the agenda either, cooperation is certainly preferable to increasing tensions. Still, fostering trust in light of recent deteriorations over the security understandings will be difficult to do.

If the EU continues to defy traditional prescriptions of clearly defined spheres of influence, then it must take the alternative, costlier policy, one of pushing back the Russian influence. To do so, however, it must tackle two issues. First, it must provide Russia-friendly EU member states with a legitimate alternative, especially in the economic sphere. Russia-friendly EU member states will be very hostile to any policies that will disproportionately burden them compared to the rest of the EU. Second, the EU must step up in its military commitments. Several EU lawmakers in the European parliament stated that the EU needs credibility, and to have it, it must be able to militarily defend its member states. In other words, Europe must be ready to go to war (Gotev, 2015). United

States seems to be withdrawing from the global leadership role that it has assumed for almost seven decades (Weinstein, 2016). Not surprisingly, Obama has stated that the Europeans are "free riders" on the security provided by the American taxpayers. As such, Jochen Bittner believes that NATO's recent saber rattling is a direct response to its potential decline in Europe (Bittner, 2016). Russia will very likely intervene at one point, given the popular support behind the national consolidation project, to try and demarcate its strategic zone of influence, and the EU must be ready to counter that threat without overburdening its North American allies. Russia can also trigger several frozen conflicts at the periphery of the EU, and it can coordinate a different approach to tackling terrorism and instability coming from the Middle East that will negatively impact the EU. As a consequence, the EU in that case must prepare for a costly strategy, one whose goal will be to either defeat or transform Russia.

Up to this point, the realist framework has successfully forecasted the current scenario in Europe defined by ambiguous boundaries that are propelling the EU and Russia to clash, a scenario George Kennan, a prominent realist, already predicted in 1947 (Lo, 2015). While this alternative policy will certainly destroy the stability that many Europeans have become accustomed to, the EU's failure to more substantially engage Russia and more clearly define boundaries will likely result in increased tensions. As such, Alexey Gromyko's (2013) proposal to have "a harmonious mechanism to solve the Old World's common external and internal problems" will likely remain on the back burner. Although some may expect Russia to be the one that will better define boundaries, it has historically been Europe that has set the terms with regard to Russia's legitimate place on the old continent (Giusti and Penkova, 2012)

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