When Hybrid Warfare Supports Ideology:
Russia Today

Dr. Vira Ratsiborynska[1]

"One of our greatest strengths is our ability to adapt."
NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg[2]

Introduction

The Russo-Georgian War in 2008, the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia in 2014 and covert Russian military activities in Eastern Ukraine opened a new chapter in NATO-EU-Russia-Eastern Partnership countries relations. These became challenged by Russia's undeclared conflict in the EU's Eastern neighborhood. The hybrid nature of this conflict and its 'multi-modality' generated a new range of security threats on the EU's Eastern periphery and NATO's Eastern flank. How did this happen, and what is the background of such a reality?

Since the implementation of the Eastern Partnership project[3] – the initiative established by the EU in 2009, to improve political and economic relations with the post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the Eastern Partnership countries, especially Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, have become theaters of geopolitical competition between the European Union and

---

[1] Dr. Vira Ratsiborynska is a Visiting Scholar at the Research Division of the NATO Defense College (NDC). The views expressed are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of the NATO Defense College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

[2] NATO Secretary General, Remarks at the ACT Transformation Seminar, Washington DC, March 25, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_118430.htm (accessed 15 March 2016).

[3] The Eastern Partnership program is the EU's initiative to improve its political and economic relations with the post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. EU-Eastern Partnership countries relations were to be promoted through trade and economic agreements such as the Association agreement, but also through democratic institution-building and multilevel cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries.

Russia. Since the Eastern Partnership project was launched by the EU, Vladimir Putin has continued pursuing an assertive policy aimed at bringing the Eastern Partnership countries into the Eurasian integration project or the Eurasian 'civilizational space'.

The competition between the European model of integration and Russia's Eurasian model has led to considerable differentiation among the Eastern Partnership countries. As recent events in this region have shown, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have decided to follow the modernization course proposed to them by the European Union and they signed the Association agreement with the EU in 2014, while Armenia and Belarus have chosen the Russian geopolitical model and Azerbaijan has not committed firmly to either course.

Since the initial launch of the Eastern Partnership initiative, Ukraine has become a contested space between Russia's Eurasian model of integration and progression towards EU association. The Euromaidan events of 2013-2014 led to the ousting of the pro-Russian regime of President Yanukovych and its replacement with a pro-western government. Given its failure to prevent Ukraine from establishing closer links with the EU and keep it completely in Russia's orbit, Moscow invaded and annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in March 2014. In this struggle for what could be described as "Eurasian dominance," Ukraine is not only a testing ground for a transformation of the EU and NATO security model in this region. It also serves as a persistently troublesome example of the divided and disputed peripheral region between the EU and Russia. It illustrates that, while the period of the so-called Cold War might be over, the geopolitical struggle over the region continues.

Faced with these developments and given the resulting geopolitical situation, the need arises for the EU and NATO to coordinate their efforts and join forces in addressing two urgent questions: how to confront Russia's geopolitical strategy in Ukraine and in the other Eastern Partnership countries, and how to restore peace and security in the region.

The Warsaw Summit in July 2016 intensified EU-NATO cooperation in dealing with the strategic challenges facing Europe, and placed new emphasis on EU-NATO-Eastern Partnership countries relations as a possible basis for conflict resolution in the region. This Summit provided a policy guideline for EU-NATO cooperation, related to the new hybrid threat environment created by Russia's actions in the Eastern neighborhood.

This research analyzes the political, geopolitical and ideological features of Vladimir Putin's actions in achievement of the Eurasian Union project. It will be argued that a tool such as hybrid warfare supports the realization of this ideological project. The conclusions will provide possible solutions to the issues raised.

Geopolitics in Russia's hybrid war

The post-Cold War unipolar system of international relations is currently changing: the world is becoming multipolar. As a result, the geopolitical ambitions of powers to the East of the EU, such as Russia, are growing. This may constitute a threat for the underdeveloped system of European security in this Eastern periphery. In the absence of a combined and strengthened EU and NATO defense and security system, and given the EU's inability to quickly address common security threats at regional and international level, the threat of Russia's hybrid warfare to the security and stability of the Eastern Partnership countries further fuels the struggle between the different geopolitical powers.

Figure 1: Territorial conflicts in the Eastern periphery of the European Union[4]

The aggravation of the tensions between the West and Russia can lead not only to a re-exacerbation of the so-called frozen conflicts in the countries of the Eastern Partnership region (e.g. Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh), but also to new territorial conflicts within Eastern Partnership countries, similar to what happened in eastern Ukraine and in Crimea (**Figure 1, 2**). This deterioration of relations can also lead to a destabilization of the immediate neighborhood, which can in turn create further conflict zones. The destabilization of the region, if security does not improve, might result in a regional shift of the "spheres of influence." As a consequence, the pro-Eurasian model of integration would be imposed

not only on the countries of the Eastern periphery that already seem to be firmly under the Kremlin's control (Belarus and Armenia), but also on more pro-European countries affected by territorial conflicts such as those in eastern Ukraine, eastern Moldova (Transnistria) and parts of northern Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). The latter can, for obvious reasons, have a dramatic impact on the pro-European development model and further weaken it in the other parts of the region not yet affected by territorial disputes, for example in the central and western parts of Ukraine or in the remaining parts of Moldova and Georgia (**Figure 2**).

4   S. Pugsley and F. Wesslau (eds.), *Life in the Grey Zones – Reports from Europe's breakaway regions*, European Council for Foreign Relations, http://www.ecfr.eu/wider/specials/life_in_the_grey_zones (original map, accessed 29 March 2016), adapted by the author.

Figure 2: Overview of areas in Eastern Partnership countries affected (Transnistria, Crimea, eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) and not yet affected by territorial conflicts involving Russia[5]

Russia's influence on the Eastern Partnership countries is not only based on its role in the aforementioned territorial conflicts, but also on energy and economic interdependence. This interdependence could lead to a new form of interaction between the two rival models of integration and thus, in turn, to a convergent model which is neither completely pro-European nor pro-Eurasian.

The creation of such a convergence model could be considered a victory of sorts for Russia. In order to dilute and weaken the pro-European model within partnership countries, Moscow is trying to undermine stability through different hybrid warfare methods. These include political, economic and energy pressure as well as deliberate coercion, extending to information warfare and propaganda, ideological warfare and other possible means of influencing the local populations. These latter methods may polarize local populations and undermine the overall security of the region. Or, as Russian security analyst Vladimir Levin puts it: "In case of necessity Moscow might neutralize all US efforts by local supporters and friends, behind the scene intrigues, by destabilizing activity and as the last resort by covert actions."[6]

In Russia's attempt to counter what it considers "Western" encroachment and to regain geopolitical dominance over the Eastern Partnership region, "the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."[7] This means that a shift has taken place, away from the exclusive use of brute military force and in favor of a broad array of other

---

[5]   'V. Ratsiborynska, 2016.

[6]   I. Isakova, *Russian governance in the 21st century. Geostrategy, geopolitics and governance,* USA, Frank Cass, 2005, pp.116-117.

measures such as political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military approaches. These are combined and coordinated to increase "protest potential of the population" in the target countries. It would be wrong, however, to think that Russia by doing so has discarded the military option; it has just changed the character of its operations. All the aforementioned measures are "supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special operations forces."[8]

In this new Russian geopolitical calculus, ideological, informational and political components serve as a method "to achieve political objectives without the utilization of military force."[9] It also has an ideological or instrumental perspective, to "shape a favorable response from the world community to the utilization of military force."[10] While Russia is trying to restore its geopolitical influence and presence in the EU's Eastern neighborhood, and to maximize its asymmetric advantages there, the West is trying to adapt to this new geopolitical and military reality – a reality that Russia, consistent with the vision of its long-time ruler Vladimir Putin, is constructing in what the Kremlin considers its Western periphery. This vision has been considerably influenced by so-called Eurasian theories.

Eurasian theories in the geopolitics of Russia

One crucial pillar of Russia's ideological justification for reasserting its grip on its neighbors is based on the so-called Eurasian theories, used as a spiritual foundation by Moscow. When trying to understand these theories, it is important to first refer to the historical concept of Eurasia. Russian historians and theorists describe this geographical area, located partly in Asia and partly in Europe,[11] as the "sacred space" of Russia or as "a vast area in the north-central part of the continent ruled from Moscow or Saint Petersburg."[12] This area, defined by particular ideological,[13] ethnical and historical characteristics, combines certain aspects of European and Asian cultures.[14]

The area described by theorists as Eurasia was acquired by Russia through conquest or colonization.[15] This is the basis for Henry Kissinger's argument that "imperialism has been Russia's basic foreign policy as it has expanded from the region around Moscow to the shores of the Pacific, the gates of the Middle East and the center of Europe, relentlessly subjugating weaker neighbors and seeking to overawe those not under its direct control."[16] Russian imperialism was strongly influenced by Eurasian theories.

However, closer analysis of Russia's imperialism reveals that it was mainly motivated by the wish for

[7] V. Gerasimov, *Tsennost nauki v predvidenii,* Voenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer 8(476), 27 February, 2013, http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632 (accessed 8 April 2016).

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Voennaja Doctrina Rossijskoj Federazii, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 5 February 2010, translation by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010 russia_military_doctrine.pdf (accessed 15 April 2016).

[10] *Ibid*.

[11] Geographically, Eurasia was classified by classical Eurasian theorists as a territory that includes the territories of the former Russian empire but also of Iran and Asia Minor (Anatolia). After 1990, Russian Neo-Eurasianists defined Eurasia as a supercontinent that encompasses the former Soviet republics and also Eurasian countries, belonging to the geopolitical Moscow-Delhi-Beijing axis, that oppose the idea of a unipolar world.

[12] D. Trenin, *The end of Eurasia. Russia on the border between geopolitics and globalization,* Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, pp. 30-31.

[13] According to the Eurasian theorists Christianity was a cultural foundation to unite Eurasia.

[14] M. Laruelle, *La quête d'une identité impériale. Le néo-eurasisme dans la Russie contemporaine,* Paris, Petra éditions, 2004, p.314.

[15] N. Danilevsky, *Rossiya i Yevropa. Vzglyad na kulturniye i politicheskiye otnosheniya slavyanskogo mira k romano-germanskomu,* 6th ed., St. Petersburg, Glagol/ St. Petersburg University, 1995, p.19.

[16] H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy,* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1994, pp.24-25.

geographic expansion, i.e. by the wish to acquire control over new territories and waters. This factor determined Russia's strategic thinking, which concentrated on the exploitation of the natural resources of these territories and on the creation of defensive military buffer zones and zones of political influence. And, while the actual geographical expansion was realized through military means, Russia's geopolitical strategy of taking control over new territories and their natural resources was complemented by a civilizational approach. Through the often forced dissemination of Russian culture, religion, values, ethnicity, identity and language, Russia wanted to achieve a maximum of "unity" amongst the conquered populations so as to strengthen its geostrategic position, extend its spheres of influence, give the empire a specific Russian identity and consolidate its borders. This consistently used approach did not effectively change after the revolution that ended the Empire of the tsars and that led to the creation of the Soviet Union.

The breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in an at least temporary end to Moscow's absolute dominance in the region and in the creation of a new geopolitical reality, described by Vladimir Putin as the "biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century."[17] The USSR ceased to exist and split up into many, as Moscow saw it, "newly created nations" – a development that pushed the Kremlin to search for new ways to protect old borders and to reunite these countries into one big and powerful Russia.[18]

It was at this point, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar superpower system in 1990, that Eurasian theories re-emerged.[19] Based on the concept that "Russia was slighted by the West,"[20] the purpose was to reunite all the countries of the former USSR into one powerful Russia. This concept found fertile ground in a country whose population was pervaded by a feeling of being unjustly treated and of being on the wrong side of history in this new, unipolar world order.

This Neo-Eurasian theory also served as the ideological basis for Moscow's restoration of the Russian empire in the post-Soviet space. When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, this was welcomed and strongly supported by the Neo-Eurasianists. They approved of his decisive and aggressive policy towards the former Soviet republic of Georgia and other states in the South Caucasus. They felt fulfilled again when Putin, at the 2001 APEC Summit, declared that "Russia always felt itself a Eurasian country."[21] For them, this was the "official declaration of Russia's Eurasian policy at a global forum" and the "policy of Eurasianism in action."[22]

When analyzing the main ideological and geopolitical concepts of Neo-Eurasianism, it is important to take into account the concept of the *Russian nation* as established by the founder of Neo-Eurasianism, Aleksandr Dugin, in his book *Fundaments of geopolitics*. According to Dugin, Russians were not expanding to conquer "living spaces"; rather, they had a special civilizational mission. This mission, according to him, was based on a deep understanding of the necessity to unite all of Eurasia.[23]

In order to be able to achieve this vision, Dugin

---

[17] V. Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, Speech of the President of Russia, Addresses to the Federal Assembly, 2005, *http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029 type82912_87086.shtml* (accessed 26 April 2016).

[18] As far back as 1990, Russian historian and Nobel Prize winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn published "a plan of Russian union that would include the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russian-populated provinces of Northern Kazakhstan."

[19] In Russian history, Eurasianism theory is not a new concept but a theory that had already evolved through several stages, from classical Eurasianism in 1920-1930 to the Eurasian concepts of Leonid Gumilev (1956-1992) and to the Neo-Eurasian developments that appeared after 1990 (founder A. Dugin).

[20] A. Solzhenitsyn, *Rossiya v obvale*, Moscow, Russki put, 1998, pp. 44-45.

[21] G. Mostafa, *The concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian policy and its implications*, Journal of Eurasian Studies, Volume 4, issue 2, July 2013.

[22] *Ibid.*

considered it essential to eliminate the geopolitical and ideological reasons that contributed to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. According to his theories, the geopolitical reasons for the USSR's failure could be eliminated either by enlarging Russia's territory as far as the oceans in the West (Atlantic Ocean) and in the South (Indian Ocean), or by the creation of neutral political blocs in Europe and Asia, not under the control of any superpower. Dugin also identifies another factor that could contribute to the successful geopolitical rebirth of an enlarged and powerful Russia as alignment with potential partners such as France and Germany,[24] as well as China, India, Iran, South Korea, Turkmenistan and Turkey.[25]

The ideological reasons that, in his opinion, caused the downfall of the Soviet Union could be eliminated through the introduction of national and spiritual elements characterizing the *Russian nation* (as defined by him) – elements that had not been present in the communist ideology of the USSR.[26] When referring to these ideological reasons, Aleksandr Dugin particularly emphasizes the need for the reunification of the *Russian nation* which, according to him, is a historic unity with all the qualities of a stable political entity. His Russian nation is ethnically, culturally, psychologically and religiously united. He claims that, unlike many other nations, it emerged as the leader of a particular civilization that has all the distinguishing features of an original and universal historic phenomenon. The *Russian nation* not only gave the Soviet Union its ethnic basis, but also expressed a special concept based on an exceptional civilizational idea.[27] This approach, as Dugin defines it, can be linked to the "national and geopolitical re-birth of Russia," which "is tied up with the re-birth of a national idea as a messianic idea, which means a universal idea."[28] It is centered around the concept of the 'Russkij mir' ("Russian World"); for Dugin, it applies to the enlarged Russia, to the renaissance of the Eurasian and Russian civilizations that oppose Atlanticism and the American New World Order, and that include all the territories of the former Russian empire and the ex-USSR.[29,30]

Since the re-emergence of Russian Neo-Eurasianism after 1991, many of its military and political proponents in the country have grounded their actions and ideas on the concepts of 'Russkij mir' and on the special civilizational mission of the Russian nation. This has affected not only Russia's domestic politics, but also its foreign policy vis-a-vis the newly independent, ex-USSR countries.[31,32]

[23] A. Dugin, *Fundaments of geopolitics,* Moscow, Arktogeya, 2000.

[24] According to A. Dugin, geopolitical axes are structured as follows: Russia/Europe; Russia/Islamic world; and Russia/China (footnote 23).

[25] A. Dugin, Est li druzja u Rossii?,Vremya Novostei, 23 August 2006. A. Dugin, Evrazijskij revanch Rossiji. Bitva za Rossiju, Moscow, Algoritm, 2014, p. 18.

[26] A. Dugin, op.cit, footnote 23.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] I. Vasilenko, Geopolitika sovremennogo mira, Moscow, Gardariki, 2007, p. 138.

[29] A. Dugin, Ukraina: moja vojna. Geopolitigeskij dnevnik. Moscow, Zentrpoligraph, 2015.

[30] A. Dugin, Novaja formula Putina. Osnovu etigeskoj politiki, Moscow, Algoritm, 2014. In this book A. Dugin states that Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are part of the enlarged Russia. The Baltic States and Western Ukraine may partially belong to it, too.

[31] Military proponents following Early Duginian Eurasianism include Lieutenant General Nikolai Klokotov and General Leonid Ivashov. Political and civic proponents or Duginism followers include Vladimir Putin, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Gennady Zyuganov, Dmitry Rogozin, Sergey Glazyev, Ivan Demidov, Igor Panarin, Mikhail Leontyev, Dmitry Kiselyov, Alexander Prokhanov, Avigdor Eskin, Yuri Solonin and Maxim Shevchenko.

[32] D. Shlapentokh, *Implementation of an ideological paradigm: Early Duginian Eurasianism and Russia's post-Crimean discourse*, Contemporary Security Policy, number 35, issue 3, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, November 2014, p. 384.

Putin's geopolitical goals and the realization of his vision of a Eurasian empire

When Vladimir Putin rose to power he had a firm strategic vision. He not only wanted to consolidate his strong grip on leadership, but he was also determined to strengthen the country's national and geopolitical interests as he saw them, both inside Russia and in its Near Abroad. In order to increase Russia's power on the stage of world politics, his major foreign policy emphasis involved reinforcing the country's role in the geopolitical competition with the USA, the EU and China, and consolidating Russia's position in the CIS. In this endeavor to regain influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union and to preserve the CIS region as a strategic buffer zone, the Eurasian theories became a source of inspiration for Putin.

Alexander Dugin's concepts, such as Russia's civilizational mission, Russian nationhood (narodnost) and 'Russkij mir,' became the dogmatic core of Vladimir Putin's Eurasian project. Inspired by Dugin's theories, Putin created his own political ideology, centered on the idea of a supranational Russian entity. The scope of this entity – with a fierce nationalism for *Homeland Russia* at its heart – goes "beyond the boundaries of territory and citizenship."[33] Concepts such as an integrative patriotism,[34] which "encompassed pride in Russia's diversity, its history and its place in the world"[35] and sovereign democracy and the "conviction that Russians should define their own democracy and

protect themselves from values exported from outside,"[36] became the essential elements of Putin's ideology.

Moreover, in order for Putin to realize his geopolitical ambitions to form a unique, distinctive Russian identity that, from his point of view, had to encompass the entire territory of the former Soviet Union, *Russian specificity* or the uniqueness of Russian unique nationhood had to become a cornerstone of his power. This Russian nationhood concept that laid down the basic provisions of the Russian Federation's foreign policy was based on the uniqueness of 'Russkij mir' that, in Putin's imperialist perception, was to unite everybody who cherishes the Russian language and Russian culture, both inside Russia and abroad.[37] In addition to the ideas and concepts mentioned so far, another important element was added to Putin's ideology: religion. Orthodox Christianity served as a means to unite the East-Slavonic people around orthodox Christian cultural norms and values,[38] and to reflect "the larger identity of Rus' as the people of Eurasia divided by the borders that had sprung up since 1991."[39]

Vladimir Putin has pursued several goals with the creation of his ideological concept: securing Russia's position in the CIS, preserving Russian national interests in these territories and, finally, rallying Russian ethnic minorities, speakers and like-minded nations under the banner of Russia. Since the year 2000, Putin's revival of Russian imperialism has been based not only on a set of well calculated

---

[33] R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

[34] In 2008 Vladimir Putin appointed Ivan Demidov, a supporter of Dugin, as the head of the Directorate for Ideological Work of United Russia's Central Executive Committee.

[35] R. Sakwa, *Putin. Russia's choice*, London and New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 216.

[36] M. Light, *Russia and Europe and the process of EU enlargement*, in The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy, ed. Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 83-96.

[37] S. Lavrov, Russkij mir na puti k konsolidazii, Rossijskaja Gazeta, http://rg.ru/2015/11/02/lavrov.html (accessed 13 May 2016). V. Veritov, Russkij mir-ideologigeskij mif ili politigeskaja realonost?, Politigeskaja Rossija, http://politrussia.com/society/russkiy-mir-918/ (accessed 14 May 2016).

[38] Russkoje edinstvo, Patriarch Kiril: Russkij mir – mir vostognux slavan, Megregionalnaja obhestvennaja organizazija "Russkoje edinstvo." http://russkoe-edinstvo.com/stati/item/7-russkiy-mir (accessed 20 May 2016).

[39] R. Sakwa, op.cit, footnote 35, p. 227.

direct policies and measures aimed at reestablishing Russia as a global power, but also on less obvious soft power means such as instrumentalizing the Russian language, Russian culture, the Russian nationhood concept and Russian orthodox Christian values that make up his version of the 'Russkij mir' in Russia itself and beyond its current geographical boundaries. These powerful components of the 'Russkij mir' serve a double purpose in Putin's geopolitical calculations: they are means not only of exercising Russia's spiritual and cultural influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union, but also of bringing forth a new identity for Russia and of maintaining control over neighbors and over the minds of Russian speakers. The goal is to "unite not so much the lands, but rather peoples and the citizens in the name of a common state body."[40] These soft power techniques have eroded the national identities of each state in the CIS, and have prevented the newly (re)born nations from achieving national consolidation.

But while Moscow's soft power techniques based on Russia's cultural, religious and linguistic attraction proved to be powerful vehicles for spreading its ideological, informational and psychological influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union, they were also extensively and aggressively combined with hard policy tactics. Intimidation, coercion, energy-related pressure, economic control, the establishing of military bases beyond its own borders and military force were all used by the Kremlin when CIS members were not willing to follow Russia's in pursuit of its Eurasian project.

In addition to these soft and hard power techniques directed at the former Soviet republics, Vladimir

Putin's course of action has also been marked by his other policy actions, directly targeting ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living there. The "passportization" of ethnic Russians (or just Russian speakers) outside of Russia has become an influential method. This process of Moscow inducing mostly former Soviet passport holders in neighboring countries to apply for Russian citizenship, thus providing grounds to declare it in Russia's national interest to "protect" these citizens as it sees fit, was employed in regions like Abkhazia, South Ossetia and also in Crimea. It clearly illustrates the intention of the Russian geopolitical model: to reunite the former parts of the Soviet Union into one powerful Eurasian Union under Moscow's control.

The "mission" of Putin has also been supported by a political and military doctrine[41] that defines Russia as the only protector of ethnic Russian minority rights in the former Soviet republics. This specific Russian claim to safeguard ethnic Russians, of whom more than 25 million are living in the 14 former Soviet republics (excluding Russia),[42] was even included in the text of the Concept of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, proclaiming Russia's intention to exercise "its sovereign rights and jurisdiction while ensuring the unconditional observance of Russian national interests."[43] As a consequence, this Russian policy action towards the CIS has become one of Vladimir Putin's measures to accelerate the formation of the Eurasian Union. And it is a process which had started long before the official proclamation of this Union.[44]

Influenced and motivated by Dugin's Eurasian theories, Vladimir Putin has, since coming to power

---

[40] Euractiv, *Moscow fleshes out 'Eurasian Union' plans,* Euractiv, http://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/moscow-fleshes-out-eurasian-union-plans/ (accessed 27 May 2016).

[42] Called the Karaganov Doctrine. This doctrine was implemented by Sergei Karaganov, the Advisor of the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of Vladimir Putin from 2001.

[43] V. Shlapentokh et al., *The new Russian diaspora. Russian minorities in the former Soviet Republics*, New York, M.E. Sharpe Armonk, 1994.

[44] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDED-EDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F (accessed 10 June 2016).

in 2000, been busy preparing a fertile soil for the seeds of his ambitious Eurasian project – the project which is nothing less than to unite the former Soviet states ideologically, politically, economically and militarily into one reborn Russian empire.

This was also catalyzed by external events. The attacks of 11 September 2001 and their consequences, as well as the eastward enlargement of both the European Union and NATO, created a new geopolitical reality to the West of Russia that convinced Putin to act decisively. The Eastern Partnership program implemented by the EU in 2009 was perceived by Putin as a threat to Russia's national interests in "its backyard," the neighborhood it shares with the Europeans. This conviction pushed Putin to intensify his political and military campaigns, so as to protect what he perceived as Russia's vital national interests in the lands "lost" during the collapse of the Soviet Union and to conduct and speed up his expansionist policy towards these countries.

So the Eurasian Union became the Russian president's ambitious geopolitical and military project of "building a quasi-European Union out of former Soviet states."[45] The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), created in 2014-2015, is aimed at reviving "the former Soviet Union in a different form"[46] and at uniting the CIS countries, not only politically or economically but also militarily and ideologically, under the institutional framework of the EEU and under the political will of Moscow. The integration of the CIS into a common economic space was supposed to speed up the political integration process, and also to unite the states concerned with regard to security policy areas within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. For Putin, each member of the Eurasian Economic Union has to contribute to strengthening Russia's role in

the world in one way or another: economically or geopolitically, as a Union of energy-rich countries such as Russia and Kazakhstan; or by using geopolitically important countries such as Ukraine and Belarus to increase Russia's bargaining power with the West. The overall goal is to increase Russia's geopolitical and geoeconomic significance in global affairs and, at the same time, to realize its military strategy by strengthening its role as a military superpower and by defining and securing recognition as the military arm of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Influence of Russia's geopolitical strategies on the Eastern neighborhood's security and consequences for the EU

Every attempt by the CIS countries at deviating from Vladimir Putin's set course of action, let alone at a rapprochement with the European Union or the NATO, has been perceived by Russia's president as a threat to his geopolitical objectives. And, while he had set up the Eurasian Economic Union as an alternative to the European Union, Putin, as mentioned before, moved the project forward not only by ideological means but also through military and political tactics, seeking to "convince" the Eastern Partnership countries, by whatever means necessary, to join his geopolitical Union project. In this endeavor, hybrid warfare operations or transnational destabilizing strategies have become an influential technique to persuade or simply force countries to submit to Russia's geopolitical will. The primary target for these tactics are the states in the EU's Eastern neighborhood, where Putin managed to (re)gain considerable influence and was relatively successful at undermining and weakening Western influence, thus dissuading those countries from

---

[45] The project of the Eurasian Economic Union was initiated in 2007 (R. Gidadhubli, *Eurasian Economic Union: Russia's quest to reemerge as a major global power*, IUP, 2013, p.1).

[46] *Ibid*, p. 5.

further rapprochement.

Russia's hybrid warfare has combined different military and non-military means, such as disinformation or propaganda campaigns (including ideological, linguistic and religious narratives), denying facts, deeply penetrating other countries' state and military apparatus, provocation, political repression, energy supply disruptions, trade and cyber wars, rapid military operations and coercion in the Eastern Partnership region (**Figure 3**).[47]

Multi-vector hybrid warfare has been based on the "widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures" that were "implemented through the involvement of the [local] population" and "supplemented by covert military means."[48] Based on the principles of expansionist geostrategy, Moscow's hybrid warfare is a gradual penetration of – and step-by-step expansion of Russia's influence in – the target country, with the aim of establishing direct control.[49]
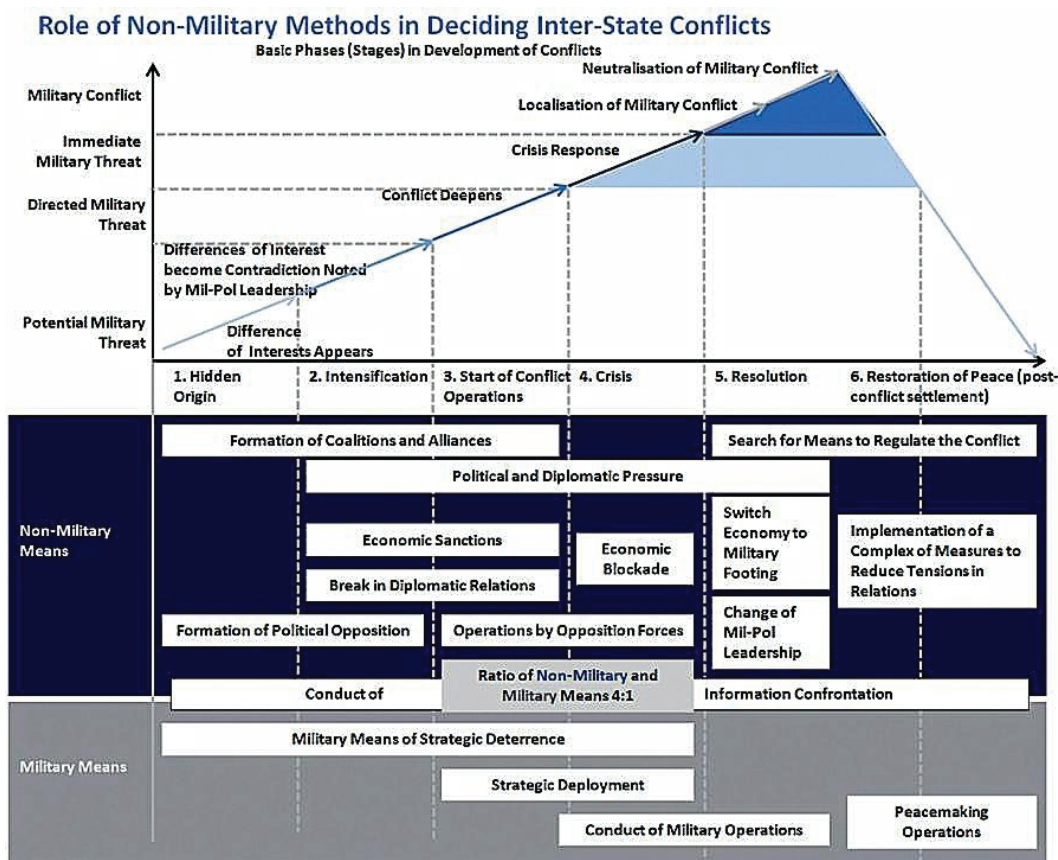

Figure 3: Illustration on crisis/ conflict phases accompanying General Gerasimov's remarks to the Russian Academy of Military Science[50]

[47] V. Gerasimov, *The value of science in prediction,* Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kurier, number 8, 27 February 2013, http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf (accessed 20 June 2016). M. Kofman, *Russian hybrid warfare and other darks arts*, War on the rocks, http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/ (accessed 25 June 2016).

[48] F. Hill and C. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, Washington, Brookings, 2013, p.337.

[49] A. Golzov, *Geopolitika ta politigna geografiya,* Kyiv, Zentr ugbovoi literaturu, 2012, p. 287.

[50] D. Johnson, *Russia's Approach to Conflict – Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence*, Research Paper, n.111, NATO Defense College Rome, Rome, April 2015, http://www.ndc.nato.int /news/news.php?icode=797 (accessed 7 April 2016).

These tools were extensively employed by Russia in the Eastern Partnership region, to exploit and fuel pre-existing historic, cultural or ethnic divisions and domestic weaknesses of each member of the Eastern Partnership project (or create them if need be). The Kremlin's tactics were supposed to rattle and to surprise the leadership of the targeted states, to sow confusion and compromise their decision-making processes, and to limit the effects and the scope of actions and measures taken by these countries. Russia's aim in pursuing these tactics in the Eastern neighborhood was to make its geopolitical calculations work out, i.e. to lead the Eastern Partnership countries off their "Euro-Atlantization" path and back into Moscow's orbit to rejoin the other ex-USSR satellites. And, by doing so, of course effectively blocking any further eastward enlargements of EU or NATO. Some of the most effective tools in the Kremlin's arsenal are discussed in greater detail below.

Russia's information warfare has included, amongst a wide variety of operations, disinformation and propaganda campaigns. The "forms and methods" of this warfare are "constantly being improved,"[51] and have become a strong instrument to steer and modify an adversary's behavior. It has been used by Moscow to spread political and economic insecurity, and to divide and fragment target societies, both among the Eastern Partnership project participants and in the EU itself. One of the core elements of this kind of warfare is *reflexive control,*[52] a means "of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decisions desired by the initiator of the action."[53] By using a double-edged approach, Russia pursues a political and a military strategy. On the one hand, from the informational point of view, it influences an opponent and his channels of information by manipulating the flow and the content of information, in order for them to reflect Moscow's final objectives. On the other hand, from a military perspective, Russia's distortion of information provides fertile ground for possible future military or political interventions. This means that this approach of information warfare can serve as a camouflage or deception technique (maskirovka), to hide military weaknesses of the Russian forces or to confuse opponents about the country's real military capacities and goals.

The point of developing the country's asymmetric warfare capabilities was to create or hone instruments for "spreading despair and disinformation"[54] and for "reducing the fighting potential of the enemy."[55] By using these methods in its hybrid warfare, Russia did not have to officially declare wars on those opposing its geopolitical project, but was able to make use of this destabilizing strategy to achieve its military and political objectives in the EU's Eastern neighborhood in the most cost-effective manner. For the Kremlin, the objective was clear: distortion of reality and facts by applying informational (and other) pressure in the Eastern Partnership countries, in order to reverse the prevalently positive perception of the Europeanization process. But the impact and the scope of misinformation and of misguidance went further than that. It was to distract the target countries from Russia's real military objectives, to "neutralize"

---

[51] V. Gerasimov, *Tsennost nauki v predvidenii*, Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer 8 (476), 27 February 2013, http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632 (accessed 6 July 2016).

[52] Reflexive control as a method of information warfare was employed by both Soviet and Russian governments and has been used on tactical and operational levels in order to control the adversary's decision-making process.

[53] T. Thomas, *Russia's reflexive control theory and the military*, Journal of Slavic military studies, number 17, 2004, pp. 237-256.C. Kasapoglu, *Russia's renewed military thinking: non-linear warfare and reflexive control,* NATO Defense College, number 121, November 2015.

[54] M. Galeotti, *Hybrid War and little green men: How it works, and how it doesn't,* New York University, 2015, http://www.e-ir.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ukraine-and-Russia-E-IR.pdf (accessed 14 July 2016).

[55] M. Galeotti, *The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian non-linear war,* 6 July 2014, https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/ (accessed 21 July 2016).

and to confuse their "operational thinking,"[56] to sow discord both inside the Eastern Partnership countries and also between them, and ultimately bring them to concede to Russia's demands and abandon their European perspectives and attempts at institutional changes. These ambitious and large-scale disinformation campaigns and the spreading of the Kremlin-favorable mindsets of the 'Russkij mir' in the Eastern Partnership member states have been conducted through social media channels, but also by using more classical mass media forms. Combined with the mobilization of the local Russian population and the penetration of the local security and state apparatus and command structures, this has helped Russia to accomplish its political as well as its military objectives.

Since the implementation of the Eastern Partnership project in 2009 the participating countries, which Russia considers to be countries in which it has privileged interests, have become prime targets for the Kremlin (for Georgia this was the case as early as 2008, because of its NATO aspirations). As a consequence, they have not only suffered the ideological and political components of Russia's hybrid warfare, but were also at the receiving end of an array of military measures. The rapprochement of the Eastern Partnership countries with the EU and NATO, and what was generally perceived in Moscow as their "Westernization," were seen by Russia as an existential threat that had to be dealt with immediately. Putin made his stance clear when he publicly declared, at the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Bucharest in 2008, that "the presence of a powerful military bloc on our borders, whose members are guided, in particular, by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, will be seen by Russia as a direct threat to our country's security."[57]

The Russian military intervention in Georgia's South Ossetia region in 2008, and the unilateral recognition of the two independent separatist republics on Georgian territory by Moscow (Abkhazia was only recognized by the Kremlin after the South Ossetia war), marked the end of Georgia's territorial integrity. The two frozen conflicts within its boundaries also spelled the end for any immediate Georgian prospects of NATO membership. Together with the frozen conflict in Moldova's Transnistria region (in which Russian troops are still present today) and the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh (in which Moscow was able to take advantage of both warring sides), these destabilized the Eastern neighborhood area as a whole and made it more vulnerable to Russian influences. These examples illustrate how, through cultural and ideological means, Russia first created or fomented internal unrest and social division in these countries before physically splitting them up by military means, thus creating unstable pro-European peripheries that can be manipulated at any given time through its (pro-)Russian exclaves or bridgeheads (as seen in Figures 1 and 2). By doing so, Russia also preserved its position to counter the West's influence.

In the case of Ukraine, the formal process of "Europeanization" began with the implementation of the Eastern Partnership project in 2009. This then continued with the milestone negotiations of the Association agreement with the EU. Russia energetically and profoundly objected to this development by employing a broad selection of the tools it had at its disposal to stop the process, but was in the end unable to maintain control of Ukraine's pro-Russian Yanukovych regime when it crumbled and was eventually ousted by the so-called

---

[56] T.L. Thomas, "Russia's reflexive control theory and the military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies,* number 17, 2004, pp.237-250.

[57] H. Adomeit, *Russia and its near neighbourhood: competition and conflict with the EU,* Warsaw, College of Europe Natolin Campus, 2011, p. 31.

Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014. But this defeat only made Putin more determined to never accept a real independence of Ukraine (from Moscow), and to prevent any further rapprochement of the second biggest (in terms of population) former Soviet republic with the European Union and NATO. As early as the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Bucharest on 4 April 2008, Vladimir Putin had threatened that "if Ukraine entered NATO, Russia would detach eastern Ukraine (and presumably the Crimean peninsula) and graft them onto Russia and, thus, Ukraine would 'cease to exist as a state.'"[58] So it did not come as a big surprise that, long before Euromaidan, Ukraine became the Kremlin's laboratory for perfecting its hybrid warfare tactics. And it was not until much later that the West even acknowledged that Putin was waging such a war and tried to react. But by then Ukraine had already been hit by all stages of Putin's asymmetrical warfare arsenal: from information manipulation, cultural, military and political penetration, up to the hard power tactics of coercing Ukraine in 2010 to extend Russia's lease of the Black Sea Fleet's naval facilities in Crimea until at least 2042. All of these clearly asserted Moscow's interests on Ukrainian territory.

Another stage of the war had meanwhile already been going on for much longer: the infiltration of all Ukrainian military, security and administrative structures by (pro-)Russians. This of course facilitated, and prepared the ground for, Putin's later military operations in Crimea and in the eastern part of Ukraine. Russia's long-term goal was "to impact not only the enemy army, but also its society, understood in terms of its cultural as well as its physical aspects."[59] The Euromaidan protests, in this regard, only accelerated the Kremlin's military and political actions in Ukraine. These culminated in the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia

in 2014, and in the ongoing occupation of part of eastern Ukraine by "local separatists" and Russian "volunteers," with an astonishing amount of Russian-made military-grade armor and equipment at their disposal that Moscow maintains they "captured from the Ukrainian Army."

Ukraine thus also became the testing ground for Russia's military hybrid warfare tools. These were employed both in Crimea and later in the eastern part of Ukraine, where "little green men" and "humanitarian convoys" were supposed to hide the de-facto invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory by Russian special (and presumably later also other) forces. Russia's tactic of denying any military presence in Ukraine contributed to the confusion and indecisiveness of the Ukrainian forces and their commanders, and to the erosion of their combat-readiness in this undeclared war. This military tactic also gave Russia the possibility of using this time to its advantage, while keeping its military options open and flexible with regard to further possible interventions in other parts of Ukraine. This *maskirovka* became the hallmark of Russia's operations to paralyze any Ukrainian resistance, and to quickly neutralize any remaining and uncompromised operational capacities the Ukrainian forces might still have possessed at this point.

Russia's hybrid warfare not only paralyzed Ukraine but also the West, and delayed its reaction; it made the West vulnerable and indecisive. By seizing parts of the Ukrainian territory and, in doing so, compromising the country's territorial integrity, Russia managed to change the security environment of the EU and its neighborhood as a whole. The West was utterly unprepared for Russia's hybrid warfare, and for its use of a combination of different

---

[58] *Ibid*, p. 32.

[59] M. Barabanov, K. Makienko, and R. Pukhov, *Military reform: toward the new look of the Russian army,* Valdai Discussion Club, Moscow, July 2012, p.9, available at http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Military_reform_eng.pdf (accessed 29 July 2016).

non-military and military means in the Eastern neighborhood region to undermine the principles of the European security order.

Energy as a destabilizing factor in Russia's hybrid warfare

In its destabilization of the Eastern Partnership countries in general – and Ukraine in particular – by military and non-military means, Russia considers energy an important non-military element in its hybrid warfare toolbox, not only against these countries but also against the West. Russia's energy resources are used as a weapon to accomplish its political goals, to increase energy insecurity and to put additional political and economic pressure on EU member states and neighbouring countries that depend on Moscow for their energy supply. This energy weapon is intended to contribute to the realization of both Russia's national and global strategies, whose goals correspond to its geopolitical interests in the EU's shared neighborhood. And, beyond this neighbourhood, energy is used as an offensive tool to destabilize, divide and weaken the European Union.

In its hybrid warfare, the energy dependency of some EU member states and of the Eastern Partnership countries on Russia has been exploited by Moscow as an element to exert pressure on their political decision-making processes, to subjugate them to Russia's will and to further undermine their potential to put up a more effective resistance in economic or energy matters against the Kremlin.

Using energy as one of its hybrid warfare tools, Russia has been weakening Ukraine's energy resilience since the beginning of the war in 2104. During its military operations in the east of Ukraine, Russia for example targeted the country's energy infrastructure such as the gas transportation system. By annexing Crimea, Russia had already reduced Ukraine's energy potential, further compromising the country's position and accelerating its energy exhaustion.

At the same time the occupied territories further swelled the Kremlin's own energy resources, putting additional energy pressure on the West.

The flare-up of the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis that occurred in April 2016 showed that any escalation of the conflict around the disputed Armenian-held enclave endangers Baku's energy export route across the Caucasus. Two pipelines transporting oil and gas from Azerbaijan westwards are located near the Nagorno-Karabakh front lines, putting them within reach of both Russia's influence and of weapon systems supplied to the warring parties should the Kremlin decide to take direct action. Closing this energy route would severely decrease Europe's hopes of reducing its dependence on Russian energy sources.

Considering these aspects, it is clear that Russia's hybrid warfare in the form of its energy manoeuvres against Europe has become a destabilizing strategy with two main objectives: to undermine the EU's energy and infrastructure potential, and that of its neighborhood, and thus create a higher degree of energy dependency; and to sabotage and cripple the EU's and its member states' capacities to quickly and effectively respond to Russia's hybrid warfare threats and actions in general.

Hybrid Conflict, the EU, and NATO: Some Recommendations

The Eurasian project was, and still is, a vehicle for the geopolitical realization of Putin's ambitions to expand Russia's control over the Eastern neighborhood and to restore its sphere of privileged influence in the EU's and Russia's shared neighborhood. The Russian president's project, the creation of an independent Eurasian pole, has been aimed at strengthening his country's hegemony in the Eastern neighborhood and at evening out the regional and global balance of power in the multipolar system of international relations. In order to achieve these geopolitical goals, Vladimir Putin resorted to different hard and soft

power means in the Eastern Partnership countries which, in combination, established the hybrid warfare strategy of Russia's pursuit of dominance in the Eastern neighborhood.

The ideological foundations of Russia's project (such as the Eurasian theories) constitute a basis for the formation of a privileged Russian position on the Eastern periphery of Europe. These foundations, combined with other non-military means and with a destabilizing energy strategy, had proved their usefulness as powerful instruments for forcing the Eastern Partnership countries to submit to Russia's geopolitical will.

Putin's revival of Russian imperialism in the Eastern neighborhood used hybrid warfare tactics to destabilize the region and to make it more vulnerable to the external threat posed by Russia. Moreover, Russia's hybrid warfare in the Eastern neighborhood region was felt far beyond it, seriously challenging the international order and the Euro-Atlantic security reinforcement as a whole.

In March 2015, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg addressed the issues to be discussed during the Warsaw Summit in July 2016. He asked: "How to deal with hybrid warfare? Hybrid is the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries. Others use it to destabilize them … Hybrid warfare is a probe, a test of our resolve to resist and to defend ourselves. And it can be a prelude to a more serious attack; because behind every hybrid strategy, there are conventional forces, increasing the

pressure and ready to exploit any opening. We need to demonstrate that we can and will act promptly whenever and wherever necessary."[60]

Improved cooperation between the EU and NATO was announced at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, which included such common objectives as "countering hybrid threats, enhancing resilience, defense capacity building, cyber defense, maritime security, and exercises."[61] The Warsaw Summit shifted the EU-NATO cooperation from political dialogue and reinforcement of institutional actions between two organizations to the strengthening of resilience commitment on hybrid security threats which will include "analysis, prevention, and early detection, through timely information sharing and, to the extent possible, intelligence sharing between staffs; and cooperating on strategic communication and response."[62]

As agreed at the Warsaw Summit, a comprehensive toolbox on the EU-NATO cooperation efforts towards emerging hybrid threats in the Eastern neighborhood would comprise building resilience on the Eastern flank and enhancing the security capacity measures and defense capabilities of the Eastern Partnership neighbors.[63]

In order to address the hybrid warfare concerns in the Eastern neighborhood, the EU and NATO can work together – i.e. unite their efforts and complement each other's activities. During this process the EU and NATO should be aware that Russia will continue exercising its influence on the region, and will try to regain control over all of the Eastern Partnership

---

[60] *Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar,* North Atlantic Treaty organization, http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118435.htm (accessed 15 September 2016).

[61] *Warsaw Summit Communiqué issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council,* North Atlantic Council, Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 20 September 2016).

[62] *Joint declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization,* North Atlantic Council, Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm (accessed 21 September 2016).

[63] *Warsaw Declaration on Transatlantic Security issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council,* North Atlantic Council, Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133168.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 22 September 2016).

countries. For this reason, coming up with an appropriate and pragmatic strategy concerning the Kremlin while taking into account Moscow's ambitions and the risks the Eastern Partnership region faces can help to draw the future EU-NATO roadmap for the Eastern neighborhood and to establish a strategic perspective on the hybrid conflict in this region. At the same time, the establishment of the right EU-NATO strategic vision for the development of the Eastern neighborhood needs to be aligned with the EU-NATO abilities to satisfy the growing expectations and aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries. This could form a new basis for an updated strategic partnership framework between the EU-NATO and the Eastern Partnership countries, and could eventually lead to the creation of 'a zone of prosperity and a friendly neighborhood' with which the EU and NATO would enjoy the closest possible ties of cooperation.[64]

Such a strategy should be combined with enhancement of the EU-NATO cooperation on countering the Russian hybrid warfare in the Eastern neighborhood. This cooperation could provide guidance for future EU-NATO activities concerning civil and military hybrid techniques in this part of Europe and possible strategic response options. The EU-NATO cooperation should include all relevant actors and instruments that could help to enhance coordination, complementarity and cooperation between the two bodies and create synergies between them. One example where such a synergy would be possible are the bodies working on hybrid threats: the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, the Centre of Excellence and NATO's Hybrid Fusion Cell can unite their efforts on building resilience and prevention and on improving the awareness regarding hybrid threats, both inside the EU and in the partner countries. A synergy effect within these bodies could be achieved

by improving information exchange, and promoting intelligence sharing between them and the Eastern Partnership countries. The EU Hybrid Fusion Cell, the EU-NATO-Eastern Partnership countries' Resilience Support teams, the NATO Centre of Excellence (which involves different Member States and partner organizations) and NATO's Hybrid Fusion Cell could work together on developing a security risk assessment in the Eastern Partnership countries which could combine such measures as the establishment of early warning mechanisms, the development of different hybrid threat scenarios and an identification of hybrid threat indicators in the Eastern Partnership countries. Enhanced strategic communication between these bodies, other relevant actors and the partner countries could contribute to boosting cooperation, interoperability and dialogue on countering hybrid threats and on building security sector capacities in the partner countries.

Since most hybrid threats are of a non-military nature, the EU could play a prominent role in helping the partner countries to build up appropriate resilience mechanisms against hybrid threats; while NATO could play a more influential role in deterrence and defense mechanisms. Combined EU-NATO efforts could be directed towards pushing for modernization and reforms in the Eastern neighborhood region and towards reinforcing capacity and confidence building measures in the security sector. Special attention could be devoted to such areas as situational awareness of hybrid threats, early warning capabilities and threat assessment, strategic communication, non-military crisis management, civil emergency planning and prevention. These are all issues that would contribute to the improvement of the security sector in the Eastern neighborhood, the development of NATO standards, structural changes and interoperability between NATO and Eastern Partnership countries,

[64] Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, *Wider Europe-Neighborhood: A new framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern neighbors,* Commission of the European Communities, COM(2003) 104 final, Brussels, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf (accessed 23 September 2016).

which in turn could lead to a maximization of their capacities and effectiveness in crisis prevention.

Furthermore, the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy tools and missions could contribute to enhancing the security capacities of the Eastern Partnership countries and to fostering situational awareness regarding hybrid threats. These EU mechanisms could include civilian and military hybrid-related training, civil-military education and exercises that comprise hybrid scenarios, development of new military capabilities, enhancement of operational planning, support of border control management, strengthening of early warning capabilities on hybrid threats, assistance in border security, assistance in the protection of key infrastructure, etc.

Another important issue EU-NATO cooperation should focus on is the fight against the Eurasian ideology that the Kremlin is spreading through mass media and other communication channels. Russia's information warfare in the Eastern neighborhood has been used to spread political insecurity and to divide local target populations. Measures that the EU and NATO could take in order to counter Russia's information warfare could be directed towards enhancing EU-NATO strategic communication on narratives that Moscow is using in the Eastern neighborhood. This EU-NATO strategic communication should also focus on the creation of a new European identity in the Eastern Partnership region, based on Western values and norms as well as on ideas of Euro-Atlantic partnership. Such 'Western values-based communication' could stimulate the development of strategic thinking amongst the Eastern Partnership populations, help unite society and enhance critical thinking amongst those audiences who receive their information from the Kremlin. All these measures combined could constitute an effective and comprehensive approach of the EU and NATO towards countering the hybrid threats posed by Russia in the Eastern neighborhood.

Conclusion

The hybrid warfare strategies employed by Russia in its pursuit of dominance in the Eastern neighborhood constitute a threat to the 'European development' of the Eastern Partnership countries. In the evolving security environment in Europe, the EU and NATO have to adapt quickly to strategic challenges and to external threats emanating from the Eastern neighborhood, and to diminish the potential risks weakening Europe. An appropriate response to hybrid threats (that includes strengthening resilience mechanisms, a security reinforcement of the Eastern Partnership region and a development of an enhanced cooperation between the EU, NATO and the Eastern Partnership countries on hybrid warfare mechanisms) constitutes a priority for the EU, NATO and the Eastern neighborhood. Enhanced EU-NATO complementarity in the approach to Russian hybrid warfare in the Eastern Partnership region, with all the measures discussed above, might help to increase the responsiveness of the Alliance, the Eastern Partnership region and the EU to future security challenges. This would allow adaptation to the new strategic environment and security architecture, with benefits for European and Atlantic security.