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*Konstantinos Papadakis, Vera Spyrakou*

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# The Influence and Implications of the Ukrainian Crisis on European Regional Security<sup>1</sup>

Konstantinos Papadakis<sup>2</sup> & Vera Spyrakou<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

In this analysis, the theoretical framework is examined based on primary and secondary sources of research concerning the foundation of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Subsequently, the existing security environment is extensively analysed, at the international and regional level, while a critical overview of the political-military framework of security at the European level is also examined. Furthermore, an overview of the relations between Russia and Ukraine is attempted in two dimensions, regarding to the geopolitical role of Greece and its role in the European interaction, and the analysis of influence and the effects of the Ukrainian crisis in the field of Energy Policy of the European Union (EU) within its effect on the European defence policy. In this context, the key role of Greece and Cyprus and both mediation for energy sufficiency and Europe's autonomy is thoroughly examined, as a consequence of the geopolitical and geographical factor that may affect the existing dependencies on Russian natural gas based on of the East Med area, hence the potential influence of forming a new field of interdependence at the energy level.

**Keywords:** Russian invasion; Ukrainian crisis; European Union; Exclusive Economic Zone; Common Foreign Policy; European Defence Policy.

## Mapping the introductory and theoretical framework based on the historical structure of Russia-Ukraine relations - the sociological approach

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the relations between Russia and Ukraine have been one of the classic cases of “opposing dyads” and national conflicts, with a long history of confrontation and hostility, as it happens and is theoretically reflected in other cases with a strong national and symbolic shared past. The above relationship is structured and dates much earlier, from the establishment of the Soviet Union, with the culmination of this hostility during the great famine of Ukraine which took place from 1932 to 1933 and was recorded as the greatest national disaster in the history of the Ukrainian nation; leading to the death of almost 12 million people, thus the 1/3 of the total population, while the United Nations in 2003, with a statement signed by 25 states, has estimated the loss of people from 7 up to 10 million. It is important to be mentioned here, that in the consciousness of the Ukrainian people it has been recorded as a “genocide”, while it was officially recorded likewise on

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<sup>2</sup> Political Scientist (PhD MA), Computer scientist (BSc), Researcher of the Center for European Policy and Regional Development, Department of Political Science, University of Crete, Greece.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Vera Spyrakou is Postdoctoral Researcher - Department of Political Science & Public administration at National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece.

November 28, 2006 by the Ukrainian Parliament. Also, of course the famine in Ukraine was the consequence of the economic policy followed by the Soviet Union under the Stalinist leadership, in particular the collectivization program which was implemented. Thus, the vast majority of Ukrainians believed that it was an organized extermination plan (Ploky, 2008). This stance led, during the Second World War, the Ukrainian people to welcome the Germans as liberators. In addition, the conscientious charge of the Ukrainian people strengthened the hostility towards Russia (Rywkin, 2014). Moreover, for devotees of Russian national security policy, Ukraine appears to pose a significant threat, not because of its offensive military capabilities, but because of its intention to join the European Union (EU) and especially NATO. Russia considered the above statements hostile, on the basis of which an “unacceptable” threat to Russian national security is systematically structured, a fact that led to aggressive operations against Ukraine in the past, such as the annexation of Crimea, as well as the intervention in the Donbas war (Kuzio, 2018).

### **Causes and origins of the Russian-Ukrainian war in the field of International Relations**

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has sparked a remarkable debate about its causes (Kathimerini, 2022a). Characteristically, John Mearsheimer clarifies part of the international and geopolitical issues that respond to the ongoing crisis (Mikelis & Troulis, 2015). Nevertheless, in the fall of 2014 and while Moscow had already invaded Ukraine, seizing Crimea and part of Donbas (Kathimerini, 2022b), Mearsheimer published his analysis in *Foreign Affairs* assigning responsibility for the crisis to the West and NATO's enlargement strategy (Wolf, 2022). In addition, he underlined that the enlargement of the EU, as well as the “western” support of the democratic movements in Ukraine, were decisive factors for the Russian military intervention. According to Mearsheimer, the liberal delusions of the West caused Putin's reaction and made it a major issue of international political interest. However, it is appropriate to examine whether the above approach that interprets the Russian attitude, in terms of “political realism”, is also founded historically as an assumption based on which “[...] Moscow in the first post-Cold War decade all it wanted was an agreement with NATO and did not wish to regroup and expand its spheres of influence”. Considering that, it seems that is not in harmony with the basic theoretical starting point of “aggressive realism”; according to this approach, great powers in order to survive evolve into aggressive and violent power maximisers and are not willing to cooperate sufficiently when cooperation increases the power of their competitors (Syrigos, 2016). Based on this contradiction, from the first post-Cold War period and onwards, it is sufficing that Moscow exerted hegemonic pressure on its near abroad. Thus, the majority of the post-Soviet states rushed to the West, so that through synergies with it, any potential relationship with Moscow could be severed in time in order to secure the independence of the states. As a result, in March 1992

Russia mutilated Moldova and formed Transnistria as a de facto state. Further, when Russian forces invaded Abkhazia, about the same period, any discussion of NATO enlargement was absent. It should be mentioned that with the historical weight of the Cold War confrontation and the ideological, but most importantly, the strategic defeat of the USSR, the current leadership in Moscow embraces the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance in terms of threat and encirclement, since the strategic culture of the Russians has been cultivated according to the belief that due to its vast natural borders it is vulnerable to invasions from the East and West. However, it seems that this discussion is pretentiously constructed either as an alibi or as a possible reliable outcome. Moreover, the above analysis is based on a series of reasons and facts: a) the fact that during the Yalta era it was morally reprehensible, but politically unproven to allow the victorious Soviet Union to establish spheres of influence. In 1990, regarding the power relations and geopolitical reality, it was expected for the countries of Eastern Europe to choose to join the winners of the Cold War (Kathimerini, 2022b), b) the prospect of Ukraine's NATO membership will dissipate after 2008, despite Kiev's efforts to revive it, c) the fact that Russia had already invaded and crippled Ukraine since 2014, while maintaining military control over the areas it either annexed, such as Crimea, or “autotomized”, such as the case of Donbass, in which the Ukrainian authorities did not exercise any control and the responsibility for non-compliance with the Minsk agreements falls equally on both parties. Further, Russia has faced no real threat because, since the 1990s, the West has supported Russia both financially, with tens of billions of dollars in foreign direct investment programs, and strategically. In this regard, Russia's accession to the WTO, the OECD, the Council of Europe, the G8, the NATO-Russia cooperation and security agreement in 1997, the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council in 2002 with the signature of Putin established the essential framework of cooperation and consultation. Nevertheless, it seems that the absence of a coordinated plan to block Russia, and potentially the ultimate goal of confrontation, has made Europe dependant on its energy security from Moscow, at least since 2005, when the first energy crisis broke out between Moscow and Kiev. Another important factor is the fact that the military interventions in Iraq 2003 and Libya 2011, as well as the independence of Kosovo in 2008 combined with the “coloured revolutions” that tried to establish pro-American regimes in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004, cultivated Putin’s belief that the West is taking advantage of Moscow’s weaknesses. Nevertheless, the above factors led to the lack of trust about the good intentions of the western countries and make Putin believe that there is a plan to divide and decrease the influence of the Russian federation in total. However, the set of Western countries’ reactions could

be described as balancing and following a peace-mediating role, whereas Russia remains the strongest - given the fact of its potentiality - nuclear power<sup>4</sup>.

### **Consequences to International Politics**

The invasion of 24th of February is generally considered an expansionist war with a strategic background based on which crimes against civilian populations are being committed, while seeking to annex part of Ukraine's territories at the expense of its integrity as a whole. The Russian invasion is entirely responsible for the brutal violation of the fundamental principles of International Law and nullifies rules and values that the international institutional system has tried to preserve in order to maintain and defend global peace. After the Russian invasion, the Western countries appear more concerned, united and determined to improve their security conditions, adopting a new doctrine of deterrence and containment of Moscow, while the timing suggests that the balance of power is overwhelmingly against it, a fact that contradicts the Cold War era, when the USSR enjoyed a relative balance. According to “political realism”, the Putin’s policy and not the West, emerges as an irrational factor. As Lawrence Freedman pointed out, “Russia cannot win this war no matter how much force it uses” (Freedman, [2009] 2022, von Hauff, 2019). Moreover, in Russia analysts did not believe that Putin’s choice would be to start a war given the fact that he already controlled Crimea and some Donbass’ territories. However, it was not any kind of essential reason for this risk and uncertainty of war, and although realists believe that war cannot come to an end from the international political arena, they are also claiming that states are incapable of “common understanding”. Furthermore, the Russian leadership attempted to transform a trans-regional superpower into a global one, but failed miserably (Freedman, 2022). Consequently, in international politics “the law has value only between equals (in force)” according to Thucydides’ thinking. Moreover, the agreements of Budapest’s crucial memorandum in 1994, signed by Russia, Ukraine, Great Britain and the USA, according to which Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear weapons to Russia, for the sake of nuclear security, and in return the signatory powers promised that none of them would use force or threats against Ukraine, is a remarkable example that all parties would respect its sovereign rights and existing borders. However, the agreement also stipulated that due such an aggression, the signatories would immediately seek the involvement of the United Nation Security Council in order to support Ukraine. Russia has not respected the agreement, instead it has invaded and is threatening Ukraine with nuclear weapons. Considering the facts, a question arises, whether Ukraine had not handed over its nuclear weapons or

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<sup>4</sup> For the reference, it has more than 6,000 nuclear warheads, advanced ballistic technology, also the possibility of second and third strikes, while its nuclear triad is quite modern. The US, on the other hand, offered many times an agreement that would exclude the Baltic States from installing ballistic missiles.

even a part of them, would Russia have invaded? Such a question to be answered properly needs further research and clarification of the facts, especially in critical periods of limited financial resources, thus an obstacle for successful foreign policy, while it seems that cooperation with neighbouring states and the conclusion of alliances at a tactical and strategic level can be an extremely useful element for promoting national interests effectively (Syrigos & Dokos, 2018).

### **Reviewing the role of the European neighbourhood policy**

The Russian-Ukrainian war highlighted the ongoing prospect of a common European defence policy as a condition for dealing with similar phenomena with geopolitical and financial elements. In this regard, on March 21, 2022, the need of the creation of a European urgent intervention force was agreed upon, hence it was approved by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence of the EU Member States in the framework of the “Strategic Compass” (Consilium Europa, 2022); such initiative arises as a consequence of the recent developments Europe has to deal with and could be seen as a reinforcement regarding the Greek case, thus due to the special reference to the Eastern Mediterranean and the challenges from unilateral external actions towards the EU Member States. Specifically, extended reference has been contacted regarding the violations of the sovereign rights of Greece and Cyprus and these reports were aiming to highlight the importance of maintaining a stable and secure environment based on the interests of EU Member States and third countries.

#### ***i) EU Defence and Security Policy***

The Ukrainian crisis brought back to the fore the eventual realisation of the plan-prospect which has been presented by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joseph Borrell Fontelles, in last November. Instead of its opposite reactions, he characteristically mentioned that “Russia's war of aggression constitutes a tectonic change in European history” and “[...] everyone is convinced that Europe is in danger from a neighbour who is determined to wage war” (Kathimerini, 2022c), emphasizing that recent developments and the reinstatement of the EU’s defence policy are “a strong message of EU unity”. The “Strategic Compass” includes clear timetables for strengthening the EU’s defence capabilities and in order to deal with its “defence gaps”, while average defence spending in the EU should rise significantly from the current 1.5% of GDP. In addition, the unity of the EU is emphasized in the amendment of the “Strategic Compass” project that highlighted the need for immediate and effective action in potential crisis periods. The main objective of this initiative is to strengthen security and defence policies by 2030 due to necessity of the EU to acquire the dynamics of its “self-protection”, on the basis of which it will secure its interests and protect its citizens, while the need to strengthen systematic cooperation with partners, as in the case

of NATO, is also highly underlined. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the Western Balkans, while on the Eastern Mediterranean, threatening actions are registered as threats and challenges facing the EU. In particular, Joseph Borrell Fontelles states that Ankara must commit to follow the path of cooperation, a consistent de-escalation with regard to the Declaration in March 2021. Nevertheless, within this Declaration, the EU directly requested Turkey to refrain from provocations, unilateral actions, and illegal drilling in violation of International Law; the Declaration reminded that the EU has at its disposal the tools and means to defend the interests of the Member States and shield stability. It should be mentioned here, that according to diplomatic sources of the Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Greece has long emphasized the need to exempt part of defence spending in order to achieve the agreement effectively. Furthermore, other Member States made a unilateral statement likewise the same achievement. Additionally, it is noted that with the adoption of the “Strategic Compass” project, efforts are being made for European autonomy to be gained within the support of Greece. As far as it concerns the immigration policy, the EU strongly supports Greece regarding the exploitation of refugees and immigrants during the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and EU has welcomed Ukrainian refugees, allowing them to enter its 27-Member States with visa-free, live and work freely for up to three years. Nevertheless, there is still an unpleasant reality, the Ukrainian refugees who could destabilize the coherence of EU policies and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Hosting Ukrainian refugees could cost Member States more than \$30 billion, according to an analysis by the non-profit think tank “Centre for Global Development” (Centre for Global Development, 2022); given the fact that such case could create forthcoming challenges for the European economy which is already under pressure due to high inflation (Viadiplomacy, 2022), among the stability and the formation of the common defence policy due to war invasions, the EU immigration policy gaps (Tzagkarakis, Papadakis & Kritas, 2021) shall be diminished.

***ii) Defence of the EU and the institutional contribution of the European Parliament to strengthen European cooperation***

The contribution of the European Parliament to the EU countries in order to increase their national defence spending to 2% of their GDP, emerges as a catalyst, although it is found that these investments are not enough. The EU loses around €26.4 billion per year to overlapping defence spending (European Parliament, 2022). Nevertheless, the European Parliament is systematically enhancing the Member States to jointly purchase defence resources (European Parliament, 2016), while in the 2016 resolution adopted concerning the European Defence Union, MEPs identify the appropriate ways in which Member States could pool their capabilities, thus to create a common crisis and management plan which will allow the EU to react more quickly and effectively to potential

threats to its security and defence area. Additionally, EU investment in defence research. Although this could be captured as a sample that could be resolved since the European Parliament considers collaborative research projects as an adequate solution, the EU budget cannot replace Member States' internal national defence, but it shall be used to support EU Members that are in cooperation. In order to maximize the production and effectiveness of defence spending, the European Commission presented the European Defence Action Plan and the European Defence Fund in November 2016. The European Parliament accepted such initiatives as a feature of supporting the financing of the capabilities which have been jointly agreed by the Member States. Furthermore, the symbolic value aimed at the enhanced cooperation and security of the EU in all its political and operational structures is sought, thus the cooperation in the foreground of the jointly accepted values and legal principles of European cooperation, should be considered as parameter of high importance for the coherency of the institutional and legal framework. Nevertheless, the role of the European Parliament was decisive and, evaluating the current legal possibilities offered by the Treaty of Lisbon, it ended up in a statement on the common Security and Defence Policy, without ignoring the fact that what has not been achieved at the European level of cooperation is the its political development which presupposes "political will" (European Parliament, 2017). From this perspective, the geopolitical changes in the neighbouring countries of the EU, combined with the energy insecurity resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, point to the necessity for a common policy to deal with the ongoing crisis and, ultimately, every potential crisis. On this basis, the Treaty on EU but also NATO provide intensively the common defence clause. Although both support the "strategic autonomy" at the EU level, according to the European Parliament, a possible European defence union would be a trigger and reinforcing dynamic for the partnership between the EU and NATO.

## **Conclusion**

The Russian attack on Ukraine laid the foundations for "more Europe", though the origins of this war invasion respond to historical and national features that the international community argues as a peculiar geopolitical condition, thus particular expansionist politics and sovereignty issues. Additionally, the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war have a strictly reflection on the economic and social stability and coherence of the European Member States and international politics raise issues of revision of the existing security and defence policies with particular implications for the systematization of the Energy Policy and Europe's autonomy. Although the mechanisms of coexistence seem to be leading to anchorages for reasons of geopolitical power and economic autonomy, the aim for systematic promotion of EU Defence plan within the restoration of European cohesion based on International Treaties, is apparent. The case examined in this analysis should be



open to further research as it responds to a complex field with multiple crises dealing with the economic and social dimensions at global level. In this analysis, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis as a case study was depicted in a comparative way, in terms of the consequences of the war at the national and European level and as an ongoing policy-task of strengthening European cooperation, following the balancing of Greece's external relations regarding its geopolitical and energy role as well as its perspective as an allied actor of the security and defence policy of the European territory.

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