The Russian War in Ukraine

Guest Editors
Mara Morini, University of Genoa
Lara Piccardo, University of Genoa

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Introduction

Unless otherwise specified, the last consultation of online resources is 22/08/2024.
Salvo diversa indicazione, l'ultima consultazione delle risorse online è del 22/08/2024.

The Russian War in Ukraine

Mara Morini and Lara Piccardo

Since the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine is a neighbouring country of the European Union and Brussels made different efforts in order to find positive interactions with the neighbourhood, so to build «an organized and living Europe [which] is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations»[1], as Robert Schuman already declared on 9 May 1950.

Kyiv articulated clear intentions to join the European Union as early as the 1990s. However, Brussels pointed out the need for domestic political reforms and linked this to all concrete steps towards EU membership. A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Ukraine was signed on 14 June 1994 and entered into force in March 1998.

Since the "Orange Revolution" of 2004, economic integration and political cooperation between Ukraine and the EU have been a central goal of Ukrainian foreign policy. The EU also sees Ukraine as a "priority partner" within the framework of the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), a program to improve economic, political and cultural cooperation between the EU and neighbouring States.

On 1 January 2008, agreements between the EU and Ukraine on visa facilitation and the readmission of people staying illegally came into force. Ukraine is also a partner country in the EU's so-called "Eastern Partnership", which was founded on 7 May 2009 at the summit in Prague. The aim was to bring the EU and six partner countries from its Eastern neighbourhood and the Caucasus region (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) closer together politically and economically.

At the end of November 2013, President Viktor Yanukovych put the association agreement negotiated with the EU on ice shortly before it was scheduled to be signed, apparently due to pressure from Russia. The agreement deals not only with economic and trade relations and the creation of a free trade area, but also with political cooperation. This agrees on close cooperation in foreign policy as well as in questions of justice and fundamental rights. With association agreements, the EU is trying to bind neighbouring States more closely to itself without offering them EU membership.

Six months later, in June 2014, the EU concluded an association agreement with the new Ukrainian government, despite ongoing tensions with Russia. President Petro Poroshenko signed the economic part of the agreement on 27 June, while the

Mara Morini, University of Genoa, mara.morini@unige.it
Lara Piccardo, University of Genoa, lara.piccardo@unige.it

[1] Robert Schuman (9 May 1950). *Schuman Declaration*, https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950_en, last check 22 August 2024.

political part had already been agreed in March. In September 2014, the parliaments of Ukraine and the European Union adopted the association agreement, which came into force on 1 January 2016.

According to a survey conducted in 2019, 57% of respondents were in favour of joining the EU, although there were significant regional differences. In the West of the country, the vast majority of respondents were in favour of EU accession. The South and the Donbas, on the other hand, were more in favour of membership in the Eurasian Economic Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus[2].

On 7 February 2019, the Ukrainian parliament enshrined a strategic orientation of Ukraine towards full accession to the EU and NATO in the constitution with a majority of 334 out of 450 MPs[3].

Since Russia's war against Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, some politicians have been calling for the country to join the EU quickly. According to EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, Ukraine should become part of the community of States as soon as possible. When asked about Ukraine's admission to the EU just a few days after the Russian war of aggression against the country began, she said: «Ukraine is one of us and we want them in the European Union»[4].

In view of the catastrophic situation in his country, Ukrainian President Zelensky had also repeated an urgent request for admission to the EU. On 1st March 2022, Zelensky joined a meeting of the European Parliament in view of the war in Ukraine and made the following emotional appeal to the Europeans: «You know that we are giving lives for the rights, for freedom, for the desire to be equal as much you are»[5] in order to preserve values and rights as in Europe, Zelensky said. And he concluded: «We are fighting for our rights, for our freedom, for our lives. We have proven our strength. Now prove that you are with us. Do prove that you indeed are European. Glory to Ukraine»[6].

Meanwhile, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky submitted an official application to join the EU on 28 February 2022. A short time later, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova also submitted an application to join the EU. The European Commission is now in the process of reviewing the applications in order to assess the potential EU accession of the three States.

During her trip to the war zone in Ukraine on 8 April 2022, Commission President

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[2] Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation in collaboration with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (4-19 November 2019). *European Integration of Ukraine: The Dynamics of Public Opinion*, https://dif.org.ua/en/article/european-integration-of-ukraine-the-dynamics-of-public-opinion, last check 22 August 2024.

[3] Radio Free Europe (7 February 2019). *Ukrainian Parliament Passes Constitutional Amendment to Reflect EU, NATO Aspirations*, https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-parliament-passes-constitutional-amendment-to-reflect-eu-nato-aspirations/29756695.html, last check 22 August 2024.

[4] Euronews (27 February 2022). *Ukraine is One of Us and We Want Them in EU, Ursula von der Leyen Tells Euronews*, https://www.euronews.com/2022/02/27/ukraine-is-one-of-us-and-we-want-them-in-eu-ursula-von-der-leyen-tells-euronews, last check 22 August 2024.

[5] Volodymyr Zelensky (1st March 2022). *Extraordinary Plenary Session on the Russian Aggression against Ukraine: Statement by Volodymyr Zelensky, President of Ukraine*, Multimedia Centre of the European Parliament, https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/extraordinary-plenary-session-on-the-russian-aggression-against-ukraine-extracts_I219552, last check 22 August 2024.

[6] *Ibidem*.

von der Leyen encouraged Ukraine on its path to the European Union. She wants to push ahead with the country's EU membership quickly: «We are with you as you dream of Europe. Dear Volodymyr, my message today is clear: Ukraine belongs in the European family. We have heard your request, loud and clear»[7], said von der Leyen. During her visit, the EU Commission President also handed Ukraine a questionnaire, which the EU would like to use to sound out the conditions for Ukraine's accession. Ukraine immediately completed the questionnaire. The European Commission then assessed the application for accession positively. Ukraine was officially granted candidate status on 23 June 2022.

Meanwhile, the war goes on and the EU and its member States are facing a crucial moment. The topic is relevant to find a scientific discussion and it is not a case if this issue of *De Europa* is dealing with the ongoing war in Ukraine after the Russian invasion of 22 February 2022.

This day marks an epochal change in the nature of relations among States, in the return of nationalisms, in the East-West confrontation, in the crisis of the international order and, above all, it underlines how superficial it is to echo the "end of history".

As a matter of fact, the Russian invasion of Ukraine took European and world public opinion by surprise. After the conflict in the former Yugoslavia (1991-2001), a new war broke out in Europe, taking on different connotations – economic, values and political – which have in common Russia's challenge to the global order.

In the light of these dynamics, the contributions in the following pages aim at providing a general overview of the Russian invasion in Ukraine through a historical-political analysis of the strategic and geopolitical decisions of the actors involved. The methodological approaches change according to the field of the researchers, offering a multifaceted view of the topic.

Giovanni Savino discusses the origin and the development of the Russian nationalism, which provides a historical and contemporary understanding behind President Vladimir Putin's obsession with Ukraine as being part of the so-called "Novorossiya". It highlights the traditional and cultural sources of the Russian national identity, which explains Putin's denial of the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians as a people, even prior to the 2014 crises in Crimea and Donbas. Doing so, the author takes also in consideration the roots of twentieth-century Ukrainian nationalism and its development after the Euromaidan events.

Lara Piccardo rebuilds the causes of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict coming back to the long-term history of an area that has always been the victim of its powerful neighbours: Poland, which intends Ukraine as the last frontier of Catholicism, and Russia, which considers the territory the ancestral homeland. Like a barometer, Ukraine always registered the changing balance of power between its neighbours and, when Poland first joined NATO and then the EU, Kiev found itself in the middle of the West and Moscow. The analysis reveals four salient moments in Ukrainian his-

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[7] European Commission (8 April 2022). *Statement by President von der Leyen with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy at the Occasion of the President's Visit to Kyiv*, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-occasion-presidents-visit-kyiv-2022-04-08_en, last check 22 August 2024.

tory, which represent as many fundamental turning points for determining the deep reasons for this war. First: 1. the birth of the Kievan *Rus'* and Ukrainian entrance in the Tsarist Empire. Second: the creation of various Ukrainian republics at the beginning of 20th century. Third: some problems of the independent Ukraine born with the dissolution of the USSR. Fourth: finally, the emergence of the reasons for the Euromaidan crisis in 2013-2014. Each of these phases reveals, with varying intensity, how Ukraine is subject to incessant change in its dimensions, how fragile its identity is and how its independence has always been precarious.

Claudio Catalano underline the *casus belli* of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Followed by 6 sequential NATO enlargements ("Open Door") to willing East European and Balkan partners (1999, 2002-2004, 2009, 2017, 2020), and strengthened by parallel European Union enlargements and associated partners, the issue of the enlargement to Eastern Europe as a justification for Russian aggression to Ukraine as mentioned by Putin's speech at the Security Conference in Munich in 2007, where he rejected the post-cold war system, has been widely debated among politicians in the Western mass media. Consequently, the article explores the historical and political background, which paved the way to one of the most quoted reasons why Putin's Russia decided to invade Ukraine.

The interaction between domestic and foreign policy under Putin's presidency is explored by Mara Morini, who tries to combine the main domestic reasons - *i.e.* Putin's personality and ideology, the institutional design, the legacies of the historical and cultural traditions – as well as the role played by the external factors (NATO, EU, and the US) in determining Russia's reaction against Ukraine. So far, studies have interpreted "Putin's war" as a nostalgic choice based on the will to restore former imperial glories to unify the Russian peoples denying, at the same time, the Ukrainians' right to live in an independent State. Other scholars argued that the Russian invasion was mainly the effect to the Western policies – especially the NATO enlargement – perceived as a security threat by the Kremlin.

Cecilia Frego pays attention to Russian-speaking population, meaning to anyone who uses Russian as their preferred language, regardless of their ethnic background and political preferences. The presence of such a high number of Russian speakers became problematic from 2014 onward, when the use of the Ukrainian language took on a more pronounced political significance, and the divide with the rest of the Russian-speaking world became more apparent. This divide was evident through Ukraine's political choice to align with the Euro-Atlantic world and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The situation became even more complex following the Russian attack on 24 February 2022, which exacerbated tensions and moved away from the prospect of a peaceful resolution.

Matteo Mazziotti di Celso and Mattia Sguazzini contribute to the debate on the strategic autonomy of the EU by providing empirical analysis that allows for robust assessment of the leading hypotheses developed within this scholarly discourse. Since 2016, the European Union's ambitions to become more autonomous from the USA have sparked intensified debate and it is hindered by two main challenges: stra-

tegic cacophony – *i.e.*, the presence of continent-wide divergences across national threat perceptions – and severe military capacity shortfalls. This analysis reveals that the strategic cacophony persists but has not prevented the EU from implementing a substantially cohesive response to the war, at least for now. The methodological approach is mainly based on some analytical dimensions: 1) the causes of the conflict with a particular attention to the historical origins of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine; 2) the objectives of the various parties involved between revisionist politics and defence of the *status quo*; 3) the possible war resolution scenarios. Moreover, the monographic issue aims to frame the Russian-Ukrainian conflict theoretically and historically within analytical dimensions consolidated in the scientific literature, which allow the study of the phenomenon to be addressed diachronically and in a comparative perspective.

Bringing together a research team made of historians and political scientists whose desire is basically to understand rather than to judge for political ends, these articles represent their scholars' experience "on the ground" and their engagement in the post-Soviet area studies, useful for underling historical and political elements for the future EU actions.

Essays

L'Ucraina e il nazionalismo russo in prospettiva diacronica

Giovanni Savino

Introduzione

Nel messaggio del 21 febbraio 2022, trasmesso dai canali televisivi russi e nel quale annunciava il riconoscimento da parte russa delle repubbliche popolari di Doneck e Lugansk, Vladimir Putin si è a più riprese soffermato su alcuni aspetti dell'evoluzione storica dell'Ucraina, mettendone in discussione la legittimità come Stato indipendente e come nazione. Sin dai primi minuti del discorso, il presidente russo ha dedicato ampio spazio alla propria interpretazione del processo di definizione del territorio ucraino, ritenuto il risultato della volontà bolscevica di indebolire l'identità nazionale russa. Infatti, secondo Putin,

> l'Ucraina contemporanea è stata completamente, totalmente, costruita dalla Russia, per essere esatti dalla Russia bolscevica, comunista. Questo processo è iniziato praticamente subito dopo la rivoluzione del 1917, in più Lenin e i suoi compagni lo hanno avviato in modo estremamente brutale per la Russia, ovvero con la separazione, l'estraniazione di una parte dei suoi territori storici. A milioni di persone che vi vivevano, ovvio, nessuno aveva chiesto nulla. Poi prima e dopo la Grande guerra patriottica Stalin unì all'Urss e consegnò all'Ucraina alcune terre, prima appartenenti alla Polonia, alla Romania e all'Ungheria, e come sottospecie di compensazione assegnò alla Polonia una parte dei territori originari tedeschi, e nel 1954 Chruščev non si sa perché tolse alla Russia la Crimea e la regalò all'Ucraina: ecco come si è formato il territorio dell'Ucraina sovietica (Putin 2022a).

Il senso di quest'analisi viene espresso poco dopo, quando il leader russo esclama una frase diventata rapidamente popolare, definendo il paese vicino come "l'Ucraina di Vladimir Il'ič Lenin"[1], le cui statue verrebbero abbattute in nome di una decomunistizzazione considerata poco conseguente da Putin, pronto a mostrare cosa invece vuol dire una "vera" operazione di eliminazione dell'eredità del socialismo reale. Un argomento già sollevato in precedenza durante la conferenza stampa tenuta nel dicembre del 2021 e ancor prima nel saggio dedicato alla storia dei due paesi, ma che si configura come più di un'allusione a un tema ben presente nel pensiero nazionalista russo del XX secolo, ovvero la negazione di un profilo autonomo nazionale, di una identità culturale e linguistica degli ucraini, ritenuti parte integrante del nucleo rappresentato dal "trino popolo russo"[2], la cui divisione ne avrebbe comporta-

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Giovanni Savino, Università di Napoli Federico II, giovanni.savino@unina.it

[1] In realtà la traduzione letterale sarebbe "l'Ucraina in nome di Vladimir Il'ič Lenin".

[2] Espressione dell'idea dell'unità culturale, linguistica e religiosa degli slavo-orientali, il concetto di *triedinnyj russkij narod* rispondeva anche alla necessità di definire il centro imperiale rispetto agli altri popoli non-russi. Nel corso della seconda metà dell'Ottocento il progetto di costruzione della *bol'šaja russkaja nacija,*

to la crisi e la fine dello Stato. La questione ucraina assume però anche contorni geo-strategici, descritti in un paragrafo del lavoro di Zbigniew Brzezinski *The Grand Chessboard*, in cui si delinea come cruciale il controllo da parte di Mosca di quei territori, in forma diretta o indiretta. Scriveva l'ex consigliere di Jimmy Carter:

> Ukraine, a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard, is a geopolitical pivot because its very existence as an independent country helps to transform Russia. Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. Russia without Ukraine can still strive for imperial status, but it would then become a predominantly Asian imperial state […]. However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia. Ukraine's loss of independence would have immediate consequences for Central Europe, transforming Poland into the geopolitical pivot on the eastern frontier of a united Europe (Brzezinski 1997: 46).

Dalla rivoluzione arancione in poi, ovvero dal 2004, le parole di Brezinski assumono un carattere profetico all'interno del dibattito russo sulle relazioni con il "vicino estero" e con l'Ucraina, usate a seconda dei casi per sottolineare la capacità o i fallimenti di elaborare una politica di grande potenza da parte di Mosca (Luk'janov, Miller 2017: 12). La considerazione espressa dallo studioso statunitense d'origine polacca non appariva, inoltre, come una novità a quegli ambienti in contatto con il pensiero nazionalista e le sue articolazioni panslaviste della seconda metà dell'Ottocento. Vladimir Lamanskij, filologo di grande rilievo, professore dell'Università imperiale di San Pietroburgo e attivo nella promozione del locale Comitato slavo, aveva ribadito come i piccolo-russi, i grandi-russi e i bielorussi formassero un unico popolo, un'unica terra di cui espressione erano "il vessillo della fede (ortodossa – NdA) e le comuni istituzioni statali", ammonendo come "la sottrazione di Kiev e della sua regione alla Russia porterebbe alla decomposizione del popolo russo, alla caduta e alla divisione della terra russa" (Lamanskij 1861).

Immagini e rappresentazioni del passato hanno un ruolo importante nel determinare (e nel giustificare) scelte politiche, ma nel contesto odierno russo vi è una elaborazione, seppur spesso disordinata e poco consequenziale, delle complesse vicende storiche contrassegnata dalla nostalgia. Svetlana Boym nel suo lavoro *The Future of Nostalgia* l'ha definita come il sentimento di perdita di una casa mai esistita o che non esiste più, in una ricerca di un meccanismo in grado di difendere la comunità dai ritmi frenetici della modernità (Boym 2001: XIII-XIV). La proiezione verso l'avvenire, in tal senso, viene però a mancare, in un tentativo di ricostruire un passato armonioso, artificiale, interrotto dal presente. Scriveva Boym:

> Nostalgia itself has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed toward the future. Sometimes nostalgia is not directed toward the past either, but rather si-

denominazione impiegata da Aleksej Miller, riteneva poco significative le differenze etniche e culturali presenti tra russi, ucraini e bielorussi ai fini del successo dell'operazione. Si veda per un'analisi della questione e delle contraddizioni presenti tra la *bol'šaja russkaja nacija* e il patriottismo locale nelle regioni ucraine (Miller 2013: 45-51).

deways. The nostalgic feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space (Boym 2001: XIV).

Zygmunt Bauman ha sviluppato ulteriormente le intuizioni presenti in *The Future of Nostalgia* in uno dei suoi ultimi saggi, *Retrotopia*. L'inversione di rotta, secondo il sociologo polacco, diviene la risposta alla crisi dell'idea di progresso, ormai diventato obiettivo personale, e a un futuro ritenuto dannoso. Il percorso a ritroso nel tempo non consiste però in un ritorno al passato, ma ne costituisce il recupero di alcune parti e la cancellazione di altre, nella formazione di una narrazione omogenea, plasmata attraverso il ricordo e passibile di continui aggiustamenti.

> In *teoria*, il futuro è la sfera della libertà (in cui tutto può ancora accadere), mentre il passato è la sfera dell'inesorabilità immutabile e inalterabile (in cui tutto ciò che può accadere è già accaduto); il futuro in linea di principio è duttile, mentre il passato è solido, massiccio e definito una volta per tutte – notava Bauman - Nella pratica della politica della memoria il futuro e il passato si sono – o è come se si fossero – scambiati i rispettivi punti di vista. La duttilità del passato, la facilità di plasmarlo e riplasmarlo, è sia la condizione necessaria della politica della memoria, sia il presupposto quasi assiomatico della sua legittimità, sia infine ciò che permette di ricrearlo e reinterpretarlo all'infinito (Bauman 2017: 55-56).

Il tema di un'adozione in toto di una visione coerentemente nazionalista, incentrata sull'etnia russa, da parte del Cremlino oggi è oggetto di un dibattito spesso condizionato (inevitabilmente) dalla guerra in Ucraina e dai suoi riflessi nella discussione pubblica. L'adesione del presidente russo a un'agenda etno-nazionalista, con al centro la nazione russa, spesso viene presentata come dato acquisito, quando in realtà si tratta della costruzione di una narrazione ben più complessa, in cui elementi provenienti da quel tipo di tradizione convivono con suggestioni e idee di diverso segno, dal conservatorismo religioso alla retorica anticoloniale diretta ai paesi del Global South. Appare in tal senso fuorviante l'idea di una assunzione delle posizioni dell'estrema destra e del nazionalismo russo in modo acritico da parte del Cremlino, tralasciando quest'opera di selezione e saldatura in cui coesiste la rivendicazione del carattere multietnico della comunità politica russa (intesa come *rossijskaja*)[3] e del ruolo centrale della lingua russa (*russkaja*) come idioma del popolo costruttore dello Stato (*gosudarstvoobrazujuščij*)[4]; inoltre, il lungo percorso ai vertici della Federazione Russa di Vladimir Putin ha visto fasi differenti nella sua azione di governo, come anche nella costruzione della propria narrazione, con una continuità nel ritenersi un *gosudarstvennik*, ovvero un difensore della statualità del paese. Anche la definizione di

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[3] In più occasioni Putin si è soffermato sul punto, anche dopo l'inizio dell'invasione dell'Ucraina, anche in eventi ufficiali, come quando, intervenendo nel corso del concerto organizzato per l'ottavo anniversario dell'annessione della Crimea il 18 marzo 2022, ha dichiarato durante il suo discorso: "Noi, popolo multietnico della Federazione Russa, unito da un comune destino sulla propria terra – queste sono le prime righe della legge fondamentale della Russia e ogni parola è impregnata di un profondo significato e ha una grande importanza" (Putin 2022b).

[4] Dopo le modifiche costituzionali del 2020, il comma 1 dell'art. 68 recita: "La lingua di Stato della Federazione Russa su tutto il suo territorio è la lingua russa in qualità di lingua del popolo costruttore dello Stato, parte dell'unione multietnica dei popoli eguali della Federazione Russa" (Konstitucija RF 2020). La formulazione contorta riflette la difficoltà storica della ricerca di un equilibrio tra le diverse nazionalità.

"eurasista", spesso intesa come accettazione delle teorie proposte dal pensatore e militante d'estrema destra Aleksandr Dugin, erroneamente rappresentato sotto le vesti di consigliere particolare del presidente russo dai media in Italia e in Occidente, appare lontana dal fornire un quadro complessivo delle convinzioni e delle opinioni del leader russo. La presenza dei termini Eurasia (*Evrazija*) e eurasiatico (*evrazijskij*) al punto 4 del primo paragrafo della Dottrina di politica estera approvata nel 2023 (Ministero degli Affari esteri della Federazione Russa 2023) ha dato nuove basi ai sostenitori del "Putin eurasista", fornendo come spiegazione il perseguimento di misure di "eurasiatizzazione" (Eurasianization), in grado di determinare la traiettoria del paese all'insegna dell'isolamento (Michta 2023). Tra i pensatori che si son richiamati alla tradizione ideologica dell'eurasismo, Putin ha più volte fatto riferimento a Lev Gumilev, etnologo sovietico, autore della concezione della "passionarietà" (*passionarnost'*) (Bassin 2015: 168; Gumilev 1989: 308-309) di cui il presidente ha fornito una propria interpretazione che si discosta dall'elaborazione dello studioso in modo originale: se per Gumilev la passionarietà di un popolo era animata dall'interazione tra l'energia proveniente dal cosmo e il contesto geografico, in un ciclo di nascita, ascesa e declino, per l'esponente russo ad agire da motore è la memoria storica. Nell'intervenire nel corso dell'apertura dell'anno scolastico 2017/18 a Jaroslavl', Putin si rivolse agli studenti chiarendo la sua reinterpretazione della teoria esposta da Gumilev:

> Se esistiamo da più di mille anni e ci sviluppiamo e rafforziamo così attivamente, deve esserci qualcosa che ce lo consente? Questo "qualcosa" è il "rettore nucleare" all'interno del nostro popolo, dell'uomo russo, che consente di andare avanti, è la cosiddetta passionarietà, di cui parlava Gumilev, la quale spinge avanti il nostro Paese (Putin 2017).

Durante l'incontro annuale del Club Valdaj nell'ottobre del 2021, il presidente russo ritornò sul tema, citando l'etnologo, assieme ai filosofi Ivan Il'in e Nikolaj Berdjaev, tra gli autori da cui era affascinato:

> L'idea sulla passionarietà delle nazioni è nota, è un'idea interessante, se ne può discutere e ancora oggi lo si fa […]. Ritorno sulla passionarietà delle nazioni, essa è legata, secondo il pensiero del suo autore, al concetto che i popoli, le nazioni, le etnie nascono, raggiungono il picco del proprio sviluppo e poi mano a mano invecchiano, proprio come gli organismi viventi. In molti paesi, tra l'altro anche nel continente americano, l'odierna Europa occidentale è ritenuta invecchiata, utilizzano tale termine, se sia così è difficile dirlo, ma l'idea per cui all'interno della nazione debba esserci un meccanismo di sviluppo in costante movimento, una volontà di crescita, di affermazione a mio avviso ha delle basi (Putin 2021b).

Lo studio delle differenti componenti ideologiche dell'agenda putiniana non può prescindere dalla rielaborazione continua dei principali attori presenti nell'Amministrazione presidenziale, nel mondo accademico e nei media, e richiede una particolare attenzione nell'individuare una genealogia dei termini, delle idee e dei richiami. Nel presente saggio a essere al centro dell'attenzione è la riflessione sull'adozione di stilemi e *topoi* provenienti dal patrimonio ideologico e culturale del nazionalismo russo da parte di Vladimir Putin e della politica della memoria del Crem-

lino, evidenziandone le fonti, variegate e eclettiche come d'altronde è quel movimento politico.

1. Un'identità artificiale? L'Ucraina nell'interpretazione del nazionalismo russo

Il 12 luglio 2021, poco più di sei mesi prima dell'inizio della *special'naja voennaja operacija* (operazione speciale militare), ovvero della guerra, viene pubblicato un corposo saggio a firma di Vladimir Putin intitolato *Ob istoričeskom edinstve russkich i ukraincev* [Sull'unità storica dei russi e degli ucraini]. Per la prima volta nel testo viene esposta in maniera compiuta e particolareggiata la visione del presidente sui rapporti storici tra la Russia e l'Ucraina, in una ricostruzione che prende l'avvio dal battesimo del principe Vladimiro di Kiev e la conseguente conversione della *Rus'* al cristianesimo ortodosso. L'interpretazione della *koiné* slavo-orientale come struttura centralizzata, base dello Stato antico-russo, adottata da Putin, confligge con la realtà del frammentato e spesso conflittuale sistema di potere della dinastia di Rjurikidi, signori delle principali città della *Rus'*, e della varietà di istituzioni presente all'interno dell'ampio spazio territoriale grossomodo corrispondente a gran parte delle attuali Bielorussia, Ucraina e Russia centro-occidentale. Non si tratta di un'innovazione del presidente, ma dell'adesione allo schema fornito dalla storiografia russa dell'Ottocento delle origini della *Rus'*, dove l'unità di russi, *malorossy* (i piccolo-russi, ossia gli ucraini) e bielorussi era fornita come dato certo e incontestabile (Miller 2013: 41)[5].

> I russi, gli ucraini, i bielorussi – precisa Putin - sono i discendenti dell'antica *Rus'*. Le tribù slave e altre nell'enorme spazio che si estendeva dal Ladoga, Novgorod e Pskov a Kiev e Černigov erano unite da un'unica lingua (oggi la definiamo russo antico), da legami economici, dal potere dei principi della dinastia dei Rjurikidi, e, dopo il battesimo della Rus', dalla comune fede ortodossa [...] Più tardi, come accaduto ad altri stati europei, l'antica Rus' si scontrò con l'indebolimento del potere centrale e la frammentazione, ma ciononostante sia la nobiltà che la gente comune vedeva la Rus' come spazio comune, come propria patria (Putin 2021a).

Una interpretazione ancora oggi rivendicata dai più conseguenti sostenitori del patrimonio ideale del nazionalismo russo, e su cui Putin mantiene un atteggiamento ambiguo, dove alla denuncia, presente in numerosi interventi pubblici, della frantumazione della primigenia unità nel corso dei secoli si accompagna anche la traduzione in lingua ucraina del saggio, pubblicata in contemporanea con l'originale (Putin 2021a). Vi sono, però, degli adattamenti, a prima vista secondari ma in realtà in grado di fornire preziose indicazioni sull'orizzonte interpretativo adottato dal potere, ad alcuni termini utilizzati dalla storiografia, come la sostituzione di *Kievskaja Rus'* (Rus' di Kiev) con *Drevnerusskoe gosudarstvo* (Stato antico-russo), presente anche nelle nuove redazioni dei manuali scolastici di storia patria. Una correzione che tende a rivendicare il patrimonio storico e culturale della civiltà slavo-orientale, suggellato anche

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[5] Aleksej Miller sottolinea come alla base di tale interpretazione vi sia la ricezione della *Sinopsis*, testo del monaco Innokentij Gizel', del 1674, in cui si affermava l'unità storica e spirituale della Grande e Piccola Russia. Per una disamina del ruolo delle mitologie nella storia e storiografia russa si veda Keenan 1994.

dall'inaugurazione, nel 2016, della statua del principe Vladimir in piazza Borovickaja a Mosca, a pochi metri dall'omonima porta del Cremlino, segno della continuità tra l'odierna Federazione Russa e la *Rus'*.

La presentazione delle origini dello Stato russo nell'antichità slavo-orientale non risale solo alla scuola storica ottocentesca, ma è stata successivamente adottata dal movimento nazional-conservatore nelle sue differenti espressioni, soprattutto dai sostenitori attivi nelle province sud-occidentali dell'impero zarista, oggi parte dell'Ucraina contemporanea. Uno dei principali alfieri dell'inesistenza di una identità ucraina autonoma e differente dalla Russia è stato Vasilij Šul'gin, deputato alla Duma di Stato, leader dei nazionalisti e figura emblematica di un mondo segnato dalla rivoluzione e della guerra civile, già direttore del quotidiano di famiglia "Kievljanin", fondato dal padre Vitalij[6] nel 1864 con l'intento di ribadire come quella regione fosse "russa, russa, russa", secondo la celebre definizione apparsa nell'annuncio ai lettori del primo numero del periodico. Sempre nella prima pagina della nuova testata, si afferma l'adesione di essa al concetto del popolo russo trino:

> La redazione guarda ai rapporti reciproci tra grande-russi, piccolo-russi e bielorussi non attraverso il miope punto di vista grande-russo, né quello ucraino da Leopoli, né tantomeno della szlachta polacca: guarda a queste tre comunità locali come a tre rami congiunti, come a tre manifestazioni del popolo russo. Esse sono unite non dall'esteriore legame statale, la loro unità è ben più profonda: è penetrata negli umori e nel sangue di un organismo tenuto assieme dalla stessa fede, dalla stessa etnia, dalla stessa lingua, perché così formato dalla storia, e che non potrà esser diviso né dagli studiosi da poltrona né dagli autoproclamati patrioti regionali (Kievljanin 1864).

Tempo dopo, durante gli anni alla Duma, il deputato si era distinto tra i principali avversari delle rivendicazioni culturali e linguistiche delle organizzazioni e dei gruppi ucraini, ritenendole ingiustificate dal punto di vista storico e animate dal fine ultimo della conquista dell'autonomia nazionale. Nella risoluzione presentata dal Club dei nazionalisti russi di Kiev, formazione istituita nel 1908 sotto gli auspici della locale *intelligencija* conservatrice raccolta attorno al "Kievljanin" e di cui Šul'gin era tra i principali esponenti, rivolta contro il progetto di legge presentato da 37 membri della Duma in favore dell'insegnamento della lingua ucraina nelle scuole elementari parallelamente al russo, leggiamo come "la lingua russa per i piccolo-russi e i bielorussi non è solo idioma di Stato, ma lingua materna, propria, come lo è per i grande-russi" e l'ucraino viene definito artificiale, "inventato negli ultimi decenni dai galiziani ucrainofili" (Sbornik 1908: 31, 34). L'attenzione posta al passato da parte degli aderenti al Club è evidente in numerosi testi, e la presenza di una genealogia improntata all'unitarietà dello spazio slavo-orientale come dato perenne e considerato storicamente indiscutibile è ripetuta in più occasioni. In occasione di un intervento sempre nel 1908, il giornalista Anatolij Savenko, in seguito deputato alla IV Duma e figura cari-

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[6] In realtà secondo la slavista statunitense d'origine russa Olga Matich, discendente di Vasilij Šul'gin, il vero padre di quest'ultimo era Dmitrij Pichno, brillante docente di Economia politica dell'Università imperiale di Kiev e collega di Vitalij, di cui sposerà la vedova e erediterà la guida del "Kievljanin" dopo la sua prematura scomparsa (Matich 2017: 46).

smatica del mondo culturale kieviano, rievocava in questo modo le vicende storiche originarie della *Rus'*:

> Dai primi inizi dell'esistenza politica del popolo russo esso fu unito e, anche se fino al conseguimento dell'unità politica era frammentato in diverse tribù, queste avevano in comune la lingua secondo quanto riportato da Nestor il Cronista, elemento che indica la totale unità nazionale del popolo russo. Il gran principe Oleg lo unì politicamente, azione portata a compimento da san Vladimir, allorquando tutta la Rus', inclusa la galiziano-carpatica, entrò a far parte dello Stato russo unito (Sbornik 1908: 37).

Una posizione mai messa in discussione dai dirigenti del movimento nazional-conservatore a Kiev, nemmeno nel momento in cui, come conseguenza del collasso dell'impero zarista e dell'occupazione tedesca, veniva a costituirsi lo Stato ucraino, noto anche come Etmanato dal titolo conferito al generale Pavel Skoropadskij, messo a capo della nuova formazione statale dopo un recente passato nell'esercito imperiale russo. Sia Savenko che Šul'gin rifiutarono la cittadinanza ucraina, con un documento diviso in tre parti, dove si fornivano le basi storiche, politiche e internazionali di cui, secondo i due nazionalisti russi, era priva la nuova Ucraina. Il documento, apparso successivamente sulla stampa a firma del solo Šul'gin, riprendeva le argomentazioni classiche della negazione dell'identità ucraina, mettendone in discussione la legittimità storica. Scriveva l'ormai ex deputato:

> La storia delle terre legate a Kiev può essere divisa in vari periodi: il primo è quello antico, quando sotto il potere dei principi del casato di Rjurik si è costituito un forte Stato russo con Kiev come proprio centro. Tutti i documenti storici, siano essi russi o stranieri, definiscono sempre e dovunque questo antico Stato di Kiev come Rus', e così come russi tutti i principi del casato di Rjurik e come russe le terre sotto il loro dominio. Non vi è mai stata menzione alcuna dello Stato ucraino (Šul'gin 1918: 171).

Più di un secolo dopo, durante un incontro con il presidente della Corte costituzionale della Federazione Russa Valerij Zor'kin, nell'esaminare una carta geografica francese risalente al XVII secolo Vladimir Putin ha convenuto con l'ospite sull'assenza dell'Ucraina, perché "il potere sovietico ha creato l'Ucraina sovietica, è noto a tutti, e fino a quel momento non vi era mai stata alcuna Ucraina nella storia dell'umanità" (Putin 2023a). Una concezione che sarebbe espressa anche dalla stessa etimologia del toponimo, derivante secondo il leader dalla parola *okraina,* che in russo ha i significati di periferia, marca di confine, regione di frontiera (Putin 2021a). Anche in questo caso vi è una derivazione di tale immagine dalla tradizione politica del nazionalismo russo d'inizio Novecento, dove la contestazione dell'esistenza di una comunità distinta e separata dall'identità *obščerusskaja* vedeva tra le argomentazioni proprio quanto espresso dal presidente nel suo saggio del luglio 2021. In un piccolo pamphlet pubblicato a Rostov sul Don, all'epoca centro controllato dai Bianchi del generale Anton Denikin e dove Šul'gin si era rifugiato per collaborare con la Commissione speciale istituita per l'amministrazione civile della Russia meridionale, intitolato *Ukrainskij narod* [Il popolo ucraino], l'ex deputato polemizzava con l'etnonimo e il toponimo, fornendo una propria ricostruzione filologica delle loro origini:

In francese vi è la parola Marge, che corrisponde esattamente al termine "Ucraina". Marge vuol dire margine: ad esempio si dice "le marges d'un livre", cioè margine o spazio di un libro. La parola francese Marge è il lemma latino modificato Margo, che ha lo stesso significato. I vecchi storici traducevano con Margo la parola "Ucraina" (ad esempio lo scrittore del XVII secolo Somuil Bronskij scrive: Margo enim polonice kray; inde Ucraina guali provincia ad fines regin pesta. "Margo", che vuol dire in polacco "marca". Da qui Ucraina, ovvero provincia situata ai confini dello Stato). Così la traduzione esatta in lingua francese di "Ucraina" sarà Marge e per questo gli "ucraini" andrebbero chiamati Les Margines, ovvero gente che vive nei pressi della frontiera. […] "Ucraini", "ukrainjane" o "ukrainniki" ha sempre descritto la popolazione che abita al confine (Šul'gin 1918a).

Già a partire dalla metà del XVII secolo gli abitanti dei voivodati di Kiev, Černigov e Braclav si definivano come ucraini, e lo Stato sorto come conseguenza delle guerre cosacche contro la Confederazione polacco-lituana veniva chiamato Ucraina, spesso come sinonimo della *Rus'* di un tempo (Jakovenko 2009: 84-93; Kotenko, Martinjuk, Miller 2012: 395). Un processo descritto anche dallo storico russo Fëdor Gajda, autore di un importante studio su posizioni nazional-conservatrici sulla genealogia dell'etnonimo, dove non può esimersi dal notare come:

a partire dall'ultimo trentennio del XVII secolo nella parte di Piccola Russia passata sotto il controllo dello Stato moscovita nei circoli filomoscoviti dell'élite e del clero cosacchi il termine "ucraini" viene adoperato in relazione ai cosacchi (Gajda 2019: 43).

La battaglia dei patrioti *malorossy* di Kiev, condotta attraverso il Club dei nazionalisti russi, dalle pagine del "Kievljanin" e dalla tribuna della Duma di Stato, vedeva però il netto rifiuto di ogni significato nazionale all'etnonimo. Una posizione radicale diretta non solo contro il "mazepismo", come veniva definito il movimento nazionale ucraino, ritenuto ispirato alle gesta dell'etmano Ivan Mazepa, schieratosi con il regno di Svezia contro Pietro I durante la Grande guerra del nord di inizio Settecento, ma anche contro i polacchi, ritenuti i veri responsabili del sorgere delle rivendicazioni ucraine. Un'argomentazione presente anche nel summenzionato saggio di Vladimir Putin, dove l'adozione delle misure restrittive nei confronti della pubblicazione e della circolazione di testi e libri in lingua ucraina (piccolo-russa nei documenti) sancita dalla circolare Valuev del 1863 e dall'editto imperiale di Ems del 1876 viene spiegata con "i drammatici avvenimenti in Polonia" all'inizio degli anni Sessanta del XIX secolo, per cui il divieto venne messo in atto "a causa della volontà dei leader del movimento nazionale polacco di utilizzare la 'questione ucraina' per i propri interessi", ambizione divenuta poi progetto politico:

I fatti oggettivi dicono che nell'impero russo era in corso un attivo processo di sviluppo della cultura piccolo-russa e dell'identità all'interno della *bol'šaja russkaja nacija*, che univa grande-russi, piccolo-russi e bielorussi, ma contemporaneamente nell'ambito dell'élite polacca e di una certa parte dell'intelligencija piccolo-russa emergevano e si rafforzavano le percezioni di un popolo ucraino separato da quello russo. Non ve ne erano le basi né potevano esserci e per questo le deduzioni erano costruite su varie fantasie (Putin 2021a).

Una conclusione non dissimile dalla disamina polemica presente in un discorso, successivamente apparso in formato di pamphlet, di Ivan Sikorskij, psichiatra, docente dell'Università imperiale di Kiev e pioniere di una declinazione razzista e antisemita degli studi antropologici nell'impero russo, assurto alla notorietà nel 1913 come consulente del pubblico ministero nel processo Bejlis, basato sulla falsa accusa di omicidio rituale da parte di un operaio ebreo di un bambino ucraino (Mogil'ner 2008: 245-260). Nell'intervento presentato in un'assemblea plenaria del Club dei nazionalisti russi, Sikorskij obiettava come:

> Qui non vi sono ucraini! Non ve ne sono né tra i vivi né nei cimiteri, né sulla terra, né sotto, per questo se prendiamo in considerazione per le discussioni e le deduzioni la componente fisica della popolazione, la sua razza e natura, in Ucraina non vi è una popolazione che abbia componenti specifiche: qui vi è quello che esiste anche al di fuori di essa. Per cui la conclusione naturale è che "Ucraina" e "ucraini" sono termini rispettivamente geografico e politico, ma non antropologici o etnici (Sikorskij 1913: 12-13).

2. Da Il'in a Solženicyn: il pensiero nazional-conservatore russo e la questione ucraina

L'accezione politica conferita alla denominazione nazionale non consisteva nel riconoscere l'alterità degli ucraini, ma ne denunciava il carattere di minaccia reale non solo per l'architettura imperiale, ma per l'essenza della comunità *obščerusskaja*. L'impegno a una lotta per la conservazione e, successivamente alla costituzione dell'Ucraina sovietica, per la riunificazione dei territori ritenuti patrimonio della *Rus'* era ritenuto, anche dagli esponenti nazional-conservatori dell'emigrazione russa nel periodo interbellico un obiettivo imprescindibile per ricostruire l'originaria unità. Tra di essi il più noto, assieme a Vasilij Šul'gin, vi era Ivan Il'in, filosofo e pubblicista spesso citato da Vladimir Putin e ritenuto tra i principali pensatori a cui l'attuale presidente russo si ispira nell'azione di governo[7]. Nella risoluzione finale del Congresso dei Bianchi tenuto nel 1938 con l'obiettivo di raccogliere le organizzazioni di destra e monarchiche in esilio, il filosofo, incaricato dal generale Anton Denikin di stendere il documento, denunciava:

> Il separatismo ucraino è un fenomeno artificiale, privo di basi reali, nato per le ambizioni dei propri capetti e a causa degli intrighi internazionali (…) La Piccola Russia e la Grande Russia sono unite da un'unica fede, dalla stessa etnia, dal comune destino storico, dalla collocazione geografica, dall'economia, dalla cultura e dalla politica. Gli stranieri che preparano questa separazione devono ricordare che in questo modo dichiareranno una guerra secolare a tutta la Russia (Il'in 1938a)[8].

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[7] In occasione della cerimonia di annessione delle quattro regioni ucraine di Doneck, Lugansk, Cherson e Zaporiž'ja, atto non riconosciuto dalla comunità internazionale, il 30 settembre 2022 Putin ha concluso il suo discorso citando queste parole di Il'in: "Se ritengo la Russia patria mia, questo vuol dire che amo alla russa, rifletto e penso, canto e parlo in russo; significa che credo nelle forze spirituali del popolo russo e accetto il suo destino storico con il suo istinto e la sua volontà. Il suo spirito è il mio spirito, il suo destino è il mio destino, le sue sofferenze sono il mio dolore, il suo fiorire è la mia gioia" (Putin 2022c).

[8] Il testo è stato in seguito pubblicato in un'antologia caratterizzata da un forte sentimento antiucraino, assieme a testi di pensatori e intellettuali d'orientamento nazional-conservatore e patriottico (Semenova 2019: 253).

Il'in tratteggiava la questione ucraina non puramente come problema di identità nazionale e di possibile catastrofe spirituale per la nazione russa, ma ne vedeva le implicazioni oggi definite di profondità strategica. L'Ucraina indipendente sarebbe diventata, nelle prospettive delineate dal filosofo nel caso del crollo dell'Unione Sovietica e di una mancata instaurazione di una dittatura nazionale russa, un avamposto decisivo nel futuro scontro, ritenuto come inevitabile, tra una Germania di nuovo ascesa a potenza militare europea e una Russia indebolita, priva anche di territori (nel testo Il'in accenna a uno Stato indipendente nel bacino del Don) considerati parte dell'allora Repubblica socialista federativa sovietica russa. Un'Ucraina quindi ridotta al ruolo di *proxy* tedesco, impegnata in una laboriosa opera di contenimento dei propri vicini e al tempo stesso piazza d'armi per l'invasione da Occidente, descritta dal filosofo in questo modo:

> Questo "Stato" sarà prima di tutto costretto a costruire una nuova linea difensiva da Ovruč a Kursk e più in là, attraverso Char'kov, verso Bachmut e Mariupol'. In risposta dovranno far fronte contro l'Ucraina e la Grande Russia e la regione militare del Don: entrambi i due stati vicini saranno a conoscenza che l'Ucraina si appoggia alla Germania ed è un suo satellite; e che in caso di una nuova guerra tra Germania e Russia l'avanzata tedesca partirà da subito da Kursk verso Mosca, da Char'kov al Volga, e da Bachmut e Mariupol' verso il Caucaso. Si tratterà di una nuova situazione, nella quale i punti di massima avanzata attualmente dei tedeschi saranno le loro posizioni di partenza (Il'in 1950: 337).

La pretesa incapacità di una volontà politica indipendente ucraina è ripresa anche da Putin, e in modo ancor più fragoroso dai media ufficiali russi: a promuovere la coscienza nazionale nella Galizia orientale, allora provincia dell'impero austro-ungarico, son state le autorità absburgiche in funzione antipolacca e antirussa, e l'odierna Ucraina è "eterodiretta", scriveva il presidente nel 2021 (Putin 2021a); il controllo degli Stati Uniti d'America sulla politica interna è ritenuto un dato di fatto, come lo è la circolazione nel territorio ucraino e il suo utilizzo per operazioni militari dell'Alleanza Atlantica (Putin 2022a). Il temuto (e non avvenuto al momento) allargamento della NATO ai confini sud-occidentali della Federazione Russa si accompagna, nell'illustrazione data dal Cremlino, alla rivendicazione delle regioni ucraine come patrimonio nazionale, eredità secolare e parte costitutiva del passato imperiale e del presente da grande potenza. Un binomio su cui si son mossi anche gli analisti e i commentatori più orientati al nazionalismo radicale, di cui una testimonianza è fornita da un editoriale, poi cancellato, apparso sul portale dell'agenzia statale di stampa RIA Novosti a firma di Petr Akopov, pubblicista d'estrema destra, dove annunciava la "soluzione finale" della questione ucraina e preconizzava come:

> L'Ucraina intesa come anti-Russia non esisterà più. La Russia ristabilisce la sua interezza storica, aggregando il mondo russo, il popolo russo insieme in tutta la sua totalità di grande-russi, bielorussi e piccolo-russi. Se ci fossimo rifiutati di agire, di consentire a questa separazione temporanea di consolidarsi nei secoli, non solo avremmo tradito la memoria dei nostri avi, ma saremmo stati maledetti dai nostri discendenti per aver consentito la divisione della terra russa (Akopov 2022).

L'espansione ad est della NATO era stata denunciata, già alla fine degli anni Novanta, da Aleksandr Solženicyn. Il premio Nobel per la letteratura, espulso dall'Urss nel 1974 e poi tornato in Russia vent'anni dopo, avrebbe ribadito la sua contrarietà, in una intervista al settimanale *Moskovskie Novosti*, nei confronti delle "truppe d'occupazione" degli Stati Uniti in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia e Kosovo, sostenendo come le "azioni della NATO e le azioni solitarie americane differiscono poco nella sostanza", esprimendo la preoccupazione nei confronti di una politica estera ritenuta aggressiva in Europa orientale, dove l'Alleanza Atlantica "con metodo accresce il proprio apparato militare" (Solženicyn 2006: 22). Nel rispondere a un'altra domanda del giornalista Vitalij Tret'jakov su cosa pensasse riguardo alla volontà espressa da una parte dell'establishment politico ucraino di aderire alla NATO e all'Unione Europea, l'autore di *Arcipelago Gulag* riferiva del proprio "dolore" di fronte alla "marginalizzazione" della lingua russa e nella possibile, definitiva, perdita degli "ampi spazi, mai appartenuti all'Ucraina storica, come la Novorossija, la Crimea e le regioni sud-orientali" (Solženicyn 2006: 23). La polemica nei confronti dell'artificiosità dei confini della Repubblica sovietica ucraina prima e in seguito dell'Ucraina contemporanea e della loro identità non rappresentava una novità per il dissidente, che avrebbe dedicato nel suo pamphlet *Kak nam obustroit' Rossiju?* (apparso in italiano con il titolo *Come ricostruire la nostra Russia?*) un appello a bielorussi ed ucraini a dar vita a un'unione slavo-orientale che avrebbe dovuto in più includere il Kazakistan, perché:

> Oggi dividersi dall'Ucraina vuol dire separare milioni di famiglie e di persone, con una popolazione mista, con intere regioni con una preminenza russa; quanta gente c'è che non sa quale delle due nazionalità adottare; quanti sono di provenienza mista e quanti sono i matrimoni misti e finora nessuno li considerava tali. Alla base della popolazione non vi è nessuna intolleranza tra ucraini e russi.

> Fratelli! Non abbiamo bisogno di questa feroce separazione! Si tratta di una confusione degli anni del comunismo, abbiamo sofferto insieme nell'epoca sovietica, siamo caduti assieme in questo calderone e assieme ne usciremo (Solženicyn 1990: 545).

L'invito a una nuova forma di unità da parte di Solženicyn venne accolto come un tentativo di negazione del diritto all'autodeterminazione del popolo ucraino, al punto da spingere Svjatoslav Karavanskij, figura storica della dissidenza antisovietica nella repubblica e già detenuto nei campi di lavoro, a rispondere con una lettera aperta nella quale si accusava lo scrittore di essere un "imperialista". La replica del premio Nobel, pubblicata dal periodico *Russkaja mysl'* il 2 novembre 1990, ribatteva indicando le rivendicazioni ucraine come ipocrite, chiedendosi perché mai:

> Oggi, quando nell'Ucraina occidentale giacciono al suolo i monumenti a Lenin (e a terra meritano di stare!), chissà perché, gli ucraini occidentali più di tutti vogliono che l'Ucraina abbia proprio i confini leniniani, a loro regalati da Lenin, quando cercava di ingraziarsela per la perdita dell'indipendenza, dandole i territori mai ad essa appartenuti della Novorossija (Russia meridionale), del Donbass (per separare il bacino del Donec dalle influenze "controrivoluzionarie" del Don) e una parte importante della riva sinistra del Dnepr (e Krusciov le "ha regalato" la Crimea). Ebbene, adesso i nazionalisti ucraini sono all'erta, in difesa di questi "sacri" confini leniniani? (Solženicyn 1990: 348-349).

Considerazioni ripetute in un altro testo, *Russkij vopros k koncu XX veka*, dove il dissidente ormai rientrato in patria aveva parole durissime nei confronti dei

> nazionalisti ucraini, così eroici nel combattere in passato il comunismo, sempre pronti a maledire Lenin, son stati sedotti dal suo regalo avvelenato, accogliendo gioiosamente i falsi confini leniniani dell'Ucraina (e addirittura il pegno crimeano dello stupido Chruščev) (Solženicyn 1994: 687).

Solženicyn non ha mai, è il caso di specificarlo, invocato la violenza nei confronti dei vicini ucraini, ma l'idea di una separazione artificiale, di uno Stato a cui erano stati annessi territori russi, è ben presente nei suoi lavori degli anni Novanta ed è stata espressa nelle interviste d'inizio XXI secolo. Vladimir Putin lo ha definito, dopo aver citato dal famoso discorso di Harvard del 1978 la "persistente cecità" nata da un "senso di superiorità illusorio" dell'Occidente, un "vero, autentico patriota russo, un nazionalista nel senso buono, civile, della parola" (Putin 2023b), riconoscendo il debito ideale nei suoi confronti.

3. Conclusioni

L'inversione del corso della storia, il tentativo di ricostruire l'originaria armonia etnica, linguistica, culturale e religiosa assume i contorni della retrotopia, in grado di cancellare le divisioni originate dalla temperie rivoluzionaria del 1917 e dal crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, appaiono passibili di realizzazione nonostante la cesura radicale causata dal passare dei decenni e dalle trasformazioni sociali e culturali. Il tentativo di eradicare l'immaginario ucraino appare voler rispondere a quanto denunciato da Vasilij Šul'gin nel già citato documento dove non accettava di esser considerato cittadino del nuovo Stato:

> I termini Ucraina, ucraini, lingua ucraina, Stato ucraino hanno un unico significato: togliere dalla testa della popolazione locale l'idea che questa regione è russa, che i suoi abitanti sono i più russi dei russi, che la lingua della parte più acculturata della popolazione è il russo letterario e che nelle nostre campagne si usa il dialetto piccolo-russo così come nelle campagne della Grande Russia si usa il corrispettivo dialetto. Ma noi, abitanti originari di questa regione che abbiamo cara la nostra appartenenza al popolo russo unito, a questo popolo a cui è riservato, nonostante le difficoltà che ora attraversa, un grande futuro, non vogliamo rinunciare alla gloriosa denominazione nazionale dei nostri antenati per la quale hanno combattuto tanti secoli. E non possiamo trasformarci in ucraini senza appartenenza ed etnia: siamo nati russi e restiamo russi (Šul'gin 1918: 174).

Nelle asserzioni del presidente russo sull'identità ucraina, a differenza dei nazionalisti russi d'inizio Novecento, i riferimenti alle posizioni odierne del nazionalismo ucraino risultano essere generici, un elemento importante che dovrebbe interrogare maggiormente gli studiosi: infatti, oltre al sottolineare la politica di collaborazione con il regime nazional-socialista tedesco perseguita dalle due formazioni nate dalla scissione dell'Organizzazione dei nazionalisti ucraini (OUN), dirette rispettivamente da Andrij Mel'nik e Stepan Bandera, manca una riflessione su quali siano i programmi

e le idee dell'estrema destra ucraina, di cui ci si limita a denunciare l'eredità collabora-zionista.

L'eclettismo presente nel pantheon ideologico del Cremlino, dove, come dichiarato dallo stesso Putin, vi è spazio per pensatori assai diversi come Nikolaj Berdjaev, Ivan Il'in, Lev Gumilev, vede nell'interpretazione della storia russa come perenne tensione verso la difesa dello Stato e della propria civiltà anche *manu militari* il proprio tratto comune, in grado di unire epoche, figure e avvenimenti in alcuni casi contrastanti. Nell'odierna narrazione proposta sulla guerra in Ucraina alla lotta contro la "giunta neonazista di Kiev", elemento che richiama la Grande guerra patriottica del 1941-45 e legittimerebbe la Federazione Russa, quale erede dell'Unione Sovietica, nel compimento della "operazione speciale militare", si aggiunge l'immagine tradizionale veicolata dal nazionalismo russo dell'indipendenza e dell'identità ucraina come innaturali, incarnazione dell'anti-Russia da combattere in tutto e per tutto.

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Historical Roots of the Russo-Ukrainian War

Lara Piccardo

Introduction

On 24 February 2022, Putin launched the "special military operation" (Putin 2022), presented as "self-defence against the threats" (*ibid.*).

In the speech broadcast on Rossija-24, the Russian president reported Moscow's goals: the protection of "people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years" (*ibid.*) and "the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine" (*ibid.*). Putin also reiterated that Russia could not allow Kiev to acquire nuclear weapons and mentioned the "unacceptable […] expansion of the NATO bloc to the East" (*ibid.*).

Since that moment, a local war with global impacts kicks off and diplomatic solutions seem unobtainable.

In general, the reason for this diplomatic standoff lies in the unwillingness of the Russian elite to face a negotiation and the lack of a common ground on which to start working. Peace proposals are also difficult to elaborate given both the absence of clarity of Russian objectives and some Ukrainian needs that go beyond the defence of its territory and its citizens. Moreover, US and Europe (intended both geographically and as the European Union – EU) are linked with different intensity to Moscow and express various political positions, albeit unanimously condemning the aggression.

In addition to contingent problems[1], the deep reasons for the conflict reside in a complex and long-standing intertwining of ethnic, territorial, geopolitical and economic problems, which have increased in the area over the course of history. Explaining and understanding them means providing a diagnosis not only of war, the last violent symptom of a more serious disease, but also and above all of the arcane causes that underlie it. Only the correct diagnosis will allow for adequate therapy. Indeed, the risk is that of not finding the right medicine, but just a palliative that will be able to stop the hostilities temporarily and to return them to the condition of a "frozen conflict" ready to explode again in the near future.

To determine the causes of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, we must therefore return to the long-term history of an area that has always been the victim of its powerful neighbours: Poland, which intends Ukraine as the last frontier of Catholicism, and Russia, which considers the territory the ancestral homeland. Like a barometer,

Lara Piccardo, University of Genova, lara.piccardo@unige.it

[1] Among these problems there are the pro-European positions of Ukraine and its hypothesized annexation to NATO, unwelcome in Moscow, the Donbas, the annexation of Crimea, the question of energy supplies and gas pipelines, as well as broader international scenarios, which also involve Washington, Beijing, and others.

Ukraine always registered the changing balance of power between its neighbours and, when Poland first joined NATO and then the EU, Kiev found itself in the middle of the West and Moscow.

The following pages reconstruct four salient moments in Ukrainian history, which represent as many fundamental turning points for determining the deep reasons for this war:

1. the birth of the Kievan *Rus'* and Ukrainian entrance in the Tsarist Empire;
2. the creation of various Ukrainian republics at the beginning of 20th century;
3. some problems of the independent Ukraine born with the dissolution of the USSR;
4. finally, the emergence of the reasons for the Euromaidan crisis in 2013-2014.

Each of these phases reveals, with varying intensity, how Ukraine is subject to incessant change in its dimensions, how fragile its identity is and how its independence has always been precarious.

1. Ethnic Groups and Powerful Neighbours: Ukraine from Kievan *Rus'* to the Tsarist Empire

Already inhabited by Sarmatians, Scythians and Goths, the territory of present-day Ukraine was populated in the 6th and 7th centuries a.C. by Slavic populations of the Eastern branch, *i.e.* Ukrainians and Ruthenians, called "little Russians". Their history is closely intertwined with that of the Russians properly so called, or "Great Russians": the first Slavic political structure, the Kievan *Rus'*, took its name from what would become the historical capital of Ukraine. Destined to be the subject of historiographical speculation (Velychenko 1992), Kievan *Rus'* gave rise to an exploited and politicized historical memory, which is still today disputed between the heir nations of that first Slavic State.

The sources of the time describe the Slavs as a heterogeneous group, unable to self-determination. This political disunity, in addition to the flat territory crossed by many rivers, allowed several incursions by foreign populations. According to the *Russian Primary Chronicle* by Nestor, a monk, in 859 the Norsemen conquered the Sarmatian plain. Three years later, the Slavs defeated them but, being unable to create a political and administrative unity, asked the Vikings for the management of the territory. Three noble Varangian[2] brothers, Rurik, Sineus and Truvor, accepted the invitation and settled in the Eastern territory. Upon the death of the last two, Rurik reunited the lands under his control, identifying the city of Novgorod as his capital and giving life to the Nordic dynasty of the Rurikids. A different interpretation of Nestor's writings reports that the Varangian brothers did not arrive in present-day Ukraine, Russia and Belarus called by the local populations, but simply as leaders, who conquered the area taking advantage of the political instability. These two versions have always fuelled the historiographical debate on the ethnicity of the founders of Kievan *Rus'*.

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[2] The Scandinavians were known in Europe as Vikings, Normans, Norsemen, or Varangians.

Russian historiography, for example, has always highlighted the importance of the autochthonous Slavic role in the formation of *Rus'*, using it for the nationalization of the myth and for the Pan-Slavism often evoked by the Tsarist Empire.

The life of Kievan *Rus'*, which included the territory of Kiev, Chernigov, Pereiaslav, ended in the 13th century, with the Tatar-Mongol invasion. Several principalities were established, all stemming from what had been a large Slavic state entity and distilling their own distinct histories and cultures over the centuries to come.

Indeed, the decline of the *Rus'* as a unitary State caused the emergence of other centres of local power. Galicia and Volhynia in the Southwest, the territory of Novgorod in the Northwest, and the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal in the Northeast acquired particular political weight. Thus began the process of differentiation, which would lead to the birth of today's three Eastern Slavic ethnic groups: Ukrainians (or Ruthenians or Little Russians) in the Southwest; Belarusians (or White Russians) in the Northwest; Russians (or Great Russians) in the Northeast. The geographical location led the first two groups to have, in the following centuries, deep contacts with Lithuanians and Poles, which the great Russians lacked entirely; the latter instead had relations with Asian peoples, such as the Mongols and their Tatar allies and, later, with the autochthonous populations of Siberia.

Leaving aside the history of the principalities of Novgorod and Vladimir-Suzdal, it is here briefly interesting to recall that after the birth, around 1137, of the two principalities of Volhynia and of Galicia, the prince Roman unified them in 1199. Roman gave life to a dynasty that ruled the principality until 1323, when a Polish prince, Bolesław I of Masovia, ascended the throne.

In 1340, the king of Lithuania, Casimir the Great, took possession of Galicia and Volhynia. This was the first step for a further advance in the Ukraine of the Lithuanians, who drove the Tatars away and granted a certain autonomy to the local lords. The situation changed in 1386 following the dynastic union between Lithuania and Poland. Large landholdings were created and serfdom was introduced. The influence of Polish culture became increasingly strong: it is not a case if the term "Ukrayina" with the meaning of "border region" dates back to this Polish period. The peasants were enslaved to the landowners, so many of them fled to no man's lands, becoming "Cossacks", *i.e.* "adventurers".

During the 16th century, the Dnieper Cossacks colonized the newly occupied lands by organizing themselves into military communities; they placed their centre on the islands of the river and constituted the "Zaporozian Sich" (*i.e.* Cossack society), headed by the "hetman", a sort of sovereign leader elected by the Cossack "Rada" (Council).

In 1569, with the Lublin Agreement, the territory of the Middle Dnieper was incorporated into Poland. To tame the Cossacks, the Poles hired some armed departments at their service, expecting that the others were reduced to peasants subjected to the Polish magnates who conquered the area. The population also found itself divided into three groups of different religious denominations: Catholics of the Latin rite mainly Poles; Uniate Catholics, the Ruthenians; and Orthodox, mostly Cossacks. This sharpened the contrast between Poles and Cossacks.

Between 1635 and 1648, the Cossacks were the protagonists of great revolts, then placing themselves under the protection of Tsarist Russia, to which they were united by the Orthodox faith. In 1648, the Poles were defeated by the hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, but the latter, defeated in his turn in June 1651, had to cede the provinces of Chernigov and Braclav. The Cossack Rada, however, did not accept these assignments and continued the fight with the protection of Tsar Alexius I: the Treaty of Pereyaslav, which also recognized the hetmanate on the left bank of the Dnieper, ratified Russian support on 18 June 1654.

However, within a few years, the Russian presence began to seem cumbersome and so, in 1657, Cossacks tried to remove Ukraine from Russian influence, associating Ruthenia with Poland and Lithuania in a political union. The consequence was a Russian-Polish conflict that lasted seven years and ended in January 1667 with the truce of Andrusovo, which divided Ukraine between Poland and Russia: the first received the territories to the right of the Dnieper, the second those on the left, besides the city of Kiev.

The Cossacks of the right bank then asked help to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, Mehmed IV, who, in 1672, imposed on Poland the Bucaş Treaty: Polish Ukraine came under Turkish influence and the passed to Poland, albeit not in the whole, in 1676, when the Sultan signed the Treaty of Żurawno.

On the left side of the Dnieper, discontent began to spread as well. The modernization of the State undertaken by Peter the Great generated a strong political centralization, which threatened the traditional autonomy of the Cossack hetmanate guaranteed by Pereyaslav Treaty. When, finally, the tsar denied help to Ukraine to fight the Poles, hetman Ivan Mazepa abandoned his devotion to Russia and openly sided with the Swedish ruler Charles XII. On 29 June 1709, in Poltava, the two were defeated. If for Sweden, it was a nefarious stage in the Great Northern War, which would lead to the final defeat in 1718, for Eastern Ukraine, it marked the end of any independence ambitions: it was annexed to the Russian Empire and Catherine the Great abolished the Cossack society in 1775.

Ukraine then came under the rule of St. Petersburg when Poland underwent the second partition in 1793. The elite of the population continued to cultivate a sense of a Ukrainian identity kept alive by underground societies, papers published abroad and cultural activities in the historical and literary field that the tsarist regime strove to eradicate: in 1876, the use of the Ukrainian language was prohibited in teaching and in the press. This measure failed to serve its purpose and, on the contrary, strengthened Ukrainian nationalist pride, subjugated but not defeated by the so-called "Russification".

2. The Lack of Independence: From the February Revolution to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic

A second fundamental historical turning point took place at the beginning of the 20th century. Although the years immediately preceding WWI saw the start of Ukrainian political mobilization, only the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian em-

pires in 1917-1918 created the conditions for nationalist activism by a part of Ukrainians and brought to light several subjects aspiring to be independent Ukrainian States. This period, however, was extremely chaotic, characterized by revolutions, international and civil wars, and the lack of a strong central authority. Many factions vied for power in what is now Ukraine, and not all factions wanted a separate Ukrainian State. While independence was short-lived, with most of the territory incorporated into the USSR and the rest divided among Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania, it should also be noted that Ukraine was finally established as a geopolitical and cultural unit, developing a strong collective memory of what might have been experienced and allowing some Ukrainians to claim in 1991 that post-Soviet Ukraine was getting what was taken from it seventy years earlier.

Recalled in national historiography as the "Ukrainian revolution", the events of the period 1917-1920 find their genesis in the broader framework of the Russian Revolutions of February and October.

As known, with the February Revolution the Tsarist Empire found itself with a dual power, divided between the Provisional Government and the Soviets. The territorial unity of the kingdom was opposed by groups and associations of workers and soldiers representing the national interests of individual ethnic groups, who demanded the formation of self-governing and independent States, such as the Ukrainian State and the Crimean Tatar State (Magocsi 2014: 83).

In Ukraine, there was even a "triple power" because Ukrainian nationalists also aspired to leadership. Already on 7 March 1917, activists of the Society of Ukrainian Progressives founded their own institution, the Central Rada. All major Ukrainian political parties sent representatives. They expressed different positions: the League of Ukrainian Autonomists-Federalists advocated strong Ukrainian autonomy throughout within a Russian State, but refused requests to seize large landed estates; the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Ukraine wanted more radical land reform, thus finding strong support among the peasants and managing to become the largest Ukrainian party, only nominally allied with similar revolutionary socialist parties of the Russian Empire; finally, the Social Democratic Labour Party of Ukraine targeted the working class and included younger radicals.

A new season therefore opened for the Ukrainian national movement: it pursued the objectives of national-territorial autonomy and the reorganization of the State in a federalist sense and rejected any solicitation of subordination to the priorities imposed by the war emergency.

Meanwhile, the Central Rada had to begin to reflect on its legitimacy: it was in fact an unelected and unrepresentative body of Ukrainian society. To increase its base, the Assembly organized a First Ukrainian Congress from 17 to 21 April (Reshetar 1952: 49). The assembly adopted a resolution declaring that only national and territorial autonomy would satisfy Ukrainian needs. It was therefore not a question of a declaration of independence and, on 23 June 1917, an expanded Central Rada proclaimed the *First Universal*, so to announce Ukraine national autonomy as part of a federated Russian Republic.

Noting that the Rada was not an elected body, the Provisional Government rejected the Assembly's appeal, which did not clarify the meaning of "autonomy", nor the territorial boundaries. Meanwhile, representatives of national minorities, including Russians, Poles and Jews, received over a quarter of the seats in another expansion of the Central Rada. On 16 July 1917, it styled itself the "supreme organ of revolutionary democracy" (Reshetar 1952: 52-53) and promulgated the *Second Universal*, stating that the final form of Ukrainian "autonomy" would be decided by the Russian Constituent Assembly (Cigliano 2017:417).

In July 1917, the elections for Ukrainian municipal councils brought out the full disruptive force of Russian and Russian-speaking minorities: Russified Eastern Ukraine, with its relatively large working class, gravitated more towards Marxist-oriented parties; in Kiev, anti-Ukrainian groups strongly opposed the introduction of the Ukrainian language in schools (Reshetar 1952: 137).

Increasing the dissatisfaction and intolerance of the population, on 20 November 1917 the Rada promulgated the *Third Universal*, which proclaimed the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR), made up of the nine provinces of Kiev, Podolia, Volhynia, Chernigov, Kharkiv, Poltava, Yekaterinoslav, Kherson and Taurida (excluding Crimea), and referred the partial annexation of the territories of Kursk, Kholm and Voronezh to future negotiations.

However, the *Third Universal* unleashed the civil war. The Bolsheviks, who had strong support in Eastern Ukraine, refused to accept any idea of a separate Ukraine. In December, they organized a Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, which tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the Central Rada. On 25 December, in Kharkiv, they proclaimed the creation of the Ukrainian Socialist Republic (USR), which would be loyal to Lenin's government. Russian Bolshevik forces, together with pro-Bolshevik Ukrainian forces, marched on Kiev. The Bolshevik detachments, while not large, were well organized and won the support of many Ukrainians because they endorsed a more radical social program.

Meanwhile, on 16 December 1917, the Council of People's Commissars ratified a *Manifesto to the Ukrainian People* with final requests to the Ukrainian Rada: the ultimatum asked, among other things, to renounce any independence aspirations and to stop the disarmament of the Bolshevik regiments in Ukraine.

On 20 December 1917, the Ukrainian General Secretariat, established by the Rada, stressed that the Russian Council of People's Commissars had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine, stating that Russian Bolshevik units should realize their national aspirations in Russia, not in Ukraine, and that Ukraine would oppose Bolshevik methods of establishing power.

On 22 January 1918, the Rada hastened to ratify the *Fourth universal*, which declared the country's independence, providing that the UPR would become an independent, free and sovereign State of the Ukrainian people. It expressed his willingness to live in harmony and friendship with all neighbouring countries, but reiterated that none of them could interfere in the life of the independent republic.

On 9 February, the UPR signed a peace treaty with Germans and Austrians. The document recognized Kiev's authority over the nine Ukrainian provinces. The at-

tached secret protocols, however, stipulated that Ukraine would deliver food to the German and Austrian armies. In return, Berlin forced the Bolshevik government engaged in peace talks to recognize the UPR, withdraw from Ukrainian territory, and cease efforts to establish a Ukrainian Soviet government. The Ukrainian Bolsheviks, who had presided over the executions of thousands of "class enemies" in Kiev and elsewhere, withdrew from Ukrainian territory in April 1918. Many of their leaders fled to Russia, where they created the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine.

With German and Austrian assistance, the UPR returned to rule on Ukraine. Despite its struggles against the Bolsheviks, the UPR remained socialist in orientation.

This leftward direction alienated the conservative German military administration in Ukraine, an important patron of the UPR. By April 1918, the Germans took control of the railways, revoked the land tenure decree and introduced martial law. At the same time, the Central Rada signed an agreement with Berlin to supply Germany and Austria-Hungary with, among other things, 1 million tons of grain by the end of July (Reshetar 1952: 119).

It was clear, however, that the Central Rada lacked the means to comply with this agreement. As a backup plan, the Germans made contact with Pavlo Skoropadskyi, a Russian-speaking former tsarist general descended from an 18th-century Cossack hetman. Berlin diplomats discussed with him the possibility of creating a Ukrainian monarchy and offered him the throne. Skoropadskyi accepted and on 29 April 1918, while the Central Rada was adopting the Constitution, the *coup d'état* took place: the conservative Congress of Ukrainian landowners proclaimed Skoropadskyi hetman of Ukraine, without any resistance.

However, the new rule of the hetman was short-lived. German expeditions to seize grain led to peasant rebellions in the countryside; the political opposition consolidated into the Ukrainian National Union, whose leaders formed a Directory with the aim of overthrowing Skoropadskyi. Thousands of peasants volunteered to fight for the Directory, and many of the Hetmanate units, feeling that the situation had changed, deserted. On 14 December 1918, the Germans left Kiev and Skoropadskyi, disguised as a German officer, fled with them.

Meanwhile, parts of Western Ukraine remained spectators of the events just described, because they were still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Only towards the end of 1918, the authorities offered concessions to the various minority groups of the Empire, pledging, for example, in October 1918, to create a free federation of peoples. On 18 October, Ukrainian deputies of the imperial and provincial parliament, together with representatives of the main political parties, established the Ukrainian National Council in Lviv. On 1 November, few days before the end of the conflict, the National Council of Ukraine declared the establishment of an independent Ukrainian State, the West Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR).

Poland, which had its own territorial and national aspirations, opposed. The Poles claimed all of Galicia because they were the largest group in major cities, including Lviv. Clashes and riots broke out between Poles and Ukrainians in November, and the Poles forced the fledgling government of Western Ukraine out of Lviv. This conflict

escalated into a full-blown Ukrainian-Polish war, which later developed into the So-viet-Polish war. During the same period, the Ukrainian-populated regions of Bukov-ina and Transcarpathia were transferred respectively to an enlarged Romanian State and to a new country, Czechoslovakia.

Thanks largely to a relatively liberal political environment under the Austrians, Ukrainian civil society was well organized and unified in the fight against long-time rival Poles. The WUPR had its own national army, the Ukrainian Galician Army, which included former German and Austrian officers and, interestingly, its two command-ers-in-chief were former Russian generals.

The WUPR sought support in the East, attempting to join the emerging Ukrainian State in the former tsarist Russian lands. On 22 January 1919, the two Ukrainian States formally united, making the WUPR the Western province of the larger UPR.

Given the violent and complex premises linked to its birth, this State did not im-mediately have a good chance of survival. In the West, the Ukrainian Galician Army mounted an anti-Polish counter-offensive, but it was unsuccessful.

After all, Poland born in Versailles decided to take advantage of the Russian chaos to settle the old scores of the past: on 14 February 1919, it invaded Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine to recreate a "great Poland".

In this new war phase, the two different geopolitical orientations emerged cor-responding to the two main Ukrainian souls, that of the UPR and the WURP. While Western Ukrainians hoped that their compatriots in the East would help them against the Poles, the leaders of the Directory considered the Poles as allies in their battles against the Russian Bolsheviks. The Ukrainian Galician Army engaged alongside the Directory forces for most of 1919, even occupying Kiev in late August. However, haunted by heavy fighting with the Red and White Armies as part of the wider Rus-sian civil war and decimated by deadly typhus epidemics, the Galician army sur-rendered to the White forces in November. Meanwhile, the Poles, who signed a sep-arate peace with the Ukrainian Directory, advanced further into Western Ukraine, oc-cupied the provinces of Volhynia and Podolia and entered Kiev on 7 May.

Since Kiev had proved incapable of acting effectively on its own, Bolshevik Rus-sia decided to intervene on Ukraine's behalf as well. The Red Army reorganized itself and went on the counteroffensive inflicting heavy defeats on the Polish army, liber-ating the occupied territories and entering the heart of Poland in the direction of Warsaw. When the fall of the Polish capital seemed imminent and the advance of the Bolshevik troops unstoppable, a Polish counter-offensive led to the defeat of the Soviets at the gates of Warsaw and allowed Poland to regain part of the lost ground. The war ended with a compromise between the parties, negotiated with the sup-port of the League of Nations and sanctioned by on 18 March 1921 the Treaty of Riga, which led to a partition of Belarus and Ukraine between Soviet Russia and Po-land.

Ukraine passed to Russia became the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine (SSRU) within the broader structure of the nascent USSR: the independence parenthesis was closed, but it left the ambition to create a new Ukrainian State.

However, the USSR lacked seven million Ukrainians, one of the largest stateless minorities in Europe, who found themselves scattered across a reconstituted Polish State, the new Czechoslovakia and an enlarged Romania.

Meanwhile, in the USSR, Lenin recognized that Russification was not an effective measure and drafted a policy on nationalities that allowed the non-Russian parts of the old tsarist empire under Bolshevik control to be "national in form, socialist in content". The USSR was initially composed of four separate and ethnically defined republics: Russia, Belarus (White Russia), the Transcaucasian Federative Republic (which included Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan), and the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. The latter had its own government (communist, of course) based, until 1934, in Kharkiv, closer to the Russian border than Kiev, and controlled some economic enterprises and cultural and scientific institutions for the development of language and culture Ukrainians. Furthermore, Ukrainian nationality (albeit Soviet citizenship) was recognized and retained the right to secede from the USSR. For a long time this had no consequences, as secession was politically impossible and, at least according to Soviet ideology, unnecessary, as the USSR was a fraternal union of various peoples and pre-existing national differences would gradually disappear under communism. This development, of course, did not happen and Soviet Ukraine was finally able to act on its right to secede in 1991.

3. Independent Ukraine after Soviet Collapse

A third historical turning point is represented by the events linked to Soviet collapse, which had its final phase with the election of Gorbachev.

While engaged in the revival of pure communist ideology with perestroika and glasnost (Gorbaciov 1987: 30), the last Soviet leader had to deal with the first crack in the Soviet system. Perestroika, indeed, also allowing greater autonomy for the Soviet republics, created the conditions for the birth in Vilnius, in October 1988, of the nationalist movement "Sajudis", led by Vytautas Landsbergis, who on 16 February 1989 pronounced himself for the self-determination of the Republic of Lithuania. The elections of the following 26 March led the nationalists to victory, even inducing the Central Committee to accept after a few months a programmatic document, which ratified the "right to economic sovereignty" of the Baltic Republics.

The new course initiated by Gorbachev was emblematically reawakening nationalist sentiments suffocated by the previous Soviet leaders and would soon have a boomerang effect against its creator.

On 8 September 1989, a movement in favour of reforms and perestroika, the "Rukh", was born in Kiev, and on the following 17, about 100,000 Uniates demonstrated in Lviv for the recognition of their Catholic Church, protesting against the forced integration within the orthodox one decided by Stalin in 1946. In the local elections of 4 March 1990, which took place under the new rules of multi-party system, only 239 out of 450 deputies of the *Verchovna Rada* (the Ukrainian Parliament) belonged to the Communist Party: the others were members of the movement for perestroika and other opposition parties.

On 16 July 1990, with 355 votes in favour and 4 against, the Rada approved a declaration ambiguously called "of sovereignty", which claimed the right of Ukraine to have its own army and police and proclaimed the supremacy over its entire territory. The enigmatic nature of the term "sovereignty" used in the document was aggravated by the fact that the thoughts of the Ukrainian government regarding the institutional future of the USSR were not known. Shortly thereafter, on 23 July, Leonid Kravchuk, former Secretary-General of the local Communist Party, was elected president of Ukraine.

Precisely on the institutional question, the Soviet people would have been called with the referendum of the spring 1991: the consultation handed over the favour of the voters to the maintenance of the USSR on condition of its reformation. From that moment, events escalated throughout the USSR.

During the Soviet coup of 19 August 1991, Kiev proclaimed its independence from Moscow and dissolved the Communist Party five days later. At the same time, on 29 August, Ukraine signed an agreement with Russia to maintain the borders of the USSR.

In November, a session of the Council of State addresses the node on the new Soviet State architecture:

> [Yeltsin, president of the Russian republic] Without Ukraine there can be no Union. [Gorbachev, president of the USSR] But the opposite is also true. If we repudiate the Union, we will give the [Ukrainian] separatists a gift. [Yeltsin] Let's wait (Chosroevič 1993: 301; Dunlop 2003).

Time was running out and it was not possible to resolve the issue of the new reformed USSR, an ambiguous term that lent itself to various currents of thought: a sort of "common market" on the model of the first European Economic Community; a British Commonwealth; a real confederation of independent and sovereign States.

In this equivocal context, the referendum was held in Ukraine on 1 December 1991. It was an opportunity to confirm the separatist will: 90% of the voters declared themselves in favour of a divorce from Moscow and elected Kravchuk as president of the Republic. Then, on 8 December, with the presidents of Russia, Yeltsin, and Belarus, Stanislav Shushkevich, Kravchuk himself announced the death of the USSR and the creation of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The transition was less painful than in the past, but the future remained uncertain.

Right from the start, serious financial problems afflicted Ukraine: the difficult transition to a market economy, inflation and corruption undermined the economic and, consequently, political foundations of the new State. On 8 October 1992 the Prime Minister, Vitold Fokin, in office since the previous August, was forced to resign, accused of being too cautious in liberalizing the market and of having caused hyperinflation. He was replaced by the pro-Russian Leonid Kuchma, who also resigned the following September. The president then assumed the interim head of government; the parliament fixed in 1994 the calling of the elections for the renewal of both the parliament and the presidency. The communists and their allies (socialists and peasants), especially in the Eastern part of the country, won a third of the seats; the pro-

Western nationalists got about a third, mostly in the Western regions, and the other third went to the independent moderates.

In July 1994, Kuchma won the presidential elections and immediately afterwards, with a decree, granted himself broad executive powers, recognized by the Constitution approved on 28 June 1996. Three years later, he was re-elected.

In November 2000, the "Kuchmagate", or "Tapegate", broke out: a video began to circulate showing Kuchma ordering the kidnapping – which took place months earlier – of the journalist Georgy Gongadze. While not seriously damaging the president's political career, the scandal paved the way for the "Orange Revolution" and brought out with explosive force the division between pro-Western and pro-Russian that would be consumed in the subsequent presidential elections and street demonstrations.

The "Ukraine without Kuchma" movement, which organized large protests, gained new momentum: the opposition clustered around Kuchma's former Prime Minister, Viktor Yushchenko.

Kuchma did not give up, repressed demonstrations and held office until 2005. In April 2003, he identified Viktor Yanukovych, the then Prime Minister, as his potential successor, and introduced a constitutional reform that would have severely curtailed the powers of a future president. Surprisingly, the measure did not pass the scrutiny of the Supreme Council of Ukraine and the 2004 presidential elections resulted in a contest between the authorities and the opposition over the balance of power.

In his electoral campaign, Yushchenko emphasized his role as a "candidate of the people", in opposition to that of the government, counting on a mass mobilization of support through organized public demonstrations, especially in Kiev. On the other hand, Yanukovych relied mainly on a pension increase carried out on the eve of the elections. Funding for this measure came from Russia, which pushed for the creation of a near-monopoly of television coverage for Yanukovych at Yushchenko's expense and the propagation of a false image of the latter as a Western Ukrainian, Nazi sympathizer and NATO supporter. Furthermore, after a secret dinner on 5 September 2004 with the heads of the Security Service of Ukraine, Yushchenko fell seriously ill and moved to Austria for treatment: it was dioxin poisoning, even though government-sponsored media in Kiev reported a self-inflicted disease.

The first electoral round of 31 October 2004 therefore took place in a very tense climate. The second round followed on 21 November: at its end, anticipating a fraud in favour of his opponent, Yushchenko asked his supporters to gather on Independence Square, the well known Maidan Nezalezhnosti. Thus, the "Orange Revolution" began.

Yanukovych's counter-protesters also gathered in Kiev, but they had been brought by train from the East. Meanwhile, the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) published the outcome of the second round vote, in favour of Yanukovych. While Putin congratulated the latter twice, as the first congratulations were sent before the results were announced by the CEC, pro-Yushchenko protesters blocked government buildings.

On the initiative of Polish President Alexander Kwaśniewski, an official EU mission initiated a series of roundtables that brought together the candidates and President Kuchma to negotiate a way out of the deadlock. On 3 December, the Supreme Court of Ukraine recognized the validity of Yushchenko's complaints, stating that the violations committed made impossible to determine the true results, and setting 26 December as the date for the re-run of the second round of the presidential elections. The decision was not appealable.

On 7 December, Kuchma signed the decree removing Yanukovych as Prime Minister and appointed Mykola Azarov as his replacement. The next day, the Supreme Council of Ukraine revoked the CEC and voted a new package of laws with constitutional changes that strengthened the parliament at the expense of the president, introduced the approval of ministers by the Supreme Council of Ukraine, and entrusted responsibility of the Prime Minister and his cabinet to the parliamentary majority rather than exclusively to the president. Unsurprisingly, the agreement was a compromise: such was the extent of the success of the Orange Revolution.

Meanwhile, in the repeat of the second round, on 26 December Yushchenko won.

Yanukovych would arrived at the helm of the country in 2010, in time for the Euromaidan.

Although Ukraine seemed to have finally reached the longed-for independence, it struggled like perhaps no other country born from the dissolution of the USSR to find a satisfactory political, economic and social order. The division between political forces striving for a liberal renewal of the country and those more linked to the collectivist past weighed above all. Such a division had in part also a geographical nature and differentiated a more nostalgic and pro-Russian East from a more reformist and westernizing West. The uncertainties of orientation played in the direction of a social fragmentation and of territorial communities. The formal governing bodies, governed by a largely incompetent or corrupt political class, had little grip on them, with disastrous consequences for the overall trend of the economy, which had been steadily worsening since 1989. Ukraine received some but unequal support from international financial institutions and Western powers, including in recognition of the Ukrainian commitment to decommissioning former Soviet nuclear warheads on its territory.

The disputes with Russia over the possession of the Crimea and the division of the Black Sea fleet also weighed. Already with a referendum held on 21 January 1991, the peninsula obtained the status of "Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Crimea". In February of the following year, after the dissolution of the USSR and the birth of independent Ukraine, the Rada of Simferopol (*i.e.* the Crimean Rada) declared the birth of the Republic of Crimea, still included in the Ukrainian State but with a strong autonomy. The city of Sevastopol was located within the Republic, but enjoyed the status of a special municipality: this was because the city hosted the Russian Black Sea Fleet. On 5 May 1992, the Crimean Rada approved a new Constitution, as well as a declaration of independence which should have been accepted through a referendum to be held on the following 21 August. In the session of 15 May, the Ukrainian Rada,

based on art.135 of the Constitution – which establishes that the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea must be approved by the Ukrainian Parliament – annulled the declaration of the Parliament of Simferopol ordering the cancelation, within a week, of the calling of the referendum. In June 1992, the parties reached a compromise, under which Crimea would remain within Ukraine, but with the status of autonomous republic. Nonetheless, the "Crimean node" was far from a solution.

In May 1994, the Crimean Rada restored the 1992 Constitution. In September 1994, the Parliament and the President of Crimea, Yuri Meshkov, decided to draft a new charter. On 17 March of the following year, the Ukrainian Rada again abolished the May 1992 constitution and suppressed the post of president of Crimea. For this reason, from June to September 1995, President Kuchma ruled Crimea through a presidential decree of direct administration.

In October 1995, the Crimean Parliament adopted a new constitution, which was not recognized by Kiev until April 1996, when significant amendments relating to Crimea's belonging to Ukraine were passed. This generated a further bill for the revision of the October 1995 Constitution, which was ratified in the new version by the Simferopol Rada on 21 October 1998. The text finally found approval, on the following 12 December, by the Verkhovna Rada and it entered into force on 12 January 1999. Crimea was thus able to see its requests partially satisfied: while still included in Ukrainian sovereignty, the republic confirmed its autonomous status, the right to draw up its own budget and direct management of its properties.

Meanwhile, in 1997 Ukraine entered into a twenty-year agreement that allowed the presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea. In 2010, the Russian and Ukrainian parliaments ratified a new agreement that extended the fleet's stay by another 25 years in exchange for a 30% discount on supplies of Russian gas. Conditions radically changed after the fall of Yanukovych and his replacement, following the elections of 25 May 2014, with Petro Poroshenko.

4. Between Russia and the EU: Ukraine and the Euromaidan

The last dramatic stage of the path towards the Russo-Ukrainian war was the Euromaidan. To understand it, the relations between Russia and the EU that developed since 1991 cannot be ignored.

Indeed, with the birth of a new Russia on the ruins of the former USSR, a new and more intense period of contact between Moscow and Brussels began. These relations confirmed the importance attributed by the Kremlin to its relationship with Europe.

It should be reiterated that under the presidency of Yeltsin, Moscow continued to assign relations with Brussels a subordinate role in respect to its relationship with Washington: this orientation was based on the perpetuation of the idea that Russia, despite its serious economic difficulties, remained a superpower and therefore could negotiate on the same level as the US. During those years, the Russian-European dialogue proved that it was able to overcome recurring tensions, mainly due to initiatives by the Russian government, both international and internal, that violated stand-

ards of democratic and responsible behaviour that were formally sanctioned by both parties (violations of human rights, limitations on freedom of the press, repression of minorities). Even the expansion of the EU towards Eastern Europe, the subject of lively debate in Moscow (Dundovich 2004), did not create any obstacles that could compromise the reciprocal relationship (Pons 2003). For their part, Russian leaders also openly showed their desire to accelerate the construction of a "Greater Europe" (*Bolshaya Evropa*) from Lisbon to Vladivostok, an idea also taken up by Vladimir Putin himself at the 2005 EU-Russia summit.

This political line of thought would define an organic and articulated system of relations, meeting the demands of Russians and Europeans to form a strategic partnership. On the Russian side, the awareness that Moscow was dealing with an EU looking for liberation from the condition of being an "economic giant, political dwarf" (Eyskens 1991) contributed to the commitment to Western Europe.

The enhancement of the political and economic relationship also met the aspiration of Brussels, providing a significant contribution to the efforts to cover an important role in the realm of intercontinental relations: Russia, even though in terms not comparable to the type of privileged relations with the US, represented the other "superpower" that could offer the EU significant international collaboration.

In December 1990, during the Rome European Council, some members of the Community expressed their recognition for the importance of initiatives aimed at political and economic reforms in the USSR for the promotion of peace and stability in the continent and in the rest of the world.

To support and facilitate the new political path initiated by Moscow, in July 1991, the 12 EC Member States (MS) founded a program of technical-financial assistance TACIS (*Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States*). It was conceived taking into consideration only one partner, the USSR, but soon afterwards, it collapsed, resulting in the independence of the Baltic States and the creation of twelve independent republics.

It was on that occasion that the EU acknowledged the importance of supporting the drive for reforms following the creation of the new States: their decision to opt for democracy and an economic system leaning towards the free market would mean breaking away from structures and traditions that had consolidated over decades and introducing new legal and administrative mechanisms, as well as new autonomous States.

The TACIS program therefore opened to Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Moldavia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Mongolia, becoming a key instrument for political cooperation between the EU and its partner countries. The first phase concluded on 31 December 1999, but a second body of regulations adopted by the Council on 29 December 1999 renewed the program for the period 2000-2006.

Despite the role played by the TACIS program in supporting the transition of Russia to a legal state and free market economy, the true cornerstone of the Russian-European relations was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA).

The agreement was signed at the Corfu European Council on 24-25 June 1994 and subsequently ratified by the parties, including Austria, Finland, Sweden, the three EU members that would be joining in 1995. The PCA was implemented on 1 December 1997, upon conclusion of the conflict in Chechnya. The agreement was based on the principles of promoting international peace, security and support for a democratic society founded on political and economic freedom. It also intended to create "economic cooperation of wide scope" (PCA 1997: 18) as part of a political and institution dialogue, which operated based on and was inspired by recommendations for an institutional approach, but concrete commitment by both parties would be necessary to produce results and not just empty declarations based on principles.

In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam introduced another instrument used in Russian-European relations: the common strategy. This was not a document with a mere generalised aim, but a precise, binding decision for the EU Council, which mandated its definition to the European Council (Treaty of Amsterdam: 10).

The common strategy was adopted for the first time at the Cologne European Council (2-3 June 1999), to delineate the general framework for the common actions to be taken with regard to the Kremlin.

The specific initiatives pursued by the EU as part of the strategy involved political and security-related dialogue, a dialogue on economic issues, trade and investments, dialogue on energy, the fight against organized crime, and the twinning program. Nevertheless, these actions would have to conform to the PCA framework and to be realized within that agreement.

The PCA would last for 10 years. Upon its expiry in 2007, the new Russian President, Putin, no longer had the intention to proceed with stipulation of a new agreement, and the EU also did not seem capable of offering concrete, shared counterproposals.

Defining an accounting of this agreement, it should be highlighted how, even though the interviews were held regularly, it seems that the instrument was unable to meet its established objectives. An example would be the slaughter occurring between 1-3 September 2004 in the Number 1 School in Beslan, North Ossetia, an autonomous republic in the Caucasia Region of Russia, where a group of rebel fundamental Islamists occupied the school building and kidnapped approximately 1,200 adults and children. Three days later, the Russian special forces raided the building, causing the deaths of about 100 people. A wide range of international observers criticized the management of the crisis by Putin's administration. Initially the EU also debated the Russia response, but it retracted discussion later, affirming that it had been misinterpreted. On the basis of the PCA, which established the possibility to interrogate partners about *domestic jurisdiction*, the Dutch Prime Minster, Jan Peter Balkenende, who was also the President of the European Council at the time, asked Putin to explain what happened and what his actions meant. The other European leaders disassociated themselves from his statement, demonstrating solidarity with Putin and distancing from Brussels.

In the meantime, the EU tried to provide more impulse to the collaboration with Moscow, activating another instrument destined for "foreign policy". During the

European Parliament assembly on 18 December 2002, then President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), developed starting in 2003 to establish privileged relations with countries neighbouring the EU (Alcaro, Comelli 2005), those "sharing everything with the Union but institutions" (Prodi 2004). The ENP was designed on the concept of promoting democracy, liberty, prosperity, security and stability, even though it was conditioned by reciprocal interests in respect to common values, notably democracy, the legal state, human rights, good government, in addition to principles of a market economy and sustainable development.

Evolving after the last expansion of the EU towards the more far-reaching formulation of a *Wider Europe Neighbourhood Policy* (WENP), the new neighbourhood policy presented several significant new items. In the first place, the intent of the Commission to design a single strategic framework for relations outside of the EU with its neighbours should be judged on a positive note: this was the only way to create "a ring of friends" (*ibid.*) and to define the scope of external action of the Union more clearly. According to this concept, the politics of proximity rendered the boundaries inside of which Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) could be carried out more visible.

The construction of peaceful and cooperative relations around the EU therefore corresponded to a project by Brussels that aimed to create an area of commercial integration and close institutional cooperation, capable of rendering the old concept of the border as a "limit" obsolete, and forming a new idea of it as a "bond".

However, this aspect seems to be more of a moral philosophy than a political practice. An example can be found in the Russia-Georgia conflict in the summer of 2008. Putin was the Prime Minster that year: he was elected President for two consecutive terms (2000-2004; 2004-2008) and could not serve a third term. His right-hand man was elected, Medvedev, President until 4 March 2012, when Putin returned to the highest Russian office.

The Georgian army entered Ossetian territory on the night between 7-8 August 2008. Ossetia declared its independence. The next day, Russia, which had already stationed its military in southern Ossetia and Abkhazia in the role of UN peacekeeper, massively intervened, defeating the Georgians and occupying a large portion of the territory.

On 15 August, a preliminary agreement was signed between Russia and Georgia for a ceasefire, with mediation by the EU guided by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy: based on this agreement, the troops reciprocally agreed to withdraw to their former positions before the start of the conflict, and Georgia committed not to use force against the two secessionist republics. After the initial withdrawal of the foremost positions, Russia then decided to continue its military occupation of the two buffer zones in Georgia to prevent possible attacks on South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These occupied areas initially also included the Poti port on the Black Sea, in addition to the presence of Russian blockades on the main national routes, which were kept in place for about two months. Starting on 1 October 2008, 200 EU military observers stationed in the two buffer zones, as agreed during talks in September between Moscow and Brussels, while the withdrawal of the Russian troops from the buffer zone near South Ossetia finished on 8 October 2008.

Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on 26 August 2008, subsequently signing a military agreement with the two republics.

It should be noted that also in this case, the EU measures used to prevent the crisis did not produce any effect, and the EU found itself not facing a crisis, but a war, a situation for which it was unprepared. The discordant behaviours of the MS also served to demonstrate the weakness that is typical of foreign policy that is not "shared", but "traditional" in nature.

In an attempt to respond to the Russia-Georgia war and draft better forms of prevention, in May 2009 the EU launched six partnership agreements (PAs) with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine. For Europe, the PAs signified better security and stability along its Eastern borders, in light of the fact that this region had become a centre of crisis and was even then still plagued by unresolved conflicts, the known "frozen conflicts".

It was the request to ratify the PA that spurred the complex Ukrainian crisis (Di Rienzo 2015). In November 2013, pressured by the Kremlin, especially with regard to the energy issue, President Yanukovych suspended negotiations with the EU. Therefore, peaceful protests began in Kiev's Independence Square, taking the name "Euromaidan". Yanukovych, elected in 2010 thanks to the strong support of the electorate in Crimea and Southern/Eastern Ukraine, condemned the protests, and at the end of the month decided to intervene with the Ukrainian special forces, the *Berkut*. The protest transformed into urban guerrilla warfare, and dissent began to focus on Yanukovych, forcing him to flee Kiev after he was delegitimized by the Parliament on 22 February 2014. This was followed by the liberation of the former Prime Minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, but as this new course of events began to unfold, protests in other cities with Russian majorities also began, who condemned the events a true *coup d'état* and a threat for their communities.

This generated other political crises in several Ukrainian regions, the first of which was Crimea. Here, on 27 February 2014, unidentified troops (suspected to be under the direct control of Moscow) occupied the Crimean Supreme Council building and the Council of Ministers building in Simferopol, where they hoisted the Russian flag. In this situation marked by growing chaos, the Crimean Rada designated Sergey Aksyonov, a representative of the minority Russian party Russian Unity, as the Prime Minster of Crimea. The nomination was censured as illegal by the government in Kiev, which declared Aksyonov a criminal according to art.109 of the Ukrainian criminal code – the article governing violent acts to change or overthrow constitutional order – and condemned his acts. On the same day, the Crimean *Berkut* set up controlled access to the Perekop isthmus and the Chongar Peninsula, which separated Crimea from the mainland: in a few hours, Ukraine and Crimea were *de facto* divided.

Two days later, on 1 March 2014, Aksyonov announced that the new Crimean authorities had control over all the Ukrainian military institutions on the peninsula, and asked Putin to guarantee peace and public order in Crimea. This request resulted in Russia immediately entering the field, with the Duma on the very same day ratifying

the military intervention and sending troops and weapons to Sevastopol, sparking protest by the entire international community.

In the meantime, the Crimean Supreme Council called a referendum vote for annexation to Russia. Initially scheduled for 25 May 2014, on 6 March the Simferopol Assembly moved the date up to 16 March, emphasizing that the vote would only be open to Crimean citizens.

Despite firm opposition from Kiev, where the parliament issued an act of dissolution of the Crimean Rada and the Constitutional Court declared illegal the referendum, the voting took place on the scheduled date, with a nearly unanimous result for annexation to Russia. Approximately 96% of voters in Crimea gave an affirmative response to the question "Are you in favour of reunification of Crimea with Russia as a constitutional entity?" (Rizzi 2014).

On the same day, the United Nations Security Council voted on a Resolution with a wide majority to declare the referendum invalid. The result was inevitable, demonstrating the international isolation of Russia. Two principles of international law clashed within the referendum: the right of "self-determination of people", sanctioned for the first time in the 14 points by Wilson on 8 January 1918 and invoked by the Crimean Republic and Russia, and the "inviolability of frontiers", proclaimed in 1975 in the Helsinki Accords from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), invoked by Ukraine. Both principles are equally valid, and international law has yet to express in favour of one or the other.

On 17 March, after the official announcement of the referendum results, the Supreme Council of Crimea, renamed the State Council of Crimea, formally declared independence of the Crimean Republic, including the territories of the autonomous Crimean Republic and the city of Sevastopol, which was assigned a special status within the legal order of the separatist republic. The Crimean Rada announced partial abrogation of Ukrainian laws, the adoption of the Russian rouble as its official currency alongside the hryvnia, started nationalization of Ukrainian state-owned properties and churches, and formally requested annexation from the Russian government (Deliagin 2015).

The annexation was granted on 18 March, with the signing of the treaty by Putin, Aksyonov, and Aleksei Chaly, Mayor of Sevastopol. The treaty was implemented on the following 21 March, with approval of the Russian federal constitutional law n.6, *Adhesion to the Russian Federation of the Crimean Republic and formation of a new entity within the Russian Federation – the Crimean Republic and the federal city of Sevastopol*.

The international community did not recognize the annexation. The US and EU applied so-called "intelligent sanctions", which selectively penalized those at the apex of power, but which were not capable of inducing a change in the Russian positions on Crimea, positions that remained for unaltered.

While the Ukrainian question was still *in fieri*, on 27 June 2014 the governments of Ukraine, Moldavia and Georgia signed free trade agreements with the EU, provoking a harsh reaction from Moscow.

On 30 June, ANSA reported statements by the Russian vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Grigory Karasin, commenting on the agreements: "The free trade agreements

will have serious consequences" (ANSA 2014). Indeed, Moscow considered the signed agreements with Brussels to be incompatible with the free trade areas that it had already established with the countries in question and threatened higher tariffs and more severe border controls.

Russia reacted to the Eastern Partnership with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), founded in January 2012 and composed of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, and then expanded to include Armenia in October 2014 and Kirghizstan the following May. Inspired by the integration of EU countries, the idea was announced in October 2011 by Putin, who launched a proposal originally formulated by the Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbaev in 1994 (Kilner 2011). It was not solely an economic project, but also a geopolitical project for an alternative to the proposals of Brussels for former Soviet countries.

It must be underlined that the progressive worsening of relations between Russia and the West made the prospect of "Greater Europe" increasingly less realistic. Parallel to the deterioration of the *zapadny vektor* ("Western vector"), Russia turned its gaze increasingly to the East, starting with ever-greater determination to establish pragmatic and mutually beneficial relations with Beijing. Strongly opposing the unipolarity imposed by the United States in the aftermath of the Cold War, Moscow and Beijing showed their willingness to implement a radical transformation of the international order, aiming to reduce the overall weight of the West and the United States through the creation of a multipolar world order.

In this sense, instead of that "Greater Europe" from Lisbon to Vladivostok promoted by Mikhail Gorbachev and Western leaders, the idea of a "Greater Eurasia" (*Bolshaya Evrazija*) from St. Petersburg to Shanghai emerged. It was an ambitious project to counter the geopolitical weight of the United States through the association of the Eurasian Economic Union with the Belt and Road Initiative.

Specifically, the Greater Eurasia project aimed to unite Russia, China and the post-Soviet States of Central Asia, potentially together with Mongolia, Iran, Pakistan and India, in a new geopolitical space that, in fact, could pose a fundamental challenge to the US-led liberal international order.

In February 2013, Vladimir Putin presented his foreign policy program (*The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*), which represented a precise turning point compared to the policies pursued in the international field until then. The document stated that Russia intended to assume the role of a new "centre of gravity" on the international scene and that the guiding idea of the action would be "Eurasianism"[3]. Dmitri Medvedev's project of creating a common Euro-Atlantic security space and inviting the European Union to join Russia's modernization process was therefore abandoned.

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[3] The most significant representative of Russian neo-Eurasianism is, from an ideological point of view, Alexander Dugin. First of all, he adopts and develops the central nucleus of the thought of the first Eurasianists of the 1920s: Russia is not a European country as it is characterized by a distinct civilisation, whose structure associates European values, such as Christianity, to values typical of Asian cultures, such as the sense of hierarchy, religiosity based on faith and not on reason, a certain tendency towards collectivism. In this vision, the West is perceived as a danger to humanity due to its universalism, its progressivism and its colonialism, the latter comparable to that of unification, of a totalitarian nature compared to the organic and natural diversity of the country, implemented by Bolshevism in the Soviet experience (Dugin 2014).

Why did Putin pass from the guise of "American" (immediately after September 11, in alliance with the United States against terrorism) and "European" (on the same line as France and Germany against the United States invading Iraq) to the guise of "Eurasian"? Putin believed that the world had changed profoundly compared to his two previous mandates and, pragmatically, that Moscow had to adapt its strategy to these changes, while maintaining the underlying objective: the return of Russia among the great powers after the geopolitical "disaster" of 1991.

From the analysis contained in *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, it appears that all the references to the basis of the old international order have been called into question: the West is no longer the undisputed centre of the world, as demonstrated by the defeats in Iraq and in Afghanistan; and furthermore the Western economic model is fragile and is causing widespread systemic crises. At the same time, other poles of development and influence are arising, especially in Asia, and a shift in the global economic centre of gravity towards the East is taking place. The result is a global geostrategic rebalancing, which requires Russia to radically review its foreign policy and redefine its relative priority. In this new international context, Russia can enhance its intermediate geographical position between East and West. According to Putin's analysis, Russia, to the extent that it can have a stabilized economy, a strong internal consensus and with the end of the post-Soviet transition crisis, can enjoy some advantages. In particular, the geographical position and the abundance of raw materials allow Russia, which also maintains the status of atomic power, to become also an energy superpower, presenting itself as an ideal supplier of oil and natural gas to both Europe and the Far East (China, India) through a complex network of oil pipelines. In concrete terms, Russia can exert significant pressure on Europe by making it clear that its economy is not the only outlet for the hydrocarbons extracted on Russian territory. Furthermore, its international position is favoured by the fact that, on the one hand, it is an active participant, as founder, of the old international order (member of the Security Council, the first G8 and the G20), on the other it is included in the group of emerging powers (BRICS, APEC and Islamic Conference), elements that broaden its diplomatic horizon at a global level. Finally, the perception that the West, through NATO, intends to expand to the Russian borders allows Putin to accentuate patriotic mobilization with anti-Western connotations and to shift the priority vector of Russian foreign policy from the West towards Asia.

Therefore, in the new Eurasian game, Russia's project is to constitute, in the post-Soviet space, not only an economic but also an autonomous political pole with the role of "central axis" of the new international architecture. Therefore, as expressly stated, neither an ancillary role as a supplier of raw materials for the benefit of Asian economic development, nor a transit corridor between the "old" West and the "new" East, but the centre of the new polycentric world.

For Putin – in accordance with Russian Eurasian thought – the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union is the first instrument of this ambitious strategy. Obviously, this also has the aim of avoiding NATO's shift to the East.

This new position was influenced by the failure of the "reset" of Obama and Medvedev and the new American foreign policy, and also by the fact that a clear strategy by the EU for relations with Moscow seemed non-existent.

The diverse intensities with which the community MS are economically linked to Russia is one of the defining factors at the base of the lacking cohesive strategy of Brussels towards the East. The EU is once again divided when facing the explosion of the crisis in Ukraine and forming a position to respond to the annexation of Crimea by Moscow. The Baltic republics and former Soviet satellites would have liked to see the West react more forcefully and with authority at the return of an authoritarian stance by Moscow in the post-Soviet area.

The countries that have important economic relations in strategic sectors like energy, including Italy, France and Germany, condemned Russian revanchism, while at the same time mediated in the EU to prevent exacerbating tension and excessively isolating Russia.

A reflection on the EU with regard to the significantly growing consent around Putin after the annexation of Crimea and the effects on policy in the neighbouring areas is overdue: if on Russia's part, a change in foreign policy is evident, traced back to the "new doctrine" (Putin 2007) of Putin's administration, on the part of the EU an ambiguous foreign policy is evident with regard to Russia. The lack of a clear long-term strategy and scarce cohesion and linearity in foreign policy, united with the recent initiative promoted in the post-Soviet bloc and perceived by Moscow as harmful to its interests there, have all contributed to creating the current state of tension.

The countries in the post-Soviet bloc are the object of offers coming from players that represent colliding models of economic and political integration, putting these countries in a fragile position. Their oscillations from one extreme to the other, according to a logic dictated by pragmatism, has the effect of destabilizing internal politics and negatively impacting democratic consolidation and good governance. In a world that has become multipolar, the players in the field are no longer the two old hegemonic super-powers, because the scenarios have changed. This would explain the European position, weakened by the lack of real community policy. It seems clear that once the EU signed a free trade agreement with Kiev, a reaction from the Kremlin was a given.

The EU may have overestimated its "transformative" power and underestimated the importance of traditional geopolitics, contributing to inciting a latent crisis "in the interregnum between *no more* and *not yet*" (Bauman-Mauro 2015).

5. Conclusions

The continuous swings in Ukrainian history left the marks of a clear ambiguity on the ground. This is evident in the language, which changes as one crosses the country from East to West: it is a variant of Russian in the Eastern provinces, but is strongly influenced by Polish in the Western part. Even the architecture reveals a wide fluctuation between Central European models very close to eighteenth-century Baroque

Poland, such as Lviv, and the Russian villages of Eastern Ukraine. The greatest symbol of Ukrainian ambiguity is probably represented by one of its major religious groups, the Uniates: they are Catholics, they obey the Roman Pope, but they celebrate their rites with the Greek liturgy.

In light of all this, it is legitimate to ask whether a country like this can be both united and sovereign at the same time. Certainly, there is an ancient Ukrainian aspiration for independence, but it was only realized for short periods, as in the first post-war period, when the most powerful neighbours were on their knees. Then, as soon as one of them raised his head, Ukraine fell, in whole or in part, under its rule and appeared to the other, inevitably, as a potential threat.

Today, the entry into the scene of the EU changed the rules of the game. Brussels could have acted as an arbiter capable of suggesting and supporting a solution different from those imposed by history. However, what the EU lacked was the ability to assure Putin, afflicted with schizophrenic Soviet superpower nostalgia, that Ukraine would no longer be a Polish and Western thorn in Russia's side.

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Casus Belli: NATO Enlargement to Eastern Europe as a Justification for Russian Aggression to Ukraine

Claudio Catalano

Introduction

Russian narrative claims that the Ukraine crisis stemmed from NATO enlargement to Russia's neighbouring countries. In a cold war-like mindset, Russian *élites* perceive NATO and the European Union (EU), but also the G7 - after Russia was excluded from the G8 as a result of the 2014 Ukraine crisis - as the "West" block opposed to Russia. Therefore, the West broke a promise (Sarotte 2014: 90) not to expand NATO and the EU in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).

This point was raised for the first time in 1993 by President Boris Yeltsin, who stated that enlarging NATO was not in the "spirit of the Two-plus-Four Treaty" (Sarotte 2021: 168). At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, President Vladimir Putin stated the "broken promise" assumption, based on early 1990s Western assurances not to expand NATO. Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, chairing UN Security Council in April 2023 dredged up both NATO's provocations and "lies" rhetoric (Lavrov 2023).

It is interesting to note that the "broken promise" or even the idea of NATO expansion as a provocation to Russia has sowed the seeds in Western political thought (Lough 2021). An almost centenary George F. Kennan opposed in 1997 to NATO enlargement considering it an unnecessary provocation to the Russians, echoing positions like those of today's Putin's entourage. In the late 1990s respected intellectuals such as Thomas Friedman shared similar positions.

Every time, there are tensions with Russia this topic resurfaces. Michael MccGwire (1998) wrote an article on "top-level assurances" against NATO enlargement republished after ten years in 2008. By that time, the official documents were released proving the thesis was wrong (Kramer 2009: 53-54; Shifrinson 2016: 8).

The 2022 debate was inaugurated by Bernie Sanders' Congressional speech on the eve of Russian aggression to Ukraine, soon joined by Mearsheimer's (2022) justification of Russian actions in Ukraine, who had already accused Clinton administration of deceiving the Soviets (Mearsheimer 2014: 83). On the other hand, former US president, Bill Clinton (2022), wrote a testimony of 1990s enlargement policy by stating that to avoid future disputes, rather than defining NATO boundaries, it was more important that Russia remained a democracy.

Claudio Catalano, Sapienza University of Rome, claudio.catalano@uniroma1.it

More interestingly, in NATO-Russia framework, before it was suspended for Ukraine aggression, Putin proposed on 17 December 2021 a security agreement that NATO "arrogantly rejected" according to Lavrov (2023). But NATO's rejection reciprocated the "broken promise": "For more than 30 years NATO has worked to build a partnership with Russia" starting with 1990 London summit. "Yet Russia has broken the trust at the core of our cooperation and challenged the fundamental principles of the global and Euro-Atlantic security architecture" (*El País* 2022).

To fact-check these assumptions, this article tries to analyse Russian strategic thinking, the negotiations on German reunification and the Two-plus-Four Treaty, the 1997 NATO-Russia agreement as the only valid agreement on the matter.

1. Russian Strategic Thinking and NATO Expansion

Putin (2007) stated this position at the 43rd Munich Security Conference:

> NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfil the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions (..) NATO expansion (..) represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust (..) against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today?

He based this assumption by misquoting a statement by then NATO Secretary General, Manfred Wörner (1990): "The very fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee". Actually, Wörner was focusing on NATO troops in East Germany after reunification, and not on CEE countries.

A Munich-like position on NATO expansion as "a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust" was officially adopted in February 2010 in the Russian Military Doctrine that regards the "global NATO" concept and the initiative of moving NATO "closer to the borders of the Russian Federation" as the first of the main external military dangers.

The "enemy at the gates" feeling is caused by "the deployment (build up) of troop contingents of foreign states (groups of states) on the territories of states contiguous with the Russian Federation and its allies and also in adjacent waters".

In a bilateral meeting on 6 February 2010 with NATO secretary general, Rasmussen, Lavrov clarified that risks were caused not by NATO itself but by the global NATO's: "Desire to give the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization global functions carried out in violation of the standards of international law, to move the military infrastructure of NATO member states to Russia's borders including by expanding the bloc*" (Interfax 2010).

On the other hand, the 2010 Doctrine also states that one of the main objectives of Russia in containing and preventing military conflicts is the development of relations with the EU and NATO (Interfax 2010).

The updated Russian Military Doctrine was published on 26 December 2014, after the Ukrainian Parliament had renounced to neutral status on 23 December intending to apply for NATO membership. The 2014 Doctrine again names NATO expansion as the key military threat among key external risks for Russia, including foreign force deployments close to Russia, which presumably refers to deployment of NATO aircraft in the Baltic States, Ballistic Missiles Defence (BMD) assets in Romania, and naval ships in the Black Sea (Trenin 2014). But it still retains a reference to collaboration with the United States or NATO, that are no longer a tool for collective security, but just "equal partners".

Sinovets and Renz (2015: 11-12) argue that:

> The 2014 Doctrine gives an impression of *déja-vu*, and harks back to the great power doctrines of the past. In the manner of the Monroe doctrine, it sends Western powers the message that Russia's neighbourhood should be regarded as its sphere of influence, which Moscow is ready to defend, if necessary by all means. The implicit concern in the doctrine over the threat to Kremlin-friendly regimes in neighbouring states is like a modern version of the Brezhnev doctrine, where direct military intervention is camouflaged by hybrid war-type activity.

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of the Russian Federation published in 2015 still retained the project of a partnership with the United States on shared interests and cooperation with the EU and its Member States, and with NATO focusing on enhancing security in the Euro-Atlantic region (Cooper 2021; Bilanishvili 2021).

The latest NSS adopted on 2 July 2021 confirms NATO as a threat to Russia, and any prospect of a partnership or cooperation with the United States or EU Member States quoted in the previous 2010 and 2014 Doctrines or 2015 NSS have disappeared. This may be interpreted as an attempt to show the West the Russian policy of so-called "Red Lines" as despite the extremely tense situation between the parties because of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia is not considering making any concessions (Bilanishvili 2021: 3).

As a matter of fact, partnership or cooperation with the West have been replaced by a more transactional view of international relations (Cooper 2021). In this view, US and EU sanctions against Russia are seen as a way to put political and economic pressure against Russia and its partners to gain advantage for the West over them (Bilanishvili 2021: 3).

With the 2021 NSS, strategy, it is now fully established in Russian elites the idea that Western intervention in Russia's neighbourhood or "sphere of influence" could, in certain circumstances, be interpreted by Russia as "an existential threat to Russian interests and security" (Leszczenko 2021: 24; Sinovets, Renz 2015: 11).

This sphere also includes the concept of "cultural sovereignty" that is threatened by the "westernization" (Leszczenko 2021: 23).

Though 2015 NSS already mentioned "spiritual and moral values", the 2021 NSS widens the issue by asserting that "traditional Russian spiritual, moral and cultural-historical values are under active attack by the U.S. and its allies, as well as by transnational corporations, foreign non-profit, non-governmental, religious, extremist and terrorist organizations" (Bilanishvili 2021: 5; Galeotti 2021).

As Galeotti (2021) put it, the 2021 NSS:

> Does mark the progressive shift in the Kremlin's priorities towards paranoia and a worldview that regards not just foreign countries as a threat, but the very processes reshaping the modern world.

The "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity" has been well described by George F. Kennan (1946) as the Russian élites' "fear of more competent, more powerful, more highly organized societies" of the West:

> Russian rulers have invariably sensed that their rule was relatively archaic in form fragile and artificial in its psychological foundation, unable to stand comparison or contact with political systems of Western countries.

Kennan also speculated on the commitment to "the concept of Russia as in a state of siege, with the enemy lowering beyond the walls" as a justification for power of the Russian ruling class, that "must defend at all costs this concept of Russia's position, for without it they are themselves superfluous."(Kennan 1947: 571).

2. Western Promises

The reunification of Germany was the first test for the post-cold war order. For NATO, the expansion of Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) over German Democratic Republic (GDR) territories meant to rethink European security East of Rhine and up to Oder-Neisse Polish border. For the Soviet Union the creation of a unified Germany fully integrated in the Western bloc, would officially mark the decline of its security framework (Bianchi 2021: 12).

Therefore, to appease the Soviets, in January-February 1990 two Western foreign ministers, respectively Hans Dietrich Genscher of the FRG and George Baker of the United States, made statements against NATO expansion, that were disavowed by their respective governments.

Genscher in Tutzing on 31 January 1990 stated "that whatever happens in Warsaw Pact, there will be no expansion of NATO territory eastward, that is to say, closer to the borders of the Soviet Union." (Sarotte 2022: 48; Zelikow and Rice 2001: 174-176; Kramer 2009: 47). The speech had not been cleared by German government, and Genscher made various similar statements to trade off Soviet assent for German reunification, but this idea was not shared by Kohl government.

The rationale of "Tutzing formulation" was explained by Genscher in a meeting with British foreign secretary, Douglas Hurd. His idea was to appease Gorbachev, who opposed to any NATO eastwards influence on GDR or CEE, by delivering public general statements on NATO non-expansion, to reassure that for instance a change of government in Hungary could not allow the country to join NATO. Hurd agreed in principle (Sarotte 2014: 91-92).

A few days before, Genscher discussed with Baker this issue in Washington on 2 February, and the secretary of state agreed in principle with the "Tutzing formulation" (Kramer 2009: 47). On the other hand, Baker "not one inch Eastwards" statement was meant to prevent, not to facilitate, a German-Russian trade off.

US President, George H.W. Bush, was in favour of a German reunification, because he trusted chancellor Helmuth Kohl's loyalty to the Atlantic Alliance (Duroselle and Kaspi 2001: 558-559). Bush's plan was to keep a united Germany into NATO, by expanding NATO to GDR[1] (Sarotte 2022: 105).

Kohl agreed to Bush's proposal that Germany could not become a neutral State as a few German politicians suggested to please a large share of German public opinion (Duroselle and Kaspi 2001: 558-559). Only 20% of West Germans supported NATO membership for united Germany, and 1990 was election year in RFG.

On the other hand, Kohl was ready to make concessions to the Soviet Union to obtain his goal. For this reason, Bush administration feared that Kohl could cut off them from the negotiations, and bargain with Gorbachev on neutrality or even to leave NATO. They feared that Kohl might make such a move in his visit to Moscow in February 1990.

Therefore, US Secretary of State, George Baker met with Gorbachev and Shevarnadze in Moscow between 7 and 9 February to prepare the ground.

Baker expressed the "Tutzing formulation" on 8 February that a changed NATO should not move eastward, and if united Germany was in NATO no NATO forces would ever be deployed in GDR (Sarotte 2022: 55; Kramer 2009: 48).

Therefore, on 9 February, Baker met Shevardnadze by sponsoring the united Germany's full membership in a "changed NATO" framework supposed to "evolve into much more of a political one" and with "iron-clad guarantees that NATO's jurisdiction or forces would not move Eastward"[2] (Bianchi 2022: 13-14). These guarantees were meant to prevent a neutral Germany to acquire a military nuclear capability.

On the same day, Baker reiterated to Gorbachev the assumption that a neutral Germany did "not mean it will not be militaristic. Quite the opposite, it could very well decide to create its own nuclear potential instead of relying on American nuclear deterrent forces"[3].

Baker echoed Lord Ismay's motto on NATO "to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down" by saying that NATO was "the mechanism for securing the U.S. presence in Europe" and:

> not only for the Soviet Union but for other European countries as well it is important to have guarantees that if the United States keeps its presence in Germany within the framework of NATO, not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction[4].

Baker also asked, specifying he was expecting a direct reply:

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[1] *Memorandum of Conversation Bush-Thatcher of 24 November, Camp David*. George Bush Library. https://bush41library.tamu.edu/files/memcons-telcons/1989-11-24--Thatcher.pdf (accessed 30 September 2023).

[2] *Memorandum of Conversation between M. Gorbachev and J. Baker in Moscow*, 9 February 1990, NSA: 3, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325679-Document-05-Memorandum-of-conversation-between, accessed 30 September 2023.

[3] *Record of Conversation between M. Gorbachev and J. Baker in Moscow (Excerpts)*, 9 February 1990, NSA: 5. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325680-Document-06-Record-of-conversation-between, accessed 30 September 2023.

[4] *Ibidem*.

Supposing unification takes place, what would you prefer: a united Germany outside of NATO, absolutely independent and without American troops; or a united Germany keeping its connections with NATO, but with the guarantee that NATO's jurisprudence or troops will not spread east of the present boundary?

According to Baker's notes Gorbachev took time, referring to a decision at leadership level, but anticipated that "broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable". Baker replied "we agree with that" and Gorbachev conceded that given the actual situation it was possible and realistic that "the presence of American troops [could] play a containing role" towards future German militarism outside of European structures[5] (Kramer 2009: 47; Sarotte 2022: 55; Bianchi 2022: 14).

In Gorbachev's opinion this was the moment that "cleared the way for a compromise", while Baker was just testing the ground, but no written text was agreed. However, in the press conference Baker said that NATO jurisdiction would not be moved further (Sarotte 2022: 55).

According to Kramer (2009: 46), this promise was not important, as:

Gorbachev would not even have contemplated seeking an assurance about NATO expansion beyond Germany because in February 1990 that issue was not yet within his ken. Also, Gorbachev was not yet under intense domestic pressure over this issue.

Soviet aides were sceptical about Gorbachev concessions to the West, no one publicly criticised him, except for KGB chief Vladimir Kryuchkov. These negative opinions could be found in memorandums, internal documents or memoirs[6].

After Moscow meetings, Baker informed Kohl that the Gorbachev would agree on a unified Germany tied to NATO in exchange for assurances that NATO would not expand itself further (Sarotte 2014: 92; Bianchi 2022: 14)[7].

Nonetheless, Bush's position was that the Soviets could not decide over RFG relation with NATO. The NSC staffers also questioned "how could NATO's jurisdiction apply to only half of a country", and they drafted on Bush's behalf a note to Kohl on the eve of his visit to Moscow, that welcomed a "special military status" for GDR territories in NATO, meaning that united Germany was to be in NATO and face-saving solutions were to be found to make it easier for Gorbachev to accept this development (Sarotte 2014: 93). The term "Special military status" was first coined in a speech in Hamburg on 8 February 1990 – the day before Baker negotiations in Moscow - by Wörner, without detailing it. This was a change in US policy that implied extending FRG and NATO jurisdiction over GDR territories, although with specific military limitations (Kramer 2009: 49-50).

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[5] *Ibidem*: 8-9.

[6] See for instance *Memorandum of Conversation between R. Gates and V. Kryuchkov in Moscow*, 9 February 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325681-Document-07-Memorandum-of-conversation-between, accessed 30 September 2023; and the memorandum of Valentin Falin quoted in Bianchi (2022: 13, 15).

[7] Letter from J. Baker to H. Kohl, 10 February 1990, NSA, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4325682-Document-08-Letter-from-James-Baker-to-Helmut-Kohl, accessed 30 September 2023.

On 10 February 1990, when Kohl visited Moscow, Gorbachev stated that Soviet Union would agree "the Germans must decide for themselves what path they choose to follow". In the secret bilateral negotiations, Gorbachev would oppose to a quick reunification and ask for a neutral united Germany. However, Kohl would insist on Gorbachev clear statement on German self-determination to achieve his goals on reunification without conditions, and Gorbachev had to convene. Nonetheless, Kohl offered a large financial help to the Soviets in return for their lack of opposition to German reunification. The financial aid was the key German concession to the Soviets, who were in the middle of an economic and social crisis. After the Germans received Soviet assent to reunification no further concessions on security issues were needed.

No bargaining on NATO expansion was made, because neither Kohl nor Gorbachev could decide for NATO. Anyway, Genscher repeated his offer on NATO non expansion to Shevarnadze. Nevertheless, when Kohl informed Genscher about the supposed deal in German self-determination he proposed a toast because they no more had to grant security concession for reunification, including NATO expansion.

However, Genscher, insisted on promising security concessions, and on 23 March 1990, in Luxembourg at a WEU meeting, he proposed that NATO and Warsaw Pact merged into one, in a single "composite of common, collective security" for Europe. Nevertheless, having won the 18 March 1990 General elections, Kohl wrote a "cease-and-desist" letter to Genscher to stop talking about it.

Moreover, meeting Baker on 2 February 1990, Genscher had suggested the "Two Plus Four" format that included the "two" German States, and the Second World War Four Powers: France, Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the Unites States. The two-plus-four format was discussed at the Ottawa summit between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries. The shift to this format meant that any items discussed at the bilateral meetings in Moscow in February would be superseded by the two-plus-four negotiations (Kramer 2009: 50-51; Sarotte 2022: 57-59).

After Ottawa summit, Baker abandoned the "not one inch Eastwards" motto, and adopted the Bush plan on a united Germany into NATO with special military status for former GDR. But the Soviet took a while to notice this shift and only by 18 April 1990, Falin noticed that Baker's "not one inch" rhetoric had disappeared, and NATO was preparing plans with regards to GDR and Warsaw Pact countries (Kramer 2009: 50-51; Sarotte 2009: 49, 57-59, 61, 63-64, 66, 83-85).

3. The Two-plus-Four Treaty

During the negotiations on the final settlement of the status of Germany, at no point the Soviets mentioned NATO expansion to CEE countries beyond GDR (Kramer 2009: 51; Sarotte 2014: 96; Lough 2021: 29).

At the Bush-Kohl meeting at Camp David in February 1990. Bush position was unequivocal, and the Soviets could not have a say over NATO or FRG in NATO, and according to Deputy National Security Advisor (NSA), Robert Gates' definition, the Germans had to bribe out the Soviets to obtain their assent (Sarotte 2014: 94; Sarotte

2022: 43-44). Kohl accepted the US position on the "special military status" (Kramer 2009: 51). After that meeting, Gates' priorities were to keep Germany in NATO and avoid any trade-off between unification and denuclearisation of Germany, as the extension to East Germany of art 5 Washington Treaty should not come at the expenses of having to move nuclear weapons outside the FRG (Sarotte 2014: 97; Sarotte 2022: 77).

Moreover, the Helsinki principle, that allows all signatories to the 1975 Helsinki Final Act to choose their own military alliances, was reminded by French president, François Mitterand in a meeting with Gorbachev on 25 May 1990 (Sarotte 2022: 88).

Bush succeeded in getting Gorbachev to confirm Helsinki principle, in Washington summit, at the end of May 1990. Gorbachev stated that Germans had their right to decide on their own on NATO, and Bush conceded that if Germany chose a different alliance, the US was to respect it. Soviet delegates Falin and Marshall Sergey Akrhromeyev became angry as in their opinion Gorbachev did not understand the consequences of his concessions. In the Soviet Union, also Boris Yeltsin criticised Gorbachev deal. On 1 May 1990 Yeltsin had won elections as president of Russia, and in July left the PCUS. Bush administration understood Gorbachev power was over (Sarotte 2022: 89-91).

A press conference in the evening confirmed the trade off in favour of the West, thus FRG would renounce to ABC weapons, but there would not be US financial aid to Soviet Union.

In a visit to Russia on 15-16 July 1990, Kohl and Gorbachev agreed that Russia would allow Germany in NATO if no nuclear weapons and only German troops were to stay in GDR after Soviet troops withdrawal. Kohl also stated that Bundeswehr was to be 370.000 strong (Adomeit 2006: 17; Sarotte 2014: 96; Sarotte 2022: 96). These concessions were not what Bush administration had agreed – nuclear weapons and limitations to troops. But nor Gorbachev nor Bush would go back on these. Kohl also bribed out the Soviets with 12 Bn DM. On 3 August 1990, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and German reunification became low on US administration priorities (Sarotte 2014: 96; Lough 2021: 29; Sarotte 2022: 98, 103).

In the wake of Two-plus-four signing, Soviets also asked for dual use weapons (nuclear capable artillery or fighter bombers) to be excluded from GDR, and FRG insisted on not automatically apply 1954 status of forces agreement to GDR territory, this meant that non-German NATO troops deployment had to be agreed by German government. Until 1994, with Soviet troops staying in the former GDR territory, only German troops were to be allowed, but after Soviet withdrawal non-German NATO troops were supposed to be allowed. Bush phoned Kohl on these two issues twice on 6 and 10 September. But only on 11 September in Moscow final negotiation it was settled the dual use issue by granting that dual capabilities weapons were deployed if conventionally armed only.

The US and UK were keen on NATO crossing the Elbe-line issue, Genscher realised that this could jeopardise not only the Treaty but the reunification itself, as CEE countries were knocking on NATO doors.

Genscher negotiated with Shevarnadze, who agreed only on oral assurances to NATO deployment in GDR territory, and then bilaterally with Baker. In US-German talks, Robert Zoellick of the State Department found a solution that the article was to retain the formula agreed with the Soviet Union on non-deployment, but a "minute" was added as addendum to the Treaty specifying the meaning of deployment was to be decided by the German government, thus allowing the deployment of NATO troops. Zoellick explained later that the US needed to be able to deploy troops in East Germany if Poland was supposed to join, US troops should cross Germany to be stationed in Poland, as German reunification and NATO expansion were intertwined (Sarotte 2009: 100-104).

The "Two Plus Four Agreement" or the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany was signed in Moscow on 12 September 1990.

German Armed Forces were to be downsized from 370,000 to 345,000 personnel according to a declaration made in Vienna on 30 August 1990 at the Conventional Armed Force in Europe conference and FRG confirmed its participation to 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (art. 3). Soviet forces in Germany were to leave the country by the end of 1994 (art. 4) and they left in August 1994. Until Soviet troops were withdrawn, no non-German troops could be stationed in the Eastern territories, except for Four Powers forces in Berlin. After Soviet withdrawal, German armed forces assigned to NATO could be deployed in these *Länder* without any nuclear weapon carrier. In compliance to Wörner's "special military status" East Germany became a nuclear-free zone for foreign armed forces (art. 5). Nothing was said on NATO expansion to CEE (Kramer 2009: 53, 55).

The Treaty had given a united Germany its independence and the right to choose alliances. FRG maintained its role in international organisations, and NATO and the EEC (in compliance with art.6), and GDR incorporated in the FRG became part of those organisations.

4. CEE Countries Request to Join NATO

United Germany maintained NATO membership, while the Soviets had lost influence over the Warsaw Pact countries. Anatoly Chernyaev, advisor to Gorbachev predicted on 4 May 1990 that Germany was "going to be in NATO. There is simply no realistic way for us to prevent this. It is inevitable" and the next step would be the "possible entry of Poland into NATO" however, what mattered was not the Oder-Neisse line or Germany and Poland in NATO, but the "nuclear balance between the Soviet Union and the USA" (Kramer 2009: 51; Sarotte 2022: 85).

Gorbachev admitted that the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 were "errors", so Hungarians and Czechoslovakian asked for Soviet troops to leave. On 23 January 1990, Hungarian prime minister, Miklos Német, obtained the promise of Soviet troops withdrawal, and Czechoslovakia was next, thus putting into question the very existence of the Warsaw Pact (Sarotte 2022: 46). On the other hand, Czechoslovakia and Poland were ambiguous about Soviet stationing in their territor-

ies. At Camp David meeting with Kohl in February 1990, Bush complained that Czech president, Vaclav Havel, wanted to have demilitarised CEE free from Soviet, but also wanted US troops out of Europe. The Poles, including Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki but except Lech Wałęsa, felt that Soviets should stay to prevent Germans to get back their former lands in Poland or violating the Oder-Neisse border line. This until a common statement by RFG and GDR parliaments confirmed the border on Oder-Neisse line, thus reassuring the Poles who renounced to hosting Soviet troops (Sarotte 2022: 79, 93).

The "security vacuum" created in CEE could be filled by CSCE or a Pan-European security organisation. Mitterrand had unenthusiastically conceived a Pan-European organisation because he was against CEE enlargement to the EEC. Havel also favoured Mitterand's project until the proposal failed at the Prague conference on 12 June 1991.

Quite the opposite, Kohl enthusiastically approved Poland in NATO, as he told to Party leaders on 11 June 1990: "The best thing could happen to us would be for Poland to demand NATO membership". This would both take RFG off the frontline and ease Polish anxieties over German border. Germany opposing to NATO expansion to Poland would "destroy the alliance" (Kramer 2009: 42; Sarotte 2022: 87).

Hungarian foreign minister, Gyula Horn, asked on 1 March 1990 to US Deputy Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger how NATO could provide a political umbrella for CEE, but Eagleburger downplayed it as "revolutionary", and dictated by electoral propaganda for Hungarian elections. Polish foreign minister, Krzysztof Skubiszewski inaugurated on 21 March 1990, a series of visits by CEE countries to NATO HQ in Brussels by stating that NATO had a "stabilising effect". Czech foreign minister arrived in March, the Hungarian foreign minister in June soon followed by his prime minister, and followed by Romanian and Bulgarian politicians (Sarotte 2022: 79-81).

The West started to think over welcoming CEE countries. The US State Department policy planning staff started in March 1990 to draft options for Hungary and Poland to join NATO or the EEC, as a solution to a "German-Russian security dilemma", reasoning that Poles and other Eastern Europeans may support NATO if they could join it[8].

CEE countries foreign ministers were invited to a special EEC ministerial meeting in Lisbon on 23-24 March 1990 to see what forms of affiliation were possible (Sarotte 2022: 80).

However not until late Spring 1990 there was the idea to dissolve Warsaw Pact with new Hungarian prime minister, Jozsef Antall leading the way (Kramer 2009: 43). Gorbachev worried about Warsaw Pact countries requests to join NATO, wanted Warsaw Pact countries to sign bilateral agreement on security, but Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia refused. Gorbachev in a meeting with Baker on 18 May 1990 asked to that Soviet Union join NATO. For Baker, this was a serious proposal that he was to discuss with Bush (Sarotte 2022: 87-88, 111). This was just the first of a series of NATO applications by Russia.

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[8] See Harvey Sichermann, memorandum on 12 March 1990, US State Department policy planning, and Dennis Ross memorandum, both quoted in Sarotte (2022: 79-80).

5. London Communiqué, Visegrád Group and NACC

NATO summit's London communiqué of 5-6 July 1990 (declaration on a transformed North Atlantic Alliance) started relations and opened NATO liaison offices in CEE countries. On 6 July, Bush highlighted to Gorbachev the key messages of NATO London communiqué to transform NATO and expand over former Warsaw Pact countries, to win Gorbachev's opposers in the Soviet Union. The Communist party congress approved this NATO declaration. Gorbachev stated options to make Soviet Union acceptable to have RFG in NATO, because NATO has different degrees of membership, such as those of France or Denmark (Sarotte 2022: 94).

By reaffirming the Helsinki principle, Soviet Union signed the Charter of Paris in November 1990 with the commitment to "fully recognize the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements" (Lough 2021: 30).

In the Summer-Autumn 1990, Havel, Wałęsa and Antall pressured the United States on accepting them in NATO if they dissolved the Warsaw Pact. Bush told Havel that NATO should focus on building liaison office with CEE countries as US administration was not sponsoring Eastern enlargement, only Dick Cheney at the Office of Secretary of Defense was for granting them an observer or "associate status".

Bush was referring to administration's reports. State Department on 22 October 1990 produced an analysis on "Eastern Europe and NATO" that concluded it was "not in the best interest of NATO or the US that these states be granted full NATO membership and its security guarantees" as the US should refrain from organizing "an anti-Soviet coalition whose frontier is the Soviet border". This would look predatory for the Soviets and spoil the good relations built. The European Steering Group (advisors to NSA, Departments of State, Defence, etc.) came to a similar conclusion in a session on 29 October 1990: "All agencies agree that East Europe government should not invited to join NATO anytime in the immediate future".

Prophetically, Havel said to Paul Wolfowitz in a visit to Prague on 24-26 April 1991 that he saw "two possibilities in the next ten years: NATO and the EC". CEE countries felt that after German reunification, NATO and EEC were to stay, mostly unchanged, while any other form of demilitarised zone or Pan-European association were to fail. Therefore, the European Post-Cold war division would be between NATO and EEC, and non-NATO or EEC countries, so they wanted to join NATO and EEC (Sarotte 2009: 109-110).

Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia established the Visegrád group cooperation in February 1991 to support their membership for NATO and the EEC. At the same time, the Warsaw Pact countries decided to disband their alliance that ceased to exist in July.

In June 1991, the Yugoslavian crisis burst out and the Europeans had to focus on it and after the coup in August 1991 in Russia, Yeltsin was manoeuvring to oust Gorbachev and to dissolve the Soviet Union.

National Security Council (NSC) considered again in October 1991 the options for NATO enlargement to CEE, but its conclusion was just to focus on NATO liaison offices in these countries. However, Wörner wanted an upgrade in CEE-NATO relations, and

a Baker-Genscher proposal was conceived for some kind of NATO affiliated organisation that CEE countries could join, leaving the door open, but avoiding full membership. This resulted into the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) to provide with a forum for dialogue and cooperation for former Warsaw Pact countries plus the Baltics. According to Wörner, Soviet republics and former Warsaw Pact countries were to receive a non-differentiated approach in processing applications to NACC. Visegrád group countries opposed to this approach, and Havel renewed on 22 October 1991, his request to for "some form of membership of NATO". On the contrary, Yeltsin welcomed the NACC and to get Russia involved in that body as part of a support to NATO for a new security system from Vancouver to Vladivostok (Sarotte 2022: 124-126,128). A plan emerged to announce the NACC at NATO summit in November 1991, and the NACC convened its first session in December 1991.

CEE countries renewed requests to NATO in 1992, but NATO preferred to deepen NACC and on 10 March 1992, all former Soviet Republics, except for Georgia, joined NACC. This diluted Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland aspirations for fast-track membership. On 6 May 1992, in Prague, Visegrád leaders stated that their goal was a full-fledged NATO membership.

After Maastricht Treaty, in March 1992, Kohl told Bush that CEE countries would have to wait until the end of 1990s to join the EEC, because Sweden, Finland, Austria and possibly Norway had higher priority for enlargement. Kohl said that it was unlikely that any former Soviet Republic may join, but they may have their own economic zone "as a bridge from Europe to Asia". The EU also needed to address the violence in Yugoslavia, and also Visegrád countries and Ukraine were already cooperating with NATO in Croatia and Bosnia (Sarotte 2022: 141, 149).

US Department of State debated again on NATO enlargement, this time there were opposing views. The con was "where to stop" once enlargement had started not to provoke Russia, while the pro focused on a "sequential" approach to candidate countries, and raised the issue that FRG was not more willing to host US troops, while Poland was welcoming them. Rand corporation also reasoned that if Poland was out of NATO it would develop nuclear weapons and if attacked by Russia, it would be helped by Germany thus involving NATO (Sarotte 2009: 141-142).

6. Clinton, Yeltsin and the Founding Act on Russia-NATO Relations

If Bush administration was not very supportive of CEE demands for NATO, Clinton administration was more favourable of NATO expansion thus finding a positive attitude of Yeltsin.

But Yeltsin had his "ups-and-downs" and in a letter to Clinton on 15 September 1993 inaugurated the "broken promises" argument, stating that NATO enlargement, in particular for Poland, was in contrast to the "spirit" of Two-plus-Four Treaty. By recalling art.5, he implied that it prevented NATO from expanding to CEE countries. Therefore, US State Secretary Warren Christopher, and Wörner consulted the German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel, and his adviser, Dieter Kastrup a close aide of

Genscher. Kastrup replied that Yeltsin was formally wrong as the Treaty focused on FRG alone, nonetheless there was "political and psychological substance" in Russian claim, based on Genscher's various promises on NATO expansion, so that the Russians may think that the "basic philosophy" of the Treaty was on preventing NATO eastward enlargement. Wörner, who was the only one of them in office at the time of the negotiations, rejected this interpretation, reminding that the Treaty focused on FRG only and not on NATO, and the second paragraph of the art. 5 allowed German NATO integrated forces to deploy in East Germany, after the Soviet troops had left, a condition that was to become reality in the following months (Sarotte 2022: 168). Philip Zelikov too, who was at the NSC confirmed, that "the option of adding new members to NATO" was "not foreclosed by the deal actually made in 1990" (Zelikov 1995; Kramer 2009: 40).

The Partnership for Peace (PfP) was a solution to widen NACC and was positively welcomed by Russian government - though Duma expressed concerns - that signed a PfP Framework Document on 22 June 1994 hoping to influence NATO policies. Russia got a special status by participating to the Contact Group informal forum alongside the United States, the United Kingdom and FRG.

But a "new form of encirclement" feeling was expressed by Yeltsin, who told Clinton in a meeting on 10 May 1995 that Russia could not accept the NATO bloc continuing to exist and to expand towards Russia's borders, while the Warsaw Pact had been abolished.

On 21 April 1996, they met at Kremlin. Yeltsin was concerned about the Russian general elections in June and the raising anti-Western sentiment of Russian voters. Yeltsin suggested postponing NATO expansion until 1999 or 2000, but he accepted trade-off. Clinton who was also pressed by the Republican-controlled Congress, that if Russia accepted NATO enlargement she would obtain a clear statement on candidate status for NATO and a greater integration in other organisations as the G7 (NSC 1996: 4; Bianchi 2022: 19-21)[9].

After having been both re-elected, Clinton and Yeltsin met between January and May 1997 to resume NATO-Russia relations.

At their meeting in Helsinki in March 1997, Yeltsin reiterated the idea that NATO enlargement was wrong, but he was forced to accept it, and he offered a legally binding agreement between 16 NATO countries and Russia that no conventional or nuclear weapons were to be deployed close to Russia to create a *cordon sanitaire* and a secret "gentlemen's agreement" that no former Soviet Republic would enter NATO, in particular Ukraine. Yeltsin reasoned: "You are conducting naval manoeuvres near Crimea. It is as if we were training people in Cuba. How would you feel? It is unacceptable to us." Clinton quietly refused Yeltsin's proposal: "I can't make commitments on behalf of NATO, and I'm not going to be in the position myself of vetoing NATO expansion with respect to any country, much less letting you or any-

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[9] NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin", Clinton Digital Library, meeting on 21 April 1996: 4, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569 (accessed 30 September 2023).

one else do so." This also because NATO decision-making operates by consensus of all the countries (NSC 1997: 2-64)[10].

The final result of these negotiations in early 1997 was the only official text on NATO-Russia relations, the "founding act on Russia-NATO relations" signed at the Paris summit on 27 May 1997. In the document, the only promise made by NATO was that no nuclear weapons could be deployed or stored in on the territory of new NATO members.

NATO also stated that the Alliance "will carry out its collective defence and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" but the fact that "it will have to rely on adequate infrastructure commensurate with the above tasks" actually watered down this commitment by allowing NATO military installations in Eastern NATO countries, including the BMD in Romania, and more recently "Camp Trump" in Poland.

In the agreement there was no mentioning of NATO expansion to Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland that few weeks later at NATO Madrid summit in June 1997 were invited to join, and in a couple of years at the Washington summit in April 1999, would officially join the Alliance, in a move negatively viewed by the Kremlin. Moscow soon retaliated in June, after the end of Kosovo war, when the Russian peace-keepers exiting Bosnia cut the road to KFOR "initial entry force" reaching first the Pristina airport, and causing a diplomatic incident.

The 9/11 and the terrorist threat linked to Russian-Chechen war, forced a reconciliation between the United States and Russia, and Rome declaration in May 2002 "opened a new page", thus inaugurating the NATO-Russia Council (Bianchi 2022: 26).

Eventually, a few months later, no incidents happened when at Prague NATO summit on 21-22 November 2002 seven countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) were invited for membership, and officially joined NATO at the 2004 Istanbul summit.

7. Conclusion

There is no "smoking gun", there had been no official promises or written agreement from Western leaders to Russia not to expand to the East. Therefore, there was no "broken promise".

The West obtained "green light" on German reunification, but Gorbachev never obtained a written agreement (Sarotte 2014: 91), and no one among Gorbachev's advisers or among his opponents, not even those who more or less openly distrusted the attitude of the Western leadership, explicitly recommended asking the other party to set out a written arrangement on NATO non-expansion (Bianchi 2022: 16).

Putin too admitted in 2017 Oliver Stone's interview that there was no official agreement, just a gentleman's promise from Bush administration to Gorbachev. He referred

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[10] NSC *cit.* Memorandum of Conversation: Morning Meeting with Russian President Yeltsin: NATO-Russia 21 March 1997: 2-64 https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569 (accessed 30 September 2023).

to informal meetings with Senior Republicans. However, by means of the spoiling system, retirement or ageing, they were out of office, retired or even dead about ten years later in the late 1990s, when Clinton administration launched NATO expansion to CEE.

The Two-plus-Four Treaty gave a clear view of commitments on German reunification that did not involve any commitment on NATO enlargement (Kramer 2009: 40). But misinterpretation of Western reassurances over a united Germany in NATO as a permanent ban on NATO enlargement is common in every Russian leader. It was evident in the Putin speech in Munich, but also Yeltsin in 1993 gave a broad interpretation of the Two-plus-Four Treaty. This can be explained by Kennan's thesis that without the "concept of Russia as in a state of siege" the Russian ruling class would be "superfluous".

One may reason that when Yeltsin requested reassurance on NATO expansion to former Soviet States in 1997, and Clinton objected because he could not decide for the whole alliance, Clinton was already sponsoring NATO and EU enlargement by that time. Conversely, there is no evidence that, in the absence of EU and NATO enlargement, Russia would have suspended its traditional security thinking (Lough 2021: 30).

Until proven otherwise, the only official text on NATO-Russia relations, the Founding Act of 1997, only stated that NATO was not to deploy nuclear weapons in the CEE. Nevertheless, this did not mean a promise not to expand NATO to the East, and in a couple of years, Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland would join NATO.

Chernyaev's prophecy in 1990 maintained that not enlargement but nuclear balance was the key issue of future NATO-Russia relations, and Art. 5 of Two-Plus-Four Treaty ruled that East Germany was to be free of foreign nuclear weapons after Soviets left.

Nuclear weapons were also the subject of the 1991 Minsk Agreement, when former Soviet republics agreed that Russia would be given charge of all nuclear armaments.

Ukraine after various afterthoughts returned nuclear weapons to Russia in 1996 in change for aid and security assurances. Two years before the 1994 Budapest Memorandum signed by the Ukraine, United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom included security assurances against the threat or use of force against Ukraine's territory or political independence.

Risks of a war between Russia and Ukraine had been predicted since Ukrainian independence. In a meeting in Washington between Bush, Baker and Gorbachev's aide Alexander Yakovlev, on 19 November 1991, Baker asked if there would be an open conflict if Ukraine separated from Soviet Union, Yakovlev replied that there were 12 million of ethnic Russians in Ukraine with "many mixed marriages" so "what sort of war could that be?", Baker just answered "a normal war" (Sarotte 2022: 126).

Ukraine became independent after the referendum on 1 December 1991, and since then it had become a possible candidate for NATO membership.

One year after Putin's Munich-speech, US President George W. Bush proposed at Bucharest NATO summit in April 2008 to include Ukraine and Georgia in the Membership Action Plan for future NATO membership according to "open door" policy. However, FRG and France opted for just a compromise communique, that stated a future

membership for the two countries. German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was keen on opposing to the Ukraine membership, reasoning about Putin's reaction. The end compromise, as one Ukrainian diplomat put it "the door was open, but we were not invited" (Le Monde 2023).

Bucharest summit made Putin think that NATO was divided, and he invaded Georgia in the short Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 (Le Monde 2023). NATO membership was one of the reasons for the war (Sarotte 2014: 91), and in September 2008, Lavrov reiterated the "broken promises" rhetoric (Kramer 2009: 40). Nonetheless, in December 2011, NATO assured Georgia the status of an "aspiring" country[11].

After Georgia, Russia started to confront with the EU. A dispute with Ukraine made Russia cut off gas supplies to Europe in 2009, and EU anti-trust investigation of Gazprom in 2011 changed attitudes in EU-Russia relations (Lough 2022: 30). The direct cause of 2014 Ukraine crisis was Russia's stated opposition to the signature of the EU-Ukraine Association agreement. On 21 March 2014, just three days after Russia had annexed Crimea, Ukraine signed the political part of this Agreement, during the extraordinary EU-Ukraine Summit. The economic part of the Agreement was signed by President Poroshenko at the margins of the European Council on 27 June 2014, and the Ukrainian and European Parliament simultaneously ratified the Agreement on 16 September 2014, to be provisionally applied from 1 November 2014. On 1 September 2017, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement came into full force despite Russian opposition and the occupation of Crimea and Donbas.

Apart from technical criteria for accession, the issue of Ukraine in NATO or EU real question is "where Europe ends?". A question posed since George H.W. Bush administration.

To answer to this, we should remind that not an invitation by the West, but the self-determination of CEE democracies and their transition to market economy was the real reason for NATO and the EU expansion. Starting from Visegrád Group, the CEE countries voluntarily applied to NATO and the EU, although it is true that Clinton administration, and in particular Czech-born Ms Albright, sponsored their applications also in opposition with a few Member States.

Clinton was supporting a "doctrine of enlargement" to expand the community of market democracies around the world, as CEE countries were then considered as countries in transition to market economy (Clinton 2022). It shall be reminded that the concurrent EU enlargement launched by the Copenhagen European Council meeting in 1993 had set the "Copenhagen criteria" focusing on democracy, rule of law, economic and *acquis communautaire* requirements for countries who wanted to join the EU.

In conclusion, the fact that NATO is a voluntary community by self-determination of a country is confirmed by the fact as a reaction to the Ukraine crisis, Sweden and Finland abandoned their longstanding neutrality and joined NATO.

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[11] Final statement, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, on 7 December 2011.

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Internal and External Factors of Putin's War on Ukraine

Mara Morini

Introduction

In literature it has been widely debated that domestic politics and international relations are often somehow entangled to the extent that it is quite difficult "whether domestic politics really determines international relations, or the reverse" (Putnam 1988: 423).

In this respect, the study of the Russian invasion in Ukraine can offer an opportunity to understand better the relationship between domestic and external factors that have determined Vladimir Putin's choice to attack the Ukrainian territory.

Late in 2021, big numbers of Russian troops were deployed close to Ukraine's boarders but Putin denied he would invade his neighbour. Some months later, Putin announced the beginning of the so called "special military operation" to defend Russia from NATO's threats to attack "our historic future as a nation", and, mostly important, to stop the process of "nazification" in Ukraine[1].

Since 22 February 2022 it has been argued in Russia that president Putin authorised a "special military operation" against Ukraine to demilitarise Russia's Southern neighbour: "to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide (…) for the last eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine"[2]. The Kremlin chief's announcement followed an appeal from the Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine for military help against what they said was growing Ukrainian aggression (Yudin 2022).

Nonetheless, many scholars argue that Putin's invasion of Ukraine also marks a distinctive challenge to the liberal international setting led by the American presidential administrations to pave the way to a "new era" in the global order with the support of the Chinese leader Xi Jinping (Mankoff 2022; Ellison *et al.* 2023; Wahyu *et al.* 2024).

Being at the crossroads between the East and the West, Ukraine has become a land of political conflict where both the American and the European institutions have tried with the passing of time to anchor the Ukrainian society and politics to Western values. As we will see, the Western support to countries in a democratization process has always perceived by the Kremlin as a threat and a domestic interference in post-Soviet States that are still considered as a part of a Russian sphere of influence (Suslov 2018).

Mara Morini, University of Genova, mara.morini@unige.it

[1] See https://theahseagle.com/15039/news/the-full-breakdown-of-russias-invasion-in-ukraine/, accessed on 28th October 2023.

[2] See https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russias-putin-authorises-military-operations-donbass-domestic-media-2022-02-24/, accessed on 28th October 2023. See http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843, accessed on 28th October 2023.

So far, studies have interpreted "Putin'war" as a nostalgic choice based on the will to restore former imperial glories to unify the Russian peoples denying, at the same time, the Ukranians' right to live in an independent State (Kuzio 2022; Zaporozhchenko 2024).

Other scholars argued that the Russian invasion was mainly the effect to the Western policies – especially the NATO enlargement – perceived as a security threat by the Kremlin (Maersheimer 2014).

More recently, Kseniya Kizilova and Pippa Norris have theorized that Putin may have decided to invade Ukraine in February 2022 as an attempt to manufacture a "rally-around-the-fag" effect at home, designed to boost his fagging personal popularity among ordinary Russians (Kizilova, Norris 2024: 235).

What it is still missing in literature is an analysis, which combine the main domestic reasons - *i.e.* Putin's personality and ideology, the institutional design, the legacies of the historical and cultural traditions – as well as the role played by the external factors (NATO, EU, the US) in determining Russia's reaction against Ukraine.

Consequently, this article aims at describing the main reasons why Putin decided to attack Ukraine and challenge the West trying to analyse both the domestic situation and the international environment, which constitutes the political background of the Russian war.

In doing so, the first paragraph provides a general overview of the main political decisions implemented by Putin as soon as he was elected in 2000 until nowadays. This approach is useful to better understand on which principles the emergence of the so-called "vertical power" has been shaped to guarantee a more stabilized political system after the Boris Yeltsin's chaotic era. Moreover, it provides the ideological background of the so-called Putinism which consists of two principles: *tsivilizatsiya* (civilization) as a cultural entity and *konservatizm* (conservatism) as a tool to preserve population and to reject extremism as a means of action[3].

The second paragraph will describe the main concepts of Russian foreign policies showing a shift to the East starting from 2008 with the beginning of a more revisionist attitude towards both US and NATO (Termine, Natalizia 2020).

Moreover, using a psychological approach, it will be analysed the role played by his personality, beliefs and ideology which have shaped his mind and political strategy during his presidency. Taking into account any kind of methodological fallacy when speaking of personality and psychological attitudes (Greenstein 2014), it will be finally discussed the relationship between the main independent variables (institutional setting, personality, and ideology) and the dependent one with regard to the Russian attack in Ukraine.

Such an approach will allow a wider overview of the multiple domestic and international factors, which provoked the war bearing in mind that some of the findings in this study should be seen as suggestive rather than conclusive.

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[3] See https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/insights/what-does-putins-conservatism-seek-conserve, accessed on 28th October 2023.

1. The Two Sides of Putinism: Domestic and Foreign Policies

Putin's era has been marked by a shift from a hybrid regime towards a more authoritarian one, especially starting from 2004 (Morini 2020; Robinson 2019, 2020). His long-lasting presidency has made some analysts talk about "Putinism" as a personalistic regime who has completely changed the Russian path towards democratization (Fish 2017; Applebaum 2013; Hill, Cappelli 2013; Inozemtsev 2017; Colton 2017). The so called "vertical of power" has marked a political system where repressive policies against extra-parliamentarian opposition, control on traditional and social media and a centralization of power in few hands are the clearest empirical evidence of such an authoritarian regime (Monaghan 2012; Chaisty 2012).

Nevertheless, it would be a superficial approach to state that Putinism is mainly a direct expression of the man in power. Reading the articles of the Russian Constitution (1993), we can easily understand that the institutional origins of his leadership style are based on the constitutional design implemented by his predecessor: Boris Yeltsin. It was Yeltsin who wanted that the President of the Russian Federation had to be a *super partes* political actor, *i.e.* a sort of a fourth power which controls the judicial, legislative and executive ones (Partlett 2022). A president who should save his Motherland in times of trouble and act basically to express people's will in domestic politics and, in the international setting, to make Russia stronger again as it was in the Soviet period.

These are the main principles, which characterize the Russian Constitution and the role of the president on which both Yeltsin and Putin wanted to develop their political power. What makes a great difference between the two presidents is that in 2000 Putin was younger and healthier than Yeltsin and he took also advantage by the observation of all the main obstacles and problems that Yeltsin faced during his presidency (1991-1996).

That's why as soon as Putin was elected, he decided to implement some institutional reforms to make more stable and stronger his presidency and, in general, the presidential administration. He understood the importance of having a "party of power" which dominates in the lower Chamber (Duma) to avoid any attempts by the opposition to impeach Presidents or to weaken the legislative procedure as it happened with the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPFR) led by Gennadi Zyuganov between 1993-1995 (Kunov *et al*. 2005; Gel'man 2009; Remington 2013).

Putin also wanted to reduce the political autonomy of governors and reorganize the presidential administration to better rule and control the institutional and political activities (Klimovich 2023). That's why he believed in the importance of the emergence of a "party of power" able to control both local and federal politics and to act without any legislative obstacle in Parliament with a larger margin of control over the voting of the members. Unlike Yeltsin, who never believed in political parties, Putin created a dominant party regime where party and State are closely intertwined. The Russian president also relied on a network of security services and law enforcement veterans known as *siloviki* (power agents) who form "the backbone of the President Putin's administration (Treisman 2007: 141)".

Putin can also get the support of the military faction led by his intimate friend Sergey Shoigu that is extremely important in terms of maintaining power without any threat of a potential coup d'Etat.

As Lanskoy and Miles-Primakoff describe: "Putin's Russia offers a vivid illustration of how kleptocratic plunder can become not only an end in itself, but also a tool for both consolidating domestic political control and projecting power abroad" (Lanskoy and Miles-Primakoff 2018: 76).

At the domestic level, Putin's efforts are based on the will to make the political regime more stable thanks to specific choices which deal with repressive policies, propaganda's tools and economic policies which can re-establish the Soviet model with a set of authoritarian strategies.

In foreign policy, the Kremlin has developed a distinctive, pragmatic and ideological driver, which underline the Western threat to weaken and destabilize Russia in order to avoid the resurgence of its rightful place among great powers in the world (Salimzade 2018; McFaul 2020).

The NATO enlargement, the so-called "promotion of democracies", the "coloured revolutions" and the EU expansion towards East are the main topic of discussion both at the elite level but also among Russian citizens who usually get political information in TV channels.

Therefore, it is not surprising that some political events such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian invasion in Ukraine can determine positive feelings and support towards Putin's among Russian citizens[4].

Reading through the speeches of the Russian Presidents or analysing the "Foreign Policy Concepts" from 1993 till 2008, there is no doubt that there was a general and positive attitudes towards the West, both the US and the EU, during the Nineties and the first couple of years of Putin's term (Kubicek 1999; Tsygankov 2019, 2023).

The Nineties has been characterized by the wave of the so-called Westernizers *i.e.* those politicians who strongly believed that Russia is European and should effectively interact with Western countries and international organizations. This is particularly true when we refer to some statements by the former Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrey Kozyrev (1992-1996) who argued that Russia should become a member of both the EU and NATO because such a process would have anchored a more democratic Russia in the West (Kozyrev 2022).

Kozyrev realized that Russia and the EU have same common interests in developing cooperation and a constructive dialogue should have been implemented. This foreign policy marks the period of the legal basis of this relationship by the signature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in force since 1997 and valid for 10 years. Based primarily on trade, investments and economic relations this document paved the way to a large number of cultural and political activities developed in the following years.

Among them, the Four Economic Spaces which consisted of 1) a common economic space; 2) a common space of freedom, security and justice; 3) a space of co-

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[4] See the trend since the beginning of the war at the following website: https://www.levada.ru/en/, access on 31st October 2023.

operation in the field of external security; 4) a space of research, education, and cultural exchange. In the framework of this partnership Russia stated that the parties' shared "respect for democratic principles and human rights and a commitment to international peace and security as defined in particular in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a new Europe"[5].

In 1997 the Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Cernomyrdyn, argued that "Russia ought to become an EU member in the not-too-distant future" and he added that Moscow's "entire relationship with the EU" is primarily aimed at achieving that goal[6].

These common activities went on for many years to the extent that the EU became Russia's largest trading partner while Russia was the largest exporter of oil and gas till 2014.

Following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the civil war in Donbas the EU-Russia dialogue worsened because the EU reacted with economic sanctions against Russia. It was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, who stated, in 2021, that "there are no relations with the European Union as an organisation. The entire infrastructure of these relations has been destroyed by the unilateral decisions of Brussels"[7]. If this statement best represents Russian attitudes towards EU after 2014, the war in Ukraine has provoked the end of any cooperation both in the economic and political sectors.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to think that the turning point of this political change between these two actors started in 2014. Conjunctural events and changes in the Russian leadership determined a shift in the Russian foreign policy at the end of the Nineties. It was the period when Evgenij Primakov succeeded to Kozyrev as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996-1998) being supporter of a different approach in foreign policy aiming at looking at East.

Primakov stressed the importance of multilateralism as an alternative to the American hegemony in the international order and strongly believed in the "strategic triangle" (namely Russia, China, and India) to counterbalance the US. He was against NATO's expansion into the former Eastern Bloc and US attack in Bosnia while he believed in expanding Russian influence towards both the East and the Middle East (Sakwa 2013; Janeliūnas, Kojala 2019).

As Prime Minister, Primakov, did U-Turn over Atlantic after the NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia and refused to meet with the Americans politicians to talk about the Kosovo issue. Primakov was well known to be a representative of the so-called "Eurasianism" and a potential presidential candidate after Yeltsin. However, the latter chose Putin, his protégé, who came from the former KGB – State Security Committee - and represented the right man who could provide a peaceful and prosperous future for Yeltsin and his entourage.

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[5] "Agreement on partnership and cooperation establishing a partnership between the European Communities and their Member States, of one part, and the Russian Federation, of the other part". Archived from the original (PDF) on 31st October 2017. Retrieved 18th August 2015. "European Commission – PRESS RELEASES – Press release – The EU-Russia Partnership – basic facts and figures". europa.eu. Retrieved 18th August 2015.

[6] See https://www.rferl.org/a/1085916.html, access on 31st October 2023.

[7] See https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/lavrov-pronounces-russia-eu-relations-as-dead/, access on 31st October 2023.

Since then, Putin uses the pseudo-philosophical rhetoric of the Eurasianists to justify Russia's Great Power status and a greater role for it in East Asia with pragmatic and geoeconomic aspects of Russia's Eurasianist identity that are being stressed most by the presidential administration, especially on energy and transport links (Rangsimaporn 2006; Schmidt 2005; Morozova 2009).

As Aglaya Snetkov states Putin paved the way to a change in the regime's conceptualisation which moved from a Western oriented policy towards the East, prioritising internal security threats to a strong state confronted by the West as the main "Other" (Snetkov 2014).

2. Putin's Personality between Myth and Reality

In 2016 Valerie Sperling published an article in the journal *Communist and Post-communist Studies* on "Putin's macho personality cult", which best represents the contemporary narrative on the Russian president in power[8].

As soon as he was elected in the first term (2000-2004) it was quite evident to Russian people that the new president was younger, healthier, stronger and resolute then his predecessor just looking or listening to him. A stronger president for a stronger Russia was the main chatting at the mass and elite levels and the new institutional reforms and his speech abroad made this idea spread throughout Russia and beyond.

In TV channels, in libraries, in radio and also in social media Putin's image and cards depicted him in hunting, swimming, riding, making different sports with a large coverage in many Russian and foreign magazines (Simons 2019).

Putin's image reminded those times in the Soviet Union where Josef Stalin's cult of personality was part of the Soviet propaganda and regime: an infallible, omnipotent leader whose cult was one of the strongest in modern history.

Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" given at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 denounced "the cult of individual" "(*kul't lichosti*) which would have led to pervert Party's principles but in times of personalization and presidentialization of politics it can be argued that Putin's cult is still an important aspect of the so called Putinism.

The construction of a macho politics around Putin can be considered as a political strategy in domestic and foreign policy strongly connected to the "surges of masculinezed and patriotic nationalism in contemporary Russia (Sperling 2016: 17).

During Putin's presidency the Russian population has seen "a tough, patriotic leader protecting Russia from the nefarious plans of Western States to weaken Russia and take advantage of her oil and gas resources" (Sperling 2016: 15). Since his first term Putin was considered a "real-man" in Russian politics (Riabova and Riabov, 2011) who represents a well recognized national pride and patriotic machismo.

Putin's masculinity has been a political strategy to secure leader's position in power, taking advantage of the cultural legacies of the past, which constitutes a good

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[8] See "The United States' 2018 National Defence Strategy", which identifies Russia and China as revisionist States: https://www.dau.edu/sites/default/files/Migrated/CopDocuments/2018%20National%20Defense%20Strategy%20Summary.pdf, accessed on 5th November 2023.

background of a patriarchal system where macho's politics is widely accepted, especially if this also represents a way to country's resurgence.

These attitudes towards Putin's macho politics can be recognized also in the Russian foreign policies. Starting from the well-known Munich's speech against the West in 2007, the attack to Georgia and, especially, the annexation of Crimea, the more Russian assertive, aggressive stance in the international order has been a matter of political debate in Western countries (Borozna 2022).

In the last decade, Russia and China have increasingly been referred to as revisionist powers, which seek to alter the international system to their advantage being unsatisfied of the status quo distribution of power.

In 2015, Putin asserted that "the pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine were not fighting merely the Ukrainian regular army, but rather, a NATO-sponsored foreign legion". As Putin explained, Ukraine's army was, "in effect (…) no longer an army but a foreign legion e in this case NATO's foreign legion e which does not of course pursue Ukraine's national interests." NATO's proxy forces in Ukraine boasted a "completely different agenda" and a broader geostrategic goal, namely, "containing Russia" (Whitmore, 2015).

And what about the relationship between the cult of personality and Putin's individual characteristics?

Is it a legitimate political strategy based more on leader's image and narrative or Putin's nature facilitates such a propaganda tool (Bäcker, Rak 2022)?

In 2022, after the Russian invasion an update on Vladimir Putin's mental state took place[9].

A research project conducted at the Unit for the study of Personality in Politics (USPP) in 2017 and 2023 (Immelman, Trenzeluk 2017) has tried to develop a psychological profile of the Russian President, taking into account data from open-source intelligence and synthesized into a personality profile using the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC), which represents the basis of interpretive guidelines provided in the MIDC and Millon Index of Personality Styles manuals.

In doing so, the results of an indirect assessment of the personality of Vladimir Putin are based on the levels of interaction that a person can have in his environment (family, education, politics, and so on). In this respect, the dissolution of the USSR, the economic and political consequences of this change, the hope to live in a better future for his country, and a sort of revenge towards the US can undoubtedly affected Putin's personality and leadership.

In sum, the report states that "Putin's primary personality patterns were found to be Dominant/controlling (a measure of aggression or hostility), Ambitious/self-serving (a measure of narcissism), and Conscientious/dutiful, with secondary Retiring/reserved (introverted) and Dauntless/adventurous (risk-taking) tendencies and lesser Distrusting/suspicious features. The blend of primary patterns in Putin's profile

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[9]   https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11788913/Putin-Russian-presidents-physical-mental-state-deteriorated-year-war.html, accessed on 5th November 2023. See also, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-02-28/russia-putin-behavior-mental-health, accessed on 5th November 2023.

constitutes a composite personality type aptly described as an *expansionist hostile enforcer"* (Immelman, Goff 2023).

Applying the personality model by Theodore Millon (Millon, Davis 1996), the founder of the *Journal of Personality Disorders*, Putin's personality would be summarized as follows: dominant (26%), ambitious (23,3%), conscientious (20%), retiring (11,7%), and dauntless (8,3%).

All these aspects describe a man who likes to be competitive, to get power, to intimidate, enjoy the power to direct others and to evoke obedience and respect; they are tough and unsentimental and often make effective leaders. This personality pattern comprises the "hostile" component of Putin's personality composite. He easily assumes leadership roles, expect others to recognize their special qualities, and often act as though entitled. This personality pattern delineates the "expansionist" component of Putin's personality composite.

As far as *conscientious individuals* are concerned, they are dutiful and diligent, with a strong work ethic and careful attention to detail; they are adept at crafting public policy but often lack the retail political skills required to consummate their policy objectives and are more technocratic than visionary. This personality pattern fashions the "enforcer" component of Putin's personality composite.

Individuals tend not to develop strong ties to others, are somewhat deficient in the ability to recognize the needs or feelings of others, and may lack spontaneity and interpersonal vitality.

Being *dauntless individuals* means to be adventurous, individualistic, daring personalities resistant to deterrence and inclined to take calculated risks.

In sum, the analysis made by this team describes Putin's particular blend a set of personality patterns, which suggest a foreign policy orientation best described as that of a *deliberative high-dominance introvert* and a major personality-based strengths in a political role based on commanding demeanour and confident assertiveness. His major personality-based shortcomings are his uncompromising intransigence, lack of empathy and congeniality, and cognitive inflexibility.

The second issue concerns Putin as a risk-taker. Apparently, Putin did not believe in Western economic sanctions if he decided to take Crimea. The strongest reaction he expected from Western countries was a boycott of the G8 summit in Sochi (Zygar 2016: 572). Still, according to Zygar, the riskiness of the Crimea action was recognized by everyone in the Kremlin (Zygar 2016: 557). There was a real chance that Ukraine would fight back, and nobody knew for sure how the West would react. The concern here is both with Putin's personality in terms of taking risk, and with the risk-taking in this particular situation.

Unfortunately, according to many analysts, due to his overall personality traits, cognitive inflexibility, and uncompromising demeanour, it will be extremely challenging to negotiate with Putin over the Ukrainian war. And if we refer to his 2000 biography *Ot pervogo litsa* (In the First Person), when Putin mentioned that when studying at the KGB-academy it was registered as a negative trait of his personality that he had a "lowered sense of danger" (Gevorkian, Timakov, Kolesnikov 2000: 34), it is

highly likely that the war in Ukraine is a very complicated issue to solve (Dylan, Gioe, Grossfeld 2023).

As Greg Simons argues, "Putin is a controversial figure in international politics (…). He has cultivated a very specific image for the Russian publics, a nonsense leader and man of action, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and a patriotic guardian of Russia who is anti-democratic and is leading Russia into a more nationalistic and militaristic state with some religious overtones" (Simons 2019: 307-308).

3. Putin's Ideology

The Putin's ideological background is basically determined by readings of some philosophers such as Ivan Il'in, Nikolay Berdyaec and Lev Gumilev and the historical role played by the Tzars as Peter the Great, Alexander the Third and Catherine with a particular attention to the late Empire Era (Morini, Savino 2022).

Used as to legitimate political decisions through symbols, keywords and the cult of the past (which it is still present) are the main elements which shape the modern and contemporary Russian nationalism based on the concept of a "Greater Russia" (*bol'šaja russkaja nacija*) (Nygren 2007; Szporluk 2006).

In this respect, the three Eastern-Slavic population – Belarus, Russian, Ukrainian – are a single ethnic-cultural-religious entity where the Great Russians are literally predominant on the Little Russian (Ukrainians) and the Belarus (White Russians). As a matter of fact, Moscow and Saint Petersburg have represented the core of power in different centuries without taking into account the legitimacy of an independent Ukrainian identity which has been considered a mere regional periphery at the beginning of the 21st century.

Consequently, any Ukrainian attempt to revenge its own autonomy and independency has been described by the Kremlin as a threat for Russian identity from the Ukrainian nationalistic movements (Roberts 2022).

Putin's conservatism is based on a strong State whose main goals are to defend its citizens from domestic (terrorism) and Western international actions aiming at weakening Russia, to promote processes of modernization of the country, to spread welfare policies in the Russian Federation and to guarantee sovereignty, order and stability as it was expressed by Putin in his speech in 1999 (*Millenium Message*) (Morini, Savino 2022: 4; Prozorov 2005; Kaylan 2014; Suslov, Uzlaner 2019).

During Putin's presidency the Russian nationalism has also developed the idea of a *Russkij Mir* ("Russian world" but also Russian "peace"), elaborated by Sergej Karaganov in 1992 where Moscow should defend the Russian diaspora and Russophone people in the "near abroad" and post-soviet States trying to support their rights and avoid any kind of discriminations by other populations around the world. For a patriotic ideologue such as Putin, this separation of Russophones from their motherland was an existential threat to the survival of the great Russian civilization. That's why the Kremlin decided to establish a cultural foundation in 2007 in cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church to spread the Russian language and culture

as it was also mentioned in the Foreign Policy Concept in 2016 in the following statement: "actions of foreign policy of the State must aim at assure protection and effective rights of Russian citizens and their compatriots abroad" (Natalizia 2022: 2).

According to Benjamin Young (2022):

> Putin believes an invasion of Ukraine is a righteous cause and necessary for the dignity of the Russian civilization, which he sees as being genetically and historically superior to other Eastern European identities. The idea of protecting Russian-speakers in Eurasia has been a key part of Putin's "Russkiy Mir" worldview and 21st-century Russian identity. Under the rubric of "Russkiy Mir" (Russian World), Putin's government promotes the idea that Russia is not a mere nation-state but a civilization-state that has an important role to play in world history[10].

For the last 20 years, Putin has used the concept of *Russkiy Mir* to justify the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2014 annexation of Crimea and Ukraine plays a special role because without a Russophone Ukraine, there is no Russian World.

President Putin expressed these ideas in a long article where he stated that Russians and Ukrainians are "one nation", and he also described the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 as the "disintegration of historical Russia". As far as this last sentence is concerned, it could be argued that in Putin's mind the breakup of the Soviet Union is not a mere nostalgia for the Soviet political system rather a real disappointment for the loss of territories of the Soviet Republics. Consequently, the annexation of both Crimea and Donbas or the entire Ukraine could be also interpreted as the will to expansion of lands and populations for the Russian Federation since the problem of demography is a matter of concern in his political agenda (Eltchaninoff 2018).

Thus, when Putin came back to power in 2012, he decided that it is needed "to be active on the Ukrainian front, otherwise we may lose the country" (Zygar 2016). In Mikhail Zygar's opinion, Putin could not stand anymore the fact that the Ukrainian leadership has always mentioned and supported its "ukrainstvo" *i.e.* the constant "tendency to always point out the differences between Russians and Ukrainians" (Zygar 2016).

In a pre-dawn TV address on 24 February, President Putin declared Russia could not feel "safe, develop and exist" due to the constant threat from modern Ukraine led by fascists since 2014 who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians. That's why he used a false narrative stating that Ukraine must get rid of oppression and "cleansed of the Nazis". According to the head of the Russian Security, Nikolai Patrushev, the US supported the current rise of Nazism in the Baltics and Ukraine but reading through the Ukrainian history there are several examples of Ukrainian presidents since 1991 who called Ukraine is not Russia also among the Eastern Ukrainian business elite.

Another important element to take into consideration is what it could be called as "the Russian obsession": the security issue. In this respect, NATO enlargement to Ukraine has always perceived by the Kremlin as a potential threat and the Western strategy to distance Ukraine from the Russian sphere of influence. This was also one main messages in Putin's famous 2007 Munich speech where he said that the end of the cold war had

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[10] See http://personality-politics.org/russia, accessed on 12th November 2023.

been made possible by a "historic choice of the people of Russia" but the West was not grateful at all and reacted by creating new walls around Russia (Putnam 2016).

This is quite evident in Putin's speech at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 where he declared that if Ukraine would have joined NATO the country will have to do that "without Crimea and the East". To sum up, in Zygar's words, the former Putin mantra of "we need to deal with Ukraine", was gradually transformed into "if Ukraine goes to NATO, we take Crimea" (Zygar 2016: 557).

He has not only demanded that Ukraine never join NATO but that the alliance turns the clock back to 1997 and reverses its eastward expansion.

Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy wrote in their political Putin's biography Mr. Putin that "if Russia had not intervened in Ukraine after the fall of Yanukovych, the interpretation in Moscow was that Russia would not only have lost Kiev, but also the Eurasian Union would have become meaningless and Russia's general position in Europe would have been greatly reduced" (Hill, Gaddy 2012; Hill, Gaddy 2015: 363).

4. Conclusion

The description of Putin's personality, ideology and political strategy has provided a wider picture of the Russian president that can be used for a better understanding of the revisionist stance of the last 15 years in the international stage.

On the one hand, Putin can be defined as a conservative in the exact sense because he defends the *status quo* and opposes all programs for economic, social and political transformation. One of his main goals is to restore a glorious past relying on traditional values and historical events that made both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union to be considered as a powerful political regime in the world.

After the spreading of an humiliating feeling among Russians due to the collapse of the Soviet union and its defeat in the Cold War, Putin stressed the importance of patriotism relying on the ethnonationalist call for *Rossiia dlia russkikh* (Russia for the ethnic Russians) with a more belligerent and aggressive stance.

In literature, the nature of Putin's regime has been labelled in different ways with a common red line which combines both element of authoritarian regimes with that one of a "personalist" dictatorship, which places no institutional constraints on his whims. According to some analysts, Putin's attitudes should also derive from his personality, preferences, personal beliefs which determines a much larger role in shaping the Russian foreign policy.

A combination of strategic, ideological, and political considerations likely motivated his decision to invade Ukraine, which under the Western influence was considered by the Kremlin as an existential threat to the autocratic rule (Egorov, Sonin 2023).

His individual orientation to face risk-decision made him to ignore warnings about the economic and political effects of the aggression but it seems that Russia's political and economic system was able to react to all the Western sanctions.

The weakening of Russia is still a matter of discussion among Western leaders and nobody knows to what extent Russia will be able to survive and be resilient so far.

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The Russian-Speaking Minority in Ukraine and the Russian Invasion

Cecilia Frego

Introduction

During a conflict, political and military arguments inevitably prevail. Nonetheless, it is essential to focus on the issue of the protection of the rights of linguistic minorities, providing that this issue played a role in triggering the ongoing war (*e.g.*, Chayinska 2020; Eras 2023; Teurtrie 2017) and will undoubtedly have relevance when organizing peace. The hypothesis of Ukraine's accession to the European Union – the official candidate status was obtained on 23 June 2022 – reinforces this necessity, given the inclusion of minority protection in the criteria for EU accession set out in Copenhagen in 1993 (DOC/93/3 point 7.A.iii). In line with these considerations, this work aims to provide a definition of the Russian-speaking minority, demonstrating the utility of such a concept. Secondly, the history of Ukraine will be traced, highlighting how territories and populations identifying as Ukrainian have changed over time, and how the minority-majority dynamics between Ukrainians and Russians have consequently evolved. In the third and final part, the focus shifts to the more recent situation, analyzing progress and setbacks in the protection of the Russian-speaking minority using reports, comments, and opinions by the Advisory Committee of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* and by the Committee of Experts on the Application of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*.

1. Definition of Russian-Speaking Minority

There is no universally agreed-upon definition of what constitutes ethnic or national minorities. In practical terms, what helps identify a national minority is the existence of a significant group of people who share a language, traditions, and ways of life different from those of the dominant group or the group in control of the state. Kymlicka (1998) proposes additional necessary characteristics for considering a group as an ethnic minority (distinct from the group of migrants who might otherwise have partly coinciding characteristics): a "historical" element, meaning the minority is such if it is "indigenous" to the territory where it resides, and an "organizational/political" element, meaning the minority is such if it recognizes itself as a group with distinct interests and needs compared to those of the majority ethnicity/nationality and there-

Cecilia Frego, University of Pisa, cecilia.frego@phd.unipi.it

fore advocates for different political demands with a self-preservative outlook. The term "minority" is thus more about access to power rather than just numerical data (often in areas of traditional settlement, the minority is in the majority), as noted by Kymlicka (1998). However, this article focuses on a linguistic minority, as defined by Francescato (1993: 311). His definition is based on the criterion of the first language or mother tongue: the minority group has a language of primary socialization different from the official national language. Kymlicka's observations remain relevant, as they help highlight the power dynamics inherent in the minority-majority relationship.

The presence of minorities in a territory can indeed be a source of problems. Minorities are often perceived as foreign or unreliable elements of the population. In this perspective, members of the minority could be seen as a potential "enemy within", especially when the national minority has a "protecting" state, whether nearby or distant. This is particularly true in the post-Soviet area, for which influential studies by Brubaker (1996) contributed to conceptualizing the triadic and conflictual relationship between the Russian minority, the state that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation as a catalyst and influential support for the minority beyond its borders. The unease caused by the presence of minorities is not unfounded (Teurtrie 2017). However, in a supposedly civilized world, ethnic minorities within a state's territory cannot be eliminated.

An apparently conclusive response may seem to be the assimilation of minorities into the majority. However, this approach has significant limitations and has proved to be quite ineffective in practice (Kymlicka 1998). Assimilation places the burden solely on the minority to conform to the majority, denying its right to preserve its own distinctiveness. This often ends up exacerbating and deteriorating relations between the minority and the majority, leading to the unintended consequence of alienating the minority and fostering separatist demands.

An alternative and effective model for preventing open conflicts is that of coexistence, as applied in South Tyrol/Alto Adige. The guarantee of dedicated and equal institutions, with the obligation - at least on paper - of mutual language proficiency at the local level, along with the provision for representation at the national level, has so far been effective in preventing the recurrence of conflicts (Benedikter 2021).

An approach that emphasizes integration remains the most desirable. Striving for integration means allowing languages to coexist, providing minorities with their own space, making them feel involved, and enabling them to contribute in their own way to state-building. Consistent with a liberal approach (Kymlicka 1998), the acceptance of minorities through the appreciation of their contributions can be achieved, if members of the minority are included in the identity-building process, identifying "the essence" of being Ukrainian not in linguistic commonality but in shared values. Alongside policies that promote the study and knowledge of multiple languages, an approach that refers to identity in multiple dimensions (Sciolla 2010) might be conclusive.

Ukraine is indeed a multi-ethnic and multilingual country that hosts various minority groups, including Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Crimean Tatars, Rusyns, and Roma. Ukraine's accession to treaties such as the *Framework Convention for the*

Protection of National Minorities (1998) and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (2006) had raised hopes for their proper management. Unfortunately, the dominance of nationalist parties and divisive interests, often fueled by external powers, has led the state to backtrack on its commitments, to the detriment of all minorities within Ukraine's territory (Csernicsko, Kontra 2022).

The issue concerns in particular the use of language. Language is indeed one of the fundamental elements that determine the sense of belonging to an ethnic or national group, and it has been used in various studies as a criterion for the assertion of inclusive rights (*e.g.*, Castano 2002; Moscatelli 2017). Education policies are therefore crucial within states that host minority populations (Taylor *et al.* 2008) and have a significant impact on the well-being of minority members (Kachanoff *et al.* 2019). Consequently, laws and regulations related to language use often heavily interfere with intergroup relations (Jetten, Wohl 2012; Taylor 2008).

In Ukraine, over time, Russian has assumed the status of an interethnic communication language, eventually becoming the preferred language of use even for individuals who are not ethnically Russian. The significance of the linguistic aspect was clear to the Ukrainian state as well. In the first census after independence (Kuras *et al.* 2004), in addition to questions about the ethnicity of Ukrainian residents, the questionnaire delved into the use of the Ukrainian language and other languages in daily life (Kuras *et al.* 2004: 39-40). The census showed that in 2001, ethnic Russians were 17% of the population, while Russian was considered the main language of use by 29.6%. It is not surprising that Russian speakers were in the majority in the regions of Lugansk, Donetsk, and Crimea with Sevastopol, while in the regions of Odessa, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia, Ukrainian and Russian speakers were roughly equal in number. The document also highlights how knowledge of both languages was widespread, likely facilitated by their similarity. More recent surveys (Kulyk 2023) confirm that the Russian language is commonly used in Ukraine, even among people who do not identify as ethnically Russian.

The fact that people predominantly speak Russian in their daily interactions does not necessarily imply a political stance (or at least it did not in the past), nor does it imply an adherence to the Russian model, as was initially imagined by scholars in the early 1990s (Kulyk 2023). Russian speakers are not homogenous, which is why the term "Russian-speaking" is preferred over the concept of the "Russian diaspora", which is used by other researchers (King, Melvin 1998; Shlapentokh 1994; Smith, Wilson 1997). Focusing on the linguistic aspect allows for the identification of a common characteristic among diverse individuals, aiding in the description of a unique situation, typical of post-Soviet countries, where different languages coexist and are freely used, enriching the linguistic diversity of those immersed in it. When discussing Russian speakers, it is possible to consider the needs of those who identify as Ukrainian but prefer to use the Russian language in their daily interactions. Moreover, recognizing rights for Russian speakers does not delegitimize the Ukrainian language; on the contrary, the point is to guarantee linguistic freedom of choice so that those who abandon Russian do so by choice and not out of fear of persecution.

Since 2014, the Ukrainian language has gained increasing political significance, and the relationship with the Russian world has deteriorated (Chayinska 2020; Eras 2023). It has been demonstrated, through the analysis of questionnaires conducted before and after the events of Euromaidan, that many individuals who clearly identify as Ukrainian have continued to use the Russian language in their daily interactions (Kulyk 2023: 324). However, the situation likely changed after the Russian attack on February 24, 2022 (Chebotarova 2023).

2. History

In its relationship with Russian speakers, independent Ukraine adopted a post-colonial approach (Pavlenko 2011). This approach argues that, starting from the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654, the Tsarist Empire and later the Soviet government gradually colonized and Russified the Ukrainian state (Masenko 2004; Besters, Dilger 2009). However, this perspective tends to overestimate the "Russifying" influences and underestimate interventions aimed at preserving the Ukrainian language (Pavlenko 2011).

Given the tendency of geopolitical contenders to instrumentally use history, it is essential to reconstruct the stages of Ukraine's formation to understand how numerous diverse ethnicities ended up being in its territory, not as the result of a specific political will but as the outcome of border shifts and population movements.

It is a tradition to trace the historical origins of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian populations back to the Principality of Kyiv - in the 9th to 10th centuries. Among the territories controlled by this principality, those of Kyiv, Pereyaslav, Chernihiv, Galicia, Volhynia, and Turiv formed the basis of Ukrainian settlement. Due to the Mongol invasions of 1237-1240, these territories lost contact with their counterparts and ended up being influenced in ways that set them apart from their neighbors to the east (the Russians – "Muscovites") and to the north (the Belarusians). However, even these six regions were unable to maintain their unity. Galicia and Volhynia, starting from 1387, became incorporated into the Polish kingdom, while the rest remained more or less autonomous but subject to frequent Tatar raids.

In response to the Tatar threat, the "Ukrainian Cossacks" emerged. The Cossacks, mentioned for the first time in 1492 (Doroshenko 1939: 141), fiercely resisted the Tatars, forming alliances at different times with the Poles, Lithuanians, Muscovites, and Swedes to maintain as much independence as possible. It is not feasible to recount the constant border shifts and countless alliances here. The result was the emergence of a distinct identity from that of the Russians, Poles, and Belarusians. The nation born out of this population found an important symbol of their uniqueness in the election of their leader called the "hetman" or "ataman", in opposition to the autocratic tsar.

At the time of the Treaty of Lublin in 1569, Galicia, Kholm, Pidliasha, Podolia, Volhynia, Kyiv, and the southern part of Sieversk were formally under the control of Poland, while the districts of Brest and Pinsk were under Lithuanian administration. Moscow annexed the northern part of the Sieversk area, while Carpathian Ukraine was

under Hungarian control. The other Dnieper-crossing territories, sparsely populated due to continuous incursions, remained under Cossack control. The lands under Polish control experienced "Polonization" pressures, leading to the emergence of the Uniate Church. However, the situation remained rather fluid, with continuous territorial adjustments. In 1618, the Cossacks besieged Moscow in support of the Poles (Treaty of Deulino) and conducted numerous campaigns against the Turks in Bessarabia, along the Dniester River, and against the Tatars in Crimea. In 1648, the Cossack rebellion led to a reduction in Polish influence.

In 1654, the Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky concluded the Treaty of Pereyaslav with the Muscovite Tsar, primarily as an anti-Polish move. This treaty has been the subject of much discussion because it has been used by Russian rulers, Soviet scholars (Ohloblyn 1954), and even by Putin (2021) to justify Ukraine's submission to Russia. However, it is more likely that at the time, it was conceived as a simple military agreement. This is evident from the fact that in 1658 the Treaty of Hadiach was concluded, which confirmed the Union of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine (Doroshenko 1939: 283). Ukraine - specifically, the provinces of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Bratslav - was recognized as a free and independent state under the name of the Principality of Ruthenia. This principality was supposed to join a confederation with the Poles and Lithuanians, with the right to elect the king as the head of the Confederation. The hope was to gain control of territories along the Black Sea, with the possibility of extending influence all the way to Moscow. However, this confederation project was short-lived, as Muscovite troops had already occupied Kyiv by 1659.

Another crucial milestone was the Treaty of Andrusovo in 1667 between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Russia, which resulted in Russia gaining definitive control of the territories on the left bank of the Dnieper River. This brings us to the year 1709 when the Hetman Mazepa, allied with the Swedes in an attempt to break free from Russian influence, was forced to flee with Charles XII to the Ottoman Empire following the defeat at Poltava. The outcome was the opposite of what Mazepa desired, as Russian influence continued to grow until the dissolution of the Cossack Hetmanate system in 1763-64 under the rule of Catherine II.

Catherine II's rule and her assimilationist tendencies undoubtedly had a negative impact on the development of Ukrainian consciousness. However, it was primarily due to territorial acquisitions during her reign that most Ukrainians - divided until then - found themselves united within a single empire. Russia acquired the territories of Cherson and those along the Sea of Azov in 1774 with the Treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardji (Ruze 1997: 56-57), while the annexation of Crimea took place in 1783. These regions united in a district called Novorossiya and were placed under the control of General Potemkin (Doroshenko 1939: 498). In 1781, the districts of Chernihiv, Novgorod-Sieversk, and Kyiv merged into a single *guberniya* (province) called Little Russia. Even areas like Poltava, Kharkiv, and the southern parts of Voronezh and Kursk, which had remained sparsely populated due to constant conflicts between the Turks and Cossacks, were repopulated/colonized by people of various ethnicities, thanks to the peace guaranteed by Russian rule.

Another area where the ethnic composition significantly changed during that period is Zaporizhzhia, where rebellious Cossacks - difficult to control but useful in an anti-Turkish context - had long found refuge. Catherine II forced them to move to the territory of Budjak (Southern Bessarabia, the area around the mouth of the Danube, still formally under the control of the Sultan), facilitating the settlement of Serbs who had emigrated from the Habsburg Empire in the territories they vacated (Doroshenko 1939: 493-500). The partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, and later in 1815) also facilitated the reunification of Ukrainian territories under a single power, leaving only Galicia and Bukovina outside of Russian control.

Thus, we arrive at the 19th century, a period marked by the emergence of nationalist sentiments throughout Europe because of the French Revolution and the upheavals brought about by Napoleon. Ukrainians were no exception to this trend: books, research, literary works, and theater productions were published, and independentist movements and groups began to develop. In response to these developments, in 1863, the Valuev Circular (issued by the Minister of Internal Affairs) prohibited the use of Ukrainian in Russian territory, denying it the status of a language. The ban was further intensified in 1876 when Tsar Alexander issued the Ems *Ukaz*, which prohibited the publication of books in Ukrainian and even the staging of theatrical performances in the language (Bauman 2023). Ukrainian nationalists continued their activities secretly, aided by the fact that the Ukrainian language continued to be used and developed in Galicia (and partially in Bukovina), which was under Habsburg control. This situation led to a division where Ukrainian nationalists in Galicia (the Western regions of present-day Ukraine) tended to be pro-Russian, while in the eastern regions under Russian control Ukrainian nationalists were firmly anti-Russian. There were no further significant territorial changes for Ukraine, except for the definitive Russian acquisition of the southern part of Bessarabia (Budjak) following the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

The 1905 revolution marked another milestone for Ukrainians because, thanks to the Imperial Manifesto of October 15, 1905, the use and printing of the Ukrainian language were again allowed. With the outbreak of the First World War, history moved again for Ukraine, which became a war zone. The front line shifted multiple times in the territories of Ukraine, with the Austro-Hungarians and the Russians making promises to gain Ukrainian support that they would not ultimately be able to keep (Doroshenko 1939: XXIX).

With the February 1917 Revolution, the situation changed again in a way that seemed favorable to Ukrainian interests. In July of the same year, the Provisional Russian Government recognized Ukrainian autonomy, limited to the provinces of Kyiv, Poltava, Chernihiv, Volhynia, and Podolia. This led to the establishment of an Autonomous Ukrainian Government, called the "General Secretariat" and ruled by Volodymyr Vynnychenko (Doroshenko 1939: 621). Following the Bolshevik Revolution, the Ukrainian Central Rada in Kyiv declared the establishment of the Ukrainian People's Republic, federated with Russia. This Republic included provinces with a majority Ukrainian population, such as Kyiv, Poltava, Chernihiv, Volhynia, and Podolia, as

well as the provinces of Kharkiv, Katerynoslav, Kherson, and Taurida (excluding Crimea). Minorities within the territory were promised a degree of autonomy. The Ukrainian People's Republic declared independence from Russia in 1918 and received recognition from the Central Powers as the Ukrainian National Republic. Subsequently, some Ukrainians aligned with the Bolsheviks and negotiated with them at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, while others allied with the Germans against the Bolsheviks, and others sought Western support. A new Hetman, Skoropadsky, was elected, who claimed Crimea, Bessarabia, and territory along the Kuban River, aiming to establish a monarchy and receiving partial German support. In response, a directorate composed of Vynnychenko, Petliura, F. Shvets, A. Makarenko, and O. Andriyevsky launched a revolt and managed to take Kyiv, reestablishing the Ukrainian National Republic. Other Ukrainian forces organized in Galicia and Bukovina under the leadership of Petrushevych, proclaiming union with the Ukrainian National Republic in January 1919. At the end of World War I, a Ukrainian delegation appeared at the Paris Peace Conference but achieved limited results (Chopard 2014). The ongoing civil war further complicated the situation, which was eventually clarified by the Riga Armistice of October 18, 1920. The signatory was the Soviet Ukrainian Republic, a Bolshevik creation, while the Ukrainian National Republic, which had changed its name to the Ukrainian Democratic Republic, was liquidated. The territories under the control of the Soviet Ukrainian Republic included the regions of Chernihiv, Donetsk, Katerynoslav, Kharkiv, Kremenchuk, Kyiv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Podolia, Poltava, Volhynia, and Zaporizhzhia. Galicia and Bukovina remained under Polish control, while Bessarabia came under Romanian control.

In the 1920s, Soviet Ukraine kept a degree of autonomy. There were some administrative changes in the composition of territories, notably in 1923, when the capital moved from Kyiv to Kharkiv. The Soviet Ukrainian Republic reorganized into 53 districts, with a partial reassignment of some territories (Tanarych and Sharrstky) to the Russian Soviet Republic (DAU2023). In 1924, the lands along the Dniester River were separated from the rest of Ukraine to create the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic - at this stage, still an autonomous territory within the Soviet Ukrainian Republic. In Soviet Ukraine, Ukrainian became the official language, leading to the reopening of cultural institutions and schools. The Ukrainian leadership, based on the results of the 1926 census, requested control over the Kuban, Kursk, Voronezh, and North Caucasus territories but was unsuccessful in obtaining them (Arel 2002). Other minor administrative changes occurred in 1928, 1930, 1932, and 1934, including the return of Kyiv as the capital (DAU2023). However, the most significant events in Ukrainian history during the 1930s were the tragic famine known as the Holodomor, which resulted in a devastating loss of life, and the forced population movements initiated by Stalin (Mattingly 2023). From a language planning point of view, at the 12th Congress of the Communist party in 1923 the policy of "indigenization" was pursued, and in Ukraine this meant that Ukrainian became the official language of communication at all levels of the society in that part of the country (Krouglov 1997: 12). The newly formed Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, together with the Communist

Party, put considerable effort in bringing the language in line with the new ideological postulates. However, in 1930 the official policy changed again, pushing for the use of Russian as the language of cooperation and progress, with the Ukrainian intelligentsia being crushed once again (Krouglov 1997: 12).

With the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the start of World War II in 1939, the Soviet Union conquered the remaining "ethnically" Ukrainian territories, taking them from Poland (Galicia) and Romania (Bessarabia - which, from 2 August 1940, formed the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, permanently separated from Ukraine). However, this process led to significant population displacements and disruptions. At the end of World War II, the borders were determined through a series of treaties and conferences. The Yalta Conference of 1945 was crucial for defining Polish borders, following the Curzon Line, which was drawn along the Western Bug and Solokia rivers, with territories to the east of these rivers assigned to the Soviet Union and, subsequently, Soviet Ukraine. This arrangement was confirmed by the treaty between Poland and the Soviet Union on August 16, 1945. In 1951, a second treaty was signed, which transferred the Drogobychko department (northwest of Lviv) under Polish sovereignty, while part of the Lublin Voivodeship (southwest of Lviv) came under Ukrainian control (Rindlisbacher 2023). Another significant change in Ukraine's territorial composition occurred in 1954 when the Crimean territory was transferred under its jurisdiction, ostensibly for administrative efficiency (Rindlisbacher 2023).

Stalin implemented many deportations, and in some cases, such as with the Crimean Tatars, he deported entire populations, further complicating the ethnic composition. In general, throughout the Soviet period after World War II, internal mobility was promoted in order to foster citizens' identification with the Soviet state rather than their ethnic origin. Russian was the lingua franca in the Soviet Union, and those who migrated internally were not always interested in learning the "local" language of their new place of residence. Therefore, the accusation against Soviet authorities of actively pursuing a policy of Russification at the expense of "local" languages is not unfounded (Alpatov 2000; Bilinsky 1968; Pavlenko 2011; Smith 1998), but it tends to be overemphasized (Bilaniuk, Melnyk 2005; Liber 1992; Palvenko 2011; Solchanyk 1985).

A partial revitalization of Ukrainian language and culture can be identified in 1963-1972, as a result of the Petro Shelest's policy of national communism, but this period ended yet again as a massive russification was initiated in Moscow by Brezhnev ideologists and promoted by Volodimir Shcherbytsky, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine (Krouglov 1997: 15). Shcherbytsky could maintain his predominant position until 1989, when the changes in Moscow, notably the rise of Gorbachev with his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost,* as well as the aftermaths of the Chernobyl disaster, fostered the creation of the Taras Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society and the Popular Movement for Restructuring in Ukraine. Because of their influence and the introduction of language laws promoting the indigenous languages in the other Soviet republics the Soviet Supreme Council of Ukraine proclaimed Ukrainian as the state language, recognizing the role of Russian as the lan-

guage of international communication between the people of the USSR (Krouglov 1997: 17). This helped Ukrainian to slowly regain its status as a proper language.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine declared its independence in 1991. In 1992, tensions and protests in Crimea were resolved when the region was granted autonomy (ECRML (2010) 6: point 11). The first Constitution was adopted on June 28, 1996, and Article 132 established that Ukraine would consist of the following regions: the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Vinnytsia, Volyn, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Transcarpathia, Zaporizhzhia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Luhansk, Lviv, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Poltava, Rivne, Sumy, Ternopil, Kharkiv, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernivtsi, and Chernihiv, with the Special Status Cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol.

In 1994, Ukraine obtained guarantees of its territorial integrity with the Budapest Memorandum in exchange for relinquishing its nuclear arsenal. In the early 2000s, agreements between the Russian Federation and Ukraine seemed to have resolved most of its border issues. However, in 2014, in response to the events of Euromaidan, pro-Russian forces in the Republic of Crimea organized a referendum, declared independence, and requested annexation by the Russian Federation, which promptly annexed it, causing international outrage. At the same time, in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, pro-Russian separatists began guerrilla operations, culminating in 2022 with a request for recognition as independent entities and subsequent annexation by the Russian Federation. The Russian Federation took advantage of the situation on the ground to launch a large-scale offensive, initiating the current war.

3. Current Situation of the Russian-speaking Minority

Ukraine is a party to the two major conventions protecting minorities: the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (since 1998) and the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (since 2006). Ukraine's accession to the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* faced complications. It was initially ratified in July 2000, but the Ukrainian Constitutional Court declared the ratification null due to procedural defects (Shul'ga 2001: 207–212). The instrument of ratification was only deposited in 2006, and as a result, the Charter has been in full effect only since that year.

The Ukrainian Constitution (Constitution of Ukraine 2020) in Article 10 declares Ukrainian the official language of the State. In the third paragraph of the same article, Russian is recognized to have a more prominent position than other minority languages (Kolesnichenko 2007). Other articles containing specific provisions for the protection of minorities include Article 11, which promotes the development of autonomy for all indigenous populations and national minorities, and Article 53, which recognizes the right to education in one's mother tongue. The entire second section - devoted to human and citizen rights, freedoms and duties - guarantees a high level of protection for all citizens, expressly enshrining in Article 22 the absolute intangibility of constitutional safeguards. It is also allowed to make special arrange-

ments at the local level, where a minority is present in significant numbers. Numerous laws and administrative acts relate to the lives of members of minorities. In examining their application and effects on the Russian-speaking minority, I relied on opinions, comments and reports produced by the Advisory Committee of the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities,* and by the Committee of Experts for the application of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*.

The reports produced by the Ukrainian government since its accession to the Convention have been five in total. The first report, produced in 1999 and commented upon in 2002, highlighted that the overall situation was characterized by a spirit of tolerance and dialogue. Nevertheless, tensions related to the language issue were noted, which had arisen in political debates surrounding laws regulating the use of Russian and Ukrainian in various contexts. The tones of these debates were contrary to the principles established in Article 6 of the Convention and could hinder a more inclusive approach to the matter (ACFC/INF/OP/I(2002)010: paragraph 35). An incident was reported in which local authorities in Lviv had attempted to limit the right to use the Russian language in 2000, although this attempt ultimately failed (ACFC/INF/OP/I(2002)010: paragraph 49). For this reason, the Ukrainian government was encouraged to promote greater awareness and better implementation of the content of the Convention. It was also noted that there was a general legislative deficiency regarding the prohibition of discrimination.

In 2008, the second Commentary (ACFC/OP/II(2008)004) acknowledged the efforts made, such as the definitive accession to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, but still criticized the Ukrainian legislative framework as outdated and inconsistent (ACFC/OP/II(2008)004: point 9). The *Law on National Minorities* (1992) and the *Law on Languages* (1989) were criticized for being outdated. The Committee also reported the concerns expressed by Russophones regarding the undue restriction of the use of the Russian language, followed by the Committee's call to ensure that the promotion of the official language did not excessively harm minority languages, including Russian (ACFC/OP/II(2008)004: point 12). Regarding education specifically, the Committee noted that the use of the Ukrainian language was steadily increasing while the use of the Russian language was decreasing – a fact that was not illegitimate but needed monitoring. The Committee raised serious concern about the Ministry of Education's failure to consult with minority representatives when deciding to enforce the mandatory use of Ukrainian for all secondary education final exams starting from December 2007, even for students who had followed curricula in a minority language. Another potential issue was the reform of the electoral system where the introduction of a pure proportional representation system with a single national constituency (instead of the previously mixed system) made it more challenging for minorities to elect their own representatives.

Another comment on the situation in 2008 is expressed in the first Report of the Committee of Experts on the application of the Charter by Ukraine (ECRML (2010) 6). The Committee noted that in drafting its official report, the government failed to sufficiently involve minority representatives. Issues with the translation of the Charter

into the Ukrainian language had emerged, leading to an inadequate understanding and potentially incorrect application of the Charter (ECRML (2010) 6: point 2 p. 4). Given the large number of Russophones and the situation regarding the use of the Russian language, the Committee recommended providing translations of all materials in this language, granting it a differentiated status (ECRML (2010) 6: point 5, reiterated at points 16, 47, 58, 10, 61, 10, 77-79). At point w, page 96, of the first Commentary (ECRML (2010) 6), the Committee observed that if commitments to protect the Russophone minority had been respected, this had occurred in a minimal and inadequate form considering the cultural significance of the Russian language in the country. It highlighted that some restrictions on the use of the Russian language in the media and education could likely lead to issues with the Russian-speaking community. In the document, the Committee acknowledged the legitimate aspiration for an increased use of the Ukrainian language but reminded the authorities that this should not come at the expense of minority languages (ECRML (2010) 6: point B). This consideration was not repeated in the *Second Commentary on the Application of the Charter* (ECRML (2014) 3; Chapter 4, 188-190) following the amendment to the *Law on the Use of Ukrainian* in a more favorable direction for minorities but resurfaces in the 2023 Commentary (MIN-LANG (2023) 15). This Commentary emphasizes throughout the text that the new law (*Law of Ukraine - On Supporting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language of 2019*) risks hindering the effective use of minority languages. Criticisms of the *Law on the Use of Ukrainian* are also present in the *Opinions* on the application of the Convention.

In the *Opinion on the Third Report on the application of the Convention* (ACFC/OP/III(2012)002), the Committee acknowledges the modification of rules concerning school exams and the cooperation of the authorities in conducting monitoring visits. However, it highlights problems related to the polarization of the debate on the use of Russian as an alternative to Ukrainian and how this significantly worsened the situation for members of other minorities. The dissolution of the *State Committee on Nationalities and Religions* is criticized. Even though it was partially replaced in 2010 by a sub-department *on National Minorities and the Ukrainian Diaspora* under the control of the Ministry of Culture, its dissolution made it more challenging for minorities to identify an interlocutor (ACFC/OP/III(2012)002 point 11). The Committee laments the limited involvement of minorities in the production of government reports and notes the lack of translation into the official language of the materials produced. It criticizes the continued absence of a register for verifying the existence of discriminatory practices, observes an increase in conflicts in Western Ukraine and Crimea, and reiterates how the debate regarding the use of Russian and Ukrainian languages ends up harming other minorities as well.

In 2014, within the context of the Euromaidan protests and increased conflict, the Committee adopted an "ad hoc procedure" (ACFC(2014)001) to comment on the ongoing structural reforms during that period. It expressed optimism regarding the support for European values but at the same time raised concerns about the tone of the media-promoted interethnic relations debate. Specifically, addressing the Rus-

sian minority (ACFC(2014)001 point 10), the Committee highlighted the presence of very diverse opinions within this group. Some felt adequately protected, while others feared a "linguistic genocide" was taking place. The Committee noted the potential for manipulation from this situation, which could lead to intra-ethnic violence. It suggested that the authorities demonstrate their commitment to promoting the use of all languages and provide clear and precise information regarding constitutional and legal changes. Given the collapse of the Party of Regions (primarily supported by the Russian minority), the Committee urged greater efforts by the authorities to ensure adequate representation of Russophones to prevent radicalization. The fact that representatives of the Russian minority in Kharkiv had refused an invitation to present their viewpoint was cause for concern (ACFC(2014)001 point 19).

In the following Opinion (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002), published in 2018, the Convention Committee notes that the illegal annexation of Crimea did not help improve interethnic relations. They acknowledged that the Ukrainian state, lacking effective control over Crimea and the Donbas region, could not ensure the observance of conventions in those areas. The monitoring visit was carried out in 2017 simultaneously by the Committee against Racism, the Charter Committee, and the Convention Committee. They noted the lack of translations and meetings with minority representatives by the Ukrainian government. The Convention Committee also observes how the conflict has created a situation where people with complex and multiple identities have felt compelled to demonstrate their loyalty to the state, and this has had repercussions, especially on Russian speakers. The document expresses disappointment over the deterioration of protections: the improvements introduced by the 2012 laws were challenged, legislation with substantial enhancements was not being voted on, and the new laws adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament did not ensure sufficient protections for minorities. Specifically, the following aspects were criticized:

- the legislation introduced in 2016 regarding media usage, imposing a minimum quota of Ukrainian songs on all radio stations, explicitly excluding Russian and other "non-European Union" languages, as this could be seen as a clear indication of the intention to marginalize these languages (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 22);
- the draft *Law on the official language*, which would have created a *National Commission on Official Language Proficiency Standards* with investigative and punitive powers, introducing criminal liability for public non-compliance with the Ukrainian language (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 25);
- the new *Higher Education Law*, foreseeing the use of only the Ukrainian language, with the use of other languages only as exceptions (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, points 23-25);
- the *Discrimination Law*, considered to be lacking precision in defining specific cases and unclear in identifying effective remedies (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 28).

The Committee also highlighted as particularly serious the tendency to prohibit the use of languages other than Ukrainian in private conversations (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 24) and the failure to conduct a new census, initially planned for 2011 but postponed to 2013, then to 2016, and again delayed to 2020 but never carried out (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 37).

In regard to Russian speakers, the eviction of the Pushkin Association in Lviv was reported as unjust(ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, point 72), and concerns were raised about the inappropriate use of laws for the removal of Communist and Nazi symbols adopted in 2015, which were used in an anti-Russian manner - contrary to the spirit of the Convention (ACFC/OP/IV(2017)002, points 77-78). The situation described in the fourth comment is, therefore, very negative.

As of the time this article is being written, the *Opinion on the Fifth report on compliance* with the Convention is not yet available. However, given the dramatic backdrop of the armed conflict, along with the formulation of the *Law on the Functioning of Ukrainian as the Official Language* (Law of Ukraine 2019) and the hostility evident in the January 2022 Report - for example, the fact that the number of Russian speakers exceeds the number of ethnic Russians is considered a problem (ACFC/SR/V(2022)001: 64) - it is reasonable to fear that the situation may have worsened for the Russian-speaking minority.

In addition to official data, assessing the quality of life of the Russian-speaking minority also requires an understanding of the attitudes of the Ukrainian population towards Russian-speakers. In this regard, the work of Eras (2023) is helpful, as it analyzes responses to surveys conducted by the Kyiv Statistical Institute regarding the perception of Russian speakers by the rest of the population from 1995 to 2018. The study notes an increase in social distance after 2014, particularly during President Poroshenko's presidency. Chayinska *et al.* (2020) confirm the trend of social distance by analyzing the positive responses of Ukrainians to laws that restrict the use of Russian and other non-Ukrainian languages. The study (Chayinska *et al.* 2020: 10) demonstrates that the more members of the analyzed group felt a sense of attachment to Ukraine - perceived as a "historically victimized" state - the greater the collective anxiety about the fear of losing the right to use their own language, and hence the greater the support shown for "monolingual" legislation at the expense of other linguistic groups in Ukraine. This phenomenon can be explained by Ukraine's choice to emphasize language use as a legitimizing criterion for its independence from Russia (Arel 2002: 28), with the Russian Federation, on the other hand, repeatedly using the protection of Russian speakers, who are the "true majority" of the Ukrainian population (Arel 2002: 239), to justify its armed intervention (Putin 2016; Putin 2022).

4. Conclusion

In the past, Ukraine has made significant efforts to ensure adequate protection for the minority populations within its territory. However, even before 2014, there were steps backward in this regard, and there is reason to believe that the situation may worsen in the future, particularly concerning the Russian-speaking minority.

The study by Chayinska *et al*. (2022) demonstrates that the direction taken towards progressively reducing the public space available for languages other than Ukrainian has decreased, with the support of a growing number of Ukrainian nationalists likely to increase with the conflict. It is also significant that an official Russian-language version of the constitutional text is no longer available on the Ukrainian Rada's website, even though it was present at least until 2018. Unfortunately, there are also journalistic reports of rejections toward those who do not speak Ukrainian (Brizzi, Matteis 2023; Kurkov 2023). However, such resistance contradicts the European constitutional values of equality, inclusion and respect for human rights.

Furthermore, alienating a significant percentage of the population due to language preferences does not seem conducive to the creation of a prosperous and cohesive state. Restrictions aimed at Russian speakers have often had negative impacts on other Ukrainian minorities as well (Brenzovics *et al.* 2020). Ensuring support and space for minorities within the Ukraine that will emerge from the conflict is a necessary commitment. While it may seem premature or even superfluous to address this issue during wartime, it is, in fact, a primary goal to ensure a just and lasting peace. Addressing minority rights and protections is a crucial aspect of building a more stable and harmonious future for Ukraine.

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The Road to Strategic Autonomy: Reflections from the Russia-Ukraine War

Matteo Mazziotti di Celso, Mattia Sguazzini

Introduction

In 2016, the European Union (EU) launched a new Global Strategy (EUGS), outlining its ambition to acquire "strategic autonomy" (European Union 2016). Even though the strategy did not precisely define what this term meant, it nonetheless signalled that the EU was determined to enhance its ability to carry out military operations with greater autonomy from the United States (Tocci 2021). The EUGS injected fresh momentum into European security and defence efforts, spurring the implementation of various initiatives to enhance European defence cooperation, including the Permanent Structured Cooperation, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, and the European Defence Fund. These measures collectively sought to reinforce the EU's strategic autonomy and laid the groundwork for a European Security and Defence Union.

However, despite the implementation of significant initiatives, many scholars remain sceptical about the EU's ability to achieve its goals, at least in the short and medium term (Menon 2011; Simón 2017; Hyde-Price 2018; Barrie *et al.* 2019, 2021). The hypotheses developed by these academics were summarised in an important study conducted by Meijer and Brooks in 2021. According to these scholars, two mutually reinforcing constraints prevent the EU from achieving strategic autonomy: "strategic cacophony", or profound, continent-wide divergences across all domains of national defence policies – most notably, threat perceptions, and severe military capacity shortfalls that would be very costly and time-consuming to close. To develop their hypotheses, Meijer and Brooks analysed the historical trajectory and the current and likely future state of European interests and defence capacity. Their analysis is rigorous and systematic, providing very clear results. However, as they explain in their article, it is not conducted by examining case studies but instead based on a hypothetical scenario in which the EU finds itself facing the Russian threat alone without the United States. As such, although their hypotheses effectively explain why the European defence integration process often encounters obstacles, they have not been verified considering the actual response implemented by European countries in reaction to a real military threat.

Within this context, the Ukrainian war acts as a proving ground to explore the consistency of these assertions. With the war, the EU was confronted with a signific-

Matteo Mazziotti di Celso, Università di Genova, Matteo.mazziottidicelso@edu.unige.it
Mattia Sguazzini, Università di Genova, Mattia.sguazzini@edu.unige.it

ant threat to its security. How it reacted greatly helps in understanding how well-founded the arguments presented by pessimist scholars are. Analysing the EU's response to the war in Ukraine is also helpful in understanding to what extent the EU members have managed to overcome the problem of strategic cacophony and address their military deficits since they were identified by Meijer and Brooks in 2021.

This article provides a detailed analysis of the European Union's response to the outbreak of the Russo-Ukraine war. The objective is to provide an initial exploratory analysis that allows for some preliminary considerations regarding the war's effect on the strategic cacophony and the defence capability shortfall of the European Union. For this reason, the article analyses the reaction of the EU on three analytical dimensions. First, the measures taken by the EU and its member states in support of Ukraine and against Russia. We outline the assistance provided by the EU to Ukraine, including its form, evolution, contributors, and amounts, both at the supranational and national level, including sanctions. This allows us to evaluate to what extent the EU's strategic cacophony has affected the response's cohesiveness. The second one is the reaction of the public opinion. We analyse the EU's public attitude toward the main issues concerning the war. This allows us to assess how and to what extent the perception of the Russian threat varies from one country to another and across time. The third dimension is military adaptation, namely the increase in defence spending and the investments in conventional military systems. This dimension allows us to assess how much the war in Ukraine has succeeded, at least so far, in pushing Europeans to address their military deficits. Of all these dimensions, the analysis is conducted cross-country and cross-time. The data primarily consists of secondary sources, predominantly from the Military Balance, the EU's Eurobarometer, and the Ukraine Support Tracker Dataset developed by the Kiel Institute, supplemented by secondary sources, primarily comprised of grey literature and reports.

The article is structured as follows. The first part provides a brief overview of the debate on strategic autonomy; the second part introduces our research design; the third part presents the analysis results; the fourth discusses our results. Finally, the last section concludes.

1. The Debate on the European Union's Strategic Autonomy

In the last twenty years, the emergence and progression of European defence cooperation have sparked a significant debate among academics. Although this debate has been ongoing since the early 2000s, particularly since the initiation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), it received a significant acceleration in 2016, when the new EUGS publicly revealed the EU's new ambitions in the defence and security domain. This debate has not been limited to Europe, but has also garnered considerable attention beyond the Atlantic, given its relevance to US grand strategy and NATO (Brooks, Wohlforth 2016). Scholars participating in the ongoing US grand strategy debate were interested in engaging with this issue because the prospect of Europe achieving defence autonomy holds implications for US resource allocation,

potentially allowing a shift in focus towards the Indo-Pacific region (Walt 2019; Posen 2021a). Conversely, a Europe reliant on external defence arrangements would necessitate continued US presence on the continent.

Within this debate, it is possible to distinguish two main perspectives. The first is optimistic. This perspective was prevalent in the early years of the CSDP when the prospects of a more integrated Europe in the defence sector were more favourable. This group of scholars acknowledged that the EU still faces many obstacles to becoming autonomous from the United States, but they also recognise that the EU has made significant progress that bodes well for the future (Smith 2004; Meyer 2005; Cross 2011). This view is supported by several American scholars advocating for a policy of restraint by the USA, suggesting that they should allow Europe to take more independent responsibility for its security. As one of the most optimistic scholars argued in 2006, "Europe will within a decade be reasonably well prepared to go it alone" (Posen 2006: 153). This optimistic scenario, however, was followed by a period of disillusionment. The 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent economic depression led to drastic cuts in defence budgets, while the 2011 military operations in Libya – conducted first through a bilateral Franco-British mission and then by NATO – confirmed a growing distrust towards the CSDP (Menon 2011; Hyde-Price 2018). In the last ten years, therefore, the optimistic view has given ground to a more pessimistic view. Scholars embracing this perspective believe that the obstacles the EU must overcome to achieve strategic autonomy are too significant, at least in the short to medium term, preventing them from operating more autonomously from the United States (Meijer, Brooks 2021). As a result, they argue that the USA should not disengage from Europe because it would not be able to ensure its own security independently.

Although these two views differ on multiple points, there are two primary dimensions where the differences are most pronounced (Posen 2021b). The first dimension concerns the perception of threats among European countries. Pessimist scholars argue that one of the most significant obstacles, if not the most important, to the EU's ambitions in the defence domain is the presence of discrepancies in national threat assessments (Meijer, Wyss 2019; Béraud-Sudreau, Giegerich 2023). Europeans are profoundly divided as to the main threat to their security. Meijer and Brooks have referred to this situation as "strategic cacophony"[1], defined as the presence of "profound, continent-wide divergences across all the domains of national defence policies, most notably threat perceptions" (Meijer, Brooks 2021: 9-10). The varied threat perceptions of European states have been shaped by a complex mix of history, politics, and geography, as well as by changes in the regional strategic environment. The main problem, they argue, is that, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Europeans lacked any semblance of a unifying threat. As a consequence, wide discrepancies emerged in their threat prioritizations. Whereas some states rank terrorism and instability in the Mediterranean region at the top of their threat assessments,

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[1] "Strategic cacophony" is a term first coined, although without being defined, in a 2013 policy paper that referred to the incongruences in the national security strategy documents of the EU member states. See De France, Witney 2013.

others identify Russia as their overarching security concern while largely ignoring the diffuse threats on Europe's southern shores. Between these two extremes, different countries and groups of countries exhibit varying perceptions of their core security challenges. Strategic cacophony negatively affects the ability of various governments to support a European defence policy (Howorth 2017). First, it leads to capacity gaps in the military domain. This is because different perceptions of threats correspond to investments in various weapon systems. Second, it makes institutionalised, intra-European defence cooperation harder. Third, it prevents the EU from adopting a common response in the case of external aggression.

Optimist scholars argue that this discussion is excessively pessimistic. In their view, differences exist among EU members on the issue of threat prioritisation, but the EU can play an important role in bringing European countries together in the security realm. In this regard, Posen stresses that the EU is "a good base" on which Europeans could build an autonomous defensive capability and that the emergence of a Common Security and Defense Policy "demonstrates that [the Europeans] can look after themselves" (Posen 2018: 89-90). Pessimist scholars reply that the EU is not an effective institutional platform for overcoming Europe's strategic divergence, pointing to the fact that the EU is a kaleidoscope of countries with diverging interests that operates on the basis of consensus in the field of foreign and defence policy—thus making the Common Security and Defense Policy a "structurally limited undertaking" (Howorth, Menon 2009).

The second dimension on which pessimist and optimist scholars' views diverge the most is military capability. Pessimist scholars argue that the EU suffer from a severe capacity shortfall, especially in the conventional dimension (Barrie *et al.* 2019, 2021; Meijer, Brooks, 2021). Meijer and Brooks have outlined four main hurdles in these dimensions (2021). First, since the early 1990s, Europeans, especially those in Western Europe, including France, Germany, and Italy, have rapidly reduced the resources and personnel available and have structured their military apparatus for conducting crisis management operations out of the area (Coticchia *et al.* 2023; Coticchia, Di Giulio 2024). Further, these countries also face readiness issues. This means that not only they have few assets, but many of them are not ready for deployment. Second, they point out that the effective employment of modern weapons systems is far more challenging than in past eras for various reasons and argue that the EU lacks both these systems and the capacity to use them. In their view, to overcome this deficit, the European Union would need to buy large amounts of new C4ISR systems (*e.g.*, surveillance and communication satellites; early warning and control aircraft; sensor systems; air, naval, and land command and control platforms) and invest the financial resources needed to develop the skills to use these systems. Since the EU member states are reluctant to invest resources into the military domain and are increasingly struggling with recruiting high-skilled personnel, overcoming this deficit would take decades. Third, Europe lacks a centralised command structure like that of NATO, without which it is impossible to conduct operations coordinating numerous quantities of personnel and weapon systems. Without US leadership and command-and-control hardware, the

Europeans could not manage allied forces for a war with a country such as Russia. Fourth, the European military industry is too fragmented. Today, European factories produce too many different weapon systems, creating inefficiencies (Calcara *et al.* 2023).

In contrast to the negative view, an optimistic view considers it plausible that the EU could develop the military and political capabilities necessary to achieve a strategic autonomy that enables it to address its security more independently within a relatively short period of time. This view is characteristic of scholars who support American restraint (Posen 2006). On military capabilities, they point out that Europe's deficits are exaggerated. Posen argues that the EU has the material wherewithal to fight Russia (Posen 2020, 2021b). The point they raise is that Europe already has enormous potential today, with a GDP of 600 trillion, significantly higher than that of Russia, with which it could quickly address all the problems raised by pessimistic scholars in a short time (Posen 2014, 2020; Walt 2019). They also note that Europe has an advantage in manpower superiority over anyone else, as it has a population of 600 million. Consequently, the Europeans could impose a long attrition war on Russia, in which Europe could mobilise its superior resources. Readiness might be low, although they say that this allegation is based on anecdotal information but that this can easily be raised. Finally, they reckon that the EU has overlapping production capacities but that these inefficiencies in procurement are exaggerated (Posen 2020).

So far, these hypotheses have been tested through official document analysis, interviews, counterfactual analysis or war-games. Few empirical case studies have been conducted to verify Europeans' threat perception and ability to recover their military capabilities. Within this context, the Ukrainian war acts as a proving ground to evaluate the credibility of these assertions. With the war, the European Union was confronted with a significant threat to its security and had to react. How it responded greatly helps in understanding how well-founded the arguments presented by scholars are.

The initial studies on the topic suggest that Russia's attack on Ukraine has significantly weakened strategic cacophony. Mader (2024) showed that the war has led to increased perceptions of threat and stronger support for collective defence among European countries. He also demonstrated that the Russia's invasion of Ukraine clarified Europeans' preference for NATO over an EU alternative and boosted Europeans' willingness to defend other European countries. These findings are in line with other studies that provided evidence that Russia's unexpected acts of aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022 strengthened European identity, trust in EU institutions and support for various EU policies (Fernández *et al.* 2023; Gehring 2022; Steiner *et al.* 2023; Wang, Moise 2023), and that Europeans who perceive higher levels of international threat are more supportive of European security and defence integration (Graf 2020; Mader *et al.* 2023; Mader *et al.* 2024). These are in line with the hypothesis according to which the notion that common threat perceptions may foster alliance cohesion (Everts, Isernia 2015). Recent work by Graf, Steinbrecher, and Biehl (2023) reports not only that threat perceptions and support for collective defence increased among the German population following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 but also that the increase in the latter was more pronounced among those who perceived a high level of threat.

This article aims to contribute to this debate by providing a comprehensive descriptive analysis of the EU's reaction. It examines the main initiatives of the EU and its member states, the internal adaptation that the war has caused within European states and the reaction of public opinion. The goal is to provide an initial assessment of the validity of the principal hypotheses developed in the scholarly debate and to furnish a basis for further development of the discussion more grounded on empirical analysis. Without claiming to provide a definitive assessment of the war's effect on the European integration process in the defence sector, the article merely offers some initial points of reflection that emerge from the analysis.

2. Research Design

Analytically, we divide the EU's reaction into three dimensions. The first dimension includes all the initiatives launched by the EU and its members to provide material aid to Ukraine and weaken Russia. To analyse the EU's assistance, we distinguish between military assistance (transfer of weapons and ammunition), financial assistance (grants and loans) and humanitarian assistance (refugees). In doing that, we rely on the data furnished by the Ukraine Support Tracker (Trebesch *et al.* 2024), a database of military, financial and humanitarian aid provided by a German think-tank, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy. The dataset distinguishes between allocations and commitment. Allocations are defined as aid that is earmarked and/or specified for delivery in the near term. Governments allocate aid by specifying an aid package to be sent to Ukraine. These announcements can usually be linked to a previous specific government commitment to military, financial or humanitarian aid. In practice, the commitment is "drawn down" and specified through an allocation, thus moving closer to the actual delivery to Ukraine. All allocations coded are intended for delivery in the short to medium term, meaning in a few days, weeks or months. Commitment includes aid to be allocated or delivered within the next fiscal year (short-term commitment) or over a horizon of two or more years (multi-year commitment). Initiatives launched with the aim of directly weakening Russia mainly consist of sanctions. To analyse sanctions, we rely on data provided by the official website of the European Commission and the European Parliament. We examine which sanctions have been implemented and how many.

The second analytical dimension is the attitude of public opinion. Within this dimension, we focus on the attitude of public opinion toward those issues, which we consider relevant to assess the validity of the hypotheses presented in the prior section: strategic cacophony and defence capability shortfall. We use data from the EU Eurobarometer, a collection of cross-country public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the EU Institutions. We analyse the results of the surveys conducted by the EU Eurobarometer from April 2022 to November 2023.

The third dimension includes the initiatives implemented by EU members to strengthen their armed forces. Specifically, we focus on initiatives to modify the budget and to invest in conventional military capabilities (main battle tank, artillery,

infantry fighting vehicle). For both of them, we use data from the International Institute of Strategic Studies' Military Balances (2020-2024).

3. Analysis. The European Union's Initiatives

The European Union and its members have implemented extraordinary actions to aid Ukraine and its populace, weaken Russia, and strengthen Europe's security. These initiatives include providing Ukraine with financial, humanitarian, and military assistance, applying sanctions against Russia, and deploying military contingents to Eastern Europe to reinforce NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities.

At the institutional level, the EU implemented a series of groundbreaking measures in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Firstly, the EU endorsed a strategic compass aimed at delineating a cohesive foreign policy and security strategy, while also strengthening its collaboration with NATO. Additionally, the EU adopted multiple sanctions packages targeting President Vladimir Putin and his close circle of oligarchs, aiming to impose financial constraints, politically deter Russia, and undermine its economic capacity to sustain the ongoing aggressive war. Concurrently, the EU made history by activating the European Peace Facility (EPF), a novel financial instrument linked to the new EU multi-annual budget. This initiative mark the first instance where EU funds were directed towards supporting the Ukrainian military, including the procurement of lethal weapons. Furthermore, the EU launched a Military Assistance Mission focused on training Ukrainian army officers in the effective utilization of advanced weaponry provided by European nations. In the early summer of 2023, the European Parliament (EP) and the Council of the European Union jointly approved the Act on Supporting Ammunition Production (ASAP). The primary objective of ASAP is to bolster the production capabilities of the EU defense industry. This pioneering initiative represents a significant step in industrial defense, expediting the supply of ground-to-ground artillery ammunition and missiles crucial for Ukraine's battlefield needs, funded entirely by EU resources for the first time.

3.1. EU's Assistance to Ukraine

Based on the data provided by the Ukraine Support Tracker developed by the Kiel Institute, the combined support from the EU institutions and its member states to Ukraine as of 15th February 2024 amounted to over €144 billion across various forms of military, financial, humanitarian, and emergency aid (Trebesch *et al.* 2024: 8). In terms of allocations, total EU aid totals €77 billion. Regarding the United States, the total commitment amounts to €68.72 billion, while the allocations are EUR 66.6 billion. It is evident, therefore, that a significant gap exists between commitments and allocations among EU countries, as only about 50% of promised aid has been allocated for delivery or disbursement. This implies that the aid reaching Ukraine is much smaller than what commitment numbers suggest, and it also indicates that the EU still has ample financial room to allocate future aid to Ukraine.

Figure 1: Total bilateral aid commitments provided to Ukraine by EU institutions in billion euros between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2024 (Trebesch et al. 2024).

In total, European institutions committed €84,99 billion in aid, more than any EU member. Regarding the EU countries, in absolute terms, with €22.06 billion, Germany was the top EU country in terms of assistance provided to Ukraine, followed by Denmark (€8.76 billion), Norway (€7.57 billion), and the Netherlands (€6,21 billion). According to the Kiel Institute, France ranks eighth, with €2.0 billion, and Italy ninth, with €1.4 billion.

However, when considering assistance measured relative to GDP, the top country is Estonia (3.6% bilateral aid, 0.5% share of EU aid), followed by Denmark (2.4% bilateral aid, 3% share of EU aid) and Lithuania (1.5% bilateral aid and 0.5% share of EU aid). Germany ranks tenth (0.6% bilateral aid and 0.5% share of EU aid), Italy ranks twenty-first (0.07% bilateral aid and 0.6% share of EU aid), and France ranks twenty-second (same values as Italy) (see figure 2).

Furthermore, various EU countries have concluded bilateral agreements with Ukraine to further strengthen their bilateral assistance, with the aim of providing critical long-term military and economic support. The foundations for these agreements were laid at the NATO Vilnius Summit in July 2023, where the leaders of the G7 countries announced a framework for negotiating security agreements with Ukraine (Boswinkel 2024). Most of these agreements were signed in the weeks leading up to the war's second anniversary (see figure 3).

We now unpack the assistance and see how it has evolved over time and how various states have contributed.

Regarding financial support, throughout 2022 and 2023, the EU and its members pledged a combined €85.41 billion to bolster Ukraine's broader economic, social, and

financial stability (Trebesch *et al.* 2024). This assistance took various forms, including macro-financial aid, budgetary support, emergency relief, and crisis management (European Commission 2024a). During an extraordinary summit in Brussels on 1 February, all 27 EU heads of state finally agreed on a €50 billion support package for Ukraine through the Ukraine Facility, a new funding instrument (€33 billion in loans and €17 billion in grants) for the 2024-2027 period (European Commission 2024b). The funds will be disbursed over the next four years. Unlike previous financial aid packages for Ukraine, this plan

Figure 2: Total bilateral EU aid commitments provided to Ukraine across donors in billion euros between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2024 (Trebesch et al. 2024).

will be financed through contributions from member states rather than borrowing from financial markets. The financial grants will be sourced from the revised 2021-2027 European multiannual financial framework. Additionally, funds will be derived from profits generated by immobilised Russian assets, which is unprecedented.

Unlike in the case of humanitarian and military aid, this type of assistance has been predominantly provided by European institutions. Overall, according to the classification made by the Kiel Institute, the EU has contributed approximately €77.18 billion. As a point of comparison, this is much more than the US, which has contributed €24.03 billion. The contribution directly provided by individual European countries is very modest. Norway provides the highest contribution, amounting to €3.42 billion (see figure 4).

Figure 3: EU members post-NATO 2023 Vilnius Summit bilateral security agreements with Ukraine (Boswinkel 2024).

Regarding humanitarian aid, the EU has allocated €926 million for civilians affected by the Ukraine war, with €860 million for Ukraine and €66 million for Moldova. Additionally, €9.1 billion was raised at the 'Stand Up for Ukraine'event, including €1 billion from the EU. The EU provides substantial support to Ukraine through emergency loans and budget assistance. Material assistance is being coordinated through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, with offers from EU Member States and other countries. Moldova has also activated the Mechanism to assist Ukrainian arrivals. Further aid, including medical equipment valued at over €127 million, has been provided through EU medical stockpiles.

Overall, EU members and institutions have allocated €9.05 billion, with €6.84 provided by EU countries and €2.21 provided by EU institutions. Germany made the most significant contribution, with €2.95 billion, followed by Switzerland (€2.28 billion) and the Netherlands (€0.72 billion) (see figure 5).

The provision of military assistance by the EU to Ukraine is undoubtedly one of the most debated topics. This is because it marks the first instance in its history where the EU has supplied lethal weaponry to a third country. The assistance has been provided through the European Peace Facility. It is an off-budget instrument aimed at enhancing the EU's ability to prevent conflicts, build peace and strengthen international security. Through its European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU has committed €5.6 billion to date in military assistance financing for Ukraine, including €3.1 billion for lethal equipment, €380 million for nonlethal supplies, and €2 billion to provide Ukraine with 1 million rounds of ammunition (either from member state stocks or through joint procurement, but production challenges exist). In addition, on 17 October 2022, the EU agreed to set up a two-year Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), providing training to the Ukrainian armed forces and co-ordination and synchronisation of member states' training support for Ukraine.

Until January 15, 2024, the military aid provided by EU countries collectively amounted to €49.67 billion, more than that provided by the United States, which amounted to €42.22 billion. The EU institutions provided €5.60 billion, while EU countries provided €44.07 billion. The top contributing country was Germany (€17.70 billion), followed by Denmark (€8.40 billion), the Netherlands (€4.44 billion), and Norway (€3.80 billion). France ranked thirteenth, with €0.64 billion, while Italy ranked twelfth, with €0.67 billion (see figure 6).

3.2. Individual and Economic Sanctions

The EU has enacted various sanctions in response to Russia's war, extending beyond Russia to include Belarus due to its involvement in the invasion of Ukraine and Iran because of the use of Iranian drones in the conflict. Initially, there were concerns that the EU might lack the necessary unity to approve sanctions, given that unanimity is required. This was particularly concerning in Hungary, where public opinion was against sanctions. However, despite various attempts to weaken the sanctions packages and remove specific individuals

Figure 4: Total bilateral financial aid commitments to Ukraine across donors, in billion euros, from January 24, 2022, to January 15, 2024 (Trebesch et al. 2024).

and entities from the EU's sanctions list, Hungary has not vetoed any of the previous rounds of sanctions. As of February 23rd, 2024, the EU has implemented 13 packages of sanctions (European Commission 2024c). These sanctions target critical sectors such as finance, business, defence, technology, media, and energy, freezing the assets of numerous entities and individuals, imposing restrictions on transactions with Russia's central bank, and prohibiting exports of specific goods. Additionally, there are bans on activities like transactions with Russian military-industrial enterprises and broadcasting by certain Russian media outlets. However, the EU faces challenges in fully enforcing these sanctions due to its reliance on Russian energy sources.

The EU has also taken several initiatives to reduce its energy dependency on Russia. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU committed to phasing out all imports of Russian fossil fuels, including natural gas, before 2030. By the end of 2022,

Figure 5: Total bilateral humanitarian aid commitments to Ukraine across donors in billion Euros between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2024 (Trebesch et al. 2024).

pipeline gas from Russia represented approximately 8% of EU gas imports, down from 40% in early 2022, although this reduction partly reflects Russia's decision to decrease deliveries. Meanwhile, EU imports of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) slightly increased during the same period. In 2023, EU data indicated further declines in Russia's share of EU coal, oil, and pipeline gas imports and a slight decrease from 2022 in Russia's share of EU LNG imports (Congressional Research Service 2024).

It should be noted that while all EU countries adhered to the sanctions policy, the effects on the economies of these countries varied significantly. Specifically, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries were particularly vulnerable to disruptions in trade relations with Russia, as many of them relied heavily on Moscow, especially in terms of energy. In addition to the CEE countries, Germany and Italy were also severely affected, given their substantial trade dependencies on Russia. Before February 2022, Germany imported 55% of its gas from Russia, while Italy imported around 40% (Andreolli *et al.* 2023). The impact was significant not only in the energy sector, prompting both countries to seek alternative sources (Germany turning to Norway, Italy to Algeria), but also in the automotive industry, where both nations excel due to their reliance on palladium sourced from Russia (Redeker 2022).

3.3. The Public Opinion

This session examines the response of public opinion. Specifically, the section analyses the trend of public opinion in European countries regarding EU initiatives towards Russia, the perception of the Russian threat, and the necessity for further integration of European defence. Previous research have already shown that the war has increased perceptions of threat and stronger support for collective defence, with some variation in the size of these changes across countries and aspects of collective defence. Perhaps most noteworthy, while Rus-
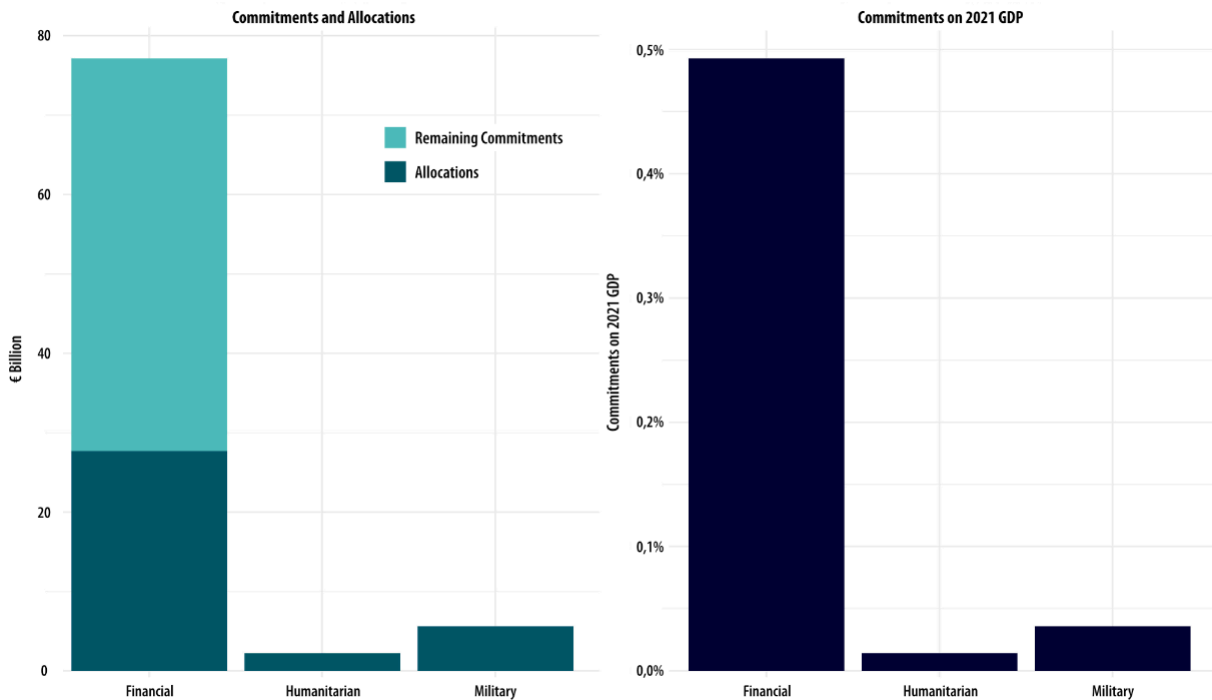

Figure 6: Total bilateral military aid commitments to Ukraine across donors in billion Euros between January 24, 2022, and January 15, 2024 (Trebesch et al. 2024).

sia's invasion of Ukraine clarified Europeans' preference for NATO over an EU alternative somewhat, the most pronounced changes occurred with respect to their general willingness to defend other European countries. More than coming to terms with institutional issues, at least in the short term, the event reminded Europeans of the fundamentals of collective defence.

Based on the surveys performed by EU institutions, support for a range of actions taken in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine remains very high. Almost nine in ten (89%) agree with providing humanitarian support to the people affected by the war, and more than eight in ten (84%) agree with welcoming into the EU people fleeing the war. Moreover, 72% of respondents agreed with providing financial support to Ukraine. The same proportion (72%) support economic sanctions on the Russian

government, companies, and individuals. Around six in ten approve of the EU financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine (60%).

Although the overall percentage of support is quite high, as illustrated in the graph, these values have decreased significantly since the beginning of the war. In some countries, the decrease in support is very pronounced (see figure 7).
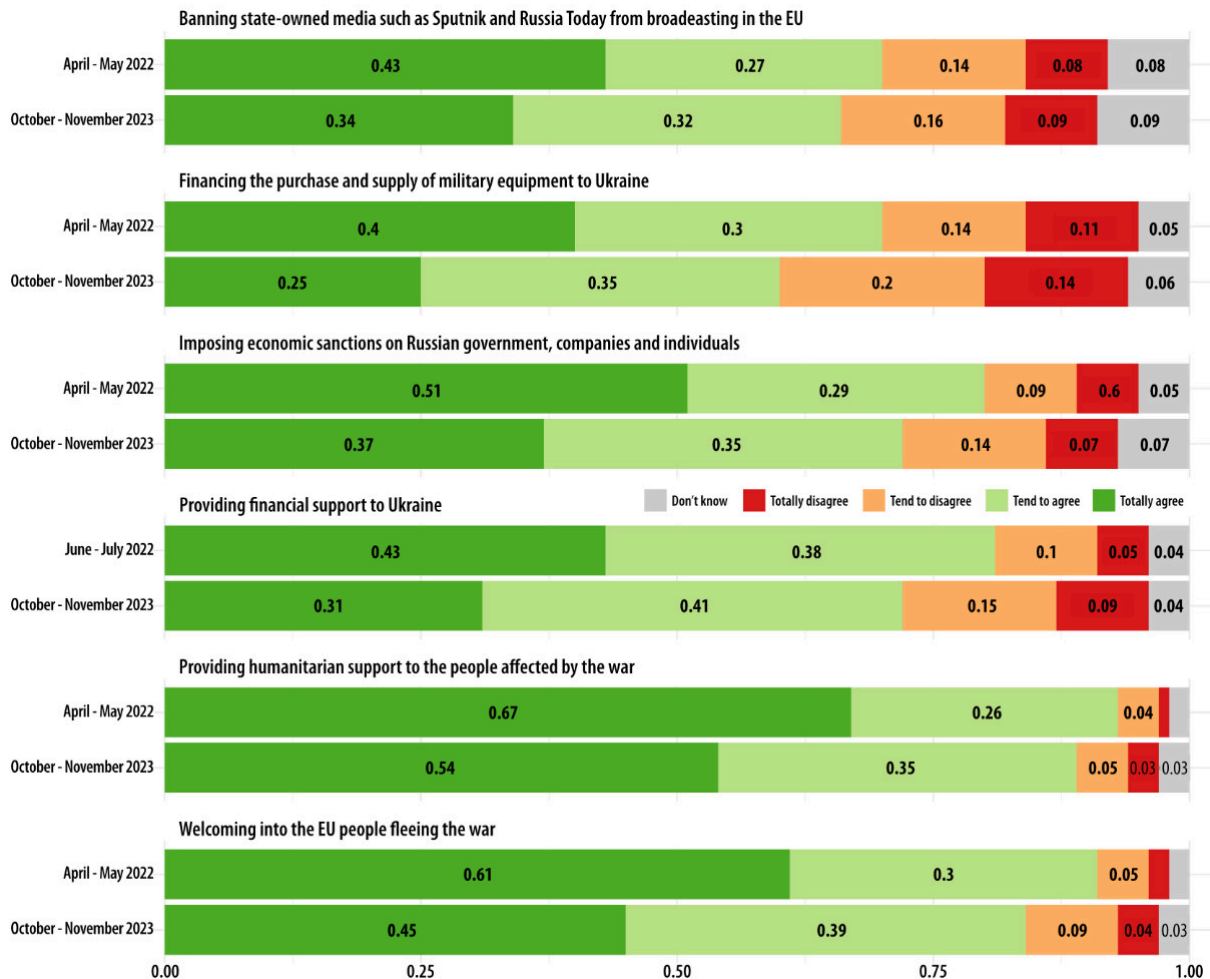
Figure 7: Evolution of European countries' public opinion towards the main initiatives adopted by the EU to support Ukraine and weaken Russia (April/May 2022 – October/November 2023) (European Commission 2023).

The reduction in the percentage of those who agree with these initiatives has decreased on average by 8.75%. Where it has decreased the most is in support for the provision of weapons (-12.5%) and financial support (-11.5%), while where it has decreased the least is in humanitarian support (-5%).

The types of assistance that have seen the most significant decline in support are financial and military aid. As shown in Fig. 6, public opinion strongly supports financial assistance to Ukraine in almost all European countries. Even where lower values are recorded, such as in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, the percentage supporting this aid still hovers around 50% at the end of 2023. As noted from the graph, countries in North-Eastern Europe, those closest to Russia, tend to express greater consensus towards financial assistance to Ukraine, while the lowest percentages of support are recorded in South-Eastern Europe, particularly in the Balkans (see figure 8).

QD2.6. The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent you agree or disagree with each of these actions taken.

AVG Value 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00 Opinion Level 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

	Jun-Jul 2022	Jan-Feb 2023	May-Jun 2023	Oct-Nov 2023
Austria	0.74	0.71	0.58	0.65
Belgium	0.8	0.75	0.73	0.67
Bulgaria	0.58	0.55	0.54	0.52
Croatia	0.82	0.83	0.82	0.82
Cyprus	0.8	0.81	0.62	0.57
Czech Republic	0.64	0.61	0.6	0.48
Denmark	0.93	0.92	0.94	0.91
Estonia	0.76	0.72	0.58	0.59
Finland	0.95	0.94	0.91	0.93
France	0.72	0.68	0.68	0.64
Germany	0.84	0.8	0.75	0.73
Greece	0.75	0.66	0.66	0.59
Hungary	0.75	0.61	0.6	0.58
Ireland	0.94	0.9	0.91	0.86
Italy	0.8	0.76	0.72	0.67
Latvia	0.78	0.84	0.8	0.77
Lithuania	0.86	0.92	0.89	0.86
Luxembourg	0.84	0.76	0.82	0.76
Malta	0.88	0.87	0.85	0.81
Netherlands	0.88	0.93	0.91	0.88
Poland	0.92	0.86	0.86	0.84
Portugal	0.93	0.88	0.94	0.89
Romania	0.7	0.59	0.58	0.56
Slovack Republic	0.64	0.53	0.54	0.5
Slovenia	0.73	0.72	0.66	0.62
Spain	0.86	0.82	0.78	0.78
Sweden	0.95	0.94	0.95	0.96

Figure 8: The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these actions? Providing financial support to Ukraine.

QD2.3. The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent you agree or disagree with each of these actions taken.

AVG Value 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00 Opinion Level 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

	Apr-May 2022	Jun-Jul 2022	Jan-Feb 2023	May-Jun 2023	Oct-Nov 2023
Austria	0.54	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.43
Belgium	0.76	0.73	0.68	0.69	0.6
Bulgaria	0.3	0.35	0.33	0.3	0.31
Croatia	0.81	0.74	0.73	0.72	0.74
Cyprus	0.45	0.44	0.49	0.36	0.31
Czech Republic	0.66	0.56	0.5	0.54	0.42
Denmark	0.9	0.91	0.89	0.89	0.83
Estonia	0.75	0.75	0.72	0.64	0.62
Finland	0.9	0.89	0.88	0.89	0.9
France	0.68	0.62	0.6	0.58	0.55
Germany	0.66	0.7	0.63	0.62	0.61
Greece	0.5	0.41	0.36	0.43	0.37
Hungary	0.6	0.57	0.5	0.44	0.43
Ireland	0.9	0.86	0.81	0.79	0.72
Italy	0.61	0.57	0.56	0.6	0.51
Latvia	0.74	0.72	0.77	0.74	0.7
Lithuania	0.86	0.83	0.88	0.84	0.83
Luxembourg	0.68	0.62	0.64	0.7	0.59
Malta	0.8	0.74	0.76	0.64	0.61
Netherlands	0.87	0.85	0.9	0.85	0.85
Poland	0.93	0.91	0.89	0.86	0.85
Portugal	0.91	0.86	0.82	0.9	0.82
Romania	0.65	0.61	0.55	0.55	0.49
Slovack Republic	0.42	0.5	0.38	0.37	0.34
Slovenia	0.57	0.54	0.52	0.49	0.46
Spain	0.74	0.67	0.65	0.6	0.53
Sweden	0.92	0.92	0.92	0.93	0.91

Figure 9: The EU has taken a series of actions as a response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of these actions? Financing the purchase and supply of military equipment to Ukraine.

With regard to military aid, it is immediately apparent that support for military assistance is generally lower than that expressed for financial assistance. In countries like Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, it hovers around 30% by the end of 2023. Similar to the previous case, this support tends to decrease almost everywhere, even in countries expressing stronger stances towards Russia, such as Poland and Sweden. Again, as in the previous case, support is solid in the northeast and particularly weak in the southeast, especially in the Balkans (see figure 9).

With regard to the perception of insecurity. The Eurobarometer show that war is not a top priority for every European country. It is indeed a concern in general, as 28% of Europeans consider immigration and the war in Ukraine to be among the two most important issues facing the EU. Then comes the international situation (24%), followed by rising prices, inflation, and the cost of living (20%, ranking fourth while it was the primary concern last spring). However, for many countries, war is not their primary concern at all. For many Southern European countries, other concerns take precedence, such as immigration (the top concern in France) and inflation (the top concern in Italy). The following figure shows the main issues according to public opinion in the member states in November 2023 (see figure 10).

	Austria	Belgium	Bulgaria	Croatia	Cyprus	Czech Republic	Denmark	Estonia	Finland	France	Germany	Greece	Hungary	Ireland	Italy	Latvia	Lithuania	Luxembourg	Malta	Netherlands	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Slovak Republic	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden
The war in Ukraine	0.26	0.24	0.32	0.31	0.25	0.40	0.43	0.52	0.46	0.20	0.35	0.19	0.31	0.48	0.23	0.45	0.52	0.25	0.46	0.35	0.24	0.41	0.31	0.38	0.39	0.31	0.44
Immigration	0.26	0.29	0.32	0.20	0.47	0.35	0.22	0.24	0.13	0.30	0.45	0.27	0.29	0.26	0.20	0.26	0.21	0.27	0.32	0.43	0.30	0.21	0.12	0.29	0.35	0.25	0.15
The international situation	0.26	0.21	0.37	0.29	0.19	0.27	0.29	0.35	0.34	0.20	0.25	0.33	0.23	0.22	0.25	0.26	0.35	0.22	0.36	0.25	0.23	0.20	0.26	0.30	0.21	0.25	0.24
Rising prices/ inflation/ cost of living	0.21	0.27	0.22	0.27	0.28	0.20	0.09	0.14	0.15	0.24	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.28	0.25	0.23	0.12	0.32	0.16	0.12	0.26	0.21	0.20	0.18	0.17	0.26	0.10
The environment and climate change	0.23	0.21	0.04	0.09	0.05	0.07	0.37	0.07	0.19	0.21	0.17	0.12	0.13	0.17	0.14	0.05	0.08	0.18	0.12	0.36	0.13	0.12	0.12	0.10	0.16	0.12	0.41
The economic situation	0.17	0.12	0.11	0.15	0.22	0.14	0.08	0.15	0.09	0.12	0.12	0.19	0.15	0.11	0.20	0.15	0.14	0.12	0.13	0.07	0.13	0.19	0.15	0.14	0.15	0.18	0.12
Terrorism	0.10	0.18	0.11	0.14	0.19	0.11	0.10	0.06	0.12	0.19	0.05	0.08	0.11	0.10	0.06	0.12	0.15	0.13	0.09	0.05	0.11	0.11	0.17	0.07	0.16	0.10	0.14
Energy supply	0.10	0.11	0.15	0.11	0.07	0.15	0.09	0.14	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.19	0.15	0.12	0.14	0.10	0.09	0.11	0.06	0.08	0.10	0.06	0.14	0.12	0.13	0.09	0.15
The state of Member State's public finances	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.15	0.04	0.12	0.05	0.09	0.12	0.08	0.12	0.15	0.17	0.03	0.14	0.05	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.09	0.13	0.15	0.09	0.19	0.05	0.11	0.06
The EU's influence in the world	0.11	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.03	0.07	0.14	0.05	0.13	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.05	0.10	0.10	0.05	0.14	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07
Crime	0.05	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.10	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.10	0.04	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.03	0.07
Health	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.09	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.03	0.02	0.05	0.02
Unemployment	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.10	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.00	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.03	0.01	0.06	0.01
Pensions	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.00
Taxation	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.00
Don't know	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.05	0.00
Other (SPONTANEOUS)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
None (SPONTANEOUS)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Figure 10: What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment? (MAX. 2 ANSWERS) (%).

It is worth noting that although the war is perceived as a significant threat almost everywhere in Europe, it has experienced a decline over time. This also occurs in countries most concerned about Russia, such as the Baltic Republics (see figure 11).

QD3.2. Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statement: Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of (OUR COUNTRY)

	Apr-May 2022	Jun-Jul 2022	Jan-Feb 2023	May-Jun 2023	Oct-Nov 2023
Austria	0.66	0.65	0.61	0.53	0.61
Belgium	0.71	0.67	0.74	0.69	0.66
Bulgaria	0.68	0.64	0.6	0.58	0.56
Croatia	0.83	0.82	0.81	0.83	0.74
Cyprus	0.57	0.6	0.51	0.41	0.36
Czech Republic	0.78	0.76	0.74	0.77	0.69
Denmark	0.68	0.7	0.81	0.81	0.82
Estonia	0.73	0.77	0.76	0.68	0.71
Finland	0.84	0.81	0.85	0.82	0.85
France	0.65	0.65	0.67	0.64	0.62
Germany	0.79	0.81	0.77	0.78	0.76
Greece	0.64	0.68	0.62	0.64	0.58
Hungary	0.79	0.81	0.72	0.7	0.63
Ireland	0.78	0.77	0.72	0.77	0.64
Italy	0.77	0.76	0.79	0.77	0.73
Latvia	0.75	0.76	0.81	0.78	0.73
Lithuania	0.91	0.86	0.89	0.89	0.84
Luxembourg	0.56	0.57	0.72	0.71	0.64
Malta	0.86	0.8	0.8	0.79	0.69
Netherlands	0.7	0.63	0.75	0.76	0.71
Poland	0.94	0.92	0.9	0.88	0.9
Portugal	0.83	0.89	0.85	0.91	0.82
Romania	0.74	0.72	0.71	0.65	0.66
Slovak Republic	0.82	0.76	0.71	0.68	0.69
Slovenia	0.62	0.67	0.69	0.65	0.63
Spain	0.84	0.8	0.8	0.78	0.78
Sweden	0.88	0.86	0.89	0.87	0.88

AVG Value 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00 — Opinion Level 0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

Figure 11: Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a threat to the security of (OUR COUNTRY).

With regard to the public opinion towards European defence integration, compared to what we have seen regarding the Russian threat and military and financial assistance, the response from Europeans is more homogeneous. Even countries like Bulgaria and Slovakia, more reluctant to align against Russia, show strong support for European defence, with "agree" percentages exceeding 70%. This demonstrates that, in line with previous findings, the consensus towards European defence is closely linked to the perception of the external threat (Mader *et al.* 2024).

Yet, an interesting point is that this support follows the trend we have seen in the case of public opinion regarding military and financial assistance: it declines over time. The support towards EU integration in the defence domain is thus subject to a fading effect (Johansson *et al.* 2021). Like many studies on political behaviour have shown, the increased support caused by the occurrence of exceptional circumstance and major crises tend to wane over time as consensus over policy innovation fades away (Altiparmakis *et al.* 2021; Baker, Oneal 2001). Recent research shows that, in the case of the EU, this fading effect is mainly driven by partisan polarisation both at the national and European levels (Truchlewski *et al.* 2023). This implies that the response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is underpinned by strong political conflicts that might be detrimental to European unity in the future (see figure 12).

QD3.4. Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Co-operation in defence matters at EU level should be increased

AVG Value
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

Opinion Level
0.00 0.25 0.50 0.75 1.00

	Apr-May 2022	Jun-Jul 2022	Jan-Feb 2023	May-Jun 2023	Oct-Nov 2023
Austria	0.79	0.75	0.75	0.64	0.69
Belgium	0.92	0.89	0.84	0.83	0.82
Bulgaria	0.73	0.72	0.71	0.68	0.66
Croatia	0.88	0.86	0.86	0.9	0.85
Cyprus	0.86	0.85	0.86	0.83	0.81
Czech Republic	0.84	0.83	0.8	0.79	0.76
Denmark	0.81	0.77	0.8	0.81	0.83
Estonia	0.77	0.8	0.76	0.7	0.72
Finland	0.92	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.88
France	0.82	0.79	0.8	0.76	0.76
Germany	0.87	0.87	0.84	0.83	0.81
Greece	0.84	0.82	0.82	0.83	0.78
Hungary	0.9	0.9	0.85	0.85	0.82
Ireland	0.92	0.89	0.82	0.85	0.77
Italy	0.81	0.78	0.79	0.75	0.74
Latvia	0.83	0.82	0.87	0.83	0.82
Lithuania	0.94	0.9	0.92	0.9	0.88
Luxembourg	0.89	0.88	0.85	0.89	0.84
Malta	0.88	0.93	0.91	0.88	0.75
Netherlands	0.9	0.89	0.91	0.89	0.89
Poland	0.95	0.95	0.92	0.88	0.88
Portugal	0.95	0.9	0.82	0.92	0.9
Romania	0.79	0.71	0.69	0.72	0.67
Slovack Republic	0.73	0.8	0.65	0.66	0.65
Slovenia	0.71	0.73	0.67	0.69	0.68
Spain	0.86	0.84	0.82	0.76	0.79
Sweden	0.91	0.89	0.85	0.86	0.88

Figure 12: Please tell to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Co-operation in defence matters at EU level should be increased.

3.4. Changes in Military Policy

This section analyses European Union countries' response by examining military policy changes. Specifically, two aspects are analysed: changes in defence budgets and investments in conventional military capabilities, focusing solely on the land sector. According to Meijer and Brooks (2021), we focus on land systems because these are the ones Europe needs most.

3.4.1. The Defence Budget

The data demonstrates that the war in Ukraine has prompted European Union countries to increase defence budgets. In real terms, European defence spending rose by 4% between 2022 and 2023, accelerating from a 2% annual increase the previous year (International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2024). Across the EU, aggregate defence spending increased by 6% between 2022 and 2023, compared to a 4% annual rise in the previous year. Data from the Military Balance shows that in 2023, ten European NATO allies met the agreed objective of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence, up from eight countries in 2022 and only two in 2014. Several countries are nearing or have reached the 3% mark, including Estonia (2.9%), Greece (3.0%), and Poland (2.8%). However, Germany, Europe's largest economy, still falls significantly below this spending level, allocating only 1.4% of GDP to the armed forces. Most of

these budget increases are directed towards higher equipment spending, encompassing weapons acquisitions and defence research and development.

Despite overall growth at the aggregate level, there are significant disparities between sub-regions, indicating continued variations in threat perceptions. Central and Northern European countries, closer to Russia, increased defence spending more rapidly than their Western and Southern European counterparts. In Southern Europe, only Spain substantially increased defence expenditure, with a real-term growth of 20% to reach €17.5 billion in 2023. Portugal saw a more modest 1% increase in real terms, while all other countries in the sub-region reduced their military outlays. Greece's 13% decline in real terms is attributed to several significant procurement expenses spreading over the years, including ongoing purchases of three frigates and 24 Rafale fighter ground-attack aircraft. Although Greek procurement spending remained high at € 3.1 billion in 2023, it fell short of the previous year's €3.41 billion. Italy increased its budget by a minimal percentage between 2021 and 2023 (from 1.58% to 1.68%), but it returned to decrease in 2023.

In Central Europe, Poland primarily drove the increase, with Warsaw's defence budget growing by 46% in real terms between 2022 and 2023. In South-Eastern Europe, all three countries increased their defence spending in 2023 compared to 2022, with Bulgaria seeing 6% growth and Romania 32%. Turkey's allocations doubled in local-currency terms between 2022 and 2023, translating into 39% real-terms growth, which is noteworthy given the country's staggering inflation rate of over 50% in 2023. In the Balkans, total defence spending rose by 7%, driven by a significant swing in Bosnia-Herzegovina's defence budget (see figure 13).

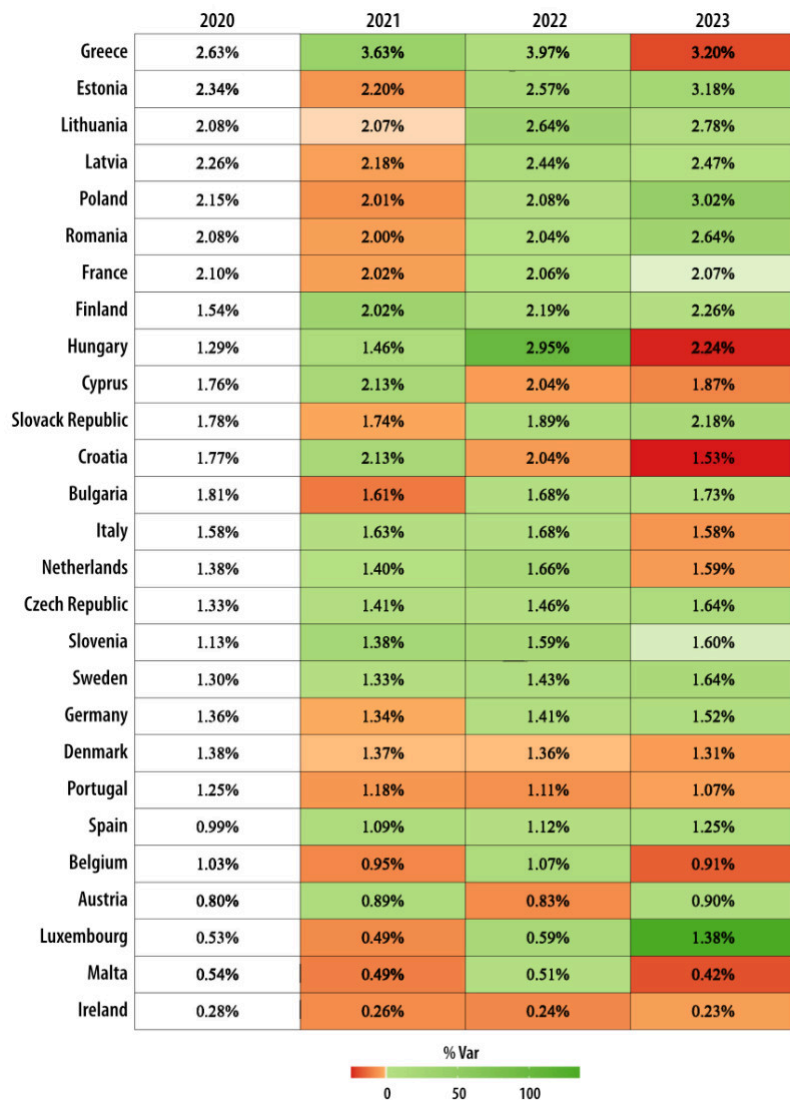|	2020	2021	2022	2023
Greece	2.63%	3.63%	3.97%	3.20%
Estonia	2.34%	2.20%	2.57%	3.18%
Lithuania	2.08%	2.07%	2.64%	2.78%
Latvia	2.26%	2.18%	2.44%	2.47%
Poland	2.15%	2.01%	2.08%	3.02%
Romania	2.08%	2.00%	2.04%	2.64%
France	2.10%	2.02%	2.06%	2.07%
Finland	1.54%	2.02%	2.19%	2.26%
Hungary	1.29%	1.46%	2.95%	2.24%
Cyprus	1.76%	2.13%	2.04%	1.87%
Slovack Republic	1.78%	1.74%	1.89%	2.18%
Croatia	1.77%	2.13%	2.04%	1.53%
Bulgaria	1.81%	1.61%	1.68%	1.73%
Italy	1.58%	1.63%	1.68%	1.58%
Netherlands	1.38%	1.40%	1.66%	1.59%
Czech Republic	1.33%	1.41%	1.46%	1.64%
Slovenia	1.13%	1.38%	1.59%	1.60%
Sweden	1.30%	1.33%	1.43%	1.64%
Germany	1.36%	1.34%	1.41%	1.52%
Denmark	1.38%	1.37%	1.36%	1.31%
Portugal	1.25%	1.18%	1.11%	1.07%
Spain	0.99%	1.09%	1.12%	1.25%
Belgium	1.03%	0.95%	1.07%	0.91%
Austria	0.80%	0.89%	0.83%	0.90%
Luxembourg	0.53%	0.49%	0.59%	1.38%
Malta	0.54%	0.49%	0.51%	0.42%
Ireland	0.28%	0.26%	0.24%	0.23%

% Var

0   50   100

Figure 13: Defense Budgets of European Countries, 2020-2023.

3.4.2. Investments in Conventional Military Capabilities

The war in Ukraine has prompted European countries to reorient their armed forces towards traditional defence and deterrence tasks. Many countries, such as France, Germany, and Italy, have published political-strategic documents stating their intention to reinvest in these capabilities (Barrie *et al.* 2019; Meijer, Brooks 2021). To assess what has been done, we observe how the numbers of key ground assets considered essential in conventional combat have varied – specifically, main battle tanks, artillery systems, and infantry fighting vehicles.

The graph represents the variation of these systems over time. It emerges that it is possible to distinguish a general trend in none of the three categories. Regarding main battle tanks (MBTs), in many countries, the number of systems remains essentially the same (such as Greece and Denmark) or even decreases (Italy and Poland). An increase is recorded in a few cases, such as in Germany and Finland. The same applies to infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), with a slight increase in Romania and Hungary and a sharp decline in Poland – likely due to the transfer of these systems to Ukraine. As for artillery, again, there is no general trend. The inability to notice a trend is likely because it takes a long time to procure these systems. Even if one wishes to purchase off-the-shelf – something the national military industry seeks to avoid – it takes several years for the acquisition process to begin (see figure 14).
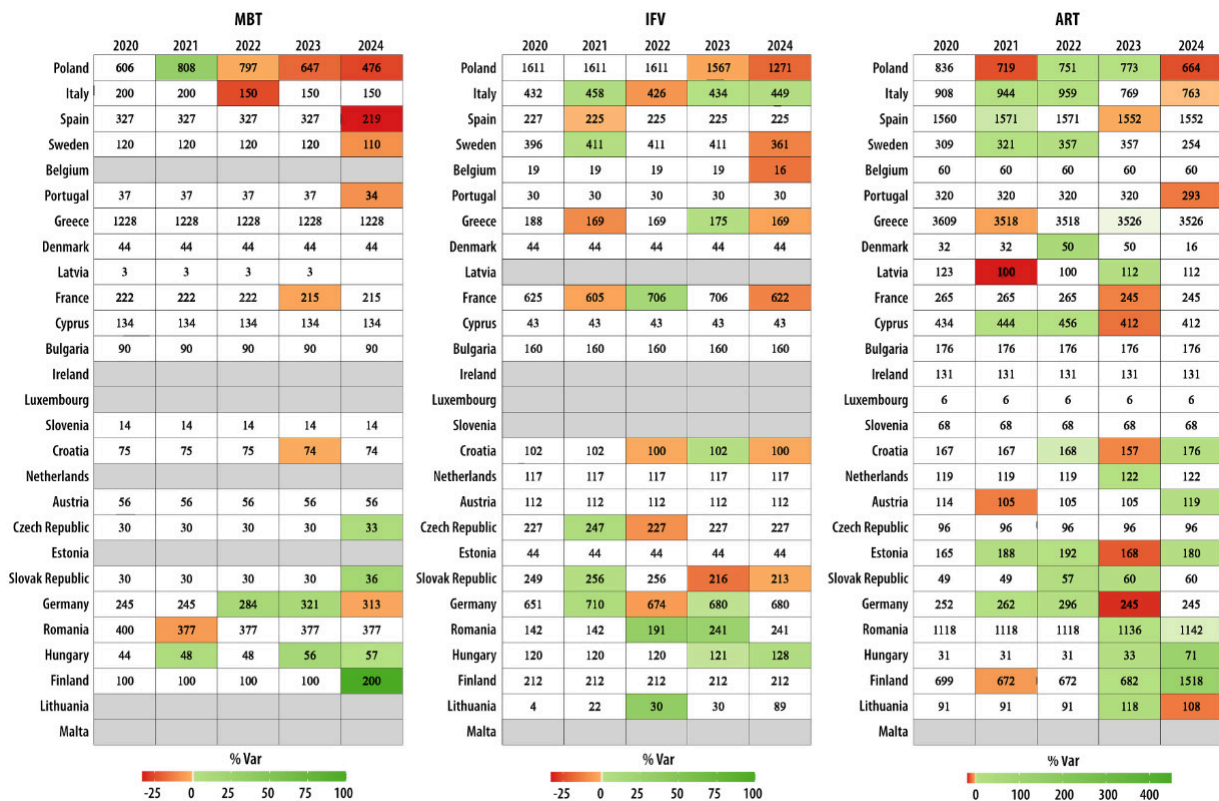
MBT

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Poland	606	808	797	647	476
Italy	200	200	150	150	150
Spain	327	327	327	327	219
Sweden	120	120	120	120	110
Belgium					
Portugal	37	37	37	37	34
Greece	1228	1228	1228	1228	1228
Denmark	44	44	44	44	44
Latvia	3	3	3	3	
France	222	222	222	215	215
Cyprus	134	134	134	134	134
Bulgaria	90	90	90	90	90
Ireland					
Luxembourg					
Slovenia	14	14	14	14	14
Croatia	75	75	75	74	74
Netherlands					
Austria	56	56	56	56	56
Czech Republic	30	30	30	30	33
Estonia					
Slovak Republic	30	30	30	30	36
Germany	245	245	284	321	313
Romania	400	377	377	377	377
Hungary	44	48	48	56	57
Finland	100	100	100	100	200
Lithuania					
Malta					

% Var
-25 0 25 50 75 100

IFV

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Poland	1611	1611	1611	1567	1271
Italy	432	458	426	434	449
Spain	227	225	225	225	225
Sweden	396	411	411	411	361
Belgium	19	19	19	19	16
Portugal	30	30	30	30	30
Greece	188	169	169	175	169
Denmark	44	44	44	44	44
Latvia					
France	625	605	706	706	622
Cyprus	43	43	43	43	43
Bulgaria	160	160	160	160	160
Ireland					
Luxembourg					
Slovenia					
Croatia	102	102	100	102	100
Netherlands	117	117	117	117	117
Austria	112	112	112	112	112
Czech Republic	227	247	227	227	227
Estonia	44	44	44	44	44
Slovak Republic	249	256	256	216	213
Germany	651	710	674	680	680
Romania	142	142	191	241	241
Hungary	120	120	120	121	128
Finland	212	212	212	212	212
Lithuania	4	22	30	30	89
Malta					

% Var
-25 0 25 50 75 100

ART

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Poland	836	719	751	773	664
Italy	908	944	959	769	763
Spain	1560	1571	1571	1552	1552
Sweden	309	321	357	357	254
Belgium	60	60	60	60	60
Portugal	320	320	320	320	293
Greece	3609	3518	3518	3526	3526
Denmark	32	32	50	50	16
Latvia	123	100	100	112	112
France	265	265	265	245	245
Cyprus	434	444	456	412	412
Bulgaria	176	176	176	176	176
Ireland	131	131	131	131	131
Luxembourg	6	6	6	6	6
Slovenia	68	68	68	68	68
Croatia	167	167	168	157	176
Netherlands	119	119	119	122	122
Austria	114	105	105	105	119
Czech Republic	96	96	96	96	96
Estonia	165	188	192	168	180
Slovak Republic	49	49	57	60	60
Germany	252	262	296	245	245
Romania	1118	1118	1118	1136	1142
Hungary	31	31	31	33	71
Finland	699	672	672	682	1518
Lithuania	91	91	91	118	108
Malta					

% Var
0 100 200 300 400

Figure 14: Variation in the number of MBTs, IFVs, and artillery systems in European countries, 2020-2024.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The article analysed how the EU and its members reacted to the Ukraine war outbreak. It was conducted to provide some initial considerations regarding the EU's capacity to overcome two important obstacles that constrain the achievement of full strategic autonomy: strategic cacophony and defence capabilities shortfall.

The results of our analysis allow us to formulate three main considerations. Firstly, despite differences of views within the EU, the response has been relatively cohesive overall. The analysis results demonstrate that the EU members have shown substantial consensus towards the measures adopted by the EU against Russia, featuring a surprising unity. Although support for Ukraine is not a priority for all EU member states, it remains high among European publics. There have been obstacles, such as those posed by Hungary, and delays. However, ultimately, the EU approved the most significant aid packages, unlike the United States, where, as of 15th February 2024, aid commitments and deliveries have essentially come to a halt, given the blocking of the package at Congress. European aid, in contrast, continues to grow in terms of commitments and aid allocations.

Secondly, the EU response features a relevant cross-country variation in terms of assistance provided, public opinion towards the war, and adaptation of military policy. In all these dimensions, Europe appears to be divided into two parts. On the one hand, the countries of North-Eastern Europe, which deploy significant resources supporting Ukraine, endorse EU initiatives, consider the war a top priority threat to their security, and substantially increase resources for their armed forces. On the other hand, the countries of Southern Europe, except Spain, and particularly those in the Southeast, which are more reluctant to allocate resources in favour of Ukraine, show less consensus on EU initiatives and do not necessarily consider the war an essential threat to their security – although among the top threats – and are not willing to invest too many resources in their armed forces.

The third consideration concerns the cross-time variation of this support. Over time, public support for EU initiatives and the willingness of member states to contribute to Ukrainian support have significantly declined in virtually all countries. Europe has implemented a decisive and cohesive response, but over time, the determination with which it carries it forward seems to decline gradually. This suggests that support for Ukraine may be more fragile than we think.

In light of these considerations, it is possible to conclude that, to date, strategic cacophony has not prevented the EU from implementing an adequate response. The EU has contributed more than the United States, at least based on the data provided by the Kiel Institute. However, strategic cacophony indeed persists, as evidenced by the cross-country variation in response, even though the reaction of some countries, like Spain, demonstrates that even Southern European countries perceive Russia as a danger. Regarding the shortfall in military capabilities, the analysis results are more pessimistic. They show that many Southern European countries, including Italy, Greece, and Portugal, are not willing to invest resources to address their military deficits, demonstrating how differences in the perception of the threat not only still exist

but are still able to hinder the development of greater military capabilities for the EU.

All in all, the analysis provides two main contributions. First, it offers a detailed description of the European response, providing some initial considerations on the EU's ability to achieve strategic autonomy. It demonstrates that the response is generally unanimous but features important cross-country and cross-time variation. It also shows that support toward EU initiatives is subject to a fading effect, the causes of which have yet to be investigated. Second, it lays the groundwork for future research to understand the variables that explain this variation. For example, future studies could identify the main variables that help understand why some Southern countries, like Spain, have proven to be more proactive than expected while others, like Italy, have shown more reluctance, especially when considering the adaptation of military policy. Another line of research could investigate the reasons behind the attitudes of South-Eastern European countries. Like the North-Eastern countries, they are very close to Russia. However, unlike the latter, the response of South-Eastern countries has been much weaker, especially in Bulgaria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

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Varia

L'America Latina fra Unione Europea e Cina.
Verso una de-occidentalizzazione?

Tiziana Bertaccini

Introduzione

La celebrazione del vertice Unione Europea – Celac nel luglio del 2023, dopo 8 anni di silenzio, è stata letta dai più ottimisti come un nuovo inizio nelle relazioni euro-latinoamericane (Domínguez, Sanahuaja 2023: 4).

La Dichiarazione finale UE-Celac ha ribadito i valori e i principi comuni sui quali si basa la rinnovata alleanza (Declaración de la Cumbre UE-Celac de 2023). Entrambe le regioni sembrerebbero dunque condividere i principi liberali nelle relazioni internazionali, tuttavia la discussione sulla guerra in Ucraina (oggi rafforzata dalle posizioni sul conflitto israeliano – palestinese) ha palesato la nota frammentazione interna alla regione e l'assenza di una visione strategica comune in politica internazionale.

Alcuni recenti riflessioni sul vertice UE-Celac hanno di fatto riprodotto una conosciuta, ed ormai anacronistica, visione eurocentrica imputando la mancanza di dialogo fra le due regioni più alla frammentazione interna latinoamericana che al disinteresse da parte europea (Nolte 2023). Un disinteresse riconosciuto perfino dall' Alto Rappresentante dell'Unione Europea per gli Affari Esteri e la Politica di Sicurezza, Josep Borrell, nel 2020[1].

In realtà, nonostante la sempre decantata condivisione di valori e di storia, che ormai è diventata un ripetitivo esercizio di retorica da parte dell'UE, durante questo secolo si è assistito un distanziamento delle relazioni fra le due regioni e al sostanziale fallimento di quella originale partnership strategica che, inaugurata nel 1999, prometteva un roseo futuro comune. Al di là delle ragioni ampiamente analizzate dalla letteratura, durante gli anni dei governi progressisti in America Latina si è diffusa una narrazione (o racconto) del passato, cioè un esercizio semplificatorio assai diverso dalla disciplina della ricerca storica[2], costruita sul riscatto dei gruppi sociali esclusi e su un sentimento anticoloniale. Le narrazioni (o racconti) rafforzano la memoria condivisa basata su alcuni valori fondanti e sulla contrapposizione fra "un noi e un loro" (Vangelista 2023). Nel caso in questione, l'Europa è spesso diventata per l'America Latina quell' "altro" a cui controporsi.

Tiziana Bertaccini, University of Turin, tiziana.bertaccini@unito.it

[1] Nel 2020 Borrell dichiarò apertamente che l'America Latina non aveva avuto un posto rilevante nell'agenda dell'UE e di conseguenza le interazioni erano state inferiori alle possibilità reali. (Borrell 2020).

[2] Sulla differenza e la separazione fra la storia, come disciplina scientifica e le narrazioni, e sul processo di sostituzione della disciplina della ricerca storica con il racconto (o narrazione) che, al contrario della storia, semplifica rifuggendo dalla complessità del reale si veda (Vangelista 2023).

Lo spazio che l'Unione Europea ha lasciato vuoto in America Latina durante questo millennio è stato poco a poco occupato dalla Cina, un paese che, libero dal peso del passato coloniale, ha promosso alcuni principi e una visione della *governance* globale condivisa dai governi progressisti della regione.

L'articolo non vuole ripercorrere le tappe della relazione fra America Latina ed Europa e le sue criticità (Su questo si veda (Bertaccini, Finizio 2022)), ma intende aprire uno spazio di riflessione sulla tensione generata dalle narrazioni anticoloniali, e dunque antieuropee, parte dei progetti politici dei governi progressisti del nuovo millennio, legati anche ai movimenti sociali. A fronte di questa tensione soggiacente alla relazione con l'UE l'articolo osserva le affinità con le proposte avanzate dalla Cina offrendo un'interpretazione complementare alle ragioni di tipo economico[3] per spiegare il successo del gigante asiatico in America Latina e l'allontanamento dall'UE. Allo stesso tempo tali affinità ideologiche potrebbero preludere a un allontanamento dai valori occidentali avvallato anche dalle stesse narrazioni anticoloniali.

Unione Europea e America Latina: una storia condivisa?
La narrazione anticoloniale

Fin dal primo decennio del XXI secolo la relazione bi-regionale fra Europa e America Latina si trovava in difficoltà. Le cause furono imputate a un'agenda troppo ampia, all'assenza di una strategia globale e di obiettivi chiari, alle asimmetrie, o alle divergenze che ne rendevano difficili gli accordi (Ayuso 2009; Malamud 2010). Innegabilmente esisteva un'America latina frammentata al suo interno, che doveva affrontare la presenza di nuovi attori nella scena internazionale, e un'Unione Europea sotto pressione a causa dell'ingresso di nuovi membri che ne rendevano difficile la coesione interna e che erano poco interessati alle relazioni con la regione (Bertaccini, Finizio 2022).

Anche le speranze europee suscitate della nascita, nel 2011, della Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC), un foro di concertazione regionale e interlocuzione politica che per la prima volta riuniva tutti i paesi della regione senza la presenza degli Stati Uniti, furono presto destinate a spegnersi. Infatti, nel vertice UE-CELAC del 2015 il consenso si ruppe sul tema della crisi venezuelana, palesando dunque la distanza da quei valori presuntamente condivisi. Il vertice dette adito alle interpretazioni sull'inefficacia della relazione "onnicomprensiva" bi-regionale, che infatti fu dichiarata inadeguata ("La relación UE-Amèrica Latina, el final del café para todos", infolatam 10 giugno 2015). I vertici fra le due regioni non sembravano avere la rilevanza e la credibilità che avevano avuto in un passato non troppo lontano e si percepiva una generale sensazione di affaticamento (Cañaheja 2015 : 28-30).

La narrazione proposta dall'Unione Europe ha continuato a ribadire in maniera retorica l'esistenza di una naturale alleanza basata sulla condivisione di storia, cultura e valori. Una visione eurocentrica e sostanzialmente fondata sui residui di vecchi stereotipi (ormai sconosciuti alle nuove generazioni) che dimostra una scarsa conoscen-

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[3] Gli studi sulle relazioni fra Cina ed America Latina hanno prevalentemente trattato gli aspetti economici.

za del passato, lontano e recente, e della complessità storica delle molteplici realtà latinoamericane che dalle transizioni democratiche ad oggi hanno ormai riscritto alcuni decenni della loro storia.

Proprio su quella "storia condivisa" da sempre declamata dall'Europa per arrogarsi un primato nei rapporti con la regione, i progressismi latinoamericani, che nel complesso ha governato più a lungo durante questo secolo, hanno costruito una visione diametralmente opposta. Così, alla narrazione europea della storia condivisa se ne contrappone un'altra che ha trovato eco nei progetti politici di alcune sinistre.

Nella visione dei progressismi latinoamericani il passato e l'uso della storia piegato ai fini politici hanno ricoperto un posto rilevante. Nelle loro narrazioni emerge il peso del passato coloniale, che in questo secolo è stato rafforzato dalle nuove visioni dei governi in turno e dai movimenti sociali che spesso li hanno sostenuti.

Come ben si sa, in America Latina l'antimperialismo è stato una rivendicazione che dall'Ottocento ha attraversato tutto il ventesimo secolo configurandosi come elemento essenziale del nazionalismo latinoamericano (Bertaccini 2020: 152-153). Al centro dell'ideologia politica di molte sinistre latinoamericane troviamo l'ideale bolivariano di "Nuestra America" che esalta la memoria storica delle guerre di indipendenza i cui eroi sono parte del *pantheon* ufficiale della storia patria e che in alcuni casi sono entrati a pieno titolo nelle Costituzioni riformate dopo le transizioni democratiche[4] (Bertaccini, Finizio 2022). Il *bolivarismo* e il suo principio di unità continentale, che fin dal Congresso di Panamá si definì in opposizione al *monroismo*, ha attraversato il XX secolo sotto varie sembianze, passando per l'evocazione del *Espíritu Americano* del Ariel, la *Raza Cosmica* di Vasconcelos, l'*Indoamerica* di Haya de la Torre, il terzomondismo e il progressismo riformista degli anni '70[5] giungendo sino a noi, nel socialismo del XXI secolo e quale principio fondante delle integrazioni regionali di questo millennio, promosse dai governi progressisti.

Il sogno bolivariano di unità continentale posto a fondamento delle recenti forme di integrazione regionale, come la CELAC, contiene in sé uno spirito difensivo contro ogni tipo di intromissione esterna, incarnato intorno ai principi di politica estera di non intervento e di difesa della sovranità nazionale (Declaración de Oaxaca, 12 ottobre 1979).

Il progressismo latinoamericano, e non solo le vertenti rivoluzionarie e guerrigliere delle sinistre, ha fra i suoi valori fondanti la lotta contro il colonialismo e contro qualsiasi tipo di penetrazione straniera e fin dagli anni '60-'70 del secolo passato si è espresso in favore della lotta dei paesi in via di sviluppo per realizzare un nuovo ordine economico internazionale (Bertaccini 2022).

In epoca più recente il sentimento anticoloniale si è riacceso in nuove narrazioni politiche che prendono vita a partire dalla tappa di assestamento dello scenario internazionale degli anni'90. Caduto il blocco sovietico, le relazioni interamericane cercaro-

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[4] Ricordiamo la Costituzione venezuelana del 1999 cambiò il nome del paese in Repubblica "bolivariana" del Venezuela e la citazione dell'eroe dell'indipendenza cubana, San Martí nella rinnovata Costituzione del 2019.

[5] La Conferencia Permanente de Partidos Políticos de América Latina (COPPPAL), nata nel 1979, che oggi riunisce una sessantina partiti progressisti, si definiva antimperialista e trovava nell'ideale bolivariano il collante per una rinascita dell'unità e identità continentale.

no una nuova forma di relazionarsi e si caratterizzarono per un momento di dialogo, le posizioni di Washington si inclinarono a favore della pace in centroamerica e alla riduzione della loro presenza in territorio straniero (Rojas Aravena1993: 13). Così, il 27 giugno del 1990 il Presidente George H.W. Bush annunciò l'*Iniciativa para las Américas* che prevedeva la creazione di un'immensa area di libero commercio che avrebbe compreso tutte le Americhe (ALCA). Pochi giorni dopo l'annuncio Fidel Castro e Ignacio Lula da Silva invitarono partiti, movimenti e organizzazioni di sinistra a riflettere sui recenti avvenimenti seguiti al crollo dell'Unione Sovietica, e sui possibili cammini della sinistra latinoamericana. Da quell'incontro scaturì la *Declaración de São Paulo*, il documento fondante del Foro de São Paulo, nato l'anno seguente a Città del Messico Nel documento 48 organizzazioni, partiti e fronti di sinistra, riaffermavano la lotta antimperialista dinnanzi all'offensiva volta a favorire la restaurazione capitalista come conseguenza della crisi dell'Europa Orientale. In altre parole, il Piano Bush fu visto come aggressivo e come la manifestazione della "vera faccia dell'Impero" di fronte alla quale si riaffermava il concetto di unità e di integrazione continentale contenuto nella denominazione di "Nuestra America", rivendicando i principi di sovranità, autodeterminazione e la propria identità culturale e storica (*Ibidem*).

Proprio durante i decenni '80 e '90 il dibattito sull'anticolonialismo si arricchì con nuovi apporti del pensiero post-coloniale e decoloniale[6]. Il pensiero critico di un gruppo di intellettuali latinoamericani ed europei sfociò nella teorizzazione del Socialismo del XXI secolo di Heinz Dietrich Steffan[7]. Le riflessioni che portarono al saggio di Dietrich erano iniziate nel 1988 quando si era costituito il *Foro por la Emancipación e identidad de América Latina* che nel 1992 si era opposto ai festeggiamenti dei 500 anni della Scoperta dell'America. Infatti, in occasione del cinquecentenario si era riaperta la riflessione sull'esperienza coloniale. Per riferirsi al 1492 si usava il termine di invasione dell'emisfero occidentale. La visione che si andò elaborando, e che successivamente ritroviamo nelle proposte politiche del socialismo del XXI secolo latinoamericano, era che l'invasione del 1492 fosse la prima globalizzazione neoliberale della nascente superpotenza "europea". In quest'ottica, il neoliberalismo era considerato la continuazione organica di 500 anni di sfruttamento da parte delle borghesie atlantiche. La stessa Guerra Fredda, letta attraverso questa lente, veniva concepita come un episodio nella lunga guerra nord-sud e parte del secolare problema del colonialismo e dell'imperialismo occidentale (Dietrich senza data: 8). L'apologia della visione negativa verso il passato coloniale spagnolo si sviluppò poprio mentre il paese iberico faceva ingresso nell' UE dove assunse un ruolo di primo piano nelle relazioni con l'America Latina, dando anche vita nel 1991 alle *Cumbres Iberoamericanas*.

Secondo la narrazione di Dietrich dopo il 2001 era nato un terzo Ordine Mondiale[8]. Il cambiamento avvenuto nel sistema globale aveva dato inizio al terzo disegno

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[6] Sul dibattito e le differenze di anticolonialismo e de-colonialismo si veda (Avíla-Rojas 2021). Per la riformulazione recente del concetto di *decolonialidad* si veda (Torre, Benegiamo, Dal Gobbo, 2020).

[7] Gli antecedenti sono contenuti nel testo *Fin del capitalismo global. El Nuevo Proyecto Histórico*, opera collettanea uscita nel 1999.

[8] Secondo questa visione il primo sistema di regolazione globale capitalista era sorto al termine della Prima Guerra Modiale, il secondo Ordine Mondiale, bipolare, sorse al termine della Seconda Guerra Mondiale e collassò con la fine dell'Unione Sovietica dando inizio a un momento di transizione durato fino al 2001.

strategico della borghesia atlantica, termine con il quale non si intendeva solo la borghesia statunitense ma anche quella europea (Dietrich senza data: 4). Secondo questa lettura i metodi imperialisti erano diversi dal passato e proprio all'Europa veniva assegnato un particolare ruolo nel consolidamento del potere occidentale e dell'élite atlantica. Infatti, una delle caratteristiche del terzo ordine mondiale risiedeva nella "politica concertata fra imperialismo statunitense ed europeo" che impediva la democratizzazione della società mondiale (Dietrich senza data: 6). Compariva anche il tema della Cina: nel paese asiatico l'élite atlantica avrebbe esercitato una politica di contenzione per convertirla in una neo colonia. Eventi quali la guerra contro l'Afghanistan (frutto del terzo ordine mondiale) generavano la coesione dell'alleanza fra borghesia europea e statunitense contro il terzo Mondo.

Il *modus operandi* che questa borghesia atlantica aveva sviluppato negli ultimi 10 anni, cioè durante la transizione dal Secondo al Terzo Ordine Mondiale, era dunque vista con preoccupazione. Con la scomparsa dell'Unione Sovietica si pensava che l'Occidente avrebbe potuto ristabilire un imperialismo classico stile XIX secolo, per questo era urgente fermare il progetto di Bush, così come suggeriva anche il Foro di São Paulo. L'assimilazione dell'Europa al nuovo imperialismo a fianco degli Stati Uniti si evince anche dalla denominazione data al progetto dell'area di libero scambio delle Americhe: il piano Bush-Blair. Per l'America latina era dunque fondamentale affossare l'ALCA e difendere la rivoluzione bolivariana in Venezuela.

Il nuovo ordine internazionale si caratterizzava dunque per questa "accelerata integrazione dell'imperialismo europeo", un processo che si pensava destinato a potenziarsi con l'introduzione dell'euro, in quanto si credeva che questo avrebbe consolidato la sua identità e di conseguenza avrebbe accresciuto il suo imperialismo (*Ibidem* 6).

Il termine 'Socialismo del XXI secolo' acquisì diffusione in seguito, nel 2005, quando fu usato dal Presidente Hugo Chávez durante il V Foro Social Mundial Porto Alegre, che decretò la fine definitiva dell' ALCA.

Nei primi anni del nuovo millennio l'Europa rappresentava ancora per le forze progressiste latinoamericane un possibile partner[9] per evitare l'unipolarismo statunitense. Tuttavia, nell'incontro fra alcune forze progressiste latinoamericane ed Europee, tenutosi a Roma nel 2004, emersero anche le critiche: non solo le asimmetrie fra le due regioni ma soprattutto la divergenza nei programmi politici dei partiti delle sinistre democratiche latinoamericane ed europee. Infatti, vi fu chi sostenne che un'agenda comune programmatica avrebbe dovuto prevedere punti condivisi come lavorare per un commercio equo e un'agenda di riforme degli organismi internazionali, in *primis* le Nazioni Unite, il FMI e la BM[10]. Si rimproverava all'Europa, che aveva 41.7% dei voti nel FMI, di essere sempre alleata degli Stati Uniti. La sfiducia verso l'Europa si poteva percepire anche nelle parole di Paolo Delgado, responsabile della politica estera del Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) che, denunciando la poca influenza del Brasile nel sistema internazionale, disse: 'Ci aspettiamo che l'Europa non ci veda come una "Nuova Compagnia delle Indie orientali" e non voglia trasformarci in un

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[9] Discorso del senatore cileno Ricardo Nuñez (Idee Progressiste in America Latina e in Europa-Atti della Conferenza Internazionale 2004, 29-36).
[10] Discorso di Pedro Santana, presidente dell'Associazione "Viva la Ciudadanía "Colombia (*Ibidem*, 81-82).

continente di *commodities* e di montaggio'. La distanza era accresciuta anche dalle richieste di riscatto dei *pueblos indios* poste al centro delle narrazioni anticoloniali dei progressismi, che rivendicavano la democrazia partecipativa contro la democrazia rappresentativa, quest'ultima considerata un difetto tipicamente occidentale. Infatti, i progetti nazionali rifondativi del socialismo del XXI secolo riscattando la partecipazione dei *pueblos* originari si oppongono al passato coloniale.

Bisogna ricordare che uno dei fenomeni rilevanti fin dagli anni '80-'90, nell'epoca delle transizioni, sono stati i movimenti dei *pueblos indios* le cui organizzazioni raggiunsero avanzati gradi di articolazione, confluendo in ampi movimenti, talora anche di dimensioni continentali, che rivendicavano autodeterminazione, stati multietnici e soprattutto la loro identità (Per una sintesi si veda Bertaccini 2024, 227-232). Con essi si sviluppò anche un'ideologia panindianista che proponeva una revisione della categoria di indio in senso positivo, quale simbolo mobilitante di un'identità panetnica capace di contrapporre colonizzato a colonizzatore, esprimendo così il carattere decolonizzatore del movimento. Nel discorso panindianista insieme alla critica alla dominazione e al passato coloniale si avverte una generica opposizione alla società occidentale.

Per citare un altro esempio, il preambolo della Costituzione della Repubblica Bolivariana del Venezuela del 1998 è scritto in nome del *pueblo* venezuelano e accanto all'invocazione a Dio e a Simon Bolivar troviamo la specifica menzione ai sacrifici degli antenati aborigeni per stabilire una società democratica, partecipativa e protagonista.

Nel nuovo costituzionalismo andino di Ecuador e Bolivia, il concetto del sumak kawsay o del suma qamaña, tradotto con il termine di *Buen Vivir*, prende le distanze dalla visione antropocentrica occidentale riconoscendo un modello alternativo di società incentrato sui popoli indigeni tradizionalmente emarginati dalle élite e dagli stati monoetnici, mostrando chiaramente un processo di de-occidentalizzazione del pensiero. Il *Buen Vivir* propone un nuovo modello di vita che rifiuta qualsiasi deriva monoculturale.

Il movimento di Evo Morales si è fatto portatore di una lotta contro 500 anni di colonialismo ininterrotto, con l'obiettivo di distruggere il sistema politico e cambiare il modello di Stato Repubblicano. Infatti, la nuova Costituzione del 2009, basata sulla critica al capitalismo liberale e alla società borghese del Socialismo del XXI secolo, definisce un nuovo modello di stato. Si metteva in discussione lo Stato nato con l'Indipendenza e dunque i valori del costituzionalismo liberale occidentale emersi con la Rivoluzione Nordamericana e la Rivoluzione Francese. La nuova Carta nega la Repubblica come modello di Stato, come sancisce il suo preambolo: " […] Dejamos en el pasado el Estado colonial, republicano y neoliberal." (Constitución Bolivia 2009). Il concetto di Repubblica viene eliminato e sostituito con il concetto di Stato Sociale Plurinazionale e Comunitario[11]. La stessa Costituzione è concepita come il risultato di 500 anni di lotte dei *pueblos indigeni* contro la sottomissione coloniale e republicana. La nuova visione della storia che viene in tal modo ricostruita rivendica la parteci-

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[11] "Un Estado Unitario Social de Derecho Plurinacional Comunitario, libre, Independiente, soberano, democrático, intercultural, descentralizado y con autonomías. Bolivia se funda en la pluralidad y el pluralismo político, económico, jurídico, cultural y lingüístico, dentro del proceso integrador del país." (Art. 1 Constitución Bolivia 2009).

pazione dei *pueblos* indigeni nel processo di indipendenza[12]. A differenza del modello repubblicano liberale la collettività diventa la base dell'ordinamento costituzionale.

Più in generale, i numerosi movimenti sociali che si svilupparono nelle ultime due decadi del secolo scorso contribuirono alle vittorie delle nuove sinistre, condividendone i postulati, si pensi per esempio al conosciuto caso del Movimento Senza Terra del Brasile che, insieme a molti altri, entrò a far parte del Partido dos Trabajadores (PT) di Lula o ai movimenti che costituirono il MAS di Evo Morales.

In seguito, nel 2017, dinnanzi alla congiuntura politica che vedeva un arretramento dei governi di sinistra e un avanzamento delle destre[13], il Foro di San Paolo emise un documento intitolato proprio *Consenso de Nuestra América*. (Consenso de Nuestra América 2017). Il concetto di *Nuestra America* continua ad essere concepito come "un tutto, come un cammino e un destino comune." Come sempre, si attinse all'"inestimabile patrimonio storico" dagli albori delle civiltà precolombiane fino alle lotte emancipatrici contro il colonialismo europeo. In questa narrazione le battaglie emancipatrici del presente trovavano fondamento nella rivendicazione di un passato di lotte che ebbero inizio con l'invasione dei *conquistadores* europei, proseguirono con la Rivoluzione anticolonialista e antischiavista haitiana e con l'Indipendenza. Il documento citava la famosa *Carta de Jamaica*, nella quale Bolivar, al momento della nascita delle nuove repubbliche indipendenti, auspicava l'inizio di un mondo nuovo che si sarebbe convertito in un'unica grande nazione: *'El velo se ha rasgado: ya hemos visto la luz, y se nos quiere volver a las tinieblas; se han roto las cadenas; ya hemos sido libres; y nuestro enemigos pretenden de nuevo esclavizarnos […] seguramente la unión es nos que falta para completar la obra de nuestra regeneración'* (Consenso de Nuestra América 2017).

In questo documento si amplia l'arco temporale della narrazione il cui inizio viene spostato al momento dell'invasione, rafforzando l'elemento della lotta anticoloniale. Si citano così gli attori delle lotte preispaniche, che diventano gli eroi delle battaglie contro il colonialismo europeo: Cuauhtémoc, Túpac Amaru, Atahualpa, Túpac Katari. A questi segue invariata l'enunciazione dei vari Libertadores ottocenteschi a cui si aggiungono però i protagonisti del XX secolo (Sandino, Farabundo Martí, Mariátegui, Flora Tristán, Zapata, Villa, Cárdenas, Camilo Torres, Manuel Marulanda, Albizu, Allende, Torrijos, Seregni, Manley, Hándal) e del XXI (Kirchner e Chávez), insieme all'eredità "etica ed internazionale" di Che Guevara e il pensiero 'fondazionale' di Fidel Castro (Consenso de Nuestra América 2017).

José Martí, eroe dell'indipendenza cubana, veniva definito un apostolo, di lui si cita una frase che mette in luce tutta la forza della logica amico/nemico propria di queste narrazioni : *'A un plan obedece nuestro enemigo: de enconarnos, dispersarnos, dividirnos, ahogarnos. Por eso obedecemos nosotros a otro plan: enseñarnos en toda*

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[12] Come si evince dal preambolo: "El pueblo boliviano, de composición plural, desde la profundidad de la historia, inspirado en las luchas del pasado, en la sublevación indígena anticolonial, en la independencia, en las luchas populares de liberación, en las marchas indígenas, sociales y sindicales, en las guerras del agua y de octubre, en las luchas por la tierra y territorio, y con la memoria de nuestros mártires, construimos un nuevo Estado."

[13] Nel 2015 vinse le elezioni argentine Mauricio Macri, nel 2016 un impeachment destituì Dilma Rousseuf in Brasile dando il potere al vicepresidente Michael Temer e Pedro Pablo Kuzcinsky vinse le elezioni in Perú. Il ciclo elettorale del 2017-2018, vide il ritorno di Sebastián Piñera en Chile, la vittoria di Lenin Moreno in Ecuador, Iván Duque in Colombia e Jear Bolsonaro in Brasile.

nuestra altura, apretarnos, juntarnos, hacer por fin a nuestra patria libre. Plan contra plan.' (*ibidem*). Nel documento si reitera, ancora una volta, che l'imperialismo e le oligarchie sono i principali avversari. Il sistema capitalista è legato alla storia di conquista, colonialismo e neo-colonialismo che sono considerati la causa del sottosviluppo dell'America Latina. Infatti, i principali ostacoli per raggiungere la vera indipendenza e il progresso sono la dipendenza dai centri di potere extraregionali. Senza dubbio qui si percepisce la distanza con l'Europa: si dichiara esplicitamente che in America Latina e nei Caraibi prevale la dominazione coloniale da parte delle potenze europee. La grande sfida e la responsabilità della sinistra sarebbe dunque lo "sradicamento totale e definitivo della dominazione coloniale di Nuestra America" (Consenso de Nuestra América 2017). I mega TLC siglati dall' Europa e dagli Stati Uniti sono visti come l'imposizione della contemporaneità.

In Messico, il presidente López Obrador, fondatore di Morena (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional), una sinistra non direttamente ascrivibile al Socialismo del XXI ma associata al Foro de São Paulo, durante le celebrazioni del suo insediamento, nel 2018, ha inscenato nello Zocalo della capitale una cerimonia di purificazione con i *pueblos originarios*[14] rivendicando le loro lotte ancestrali. Nel 2019, in occasione del V centenario dell'arrivo di Hernán Cortés in Messico ha inviato una lettera al Re di Spagna chiedendogli di presentare pubbliche scuse per gli abusi commessi dagli spagnoli durante la Conquista. Nel 2021, in occasione delle commemorazioni dei 500 anni della caduta di Tenochtitlán López Obrador ha costruito una narrazione del passato piegando la storia ai propri fini politici, spostando perfino la data di fondazione dell'antica capitale Mexica per inventare un nuovo mito di fondazione, suscitando il disappunto degli storici[15]. Per commemorare la resistenza indigena è stato cambiato il nome della piazza dove era fuggito Cortés con i suoi uomini scappando da Tenotchitlan e l'albero della Noche Triste è diventato l'albero della Notte Vittoriosa, così come la strada México Tacuba è stata ribattezzata México-Tenotchitlán.

Questa rilettura del passato è anche condivisa da una parte della società civile che durante le manifestazioni del 2019 un po' ovunque, dal Cile alla Colombia, ha deturpato, rimosso o distrutto i monumenti dei *Conquistadores*. D'altra parte alcuni anni prima la stessa Presidentessa Cristina Kirchner dopo una visita di Chávez aveva rimosso il grande monumento di Cristoforo Colombo.

Se le posizioni esposte sembrano includere solo le visioni più radicali legate al Socialismo del XXI secolo, non dimentichiamo che le rivendicazioni territoriali, in primis le Malvinas, ma anche Georgia del Sur, le isole Sandwich e il territorio Antartico Britannico, sono condivise da gran parte dei partiti progressisti , che si uniscono nella lotta contro le pretese considerate coloniali "finché anche l'ultimo e il più piccolo paese dell'America Latina non abbia ritrovato la sua autonomia" (Copppal Declaraciones, Resoluciones y otros documentos 2009: 21) perpetrando così questo immaginario di un Europa colonialista e imperialista. Il progetto di una Costituzione Europea

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[14] Per la prima volta nella storia un presidente ha ricevuto il "Bastón de Mando", cioè il simbolo del potere delle comunità, da parte di 68 *pueblos originarios,* inscenando un rituale purificatore quale simbolo del riconoscimento dei gruppi indigeni del paese e della purificazione politica promessa. (El País 2 dicembre 2018).

[15] Per un riassunto delle principali voci intervenute nel dibattito si veda (El País 13 agosto 2021).

fu visto con riluttanza proprio perché questi territori venivano denominati "paesi e territori d'oltremare".

Con l'arrivo al potere dei governi conservatori, nel ciclo elettorale del 2017-2018, vi fu un *impasse* delle forme di integrazione regionale che contribuì a creare una sorta di vuoto di potere nella regione (Bertaccini 2021: 271). A partire dall'elezione di Macri in Argentina (2015) e di Temer in Brasile (2016) si era rotta la vicinanza di questi paesi con il blocco *panlatino* e in particolare con il Venezuela, che nel 2017 fu perfino sospeso dal MERCOSUR, una decisione prima impensabile. Nello stesso anno Trump si insediava al governo degli Stati Uniti e la *V Cumbre* della CELAC fu disertata da molti presidenti latinoamericani. I governi conservatori della regione, che intanto si erano riuniti nel Gruppo di Lima (8 agosto 2017) condannarono la rottura dell'ordine democratico del Venezuela. Nel 2018 Brasile, Argentina, Cile, Colombia, Paraguay e Perù sospendevano la loro partecipazione nell' UNASUR, che di fatto rimase inattiva. Infine, nel 2019 L'Unione Europea si schierò a favore del leader oppositore di Maduro Juan Guaidó, appoggiato da Trump e dal Gruppo di Lima, capeggiato da Bolsonaro, e dall'Organización Estados Americanos (OEA), da sempre vista con diffidenza dalle sinistre per la presenza al suo interno degli Stati Uniti.

America Latina e Cina: i principi condivisi

Mentre le distanze con l'Europa, e con gli Stati Uniti, si andavano ampliando l'America Latina ha iniziato a volgere il suo sguardo verso l'Asia. In questo millennio è cresciuta la presenza della Cina, che si è sostituita al Giappone come principale partner commerciale, grazie a una strategia di lungo periodo non solo economica e commerciale ma anche politica e geostrategica.

La Cina in pochi anni è diventata il primo o il secondo socio commerciale di molti paesi latinoamericani, mentre l'Europa è retrocessa dalla seconda alla terza posizione quale partner commerciale. Se negli anni Novanta il commercio estero con la Cina era poco significativo (circa lo 0.6% nel 1990) nel 2008 il gigante asiatico aveva guadagnato la posizione di secondo socio commerciale[16]. Nel 2009 il commercio estero con la regione era salito al 9.7 % e dal 2017 è diventato il primo socio regionale in quanto alle esportazioni. Nel complesso, gli investimenti diretti sono aumentati da 25.000 milioni di dollari a 241.000, superando gli Stati Uniti.

Sebbene in un primo momento la relazione con la Cina si sia contraddistinta per la crescita in ambito commerciale (Lechini, Dussort 2020: 146-147), oltre agli interessi economici il gigante asiatico ha perseguito anche fini politici come parte di una strategia di lungo periodo mirata a rafforzare gli accordi multilaterali e la sua presenza in organismi regionali[17]. La Cina ha partecipato al gruppo di Rio, ai dialoghi con il MERCOSUR e dal 2004 è entrata in qualità di osservatore permanente dell'OEA (Organiza-

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[16] Nel 2000 lo scambio commerciale fu di 11.000 milioni di dollari, nel 2008 di 35.000 milioni di dollari e nel 2017 è stato di 259.000 milioni. Nel 2013 si registrò il record storico quando il commercio sfiorò i 274.000 milioni (Lechini, Dussort 2020: 146-147). Le esportazioni dell'America Latina verso la Cina si concentrano in prodotti agricoli e minerali.

[17] Sul multilateralismo cinese si veda (Tosone 2020).

ción de Estados Americanos), posizione che è servita ad ampliare i suoi contatti nella regione (Sideri 2009: 270).

Nel 2003 la dottrina dell'"ascesa pacifica" di Zheng Bijang, in sintesi la ricerca della pace e dell'ordine internazionale senza un'espansione esterna di tipo coloniale, rappresentò un momento importante per le relazioni con l'America Latina. L' uso dell'espressione "ascesa pacifica", divenuta comune nei discorsi dei leader cinesi, probabilmente era orientata a una costruzione linguistica discorsiva che dava una risposta alle paure occidentali della "minaccia cinese" (Fierro De Jesús 2020: 22) ma al contempo trovava anche una analogia nelle proposte dei governi progressisti della regione, che in quel momento erano in maggioranza. I richiami alla pace sono stati ricorrenti nei discorsi dei Kirchner davanti alle NU (si vedano i discorsi di Nestor e Cristina Kirchner all' ONU (Discurso de Nestor Kirchner en la ONU, 2003 e 2004)). Discurso Cristina Fernandez da Kirchner, 2008 e 2013). Altresì, il riferimento alla pace è presente in tutte le Dichiarazioni che portarono alla nascita dell'UNASUR, dove infine si auspicò per la costruzione di una zona di pace, priva di conflitti internazionali e in favore di una soluzione pacifica delle controversie (*Declaración de Cochabamba-Colocando la Piedra Fundamental para una Unión Sudamericana* 2006). In seguito, durante II Vertice della Celac del 2014, l'America Latina e i Caraibi si sono proclamati zona di pace (*II Cumbre Celac*, Havana 2014) ribadendo i tradizionali principi di politica estera basati sulla non ingerenza, il non intervento e sull'autodeterminazione dei popoli. La stessa Cina ha riconosciuto nell'America latina una forza importante per preservare la pace e lo sviluppo del mondo (*Documento sobre la Política de China Hacia América Latina y el Caribe* 2016).

Accanto a questo discorso, che trova una coincidenza di interessi fra le due regioni, non bisogna dimenticare che fin dalla sua creazione la Repubblica Popolare Cinese si è dichiarata parte dei paesi del Terzo Mondo, accanto all' America Latina e all' Africa, trovando così un elemento di identità comune. Inoltre, la Cina è libera dal peso di un passato coloniale, che al contrario grava sull'Europa, e in diverse occasioni ha ribadito che la propria ascesa non si basa sull'espansione o sull'appropriazione di territori altrui.

L'interesse della Cina per approfondire la relazione con l'America latina si è manifestato in maniera più esplicita con il primo Libro Bianco del 2008, proprio durante l'anno cruciale della crisi finanziaria che l'America Latina superò agilmente grazie alle relazioni commerciali con il gigante asiatico che permisero la continuità del ciclo virtuoso di crescita basato sulle *Commodities*. Dopo la crisi del 2008 la Cina è diventata il primo socio commerciale del Brasile (2009) del Cile (2010) e del Perù (2010), il secondo di Argentina (2008) e del Venezuela (2011) (Fierro De Jesus 2020: 29).

Al di là degli aspetti strettamente economici il primo Libro Bianco prometteva un "trattamento fra eguali" e poneva la cooperazione come pietra angolare della politica estera verso l'America Latina. Si riprometteva così di stabilire un'associazione di cooperazione Cina-America latina e Caraibi (ALC) basata su 5 principi di coesistenza pacifica: sull'uguaglianza, il beneficio mutuo (win-win), lo sviluppo condiviso, la fiducia e l'apprendimento vicendevole, ma soprattutto dichiarava di non volersi porre contro

qualcuno e di non voler escludere nessuna terza parte (*Documento sobre la Política de China Hacia América Latina y el Caribe* 2016).

La promozione della cooperazione sud-sud trovava forte riscontro nelle politiche delle sinistre latinoamericane in quel momento al potere. Si ricordi, per esempio, che la politica estera dei governi di Lula (2002-2010) assegnava un luogo prioritario alla Cooperazione Sud-Sud. E ben presto Cina e Brasile si sarebbero trovati fianco a fianco nei BRICS a condividere questi postulati.

Una svolta decisiva si ebbe proprio con l'avvento al potere di Xi Jinping nel 2012. Il governo di Xi Ping ha incoraggiato la cooperazione sud-sud e sono cresciute le associazioni strategiche (Argentina, Brasile, Cile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mesico, Perù, Uruguay e Venezuela)[18] evitando però la firma di Trattati di Libero Commercio, poco graditi dai governi progressisti in quanto considerati uno strumento di penetrazione neo-coloniale. Le associazioni strategiche stabiliscono un quadro di intesa preferenziale che, senza presupporre un'alleanza vera a propria, indicano una associazione costruttiva e progressiva e una preferenza verso i paesi con cui è stata siglata (Ríos 2019: 3).

Le teorie di Marx, Mao Zedong e il pensiero politico-morale di Confucio sono alla base del pensiero di Xi Jinping la cui ideologia "Socialismo con Caratteristiche Cinesi per una Nuova Era", è stata integrata alla Costituzione del 2017, divenendo così obbligatoria (Fierro De Jesús 2020: 22). In America Latina il pensiero di Mao non era nuovo, le sue teorie si erano diffuse in una parte delle sinistre guerrigliere della regione. Xi Jiping impresse un nuovo corso alla politica estera che, come i suoi predecessori[19], si proponeva di riconfigurare il sistema internazionale e di stabilire un nuovo ordine globale (Fierro De Jesús 2020: 13-14). Presero così vita diverse iniziative: nel 2013 fu annunciata la Belt and Road Initiative, che in seguito incorporerà anche l'America Latina, nel 2014 fu creato il Forum Celac - Cina per rinsaldare la cooperazione e nel 2015 si celebrò la prima riunione ministeriale a Beijing che rilanciò lo sforzo congiunto per promuovere la cooperazione e si concluse con l'emanazione di 3 documenti fra cui il Piano di Cooperazione 2015-2019[20].

Nel 2016 fu pubblicato il secondo Libro Bianco, un approfondimento della strategia proposta nel 2008. A differenza dalle potenze Occidentali, nel nuovo documento la Cina ha proposto un approccio che, grazie anche alla sua scelta di considerarsi un paese del terzo Mondo, ribadisce la sua disposizione ad aumentare i punti di convergenza con gli altri paesi per costruire un nuovo tipo di relazioni internazionali e forgiare "una comunità di destino dell'umanità, prendendosi per mano" (*Documento Sobre la Política de China Hacia América Latina y el Caribe* 2016). L' associazione di cooperazione integrale fra Cina e America Latina e Caraibi (ALC) si propone l'obiettivo dello sviluppo comune abbracciando il principio di non porsi contro nessuno e senza

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[18] Argentina en 2004, Brasile 1993, Cile 2004, Costa Rica 2005, Equador 2016, Messico 1997, Perù 2005, Venezuela 2014, Uruguay 2016.

[19] Continuando gli ideali dei predecessori che sostenevano l'importanza per la Cina di occupare uno spazio decisionale fondamentale nella politica internazionale (Fierro 2020, 13).

[20] Lo slogan della riunione fu "Nueva plataforma, Nuevo Punto de Partida y Nuevas Oportunidades -Esfuerzo Conjunto para promover la Asociación de Cooperación Integran China ALC". I tre documenti: *La Declaración de Beijing, El Plan de Cooperación* (2015 -2019) e le *Disposiciones Institucionales Y Reglas de Funcionamiento del Foro* (Osterloh Mejía 2018,12).

escludere terze parti, trovando così un terreno comune in entrambe le regioni. Allo stesso tempo propone una maniera di comportarsi che dimostra ai paesi in via di sviluppo di saper lavorare insieme sulla base dell'uguaglianza, della reciproca assistenza e nel rispetto del diritto dei paesi latinoamericani.

Il tema della *governance* globale che ha creato tensioni e dissidi con l'UE al contrario ha trovato nelle proposte della Cina una posizione condivisa con il progressismo latinoamericano. Infatti, il paese asiatico ha reiterato chiaramente di voler perseverare nella collaborazione internazionale promuovendo l'equità e la giustizia e si è dichiarata disposta a rafforzare il coordinamento con i paesi latinoamericani e caraibici per preservare l'ordine internazionale retto dai principi della Carta delle Nazioni Unite nel segno del multipolarismo: *"sostenere il processo di multipolarizzazione, la democrazia e la legalità delle relazioni internazionali, così come aumentare la rappresentatività e il diritto di voto dei paesi in via di sviluppo"* (Documento sobre la Política de China Hacia América Latina y el Caribe 2016, nostra la traduzione).

La ricerca di un Nuovo ordine Economico Internazionale, che come sappiamo non era di certo nuova nella regione latinoamericana, era stata infatti al centro del terzomondismo negli anni '70, ha ritrovato un nuovo vigore con i governi progressisti che, nel contesto di transizione del sistema internazionale e per rispondere ai problemi sorti con la globalizzazione hanno iniziato a richiedere un ordine internazionale multipolare, da costruirsi anche grazie alle nuove integrazioni regionali[21].

Secondo la visione di Chávez era bisognava costruire nuovi poli di potere internazionale per rompere l'egemonia unipolare nordamericana e per conseguire la giustizia sociale, la solidarietà e la pace, approfondendo il dialogo fraterno fra i popoli, la loro autodeterminazione e il rispetto delle libertà di pensiero (Linea General del Para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de la Nación 2007-2013, Caracas 2007). Il Plan de la Patria 2013-2019, che Chávez lasciò in eredità a Maduro, aveva proprio l'obiettivo di smontare il sistema neocoloniale di dominazione imperiale. Per fare ciò si rendevano necessarie alleanze utili a neutralizzare le azioni delle potenze neocoloniali all'interno degli organismi internazionali (Plan de la Patria 2013-2019: 24). Bisognava dunque ridurre le relazioni con i centri di dominazione imperiali e neocoloniali, cioè Europa e Stati Uniti, e incrementare la collaborazione con i poli emergenti del mondo[22]: la Repubblica Popolare Cinese, la Federazione Russa, il Brasile, la Bielorussia e l'Iran, per continuare a consolidare il proprio potere nazionale (Plan de la Patria 2013-2019 : 24). Si dovevano dunque intensificare i meccanismi di integrazione non solo economici ma anche politici con l'Asia e dare impulso ai fori di unione interregionale Sud-Sud con speciale enfasi nei BRICS (Plan de la Patria 2013-2019 : 24). In questa visione anche il rafforzamento di Unasur, che Chávez aveva caldeggiato, era considerato fonda-

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[21] Infatti, le nuove integrazioni regionali che sono proliferate durante i governi delle sinistre nel nuovo millennio, si sono poste come obiettivo prioritario costruire un mondo multipolare basato sull'eguaglianza fra gli stati per affrontare le sfide della globalizzazione e le sue implicite asimmetrie.

[22] Nel *Plan de la Patria* si specificava: ridurre la relazione economica e tecnologica con i centri imperiali di dominazione e ridurre intercambio commerciale e relazioni con circuiti finanziari dominati da potenze neocoloniale, così come in altri ambiti, ed effettuare la maggior parte degli scambi economici e commerciali con i poli emergenti del nuovo mondo.

mentale per realizzare un mondo multipolare (Plan de la Patria 2013-2019 : 23). Infatti Lula considerava la nascita di UNASUR, il fiore all'occhiello della sua politica estera, un passo decisivo per rafforzare il multilateralismo e per realizzare *"un mundo multipolar, equilibrado y justo"* fondato sull'uguaglianza sovrana degli stati. L'idea di giungere a un ordine internazionale multipolare è stato un punto condiviso dalle sinistre latinoamericane, non solo del socialismo del XXI secolo. Non bisogna dimenticare che in quegli anni le sinistre latinoamericane al governo gravitavano intorno al blocco pan-latino del socialismo del XXI secolo, come l'Argentina dei Kirchner, e comunque non lo osteggiavano.

Inoltre, l'obiettivo di democratizzare le relazioni internazionali non era nuovo ma era già previsto dal Grupo de Rio, foro politico dal quale prenderà vita la Celac. Anche il Pacto de Buenos Aires, siglato fra Néstor Kirchner e Lula da Silva nel 2003, che prevedeva un MERCOSUR rinnovato (con una vocazione non solo economica ma soprattutto politica e sociale) era considerato uno strumento per rafforzare l'ordine internazionale che avrebbe dovuto fondarsi sull'uguaglianza fra gli stati rifiutando qualsiasi tipo di potere unilaterale.

La critica contro l'ordine internazionale escludente era condivisa un po' da tutto l'eterogeneo universo delle sinistre che reclamavano una riforma degli organismi internazionali, alcune con posizioni moderate altre meno. Ricordiamo i ripetuti attacchi dei Kirchner contro il Fmi e la BM. Dal canto suo, il Brasile auspicava una riforma del FMI che concedesse una maggior rappresentanza dei paesi in via di sviluppo e delle economie emergenti, con la conseguente diminuzione della presenza europea (Sideri, 256)[23]. Nonostante una relazione privilegiata del Brasile con l'UE, la loro relazione non si è mai consolidata veramente[24] e venne anche ostacolata proprio dall'orientamento sud-sud della politica estera brasiliana e dai suoi legami con i BRICS con evidenti posizioni antioccidentali (Sideri 2013: 256). L'asiatizzazione dell'economia brasiliana favorì un progressivo allontanamento dall'UE che ha iniziato a percepire nel Brasile un'identità ibrida, divisa fra l'occidente e i paesi dei BRICS (Sideri 2013: 253).

Nel complesso, la richiesta di riformare il sistema di governance globale trovava consenso all'interno nei BRICS.

Così, se da una parte la Carta delle Nazioni Unite era unanimemente ratificata, dall'altra la richiesta di riforma del Consiglio di Sicurezza della N.U. è stata una costante. Paesi come il Venezuela di Chávez e la Bolivia di Morales hanno assunto una posizione fortemente critica verso le N.U. in quanto organismo considerato espressione degli interessi dei paesi ricchi. Il sogno *chavista* si spingeva ben oltre: desiderava una vera e propria rifondazione delle N.U. con sede nel sud del mondo che avrebbe portato a un cambiamento dell'ordine internazionale (LX Asamblea General de la Organización de Naciones Unidas, *"El sueño de la paz mundial necesitas alas para volar"*, Nueva York, 17 settembre 2005, in Sergio Rinaldi (ed.), La Unidad Latinoamericana,

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[23] La riforma del 2010 aveva assegnato al Brasile una quota che lo collocava fra i 10 paesi con maggior diritto al voto, con una riduzione di quella europea, ma ancora inferiore al peso reale del Brasile nell'economia mondiale (Sideri 2013: 256).

[24] Per il conflitto commerciale, le frontiere culturali, e lo scarso peso Portogallo in Europa rispetto alla Spagna si veda (Sideri 2013: 252).

Ocean Sur, Bogotà, 2006, p. 208). Altri paesi, come il Brasile, hanno adottato una posizione più moderata ma sempre in favore di una riforma che concedesse maggior rappresentanza ai paesi del sud del mondo nel CdS.

La Cina ha anche rafforzato gli sforzi diplomatici per cercare di creare un'immagine positiva in America Latina (Tussie 2019: 110-112). Come l'Europa anche la Cina ha usato la narrativa di "soci naturali" per riferirsi all' America Latina. Tuttavia, la sua strategia di lungo periodo si basa sul modello di approccio differenziato che combina diversi aspetti della cooperazione. In ambito politico sono previsti scambi di Alto Livello ma anche di esperienze di *governance*[25], in ambito sociale[26] obiettivi quali la riduzione della povertà e la cooperazione sanitaria (ambito nel quale ha dato prova di collaborazione durante la pandemia).

E' significativo che la penetrazione cinese preveda anche l'ambito culturale e umanistico per instaurare un vero dialogo fra civiltà "accrescendo la vicinanza di cuore e l'affetto fra i popoli della Cina e dell'America Latina e Caraibi" per realizzare una convivenza armoniosa, grazie a un dialogo permanente con le autorità culturali, rafforzando le interazioni in ambito sportivo, fra i mezzi di comunicazione, fra le università, fra *think tanks* e si prevedono una serie di sub-fori in aree specifiche (Libro Bianco 2016). Infatti, da alcuni anni hanno iniziato a crescere nella regione gli Istituti Confucio, sebbene la loro presenza sia ancora modesta.

Anche in campo militare si è registrato un avanzamento della presenza cinese in America latina. Nel 2015 si è tenuto un foro di logistica militare ma ben più in là dello scambio di idee fra Esercito Popolare Cinese ed eserciti latinoamericani, è significativo che siano stati donati equipaggiamenti e che sia cresciuto il numero di ufficiali invitati in Cina per completare la loro formazione (Ríos 2019, 13). Inoltre, dal 2018 esiste l'installazione di una base in Patagonia.

Nel 2017 mentre la Cina procedeva nella sua ambiziosa strategia di collaborazione verso la regione, il Foro UE-Celac languiva nel nulla; nel 2018 l'America Latina partecipava alla Seconda Riunione Ministeriale del Foro Cina-Celac durante la quale furono firmati memorandum di intesa, un piano d'azione dettagliato per il 2019-2021 e la creazione di una grande linea di trasporto transoceanica che si articolava con il progetto aprendo la 'Nuova via della seta'.

Conclusioni

Sebbene gli anni '80 siano generalmente considerati come un momento di svolta positivo per le relazioni fra America Latina ed Unione Europea e negli anni '90 l'Europa abbia sviluppato un approccio originale con la regione, con la fine del blocco sovietico, la globalizzazione e l'inizio di una fase di transizione nel sistema internazionale, si è rafforzata una narrazione anticoloniale e un'immagine dell'Europa come potenza imperialista al lato degli Stati Uniti e poco favorevole alla democratizzazione

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[25] Meccanismi intergovernativi di dialogo e consulta, intercambio fra gli organi legislativi intercambio fra partiti politici e fra i governi regionali (Libro Bianco 2016).

[26] Include la *governance*, le politiche sociali, la riduzione della povertà, ambiente e cambiamento climatico e la cooperazione sanitaria (Libro Bianco 2016).

degli organismi internazionali. Lo sviluppo delle narrazioni anticolonialiste promosse da alcune sinistre al governo possono aver creato una tensione soggiacente che si è aggiunta alle ragioni più profonde del distanziamento fra le due regioni. Dal canto suo, l'Europa ha proposto una narrazione retorica fondata su una naturale "alleanza storica" mostrando di non conoscere a fondo la storia e le nuove dinamiche interne dell'America Latina e non ha promosso sufficienti politiche, anche culturali, per favorire l'avvicinamento. Al contrario, la Cina si è proposta come un paese del sud del mondo, pacifista e con i medesimi obiettivi di governance e democratizzazione del sistema internazionale multipolare e prevede di sviluppare le relazioni con la regione in ogni ambito.

Le elezioni del 2021 -2022 hanno riportato i governi dell'America Latina verso sinistra, come sempre si tratta di un panorama composito di diverse sinistre, alcune nuove, come Boric in Cile – e Petro in Colombia, che prendono le distanze dalle vecchie opzioni *caudilliste* e antidemocratiche che, al contrario, sono rimaste al potere in Venezuela, Cuba e Nicaragua; in Brasile è ritornato al potere Lula mentre Morena è stata riconfermata al governo del Messico nel giugno del '24. Queste sinistre si trovano in un contesto diverso dal precedente, in paesi fortemente polarizzati dove sono cresciute nuove destre patriotiche – radicali[27], che in alcuni casi sono arrivate al potere come in Argentina e in El Salvador. Si tratta di destre antiglobaliste e avverse al multilateralismo, che sono fortemente vincolate con i partiti affini europei, con Vox in particolare, sovraniste e poco inclini all'UE (Bertaccini 2024).

Se da una parte il vertice Ue-Celac celebrato nel 2023 dopo otto anni di silenzio potrebbe preludere a un nuovo inizio delle relazioni fra le due regioni, dall'altra i BRICS hanno acquisito rinnovata rilevanza all'interno del convulso scenario internazionale e per volere della Cina aspirano ad ampliarsi includendo nuovi membri, anche in America Latina. Dal canto suo la Russia ha assunto, ormai da tempo, un ruolo geostrategico in America Latina con una presenza attiva sia attraverso un'intensa diplomazia presidenziale in ambito multilaterale, come nei Brics, sia attraverso accordi militari di carattere geostrategico (Grabendoff 2018, 60).

Recentemente la Cina ha dichiarato davanti all'Assemblea Generale delle N.U. che si considera parte del Sud Globale e che si identifica con gli obiettivi e le sfide dei paesi meno sviluppati, offrendosi di fatto come un'alternativa all'egemonia occidentale (AP news 2023). La cooperazione sud -sud e la vicinanza dei paesi all'interno BRICS ha portato i paesi latinoamericani ad assumere in alcune occasioni comportamenti non sempre chiari nei confronti dei valori liberali occidentali, e in altre ad appoggiare governi autoritari.

Bisognerà attendere per vedere come si svilupperanno le relazioni con la Cina, e la Russia, in un'America Latina che da alcuni anni vive un regresso democratico, dimostrando poco rispetto per lo stato di diritto e i diritti umani che dovrebbero essere al centro dei valori condivisi con l'Europa e dell'internazionalismo liberale.

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[27] Sulle nuove destre latinoamericane e le sue connessioni internazionali si veda (Bertaccini 2024).

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Book Reviews

Juliette Charbonneaux (2022). *L'Europe face à l'épidémie. Comparaisons et sentiments médiatiques.* **Paris : Les petits matins, 144 pp[1].**

Francesca Bisiani

L'ouvrage de Juliette Charbonneaux s'intéresse à la production du discours médiatique français pendant la période de pandémie de covid 19. Par une approche sémio-discursive, elle propose notamment d'examiner le processus de représentation de la crise sanitaire qui ressort des pratiques comparatives des médias français. Il s'agit de saisir la narration autour de la pandémie sous le prisme des récits qui suggèrent une comparaison entre les États, ce qui contribue, d'après l'autrice, à la construction progressive d'un imaginaire supranational européen.

Pour appréhender ce travail, réalisé pendant la pandémie, J. Charbonneaux s'appuie sur des énoncés tirés de la presse, des sites d'information en ligne, des émissions de radio ou de la télévision (p. 15). La construction du corpus est envisagée à partir d'une position volontairement de « lectrice non spécialiste » qui s'intéresse aux informations autour de la santé en France et en Europe (p. 15) avec une focalisation particulière sur les titres et sur les dispositifs comparatifs proposés par les médias (ex. les cartes graphiques). La méthode se veut qualitative - n'utilise donc pas un traitement informatique du corpus - et ne précise pas certains éléments de délimitation du corpus, chronologiques ou énonciatifs, ce qui limite l'interprétation des observables. Cela dit, les conditions d'analyse des données bénéficient d'une hétérogénéité d'énoncés reliée à des signes iconiques qui permettent de relever plusieurs facteurs de structuration de la narration médiatique en temps de covid-19.

L'ouvrage est structuré en trois parties. La première se focalise sur différents éléments sémiotiques, cartes, chiffres, graphiques, noms propres, qui concourent, par le recensement des morts aux stratégies vaccinales, à alimenter la comparaison transnationale entre les situations pandémiques en Europe. Le recours aux représentations chiffrées et au discours expert, qui renforce la légitimité de l'information donnée, contribue à répondre au besoin de « transparence » de la société dans la gestion de la crise (p.28). Ce type de récits parvient également à observer, par la comparaison, le cas de la France lors de la pandémie. L'autrice constate un « jeu équilibriste » (p.39) des médias qui passent des constats dramatiques liés aux échecs des stratégies mises en place pour limiter la propagation du virus à sa glorification par exemple au moment de la mise en place du passeport vaccinal. À ce propos, il serait important, à notre sens, de mettre en avant la possible intersection, voire influence, entre les discours politique et journalistique. Est-ce que cette évolution ne serait-elle pas liée à la

Francesca Bisiani, Université Catholique de Lille, francesca.bisiani@univ-catholille.fr
[1] La numérotation des pages correspond à la version e-book de l'ouvrage.

nécessité d'imposer des mesures spécifiques exceptionnelles, telles que les confinements ou la vaccination obligatoire ? Bien qu'une étude quantitative comparative et diachronique pourrait soutenir davantage cette hypothèse (p. 40-43), les énoncés reportés ici semblent suggérer cette piste. Il ne s'agit pas de considérer la presse comme vecteur d'un marketing politique, mais de souligner la non-opposition qui existe entre l'action politique et l'action d'informer (voir Chareadeau, 2007).

La deuxième partie s'ouvre avec une analyse sur la prolifération dans les médias des instruments d'évaluation. Plusieurs expressions et formules laissent entrevoir un désir de concurrence et de classement. L'autrice cite par exemple, la tendance à désigner des gagnants, voire des champions, ou des perdants pendant la course à la vaccination. Elle montre également la mise en place d'autres figures métaphoriques récurrentes comme celle de l'institution scolaire où les pays deviennent, dans une vision hiérarchique, de bons ou mauvais élèves (p. 51 et s.) ou encore des « modèles » à suivre ou à contester (p. 57 et s.). Dans cette perspective, un autre aspect intéressant qui soulève J. Charbonneaux est le retour de la vision stéréotypée des rapports (p. 70) entre les pays du Nord et du Sud. Elle évoque notamment l'appellation des « Frugal Four », utilisée largement dans la presse, qui renvoie aux quatre pays européens – l'Autriche, le Danemark, les Pays-Bas et la Suède – s'opposant au plan de relance européen. Aux pays du Nord peu solidaires s'oppose dans la presse une Europe du Sud encore une fois fragilisée et dépendant du tourisme. Cette élaboration dans le discours de presse ne fait que conférer encore plus, pour utiliser une notion que l'on emprunt à Marie Veniard (2013 : 22), un « sens social » à l'évènement. Par un travail de signification sémantique qui remémore le clivage Nord/Sud de la crise 2008 et 2020-21, les récits médiatiques participent à figer dans l'imaginaire collectif une représentation de l'Europe partitionnée et, surtout, de la France qui « se voit attribuer une place médiane et, somme toute assez confortable » (p. 79). À cet égard, nous souhaiterions spécifier que, tel que l'explique dans une perspective historique Jorge Villaverde, si les stéréotypes sont une pratique souvent humoristique de se rapporter à l'autre « dans les moments de crise, ils émergent et servent d''agglutinateurs sociaux' qui permettent de créer un consensus et prendre des mesures exceptionnelles ». (Villaverde Crisol, 2016). Ce processus de caractérisation nationale lié à la pandémie et les parallélismes avec les crises antérieures semblent non seulement participer à la cristallisation des imaginaires, mais aussi, tel qu'on l'avait évoqué auparavant à une volonté politique de recherche du consentement collectif que l'on souhaite obtenir dans l'urgence.

La troisième et dernière partie propose de comprendre le rôle des modalités comparatives de la presse dans la structuration d'un imaginaire supranational européen. Au-delà de la comparaison entre États européens, l'autrice observe la confrontation internationale qui mène généralement à une idée unifiée de l'Europe face à la crise sanitaire. Elle se penche notamment sur l'expression « Europe de la santé » qui circule abondamment dans la presse et qui devient une « formule », au sens d'Alice Krieg-Planque (2003 : 23). L'expression, à dimension politique, semble donc s'imposer dans l'espace public et fait l'objet de discussions et de débats. Il en résulte que le dis-

cours journalistique participe de la représentation d'un espace supranational partagé et parvient à soutenir, et à publiciser, le projet politique d'un modèle commun européen en matière de santé. J. Charbonneaux poursuit sa réflexion par l'analyse de deux autres notions, la « solidarité » et la « souveraineté » (p. 96 et s.) qui émergent dans le discours et qui encouragent la nécessité d'affirmer une identité supranationale. Dans le premier cas, l'analyse prouve l'existence d'un positionnement émotionnel des médias, qui encore une fois, par des oscillations entre la préoccupation et l'espoir, soutiennent la cohésion interétatique sur le plan européen. Dans le deuxième cas, les récits autour de la crise appellent à renouveler le projet d'une « souveraineté européenne ». Ce terme, bien que flou dans le contexte sanitaire, apparait dans une pluralité d'énoncés et entraîne parfois des glissements sémantiques vers les concepts d'« autonomie stratégique » et de « leadership » (p. 112 et s.). L'idée d'une Europe indépendante, surtout du point de vue économique, sur la scène internationale, notamment face aux deux compétiteurs principaux, les États-Unis et la Chine fonctionne comme un « opérateur identitaire » (p. 118) qui vise à définir les enjeux et les objectifs communs.

En conclusion, cet ouvrage envisage la représentation médiatique de la crise en Europe comme possible élément de médiation et de configuration d'une identité supranationale. La démarche suivie permet de dégager des pratiques comparatistes, sur le plan national et international, et des jugements de valeur qui permettent de relever le rôle politique du discours médiatique. Les expressions récurrentes, notamment les métaphores compétitives et connotant le classement, démontrent, tel que l'explique l'autrice, une conception politique et économique de l'Europe, de type capitaliste, proche de celle macronienne.

Cet ouvrage nous semble apporter une réflexion significative sur le rôle des médias français dans l'écriture de la pandémie et de la gestion de la crise par les institutions nationales et supranationales. Remarquons toutefois qu'il s'agit d'une étude sur l'Europe qui reste liée à une vision française des faits, ce qui est précisé dans l'ouvrage, mais qu'il conviendrait d'expliciter clairement y compris dans le titre de l'ouvrage et, si l'on prend en compte également les éléments iconiques, dans l'image de couverture. Ces réserves ne dissuaderont pas les lectrices et les lecteurs de lire cette belle étude qui met en évidence des stratégies discursives à travers lesquelles se construit et se diffuse dans l'espace public le discours médiatique, et politique, en temps de crise.

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Andrea Geniola e Deborah Paci (a cura di) (2022). *Sulle tracce della Comunità immaginata. Identità e istituzioni nell'Europa degli Stati nazionali.* **Trezzano sul Naviglio (MI): UNICOPLI, 231 pp.**

Alon Helled

Raramente un libro ha cambiato la percezione degli studi su nazione e nazionalismo come il classico volume di Benedict Anderson (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (tradotto e pubblicato in italiano per la prima volta nel 1996 dalla casa editrice *manifestolibri*) alimentando al contempo un dibattito accademico così intenso. A quasi quarant'anni dalla sua pubblicazione, Andrea Geniola e Deborah Paci hanno raccolto e curato un sorprendente insieme di saggi il cui comune denominatore è il punto intermedio degli insegnamenti di Anderson, sia come ricezione e utilizzo delle sue teorie, sia come aggiornamento e disanima di casi studio più o meno noti.

Il volume s'inaugura con una prefazione scritta dallo storico contemporaneista Rolf Petri (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), che aggiorna e reinquadra il dibattito a proposito della valenza storicopolitica e socioculturale - e di conseguenza anche psicocognitiva--della nazione come categoria politica, ovverosia come un dispositivo condizionante, strutturante e rigenerante della nostra contemponeità, sebbene esso sia stato dato per ampiamente superato da predizioni "assolutiste" di fronte ai processi di globalizzazione e di integrazione sovranazionale. Petri quindi introduce gli undici contributi del libro che spaziano dalla considerazione di specifiche situazioni locali e regionali a quella generale del contesto internazionale, rilevante in particolare in Europa e per l'Europa, in quanto la storia del 'vecchio mondo' è rimasto il laboratorio di nazionalismi *par excellence*.

Il primo saggio, *Lo spatial turn e lo studio del nazionalismo. Dalla costruzione delle identità regionali agli approcci transnazionali* dello storico Eric Storm (Universiteit Leiden) fornisce una panoramica dell'impatto prodotto dallo *spatial turn*, - cioè dallo spostamento dell'unità di analisi della 'nazione' oltre alla sua specificità territoriale e politica-, alla luce della globalizzazione, non soltanto come sfera di azione del capitalismo, ma anche delle politiche della *devolution*, della geopolitica. Tutti questi andamenti globali non si sono articolati *in abstracto*, bensì hanno fatto sì che le diverse regioni e le loro identità territoriali continuassero, e continuino, a costituire un fattore sulla scena (*inter*)nazionale. Di conseguenza, Storm ci invita a studiare comparativamente le identità nazionali senza isolare i processi di *nation-building* che le originarono (rinunciando quindi al nazionalismo metodologico), né isolarle dallo scenario generale, spesso trasformativo delle stesse identità in questione.

Alon Hellad, Università di Torino, alon.hellad@unito.it

Il secondo saggio *Francia: Giacobinismo e 'petites Patries'*, elaborato dalla studiosa francese Anne-Marie Thiesse (CNRS-Paris), ci introduce un caso-studio: la costruzione stato-nazionale francese. La Thiesse esamina la nozione di *petite patrie*, "piccola patria", che è stata sovente impiegata nei discorsi patriottici e pedagogici in Francia al fine di garantire un repubblicanesimo statocentrico.La sua analisi contrasta empiricamente la vulgata francese- altamente omologante e omogenizzante - mostrando che il regionalismo è stato un fattore, nonché un vettore, decisivo nel processo di costruzione della nazione francese, e conseguentemente, dev'essere esaminato nel contesto transnazionale della modernità politica e culturale)il che rafforza il contenuto della prefazione del volume).

Seguono due saggi francesi: *La Fin des Territoirs? La storiografia sul Midi francese quarant'anni dopo l'opera di Weber* di Francesca Zantedeschi, in cui si contestualizza la patrimonializzazione delle lingue regionali portata a termine dallo Stato nazionale francese implicando la loro nazionalizzazione verso la modernità dei tempi, senza che fossero riconosciute oltre al loro ruolo folcloristico e simbolico; e poi, il saggio di Deborah Paci, *La "Comunità Immaginata" Corsa (1974-1984). Il nazionalismo nello sguardo dei contemporanei*, in cui pesa e contrappesa testi politicoletterari che dimostrano contesti e pretesti dell'identità corsa fino alla "guerra fratricida" tra i nazionalisti essenzialisti e isolazionisti e coloro che ritennero possibile la doppia identificazione di appartenenza, corsa e francese.

Il volume prosegue, oltrepassando i Pirenei, portando il lettore nella penisola iberica, dove César Rina Simón (Universidad de Extremadura(analizza la costruzione di immagini e riferimenti caratteristici degli Stati-nazioni portoghese e spagnolo attraverso la vasta letteratura di viaggio prodotta all'interno della penisola iberica, nel suo saggio intitolato *Viaggiatori attraverso L'Iberia. La costruzione degli imagotipi nazionali nella Penisola iberica (1868-1920)*. Rina Simón enfatizza il ruolo della letterature di viaggio nella dialettica tra le narrazioni di unità/alterità e i processi di definizione delle basi di due nazioni "sorelle". Il saggio di Andrea Geniola, *Spain Id Different: Immaginare la patria attraverso la regione nella Spagna degli anni Sessanta*, si addentra nella dimensione sub-statale dello stato-nazionalismo, nella declinazione regionale, e spesso anche locale, dell'identità nazionale coincidente con i confini dello stato nazionale spagnolo e le sue relative narrazioni il decennio *desarrollista* dell'epoca franchista. Egli mostra che, in Spagna, la regione, il locale, la *petite patrie* sono state chiamate a supportare le glorie della Grande Patria, e furono nazionalizzati e integrati in varia misura, non dissimilmente rispetto ad altri stati-nazione europei.

Dall'Europa continentale il lettore, poi, si confronta con il contributo di Cecilia Biaggi, *La Minoranza Cattolica in Irlanda del Nord e la Boundary Commission*, che contestualizza il nesso tra nazionalismo e religione in un caso-studio conflittuale, le cui cicatrici permangono tra due Stati, la Repubblica d'Irlanda e il Regno Unito, ma anche all'interno delle comunità religiose che vi abitano. Dopo aver esaminato un caso europeo *sui generis*, il percorso prosegue col saggio di Chris Kostov *Macedonia, Il Pomo della Discordia Balcanico*, un caso extra-Unione europea, ma ampiamente europeo, dal momento che attraversa il massimo esempio della violenza

nazionalistica del Novecento. Kostov esamina gli storici macedoni, che a partire dal secondo dopoguerra cercarono di appropriarsi di tutti i governanti e intellettuali bulgari medievali e del XIX secolo per dimostrare la continuità della nazione e della lingua macedone. Si sofferma sul dibattito storico tra tre paesi antagonisti, ossia FYROM, Grecia e Bulgaria. Gli ultimi due provarono a negare l'esistenza di un'identità etnica macedone, mentre i macedoni negarono il loro passato non macedone. Identità e alterità che condizionano l'Europa e la sua integrazione.

Dopo i casi-studio "contemporanei", il lettore si tuffa nel passato con due contributi storiografici alquanto singolari. Giovanni Savino ci porta a riflettere sul nazionalismo russo nel suo saggio *Tra Impero e Nazione. Russkoe Sobranie e le origini del nazionalismo russo (1900-1914)*. Attraverso le vicende della prima organizzazione politica d'area monarichico-nazionalista, la *Russkoe Sobranie*, Savino storicizza il tessuto ideologico-culturale della vita russa che diede vita a formazioni successive, prima del crollo dell'ordine imperiale. Non dissimile è l'intento di Alexander Maxwell nel suo *La Nazionalità Multipla Ungaro-Slava e Le 'Comunità Immaginate' di Benedict Anderson*. Egli si sofferma in particolare sul caso del nazionalismo slavo del XIX secolo nelle contee settentrionali del Regno d'Ungheria, esaminando criticamente il nesso tra "nazione", "sovranità" e "statualità", così centrale nel pensiero di Anderson.

Il saggio di Pedro Ponte e Sousa, *Benedict Anderson e Le Relazioni Internazionali alla luce dei Nuovi Approcci Teorici*, conclude il volume. Lo studioso portoghese non fa sconti alla teoria andersoniana, ma stabilisce un itinerario - introduttivo - delle possibili interazioni tra essa e le proposte teoriche delle Relazioni internazionali. Tale itinerario aggrega, grazie alla cura dei due curatori del volume, i contenuti casistici e lo sguardo delle discipline storico-sociali, esemplificando il nazionalismo e lo studio che cerca di decifrarlo, come un pilastro, talvolta sottovalutato, della nostra stessa contemporaneità.

Book Recommendations

Matteo Gerli (2022). *L'Europa della conoscenza. Politica della ricerca e scienze sociali in prospettiva transnazionale*. **Milano: FrancoAngeli, 368 pp.**

I programmi quadro comunitari costituiscono un'opportunità rilevante per la ricerca e l'innovazione scientifica perché capaci di creare network di studiosi, competenze e discipline e perché fonte di finanziamenti indispensabili agli studi e alle professionalità coinvolte. Ai programmi europei sono dedicati ormai diversi testi e approfondimenti ma, soprattutto a livello italiano, ancora in larga parte inesplorata rimane l'indagine sull'esistenza di un collegamento tra processo di costruzione comunitaria e ricerca scientifica. Il volume si pone l'obiettivo di colmare questa lacuna attraverso un percorso di ricerca fondato su una "triangolazione" tra le prospettive sociologiche relative ai processi culturali e comunicativi, alla formazione e circolazione delle idee e della conoscenza e all'integrazione europea.

Il libro si occupa specificatamente di un'area scientifico-disciplinare, quella delle scienze sociali, il cui ruolo emerge sia in relazione alla loro applicabilità, sia come riserva di significati e di artefatti empirici a supporto della costruzione di uno "spazio pubblico europeo".

Abstracts and Keywords

L'Ucraina e il nazionalismo russo in prospettiva diacronica
Giovanni Savino

Il presente saggio esamina le posizioni storiche del nazionalismo russo d'inizio Novecento riguardo all'Ucraina, rilevando come Vladimir Putin e l'attuale leadership russa utilizzino alcune interpretazioni per legittimare l'intervento militare e contestare la legittimità dello Stato ucraino. Nel saggio si analizzano vari riferimenti storici e ideologici, dall'eredità dell'Impero Russo all'Unione Sovietica, mostrando come la narrazione russa attuale sia influenzata da un ventaglio di rielaborazioni e reinterpretazioni del passato per rafforzare la visione di un'Ucraina come parte integrante della Russia. Il saggio discute anche l'influenza di pensatori come Ivan Il'in e Aleksandr Solženicyn nella formazione delle idee contemporanee russe, concludendo che l'attuale politica russa è un tentativo di riaffermare una presunta unità storica che, secondo il Cremlino, è stata spezzata dalla Rivoluzione del 1917 e dal crollo dell'URSS.

Parole chiave: Ucraina, nazionalismo russo, Vladimir Putin, identità, memoria

This essay examines the historical positions of early 20th-century Russian nationalism regarding Ukraine, highlighting how Vladimir Putin and the current Russian leadership utilize certain interpretations to legitimize military intervention and challenge the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state. The essay analyzes various historical and ideological references, from the legacy of the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union, demonstrating how contemporary Russian narratives are influenced by a range of reworkings and reinterpretations of the past to reinforce the view of Ukraine as an integral part of Russia. The essay also discusses the influence of thinkers like Ivan Ilyin and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in shaping contemporary Russian ideas, concluding that current Russian policy is an attempt to reassert a supposed historical unity that, according to the Kremlin, was disrupted by the 1917 Revolution and the collapse of the USSR.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russian nationalism, Vladimir Putin, identity, memory

Historical Roots of the Russo-Ukrainian War
Lara Piccardo

Since 24 February 2022, an exhausting local war begins with huge global impacts: in addition to the disastrous consequences in terms of loss of human life and material damage, especially in Ukrainian territory, there are heavy repercussions in agriculture and food, energy, economic and political fields. Diplomacy is struggling and solutions seem far to be found. The reason for this diplomatic stalemate lies in the Russian elite's unwillingness to sit with conviction at the negotiating table and the lack of a minimum common denominator on which to start working. In addition to contingent problems such as Ukraine's pro-European positions and its hypothesized annexation to NATO, unwelcome to Moscow, the unresolved issue of Donbass, which has been dragging on for 10 years now, the annexation of Crimea, the question of energy supplies and gas pipelines, as well as broader international scenarios, which also involve Washington and Beijing (and not only), the profound reasons for the conflict lie in a complex and mix of ethnic, territorial, geopolitical and economic problems, which have increased in the area over the of history. Explaining and understanding them means providing a diagnosis not only of the war, but also and above all of the arcane causes that underlie it. The article reconstructs four salient moments of Ukrainian history, which represent as many fundamental turning points for determining the profound reasons for this war: the birth of Kievan Rus', in medieval times; the creation of several Ukrainian republics during the Russian Revolutions and civil war; some of the problems of independent Ukraine born with the dissolution of the USSR; finally, the emergence of the reasons for the Euromaidan crisis in 2013-2014. Each of these phases reveals, with different intensity, how Ukraine is subject to incessantly changing its dimensions, how fragile its identity is and how its independence has always been precarious.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russo-Ukraine war, historical roots, frozen conflicts

Casus Belli: NATO Enlargement to Eastern Europe as a Justification for Russian Aggression to Ukraine
Claudio Catalano

Russia claims that the Ukraine crisis stemmed from NATO enlargement to Russia's neighbouring countries. The idea is that the United States and its Allies had broken a promise not to expand NATO and the European Union in Central and Eastern Europe, as stated by Russian President Putin at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. However, more interestingly, since the mid-1990s the debate on NATO expansion as a threat to Russia often resurfaces in Western political thought in periods of crisis with Russia. This article will uncover, by examining the historical events and documents, that there was never such a promise not to expand NATO, while the only existing promise made by NATO was not to deploy nuclear weapons in Central and Eastern Europe.

Keywords: Russia, NATO, European Union Enlargement, Cold War, NATO-Russia negotiations

Internal and External Factors of Putin's War on Ukraine
Mara Morini

In literature it has been widely debated that domestic politics and international relations are often somehow entangled to the extent that it is quite difficult "whether domestic politics really determines international relations, or the reverse" (Putnam 1988:423). In this respect, the study of the Russian invasion in Ukraine can offer an opportunity to better understand the relationship between domestic and external factors that have determined Vladimir Putin's choice to attack the Ukrainian territory. So far, studies have interpreted "Putin'war" as a nostalgic choice based on the will to restore former imperial glories to unify the Russian peoples denying, at the same time, the Ukranians' right to live in an independent State (Kuzio 2022; Zaporozhchenko 2024). Other scholars argued that the Russian invasion was mainly the effect to the Western policies – especially the NATO enlargement – perceived as a security threat by the Kremlin (Maersheimer 2014).
What it is still missing in literature is an analysis, which combine the main domestic reasons - _i.e._ Putin's personality and ideology, the institutional design, the legacies of the historical and cultural traditions – as well as the role played by the external factors (NATO, EU, the US) in determining Russia's reaction against Ukraine.
Consequently, this article aims at describing the main reasons why Putin decided to attack Ukraine and challenge the West trying to analyze both the domestic situation and the international environment, which constitutes the political background of the Russian war.
Such an approach will allow a wider overview of the multiple factors – domestic and international –, which provoked the war bearing in mind that some of the findings in this study should be seen as suggestive rather than conclusive.

Keywords: Putinism, Ukraine, Russian Foreign Policy, Eurasia

The Russian-Speaking Minority in Ukraine and the Russian Invasion
Cecilia Frego

Various ethnic and linguistic minority groups live within the borders of Ukraine. The management of these minorities has led to tensions, which seemed to be resolved partly due to Ukraine's adherence to international treaties ensuring their protection. Among these diverse minority groups, the Russian-speaking population needs special attention. By Russian-speaking, we mean anyone who uses Russian as their preferred language, regardless of their ethnic background and political preferences. The presence of such a high number of Russian speakers became problematic from 2014 onward, when the use of the Ukrainian language took on a more pronounced political significance, and the divide with the rest of the Russian-speaking world became more apparent. This divide was evident through Ukraine's political choice to align with the Euro-Atlantic world and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The situation became even more complex following the Russian attack on February 24, 2022, which exacerbated tensions and moved away from the prospect of a peaceful resolution. In the first part of the article, a definition of Russian-speaking minorities is provided, with data justifying the choice to focus on the linguistic factor instead of relying solely on ethnicity. The second part historically explains the presence of minorities in Ukraine. The third part analyzes the situation of Russian speakers from the time of Ukraine's independence to the present by examining the Ukrainian constitution and regulations related to minority management. It also considers the reports, comments, and opinions of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee of Experts on the Application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The goal was to trace how the situation of Russian speakers in Ukraine changed over time, with a particular emphasis on issues arising from the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Keywords: minority, language, Russian-speaking, Ukraine, protection

The Road to Strategic Autonomy: Reflections from the Russia-Ukraine War
Matteo Mazziotti di Celso, Mattia Sguazzini

Since 2016, the European Union (EU)'s ambitions to become more autonomous from the US have sparked intensified debate. Academics hold contrasting perspectives on the EU's potential for achieving strategic autonomy. The prevailing view suggests that the EU's road to strategic autonomy is hindered by two main challenges: strategic cacophony – *i.e.*, the presence of continent-wide divergences across national threat perceptions – and severe military capacity shortfalls. The Ukrainian war acts as a proving ground to explore the consistency of these assertions, as the EU reacted to a conventional military threat to its security. In this article, we analyse in detail the EU's response to the conflict, with a focus on three key aspects: the initiatives undertaken by both the EU and individual member states aimed at undermining Russia and supporting Ukraine; the public opinion's stance on major issues concerning the war; and the adaptation of military policies. Across all these facets, the article analyses cross-country and cross-time variations. The initial analysis reveals that the strategic cacophony persists but has not prevented the EU from implementing a substantially cohesive response to the war, at least for now. Regarding military deficit, the analysis shows that many European countries, especially in the South, have not reacted by addressing their military capabilities shortfalls. The article contributes to the debate on the strategic autonomy of the EU by providing empirical analysis that allows for robust assessment of the leading hypotheses developed within this scholarly discourse.

Keywords: strategic autonomy, European Union, European defence, Russia-Ukraine war

L'America Latina fra Unione Europea e Cina. Verso una de-occidentalizzazione?
Tiziana Bertaccini

L'articolo apre uno spazio di riflessione sulla tensione generata dalle narrazioni anticoloniali latinoamericane che soggiace alla relazione con l'Unione Europea. Durante questo millennio le narrazioni anticoloniali proposte dai governi di alcune sinistre latinoamericane hanno riprodotto l'immagine di un'Europa come potenza imperialista e una narrazione della storia opposta a quella proposta dall'Europa. Nello spazio lasciato vuoto dall'allontanamento fra le due regioni si è inserita la Cina che, libera da un passato coloniale, si considera parte del sud globale identificandosi con le sfide e gli obiettivi dei paesi meno sviluppati, trovando affinità ideologiche in America Latina dove potrebbe essere un'alternativa all'egemonia occidentale.

Parole chiave: America Latina e Unione Europea, Cina e America Latina, narrazioni anticoloniali

The article's purpose is to reflect on the turmoil produced by Latin American anti-colonial narratives directed towards the European Union. From the start of the 21st century anti-colonial narratives proposed by some left-wing Latin American governments have generated an imperialist image of Europe, opposed to the historical narrative proposed by Europe itself. China, freed from a colonial past, has taken advantage of the estrangement between Latin America and Europe. It considers itself part of the global south, aligning its goals and challenges with those of less developed countries. This alignment has led to ideological similarities with Latin America, presenting a possible alternative to Western hegemony.

Keywords: Latin America and European Union, China and Latin America, anti-colonial narrations