

3 **BIG EUROPE'S GAP: DYNAMIC OBSTACLES FOR INTEGRATION BETWEEN EUROPEAN UNION AND EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION**

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of a 'Big United Europe' was among the ideas that defined the political transformation of the European nations between Dublin and Vladivostok for some time. De Gaulle's 'Europe from Atlantics to the Urals' and Gorbachev's 'Europe as Common House' are a few expressions of this concept in recent years. However, the significance of this idea has shifted from the utopian vision of several dreamers to a project being realized by major political and economic institutions. The present generation has survived this last great cycle between 1989 and 2014. The fall of the Berlin Wall has made it possible once again to make 'Big Europe' united in and by the Council of Europe; the Crimean annexation, the start of the Donbass war, and the introduction of sanctions against each other by the EU and Russia have marked just another period of United Europe's decline.

In a nutshell, Big Europe is the idea of European integration as "transformatory goal of bringing together the continent on the basis of peace and justice".¹ This transformation envisions a deep and comprehensive change in the ways how states, economies and societies function to ensure stable peace and practicable justice.

The current crisis of the Big Europe is a result of processes constituted by dynamic obstacles of integration of EU member states with their neighbors in the East. The nations of European Union and those of Eastern Europe/Western Eurasia have evolved in different directions: the sociopolitical dynamic in these two European sub-regions has become incongruous in the last 15 years. After World War II the chances for war among EU member states have decreased. Rule of law and political freedoms are fundamental for member states of EU. Trade and other economic ties among EU member states have grown and strengthened since the 1950s. Even though Brexit endangered EU's unity, it may well lead to even greater integration on the western part of the European continent. At the same time, the number and depth of conflicts have grown in Eastern Europe; the integration

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¹ R. Sakwa, 'The Death of Europe? Continental Fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91(3), p. 553.

projects were and are failing; the intra- and inter-national institutions, practices and agents have supported neither democratic development nor stable socioeconomic growth. Consequently, the European continent is split in two antagonistic integration projects: (1) the European Union of states based on the rule of law, the international peace, an inclusive society, as well as the practice of human rights, and (2) the Eurasian Economic Union consisting of aging authoritarian regimes with societies and economies in deepening crises.

Before the Crimean and Donbass crises, the existence of the two integration projects were expected to support the process of integration between different macro-regions of Big Europe, EU and EAEU. In addition to its steadily increasing integration, the EU came up with the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to create a soft integration project eastward. In 2004 ENP involved the post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova in deepening cooperation with EU. In 2009 the EU made a next step to deepen the integration with its Eastern European neighbors and launched the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP). The EaP's strategy was that – by applying the EU model of regulation and governance – all participating partners would benefit from modernization of their economies and political systems.² It was definitely a step ahead in the direction to One Europe.

Those countries that were not involved in ENP/EaP framework were also trying to integrate. The Commonwealth of Independent States, which emerged on the ruins of USSR, was never a working project for integration in the East. After many integration attempts by the end of 2010 the elites of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia have come up with the idea of Eurasian Union, which would simplify customs policies, increase economic integration and promote the political intersects of the post-Soviet regimes.

Leaders of the Eurasian Economic Union were initially quite articulate about the possibility of integration between EU and EAEU within the future United Europe. In 2011 Vladimir Putin, the then prime minister of Russia, wrote that the Eurasian Union would be using the same integration practices as the European Union.³ Furthermore, he assured that in the near future it would have been Eurasian Union, not national states in the East that would have been major partners for EU.⁴ Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbaev, one of the founders of the Eurasian integration idea, called it 'an open project' that aims

2 For a deeper analysis of the European Neighborhood Policy's impact on integration processes in Eastern Europe please refer to: S. Lightfoot, S. Szent-Iványi & K. Wolczuk, 'Mesmerized by Enlargement: The EU's Eastern Neighborhood Policy and New Member State Transition Experience', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, No. 20, 2016, pp. 1-21; M. Minakov, 'Overcoming European Extremes. Towards One European Neighborhood', in *Rebuilding Neighborhood: Heinrich Boell Stiftung – EU Special Issue*, 2016, available at: <<https://eu.boell.org/en/2016/06/22/overcoming-european-extremes-towards-one-european-neighborhood>> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

3 V. Putin, 'Novyi integratsyonnyi proekt dlia Evrazii – budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia' (New Integration Project for Eurasia – A Future That Gets Born Today), *Evraziiskaia Integratsiia*, No. 10, 2011, pp. 10 *et seq.*

4 Id., p. 13.

to cooperate with European Union.⁵ These statements were made yet before the formal establishment of EAEU (founding documents were signed in 2014 with enforcement as of 1 January 2015). There were also a number of publications by Russian, Kazakhstan and Belarussian experts that the Eurasian Economic Union would increase chances for the realization of the Big Europe project.⁶ At a certain moment, Turkey was also looking at Eurasian Union as a possibility for some sort of European integration in absence of the possibility to become a EU member state.⁷ Minor members of the EAEU, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, were also hoping for a broader integration agenda.

Nations that turned out to be in between the two integration projects of the continent – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – have made their choice in favor of a soft integration with EU in the form of association. These three countries signed and ratified the association agreements with EU in 2013-2015.

However, this choice of association with EU was reviewed as a hostile act by Russian leadership. Since 2013, relations between Russia, EU and those post-Soviet nations that signed for association with the EU have grown steadily worse. The Crimean annexation and the support for separatists in Donbass war have ended the period of official declarations for cooperation and integration within the frameworks of a Big Europe.

In the cited article on Europe's death after Ukraine's crisis, Richard Sakwa expresses a disturbingly pessimistic view of the future of the One Europe. In his article, Sakwa shows how the EU was losing its grip on continental integration. In short, his analysis demonstrates that the One Europe project has been forgotten by Western European elites: "Instead of embodying a vision embracing the whole continent, the EU is in danger of becoming little more than a civilian wing of the Atlantic security alliance".⁸ While I find his analysis exemplary, I disagree with Sakwa's focus on the western part of the continent and the conclusions of his analysis. The danger for continental integration comes predominantly from Eastern Europe, not the EU. However, it is exactly the crisis in the east that can actually reanimate One Europe as a vision and a value. The Ukrainian crisis has launched a long process of Eastern European authoritarian regimes' disintegration. The Donbass

5 N. Nazarbaev, 'Evraziiskii Soiuz: ot idei k istorii budushhego' (The Eurasian Union: From the Idea to the History of Future), *Evrasiiskaia Integratsiia*, No. 10, 2011, p. 24.

6 Please refer to: S. Dedkov & V. Shcherbin, 'Perspektivy ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva Evraziiskogo i Evropeiskogo Soiuzov' (Perspectives of the Economic Cooperation of Eurasian and European Unions), *Ekonomicheskie i sotsialnye peremeny: fakty, tendentsii i prognozy*, Vol. 2(32), 2014, pp. 79-95; E. Ilin, 'Konceptsiia 'Bolshoi Evropy' ot Lissabona do Vladivostoka' (The Concept of 'Big Europe' From Lisbon to Vladivostok), *Mezhdunarodnyie otnosheniia i mirovaia politika*, No. 3, 2014, pp. 84-92; Zh. Kembayev, 'Partnership Between the European Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 3, 2016, pp. 185-203; V. Andreichenko, 'Belarus: Dvadsat let po puti integratsii' (Belarus: Twenty Years on the Way of Integration), *Evrasiiskaia Integratsiia*, No. 10, 2011, pp. 35-39.

7 See more on this possibility at: E. Vinokurov & A. Libman, *Eurasian Integration: Challenges of Transcontinental Regionalism*, Personal RePEc Archive, Munich, 2012, p. 13 *et seq.*

8 *Id.*, p. 553.

war and the Crimean annexation are critical challenges for the entirety of Europe; by solving these conflicts, those countries and agglomerates of countries that value European unity may regain the integration energy lost with Brexit and Ukraine's crisis.

In order to support my opinion, in this chapter I will focus on the dynamic obstacles for a United Europe in the eastern sub-region of Europe that includes Eurasian Union member states and post-Soviet states associated with EU. I will describe how the Crimean crisis and the Donbass war impeded other destructive processes in the East of Europe, created a vacuum in the international order and increased possibilities for future military conflicts in the region. I will also show that Russia's Ukrainian policy has launched destructive processes within the Eurasian Union. These two factors are to articulate my thesis that the dynamics of political processes in Eastern Europe and Western Eurasia create ever-growing number of obstacles for the Big Europe's integration. However, my account will end with an optimistic conclusion that the alternative integration of Eastern European and Western Eurasian authoritarianisms is becoming weaker, and that the value of peace is getting more attention of all major powers on the continent.

3.2 REGIONAL SECURITY NEGATIVE DYNAMICS

The deterioration of the security situation at the east of EU has been visible since 2005-2008 when Russia and Ukraine entered into a sustained trade-war period, while Russia and Georgia had a military conflict. None of the post-Soviet regional institutions (or set of institutions such as the Commonwealth of Independent States) was able to respond to the emerging hostility in the region. With no regional structures built to prevent conflicts, the possibility of military conflicts among post-Soviet countries has been increasing since 2008.

This dynamic of security deterioration has led to an acceptance of the deployment of military force by Russia against its neighbors. Annexation of Crimea by Russia occurred with the deployment of army forces to take over Crimean authorities and with the highly questionable referendum in March 2014.⁹ Simultaneously, the Russian Parliament approved the use of Russian army on the territory of Ukraine.

The political decisions to deploy the army abroad and the deployment of force in Ukraine illustrated the emergence of a new Kremlin foreign policy toward its neighbors. This policy has been characterized as 'Russia's Ukrainian Policy'. This policy consists of a number of decisions to use every means available including army, special security services,

9 For details on the Russian army used for Crimean annexation, see: I. Sutyagin, 'Russian Forces in Ukraine', *Briefing Papers of the Royal United Services Institute*, March 2015, available at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20150508220714/https://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

Russian agents' networks, non-state actors (such as diversionary groups, separatist movements, etc.) not to let Ukraine to become a member of NATO and EU, and to remain in the Russian sphere of influence. I agree with Dmitri Trenin who has defined Russia's Ukraine policy as a policy with two mid-term objectives: the taking over of Crimea, and the federalization of Ukraine.¹⁰ The achievement of the first objective would not let NATO to establish its bases in Crimea, while the second objective's achievement would fulfill Moscow's plans to first create obstacles for Ukraine's European integration, and then to reintegrate Ukraine in the Russia-led Eurasian Union. Whichever real or imagined threats were behind it, so far Russia's Ukrainian policy has resulted in the destruction of the Helsinki international order and of the Budapest Memorandum post-Soviet stability.

The immediate results of Russia's Ukraine policy have led to (1) an unprecedentedly large number of refugees in Eastern Europe; (2) an ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists (and also the Russian army in February-March, August-September 2014 and February 2015); (3) destruction of the existing system of borders based upon Budapest Memorandum; (4) an increased number of post-Soviet unrecognized states; and (5) militarization of the entire Eastern European region.

The annexation of Crimea and the Donbass war have caused a large number of refugees fleeing to Ukraine.¹¹ Over one million of Ukrainian citizens have moved to Russia, and over 1.5 million Ukrainians moved into the internal regions of Ukraine. Human rights situation, political liberties and media rights have also worsened for the population remaining in Donbass (around 3 million in the unrecognized Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, and over 2 million in Ukraine-controlled Donbass).¹² This humanitarian disaster in Eastern Europe is the most severe since World War II. The Donbass war (2014-2016) is still going on. The active military engagements ceased in September 2015, but every month over 20 people from both sides of the frontline die in low-intensity attacks.¹³ Direct military actions in Donbass have thus far led to the death of about 10,000 individuals. Over a million of refugees from Donbass have fled to the inner regions of Ukraine, to Russia, and to Central Europe. There are two Ukrainian territories that are governed by military regimes in unrecognized Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (which constitutes 3%

10 D. Trenin, *The Ukraine Crisis and Resumption of Great Power Rivalry*, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2014, p. 6 *et seq.*

11 'UNHCR Ukraine Operational Update', 2-22 April 2016, available at: <www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=5614d3fb9&query=Crimea%202015> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

12 *Ukraine: Fear, Repression in Crimea. Rapid Rights Deterioration in 2 Years of Russian Rule*, Human Rights Watch Report, 18 March 2016, available at: <www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/18/ukraine-fear-repression-crimea> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

13 *Latest from OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine, Based on Information Received as of 19:30hrs*, 27 April 2016, available at: <www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/237451> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

of Ukraine's territory populated by over 3 million Ukrainian citizens).¹⁴ Though the Minsk process promises a stable armistice and even reintegration, the Donbass war still goes on.

Russia's step has destroyed the post-Soviet international order based on Budapest Memorandum. The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (signed on 5 December 1994) provided security assurances against the threats or the use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. In exchange, these states joined the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and gave up their nuclear arsenals that remained after the USSR dissolution. Thus, Crimean annexation has not only initiated Russia-Ukraine conflict but ruined the legitimate expectations of new post-Soviet nations of securing their borders and being respected by all powers in the region. The destruction of the post-Budapest order has impaired legitimate foundations for international security in the region.

The Russia-Georgia war (2008) and the ongoing Donbass war have finalized the creation of a belt of unrecognized nations in Eastern Europe. Abkhazia, a home for 242,000 citizens, and South Ossetia, a country with a population of 53,000, living in an unstable Russia-subsidized economy with non-free political regime, are a permanent problem for Russia-Georgian relations. Nagorno-Karabakh, populated by 146,000 Armenians and over 70,000 Azerbaijanis, have now entered into another war period that destabilize the entire Southern Caucasus. Over 550,000 Transnistrians also depend on Russia in economic and political terms. The populations of all of these *de facto* states have participated in the Novorossia revolt in 2014, and actively participate in the spread of radical forms of politics in the region.¹⁵ With the Donbass separatist republics, the populations of post-Soviet unrecognized nations have tripled and have reached four million people. Today, none of ENP/EaP member states is able to fully control its territory. These territorial disputes have turned into a lasting mechanism provoking wars and distrust in Eastern Europe.

Finally, instability in the East have caused a substantial increase of military spending by all countries. In 2016, as stated in the Istituto Affari Internazionali's report "Defense Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Developments, Trends and Drivers", the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have increased their military spending of 19.9%.¹⁶ Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland have demanded an increase of the NATO presence in the region. Following the NATO Warsaw summit on 8-9 July 2016 these demands have been partially addressed with the creation of three international NATO battalions in Baltic

14 For data, see: *OSCE Status Report as of 20 April 2016*, available at: <www.osce.org/ukraine-smm/235106> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

15 M. Minakov, 'Transnationalism of Un-Recognized Post-Soviet Nations: The Case of Novorossia Project', *Unpublished paper presented at international conference "Ukraine's Historical and Contemporary Interlockings: A Transnational Perspective on Transformations"*, University Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany, 5-6 November 2015.

16 A. Marrone, O. De France & D. Fattibene (Eds.), *Defence Budgets and Cooperation in Europe: Developments, Trends and Drivers*, IAI, Rome, 2016, p. 3 *et seq.*

countries, and the creation of two reinforced NATO bases in Poland and Romania.¹⁷ Furthermore, Poland boosted its spending by 22%, so that its military spending reached 2.2% of its GDP in 2015. Romania declared the intention to raise its military budget from current 1.4% of GDP to 2% by 2017. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also increased military expenditure by 6.6%, 14% and 33%, respectively.¹⁸

The same SIPRI report shows that the situation in the non-NATO Eastern European countries is identical: military spending has been increasing in spite of economic crises in most of these countries. For example, in 2015 Russia's military spending has reached \$66.4 billion (7.5% increase in comparison with 2014 budget). Ukrainian military expenditure in 2015 has been increasing by 10% and reached \$3.6 billion. Ukraine's military spending has risen by 34% since 2013.¹⁹

The Donbass war also created stabilized antagonisms between Russian and Ukrainian societies. As recent polls conducted by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and Moscow-based Levada Center have shown, the hostility among Ukrainians and Russians has considerably grown in 2015-2016. In Ukraine 36% of respondents have now a positive attitude toward Russia (it was about 80% in 2013), and in Russia 27% of respondents have positive views toward Ukraine (it was about 70% in 2013). The percentage of Ukrainians who were negatively disposed toward Russia amounted to 47% in January 2016, while in 2013 it was less than 10%. In Russia those unfavorably disposed to Ukraine amounted to 59% in 2016, whereas in 2013 it was a bit higher than 10%. The poll also showed that 22% of Eastern Ukrainians had strong negative views on Russia in 2016.²⁰ Personal experience with war and war-connected socioeconomic effects have changed the usual Ukrainian sympathy toward Russia. This change reduces the chances for any potential integration process of Ukraine in the eastern direction.

Militarization and distrust among peoples of Eastern Europe is now a fact. And this militarization means readiness for further worsening of relations between two sub-regions of Big Europe. The dangerous tendencies in the Eastern sub-region of Big Europe create huge obstacles for the short- and middle-term perspectives of integration.

17 *NATO Summit Guide* (Warsaw, Poland, 8-9 July 2016), available at: <www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_132786.htm> (accessed on 11 July 2016).

18 'Trends in World Military Expenditure – 2015, SIPRI Factsheet', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, April 2016, pp. 4-5, available at: <<http://books.sipri.org/files/FS/SIPRIFS1604.pdf>> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

19 *Id.*, p. 5.

20 'Changes in the Attitude of the Ukrainians toward Russia and of the Russians toward Ukraine', *KIIS Official Website*, 11 March 2016, available at: <www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=608&page=1> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

3.3 THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE EURASIAN UNION

Russia's Ukraine policy has led to a number of decisions – to annex Crimea and to militarily support Novorossian separatism – that alienated two key Russia's allies, Belarus and Kazakhstan, from further integration within the frameworks of Eurasian Economic Union. The authoritarian regimes²¹ of Belarus and Kazakhstan have joined Russia in the Eurasian Economic Union, and used its opportunities for the benefits to their economies and for the sake of their rule's stability. But with the Budapest Memorandum order destroyed, Nursultan Nazarbaev and Alexander Lukashenko have started taking active measures to decrease dependency of their regimes on Russia.

First, Astana and Minsk have been actively involved in mediating conflict between Russia and Ukraine since early 2014. Both governments have refused to acquiesce to Putin's demand to support the Russian invasion into Crimea in February and March of 2014. Simultaneously, both regimes put in place very strong administrative and security measures to prevent the export of the revolution from Ukraine. And both presidents, Lukashenko and Nazarbaev, did their best to protect their countries from dissemination of separatisms inspired by Novorossian revolt. Yet in spite of likeness of the two regimes' reaction to the Crimean annexation, the Donbass war and Russia's Ukrainian policy, Minsk and Astana acted differently to preserve their countries' sovereignty and independence.

Kazakhstan's traditional multi-vectored foreign policy has not been effective since the application of Russia's Ukrainian policy. For some time, Astana has been balancing the competing interests of Russia, China and the West in Central Asia. After the Russian army entered Crimea on the ground of 'defense of Russian-speaking populations' abroad, the Kazakhstan government had to ensure safety of their borders and loyalty of the Russian community. Also, as Eugene Rumer and Paul Stronski stressed in their assessment of the 25 years of post-Soviet development, President Nazarbaev has regretted his decision to make his country a non-nuclear-weapon state: this was the source of international recognition of his country in the early 1990s; however, this decision has turned out to be "controversial after Russia's intervention in Ukraine". The Russian government's disrespect for the Budapest Memorandum in the case of Ukraine in 2014, and the West's inability to act as guarantor to the Memorandum, has worried "Kazakhstan's political elites and raised questions among them about Russia's long-term reliability as an ally, neighbor, and trading partner".²² Kazakhstan's government had to adapt to new risks coming from Russia's new

21 'For longtime both two countries were classified as 'non free' in the Freedom in the World Index', *Freedom House*, available at: <<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2015>> (accessed on 1 January 2017).

22 E. Rumer & P. Stronski, 'Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia at Twenty-Five – A Baseline Assessment', *Carnegie Regional Insight*, 14 December 2015, <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/14/russia-ukraine-and-eurasia-at-twenty-five-baseline-assessment/in4v>> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

behavior in the post-Soviet region. Consequently, the integration within the Eurasian Union was crossed out from Astana's political agenda.

To properly respond to Russia's Ukraine policy, Astana has simultaneously tried to appease Moscow (to the level that the Kazakhstan's national interests could permit) and to increase China's political and economic presence in the country.

At a critical time for Russia-Ukraine conflict, in March-May 2014, President Nazarbaev refused to support the deployment of Russian army in Crimea. Somewhat paradoxically, he recognized the results of the Crimean referendum and abstained together with Russia from the 2014 UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262, which declared the annexation of Crimea invalid. He has also repeatedly offered to hold talks to peacefully resolve the conflict in Ukraine. This contradictory position did not satisfy the Kremlin, but Astana kept a low profile in answering to Moscow's official dissatisfaction. Later, when the Donbass war intensified in the second half of 2014 and at the beginning of 2015, Kazakhstan government started to distance itself from Moscow on the international arena.

An important change in Kazakhstan government's policies is connected with the intensification of Astana's dialogue on the participation in the Eastern Partnership. It was a clear signal to Moscow when Kazakhstan and EU signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in December 2015. At the same time, this agreement has very ambiguous stipulations that support an open disagreement on Moscow's part.

Furthermore, Nursultan Nazarbaev intensified the cooperation with Ukrainian government. President Poroshenko was invited with an official visit in Astana in October 2015. Behind the official rhetoric regarding the need for a fast resolution of the Donbass war, the two presidents reached agreements to increase trade connections, those being critical for the survival of Ukrainian economy.

Astana has also changed its security regime within the country. First of all, to avoid uncertainties brought by the growing economic crisis and Russia's unpredictability, President Nazarbaev scheduled early presidential elections for 26 April 2015. He easily won these elections with over 80% of the votes cast in his favor. Simultaneously he cleansed his surroundings of any person resembling his successor. Also, those officials seaming eager to cooperate with Russia were sacked. Nazarbaev's regime consolidated national elites around the president and assured the society of the president's readiness to defend the country's sovereignty.

After establishing the security of his own government, President Nazarbaev launched reforms of the political system at all levels, from the local to the national one. Security services and local administrations received many more responsibilities to ensure order and loyalty in all communities around the country. The government action inspired

internal migration of the Kazakhs into territories densely populated by Russians.²³ Kazakhstan entered 2016 more ready for the uncertainties created by Russia's Ukrainian policy.

The Belarussian regime has implemented even more radical policies to decrease its dependency on the Kremlin. After the launch of Crimean annexation Belarus turned out to be the last peaceful country in Eastern Europe. As Balazs Jarabik has rightly noted, "Belarus is now the only country in the EU's Eastern Partnership region with full territorial integrity (the others being Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine)".²⁴ As it was mentioned above, all other EaP countries have problems with the separated territories and new realities created by the Russian-Ukraine conflict.

Belarus, just like Kazakhstan and Ukraine, was highly integrated with Russia in demographic, economic, political and military terms. However, there are no regions with a dominant Russian population in Belarus. Russian separatism is not as dangerous for Belarus, as it is in Kazakhstan and Ukraine. The biggest risks for Lukashenko were the ties of his entourage with Kremlin and Russian security services. After the introduction of EU and US sanctions against 'the last European dictator in the first years of 21st century', Russia became the only partner for Belarus. Together, the two countries established a 'Union State' and cofounded the Eurasian Economic Union. Because of this it was much harder for Minsk to balance the Russian economic and political influence than it was for Astana in 2014.

In spite of this huge integration with Russia, Kremlin's Ukraine policy has forced Alexander Lukashenko to soften his stance vis-à-vis the opposition and the West. In 2014-2015 he rebuilt Belarus' ties with Europe, welcomed the EU and the US diplomatic missions back in Minsk, and released several political prisoners. Minsk has also eased the conditions for the functioning of non-politicized civil society. However, this 'softening' was quite limited: all activities of the Western missions remain under a strict control, and economic ties with the West are no match to the Russian ones.

To address the immediate risks for the personal power, President Lukashenko has acted in the same manner as his Kazakhstan counterpart: he called for early presidential elections. To improve connections with the West, the government permitted three other candidates to be registered and to participate in the presidential elections in October 2015. According to the report of the Belarussian Central Electoral Commission, 83% of the Belarussians voted in favor of Lukashenko in 2015.

23 'Stress Tests for Kazakhstan, Europe and Central Asia Briefing', *International Crisis Group*, No. 74, 2015, available at: <<https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b74-stress-tests-for-kazakhstan.pdf>> (accessed on 11 January 2017).

24 B. Jarabik, 'Revisiting Belarus: The Reality beyond the Rhetorics', *Carnegie Regional Insight*, 3 December 2014, available at: <<http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/12/03/revisiting-belarus-reality-beyond-rhetoric>> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

It is important to remember that during the presidential campaign Alexander Lukashenko addressed the 'Russian threat' and 'Maidan disorder' in a public way. For example, at a meeting with Belarussian and foreign media he informed the journalists that extremist Russian groups were active in Belarus and claimed he had 'taken measures against them'.²⁵ Indeed, security services had been checking on pro-Russia civil society organizations who proved to be used by Kremlin in the separatist rebellion in Ukraine. By the end of 2015 none of these CSOs could freely function in Belarus, with many activists having to flee to Russia. The same policy was applied to several NGOs with links to Ukraine: they were either placed under control, or dissolved. Through these actions, the government sought to prevent the importation of both Maidan and separatist revolutions into Belarus. Those Belarussian volunteers who fought either on the Novorossian or on the Ukrainian side in Donbass were imprisoned when they returned to the country. Minsk and Moscow have also started competition in the military sphere. In January 2015 President Putin allowed foreign nationals to serve in the Russian army. President Lukashenko immediately responded by changing Belarussian military doctrine. It now clearly states that "the sending of armed groups, irregular forces, or mercenary groups using arms against Belarus would lead to a declaration of war".²⁶ It also envisages the punishment of Belarussian citizens for serving in foreign armies or other military formations. Also, Minsk suspended the plan to create a new Russian military base on the Belarussian border with Ukraine.

If, however, the military sphere was creating tensions between the two countries, economic cooperation still increased. The general economic situation has been worsening in Belarus since 2013. But Russia's estrangement with the West has provided economic opportunities for Minsk. Russia's sanctions on European goods offered new openings for entrepreneurs in Belarus: local businessmen were positioned to deliver the prohibited goods disguised as Belarussian products to Russian market. Also, local producers increased the export of agricultural goods to Russia.

However, in spite of unexpected dependency of Russian market on Belarus, the economic ties of Russia and Belarus were tested by several trade wars in 2014-2016. However, these conflicts were quickly resolved and did not lead to any lasting dispute between the two governments.

To sum up, Lukashenko's strategy vis-à-vis Russia's Ukraine policy was focused mainly on securing his personal security and control over the key public institutions. He managed to assert his own independence, reduce the risk of separatist revolts and increase diplomatic

25 'Stenogramma vstrechi Alexandra Lukashenko s predstaviteliami SMI' (Minutes of the Meeting of Alexander Lukashenko with Media Representatives), *Belarussian President's Official Website*, 29 January 2015, available at: <http://president.gov.by/ru/news_ru/view/stenogramma-vstrechi-s-predstaviteljami-belorusskix-i-zarubezhnyx-smi-10760/> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

26 'Zakon Respubliki Belarus "Ob Utverzhdenii Voiennoi Doktriny Respubliki Belarus"' (Law of Belarus "On Approval of the Military Doctrine of Belarus"), was approved in the first reading on 5 April 2016, available at: <www.bsblog.info/proekt-voennoj-doktriny-belarusi/> (accessed on 5 August 2016).

balance. At the same time President Lukashenko did not succeed to eliminate the dependence on Russia in the spheres of defense and economy.

Kazakhstan and Belarus have considerably decreased their cooperation within the official and unofficial frameworks of the Eurasian Economic Union. As their economic ties become less important, new partners like EU and China have become more important. In security areas both regimes have decreased the level of integration to the minimum possible. The trust between Moscow, Astana and Minsk has reached a historical low. Consequently, with less capacity for integration, the Eurasian Union cannot be a serious factor in neither Big Europe's nor Eastern European (re) integration.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

Today, Eastern Europe and Western Eurasia are a territory with tendencies that prevent the establishment of any stable peace, cooperation and integration. The dynamic obstacles for integration include a serious worsening of regional security in Eastern Europe and growing tensions among the Eurasian Economic Union member states.

Eastern Europe and Western Eurasia are zones of ongoing and potentially novel wars and conflicts. The destruction of the regional international order based on Budapest Memorandum agreements has caused the remilitarization of Eastern Europe. Free, partially-free and non-free states of the region are equally concerned about their security. The Donbass war and the Crimean annexation have created a number of lasting traumas that would limit any future cooperation in Eastern Europe.

In the last two years the Eurasian Union has considerably decreased its integration potentials. Russia's Ukraine policy has set off a process of mutual distrust among the three major members in the Union: Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. For the current state of affairs in the Eurasian Union, it is no match for the European Union. Furthermore, there are growing tensions between authoritarian regimes in the region. These tensions have already provoked a heightened interest among the Eastern European societies in the value of peace and justice, and their elites now seem to realize how important it is to establish such working institutions that would ensure peace among nations.

Regretfully, the 'One Big Europe' perspective remains distant from being a realistic option for these political actors. However, it is critically important to preserve the pan-European perspective for the reconstruction of peace and cooperation on our continent. The conflicts in Eastern Europe have increased the demand for effective institutions enabling a lasting peace in the entire continent.