

CONSEQUENCES OF THE RUSSIA INVASION OF UKRAINE FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN THROUGH THE LENS OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

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Introduction

The world's reaction to Russian aggression is still inadequate. What consequences does it have, and what other challenges can it bring to Ukraine, Russia, other countries, and entire regions? Russian aggression against Ukraine has affected not only these two countries. Above all, it has influenced the further development of global problems such as famine, decline of agriculture, rising prices, economic instability and shortage of cheap energy. The war affects not only developing countries but also the most developed ones. Therefore, this chapter presents scenarios for the Mediterranean countries, the EU, and NATO (since the fate of these organisations is vital for the Mediterranean) as they appeared in Academia.

The research question is: How has the Russian-Ukrainian war affected the academic discourse on the scenarios for the future of Mediterranean countries? About 100 sources were collected, published during 2022-2024. Semi-structured interview and data from media and secondary sources were used to collect qualitative data; Discourse Analysis was implemented to analyse the qualitative data. The hypothesis is that the Russian-Ukrainian war influenced academic discourse, so we can talk about the return of Classical Realism as the main school of international relations theory.

Scientists choose scenario planning as a primary tool for constructing scenarios for the future development of the conflict and its consequences, which allows for managing the uncertainty of the future. The essence of this tool is to study the organisation's external environment for the presence of *predetermined elements* and *key uncertainties* and combine them to formulate alternative

scenarios for the future. In short, we must make a choice that, in our opinion, determines the future in a given context. Critical factors for planning are where uncertainty is high and impact is substantial. In our case, the context is Russia's war against Ukraine, and the subject of substantial impact is the Mediterranean. Scientists use the Russian-Ukrainian war to construct a scenario field/field of uncertainty; then they form scenarios, all the time thinking about their plausibility.

Global Problems and Their Regional Dimensions

Famine

Many activities were not possible last years. Even if Ukrainian farmers could reach their fields during the 2022-2024 seasons, they were short of fertiliser, pesticides, herbicides, and fuel for farm machinery. Immediately after the beginning of the Russo-Ukrainian War, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) predicted that between 20-30% of the areas under winter cereal, maize and sunflower seed production in Ukraine would either not be planted or remain unharvested, with the yields of these crops also likely to be adversely affected (Benton, Froggatt, & Wellesley, 2022).

Today, countries dependent on food imports are at particular risk of a prolonged crisis because Russia and Ukraine are among the world's largest exporters of wheat, sunflower oil, animal feed and fertilisers to the Middle East and Africa. For example, Egypt is the largest importer of wheat in the world, importing up to 23 million tonnes (2020). Over 80% of these imports come from Russia and Ukraine. Lebanon is a major wheat importer, with 68% (2020) of imports coming from Ukraine and Russia. 98% (2020) of Lebanon's sunflower oil comes from Russia and Ukraine. The World Bank has described the current crisis in Lebanon as one of the most severe of the past 100 years (Adibe, 2022).

The World Food Programme anticipated significant disruption to its shipments from Odesa destined for Africa, where from 2022 to 2023, up to 14.5 million people were food insecure. The blockade of Ukrainian ports left an estimated 22 million tonnes of wheat, corn and other grains stranded in silos, with

devastating effects on global food prices and poverty levels. Thus, the World Food Programme warned that the conflict would push an additional 47 million people globally into “acute hunger”, with Africa’s steepest increase in starvation rates (Temnycky, 2022).

Since staple crops and oilseeds are substitutable in many global markets, price rises for one food type can prompt similar price movements for other types (OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030, 2021). Price movement is currently evident in most staple grain and oilseed prices. In 2024, rice prices were 18 per cent higher yearly. Maize prices were 10 per cent higher, wheat prices 5 per cent lower, and rice prices 46 per cent higher than in January 2020. In 2024, production was 0.1 per cent lower than in 2023, with declines in the European Union, Turkey, and Ukraine. Maize production was 1.3 per cent lower than in 2023, driven by reductions in Ukraine, although the European Union had larger harvests than in 2023. Rice production for 2024/25 is tentatively projected to grow by 0.9 per cent yearly to achieve a new peak, bolstered by robust plantings and greater yield. Wheat export prices surged dramatically because of mounting concerns over production in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly in the Black Sea region, exacerbated by attacks on shipping infrastructure in Russia and Ukraine. Average Grains and Oilseeds Index wheat sub-index values spiked by 11 per cent to 8-month high, with Russia and Ukraine experiencing firmer market conditions amidst domestic price increases and supply constraints. In maize markets, prices rose for the third consecutive month, driven by production uncertainties and spill-over effects from wheat. Ukraine led the gains with tightened old crop supplies amid increased shipments (Food Security Update, 2024).

Conflict, leading to widespread displacement, destruction of food systems, and restricted humanitarian access, remains the primary cause of food insecurity in many hotspots. The conflict in Gaza worsens conditions there, potentially leading to famine by May 2024. In the Middle East and North Africa, Lebanon and Syria face increasing challenges due to regional conflict dynamics. So, in Syria, 12.9

million people are in “Acute Food Insecurity in Hunger Hotspots”, and in Lebanon – 1.2 million.

According to the IPC analysis, a high and sustained risk of “Famine” persists across the whole Gaza Strip as long as the conflict continues and humanitarian access is restricted. Approximately 96 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip (21.5 million people) face high levels of acute food insecurity. Although the whole territory is classified in “Emergency” condition, the latest IPC findings show that approximately 495.000 people (22 per cent of the population) face “Catastrophic” levels of acute food insecurity through September 2024. In this phase, households experience an extreme lack of food, starvation, and exhaustion of coping capacities. Another 745.000 people (33 per cent) face “Emergency” conditions.

The conflict in southern Lebanon has heightened the risk of wildfires, mainly because of Israel’s use of incendiary munitions such as white phosphorus. It has resulted in extensive damage to agricultural lands, with significant losses of olive, banana, and citrus trees and severe impacts on soil fertility and local ecosystems.

In Jordan, WFP has been facing a funding shortfall since July 2023, resulting in a 30 per cent reduction in regular cash assistance levels for refugees.

During the national meeting in Algeria, “Naama: Perspectives for Investment in Strategic Crops and Development of Local Breeds”, officials emphasised government efforts to support agricultural investment and integrate production into processing operations, particularly in southern regions.

In Libya, climate change has severely decreased food security, turning once-fertile lands known for figs, olives, and almonds into barren fields, forcing villagers to abandon their lands and livestock.

In Morocco, forecast production of the main cereals (soft wheat, durum wheat, barley) for the 2023/24 crop year is estimated at approximately 31.2 million quintals, compared with 55.1 quintals in 2022/23 – a decrease of approximately 43 per cent. Moroccan wheat imports are set to increase by 19 per cent in 2024, reaching nearly 7.5 million tonnes.

In Syria, wheat production remains subsidised in areas under and out of the control of the Syrian government, and the Syrian government and autonomous administration in north-eastern Syria have set the price for purchasing above international benchmarks. Nevertheless, given the volatility of the Syrian pound, farmers prefer to use their production or sell it on the free market, given delays in payments from the government and authorities in control (Food Security Update, 2024).

The attempts to deal with this problem also failed because of the Russo-Ukrainian War. On July 22, 2022, Ukraine and Russia struck separate deals with the UN and Turkey to avoid a global food crisis, agreeing to a “de facto ceasefire” on cargo ships that would collect millions of tonnes of stranded grain from Ukrainian ports. The first grain ship bound for Lebanon left Odesa under the deal on August 1. UN Secretary-General António Guterres said the agreement would “bring relief for developing countries on the edge of bankruptcy and the most vulnerable people on the edge of famine” by helping to stabilise global food prices. However, with fighting continuing in Ukraine and deep mistrust between the two sides, especially after the missile attack on the Odesa port on the second day after the signing of the agreements, upholding the deal would be a considerable challenge (Zabrisky, 2022).

Assessing this situation, Timothy Snyder came to the conclusion: “To starve Africans and Asians, as Putin sees it, is a way to transfer the demographic stress to Europe by way of a wave of refugees fleeing hunger. The Russian bombing of Syrian civilians followed a similar logic. Russian propaganda today has an edge in the global South. Russia is a known quantity in much of Africa, whereas Ukraine is not. Few African leaders have publicly opposed Putin’s war; some might be persuaded to parrot his talking points. Across the global South, it is not widely known that Ukraine is a leading exporter of food – nor that it is a poor country with a GDP per capita comparable to that of the countries it feeds, such as Egypt and Algeria” (Snyder, 2022). But there is some reason for hope: “Ukrainians have been trying to communicate the reality of their position to people in the global South so

that they can speak the truth about Moscow's hunger plan and thereby make it impossible. If Ukraine wins, it will resume exporting foodstuffs to the global South. By removing a great risk of suffering and instability in the global South, a victorious Ukraine would preserve the possibility of global cooperation on shared problems such as climate change" (Snyder, 2022).

Decline of Agriculture

Immediately after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, some countries imposed fertiliser export restrictions; Ukraine and Russia have banned fertiliser exports. Also, in mid-March, Russia banned the export of wheat, maize, and other cereals, while Egypt and Serbia imposed export bans on staple crops (Mariotti, 2022).

Economic sanctions have constrained the global supply of nitrogenous and phosphate-based fertilisers from Russia and potassic fertilisers from Belarus and Russia. These fertilisers are needed everywhere. Supply chain disruptions create economic challenges for the industry as input prices rise and sales decline. It can lead to business failures and job losses. All these impacts heighten the economic burden of the growing crisis on governments (Canuto, 2022).

The current high price of fertiliser is already changing farming practices through reductions in areas sown and amounts of fertiliser applied, which will further constrain the food supply. Not only that, impacts of the conflict on transportation costs are already becoming evident in the US: as demand for wheat pivots, the costs of exporting grain from the Gulf of Mexico coast have risen to a near eight-year high (Korn, & Stemmler, 2022).

So, food and supply chain disruptions will create economic challenges for the industry as input prices rise and sales decline, which can lead to business failures and job losses. All these impacts add to the economic burden and crisis many developing countries face.

Shortage of Cheap Energy and Prices' Rising

Goldman Sachs, a leading global financial institution that delivers a broad range of financial services, has stated after the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine that the world could now be facing one of the "largest energy supply

shocks ever”. At the same time, Barclays and Rystad Energy suggest worst-case scenarios leading to prices of US\$ 200 per barrel of oil (Felbermayr, Mahlkow, & Sandkamp, 2022).

The European Commission introduced a proposal to reduce the use of Russian gas by 60% in 2022 through the diversification of pipeline gas, as well as the production of renewable gas; increased energy efficiency in homes, including through behavioural change; accelerating the rollout of heat pumps; and the accelerated deployment of renewables. The EU proposed that the bloc cut its natural gas consumption by 15% over the next eight months in a plan that would affect all households, power producers and industries (Hoop Scheffer, & Weber, 2022).

Developed countries are also affected by higher oil and gas prices. For instance, in the face of Russian aggression, the European Union (EU) plans to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas significantly. Moreover, the war in Ukraine could exacerbate the cost of living crisis as price pressures hit consumers hard. Unprecedented price rises for food, fuel and other essential goods spell trouble for populations worldwide, particularly when governments want to reduce spending on social safety nets (Brusylovska, The Russia-Ukraine war, 2022).

The world faces a risk of rising food and energy insecurity, and the current cost of living crisis may spark further conflicts.

The Adverse Scenario for the Mediterranean

Cold War analogies will not be helpful in a world where Ukraine lost the war. The Cold War border in Europe had flashpoints, but the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 stabilised it. By contrast, Russian suzerainty over Ukraine would open a vast zone of destabilisation and insecurity from Estonia to Turkey. For as long as it lasts, Russia’s presence in Ukraine will be perceived by Ukraine’s neighbours as provocative and unacceptable and, for some, as a threat to their security. Amid this shifting dynamic, the order in Europe will have to be conceived of in primarily military terms – which, since Russia has a more substantial hand in the military

than in the economic realm, will be in the Kremlin's interest – side-lining non-military institutions such as the European Union.

Eastern member states would have NATO troops permanently on their soil. NATO will depend on US support, as will the anxious and imperilled countries of Europe's East, the frontline nations arrayed along a now huge, expanded, and uncertain line of contact with Russia, Belarus and the Russian-controlled parts of Ukraine. Eastern member states, including Albania, Croatia and Slovenia, will likely have substantial NATO troops permanently stationed on their soil (Uvalić, 2023).

Disappointment, a deficit of trust, and fear of being betrayed by the allies may eventually push Ukraine into searching for alternative formats of cooperation and relying on the other actors who may contribute to the security and stability of the region (be it the US, the UK or other actors powerful enough to deter Russia). A few formats of that type have already been sketched, such as the so-called European Commonwealth, the recent initiative allegedly voiced by the British leadership. The potential for such initiatives will be lower than the EU's or NATO's, and they will thirst for investments and lack European normative power. However, their existence will serve as a plan B in case of the inefficiency of the existing security and cooperation formats or the failure to provide adequate support to the region in the event of further Russian aggression (by applying Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union or Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). Moreover, trust among the participating parties will compensate for other weaknesses of the abovementioned blocks and initiatives (Heusgen, 2022).

The Favourable Scenario for the Mediterranean

However, in addition to the adverse, a favourable scenario is associated with new regional trends. First, post-communist countries, like Albania, Croatia and Slovenia, are at the centre of attention worldwide. The problems often voiced by the leaderships of these countries are now being discussed at the level of the G7, the

UN, and other international institutions and forums, and what is even more critical are being taken seriously. The narrative of blaming the region's leaders for unjustified Russophobia is fading away (Poliak-Grujić, & Domaradzki, 2022).

If earlier the EU and its leading countries blamed them for exaggerating the threat of Russia's weaponised gas supplies, now the EU is fully aware of the risks and is moving ahead with a green transition and seeking alternative supply routes. These states are the pioneers in this regard. Also, the new solidarity and the accelerated launching of the interconnectors played their role in assuring resilience in facing up to Russian pressure in the energy domain: the Bulgarian and Greek energy regulators took a joint decision to license the gas connection operator – ICGB. The news from Romania may also impact developments in the region's energy security domain. Romanian gas transmission systems operator Transgaz has signed a roadmap agreement with the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund (3SIIF) to develop green-field gas infrastructure projects in the country. Given Romania's extensive domestic oil and gas reserves, further investment in gas transmission infrastructure is anticipated to drive economic development in the region while also supporting European energy security and the energy transition in the Three Seas region (Brusylovska, Consequences of Russia's invasion, 2022).

Solidarity with Ukraine, with a high level of support, including military support, has not only resulted in closer relations with Kyiv but also made the voices of these countries stronger. While their support for Ukraine was often perceived as an unjustified sentiment, nowadays, for the EU, it is clear that such support is a necessary precondition for stabilising the region and a way to deter further Russian aggression. Moreover, the emerging security cooperation of the countries of the region creates a pretext for shaping a sort of defence alliance that has the potential to strengthen NATO in the region and beyond NATO borders. Moreover, Finland and Sweden's decision to ensure their security by joining NATO may also lead to their desire to join 3SI, strengthening the initiative economically and militarily.

The critical role of Ukraine as a contributor to security and as a country that may eventually be an essential participant in regional projects points out that it should gain the status of a partner, if not a full member, of the mentioned initiatives. An additional argument in this regard is that Ukraine will need lots of investment for reconstruction and adaptation to post-war reality. The EU-centred Three Seas Initiative (3SI: Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, launched in 2015) may serve as a hub for the reconstruction projects, to connect Ukraine to the security cooperation framework existing within this initiative and supported not only by the EU and NATO but also by the US and Japan, which are expressing a growing interest in the region (Брусилівська, 2022).

Ukraine's partners realised this need and advocated for Ukraine's membership in 3SI. For example, the Three Seas Initiative may give an additional impetus to the infrastructure projects, considering the changes in the security situation in the Mediterranean, Baltic, and the Black Sea.

So, if Ukraine receives strong Western support (be it weapons, ammunition, financial support, or the status of a candidate for EU accession), the chance given to Ukraine and Europe will be well-spent. To some extent, the emerging initiatives may help to preserve local cooperation and regional projects, but only the security gravity of NATO and the normative and economic power of the EU may drive other regions like the Mediterranean forward.

Consequences for the EU and NATO: Influence on the Mediterranean *Adverse Scenario*

If Russia gains control of Ukraine or manages to destabilise it on a significant scale, a new era for Europe will begin. European leaders would face the dual challenge of rethinking European security and not being drawn into a larger war with Russia. All sides would have to consider the potential of nuclear-armed adversaries in confrontation. These two responsibilities – robustly defending European peace and prudently avoiding military escalation with Russia – will not

necessarily be compatible. The EU countries could find themselves profoundly unprepared for the task of having to create a new European security order as a result of Russia's military actions in Ukraine. If Russia achieves its political aims in Ukraine by military means, Europe will not be what it was before the war. Any sense that the European Union or NATO can ensure peace on the continent will be the artefact of a lost age. Instead, security in Europe will have to be reduced to defending the core members of the EU and NATO. Everyone outside the clubs will stand alone. Reducing may not necessarily be a conscious decision to end enlargement or association policies, but it will be a *de facto* policy. Under a perceived siege by Russia, the EU and NATO will no longer have the capacity for ambitious policies beyond their borders (Брусиловська, 2022).

Europe will also be in a state of permanent economic war with Russia. Russia will retaliate in the cyber domain and the energy sector. Moscow will limit access to critical goods such as titanium, which Russia has been the world's second-largest exporter. This war of attrition will test both sides. Russia will be ruthless in trying to get one or several European states to back away from economic conflict by linking a relaxation in tension to these countries' self-interest, thus undermining consensus in the EU and NATO. Europe's strong suit is its economic leverage. Russia's asset will be any source of domestic division or disruption in Europe or Europe's transatlantic partners. Here, Russia will be proactive and opportunistic. If a pro-Russian movement or candidate shows up, that candidate can be encouraged directly or indirectly. Suppose an economic or political sore point diminishes the foreign policy efficacy of the United States and its allies. In that case, it will be a weapon for Russian propaganda and espionage. Through methods fair and foul, Russia will take whatever opportunity comes its way to influence public opinion and elections in European countries. Furthermore, the massive refugee flows arriving in Europe will exacerbate the EU's unresolved refugee policy and provide fertile ground for populists (Petsinis, 2023).

In the event of a Russian victory in Ukraine, Germany should wait to challenge its position in Europe; France and the United Kingdom will assume

leading roles in European affairs with their comparatively strong militaries and long tradition of military interventions. Russia has Europe's largest conventional military, ready to use. The EU's defence policy – in contrast to NATO's – is far from being able to provide security for its members. Responding to a revanchist Russia with sanctions and the rhetorical proclamation of a rules-based international order will not be sufficient (Maurer, Whitman, & Wright, 2023).

In Ukraine, EU and NATO countries will never recognise a new Russian-backed regime created by Moscow. Nevertheless, they will face the same challenge they do with Belarus: wielding sanctions without punishing the population and supporting those in need without having access to them. Some NATO members will bolster a Ukrainian insurgency, to which Russia will respond by threatening NATO members. Confrontation with Russia at the same time can, in the worst case, extend to proxy wars in the Middle East or Africa.

Favourable Scenario

A favourable scenario means we witness a new concept of the EU's foreign politics and transition from "the strategic partnership" to "strategic confrontation" with Russia. So, the worst principle of the previous policy – "business as usual" – must have been in the past. As Michal Baranowski stressed, "This is the start of an era of a long confrontation with Russia: Putin made it clear that his ambitions extend beyond Ukraine into Central Europe. It is critical that NATO frustrates his plans in Ukraine and secures the alliance's borders for the long run" (Baranowski, 2022).

James Nixey was the first scientist to make the following emphasis: "Only wide-ranging countermeasures can have any effect on Russia's war in the medium term. This means not ordinary sanctions but massive sanctions, "oligarch squeezing", disinvestment especially in energy, cultural and sporting boycotts, supporting Ukrainian resilience with military, economic, and humanitarian assistance, and assurances of international criminal legal recourse in the long-term. There needs to be an understanding that, although all this comes at a heavy cost, it

is the price of finally facing down Putin and ensuring the future safety of Europe” (Nixey, 2022).

Paul Maddrell predicted that “Putin’s policy will fail, just like Stalin and his successors failed, only if the West proves too united and too strong to be defeated. To take their eastern and southern territories back, the Ukrainians will not only have to wage a long war, but they will also have to receive enormous military, financial and economic assistance from Europe. The US cannot be expected to provide the lion’s share of the assistance, as it has done up to now” (Maddrell, 2022). Full membership of the European Union for Ukraine must be on the cards to strengthen the country (Maddrell, Interview, 2022).

And finally, Maria Popova and Oxana Shevel resumed: “Only collective resolve to deter Putin could both prevent an even wider war in Ukraine and preserve the rules-based democratic order in Europe and beyond. Standing up to Putin as he seeks to destroy freedom for Ukraine defends not only Ukraine but also its people. It would defend a core value of Western democracies and thus their national interests” (Popova, & Shevel, 2022).

So, from the very beginning of the Russian invasion, we see a fairly stable expert opinion in favour of the possibility of supporting Ukraine, which has become a critical factor in the future security of Europe.

The unprovoked Russian aggression provided explicit evidence of the malign Russian influence on the EU member-states and its immediate neighbourhood and is now being deterred not only at the national level but also at the EU level. The efforts to tackle Russian hybrid warfare, which were previously undertaken separately by such countries as Croatia or Slovenia, are now coordinated at the EU level and supported by the EU’s tools. The European Union has already limited the inflow of Russian propaganda. European countries continue to shut down Russian propaganda channels and take other measures against them. The European Platform of Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) coordinates information related to the measures taken by the European National Regulatory Authorities. The EU has imposed sanctions on state media RT/Russia Today and Sputnik in the EU. Sputnik and

RT/Russia Today have been suspended from broadcasting in the EU. Third, the agreement between the European Parliament and the member states on the Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union (NIS 2 Directive) paves the way for enhanced cyber defence. On top of it all, hundreds of officials in Russia's diplomatic missions have been expelled by Western countries since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. That is one of the largest collective expulsions of Russian diplomats in modern history. The expulsion of Russian diplomats also limited their malign influence on the national governments. The investigations following the expulsion helped find out the sources of leaks of classified information (Giles, 2022).

NATO has also intensified efforts to counter disinformation, following clear direction from the Allied Heads of State and Government in the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration and the 2019 London Declaration. Secondly, it is clear today that if NATO allows Russia to seize a country by force, fearing its threats, it will deal a fatal blow to the principle of Nuclear Non-Proliferation. Then, there will no longer be convincing arguments against nuclear weapons for states with nuclear ambitions. Because then they will conclude that they can, at their discretion, use the bomb as a means of capturing nuclear-free states simply by threatening to use it. If there may be little that the collective West can do to prevent a Russian military conquest, it will be able to influence what happens afterwards (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept).

The shock of an immense military move by Russia will raise questions in Ankara. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey has been enjoying the venerable Cold War game of playing off the superpowers. Nevertheless, Turkey has a substantial relationship with Ukraine. As a NATO member, it will not benefit from militarising the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean (Kardaş, 2022). Russian actions destabilising the broader region might push Turkey back toward the United States, which could drive a wedge between Ankara and Moscow. Such a move would suit NATO and open up greater possibilities for a US-Turkish partnership in the Middle East. Rather than a nuisance, Turkey could turn into the

ally it is supposed to be. So, according to Frans Osinga, for example, Russia's war failed, and after this change, NATO will soon be even more influential (Rothman, Peperkamp, & Rietjens, 2024).

The question of democratic values is also at stake. As Timothy Snyder underlined, "Democracy and nationhood depend on the capacity of individuals to assess the world for themselves and take unexpected risks; their destruction depends on asserting grand falsehoods that are known to be such; the war in Ukraine is a test of whether a tyranny that claims to be a democracy can triumph," and vice-versa, a Ukrainian victory would give democracy a fresh wind (Snyder, 2022).

Conclusion

Studying articles devoted to Russia's war against Ukraine, we can conclude that they are built within the framework of the "good news – bad news" dichotomy, that is, the story focuses on a contrasting description of the main characteristics of the scenario as it is being implemented. First, it's bad, and then it's good. Then everything changes places. In the end, things got bad but couldn't get any worse. So, there is hope for improvement in the future.

Our hypothesis that the Russian-Ukrainian war influenced academic discourse so that we can talk about the return of Classical Realism as the main school of International Relations Theory was not approved. Most academic work is based on international political theory, where morality, norms, values and human rights are central (for ex., Rothman, Peperkamp, & Rietjens, 2024). In our case, the interdependence between the Russian-Ukrainian war and developments in the Mediterranean is not the least important.

To conclude, the specificity of the Russian-Ukrainian war is that it is a regional crisis that lies outside the area of responsibility of the EU or NATO. However, a regional crisis with global consequences has already affected almost all countries and all levels of international relations. Concerning the world economy, price rises will be a great challenge, particularly for low-income households, who

spend large proportions of their incomes on food, and at a time when governments are looking to reduce spending on social safety nets and moving to increase spending on defence and national security. Higher energy prices in developing countries will also be particularly damaging, as much of the population already has to spend more of their income on fuel (often primarily needed for cooking or transport). Higher prices may lead to further supply shortages, as those who can afford to do so may start hoarding these supplies. The additional economic costs of responding to the war in Ukraine, on top of the enormous disruption caused by COVID-19, could push economies into recession. People unable to access enough food and energy can quickly become more militant in their efforts to reach better security.

In the current war, Putin's first order of business is to topple the pro-Western government of Ukraine and to make the country a vassal state like in neighbouring Belarus. It signals to the world that the Kremlin will not tolerate any further expansion of NATO to the East. Russia seeks to acquire an unofficial right of veto to prevent the expansion of NATO and the EU to the East. Why? Because of this, Russia sees the only way to regain its status as an empire, which is essential not only for the Kremlin elite but, as polls show, the majority of Russians are in favour of returning to the status of a great power.

A prolonged war that ravaged Europe's largest country radiates instability into all regions. Russia's attempts to undermine solidarity in the EU and NATO put in question the cohesion and sustainability of both blocks and, indeed, may create division lines between the countries that strive to deter Russia and those which are still influenced by Russian propaganda and *Putinverstehers* (which translates as «Putin understander» politicians, analysts and businessmen who try to understand Putin and to justify his policies).

For today granting Ukraine candidate status concerning the EU is decisive for ending the war. It will recognise Ukraine as part of the European community, open the way for investments to rebuild Ukraine, and encourage closer relations with the EU and its Neighbourhoods.

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