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EASTERN EUROPEAN REGIONAL COOPERATION AFTER CRIMEA: THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE

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Russia's policy towards Ukraine did not simply change the system of international relations, rebuilding the relations between its key elements. Moscow's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine have urged the need for sub-regional cooperation. Regionalization is one of the key trends in international relations. The author examines factors that stimulated sub-regional cooperation on the European continent (Central and Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the Black Sea region), the impact of the current global and regional processes on regional interaction, as well as the question of whether the Russian-Ukrainian crisis has raised the issue of a sub-regional security system formation due to a sharper sense of insecurity among states of CEE, SEE and the Black Sea region. The factors that facilitate or hamper efficiency of regional cooperation are studied as well.

Transforming the system of international relations in the post-Cold War period as well as forming new elements of the structure and rebuilding the links among its key elements is extensively examined. The revisionist policy of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space enhances academic interest to these issues. However, while the Ukrainian-Russian crisis is studied in the context of the geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the West and its influence on the system of international relations, not enough attention is paid to the effects of this confrontation on the system of relations in the region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and South-Eastern Europe (SEE).

The annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation has raised some issues in the modern system of international relations. The first one among them is the return to the use of force in foreign policy as a means to achieve state interests. The

second one is a violation of the principle of territorial integrity of sovereign states. Thirdly, it is the ineffectiveness of the existing mechanisms of international organizations under international law. Altogether, these points indicate that the period of "Cold Peace" is over. They also aggravated a sense of insecurity in the countries of the region, which belong to the area of "priority interests" of the Russian Federation. Thus, the aim of this study is to comprehend the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict for the CEE and SEE states, to identify trends that will define the system of regional relations in the short and medium term.

Regionalization and the modern system of international relations

The role of regional cooperation increased significantly just after the end of the Cold War. In Europe regionalization occurred

simultaneously at three levels: first, in the framework of transatlantic cooperation on security (NATO and the OSCE); secondly, within the Western European integration process — establishing the European Union and its subsequent enlargement; and thirdly, in the former Warsaw Pact area. In contrast to the first two levels, where cooperation was developing during the second half of the twentieth century, the CEE and SEE countries began to create regional structures only with the end of the Cold War. The system of interaction and interdependence among the participants of the first two areas and the high efficiency of their collaboration was so obvious that it made them the centre of attraction for the post-socialist countries, as well as an impetus to develop their own formats of regional cooperation.

It should be noted that one of the main features of the post-bipolar regionalism is the emphasis on equal partnership in the process of regional cooperation in contrast to the dominance of large states over the small ones. At the same time, the leading regional states help to strengthen ties and cooperation structures in order to pursue their interests as effectively as possible. The second characteristic of modern regionalism is institutionalization: establishing economic, political and military structures that provide a platform for dialogue on preferential issues among the states of the region as well as with the existing unions — the EU, NATO⁴⁵.

The regionalization of the CEE and SEE states started during the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar international system, which, according to William C. Wohlforth,



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is the least war prone of all structures⁴⁶. Therefore, it should be more secure, allowing the focus on the development of mutually beneficial cooperation. This reduces the sense of threat or even danger to some extent since the states unanimously show their wish to be guided by the Western norm and rules. So regional cooperation has become one of the key mechanisms of integration of the CEE and SEE states.

Among the factors that contributed to the consolidation of the regional relations, the most influential ones were the following aspirations of CEE and SEE states:

- to get out of the scope of Russia's sole influence as a successor of the USSR;
- to restructure the economy, trade and economic ties;
- to obtain security guarantees;

These factors had a clear external origin and links with a subjective external identification of countries in the region. Thus, the imperative of regional cooperation was the accumulation of resources and successful integration into the EU and NATO. The traditional perception of Russia as a threat — a state that implemented the hegemonic policy — laid at the heart of the Euro-Atlantic aspirations, especially for

⁴⁵ Восток/Запад: Региональные подсистемы и региональные проблемы международных отношений (Voskreesenskiy A. (ed.), East/West: Regional subsystems and regional problems of international relations), ROSSPEN: Moscow, 2002, p. 33; Европа: вчера, сегодня, завтра (Shmelev N. (ed.) Europe: yesterday, today, tomorrow), Publishing House "Economica": Moscow, 2002. — p. 420.

⁴⁶ W.C. Wohlforth, The stability of a unipolar world, [in:] R. Little, M. Smith (ed.), Perspective in world politics, Routledge Taylors & Francis Group: London and New York 2006, p. 116.

some of the CEE states. A Ukrainian expert Olga Brusylivska argues that the EU's role in the processes of post-communist transformation of CEE states was beneficial without any exaggeration, while the estimation of NATO's role requires considerable caution because of its both internal contradictions and ambiguous results⁴⁷. Nevertheless, the perspectives of NATO and the EU membership became those fundamentals, which allowed integrating into these structures in a relatively short period of time, greatly reduced the degree of tension, and inspired with a sense of security.

The occupation of Crimea and the international context of the armed conflict in the East of Ukraine undermined that. The events of 2014-2015 in Ukraine, as well as the reaction of the Western countries demonstrated that the international system today is not a system of "co-ordinates with clear balance of power and the capacity of States"⁴⁸. Many experts have concluded that the period of unipolarity has ended and the world has become "nonpolar" or "multipolar" where the centres are not the only superpower, but also alliances of states. Specific features of this system are its dynamics and vagueness, which lead to a significant increase in a number of states actively involved in a dialogue on key issues, looking for joint solutions. It should be stressed that these states prefer to rely on domestic imperatives and subjective assessments. Under these circumstances a "diffusion of power" occurs and results

in the ineffectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and institutions' weakness. The result is a raise of the regional countries' role in international processes⁴⁹. This situation generates a "variability order" when alliances and associations are established in response to the situation or current interests⁵⁰.

A special meaning of this approach is underlined in the use of force for enhancing national interests or to getting control over resources. That really provokes the increase in the total sense of danger and contributes to emerging new threats. The existing system of international security under such conditions practically ceases to exist due to the lack of trust among key actors, lack of solidarity within the Euro-Atlantic area with regard to Russia's role in the new Eastern Europe and a model of relations with Russia as a whole, as well as the marginalization of Russia.

Russia's interests in the CEE and SEE

To understand Kremlin's approach to security in Europe we should take into account the following cornerstones of the Russian worldview. First, "a genuinely inclusive and symmetrical post-communist political and security order" was not created after the Cold War, which led to the emergence of new resentments and potential for new conflicts⁵¹. The Russian perception of the world was built on a strengthened sense of marginalization of

⁴⁷ Брусиловська О. Посткомуністичні трансформації країн Східної Європи (O. Brusylivska, Postcommunist transformation of the Eastern European States), Astroprint: Odessa, 2007, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Т. Бордачев, Возвращение внешней политики (T. Bordachev, Return of foreign policy), "Russia in Global Affairs", April, 2010 [www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Vozvrashchenie-vneshnei-politiki-14955 access: 17 April 2014].

⁴⁹ С. Толстов, Міжнародна система початку XXI століття (S. Tolstov, The international system of the beginning of 21st century), "Foreign Affairs", September, 2013, p. 10.

⁵⁰ R.N. Haas, The age of non-polarity: what will follow US-dominance "Foreign Affairs", May/June, 2008.

⁵¹ J. Steele, Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands by Richard Sakwa review — an unrivalled account, "The Guardian", 10 March 2015, [<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/10/ukraine-russia-richard-sakwa-extract> access: 15 October 2015].

Moscow, a feeling that Russia was seen as a regional state, excluded from a global dialogue of the centres of power, as well as on a tense perception of threats to the national and state interests. In this context, Russia's actions should be viewed through the approach of William C. Wohlforth. He notes that when the leading state excels in the production of economic and naval capabilities but not conventional land power, it may seem simultaneously powerful and vulnerable. Therefore, other states that are powerful militarily, but lack economic and political authority get to increase the share of military capabilities in foreign policy. This results in ambiguity — which state is more powerful, which is more secure, which is threatening, and which might make a bid for hegemony. In the end, the situation will come to the fact that efforts to produce a counterbalance globally will generate powerful countervailing action locally⁵².

Secondly, Russian strategic culture is based upon two qualities: a deep feeling of insecurity, and a major emphasis on power projection⁵³. Still perceiving NATO and the EU as threats to its geopolitical influence, the Kremlin starts to strengthen its security. This demonstrates the security dilemma of the Russian Federation as defined by Robert Jervis: all states tend to assume the worst in others and respond accordingly. Thus, the attempts of one state to achieve security precipitate a feeling of insecurity in other states. However, the Kremlin is taking steps, which are inevitable seen as offensive rather than defensive by other states, especially by the states of Central

and Eastern Europe and the Baltic. Their collective actions unintentionally generate a spiral of insecurity for Russia. In extreme cases, says Jervis, states that seek security may believe that the best, if not the only, route to that goal is to attack and expand⁵⁴.

Such a strategy is at the heart of Moscow's policy towards Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It creates hotbeds of unresolved conflicts on the territory of countries that show their aspirations to integrate into European structures. To use this approach, the Kremlin seeks to get the maximum political influence with minimal efforts. Moreover, by this aggressive policy towards Georgia and Ukraine, Russia demonstrates that it no longer sees itself as a part of the common space of security and stability, but "as a result of the policy of the West" has turned into an isolated and unpredictable actor, which will use all the resources to return its hegemonic status. As a Ukrainian expert M. Vorotnyuk pointed out, Russia's tactics regarding conflicts on the post-Soviet area is based on identical premises to insist on its exclusive status of observer and mediator in conflicts, self-inspired, as well as to hamper the capacity of the international community, in particular the EU, to play a more active role in the processes of conflict resolution⁵⁵.

By recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and signing the agreements on alliance and strategic partnership with them at the end of 2014, as well as by annexing Crimea in March 2014, Russia anchored its position in the Black Sea, minimizing one of the greatest dangers

⁵² W.C. Wohlforth, *The stability of a unipolar world*, [in:] R. Little, M. Smith (ed.), *Perspective in world politics*, Routledge Taylors & Francis Group: London and New York 2006, p. 113-117

⁵³ P. Sinovets, C. Becker, H. Reisinger, B.S. Windsor, *Ukraine and its Neighbourhood How to Deal with Aggressive Russia*, "NDC Conference Report", March, 2015 [<http://www.ndc.nato.int> access: 10 August 2015]

⁵⁴ R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton University Press: Princeton 1976, p. 63.

⁵⁵ M. Vorotnyuk, *Ukraine in the Black Sea region after annexation of Crimea: position and interests*, "Russian-Ukrainian conflict: possibilities for de-escalation Collection of analytical works", 2015 [https://www.academia.edu/14568534/Ukraine_in_the_Black_Sea_region_after_anexation_of_Crimea_position_and_interests_in-Russian-Ukrainian_conflict_potential_for_deescalation_2015 access: 21 October 2015]

for itself — “the potential deployment of the NATO troops in Ukraine, particularly in Crimea, which would further reduce Russian strategic depth”⁵⁶. The Republic of Moldova can be a next one, where Transnistrian conflict still exists, or even the Baltic states, where 25% of the population are Russian, aiming to weaken NATO by invading these states using a humanitarian intervention concept as a cover.

Therefore, the question whether Moscow will be acting in the same way in the Baltic direction, which is included in the zone of “vital interests” of Russia, is still open. However, Russia is now actively using the Kaliningrad region for the promotion of the “Russian World” branches established in almost all CEE and SEE states. There is no direct threat yet, however, the Kremlin keeps using in its geopolitical rhetoric the theses on priority to “take care of the Russians who found themselves outside the Russian Federation”⁵⁷ and the exclusive right to “fully protect the rights and legal interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad”⁵⁸. Such a stance and methods already used in Ukraine largely undermine the national security of the Baltic states and the stability in the region.

The Balkan region is also of great interest to Russia because of its strategic importance as a major infrastructure component of oil and gas transportation system to Europe. It should also be kept in mind that the

Kremlin aims at gaining control over the key internal areas of a state — military, political, financial, economic, social, and cultural. It is emphasized in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation in 2013 that the global competition is acquiring a civilizational dimension for the first time in modern history, and is put into the rivalry of different values and models of development based on universal principles of democracy and market economy. Thus, the Russia’s actions regarding Ukraine and other Eastern European countries will continue to be guided by the logic of fixing the “red line” that defines the “Russian world” and that is not the boundary of the former Soviet Union or the Russian empire, but Russia’s ideas about “what resides to it”⁵⁹. Therefore, Russia, in accordance with this logic, is obliged to play a defensive role in Eastern Europe to the extent of using the armed force and to intervene into the territory of another state on the basis of a simple reference to the history, geography and culture (or civilization).

The Kremlin’s approach to getting its superpower status back constitutes the international system that is characterized by asymmetric and multivector links between its elements. It will lead to the preservation of instability and conflict potential. Under these conditions, the strengthening of interaction within regional organizations and structures can be a compensatory factor.

⁵⁶ P. Sinovets, C. Becker, H. Reisinger, B.S. Windsor, Ukraine and its Neighbourhood How to Deal with Aggressive Russia, “NDC Conference Report”, March, 2015 [http://www.ndc.nato.int access: 10 August 2015]

⁵⁷ Послание президента Б. Ельцина Федеральному собранию РФ: «Об укреплении Российского государства» 1994 год (Message from the President Boris Yeltsin to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation “On the strengthening of the Russian State” 1994) [http://www.intelros.ru/strategy/gos_rf/psl_prezident_rf_old/58-poslanija_prezidenta_rossii_borisa_elcina_federalnomu_sobraniju_rf_1994_god.html access: 23 October 2015]

⁵⁸ Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации от 12 февраля 2013 года (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 12 February 2013) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russia [http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEBF7DA644257B160051BF7F access: 15 March 2013].

⁵⁹ Ф. Лукьянов, Принуждение к новому миру (F. Lukyanov, Constraint to a new world) “Russia in Global Affairs”, March, 2014 [http://www.globalaffairs.ru/redcol/Prinuzhdenie-k-novomu-miru-16452 access: 12 February 2015]; A. Makarychev, EU & Russia: competing realities and misperceptions “PONARS Eurasia Policy Memos”, March, 2014 [http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/eu-russia-competing-realities-and-misperceptions access: 12 February 2014].

Prospects for Regional Cooperation after 2014

In the context of Kremlin's geopolitical counteractions to the Western order, creating a hotbed of instability and armed conflict at the edge of the united Europe that shut the "arc of instability" from the Balkans to the Middle East, it is strategically important to intensify regional cooperation from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The regionalization of the CEE and SEE indeed is one of the main tools to defend their own interests and to boost security. These states already have the experience of sub-regional cooperation; however, in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, the existing structures as well as states' dialogue are facing new challenges.

The existing sub-regional cooperation can be divided with certain reservations into three dimensions: Central and Eastern European, South Eastern European and the Black Sea. The conditionality is determined by the fact that many countries are simultaneously involved in the regional structures of different geographical and geopolitical areas. Thus, the Visegrad Group and the Central European Initiative remain important platforms for inclusive dialogue over regional problems and defining ways to solve them. Security issues were included in the agenda indirectly, mostly as a component of social, energy, and transport interaction.

The mechanisms for cooperation among the countries of South Eastern Europe developed under the influence of conflicts in the Balkans. That resulted in concentration on security issues and deep cooperation with NATO, the OSCE and the EU. The greatest attention is paid to the development of such structures as the Regional Cooperation Council, South East Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM), Multinational Peace Force South-Eastern Europe SEEBRIG, and the Balkan

Battle Group within the European Union (HELBROC) etc. Moreover, Romania and Bulgaria are active participants in the regional structures of the Black Sea region — the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Naval Force (BLACKSEAFOR), where the priority is given to the development of trade and economic relations and cooperation of navy as well.

The Kremlin's policy towards Ukraine, the visible violation of the basic principles of international law and Russian international obligations, as well as the purposeful manipulation of European dependence on Russian energy — all of these have become an unprecedented challenge for regional cooperation. On one hand, security issues have been put to the fore; the role of regional organizations in this field has been revised. On the other hand, the difference in the approaches to security and security threats within the region has become sharp.

Historically, Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania share misgivings regarding any demonstrations of neo-imperialist policy of the Kremlin, especially towards the states that are placed in the buffer line — Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. Pro-European choice of Kyiv and Chisinau, and their adoption of the Western democratic values are seen in Moscow as a tool to limit and neutralize Russia's influence in the region. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has already had a significant impact on the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, as well as the system of regional relations. It reveals the multidimensional nature of the current problem of the European security that in addition to energy dependence on Russian energy sources also faces hybrid threats. These threats are characterized by asymmetry and unavailability of any European or Euro-Atlantic structures (EU and NATO, even the OSCE) to their counteraction. Among these hybrid threats, "dirty" media campaigns and

mass propaganda, support for separatist sentiments using the slogan of the right of nations to self-determination and protection of rights of national minorities, as well as providing military-technical assistance to insurgents within so-called “humanitarian aid” should be pointed out.

One of the main consequences of the Ukrainian crisis for these countries is the preservation of their unsettled status. The longer it lasts, the more Russia will be perceived as a “winner” in the confrontation with the EU and the Western powers, unable to prevent the protracted conflicts in countries that strive to integrate into Western structures. Another important negative consequence will be disappointment and big divergences within the integration structures that are not able to defend the values, norms and rules on which these institutions are based⁶⁰. Such outcome is unacceptable for Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

At the same time the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and to some degree Bulgaria are opposing them. The policy of this group of states is primarily based on pragmatic interests: to support economic ties with Russia and to maintain the volume of investment flow from this country. Hungary has behaved less and less as a NATO or a EU member state. Hungarian leaders are open to Russian propositions on the nuclear power plant in Paks, and dependence on Russian energy⁶¹. Bulgaria has serious problems with aggressive



the difference in the evaluation of threats from the Kremlin for the security of the CEE and SEE states has a direct impact on the integrity and effectiveness of the regional system

Russian businesses in Sofia. Serbia traditionally behaves like a Russian satellite in the Balkans⁶². These states' leaders are confident that the situation in Ukraine is not an external threat, but it is rather “internal turbulence”⁶³, moreover, they nourish dangerous “illusion that these countries are protected from the invasion of Russia”, that Russian aggression against Ukraine will not have any effect on the Eastern Europe and the security of the EU⁶⁴. First of all, the experts are worrying about weak political, economic and security structures of these states that are still in the process of transition, and that combined with the Moscow pressure may lead to the rise of corruption, delay in reforms and social unrests inside of the EU.

Thus, the difference in the evaluation of threats from the Kremlin for the security of the CEE and SEE states has a direct impact on the integrity and effectiveness of the regional system. The threat of a repetition of the “Eastern scenario” on the Southern border of the EU (Moldova) and the EU member states (the Baltic States), where there is a lot of Russian-speaking

⁶⁰ R. Bambals, European security, defence, and global role: a year after Crimea [in:] A. Pabriks, A. Kudors (ed.) The war in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe. University of Latvia Press: Riga, 2015, p. 33

⁶¹ E. Hajdú The ugly truth of project V4. Can a few common goals move Visegrad cooperation forward? Visegrad Insight, 5 January, 2015 [<http://visegradinsight.eu/the-ugly-truth-of-project-v405012015/> access: 25 January 2015]

⁶² Romania Needs a Real Partnership with Poland : An interview with Armand Goșu, a professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Bucharest University, “The New Eastern Europe”, 11 March 2015 [<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/1522-romania-needs-a-real-partnership-with-poland> access: 20 October 2015].

⁶³ B. Jarabik, Russia, Ukraine, and the Visegrad: Time to Get Real, “Visegrad Revue” 14 November, 2014 [<http://visegradrevue.eu/russia-ukraine-and-the-visegrad-time-to-get-real/> access: 17 February 2015].

⁶⁴ J. Dempsey, Not Another Iron Curtain, “Carnegie Europe”, 23 February 2015, [<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=59150> access: 25 February 2015].

population, increases Europe's security vacuum, while the question of who will be in charge of the European security provokes the securitization of the region. Romania has already adopted a new National Defence Strategy, where the regional instability is put on the first place in the "Risks" Chapter⁶⁵. It also emphasizes the change of the global paradigm that heightens security risks for Romania, situated in a region that was defined for a long time by the presence of frozen conflicts, and today is marked by active conflicts and the deterioration of the relations between NATO and the Russian Federation. The Strategy also notes that new challenges of the security environment require effective and efficient collaboration within international cooperation mechanisms and formats — especially with NATO, the EU, in the framework of the strategic partnership with the United States and other international actors. The leaders of Poland, where Law and Justice Party won the recent elections, also stated the need to revise the National Security Strategy. According to Judy Dempsey, Jaroslaw Kaczyński, the founder of this party and ex-Prime-Minister, is very anti-Russian⁶⁶. Poland's president Andrzej Duda has already signalled that building an alliance of Eastern European countries running from the Baltic Sea down to the Black Sea that would keep Russia at bay will be a priority of his presidency⁶⁷. To achieve that A. Duda is going to run some tracks concurrently: to deal with Romania and

Baltic states, to win over Polish partners in V4 and to strengthen NATO presence.

A number of steps to enhance regional cooperation in the sphere of security and defence have already been taken; among them, there are the following:

- Declaration of the Visegrad 4 "Long vision of the Visegrad countries on deepening their defence cooperation", March 2014 that may increase the cohesion of the V4 group by practical defence cooperation in the frames of V4, the EU and NATO;
- Poland-Romania declaration on strengthening security and defence ties that "would allow the opening of a new stage in the strategic partnership between Romania and Poland"⁶⁸.
- Poland-Bulgaria memorandum on cooperation within the field of security and defence, a letter of intent, pertaining the collaboration involving the defence industries of both states.

In spite of these, there is a clear trend to deepen the partnership with the US in the context of strengthening NATO in the region. Lithuania signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation of Lithuania military force and the US Army in Europe 2015-2017⁶⁹. Poland has already purchased American-made Patriot missiles for its own national missile defense system and agreed with the US to deploy heavy weapons in 2016

⁶⁵ Romanian National Defense Strategy 2015-2019 [https://www.presidency.ro/static/National%20%20Defense%20Strategy%202015%20-%202019.pdf access: 01 November 2015].

⁶⁶ J. Dempsey, Poland's Euroskeptical Future, "CarnegieEurope", 26 October, 2015, [http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=61741 access: 05 November 2015]

⁶⁷ V. Gera, M. Scisłowska, Poland's new leader seeks greater regional unity, NATO bases, "The Big Story", 21 August, 2015 [http://bigstory.ap.org/article/b00343b6e0a24c2595a56b15c35ae2f6/polands-new-leader-seeks-greater-regional-unity-nato-bases access: 05 November 2015]

⁶⁸ Romania Needs a Real Partnership with Poland : An interview with Armand Goșu, a professor at the Faculty of Political Science, Bucharest University, "The New Eastern Europe", 11 March 2015 [http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/1522-romania-needs-a-real-partnership-with-poland access: 20 October 2015].

⁶⁹ Литва и США подписали меморандум о сотрудничестве (Lithuania and the United States signed a memorandum of cooperation) "Weekly Mirror" 5 July 2015 [http://zn.ua/WORLD/litva-i-ssha-podpisali-memorandum-o-sotrudnichestve-181581_.html access: 20 October 2015]

that will be based in the west and northeast of the country amid tensions with Russia⁷⁰. Romania as another stalwart NATO ally is going to deepen military cooperation with the US and NATO as a whole. It has already announced its strong support for hosting the NATO missile defense system in Deveselu, a former Romanian military airforce base, as well as for the new Spearhead Force and the other decisions taken at the Wales summit. As a Black Sea state, Romania will evidently have a strong central role on defining an effective counter-strategy. Bulgaria and the Baltic states also agreed to host US military equipment.

On one hand, Europe will be forced to increase its defense capabilities in the future if it wants to deal with the myriad of threats in its neighbourhood, including those related to energy, transport, and transit security and illegal immigration, uncontrolled borders, the proliferation of weapons, drugs and smuggling, intensification of separatist movements in areas of existing conflicts and potentially unstable regions; as well as the growth of ethno-national tensions and the subsequent manipulation of public consciousness within national minorities. On the other hand, those issues relate to the strategic priorities of all states in the region and should contribute to the evolution of existing regional structures and initiatives of CEE and SEE states.

Conclusion

The continuation of the expansionist policy of the Kremlin towards the states of Central and South-Eastern Europe seems unlikely. However, if Ukraine and Moldova become

part of the new Russian “transregional empire” the situation in the region of the CEE and SEE will definitively return to the state of a “new Cold War”. Thus, the destabilization of Ukraine is affecting the stability and security of the CEE and SEE region as a whole. The main challenge in the region, provoked by the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, is the growing split between the states. Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia actively support Ukraine and declare their readiness to expand regional contacts to ensure stability and strengthen security. Undisputed is the opinion of experts that the policy of these countries is the most important for the development of a new system of regional relations. Sharing the perception of threats and challenges, these countries are ready to move from declarations to real formats of reasonable defense. The lack of resources is covered by the expanded technical assistance from the United States and NATO. Nevertheless, the main task is still to reach a common vision of regional security. Questions remain regarding other countries following this initiative group, but the fact that the Ukrainian issue has become an unprecedented challenge for the unity of the states of the region and the European system of values is evident. Obviously, the system of relations in the CEE and SEE countries will no longer be the same as well as Ukraine itself.

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⁷⁰ E. Cadei Poland: military superpower? “OZY”, 29 May, 2015 [http://www.ozy.com/acumen/poland-military-superpower/41673?utm_source=FBorganic&utm_medium=Social access: 20 October 2015]; US heavy weapons to be deployed in Poland next year, “EUObserver”, 28 August, 2015 [<https://euobserver.com/tickers/130027> access: 29 October 2015]