BREXIT, PRESIDENT TRUMP, AND THE CHANGING GEOPOLITICS OF EASTERN EUROPE

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

One day in November 2016, a Russian MP stormed an uneventful session of the State Duma in Moscow to shout that Donald Trump had won the US presidential election. President Putin's 'lawmakers spontaneously leaped to their feet and delivered a raucous standing ovation' (Weir 2016). Europeans had good reasons to be in a very different mood as they began to 'wait in fear of the next Trump tweet' (Ischinger 2017). Soon, there was 'an insurgent in the White House' and Washington found itself 'in the grip of a revolution' (*The Economist*, February 4, 2017). In addition to Russia, China, and Iran, another 'hostile revisionist power has indeed arrived on the scene, but it sits in the Oval Office, the beating heart of the free world' (Ikenberry 2017: 2). Under its influence, the USA would dismantle the international liberal order it has constructed since Bretton Woods, support dictators all over the world, and betray its allies. In Eastern Europe, it would seek a grand alignment with much admired President Putin. If invaded, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) eastern members would first be checked if they 'fulfilled their obligations to us' (Sanger and Haberman 2016). Accordingly, a period of 'geopolitical recession' was announced (Bremmer and Kupchan 2017: 2). Alarmed East European leaders sent a letter to the President-elect explaining the dramatic regional consequences of his intensions to end sanctions on Russia and to accept 'the division and subjugation of Ukraine.' Aptly, their supreme argument was flattery: 'Putin does not seek American greatness. As your allies, we do' (Băsescu et al. 2017). To the general surprise, during the following

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months everybody noted that 'Donald Trump's foreign policy looks more normal than promised' (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017). 'More normal' does not mean 'normal;' the behavior of the new President remains as atypical and unpredictable as ever. Still, at least in Eastern Europe, the US foreign policy does not look very different from what it used to be during the last period of the previous administration. Some prefer to take this as a strong indication of the fact that, ultimately, nothing is going to significantly change in that region. This book is based on a very different view. On the one hand, the Washington-Moscow relationship can develop in a number of very different ways, which include the unlikely but not impossible grand alignment desired by President Trump. On the other hand, East European geopolitics will be considerably influenced by the major changes in the EU integration process triggered by Brexit and by the Union's identity crisis the latter illustrates. Consequences might not be obvious today, but their medium- and long-term impact on Eastern Europe and on the entire European continent is likely to be dramatic.

The theoretical approach used in this book is presented in Chapter 2. It is based on Stefano Guzzini's view of neoclassical geopolitics enriched with elements from the Regional Security Complex Theory. The resulting thin cognitivist approach accordingly combines materialist and ideational elements. Its object of study is the East European regional security complex, which is defined as incorporating post-communist EU member states, the rest of the European Union, western Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) republics, and Russia. Two external powers, the USA and the post-Brexit UK, penetrate this complex.

Chapter 3 analyzes in what way the need for domestic legitimacy of President Putin's authoritarian regime and the deep impact of neoclassical geopolitics on the development of Russia's identity as an international actor have turned Moscow into an aggressive revisionist power that seriously endangers the stability of the East European regional security complex through the use of effective instruments that range from cyberwarfare and energy blackmail to hybrid wars and frozen conflicts. The Kremlin's actions have already led to the 'militarization of thinking' in Eastern Europe and increasingly threaten European Union's Kantian geopolitical vision. Russian cooperative projects such as the Eurasian Union or the Greater Europe proposal also exist, but they are indicative of the Kremlin's willingness to adopt a non-antagonistic attitude in Eastern Europe only on its own terms, which are inspired by neoclassical

geopolitics and require a never-ending series of Munich-type concessions from its partners. Due to Washington's and Brussels' rejection of such concessions, Russian aggressiveness has come to represent a sort of structural constraint that will impact considerably the future trajectory of the entire regional security complex.

A very different actor is scrutinized in Chapter 4. The 'civilian power' European Union is a mature tightly coupled security community that lacks a fully 'communitized' foreign policy. Brussels' efforts to export its Kantian, win-win geopolitical vision to the Eastern neighborhood—which include the Eastern enlargement, the European Neighborhood Policy, and the Eastern Partnership—have resulted in conflict with Moscow. Institutionally and intellectually unprepared, lacking effective instruments and experience, the EU was unable to face the Russian neoclassical geopolitical offensive, as illustrated by the Ukrainian crisis. Even more importantly, inside the Union the populist wave and a number of overlapping serious economic and political crises have led to a 'dynamic of disintegration' and to an 'existential crisis.' Brexit represents the starting point of a process of change that might lead either to deeper integration or to the dominance of the Franco-German axis, which in turn could eventually evolve toward the geopolitical irrelevance of the EU accompanied by the transformation of Germany into the most important West European actor.

The role of the USA and its probable future evolution are analyzed in Chapter 5. Simplifying this complex topic to an extreme, at the systemic level of analysis there is the key linkage between the 'pivot to Asia' required by China's geopolitical rise and the 'reset' of the relations with Russia needed in order to transfer resources to the Pacific. At the individual level, there are President Trump's personality traits (that I examine using Aubrey Immelman's psychology approach) and ensuing worldview, which includes hostility to China and admiration for President Putin. In between, at the state level of analysis, there are the opposition of Republicans and US foreign policy establishment to a Kremlin-friendly foreign policy and the critical issue of the Russiagate scandal, which greatly constraints the President's pro-Moscow actions. Four possible scenarios ensue that include moderate US-Russia tensions, limited cooperation, a short-lived grand alignment, and a genuine one allowing for a complete American pivot to Asia leading to major tensions and possibly to a Cold War with China.

Chapter 6 examines the European states and identifies a hierarchy among their ability to influence geopolitical interactions within the East European security complex. The Franco-German axis will likely acquire unprecedented influence by taking control of the European Union. If—or rather when—both the axis and the Union decline for reasons related to the lack of balance between France and increasingly hegemonic Germany and to their opposing views on a number of issues that include the critical EU common commercial policy, Berlin will become the prime West European actor. Post-communist EU member states as well as the CIS republics will try to use US and British support in order to avoid joining Berlin's or Moscow's spheres of influence. Moreover, they will have to deal with major domestic challenges related to the rise of populist nationalism and to the ensuing development of authoritarian regimes.

However, this does not mean that East European states will passively be subjected to great power actions and structural factors. Chapter 7 shows the importance and complexity of small state agency within the CIS using the case study of Moldova. This tiny post-Soviet republic is marked by poverty, corruption, state capture, the frozen conflict of Transnistria, and the failed frozen conflict in Gagauzia that was almost reignited during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. Moscow has instrumentalized all these issues and has made considerable efforts to bring the country within its sphere of influence. Paradoxically, in recent years, this has failed because of the strong pro-EU attitude of the corrupt and highly unpopular oligarch in control of the Moldovan Parliament and government. But in response to his undemocratic practices, the electorate has become largely pro-Russian. A Kremlin-friendly President was elected. His vocally pro-Moscow party will win the fall 2018 parliamentary elections unless they are rigged or otherwise distorted by the imaginative pro-European strongman. Between these two camps, there is the democratic pro-European opposition fighting a quixotic battle that it cannot win. If de facto independent Transnistria and resolutely pro-Russian Gagauzia are added, it is clear that in Moldova—as elsewhere in the CIS—domestic politics and geopolitics cannot be analyzed as separate realms anymore.

The concluding chapter analyzes the most likely future trajectories of the East European security complex. Four main scenarios are identified; however, three are less probable because they are based on either a successful Washington-Moscow grand alignment or on the deepening of

the European integration process. In the remaining one, Eastern Europe becomes the arena of a mainly three-cornered rivalry whose actors are Russia, the Franco-German axis and later Germany, and the USA in alliance with the UK and certain East European states (either within NATO or, more likely, through US-UK-Poland-type trilateral alliances). Russia uses hybrid wars and reignited frozen conflicts to expand its sphere of influence within and even outside the CIS, but the active role of the USA prevents it from turning the region into a Hobbesian arena. Tense episodes alternate with more peaceful ones, allowing for the survival of substantial economic cooperation.

To summarize, this book:

- is the first to analyze the combined consequences of Brexit and of the new US foreign policy under President Trump on the geopolitical situation of Eastern Europe;
- claims that security developments in this region are best studied within the theoretical framework of an East European regional security complex that has replaced the previous loose supercomplex composed of the EU-Europe security complex and of the CIS one;
- perceives the evolution of this regional complex as a struggle between European Union's Kantian, win-win geopolitical vision and Russia's neoclassical geopolitics also promoted by President Trump. It is highly probable that the latter approach will have the upper hand; and
- finds that the most likely Brexit- and President Trump-influenced scenario is that of the decline of the European Union, which will lead to the partial and then total renationalization of member states' foreign policy. Consequently, Eastern Europe will become the arena of a mainly three-cornered neoclassical geopolitics rivalry opposing Moscow, the Franco-German axis and then Berlin, and Washington in alliance with London and certain East European states.

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CHAPTER 2

Geopolitical Approaches, Regional Security Complexes, and Political Psychology

As this book addresses a case of mainly Western-Russian rivalry for the control of one specific region, one might be tempted to place its analysis in the intellectual framework of the nineteenth-century Great Game and of associated classical geopolitics. Consequently, it would be reasonable to use the rather general definition of geopolitics provided by Saul Bernard Cohen: 'the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other, political processes' (Cohen 2015: 16). Yet, authors of the critical geopolitics school—to which I will return in the following pages—have noted that geopolitics does not have a singular meaning or identity. Its discourse is a way of representing geography and international politics that is politically and culturally varied (Gearóid Ó Tuathail quoted by Cohen 2015: 16). Indeed, within the European Union something very different from Mackinder's ideas has developed. This is a peaceful, 'post-modern,' economically interdependent group of states that share a genuinely Kantian culture of anarchy, to use Wendt's term. Power politics, it was hoped, was tossed in the dustbin of history (Simón and Rogers 2010: 62). The EU and, up to a point, the pre-Trump USA have tried to move past zero-sum geopolitical questions of territory and military power, replacing them with 'win-win' issues and approaches related to world order and global governance (Mead 2014).

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2.1 The European Union as a Security Community

This remarkable development as well as the highly atypical nature of the European construct—'a new form of polity that is neither a gigantic territorial state nor a simple common market' (Agnew 2003: 1–2)—has led to the development of a large number of theoretical approaches (for a detailed review see Wiener and Diez 2009). Out of this multitude, the theory of security communities is perhaps the most appropriate for explaining the peaceful vision of the European Union especially if its interpretation as a 'general theory of integration' proposed by Ben Rosamond is taken into consideration (Rosamond 2002: 41; Rieker 2016: 6). The concept of security community was first introduced in the early 1950s by Richard van Wegenen, but it was the 1957 seminal work of Karl Deutsch and his colleagues that made it widely known (Deutsch et al. 1957; see also Bellamy 2004: 6). Significantly, three years earlier Deutsch had already associated it explicitly with integration when defining a security community as:

> a group which has become integrated, where *integration* is defined as the attainment of a sense of community, accompanied by formal or informal institutions and practices, sufficiently strong and widespread to assure peaceful change among members of a group with 'reasonable' certainty over a 'long' period of time. (Deutsch 1954: 33, emphasis in the original; for comments, see Koschut 2016: 1)

The 1957 book mentions 'a belief on the part of individuals in a group' who agree 'on at least this one point: that common social problems must and can be resolved by processes of "peaceful change",' the latter being defined as 'the resolution of social problems, normally by institutionalized procedures, without resort to large-scale physical force' (Deutsch et al. 1957: 5; for comments, see Tusicisny 2007: 426; Diez et al. 2011: 198; Koschut 2016: 1). As Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver noted, 'the classical Deutschian definition of a security community states that the actors cannot *imagine* a war among each other' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 57; emphasis in the original). This applies to both amalgamated and pluralistic security communities; states in the first category share some type of common government after forming the community, while the members of the latter remain legally independent (Deutsch et al. 1957: 6). The concept 'remained more or less dormant' until after the end of the

Cold War (Tusicisny 2007: 426). At that time, the constructivist turn in the theory of International Relations allowed Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett to emphasize the importance of shared identities, values, and meanings in the development of a pluralistic security community they defined as 'a transnational region comprised of sovereign states whose people maintain dependable expectations of peaceful change' (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30). The two authors distinguished between loosely and tightly coupled pluralistic security communities. While the former observe only the minimal definitional properties, the latter construct collective system arrangements within a 'mutual aid' society. Their system of rule lies between a sovereign state and a centralized regional government, thus creating 'a post-sovereign system, endowed with common supranational, transnational, and national institutions and some form of a collective security system' (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30; see also Bellamy 2004: 8–9). The loosely coupled pluralistic security communities are well illustrated by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), while the EU provides an example of a tightly coupled one (Diez et al. 2011: 199). Adler and Barnett have also described three phases in the development of a security community: nascent, ascendant, and mature. In the latter, member states develop a common identity and institutionalize their transactions through a variety of domestic and supranational settings that make war unthinkable (Adler and Barnett 1998: 50–57; Diez et al. 2011: 201). This is the case of the European Union, which besides being the best example of a mature tightly coupled security community also represents 'one of the world's most advanced security community-building institutions' with respect to its neighborhood (Bremberg 2015: 675). More will be presented about the features of the EU as a security community and about its interactions with and expansion to Eastern Europe in Chapter 4. Here, I will only emphasize the fact that the norms at the heart of a mature security community become embedded and internalized by its member states, allowing for a mutually constitutive relationship to develop between each of these states and the security community. 'Member states seek legitimacy for their actions from the community by justifying their actions in terms of the community's norms' (Bellamy 2004: 9). It is the peaceful, cooperative nature of these security community norms that explains the Kantian, 'win-win' vision of the European Union and its efforts to move past zero-sum geopolitical questions of territory and military power.

However, at present the further deepening, the geographical expansion, and perhaps the very survival of this vision are increasingly challenged by a very different political process.

2.2 The Renaissance of Geopolitics

The previous paragraph has shown that, at least for the time being, the interactions among EU member states (and, as I will explain in Chapter 5, the USA) have very little in common with the classical geopolitics mentioned in the first paragraph of this chapter. A further argument against the use of this approach in assessing present and predictable East European interactions comes from the fact that after 1945 it was discredited both as an academic field and as political discourse due to the role it played in Nazi ideology and foreign policy. During the 1970s, Henry Kissinger did reclaim geopolitics as a legitimate component of Cold War US foreign policy able to protect realist 'national interests' as opposed to policy choices based on idealism and ideology (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 350), but this view failed to get widespread support. Yet, during the 1980s a genuine 'renaissance' of geopolitics took place in France. NATO's decision to deploy middle-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe led to the emergence of broad movements opposed to such measures that they perceived as increasing the probability of conflict with the Soviet Union. Instead, they started to advocate the parallel disengagement from both superpower camps. In turn, this 'stirred a vociferous conservative pro-NATO reaction' that in France brought geopolitics back into the political discourse as an instrument in support of the status quo (Bassin 2004: 622). A milestone was represented by the 1982 establishment of the explicitly pro-Atlanticist (and anti-communist) International Institute of Geopolitics. Geopolitics expanded among French scholars and intellectuals and 'quickly re-entered the lexicon of popular political discourse.' It became a key feature of the French New Right, which soon spread across Europe (ibid.: 622, 624). The French Left could not escape the new fashion either. It started to value the virtues of geopolitical thinking from its own perspective: 'progressive geographer Yves Lacoste reclaimed geopolitics for an activist and emancipatory approach to geography and politics' (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 350).

Things could have stopped there as the Cold War came to an end. Previously unconceivable unanimity within the UN Security Council was

at hand and actually led to the liberation of Kuwait. Books started to be written about 'the end of history.' At first view, the vanishing of bipolar antagonism should have prevented the development of an approach that historically had been so closely associated with conflict. Paradoxically, it was precisely the end of the Cold War that turned the renaissance of geopolitics from French intellectual fashion into worldwide phenomenon. Scholars have associated this unexpected process with the disruptions of world politics brought by 1989: the ensuing dismantlement of the Soviet Union, the increased political-economic heterogeneity of states in the Global South, and the rise of new threats to international order such as failed states and global terrorism (Agnew 2004: 634–635). In the words of Stefano Guzzini, 'world political crises and their aftermath spur geopolitical imaginations, old and new' (Guzzini 2012: 17). Changes in the real-world global map were mirrored by a shift at the level of theoretical paradigms and conceptual frameworks, which was in part marked by the contemporary 'postmodern turn' (Newman 2004: 627). The discourse about space and territory did not necessarily change due to a general strengthening of the 'geo' element in international politics. Rather, this was due to a change in the formation of global representations. The end of a geopolitical master frame based on bipolarity, proxy wars, and the iron curtain created a demand for new interpretations and a need for a new global metanarrative (Reuber 2004: 630).

At a deeper level of analysis, the most complex explanation of the post-1989 revival of geopolitics was provided by Stefano Guzzini based on the concatenation of two independent mechanisms. On the one hand, the end of the Cold War triggered a foreign policy identity crisis. The 'alleged ease and determinacy of geopolitical thought' was able to provide a response to that crisis mainly because of the existence of a set of open parallel historical processes that included ideational path dependency; the institutional framework and political economy of national foreign policy expertise; and political struggles around the definition of the national interest. Accordingly, a social mechanism of identity crisis reduction developed that triggered a response which mobilized geopolitical ideas (Guzzini 2012: 275–276). On the other hand, there was a second mechanism that worked mainly as a self-fulfilling prophecy. By affecting security imaginaries, geopolitical thought essentializes physical and/or human/cultural geography. Through foreign policy interactions, security-imaginary diffusion, and the autonomous development of imaginaries, this leads to a militarized vision of politics and to essentialized

identities (ego and alter). In turn, the combination of militarized politics and essentialized identities results in nationalist foreign policy and rigid friend–foe schemes. In fact, militarization was limited, but the process of homogenizing identities was strong enough to lead to 'a vicious circle of essentialisation.' It is the concatenation of these two mechanisms that produced the 'self-fulfilling geopolitics' that developed '*not despite* the end of the Cold War but paradoxically *because of* it' (ibid.: 276–277, emphasis in the original).

Consequently, a series of new geopolitical narratives emerged during the early 1990s. They included geo-ecological approaches as well as the effort to substitute 'geo-economics' for geopolitics (Reuber 2004: 630–631). The most important ones, however, were critical geopolitics and neoclassical geopolitics. Today, the former represents the dominant school of geopolitics in US geography departments (Haverluk et al. 2014: 19). It was developed by Michel Foucault-inspired political geographers aiming to disclose geographical assumptions in geopolitical discourses and to unmask 'the politics and the power relations behind the discursive practices of intellectuals of statecraft' (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 350). Their focus was 'on the conditions of possibility of geopolitical truth, knowledge and power' (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998: 7), which resulted in a new understanding of geopolitics as 'the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states' (Ó Tuathail 1996: 46). In other words, geopolitics moved from first-order observation targeting the relationship between geography and politics to the second-order observation of the interaction between the geopolitical representation itself and the geography and foreign policy it analyzes (Guzzini 2012: 41).

Yet, contemporary geopolitics has 'two faces' (Bassin 2004). Critical geopolitics does reign supreme among geographers, but it is hardly familiar to International Relations scholars, most of whom prefer the more traditional research agendas of neoclassical geopolitics (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 353). Before presenting the latter's detailed features, it is useful to emphasize the very different nature of—or, rather, the incompatibility between—these two geopolitical approaches. The divide is twofold. On the one hand, in scholarly terms critical geopolitics with its focus on the fusion of geographical knowledge and power clearly belongs to the realm of constructivist approaches (Guzzini 2012: 41). On the contrary, the use of geographical knowledge and representation to naturalize power places neoclassical geopolitics firmly within the

category of realist approaches (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 353). On the other hand and perhaps more importantly for this book, the debate between critical and neoclassical geopolitics is not politically neutral. It is a politicized one:

> We argue that both classical geopolitics and critical geopolitics are political movements that use geopolitics to advance their social agendas. Each school has an underlying political agenda that blinkers their world views. (Haverluk et al. 2014: 20)

Indeed, critical geopolitics has been developed by left-wing, critical, or radical scholars that in some cases go as far as promoting the 'utopian wishful thinking' of the radical left (Jeremy Black quoted by Haverluk et al. 2014: 20). They are opposed by right-wing, conservative, realist academics and politicians in France, Germany, Russia, and the USA who share neoclassical geopolitical views (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006: 351; Bassin 2004). As this book will show, it is at least in part due to the actions of such conservative politicians—including the outstanding example of President Putin—that Eastern Europe and the European Union itself move away from the Kantian vision presented earlier in this chapter. For their part, people inspired by critical geopolitics have little interest in putting an end to this vision, even if they might want to further 'improve' it in accordance with their own ideological convictions. Yet, critical geopoliticians 'are far from the corridors of power' and cannot influence decision makers (Haverluk et al. 2014: 21). Their ability to create a new scholarly field has 'not been successful at substantively altering contemporary hegemonic structures' as they are geographers and—unlike political scientists—this category of scholars has seldom been associated with governments' international actions. In the case of the USA, for example, there were no geographers in the foreign policy teams of Presidents Obama, Bush, and Clinton (Haverluk et al. 2014: 21). Accordingly, one should not expect critical geopolitics to have influenced those administrations. President Obama's 'pivot to Asia,' to give an example, was an expression of the views shared by many politicians, officials, and think tank experts involved in US foreign policy making who took their inspiration from the darker realm of neoclassical geopolitics. In fact, this book will show that there is a high probability for the future of Eastern Europe and of the international system as a whole to be strongly marked by this increasingly influential geopolitical approach.

2.3 Neoclassical Geopolitics

Much of the aforementioned right-wing French geopolitical renaissance of the 1980s was associated with neoclassical geopolitics: a 'specifically classical and more determinist form of geopolitical thought' that 'no longer shies away from using its arguments, or indeed its own name' (Guzzini 2012: 9). Its understanding of the effects of geography on international relations 'explicitly locates [itself] within the Mackinder-Haushofer-Spykman tradition' while 'creatively rework[ing] it with reference to changed social, economic, political and cultural factors' (Megoran 2010: 187). Stefano Guzzini defined neoclassical geopolitics as:

> a policy-oriented analysis, generally conservative and with nationalist overtones, that gives explanatory primacy, but not exclusivity, to certain physical and human geographic factors (…), and gives precedence to a strategic view, realism with a military and nationalist gaze, for analysing the 'objective necessities' within which states compete for power and rank. (Guzzini 2012: 43)

Like classical geopolitics, it is politically conservative and close to IR Realism; it provides policy advice to politicians; it associates the diffusion of democracy with the interests of the USA and Britain; it is attentive to public and policy audiences; and, overall, it 'overlap[s] with the academic and representational concerns of contemporary conservative geopolitics' (Megoran 2010: 188). Geography is seen by both approaches as setting the framework within which international politics must occur, thus demanding a responsibility for political action (ibid.: 189). Unsurprisingly, the constructivist views of critical geopolitics are strongly rejected. Geographical space is not perceived as a discursive subject or as a construct created by political actors for their own power-related purposes. Classical and neoclassical geopolitics alike identify it as the objective, natural- and physical-geographical world understood as an existential pre-condition for all politics (Bassin 2004: 621). Unlike classical geopolitics, however, the neoclassical variant has adapted the Heartland thesis—which it sees as essentially dynamic—to recent technological and social changes. For example, it has incorporated space flight and post-colonial deterritorialized social networks while it pays no attention to 'the [classical geopolitics] anxiety to fix

racial boundaries' (Megoran 2010: 189). Neoclassical geopolitics also has much in common with IR Realism but differs from it in that it accepts the explanatory primacy of environmental determinism. More specifically, it gives a privileged position to geographical factors associated with state resources. These factors are related not only to political and economic geography but also to human and cultural geography: Neoclassical geopolitics 'include[s] a cultural, if not civilisational, component' (Guzzini 2012: 43–44). A good example is provided by James Bennett's concept of 'the Anglosphere.' In a globalized but not 'borderless' world where states remain vital, the trading, economic, and military sphere of the 'Anglosphere Network Commonwealth' is identified as a geopolitically relevant 'network civilisation' (James Bennett quoted by Megoran 2010: 188). For different reasons, both classical geopolitics and IR Realism might not feel comfortable when dealing with such a topic.

Politically, the influence of neoclassical geopolitics is highly localized and concentrated. It 'remains wedded to conservative and militarised foreign policy agendas of powerful states' (Megoran 2010: 189) that prioritize power and national interest. While it is 'anchored securely on the right,' it oscillates between mainstream and radical conservative perspectives (Bassin 2004: 621). Gearóid Ó Tuathail has shown that neoclassical geopolitics—as well as classical geopolitics before it—appeals to right-wing counter-moderns mainly because it 'imposes a constructed certitude upon the unruly complexity of world politics, uncovering transcendent struggles between seemingly permanent opposites (…) and folding geographical difference into depluralized geopolitical categories' like Heartland or Rimland (Gearóid Ó Tuathail quoted by Kearns 2009: 259). Critically, its growing influence is able to halt and reverse the progress of the Kantian vision of European security (Guzzini 2012: 18). This is not only due to the militarization of politics it promotes but also the effects of the 'vicious circle of essentialisation' first identified by Stefano Guzzini in his aforementioned analysis of the causes of the post-1989 revival of geopolitics. Neoclassical geopolitical thought makes the meaning of political and human geography elements such as territories and populations to appear as fixed and naturally given. Policies inspired by such thinking 'risk becoming self-fulfilling prophecies' as the social reality that neoclassical geopolitics should only try to explain is actually impacted by the ideational content of this approach: 'there is

a "politics of geopolitics" which affects the structure of the European order in the long run' (Guzzini 2014).

Indeed, in recent years neoclassical geopolitics has become increasingly influent in the realm of actual international affairs. The latter has been strongly marked by the rise of 'revisionist powers' such as Iran, China, and especially Russia. Their increasingly aggressive actions challenge the post-Cold War status quo and undermine the Eurasian geopolitical order in ways incompatible with the European 'win-win' vision. This has changed the very character of international politics: 'the world is looking less post-historical by the day' (Guzzini 2012: 43). In the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), regional dynamics are now dominated by hard security issues. This trend is expanding westward, with the Baltic states and Poland feeling increasingly threatened. As shown in more detail in the following chapters, Russia is trying to create a new regional order that would place it in a dominant position. This 'set in motion a sudden militarization of thinking in Central and Eastern Europe as well as throughout the entire post-Soviet space' (Missiroli et al. 2014: 49). In turn, this halted the eastward expansion of the Kantian vision of European security. Certain authors have already claimed that it might even threaten its survival within the very EU (Guzzini 2012: 18; this issue is discussed in Chapter 4) after the possible completion of the US shift of interest toward Asia, which would leave a gap in Europe 'that Germany might choose to fill' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 60). All this is due to the fact that the EU 'post-modern' vision is effectively challenged by the neoclassical approach reflecting, in a large measure, the Russian view of geopolitics (Astrov and Morozova 2012). This process has significantly been enhanced by the election of President Trump. Like President Putin, he believes that 'the world is made of winners and losers and that only the strong prevail' (Szabo 2016). Accordingly, he advocates a unilateralist US foreign policy based on superficial quick wins and bilateral zero-sum games (Munich Security Conference 2017, section 'United States: Trump's Cards') that resonates with the Russian neoclassical view of geopolitics. As shown in Chapters 4 and 8, not all scenarios for the future of Eastern Europe and the EU claim that neoclassical geopolitics will reach a dominant position. However, those with the highest probability of materialization do take this view, and such a change would influence most deeply the geopolitical future of Eastern Europe and of the entire European continent.

2.4 The Regional Security Complex Theory

Given its likely political impact on the region under scrutiny, it is logical to think that neoclassical geopolitics could also provide an appropriate theoretical framework for this book. However, this approach was not conceived in order to specifically address regional situations and developments. Yet, a focus on regional aspects is critical for a good understanding of East European security interactions. Equally important, neoclassical geopolitics is heavily materialist. This makes its use very difficult, if not impossible, when the object of study involves shared identities, values, and meanings (which, as shown earlier in this chapter, is the case of the EU security community). This leads to the idea that the explanatory power of neoclassical geopolitics might benefit from a certain degree of influence from the 'Constructivist turn' in International Relations. This is why I intend to enrich this book's neoclassical geopolitical analysis through the addition of elements pertaining to a complementary approach better equipped for dealing with a specific region and incorporating some useful ideational elements: the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT).

The classical definition of an international region was formulated in 1968 by Joseph Nye: 'a limited number of states linked together by a geographical relationship and by a degree of mutual interdependence' (Nye quoted by Exner-Pirot 2013: 120). Since the 1990s, the IR literature has considerably increased its interest in the study of regions, most notably within the so-called new regionalism (for a review see Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 43). This was explained by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver as a natural consequence of the coming to an end of the rigid bipolar structure that defined the Cold War. As superpower rivalry ceased to intrude obsessively into all regions, local powers started to have more room for maneuver, which allowed for the development of a pattern of international security relations based on the relative autonomy of regional security (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 3). Not all authors agree. Some prefer to emphasize, on the contrary, the growing importance of global issues such as international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the economic empowerment of China, or the threat from Islamic fundamentalism that also seem to contradict state-centrism and to reflect a more pluralistic definition of security (Freeman 2001: 8). Still, it cannot be denied that for 'important security processes' the end of the Cold War was followed by 'the accentuation of the significance

of the regional level' (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 5); hence, the Copenhagen School's 1990s claim that 'a world order of regional security complexes was emerging' (Freeman 2001: 7).

The central idea of this approach is that 'most threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones,' which leads to a pattern of security interdependence based on regional clusters called regional security complexes (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 4). The latter concept was defined by Barry Buzan at the beginning of the 1990s as:

> a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another. (Buzan 1991: 190)

The RSCT was eventually updated by the Copenhagen School of security studies in an effort to bring the concept in line with the wider post-Cold War security agenda through the addition of elements of the securitization theory. This was a move from 'the original, state-centric, and partly objectivist formulation' to a 'multisectoral, multi-actor securitisation perspective' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 45). As illustrated by the 1998 book by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, the resulting new RSCT represents a reunion of materialist and constructivist approaches. The former include the neorealist-inspired ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power, while the latter focus on the political processes by which security issues get constituted and perceive the distribution of power and of the patterns of amity and enmity as essentially independent variables (ibid.: 4; Buzan and Wæver 2003: 145). Moreover, the concept of security was expanded to include societal, economic, and environmental dimensions in addition to the military and political ones (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 70). Accordingly, the regional security complex was redefined as:

> a set of units whose major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another. (Buzan et al. 1998: 201)

For readers unfamiliar with the securitization theory (for detailed presentations see Wæver 1995; Taureck 2006; Balzacq 2011), it is perhaps useful to mention that securitization is understood as:

> the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat. (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 491)

while desecuritization is:

> a process by which a political community downgrades or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and reduces or stops calling for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat. The process can be directly discursive addressing the definition of the situation; more often it is indirect, where a shift of orientation towards other issues reduces the relative attention to the previously securitised issue. (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 489)

All this might sound a little bit too post-positivist to be compatible with neoclassical geopolitics; after all, not everybody agrees with Ole Wæver's definition of security as a speech act. I will return to this aspect later in this section, but it is important to mention that the securitization-centered approach represents only one branch of the RSCT. An alternative view has been proposed by David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, who provided their own definition of the regional security complex: 'a set of states continuously affected by one or more security externalities that emanate from a distinct geographic area' (Lake and Morgan 1997: 12; Lake 2009: 35). Differences between the two approaches have been frequently emphasized especially with respect to the status of external powers (see below). Perhaps more importantly, the existence of a plurality of views on the regional security complex delinks this concept from a specific, narrow IR theoretical framework and allows it to be used in conjunction with neoclassical geopolitics. In fact, what the RSCT shows is that the degree of security interdependence is 'more intense between the actors inside such complexes than […] between actors inside the complex and those outside it,' which translates into a substantial degree of regional autonomy from the patterns set by the global powers (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 4). Accordingly, despite their divergent views, Buzan and Wæver as well as Lake and Morgan agree that 'security complex theory has considerable power to explain and predict both the formation of durable regional patterns of security relations and the pattern of outside

intervention in these regions' (Buzan et al. 1998: vii). This is why the concept of regional security complex can usefully complement the use of neoclassical geopolitics in contributing to an improved understanding of East European security interactions.

Such security complexes are characterized by distinctive regional security patterns shaped by the distribution of power and by historical relations of amity and enmity. Based on the former, there are standard regional security complexes—'broadly Westphalian in form with two or more powers and a predominantly military-political security agenda'—and centered ones, which are unipolar (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 55). Based on the relations of amity and enmity, security complexes can be hostile, cooperative, or pluralistic (Buzan et al. 1998: 12). Before analyzing in what way these features are relevant in the case of Eastern Europe, it is important to address the issue of external powers. Geographically, both the USA and post-Brexit Britain do not belong to the region under scrutiny. David Lake and Patrick Morgan claimed that great powers from outside a regional security complex involved in regional politics are in fact members of the complex. A more refined approach is that of Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver. They developed the concepts of penetration and overlay, which permit the great powers to be seen as integral to a regional security complex without being members (Lake 2009: 35). Penetration occurs when outside powers make security alignments with states within a complex (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 46). Overlay means that external powers move directly into the regional complex with the effect of suppressing the indigenous security dynamic (Buzan et al. 1998: 14). The concept of penetration will be used in this book to analyze the USA as well as post-Brexit UK as fully fledged actors of the East European security complex despite the fact that they are not considered genuine members of this complex.

Another disputed issue is that of whether regional security complexes are exclusive or overlapping. Buzan and Wæver claimed that they are mutually exclusive, but this book adopts the view of Lake and Morgan who believe that they can have overlapping memberships (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 48). The example of China was used to show that a state can be part of both the Northeast and Southeast Asian security complexes (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 46). Accordingly, I see Russia (see below) and Turkey (see Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 47; Barrinha 2014; Kazan 2005) as members of more than one regional security complex. This brings the discussion to the practical aspect of

identifying the actual regional complexes and defining the borders of the East European one. The literature tends to speak about twelve such units: Europe ('EU-Europe' before the 2004 Eastern enlargement), Central Eurasia, North and South America, West, Central, and Southern Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, as well as South, Northeast, and Southeast Asia (Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 44). The first two—'the Europes'—were analyzed in detail by Buzan and Wæver (2003). At that time (i.e., before the EU accession of former communist states), the 'EU-Europe' regional security complex was described as a center-periphery structure. Central Europe—the Cold War's 'Eastern Europe'—was organized as concentric circles around the Western core. Its security issues partly followed the same pattern as in Western Europe but had additional complications 'because the dependence on Western Europe [was] both anchor of stability and line of intrusion' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 353). The regional security complex itself was centered, but its integration was due to European institutions rather than to a single power. However, a significant degree of ambiguity was noted when assessing the European Union that hanged 'halfway between being a region in the form of a highly developed security community, and being a great power in its own right' (ibid.: 57). Because for some purposes France, the UK, and Germany retained great power status, the security complex was seen as 'shaped by the simultaneous existence of powers at two levels,' which prevented it from being 'unequivocally categorised as a system with one great power, the EU' (ibid.: 344). There was no such ambiguity in the Central Eurasian regional security complex represented by the CIS (ibid.: 62; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 45 add Afghanistan, which for Buzan and Wæver was an insulator). Its unipolar structure was clearly centered on one great power, Russia. Because of the geographical closeness of the latter and the European Union, the reunification of the EU-Europe and CIS regional security complexes was believed to be possible. Yet, in 2003 'the EU and Russia [were] not enough involved in each other's security issues to turn "Europe" into one large RSC.' Instead, they formed a loose supercomplex (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 343). The latter concept was defined as a set of regional security complexes 'within which the presence of one or more great powers generates relatively high and consistent levels of interregional security dynamics' (ibid.: 491).

This is a good depiction of Europe's security situation 15 or 20 years ago. Regional complexes, however, are not static. They evolve, mainly

due to changes in associated constellations of power (including penetration-related ones) and/or in threat perception that impact their essential structure (for a discussion see Erdağ 2017: 9–10). Central Asia provides a good example. In 2003, it was analyzed as a subcomplex of the Central Asian complex (Ole Wæver quoted by Musiol 2015: 59). Later, it was described as a '"weak subcomplex" with the elements of an unstructured region and a proto-complex' as well as a 'candidate for a separate RSC' (Troitskiy 2015: 5). This development was due to the redefinition of the relations between Central Asia and other players as a consequence of US military and political involvement, Chinese political and economic activity, and Russia's new position (Musiol 2015: 73). At one point, a 'critical mass of changes had been accumulated and a qualitatively new level of Central Asia's positioning in the RSC map was achieved. It became a separate standard RSC' penetrated by the USA, Russia, and China (Troitskiy 2015: 6). A change very different in details but similar in nature has been taking place in Eastern Europe. It is one of the main ideas of this book that recent, present, and predictable security interactions between Russia, the European Union, and/or West European great powers make the division between the European and Central Eurasian regional complexes increasingly irrelevant. In 2003, the connection between their respective security dynamics was weak enough to be correctly described by the conceptual framework of a 'loose supercomplex.' The EU and NATO Eastern enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy significantly changed that situation, which the Crimean *Anschluss* and ensuing events brought to an end. The scenarios presented in the following chapters will show that predictable EU and Russian involvement in Eastern Europe can in no way be explained outside the framework of a common regional security complex. Eastern Europe properly includes the former communist states that are now EU and NATO members (plus the West Balkan candidates) and the western members of the CIS (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and the three Caucasus republics). Yet, the East European regional security complex also incorporates the European Union and Russia, which are directly and deeply involved in the region's security evolutions. Post-Brexit UK will cease to be part of the complex and will penetrate it similarly to—and probably in cooperation with—the USA. Out of the CIS, only the members of the aforementioned new Central Asian security complex remain outside the East European one. The latter also includes Turkey, due to its key role in the Caucasus and in the larger Black Sea area. This, however, does not

prevent that country from also belonging to the Middle Eastern regional complex.

The arena scrutinized in the following chapters is therefore a regional security complex that reunites most of Buzan and Wæver's (2003) 'two Europes.' An inescapable question—and potential criticism—concerns the 'East European' label. Why should it be 'East' instead of, say, 'larger,' or Europe *tout court*? The answer has much to do with the very essence of this book. The unification of the previous two regional complexes is considered to be the result of a neoclassical geopolitical struggle for the control of Eastern Europe. It is this region that represents the key element which brings together the European Union and Russia, that shapes their interests and ensuing policies, strategies, and actions targeting each other, that—to use a constructivist term which might seem inappropriate in a neoclassical context and to which I will therefore return shortly—increasingly constitutes them as international actors. A related issue is that of Britain's exclusion from a security complex encompassing the rest of the continent. As explained in a later chapter, Brexit represents precisely UK's effort to extract itself from Europe. Interactions with the European Union, including security ones, will continue, but they will be those of an external power. Critically, there will be no extra-NATO institutional arrangement or group solidarity linking Britain to Eastern Europe. Unless NATO as a whole decides otherwise, London will be free to choose if it wants to get involved in those countries' security issues or not, a choice that the European Union and, implicitly, its western members are not free to make at least with respect to eastern member states. This is much closer to a US-type penetration situation than to membership of the same regional security complex, a situation that makes me exclude Britain from the East European one.

By now, the picture of this security complex should be clear in terms of genesis and borders. Following chapters will analyze its recent evolution, present state, and predictable development using a number of possible scenarios. However, the key issue that needs to be addressed at this point is the relationship between the RSCT and neoclassical geopolitics and the way they can be merged into one theoretical framework. In fact, this relationship has already been analyzed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, who noted that their 'approach is akin to a security version of much political geography' as 'RSCT is a theory of security in which geographical variables are central' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 69–70). While criticizing classical geopolitics as 'too materialist and mechanical'

and critical geopolitics as 'too absolutist in studying only the social construction of space,' they concluded that 'geography as such matters but (…) it has to be analysed in a political framework' such as that provided by the RSCT (ibid.). Leaving aside the primacy that one might prefer to give to either politics or geography, the close relationship between geopolitics and regional complex theory clearly allows them to be combined in one coherent theoretical framework. Moreover, Buzan and Wæver's criticism of both classical and critical geopolitics as too extreme in their respective materialist and constructivist views leads to the implicit suggestion that the RSCT is superior due to the fact that it brings together elements from both categories. Merging this materialist and constructivist theory with heavily materialist neoclassical geopolitics will certainly result in a predominantly materialist approach that the neoclassical geopolitician will still perceive as familiar. Yet, it will also bring in certain ideational elements. The ratio between the two categories might be different from that preferred by Buzan and Wæver, but the combination preserves the virtues hailed by the two authors. On the constructivist side, a key example is represented by the way neoclassical geopolitics can benefit from the addition of patterns of amity and enmity that are part of the essential structure of a security complex. The following chapters provide abundant examples of such patterns that prevent Eastern Europe from representing a permanently changing realist distribution of billiard balls. At a theoretical level, the consolidation of such cooperative ties and adversarial relationships among actors highlights the importance of shared ideas, meanings, identities, and social and historical contexts in turning the regional security complex into a structure that can modify the patterns of behavior of its members (Mattos et al. 2017: 265). This is of course too constructivist to be accepted within orthodox neoclassical geopolitics, but can significantly contribute to the better understanding of security developments in Eastern Europe and therefore will be used in this book's analysis. The same can be said about the EU security community, whose study becomes possible through the addition of RSCT constructivist elements. In fact, one could even contemplate the analysis of a security community as the outcome of an extremely dense network of regional patterns of amity. Other atypical (from a neoclassical perspective) aspects that need to be emphasized are the very genesis as well as the politicized character of neoclassical geopolitics presented earlier in this chapter. As elements of second-level analysis targeting the theory of geopolitics itself—and showing that neoclassical geopolitics

ultimately is a social construct—they cannot be completely dissociated from post-positivism and critical geopolitics. Yet, today it is not uncommon for neoclassical geopolitical works to address such issues despite their unorthodox flavor (see Guzzini 2012). This book does the same, based on the idea that enriching neoclassical geopolitics with useful elements pertaining to other approaches, and therefore, turning it into a weak cognitivist theory (see Hasenclever et al. 1997: 137–138) is more beneficial in terms of actual results than preserving a dogmatic respect for positivist orthodoxy.

2.5 Frozen Conflicts and Hybrid Wars

Moving toward less abstract issues, one might note that Russia's expansionist efforts within the East European regional security complex have been accompanied by the increasingly visible use of certain partly military instruments. The first one is represented by the post-Soviet frozen conflicts, a topic brought to the attention of the general public by the 2008 Russian-Georgian war and once more by low-intensity warfare in eastern Ukraine; this book will analyze it based on the case study of Transnistria (see Chapter 7). Frozen conflicts are defined as military confrontations de facto brought to an end by a durable mutually agreed cease-fire but lacking a formal peace agreement; reignition is therefore possible. This category is both vast and heterogeneous as it brings together the Cyprus crisis and the Korean War (see Lynch 2004: 4–7). Yet, in the CIS its forms of manifestation are strikingly similar. Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh experienced open warfare initiated in reaction to the independence moves of Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. These were mainly ethnic conflicts (Transnistria was an exception) initiated by local elites that wanted to prevent shifts in the structure of political and economic power that would have endangered their dominant position. They turned themselves into 'ethnic entrepreneurs' who used alleged threats to the community (which they defined in ethnic terms) in order to reconstruct the interests of their minority groups (Gagnon 1994–1995: 132). Their success—which resulted in the creation of working de facto states—was due to the fact that they drew upon, distorted, and fabricated elements from their group's culture to support the process of ethnic mobilization (Brass 1991: 8). The 'ancient hatreds' frequently mentioned to explain such conflicts are in fact masking purposeful and strategic

policies that serve the interests of local elites (Gagnon 1994–1995: 164; Tudoroiu 2016: 377).

At the same time, these conflicts were instrumentalized by Moscow to prevent centrifugal republics from leaving the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and, later, the Russian sphere of influence. The Kremlin provided active military support to the secessionist forces, which allowed them to escalate initial tensions into fully fledged civil wars and to defeat militarily their respective governments. At that point, Russia mediated peacekeeping arrangements that—with the exception of the case of Nagorno-Karabakh—included the participation of its own troops. Violence did not occur until and after the 2008 Georgia war. However, more than twenty years of negotiations have not led to a political settlement (Tudoroiu 2012: 137). There are several factors that contribute to the immobility of such conflicts. First, there is a reasonably stable military balance between the sides, none of which has the capacity to prevail. Second, the nature of intra-societal grievance—often ethnically based—is intractable. Violent conflict deepens alienation between communities that share a deep sense of grievance as well as substantial fear and uncertainty concerning the risks of negotiated settlement. Political leaders therefore are reluctant to propose compromises and, if they do, endanger their own positions. Third, settlement and normalization are resisted by those who benefit economically from 'frozenness.' Fourth, some outside powers see their own interests served by the status quo, while the interests of other powers are weak and prevent them from investing sufficient diplomatic efforts and resources in the resolution of the conflict (MacFarlane 2008: 24–25). All these elements are present in the case of the post-Soviet frozen conflicts. Yet, the latter's key common feature has been the aforementioned instrumentalization by the Kremlin. Moscow's policy paradigm with respect to these conflicts was defined by Vladimir Socor as 'controlled instability.' It promotes Russia's geopolitical interests by perpetuating Russian military presence; by fostering state weakness and chaotic conditions in the target countries; by distracting the latter from the agenda of systemic reforms; and by discouraging Western interest in developing close relations with Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (Socor 2004: 2). Unsurprisingly, in 2014 President Putin decided to use this effective instrument in Donetsk and Luhansk as part of his aggressive regional policy. Today, the two conflicts are in the process of being 'frozen' but not settled, which will give Moscow a means to influence Ukraine in the long term.

A less known but closely related category is that of the failed frozen conflicts, which is analyzed in Chapter 7 using the example of Moldova's southern autonomous Gagauz region. They had exactly the same origin and development as the 'genuine' ones. This included serious political tensions, a potential or actual declaration of independence, and advanced plans to create de facto states. Yet, accommodations normally based on regional autonomy were found before reaching the stage of military confrontation. The crises apparently came to an end. However, a comprehensive and effective response to the initial grievances leading to their total disappearance was not provided. The conflicts were not fully resolved and preserved an important potential of reignition. This was the case of Gagauzia, Tatarstan, and Crimea (Tudoroiu 2016: 376–377). Theoretically, the long-term survival of this destabilizing potential has been explained using the regional mobilization approach. Different form the 'active' phase of the conflict, local elites do not exacerbate ethnic tensions in their autonomous republics. They nevertheless make selective use of history and mobilize cultural symbols to create new regional imaginative spaces. A region-building process is at work that, similar to nation-building, puts in place a system of social regulation and collective action (Keating 1999: 5). Regionalist political parties contribute significantly to solidifying the perception of the region's ethnic, civic, and/or socioeconomic diversity (Keating 2001). Processes of institutional development related to regional autonomy also strengthen alternate forms of subjective political-territorial identification (Lecours 2001: 54). These elements prevent the fading out of the mobilization potential initially associated with the failed frozen conflict. If external conditions become favorable, local elites can revert to their 'ethnic entrepreneur' role and reignite the crisis, allowing Russia to instrumentalize it once more (Tudoroiu 2016: 378). Both 2014 Crimea and Gagauzia represent typical examples of such a development (see Chapter 7), which suggests that failed frozen conflicts as well as 'normal' ones will continue to be used by Moscow as part of its expansionist plans.

Another instrument, the hybrid war, is a new form of warfare that needs some clarification. In fact, this term has been used for more than a decade, but in most cases as a synonym for asymmetric conflicts like those of Afghanistan or Iraq also known as Fourth Generation Warfare. Yet, the latter is an evolved form of insurgency, while hybrid war is a much broader concept that focuses on external threats (Lasica 2009: 14–15) while combining the properties of intrastate and interstate wars

(Fuamba et al. 2013: 322). John McCuen noted that the hybrid war is a combination of symmetric and asymmetric war that includes military operations as well as efforts to secure and stabilize the combat zone's indigenous populations. The control and support of this population have to be accompanied by a wider struggle for the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations as well as for international support (McCuen 2008: 107). The hybrid war projects all elements of national power along a continuum of activities ranging from stability operations to armed combat (Bond 2007: 4). Conventional, irregular, information, cyber, and economic warfare are simultaneously blended in the battlespace, with a focus on their cognitive and moral dimensions (Lasica 2009: 10–11). Using this approach, in 2014 Russia tried to defeat Ukraine by breaking its ability to resist through the use of the whole spectrum of military and non-military means (including diplomatic, economic, political, social, and information ones) while exploring and capitalizing on its adversary's inherent structural weaknesses—including corruption—in order to infiltrate its political, administrative, economic, defense, police, secret service, social, and media structures (Rácz 2015: 87–88). It is obvious that the actual and potential use of this new instrument represents a major development within the East European regional security complex that further contributes to the aforementioned 'militarization of thinking' in the region and, implicitly, to the progress of a neoclassical geopolitical vision among both elites and citizens in directly concerned states and their neighbors.

2.6 State Capture

The domestic situation of many CIS countries—including Moldova, which is analyzed as a case study in Chapter 7—is significantly influenced by state capture. This concept was first introduced in 1999–2000 by Joel Hellman and Daniel Kaufmann in a series of studies published by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank (for details see Tudoroiu 2015: 456). The point was to make a distinction between two separate components of corruption. One is administrative corruption, which simply distorts the implementation of laws, rules, and regulations to provide advantages to specific actors in exchange for private gains to public officials (World Bank 2000: xvii). The other is state capture, which concerns actors' actions to illicitly influence the very formulation of laws, regulations, decrees, and other

government policies to their own advantage in exchange for private benefits to public officials (Gray et al. 2004: 10). In this book, I will use the definition provided by Transparency International because it emphasizes the connection between this phenomenon and the highest levels of the state apparatus:

> State capture is an advanced form of endemic corruption, predominantly in the top level of state power, where the interests of a narrow oligarchic group significantly influence the decision making process in the country. The ways of promoting its decisions at a first glance are not always illegal, but the capture of some state institutions in the final form lead to the capture of the entire state system. (Transparency International Moldova 2017)

When high levels of state capture are reached, the legitimate channels of political influence and interest intermediation are subverted or replaced, which diminishes the access of competing groups and interests to state officials (World Bank 2000: 3). Ultimately, the very 'sovereign control over future policy direction is annulled' (Conley et al. 2016: 1), which questions the working of democratic mechanisms as well as the very legitimacy of the state and its key institutions (Tudoroiu 2015: 671–673). In turn, as shown in Chapter 7, the effects of this delegitimizing can be easily instrumentalized by states like Russia in their effort to influence the foreign policy orientation of the target country.

2.7 Political Psychology

A final point has to be made on a theoretical issue of a very different nature. It is undoubtful that the change in US foreign policy brought by the election of President Trump has significantly impacted global developments. It is equally difficult to deny that this change mainly stems from the political vision, ideas, and leadership style of the new President. Critically, he has brought in the international arena an unprecedented degree of uncertainty that would be difficult to explain without discussing his personality traits. Accordingly, the chapter on American foreign policy needs to and does make use of Political Psychology elements in order to identify possible scenarios for future US involvement in the East European regional security complex. The problem is that to many IR scholars Political Psychology represents a strange and dangerous realm that should simply be ignored. A reviewer of one of my

article manuscripts despisingly rejected my use of 'Freudian approaches.' Another one encouraged me to drop the entire Political Psychology section of a text scrutinizing precisely President Trump's foreign policy. It happened that the first one expressed clearly neo-Marxist views, while the second seemed to be a neorealist. These two approaches prioritize the system level of analysis, and it is hardly surprising that they leave no room for the individual one, to which Political Psychology is closely associated. This is not a problem when dealing with International Relations in general, but might become one when the narrower field of Foreign Policy Analysis is taken into consideration. It is my belief that a neorealist or neo-Marxist study of present US foreign policy that ignores President Trump's voluntaristic decisions and preference for uncertainty is unable to provide a valid analysis of recent developments and will necessarily fail to identify the most likely scenarios concerning the evolution of the East European security complex. Therefore, the chapter on US foreign policy includes a section exploring the political consequences of President Trump's personality traits. The latter is analyzed using a Political Psychology approach developed by Aubrey Immelman on the basis of the conceptual perspective of Theodore Millon. In this view, the concept of personality is understood as:

> a complex pattern of deeply embedded psychological characteristics that are largely nonconscious and not easily altered, expressing themselves automatically in almost every facet of functioning. Intrinsic and pervasive, these traits emerge from a complicated matrix of biological dispositions and experiential learnings, and ultimately comprise the individual's distinctive pattern of perceiving, feeling, thinking, coping, and behaving. (Theodore Millon quoted by Immelman 2017: 1)

More details of personality patterns and of their critically important consequences in terms of political leadership and foreign policy actions are provided in Sect. 5.4. What I want to note before concluding this theoretical chapter is that this book is scrutinizing an extremely complex process that cannot be understood using only one level of analysis or one type of actors. The issue of President Trump's personality shows that the individual level cannot be ignored. The case study of Moldova will be used to explain how CIS oligarchs and civil society-related political groups bring a significant contribution to East European interactions. Those interactions mainly take place among neoclassical geopolitically

minded states that need to be scrutinized using the state level of analysis. The regional dimension, as illustrated by the use of the RSCT, is also highly relevant. Finally, when the conditions and consequences of an unlikely but not impossible US-China Cold War are addressed, it is the system level of analysis that becomes critical. The following chapters take into consideration all these elements in an effort to avoid sterile theoretical dogmatism and counterproductive narrow approaches. Those who prefer pure neoclassical geopolitics uncontaminated by RSCT constructivist ideas or neorealist analyses devoid of any Political Psychology element will certainly disapprove. For my part, I am mainly interested in effectiveness. Accordingly, I believe that the analysis of East European security requires a theoretical instrument as complex as the region itself and I hope that this book will succeed in providing it.

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CHAPTER 3

East European Interactions: Russian Foreign Policy as Structural Constraint

It might seem unusual to start the substantive part of a book on Brexit and President Trump with a chapter that, in a large measure, deals with Russia. The explanation is simple: This is not a book about the influence of Brexit and President Trump in general. It scrutinizes their impact on Eastern Europe, and within this regional security complex, the Russian factor can almost be assessed as a structural constraint. 'Almost' is used here in order to acknowledge the fact that Moscow's present role is not a given. It has been constructed recently, and it has its own dynamics. The goal of this chapter is precisely to analyze geopolitical interactions within the East European security complex in the context of the genesis, features, impact, and predictable evolution of the Russian factor that undoubtedly represents 'the most pressing geostrategic challenge for European stability and order' (Simón 2015: 21).

3.1 Putin, the Authoritarian Restorer

3.1.1 Weimar Russia

It is almost customary to start analyses of Russia's present anti-Western stance with depictions of Kievan Rus', Byzantine influence, and the Third Rome ideational construct. However, I will take for granted readers' familiarity with the cultural history of Eurasia's last eleven centuries

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and begin with what I call Weimar Russia (1992–1999). Similar to 1920s Germany, it was strongly marked by dramatic economic crises leading to mass poverty, by post-great power trauma, and by the difficult quest for a new national identity. Unlike its German counterpart, Weimar Russia was not a democracy. The state led by Boris Yeltsin evolved from a hybrid regime to a semi-consolidated authoritarian one, to use the terminology of Freedom House. Still, at the end of the day this difference proved to be irrelevant. Both Weimars disappointed their citizens, which resulted in legitimizing eventual fully fledged dictatorships.

In socioeconomic terms, the fall of communism was followed by a Western-inspired transition to market economy that was neoliberal in nature and as such 'largely inattentive to equality and the fair distribution of assets.' It led to formidable concentrations of wealth resulting in the extreme polarization of the Russian society (Deudney and Ikenberry 2009: 54). A small number of oligarchs 'amassed huge fortunes by plundering the country's wealth' (Shlapentokh 2014: 49), while for most citizens wages, social benefits, and living standards declined catastrophically. Post-great power trauma was equally important. Russian leaders found it difficult to accept the sharp decline of Moscow's influence in world affairs (Larrabee 2010: 34). Loss of prestige also 'caused resentment among quite a few people with a nostalgic view of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' (Shlapentokh 2014: 49). Due to its openness, liberalism, and incipient democratic reforms, Weimar Russia has been perceived in the West in a favorable light. This is hardly the case among the Russians. To most of them, both President Yeltsin and its foreign ally and supporter, the USA, were responsible for 'economic decline, political chaos, and weakness' (Larrabee 2010: 34). Unsurprisingly, associated disenchantment, bitterness, and vengefulness led to the rise of popular support for a new regime able and willing to improve economic conditions and, critically, to promote a more assertive foreign policy (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 269; Shlapentokh 2014: 49–51).

3.1.2 Putin, Restitutor Orbis

At the end of the military anarchy of the third century, a number of Roman emperors more or less responsible for bringing the empire back to normality triumphantly proclaimed themselves 'Restitutor Orbis.' This is exactly how President Putin sees himself: as the 'Restorer of the (Russian) World.' He was unable—and perhaps unwilling—to

fundamentally change the economic heritage of Weimar Russia. The country continues to have 'a primitive economy based on raw materials and endemic corruption,' to quote President Medvedev (Sakwa 2015a: 67). It is 'a territorialised rentier economy based largely around oil and gas extraction' (Agnew 2017: 405) and strongly marked by 'lack of reform, bloated state spending, rampant corruption and bureaucratic mismanagement, [and] political pressure on business' (Missiroli et al. 2014: 50). Its 'uni-dimensional and backwards character (…) makes it more vulnerable and less resilient' than those of many East European states (Braun 2012: 393). Still, when President Putin took power (December 1999), Russia was enjoying rapid short-term economic growth. During the first year of his tenure, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by more than 5% while the inflation fell from 50 to 21% (Saltzman 2012: 548). Helped by rising oil prices, the country was recovering from the terrible 1998 crisis and its new leader took advantage of this situation to legitimize his regime.

In terms of methods, observers have noted 'Mr. Putin's awkward mix of brutality, cynicism and cultural pragmatism' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017). As a statesman, he was described by Aleksandr Dugin as a Russian conservative who values statism: a leader committed to an idea of nation based on a sense of historical mission, tradition, and greatness (Roberts 2017: 35). He is also a neopatrimonial leader who inherited Weimar Russia's system and developed it 'to his advantage, to keep his loyal friends rich and himself in power' (ibid.: 33). In fact, neopatrimonialism is so developed that certain authors speak of 'contemporary Russia as a feudal society' (Shlapentokh 2007). One of its key features is corruption, which turns the state into a kleptocracy 'where the regime itself is organized around the plunder of public wealth by the ruling clique' (Puddington 2017: 36) or into a mafia state controlled by 'an interlocking network of associations and clan-based politics centered on Putin' (Karen Dawisha quoted by Conley et al. 2016: xii). In political terms, the new regime 'has emerged as a leader of modern authoritarian innovation' as it:

> pioneered the capture of the media through state enterprises and oligarchic cronies, the adoption of laws designed to dismember civil society, the use of the judiciary as an instrument of political harassment, and, perhaps most importantly of all, the development of modern propaganda and disinformation. Russia has also been in the vanguard of a relentless campaign

> against liberal values, and has moved relentlessly to export authoritarian ideas and techniques to other societies. (Puddington 2017: 6)

This first major step in the construction of the new regime was President Putin's centralization of state power. He put an end to the autonomy and influence of regional governors, took control of the Duma (the lower house of the Parliament) through his own party of power, United Russia, and put the network of the so-called *siloviki* (former security officials) in control of the state bureaucracy (Orenstein 2015: 534). Weimar Russia oligarchs were deprived of their power through co-option, intimidation, or exile, while the media was turned into 'a more compliant tool and supporter of government policy' (Larrabee 2010: 35). Civil society organizations were created to mobilize the population in support of the regime; elections were rigged (Orenstein 2015: 534). At times, high-profile contract killings such as those of Anna Politkovskaya in 2006 or Boris Nemtsov in 2015 were used to intimidate and silence adversaries (Kuchins 2015: 124). Overall, the Russian state saw both its power and its control over key strategic industries—especially energy—restored (Larrabee 2010: 35), but this was done through systemic political deinstitutionalization and centralization of authoritarian power in President Putin's hands (Anders Aslund quoted by Saltzman 2012: 549): A dictatorship was born. Its legitimizing domestic discourse presents the Western-influenced 1990s as chaotic and un-Russian, emphasizes past patriotism, and identifies the new regime with the anti-Nazi struggle during World War II (Lindley-French 2016: 108). Accordingly, Russia's consolidated authoritarian regime was labeled by his leader 'sovereign democracy' (Braun 2012: 393).

Previous paragraphs might give the impression that the Russian dictatorship was created by one man. I remember the Nobel Prize winner, Orhan Pamuk, saying a couple of years ago that if someone believes that the problems of Turkey's democracy are due to one man (i.e., to that country's authoritarian leader, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan), that person hasn't understood a thing about present Turkey. Similarly, President Putin represents only the tip of an iceberg made up of mainly structural factors. I will not engage here the vast literature on democratization and democratic consolidation. I will only mention the critical aspect of Russia's political culture that historically was undemocratic and, after 1917, suffered the prolonged trauma of totalitarianism. Lipsetian factors have to be added: Due to the poverty and extreme

social polarization of Weimar Russia, the middle class is small, weak, and unable to impose its democratic values on the rest of the society. Furthermore, mass poverty fuels nostalgia for Soviet times and hostility toward the democratic West. Finally, as noted by Richard Sakwa, the leverage of the European Union over Russia has always been relatively weak and it has not been accompanied by linkages. Accordingly, it failed to contribute to the country's democratization (Sakwa 2010: 8). It is the sum of all these factors that allowed President Putin to 'restore the Russian world' domestically as a dictatorship. The restoration, however, also has an international dimension.

3.1.3 A Great Power, Once More

The idea of using a triumphalist foreign policy to distract public attention from domestic problems is hardly new. In the specific case of Russia, it was enhanced by the nostalgia for the superpower past and by the domestic perception of Weimar Russia as a result of humiliating defeat and disintegration. Later, when anti-Putin public protests started to develop, an aggressive foreign policy discourse also allowed the regime to blame domestic turmoil on an American-funded fifth column (Bugajski 2014: 6). At the same time, the effort to restore Russia's international influence required considerable resources, which gave President Putin a good reason for the aforementioned process of authoritarian centralization resulting in the creation of a strong dictatorship (Larrabee 2010: 35).

From the very beginning, the military was closely associated with this project. Weimar Russia's army had been in complete turmoil. President Putin's 2000 National Security Concept and his 2001 decision to start reforming the armed forces were accompanied by 30 and 34% increases of the defense budget in 2000 and 2001, respectively. Relative economic prosperity allowed for a five times rise in military expenditure between 1999 and 2005 (Saltzman 2012: 551). The 'boost to the morale and importance of the military' was a key component of President Putin's plan to reconstruct the image of Russia as a great power (Duke 2017: 96). An increasingly assertive foreign policy represented the other side of the coin. It was noted that 'the essence of Putinism (…) is to ensure that the choices are never unequivocal and do not foreclose other options.' At the same time, however, there is 'a grim determination to ensure that Russia's status as a great power (…) is safeguarded' (Sakwa 2015b: 112).

Initially, this was not accompanied by a specific foreign policy ideology. Yet, despite his pragmatism, in time President Putin 'subscrib[ed] to an evolving narrative about Russia's role in the world.' He and his regime internalized the story of Russian culture and experience as well as the country's imagined destiny, which were increasingly reflected in foreign policy. During the same period, worsening relations with the USA led to the emergence of a heightened siege mentality combining nationalism and the obsession with threat from a hostile West (Roberts 2017: 35). The latter became particularly relevant at the end of Dmitry Medvedev's presidential tenure, when Vladimir Putin's intention to return as President led to the largest wave of protest in post-Soviet Russia. He claimed that behind the protesters there were foreign powers seeking hegemony; accordingly, a series of clearly anti-American actions were initiated that contributed decisively to the tensioning of bilateral relations (Greene 2016: 42). External factors presented below obviously need to be taken into consideration, but it cannot be denied that domestically the confrontation with the West has been used as a solution to the critical problem of President Putin's waning legitimacy. As a result, 'the shift to confrontation with the West is now structural, built into the fabric of the new kind of regime Putin has put in place' (ibid.: 41). Eventually, worsening economic conditions in Russia due to Western sanctions and to the fall of oil prices have further increased the regime's need for legitimization. Therefore, President Putin's present hostility to the West cannot be abandoned unless exceptional international circumstances justify the domestic costs.

Anyway, post-Weimar Russia 'has recovered more rapidly than many observers expected' while its international influence increased visibly (Larrabee 2010: 35). The problem is that, in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Russia can be either an empire or a democracy, but it cannot be both' (Zbigniew Brzezinski quoted by Williams and Neumann 2000: 373). Under President Putin, it reemerged as an authoritarian empire whose democratization is highly unlikely even in the long term. Scenarios constructed for Russia's future suggest that by 2025 its domestic situation will not improve. It will muddle along with a difficult context of economic stagnation or even increasing hardship. Yet, it will be able to 'maintain essential levels of stability' mainly due to public fatigue with the 1990s-style instability that legitimizes the regime. In turn, this will allow Moscow to continue to conduct a robust foreign policy (Haukkala and Popescu 2016: 69).

3.2 Russian Geopolitics

3.2.1 Geopolitics and Eurasianism

The previous section has shown that Russia's domestic transformation under President Putin has been intertwined with an effort toward the restoration of the country's great power status. Accordingly, a linkage between domestic (mostly ethnical as well as cultural/civilizational) and external discourses, debates, and programs can be easily identified when scrutinizing Russia's worldview. More specifically, this concerns mainly the complex relationship between geopolitics and Eurasianism. Russia has been used as an example of the 'crucial role of "foreign-policy identity crises" in stimulating the recourse to older seemingly long-buried genres of geopolitical thinking' (Agnew 2017: 405). The loss of superpower status led to a strong revival of classical-style geopolitics. The 2014 Crimean *Anschluss* was justified by President Putin in 'longstanding but recently dormant' Pan-Slavic terms. It is only that, in comparison with older Tsarist and Soviet discourses, 'civilisational claims are more ethnic-identity related' today (ibid.: 405). The Soviet Union had banned the formal use of geopolitics, which spectacularly reemerged in Weimar Russia in 'a wide range of treatments, ranging from academic texts to policy-oriented polemics' (Berryman 2012: 537). Russian liberals and realists debated the value of geopolitics (see below). Unlike their Western counterparts, who were mainly interested in containing the Heartland, Russian geopoliticians have given preference to the continentality of Mackinder's model. Supporters of the civilizational approach, such as Vadim Tsymbuskii, even conceived of Russia as a geopolitical and ethno-civilizational *island* within Eurasia that should focus on its inward development (ibid.: 537–538). More generally, the entire Russian school of geopolitics was assessed as 'a particularistic form of geocultural studies' that emphasizes the stability of Eurasia 'based on the spread of Russian language, ethnicity and culture, that was notionally achieved under Catherine the Great' (Sussex 2015: 33). Ultimately, it is claimed that in order to remain a great power, Russia has to represent the strategic axis of Eurasia. At least for a time, this made Eurasianism an inescapable key element of the Russian worldview (Berryman 2012: 537).

Eurasianism (for its detailed historical development see Bassin et al. 2015; for its political and geopolitical impact, see Kanet and Sussex 2015; Lane and Samokhvalov 2015) was created by a group of exiled

Russian writers in the 1920s and 1930s. The starting point was the 1921 *Exodus to the East* collective volume, the first to define Russia as a unique civilizational entity bringing together Orthodox and Muslim Russians/Slavs, Finno-Ugric, and Turkic people. Its culture cannot be considered as part of the Slavic one and is not compatible with that of Europe (Silvius 2015: 78; Shlapentokh 2014: 52). During the Soviet period, Eurasianism incorporated the significant contribution of ethnologist Lev Gumilyov's objectivist theorizing about ethnicity, but it was during the first years of Weimar Russia that Eurasianist geopolitical orientations developed and succeeded in 'uniting a diverse range of anti-liberal and anti-democratic elements, including monarchist, communist, nationalist and fascist forces seeking a restoration of the Soviet Empire' (Silvius 2015: 79). They all rejected the new American-centered unipolar world order and the associated liberal democratic institutions. Toward the end of the 1990s, even the Russian official discourse took its inspiration from this school of thought, with Foreign and later Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov representing the 'pragmatic' Eurasianist foreign policy orientation (ibid.). Undoubtedly, the best known ideologue of Eurasianism is Aleksandr Dugin, the former leader of the proto-fascist Russian National Bolshevik Party (Sussex 2015: 24) whose influence reached its peak during the first years of President Putin's tenure. At that time, his ideas were popular among many Russian conservative intellectuals while he was regarded as perhaps the major ideologist of the new regime (Shlapentokh 2014: 56; for a review and classification of all Russian geopolitics/Eurasianist approaches see Morozova 2009: 674–683). His main work, *Foundations of Geopolitics*, was allegedly written in 1996–1997 with the assistance of a general of the Russian General Staff Academy. It presented his geopolitical views as an all-encompassing *Weltanschauung* able to provide an accurate interpretation of all natural and human phenomena. Critically, it also provided 'a means to restore the grandeur of Russia as hegemon of the Eurasian space' (Silvius 2015: 78–79). It should be noted that Dugin's Russia is 'not so much a country but a civilization' that should be compared with Europe as a whole, not with individual European countries (Shlapentokh 2014: 68). This influenced significantly the Eurasianism embedded in the Putin era discourse, which:

> manifested [itself] in the foreign policy orientation of the Russian state [as] a geopolitical strategy predicated on a balancing orientation towards, if not a degree of contempt for, US hegemony. Furthermore, Eurasianists deem

> geopolitics as partly constituted by particular civilizational and cultural qualities: a defence of international cultural plurality accompanies a desire for Eurasian sovereignty, the guarantor of which is Russia, against the purported homogenizing tendencies of a Western-led globalization. (Silvius 2015: 79)

'Civilization' does not appear at all in the 2000 Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation. However, it is mentioned 12 times in the 2008 version of the same document and 14 times in 2013. 'Eurasian' is mentioned once in 2000, six times in 2008, and four times in 2013 (ibid.: 83). Yet, this masks a rather surprising reality: Eurasianism quickly fell from grace at the beginning of President Putin's rule. In fact, it had already exhausted itself by the end of Weimar Russia due to its failure to sustain a coherent foreign policy leading to the restoration of Russian uncontested hegemony in the post-Soviet space. In practical terms, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was unable to counter the enlargement of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through some form of institutional development. In conceptual terms, Eurasianism failed to materialize its conceptual promise to identify itself with Russia's mission and national interests. In civilizational terms, Eurasianists did not succeed in turning Russia into a third way in between East and West. All this contributed to the progressive rise to preeminence of geopolitics, which 'is assumed to have exhausted, subsumed and taken over Eurasianism' (Morozova 2009: 667, 672; Berryman 2012: 537).

It should not be forgotten that Russian geopolitics and Eurasianism reemerged almost simultaneously after the end of the Cold War, constantly reinforced each other and overlapped in a large measure during a decade, but preserved their distinct identities. In 1999, Graham Smith noted that the most influential Russian geopolitical approaches—promoted by the New Right, Eurasian communists, and Democratic statists, respectively—were subclasses of Eurasianism. In 2003–2006, there were the Westernizers, Democratic statists, Neo-Eurasianists, and Neo-communists. Critically, Democratic statism had moved from Eurasianism toward claiming Russia's European identity and supporting its cooperation with the West (Mäkinen 2014: 89). Even more importantly, under President Putin 'geopolitics in its conventional meaning is said to have completely overtaken Eurasianism as the prevailing mode of foreign policy thinking' (Morozova 2009: 672). In Weimar

Russia, geopolitics first emerged as a liberal effort 'to close the door on the ideology-permeated foreign policy of the Soviet past' that would be replaced by a new liberal, democratic, and pro-Western approach. Accordingly, concepts such as spheres of influence, politics as territorial control, and any crude geographical reductionism or determinism were absent. However, the 1993 parliamentary elections opened the arena to a very different view of geopolitics supported by an alliance between the increasingly insurgent military and nationalist political parties. Nationalist geopolitical arguments were brought to the forefront and began to enter the vocabulary of President Yeltsin's political elites. From that point on, Weimar Russia's official geopolitical approach 'was a problem-solving discourse which presented security along Russia's newly established borders as a problem and made pursuit of Russian national interests a key to its solution.' This pronouncedly geopolitical security discourse placed the CIS republics into a 'common post-Soviet geopolitical space' affecting Russia's vital interests and therefore representing its natural sphere of influence (ibid.: 669). This view was progressively populated with elements of Eurasianism and in particular with the latter's civilizational dimension. Eurasianism itself lost its direct influence on Russian foreign policy making 15 years ago, but some of its ideas continue to affect Moscow's international behavior because they were integrated into the hard core of President Putin's geopolitical thinking.

The latter reflects almost perfectly Stefano Guzzini's definition of neoclassical geopolitics: It is conservative with nationalist overtones, gives a privileged position to political and economic geography but also to human and cultural geographical factors (and especially to Eurasianism-inspired civilizational ones), gives precedence to a realist, military-centered, and nationalist strategic view, and is highly interested in the international competition for power and rank (Guzzini 2012: 43–44). Unsurprisingly, this view 'remains wedded to [a] conservative and militarised foreign policy agenda' (Megoran 2010: 189) that prioritizes Russian power and national interest, with a special focus on the CIS and, increasingly, on the entire East European security complex. As it 'imposes a constructed certitude upon the unruly complexity of world politics' (Gearóid Ó Tuathail quoted by Kearns 2009: 259), it is conceived in order to reassure and mobilize Russian citizens and thus legitimize President Putin's regime. At the same time, the militarization of thinking it tends to promote has very negative consequences on the region's stability.

However, Russia's adoption of neoclassical geopolitics should not be exclusively associated with military aggressiveness. Two *cooperative* projects launched by the Kremlin are presented in the following sections in order to examine the conditions under which the Russian neoclassical geopolitical approach can be compatible with the promotion of peaceful, non-antagonistic regional relations.

3.2.2 The Eurasian Union

Since the dismantlement of the USSR, 'there have been a plethora of integrative plans in the post-Soviet Eurasian region' (Sakwa 2015a: 54). The CIS is of course the most visible, but it remains under-institutionalized and ineffective. Ukraine has never ratified its charter; Georgia left the organization in 2008. Already during the 1990s the Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova group (GUAM), sometimes joined by Uzbekistan [which turned it into Georgia-Ukraine-Uzbekistan-Azerbaijan-Moldova (GUUAM)], blocked further integration. In the field of security, the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty was signed in 1992. In 1999, it was upgraded to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), whose charter was adopted in 2002. Yet, its evolution was hardly more successful than that of the CIS (ibid.). What did work was the much smaller 'coalition of the willing' incarnated by the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan Customs Union. Initiated in 2006 and launched in 2010, it was turned in 2012 into a Common Economic Space and into the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) on January 1, 2015 (Popescu 2014: 9). This construct was sometimes perceived as 'just another typical functionalist integration project' (Sakwa 2015a: 53). However, its genuinely functionalist development is seriously plagued by a number of factors. Most CIS republics do not look interested in joining it; only Armenia and Kyrgyzstan were added to the initial three members of the Customs Union, mainly due to Russian pressure. Economically, the rise of China and the development of relations with the European Union have drastically reduced the importance of Russia as a trading partner. Except for Belarus and Uzbekistan, Russia is trading less with any CIS republic than the EU and China (Popescu 2014: 11). In other words, the EEU does not represent an institutional framework created in response to the region's natural economic trends and needs. Moreover, it will complicate Chinese-Russian relations as it will diminish its members' trade with Beijing despite the latter's growing economic interests in Central Asia (Duke 2017: 101).

In fact, functionalism is not the key. The Eurasian project is geopolitical in nature. President Putin launched it in an October 2011 article in *Izvestia* as an explicit plan to create a new building block of global development that, like the European Union or NAFTA, would become 'a distinctive pole of influence in a multipolar world by reversing the "civilised divorce" of former Soviet republics from the USSR' (Popescu 2014: 7). Accordingly, the vision of the Eurasian Union as a complement to the EU is much less convincing than that presenting the new Union as the vanguard of 'the restoration of Russian dominance over the entire Soviet/imperial space and the adjacent traditional spheres of influence' (Trenin quoted by Duke 2017: 98). Russian-sponsored Eurasian integration is both an effort to impose 'Russia's pre-eminence in post-Soviet Eurasia' and to reinforce Moscow's 'claims to being an autonomous great power' (Sakwa 2015a: 55). Of course, one can easily identify in this the heritage of Eurasianism. After all, the very name of the Union suggests the obsession with Russian hegemony in Eurasia. Yet, this is not Eurasianism *à la* Dugin. The civilizational aspect is hardly dominant. Rather, the reasoning is that of a genuine neoclassical geopolitical approach whose already remote genesis was influenced by Eurasianism.

Building a sphere of influence represents the inevitable goal of such an approach. Yet, the fact that this can be done in the form—or at least under the mask—of an economic block that some have perceived as a functionalist-inspired phenomenon might suggest that Russia's neoclassical geopolitics is not, after all, necessarily conducive to open conflict. In other words, Moscow might be open to peaceful, cooperative relationships that could even evolve toward a win-win regional situation. Unfortunately, this optimistic scenario has a problem. In 2014, when the launch of the EEU was prepared, President Putin also invaded Ukraine. As shown in the following sections, the new Union cannot be separated from the larger context of the confrontational relationship with the West. Leaving this aspect aside, in practical terms the Crimean *Anschluss* and the warfare in Donbass made sure that Kyiv would not participate in the integrationist project. Yet, 'the foundation of a Russian-led geopolitical bloc (…) makes little sense without Ukraine' (Duke 2017: 98); 'Ukraine was (…) turned into the graveyard of Moscow's ambitions to build a geopolitical Eurasia' (Popescu 2014: 43). More importantly, the uncanny simultaneity of military aggression and less successful calls for economic integration ultimately shows that 'Russia might have a lot of disruptive power in (…) post-Soviet states, but it lacks the power to

create a positive unifying project' (ibid.). In normative terms, this was paralleled by Moscow's rejection of the need for a positive normative basis for its regional projects. Unlike the EU European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership, Russian integrative projects are exclusively supported by a 'negative normative dimension based on a type of order enshrining sovereignty, non-interventionism and a pluralism of regime types' (Sakwa 2015a: 67). This has much to do with Russia's support for authoritarianism in the CIS, but at the same time compels 'Eurasian integration [to be] based on normative criteria that undermine integration' (Sakwa 2015a: 67). In combination with Moscow's openness toward the use of military instruments closer to its neoclassical geopolitical vision, this makes the prospect of genuine functionalist regional integration and associated non-antagonistic Russian behavior in the CIS highly unlikely.

3.2.3 Russia's Greater Europe

The Eurasian Union is not the only cooperative regional project proposed by Russia in recent years. A much more ambitious one concerns the entire East European security complex. For a long time, the concept of European integration has been monopolized by the 'Wider Europe of the European Union and the West modelled after Western democratic institutions with a decidedly Atlanticist tilt' (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 1). Reminiscent of President Gorbachev's idea of a common European home, a Russian alternative project was proposed that would bring together the European Union and the Eurasian Union in a Greater Europe that would focus more on broader civilizational ideas than on institutional aspects (Sakwa 2010: 5). While present political and cultural differences would be preserved, barriers to collaboration would be reduced (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 1) especially in the realm of practical economic and energy integration. This vast continental process would allow for the non-conflictual development of the two separate integration projects (Sakwa 2015a: 60). Of course, the *sine qua non* condition of this Greater Europe would be the placing of Russia's norms and values on the same footing as the EU *acquis communautaire*, the end of Brussels' political conditionalities, and Western acknowledgment of Eurasian Union's full legitimacy as an equal partner (Lo 2015: 181).

The project was first presented by President Medvedev at a meeting with Russian diplomats several days after he signed Russia's Foreign Policy

Concept in July 2008. One month later the war in Georgia made such cooperation unlikely, but the project was mentioned again in an article published by the President in 2009 (White and Feklyunina 2014: 131). That year the Russian initiative was widely discussed and led to the preparation of a draft European Security Treaty that President Medvedev sent to the leaders of Western states and European security organizations. A pan-European security conference was proposed to be held in Helsinki in order to turn this project into reality (Lomagin 2010: 181, 185). The explicit goal of this 'Helsinki II' was to promote the 'principle of indivisible security' in 'a common undivided space in order to finally do away with the Cold War legacy' (Freire 2016: 38). While all this came from President Medvedev, in a speech in Berlin in November 2010 then-Prime Minister Putin also called for the geopolitical unification of 'greater Europe' from Lisbon to Vladivostok to create a genuine strategic partnership (Sakwa 2015a: 59). He reiterated this idea in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, after his inauguration (White and Feklyunina 2014: 131), and even at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis at the Russia-EU summit in Brussels on January 28, 2014 (Sakwa 2015b: 116). Despite ensuing tensions and sanctions, the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy mentions 'the harmonization of integration processes in Europe and on the post-Soviet territory, and the formation in the Euro-Atlantic region of an open system of collective security' (Russian National Security Strategy 2015, §97).

The geopolitical dimension of this project is obvious. 'Greater Europe' was conceived in the context of Russian criticism of European Union's inability to develop an independent foreign policy, which led to subordination to the USA (Sakwa 2010: 14). It showed Moscow's willingness to involve itself more directly in European security issues (Freire 2016: 37–38) by creating 'a new European order through a closer relationship with France and Germany, the expulsion of the US from Europe, and the withering of NATO' (Lindley-French 2016: 107). Within this new bipolar Europe, the absence of the USA would have brought a 'Russian-friendly balance of power' (Freire 2016: 38). Moreover, turning the Eurasian Union into Europe's second pillar would have legitimized Russian hegemony or even control within the CIS, which in turn would have 'increase[d] Russia's bargaining power *vis-à-vis* Europe and the rest of the world.' In fact, President Putin has already used the promise of the Greater Europe to promote the Eurasian Union as an instrument of 'integration into Europe via Moscow' (Popescu 2014: 36).

The neoclassical geopolitical nature of the project hardly can be contested. This was a plan to have Russia's sphere of influence fully recognized in the East while a close partnership would be set up with a Western Europe weakened by the termination of the transatlantic relationship. Interestingly, in addition to the balance of power dimension, Greater Europe would also have implied the end of European Union's claims to normative superiority (White and Feklyunina 2014: 132). Indeed, under the mask of 'normative pluralism,' the new arrangement would have legitimized Russia's non-democratic values and its right to support their diffusion within the Eurasian Union. For its part, the EU would have needed to give up its democratic conditionality when dealing with CIS republics. In turn, this would have led to the questioning of the use of the same instrument in the Western Balkans and would have considerably helped EU post-communist 'illiberal democracies' such as Hungary and Poland in their own challenging of European democratic values. In other words, Greater Europe would have threatened the very unity and coherence of the European Union with regard to a key dimension of its identity: democracy.

Russian hopes that such a plan would be acceptable to EU members and to the USA were 'very idealistic,' to say the least (Lomagin 2010: 189, 195). Unsurprisingly, the Westerners responded with 'polite contempt' and initiated a Corfu process within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to assess the proposal (Sakwa 2015b: 116) that soon slid into irrelevance. What the plan and its rejection by the West actually showed was the fundamental difference between the geopolitical visions of Russia and the European Union with respect to their common—and, in certain regards, shared—East European neighborhood. As Nicu Popescu noted, both these visions were 'maximalist.' Brussels tried to construct its own unipolar Europe of concentric circles structured around the European Union. Russia proposed a bipolar Europe within which it would have taken advantage of a favorable balance of power (Popescu 2014: 35–37). These different approaches will further be contrasted in the next chapter. Here I will only note that Russia's Greater Europe project, like the Eurasian Union one, is indicative of Moscow's willingness to adopt a non-antagonistic attitude in Eastern Europe only on its own terms, which are inspired by neoclassical geopolitics. This has much to do with Russia's identity as an international actor. Before exploring this important aspect, however, it is useful to take a brief look at recent interactions within the East European

regional security complex that have both shaped and revealed the aforementioned identity.

3.2.4 Moscow and Washington: The Narrative

When dealing with 'the West,' Russia has faced two very different geopolitical entities, the USA and the European Union. For a time, it seemed that only the former was a heavyweight player deserving the Kremlin's respectful attention. During the 1990s, the USA penetrated the loose supercomplex formed at that time by the EU-Europe and the Central Eurasian regional security complexes (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 343) most visibly in the context of the Yugoslav wars and through NATO's Partnership for Peace while constantly exercising a high degree of diffuse political influence. Still, for more than a decade Washington showed considerable self-restraint in order to avoid antagonizing Moscow and to preserve as much as possible of the harmonious relationship that seemed to have developed at the end of the Cold War. Russia's instrumentalization of the frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Ossetia, South Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh was completely ignored as were most of its unfriendly actions toward other CIS states. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, a forum for consultation and cooperation, was established in 1997. The first NATO enlargement in 1999 only concerned three Central European states. Yevgeny Primakov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, had calmly anticipated this development in 1996 by describing it as similar to 'sleeping with a porcupine - the best we can do is reduce its size and keep its quills from making us too miserable' (Lomagin 2010: 189). However, toward the end of President Yeltsin's tenure developments that included the Kosovo war led to the considerable tensioning of the bilateral relationship. It was President Putin's coming to power in 2000 that brought an almost immediate Obama-style 'reset.' Indeed, during his first years at the Kremlin, the new President 'sought engagement and accommodation with the West, and he was perhaps the most pro-European leader Russia has ever had' (Sakwa 2015a: 60). He took advantage of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to express solidarity with the USA and join its antiterrorist actions. His 'extraordinary openness' was confirmed by the German language speech he delivered to the Bundestag on September 26, 2001, which insisted on Russia's 'European destiny'

(White and Feklyunina 2014: 129; Sakwa 2015a: 60). For his part, President Bush famously declared after their first meeting in Ljubljana 'I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straight forward and trustworthy' (Leichtova 2014: 132). In 2002 the Permanent Joint Council was upgraded to the NATO-Russia Council, a mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision, and joint action in which individual NATO states and Russia were equal partners (Studzińska 2015: 22). That same year, the announcement of the second NATO enlargement—which concerned no less than seven post-communist countries, including the Baltic states—did not lead to major tensions. It is likely that President Putin hoped that NATO would be transformed into a military instrument of President Bush's war against terror, thus losing much of its relevance for Eastern Europe. It was the 2003 Iraq war that brought this surprising harmony to an end. But even then Russia cautiously teamed with France and Germany in opposing American plans. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's statement that the USA should 'punish France, ignore Germany and forgive Russia' suggests that, out of the three, Washington still perceived Moscow as the least antagonistic (Leichtova 2014: 142). However, this would soon change. The Black Sea region and former Soviet Central Asia became parts of an American transit corridor to Iraq and Afghanistan. A new regional geopolitical balance emerged that favored the 2003–2005 pro-Western Colored Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and, more generally, offered a political and security alternative to post-communist states previously forced to acknowledge Russian regional preeminence. Populist leaders in Georgia, Romania, Ukraine, and even Bulgaria tried and sometimes succeeded in conducting successful aggressive anti-Russian foreign policies that would have been unimaginable without US support (Tudoroiu 2014). When the second NATO enlargement became effective in 2004 and brought the organization to the borders of the CIS and of Russia itself, the latter, unlike two years earlier, 'loudly protested' (Leichtova 2014: 141). During the following couple of years Russia's attitude became increasingly hostile to the USA, a process that led to President Putin's famous 2007 Munich Speech which harshly 'criticized the US for unilateralism, its abuses of power, for being the source of great instability in the international system, for using international law selectively, and for creating intractable problems' (Roberts 2017: 38). A long list of strategic troubles created by the USA

was presented in order to support the idea that American hegemony needed to be replaced through a 'wholesale overhaul of the global security architecture' (ibid.: Sakwa 2015a: 62).

This was by far the most important negative shift in Russian-Western relations since the end of the Cold War. It marked Russia's transformation into a 'revisionist power' and the beginning of its overtly antagonistic attitude toward Washington and, later, Brussels that led to the war in Ukraine and to the present conflictual situation that is likely to continue for the predictable future. The following sections will provide a more detailed analysis, but it is important to emphasize at this moment the fact that the cause of all this was not and could not have been the US intrusion in the CIS alone. This was of course important, but—to give an example showing that other responses would have been possible—in the past President Gorbachev had made considerably larger geopolitical concessions to Washington. Two sets of factors were decisive in turning Western expansion into what was presented by the Kremlin as an intolerable threat. On the one hand, in Russia itself President Putin had completed the aforementioned process of authoritarian centralization, thus consolidating his control of the state apparatus and the society and somewhat improving the economy, which also benefited significantly from the rise of energy prices. Critically, he sincerely believed that he had made Russia stronger. Accordingly, he perceived himself as the leader of a major great power that deserved to be recognized as such. In terms of both narcissistic personal convictions and domestic prestige (that would further legitimize his rule), a more assertive—and even aggressive—foreign policy was needed that was incompatible with following America. At the same time, the instrument for conducting such a foreign policy had already been forged: it was around this time that the regime's neoclassical geopolitical vision came to full maturity after having emancipated itself from the previous overwhelming influence of Dugin-style Eurasianism.

On the other hand, a key change at the international level also favored President Putin's plans. As noted by Luis Simón, for both US/NATO and the UE 2005–2006 represented a cutoff point. Before that, in reaction to the 9/11 events the Bush administration shifted its priorities to Central Asia and the Middle East, adopted a unilateral and militaristic approach, and emphasized expeditionary capabilities. Still, military failures associated with asymmetrical conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan led to a marked turn toward multilateralism and away from military

intervention at the beginning of President Bush's second mandate. The 2006 NATO Summit in Riga explicitly emphasized the new preference for non-military means and multilateral solutions to security (Simón 2013: 15). At the same time, within the European Union the 2005 rejection of the proposed EU Constitution by popular vote in France and the Netherlands led to a so-called period of reflection while the agenda of the EU Common Security and Defense Policy started to emphasize civilian crisis management as well as a comprehensive security approach (ibid.). Accordingly, 2005–2006 put an end to the West's geopolitical expansion—which included the 2004 EU and NATO enlargements—and initiated its 'retreat into an increasingly multilateral and cautious approach.' It was the fact that American power in Europe seemed to be on the wane that 'set the stage for Russia's comeback from its post-Cold War geostrategic lethargy' (ibid.: 12, 151). Indeed, the new geopolitical situation as well as factors presented in the previous paragraph led to Russia's transformation into an overtly revisionist power whose geopolitical program was well illustrated by President Putin's aforementioned 2007 Munich Speech. Hostility toward the USA was accompanied by the explicit intention to change the European post-Cold War security order that, being set up when Russia was weak, did not take into consideration the latter's new potential and ambitions (Larrabee 2010: 35). The Kremlin's objectives were in no way similar to those of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It did not intend to revise the existing international order and associated contemporary international practices and principles. It only asked for a considerable upgrading of its own great power status. However, this was enough to launch 'the militarization of international politics, the structural erosion of the post-communist peace and the assertion of elements of a post-ideological Cold War' (Sakwa 2015a: 63–64).

Two major events ensued. The 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit failed to grant Georgia and Ukraine Membership Action Plans as France and Germany opposed the US initiative on the grounds that it would further antagonize Moscow (Studzińska 2015: 26). Far from being appeased, that same year Russia showed its willingness to use military instruments in order to defend its interests in the CIS by invading Georgia. The attack was a success as it demonstrated that CIS republics cannot rely on the USA and NATO to protect them and made NATO enlargement in the region highly unlikely (Larrabee 2010: 36). What Moscow was unable to obtain, however, was the recognition of a sphere of influence of its

own in the former Soviet Union. President Bush stated clearly that 'the days of satellite states and spheres of influence are behind us' and warned that 'bullying and intimidation are not acceptable ways to conduct foreign policy in the 21st century' (Saltzman 2012: 559). Yet, some months later a new American President came to power, bringing in a very different approach.

Many of President Obama's major foreign policy moves were clumsy and incompetent. He tried to disengage the USA from the Middle East and Eastern Europe as part of his 'pivot to Asia' strategy stemming from the idea that 'the fulcrum of world power shifts from the Atlantic to the Pacific (…) [while] Europe moves to a peripheral position' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 58). The way he chose to address the rise of China was inspired in part by ideas advocated for years by offensive neorealists such as Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 2010) but tempered by a softer, almost non-antagonistic approach. The resulting hybrid hardly was a success (see Sect. 5.2). The same thing can be said about the consequences of the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. Also in the Middle East, the reaction to the Arab Spring was particularly inappropriate resulting, among others, in turning the criminal government in Damascus, its Iranian and Russian protectors, and the Islamic State into the major actors of the prolonged Syrian crisis. However, President Obama's biggest misjudgement was likely the 2009 'reset' of the relations with Russia. Like President Bush eight years earlier, he trusted President Putin and believed that a win-win agreement with Moscow was possible and satisfactory for all sides. Critically, he believed that American disengagement from Eastern Europe would put an end to Russians' besieged fortress mentality and turn them into the friendly partners of countries like Georgia. He was particularly naïve in underestimating the resilience of Russia's expansionism. The Kremlin viewed the US plans as 'at least potential concessions at Eastern Europe's expense' and felt emboldened in terms of regional ambitions, which in turn fueled East Europeans' fears (Braun 2012: 392, 397–398). No less than 22 of the region's best known former leaders—including Vaclav Havel and Lech Walesa—sent an open letter to President Obama describing Russia's ongoing 'overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests (…) [and challenge] the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe' (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2016: ix; Braun 2012: 392).

The 'reset' might well have been the preparation of the eventual 'pivot to Asia' in terms of limiting the US commitment in Europe; commenting on this diminished commitment, the letter's authors stated vocally that 'NATO today seems weaker than when we joined' (Webber et al. 2014: 779). President Obama denied that this was the case (Copper 2014: 102) but a general opinion developed that the 'pivot' would cause 'power vacuums and a "Great Power sclerosis" that will lead to instability and opportunism by revisionist powers' such as Russia (Oliver and Williams 2016: 550). Indeed, Moscow's behavior toward CIS and, more generally, post-communist states did in no way improve. It continued to use threats of trade wars or of cutting off gas supplies, raises in gas price, and support for anti-Western local political forces (Orenstein 2015: 532). This did not change even when discord was due to American-initiated projects such as the anti-ballistic missile defense system in Eastern Europe (intended to prevent Iranian and North Korean attacks) initially cancelled but eventually reactivated by President Obama (see Larrabee 2010: 46; Braun 2012: 396; Saltzman 2012: 558–562; Konoplyov and Delanoë 2014: 365). As already shown earlier in this chapter, the 'reset' was brought to an end by increasingly hostile Russian actions in 2012–2013 due in part to then-Prime Minister Putin's decision to blame Washington for the largest post-Soviet wave of protest in Russia generated by his intention to return as President. Equally important was the fact that, despite its initial impression, the Kremlin was actually not given a totally free hand in Eastern Europe allowing it to build overtly the sphere of influence rejected in 2008 by President Bush. This perceived American betrayal fed Russian frustration resulting in the renewal of the Moscow-Washington antagonism and the further hardening of Russia's regional policies. In response to the latter, in December 2012 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the Kremlin attempt to 're-Sovietize' CIS republics and stated that Washington was 'trying to figure out ways to slow down or prevent it' (Sakwa 2015a: 65). It is not a coincidence that in October 2012 an opinion poll showed that Russians considered the USA as the most unfriendly country and 56% of those believing that Russia had foes named America among them (Zevelev 2015: 140). Overall, it is not exaggerated to claim that President Obama's 'reset' indirectly but decisively contributed to Russia's 2014 military actions in Crimea and Donbass.

The latter have appropriately been described as 'game-changing' events. In fact, Donetsk and Luhansk only add to the collection of

frozen conflicts previously engineered by Moscow; the annexation of Crimea, however, represents the first Russian actual aggrandizement of territory (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 1) and challenges the post-1945 European order, Helsinki principles, Ukraine-related post-Cold War great powers arrangements, and fundamental United Nations norms and principles. Moreover, it eventually became clear that President Putin seriously contemplated a much more ambitious plan that would have put in Russian hands a continuous strip of land from Kerch in Crimea to Transnistria and Gagauzia in Moldova which would have included Odessa, thus depriving Ukraine from its Black Sea coast. It was probably the fear of major Western sanctions that prevented this significant military escalation (Tudoroiu 2016: 389; see Sect. 7.4). Yet, this might change in the future and Russia's neighbors have been intimidatingly warned of what they might face in a not-so-remote future.

Ironically, ensuing fears in neighboring NATO countries compelled President Obama to respond—in addition to the adoption of economic sanctions—by deploying heavy weapons in Eastern Europe in June 2015 (*BBC*, June 23, 2015) in a clear reversal of the 'pivot to Asia' rationale. The NATO was revigorated; at the September 4–5, 2014 Wales Summit, a Readiness Action Plan was adopted that placed renewed emphasis on defense and deterrence in an eastern flank context. A new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was created (Simón 2014: 68). Two years later, the July 8–9, 2016 Warsaw Summit—considered by many to be NATO's most important one since the end of the Cold War—decided to deploy four multinational battalions in Poland and in the Baltic states (*Washington Post*, July 9, 2016). For its part, Russia engages in regular exercises aimed at intimidating pro-Western neighboring states, systematically violates the air and maritime spaces of NATO countries—NATO fighters were sent to meet Russian aircraft more than 400 times in 2014 as well as in 2015 and 800 times in 2017 (*The Economist*, August 10, 2017)—allocates increased resources to its military nuclear program, agitates Russian minorities in Eastern Europe, and wages a broad disinformation campaign intended to undermine European and transatlantic cohesion (Simón 2016: 14). The 2015 Russian National Security Strategy mentions the US 'policy of containing Russia' as well as the 'buildup of the military potential of NATO and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law' as 'new threats to national security' (Russian National Security Strategy 2015).

However, despite these developments, the Obama administration did not abandon the 'pivot to Asia.' Balancing growing Chinese influence has remained an important US foreign policy objective that cannot be easily conciliated with the continued allocation of American resources to the East European security complex. This is the dilemma President Trump inherited and, like President Obama eight years earlier, intended to solve through a Russian-friendly major change of policy. Its prospects will be explored in Chapter 5. The Russian side of the story is even more complicated because its actions in the East European security complex cannot be limited to the Moscow-Washington relationship. The regional game has become triangular as the European Union increasingly involved itself in Russia's near neighborhood. The consequences of this change are analyzed in the following section.

3.2.5 Moscow and Brussels: The Narrative

For a long time, Russia did not perceive the European Union as a rival. Brussels initially belonged to another security complex and was seen as much weaker than Washington. The Russians had little understanding for soft power; in particular, the 'transformative power' of the EU (see Grabbe 2005) was invisible to them. Accordingly, relations were friendly: a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed in 1994 that covered four common spaces—economy; freedom, security and justice; external security; and research and education (Duke 2017: 91)—and established a mechanism for common summits (Studzińska 2015: 22). The concept of a Common European Economic Space, inspired by the European Economic Area, was presented by the Europeans to President Putin in 2001 and adopted at a common summit in 2003 (Sakwa 2015a: 62). As already mentioned, Russian criticism of the US intervention in Iraq was in fact a joint venture with the Germans and the French that further improved Moscow's relations with the Europeans. In fact, President Putin established very close personal relations with Chancellor Schröder and President Chirac (Leichtova 2014: 142). Yet, by 2004 the European Union began to take a hard line in regard to Russian non-respect of democratic values such as human rights and media freedom (Sakwa 2015a: 62). President Putin qualified the mounting criticism of his authoritarian regime as interference in his country's internal affairs and as European unwillingness to accept Russia as an equal. He therefore decided to diversify foreign policy priorities. In a June 2006 speech he

made it clear that Europe had ceased to be viewed as a priority. Bilateral relations were to continue on a pragmatic basis: 'everything but institutions' (White and Feklyunina 2014: 130). It is important to mention the fact that the EU Eastern enlargement also contributed to growing discord. In particular, the Kremlin took an uncompromising stance against what it perceives as the 'new cold warriors,' a group of vocally anti-Russian post-communist countries consisting of Poland, the Baltic states, and at times Romania that it accused of having 'Europeanized' their own disputes with Russia (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 50). Various authors described these states as 'revanchist' and 'imbued with a Cold War geopolitical spirit' (Sakwa 2010: 17–18), but their fear—that generally is not well understood in Western Europe (Braun 2012: 392)—stems from historical, cultural, and security factors difficult to ignore when enhanced by the construction of a Russian sphere of influence at their eastern borders that is implicitly acknowledged by a conciliatory Germany (see Chapter 6). In any case, the Russians have claimed that East Europeans 'have injected a spirit of confrontation and intolerance' in the European Parliament (Bugajski 2007: 9) and 'brought the spirit of primitive Russophobia to the EU' as a whole (Sakwa 2015a: 62).

On the Russian side, there was Moscow's progressive realization of the threat represented by the aforementioned 'transformative power' of the European Union, which tended to turn this organization into an adversary perhaps more dangerous than NATO. Indeed, the 2004 launching of EU ENP and especially the 2009 creation of the Eastern Partnership (see Chapter 4) involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine led to increasing European involvement inside the CIS. The threat represented by associated democratic conditionality added to Russia's instinctive neoclassical geopolitical rejection of such interference in what it perceived as its sphere of influence. The Kremlin started to perceive Brussels as a competitor and 'a tough adversary' in the post-Soviet area and even inside Russia (Popescu 2005: 25). Many authors believe that this contributed more than US regional involvement to Moscow's policy of 'pragmatic reimperialisation' seeking to restore its regional dominance and to reestablish zones of 'privileged interest' in the former Soviet bloc (Bugajski 2010: 3). This response 'turned on its head' the geopolitical logic of the ENP, which had been conceived in order to avoid drawing firm borders to the east (Duke 2017: 83). It also fundamentally challenged the EU conception of Europe in terms of concentric rings, with member states at the core,

candidate countries surrounding them, and a friendly neighborhood located further east gradually adopting EU norms and values (Popescu 2014: 35; Sakwa 2010: 6). Moscow meant to 'freeze the process of European integration and replace it with a regional bipolarity' (Blank 2008: 31). The Greater Europe project presented earlier in this chapter can be understood as a Russian offer to give a cooperative turn to this bipolarity. Its acceptance would have put an end to EU-Russia hostility, made the Americans leave Europe, create a continental balance of power favorable to Moscow, preserve non-democratic values in CIS republics, and acknowledge the transformation of the CIS into a Russian sphere of influence within a bipolar 'common' Europe. In conjunction with President Obama's failed 'reset,' the EU refusal of the plan can be considered to have caused the crisis in Ukraine. The difference is that President Obama did not need to launch the 'reset,' in the first place. On the contrary, Greater Europe was not a real option for the European Union as it would have led to a 'Russian-friendly balance of power' while threatening the unity and coherence of the Union in terms of democracy (see above).

The rejection turned Russia's anti-Americanism into wider anti-Atlanticism (Duke 2017: 97). The Kremlin had already launched a campaign to prevent EU membership for CIS republics in 2009, but in 2012 it made this policy public (Orenstein 2015: 532). A key element in the European Union's CIS strategy was the November 28–29, 2013 Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit, where unprecedented association agreements as well as visa facilitation and liberalization agreements were to be offered to some of the six partner countries (European Commission 2013). Russia put strong political and economic pressure on those countries to reject Brussels' offer and join the future EEU instead. Consequently, only Georgia and Moldova initialed Association Agreements at Vilnius (Euractiv 2013). For their part, Armenia and Ukraine gave up and decided to join the Russian-led Customs Union (*BBC*, September 5, 2013). Moscow seemed to have the upper hand, but the decision of the Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovych, was highly unpopular in his country. In Kyiv, tensions turned into mass protest resulting in the February 2014 Ukrainian revolution that brought to power a pro-European government. President Putin responded by launching in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk the best known example of hybrid war: 'a complex succession of diplomacy, propaganda, secret operations, political activism and, in the end, use of paramilitary,

and finally military, forces in undeclared aggression' supported by a Sudetenland-type rhetoric that describes Russia as a 'disunited nation' finally gathering—despite the efforts of Russian 'national traitors'—'historically Russian earth' as the first step toward the full restoration of the 'Russian world' (Freudenstein 2014). The aggression against Ukraine antagonized the European Union and made it join the USA in vocally condemning Russian actions and in imposing economic sanctions. At the same time, it also showed that the EU was not prepared to compete with the Kremlin and put an end to any expectation of future EU accession of CIS republics (Grygiel 2015: 511).

More good news for President Putin was the moderation—in fact, the weakness—of the European response. Most EU states clearly did not want to escalate bilateral tensions beyond a point of no return and showed their preference for soft instruments such as diplomacy and economic sanctions (Simón 2016: 20). The former led to the ineffective Minsk agreements concluded in the framework of the Normandy Format (France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine) due to the initiative of President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel (Duke 2017: 94). For their part, the sanctions might have given the impression that the West did not want to tolerate Russian revanchism anymore and therefore acted very differently from the case of the 2008 Georgia war (Sussex 2015: 36). In fact, the way they were negotiated proved that EU states were 'weak, divided, and dependent on US leadership,' thus providing 'a potential invitation to Russia for future offensives' (Bugajski 2014: 7). Indeed, economic sanctions were adopted only due to strong American pressure. Bilateral trade between the European Union and Russia was more than ten times larger than that between the USA and Russia; expected negative consequences for EU economies were hard to ignore (Sussex 2015: 34–35). Yet, this is only half of the explanation. The other half has much to do with the pro-Russian attitude of many EU states (see the following sections and Chapter 6). Accordingly, Russia's 'strategy has been to simply wait Europe out,' knowing that sooner or later the sanctions will be dropped (ibid.: 35). Yet, in the short term they did have negative effects: in conjunction with the 2014 fall of oil prices, Western sanctions triggered an economic crisis in Russia (*The Economist*, August 5, 2017). Paradoxically, this helped enforce the regime, which appealed to nationalism and Russian values, including religion, to successfully channel popular frustration against the West (Karen Dawisha quoted by Duke 2017: 89). Overall, from the point of view of the European

Union Russia turned itself from a strategic partner into a 'strategic problem' (*Financial Times* quoted by Duke 2017: 90) or even a 'strategic challenge' (Missiroli et al. 2014: 49). Critically, the Brussels-Moscow relationship has become antagonistic for reasons that mainly relate to differences in the two actors' geopolitical visions, projects, and identities.

3.2.6 The Cold Peace

The first important change revealed by the previous two sections is related to the framework of the Washington-Brussels-Moscow geopolitical interaction. Before the EU and NATO enlargements, there was only a weak connection between the 'EU-Europe' regional security complex and the CIS one within a loose supercomplex (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 343). By the time of the Ukrainian crisis, the EU, the USA, and Russia were involved in a West-East direct geopolitical competition whose intensity can be associated only with the emergence of a new, larger regional security complex that includes the EU, Eastern Europe, and Russia. The times when 'the EU and Russia [were] not enough involved in each other's security issues' (ibid.) are, perhaps unfortunately, gone. The second change concerns precisely the intensity of this antagonistic relationship. Russia's vast human and natural resources, territory, and nuclear arsenal make its aggressiveness look particularly threatening (Braun 2012: 391). Growing mutual hostility has resulted in a situation variously described as a cold peace, a shadow war, an iron curtain divide, or a post-ideological Cold War (Sakwa 2015b: 63–64, 112; Bugajski 2014: 9). The latter term, however, is an exaggeration. Russia is not repudiating the existing international order as the Soviet Union did. It preserves a certain degree of political cooperation as well as important economic relations with both the USA and the European Union. Certain authors even claim that it 'endorses US hegemony as long as what it perceives to be its vital interests and prestige are recognized' (Sakwa 2015a: 63). The key reason for this moderation is represented by Russia's profound structural weaknesses that make it unable to initiate a protracted conflict with the West (Lindley-French 2016: 108). With a GDP equal to that of Spain, it could not realistically hope to successfully balance the USA and the EU. Accordingly, President Putin understands very well that attempts at superpower restoration are unrealistic (Braun 2012: 398).

What continues to be debated is the nature of Moscow's geopolitical plans for the post-Soviet and, more generally, post-communist area.

It is clear that Russia's self-understanding as a great power, which 'entails a normative dimension based on a type of order enshrining sovereignty, non-interventionism and a pluralism of regime types' (Sakwa 2010: 17), means in practical terms that the Kremlin alone should have the right to intervene inside the CIS, whose authoritarian regimes should be accepted as fully legitimate. What is less clear is the exact form of Russia's regional hegemony. One view is that the Kremlin is aware of its slim to nonexistent prospects of successfully pursuing an imperial project. Therefore, Russia perceives itself as a continental great power with no imperial pretensions that is unwilling to exercise even indirect control over CIS republics, except for purely defensive purposes (thus the wars in Georgia and Ukraine). Another view, however, is that the Russian elite has not changed its attitude toward these republics, over which it claims a right of ownership despite the serious material obstacles encountered in reconstituting the empire. A version of this second approach perceives Russia as a 'postmodern empire' whose resurgent imperial spirit is not affected by the disappearance of many of the physical features of the old empire. Political and economic obstacles prevent the reestablishing of a Soviet Union-type structure but do not make the Kremlin fully recognize the sovereignty of the CIS republics or the right of external powers to involve themselves in the region (Lo 2015: 100–101). 'Soft' versions also exist that speak of a 'proxy empire' in which Russia only wants its privileged interests to be recognized (Sakwa 2010: 9); of 'mimetic imperialism,' where imperial ambitions are in fact replaced by a combination of international activism and claims to cultural superiority over smaller states intended to reshape the international system in a way compatible with Russia's demand for status and respect (Sakwa 2015a: 65); or of a 'subaltern empire' whose relationship with a Eurocentric world is strongly marked by material and ideational subalternity (Morozov 2015: 1). Other authors prefer to analyze Moscow's regional actions in terms of spheres of influence, a concept they associate with either the aforementioned continental great power with no imperial pretensions or with a softer form of empire. The Russian leadership has repeatedly stated that there are regions where it has privileged interests and, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, has unsuccessfully tried to have its sphere of influence formally recognized by the USA. Certain scholars have mentioned 'a new form of Finlandization' related to Russian actions toward Georgia and Ukraine (Ronald Asmus quoted by Braun 2012: 391) or claimed that the Kremlin's pragmatic approach leads to the creation of 'spheres

of interest' that are much smaller and lighter than Soviet Union's spheres of influence (Trenin quoted by Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 166).

Out of all these concepts, that of spheres of influence probably captures best the Kremlin's neoclassical geopolitics-inspired regional approach. Still, it should be noted that it is only because it lacks resources that Russia is not constructing a Soviet-style empire. As shown later in this chapter, its perception of the region is based on a number of concentric circles somewhat similar to those of the European Union; ideally, in time they should all be included in Moscow's sphere of influence. However, this process is not a 'soft' one. The frequently brutal means employed to control post-Soviet states and to isolate them from external influences do justify Janusz Bugajski's label of 'pragmatic reimperialization' (Bugajski 2010). It is not by chance that at the opening ceremony of the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, the 11-year-old girl illustrating the Russian alphabet with great names such as Chaikovsky and Nabokov used 'Russian Empire' for 'i.' Indeed, the will of *imperium* is there and if, by miracle, all of the sudden Russia found the necessary resources, a not-so-postmodern imperial project would be immediately launched. This is, of course, an unlikely prospect; but for Moscow's neighbors the intentions behind it are hardly reassuring.

Obviously, the regional dimension cannot be separated from the global one, i.e., from President Putin's 'manifest destiny' vision of restoring Russia's great power status, which should be fully acknowledged by the USA (Saltzman 2012: 563). Overall, the primary objectives of Moscow are to reach the status of uncontested major pole of power in a multipolar world and to reverse American influence in the new East European security complex (Bugajski 2014: 6; Bugajski 2016: 30). This is to say that, under President Putin, Russia has evolved 'from retrenchment to revanchism' (Sussex 2015: 26) and, with China and Iran, represents one of the revisionist powers that challenge the political settlement of the Cold War. While they have not succeeded in overturning it, these states 'have converted an uncontested status quo into a contested one' (Mead 2014). This idea did have its contesters, who claimed that Beijing and Moscow are 'spoilers at best,' not revisionist powers, in addition to the fact they are embedded in the international economy (John Ikenberry quoted by Duke 2017: 76). In fact, it was argued by other analysts that Russia and China are revisionist powers even in economic terms as they have set up various financial and economic structures such as the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Council, or the Asian

Infrastructure Investment Bank, and have acted jointly in many other international frameworks in order to challenge the US-dominated economic *status quo* (Duke 2017: 76–77). Yet, President Putin's revisionism is in no way radical. It has been described as a process of *à la carte* engagement with the West based on the compartmentalization of interests. Western values and geopolitical projects are rejected; but Western large-scale technical assistance, for example, is welcomed. Russia seeks 'not convergence or integration with the West, but cooperation and acquiescence *by* the West' (Lo 2015: 198; emphasis in the original).

In terms of results, it can be claimed that Russia's foreign policy has been 'overwhelmingly successful' as it helped transform the country into a self-confident, influential, and competitive resurgent global power (ibid.: 199). At different times and in different ways, the Kremlin was able to manipulate the USA, the European Union, and West European great powers, to exploit divisions within the EU and NATO, and to isolate East European states (Braun 2012: 389). NATO and EU expansion within the CIS was stopped. Georgia and especially Ukraine were attacked militarily in ways humiliating for the West and intimidating for other CIS republics. Not least, all this solidified the regime domestically (Mead 2014). Critically, the East European security complex—where Russia has become 'the indispensable and possibly dominant player'—has experienced a major shift as its regional dynamics is now dominated by hard security issues (Missiroli et al. 2014: 49). In the case of actual warfare, Moscow showed a preference for a fait accompli strategy followed by political consolidation (Lindley-French 2016: 109). Yet, in most cases it has employed hybrid tactics that combine hard and soft power. They range from the political use of pressure, manipulation, and stealth to:

> covert operations (…); probing of air and sea defence systems; cyber espionage; bribery and blackmail of political and economic elites, sometimes in cooperation with organised crime groups; foreign asset acquisitions; information warfare; local disorder in support of separatist claims; and, of course, direct economic coercion through energy and trade pressures. (Missiroli et al. 2014: 49)

Sharp geopolitical conflict has put an end to any hope to export European Union's win-win, Kantian vision to the CIS republics or to help them achieve stable and effective democratic governance (Mead 2014). The militarization of politics led to the militarization of thinking

in the region (Missiroli et al. 2014: 49) and to the 'structural erosion of the post-communist peace' (Sakwa 2015a: 63). The consequences of Brexit and, possibly, those of President Trump's foreign policy are likely to further exacerbate this tense situation.

3.2.7 Munichs, Worldviews, and Identity

Somewhat surprisingly, there is a large category of scholars who strongly reject the idea that Russia might be responsible for the disturbing situation depicted in the previous section. Their analysis is based on realist or neorealist balance of power considerations. In 1997, George Kennan strongly argued against the enlargement of the North Atlantic alliance: 'expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era' because it would inflame nationalistic, anti-Western, and militaristic tendencies in Russia and restore the atmosphere of the Cold War (Kennan 1997). The 2004 NATO and EU enlargements were accordingly considered to have 'deeply alienated Russia [and triggered] the disintegration of the old European security regime' for balance of power reasons in addition to actions of 'revanchist' post-communist states toward 'the perpetuation of the Cold War by other means' (Sakwa 2010: 18). Perhaps, the best example of this approach is provided by John Mearsheimer's claim that the USA and its European allies, not Russia, are responsible for the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. Moscow was just a victim—'this is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory' (Mearsheimer 2014: 5–6)—and appeasement is the only reasonable strategy when dealing with it. It is interesting to note that the same author suggests a very different approach when China is concerned. For many years he has advocated a policy of containment explicitly inspired from that against the Soviet Union (Mearsheimer 2010), which might well ignite a Chinese-American Cold War. The usual rationale behind such contradictory views is that Russia only looks for regional influence, which is acceptable to US interests and should be granted at the expense of dispensable East European allies. China, on the contrary, is in the process of turning itself into a challenger of American hegemony; this cannot be tolerated and therefore threatened Asian states should receive Washington's resolute support. Leaving aside the typically realist cynicism of this line of reasoning, certain authors note that in the case of Russia a difference should be made between national interests

and the regime's ambitions. The 2014 Ukrainian revolution did in no way threaten Russia's security. It only frustrated the Kremlin's project of expanding the Eurasian area in which Moscow is the dominant political player (Bugajski 2016: 29). If this project is recognized as legitimate Russian national interest and the democratic future of a region is sacrificed for *Realpolitik* reasons, this is Munich 1938 once more. It should be remembered that in the (now very difficult to find) 1939 first edition of E. H. Carr's influential *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Britain's and France's betrayal of Czechoslovakia at Munich was praised as a wise and legitimate realist accommodation of Germany's restored power that would preserve peace in Europe (Carr 1939). The idea of similarly betraying Ukraine is, to quote Talleyrand, worse than a crime; it is a mistake. It would only increase Russia's appetite for further imperial aggrandizement, which can easily lead to serious miscalculations ultimately resulting in conflict with the West (Bugajski 2016: 29). As already shown earlier in this chapter, this is what President Obama's 'reset' actually—and unwisely—did. Given the domestic legitimacy reasons that strongly impact President Putin's foreign policy, the neoclassical geopolitical vision of his regime, and the resulting obsession with the building of a Russian sphere of influence, the Munich scenario could really make the Kremlin Western-friendly only if the latter is overtly given a totally 'free hand to methodically undermine countries along its borders' (ibid.); but very few were ready for this before President Trump took power. On another hand, one should remember what a much younger George Kennan wrote in his famous 1946 Long Telegram:

> Soviet power, unlike that of Hitlerite Germany, is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to logic of force. For this reason it can easily withdraw—and usually does—when strong resistance is encountered at any point. Thus, if the adversary has sufficient force and makes clear his readiness to use it, he rarely has to do so. (Kennan 1946: 15)

This perfectly captures President Putin's style of reasoning. He only speaks the language of power, but his dialect is a very pragmatic one. Neither schematic nor adventuristic, he will take only very moderate risks. Offering him a Munich, on the contrary, would be an invitation to continued aggressiveness.

No matter what choices are made, it is not totally surprising that Russia-related US geopolitical debates and calculations have in a large measure been power-oriented even under the rather liberal Obama administration. Due to its very nature, the American hyperpower—to use the term coined at the end of the 1990s by the French Foreign Minister, Hubert Védrine—has never totally espoused European Union's Kantian vision. This explains the relative 'normality' of zero-sum interactions between the White House and the Kremlin. When the relationship between Brussels and Moscow is taken into consideration, however, the situation is more complicated. As shown in previous sections, everything started with a prolonged honeymoon. It should be noted that while impoverished Russians increasingly associated the USA with everything negative in their post-communist lives, the EU became the friendly symbol of the few positive aspects of the social-economic transformations they were experiencing, such as the freedom to travel or the availability of high-quality consumer goods. For many, the 'gravitation to Europe' led to the idea—the 'dream'—of a Russian-EU major geopolitical alliance that people like Dugin supported in their writings (Shlapentokh 2014: 49–51). In actual foreign policy terms, the situation was quite different. Natalia Chaban and her colleagues came to the conclusion that Russia's perception of the European Union developed as a combination of political concerns and misconceptions based on three main dimensions. First, there was the view of the EU as a weak actor, unable to develop a cohesive Russia policy due to Moscow's relations with individual EU member states; second, Brussels was considered a strong actor when dealing with energy issues; third, the same was true with respect to European involvement in the common neighborhood, where the EU behavior—motivated by 'unsustainable ambitions'—was perceived as suspicious and untrustworthy. It was mainly this latter aspect that, in time, pushed the Kremlin from an attitude of benevolent passivity to one of rigorous objection (Chaban et al. 2017: 485). One of the unexpected consequences was the emergence in Russia of a sort of British-style 'Euroscepticism' that criticizes Brussels' bureaucracy and interventionism as well as, in cultural terms, its liberalism that erodes Christian heritage and therefore endangers European civilizational coherence (Sakwa 2015a: 60). More importantly, the European Union has a pivotal position in Russia's geopolitical plans because of what is perceived as the threat represented by a common EU foreign policy aligned with that of the USA and because of the destabilizing effects of its

democratization agenda on pro-Russian authoritarian regimes in the CIS (Bugajski 2016: 29). As shown earlier in this chapter, it is the EU concentric circles model promoted by the ENP and the Eastern Partnership that Russia started to challenge. Toward the end of the 2000s, the degrading bilateral relationship reached the stage of 'a lukewarm embrace that at times becomes a chilly estrangement' (Sakwa 2010: 5). The Eurozone crisis made the Kremlin believe that the European Union was in disarray and decline; its internal convulsions would last for years, significantly weakening Brussels' Eastern policies (Bugajski 2014: 6). But it was the Ukrainian crisis—due in part to the failure of the Kremlin's Greater Europe project—that fundamentally transformed the EU view of Russia (Popescu 2014: 44) as well as the Russian perception of the European Union. The latter change is well captured by a study comparing the 2011/2012 and 2015 Russian media and public attitudes toward the EU. In both years newspapers had a critical view of its achievements and insisted on its weakness that was attributed to an institutional structure that is too complex and convoluted. To Russia, Brussels was both a cooperative partner and a competitor, or even an enemy. Negative images were predominant in both years. Yet, positive ones did exist in 2011; in 2015 they had almost completely disappeared. Comparisons evolved between the two years from depicting the EU as a poor wrestler to presenting it as an animal or even a 'quiet monster.' At the same time, opinion polls showed that between 2012 and 2015 Russians' positive views of Brussels diminished from 62 to 23% while negative ones increased from 7 to 40%. Main descriptors evolved from 'modern,' 'united,' 'likeable,' 'peaceful,' and 'strong' to 'hypocritical,' 'multicultural,' 'arrogant,' 'modern,' and 'aggressive.' Overall, the post-Ukraine Russian media and public perception of the EU has been that of a dehumanized and hostile actor that is decadent and weak but at the same time condescending. All this closely mirrors elite and policy-making images that the Putin regime forged for self-legitimizing purposes, diffused effectively due to its control of Russian mass media, and enforced through the use of strong emotions generated by its convincing nationalist discourse (Chaban et al. 2017: 480–496).

Critically, the self-serving propaganda of the authoritarian regime was able to have such considerable effects because Russian identity—like that of the European Union—sill is in a formative process. This process has already reached an advanced stage, but it is not complete. This is true both domestically and internationally, but in terms of foreign policy,

'the construction of inter-subjective meanings has the potential to be a particularly transformative element in the [Russia-EU] relationship' (Debardeleben 2012: 418). This is why this relationship is more complex than that between Moscow and Washington. The Ukrainian crisis showed that in the CIS Russia can engage—and defeat—the EU in a hard power approach. Yet, the Greater Europe project illustrates an equally cynical but genuinely cooperative attitude that the Kremlin is also willing to adopt. I do not in any way share the views of a thick cognitivist theoretical approach claiming that Russia's identity as an international actor is permanently reshaped by international socialization. However, as explained in the Chapter 2, the constructivist elements included in my theoretical framework do allow for some flexibility in terms of giving a thin cognitivist turn to neoclassical geopolitics' strongly materialist features. Accordingly, I believe that Russia's identity does change mainly because this is a new international actor very different from the Soviet Union and insufficiently consolidated under Weimar Russia. At the same time, I believe that this change is slow and incremental; that the formative process is quite advanced; that it has been strongly marked by the neoclassical geopolitical worldview; and that this makes any genuinely Kantian development impossible. More specifically, I claim that even within a bipolar Greater Europe Russia would not have become a peaceful, win-win-oriented international actor mainly interested in its citizens' welfare. It would have preserved its neoclassical geopolitical vision based on hegemony in the CIS and on a favorable balance of power toward the EU. Still, it would have hidden hegemonic aspirations behind a smiling face. This would have been the consequence of realist concealment much more than that of international socialization; nevertheless, the resulting patterns of Russian action within the East European security complex would have been less conductive to the use of military force and other brutal methods, which ultimately translates into a somewhat different identity of Russia as a less aggressive international actor.

This suggests that interaction with the EU has the potential to modify, be it slightly, Russia's identity. At the same time, the present antagonistic relationship between the two actors is frequently discussed in terms of opposing identities. On the one hand, this is about the incompatibility between Kantian and neoclassical geopolitical visions (Orenstein 2015: 531; Wolff 2015: 1111; see Chapters 1 and 4) that often makes them unable to find a common language, thus leading to incompatible strategies and serious misunderstandings. On the other hand, the important

topic of Russia's 'ambiguous European identity' also needs to be addressed (Splidsboel-Hansen and Tsygankov quoted by Debardeleben 2012: 426). It should be noted that to Russian media, elite, and public the European Union is not 'Europe,' as it only relates to economic, political, and energy affairs. Europe itself—by which Russians usually understand Western Europe—is perceived in terms of high culture, religion, and lifestyle, i.e., as civilization (Chaban et al. 2017: 486). In this context, the country's East-West tribulations initially associated with Peter the Great or nineteenth-century Slavophiles and Westernizers immediately come to mind; but civilizational factors do not *directly* influence the present formation process of Russia's identity as an international actor. They were imported through the backdoor of Eurasianist past influence on Russian neoclassical geopolitics, which led to a non- or even anti-European orientation that further enhances aforementioned EU-Russia differences. The answer to the 'Is Russia European?' question, then, should be clearly negative. Yet, things are more ambiguous: while analyzing Russian-orchestrated Eurasian integration, Richard Sakwa noted that one cannot say if this process intends to continue Europe by other means, to establish Russia as the core of another Europe, or to repudiate the country's European destiny (Sakwa 2015a: 67). It might be that the question itself is irrelevant. Russia, European or not, 'does provide some indications of an alternative model of European politics' (ibid.). The key aspect is its development as an international actor deeply involved in the East European security complex whose identity is dominated by a neoclassical geopolitical vision. In ways described in previous sections, this identity led to Moscow's present aggressiveness, which represents a structural constraint for the complex's predictable future.

In fact, anticipating the future of Russia's relations with the West is a rather popular topic in the literature. The idea of a Brussels-Moscow alliance is considered to be 'hopelessly utopian.' There still are some voices claiming that cooperative engagement between these two actors remains possible based on close economic interdependence and on the need to respond to the rise of Islamist extremism. Yet, many more believe that 'truly formidable' fundamental disagreements of policy and principle will impose a path of negative continuity that concerns Russia's interactions with both the European Union and the USA: 'an overall downward trend, punctuated by periodic crises and, more rarely, brief upturns.' Finally, some authors even mention a possible new Cold War (Lo 2015:

166, 196, 200). The prognosis based on the analysis of Russia is, indeed, 'depressing' because, as shown above, nobody can realistically expect its key foreign policy characteristics to change. Yet, one needs to examine the other side of the relationship, too. This book tries to show that change in the East European security complex cannot and will not come from Russia itself, as its role is that of a mainly structural constraint. It will come from the consequences of Brexit and of President Trump's foreign policy that are analyzed in the next two chapters. However, before addressing those topics, Moscow's views of and instruments used in Eastern Europe need to be examined.

3.2.8 The Kremlin's Concentric Circles

Using a variety of means that are presented in the following section, the Kremlin has successfully tried to create a network of friends and partners in the European Union that help further Russian interests (Lo 2015: 194). This network includes major West European states such as Germany, France, Italy, and Spain. The first three have acted as Moscow's strategic partners: strong bilateral relationships were developed both politically and economically while Russian domestic authoritarianism and CIS hegemonic actions were pragmatically overlooked. The Kremlin has even been perceived as a counterbalance to Washington (Bugajski 2007: 11). The Ukrainian crisis has somewhat modified this situation, but these states remain the champions of 'normalization' and renewed cooperation. Their actions have been countered by the vocally anti-Russian group that includes Poland, the Baltic states, and at times Romania. These are the already mentioned 'cold warriors' that feel directly threatened by the construction of a Russian sphere of influence at their eastern borders. The group is small and composed of states with little influence but it could not be brought to silence or ignored mainly because, inside the European Union, it has constantly been supported by Britain and Sweden, which are sometimes included in the club of 'frosty pragmatists' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 39). Brexit will of course alter this situation. 'Friendly pragmatists' also exist; more details will be provided in Chapter 6, but it is important to note that they include East European members of the EU that have weakened democratic institutions and embraced illiberalism. Relations with Russia are used by regimes such as that of Hungary to further erode the West's credibility and influence, which turns Moscow into a natural ally

(Conley et al. 2016: x). Finally, there are Greece and Cyprus, the Kremlin's 'Trojan horses' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 27).

The situation is much less balanced within the CIS. It should not be forgotten that after the Cold War the latter constituted the Central Eurasian regional security complex whose unipolar structure was centered on Russia (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 62; Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier 2012: 45). At present, the CIS represents the primary arena of Russian actions targeting 'strategic, economic, and normative leadership (…); preserving a power relationship over the ex-Soviet republics; and the marginalization of outside—especially Western—interests and influence' (Lo 2015: 101). Cultural identification and the existence of important Russian minorities in the region serve as both justification and instruments for these actions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Kremlin's efforts are directed toward the creation of a sphere of influence that the West should recognize. 'Finlandization' (Braun 2012: 398) or rather 'Finlandization-plus' would be a minimum, with politically and economically feeble CIS quasi-states maintaining far closer relations with Russia than with any other state (Lo 2015: 103). Regional institutional frameworks have been created, but in fact Moscow has given preference to separate bilateral relationships based on different degrees of strategic significance. Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus represent the key cluster; Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are important; while the remaining republics retain considerably less importance (Lo 2015: 106). However, as shown by the examples of Ukraine and Georgia, this order of priorities in Russian foreign policy making has not resulted in similarly ordered degrees of influence. If the actual degree of subordination to or influence of Russia is combined with the latter's long-term plans and expectations, a structure of concentric circles can be conceived that mirrors the EU one (see Chapter 4).

First, there are the friendly CIS republics comprising (1) the Customs Union (which includes old reliable Belarus and Kazakhstan), the hard core of the present Moscow-centered process of regional integration; and (2) the supposedly expanding Eurasian Union (for the time being, only Armenia and Kyrgyzstan have joined the three members of the Customs Union). Then, there is the much more heterogeneous category of neutrals, dissenters, and runaways that sooner or later should rejoin the previous categories: (3) the other CIS or former CIS republics, including rebellious Georgia (which left CIS in 2008/2009) and Ukraine as well as the rest of the old GUUAM group; and (4) the

remaining post-Soviet republics, i.e., the three Baltic states. Finally, outside the CIS there are the Eastern and South-Eastern European states that can serve as useful Trojan horses, might join the Russian sphere of influence, or at least should be convinced to adopt an attitude of friendly pragmatism: (5) the brotherly Orthodox states of the Balkans (Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, and Cyprus); and (6) the other former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe (Visegrad-4 and Romania).

Unlike the EU, in the disputed neighborhood Russia can also rely on two types of non-state entities that might be considered to represent a circle of their own: (1) the frozen conflict-related Russian protectorates of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and—since 2014—Donetsk and Luhansk. While its primary loyalty goes to Armenia, in strategic terms Nagorno-Karabakh belongs to the same category; and (2) Russian or pro-Russian minorities in the former Soviet republics (including the Baltic states). Special emphasis has to be put on minorities benefitting from some form of regional autonomy, such as pre-2014 Crimea in Ukraine or Gagauzia in Moldova. It should be noted that both these cases also represent examples of failed frozen conflicts, which brings them closer to the previous category. Unsurprisingly, in 2014 they were taken into consideration as targets for hybrid warfare in the context of President Putin's larger plan of regional expansion (see Chapter 7).

Given Russia's limited resources, the idea of imposing a significant degree of control or influence in all these circles might look too ambitious. However, success seems less unlikely if the atypical nature of many of the instruments used by Moscow is taken into consideration.

3.2.9 The Kremlin's Instruments

The foreign policy approach of President Putin's regime has constantly been eclectic and pragmatic. It 'employs flexible methods, including enticements, threats, and pressures, and is opportunistic and adaptable, preying on weakness and division among its Western adversaries' (Bugajski 2014: 7). The preference for 'non-traditional' ways is very visible. In Eastern Europe, they include energy blackmail, use of undercover assets, financial penetration, cyber-attacks, and information warfare (Simón 2014: 67). The Kremlin tries to capture important sectors of local economies, to subvert vulnerable political systems, to corrupt national leaders, to penetrate key security institutions, and to undermine national unity (Bugajski 2016: 30). While the military dimension

is important (see below), soft power means represent the majority of the influence tools used to further Russian interests. However, it should be noted that the Russian view of soft power is in reality closer to 'soft force' as it includes coercion and destabilization through means such as intimidation and demonstrations of military strength (Karlsen 2016: 183). Russian approaches are adapted to the specific conditions of each region. In Western Europe, Moscow acts in order to accelerate the decline of the European Union, which it perceives as weak, divided, and increasingly irrelevant. An important technique is the use of a selective, conditional, and fragmented approach based on the bilateralization of relations with member states while sidestepping the EU and its institutions (Lo 2015: 181, 185). As already mentioned, in the eastern part of the European Union Russia is supporting illiberal regimes in order to erode the cohesion and credibility of the EU and NATO and to discredit the liberal democratic values they promote (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2016: ix–x). Finally, in the CIS a wide range of means are used that include actual warfare.

A general-use instrument is represented by the frequent and effective use of mass media and social media for propaganda and disinformation purposes (Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 12). A complex propaganda apparatus was built that is intended to achieve or support political objectives; to win the understanding and support of audiences; and to discredit the West while defending Russia through the '4D-approach': dismiss negative reporting, distort facts, distract by launching accusations elsewhere, and spread dismay by warning that anti-Russian actions will have terrible consequences (Karlsen 2016: 185). This has been appropriately described as the 'weaponization of information' (Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss quoted by Karlsen 2016: 183) and as 'information warfare' (Ulrik Franke quoted by Karlsen 2016: 183) intended to confuse, demoralize, subvert, and destabilize targeted societies. To reach these goals, the Kremlin uses a news conglomerate operating in 35 languages that includes the RT (formerly Russia Today) broadcaster and website as well as the Sputnik radio, website, news, and video agencies (Karlsen 2016: 199). Their manipulation techniques include bias, insinuation, exaggeration, and sometimes outright lies. While the direct reach of these media outlets in the West is very limited, their effect is considerably amplified online by trolls and botnets (i.e., large numbers of automated social-media accounts) in Russia and by 'networks of conspiracy-minded activists' in the West (*The Economist*, April 12, 2017).

A 400-employee St. Petersburg 'troll farm' became famous when its industrial-scale manipulation of information on social media during the Ukrainian crisis was exposed by a *New York Times* journalist. Moreover, manipulation concerns much more than networks directly controlled by the Kremlin. Russian private media—whose impact is considerable in CIS republics—is hardly independent and contributes to the propaganda effort. Unsurprisingly, President Putin awarded the *Order of Service to the Fatherland* to 300 Russian journalists for their 'objective' coverage of the Crimean crisis (Karlsen 2016: 187, 190).

Russian propaganda-oriented information warfare goes hand in hand with cyber-spying. There is no doubt about the involvement of Moscow-controlled hackers in the 2016 US presidential campaign, when millions of files were stolen from the computers of the Democratic National Committee and passed to WikiLeaks, which made them public (Puddington 2017: 41) while Russian fake news outlets and social bots amplified the message. The primary goal was to ensure the electoral victory of a pro-Kremlin candidate, but this 'vast, covert, and unprecedented campaign of political sabotage' also was meant to undermine public faith in the US democratic process (Thomas Rid quoted by Munich Security Conference 2017). The story repeated itself, less successfully, during the 2017 French presidential election when Russian hackers failed to prevent the victory of the only anti-Russian candidate, Emmanuel Macron (*The Economist*, April 12, 2017). All this is part of a larger plan to reshape Western politics by disrupting the political establishment, weakening its unity, and increasing the weight of pro-Russian parties. The approach is based on ideological indifference: the Kremlin equally supports the Greek leftist party Syriza, separatists of all orientations, and nationalist and extreme right parties. Nigel Farage, former UKIP leader, is on the list and incidentally stated that 'Putin is the most admirable world leader.' Alex Salmond of the Scottish National Party and Nick Griffin, head of the far-right British National Party, made similar statements. Rightists represent in fact the majority of Russia's friends, with prominent positions held by the controversial Geert Wilders of the Dutch Party for Freedom and by France's Marine Le Pen (Puddington 2017: 42–43). The latter's party even secured a €9 million loan from a Kremlin-controlled bank (*The Economist*, April 12, 2017). Predictably, Le Pen rejected the imposition of EU sanctions against Russia and even proposed the creation of a pan-European grouping that would include Moscow but not Washington (Puddington 2017: 41).

Other Euroskeptics such as Matteo Salvini of the Northern League (Italy) and Frauke Petry of the extreme right Alternative for Germany (AfD) were invited to visit the Kremlin (*The Economist*, April 12, 2017). The ultra-nationalist Hungarian party Jobbik has also received Russian financial and media support (Duke 2017: 96). Arch Puddington aptly noted that 'Russia has repeatedly interfered in the affairs of European states in ways that the Kremlin would regard as intolerable if Russia were the target' (Puddington 2017: 41).

This has also happened in economic terms. Moscow's 'energy superpower' strategy (Larson and Shevchenko 2014: 270) has included the use of gas blackmail against countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and even Belarus. Only between 1991 and 2007 there were at least 55 incidents consisting in price increases, threats of supply disruptions, gas cutoffs, and even attacks on pipelines (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 29) that were meant to influence target states' policies toward Russia in an effort to isolate or even 'Finlandize' them. In relation to Western Europe more subtle plans were implemented such as those associated with the controversial Nord Stream project whose Western promoter—then German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder—eventually became an executive of Russian energy companies (Braun 2012: 397). Besides gas, Moscow has also used other economic means to put pressure on unfriendly CIS states such as Georgia or Moldova, whose exports to the Russian market were repeatedly embargoed. The Kremlin has also tried to manipulate post-communist EU member states by dominating strategic sectors of their economies. Research shows that countries with more than 12% of their GDP controlled by Russian companies—Bulgaria, at 22%, is a good example—are very vulnerable to Moscow's influence and state capture (Conley et al. 2016: xi). This is closely associated with the use of corruption. Russia itself being sometimes assessed as a 'mafia state' (see above), it was able to use domestic know-how in order to develop an opaque network of patronage across Central and Eastern Europe that, using corruption, seeks to take control of critical state institutions and the local economy (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2016: x). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in their letter to President Obama 22 former post-communist leaders expressed their conviction that the final goal of the Kremlin's use of 'overt and covert means of economic warfare' was to put an end to the transatlantic orientation of their states (Conley et al. 2016: xi).

It is within the CIS that all Russia's instruments are used simultaneously. Economic pressure is particularly effective due to the fact that CIS economies were completely integrated during the Soviet period and continue to be highly interdependent (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 25). Russian minorities are frequently used as a pretext and as a tool for political interference (Karlsen 2016: 183) due to their numerical importance: they represent 30% of the total population in Kazakhstan, 25–28% in Estonia and Latvia, 17% in Ukraine, 13% in Kyrgyzstan, and 11% in Belarus. Furthermore, they are frequently concentrated in border regions and create pro-Russian political parties that Moscow uses to influence national politics (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 25–26). It should be mentioned that in 2009 Russia's legislation was amended to permit military intervention abroad in defense of Russian citizens. The 2008 invasion of Georgia had already been justified by the need to assist the numerous non-Russian South Ossetians who had been given Russian nationality (Larrabee 2010: 37). The same generous citizenship policy concerns Transnistria, to give another example. New links between Russia and CIS republics were created through the institutional frameworks presented earlier in this chapter that are increasingly taking the form of Eurasian integration. One of them, the CSTO, is military in nature and facilitates the presence of Russian soldiers in almost all of its member states. However, Moscow's troops are also stationed in all GUAM states despite the fact that none of them belongs to the pro-Russian club (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 37). This has a very intimidating effect especially after the actual use of force in Georgia and Ukraine.

While this might not be very visible, many of the Kremlin's softer methods are effective only because targeted states do not dare take harsh countermeasures for fear of escalation that might result in open warfare. In this regard, numbers cannot be ignored: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania can oppose 2800, 1250, and 7350 soldiers respectively to Russia's 250,000 (Lanoszka 2016: 175). The three Baltic states are members of NATO, but equally feeble Georgia or Moldova are not. Events in Crimea and Donbass have shown that even Ukraine is placed in a state of considerable inferiority. The gap is increased by the fact that the modernization of the Russian armed forces has been substantial in recent years. Moreover, it has been combined with a new emphasis on nuclear intimidation (Szabo 2016). The overall effects are most visible in the Black Sea region, where this change added to the consequences

of the Georgia war and of the annexation of Crimea to cause a major shift in the balance of power. Consequently, small and medium states in the region might start bandwagoning on Russia (Simón 2014: 73–74). In the future, it is likely that the Kremlin will be tempted to make frequent use of military power simply because its economic, financial, and soft power resources will continue to be limited while military resources already are in a better situation. Of course, even they are insufficient to directly challenge the USA, and this is why Russia will never contemplate their systematic use in terms of global actions. At subregional level, however, Moscow's military preponderance will remain a significant factor (Haukkala and Popescu 2016: 73).

It is important to note that the Kremlin's view of warfare has considerably evolved in recent years. For a long time, 'Putin relied on the heavy, Soviet-style hammer' (McKew and Maniatis 2014). Yet, in 2013 the chief of the Russian general staff, Valery Gerasimov, published an influential article promoting a new doctrine based on hybrid war (*The Economist*, April 12, 2017; for a definition of the concept see Chapter 2). The shift has been explained by analysts as a means to avoid zero-sum overt warfare that might be too dangerous in terms of international response. The new approach makes use of 'strategic *maskirovka*,' a Russian 'purposeful strategy of deception that combines a disinformation and destabilization strategy (…) to the possible application of force' (Lindley-French 2016: 106). Hybrid war is much cheaper than classical warfare and places the direct contravention of international norms in the gray area of 'plausible deniability.' The conflict does not escalate, international reactions are weak and confused, but at the same time, the capabilities of the target state are seriously degraded (Lanoszka 2016: 180). The invasion of Crimea started with local pro-Russian demonstrations fomented by the Kremlin and facilitated by the existence of a failed frozen conflict (see Sect. 7.4). Unmarked troops were then deployed, outfitted for troublemaking and street-fighting. They represented a 'hybrid of soldiers and terrorists: hidden faces, hidden command-and-control, hidden orders, but undoubtedly activated to achieve state objectives' (McKew and Maniatis 2014). These 'little green men' took over government buildings and oversaw the local referendum (Lanoszka 2016: 175) meant to legitimize the Russian *Anschluss*. This was followed by armed rebellion in Eastern Ukraine, with Moscow once more denying its heavy military involvement. For their part, puzzled Western great powers simply retreated from solemn commitments to Ukraine's security

and defense (Lindley-French 2016: 106). It should be noted that conditions for similar actions are particularly favorable all over the former Soviet Union because of the region's ethnic heterogeneity, latent historical grievances, and weakness of local civil society. Moscow can therefore manipulate existing cleavages and launch hybrid wars, which gives it a considerable advantage over external powers. Furthermore, military approaches trying to counter this threat are by definition incomplete because they are unable to prevent the Kremlin from instrumentalizing nationalist identities to sow local discord. Accordingly, NATO might not be able to deter effectively Russian hybrid warfare (Lanoszka 2016: 176, 181, 185, 193). This tends to support the aforementioned idea that in the future the military instrument will be frequently used by Moscow, even if it might take this covert form. Overall, the means of action presented in this section show that, despite its structural weaknesses, Russia is a capable actor that already possesses a highly disruptive potential in the East European security complex.

3.2.10 Authoritarian Internationalism

A final point concerns the external projection of one of the most important domestic features of the Putin regime: its authoritarianism. This projection is considerably helped by the more general resurgence of authoritarian rule that has characterized this century. Huntington's democratic 'third wave' is increasingly replaced by this unexpected phenomenon whose success is due to 'refined and nuanced strategies of repression, the exploitation of open societies, and the spread of illiberal policies in democratic countries themselves' (Puddington 2017: 1). Lobbyists and political consultants from Western countries are hired to represent authoritarian interests. RT (formerly Russia Today) TV employs US journalists. As already shown, rightist, separatist, and even some leftist West European politicians and political parties 'are eager to emulate or cooperate with authoritarian rulers' in general and with President Putin in particular (ibid.: 2). The latter felt genuinely threatened by the 2003–2005 wave of CIS 'colored revolutions' and decided to protect his regime through policies that undermine democratic forces both at home and abroad. One of his major efforts was to insulate Russia from external democracy promotion (Ambrosio 2009: 6, 19, 45–68). At the same time, he moved relentlessly to export authoritarian ideas and techniques in the CIS republics (Puddington 2017: 6) and acted aggressively

against democratic forces there. Every time that there was a struggle between democratic movements and authoritarian leaders, the Kremlin clearly sided with the latter (the 'colored revolutions' themselves provide the best examples of such situations). The permanent goal was to halt any pattern of democratic transitions, thus 'undermin[ing] a sense of momentum and revers[ing] any belief that the overthrow of autocratic leaders is inevitable' (Ambrosio 2009: 23). When democrats had the upper hand, multiple instruments were used to undermine or even overthrow the new regime (the example of Moldova is detailed in Chapter 7): the failure of a new democracy turns it into a negative example that demoralizes democratic forces in the entire region and diminishes their audiences (Ambrosio 2009: 23). At the global level, Russia has participated in the 'rise in authoritarian internationalism' based on the creation of ad hoc cooperation between authoritarian powers to block criticism and to defend embattled dictatorships at the United Nations and within regional organizations like the OSCE (Puddington 2017: 3, 7). Regionally, the same cooperative effort led to the Kremlin's association with China within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (which also includes four Central Asian states) that has been criticized for seeking to 'establish a regional order which makes it illegitimate to criticize these governments, interfere in the domestic politics of its member states, or promote regime change.' The organization's strongly anti-democratic principles, norms, and values—the so-called Spirit of Shanghai—are expected to govern the future development of Central Asia (Ambrosio 2009: 24, 160). Overall, it can be said that Russia has contributed significantly to the evolution of the CIS toward heavy authoritarianism. Today, out of its twelve states, eight have consolidated authoritarian regimes while there is no consolidated or semi-consolidated democracy (Freedom House 2017). Moreover, it can be securely stated that the Kremlin's promotion of authoritarianism in the region will not diminish as long as President Putin's regime will preserve its deeply undemocratic nature.

The conclusion of this chapter is that, under President Putin, the need for domestic legitimizing of his authoritarian regime and the deep impact of neoclassical geopolitics on the development of Russia's identity as an international actor have turned Moscow into an aggressive revisionist power that seriously endangers the stability of the East European regional security complex through the use of a wide range of effective instruments. The consequences of President Obama's clumsy 'reset' and

the impossibility for the European Union to accept the Kremlin's cynical Greater Europe plan have made Russia's evolution toward regional aggressiveness difficult if not impossible to reverse. This represents a structural constraint that will impact considerably the future trajectory of the entire security complex. In fact, President Putin's foreign policy remains very pragmatic; accordingly, like the Soviet Union seven decades ago, present Russia is 'highly sensitive to logic of force (…) [and] can easily withdraw (…) when strong resistance is encountered at any point' (Kennan 1946: 15). The problem is that, as shown in the next two chapters, both Brexit's consequences and President Trump's foreign policy views are associated with a trend toward appeasement that would be highly detrimental to the sovereignty and democracy of East European states. Moreover, Russian actions have already led to the 'militarization of thinking' in the region and increasingly threaten European Union's Kantian geopolitical vision, as shown in Chapter 4.

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CHAPTER 4

The European Union and Eastern Europe Before and After Brexit

This chapter examines the European Union as an actor of the East European security complex, analyzing in more detail its Eastern policies and its bilateral relationship with Russia. Its main contribution, however, concerns the consequences of Brexit for the evolution of the process of European integration as well as its impact on the future of the regional security complex. Three possible scenarios are proposed that analyze very different types of future European involvement in Eastern Europe.

4.1 The EU as a Hybrid International Actor

Perhaps the most geopolitically oriented contemporary theoretical approach analyzing the process of European integration is, surprisingly, the Trotskyist one. It describes the EU as a 'fundamentally undemocratic institution' dominated by the interplay of national interests and best understood as the materialization of capitalist imperialism, which is defined by the overlap of economic and geopolitical competition. In fact, the European construct has a 'double imperialist constitution.' On the one hand, it is the result of US-promoted integration intended to create a junior partner that would help Washington manage global capitalism. On the other hand, the EU is an instrument allowing West European great powers to 'pursue their imperial interests in a way that they were no longer able to individually' (Callinicos 2017: 186–187). While this is, to repeat the aforementioned words of Mearsheimer, 'Geopolitics 101,' it does not reflect a widely shared view.

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The 'increasingly "post-modern", peaceful, economically thriving and interdependent Europe' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 62) that has abandoned geopolitical issues of territory and military power in favor of win-win ones (Mead 2014) has more frequently been depicted as a 'civilian power.' This concept was introduced by François Duchêne in 1972 in order to explain how the then European Economic Community (EEC) could influence the international system in a positive and stabilizing way. The EEC had already succeeded in introducing among its members 'a commonly agreed upon framework and network of economic links, in lieu of force.' This was to be expanded worldwide through 'functional spheres of influence' such as trade that would replace territorial ones and diffuse civilian and democratic standards (Bachmann and Sidaway 2009: 94, 97). Duchêne, however, did not ignore or discard the use of military power. His point was that such use should be made only collectively, conditioned by international legitimacy, and in the pursuit of 'civilizing' international relations (ibid.: 99).

Today, the spirit of Duchêne's discourse is in a large measure associated with the view of the European Union as a security community presented in Chapter 2. As shown there, the EU is a mature tightly coupled security community: its members have developed a common identity and have institutionalized their transactions through a variety of domestic and supranational settings that make war among them unthinkable (Adler and Barnett 1998: 50–57; Diez et al. 2011: 201); their system of rule is a 'post-sovereign' one, based on collective security (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30; Bellamy 2004: 8–9). These features have strongly shaped the European Union's external actions, turning it into the most advanced security community-building organization. It has constantly tried to export its Kantian vision worldwide and especially to its Eastern neighborhood (Bremberg 2015: 675). This effort was particularly successful in Central Europe, leading to the 2004–2007 Eastern enlargement and inspiring Brussels' concentric circles vision. The entire European continent as well as the southern shores of the Mediterranean was perceived as gradually adopting EU norms that were transforming them into friendly neighborhoods (Popescu 2014: 35). Seven circles were identified in the literature based on the degree of integration with the European Union measured in terms of institutional and administrative 'distance' (Bruns et al. 2016: 6): (1) the 11-state EU core; (2) the 'opt-out' member states (Britain, Ireland, Denmark, and Sweden); (3) the new post-communist member states, Cyprus, and Malta; (4) the

European Economic Area members (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland); (5) negotiating, non-negotiating, and prospective EU candidate countries in the Western Balkans as well as Turkey; (6) European neighbors in the Western CIS and the Caucasus; and (7) non-European neighbors in North Africa (Tassinari 2005: 3). However, as shown in the previous chapter, this vision started to be challenged by Russia's increasingly antagonistic stance which led to new patterns of the EU inside/outside dialectic that were no more compatible with EU-centric representations of the East European geopolitical reality (Sakwa 2010: 6). As Brussels and Moscow were unable to accommodate their very different visions of their 'shared neighborhood' (Popescu 2014: 35), the European Union unexpectedly 'stumbled into geopolitics.' Institutionally and intellectually unprepared, lacking effective instruments and experience, it was unable to face Russia's neoclassical geopolitical offensive. This became obvious during the Ukrainian crisis, when the US and EU great powers became the only relevant Western actors (Sakwa 2015b: 118–119).

Many authors claim that the conflict opposing the Kantian 'postmodern' European Union to 'modern' Russia, whose international actions mirror its Westphalian understanding of sovereignty based on fixed territory, national identity, and neoclassical geopolitics, is deeply rooted in the different nature of the two actors and in the incompatible systems of values they endorse. In 2009, the then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, declared that it was the 'postmodern DNA' of the EU that made Brussels unable to play great power politics with Russia (Klinke 2012: 935). In more practical terms, Brussels' cosmopolitan democratic view started to be criticized as conductive to a naïve liberal perception of international politics that pays little attention to hard power: Europe is a postmodern 'risk aversive society' (Ulrich Beck quoted by Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 9) that 'has lost the ability to think strategically' (Coker quoted by Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 9). In other words, the European civilian power has become too 'civilian.' In response, an 'embryonic realist geopolitical narrative' has started to cautiously emerge in the practical discourse of the European Union concerning the relationship with Russia (Klinke 2012: 929, 933, 935). In 2015, the present High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, explicitly stated that a dose of 'nuanced realism is required' (Duke 2017: 79).

In principle, nothing should prevent the European Union from continuing to be a security community that preserves a postmodern

Kantian culture within its borders and, at the same time, from learning to become a genuinely realist international actor struggling for survival in a Hobbesian world. After all, something similar has already happened during the Cold War. Moreover, the Democratic Peace Theory shows that democracies never wage war among themselves but fight non-democracies more often than non-democracies fight each other. Cultural-normative factors as well as structural and institutional constraints explain this apparently contradictory behavior (Russett 1993), a situation that can be transposed to the context of security communities. The problem is that the EU has become such a community, but internationally it has not fully become a single actor with a 'communitized' foreign policy. Instead of a common position on major international issues, diverging national points of view frequently lead to an 'uncoordinated cacophony.' Germany, France, and Britain have been the decisive actors, and their disagreement on a specific issue normally results in blockage. Consequently, especially during crises, individual member states tend to make their own foreign policy (Nünlist 2015: 1–2). This cannot be avoided as long as the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy remains intergovernmental in nature, a situation due in a large measure to British efforts (Aktipis and Oliver 2011: 72–92, 89). The 2009 Lisbon Treaty did not merge the positions of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and of External Relations Commissioner into something equivalent to a strong EU Foreign Minister. Instead, the merger led to the creation of the much weaker High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The latter can act only in areas on which there is a consensus between the member states and therefore plays 'the role of an administrator and coordinator rather than that of a strategic thinker' (Nünlist 2015: 2–3). All this means that, unless full foreign policy communitization is adopted, lack of coherence will prevent the EU from becoming an effective actor within the East European security complex even if 'realist' behavior toward Russia is adopted.

Overall, the European Union is a hybrid actor in two ways. On the one hand, it has to preserve its internal Kantian culture while learning to act in a realist—or, rather, in a neoclassical geopolitical—way within the East European security complex. On the other hand, in crisis situations, its external action is paralleled and severely hampered by the autonomous or even independent national foreign policies of its most important

members. Obviously, this can only result in a considerable degree of incoherence and ineffectiveness, which explains Russia's view of the EU as a weak international actor.

4.2 The European Union's Eastern Policies and Russia

The previous chapter has analyzed EU actions in the East European security complex from a mainly Russian point of view. A Brussels-centered complement is needed in order to better understand the internal dynamics of the European Union whose probable evolution in a post-Brexit context will be scrutinized later in this chapter. Accordingly, this section examines the geopolitical dimension of the Eastern enlargement, the European Neighborhood Policy, and the Eastern Partnership.

4.2.1 The Eastern Enlargement

While completed only in 2004–2007, the Eastern enlargement of the European Union was a direct consequence of the changes related to the end of the Cold War. It was conceived in order to address a number of issues that included (1) the recalibration of geopolitical power within the EU itself due to German reunification, a major event from which the disturbing dilemma of how German power might reassert itself stemmed; (2) containing Russian power and, more important during the 1990s, limiting the potentially destabilizing consequences of Weimar Russia's weakness; and (3) the fear of Yugoslav-type ethnic, irredentist conflicts developing all over the former communist block (O'Brennan 2006: 156–157, 168). Out of these 'existential threats' to European security (Atsuko Higashino quoted in O'Brennan 2006: 158), regional instability was the most dangerous. Accordingly, the Eastern enlargement was the geopolitical response of the European Union to the need to stabilize its external environment by normalizing inter- and intra-state relations in Eastern Europe and by contributing to the peaceful transition of the region's states from communism to liberal democracy. Brussels chose the path of a process of institutionalized cooperation facilitating the transmission of values and norms that would Europeanize candidate states (O'Brennan 2006: 156, 160, 168). This process was remarkably successful due to the effective use of conditionality (for a recent review

of the literature on EU enlargement conditionality see Gateva 2015: 22–26). Geopolitical issues were 'normalized' through this soft approach that delinked territoriality from traditional security concerns and turned peaceful problem solving into a generally accepted norm; in a very visible manner, the Eastern enlargement represented the explicit expansion of the EU security community (O'Brennan 2006: 155–156).

In the earlier stages of the relationship with Moscow, the European Union genuinely conceived the enlargement as a way to avoid geopolitical competition and to diminish actual or potential instability generated by Russia's international and domestic weakness. Considerable cooperative efforts were made that included the conclusion of the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (Duke 2017: 91; Studzińska 2015: 22) presented in the previous chapter. Institutional interaction and intense political dialogue were actively promoted in order to strengthen mutual understanding and to socialize Russian elites into the consensus-based problem-solving structures of the EU. Progressively, Brussels started to identify Russia as 'strategic partner' instead of 'strategic rival' (O'Brennan 2006: 166–167).

The fact that post-communist instability was addressed by the European Union through the enlargement of its security community accompanied by the creation of a partnership with Moscow supports the claim that, internationally, the Eastern enlargement was 'essentially about geopolitics' (Duke 2017: 79). Yet, the geopolitical dimension was not exclusively associated with the external interactions of the EU. Its internal geopolitical dynamics was also deeply modified. As noted by Luis Simón, consequences included a serious challenge to the French–German control of the European integration process, with new members supporting a more pro-Atlanticist and anti-Russian vision; the associated strengthening of the position of the equally pro-Atlanticist and anti-Russian UK; the considerable strengthening of the influence of Germany, which returned to a central geopolitical position in Europe; and the end of the exceptional position of France based on Germany's weakness and Britain's peripheral position (Simón 2013: 152–153). Overall, the Eastern enlargement altered significantly the Cold War geopolitical balance inside the then EU-Europe security complex. However, its most important consequence was that it brought the European Union to the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, thus creating the conditions for greatly increased interactions between latter's members and Brussels. In turn, this led to the transformation of the loose

super-complex formed by the EU-Europe and CIS complexes into the new East European security complex within which the present antagonistic relationship emerged.

4.2.2 The EU Eastern Geopolitical Doctrine

The European Neighborhood Policy was launched in 2004 on the basis of the March 2003 'Wider Europe' communication of the EU Commission and in connection with the Eastern enlargement. It proposed a framework for the EU relations with 16 neighboring states in Eastern Europe and Northern Africa that were not offered the prospect of EU membership. The objective was to create a 'ring of friends' that would progressively assimilate European Union's fundamental norms and values, which in turn would lead to the development of an increasingly close bilateral relationship involving a degree of economic and political integration (Wesley Scott 2005: 429). Concerned countries included the four members of the GUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) as well as Belarus and Armenia. Brussels offered financial assistance, some free trade, and cooperation in the fields of civil society programs, transfer of EU legal know-how, and visas; a less visible but critical feature was the export of the EU internal law. For their part, partner states were expected to cooperate on migration, cross-border crime, and other similar issues (Kuus 2011: 1145–1146). Action Plans were established for each country with commitments to be monitored by Brussels. Compliance resulting in successful reforms would be rewarded with access to other EU programs and with the negotiation of closer agreements (Bugajski 2007: 14). The European Neighborhood Policy vocabulary and methodology were visibly derived from the enlargement process (Kuus 2011: 1146), confirming the fact that the new policy was part of the same grand project. However, unlike the enlargement, this more modest form of engagement 'lacked a strong regional or multilateral component that could strengthen regional security' (Bugajski 2007: 14). In the case of the CIS republics, this became obvious after President Putin's aggressive 2007 Munich Speech and ensuing tensions that included the 2008 Georgia War.

In 2009, the EU initiated the Eastern Partnership in order to delink the development of relations with its Eastern neighbors from the slow progress of Mediterranean partners. The new partnership included the prospect of negotiating Association Agreements, Deep

and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements, as well as visa-free travel and other agreements. Soon it became clear that, for that region and that time, this was too ambitious. Criticism of authoritarian practices in Belarus led to this country's withdrawal (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 33–34) while Russia's growing opposition to what it perceived as a direct challenge to its regional influence led to the Vilnius summit episode described in the previous chapter and to the ensuing Ukrainian crisis. It is clear that the European Union was unprepared and unable to face Moscow. More surprisingly, for a time the promoters of the partnership—whose conceptual center 'rest[ed] firmly within the Commission' (Kuus 2011: 1146)—weren't even aware that there was the 'possibility of a competition with Russia; [the Eastern Partnership] was a bureaucratic plan, not a strategy' (Grygiel 2015: 511).

This bureaucratic plan, however, had a major implicit geopolitical dimension. The institutions of the European Union constructed the 'neighborhood' as an object of EU decision-making, a 'specific kind of place to be managed through a particular set of policy instruments' (Kuus 2014: 114). This was variously described as extra-territorial engagement, external governance, or transborder governance (for definitions and discussion, see Bruns et al. 2016: 8). The point is that this unequivocal EU policy toward the outside based on 'us' managing 'them' (Smith quoted by Kuus 2011: 114) and on stark political and economic asymmetries is 'ultimately based on geopolitical power,' even if—unlike the Russian one—it belongs to a softer variety (Wesley Scott 2005: 430). The Eastern enlargement made use of a similar approach in order to ensure the expansion of the EU security community. However, once this was completed and despite of the balance of power still at work within its borders (one could think of harsh austerity measures imposed under the pressure of Germany by the Greek government against the explicit will of its own citizens), post-communist states became fully fledged members of the security community and, at least in principle, are not in a subordinate position any more. For their part, CIS partners are simultaneously involved in dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Wesley Scott 2005: 430). They are expected to comply with EU internal standards while continuing to be treated mainly as outsiders. The resulting ambiguous and contradictory framing (Kuus 2011: 1145) has considerable potential for exclusionary policies and creates an unclear spatial homogeneity (where tensions are very much in evidence) instead of the intended spatial order that would have simplified the EU neighborhood

(Bruns et al. 2016: 5–6; Wesley Scott 2005: 429–430). This is aggravated by the fact that European Union's policy toward the partners' is 'often undecided' and does not reflect their diverse expectations and self-perceptions (Bruns et al. 2016: 6).

One can easily observe that, theoretically speaking, all this is much closer to critical geopolitics than to any neoclassical geopolitics-related approach. This should not be a surprise: neither the construction of the EU security community nor its eastward expansion through enlargement can be easily explained by neoclassical geopolitics. Yet, European Union's aforementioned need to learn how to become a realist international actor in order to face Russia and, in a certain measure, the very interaction with the partner states in the CIS do relate to the latter type of geopolitical view and show that a process of change is at work. Later sections of this book will analyze the likelihood of neoclassical geopolitics partly or even completely replacing the EU Kantian vision under the combined impact of Brexit, US foreign policy change, and the antagonist relationship with Moscow. At this point, I will only note that Realpolitik understandings of concepts such as stability, prosperity, sustainability, and security associated with the conception and working of the European Neighborhood Policy and of the Eastern Partnership cannot be separated from the emergence of an EU geopolitical doctrine toward neighboring CIS and South Mediterranean states (Wesley Scott 2005: 429–430). This doctrine is about achieving greater security without offering too much integration. Its hegemonic concept is represented by the 'area of freedom, security and justice' introduced by the Treaty of Amsterdam, whose security dimension was turned into a top priority theme of both the ENP and the Eastern Partnership (Bruns et al. 2016: 8–9). Two very different dimensions are involved: Europeanization, with its emphasis on achieving stability and democratization through the transfer of EU norms and values; and a discourse of threats that concerns the regulation of borders and immigration as well as other elements of Brussels' security agenda such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, smuggling, cross-border organized crime, and environmental hazards (Wesley Scott 2005: 431, 440–441). Europeanization is closely linked to the Kantian nature of the EU security community, but because the prospect of accession is not offered its transformative power is very limited in partner states. Addressing security threats can and in this case does relate to Realpolitik. Short of enlargement, local elites do not have enough incentives to give up selfish individual, group, and

national interests. Their response to Brussels' security needs follows a transactional logic that, at the level of international relations, is not fundamentally different from the gas-in-exchange-for-political-cooperation approach that characterizes their relations with Russia. The European Union needs to adapt to this reality, and its geopolitical doctrine accordingly has to incorporate a realist dimension. This means that the varying degrees of integration of the concentric circles presented earlier in this chapter are mirrored by a similar variation of the EU geopolitical vision and doctrine, which is purely Kantian at the core and considerably less so at the periphery. In the case of the latter, the situation has been of course considerably aggravated by Moscow's aggressiveness that compels the European Union to consider the incorporation of radically non-Kantian elements into its Eastern geopolitical doctrine.

In a different perspective, it is interesting to note the controversial issue of civilizational discourses that conservative groups have tried to incorporate into this doctrine (ibid.: 445). As discussed in the previous chapter, 'Is Russia European?' might well be an irrelevant question. Asking it in the case of a country that aspires to EU accession—to give a widely debated example, 'Is Turkey European?'—represents an element of critical importance for both the concerned state and the geographical and geopolitical self-definition of the European Union itself, as illustrated by the frequently asked question 'Are there any 'natural borders' for EU expansion?' However, this potentially destabilizing debate has been marginalized by Russia's blocking of any prospect of CIS republics joining the EU in the predictable future.

This blocking is not important in itself, as the very *raison d'être* of the European Neighborhood Policy and of the Eastern Partnership was to provide an alternative to enlargement. However, one of their key geopolitical objectives explicitly mentioned in the 2003 Wider Europe communication was to 'avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe' (Wesley Scott 2005: 440; Duke 2017: 83). In fact, the opposite happened: the EU Eastern policies have resulted in the return to bloc politics (Sakwa 2015b: 118), with a new iron curtain being constructed between two increasingly antagonist camps. Clearly, this was not what the European Union had intended. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the clash was due to the maximalist geopolitical visions of both actors: the unipolarity of the Brussels-centered concentric circles was incompatible with Russia's project for a bipolar Europe that would have included its own internationally recognized sphere of influence (Popescu 2014: 37).

The negative consequences of this situation led to a harsh Mearsheimer-type critique of European Union's Eastern policies: by seeking to transform the continent in its own image and especially by launching the provocative and unnecessary Eastern Partnership, Brussels simply forced Moscow to become aggressive. Instead, geopolitical and normative pluralism should have been accepted, i.e. the Russian sphere of influence should have been recognized. Moreover, much of the responsibility for this dangerously mistaken geopolitical doctrine rests with the post-communist 'cold warriors' in the EU who 'virulently' endorsed the Eastern Partnership. The main culprit was the Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorksi, who conceived the partnership and succeeded in associating the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt to his plan. Together, they convinced the European Union to take the path of geopolitical competition against Russia, for which Brussels was not prepared and which resulted in the USA becoming the main Western regional actor (Sakwa 2015a: 62, 2015b: 117–119).

This genuinely (neo)realist analysis is not the only possible one. A constructivist view emphasizes the EU and Russian incompatible subjectivities in the context of the construction and management of their respective East European neighborhoods. The European Union's project is 'a complex machinery of "more for more" co-option and "good practices"' (Korosteleva 2015: 193) that has made Brussels perceive itself as a normative actor playing a central role and having a special responsibility in the region as a 'force for good' and a 'helper' (Casier 2016: 23). The Russian project is based on already shared normative and cultural spaces, dependencies, and memories of the past (Korosteleva 2015: 193). Moscow is critical of the EU efforts for normative hegemony, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov describing the Eastern Partnership as a plan to build a sphere of influence. The expansion of its regulatory model turns the European Union into an intruder in the Commonwealth of Independent States, where Russia perceives itself as the only legitimate regional power (Casier 2016: 23). This is to say that the two actors' self-images are insufficiently mutually recognized. Both Brussels and Moscow perceive each other as influence maximizers at the expense of the other, understand each other's actions as negative, illegitimate, and aggressive while their own behavior is legitimate and reasonable (ibid.: 25). As knowledge internalization and positioning turn one's subjectivity into one's subjection (Korosteleva 2015: 193), this mutual non-recognition of identities can only lead to a conflictual bilateral relationship.

Even if one adopts a more moderate thin cognitivist approach, as I do, it is important to remember that the identities of both actors still are in a formative process (Debardeleben 2012: 418). I have already explained the case of Russia. The European Union might seem older and more stable, but its actorness is relatively recent in the newly created East European security complex. The development of the Eastern geopolitical doctrine and especially the associated progressive adaptation to non-Kantian regional constraints represent a process that adds a realist dimension to the security community features of its international identity. Similar to the Russian case, this change is slow, incremental, and limited as most of the EU preexisting identity traits are not affected; still, the Kantian content of its geopolitical interactions is diminishing, which in the case of a security community can imply a certain degree of identity change. If the Brussels–Moscow relationship is taken into consideration, the fact that two foreign policy identities are simultaneously formed in the context of negative mutual perceptions would normally turn mutual rejection and hostility into a long-standing trait of both the two actors and their regional geopolitical environment. In other words, a pattern of durable enmity is likely to take form within the East European security complex. However, some of the scenarios presented later in this chapter and in Chapter 8 suggest that the consequences of Brexit and of President Trump's foreign policy changes might prevent such a development.

Some practical aspects also have to be noted. The Ukrainian crisis made it clear that the European Union was 'neither institutionally nor intellectually' able to compete with Russia (Sakwa 2015b: 118; see also Grygiel 2015: 511). For things to change, both the EU external action apparatus and the Eastern geopolitical doctrine need to be significantly upgraded. Yet, this is not likely to happen in the near future. As shown in detail in the following section, the Eurozone crisis, Islamist terrorism, massive migrant waves, and their instrumentalization by rising populist nationalist and Euroskeptic political forces—whose consequences include Brexit—have considerably weakened the European Union and its ability to conceive and successfully implement an appropriate response to Eastern challenges. In turn, this has caused 'visible disillusionment' in a number of CIS capitals, thus enhancing Russia's regional position (Bugajski 2014: 6). However, the Kremlin's triumph is far from being complete. In fact, the maximalist visions of both the EU and Russia were frustrated: The simple fact that what remains of independent Ukraine perceives Moscow as the quintessential enemy represents a major failure

for Russia's plans of regional hegemony. For the time being, neither Brussels nor Moscow can realistically hope to turn into reality more than minimalist visions of their initial projects (Popescu 2014: 36–37). Still, Brexit and President Trump might significantly alter this situation.

4.3 The Present EU Crisis and Its Consequences for the Process of European Integration

It is obvious that the Eastern policies and actions of the European Union will be deeply affected by major changes of the process of European integration leading to a redefinition of the structure and identity of the Union. This section shows that today the EU finds itself at such a crossroads and analyzes the causes and possible consequences of this situation.

At least in economic terms, the European Union undoubtedly is a major global actor. However, its share of the world population and global GDP (approximately 7 and 25%, respectively) are falling while its already high share of the global social expenditures (approximately 50%) continues to rise. Furthermore, due to major financial, economic, social, institutional, political, and geopolitical problems the Union 'stand[ed] at a crossroad between progress and stagnation' (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 3) even before Brexit. It could be said that the latter represents, at the same time, a form of manifestation and an accelerator of a yet confuse process of change.

4.3.1 The Rise of Populism

Brexit has been frequently perceived as the logical result of the UK's failure to join fully the process of European integration. For decades, Britain has constantly opposed moves toward deeper integration, did everything in its power to preserve the intergovernmental nature of EU policies outside the economic pillar, and regarded opting out as a perfectly reasonable approach. The immigration issue related to the EU Eastern member states so present in the minds of the British public at the time of the 2016 vote has been instrumentalized in 'a battle between the Europhobic elite and pro-European forces' (Leonard 2015b: 2) within a larger and 'sometimes irrational' debate fuelled, critically, by 'identity politics' (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 2, 10). To many, it is the issue of identity that best explains Brexit: the British—and even

British pro-Europeans—lack what Timothy Garton Ash called 'the normative, idealistic sense of *l'Europe européene*, Europe as an ideal, a myth, the stuff of which political identities are made' (Garton Ash 2001: 12). The British identity has not been Europeanized, and as such London's position with respect to the European Union cannot be otherwise than 'strangely peripheral' (Holden 2011: 158).

This certainly represents a part of the explanation. Yet, Brexit was supported by the majority of UK citizens in 2016 and not twenty or thirty years earlier because of the emergence of additional factors of a very different nature. They are related to the populist wave that also stands behind the election of President Trump in the US and the significant electoral progress of populist political parties all over the European Union (Shipman 2016: Conclusion). In turn, this populist wave represents the indirect effect of globalization. The latter has been 'highly functional' for the Western 'transnational bourgeoisie' (Klinke 2015: 481). Yet, the technocracy and liberal-cosmopolitan outlook of this elite began to provoke popular anger (Pabst 2016: 201) among the undereducated and underprivileged working-class communities that saw their jobs moved to China or Mexico, while massive immigration depressed wages and put pressure on local services (Shipman 2016: Conclusion). Between 2007 and 2014, the income of the majority of citizens in industrialized countries has diminished or stagnated, a situation worsened by anxiety about the future (Munich Security Conference 2017: Introduction). This is the first Western generation since World War II that has lower living standards than the previous one: The promise of 'ever-more equality of opportunity, upward social mobility, and "trickle-down" wealth' has come to an end (Pabst 2016: 190). As this has been perceived as the effect of the impersonal forces of global economy, it is not surprising that it led to feelings of powerlessness and economic and cultural insecurity which resulted in support for political forces promising to restore popular sovereignty and national self-determination (ibid.). This divide between winners and losers of globalization was well illustrated by the vote for Brexit. Urban young graduates supported 'remain;' less-educated, poorer, and older citizens who felt left behind by the forces of globalization massively voted for 'leave' (Hobolt 2016: 1259–1260). Political consequences are very serious as both Europe and North America are experiencing nothing less than a reordering of politics whose most radical trends have been associated with 'the flames of far-left and far-right demagogy and soft fascism' (Pabst 2016: 190, 201).

Present Western populism can be both right- and left-wing (France's National Front and Germany's Alternative for Germany illustrate the first category; Greece's Syriza and Spain's Podemos the second). It is characterized by the refusal of conventional politics, animosity toward traditional elites, and anti-globalization gestures that include the xenophobic rejection of foreigners as well as protectionist measures. The attitude toward immigration is particularly hostile (Berman 2016: 188; Pabst 2016: 189). An anti-globalism cultural backlash is also present that questions no less than Western societies' cultural modernization (Munich Security Conference 2017, Introduction). Populist leaders present themselves as the representatives of 'the voiceless, the angry, and the disaffected' and are staunchly anti-establishment (Pabst 2016: 189); in doing that, they exploit the increasingly visible popular rejection of political elites ultimately due to the breakdown of trust between rulers and the ruled (Ryan Coetzee quoted by Shipman 2016: Conclusion). In terms of methods, these leaders prefer to turn away from reason and deploy emotion to win an argument. This is especially visible in their effort to instill and capitalize on the growing fear of the other. They 'turbocharge lack of trust' associated with citizens' grievances and insecurities to form a Western transnational 'axis of fear' supported by political agitation that frequently includes spreading outright lies (Munich Security Conference 2017, Introduction). This has resulted in the development of a 'post-truth' culture where power of conviction is more associated with the volume of the discourse than with its accuracy (Shipman 2016: Conclusion). The effectiveness of disinformation is considerably enhanced by the use of social media, which has replaced mass media as a major source of information; to give an example, only 14% of US Republicans continue to trust the latter. In this new environment, echo chambers and filter bubbles are used by populists to share and amplify partial sets of information, which distort reality up to the level where 'nothing is true and everything is possible' (Munich Security Conference 2017, (Dis)Information: Fake It, Leak It, Spread It).

This has led to the aforementioned reordering of politics. In many Western countries, the traditional Left vs. Right competition has been replaced by a political divide opposing a liberal-cosmopolitan camp and a populist one that sometimes has overt xenophobic and/or authoritarian features. In about a dozen Western states populist political parties are part of the government. Where they are not, their influence is nevertheless strongly felt as traditional parties alter their own political programs

in order to preserve the support of their electorate. As populist politics challenges essential elements of liberal democracies (ibid.: Introduction), it is not exaggerated to state that we are witnessing 'the West's post-liberal moment' (Pabst 2016: 201). Moreover, this is a phenomenon that impacts significantly the process of European integration. With populist parties making unprecedented electoral progress in a large number of EU member states, 'Euroscepticism is no longer a British disease' (Leonard 2015b: 7).

4.3.2 Souverainisme vs. Integration by Stealth

In fact, it was noted that the European Union is a misguided object of populist discontent (Pabst 2016: 189). Indeed, in terms of outsourcing, European companies think more of China than of Eastern Europe, where wages already are high and rising; much more immigrants come from the Global South than from Poland; and, if the point of view of the average right-wing extremist is to be taken into consideration, Caucasian and Christian East Europeans bring in a smaller degree of 'otherness' than North African or Middle Eastern Muslims. In practical terms, protection from globalization could be better constructed in a large EU-centered Fortress Europe than in much smaller nation states. Yet, the European Union is liberal, multicultural, and managed (critics say controlled) by a cosmopolitan bureaucracy; in certain regards, it does represent a form of manifestation of globalization. Moreover, in a 'post-truth' culture, it is easier to convince by stirring emotions than by using logic. Many remember the British citizen who explained to a Channel 4 News reporter that he had voted for Brexit one day earlier 'to stop Muslims coming into the country' (York 2016). This line of reasoning has of course very little to do with reality, but it is illustrative of the fact that in a populist perspective the European Union is not perceived as part of the solution to globalization-related problems; it is seen as part of the problem (Hobolt 2016: 1260). The solution would be precisely the fragmentation of the EU—ideally, its dismantlement—that represents a key feature of West European populists' nationalist and inward-looking agendas (Oliver and Williams 2016: 552).

The term *souverainisme* was coined to describe this populist return to nation-state patriotism frequently accompanied by xenophobia and protectionism (Heisbourg 2016: 14) and capitalizing on the economic and cultural threats attributed to the demonized triad of globalization,

immigration, and European integration (Hobolt 2016: 1260). In order to escape the complications of inconclusive EU decision-making procedures and the problems of variegated Western societies, '*souverainistes* tend to look to the brutal simplicities of the Russian East for political inspiration' (Heisbourg 2016: 15). As shown in the previous chapter, the Kremlin has responded by generously supporting its nationalist, Euroskeptic, and xenophobic admirers in the West (Fischer 2015). Perhaps the closest to President Putin is the right-wing Dutch populist, Geert Wilders (see Puddington 2017: 42–43). In anticipation of Brexit, he spoke about his hope that 'once again Britain could help liberate Europe from another totalitarian monster, this time called Brussels.' In his view, a democratic nonviolent revolution, a populist 'patriotic spring' is approaching. 'The genie is out of the bottle, and the genie will never go back in the bottle' (Foster and Boztas 2016). In January 2017, he joined colleagues from German, French, and Italian right-wing populist parties at a meeting in the German city of Koblenz attended by 1000 mostly middle-aged participants and intended to popularize 'a vision of Europe as a consortium of sovereign nations, free from politically correct elites and pesky foreigners.' The meeting was dominated by France's Marine Le Pen, who also called for a 'patriotic spring' (*The Economist*, January 28, 2017). She expressed her conviction that Brexit would 'unleash an unstoppable wave of all the dominoes of Europe' and hailed the election of President Trump, who 'does not support a system of the oppression of peoples.' She was certain that 2017—the year of presidential election in her country, which she eventually lost—would 'be the year when the people of continental Europe wake up' (Connolly 2017); in other words, that many Brexits would follow. Enthusiastic applause showed that the French nationalist leader succeeded in forging an emotional bond with the mostly German audience (*The Economist*, January 28, 2017) in a strange manifestation of what could be called 'populism without borders.'

The literature has analyzed the associated 'politicization' of the process of European integration among the EU elites and population. The term is understood as 'the emergence of widespread political debates which unsettle the traditional "permissive consensus" on European integration' (De Wilde quoted by Hurrelmann 2015: 43). In this context, one of the key aspects targeted by increasing popular (and populist) criticism is 'integration by stealth': The fact that much of the progress of EU integration has not been the result of citizens' clearly expressed will. It was the output of institutional dynamics due to powers conferred

by intergovernmental treaties on European institutions. The latter have been the engine of decades-long continuous small-scale changes whose impressive cumulative effect was legitimated only by the public's passive permissive consensus (Rose and Borz 2016: 371). It is claimed that these roundabout economic or legal strategies are responsible for over-regulation and for a rigid institutional framework that makes policy innovation impossible. In turn, this produced suboptimal policies that have prevented the EU from delivering expected public goods, which ultimately made EU institution loose their legitimacy. In addition, there is the view that 'in an information-rich environment, co-ordination by mutual adjustment becomes possible, meaning that member states are no longer as dependent on central institutions as in the past' (Majone 2009). To summarize, from a populist point of view, 'integration by stealth' and therefore European integration itself have been illegitimate, had very negative consequences, and can be replaced by more effective non-EU instruments of coordination. Such criticism contributed significantly to the increasing unpopularity of the European Union especially under the effect of the severe economic crisis that began in 2007.

4.3.3 The European Union's Existential Crisis

As Jan Zielonka wrote, 'in a world dominated by the media and their quest for spectacle and entertainment, politics is chiefly about crisis' (Zielonka 2014: 19). This trend exists all over the West; however, it is particularly strong in the case of the process of European integration because a series of actual major crises have provided a solid objective basis that populists can easily exploit. The most visible is, of course, the 'Great Recession' or 'Long Depression' initiated by the financial crash of 2007–2008. The deepest since World War II, the recession was appropriately compared with 1929 one (Callinicos 2017: 186), whose socio-economic consequences brought Hitler to power. This time, it is the viability of European integration that is questioned (Oliver and Williams 2016: 551). This questioning was stimulated by further crises the EU has experienced in recent years either as direct or indirect consequences of the recession, or due to independent internal or external factors. They include the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis, the Greek crisis, Brexit, Islamist terrorism in Western Europe, Islamist-related warfare in the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa, ensuing massive immigration waves crossing the Mediterranean and Aegean seas, Visegrad group's rejection of the EU-set migrant quotas, Hungary's and Poland's moves toward 'illiberal

democracy,' Moscow's increasing hostility, its Crimean *Anschluss* and intervention in Ukraine that led to the imposition of EU economic sanctions, and the considerable security and economic uncertainties brought by President Trump's initial foreign policy discourse. In this tensioned context, older issues resurfaced, such as the democratic deficit of the EU and, critically, those related to the economic heterogeneity of the member states (Wahl 2017: 159–160). The latter have contributed to the rift that emerged between creditor nations in Northern Europe and indebted Southern European ones; and to fears that 'European integration ha[s] been hijacked by a new German hegemon' (Klinke 2015: 479).

In the words of Germany's 1998–2005 Foreign Minister and Vice Chancellor, Joschka Fischer, all this has stretched the powers and institutions of the European Union beyond their limits; this is why 'Europe's response has been so mortifyingly weak' (Fischer 2015). Symbols of European integration such as the euro and Schengen now 'undermine civic consent and public trust in the European project;' a 'dynamic of disintegration' is at work (Pabst 2016: 198). Indeed, the present EU crisis is fundamentally different from previous ones because institutional incompetence, populist manipulation, and ensuing public distrust have disrupted the very idea of European integration (Klinke 2015: 481; Zielonka 2014). Today, people associate the European Union with ineffective and dysfunctional institutions, rigid rules, and disconnection from citizens' concerns; the EU has become a symbol of austerity and conflict. The crisis of socioeconomic cohesion and political trust is too serious to come to an end by itself even if economic recovery becomes manifest (Zielonka 2014: x–xii). The erosion of popular support makes the 'movement toward an ever closer Union' stated in all EU treaties completely unrealistic as further integration is endorsed by less than one-third of the electorate. Comparable numbers support the *status quo* and a reversal of the process, respectively. Within the latter category, soft Euroskeptics demand the repatriation of EU powers to national governments; hard Euroskeptics, however, opt for their countries to leave the European Union all together (Rose and Borz 2016: 370). Critically, populist parties try to turn this last point into the central issue of political debates and electoral campaigns in their respective countries (Fischer 2015). If they succeed and commitment to integration starts to be questioned on a large scale, this might well be the 'beginning [of] a process that unravels the EU' (Oliver 2016: 216). To quote Joschka Fischer once more, this 'is probably the greatest danger that Europe has faced since the Cold War's end' (Fischer 2015).

To revert this process, the European Union would need 'to renew the founding vision of a reciprocalist and subsidiarity polity that reconnects supranational institutions much more closely' to communities and citizens (Pabst 2016: 200). Yet, the EU is unable and partly unwilling to submit itself to a fundamental transformation (Fischer 2015). Accordingly, Jan Zielonka noted in his *Is the EU Doomed?* the need for a debate on European disintegration which, unlike the many theories of European integration, 'is still in its infancy' (Zielonka 2014: 31). The process launched by the 1957 Treaty of Rome seems to have been reversed: 'interdependence no longer generates integration but instead prompts disintegration.' Negative spillback has replaced functionalist spillover, with disintegration in one field prompting disintegration in another (ibid.: 47). Other authors concur in claiming that the EU crisis has 'fundamentally shaken the continent's self-understanding as a post-geopolitical space' (Klinke 2015: 479); it is the very promise of peace and prosperity at the basis of the postwar European construct that 'no longer holds true' (Pabst 2016: 190; see below).

Yet, the possible partial or total 'waning of the EU' is not perceived as a tragedy mainly because it is not expected to trigger the end of all economic and political cooperation in Europe. Some authors claim that coordination by mutual adjustment is possible in the present information-rich environment without any need for strong central institutions (Majone 2009). Existing economic interdependence and cultural empathy will ensure the development of various regulatory agencies and decentralized networks bringing together states, regions, cities, businesses, and citizens. They will be more effective and responsive than the EU institutions (Zielonka 2014: xi–xii) due to their flexible and functional structure and approaches: A neomedieval Europe will take the place of the present European Union (Klinke 2015: 481; Zielonka 2006).

However, this trajectory is only one of those that might be associated with Europe's future. This topic is analyzed in more detail in the next section.

4.4 The Possible Trajectories of the Post-Brexit European Union

A likely reaction to previous paragraphs announcing the death of the European Union is to question the solidity of the rather general arguments used to explain it. Nobody denies the existence of the EU

multidimensional crisis, its deeply negative effects on socioeconomic cohesion and political trust, and populists' rather successful exploitation of this situation. However, for the time being, their political parties have been unable to secure the control of a major EU member state or to resolutely push the European Union toward disintegration. In most cases, they might even fail to turn the issue of leaving the EU into a key national political debate. While globalization-related factors that are responsible for the rise of populism will certainly not disappear, the appropriate political response of traditional parties and, hopefully, economic recovery might temporarily limit the electoral success of populist parties and diminish or delay the impact of their anti-EU political programs. This is why populism and crisis should not be perceived as the main engine of change when discussing the short- and medium-term evolution of the European Union. Rather, they should be taken as major constraints for geopolitical developments mainly associated with the consequences of the key event they have already triggered: Brexit.

More specifically, this book is based on the idea that the future of the process of European integration will mainly be influenced by changes brought by Brexit on the EU 'soft' internal geopolitical balance. This is to recognize that, within the win-win, Kantian European security community, power relations continue to exist and do play an important role. In fact, Alexander Wendt noted that the Kantian 'culture of anarchy' is susceptible to the same three degrees of cultural internalization as the Hobbesian and Lockean ones, including the first such degree—material coercion (Wendt 1999/2003: 254, 302–303). Of course, in a Kantian context 'material' does not mean physical violence and excludes completely the use of military force. But the already mentioned example of strong German pressure on the Greek government resulting in the adoption of harsh austerity measures in the Balkan country against the will of its citizens shows that power and coercion are present in intra-EU interactions and at times can take brutal—though nonviolent—forms. Accordingly, an internal balance of power has continuously played an important role in the working and development of the European Union. However, this is very different from a realist balance of power. First, it is 'soft,' and in most cases very much so; second and more important, its actors include member states but also EU institutions such as the European Commission, the European Court of Justice, the European Parliament, and the European Central Bank that have been in a large measure responsible for the 'integration by stealth' process and have

successfully prevented the European Union from following a mostly intergovernmental logic. What has changed in recent years under the combined influence of the crisis and of the populist wave is precisely the strength of European institutions. The loss of legitimacy described in the previous section has diminished their negotiation weight and has increased that of member states, thus bringing the EU internal balance of power closer to an intergovernmental one. This was visible in the cases of the Eurozone crisis, of the 2015 migratory wave, and of the Greek and Ukrainian crises, with major EU member states—and especially Germany—clearly influencing and at times dictating key decisions. As explained below, Brexit will further strengthen this trend. This evolution of the internal balance of power toward the realist model represents a key development that challenges the very nature of the EU 'communitized' construct and will significantly impact its future evolution. A number of post-Brexit scenarios are possible that are analyzed in the following sections. However, they share certain common features that need to be examined first.

Undoubtedly, 'an EU without Britain [will] be smaller, poorer, and less influential on the world stage' (European Council on Foreign Affairs 2015). After Brexit, the European Union will lose the third largest member state (with 12.5% of its population), 14.8% of its GDP, one of the most competitive economies in the world, the largest stocks of foreign direct investment in the EU, 19.4% of extra-EU exports, and the second largest net contributor to the common budget (responsible for 12% of it) (Leonard 2015a: 8; Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 12). The gross contributions of the remaining member states to the EU budget will need to rise by approximately 8% (Aichele and Felbermayr 2015). Politically, the global dimension of the European Union will be considerably affected by the loss of Britain's UN Security Council permanent seat, its Commonwealth network of nations, and its G7 and G20 memberships (MacShane 2015). The UK is the only EU member other than France with a global approach to foreign and security policy and with considerable diplomatic, strategic, and naval resources. Its departure will seriously endanger the already weak Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defense Policy, threatening to push the European Union 'into parochialism and isolationism.' Worse, the UK will become a rival of the EU (Rogers and Simón 2014).

Geopolitically, the departure of Britain will eliminate the strongest pro-American voice in the European Union. It was claimed that

'Atlanticism in Europe more generally might not lose much force,' mainly due to the fact that post-communist members will continue to support this orientation (Oliver and Williams 2016: 563). The actual outcome, however, depends on the scenario followed by the European Union and, critically, on decisions adopted by the USA itself (see the next chapter). What is certain is that anti-Russian post-communist member states will be deprived of their most important supporter. As explained in the previous chapter, Poland and the Baltic states have been able to prevent the creation of the close partnership between the European Union and Russia favored by Germany, France, Italy, and Spain mainly because they were supported by the UK and Sweden (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61). This might be much more difficult without London. In fact, the Eastern 'cold warriors' should have serious reasons of concern: Brexit-triggered divisions and weaknesses 'would be likely to invite Russian meddling in central Europe' (Oliver and Williams 2016: 567). Yet, in what measure and how exactly this might happen depends decisively on the scenario followed by the European Union.

This brings the discussion to the point where possible scenarios need to be analyzed. There are many of them, a good example being represented by the *White Paper on the Future of Europe* made public on March 1, 2017, by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker. He proposed no less than five scenarios, 'each offering a glimpse into the potential state of the Union by 2025 depending on the choices Europe will make': (1) carrying on, (2) nothing but the single market, (3) those who want more do more, (4) doing less more efficiently, and (5) doing much more together. In fact, as these scenarios 'are neither mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive' (European Commission 2017) and because crisis and the populist wave make 'carrying on' an unrealistic solution, their number can be reduced to three.

4.4.1 Scenario 1: Deeper Integration

Juncker's last scenario, 'doing much more together—Member States decide to share more power, resources and decision-making across the board' (European Commission 2017) is based on the claim formulated by some analysts that Brexit will be unpleasant, but not catastrophic. In fact, these optimists perceive it as a genuinely positive development that eliminates a strong adversary of further integration. Without London's eternal veto, the Franco-German axis could push forward economic and

foreign policy projects that will deepen considerably the integration process (Leonard 2015b: 7). To give just one of many possible examples, at Maastricht France and Germany supported an extremely ambitious proposal for the Treaty on the European Union. However, due to Britain's opposition, the final treaty followed mainly the much more modest British–Italian proposal (Blair 1999), thus leading to a European Union far weaker than that imagined by fervent Europeanists. Brexit, it is hoped, will create the conditions for a fundamentally new approach based on the rapid deepening of the integration process. A German acronym, NEU, has already been coined for this 'new European Union' that would be built around the euro and based on a 'distinctly German' political and strategic culture. Inward-looking in security terms and economically less liberal than today (which would imply a lower growth rate), this 'reasonably coherent' new EU would include 'a soft-power Germany and an extroverted France' (Heisbourg 2016: 16). If all this happens, the communitization of member states' foreign policies is likely to become a reality. In combination with increased internal coherence, this would turn the European Union into a strong actor of the East European security complex. Furthermore, German, French, Italian, and Spanish preference for a close partnership with Russia will certainly be mirrored by EU external action. Very probably, the European Union will overtly opt for stability at the price of sacrificing the interests of post-Soviet states to Russian ambitions. The Eastern Partnership, for example, would be reshaped to become completely irrelevant in geopolitical terms. For his part, President Putin would be happy with a friendly Brussels–Moscow relationship recognizing the Russian sphere of influence inside the Commonwealth of Independent States. However, the overall situation of the security complex will depend very much on the position of the USA analyzed in the next chapter. Critically, by choosing to support or not anti-Russian states Washington will influence the degree of conflict in Eastern Europe, which in turn will impact on the need for the new European Union to adapt to the situation in its immediate vicinity by continuing—or not—the already initiated process of incorporating non-Kantian elements into its Eastern geopolitical doctrine. Still, it is clear that Russia would have no reason to destabilize its European partner. The postmodern, win-win geopolitical vision will lose any chance of expansion toward the CIS republics but will continue to be dominant within the EU.

The problem with this scenario is that it is not compatible with the present anti-integration trends analyzed in the previous section.

Under the influence of crisis and populists, the European Union is today much closer to 'a cycle of disintegration' (European Council on Foreign Affairs 2015) than to 'doing much more together,' to use Juncker's words. It is difficult to see how electorates voting increasingly for the French National Front, the German Alternative for Europe, and their counterparts in the rest of the EU could suddenly start to support 'more Europe,' even under a German acronym. Based on the seriousness of these negative trends, two more pessimistic scenarios have to be taken into consideration.

4.4.2 Scenario 2: The Dominance of the Franco-German Axis

Juncker's third scenario, 'those who want more do more—the EU allows willing member states to do more together in specific areas' (European Commission 2017) has been described as 'differentiated integration' or 'flexibilization.' Variable 'coalitions of the willing' work toward selective integration in certain areas while selective disintegration affects other fields previously covered by EU policies (Wahl 2017: 157–158). This would put an end to present paralysis, but at the price of replacing the supranational components of the process of European integration by quasi-intergovernmental agreements that would turn the tasks of the EU institutions into servicing and supporting the initiatives of member states. The European Court of Justice or the European Central Bank would have their powers significantly reduced (ibid.: 161). In fact, selective integration has already been experienced during recent crises that were addressed mainly through intergovernmental cooperation. For example, the European Financial Stability Facility and the European Stability Mechanism are newly created ad hoc mechanisms intended to put an end to the euro crisis based on an intergovernmental approach (Leonard 2015b: 7). Moreover, selective integration has existed for decades due to various forms of opt out or enhanced cooperation accepted by the EU treaties; the best-known examples are of course the common currency and the Schengen area (Wahl 2017: 161). Therefore, this 'flexibilization' simply recycles the older concepts of multi-speed EU, *l'Europe à la carte*, and *l'Europe à géométrie variable*.

If such a scenario is followed, it is clear that the delegitimized institutions of the European Union cannot represent the engine of a mainly intergovernmental process. The only possible candidate would be the Franco-German axis, whose 'dictatorship' could indeed considerably

increase the coherence of surviving EU internal policies and external actions. Such a leadership, however, would not be hailed by everybody. Ironically, despite its negative effects on deepening the integration process, Britain's anti-Franco-German attitude has been perceived by many small and medium member states—including pro-integration ones—as providing a much-needed counter-weight against attempts by the Paris-Berlin axis to take control of the European Union (Rogers and Simón 2014). If this happens, it will certainly frustrate and antagonize smaller states which will feel that their national interests are disregarded. In fact, negative reactions have already appeared. It is likely that post-communist member states will not find themselves in the upper layer of a multi-speed Europe. Accordingly, the Visegrad Group has come into direct confrontation with the supporters of a project that would push the four states toward the periphery of the Union. In June 2017, the Hungarian state secretary for EU Affairs vocally rejected a two-speed Europe that would 'not be viable because it might mean such a deep division that eventually it would be (…) the end of the EU in its present form' (Rogers 2017). In fact, Juncker's *White Paper on the Future of Europe* was published in preparation of the March 2017 EU summit in Rome. The concept of 'multi-speed Europe' was inserted in the draft of the summit's final declaration, but considerable pressure from the Baltic and Visegrad states led to its deletion. Instead, the commonly agreed upon final declaration stated that 'our Union is undivided and indivisible' (Bresolin 2017).

It is not by accident that the Baltic states felt threatened even more than the Visegrad group (with the possible exception of Poland). Without Britain, multi-speed Europe implies the dictatorship of the 'high speed' hard core represented by the Franco-German axis and its satellites, which in turn will lead to the adoption of a friendly attitude toward Russia. This already was the case in Scenario 1, but consensus on geopolitical compromise is much easier to reach between two than among 27 governments. Before the Ukrainian crisis—and, predictably, after its future end—Germany, as explained in more detail in Chapter 6, has constantly been and will once more be willing to make considerable concessions to the Kremlin that include the recognition of a sphere of influence. To a lesser but still relevant degree, France is in a relatively similar situation. The 'united Europe' of Scenario 1 would be a strong actor of the East European security complex ready to give up any interest and involvement inside the CIS but willing and able to protect its own

member states from Russian intrusion. In Scenario 2, the real European actor of the security complex would be the much weaker Franco-German axis. Its more limited potential will be less intimidating for Moscow, and its readiness for greater concessions could not be vetoed by peripheral members of the multi-speed EU. Trapped between the Franco-Germans and the Russians, the Baltic states and, more generally, all post-communist EU members cannot be sure how far these concessions to the Kremlin might go. Unless the USA adopts a Russian-friendly attitude (this possibility is discussed in the next chapter), these states—which are also members of NATO—will likely turn to Washington and perhaps to post-Brexit London for protection, openly challenging the French–German EU leadership.

In addition, the selective disintegration affecting a number of present common policies will further reduce the coherence and solidarity of the European Union. At the same time, poorer Southern member states will unwillingly find themselves in the peripheral 'low speed' Europe, which will result in frustration and lack of support for the dominant axis. If, in response to the demands of populist leaders in the North, the amount of structural funds transferred to the South becomes irrelevant, populist leaders in countries such as Greece, Spain, and Italy will certainly exploit the emergence of a large audience favorable to centrifugal trends. Overall, the resulting picture is that of a web of major contradictions undermining the unity of the European Union and diminishing its potential as a cohesive international actor. This troubled situation and in particular the feeling that Berlin and Paris use their dominant position to impose on the entire EU a line of external action that goes against the interests of other members is likely to lead to the partial or perhaps total renationalization of European states' foreign policies, with only the Franco-German axis continuing to act as a relatively unitary actor in the East European security complex. It goes without saying that there will be no more place for common external actions such as the Eastern Partnership, which might be one of the most visible victims of selective disintegration.

In theoretical terms, it is difficult to ignore the fact that many of the elements described in the previous paragraphs relate to neoclassical geopolitics. Unlike Scenario 1, Scenario 2 does in no way limit interactions following the logic of this approach to the Commonwealth of Independent States. Many of the post-communist members of the European Union, possibly supported by the USA, will need to engage

Russia on its basis. Moreover, they might interact in this way with the Franco-German axis itself if geopolitical interests make the latter allow their 'Finlandization' or fully fledged inclusion into Moscow's sphere of influence. Greece, Bulgaria, and certain candidate states in the Western Balkans such as Serbia might voluntarily become close partners of the Kremlin. The wave of populist illiberalism that has already taken control of Hungary and Poland will probably expand to other states in the region, reducing ideological affinities with the West and reversing the effects of the 'transformative power' of the European Union (see Chapter 6). The Kantian vision of geopolitics will certainly survive untouched in the EU hard core represented by Germany, France, and their satellites. Eastern EU member states not feeling threatened by Russia or by their neighbors (Slovenia or the Czech Republic might belong to this category) as well as Southern members of the Union will tend to follow the same trend. However, the potentially numerous populist nationalist governments with dubious democratic credentials in the Eastern part of the EU, the surviving democracies of the region directly threatened by the Kremlin or by nationalist neighbors, much or all of the Western Balkans, all CIS states, and of course Russia will engage in neoclassical geopolitical interactions. Being a member of the European Union will cease to represent a guarantee for a special status. Accordingly, the security community will cease to include a possibly large number of post-communist EU member states. Still, the overall situation of the East European security complex should not be perceived as highly confrontational. After all, two main actors—the Franco-German axis and Russia—will develop a close partnership ultimately based on the logic of mutually recognized spheres of influence. Its stabilizing effect will be endangered only if the USA chooses to actively support some of the region's states against Moscow.

The problem, however, is that the Franco-German 'dictatorship' might only represent a transitory phase toward further EU disintegration, as illustrated by the next scenario.

4.4.3 Scenario 3: The Geopolitical Irrelevance of the EU

It is hardly a secret that the Franco-German axis already is significantly unbalanced. Indeed, in many regards, Berlin has succeeded in imposing itself as the leading actor of the European Union. By underwriting the rules governing EU macroeconomic policy within the single market

and especially the monetary union, Germany has already succeeded in shaping Europe's economic order in a way that responds to the specific needs of its own economy (Simón and Rogers 2010: 58). To give one of the many possible examples that illustrate German leadership in this field, during the July 2015 Eurozone crisis related to the third bailout of Greece nobody could deny—or challenge—the centrality of Chancellor Merkel's decisions on financial and economic issues. In security terms, through a combination of economic power and skillful diplomacy Germany has placed itself at the center of a continental web of multilateral and bilateral relationships that include a strong bilateral relationship with Russia (ibid.: 61). In a smaller European Union, these trends will further develop: 'Germany, already dominant, [will] become overwhelmingly hegemonic' (MacShane 2015). This will certainly have implications for the Franco-German axis (Oliver 2016: 216). It was claimed that 'the idea that a compromise with Paris is necessary for the effective working of the EU is very much embedded in Berlin's political DNA' (Simón 2015: 20). Yet, such a scenario should not be taken for granted. In fact, a severely unbalanced relationship can only have two possible outcomes: either the French accommodation and bandwagoning of German influence or a Paris–Berlin split (ibid.). The latter is much more likely to happen due to the post-Brexit aggravation of long-standing differences between the two countries on a key economic issue.

As a strong supporter of liberal free trade, the UK has played a crucial role in extending the scope of the EU Single Market (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 12) and has constantly attempted to 'instill greater political transparency and economic openness into the EU process' (Rogers and Simón 2014). Critically, it has helped the free trade-oriented bloc formed by Germany and other Northern European countries to balance the Southern protectionist group led by France (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 12) and to give a liberal orientation to the EU common commercial policy. The latter's importance should not be minimized as it directly impacts the economic situation of each member state. In particular, intra- and extra-EU goods exports bring to Germany no less than 46% of its GDP as compared to only 20% in the case of China and 18% in that of Japan. They represent one of the country's main sources of prosperity and make Berlin strongly oppose any measure that might threaten free trade. This is why German elites were seriously disturbed by President Trump's protectionist ideas. Chancellor Merkel helped push through the EU–Canada Comprehensive Economic and

Trade Agreement, expressed hopes that negotiations with the USA on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership would restart, and has tried to convince emergent economic powers such as Brazil and India to join efforts to maintain free trade (Theil 2017: 10, 12, 15). France, on the nother hand, shares different views. President Macron is frequently presented by his domestic enemies as an arch-globalist, but he has supported the very protectionist idea—first launched in 1993 by the French socialist Minister for European Affairs, Elisabeth Guigou, and later reiterated by President Sarkozy—of a Buy European Act. This is part of a long French tradition of protectionism, which is due to specific features of France's economy that even the rather liberal President Macron cannot ignore (Kent 2017). The problem is that both Germany and France—as well as all other member states—have completely surrendered their competences on extra-EU trade to the European Union. The resulting EU common commercial policy represents the external projection of the internal cohesion reached through the establishment of the common market between the member states of the European Economic Community (EUR-Lex 2017); as such, it cannot be targeted by selective disintegration. The departure of Britain will allow the French-led group to become dominant in terms of voting power, which will make the EU more protectionist. In turn, this will frustrate the Germans and widen the gap between the French and German economic positions (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 12).

At that point, the contradiction between a majority (in terms of voting power) of protectionist member states and a free trade-oriented German quasi-hegemon will become critical and might result in the progressive disintegration of the French–German axis and in major EU institutional blockages that will irreversibly weaken the Union. Populist leaders will certainly take advantage of the situation and try to escalate tensions using a strongly nationalist and Euroskeptic discourse. Finally, Berlin could loose interest in a 'perpetually dysfunctional EU' (Simón 2015: 20) and start to act on its own. Given its economic and political importance, consequences will be dramatic: in all analyses of European disintegration 'it is invariably held to be in Germany that the future of the EU will be decided' (Oliver and Williams 2016: 560–561). This is not to say that the European Union will necessarily be dismantled. Junker's second scenario, 'nothing but the single market' (European Commission 2017), or the return to an even weaker, incomplete common market might provide a compromise solution. The more

decentralized mechanisms of economic cooperation mentioned in the last part of Sect. 4.3 could also be set up, within or outside the EU framework. However, it is certain that the complete renationalization of European states' foreign policies would ensue. Even if it survives in a diminutive form, the European Union will become completely irrelevant from a geopolitical point of view; the present Council of Europe might provide a useful term of comparison. Germany will become the main European player in the East European security complex with France also playing a certain role as an independent actor. They will engage Russia, the USA, and Britain in a way that might continue to be significantly influenced by a certain level of Western solidarity and extensive economic cooperation. Germany's 'culture of restraint' (Oliver 2016: 216) will survive for a time, but sooner or later—this depends on the evolution of electoral support for populist parties such as the currently rising Alternative for Germany—Berlin will likely become a 'normal' great power. If and when that happens, Western Europe will cease to represent a security community and the theoretical approach most apt to analyze all interactions within the entire East European security complex will clearly be represented by neoclassical geopolitics. The interactions between major actors—Russia, Germany, and possibly the USA—and lesser powers such as France and perhaps the UK will shape the security complex, which will predictably be marked by a high degree of multipolar instability. Yet, similar to Scenario 2, this does not exclude a significant level of economic cooperation based on various institutional arrangements.

4.4.4 Brexit *as Point de Rupture*

It is obvious that the analysis of the future evolution of the East European security complex cannot be complete unless the roles of the USA and of other relevant states are appropriately scrutinized. This will be done in the next two chapters. However, by now, it is clear that Brexit represents a critical breaking point in the evolution of both the European Union and the regional security complex. It is only in the unlikely Scenario 1 that the EU will continue to represent an actor of regional geopolitical interactions, and a very strong one. Yet, even in this case, its involvement within the Commonwealth of Independent States will very probably come to an end. The more likely Scenarios 2 and 3 are based on the idea that the European Union will become geopolitically

irrelevant and the very security community it represents will shrink or even disappear. Brussels' role in Eastern Europe will be taken by either the Franco-German axis or by Germany, which will interact with Russia in a way increasingly marked by neoclassical geopolitics. These two scenarios—that might simply represent the two successive stages of the same process—simply make all recent EU policies, debates, and identity issues irrelevant. New actors with new identities will bring in new debates, and the diminishing importance of the Kantian geopolitical vision will make these debates very different from those of the past.

Because Scenario 1 is hardly probable and Scenario 3 cannot materialize before the failure of the Franco-German axis, it is Scenario 2 that will most likely be followed in the medium term. The Paris–Berlin leadership and the partial or total renationalization of member states' foreign policies will considerably increase the hybrid nature of the European Union, implicitly threatening its internal cohesion and external coherence. The transformation from the present 'communitized' structure that gives an important role to the EU institutions to the mainly intergovernmental 'dictatorship' of the Franco-German axis will involve considerable tensions and disputes. The probable eventual disaggregation of the axis itself and the ensuing move toward Scenario 3 will bring another wave of conflicts. Overall, it is most likely that the EU will experience a long period of trouble that will affect many aspects of its members' policies. In particular, the renationalization of foreign policies will mean that within the East European security complex the Russian-friendly Eastern policy of the Paris–Berlin axis will compete overtly with the anti-Russian foreign policy of EU member states such as Poland, which will obviously decrease its effectiveness. However, the actual destabilizing impact of such situations depends on the continued East European involvement of the USA. This critical topic is analyzed in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 5

The USA and Eastern Europe

The goal of this chapter is to construct possible scenarios for the future US involvement in the East European security complex. In order to do this, first the role of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is analyzed as this has been the most important institutional instrument used by Washington in the region. Second, the linkage between President Obama's 'pivot to Asia' and 'reset' of the relations with Russia is examined to see if it represents a structural constraint for US foreign policy. Third, the American involvement in the East European security complex since the end of the Cold War is scrutinized, paying attention to both empirical and theoretical aspects. Fourth, the changes brought by President Trump in US policy making as well as their causes—including the President's personality traits—are analyzed. Fifth, the new administration's foreign policy ideas, actions, and trends are assessed in view of constructing the aforementioned scenarios.

5.1 The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The analysis of the previous chapter targeted the European Union and its member states. However, the fact that most of these countries are also members of NATO cannot be ignored when addressing the present situation and the future evolution of the East European security complex. The same state plays the same larger game at two different tables; this

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imposes supplementary constraints but also provides significant opportunities in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe. West European great powers such as France and Germany have to accommodate US interests but can also veto key decisions; the best example is their successful Russian-friendly opposition to Georgia and Ukraine being offered Membership Action Plans at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, which blocked the path to NATO accession of the two Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) republics. For their part, depending on the ups and downs of various American 'resets,' certain post-communist member states might find a better audience for their anti-Russian discourse in the NATO context than in the EU one.

It is this Eastern group that would very much like to see a restoration of the organization's Cold War role: 'to keep the Americans in, the Germans down, and the Russians out' (Rahe 2016: 2). Yet, by the late 1980s this already seemed obsolete with prominent neorealists critical of the 'false promise' of international institutions as a foundation for new security structures anticipating the dissolution of NATO (Williams and Neumann 2000: 357–358). Not only this did not happen; the Alliance survived, enlarged, and eventually was even believed to have turned into 'the dominant institution in contemporary security relations' (Diez et al. 2011: 203). This allowed constructivists to argue for the importance of shared democratic norms and identities due to which member states continued not to perceive each other as threats (Williams and Neumann 2000: 358). In their view, the establishment of constitutive and regulative norms and values was complemented by constant and institutionalized cooperation ultimately resulting in the creation of a security community (Thomas Risse-Kappen quoted by Diez et al. 2011: 204). Indeed, as shown in Chapter 2, NATO has been analyzed as a loosely coupled pluralistic security community. This category observes only the minimal definitional properties, and therefore the bond it creates can be assessed as weaker than that of tightly coupled security communities such as the European Union (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30; Bellamy 2004: 8–9; Diez et al. 2011: 199). This difference is important because, as shown below, it makes the disintegration of the Alliance and of the solidarity it represents easier than that of the EU. Still, NATO has developed from the purely military alliance of the late 1940s to a security community that preserved its deterrent and balance of power functions and capabilities (Adler and Greve 2009: 63). By 2000, some authors could claim that 'the place of the Alliance at the centre of contemporary

relations seems beyond dispute' (Williams and Neumann 2000: 357). At that time, European security debates revolved precisely around the implications of this centrality, with a special emphasis on the Alliance's enlargement. As explained in Sect. 3.2, the modest 1999 one was followed by the 2004 spectacular accession of seven post-communist countries, six of them bordering the CIS. Realist critics considered this course of action a huge mistake that could not fail to trigger a major clash with Russia (Kennan 1997). Other observers noted that enlargement was simply needed in order to relegitimize the organization after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the enlargement was at the heart of a wider remit that included new humanitarian and peacekeeping roles as well as a more flexible strategy (Bellamy 2004: 81). Constructivists insisted on its importance as 'a natural and innately progressive outgrowth of NATO's essential identity as a "democratic security community"' (Williams and Neumann 2000: 359). Yet, it was precisely the unity of this community that was seriously questioned during the crisis triggered by the war in Iraq. The 'transatlantic rift' opposing the USA, Britain, and the Eastern 'new Europe' to the French- and German-led 'old Europe' is too well known to need any presentation. Among the US politicians, Democrat Tom Lantos declared himself 'particularly disgusted' by the 'utter ingratitude' of France, Germany, and Belgium while Condoleezza Rice described the transatlantic relationship as 'poisoned.' Within the academia, Michael Cox wrote about the same relationship's 'free fall,' which triggered a debate about the state and prospects of the very security community incarnated by NATO; in response, Vincent Pouliot argued that 'the Atlantic alliance was healthy and that disagreement was good' (ibid.: 363). The organization did survive the crisis; in fact, eventually it was even put in charge of the UN-mandated ISAF mission in Afghanistan, thus extending its field of action to Central Asia, and provided the institutional framework for the 2011 intervention in Libya. Yet, President Obama's 'pivot to Asia' and diminishing European defense budgets led to a visible lack of interest in the organization. By 2013, the 'Is NATO still relevant?' question began to resurface (ibid.: 360, 363).

The NATO-Russia relationship was presented in Chapter 3. The history of the Permanent Joint Council created in 1997 and upgraded to the NATO-Russia Council five years later as well as the specific reasons that made Moscow react moderately to the two enlargements of the Alliance do not need to be repeated here. It should be mentioned only

that, even at the time of the Putin–Bush honeymoon, 'Russian consensus against NATO enlargement [wa]s overwhelming'; even democratic circles shared it (Williams and Neumann 2000: 359). While trying to create, fuel, and exploit tensions within the organization, the Russians have always perceived it as an American hegemonic construct and have never dissociated it from Washington's geopolitical interests. Accordingly, Moscow's increasingly antagonistic relations with the USA brought NATO back to its Cold War demonized status. Ironically, the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine had the merit of putting a clear end to the progressive Western disinterest in the Alliance. The 2014 Wales and 2016 Warsaw summits revigorated it as a defense and deterrence organization. A mobilizing 'Declaration on the Transatlantic Bond' was made, a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was created, and multinational battalions were deployed in Poland and in the Baltic states as Russia reemerged in the NATO discourse as an aggressor (Rynning 2014: 1397; Simón 2014: 68; *Washington Post*, July 9, 2016; Rahe 2016: 3; for more details see Sect. 3.2).

European Union's inability to cope with the Russian intervention in Ukraine was used as an argument supporting the claim that 'NATO is the sole remaining institution that upholds international security' and could even become the only structure able to 'provide Europe with a measure of coherence' (Bugajski 2016: 28). This, however, has little to do with NATO as a security community; rather, it is an indirect way of talking about American hegemony. Nobody else—'not even Germany'—can play the role of a hegemonic power able to rally European states in order to contain Russia (Rahe 2016: 3). Europe needs the USA, and 'NATO is the binding glue of the transatlantic link' (Bugajski 2016: 28). A discussion of defense expenditures and military capabilities (ibid.: 31) combined with the fact that Washington has been the main initiator of NATO actions intended to reassure the East Europeans (Simón 2014: 69) after the Crimean *Anschluss* supports this realist idea. Two consequences ensue. One concerns practical aspects: President Obama's 'pivot to Asia' illustrated a change of US strategic interests leading to a negative dynamic in the transatlantic security relationship (Hallams and Schreer 2012: 314). Even after the Ukrainian crisis, Washington has perceived Russia's geopolitical resurgence as one of many global security challenges (Simón 2014: 69); moreover, President Trump initially seemed to favor a dramatic change of priorities. If, for reasons discussed later in this chapter, the USA ceases to perceive its involvement in the East European

security complex as desirable, NATO has no chance to preserve its geopolitical relevance. Commenting on a similar scenario back in 2003, the then Senate Foreign Relations Chairman, Joe Biden, spoke about 'quick atrophy' (Williams 2013: 363). In the words of Paul Rahe, 'the one thing that NATO could not survive is repudiation by its hegemon' (Rahe 2016: 3).

The second aspect is more theoretical and concerns the perception of NATO as a security community. As already mentioned, this is a loosely coupled pluralistic security community; the identities and shared norms of its member states have developed in a way leading to 'dependable expectations of peaceful change' (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30), but the degree of integration—understood as 'the attainment of a sense of community' (Deutsch 1954: 33)—is less advanced than that of a tightly coupled community such as the EU. Less advanced does not mean that the community is less Kantian; the probability of conflict between the USA and Germany is hardly higher than that between Germany and France. Yet, NATO collective arrangements have not turned the Alliance into a system of rule that could be placed between a sovereign state and a centralized regional government. NATO is not a post-sovereign structure; critically, it lacks the common supranational, transnational, and national institutions of a tightly coupled security community such as the European Union (Adler and Barnett 1998: 30; Bellamy 2004: 8–9). This makes internal tensions more likely and more dangerous. The degree of transatlantic discord due to the Iraq war-related dispute simply cannot be imagined within the European Union. As long as the latter's supranational institutions preserve their coordinating, moderating, and balancing functions (something that, as previously explained, is likely to change after Brexit), it is unimaginable to speak about a 'poisoned relationship' between member states. The EU might become geopolitically irrelevant if the second and third scenarios presented in the previous chapter do materialize; yet, that will be a relatively long process caused by specific circumstances. NATO could follow the same negative trajectory in a much shorter lapse of time: This only needs the decision of a US President to define Eastern Europe as a marginal American foreign policy interest. If that ever happens, both NATO-as-an-alliance and NATO-as-a-security-community completely loose their significance. Of course, this does not mean that the USA and the European Union or its members would become enemies and could start contemplate attacking each other. The Kantian culture will survive as explained by the Democratic

Peace Theory. As long as both shores of the Atlantic remain democratic, their relationship will be more or less cordial. The US attitude might change considerably, however, in the case of post-communist EU members affected by the predictable rise of illiberal democracy in the region. The same should be expected if Marine Le Pen or Alternative for Germany (AfD) takes control of their respective countries. Moreover, Democratic Peace does not necessarily imply solidarity. Witnessing the fall of another democracy is saddening, but Realpolitik reasons might well prevent actual intervention. This is to say that if Washington turns its eyes fully to the Pacific, NATO as a security community is very likely to become irrelevant. In turn, this will trigger the end of its Kantian influence in Eastern Europe and the regional triumph of Russia's neoclassical geopolitics, with post-communist states struggling to survive between (or inside) the spheres of influence of Berlin and Moscow. There is worse. Even if the USA stays in Europe and NATO survives, the post-Brexit evolution of the European Union allowing the Franco-German axis and its satellites—which are also NATO members—to adopt pro-Russian views will make the Alliance dysfunctional. French and German vetoes will prevent the adoption of any relevant Eastern policy, and Washington will have to use non-NATO instruments for its actions within the East European security complex. This will bring overt rivalry and hostility inside NATO itself, de facto putting an end to its Kantian vision: the Alliance will survive in principle, but its post-communist members will need to act as stand-alone neoclassical geopolitical units.

The details of possible scenarios will be presented at the end of this chapter. What is important to note is that, in analyzing the predictable evolution of the East European security complex, the perception of NATO as a community security is not very relevant. I hope that it is not some materialist bias inside my thin cognitivist approach that exaggeratedly magnifies the differences between tightly and loosely coupled security communities as illustrated by the European Union and NATO; anyway, it seems to me that analyzing the role of the Alliance in Eastern Europe as an expression of American hegemony and therefore as directly depending on the latter's fluctuations ('the one thing that NATO could not survive is repudiation by its hegemon') allows for a better understanding of the region's geopolitical interactions. This also has the advantage of eliminating the contradiction between the Kantian role the USA would be expected to play toward the member states of

NATO-as-a-security-community and President Trump's very transactional approach that at times seems much closer to neoclassical geopolitics even *within* NATO.

Moreover, the fact that after the end of the Cold War and before the resurgence of Russia 'the EU and NATO came to represent the two dominant alternative geopolitical visions for Europe' with the two organizations showing patterns of both cooperation and competition (Croft quoted by Simón 2013: 4) is more difficult to explain if NATO is simply seen as a security community. Indeed, the competition was not between a larger but loosely coupled such community and a smaller but tightly coupled one. While the two communities did exist (and still do), the competition—and, at times, the tension—was that between US hegemonic interests and the EU aspirations to political and strategic autonomy. It became very visible especially after the 1999 launch of the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy that 'best embodied the promise of a full-fledged "European" vision for Europe' (Simón 2013: 4) by challenging NATO's—i.e., America's—prominence in this domain. In recent years, Russia's aggressiveness has tended to mask this competition, but this does not mean that it has come to an end. In fact, it represents one of the reasons that make France and Germany adopt Russian-friendly policies and try to push the entire European Union in the same direction. Of course, an alliance with Moscow against Washington is out of question, but using the Russian card in order to reasonably balance American influence in Europe is not. This has little to do with the working of a security community but justifies once more the hegemonic perception of NATO.

Accordingly, the analysis of this chapter is not centered on the role of the Alliance, which is seen mainly as an instrument of the US foreign policy. Instead, it targets the hegemon itself and the factors that dictate its actions within the East European security complex. Perhaps the most important of them is related to the famous 'pivot to Asia.'

5.2 The 'Pivot to Asia'

The evolution of the Washington-Moscow relationship was analyzed in Sect. 3.2. As noted there, all the last three US Presidents started their interactions with President Putin with a harmonious honeymoon. President Bush was happy to put an end to the serious tensions that had developed between Washington and Moscow toward the end of

the 1990s illustrated, among others, by the Kosovo war. He 'looked the man in the eye' (Leichtova 2014: 132) and, for a time, he liked what he saw. The case of President Trump is discussed later in this chapter. For his part, President Obama also wanted to put an end to mutual hostility. Yet, unlike President Bush but somewhat similar to President Trump, he had an Asia-related reason for the implicitly negative—and ultimately counterproductive—dynamic he imposed on the US involvement in Eastern Europe. The new situation emerged due to a generational change resulting in American politicians 'often without European roots or links' willing to look to Asia instead of Europe (MacShane 2015); to finite US resources; and, critically, to the fact that these agnostic politicians had to use the limited resources at their disposal in the context of changing American strategic interests triggered by the rise of China (Hallams and Schreer 2012: 314). This issue has already been briefly presented in Chapter 3, but there the goal was to explain the specific context of President Obama's 'reset' of the relationship with Russia. A more detailed analysis is needed in order to show that the Chinese factor represents a structural constraint on America's geopolitical orientation that will continue to impact significantly the foreign policy of present and future US administrations.

Historically, there have already been two previous 'pivots.' The first took place at the end of the nineteenth century, when the USA annexed Hawaii, took the Philippines and Guam from Spain and fought the Boxer Rebellion in China. The second Asian 'pivot' was a consequence of World War II. It included the victory over Japan and support for its revival, the containment of communist China, the war in Korea, and in the long run it led to the Vietnam War. In both cases, the turn to Asia marked 'a determination to expand US influence' (Copper 2014: 101). Today, this is no more the case. President Obama's 'pivot' was a reactive move at a time of geopolitical decline. There is a 'flood of literature' explaining that world power shifts from the Atlantic to the Pacific: Europe is entering 'an era of unaccustomed marginality' and the very epoch is becoming 'post-Western' (Sakwa 2010: 11; Simón and Rogers 2010: 58). Moreover, the rise of China is sometimes taken as announcing its inevitable transformation into a counter-hegemon that sooner or later will overtly challenge the USA. Neorealists such as John Mearsheimer have presented this prospect as the inescapable consequence of the shifting Trans-Pacific balance of power and as an excellent case study for the practical application of their theory: The power gap

between China and America is shrinking. The strategic primacy of the USA in the Pacific will disappear, but in response to the Chinese threat Washington's presence in the region is likely to grow. For its part, China cannot rise peacefully simply because no great power does (Mearsheimer 2010: 381). Already, 'China's naval leaders are displaying the aggressive philosophy of (…) Mahan, who argued for sea control and the decisive battle' (Robert Kaplan quoted by Mearsheimer 2010: 384). The Chinese are not more principled, more ethical, less nationalistic, or less concerned about their survival than the Americans; they should not be expected to act differently, i.e., to be afraid of conflict. Their next step is to gain regional hegemony while trying to push the USA out of the Asia-Pacific. There is only one possible American reaction: Cold War-style containment. Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, India, and Russia are worried about Beijing's ascendancy and should be brought together by Washington into an alliance that will 'ultimately weaken [China] to the point where it is no longer a threat to rule the roost in Asia.' Unlike the Soviet Union, China is strictly an Asian power. Accordingly, European states will not play an active role in the new competition. Middle Eastern states such as Iran, however, might get involved; the new Cold War will probably be fought in Asia and the Middle East. Overall, because the stakes are smaller and the risks of escalation are more easily contained when fighting at sea, fully fledged war is more likely to break out between the new adversaries than between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. A nationalist-flavored crisis related to Taiwan could represent its starting point (Mearsheimer 2010: 389–393).

President Obama was far from envisaging overt warfare, but it is hard to deny that his strategy reflected in a certain measure Mearsheimer's neorealist logic. As America's first self-styled 'Pacific President' (Dobson and Marsh 2014: 673), the new President came into office with a very clear sense of the shifting balance of power. In November 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated explicitly that the 'future of politics will be decided in Asia (…) and the United States will be right at the center of the action.' Washington would stand up to Beijing's challenge to American leadership (Hallams and Schreer 2012: 314). Increased diplomatic, economic, and strategic investment in the region would represent nothing less than 'one of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade' (Clinton 2011). That same month, President Obama reassured Asian allies that US presence in the region would be enforced despite overall defense budget cuts (Hallams

and Schreer 2012: 314). From a strategic perspective, the 'pivot' tried to address the rise of China's military power through the adoption of the Air-Sea Battle Concept, the redefinition of the Asia-Pacific region, and the repositioning of many US Asian bases. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, went as far as claiming that the USA had to 'overtly confront China as it faced down the Soviet Union in the past' (Copper 2014: 102–103). Economically, the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—conceived before the 'pivot' as the largest ever commercial agreement with American involvement as measured by the value of trade—was reoriented to include provisions that would deter China from joining. Basically, the TPP became 'a plan to isolate China and even dampen its economic growth' (ibid.: 105).

Accordingly, some observers analyzed the 'pivot'—and especially its military dimension—as a geopolitical decision to reaffirm American regional and global primacy. A second category described it as a counterproductive attempt to contain China. Finally, there were those speaking of mere rhetoric without serious commitment (Löfflmann 2016: 92). In fact, there were numerous critical opinions. Amitai Etzioni wrote about a premature action addressing a 'futuristic threat' as China's transformation into a major power 'will be decades down the road' (Etzioni 2012: 395, 398). Much of the criticism, however, concerned the fact that the 'pivot' was 'unclear and lacking in consistency at best and confusing at worst,' with the Obama administration uncertain about its very nature and role (Copper 2014: 100). Lack of coherence and consistency was said to undermine its credibility in both the USA and internationally (Löfflmann 2016: 92). The main problem was that, far from adopting containment, Washington was reluctant to state unequivocally the anti-Chinese nature of its project, which in fact it regularly denied. It even continued to interact with Beijing as if they were strategic partners (Copper 2014: 103). The 'pivot' was eventually relabeled 'rebalancing' (Löfflmann 2016: 95), a term supposed to suggest a friendlier attitude. At the same time, the American foreign policy focus on the Middle East did not come to an end while significant cuts in US military spending endangered the long-term financing of the 'pivot' (Copper 2014: 102, 104).

On the Chinese side, the American initiative was understood as launching a political, economic, and military competition and fueled fears of actual containment; in turn, this led to geopolitical and economic counter-measures in the region (Löfflmann 2016: 92–93) that

were described at times as aggressive and belligerent toward the USA and its Asian allies (Copper 2014: 104). It can be said that President Obama's initiative did little in terms of stopping China's rise but might have contributed significantly to make Beijing adopt or reinforce a geopolitical vision and a foreign policy line increasingly similar to those of a revisionist power such as Russia. This will not change in the predictable future, thus representing an important constraint on American foreign policy.

A theoretical assessment of President Obama's 'pivot' cannot ignore its obvious neorealist inspiration reflecting ideas of global hegemony and balance of power. At the same time, Mearsheimer's zero-sum approach was visibly tempered by a milder vision reminiscent of the European Union's softer, win-win geopolitical culture. The resulting hybrid confused Americans themselves, their Asian allies, and the leadership in Beijing; was counterproductive in its actual effects; and ultimately made the 'pivot' itself so irrelevant that by the end of President Obama's second term, the general public was almost unaware of the fact that it had not been canceled and it still represented the US policy toward China. The most important consequences, as explained in Chapter 3, were those due to the related 'reset' of the relationship with Russia that President Obama naïvely expected to put an end to Moscow's aggressiveness in Eastern Europe. It is true that chronologically the two events might seem unconnected, but the 'reset' made the 'pivot' possible by preparing a reorientation of commitments and resources. As the latter project would have been impossible without the former, they cannot be treated as independent.

Unless a fundamental change of US foreign policy vision is envisaged—President Trump initially gave the impression of contemplating such a change—it is logical to believe that America's interests in Europe will prevent it from *fully* disengaging in the short or medium term (Simón 2013: 12). In fact, when many saw President Obama's 'pivot' as an accelerated US departure from Europe (Dobson and Marsh 2014: 673–674) and criticized it for abandoning East Europeans threatened by Russia's expansionism (Copper 2014: 102), Washington repeatedly stated that it would continue to protect its European allies by fighting 'wars of necessity' while avoiding only 'wars of choice' in or around Europe (Tomas Valasek quoted by Hallams and Schreer 2012: 314). The problem is that the shift of focus from Europe to East Asia will progressively lead to a shift in the appreciation of what 'necessity' is.

A war in Ukraine might be a 'war of necessity' for an American administration interested in Eastern Europe but a 'war of choice' for one more interested in China and North Korea: 'growing attention to Asia will unavoidably lead to a more patchy approach towards [Europe and the Middle East] and is likely to result in a more anarchic and chaotic environment' (Simón 2013: 12). As long as China's political and economic power continues to grow, a neoclassical geopolitics theoretical approach leads to a conclusion identical with that of the neorealists: The USA will be unable to resist the temptation of a new and predictably more resolute 'pivot.' In turn, this will cause a 'power vacuum' within the East European security complex 'that will lead to instability and opportunism by revisionist powers' such as Russia (Oliver and Williams 2016: 550). Furthermore, this new 'pivot' should not take place in a remote future: Mearsheimer-inspired analysts claim that containment should already have been initiated as China gets stronger by the day. Accordingly, such a move might materialize in the short term as part of President Trump's new foreign policy—a scenario that will be analyzed later in this chapter. Before that, however, the features of the American involvement in Eastern Europe need to be scrutinized.

5.3 The USA and The East European Security Complex

Since the end of the Cold War, the American involvement in the East European security complex has included interactions with four categories of partners. First, there are the European Union and its major continental member states (Britain is a special case that will be analyzed in the next chapter) which aspire to political and strategic autonomy as briefly explained in Sect. 5.1. Relevant episodes worth reminding include the development of the European Security and Defense Identity, which during the mid-1990s generated a debate centered mainly on the relationship between NATO and the Western European Union. Another one is the 1999 launching of the EU Common Security and Defense Policy that made visible a degree of Lockean rivalry between NATO and the European Union (see Simón 2013: 4). Finally, there are the aforementioned simultaneously cooperative and competitive aspects of the two organizations' Eastern enlargements that readers of Catullus would certainly associate with a typical *odi et amo* story. One

might remember French President Jacques Chirac jokingly asking if, after all, Poland wanted to become an EU member or an US state, and the considerably less-friendly discourse of the same President targeting the pro-American 'new Europeans' during the Iraq war crisis. In a more discreet way, tensions also emerged during the recent Ukrainian crisis. European reluctance to react firmly to Russian aggression was of course due to economic interdependence that made sanctions costly to Europeans themselves, but also reflected pro-Russian attitudes that ultimately cannot be completely dissociated from the idea of 'softly' balancing the United States. For its part, Washington's management of the crisis showed an ability to provide leadership that perfectly fits the role of a hegemon. This is a critical aspect in both practical and theoretical terms; however, its discussion needs to incorporate the issue of America's relationship with the second and third categories of European partners: The post-communist and post-Soviet states located, broadly speaking, between Germany and Russia.

The Central and East European democracies had good reasons to support Washington in Iraq and elsewhere: Without it, they would still have been Soviet satellites in 2003. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been very influent in the region. It supported democratization and the transition to market economy through close bilateral relationships—which included the massive involvement of American NGOs—and using multilateral organizations. The technical and financial contribution of the IMF and the World Bank was particularly important in restructuring centrally planned economies. The USA also helped stabilize the region, especially through direct involvement in the Yugoslav wars but also through efforts to attenuate ethnic tensions in the rest of the post-communist area. Not everybody was happy with all this; typically, those who didn't were nationalist authoritarian leaders such as Serbia's Slobodan Milošević, whose anti-American heritage remains quite vivid especially due to the NATO bombing of the country during the Kosovo War; Slovakia's Vladimír Mečiar, whose state was described by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as a hole on the map of (democratic) Europe; or, more recently, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, who shows no hostility to the USA itself but wages a crusade against American-funded 'foreign agents' such as human rights NGOs and Soros Foundation's Central European University (ironically, back in 1989 Orbán studied for four months at Pembroke College, Oxford

University, financed by a scholarship from the same Soros Foundation (Keszthelyi 2016), which probably qualifies him as a foreign agent). However, despite such opposition, Washington was able to give a coherent form to its regional influence within the framework of NATO: The 1994 Partnership for Peace (PfP) was followed in 1999 and 2004 by the already presented first and second enlargements that turned the former Soviet satellites into fully fledged members of the Alliance.

This, of course, did not concern—except for the PfP—the third category of states represented by the republics of the CIS. For a long time, Washington was very cautious not to antagonize Moscow and did not interfere with its 'neighborhood.' As already showed, this changed mainly by accident: The Bush administration's war effort in Afghanistan and Iraq had the side effect of bringing American military and political presence to the regions of the Black Sea and Central Asia. Post-Soviet republics were suddenly able to balance the previously overwhelming Russian influence, a situation that led to the 2003–2005 pro-Western Colored Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. The first two states even started to contemplate NATO accession. It is at this time that increased interactions involving both the United States and the European Union put an end to the division between the EU-Europe and CIS regional security complexes, which were merged into the present East European complex. These interactions, however, also included the Russian counteroffensive described in Chapter 3. As shown there, a key reason for its success was the 2005–2006 end of the West's geopolitical expansion due to American military failures in the Middle East and to the rejection of the proposed European Union Constitution (Simón 2013: 15). President Obama's 'reset' continued this trend and further encouraged Moscow's aggressiveness, but ultimately this made the USA reconfirm the importance of its role in Europe as it led the response consisting in the adoption of sanctions and in the increased NATO military presence in Poland and the Baltic states.

Russia represents the fourth and final category of US partners in the East European security complex. For a certain period and in a certain measure, Moscow was not completely different from the West and East Europeans in its friendly and respectful attitude toward Washington as shown in Chapter 3. When it decided to play the card of a revisionist power and defiantly invaded Ukraine, it found itself in the situation of an outcast targeted by sanctions that a number of NATO and EU member states adopted *malgré eux* on Washington's pressing demand. Moreover,

both before and after this turn, it failed to secure a key objective: the recognition of a sphere of influence of its own in the CIS (Saltzman 2012: 559). Accordingly, even the case of Russia confirms the regional hegemonic status of the United States: Without its approval, nobody else can see its regional influence formally recognized. For sure, this has little to do with the realist understanding of the concept of hegemony. A Gramscian perspective needs to be taken into consideration, and the more than three-decade-old comment of Keohane remains surprisingly appropriate:

> American leaders did not construct hegemonic regimes simply by commanding their weaker partners to behave in prescribed ways. On the contrary, they had to search for mutual interests with their partners, and they had to make some adjustments themselves (…). In so doing, they encountered numerous frustrations. As William Diebold has reminded us, 'we have no memoirs called "my days as a happy hegemon".' It is important not to exaggerate the ease with which the United States could make and enforce the rules. Yet the United States ultimately succeeded in attaining its crucial objectives (…). Frustrations on particular issues melded into a rewarding overall pattern of hegemonic cooperation. Simplistic notions of hegemony as either complete dominance or selfless, dedicated leadership hinder rather than promote historical understanding. (Keohane 1984: 138)

Indeed, Washington hardly was a 'happy hegemon' in post-Cold War Europe. As already mentioned, pre-Brexit Britain, France, and Germany have 'largely determine[d] the nature and evolution of CSDP and NATO,' seeing both as assets 'at the service of their own (geo)political objectives and power' (Simón 2013: 9). The labyrinth of the Yugoslav wars was a hard test. Then, Russia became a challenger. President Obama had to reset his 'reset' and return to Eastern Europe in order to reassure Washington's protégés, which made his Asian 'pivot' even less coherent. Still, all this was a reasonable price to pay for preserving America's leading role and privileged position in the East European security complex.

It should be noted that the 'adjustments' and concessions that have marked the US hegemony have taken a form which mirrored European Union's win-win, Kantian geopolitical vision. NATO-as-a-security-community might not represent the best theoretical explanation of the Alliance but does correctly describe the strategy employed by its

hegemon. Unlike during the Cold War, the Partnership for Peace and the Eastern enlargement of the NATO showed to the post-communist states the smiling face of an organization very vocal about its new humanitarian and peacekeeping roles (Bellamy 2004: 81). America was bringing peace to the continent and would help everybody to be a winner. Yet, at the same time 'new Europe' was used against the 'old' one when Iraq was invaded. This was less Kantian and showed that, despite its friendly and unifying discourse, Washington's geopolitical vision has included—especially but not exclusively during the first term of President Bush—a clearly realist component. President Obama was perceived as having a liberal mindset and approach, and it was precisely in this win-win perspective that the 'reset' was presented. However, the latter was the first step toward the 'pivot to Asia,' which was hardly a liberal move. The same President's return to Eastern Europe in response to the Ukrainian crisis was even less liberal. Overall, beneath a Kantian surface the behavior of the United States in the East European security complex has preserved a significant power-based component. Once more, this is not about Hobbes; this is about a Gramscian centaur that does prefer to use the consensual instruments of its 'half man' side as much as possible. Still, it is well equipped to deal with Moscow's brutality on non-Kantian terms and therefore much more effectively than the European Union. Accordingly, the United States foreign policy is easier to analyze using the neoclassical geopolitics-inspired approach defined in Chapter 2 than the EU. More importantly, the 'half beast,' hard power side of the United States as an international actor can be used by an American President with an atypical leadership style and political vision to completely revolutionize US actorness worldwide and in the East European security complex. As shown in the next section, President Trump might be such a leader.

5.4 President Trump: 'An Insurgent in the White House'

In the first half of the thirteenth century, Europe was strongly marked politically and intellectually by the impressive figure of Frederick II, King of Sicily and German Emperor. His highly atypical personality earned him the label of 'stupor mundi.' Intellectual prowess set aside, the victor of the 2016 US presidential election represents a perhaps similar

'astonishment of the world.' His 'belligerent and highly personalised style of leadership' (*The Economist*, February 18, 2017) is accompanied by a high degree of unpredictability. He 'has made contradictory statements on some key policies and changed his mind back and forth on others' (Harnden 2017); he 'said plenty to comfort loyalists and confound foes with his extravagant and disorientating lies' (*The Economist*, January 28, 2017). He showed 'impulsiveness, combativeness, and recklessness,' broke with diplomatic traditions, challenged accepted norms, and 'respond[ed] to perceived slights or provocations with insults or threats of his own' (Gordon 2017: 10). 'His instincts are atrocious': He loves strongmen and generals, despises diplomats, and undermines his own officials; his temperament 'alarms friend and foe alike' (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). President Trump rose to power due to the same populist wave responsible for the success of Brexit and for the significant electoral progress of populist parties in Western Europe described in the previous chapter. Accordingly, he adopted an anti-globalization 'America first' political program rejecting immigrants, free trade, and the US-imposed world order itself: 'a hostile revisionist power has indeed arrived on the scene, but it sits in the Oval Office, the beating heart of the free world' (Ikenberry 2017: 2). Washington was 'in the grip of a revolution' (*The Economist*, February 4, 2017) as the new President initially threatened to change the American foreign policy in ways that would have had a considerable destabilizing potential for the international system in general and for the East European regional security complex in particular.

However, it progressively became clear that 'Donald Trump's foreign policy looks more normal than promised' (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017). 'More normal' should not be taken as 'normal,' but on major topics such as the obsolescence of NATO or the issue of one China 'Mr Trump has swerved from bomb-throwing to orthodoxy' (*The Economist*, February 18, 2017). The idea emerged that, in addition to President Trump's personality traits (see below), there might be a solid rationale behind his erratic behavior: 'chaos seems to be part of the plan' (*The Economist*, February 4, 2017). After all, making the world 'wait in fear of the next Trump tweet' (Ischinger 2017) is a strategy that can be quite successful in confounding and intimidating foes and friends alike. Another US President is well known for having used such an approach and the comparison cannot be avoided.

5.4.1 President Nixon and the Madman Theory

On December 20, 2016, James Hohmann noted in the *Washington Post* that

> Donald Trump appears to have embraced, with gusto, Richard Nixon's 'Madman Theory' of foreign policy. He thinks he can use his reputation for unpredictability and lack of respect for long-standing international norms to unnerve and then intimidate America's adversaries into making concessions that they would not otherwise make. (Hohmann with Deppisch 2016)

President Nixon was perceived by certain authors as having turned 'the use of unpredictability and apparent irrationality (…) [into] a trademark of his foreign policy' (Morgan 2002: 106–107). This might be an exaggeration, but he did use the aforementioned Madman Theory in an effort to put an end to the Vietnam War. In order to convince the North Vietnamese that he did not seek peace at any price, President Nixon repeatedly ordered tactical escalations of the war. The point was to make the leaders in Hanoi believe that he would launch a nuclear attack if they did not make peace (ibid.: 107). This approach was analyzed as an extension of Nixon's Cold War realist worldview which perceived power as the centerpiece of international relations and emphasized the importance of threat as a reliable tool in foreign policy (Siniver 2008: 74–75). In fact, the Madman Theory was perfectly rational. In the President's words,

> I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do *anything* to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that, 'for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry - and he has his hand on the nuclear button' - and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace. (ibid.: 75)

The Vietnamese leaders were not intimidated. In response, President Nixon instructed Kissinger—who sent the message through Nixon aide Leonard Garment—to tell the Soviet leadership that the President 'is somewhat "crazy" (…) at moments of stress or personal challenge, unpredictable and capable of the bloodiest brutality' (Morgan 2002: 116). The goal was 'to sow uncertainty in the minds of Moscow's leaders, encouraging them to accommodate the United States in Vietnam for the sake of international stability' (Suri 2008: 78).

President Trump seems to have adopted a somewhat similar approach. This hardly can be a coincidence given the new President's 'longtime fixation with Nixon and (…) his pre-existing Nixonian tendencies' (Hohmann with Deppisch 2016). However, the Madman Theory was only one of the three pillars of President Nixon's Vietnam policy (the other two being the Vietnamization program and linkage diplomacy) (Siniver 2008: 73), while the administration's actions in Vietnam were significantly influenced by Kissinger's highly theoretical foreign policy thinking (Suri 2008: 74). Moreover, President Nixon tried to appear as an unpredictable man to outsiders and enemies but not to his allies (Henry Kissinger quoted by Dallek 2007: 213). For his part, President Trump seldom adopts a different approach, does not rely on the constant advice of a Kissinger, and has been at least as puzzling to allies as to adversaries. It might be said that the 'madman' side of the Madman Theory is more prominent today than it was during the 1970s.

Leaving aside the criticism of the 'unsound' and 'dangerous' 'use of insanity as an instrument of diplomacy' (see Morgan 2002: 116), the key question is what made leaders like Nixon and Trump choose it. In the former's case, the explanation was associated with President Nixon's personality traits. On the one hand, they might have created a predisposition toward such an approach. On the other hand, they helped make the threat credible (or so it was hoped). Indeed, Nixon was analyzed by a surprisingly large corpus of psychological literature that spoke abundantly of paranoia, narcissism, repression, guilt, cruelty, sadism, 'a madman in the throes of a nervous breakdown,' aching insecurities, a furious drive for power, rage competing with suppressed guilt, paranoia that bred secrecy and vindictiveness, and a sense of injury that engendered feelings of entitlement (for a review, see Greenberg 2011: 526–528). The North Vietnamese or Soviet readers of this literature should have had good reasons to worry.

For his part, President Trump might well have adopted the 'madman theory' consciously as part of his tough bargaining approach to negotiations that, as a businessman, he called 'the art of the deal' (Gordon 2017: 10). Still, similar to the case of President Nixon, the rational adoption of such a strategy cannot be dissociated from the existence of specific personality traits that might be more disturbing than the 'madman' approach itself. The fact that this seems to be President Trump's *main* strategy—which significantly affects most of his foreign policy-making

activities—turns the study of the President's psychological features into a prerequisite of any comprehensive analysis of his administration's present and future international actions.

5.4.2 The Amorous Narcissist

Despite the opinion of his numerous adversaries, President Trump has the 'charismatic trait of inspiring voters to project their hopes on a single figure;' he elicits 'an almost mystical faith in one man's ability to deliver' (Harnden 2017). His admirers noted that even 'his conversation flows like a river in spate, overwhelming interruptions and objections, reflecting the force of nature that is the man' (Gove 2017). This 'force of nature' made his reputation by stirring conflict. The main cause is something he shares with President Putin (whom he admires): a vision of life as a never-ending series of fights in a world made of winners and losers; only the strong prevail (*The Economist*, January 14, 2017; Szabo 2016). Accordingly, he shows a profound inability to empathize (Dodes 2017) and an aggressiveness that frequently results in insults. His well-known 'physical impoliteness' (*The Economist*, June 3, 2017b) makes even influent members of his own party to consider him 'a vulgarian' (Harnden 2017). Still, some believe that, like his unpredictability, insults are part of a strategy; observers have noted 'a pattern of experimentation that suggests that he is testing his insults and attacks as he goes along' (Schwartzman and Johnson 2015). However, it is clear that he is unable to tolerate views different from his own. This 'grave emotional instability' (Dodes 2017) makes him denounce 'the enemies' as well as 'the dishonest media,' which might explain his obsessive preference for Twitter. For their part, 'the enemies' include the entire professional political class and the very established order (Harnden 2017), a typical feature of today's populist leaders. He is politically conservative, as shown by his attitude toward immigrants, lesbian and gay rights, climate change, or foreign dictators (Harnden 2017), but it should not be forgotten that he used to be a Democrat. Accordingly, Christopher Preble spoke of 'Trump's incoherent opportunism;' Ana Palacio, a former Spanish Foreign Minister, left diplomacy aside to note his 'opportunism, unreliability and amorality' (Preble 2016: 4–5). He has been widely criticized as a demagogue (Harnden 2017) who uses 'deception, distortion, denials and flat out lies' on a large scale. It was computed that during his first six months in power, on average he made 4.6 false or misleading claims *per*

day while deflecting to others the blame for his own faults (Zeis 2017). Surprisingly, despite all these features President Trump is in fact a 'disciplined and methodical' individual (Schwartzman and Johnson 2015) with a 'calculating business style' (Gove 2017). Instead of delegating, he prefers 'to be extremely hands-on' (Harnden 2017). He is hyperactive, needing no more than four hours of sleep every night (Schwartzman and Johnson 2015). The new President nevertheless has a problem with his short attention span that prevents him from staying focused on any topic for more than a few minutes. He cannot read long documents; they need to be turned for him into one-page memos with no more than nine bullet points each (Sarcina 2017; Cain 2016).

As long as Donald Trump was a businessman, few paid attention to the peculiarities of his personality. Things changed fundamentally with the 2016 electoral campaign and his eventual election. At that point, professional psychologists started to be very interested in his case. Moreover, their findings began to be used politically against the new President. In late January 2017, ten pro- and anti-Trump psychiatrists and psychologists identified three key psychological traits: apparent anger resulting in confrontational behavior and in the 'joy' of attacking people challenging or criticizing him; narcissism; and the seemingly compulsive need to tweet, which was explained as a way to defuse anxiety. Some of the ten mental health professionals also found evidence that he 'derives deep satisfaction from abusing and hurting people' (Begley 2017). A much more detailed analysis was published in mid-2016 by Dan P. McAdams, the Henry Wade Rogers Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University. 'Trump's problem in self-regulation' was explained as stemming from three distinctive features of his personality. First, high extraversion and low agreeableness come from an underlying impulsivity laced with anger that blocks any expression of care, affection, or empathy; makes him unable 'to squelch the impulse;' and is responsible for his charisma associated with 'feelings of danger and excitement.' Second, narcissism is at the origin of 'a motivational agenda of expanding, extolling, displaying and adoring the self.' Third, a philosophy of life based on the principle that 'when you are attacked, you hit back harder' reinforces his traits and goals 'imploring him to fight back ferociously' (McAdams 2016b). Anger, which permeates the President's political rhetoric, represents the emotional core of his personality. It fuels malice, motivates social dominance, and in combination with a considerable gift for humor (which is frequently aggressive) lies at the heart of

his charisma (McAdams 2016a). Overall, Donald Trump's temperament is defined by two prominent dispositional traits: 'sky-high extraversion (suggesting emotional exuberance and social dominance)' and 'rock-bottom agreeableness (suggesting a decided lack of empathy, caring, kindness and altruism).' They produce 'a social actor who is explosive, threatening and unpredictable' (McAdams 2016b). From these quite disturbing features to 'sociopath,' there was only one step. It is true that the one who took it was not a psychiatrist. Yet, it was somebody who knew Donald Trump well: the co-author of his 1987 book *The Art of the Deal*. Three decades later, Tony Schwartz bitterly apologized for Trump's positive image he had helped construct during the 18 months he spent working with the then businessman: 'I genuinely believe that if Trump wins and gets the nuclear codes there is an excellent possibility it will lead to the end of civilisation' (Cain 2016). Less dramatically but somewhat in the same vein, Michele Gelfand, a psychology professor at the University of Maryland, and Joshua Conrad Jackson, a Ph.D. student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, associated President Trump with 'cultural tightness.' This is a psychology concept defined as the desire for strong rules and punishment of deviance that increases when a group feels under threat. During his electoral campaign, the Republican candidate fostered a culture of threat and fear that demonized immigrants, Muslims, and free trade, in order to capitalize on the psychology of cultural tightness. In other words, he enhanced and exploited 'people's desire for authoritarianism.' His strongest supporters were those who felt that the country was under grave threat and believed that it needed tighter rules and less tolerance (Gelfand and Jackson 2016). Indeed, in a 2016 national poll conducted by Matthew MacWilliams, a political scientist at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, the single strongest predictor of expressing political support for Trump was represented by high levels of authoritarianism (McAdams 2016a), which cannot be dissociated from his aggressive populist discourse.

The ultimate—and highly politicized—conclusion of this line of reasoning was reached by John D. Gartner, a former instructor in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore presently working as a psychologist in private practice in Baltimore and New York; he is known as the author of a psychobiography of Bill Clinton. In his opinion, President Trump has malignant narcissism. This adds to three personality disorders—narcissistic, antisocial, and paranoid—whose criteria

that include impulsiveness, deceitfulness, and failing to obey laws and norms are 'manifestly' met by the new President (Estroff Marano 2017; Cartwright 2017). Unlike the other previously mentioned psychologists, in January 2017 Gartner launched an Internet petition with the following content:

> We, the undersigned mental health professionals (please state your degree), believe in our professional judgment that Donald Trump manifests a serious mental illness that renders him psychologically incapable of competently discharging the duties of President of the United States. And we respectfully request he be removed from office, according to article 4 of the 25th amendment to the Constitution, which states that the president will be replaced if he is 'unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office'. (Gartner 2017)

As of mid-January 2017, the petition was signed by no less than 69,966 mental health professionals. A supporting group was organized, 'Duty to Warn,' that held a conference at Yale in April 2017, turned itself into a political action committee, and helped publish a book edited by Bandy X. Lee, *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*, which debuted near the top of *The New York Times* best-seller list (Estroff Marano 2017). Not everybody was on Gartner's side, though. On the one hand, he was accused of having violated the 'Goldwater Rule,' which considers unethical the diagnosis of a public figure without personally examining them and without their consent (Cartwright 2017). On the other hand and more important from a scientific point of view, Allen Frances, the professor emeritus at Duke who wrote the criteria for personality disorders in the authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), now at its fifth edition, claimed that Trump's symptoms must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in order to be qualified as disorders, which is not the case. Accordingly, the 'diagnosis is poorly informed and simply wrong' (Frances 2017; Estroff Marano 2017).

This is why the most comprehensive, least contested, and clearly unpoliticized analysis of President Trump's personality traits remains that developed by Aubrey Immelman on the basis of the conceptual perspective of personologist Theodore Millon. Using the Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria (MIDC), which yields 34 normal and maladaptive personality classifications congruent with Axis II of the fourth edition of

the American Psychiatric Association's DSM, Immelman analyzed diagnostic information collected from an array of 150 media reports that offered diagnostically relevant psychobiographic information on Donald Trump (Immelman 2016). The latter's primary scale elevations were found to occur on Scale 2 (Ambitious) and Scale 3 (Outgoing). With identical scores of 24, both are at the lower limit of the *mildly dysfunctional* range (24–30). The secondary Scale 1A (Dominant) elevation approaches, with a score of 21, the upper limit of the *prominent* range (10–23). It is followed by a Scale 1B (Dauntless) elevation at the upper limit of the *present* range (5–9). No other scale elevation is remarkable or of psychodiagnostic significance. Accordingly, President Trump was classified as having an Ambitious/exploitative and Outgoing/impulsive personality, complemented by Dominant/controlling and Dauntless/adventurous patterns. In addition, he has a Contentious/resolute tendency (ibid.: 6). The resulting predominant personality patterns were identified as Ambitious/exploitative (which is a measure of narcissism) and Outgoing/impulsive, infused with secondary features of the Dominant/controlling pattern, and supplemented by a Dauntless/adventurous tendency. This personality composite can be labeled *amorous narcissism*. In political terms, it represents the profile of a high-dominance charismatic whose major personality strengths in a political role are confident assertiveness and personal charisma (ibid.: ii).

President Trump's major personality-based shortcomings come in part from his Ambitious–Outgoing Composite Pattern. Such individuals tend to be 'undisciplined, traveling an erratic course of successes, failures, and abandoned hopes.' At extreme levels, they may act impulsively (ibid.: 16). President Trump's Dauntless–Outgoing Composite Pattern brings him close to the prototypal features of the *risk-taking*: a tendency to respond before thinking, acting impulsively, and behaving in an unreflective and uncontrolled manner. Such individuals are undeterred by dangerous or frightening events. They may lack self-discipline and 'are tempted to prove themselves against new and exciting ventures, traveling on a hyperactive and erratic course of hazardous activity' (ibid.: 26). Overall,

> Trump's major personality-based limitations include the propensity for a superficial grasp of complex issues, a predisposition to be easily bored by routine (with the attendant risk of failing to keep himself adequately informed), an inclination to act impulsively without fully appreciating the

> implications of his decisions or the long-term consequences of his policy initiatives (…) all of which could render a Trump administration relatively vulnerable to errors of judgment. (ibid.: 28)

The 'perilous combination of sparse political experience and the potential for a level of impulsiveness and hubris rarely seen in occupants of the Oval Office' (Immelman 2017) is perhaps more dangerous than President Trump's alleged malignant narcissism, whose actual existence still needs to be confirmed. It should be noted that, despite the huge differences among the psychological analyses presented earlier in this section, most of them do support Immelman's conclusions. In terms relevant for the conduct of US foreign policy, the resulting portrait is that of an impulsive leader with a preference for adventurous actions, undeterred by danger, accustomed to both success and failure, with a superficial understanding of the issues he is facing and of the implications of his own decisions. This corresponds to the radicalism of President Trump's foreign policy statements before and shortly after his coming into office. As shown below, a more traditional attitude eventually emerged, at least in part due to the pressure of the Washington establishment and to the tempering influence of the technocrats among the President's advisers. However, the psychological traits presented in this section suggest that in many cases—and particularly in those of issues he is highly interested in—President Trump's unpredictability will not be replaced by a fully coherent political behavior dictated by his *entourage*. Moreover, he remains open to extreme foreign policy decisions (confronting nuclear North Korea? Launching a war trade against China?), undeterred by obvious dangers, and indifferent to long-term consequences. Accordingly, the future continuation of present trends in the US involvement in the East European Security Complex is far from certain. As shown in the following sections, dramatic developments cannot be excluded.

5.4.3 Captured by the Bureaucrats?

It is important to note that President Trump's initial radicalism was associated with his personality traits but also—at least in a certain measure—with the emergence of a 'Bannonite administration' (Abrams 2017: 10). Steve Bannon, the chief White House strategist and 'Mr Trump's most alarming adviser' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a), was given 'vast

power' and a seat on the Principals Committee of the National Security Council (*The Economist*, February 18, 2017), an unprecedented position for a political adviser (Abrams 2017: 11). The theorist of 'soft power,' Joseph Nye, compared the situation with Emperor Caligula's promotion of his horse to Senator (Caferri 2017). Unlike the horse, Bannon is a populist-nationalist provocateur whose pre-White House Breitbart News right-wing Web site systematically attacked 'globalists' in the foreign policy establishment (Abrams 2017: 10–11). In 2016, he expressed his conviction that there would be a USA-China war in the next decade (Borroz and Marston 2017: 613). While seeing Russia as a kleptocracy, he claimed that it represents a natural ally for President Trump not only in the coming war with China but also 'as part of a global revolt by nationalists and traditionalists against the liberal elite' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). In many regards, his ideas were described as similar to those of Aleksandr Dugin (Modeo 2017). It was Bannon who convinced Donald Trump—who at that time still shared some liberal views—to 'relaunch himself as a right-wing populist nationalist, contemptuous of the politically correct establishment' (*The Economist*, August 26, 2017). However, the difference between 'the ideological Mr Bannon' and 'the malleable president' has never disappeared. Trump took his advice only as long as the chief strategist had the ability to 'deliver wins' (ibid.). At one point, some of his schemes—such as the travel ban—failed while the more conventionally Republican views of Jared Kushner, the President's adviser and son-in-law, started to look more useful. In addition and perhaps more importantly, due to the narcissistic features of his personality, President Trump was enraged by media reports presenting him as Bannon's puppet (Alexander et al. 2017). The consequence was that in early April 2017, Bannon was removed from the National Security Council; in August, he left the White House (Abrams 2017: 11). The radical 'Breitbart presidency' did not come to an end, but it certainly lost one of its main engines.

Some other members of President Trump's initial team fell victim to the 'Russiagate' scandal (see below) and also left the administration. As a result, key position is occupied by 'reliable people who will give [the President] sober advice largely untinged by ideology' (Abrams 2017: 12). They include three experienced managers who share orthodox views: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who headed ExxonMobil for over a decade, and two of the most influential US military officers

of their generation, Secretary of Defense James Mattis and National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster. Vice President Mike Pence, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coates, CIA Director Mike Pompeo, and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley are experienced politicians (Kroenig 2017: 31). Fiona Hill, a respected Russia analyst, became the senior director for Europe and Russia of the National Security Council (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017). While Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer hardly share the ideas of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and chief economic adviser Gary Cohn (Leffler 2017), it is clear that President Trump's national security team 'embodies the Establishment' (Abrams 2017: 12).

It is interesting to note that many of the President's nominees are at odds with him on key issues, especially in foreign policy. Russia is a case in point: Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated that NATO members in Eastern Europe were right to be alarmed by Moscow's aggressive moves; Secretary of Defense James Mattis described Russia as dangerous, Putin as possibly delusional, and NATO as a cornerstone of the US security (Harnden 2017); Chief of Staff John Kelly shares the same commitment to the system of alliances set up by the USA (Leffler 2017). Despite his very different personal opinions, the President has shown a 'slavish regard for the military and business elites now stocking his cabinet' (*The Economist*, August 26, 2017). Many of his initial radical foreign policy views tended to be replaced by the more conventional ideas of his team (Abrams 2017: 13). This made some analysts speak about the danger of President Trump's foreign policy being captured by the bureaucracy. In fact, given the destabilizing potential of his initial projects one could claim that this is the best thing that could happen. There is the belief—or at least the hope—that the competent team around the President could 'rein in some of his worst impulses' (Harnden 2017). Yet, things do not always go smoothly. In key situations, President Trump 'undermines and contradicts his officials without warning.' His generals might advise him well, but he is the commander in chief and he alone takes the decisions (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). Given his personality traits presented in the previous section, it is certain that the President's 'able lieutenants' will not be able to compensate fully for his risky plans and sudden policy changes (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017). In fact, he might even fire those he starts to dislike, as he did with Bannon. Overall, as shown in the next section, a more conventional foreign policy has

been adopted; still, dramatic turns continue to be possible. Moreover, this is unlikely to change as long as President Trump remains at the White House.

5.5 President Trump's Foreign Policy

In the beginning, the new President seemed ready to promote a dramatic and highly destabilizing change in America's foreign policy. To give only two of the most extreme examples, 'obsolete' NATO was on the verge of dismantlement while the one China principle was discarded with a Washington-Beijing trade war in view. In fact, none of that happened. President Trump's actual foreign policy 'looks more normal than promised' (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017): The US 'has not retreated pell-mell into isolationism' (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). Still, the White House is far from a full return to normality. The first and perhaps the most important criticism is that there are 'plenty' of strategic contradictions but no foreign policy strategy (Leffler 2017). Instead, there is the President's

> vision of a dark and dangerous world in which the United States is besieged by Islamic terrorism, immigrants, and crime as its wealth and confidence fade. In [this] revisionist narrative, the era of Pax Americana - the period in which the United States wielded the most power on the world stage - is defined above all by national loss and decline. (Ikenberry 2017: 2)

This is exactly how Marine le Pen in France, Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and most Brexiteers see the situation of their respective countries. It should be remembered that candidate Donald Trump reconstructed himself with the assistance of people like Bannon as a conservative populist leader targeting a specific electorate made up of losers of globalization. Unsurprisingly, his domestic political interests continue to influence his worldview and his foreign policy: In rejecting free trade, immigrants, or ISIS, he is simply 'embracing and voicing the grievances of his voters' (Zoellick 2017).

In addition, Donald Trump has been deeply influenced by this experience as a businessman and, at 70, has to adapt to the fact that politics and especially foreign policy represent a very different realm from that of real estate deals. Hence, his difficulty to understand the international

system and American hegemony in terms of structural power. He can only reason in terms of relational power, which makes him 'transactional, not institutional' (Zoellick 2017). There is no broad vision of the stabilizing role of the USA as a defender of the free world. Instead, President Trump's focus is on the pursuit of narrow national advantage with an exclusive interest in material gains and regardless of the deeply negative impact this might have on the liberal world order championed by Washington since Bretton Woods (Patrick 2017: 52). This has resulted in a marked preference for 'superficial quick wins, zero-sum games, and mostly bilateral transactions' accompanied by the rejection of 'international order building, steady alliances, and strategic thinking' (Munich Security Conference 2017, United States: Trump's Cards). Critically, values are completely absent from this approach. On the contrary, 'Mr Trump's ego plays an exceptionally large role and so do personal - and even family - relations' (Zoellick 2017).

Accordingly, G. John Ikenberry has aptly described the new US foreign policy not on the basis on its main features but rather on that of five core convictions of the American postwar global project that are now under attack (Ikenberry 2017: 4). First, there is the blunt rejection of internationalism. Trump-the-populist is, unsurprisingly, a nationalist: 'as President of the United States, I will always put America first, (…) as the leaders of your countries will always, and should always, put your countries first' (The White House 2017). In a large measure, the other points stem from this key element. This is clearly the case of the second rejection, that of the US commitment to open trade (Ikenberry 2017: 5). President Trump has abandoned the TPP and is renegotiating NAFTA. States with large bilateral surpluses with the USA that include China, South Korea, Germany, and Mexico are viewed as adversaries (Zoellick 2017).Trump-the-businessman has 'repeatedly defined American global interests almost purely in economic terms,' which are very narrowly understood as issues of economic benefit to the USA (Sanger and Haberman 2016). His zero-sum view of the world makes him believe that net exporters win while net importers lose (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). He believes that at present, the US terms of trade are grossly unfair (*The Economist*, April 15, 2017) and contemplates harsh measures against economic competitors: 'They keep beating us. We have to beat them' (McAdams 2016a). President Trump prefers bilateral deals over multilateral ones 'because that way a big country like America can bully small ones into making concessions' (*The Economist*, November

9, 2017). But there is worse. In his inaugural address, he was the first US President since Herbert Hoover to proudly embrace protectionism (Zoellick 2017): 'protection will lead to great prosperity and strength' (quoted in Munich Security Conference 2017, Introduction). This has not been turned into an actual policy, but under the influence of this type of discourse not only Republicans but also Democrats are more protectionist now than before the 2016 elections (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). Overall, the new US economic nationalism 'jeopardizes (…) relations with key allies, interferes with (…) efforts both to contain and to cooperate with China, and offers little help to US workers' (Leffler 2017).

The third rejection concerns, paradoxically, the multilateral rules and institutions set up by and supportive of US global leadership: 'the world's most powerful state has begun to sabotage the order it created.' Multilateralism, international law, alliances, agreements on trade, environmental protection, and human rights are under threat (Ikenberry 2017: 2). Critically, even after the existence of NATO ceased to be questioned, President Trump remains ambivalent about alliances. He genuinely believes that the USA has been much too generous and should stop financing the security system it created seven decades ago (Zoellick 2017). The idea that this system has actually served America's broader interests simply seems to be incompatible with the President's worldview. The related, fourth rejection is that of the USA as a key member of the international community of liberal democracies. President Trump does not see a difference between liberal democratic friends and autocratic rivals (Ikenberry 2017: 8). He is embracing authoritarian leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Philippines' Rodrigo Duterte, or Egypt's Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (Leffler 2017). Promoting democracy and protecting human rights are not among his concerns (Abrams 2017: 14), a situation that has considerably damaged America's soft power (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). The fifth and final rejection is equally puzzling, as it contradicts the very multicultural and open character of the American society: The administration's harsh immigration policies have included the building of the Mexican wall, the temporary barring of all refugees, and the banning of immigrants from six Muslim-majority countries (Ikenberry 2017: 6). In fact, Muslims represent one of President Trump's preferred targets. ISIS is made up of 'medieval barbarians' who must be pursued 'until every one of them is dead' (McAdams 2016a). This also explains why the President, who in

general is not prone to military action, has increased American support to the governments of Iraq and Afghanistan (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017).

These five negative features of President Trump's foreign policy and their predictable consequences have been widely criticized. Still, they do have a merit: They show that 'out of the chaos and the contradiction a pattern is emerging.' This pattern might not be 'reassuring for America or for the world' (*The Economist*, June 3, 2017a), but it provides a basis for the understanding of the new administration's foreign policy. As National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster and chief economic adviser Gary Cohn wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* article,

> the world is not a 'global community' but an arena where nations, non-governmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage (…). Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it. (*The Economist*, June 3, 2017a)

This 'embrace' is based on a nationalist, unilateral, zero-sum, amoral, and frequently confrontational approach that, if pushed to its extreme consequences, would mark 'the return of self-help' in international affairs (Patrick 2017: 52). There is one concept that perfectly describes such a vision: neoclassical geopolitics. President Trump brings together all the elements of Guzzini's definition: conservatism, nationalist overtones, the explanatory primacy of American exceptionalism, strategic realism with a nationalist gaze, and the 'objective necessities' within which states compete for power and rank (Guzzini 2012: 43; see Chapter 2). The only exception is the apparent reluctance to use large-scale military actions. However, the new President stated 'everything begins with a strong military. Everything' (McAdams 2016a); accordingly, his first budget proposal included an increase of $54 billion for defense (Kroenig 2017: 32). If a crisis escalates, few would expect him to show self-restraint and humiliatingly stop short from using military means.

It goes without saying that discarding some of the win-win elements that used to be part of the US geopolitical vision under President Obama will have considerable consequences. Ian Bremmer and Cliff Kupchan claimed that the international system is entering a period of 'geopolitical recession.' President Trump is responsible for 'the most volatile political risk environment in the postwar period' characterized by the 'weakening of international security and economic architecture and deepening

mistrust among the world's most powerful governments' (Bremmer and Kupchan 2017: 2). In the specific case of the East European regional security complex, a highly destabilizing factor is represented by the President's skepticism toward NATO. Initially, he went as far as refusing to express support for the alliance's Article 5 that guarantees solidarity with a member state attacked by an external aggressor (*The Economist*, June 3, 2017a). This has changed, but he continues to vocally criticize two aspects. First, there is the insufficient level of member states' financial contribution that places most of the burden on American taxpayers. This is valid criticism, but it shows that President Trump's transactional approach places the balance sheet high above intragroup solidarity and geopolitical interests. Second, NATO is 'obsolete' because it has 'not reformed to meet the main threat that we face - Islamist terrorism' (quoted by Gove 2017). In the context of Russia's increased aggressiveness, this is a dangerous idea that would deprive the East European members of the Alliance of the main instrument ensuring their security. Of course, they would be the first to veto such a reform, but the fact that the US President believes that NATO should move its focus from Eastern Europe to the Middle East says much about his views on America's relationship with Russia and its neighbors.

The attitude toward the European Union is even more negative. In fact, it is the first time in history that a President of the USA signals the end of support for the process of European integration. President Trump has supported Brexit and is 'making common cause with right-wing European parties that seek to unravel the postwar European project' (Ikenberry 2017: 2). On the one hand, he rejects the EU as being anti-jobs and anti-growth. On the other, he perceives it as little more than a German protectorate: 'You look at the European Union and it's Germany. Basically a vehicle for Germany' (Gove 2017). His obsession with migrants makes him condemn vigorously the fact that member states were 'forced to take in all of the refugees' by Brussels. Consequently, he believes that Brexit was a smart move and expects other states to leave the EU. For Britain, 'Brexit is going to end up being a great thing' (Gove 2017). In fact, all this is hardly surprising: President Trump's neoclassical geopolitical views make him a natural adversary of a Kantian integration progress whose logic is beyond his understanding. Given the chance to influence such a process, he would certainly act in a very negative way; fortunately, this might involve costs he is in no way ready to contemplate.

Yet, by far the most serious threat to the East European status quo is represented by President Trump's attitude toward Russia. However, for reasons explained below the prospects of this bilateral relationship cannot be scrutinized without an assessment of the US foreign policy toward China.

5.5.1 President Trump and China

Initially, President Trump's statements and actions concerning Asia were as puzzling and contradictory as the rest of his foreign policy. He spoke about putting an end to the special security relationship with Japan and South Korea, which should have developed their own nuclear weapons so that the USA could save money. Eventually, Tokyo and Seoul were reassured of America's continued commitment (Kausikan 2017: 146). In the case of Taiwan, first he took a congratulatory phone call from President Tsai Ing-wen and questioned the US 'one China' policy; later, he had a call with Chinese President Xi Jinping and announced that in fact he would not change that policy (Gordon 2017: 14–15). Since then, this 'concession' to Beijing has been accompanied by many nice things he said at different times—and especially during high-level meetings—about China and the future of the bilateral relationship. This cooperative dimension was also visible in his intention to use Beijing's influence in order to address the North Korean nuclear issue. Yet, periodically President Trump has harshly criticized the Chinese as they are responsible for two-thirds of America's total trade deficit (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017b). Given his transactional, zero-sum vision, he takes this as representing an intolerable situation. It might not be exaggerated to say that, because of this specific reason, the President perceives China as USA's most important foreign affairs problem. As a presidential candidate, he claimed that Beijing was destroying jobs in the USA and stealing American economic secrets. He stated 'we can't continue to allow China to rape our country' (Gordon 2017: 14). Once in power, he brought in an Asia advisory team mainly composed of China hawks such as Peter Navarro, the head of the newly created National Trade Council. In a 2006 book titled *The Coming China Wars,* Navarro explained that the USA had to 'aggressively and comprehensively address the China problem' (Borroz and Marston 2017: 613). In a 2012 documentary, *Death by China*, he renewed the call to curb Beijing's unfair trade practices that included currency meddling and export subsidies (*The Economist*, March

30, 2017b). As already mentioned, Steve Bannon was sure that the next decade will bring war between the USA and China (Gordon 2017: 14). Even Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested in his Senate confirmation hearing that a blockade should be imposed to prevent Chinese access to its man-made islands in the South China Sea (Borroz and Marston 2017: 613). All this has a flavor of *déjà vu*: John Mearsheimer's call for the containment of China and President Obama's 'pivot to Asia' (see Sect. 5.2) pertain to the same line of reasoning. President Trump disliked the 'pivot' mainly because it had been promoted by the previous administration. He canceled its economic component, the TPP, as part of his anti-free trade campaign. But, to replace it, he contemplated much harsher measures. By far the most dramatic was the threat to impose a 45% tariff on Chinese imports. This is more feasible than it seems because Chinese goods and services represent less than 3 percent of Americans' consumer spending; for the average citizen, the effects would hardly be catastrophic. If Beijing retaliated with similar tariffs, the USA would also suffer losses; however, those of China would be much higher because a fifth of its exports—equal to nearly 4% of its GDP—go to the USA, while only a tenth of American exports—less than 1 percent of the country's GDP—go to China (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017b). But the possible imposition of such tariffs would likely degenerate into a trade war with considerable negative economic and geopolitical consequences for both countries and for the entire international system. For the time being, this has deterred President Trump from turning threats into reality. At the same time, it should not be forgotten that there is also the antagonistic security relationship triggered by Chinese naval expansion in the South China Sea and, more generally, by increased regional activism that US Asian allies perceive as a threat.

In response to these challenges, in November 2017 President Trump started to unveil his nascent strategy for Asia. During his first visit to Beijing, he happily signed trade deals worth over $200 billion. However, most of them were only memoranda of understanding, i.e., expressions of intent, not actual contracts. Some days later, while continuing his five-nation Asian tour, in one of his typical puzzling changes of policy the President spoke for the first time about a new 'Indo-Pacific strategy' intended to counter China with the support of Japan, Australia, and India. Originally, this was a Japanese plan already mentioned one month earlier by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in a speech praising India and condemning China for 'undermining the international rules-based

order' and for 'provocative actions' in the South China Sea (Sevastopulo 2017). It is not yet clear how close this strategy might be to President Obama's 'pivot.' President Trump only mentioned increased cooperation between participating states and the intention to put an end to 'chronic trade abuses.' A former Asia adviser to President Obama, Evan Medeiros, claimed that there is no serious economic component and emphasized India's ambivalence. He also noted that to many Asian leaders, this looks like a plan to contain China (ibid.). In fact, this is the key point. Despite all his ambiguities and zigzagged speeches, the US President has started to signal that he is serious about stopping the Chinese. The problem is that the new containment-flavored strategy, economic bilateral tensions that might result in a trade war, and naval tensions in the South China Sea can only lead to a high degree of instability that, in the view of some analysts, might result in proxy struggles or even in limited direct military conflict between Washington and Beijing (Borroz and Marston 2017: 615). In an extreme case, they could even lead to a new Cold War. This issue will be further analyzed in the next section, but it should be noted that from a neoclassical geopolitical point of view none of these possible developments seems illogical. President Trump's behavior toward Asia-Pacific is inspired by the same zero-sum vision shared by President Putin in his dealings with the CIS and steered by a much more impulsive personality. Accordingly, a minor crisis in the Spratly Islands might one day trigger dramatic global consequences.

There is, however, a serious out-of-area obstacle to that. President Obama's experience showed that a 'pivot to Asia'—and, much more so, the overt containment of China—cannot work if political, diplomatic, and military resources have to be reoriented back to Eastern Europe to face Russian pressure. In other words, a successful anti-Chinese policy in the Pacific requires an equally successful 'reset' of the Washington-Moscow tensions. This is why President Trump's foreign policies toward China and Russia cannot be treated as separate issues.

5.5.2 President Trump and Russia

In 2016, candidate Donald Trump shocked everybody with his blunt statement that instead of automatically assisting Eastern members of NATO overtly attacked by Russia, he would first check if the victims 'fulfilled their obligations to us' (Sanger and Haberman 2016). This would have meant the end of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, of the

US influence in Eastern Europe, of America's worldwide credibility as an ally, and of the Kremlin's self-restraint in using force on a large scale in the East European security complex. Many noted that the 'future of the American role in European security is clearly now very open' (Szabo 2016). In fact, in a way this represented a certain degree of continuity with President Obama's policy of shifting US strategic priorities toward Asia and China while pushing the Europeans to take over their own defense burden (ibid.). At the same time, it was related to 'a classic presidential beginner's mistake in dealing with the Kremlin' based on the naïve attempt to 'reset' relations with Russia (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). As already shown, President Bush and President Obama had already tried and failed. However, from the point of view of the leadership in Moscow this was an extraordinary development. When a member of the State Duma interrupted a session to shout that Donald Trump had won the election, Russian 'lawmakers spontaneously leaped to their feet and delivered a raucous standing ovation' (Weir 2016). Affinities are undeniable: The Kremlin's propaganda apparatus appropriately presents President Trump as 'an ally in the global fight between right-minded nationalists and decadent Western liberals' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). Trump-the-businessman had been courted by Moscow since the late 1980s, when he visited the then Soviet Union. But it is mainly his admiration for President Putin and for his ideas that brings them together. They share the view that 'the world is made of winners and losers and that only the strong prevail.' Both admire strong leaders because this is the role they prefer for themselves (Szabo 2016). Unsurprisingly, 'in 2016 Mr Trump was consistently effusive about Mr Putin - "very smart!"' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). In February 2017, the same week the US ambassador to the United Nations expressed a 'clear and strong condemnation' of Russian actions in Ukraine, the President responded to a Fox News journalist claiming that President Putin is 'a killer' with an unprecedented statement: 'There are a lot of killers. What, you think our country's so innocent?' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). Ideologically, President Trump sees his Russian counterpart 'as a fellow nationalist and crusader against cosmopolitanism.' For his part, President Putin has described the US President as 'a *konkretny* (down-to-earth) man he could do business with' (*The Economist*, July 13, 2017). A German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, accordingly illustrated the cover of one of its March 2017 issues with a picture merging President Putin's face and President Trump's hair subtitled 'Der Doppelregent: Wie viel

Putin steckt in Trump?' (*Der Spiegel*, March 4, 2017). One might indeed wonder 'how much of Putin is in Trump' and what could have happened if the USA had had a less consolidated democracy.

Critically, observers have noted that this affinity has influenced the foreign policy intentions of the American President at least as much as his anti-Chinese obsession. When he first 'floated the idea of reviewing sanctions on Russia if President Putin is prepared to move away from confrontation,' this was taken as an example of his transactional approach to politics (Gove 2017). Yet, the choice of his key collaborators suggested more than that. Michael Flynn, the first national security adviser, was supportive of closer ties with Moscow. In fact, he had to resign precisely because he had lied about his conversations with the Russian ambassador (Abrams 2017: 12). Rex Tillerson, who eventually became hostile to the Kremlin, was nominated Secretary of State because as CEO of ExxonMobil he had very close ties with President Putin. All this contributed to the perception of President Trump's attitude before and after the beginning of his tenure as highly favorable to no less than a 'pivot to Russia' (Ansar and Rakisits 2016: 66–67). This was something much more ambitious than President Obama's 'reset.' President Trump did—and, as shown below, still does—envisage 'a big breakthrough' and a 'grand diplomatic bargain,' 'an entirely new strategic alignment' with Russia (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a, b; Rumer et al. 2017: 17). Seen from Washington, this deal would imply Russia's support in the Middle East for the total elimination of ISIS and, more generally, for the fight against Islamist terrorism; the end of the Kremlin's collaboration with Iran; cooperation in Syria, and possibly in Afghanistan. Launching nuclear arms control talks might also be taken into consideration, but the key aspect is 'to pull Russia away from China and diminish their growing strategic alliance,' which would allow Washington to use Moscow in order to curb Beijing's expansion (Ansar and Rakisits 2016: 66–67; *The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). Indeed, 'a bid to realign the three powers lies at the heart of Mr Trump's grand bargain' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). There is also the goal of putting an end to the confrontational situation in Eastern Europe that includes warfare in Ukraine and Russian harassment of Eastern NATO members (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). However, this would be done at the expense of the East Europeans and as the price to pay for Russian concessions.

Moscow showed clear interest in a grand alignment that would put an end to American hostility and sanctions. It was Channel One, the

Kremlin-controlled main public TV channel, that was chosen to present a sort of counter-proposal some days after President Trump's inauguration. First, Russia is supportive of an 'anti-terror alliance' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). Dmitri Suslov, the Deputy Director of the Centre for Comprehensive European and International Studies at Russia's Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs and an International Relations expert close to the Kremlin, emphasized the fact that his country is ready 'for full cooperation in Syria and the Middle East' that would include joint military actions as well as intelligence sharing with the USA (quoted by Valentino 2016). Second, Moscow would like to see the end of any further expansion of NATO; third, the recognition of Crimea as Russian territory along with the lifting of Western sanctions and a de facto veto right over Ukraine's future; fourth, the end to 'global policing' by America and a clear recognition of the two states' spheres of influence (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). Visibly, this is a maximalist agenda that ignores both China and Iran and asks for considerable American concessions in exchange for little more than cooperation in Syria. Its obvious role was to represent the starting point of a bargaining process. What is important to note, however, is that not only the Russian proposal but also the US one are perfect reflections of neoclassical geopolitics that can in no way be associated with a win-win approach. Both partners would gain from this grand alignment (or this is what President Trump believes), but gains would be earned at the expense of actors outside the alliance: perhaps China and certainly Eastern European states. The most disturbing aspect of this cynical deal concerns the issue of spheres of influence. As shown earlier in this chapter, their recognition has been one of the main demands of the Kremlin that the USA has constantly rejected. Yet, President Trump 'is more open to cutting a deal with Putin along a spheres-of-influence approach' based on NATO retrenchment to a core area of Western Europe and Poland while placing the Baltic states 'in a new gray zone' (Szabo 2016). The fact that, at least for the time being, a 'Yalta 2' agreement conceding a 'zone of influence' to the Kremlin in the former USSR (Urban 2016) has not been concluded doesn't mean that the US President has changed his mind about accepting the principle of spheres of influence. On the contrary, his behavior toward China seems to confirm the fact that he is favorable to Beijing's—and Moscow's—proposals of 'carv[ing] up the world bilaterally into spheres of influence, with the great powers dominating their regions and trading favours elsewhere.' To any neoclassical geopolitician

this sounds great, but it would put an end to the present rules-based world order. If great powers—including the USA—do not protest when Russia invades Ukraine or China takes over the South China Sea in exchange for symmetrical concessions, 'the world would become a more dangerous place' (*The Economist*, April 22, 2017).

Fortunately, there are serious obstacles against a USA-Russia grand alignment related to the 'immutable realities of great-power relations, underpinned by history and geography that no deal-making can wholly negate' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). Indeed, 'the Kremlin's interests and America's are worlds apart' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). This is very visible in the case of Iran, where Moscow has major interests at stake. They include pipelines and energy projects in the region of the Caspian Sea, the sale of weapons—including advanced ones—and nuclear power plants, as well as the Russian-Iranian political and military cooperation in Syria (Nikolay Kozhanov quoted by *The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). The case of China is even more difficult. President Putin began his own pivot to Asia in the mid-2000s, a move that today is seen as 'largely irreversible' (Alexander Lukin quoted by *The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). He has much in common with Chinese leaders in terms of authoritarianism, disrespect for human rights, and threatening attitude toward weaker neighbors. He values trade with Beijing (which includes Russian exports of high-tech weapons) and Chinese investment, especially in oil and gas firms. Due to Western sanctions, China became a valuable source of credit. The Kremlin is also interested in the success of BRICS. More importantly, it fears the neighbor's military might—a situation aggravated by the old anxiety over Chinese expansion in resource-rich but poorly populated Siberia (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a, b). To President Putin, China represents a strategic priority (Dmitri Suslov quoted by Valentino 2016) that would be very difficult to abandon.

The issue of Eastern Europe is equally sensitive, but for very different reasons. An analyst, scholar, and politician closely related to the Kremlin, Sergei Markov, optimistically noted that President Trump believes that antagonizing Russia in this region is useless; to him, Ukraine represents a problem, not an opportunity (Valentino 2016). Hence, the idea to solve it through a grand alignment that would give the Russians a free hand in the entire region in exchange for cooperation elsewhere. Yet, 'Mr Trump appears not to realise what gigantic concessions these would be' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a). The former NATO Deputy

Secretary-General, Alexander Vershbow, who has also been an American ambassador to Moscow, explained that any concession on Ukraine would buy some short-term stability but would also encourage the Kremlin to press for the overt division of Europe into spheres of influence through 'some kind of Yalta 2.' By accepting such a division, President Trump would in fact create 'a much more unstable situation' in Eastern Europe, with the Baltic states immediately turned into Moscow's next targets (Urban 2016). Moreover, even after their predictable subordination, it is likely that President Putin 'would pocket Washington's (…) concessions and pursue new adventures,' continuing to destabilize the regional security complex (Rumer et al. 2017: 19). Critically, the US betrayal of East European allies and the undermining of the rules-based global order would do terrible damage to Washington's existing alliances and international reputation. Even the Kremlin was aware of this problem and, as President Trump took office, did not expect immediate concessions (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b). Moreover, it is interesting that at that time the two already mentioned prominent Kremlin experts and ideologues, Dmitri Suslov and Sergei Markov, were convinced that the Russian-American honeymoon would be short. They even provided a timeline: 'the window of opportunity will be brief, two years at most. Then, contradictions will have the upper hand' (Valentino 2016). For his part, already in January 2017 President Trump revealed that he was prepared to cut ties with President Putin: 'well, I start off trusting [him] - but let's see how long that lasts. It may not last long at all' (Gove 2017). He probably had in view setbacks similar to those faced by President Obama after his 'reset' of the relations with the Kremlin. Given the personality traits of the new President, in a similar situation one would hardly expect a rational, well-calculated response. On the contrary, there is the serious risk that, due to his impulsivity, 'Mr Trump, double-crossed and thin-skinned, will end up presiding over a dangerous and destabilising falling-out with Mr Putin' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017a).

Still, all this has remained in the realm of speculation as President Trump's actual foreign policy has taken a very different course characterized by progressively worsening relations with Moscow. Already in March 2017, President Putin's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, was sorry to note that bilateral relations were 'at the lowest possible point.' In April, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was visiting Moscow, spoke about a 'low level of trust' (Abrams 2017: 12). In June, Christoph Heusgen, Angela Merkel's foreign and security policy adviser, expressed

Germans' surprise that 'Trump was very tough on Russia, very tough' (Theil 2017: 15). In August 2017, Sergei Ryabkov, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, described President Trump's policy as 'a continuation of the worst of Obama's legacy, even a tougher policy in some aspects' (Kasperowicz 2017). His arguments included the US bill toughening sanctions on Russia in response to Moscow's meddling in the 2016 American election and to the continuing aggression in Ukraine (*The Economist*, July 27, 2017).

However, it is important to note that the latter was hardly President Trump's initiative. In fact, he 'had hoped to lift the existing package of sanctions on Russia at some point. Now he has been stripped of his presidential authority to do so' (ibid.). The Congress voted 419 to 3 the new sanctions and a provision preventing the President from suspending both old and new sanctions by executive order, in the absence of congressional approval. This means that even the Republican majority 'does not trust a president from its own party to serve the national interest when it comes to dealing with Russia' (ibid.). As already mentioned, key figures in the administration such as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, and National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster share very negative views of the Kremlin and its foreign policy (Leffler 2017; *The Economist*, July 13, 2017). They add to the many 'Republicans who, along with much of America's foreign-policy establishment, regard Mr Putin as a gangster' (*The Economist*, February 11, 2017b).

Given President Trump's personality, all this might not have been enough to deter him. In any case, in October 2017 his admiration for President Putin and desire to come to terms with Russia were as strong as one year earlier, or so they seemed to Republican Senator Lindsey Graham when he noted the 'blind spot on Russia I still can't figure out' (*The Economist*, October 26, 2017). The reason that put an end, at least temporarily, to the President's Russian-friendly foreign policy and made his relationship with President Putin 'politically toxic' (*The Economist*, July 27, 2017) is the 'Russiagate' scandal: The suspicion that people in Donald Trump's campaign and perhaps himself may have coordinated with the Russians 'in a bid to help him win the presidency' (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017a). Key involved individuals include Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law and adviser; Michael Flynn, the first national security adviser; campaign manager Paul Manafort; and Attorney General Jeff Sessions. Yet, with major revelations being made

almost every month nobody can predict the turn of the three separate investigations run by the Congress or the findings of Robert Mueller, who was appointed special counsel in May 2017. Possible outcomes range from President Trump being cleared of any wrongdoing to actual impeachment. Yet, the latter could be expected only if Democrats take control of at least one chamber of Congress in the 2018 mid-term elections; and even then the entire process might take years, i.e., more than the time until the next presidential election. There is also the possibility that the administration 'be stained, but not capsized, by never-ending inquiries and suspicions that are neither proven or allayed' (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017a; Borger 2017; *The Economist*, October 26, 2017). Simplifying, the relations with Russia can evolve in two ways. If the President is cleared, he could reactivate the grand alignment plan. If, one way or another, the scandal continues (with or without the launching of the procedure of impeachment), the present Washington-Moscow tensions will continue.

For the time being, 'Russiagate' has had two important consequences: It showed that 'Russian power is slippery and tentacular' (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017a) and has prevented President Trump 'from pursuing a grand bargain with Vladimir Putin that might have left Russia's neighbours at the Kremlin's mercy' (*The Economist*, November 9, 2017). At the end of the day, it is Eastern Europe that has been the main beneficiary of 'Russiagate.'

5.5.3 President Trump and Eastern Europe

President Obama's 'pivot' made all East European states fully aware of the consequences of even limited American disengagement from their region. Unlike the average US President, their leaders and citizens do not need to be explained that, under such a scenario, 'the inherent fragility of Russia's neighbors will create many openings for future Russian meddling' (Rumer et al. 2017: 15). Even the partial materialization of President Trump's plan for a grand alignment with the Kremlin would obviously put an end to the NATO defense buildup that Washington has coordinated since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. If pushed to its last consequences, it would leave the region fully exposed to Russia's aggressive moves. In January 2017, an alarmed group of Central and East European leaders sent a letter to President-elect Trump very similar to that mailed in 2009 to President Obama. They explained that

ending sanctions on Russia or accepting 'the division and subjugation of Ukraine' would be a grave mistake that would 'shake American credibility with allies in Europe and elsewhere' and weaken the rules-based international order. Regionally, it would demoralize people supportive of a Euro-Atlantic orientation while encouraging oligarchic and anti-Western forces. Instead of bringing peace, it would make war more likely as President Putin views any concession as a sign of weakness. Free from American constraint, he would likely use 'military intimidation, but also cyber-attacks, energy and economic pressure, espionage, psychological warfare, disinformation and the targeted use of bribery.' The supreme argument, however, was directed to President Trump's narcissistic ego: 'Putin does not seek American greatness. As your allies, we do' (Băsescu et al. 2017).

Eventually, the President and his envoys did provide abundant proof of US commitment to ensure the region's security. However, the fact that only the allegations of collusion with Russia 'made it politically impossible for him to do any far-ranging deal with Mr Putin on foreign policy' (*The Economist*, July 13, 2017) is hardly reassuring. As shown in the next section, the future of America's actions in the East European security complex remains open.

5.6 US Foreign Policy Scenarios

The factors influencing US foreign policy in or related to the East European security complex under the Trump administration can be classified in relation to the system, state, and individual levels of analysis. At system level, there is, first, the issue of China's rise. International Relations approaches such as Mearsheimer's offensive neorealism or the Hegemonic Stability Theory perceive Beijing as a counter-hegemon that cannot fail to challenge the USA in East Asia and worldwide. To all those who believe in the preeminence of power in world politics, a harmonious USA-China relationship is impossible. Second, there is the inescapable linkage between a 'pivot to Asia' and the 'reset' of the relation with Moscow. As explained in the rich literature about President Obama's similar dilemma, America's increasingly limited resources do not allow Washington to face simultaneously China in the Pacific and Russia in Eastern Europe. In order to fight the first, the USA has to accommodate the second. Third, there are considerable geopolitical difficulties in reaching a grand alignment with the Kremlin. The latter is very reluctant

to question its relationship with Iran and might never accept to replace its own 'pivot to China' with a dangerous and counterproductive antagonistic relationship.

Three more factors relate to the state level of analysis. The fourth stems from the economic cost of a conflict with China. In the case of a trade war, American losses would be smaller than the Chinese ones but would nevertheless seriously affect a significant number of US multinational corporations. To give an example, in some months China is the biggest buyer of iPhones, ahead of the USA (*The Economist*, March 30, 2017b). It is not difficult to imagine the importance of the resulting pro-Beijing lobby in Washington. Fifth, the Congress, most of the Republican Party prominent members, the US foreign policy establishment, and people in key positions of the administration nominated by President Trump himself strongly oppose the idea of a grand alignment with Russia. Sixth, as long as the 'Russiagate' scandal continues, any concession to or bargain with Moscow is impossible.

The final factors are associated with the individual level of analysis and, in part, with the peculiar personality traits of President Trump. Seventh, his understanding of world politics is largely—if not exclusively—based on his experience as a businessman. To him, hegemony, structural power, and neorealist great power politics are abstract concepts of little practical relevance. What he perfectly understands, however, is the huge Chinese trade surplus, which makes him deeply hostile to Beijing. For different reasons, his conclusions are identical to those of the neorealists and turn China into his main foreign policy adversary. Eighth, the President's neoclassical geopolitical vision makes him feel unconcerned by the survival of the rules-based world order that the US has helped establish and maintain since 1945. Instead, he is ready for a deal with Moscow based on the cynical sacrifice of American allies in Eastern Europe and on the mutual recognition of spheres of influence. Ninth, as explained in Sect. 5.4, the President has a propensity for a superficial grasp of complex issues and tends to act without appreciating the long-term consequences of his decisions (Immelman 2016: 28). This is why he clearly does not—and will never be able to—understand the serious effects of a grand alignment with Russia on America's global image and geopolitical interests and on the situation of the East European security complex. Tenth, President Trump's Dauntless–Outgoing Composite Pattern brings him close to the prototypal features of the 'risk-taking.' He is undeterred by dangerous events and loves

risky adventures (ibid.: 26). In combination with the previous factor, this might make him willing to start a trade war or, in an extreme case, even a Cold War with China. Eleventh, even if a grand alignment with Russia is reached, the President's difficulty to concentrate for a long time on a specific issue and, more importantly, the strong narcissism associated with his Ambitious/exploitative personality pattern are likely to put a premature end to his collaboration with President Putin. In fact, this might happen the first time he believes he is cheated or disrespected.

These factors can result in a variety of possible scenarios. The number of highly probable ones, however, is limited. As already mentioned, the key element is the 'Russiagate' scandal that determines the possibility of a grand alignment with Russia. Based on the present situation, its quick end seems unlikely. It is not very relevant if it leads to impeachment; the latter will probably not become effective before the normal end of President Trump's tenure, as shown by the timeline of the Nixon case. Accordingly, Scenario A sees an all-encompassing agreement with President Putin as impossible, which translates into the likely preservation of the present situation. US support for East European states threatened by Russia will not diminish. At the same time, the new 'pivot to Asia' will be as modest (and unsuccessful) as that of President Obama; the probability of a trade war with China will be low and, even if it materializes, tensions will not escalate toward military conflict.

Scenario B is based on the idea that President Trump is cleared of any suspicion of collusion with Russia, with all blame taken by people around him. Shadows will remain, but the President is hardly the kind of individual who might pay attention to such details. He will try to come to terms with President Putin, but the latter will not be willing to scrap the Russian-Chinese Partnership. Consequently, the plan for a US-Russian grand alignment will only result in limited cooperation on specific issues. Bilateral tensions will be brought to an end; in Eastern Europe, this might be detrimental to countries such as Ukraine, but not to the Baltic states or Poland. President Trump will simply not have enough incentives to sacrifice them, and the USA will continue to play its 'normal' role in the East European security complex.

Scenario C is that of a quick end of 'Russiagate' followed by a successful Washington-Moscow grand alignment. Sure of Russia's unconditional support, President Trump will become very aggressive toward China. Trade wars and minor military incidents might ensue. The world will have eyes only for the East Asian theater. Eastern Europe will become a backwater,

with Washington giving Russia a free hand in the region. Yet, after some time President Trump could change his mind. His grandiosity might be satisfied with some Chinese concessions; economic costs may be too high to his electorate; or he could come to the conclusion that the Kremlin is crossing red lines, feel insulted, and suddenly replace China with Russia as his main adversary. Finally, even if nothing of this happens, he may not get reelected and his successor will revert to a more classical foreign policy approach. In other words, the grand alignment will be a short-lived one.

Finally, Scenario D is Scenario C that escalates into a fully fledged US-Chinese Cold War marked by trade embargos, military incidents, proxy conflicts, and containment. If this stage is reached, neither President Trump nor his successor will be able to easily bring the situation back to normal. As shown by the previous Cold War, in many regards such bipolar confrontations reshape the international system and the participating superpowers in ways beyond the control of their leaders. Washington will be compelled to direct all its efforts and resources toward East Asia, thus downscaling its interest and presence in the East European security complex to symbolic levels. For its part, Russia will play a key role as one of America's most important anti-Chinese allies. In exchange, it will be allowed or even supported to expand its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and will become a decisive player in the East European complex.

Obviously, Scenario A is the most probable and Scenario D the most unlikely. However, the actual consequences of the American foreign policy in the East European security complex cannot be appropriately analyzed without taking into consideration the European Union scenarios presented in the previous chapter. This will be done in the book's last chapter.

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CHAPTER 6

Europe's Great Powers and Small States

The analysis of this book cannot be complete without the close scrutiny of individual European states and of the way their respective foreign policy will impact the East European security complex. They are grouped into three categories: the West Europeans, with an emphasis on the three great powers (Germany, France, and the UK); the former communist members of the EU (divided into Central and South-East Europeans); and the Eastern Partnership states.

6.1 The West Europeans

6.1.1 Germany at the Center

As mentioned in Sect. 4.4, 'Germany's quiet geo-strategic rise' based on economic power and skillful diplomacy has placed it at the center of a continental web of multilateral and bilateral relationships. Berlin has succeeded in shaping the EU economic order—including the single market and the monetary union—in ways favoring its own needs. Its key position in the European Union, the partnership with France, and the close relationship with Russia have turned it into the emerging pivot of the European security architecture (Simón and Rogers 2010: 58, 61). Accordingly, 'it is invariably held to be in Germany that the future of the EU will be decided' (Oliver and Williams 2016: 560–561). This idea

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has been considerably enforced by developments related to the European Union's structural crisis described in Sect. 4.3. In particular, the associated crisis management architecture led to the claim that 'European integration had been hijacked by a new German hegemon' (Klinke 2015: 479). In a book titled *German Europe*, Ulrich Beck argued that the crisis forced the role of hegemon upon the strongest European economy despite the fact that Berlin never sought such a leadership. 'Europe's uncrowned queen of austerity, Angela Merkiavelli' simply took the EU to 'an era of involuntary domination in which it is ruled not by a German master but by a German *school* master' who teaches austerity politics to its neighbors (Beck 2013; Klinke 2015: 479–480). Jan Zielonka has also claimed that Germany represents the 'only one force left to reintegrate Europe,' even if 'neither Berlin nor its neighbours are particularly keen on such a German Europe' (Klinke 2015: 481).

Germany's reserve comes mainly from its 'culture of restraint' that gives preference to geoeconomic thinking over geopolitics (Oliver 2016: 216). Indeed, both German elites and citizens share 'a deeply ingrained culture of pacifism and disengagement' (Theil 2017: 13). They show a high degree of skepticism toward the use of hard power, take perpetual peace in Europe for granted, and do not find the claim that 'Germany needs to carry its fair share of Europe's security burden' very convincing (ibid.: 15). Germany is a genuine civilian power, and its unwillingness to contemplate the use of military force has limited the progress on the EU Common Security and Defense Policy despite the stated support of successive German governments for this policy (Oliver 2013: 25). Less peaceful-minded analysts have written about the country's 'risky' civilian power strategy, noting that in fact there is a guarantee of last resort represented by a constitutional commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the USA (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61). However, it is interesting that examples of 'Germany's newfound confidence' mention two opposing recent actions: on the one hand, Berlin's pacifist lack of support for the 2011 operation in Libya led by France, Britain, and the USA (Simón 2013: 10); on the other, the fact that it was Germany that supplied the main contingent of a multinational NATO force in Lithuania, a 'monumental step' given German pacifism and long-standing reluctance to confront Russia (Theil 2017: 13).

This step suggests that, due to the new geopolitical environment, something has started to change in Berlin. One should not expect a speedy move away from pacifism, of course. But due to Brexit and to

the election of President Trump, 'Germany's elite seemed to finally wake up to the country's economic vulnerability.' The US President's lack of sympathy for Berlin—which, like Beijing, is guilty of a large trade surplus—raised 'the specter of a dangerous breakdown' in the bilateral relationship. In turn, this has accelerated Germany's rethinking of its global role (Theil 2017: 12, 16). Internationally, an unpredictable American administration and an isolated UK have also associated Berlin with hopes for stability and leadership. At times, English language media have even called Chancellor Angela Merkel 'the leader of the free world.' In May 2017, she spoke publicly about Europe's need to 'rely less on the United States for its security and [to] press ahead with globalisation.' It is clear that—as explained in Sect. 4.4—more than other powers, Germany needs the present multilateral order based on rules of peaceful coexistence and free trade. Yet, it is not able to replace the USA in sustaining it: It is too small and has no significant military power, which makes it militarily dependent precisely on Washington. There is little that Chancellor Merkel can do from this position of weakness in terms of global leadership. 'The liberal world is looking to Berlin not because the world is going Germany's way, but because it is not' (*The Economist*, July 8, 2017). America is still indispensable to the Germans (Theil 2017: 11) and will continue to be so as long as sudden shift or progressive erosion does not limit significantly the US presence in Europe. However, if or rather when that happens, Berlin will see itself pushed once more toward regional leadership.

Speaking about 'Germany's continental destiny,' Luis Simón noted that:

> Germany is a continental power whose main interests are in Europe. Its geostrategic destiny is to assert its position as the geoeconomic and geopolitical hub of a stable and integrated pan-European settlement stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. (Simón 2013: 135)

Since the end of the Cold War, this core geostrategic objective of establishing a stable and predictable political and economic space in Europe (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61) had two partly contradictory dimensions: on the one hand, Berlin's commitment to the Euro-Atlantic multilateral settings and to the latter's extension to Eastern Europe; on the other, the establishment of a reliable partnership with Russia. The civilian power narrative and a broader understanding of multilateralism

were used to diminish the increasingly visible tension between these two orientations (Simón 2013: 136). Essential for this book, Moscow is perceived 'as a key stakeholder in the stability of Central and Eastern Europe - much to the chagrin of the countries in that region' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61).

An important pro-Russian shift in German foreign and economic policy happened to coincide with President Putin's adoption of a more assertive international behavior. Under Chancellor Kohl's successor, Gerhard Schroeder, Berlin went as far as adopting a 'Russia first' policy. Economic and political relations with Moscow were considerably intensified, especially in the field of energy. No criticism of President Putin's authoritarian practices was formulated. Relations with East European states were downgraded to please the Kremlin. Germany had been the leading European advocate for the accession to NATO of Central Europe and especially of Poland. Yet, when the Baltic states wanted to join the Alliance, Berlin showed far less support as it did not want to antagonize Moscow (Larrabee 2010: 46–47). Overall, Chancellor Schröder 'fitted the Kremlin's ideal of a European leader - partial toward Russia and dismissive of the concerns of smaller neighbors' (Lo 2015: 186). Critically, Germany is Russia's largest market for natural gas. It receives 20% of Russia's gas exports and 10% of the oil ones. This represents no less than 40% of its natural gas and 20% of its oil imports (Larrabee 2010: 47), which creates an obvious relation of economic dependence. There is no easy way for Berlin to diversify gas imports (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 5); moreover, Chancellor Schröder decided to further increase this dependence by approving the construction of the controversial Nord Stream gas pipeline from Russia to Germany beneath the Baltic Sea and bypassing Ukraine. As the project increases their vulnerability to Russian economic pressure, Poland and the Baltic states strongly reacted with then Polish Minister of Defense Radek Sikorski publicly comparing the pipeline decision to the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact (Larrabee 2010: 47; Braun 2012: 397). At the end of his tenure, Gerhard Schröder was rewarded by President Putin, his personal friend, with a key executive position at the Nord Stream AG German-Russian consortium (Theil 2017: 14). His successor as a Chancellor, Angela Merkel, has been less compliant. She has criticized authoritarian trends in Russia as well as Moscow's foreign policy. She rejected President Putin's attempts to sidestep the European Union, notably by supporting the EU Third Energy Package (Lo 2015: 186). However, at the same time, she continued to expand

bilateral economic ties and refused to cancel the Nord Stream pipeline. Politically, she strongly opposed President Bush's efforts to give NATO Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine at the 2008 Bucharest summit, thus blocking the two countries' NATO accession. Later that year, she was relatively slow in condemning the Kremlin's invasion of Georgia (Larrabee 2010: 47–48; Braun 2012: 397).

It was in 2012—when President Obama's 'reset' also came to an end—that a more negative attitude developed among the German political elite and general public. The largest wave of protest in post-Soviet Russia generated by Vladimir Putin's intention to return as President, the anti-protest legislation adopted by the Kremlin, and the Pussy Riot case contributed to the diminishing of Russia's approval rating in Germany from 48% in 2011 to 32% in September 2012 (Lo 2015: 186). This trend was eventually accentuated by the Ukrainian crisis, with Chancellor Merkel condemning the Crimean *Anschluss* and being instrumental in the imposition of EU sanctions (ibid.: 187). Yet, she made efforts to leave Russia's energy sector unaffected by these sanctions (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 5), which were very unpopular with Germany's business sector: Since 2014, about 500 Russian subsidiaries of German companies have been closed (Theil 2017: 14). In 2017, when the USA strengthened sanctions on the Russian energy sector, the German Chancellor continued to support the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline that would further increase her country's energy dependence on Russia in direct opposition to the policy of the European Union (ibid.: 14). Politically, she vehemently rejected calls by American officials for the West to arm Ukraine and, more generally, did everything in her power to avoid 'recreat[ing] an adversarial European security order' (Kanet and Sussex 2015: 5).

Anti-Russian policies are still opposed by many German citizens (Theil 2017: 14). The political class continues to share strong feelings of guilt for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union during WWII and is grateful to Mikhail Gorbachev for allowing German reunification at the end of the Cold War. The business lobby 'has adopted a supportive and sometimes collusive stance toward the Kremlin' (Lo 2015: 186). Accordingly, before 2012, there was a strong consensus among German political parties to support close ties with Russia (Larrabee 2010: 47). This is still the case within the business-oriented wing of Chancellor Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (*The Economist*, November 16, 2017). Its historical rival and sometimes governing partner, the Social Democratic Party—in

which Gerhard Schröder still wields influence—is overtly favorable to the Kremlin. During the crisis in Ukraine, the Social Democrat Foreign Minister of the coalition government led by Chancellor Merkel, Frank Walter Steinmeier, accused NATO of 'saber rattling' by deploying military units to the Baltic states (Theil 2017: 14). In March 2017, he became Germany's President; during a September visit to Moscow, he 'vowed to work against the "alienation" of the two countries and looked on as a pleased Vladimir Putin announced a revival of economic relations' (*The Economist*, November 16, 2017).

For its part, Russia perceives Germany as a critical partner because of its dominant political and economic influence in Europe. Berlin represents the main trading partner and source of foreign investment, as well as a primary energy customer whose intention to eliminate nuclear power can only increase the demand for Russian gas. Politically, Germany is rather soft on the Kremlin's authoritarian practices and opposes NATO enlargement in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well as Western intervention in Syria (Lo 2015: 185–186). Moscow is trying to use its close relationship with Berlin in order to strengthen its position in Europe; to counterbalance American geopolitical influence; to neutralize efforts intended at diminishing the European energy dependence on Russia; and to have access to advanced technology (ibid.: 186). Critically, there is a German implicit acknowledgment of a Russian sphere of influence in the CIS (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61).

Before Brexit, the vocal East European EU members—and especially the 'Cold Warriors' in Poland and the Baltic states—supported by Sweden and Britain have prevented Germany (and other Moscow-friendly EU members) from establishing a close European Union-Russia partnership. This has made Germany construct on its own the particularly strong relationship presented in the previous paragraphs (ibid.). Paradoxically, at least in part, the strength of this relationship is due precisely to its bilateral nature, which eliminated the tempering influence of any other state. Had it been a EU policy, it is likely that the Germans would have been made to accept a compromise based on a more moderate level of cooperation. For the future, as shown in the scenarios presented in Chapter 4, there is little doubt that the likely post-Brexit control of the European Union by the Franco-German axis and/or by Germany will result in the imposition of a EU-Russia partnership inspired by the German-Russian present one. This, however, has to be discussed in conjunction with the issue of USA possible departure

from Europe, as Germany might fill 'most of the gap left by America's ongoing' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 60; see Chapter 8). What can be said at this point is that, in the eventuality of a move toward neoclassical geopolitics of the entire East European security complex, the turning of Germany-the-civilian-power into a 'normal' great power will surely be a traumatic experience. The end of its Kantian 'culture of restraint' is something which at least the present generation of Germans is totally unprepared to. If regional developments impose it, it will certainly generate dramatic protests and heated debates. Another Stefan Zweig will certainly write a new *World of Yesterday*.

6.1.2 The French Art of Balancing

As explained by Mahan, historically France has been—and continues to be—a partly maritime, partly continental hybrid power. However, after Trafalgar and even more so after 1871, 'the bulk of France's geostrategic energies concentrated on the European continent' (Simón 2013: 124). A similar *longue durée* perspective cannot fail to emphasize its centuries-old political, diplomatic, and military efforts to balance the Habsburgs/Germany through Eastern alliances (at first with the Ottoman Empire, Sweden, and Poland; later with Russia; and with the East European states between the two World Wars). The French art of balancing probably reached one of its peaks with President de Gaulle, who used the close partnership with West Germany and the related European integration process in order to place Paris at least in part outside the rigid bipolarity of the Cold War. Ever since, 'France's position in the Atlantic alliance has been ambiguous and enigmatic' (Østerud 2016: 129). The end of the Cold War, however, turned the USA from superpower into hyperpower, to use once more Hubert Védrine's term, while a unified Germany had no Eastern enemy to face. In response, France tried to implicate Weimar Russia in European security discussions and made considerable efforts to promote European strategic autonomy (Simón 2013: 125). During the Iraq War crisis, vigorous anti-American balancing turned a very Gaullist Paris into the champion of multilateralism. However, it was the Eastern enlargement that put an end to France's exceptional position within Western Europe that had been due mainly to the weakness of Germany and to the peripheral position of the UK. Berlin's assertiveness and the increasingly predominant role of its civilian power approach as well as the relative decline of the West led to

a major change in French grand strategy based on the improvement of relations with the USA and the 2008 reintegration of the NATO command structure while preserving the goal of European strategic autonomy (ibid.: 153, 163–164; Østerud 2016: 130).

Other strategic partnerships that Paris has preserved or developed include the Franco-German axis, whose role will most likely increase considerably after Brexit even if, as explained in Chapter 4, serious problems might eventually emerge; the privileged security relationship with Britain initiated by the 1998 Saint Malo Declaration, upgraded by the 2010 Lancaster House treaties, and which will very probably continue after Brexit; and the cooperation with Poland that had developed both bilaterally and in the framework of the so-called Weimar Triangle bringing together Berlin, Paris, and Warsaw (Heisbourg 2016: 16) before President Macron's heavy criticism of the illiberal and anti-EU practices of the Polish government led to a strained bilateral relationship (Shotter and Chassany 2017). Even more relevant for Eastern Europe, France's efforts to 'plac[e] itself alongside Germany as a pivotal mainland power' (Simón and Rogers 2010: 58) made Paris explore the construction of a strategic partnership with Moscow.

In fact, France has been more critical of Russian authoritarianism than Germany, the economic relationship is significantly weaker, and activist French foreign policy went at times against Moscow's interests. However, historically, French-Russian relations have been strong. Both countries greatly admire each other's culture and civilization. They share a great power tradition and a high level of anti-Americanism that makes them prefer a multipolar order. The realist and pragmatic approach of French leaders based on a keen sense of the national interest has been highly appreciated in Moscow (Lo 2015: 187–188). Indeed, Paris might represent the EU actor best placed to understand the Russians' neoclassical geopolitical views. For example, at the 2008 Bucharest summit, France took the same hostile position as Germany toward the US plan of offering NATO Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine. Then Prime Minister François Fillon argued that this 'is not a good answer to the balance of power within Europe and between Europe and Russia' (Adler and Greve 2009: 59). Later that year, the French preoccupation with limiting tensions between Russia and the West as well as Paris' interest in representing an important regional player was illustrated by President Sarkozy's successful mediation that halted the escalation of the Georgian war (Østerud 2016: 135). Cultural exchanges were also developed; 2010

was the 'Year of Russia' in France. In 2011, President Sarkozy went as far as selling Mistral-class helicopter carriers to Russia that the Kremlin would have used to intimidate its pro-Western neighbors in the Black Sea region. A major joint venture in train manufacturing was also set up while the French GDF Suez got a share of the Nord Stream gas pipeline (Simón and Rogers 2010: 61). The French President made constant calls for pragmatism and economic cooperation and maintained a very lenient attitude toward the Kremlin at a time when other member states were expressing harsh criticism (Charillon and Wong 2011: 24). He was clearly 'less encumbered than most by normative concerns' and 'showed little inclination to speak out in support of smaller nations' (Lo 2015: 188). However, in 2012, the negative developments in Russia that darkened the regime's perception in the USA and Germany had a similar effect in France. Favorable opinions diminished to 31% from 56% one year earlier (Lo 2015: 188). Accordingly, François Hollande, who became President in 2012, was less enthusiastic than his predecessor about the cooperation with Moscow. The Ukrainian crisis significantly contributed to this trend. In September 2014, the Mistral deal was suspended 'amid a general hardening of French policy.' Russians' hopes for a Moscow-Berlin-Paris troika had 'become defunct' (ibid.: Østerud 2016: 135).

Yet, what President Hollande did during the rest of his tenure was another exercise in balancing. On the one hand, he closely cooperated with Chancellor Merkel to put pressure on Russia and deployed airborne surveillance to reassure the Baltic states and Poland. On the other hand, he rejected the idea of Ukraine's accession to NATO, tried to temper the progress of the Eastern Partnership in order to avoid provoking Moscow, and distanced himself from European anti-Russian hardliners. The Franco-German search for compromise with Russia led to the conclusion of the ineffective September 2014 and February 2015 Minsk agreements under the auspices of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Østerud 2016: 134–136). Undiscouraged, President Hollande stated at the July 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw that decided to deploy four multinational battalions to the alliance's eastern flank 'NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe's relations with Russia should be.' He added, 'for France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat' (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* 2016). It should be added that since late 2015 close French-Russian coordination has developed in Syria with respect to the fight against ISIS (Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 12; Østerud 2016: 130). Overall, Russia was 'not regarded

as a major opponent but as a partner.' The Ukraine crisis was perceived as 'a diplomatic quarrel that should be solved as soon as possible' (Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 11–12).

President Macron might have different ideas. In fact, he was the only important candidate to the 2017 French presidential election who was not pro-Russian. To diminish his chances, shortly before the election, the Kremlin-controlled Sputnik news agency went as far as presenting a totally fictitious poll that placed Moscow-friendly François Fillon at the top of voting options. Russian hackers also tried to influence the results (*The Economist*, November 4, 2017). Some weeks later, the new French President openly confronted President Putin at a meeting at Versailles about the role of Russian broadcasters he called 'agents of influence and propaganda' (*The Economist*, June 3, 2017; Bassets 2017).

More generally, President Macron has brought significant change to both domestic and foreign French policy. Like President Trump, he is a charismatic, atypical, and anti-conventional individual that nobody had expected to become President. He is also familiar with the intensive and effective use of social media. Yet, opposed to President Trump, he has presented himself—and has been perceived by national and international audiences—as the man who defeated the populist wave in Western Europe. He is pro-globalization, pro-EU, liberal, and cosmopolitan. 'If an anti-Trump party existed, Macron would be its leader' (Bassets 2017). When the USA left the Paris climate agreement, the French President invited American scientists and engineers to immigrate to France; he took the opportunity to launch the 'Make the Planet Great Again' slogan. His public image is that of a French as well as global leader (ibid.). Geopolitically, he has a very clear plan based on the idea of reinvigorating the European project as a way of restoring French leadership. As America is looking inward while internationally its 'image, global role, and reliability' look uncertain, there is a void that France is trying to fill. President Macron sees the European Union as ineffective, out of touch, and in need of reform. The engine of change can only be the Franco-German axis, which might bring what he calls a 'European renaissance.' Critically, this should include the deeper integration of the Eurozone that would lead to a newfound sense of self-confidence. However, the centerpiece of this plan is the emergence of a new era of continental defense cooperation that would include ad hoc coalitions (Nougayrède 2017: 2, 6–7), a joint intervention force, and a common doctrine for action (Drake 2017). With Germany still a civilian power and Britain

outside the EU and concentrated on internal issues, France would take a prominent role as the top European military power (Nougayrède 2017: 6). Different from the cases of Presidents Hollande and especially Sarkozy, there is little place for friendship with Russia in these plans. This, however, does not exclude pragmatic cooperation. In November 2017, he stated 'we should conduct an intensive dialogue with Russia despite the existing problems. (…) France is conducting such a dialogue and it will go ahead with it.' Moreover, he claimed that 'one should refrain from attempts to lecture others' (Drake 2017).

It is difficult to say how much of President Macron's intentions will materialize as his voluntarism is constrained by numerous structural factors. What is certain is that 'France is unquestionably a major power' (Lo 2015: 187) that will continue to play an important role in Europe. At the same time, the rise of Germany compels Paris to continue and further intensify its balancing efforts that cannot ignore the geopolitical advantages provided by the cooperation with Moscow. Despite President Macron's personal preferences, Paris will most likely support the partnership between a Franco-German-dominated EU and Russia. If the axis disintegrates and Berlin partially or completely renationalizes its foreign policy, the French need for active involvement in Eastern Europe will be even greater. To be sure, that will certainly not be an effort to acquire regional hegemony, for which France has neither the resources nor the mindset. Paris will always be an actor considerably less important in the East European regional security complex than Berlin or Moscow, but one that nobody will be able to ignore.

6.1.3 Brexiteer Britain

Historically, the other West European great power, the UK, has constantly struggled 'to strike the right balance between its global maritime persona and its European condition' (Simón 2013: 113). Brexit represents only the most recent of a long series of political decisions that have kept Britain away from 'normal' continental politics. Its causes were explained in Sect. 4.3. Economically, domestic consequences will depend on how 'hard' Brexit will be; yet, it is clear that, at least in the short- and medium-term, they will certainly not be positive. To give an example, almost eight out of ten cars produced in Britain are exported, mainly to the rest of the Europe Union. With the UK out of the single market, the mainly Japanese and American multinational companies

producing them will have strong incentives to move their activity to the continent. The supply chain—whose value to the British economy is two times bigger—will follow (McNamara 2014a). Something similar is expected to happen to a part of the City's financial services. The ensuing economic crisis might help Scottish nationalist win a new referendum for independence, with Britain losing 9% of its population and 8% of its GDP (Lindley-French 2016: 103). Internationally, Brexit will diminish considerably London's influence in international organizations and in all frameworks of multilateral negotiations. At a time when countries struggle to form regional alliances, the UK will break away from a singularly influential bloc of 28 in order to become one of the many states with little influence and negotiating power compared to the USA, the EU, or China (McNamara 2014b). In terms of foreign policy realignments, it is useful to remind Winston Churchill's 'Three Circles' speech of October 1948 that emphasized the fact that Britain's particular influence would derive from being located at the interface of the British Empire and Commonwealth, the English-speaking world (which included the USA), and a united Europe (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 175). Some of the Brexit supporters have claimed that the UK could fall back on its relationship with Commonwealth states. This is probably true for the poorest and strategically irrelevant ones, but important Commonwealth members such as Canada, Australia, India, or Nigeria simply are no more available as they already have developed close relationships with other great powers (McNamara 2014b). In fact, it was Churchill's second circle—and, more specifically, the partnership with the USA—that became and, in many ways, continues to be the most important one (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 179). This relationship, enhanced by shared language and Anglo-Saxon heritage, has even allowed certain historians to talk of an 'Anglo-American consciousness' (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 173). In any case, this partnership has allowed Britain to continue to exercise disproportionate influence on world events (Williams 1995: 235) even after its 1973 accession to the European Community, which explains why politicians like Margaret Thatcher called it the 'extra-ordinary relationship' (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 180). In fact, one of the main reasons that have helped preserve this partnership during the last four decades has been precisely Britain's membership of the EU and 'its self-appointed role as Atlantic intermediary' (ibid.: 196). Indeed, London's voice within the European Union has been 'essential and critical to the United States,' as repeatedly announced by successive US administrations (Böttcher

and Schmithausen 2014: 10–11). In 1999, Prime Minister Tony Blair acknowledged that his country's future was not that of a superpower but of 'a pivotal power, (…) a power that is at the crux of the alliances and international politics which shape the world,' mainly due to its status as America's most loyal and stalwart ally (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 180).

Consequently, Brexit will diminish British leverage in the US-UK relationship (Böttcher and Schmithausen 2014: 11) and possibly further encourage American policy-makers 'often without European roots or links' to look to Asia and leave Europe (MacShane 2015). In fact, the relationship has already started to decline after the end of the Cold War, when the British-US asymmetry in terms of power continued to grow while global power began to shift slowly away from the West (Dobson and Marsh 2014: 685). To Washington, the usefulness of a special relationship with a medium-sized power started to look less attractive (Marsh and Baylis 2006: 180). This has become so visible that the 'terminalist' camp emerged, represented by analysts who regard the special relationship as 'either finished or gasping its last breath' (Dobson and Marsh 2014: 673). They were given new and strong arguments after the election of Barack Obama, during whose tenure tensions emerged ranging from BP-bashing during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill to serious problems in key fields such as intelligence, nuclear, and military cooperation. Critically, Barack Obama was America's first self-styled 'Pacific President,' as illustrated by his 'pivot to Asia' strategy that indicated an accelerated US departure from Europe (ibid.: 673–674). The premature end of the 'reset' with Russia made British military assistance in Eastern Europe useful once more to Washington. In 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron brought a key contribution to the establishment of the NATO Rapid Reaction Force, a quarter of which was to be made up of UK troops (Lo 2015: 191). Still, there is no guarantee that such assistance will continue to be perceived as relevant in the case of a more resolute new 'pivot'-cum-'reset.' There is the risk that bilateral relations continue to be warm but unimportant from the US point of view, with British influence on its partner's foreign policy increasingly limited to military matters related to American-led interventionist coalitions (McNamara 2014b).

Yet, for the time being, President Trump is very favorable to both Britain and Brexit. He had 'nothing but kind words and generous sentiments for a nation he believes will be his strongest ally' and described himself as 'a big fan of the UK' (Gove 2017). He even brought back

to the Oval Office a bronze bust of Winston Churchill that President Obama had returned to the British embassy in 2009. In contrast to President Obama's tenure, at present, 'prospects for deepening the Anglo-American "special relationship" are very propitious' (Harnden 2017) despite minor tensions triggered by some of President Trump's twits. London is obviously doing everything in its power to ensure the survival of the partnership with Washington, which is instrumental in the preservation of Britain's global power status. The UK has made itself useful to the USA due to its well-equipped and well-trained armed forces and to its global diplomatic, military, and intelligence infrastructure (Simón and Rogers 2010: 63). The partnership also covers nuclear cooperation and cutting-edge technology such as stealth or submarine acoustics (Heisbourg 2016: 14). It is not difficult to infer that Britain will try to preserve as much as possible of its influence on the USA by being politically and militarily hyperactive in areas critical to American security. Such regions characterized by significant British presence, interests, and potential might be identified based on the list of recent UK involvement in armed actions, which includes Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Libya. While sub-Saharan Africa is less relevant, the Middle East and North Africa as well as Eastern Europe will predictably continue to represent areas where London will do its best to assist its American ally.

It was claimed that, after Brexit, 'the UK would likely be less influential in Europe than before, but not catastrophically so' (ibid.). NATO will certainly represent the most important institutional framework for Britain's security interactions with the continent (Lain 2017). A close relationship with the European Union might also be maintained as both actors will be interested in solving the same crises while enhancing their respective global roles (Oliver 2013: 25). In fact, the UK 2017 paper on Foreign Policy, Defense, and Development mentions explicitly a 'deep and special partnership with the EU that goes beyond existing third-country arrangements' and might even lead to the creation of a strong security alliance (Lain 2017). The same is true for the London-Paris relationship already presented in the previous section. Given the two countries' 'commonality of interest and ambition' as nuclear powers and permanent member of the UN Security Council, the conventional and nuclear defense cooperation introduced by the 2010 Lancaster House treaties will surely continue (Heisbourg 2016: 13–14). In security terms, Britain will also cooperate with West European states bilaterally

as well as within the OSCE (Oliver 2013: 25). Overall, there are reasons to believe that all these cooperative frameworks will ensure the survival of a strong security partnership leading to effective action on issues of common interest such as the fight against Islamist terrorism, the control of migratory flows, or crisis management in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. However, the cooperation within the East European security complex itself—and, more specifically, the attitude toward Russia and Russian-associated crises in Eastern Europe—will critically depend on the coincidence of views between London and the EU (i.e., the Franco-German axis and/or Germany). It is likely that major differences will develop in this field soon after Brexit.

The post-Brexit UK and Russia share two important features: Geographically and geopolitically, both occupy peripheral European positions and both seek status as global powers. After the end of the Cold War, their bilateral relationship was marked by a period of engagement and accommodation; even during the Iraq war crisis, Prime Minister Tony Blair spoke frequently about the need to engage Russia (David 2011: 201). In Moscow, Britain was seen as a 'strategic partner' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 42). However, disappointment and disapprobation became dominant in 2006–2008. The alleged Russian state-sponsored murder of former FSB agent Alexandr Litvinenko, at that time a British citizen, was only one of the many issues leading to open diplomatic tension and mistrust that included accusations of espionage, the mutual expelling of diplomats, and the imposition of visa restrictions on traveling officials. Relations further worsened due to the 2008 Georgia war. A period of 'wary co-operation and pragmatic engagement' ensued (David 2011: 207; Leonard and Popescu 2007: 42). It is interesting that economic cooperation continued much longer than the political one, with Britain representing an important trade partner and one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment into Russia (Lo 2015: 190; David 2011: 207). Still, during the Ukrainian crisis, London followed Washington's hard line and was one of the champions of the EU imposing of sanctions on Moscow. It also helped establish the NATO Rapid Reaction Force, stationed 800 troops in Estonia, sent Typhoon fighters to the Black Sea Southern Air Policing Mission, and took command of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (Lain 2017; Lo 2015: 191). Accordingly, relations with the Kremlin have reached a historical low, with disagreements on 'virtually every high-profile issue' and a 'highly antagonistic perceptions of each other' (Lo 2015: 190).

During the now remote period of engagement and accommodation, the UK tried to become an effective interlocutor between the USA and Russia (David 2011: 201). Instead, President Putin has come to see it as 'little more than a US puppet' (Lindley-French 2016: 107), 'an irritating junior partner of the USA, largely alienated from the rest of Europe and with little independent influence in international affairs.' The Russian President's spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, is said to have called Britain 'a small island no one listens to' (Lo 2015: 190–191). The Kremlin's disinterest in the bilateral relationship is reflected by the fact that the UK was mentioned in the 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept as a country worth boosting mutually beneficial ties but disappeared from the 2016 edition of the document, which nevertheless emphasized relations with Germany, France, and Italy (Lain 2017).

Brexit will not improve bilateral relations. In October 2017, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Boris Johnson, held talks with representatives of Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia to assure them of 'Britain's unconditional and immovable commitment to the security and defence of Europe;' he mentioned explicitly the growing threat from Russia (Kirby 2017). As repeatedly mentioned in previous chapters, the UK has been the strongest EU supporter of East European anti-Russian member states and its stand has been instrumental in preventing Germany, France, and their allies from having the European Union adopt Russian-friendly policies. Brexit will change this within the European Union, but London has no reason to put an end to its support that will continue both through NATO and bilaterally. As long as Washington continues to have a difficult relation with Moscow, this will help Britain demonstrate its geopolitical usefulness and will therefore contribute to the enforcement of the UK-US partnership. President Trump's obsession with China and his business-inspired understanding of foreign policy will certainly make him appreciate British political, diplomatic, and military involvement in the East European regional security complex that would spare American resources. The only question concerns the unlikely but nevertheless possible scenario of a US-Russia grand alignment. In that case, British support for anti-Russian East Europeans will be hardly appreciated in Washington. Accordingly, London's involvement in the region will certainly be downscaled. Yet, if Russia and the Franco-German axis and/or Germany start to divide Eastern Europe between their respective spheres of influence, it is

probable that the UK will maintain a significant political and diplomatic regional presence. This will enhance its great power status, help influence the continental security balance, and possibly lead to the construction of useful bilateral partnerships with important East European actors such as Poland. Like France, post-Brexit Britain will likely continue to play an important role in the East European security complex.

6.1.4 The Other West Europeans

The largest remaining West European states, Italy—which developed strong economic relations with Russia—and Spain, shared Germany's and France's Moscow-friendly attitude and were perceived by the Kremlin as 'strategic partners' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 31). The Ukrainian crisis has somewhat troubled this harmonious relationship, but this was against their will; both Rome and Madrid are highly favorable to the lifting of sanctions and to 'return to business as usual' (Larrabee et al. 2017: xiv, 19), even if in late 2017 the Spaniards were irritated by Russian support for independence-minded Catalans. This is also the case of what Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu called 'the friendly pragmatists,' a category that, in Western Europe, includes Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, Malta, and Portugal. These smaller West European states are less involved in EU foreign policy making, prefer not to confront Russia, and want to 'focus on advancing pragmatic business interests' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 36). In the future, they will certainly add to Italy and Spain in supporting the Franco-German axis and/or Germany to establish a partnership with Moscow.

The situation might be different in the case of some of the 'frosty pragmatists,' a group that, in Western Europe, in addition to the UK included Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. They promoted their business interests in Russia, but nevertheless raised constantly concerns about the regime's authoritarian trends and about the situation of human rights. In fact, despite its criticism due to a values-based foreign policy approach, Ireland has had little interest in Russia. The Dutch were very vocal on issues related to the situation of human rights there, but 'not strongly enough to endanger trade and economic relations' that have developed significantly (ibid.). Besides the UK, only the Scandinavians—and in particular the Swedes—have strongly supported East European EU members feeling threatened by the Kremlin. Their attitude has further hardened since the beginning

of the Ukrainian crisis; the Russians have responded with numerous actions of harassment and intimidation. It is interesting to note that similar aggressive actions concern Finland, initially a member of the 'friendly pragmatist' group that eventually felt directly threatened by President Putin's regional policies and, like Sweden, started to contemplate closer cooperation with NATO despite being a neutral country (Larrabee et al. 2017: 12–13). In the case of a future rapprochement between the Franco-German axis and Moscow that would sacrifice the interests of the Baltic states, the only opposition within the Western part of the European Union will probably come from Stockholm. The rest will follow the line set by Berlin and Paris in order to promote their own economic interests, to put an end to threats and regional instability, and ultimately to ensure the survival of their Kantian geopolitical vision within the European Union or at least within its Western part. Sweden might continue to think otherwise, but this will obviously be insufficient to impact significantly the evolution of the East European security complex. However, with the support of a larger group of East European EU members, of the USA, and of the UK, its actions might not be completely useless. This suggests that the former communist members of the European Union could play a certain role in shaping regional evolutions. Still, the importance of this role depends on their ability to form a reasonably coherent group.

6.2 The Former Communist Members of the EU

As there are important differences between the northern and southern East European members of the European Union, the two groups will be analyzed separately.

6.2.1 The Central Europeans

Surprisingly, even within the quite homogenous northern group made up of the four Visegrad countries and the three Baltic states, the coherence mentioned at the end of the previous section seems to have become a remote goal. In regard to their attitude toward Russia, the Central European post-communist members of the European Union represent today the reunion of two very different groups. Unlike 'friendly pragmatist' Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, the more 'cold warrior'

Poland and Baltic states have been more or less constantly skeptical of the possibility of political cooperation with Russia, which also translated in frequent economic disputes. Critically, they have 'actively sought to shape a more critical EU line' toward Moscow (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 48). This is due to 'reflexive anti-Russian sentiments stemming from the Soviet Union' (Duke 2017: 91) and the more remote past. For their part, the Poles can hardly forget the three partitions of their country, Stalin's massacre of the elite of the Polish army at Katyn and his complicity in the Nazi crushing of the 1944 Warsaw uprising, as well as Poland's satellite status after 1945 (Lo 2015: 189). In a climate increasingly marked by nationalist ideas, one might easily imagine the effect of simply being reminded the chronology of the last two centuries and a half:

> 1772 Russians entered, 1793 Russians entered, 1795 Russians entered, 1831 Russians left but they entered again, 1863 Russians left but they have entered again, 1918 Russians have left, 1920 Russians entered but left soon, 1930 Russians entered, 1944 Russians entered, 1981 allegedly Russians were about to enter, 1992 Russians say that they will leave in a moment, 1993 Russians have left, 1994 Russians say that they will come again, 1995 Russians say that it [is] too early for NATO, 1996 Russians have invented the corridor to have a way to enter. (*Gazeta Polska* quoted by Kuus 2007: 34)

Except for brief periods—the most recent being associated with President Obama's 'reset'—Polish-Russian relations have been poor since the end of the Cold War. Warsaw has constantly accused the Kremlin of retaining imperial ambitions and has tried—at times, successfully—to 'Europeanize' all bilateral disputes. In turn, Moscow has accused the Poles of systematically destroying any prospect of improving EU-Russia relations (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 50; Lo 2015: 190). Poland as well as the Baltic states—whose fear of Russia is even stronger—has similarly instrumentalized NATO (Larrabee 2010: 45). However, the most ambitious action was related to the Polish effort to modify the EU agenda in a way conductive to 'pull[ing] Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia into the Western orbit' (Bugajski 2007: 18). Indeed, as already mentioned in Sect. 4.2, the Eastern Partnership was created on the basis of the plan conceived by the Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski in association with the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt

(Sakwa 2015a: 62, 2015b: 117–119). When Moscow's counteroffensive led to the Maidan revolution, Warsaw strongly supported the pro-Western Ukrainian forces. The ensuing crisis brought the confrontation with Russia out into the open. Poland—accompanied by the Baltic states—vehemently condemned the Crimean *Anschluss*, advocated harsh EU sanctions, and ensured an enhanced NATO military presence on their territory. The four countries 'return[ed] to the traditional view of Russia as an existential threat' (Lo 2015: 190).

However, this is not the way the other three members of the Visegrad group see the situation. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia have preferred to give precedence to their economic and energy interests. Their cautious and reserved approach includes a negative attitude toward EU sanctions against Moscow, which in their opinion damage their own economies more than that of Russia (Larrabee et al. 2017: 61). In fact, at least in certain cases 'friendly pragmatism' seems a weak term. For Hungary, 'a state captured by Russia' was proposed as an alternative label. One of the reasons that gave the Kremlin-friendly Fidesz ruling party a 'supermajority' at the 2014 election was a one-time gas price reduction by Moscow that led to a significant decrease in household utility costs. The Fidesz government awarded the construction contract for the Paks II nuclear reactors to Rosatom, a Russian state corporation, without any tender. A €10 billion line of credit generously offered by Russia will finance the project (Krekó and Győri 2017). In the Czech Republic, the populist and Euroskeptic President Miloš Zeman was called 'President Vladimir Putin's Trojan Horse in the eurozone' due to his overtly pro-Kremlin attitude. He has forged an informal alliance with Andrej Babiš, the equally populist and Euroskeptic Prime Minister at the head of a minority government brought to power by the October 2017 parliamentary election. President Zeman seems to be in the process of making Prime Minister Babiš, a controversial billionaire and the country's second-richest man, understand the business advantages stemming from a partnership with Russia (Berman 2017).

Therefore, nobody expects the Visegrad group as a whole to become hostile to the Kremlin. Yet, many were surprised by the direct confrontation opposing it to Brussels. Indeed, the four countries' disagreement with the migrant policy of the European Union led to their brutal refuse to accept refugees on their territory, which in turn made the EU Commission launch infringement procedures. Another area of strong disagreement was the group's 2017 rejection of any plan for a

multi-speed Europe that might have pushed them toward the Union's periphery (Rogers 2017). Finally and more importantly, in both Poland and Hungary, populist nationalist ruling parties have started to construct 'illiberal democracies.' This 'toxic combination of unfair elections and crude majoritarianism' that follows President Putin's example is based on 'the rejection of international democratic standards in favor of perceived national interests' (Puddington 2017: 2–3). The 'archconservative' Law and Justice Party in Poland and Viktor Orbán's nationalist Fidesz party in Hungary are openly replacing liberal values and democratic norms with what Prime Minister Orbán 'calls an "Eastern" approach based on a strong state, a weak opposition, and emaciated checks and balances' (ibid.: 35). As this is seriously undermining the very normative and legal foundations of the European Union, the EU Commission has taken legal action against both governments that might have serious consequences for Poland's and Hungary's very membership of the Union. It goes without saying that all this is hardly helpful to Warsaw's efforts to mobilize the entire EU against the Russian threat. Paradoxically, on top of that, the Polish government uses refugee-friendly Berlin as a bogeyman and keeps evoking Nazi crimes in Poland during World War II to further mobilize anti-German sentiment (*The Economist*, July 8, 2017). Simultaneously, antagonizing Russia, Germany, and the European Union might help increase nationalist electoral support domestically, but is hardly a productive foreign policy strategy even if the USA and Britain continue to support Warsaw. Yet, the Polish case might represent an *avant-goût* of the region's geopolitical future. By now, it is clear that the spectacular progress of Europeanization in Central Europe during the 1990s wasn't that successful, after all. Democratic conditionality seemed to result in irreversible democratic consolidation and in the interiorization of the EU Kantian, win-win geopolitical vision. However, all this is now threatened by the populist wave much more dramatically than in Western Europe, which suggests a dangerous fragility of democratic convictions and institutions. If Poland and Hungary, two of Brussels' best pupils, find themselves in this situation, it is hard to believe that populism will not expand elsewhere in the region. The probable 'dictatorship' of the Franco-German axis within the EU and its concessions to Russia are likely to enforce the support for nationalist forces and populist leaders in the eastern part of the European Union. Once in power, they will act undemocratically, which will push their countries to the periphery of or even outside the Union. Associated lack of security will

inevitably make neoclassical geopolitics dominant in the region, which in turn will further contribute to political and military instability.

6.2.2 The South-East Europeans

This line of reasoning also applies to the Balkans. Bulgaria and Romania already find themselves in one of European Union's peripheral circles. Their accession was delayed by three years, they are not members of the Eurozone or of Schengen, they have rampant corruption that affects visibly the working of democratic institutions, their economies are weak, and their standards of living cannot compare with those of Central Europe, which results in massive emigration. The situation of the Western Balkan states that were promised EU membership is even worse. Finally, few still believe that Greece's economy and level of corruption are compatible with the membership of the EU core.

Moreover, many of the region's states are strongly pro-Russian and contemplate close partnerships with Moscow. In a large measure, this is due to cultural and historical affinities. During the nineteenth century, Russia's diplomatic and military actions supported significantly the Balkan countries' struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire. Orthodox Christianity and, for Slavic countries, Moscow's pan-Slavism have created strong feelings of solidarity. This explains why today the Kremlin's 'Trojan horses' in the European Union are two states that have not experienced communism: Greece and Cyprus. Indeed, both 'have frequently placed their economic and political interests and their fear of alienating Russia above their commitment to EU' (Leonard and Popescu 2007: 30). The Greeks have a long tradition of leftist anti-Americanism. In recent years, harsh austerity measures imposed by Brussels under the pressure of Berlin have greatly enforced hostility toward Germany and the European Union. For practical reasons, most Greeks do want to remain in the Eurozone, the EU, and NATO; but it is Russia they idealize as a brotherly protector and partner. In 2014, it was favorably seen by no less than 61% of respondents. Recent events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine have barely affected their preferences (Lo 2015: 193). For its part, Greek-speaking Cyprus adds to similar cultural and historical affinities a very pragmatic reason: Since the end of the Cold War, it has represented one of the main tax havens used by Russian oligarchs for money laundering. Economic and cultural ties to Moscow are so important that EU officials expressed concerns about

the Kremlin becoming able to influence Cypriot policies (Larrabee et al. 2017: 62–63).

Equally pro-Russian Bulgaria is not so outspoken only because its weak position within the EU imposes a more cautious behavior. This ambiguity, however, is not new: From the late nineteenth century, Sofia's foreign policy followed for a long time the 'always with Germany, never against Russia' principle. Today, Germany has been replaced by the EU, but Russia is always there. In addition to anti-Ottoman and, later, anti-Yugoslav support, Orthodox Christianity, and pan-Slavism, the Russian-Bulgarian common past includes the extremely close partnership of the communist period, when 'Soviet education and mixed marriages even contributed to a certain Russification of the Bulgarian communist elite' (Tudoroiu 2014: 171). The communist dictator, Todor Živkov, asked twice for his country to be turned into the 16th Soviet Socialist Republic; it was the Soviet leadership that rejected the proposal. Economic ties inherited from the communist period continue to be very strong, especially with regard to Bulgarian dependence on Russian gas. Moscow remains close to many political groups and networks in Bulgaria, including both left (i.e. ex-communist) and extreme right ones, and to the intelligence services. This has allowed the Kremlin to influence Sofia's foreign and domestic policies in ways serving Russian interests (Larrabee et al. 2017: 61). It is interesting that two Bulgarian populist Prime Ministers, Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (2001–2005) and Boyko Borisov (2009–2013, 2014–January 2017, and May 2017–Present), took advantage of the political opportunities created by the Bush administration's interest in the region of the Black Sea in order to adopt anti-Russian foreign policies. However, both soon tempered their efforts after realizing that their new orientation was disliked by their own supporters and would have translated into significant electoral losses (Tudoroiu 2014: 170–172). An example of how local preferences and Russian influence converge in Bulgaria is provided by the 2012 canceling of shale-oil exploration contracts with Chevron by Prime Minister Borisov due to street protests. Eventually, links were revealed between those protests and two ecologically un-friendly factors: a €20 million media campaign promoted by Russian-related companies and the strong involvement of the 'aggressively pro-Russia' Ataka extreme right party (Puddington 2017: 42).

Neighboring Serbia is only a candidate to EU accession; yet, it is also 'the most obvious candidate to be a [Russian] client-state.' The

Serbs add to cultural and historical reasons very similar to those of the Bulgarians the anti-Western heritage of the Yugoslav wars, which included the 1999 NATO bombing of their country during the Kosovo war (Lo 2015: 193–194). If and when they join the European Union, Moscow will likely have a new Trojan horse at Brussels.

Things are in part different in Romania. Due to their Latin origin, Romanians are hardly sensible to pan-Slavic rhetoric. Serious historical disputes with Russia that include the loss of what represents today the territory of the Republic of Moldova and parts of Ukraine as well as the traumatic imposition of Stalinism after World War II make Moscow and its expansionist plans highly unpopular among the common people. Accordingly, President Traian Băsescu (2004–2014) conducted a resolutely anti-Russian foreign policy. In particular, he attempted to create a 'Bucharest-London-Washington axis' targeting the Kremlin's regional influence: 'it is time for the Black Sea to cease being a Russian lake' (quoted by Tudoroiu 2008: 404). However, Romania is not Poland. After the end of his second presidential term, Băsescu became politically irrelevant. Out of the two remaining major political forces, the Social Democratic Party (which is the more or less reformed former Communist Party) has constantly been discreetly pro-Russian. Its main rival, the National Liberal Party, was controlled until 2014 by Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu (Prime Minister between 2004 and 2008) and his close associate, the late Dinu Patriciu. The latter, a billionaire very interested in CIS energy deals, famously compared Russia with a bear sharing the same cage. At a meeting of the European Energy Forum in Sofia, he explained that 'you have to invest in the side of the cage where the bear is and the bear has to be convinced and allowed to invest in energy projects in Europe' (ibid.: 407). The present leadership of the National Liberal Party does not share such views, but other business-oriented prominent members will always be tempted by advantageous deals proposed by Russian partners. This is to say that, unlike Greece or Bulgaria, Romania is not part of the camp of Moscow enthusiasts. Still, after the end of the Băsescu era, its position is somewhere between 'frosty' and 'friendly pragmatists' and, under certain conditions, might further move toward the second category.

To summarize, the northern post-communist states are divided between viscerally anti- and pragmatic pro-Russians; at the same time, the mixed Visegrad group has started to antagonize Brussels, with two of its members developing increasingly anti-democratic trends that question

their very sharing of European norms and values. To the South, with the relative exception of Romania, all states hail Russia and hope to become its preferential partners while the group's EU membership has an undeniable peripheral flavor. It is clear that it would be naïve to expect any coherence in these states' responses to either a compromise or a conflict between Russia and the Franco-German axis and/or Germany. Their strategic decisions will certainly be based on opportunistic calculations that will have very little to do with any Kantian concept. Moreover, 'geopolitical recession' is likely to be accompanied by democratic regression. Overall, it is not the action of post-communist EU member states that might prevent the region from being turned into a full-fledged neoclassical geopolitical arena.

6.3 The Eastern Partnership States

The eastern part of the European Union will likely become such an arena sometime in the future. The western part of the CIS has already become one years ago. The 2008 Georgia war was one of the first consequences of President Putin's anti-Western turn. Yet, the events associated with the November 2013 Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit are even more representative as they illustrate the wider Russian offensive. As shown in Sect. 3.2, concerned CIS republics included what used to be called the GUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) as well as Armenia; Belarus had withdrawn from the partnership due to EU criticism of its heavily authoritarian regime (Cameron and Orenstein 2012: 33–34). As aptly noted by Nicu Popescu,

> [the Eastern Partnership's] strongest point was not what the EU actually did, but the fact that most post-Soviet states were desperate to increase their cooperation with the EU (although not necessarily join it), often as a way of hedging against Russia. (Popescu 2014: 37)

The first victim of Russian efforts to block this dangerous trend, Armenia, represents a very interesting example precisely because, since its independence, it had been Moscow's strategic partner in the Caucasus. This was mainly due to the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan. Military victory due to Russian assistance not only gave the control of the disputed territory to the Armenians but also led to continued hostility between Yerevan and Baku resulting in

geostrategic isolation. In particular, the Armenians have been excluded from the very profitable Azeri-centered regional energy projects. In turn, this reinforced the reliance on the Russian ally. For its part, the latter has been fully satisfied with the strategic benefit of deploying 5000 troops south of Georgia and between Turkey and Iran (Torbakov 2010: 36). Armenia did try to put an end to its dependence, but this led to opposite results. In October 2009, 'football diplomacy' resulted in the unexpected normalization of the relations with Turkey and the opening of the common border. However, the success was short-lived as Azeri pressure led to a change of mind in Ankara. Turkey swiftly returned to its former policy line; by the end of April 2010, the agreement was 'effectively dead' (Ambrosio 2011: 102, 105). Moreover, the Kremlin made sure that this situation would not repeat itself: In August, the Armenian and Russian Presidents signed a new defense agreement extending Moscow's lease of the military base in the city of Gyumri until 2044 and committing Russia to modernizing Armenia's military hardware. Even more importantly, the agreement formally made Moscow a guarantor of the country's security (Rasizade 2011: 226). The Vilnius summit seemed to provide at least a partial escape from the Kremlin's suffocating embrace. Once more, Armenian efforts failed. Strong political and economic pressure compelled Yerevan to reject Brussels' offer and join the Russian-led Customs Union instead. In January 2015, Armenia became a full-fledged member of the Eurasian Economic Union. It also takes part in the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization, and the military relationship with Moscow has been visibly intensified. In November 2016, Armenia joined Russia's anti-aircraft defense system. The Kremlin deployed advanced Navodchik-2 and Takhion UAV drones, Mi-24 helicopter gunships, and, in February 2017, Iskander-M ballistic missiles on its territory. This was put in relation with the Russian intervention in Syria, but the Iskander missiles can strike targets in Azerbaijan and Israel, too. In 2017, President Serzh Sargsyan announced discussions with the Russians on the creation of a joint military-industrial complex in the city of Gyumri, where the 102nd Russian military base is also located (Murinson 2017). The country remains little more than the Kremlin's pawn and provides an excellent example of how Moscow would like to interact with all its CIS neighbors.

However, if the child does not behave, harsher methods are envisaged. Like Armenia, Ukraine opted for the Eurasian path due to Russian pressure. Yet, this resulted in the Maidan revolution, to which Moscow

responded with military invasion in Crimea and hybrid warfare in the Donbass. President Putin taught the bad pupil a lesson and in the process took direct or indirect control of territories that include the strategically important naval base in Sebastopol. However, in a larger perspective, this might not have been such a good idea. These territories contained the bulk of pro-Russian Ukrainian voters. The attitudes toward Moscow of people in what remains of Ukraine 'have hardened to a considerable degree'; the appeal of the European Union and NATO has considerably increased. The bilateral relationship had always had ups and downs, but before 2014 most Ukrainians 'generally hoped to get along with Russia'; that is no longer the case. In April 2017, 57% of them had negative or very negative attitudes toward the aggressive neighbor, which was still supported by only 17%. A 'Ukrainian national identity has taken hold [that] includes a strong anti-Russian animus' (Pifer 2017). The EU association agreement whose rejection before the Vilnius summit triggered President Yanukovych's fall was signed by his pro-Western successor in June 2014 and took effect in September 2017. It does not promise EU membership, but if fully implemented it would bring Ukraine close to matching the Union's political and economic accession criteria (ibid.). The problem—which is common to all the countries in the region; the case of Moldova is detailed in the next chapter—is that Ukraine does not seem to move in that direction. As shown by opinion polls, Ukrainians' top worry is not war; it is corruption. Yet, in December 2017, the authorities arrested Mikheil Saakashvili, former President of Georgia, former Poroshenko-nominated governor of Odessa, and leader of a vocal anti-corruption campaign. He was set free by supporters, recaptured by the police, and set free once more by a judge. At the same time, President Poroshenko's followers dismissed the head of a key anti-corruption parliamentary committee and launched coordinated actions to neutralize Ukraine's only independent anti-graft body, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, which had aggressively prosecuted corrupt high-ranking politicians (Eristavi 2017). This was seen as a move intended to show the President's will and ability to protect corrupt oligarchs from prosecution in exchange for their support at the next elections. President Poroshenko and his associates are also in the process of 'squeezing the media and cracking down on their critics' (ibid.). This corrupt-oligarchs-vs.-pro-European-citizens story gives a bitter impression of *déjà vu*; in some years of time, the country might experience its third revolution since 2004. In conjunction with continued political and

military Russian pressure, this makes 'the status of Ukraine (…) ambiguous for some time to come' (Duke 2017: 96).

Returning to Moscow's actions, two aspects have to be mentioned. On the one hand, in strategic terms, they show President Putin's willingness to escalate tensions into serious conflict (but not overt war) in the region; bad pupils, he suggests, should reconsider their attitude. On the other hand, a more theoretical analysis emphasizes the critical importance of domestic factors. These were fully taken into consideration when assessing Russia as well as the causes and effects of the populist wave in the USA, Britain, and the rest of the European Union. Yet, in the CIS, cases like Belarus or Armenia might give the impression of monolithic and opaque billiard balls controlled by the larger Russian one. This is mainly due to the fact that those two countries have stable authoritarian regimes that monopolize the process of foreign policy making and prevent the emergence of organized political groups with different international agendas. Yet, the zigzagged evolution of Ukraine, which experienced two revolutions in ten years, shows that domestic factors can override external constraints in the CIS and significantly modify one state's foreign policy with major consequences for the entire region. Moreover, Russia's actions in Ukraine show that the Kremlin itself devotes much effort precisely to influencing and manipulating domestic actors in the target country as explained in Chapter 3. The Ukrainian case has already been analyzed exhaustively under this aspect in the literature. This is why the next chapter scrutinizes the way geopolitical and domestic factors have interacted in shaping the foreign policy of a less known but very representative CIS republic, Moldova.

To conclude this chapter, a hierarchy can be identified in European states' ability to influence geopolitical interactions within the East European security complex. The Franco-German axis will likely acquire unprecedented influence by taking control of the European Union. If, as explained in Chapter 4, both the axis and the Union decline, Germany will become the prime West European actor; still, its potential will clearly diminish with respect to that of a German-controlled EU. In that eventuality, France will join Britain as smaller but nevertheless relevant powers trying to influence the balance between Berlin and Moscow. Other West European states such as Sweden in conjunction with East European members like Poland might use USA and British support in order to promote their own, independent regional agenda. But most post-communist EU members as well as the CIS republics will have to face a difficult

regional environment and to deal with major domestic challenges related to the rise of populist nationalism. This will probably result in the development of authoritarian regimes sharing neoclassical geopolitical views. Possible regional scenarios will be presented in the last chapter of the book, but the case of the Republic of Moldova will be examined first as it provides a good insight of the Russia vs. the West regional game.

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CHAPTER 7

Domestic and Geopolitical Factors: Moldova as a CIS Case Study

Since the dismantlement of the Soviet Union, the small, poor, divided, and corrupt Republic of Moldova has represented an excellent example of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member trying to accommodate Russian hegemony and European hopes. During the last decade, it has experienced a temporarily pro-Moscow authoritarian regime, an enthusiastically pro-Brussels democratic ruling coalition, the total capture of the state by one of its pro-European oligarchs, the latter's *cohabitation* with a widely popular pro-Russian President, and a civil society-originated democratic movement that desperately tries to fight both. The Kremlin's persuasive efforts have included active propaganda, threats, trade embargos, gas blackmailing, harassment of migrant workers, as well as the instrumentalization of the frozen conflict in Transnistria and of the failed frozen one in Gagauzia. As a result of interrelated domestic and geopolitical developments, a country that five years ago used to be called an 'EU success story' is preparing to vote democratically in the 2018 parliamentary election for a return to the Russian sphere of influence. This certainly makes it worth scrutinizing by students of the region's present and future geopolitical trends.

The following sections briefly present Moldova's post-independence evolution; the Transnistrian frozen conflict as well as its instrumentalization by Russia, the irrelevance of the European Union, and Germany's little known but highly relevant involvement in the negotiation process; the ups and downs of the complex Moldovan-Russian

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relationship; the Moscow-engineered reignition of the Gagauz failed frozen conflict in the context of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis; and finally the key issue of state capture and its surprising geopolitical consequences.

7.1 Moldova's Domestic Landscape: Poor, Divided, and Vulnerable

During its first two years as an independent state, Moldova's production dropped by 60% and its citizens' purchasing power by 80%. For the rest of the 1990s, real GDP fell on average by 10% per year. Consequently, Moldova is the poorest country in Europe and the third poorest in the CIS. GDP per capita is ten times lower than the average of European Union's post-communist member states (Crowther 2004: 37; Ghinea and Panainte 2009: 99; Lupușor et al. 2017: 5). Chances of improvement are low, as the economy is based on the export of relatively unprocessed agricultural products (traditionally, on the Russian market) that is vulnerable to political shocks. There is total dependence on external energy supplies, also mainly from Russia (Całus 2016c: 7). In recent years, slow and unsustainable economic growth has been accompanied by the erosion of competitiveness and by the inability to provide jobs for the generation with ages around 30 (see Lupușor et al. 2017: 5–6). In turn, this resulted in mass emigration. Moldovans first moved mainly to Italy, Spain, and Portugal. In 1998, remittances represented 7.1% of the country's GDP. In 2007, they reached 36.2%, the second highest world level in relative terms (Institutul pentru Dezvoltare și Inițiative Sociale Viitorul 2008a: 96). However, from 2008 the Southern European countries of destination were hit by the financial crisis that triggered massive unemployment. Moldovans had to return home and, unable to find jobs, joined a process of secondary emigration to Russia. Today, remittances provide 20% of the GDP. Around 40% of working-age Moldovans are believed to be abroad, which combined with falling birth rate in shrinking the population by 20% and in making the country the third worst in terms of population decline rate (Całus 2016c: 8). This is unlikely to improve. In November 2017, 31.4% of those still living in Moldova wanted to work abroad; in addition, another 17.5% wanted to leave the country forever (Insitutul de Politici Publice 2017: 63). Remittances did somewhat improve the economic situation, but the dramatic reduction of the workforce significantly hampers the potential for domestic economic growth.

Perhaps more importantly, the most active and open-minded Moldovans moved abroad and implicitly stopped taking part in their country's social and political life. On the contrary, the Soviet-educated generation is too old to emigrate; it stays home and imposes its conservative and undemocratic choices on the rest of the electorate (Tudoroiu 2011b: 239). More generally, the very low level of socioeconomic development represents a strong Lipsetian factor that impacts negatively Moldova's potential for democratization. Geopolitically, the dependence on Russia in terms of export markets, energy supplier, and emigration destination creates obvious vulnerabilities. Moreover, as long as a majority of migrants worked in EU countries, their families back home as well as other potential migrants had a strong incentive to support Chișinău's pro-European foreign policy orientation. When crisis-triggered unemployment forced many Moldovan workers to move from Italy and Spain to Russia, their families' preferences followed. In addition to other factors, this explains the electoral shift in favor of pro-Russian political forces.

However, socioeconomic difficulties and their consequences represent only one of Moldova's major problems. Uncertainties related to national identity—which 'remains an extremely complex and yet unsolved matter' (March 2007: 603; see also King 2003; Heintz 2008)—are at least as important. The Republic of Moldova is made up of most of Bessarabia, the eastern half of the Principality of Moldova (whose 1859 union with Wallachia created modern Romania), and Transnistria, a narrow strip of land on the Ukrainian bank of the Nistru/Dniester river. All or part of this territory changed hands between the Principality of Moldova/Romania and Russia/the USSR in 1812, 1856, 1878, 1918, 1940, 1941, and 1944 before becoming independent in 1991. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union used large-scale social engineering to modify the region's ethnic profile and national identity. This included deportation of Moldovans to Siberia and Central Asia (where many died due to harsh conditions), colonization of Slavic groups, merger with historically un-Moldovan Transnistria, and a policy of Sovietization and Russification. The language, identical to Romanian, became 'Moldovan;' the use of the Cyrillic alphabet was imposed. After 1944, most of the elites fled to Romania, were physically eliminated, or were denationalized while Russians were given many of the vacated political and economic positions. Unsurprisingly, Moldovans hardly share a clear national identity. Instead,

> the 'pan-Romanian' view, (…) strongest among the cultural intelligentsia, sees Moldovans merely as a regional group of (ethnic) Romanians (…). The 'Eurasianist' view, espoused above all by most of Moldova's Russian-speaking minorities and the Transnistrian separatist regime, (…) see Moldova as part of the post-Soviet space (…). The dominant position in Moldova has been 'Basarabism,' which advocates Moldovan independence, a balance between Eastern and Western orientations and a compromise between the previous views on national identity. Moldovanism bridges both Eurasianist and Basarabist views. We can identify a neo-Soviet 'Eurasianist Moldovanism' (…) and a 'Basarabist Moldovanism'. (March 2007: 603–604)

Since the late 1980s, this identity uncertainty has been instrumentalized by both local and external actors, which has seriously hampered the country's unity and stability (Tudoroiu 2011b: 239). The lack of consensus on a model of national development led to ethnic tensions that resulted in the Transnistrian and Gagauz conflicts, which in turn prevent the state from functioning normally (Całus 2016c: 6). Moreover, today more than half of the citizens of Moldova would prefer to simply put an end to the very existence of their state: In November 2017, 21.8% were ready to vote for merging their country with Romania and 33% for union with Russia (Insitutul de Politici Publice 2017: 73).

This dramatic situation is accompanied by the existence of structural factors that have not favored the development of a democratic political culture. They include the Orthodox religion, historical influences, the limited pre-communist democratic experience, and the harshness of the communist repression that add to the aforementioned Lipsetian factors (Tudoroiu 2011b: 247). In terms of agency, it should be noted that after the pro-Romanian Popular Front became politically irrelevant in 1993–1994 and until the fall of the communists' authoritarian regime in 2009, the Moldovan political system was dominated by former members of the Soviet state and party apparatus, who continued to share the old undemocratic mentalities. Their domestic and foreign policy choices contributed greatly to hampering, blocking, or reversing the democratization process. All this led Moldova's citizens to remain reluctant to civic engagement and tolerant toward authoritarian practices. The resulting low level of social capital and weak civil society made genuine democratization impossible (ibid.: 248, 250, 252). This situation mirrors the general profile of the CIS republics, turning Moldova into a case representative for the entire group. What has been different, however, is the

extremely intense political infighting within the ruling elite. Except for the 2001–2009 period, the fact that the government was too polarized and the state too weak prevented any group from monopolizing political control. This led to what Lucan A. Way called 'pluralism by default:' instead of robust civil society, strong democratic institutions, or democratic leadership, it was the incapacity of the incumbent powers that allowed Moldovan politics to remain competitive (see also Way 2002, 2003: 455) and to avoid the heavily authoritarian trend dominant in the CIS. Yet, this was hardly enough to bring fully fledged democratization. Except for the period of communist rule during the 2000s, Moldova has had a hybrid regime. States in this category are

> electoral democracies that meet only minimum standards for the selection of national leaders. Democratic institutions are fragile and substantial challenges to the protection of political rights and civil liberties exist. The potential for sustainable, liberal democracy is unclear. (Freedom House 2017c; see also Diamond 2002; Bogaards 2009)

Indeed, the democratic future of such systems is unclear. In particular, the present situation is extremely confusing as showed later in this chapter. One of the factors that further complicate it is represented by the domestic and international dimensions of the Transnistrian issue.

7.2 The Transnistrian Frozen Conflict

The first 'Transnistria' was created by the USSR in 1924 as an autonomous 'Moldovan' republic within Soviet Ukraine in order to prepare the eventual annexation of Bessarabia that had joined Romania in 1918. The 1940 and 1944 Soviet invasions of this region were followed by the merger of most of its territory with the western part of the previous Ukrainian autonomous republic. Within the new Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, Transnistria was heavily industrialized and became home to the Soviet 14th army. In 1989, its 546,000 population was made up of Moldovans (39.9%), Ukrainians (28.3%), and Russians (25.5%) (in 2004, the ratio became 31.9/28.8/30.3%) (Lungu 2009; Cojocaru 2006). When Moldova started to move toward independence, the mainly Russian and Ukrainian heads of the Soviet state enterprises feared for their positions and mobilized the urban non-Moldovan population in order to break away from Chișinău. On September 2, 1990,

they proclaimed a separate Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic that, with the direct involvement of personnel of the 14th army, evicted Moldovan executive and judicial authorities (Hanne 2004: 80). This was clearly encouraged by Moscow in an effort to destabilize the rule of the pro-Romanian Popular Front, which indeed lost popular support with Prime Minister Mircea Druc being ousted in May 1991 (Crowther 2004: 29; Neukirch 2002: 235; Tudoroiu 2012: 140). The Moldovan government took a defensive stance and withdrew its forces from most of Transnistria. It counterattacked only on June 19, 1992, in response to the Transnistrian attack of the last police station controlled by Chișinău in the town of Tighina/Bender. At that point, on orders from Moscow, the 14th army intervened and defeated the Moldovans (Roper 2002: 108–109). Formally, the conflict was frozen by the Yeltsin-Snegur Agreement of July 21, 1992 that set up a peacekeeping mechanism involving Russian, Transnistrian, and Moldovan troops (Solomon and Gumeniuc 2008: 176–179). Ever since, Transnistria has been a *de facto* independent state.

7.2.1 The Transnistrian Regime

Under the pretext of resisting Moldovan 'fascism,' President Igor Smirnov created a heavily authoritarian regime he headed for two decades. Little has changed under his successors, Yevgeny Shevchuk (2011–2016) and Vadim Krasnoselsky. In fact, the region is controlled by the Sheriff business group that dominates its economy, influences key decisions, and is instrumental in the selection of political leaders (Tudoroiu 2012: 145). Economically, Transnistria's main resource is never mentioned in official statistics as it concerns the huge amounts of weapons and ammunitions inherited from the Soviet period and theoretically belonging to the Russian Federation. In 2000, there were 42,000 tonnes, half of which were evacuated or destroyed during the next four years (Munteanu et al. 2007: 133). But the rest adds to locally (and illegally) manufactured weapons that are sold on the international black market. Transnistria is not internationally recognized as an independent state, which protects its companies from legal action. Russian exporters also take advantage of this situation, using the region as a transit area for their own illegal trade. A book written by Xavier Deleu, a French journalist who investigated Transnistrian arms trafficking, describes this profitable trade with governments under embargo, guerilla fighters,

and terrorist groups (Deleu 2005). Other forms of illegal commerce were unveiled by a British official report that described Transnistria as 'a smuggling company masquerading as a state' and a 'virtual free criminal zone' (Galeotti 2004: 398–399). The main profiteers of these activities are of course the oligarchs and the political leaders in Tiraspol, who have absolutely no reason to accept reunion with Moldova that would place them under the control of Chișinău's police and judiciary (Tudoroiu 2012: 145). One of their key moves in this respect is quite surprising. They associated sections of the *Moldovan* elite to their illegal profits, thus generating secret but strong support for Transnistria's independence within Moldova's political class itself (Całus 2016c: 9).

7.2.2 Moldova and the Transnistrian Issue

Except for such obscure personal interests, Transnistria's secession has constantly represented an issue of major concern for Moldova's elites and citizens for a number of reasons: (1) constitutionally, Transnistria is part of the national territory; (2) in identity terms, the region is essential for the definition of Moldova as something different from a Romanian province. It was never part of the neighboring country, and the hostility of its large Russian and Ukrainian communities toward union with Romania would help preserve Moldova's independence; (3) in case of major tensions with Russia, the frozen conflict might reignite; (4) Transnistria keeps Russian troops on Moldovan territory and helps Moscow influence Moldovan politics; (5) the region has most of Moldova's industrial units; (6) it controls the main transport lines with Ukraine; (7) some of the region's numerous criminal activities extend to Moldova; and (8) all Moldovan politicians have tried to instrumentalize the Transnistrian question, thus turning it into a matter of constant public interest (Tudoroiu 2012: 139).

Probably the most successful such politicians were the communists, who in part came to power in 2001 due to their credible promises to bring Transnistria back using their good relations with Moscow and ideological affinities with Tiraspol (Tudoroiu 2011b: 245). Indeed, that was the only serious effort to put an end to the frozen conflict and reunite the country. The problem was that the price to pay in terms of national sovereignty was too high. It was the Kremlin that, noting the window of opportunity favoring its own interests, proposed in 2003 the so-called Kozak Memorandum. A special relationship between Moldova and

Russia was to be created, allowing for the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria until 2020. A new upper chamber of the Parliament would be set up with a veto right on any major constitutional and political change in Moldova. As one-third of its seats were given to the Transnistrians and one-third to the equally pro-Russian Gagauz, this simply subordinated the country to Moscow. Moldova's communist President, Vladimir Voronin, initially accepted these conditions that did not contradict the geopolitical views he shared at that time, but fierce large-scale public protest made him change his mind (Solomon and Gumeniuc 2008: 180–181; Munteanu et al. 2007: 228; Tudoroiu 2012: 142).

Since then, any progress has been blocked by the incompatibility between Chișinău's and Tiraspol's positions. The former is ready to offer an advanced degree of autonomy; the latter would only accept a federation that, in its understanding, is in fact much closer to a confederation. Because this would give it the right to quit the common state, many Moldovans oppose it as a masked legitimizing of Transnistria's eventual independence (Tudoroiu 2012: 143). In response, 98% of the Transnistrians voted in a 2006 referendum for joining Russia. There are almost permanent public displays of loyalty and devotion to Moscow. At the December 2016 presidential elections both candidates spoke of the region's future as part of Russia and rejected any scenario of integration with Moldova (Marandici 2017). The leadership in Tiraspol is particularly eager to serve the Kremlin's geopolitical interests. In 2010, when Bucharest and Washington decided to deploy interceptor missiles in southern Romania, the Transnistrians offered to accept Russian Iskander missiles on their territory as a countermeasure (Braun 2012: 395).

7.2.3 The Irrelevant European Union

In principle, the aforementioned 1992 Yeltsin-Snegur Agreement launched peace negotiations that, after 1994, involved Russia, Ukraine, the OSCE, Moldova, and Transnistria. Their irrelevant results included the 1997 Moldovan-Transnistrian Memorandum on the principles of the normalization of bilateral relations. It was only in 2005, after the failure of the Kozak Memorandum, that these multilateral negotiations seemed to become more promising. As shown below, Moldova's communist government adopted a pro-European course and in response Brussels sent a Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Ukraine and Moldova and became—with the USA—an observer to the negotiations,

which reached the present '5+2' format (Solomon and Gumeniuc 2008: 182–183). The European Union hoped to help solve the crisis on the basis of its Kantian approach. The very objectives of EUBAM represent a good illustration of the EU assistance-minded actions: to 'promote border control, customs and trade norms and practices that meet EU standards and serve the needs of its two partner countries' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 5). However, there was no visible progress and before the end of their second term the Moldovan communists started secret and ultimately unsuccessful trilateral negotiations with Russia and Transnistria based on some elements of the Kozak Memorandum (Institutul pentru Dezvoltare şi Iniţiative Sociale Viitorul 2008b). The democratic and pro-European Moldovan coalition that came to power in 2009 was immediately accused by Tiraspol of being part of a Romanian and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) plot, which made negotiations impossible (Tudoroiu 2012: 142). The '5+2' format was restored only in 2011, after a break of almost six years, but even then, the European Union was unable to bring any significant contribution (see below the section on Germany). The main cause was Russia's opposition to its involvement and the uncontestable superiority of the Kremlin's neoclassical geopolitical approach over Brussels' soft, win-win strategy.

7.2.4 All-Powerful Russia

Moscow has been both player and referee in Transnistria (Tudoroiu 2012: 146) and as such has fully controlled the dynamic of the crisis. It helped ignite the 1992 war, took part in fighting, and then froze the conflict 'to keep Moldova under control, Romania at bay, and Ukraine under threat' (Dima 1999: 37). All observers agree that, politically and economically, 'Transnistria could not have emerged without Russia, nor could it have survived' (Popescu 2005: 24). Direct involvement in the region's domestic affairs has included (1) the massive grant of Russian nationality to Transnistrians; (2) financial assistance; (3) support for referenda on independence and affiliation with Russia; (4) participation of Russian public and private capital in the privatization of key Transnistrian companies; (5) creation of a pro-Russian and anti-Moldovan media environment; (6) holding Russian parliamentary and presidential elections in Transnistria exactly as on the territory of the Russian Federation;

(7) imposition of and support for Russian nationals serving Moscow's interests in the Tiraspol administration; (8) the transformation of the Transnistrian secret service into a branch of the Russian one (Barbăroşie et al. 2008; Tudoroiu 2012: 148).

The considerable costs of these complex actions are fully justified by the geopolitical benefits associated with projecting the Kremlin's influence in the region and preventing Moldova from adopting a resolutely anti-Russian stance. More precisely, the Transnistrian frozen conflict (1) politically and constitutionally turns Moldova into an unstable, almost failed state that can in no way contemplate accession to the European Union or NATO; (2) compels all governments in Chişinău to avoid overt confrontation with Moscow or to risk the recognition of Transnistria's independence by Russia. The latter would make reunion impossible, a development with considerable electoral costs for the Moldovan party in power; (3) gives the Kremlin the opportunity to put pressure on Kiev in case of a serious crisis by blocking Ukraine's lines of communications with Moldova, Romania, and Central Europe that cross Transnistria; (4) in a geopolitical context characterized by important regional tensions, Transnistria could be turned into a Kaliningrad-type outpost allowing Moscow to project military force in western Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and South-Eastern Europe; (5) the secessionist region is used by Russia to export illegally large amounts of weapons to disreputable overseas friends; and (6) Moldova's inability to restore its sovereignty on an important part of its national territory despite Western support serves as an intimidating example to its neighbors and enhances Russia's image as a powerful regional player (Mînzărari 2009: 21; Barbăroşie et al. 2008; Tudoroiu 2012: 150).

Therefore, the '5+2' negotiations have been constantly undermined by the Kremlin, which 'transformed the other participants (…) [into] onlookers' (Barbăroşie et al. 2008). Russia's main interest is to maintain the *status quo*; if changes are to be contemplated, they should mirror the present situation. This means that Transnistria should preserve its special relation with Moscow (which includes the presence of Russian troops on its territory) and should have a constitutional status allowing it to block Moldova's pro-Western trends; in other words, the Kozak Memorandum should be fully implemented. Because it is difficult to impose such ideas in the '5+2' format, the Kremlin has always preferred a direct Moldovan-Transnistrian dialogue under its biased arbitration. At the same time, Moscow did not and most likely will never recognize the independence

of Transnistria or the latter's request to join the Russian Federation as voted for in the 2006 Transnistrian referendum. Such a development would bring little geopolitical benefit as the region already is *de facto* Russian. On the contrary, it would considerably limit the Kremlin's ability to use the reunion carrot in order to manipulate political forces in Chișinău as well as Moldova as a state. Furthermore, it would lead to international protests and to large-scale lack of international recognition, as shown by the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After the 2008 Georgia War, their independence was recognized by Russia but not by the huge majority of United Nations members, which made it irrelevant. This is a lesson that President Putin clearly learned, as suggested by his creation of two new frozen conflicts in the Donbass that represent a much more serious political problem for Ukraine than the loss of Crimea. Most likely, it is only because of the special situation of the Russian naval base in Sevastopol that Crimea itself was not turned into a frozen conflict. Overall, the 2008 reignition of warfare in South Ossetia and the more recent fighting in Donetsk and Luhansk prove Moscow's willingness to use violent means—but not overt war—against hostile CIS republics, with frozen conflicts 'gradually becoming cornerstones for a renewed foreign policy of Russia' (Kapitonenko 2009: 37). The fact that warfare seems today completely out of question in Transnistria is in no way a guarantee that the conflict will not be reactivated in the medium or long term.

As already mentioned, the European Union has had an interest in putting an end to the Transnistrian crisis but has clearly failed to prevent Moscow from constantly having the upper hand in the region. This is due to a number of factors that include (1) the considerable difference between the soft and hard power resources the two sides can mobilize in both Moldova and Transnistria. The EU trade concessions and limited assistance cannot be compared to Russia's troops, economic presence, strategic energy resources, control of much of the mass media, and special relationships with important local political forces; (2) huge differences in the knowledge of, interest in, and perceptions of the legitimacy of the involvement in the region, which is familiar to all Russian elites and citizens but almost unknown to their European counterparts; (3) very different priorities and approaches due to Moscow's visible efforts to construct a sphere of influence as compared to Brussels' cautious Kantian strategies; and (4) major differences in the local perception of the two actors. The fear of Russian brutality is hardly balanced by

the sympathy for a friendly but remote and weak power (Tudoroiu 2012: 156–157). Ultimately, this is a confrontation between the Kremlin's neoclassical geopolitical views and methods and the EU win-win strategy that, in Transnistria as in the rest of the CIS, since the Vilnius Summit has been unable to match Russia's capabilities, commitment to the region, and aggressiveness. Moldova has been exposed to this aggressiveness since the beginning of the Transnistrian crisis almost three decades ago, a situation that hardly favored its adoption of a Kantian geopolitical vision and, more generally, its Europeanization. However, in recent years an unexpected actor has tried to compensate for the EU weakness and has started to act toward the resolution of the Transnistrian frozen conflict.

7.2.5 Eastward-Looking Germany

At a June 2010 meeting in Berlin with President Dmitri Medvedev, Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed to use Transnistria as an example for a future European security architecture that had very much in common with Russia's plans for Greater Europe (see Chapter 3). The '5+2' negotiations would have been revived in order to resolve the frozen conflict. In exchange, an EU-Russia Political and Security Committee would have been set up to allow the two sides cooperate on civilian and military crisis management operations. The topic was further developed at the October 2010 Deauville meeting between Chancellor Merkel, President Medvedev, and French President Sarkozy, and at the 2010 OSCE Astana Summit (*Moldova Azi*, June 7, 2010; *The New York Times*, October 27, 2010; Gonciarenko 2012; Tudoroiu 2012: 154). The Greater Europe plan had no future, but the '5+2' negotiation format was restored after a break of almost six years while bilateral Moldovan-Transnistrian talks were held in Germany in September 2011 and June 2012 (Gonciarenko 2012). All was good until Russian mass media started to speak about a Merkel-Medvedev secret memorandum whose provisions included the federalization of Moldova. This seemed to be confirmed by the Director for Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia at the German Federal Foreign Office, Patricia Flor, who explained to the Moldovan ambassador in Berlin, Aureliu Ciocoi, that the Transnistrians would never accept a centralized Moldova and therefore a federalization scenario should be seriously taken into consideration. She added that Germany would guarantee the working of the compromise solution

(Călugăreanu 2012a). This led to very negative reactions in Chișinău, where the existence of a German-Russian deal on Transnistria was strongly denied. When, confirming her interest in Moldova, Chancellor Merkel visited its capital in August 2012, she was fully aware of this situation. She never mentioned federalization; instead, she talked about a central government and local competences for the Transnistrian administration. However, certain analysts might have been overoptimistic when they took the Chancellor's mentioning of 'the European future of Moldova' as a rejection of the idea of a Russian sphere of influence (Călugăreanu 2012b). A period of diminished German interest followed, but under Berlin's 2016 OSCE Chairmanship in Office the '5 + 2' negotiations received a new impetus once more, resulting in the signing of the June 2016 'Berlin Protocol' that included commitments to achieve progress on a number of practical questions (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 5). The problem was that the Germans wanted to show visible results during their chairmanship and sided with the Transnistrians and the Russians in putting pressure on the Moldovans. The latter were pushed to accept concessions on important sovereignty issues such as the recognition of the international travel of cars registered in Transnistria as legitimate. Nobody can ignore the fact that legally this would give the separatist region an internationally recognized status. Yet, Germany (as well as Russia and Transnistria) claimed that the negotiations were extremely successful, which was hardly Moldova's opinion. For its part, the European Union preferred to avoid any comment on the negotiations (Gancev 2016).

This shows that Germany's involvement in Transnistria can indeed contribute to changing the present situation, but it does so because—unlike Brussels—Berlin simply tends to bandwagon with the strongest player, Moscow, and sacrifice the interests of smaller actors such as Moldova. It should be noted that this has happened at a time of European sanctions against and relative hostility toward Russia due to the Ukrainian crisis. At the June 2016 negotiations, Germany acted unilaterally, without the agreement of the European Union, and gave up on a fundamental issue of international law in exchange for the futile increase of prestige associated with a minor diplomatic success. In the process, it helped Moscow solidify its sphere of influence in the CIS. One might wonder what will happen when normal Russian-Western relations will be restored and major advantages will be offered by the Kremlin in

exchange for concessions of the same nature. Germany has acted as a fully civilian power trying to bring a frozen conflict to its end. Yet, the way it acted can be much easier explained using a neoclassical geopolitical approach than the European Union's Kantian vision.

7.2.6 Unpromising Détente

As shown below, in December 2016, a politician with a strongly pro-Russian agenda became Moldova's President. His political objectives included ending the Transnistrian crisis through federalization, but the limited competences of the presidency and the hostility of the leadership in Tiraspol prevented him from getting any actual result (EADaily 2017; Lupușor et al. 2017: 40). Moreover, in 2017, the situation was further tensioned when the pro-European governments in Chișinău and Kiyv supported by the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine established a joint control point at Cuciurgan-Pervomaisk on the Transnistrian-Ukrainian border. Tiraspol and Moscow immediately condemned the action as imposing 'a new economic blockade' (Lupușor et al. 2017: 40).

Yet, Transnistria is experiencing the worst economic crisis in its history. Local economic policies, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, diminished financial support from Moscow due to Russia's economic difficulties, and the financial crisis in Moldova have impacted significantly Transnistrians' standards of living, which delegitimizes the local leadership. The Kremlin itself is trying to limit the costs of supporting the secessionist region (Całus 2017b). This explains, on the Transnistrian side, the unexpected breakthrough of November 2017. To general surprise, Chișinău and Tiraspol concluded four agreements from the 'Berlin Protocol' package on the recognition by Moldova of Transnistrian university degrees, the access of Moldovan farmers to their agricultural land in Transnistria, direct phone services, and Latin Script (i.e., Romanian language) schools in Transnistria. A bridge was also opened and two more Berlin points were to be negotiated in 2018 (EADaily 2017; OSCE 2017; International Crisis Group 2017).

However, despite appearances, there is no reason for optimism with respect to the issue of the frozen conflict itself. The Transnistrians signed the agreements for purely pragmatic reasons and 'plainly emphasise that the compromise reached in Chișinău is not a preamble to Moldova's annexation' (Całus 2017b). On the Moldovan side, the decision was taken

single-handedly by the country's pro-European corruption champion and strongman, Vlad Plahotniuc (see below), as part of his multi-level political game. Domestically, he wanted to defeat President Dodon on the latter's favorite game field and to marginalize pro-European opposition forces uninvolved in negotiations. Internationally, he looked for a success that would improve his image in the West and restore EU support for his leadership, which in turn would relegitimize him in the eyes of the electorate (ibid.). In other words, his actions have been as pragmatic and as shortsighted as those of the leaders in Tiraspol. The present *détente* is in no way a step toward the resolution of the frozen conflict, which will continue to represent an effective Russian instrument to keep 'Moldova under control, Romania at bay, and Ukraine under threat,' to repeat once more Nicholas Dima's words. It is precisely this effectiveness that made the Kremlin create two new frozen conflicts in eastern Ukraine. In a more violent future, this situation might repeat itself in the case of any Moscow-unfriendly post-Soviet republic with large ethnic (and, ideally, Russian) minorities; potential targets could include Gagauzia in Moldova, Odessa, and Southern Bessarabia in Ukraine (see Sect. 7.4), Armenian-inhabited Javakheti in Georgia, parts of Kazakhstan (Missiroli et al. 2014: 50), and—outside the CIS—Narva in Estonia as well as Daugavpils in Latvia (Larrabee et al. 2017: 7).

7.3 The Ups and Downs of the Moldovan-Russian Relationship

During the 1990s, Moldova was part of the Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova (GUAM) group of post-Soviet republics that tried to limit Russia's influence in—and domination of—the CIS without overtly antagonizing it. This changed in 2001, when a landslide electoral victory put Vladimir Voronin's Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova in control of 71 of the 101 seats of the Parliament. Domestically, the communists had promised the return of Soviet symbols and had questioned previously adopted economic reforms. Yet, when they started to implement their political program, the extreme unpopularity of certain decisions led to mass protests and to highly negative international responses. The most contested measures were canceled but anti-reformism and re-Sovietization continued to be promoted in less visible domains (Crowther 2004: 42–44; Tudoroiu 2011a: 299; Tudoroiu 2011b: 240). Critically, a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime was created characterized by

> the overlap between state and political party structures; the concentration of all the levers of power in the hands of the President and a small circle of intimates; the widespread corruption among the administrative apparatus and civil servants at every level; the limitations and infringements of basic rights and freedoms of citizens; the control of the public and private mass-media and the harassment of the few independent ones; the quasi-voiding of sense of the very act of justice by subordinating the judiciary to the political power; [and] the subordination and seizure of the business environment. (Panainte 2009: 96)

Internationally, this was paralleled by a pro-Moscow foreign policy orientation that included the intention to join the planned Common Economic Space. To President Voronin, the key element was the use of Russian influence to resolve the Transnistrian frozen conflict, which would have considerably increase communists' prestige and legitimacy. However, the failure of the aforementioned 'Kozak Memorandum' and the very negative impression it made on the Moldovan public represented the origin of a surprising change of policy. Brussels' new European Neighborhood Policy, Washington's increasing presence in the Black Sea region, and the resulting Colored Revolutions modified significantly the East European security complex. The leadership in Chișinău decided to take advantage of the new geopolitical environment and replaced its pro-Russian orientation with a resolutely pro-European one. In view of the 2005 parliamentary election, the communists adopted a political program marked by strong commitment to reform, democracy, and EU accession, and formed a totally unexpected coalition with their archenemy, the pro-Romanian Christian Democratic Popular Party. An EU-Moldova Action Plan was adopted and it seemed that communists' second term would bring a genuine process of Europeanization (Ghinea and Panainte 2009: 100; March 2007: 601–626). Yet, Moscow responded aggressively to this challenge of its regional hegemony. The Russian government, the State Duma, and the Russian National Security Council set up a 'complex pressure mechanism' against Moldova that included a strong propaganda campaign, threats of stopping supplying natural gas, and an embargo on Moldovan wine and agricultural exports. The gas blackmail was conceived to affect the living conditions of common citizens while the cutting of exports was highly detrimental to Moldova's elites (Mînzărari 2009: 18–19, 27; Tudoroiu 2012: 148–149). Both proved the country's extreme vulnerability to the Kremlin's pressure.

Anyway, the communists' Europeanization-minded reforms never went beyond the level of discourse (Mînzărari 2008). Furthermore, after the defeat at the 2007 local election President Voronin came to the conclusion that democratizing is counterproductive. He initiated a new clearly authoritarian episode and turned once more toward Russia, in the hope that a Transnistrian settlement could be reached that would allow his party to stay in power for another term. Yet, in 2009 an allegedly rigged election in April, the brutal repression of the ensuing mass protest, the defection of prominent communists, and defeat at the July early elections put an end to the 8-year rule of the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova. A four-party Alliance for European Integration came to power. It included the Liberal Democrat Party led by the Romanian-educated new Prime Minister Vladimir Filat, the Democrat Party led by a former communist, Marian Lupu, and the pro-Romanian Liberal Party. Despite serious infighting, temporary defections, and repeated elections, these three parties maintained their alliance and the control of Moldovan politics for the following six years. A resolutely pro-democracy and pro-Western program was adopted accompanied by considerable efforts to attract much needed EU support (Tudoroiu 2011a: 300–304). For their part, delegitimized communists faced repeated defections that made their return to power impossible. The 'pluralism by default' was restored and the political system became a hybrid one once more. It was hoped that successful Europeanization would turn it, for the first time in the history of the CIS, into a genuinely democratic regime.

Brussels-Chișinău relations had started in 1994, when a rather modest European Union-Moldova Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed. It was only in 1998 that it entered into force, and the amount of European assistance during Moldova's first 15 years as an independent state was limited to €300 million (Commission of the European Communities 2007: 10). This began to change with the launching of the European Neighborhood Policy and with President Voronin's pro-European turn that led to the opening of a full European Commission Delegation in Moldova in October 2005. However, it was the Alliance for European Integration that, as shown by its very name, revolutionized the bilateral relationship. Negotiations for a new association agreement were initiated in January 2010, with EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle stating that Chișinău

was a reliable partner with a coherent strategy of reforms and clear targets. To quote the title of a 2010 article, 'Moldova Impresses EU with Reform Agenda' (Lobjakas 2010). It soon became the second-largest recipient of European aid per capita and was promised a free trade agreement as well as visa-free travel in the European Union (ibid.). The actual progress of reforms should not be idealized. By the early parliamentary election of November 2010, much of the electorate of the Alliance for European Integration already was disillusioned with the very modest results of its vocally advertized reforms (Tudoroiu 2015: 659). Still, there was enough hope for further improvement to keep it in power. At the November 28–29, 2013 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, Moldova was one of the two CIS republics that initialed an Association Agreement that included the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It started to be applied provisionally in September 2014, and fully entered into force on July 1, 2016. The Agreement

> significantly strengthens political association and economic integration between Moldova and the EU. It also illustrates a deep mutual commitment based on shared values and interests in the areas of democracy and the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, a market economy and sustainable development. (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 2)

At the same time, Chișinău committed itself to an ambitious reform agenda that addressed major issues such as justice, the fight against corruption, and economic growth. In terms of results, the free trade area for trade in goods soon helped turn the European Union into the recipient of no less than 63% of Moldova's exports and the source of 50% of its imports (ibid.: 2–3). Visa-free travel to EU countries was granted to Moldovan citizens. Accordingly, Moldova was presented as an EU success story as it 'has indeed reached a certain level of integration with the EU' (Baltag and Bosse 2016: 70).

However, it was also noted that 'the process of building a security community is not mature yet enough to "lock" Moldova into a sustainable path towards European integration' (Rieker 2016: 14; Baltag and Bosse 2016). Indeed, it was out of question for Chișinău to adopt a

Kantian geopolitical vision as before the Vilnius Summit it was turned into the target of renewed—and very aggressive—Russian pressure. It should be remembered that similar measures convinced Armenia and Ukraine to turn down Brussels' offer and join Moscow's competing integration project. Key Moldovan wine, fruit, and meat exports were embargoed while customs duties on more goods were imposed or increased. Migrant workers were harassed or sent home, and gas imports were threatened with disruption once more. The ruling coalition was incessantly accused of plotting to surrender the country to Romania by Russian TV channels widely watched in Moldova, the Kremlin's proxies there were encouraged to organize vocal protests, the Transnistrians were supported in creating new disputes and, as shown in the next section, the Gagauz were set to launch initiatives possibly leading to civil war (Ceapai 2014a). On one occasion, the Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov falsely claimed that all political forces opposing European integration had been declared unconstitutional by the Moldovan Constitutional Court, which showed that the pro-European government was 'clearly attempting to move in a nondemocratic direction' (*RIA Novosti*, October 20, 2014). He also mentioned the 'negative' consequences of what he described as Brussels' plans to 'repeat the Ukrainian scenario' in Moldova and Transnistria (*Timpul.md*, October 20, 2014; Tudoroiu 2016: 389). Some of the Russian actions were timed to influence the results of the November 2014 parliamentary elections (Freedom House 2015). The European Union tried to compensate for the considerable losses due to the embargo on Moldovan exports by increasing its own import quotas, but the results were modest because many agricultural products do not conform to the EU phytosanitary standards (Freedom House 2015; European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 6). Overall, it is remarkable that the Moldovan leadership was able to resist such pressure. More recently, Moscow's instruments have in part changed but its actions have hardly come to an end. In fact, they might well turn the country into a Russian satellite after the 2018 Moldovan parliamentary elections. This issue will be analyzed in Sect. 7.5, but a better understanding of the Kremlin's present and future *modus operandi* in Moldova and the CIS requires a brief presentation of its reactivation of the Gagauz failed frozen conflict.

7.4 The Gagauz Failed Frozen Conflict

As explained in Chapter 2, failed frozen conflicts develop as genuine frozen ones but are brought to an apparent end before reaching the stage of military confrontation. Yet, the initial grievances are not comprehensively and effectively addressed, which preserves an important potential of reignition. A good example is provided by Crimea. After the dismantling of the Soviet Union, ethnic tensions complicated by the issue of the Black Sea fleet led to the serious deterioration of relations between newly independent Ukraine and Moscow-supported Crimean Russians. In April–May 1994, the situation was on the edge of taking a Transnistrian-type turn. Fortunately, actions in favor of separatism were downscaled later that year and an apparently permanent settlement was reached (Sasse 2007: 155–173). However, the initial causes of the crisis were not completely eliminated. The compromise only was masking a failed frozen conflict that was reignited spectacularly in 2014, when Russsia used it in order to annex the region (Tudoroiu 2016: 377). The very similar Gagauz failed frozen conflict was reactivated during the same period as part of the same Russian plan to put an end to the EU influence in the western part of the CIS. Its interest lies in the fact that, unlike the Crimean one, it did not represent the brief preparation of an invasion. While such a plan did exist, the turn taken by events made President Putin instrumentalize tensions from a distance, which allows for the detailed analysis of the reignition process.

7.4.1 The Beginnings

The Gagauz are a small people of about 200,000 located mainly in southern Moldova and, in a lesser measure, on the Ukrainian side of the border. They are Turkish-speaking Christian Orthodox who two centuries ago fled religious persecution in the Ottoman Empire and were settled by the Tsar in newly acquired southern Bessarabia. A cultural revival was initiated in 1983–1984 by a small informal cultural club that, in the favorable conditions created by President Gorbachev's Perestroika, was turned in 1988 into the Gagauz People's Movement, *Gagauz Halkı* (Chinn and Roper 1998: 91–92; Menz 2005: 16; King 1997: 743). Its members were initially favorable to the reassertion of Moldova's national identity. Yet, historical and cultural reasons make the Gagauz deeply pro-Russian and hostile to the

prospect of Romanian rule advocated by the Moldovan Popular Front (Katchanovski 2005: 886–900). The district-level administrative elite of Gagauz-inhabited areas that supported *Gagauz Halkı* but at the same time were part of the Soviet *nomenklatura* were resolutely opposed to any change that would have threatened their own positions (King 1997: 744). Consequently, they turned themselves into 'ethnic entrepreneurs' demanding autonomy within the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In November 1989, *Gagauz Halkı* activists began creating parallel state structures. Because the Moldovan Supreme Soviet turned down the autonomy request, on August 19, 1990, a Gagauz congress declared Gagauzia to be independent from Moldova and subject only to central Soviet authority as the sixteenth republic of the USSR. Comrat was chosen as the capital, national symbols were adopted, and a local defense force was organized. In response, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR deemed the secession declaration unconstitutional, dissolved *Gagauz Halkı* and arrested some of its members. The pro-Romanian Moldovan Prime Minister Mircea Druc mobilized 40,000 volunteers who marched on Comrat, where thousands of Gagauz gathered to oppose them. The Transnistrians decided to support the secessionists and sent around 500 people to fight Moldovan volunteers. As the danger of military conflict was real, Moldovan Parliament speaker (and later President) Mircea Snegur as well as local Gagauz and Russian leaders appealed to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to intervene. The Bolgrad Division of the Soviet army and later a battalion sent from Moscow prevented the Moldovan volunteers from entering Gagauzia and deescalated the situation. Eventually, parliamentary elections took place in the secessionist region and the Supreme Soviet of the Gagauz Soviet Socialist Republic assembled for the first time on December 12, 1990. Basically, Gagauzia became *de facto* independent from Moldova and preserved this status until December 1994. Moreover, in 1992–1993 Gagauz paramilitary formations sporadically attacked administrative offices in Moldovan and Bulgarian villages (Zabarah 2012: 186–187; Chinn and Roper 1998: 94–96; Roper 2001: 117; Menz 2005: 17–18). Finally, political changes in Chișinău allowed for a law on the special legal status of Gagauzia to be approved in December 1994 by the Moldovan Parliament and by the Gagauz leadership, putting an end to the secession of the southern region (King 1997: 750). It guaranteed a high

level of autonomy for *Gagauz Yeri* ('Gagauz land,' with a population of 171,500) and established its right to become independent in the event of unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania (Menz 2005: 18). It is interesting to note that, on the one hand, the Transnistrians were far from willing to accept a similar status. In their view, Gagauzia was not truly autonomous (Roper 2001: 118). On the other hand, the Council of Europe initially opposed the agreement because some of its members feared that their own minorities might follow the Gagauz example and demand a similar level of autonomy, which they considered exaggeratedly high (Chinn and Roper 1998: 96).

The situation of Gagauzia was in many ways similar to that of Transnistria. However, the latter succeeded in constructing a working state structure protected by a long-lasting genuine frozen conflict while Gagauz similar efforts mostly failed. This was due to three reasons. First, almost all of Moldova's industry was concentrated in Transnistria, which provided a strong negotiation tool as well as vast economic resources to the separatists. Transnistrians were able to create an economic zone independent of Chișinău that in turn became the basis of independent state structures. For its part, Gagauzia was the most backward region of Moldova. It had no industrial resources while its agriculture-based economy had to cope with a harsh climate altering between water shortages and floods. Economically, the territory was not viable on its own, which meant that full independence from Moldova was possible only if supported by Russian aid (Zabarah 2012: 187, 190; Roper 2001: 117). Second, highly industrialized and urban-focused Transnistria had one of the highest levels of education in Moldova and a large number of politically aware and active people (Chinn and Roper 1998: 93). Added to political unity and the strong organizational skills of the leaders, this allowed for the rapid and effective mobilization of the separatists (Zabarah 2012: 183). The Gagauz were considerably less mobilized simply because they were an agricultural, village-oriented population with the lowest levels of education in Moldova (Chinn and Roper 1998: 93) that lacked organizational skills and was politically passive. Furthermore, Gagauzia is a loose conglomerate of villages without territorial contiguity (Zabarah 2012: 187). Third, Transnistrian leaders were much more closely connected to the Kremlin. The region was home to the Soviet 14th Army. Its industrial facilities were under the direct control of Moscow, which implied strong links with Soviet central institutions. Moreover, after the dismantlement of the USSR,

Russia was much more interested in ethnic Russians in the Near Abroad than in the Gagauz. This is why Moscow involved itself constantly and visibly in Transnistrian affairs while support for Gagauzia was much more modest. All these factors prevented the Gagauz from establishing working state institutions (Chinn and Roper 1998: 96–97) and, in the long run, forced them to accept a compromise with Chișinău (Tudoroiu 2016: 379).

However, the resulting autonomy allowed Gagauz elites to preserve the reignition potential of the conflict by strengthening their community's subjective political-territorial identification (Lecours 2001: 54) especially through the mobilization of ethnic and cultural symbols and the selective—i.e., pro-Russian and anti-Romanian—use of history (Keating 2001). Unable to survive as a *de facto* independent state, Gagauzia was turned into a working *regional* political entity with its own effective system of social regulation and collective action (Keating 1999: 5) that had little to do with the rest of Moldova. The division became increasingly visible under the rule of the communists, who were quick in making the democratically elected Bashkan (President) Dumitru Croitor resign and replaced him, after rigged elections, with their own protégé. Tensions were considerably aggravated when President Voronin finally rejected the 2003 'Kozak Memorandum' that would have turned Gagauzia into one of Moldova's federal republics and eventually adopted an overtly pro-European foreign policy (Boțan 2006; Munteanu et al. 2007: 228). Consequently, the 2006 Bashkan election marked the emergence of two civic platforms, *Edinaya Gagauzia* (United Gagauzia) led by Ciadâr-Lunga Mayor Mihail Formuzal and *Novaya Gagauzia* (New Gagauzia) of Comrat Mayor Nicolai Dudoglo, that have ever since played a key role in the region's complex political game. Its agitated political life was difficult to understand by the Moldovans and therefore helped further isolate Gagauzia from the rest of the country and reinforced its non-Moldovan identity. Furthermore, permanent and visible tensions that led to frequent political blockages and overt confrontation between the two Gagauz political groups accustomed the local public with the use of extreme political actions. Therefore, when a window of opportunity was created by Russia's intervention in Ukraine, the idea of instrumentalizing the possible reactivation of the Gagauz failed frozen conflict within the local struggle for power was perceived as a reasonable and effective strategy (Tudoroiu 2016: 380–381).

7.4.2 The Referendum

In fact, the crisis began with the instrumentalization of minor grievances against the central government by Gagauz politicians in search of local legitimacy. They claimed that the new Moldovan Law of Local Finance would diminish transfers from the national budget. They demanded the creation of a customs office in Gagauzia whose revenues would be used by the autonomous region, and protested vocally when this proposal was turned down. As tensions began to escalate, in 2013 they replaced the teaching of the Romanian language and history in Gagauzia with the Moldovan ones, which touched a sensitive identity issue. Moreover, the promoter of this change, Ivan Burgudji (one of the leaders of Dudoglo's *Novaya Gagauzia*) also proposed the creation of a Gagauz Security Service, of a Gagauz Constitutional Court, of a separate Gagauz local administration, and of a Gagauz electoral code. Bashkan Mihail Formuzal, who was heading the rival group, tried to overbid his adversaries by frequently speaking of Gagauzia being turned into an ordinary district by the Moldovan government in blatant disrespect for the region's autonomy (Cojocaru 2013; Boţan 2013; Ciobanu 2013a; Formuzal 2014). Given Chișinău's pro-European orientation and the pro-Russian preferences of the Gagauz electorate, in December 2012 the People's Assembly debated for the first time a proposal of the Gagauz communists on holding a referendum on (or, rather, against) Moldova's foreign policy line. All sides saw the considerable electoral advantages of this plan. Ivan Burgudji as well as other politicians and civic activists even proposed to address in the referendum the very independence of Gagauzia. The Bashkan strongly supported the referendum, stressing the need for Moldova to join the Russian-centered Customs Union. He escalated the debate by asking that similar referenda be held in non-Gagauz regions of Moldova that supported a pro-Moscow orientation (Ciobanu 2013b; Formuzal 2014). Most Gagauz politicians decided to follow his example. The holding of the referendum was decided in Comrat one day before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius. On February 2, 2014, 97.2% of the Gagauz voted against EU integration and 98.9% supported Gagauzia's independence if Moldova united with Romania—something that was in no way possible at that time and clearly had nothing to do with the European Union, but was used as a mobilizing tool by the referendum's organizers (Ciobanu 2014; Mînzărari 2014). Triumphantly, Bashkan Formuzal stated 'we, Gagauzians, a small minority, are telling the central

government - stop all processes of political integration [with the EU]; take care about economic integration [with the CIS Customs Union]' (*RFE/RL*, February 3, 2014). Unsurprisingly, the holding of the referendum had been supported by the Russian ambassador in Chișinău, who was very active in all Moldovan regions with large Russian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz ethnic groups. When results were made public, the Chairman of the Russian *State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States, Eurasian Integration and Links with Compatriots* Leonid Slutsky described the referendum as 'absolutely timely.' Immediately, the Russian *Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-Being* (*Rospotrebnadzor*) allowed the import of wines produced by half of the Gagauz companies while the embargo continued to be enforced against Moldovan ones (Ceapai 2014b; *Europalibera.org*, March 25, 2014; Tudoroiu 2016: 384). This was the beginning of a very serious crisis whose development paralleled President Putin's invasion of Crimea and hybrid war in Donbass.

7.4.3 The Crisis

During the Ukrainian revolution, Gagauzia offered free treatment to injured members of special forces that had repressed the Maidan protests. It hailed the Crimean *Anschluss* and created a People's Guard the very day Crimea signed the treaty making it part of the Russian Federation. During the following week, the Bashkan visited Moscow and, at his return, decided to set up police checkpoints at the Gagauzia's borders. He also asked for a Russian consulate to be opened in Comrat. Finally, on June 6, 2014, Formuzal bluntly threatened to reignite the failed frozen conflict by stating that Gagauzia would declare independence if Moldova signed the EU Association Agreement initialed at Vilnius. Despite Chișinău's efforts to come to an understanding, he started to visit villages and encourage people to build barricades and checkpoints, and gave two weeks to Gagauz mayors to create the People's Guards. Things started to look very serious as a promoter of the February referendum, Ilia Uzun, told foreign diplomats on June 10, 2014 that Gagauz were ready 'to take up arms' while the Moldovan Intelligence Service was investigating a secret meeting between Formuzal, the leaders of two small radical parties, and the Bishop of Bălți and Fălești, Markel, where an uprising of Gagauz and Russian minorities in Comrat and Bălți had been prepared. People were to be recruited and

trained to escalate local conflicts and to wage an information war against Moldova's government (*Evz.md*, March 18, 2014; *Unimedia*, March 27, 2014; *România Liberă*, June 6, 2014; Chilianu 2014; *Ziarul de Gardă*, June 10, 2014; Tudoroiu 2016: 385). Two individuals involved in such activities were arrested by the Moldovan Intelligence Service special forces on June 25, 2014, two days before the planned proclamation of independence. As they confessed during the eventual trial, they had been trained in Russia—in two camps also used for the training of anti-government militias from eastern Ukraine—to carry out urban guerrilla actions such as using Molotov cocktails and firearms, attacking public buildings, erecting barricades, and fighting antiriot police. They had started to recruit a group of one hundred Gagauz who would receive similar training and then form assault units in order to start an uprising in Gagauzia similar to the Maidan one in Ukraine. The plan was coordinated by the head of the Youth and Sport Department of the Gagauz administration, Anatolii Cara (who fled to Russia), allegedly assisted by the First Vice-Bashkan Valerii Ianioglo and by Formuzal's 'right hand' and heir apparent, Fiodor Gagauz. It was also alleged that Formuzal himself had prepared the plan when he met high-ranking officials of Russian secret services during his spring 2014 visit to Moscow (*Gazeta de Cluj* 2014; Ungureanu 2014).

It should be reminded that, after the invasion of Crimea, President Putin seemed to seriously contemplate the plan of taking over Ukraine's entire Black Sea shore from Crimea to the Romanian border. Pro-Moscow moves did occur but were put down by the Ukrainian authorities in Odessa, with dozens of pro-Russian activists killed in a fire in May 2014. There were rumors of plots to proclaim a pro-Russian Bessarabian People's Republic in Ukraine's southern Bessarabia (or Budjak), the part of formerly Romanian Bessarabia located between the southern border of the Republic of Moldova (i.e., Gagauzia), the Black Sea, and the Danube. Allegedly, leaders would have included former Soviet army officers from the mainly ethnic Bulgarian town of Bolgrad (*The Economist*, January 3, 2015), located at about three miles from the Moldovan border. For their part, the Transnistrians were looking forward to an opportunity to join the new territory Russia would control either through Crimean-type annexation or due to the creation of Donetsk- and Luhansk-type 'republics.' It is likely that when Formuzal visited Moscow this scenario was taken into consideration and Gagauzia was given its own role in the Kremlin's larger regional game. Such an escalation would have

turned Ukraine into a failed state unable to control both its eastern and its southern territory. Moldova's poorly armed and trained 7000-strong military would certainly have not been able to prevent the secession of Gagauzia. Moreover, it is probable that pro-Russian forces would have initiated uprisings in other Moldovan regions and tried to take power in Chișinău (Tudoroiu 2016: 389). Moldova could have become a failed state.

Most likely, all this did not happen because President Putin came to the conclusion that large-scale military escalation would result in serious tensions with and heavy economic sanctions imposed by the West. Consequently, he limited warfare to the Donbass and did not encourage uprisings in Odessa, southern Bessarabia, and Gagauzia. Accordingly, despite his threats, the Bashkan did not proclaim the region's independence. He kept criticizing the Moldovan government; yet, some weeks later he stated 'Gagauzia is an inalienable part of the independent Republic of Moldova' (Goble 2014). However, there is no reason to believe that the 2014 episode will not repeat itself in the future. In the March 2015 Bashkan election, each candidate struggled to prove that he or she was the most pro-Russian. The winner, Irina Vlah, was supported by the strongly pro-Moscow Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, by Russian MPs, top athletes, and artists who came to Comrat, and by the two chairpersons of the upper and lower chambers of the Russian parliament, Sergei Naryshkin and Valentina Matviyenko, who received her in Moscow and promised to improve trade terms for Gagauzia. Right after her inauguration, the new Bashkan traveled once more to Moscow to meet First Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who promised an increase in agricultural imports from Gagauzia. Back home, she clearly stated 'I'm a pro-Russian politician and I represent the interests of the Gagauz people who are mainly pro-Russian' (Boțan 2015; Călugăreanu 2015; IPN 2015; Tudoroiu 2016: 387). It is clear that, in the case of renewed interventionism in the region, the Kremlin will be able to use once more the destabilizing potential generated and preserved by Gagauz elites.

If the failed frozen conflict described in this section is compared to the Transnistrian frozen one, it is clear that major differences exist. Most importantly, since the early 1990s Transnistria has represented a key issue in Moldovan politics that has constantly and effectively been instrumentalized by Moscow. It is a very versatile instrument: If needed, the frozen conflict can be reactivated in a matter of days, in

a 'soft' or 'hard' form. The much more modest tensions in Gagauzia were ignored for two decades by both Chișinău and Moscow. They could be used by the Kremlin only when a major geopolitical shift changed significantly the regional environment and led to their intensification through a relatively long and complex domestic process. On the other hand, however, the Russian financial effort required to keep Transnistria alive is considerable. For its part, Gagauzia is economically supported by Chișinău, with Moscow sending only occasional humanitarian aid (Boţan 2008). One could think of a certain complementarity between effective but expensive pawns and more difficult to use but also much cheaper ones. Given important financial constraints, the Kremlin will most likely continue to use both failed and genuine frozen conflicts in its future aggressive actions within the East European security complex. It is true that there are not many available Gagauzia-type cases. But Donetsk and Luhansk have recently shown that new frozen conflicts can be added to those inherited from the Soviet Union. There is no reason to believe that new failed frozen conflicts could not be created, too.

7.5 State Capture

The events analyzed in the previous section show that in recent years, Moldova's geopolitical situation has been very difficult, as was the case of other CIS republics trying to prevent their total absorption into the Russian sphere of influence. Unfortunately, its domestic problems unrelated to the case of Gagauzia have been even more serious, which is also representative for most post-Soviet states. Besides internal and external factors already mentioned in this chapter, the main source of recent difficulties is represented by state capture.

As explained in the theoretical chapter, in its extreme form state capture is a type of endemic corruption that allows a small oligarchic group to take control of the top level of state power in order to influence policy making in ways that serve their own private interests (Transparency International Moldova 2017). Joel Hellman and Daniel Kaufmann developed this concept in 1999–2000 using data from the Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Surveys, which allowed for a quantitative assessment of the level of state corruption of each state. For Moldova, they found out that, while its administrative corruption was equal to the CIS average, in terms of state capture it ranked second

in the region (after Azerbaijan), with a score of 37 on a 0–50 scale, with 0 for no state capture. The next two states, Russia and Ukraine, were five points away (Hellman et al. 2000: 7, 9). This reflected the situation toward the end of the first 'plurality by default' period. As shown earlier in this chapter, the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova came to power in 2001 and created a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime. One of the consequences was the complete elimination of barriers preventing well-connected individuals from influencing policy making in ways beneficial to their own private interests. The case in point was Oleg Voronin, the son of the President, whose fortune rapidly reached US$2 billion, a third of the country's gross domestic product. He took control of almost all of the sugar industry and of much of the grain trade, banking, insurance, building industry, real estate, tourism, and transport. His bank, FinComBank, was suddenly preferred by all state institutions (including the presidency), which also became the main partners of his building companies. Laws, rules, and regulations were tailored to serve his interests and those of similarly well-connected businessmen (*Ziarul de Gardă*, August 3, 2009; Tudoroiu 2015: 659).

As long as the communist regime lasted, these individuals remained in the private sector and used high-ranking communists to promote illegitimately their economic interests. Yet, after 2009, they decided to increase their state capture potential by migrating toward the public sector. The typical pattern they followed was to buy leading positions in some of the new and financially weak parties, which gave them access to key government positions and therefore to the direct control of state institutions. This is how Vlad Plahotniuc became an influent personality of the Democrat Party and Veaceslav Platon of the party of Serafim Urechean. A relative exception was the leader of the Democrat Party, Vladimir Filat, a businessman who had been one of the founders of his party (Tudoroiu 2015: 657, 671). The problem with the Alliance for European Integration and its successive reincarnations was that under its vigorous pro-European and pro-democracy discourse it hid a harsh competition between oligarchic groups for the capture of the Moldovan state. The most important such groups were those of Filat and Plahotniuc. As Prime Minister, the former seemed to have the upper hand, but in fact it was the latter who had larger assets and more influence, especially within the judiciary and partly within the law enforcement agencies (Całus 2016b: 2).

7.5.1 The Pădurea Domnească Scandal

The first major event that revealed the shocking scale of state capture in Moldova under the pro-European governing coalition was the so-called Pădurea Domnească ('Princely Forest') scandal. It started with a shooting incident on December 23, 2012 in a hunting party (organized illegally in a protected natural reserve) that participants tried to keep secret. They had good reasons to do so as their simple list revealed major conflict of interests. Moldova's Prosecutor General, the President and the Vice President of the Chișinău Court of Appeal, and other high-ranking state officials had chosen this opportunity to socialize with influential businessmen whose illicit activities their respective institutions were supposed to repress. When this finally became known, a parliamentary commission had to be created to investigate the case. It found that the police, the prosecutor's office, the Security and Information Service, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Forest State Agency, and the Ministry of Information Technology and Communications had all been involved in covering up the incident. Their actions included abuse of power, hiding and faking evidence, as well as false statements. Pressure was put on witnesses to change their statements by the Security and Information Service, which also tried to sabotage the inquiry. Consequently,

> the Commission found with concern that the distortion of the principle of democratic governance, through the capture of important state institutions, affected the confidence of the citizens in their own state. (…) The state institutions ceased to act in the interest of the society, serving the interests of certain political leaders. (Parliament of the Republic of Moldova 2013: 20)

The irony was that when the Democrat-nominated Prosecutor General involved in the incident resigned, Filat's and Plahotniuc's groups struggled to get their respective candidate in the vacant position so brutally that the governing coalition came to an end. From February to May 2013 its former members spent most of the time insulting and accusing each other of capturing the Moldovan state. Vlad Filat spoke explicitly about the 'oligarchic siege, (…) a campaign of sacrificing the state for the personal interest of an obscure individual who bought a place in politics and now wants to buy a country' (*Jurnal.md*, February 13, 2013). Many were disturbed by this situation, in Chișinău as well as in Brussels. The

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle criticized the 'worrying new pattern of decision making in Moldova' where 'the institutions of the state have been used in the interest of a few' (Banks 2013). Finally, the governing coalition was restored with a slightly changed composition when Filat accepted to be replaced as Prime Minister by the Vice President of his party, Iurie Leancă, on May 30, 2013. This, however, did in no way put an end to the dispute between the two oligarchic groups for the control of state institutions (Tudoroiu 2015: 664).

7.5.2 The Theft of the Billion

This dispute took a dramatic turn in the context of a financial fraud of unusual proportions that could not have taken place in the absence of an extremely high level of state capture. No less than $1 billion disappeared from three banks in a fraudulent borrowing scheme. The banks included the country's most important financial institution, the initially state-owned Savings Bank of Moldova. Its situation significantly worsened after too many credits were given to politically connected firms with ties to offshore jurisdictions. As a solution, the government led by Vlad Filat transferred the bank's control to a group of minority shareholders backed by the Prime Minister, but they continued to siphon off funds until the bank was on the brink of bankruptcy. They knew that the government would be forced to prevent a major financial crisis, which it did by transferring one billion USD from the National Bank to the three endangered banks (Marandici 2017). The bailout 'devastated [the] national budget and fostered deep mistrust in the political establishment' when it became public in November 2014 (Freedom House 2017a). Former Prime Minister Vlad Filat was stripped of parliamentary immunity and arrested in October 2015. In June 2016, he was convicted on corruption charges and sentenced to nine years in prison. Yet, he claimed that this was a maneuver of Plahotniuc, who was indeed in control of the judiciary. There were many suspicious elements and, critically, even today the investigation continues to drag with no prospect of recovering at least a part of the stolen money (Freedom House 2016; Freedom House 2017a, 2017b).

Economic consequences included inflation, the devaluation of the Moldovan currency, and the suspension of international assistance. The government in Chișinău finally succeeded in obtaining €100 million in

macro-financial assistance from the European Union to be disbursed under strict conditions in 2017–2018 and $180 million from the International Monetary Fund to rehabilitate banks of systemic importance (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 8, 12; EU4Business 2017). Nothing could be done, however, to correct the negative political consequences of the scandal. The year 2015 was marked by massive popular protests, endless negotiations to form a ruling coalition after the November 30, 2014 parliamentary elections, no less than five full or acting Prime Ministers, major splits in Filat's Liberal Democrat Party and in the Party of Communists, and finally a stable government sworn in on January 20, 2016. However, that moment can be described as the most unfortunate in the post-2009 history of Moldova. By making a coalition with the Liberals (13 seats) and by securing the support of liberal-democrat and communist splinter groups, Vlad Plahotniuc took full control of the state despite the fact that his party had only 19 of the Parliament's 101 seats (Boțan 2016a; *e-democracy.md* 2014).

7.5.3 Plahotniuc, a Typical CIS Oligarch

Plahotniuc—'the most hated national politician, ubiquitously accused of having captured the Moldovan state' (Popșoi 2016)—launched his career by closely cooperating with communist President Voronin and his son. In late 2009–early 2010, he became the main financial supporter of the Democrat Party (Całus 2016b: 1; Całus 2016c: 6) and quickly turned its formal leader, Marian Lupu, into 'a housewife' (Șerban 2011). As the *de facto* head of the ruling coalition's second party, he intensified his state capture efforts initiated during the communist regime. After defeating and jailing his main competitor, Vlad Filat, and turning his close associate Pavel Filip into a Prime Minister, Plahotniuc controls Moldova's judiciary, the anti-corruption institutions, the Constitutional Court, the National Bank, the fiscal and customs services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the police. He owns assets worth US$2–2.5 billion while members of his clan manage most state-owned companies as well as Moldova's financial flows (Całus 2016b: 1, 3, 5).

This has negatively impacted the political and economic situation of the country. In February 2016, the EU Council criticized the excessive politicization of state institutions, systemic corruption, and lack of judiciary independence in Moldova (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

2017: 2). The reforms to which Chișinău committed itself are dealt with slowly and selectively, especially in fields related to corruption. This made financial support from development partners such as the EU uncertain and has diminished investors' interests (Lupușor et al. 2017: 5, 10). Unsurprisingly, in October 2017, 91% of the Moldovans believed that the country was governed in the interest of some groups and 85% considered corruption to be 'a very big problem' (International Republican Institute 2017). Indeed, total losses from corruption were estimated at 8–13% of Moldova's GDP (Budianschi 2017: 1). In addition, 'political interference in the judiciary and law enforcement is a systemic impediment to social and economic development' (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2017: 3). Plahotniuc uses systematically his control of the judiciary as part of a 'carrot and stick' approach that allows him to subordinate politicians and business people. Equally threatening for Moldova's chances to democratize, the media landscape is very polarized with Plahotniuc owning radio stations, newspapers, news portals, and four of the five TV stations with nation-wide coverage (Całus 2016b: 5).

All this adds to the fact that, as already mentioned, the oligarch controls only 19 parliamentary seats (out of 101), which is reflected in the percentage of Moldovans who approved of him in October 2017 (21%) as opposed to those who disapproved (71%) (International Republican Institute 2017). Moreover, when asked to name the politician they most trust, only 1.5% chose Plahotniuc (Insitutul de Politici Publice 2017: 46). Yet, due to his doubtful methods, the Democrat Party initiatives regularly receive the support of 56–57 MPs, which gives him the total control of the Parliament (Całus 2017: 3). As a result, only 19% of the citizens are favorable to this institution, while 76% take the opposing view (International Republican Institute 2017). On this basis, Transparency International noted that

> Moldova is seriously affected by state capture. Control established over the main state bodies and agencies is based on patron-clientelle relationships, rent-seeking and a sophisticated mechanism of sanctioning dissent or autonomy from the dominant power-coalitions. (Transparency International Moldova 2017: 54)

There is serious danger that the Moldovan political system evolves toward a 'specific kind of soft, nominally pro-European authoritarianism' with the marginalized Parliament and government serving only as

legitimating instruments to Plahotniuc and his clan (Całus 2016b: 9). In October 2017, no less than 58.9% of the citizens believed that there was a trend toward a 'totalitarian' regime in Moldova where decision-making will be monopolized by one individual (Insitutul de Politici Publice 2017: 57).

7.5.4 The Electors Strike Back

Obviously, most citizens abhor this prospect and try to prevent it in the simplest possible way: They vote for Plahotniuc's enemies, most of whom are pro-Russian. Since the banking scandal, pro-Moscow Moldovan parties have been extremely vocal in criticizing the ruling coalition—and eventually Plahotniuc—and in associating state capture with their pro-European orientation. Strangely for an outsider, in Moldova the picture emerged of a cynical European Union that supports corrupt oligarchs for geopolitical reasons as opposed to the honesty of trusted old Russian friends. The pro-Kremlin champion is Igor Dodon's Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, the largest parliamentary party (25 seats) at the November 2014 elections. The equally radical Our Party of Renato Usatîi ceased to be a relevant actor when its leader faced accusations of attempted contract killing and took refuge in Russia. The communists are more moderately pro-Russian, and their influence diminished considerably after many of their MPs moved to Plahotniuc's camp (Freedom House 2016, 2017b; Lupușor et al. 2017: 38).

This is why it was Igor Dodon who won the presidential election of October–November 2016 after an electoral campaign assessed as 'the dirtiest in Moldovan political history' (Freedom House 2017b). A former communist Minister of Economy (Całus 2017: 3), he is a leftist who promotes religious conservatism and exploits the Soviet nostalgia of the older generation as well as the anxieties of ethnic minorities (Popșoi 2016). His democratic credentials are questionable: He has condemned European anti-discrimination policies and has frequently sent messages of hatred, discrimination, and intolerance toward sexual minorities, unmarried women, and women without children. The new President has also chosen as external partners leaders of illiberal, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes in Hungary, Turkey, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Iran, and North Korea (Lupușor et al. 2017: 37). His first priority for the first 100 days in office was 'restoring the strategic partnership with Russia' (*e-democracy.md*, October 4, 2016). Indeed, since his election, he has made innumerable

pro-Moscow statements and goodwill gestures, met President Putin five times in seven months, secured Eurasian Economic Union observer status for Moldova, and tried to convince his countrymen of the extraordinary benefits of a comprehensive partnership with Russia. With respect to the European Union, he initially wanted to terminate the Association Agreement. Eventually, he started to talk about renegotiating it in a way that would stop it from hampering trade relations with Moscow. Yet, Moldova is a parliamentary republic and the President's competences are limited (Całus 2016a; Lupușor et al. 2017: 41). This has prevented Dodon from implementing any of his plans. Moreover, when he tried to block the nomination of ministers and the promulgation of an anti-Russian law, he was repeatedly suspended by the Plahotniuc-controlled Constitutional Court and the Speaker of the Parliament signed the required documents (*Jurnalul.ro*, January 2, 2018).

In fact, Plahotniuc has benefitted from the *cohabitation* with the socialist President. They have even cooperated in introducing a mixed voting system that advantages both their parties (Lupușor et al. 2017: 10). More importantly, the key Moldovan debate now centers on geopolitical questions, which tend to hide the oligarchization of politics. Within this new debate, the 'imminent Russian threat' allows Plahotniuc to mobilize the pro-European electorate and to slow down certain inconvenient reforms, with the West perceiving him as a 'useful oligarch' able to prevent Chișinău's pro-Russian shift (Całus 2016a; Całus 2017: 4). To emphasize its resolutely pro-Western orientation, the Moldovan government responded to Russian pressure by declaring the Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin *persona non-grata*, expelling Russian diplomats, banning Russians involved in the Kremlin's propaganda campaign from entering Moldova (Lupușor et al. 2017: 42), and passing a law restricting the broadcast in Moldova of politically biased Russian TV programs (paradoxically, most of the stations airing them belong to Plahotniuc). This strategy has been successful in the cases of Romania and the USA, which do support the oligarch despite his anti-democratic actions (Całus 2017: 4).

There is, however, another group of political forces that oppose Dodon and his Kremlin-friendly policies: the democratic pro-European opposition. It is made up of two political parties with roots in the Moldovan civil society, Maia Sandu's Action and Solidarity Party and Andrei Năstase's Dignity and Truth Platform Party. They genuinely support democratic reforms, the end of state capture, and Moldova's

Europeanization (Boțan 2016b). A former World Bank economist and Education Minister, Harvard-educated Maia Sandu—considered by many the most influential female politician in Moldova's history—even qualified for the second round of the 2016 presidential election. However, the two parties are supported mainly by younger educated urban voters (Popșoi 2016) while their penetration in the regions remains limited. They lack financial resources, access to mass media with national coverage, and strong local leaders (Lupușor et al. 2017: 38). In October and November 2017, two rather discordant opinion polls found that voting preferences for Sandu's party were 23 and 12.3% and those for Năstase's party 4 and 3.4%. At 9 and 2.8%, Plahotniuc's party was in a more difficult position, but Dodon's socialists were supported by 34 and 26% of the electorate. Despite differences between the two series of figures, it is clear that the pro-Russian socialists have by far the highest probability of winning the 2018 parliamentary election as they did in the case of the 2016 presidential ones. The democratic pro-European opposition is fighting a quixotic battle that it cannot win. The real contenders are the socialists, who can rely on a large electoral support, and Vlad Plahotniuc, whose illicit methods might once more distort the output of elections. Taking advantage of the new mixed voting system (half of the MPs will be elected through uninominal voting), convincing other parties' MPs to change their affiliation, or even rigging could allow his oligarchic regime to survive. In any case, 'geopolitical voting' has become a key electoral strategy (Popșoi 2016), with Russia having a good chance to become the main indirect beneficiary of Moldova's state capture.

7.6 Analysis

7.6.1 The View from Moscow

One might wonder how does Russia perceive its own role and prospects in Moldova. The response has been provided by Andrey Devyatkov, a senior researcher at the Institute of Economy of the Russian Academy of Sciences and an Associate Professor at the Lomonosov University, in an analysis that takes into consideration all of Moldova's aforementioned problems. Despite Chișinău's obvious difficulties and the huge disproportion between the two countries, the Kremlin is fully aware of the fact that during the last decade its influence in Moldova has declined. Reasons include (1) Chișinău's dependence on Western financial

assistance, particularly after 2010, which has considerably increased the West's influence. Russia is simply unable to provide the €300–400 million received annually by Moldova; (2) falling gas prices that put an end to Russian energy blackmailing while the future connection of Moldovan and Romanian gas networks will limit the dependence on imports from Russia; (3) the shift of most of Moldova's trade from Russia and the CIS to the European Union; and (4) Romania's support for the Europeanization of Moldova and its increasing use of effective economic and soft power instruments. Consequently, Russia had to accept that it represents only one of several players in Moldova. However, its influence is sustained by (1) Moldova's economically and politically peripheral position with respect to the West. Poverty, corruption, and the oligarchic system block the reforms that could change its present situation; (2) the fact that lack of economic development has led to Soviet nostalgia, leftist ideas, and the transformation of Russia into a model of stability, with President Putin much more popular in Moldova than any local politician; (3) the importance of Russia as a labor and trade market, with massive Moldovan work migration; (4) Russian cultural influence that makes most Moldovans watch Russian TV channels, which exposes them to the Kremlin's well-engineered propaganda; and (5) the presence of Russian troops in Transnistria (Devyatkov 2017).

Overall, Russia continues to be very influent in Moldova and at present is trying to expand this influence through the electoral victory of its proxies in Chișinău. If in 2018 the socialists take control of the Parliament and place the country resolutely in the Russian camp, Moscow will legitimately claim that CIS republics enter its orbit by themselves, peacefully and democratically. This would provide an excellent propaganda instrument to discredit the effectiveness of the European Union's policy toward its Eastern Partners (Całus 2016b: 9). This is why the Kremlin has reacted very moderately to Moldova's (i.e., Plahotniuc's) aforementioned provocative actions and shows 'uncharacteristic reluctance' to use its usual brutal methods (Lupușor et al. 2017: 42). Of course, this will change if the Moldovan socialists fail to take power in Chișinău.

7.6.2 Values and Interests

When Moldova was an EU 'success story,' it was the accession to the European Union that was widely popular. The capture of the state by pro-European oligarchs eventually changed citizens' preferences. From

fall 2015 to spring 2017, more Moldovans wanted their country to join the Russian-promoted Customs Union/Eurasian Economic Union than the European Union (International Republican Institute 2017) in the hope that this will lead to the fall of their unpopular pro-EU rulers. Support for Brussels diminished with 35% from 2009 to 2016 (Popșoi 2016). It is still unclear why this changed in October 2017, when once again opinion polls turned Europe into the first choice with a difference of 4.8% (Insitutul de Politici Publice 2017: 73) or even 11% (International Republican Institute 2017) over the Eurasian Union. Those same opinion polls, however, showed that Moldova's troubled situation in recent years has combined with structural causes presented earlier in this chapter—Lipsetian factors, historical influences, the Orthodox religion, the limited pre-communist democratic experience, the harshness of the communist repression, and the survival and predominance of Soviet elites—in making Moldovans uninterested in democracy. In 2015–2017, the latter was important for only 19–35% of them. On the contrary, economic prosperity was important for 57–75 of the citizens (International Republican Institute 2017). This means that, in Moldova as in the rest of the CIS, the choice between the European Union and Russia is purely interest-based. Brussels' 'transformative power' has failed to make democratic values relevant to Moldova's citizens, which explains why most of them prefer to put an end to Plahotniuc's rule using Russian proxies with doubtful democratic credentials instead of genuinely democratic pro-European parties. Needless to say, this opens excellent geopolitical opportunities for the Kremlin.

Less surprisingly, the same line of reasoning applies to the Moldovan oligarchs. It is clear that Plahotniuc is not a democrat and his place should not be in the pro-European camp. There are fundamental incompatibilities between the values he claims to promote and the undemocratic regime he has built. Yet, he has been a genuine champion of anti-Moscow efforts. This is simply due to fear of fierce competition from the Kremlin-connected oligarchs if the country joins Russia's sphere of influence. It should be noted that this is hardly limited to Moldova. This scenario has already materialized in Belarus and was instrumental in making Ukrainian oligarchs that include President Poroshenko constantly oppose Russian domination. Ironically, this turns Moldovan oligarchs into the main defenders of their country's uncompromised sovereignty despite the citizens' contrary will.

7.6.3 Moldova and the Region's Prospects

In many regards, tiny Moldova is an encyclopedia of CIS troubles. Their study is most useful in finding out if the future of the western CIS is exclusively decided by the region's main geopolitical actors or if smaller actors do have the ability to challenge great power-related constraints. Chișinău's resistance to Russian pressure shows that small state agency is relevant; at the same time, from a methodological point of view its analysis suggests that such agency and, more generally, East European interactions cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration sub-national actors. Moldovan agency comes from the interaction of—and, frequently, the lack of balance among—domestic groups (pro-European oligarchs, pro-Russian leftist parties, disillusioned citizens, the Gagauz) whose actions are dictated by cynical interests that take form in a domestic environment shaped by unfavorable structural factors. These factors—presented in the previous section—are responsible for a dramatic situation aptly described by Kamil Całus:

> Moldova is showing signs typical of so-called failing states. It has no control over parts of its territory and large sections of its border, no effective or responsible political class, no functioning political and legal system, no coherent and generally accepted concept of statehood, and no stable economy. (Całus 2016c: 6)

One could note that most CIS republics share many of these features. There are two main aspects. On the one hand, domestic groups tend to act opportunistically and to exploit international developments to their own interest, even if this threatens the country's sovereignty or territorial integrity (as the Gagauz did in 2014). On the other hand, there are major domestic vulnerabilities that great powers cannot fail to exploit (once more, frozen conflicts are the best example). This is to say that small state agency exists in the CIS, but is plagued by the state's structural weaknesses that prevent it from reaching the intended level of effectiveness.

In a large measure, the existence of these weaknesses and vulnerabilities influences the very strategies adopted by major regional players. This chapter has shown that, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has mainly exploited Chișinău's weak points—from the existence of a large audience for Russian TV channels and gas dependence to ethnic tensions and the willingness to start a civil war—which was both inexpensive and

effective. When Brussels entered the game, it tried to help Moldova put an end to those vulnerabilities, thus making it immune to Russian pressure. This brings into discussion the two actors' geopolitical visions. The goal of the EU Kantian approach was to bring Chișinău closer to and ideally within the Brussels-centered security community. This failed when the European Union found itself in the puzzling situation of having to cope with non-Kantian Russian actions and with local developments that limited its choices to *Realpolitik* support for pro-European undemocratic forces accompanied by kind words to the democratic opposition. The only Western effort that could have reached its ambitious objective was Germany's involvement in the settlement of the Transnistrian crisis. Yet, it could have been successful precisely because Berlin acted outside the EU framework and negotiated with Russia in a zero-sum approach that fit the Kremlin's views. Forcing Moldova's federalization in the context of a larger Russian-European (and Russian-German) partnership and thus resolving the Transnistrian frozen conflict at the expense of Chișinău is exactly what Moscow hopes to achieve in a post-Brexit situation characterized by the pro-Russian attitude of the Franco-German axis and/or of Germany. As shown in the next chapter, this might well be the future of the East European security complex. Still, for the time being Chancellor Merkel found it impossible to adopt overtly a neoclassical geopolitical vision and this made her efforts fruitless. Russia, on the contrary, constantly excels in this regard and Moldova represents a good example. Their interaction is much more than a simple realist, billiard ball clash. Moscow has instrumentalized a wide range of elements that include Russian and Russian-speaking minorities, Soviet elites, Soviet-inherited economic partnerships, language, cultural, religious, and historical affinities, the popularity of its mass media, and the presence of its troops—in other words, everything that connects Moldova to the 'Russian world.' If President Putin's conservative, nationalist, and militaristic approach is added, all this represents the very definition of Russian neoclassical geopolitics that the Kremlin is using effectively in its interactions with CIS republics. The latter therefore cannot think seriously of adopting Kantian views, which contributes to making Europeanization unrealistic. On the contrary, it is the European Union—or Germany—that need to integrate neoclassical geopolitical elements into their regional strategy if they intend to deal successfully with equally cynical Russian and local actors.

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CHAPTER 8

Concluding Scenarios

Previous chapters have analyzed the main actors of the East European security complex and the factors that are likely to influence their future behavior. Ultimately, only three of these factors can be assessed as representing objective constraints. One is American hegemony. Of course, when this is mentioned, 'declining' immediately comes to mind and there are many arguments to support this association. President Nixon brought the gold standard to an end in 1971; Keohane published *After Hegemony* in 1984; the BRICS emerged in the 2000s, with everybody speaking about the coming multipolar world; and President Trump has been quite effective in making many people question America's will to sustain the hegemonic system it has constructed since Bretton Woods. Yet, the picture of a very muscular Uncle Sam was captioned 'Still No. 1' on a not-so-old cover of *The Economist* (*The Economist*, June 30, 2007). As shown in Chapter 5, no *déclinologue*—to use a term coined in a similar context by French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin—can deny the global importance of the USA and the key role it plays in the East European security complex. In some of the scenarios examined below, this regional role might come to an end; but the analysis of American agency in Eastern Europe as part of Washington's global reach is critical in the very construction of these scenarios. The second structural factor is the present process of globalization that, as explained in Chapter 4, is at the origin of the populist wave responsible for European Union's existential crisis, for Brexit, and for the election of President Trump. The *altermondialistes* do hope to bring about a more humane type of

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globalization that would curb the negative socioeconomic consequences of neoliberalism; alternatively, the initial protectionist ideas of the new US President could have triggered an even more radical change. Yet, few realistically expect globalization to take major turns in the near future. Accordingly, populist politics is likely to further expand, which will impact significantly world and East European developments.

The third objective constraint is the rise of China. Possible responses to this historical change, however, are highly subjective. American foreign policy toward Beijing can follow the logic of neoclassical geopolitics and launch a Mearsheimer-inspired escalation from 'pivot' to trade wars, containment, and Cold War; can try to return to an 'all-win,' postmodern vision that engages Beijing in peaceful cooperation; or can continue to vacillate between these two extremes. What is not subjective is the linkage between Washington's China and Russia policies, which is highly relevant for the East European security complex: due to limited resources (and here the 'declining' side of American hegemony becomes difficult to ignore), a fully fledged 'pivot' to Asia requires a successful 'reset' in Eastern Europe. President Trump's election has brought in a considerable degree of voluntarism in US foreign policy; yet, his genuine desire to confront the Chinese cannot be turned into reality unless his equally genuine sympathy for President Putin is translated into geopolitical partnership. In turn, as shown in Chapter 5, the latter depends on the unpredictable course of the Russiagate scandal. For a person with President Trump's degree of narcissism, this must be supremely frustrating. It should be noted that these three structural factors are clearly interrelated. The rise of China would have been impossible without neoliberal globalization. In turn, the latter could have not existed outside the neoliberal world order constructed by the USA as part of its hegemonic project. This is why the initial protectionist plans of President Trump had an enormous damaging potential for American hegemony, for globalization, and for China as a superpower in the making.

There is a further, 'almost' structural factor represented by Moscow's global assertiveness and regional aggressiveness. In Chapter 3, I explained the 'almost' label: these key features are not a given. Russia is not, by definition, a threat to its neighbors. It became one due to the way its new identity as an international actor has been constructed since the coming to power of President Putin. Moreover, the fundamental foreign policy change with respect to Weimar Russia that has become a definitory feature of the new regime was in a large measure dictated by the need

for domestic legitimacy. But the fact is that Russian aggressiveness in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, under less violent forms, in the rest of the regional complex is unlikely to diminish (except in exchange for considerable and never-ending concessions) and therefore has to be treated as a structural constraint.

The future evolution of the East European security complex will be strongly constrained by these structural factors. However, this does not deny the importance of agency. Previous chapters have shown that charismatic politicians such as President Macron in France can at least temporarily block the progress of populism in their respective countries, and that self-interested pro-Western CIS politicians such as Moldova's Vlad Plahotniuc can even prevent their states from joining Moscow's sphere of influence despite the will of a majority of citizens who have been brought to sincerely believe that Russia will help them find prosperity and freedom and put an end to corruption. Of course, the best example is provided by President Trump's impact on American foreign policy. On the one hand, consequences for the East European security complex stem from his worldview and ideas, that include skepticism toward North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union; sympathy for President Putin and his tough leadership style; and preference for zero-sum deals that might bring short-term benefits to the USA at the expense of the East Europeans. On the other hand, the President's narcissism, lack of self-discipline, and impulsiveness could jeopardize even a hardly reached grand alignment with Russia the first time he believes he is cheated or disrespected. Accordingly, it is difficult to associate the future of the regional security complex exclusively with structural factors. They are undoubtedly important, but cannot always override the consequences of key subjective decisions stemming from the personality traits or—as suggested by the example of Vlad Plahotniuc—from the personal interests of various influent politicians.

What is likely to be influenced mainly by structural factors, however, is the process of European (dis)integration. As suggested by some of the scenarios presented below, the Union's dramatic identity crisis and its exploitation by increasingly influent populists are likely to result in the 'dictatorship' of the Franco-German axis, with structural factors explained in Sect. 4.4 eventually hampering the latter's working, provoking the renationalization of member states' foreign policies, and ultimately resulting in the construction of a German sphere of influence in Eastern Europe facing the Russian one. Of course, the return of the

continent to an era of competing nation-states is only one of many possible outcomes; but even less dramatic ones are likely to be accompanied by the considerable expansion of the area dominated by neoclassical geopolitical interactions. This is a topic that, since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, has preoccupied political scientists as well as the European general public disoriented by the questioning of the Kantian *acquis* it took for granted. Perhaps the best illustration of such concerns is provided by a recent European TV series that explores precisely the geopolitical near future of the continent.

8.1 Okkupert

The pessimistic Norwegian-French-Swedish TV series depicting Europe's grim prospects was appropriately named *Occupied* (*IMDB* 2017). Its first season was produced in 2015, after and under the strong influence of the Crimean crisis; the second in 2017, after President Trump's election. In the near future, the new environmental friendly government in Oslo decides to stop the production of oil and gas. The European Union, however, faces an economic crisis and cannot accept the decision. Considerable diplomatic pressure is put on Norway, but the latter is not a member state and rejects any concession. As Norway belongs to the Kantian community of West European democracies, the use of brutal force cannot be contemplated by the EU. Consequently, the dirty work is outsourced to Russia. Under the threat of military invasion, Moscow makes the Norwegians comply. The oil and gas production is restored to its previous levels. To prevent any change of mind, the Kremlin's ambassador in Oslo is turned into a de facto viceroy. Her actions are supported by small numbers of Russian special forces unilaterally deployed in Norway. Soon, the country is in the process of being transformed into Moscow's protectorate. Desperate, the Prime Minister takes refuge in the American embassy. But the USA had left Europe; NATO doesn't exist anymore. To avoid complications, the US diplomats poison the Prime Minister so that he needs to be taken to a hospital, thus leaving their embassy. Eventually, he joins the resistance, and has to flee the country. In a move reminiscent of the Nazi occupation, he is replaced by a female Quisling who, to protect the fatherland from total annexation, cooperates *à outrance* with Moscow's ambassador. Russian special forces assist the Norwegian secret service in crushing the small 'Free Norway' resistance movement. The country becomes a fashionable tourist

destination for rich Russians. An economic agreement is concluded that allows a Kremlin-related oligarch to take over Norwegian oil and gas. 'Collaboration' goes very far: a law is passed that protects the *human rights* of Russian nationals, i.e., of Moscow's occupation forces targeted by Free Norway 'terrorists.'

Scenarios of this type have in fact already been turned into reality within the CIS. What is shocking in this series is the West European location of the target country, which emphasizes the fact that in the near future major geopolitical changes could significantly reduce differences between the CIS and the EU. It is important to note that in the series—which was coproduced by France—the European Union means, in fact, the Franco-German axis. No other European leader is involved in decision-making; the Swedish Prime Minister sheepishly supports the plan. Moreover, the Franco-German axis itself has become a mask for German hegemony. Decisions are taken by the German chancellor and implemented by the servile French EU commissioner. Because there is an economic crisis, France asks for a desperately needed German loan; Berlin preaches austerity measures and says no. To get the money, the French President turns to his Russian counterpart. America is out of the game; in Paris, young activists fill the streets with posters showing President Trump and the caption 'Peste.' Moscow is much closer, but not everybody loves it. At one point, Finland—whose airspace is violated daily by Russian jet fighters—and Poland succeed in bringing together the East European member states as well as France, which is bribed with the promise of a loan from EU funds. Due to the majority of votes thus formed in the EU Council, the European Union should press Moscow to withdraw from Norway. Yet, Germany convinces the East Europeans to give up by promising them precisely the enforcement of military defense at their eastern borders threatened by Russia.

The series shows an East European security complex that has become a bipolar one. The Kremlin is in full control of CIS republics (Ukrainian nationalist guerrillas are shown who operate from Poland) while EU eastern members, including Finland, are caught between Moscow—which threatens them militarily—and Berlin. Except for the danger of being invaded, countries such as France or Sweden are more or less in the same situation. Polish activism is directed toward coalition-building, but has little chances to balance the Germans. The EU is very much as President Trump already sees it today—'you look at the European Union and it's Germany. Basically a vehicle for Germany' (Gove 2017).

Western Europe still shares Kantian geopolitical convictions, but in this peaceful context Wendt's 'first level of cultural internalization,' force (Wendt 1999/2003: 268–270), is constantly used by Berlin in both financial and diplomatic forms. The European-Russian—or, rather, German-Russian—partnership ensures the continent's stability. Yet, this is done at the expense of both Western and Eastern states that are subordinated to their respective hegemon.

The series has been criticized as simply adapting Cold War clichés to an updated international environment. In fact, what it does is to adapt the 2014 Ukrainian reality to Western Europe, with further complications brought by President Trump 'pivoting' away from Europe and Germany beginning to fill the resulting void. Overall, everything is plausible enough to make European viewers feel particularly uncomfortable about their future. Yet, as shown below, this is hardly the worst scenario their countries could experience in the medium and long term.

8.2 The Scenarios

Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver have emphasized the effectiveness of the Regional Security Complex Theory in setting out the full range of possible conditions as a basis for generating predictive scenarios concerning the evolution in security terms of a specific region. They noted that 'ontologically, the scenarios are soft limits.' Constructing them is finding out what options are relevant under what conditions (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 65). Generating scenarios in a security complex-based approach is very different from devising ideal-type scenarios. The goal is to identify actual possibilities, which normally are in-between situations. What scenario does materialize is of course a question of probabilities that 'depends ultimately on politics, and structurally on the compatibility with other conditions' (ibid.: 65–66). Chapters 4 and 5 have already identified a number of scenarios concerning the future of US foreign policy and the prospects of the process of European (dis) integration, respectively. The former are due to structural factors analyzed earlier in this chapter, to President Trump's ideas and personality traits, and to the unpredictable course of the 'Russiagate' scandal that constrains his actions. There are four such scenarios: A. 'Russiagate' continues; no significant US-Russia agreement is possible; B. President Trump is cleared but a grand alignment cannot be reached; there is only limited US-Russia cooperation; C. President Trump is cleared and a

grand alignment with Russia is reached, but it is a short-lived one; and D. President Trump is cleared; fully fledged grand alignment with Russia ensues. With respect to the European Union, three scenarios were identified in Chapter 4: (1) deeper integration; (2) dominance of the Franco-German axis; and (3) the geopolitical irrelevance of the EU accompanied by the rise of Germany as a regional power. It is the combination of these scenarios that will impact the East European security complex. Yet, not all 12 resulting regional scenarios are relevant. It is important to note the critical difference between the short-term effects of the US and EU foreign policy changes and those in the medium and long term. In particular, a short-lived US-Russia grand alignment (US scenario C) will represent a spectacular development at the time of its conclusion, but will likely fail to have lasting effects; therefore, it can be left aside. Furthermore, differences between the actual impact of certain US or EU scenarios on the East European security complex are limited enough to allow their merging. Indeed, as discussed below, the difference between US scenarios A and B mainly concerns the degree of US support for CIS republics. This is certainly important for a country like Ukraine, but less so for the nature of regional geopolitical interactions. Similarly, the EU scenarios 2 and 3 are very different for the European Union itself, but the nature of security interactions within the regional complex will not be fundamentally different if the Franco-German axis is replaced by Germany as the main West European actor. It should be remembered that this is not a study of the future evolution of specific states; it is an analysis of the likely geopolitical trajectory of the East European security complex as a whole and, as such, a certain degree of simplification is needed in order to limit the number of predictive scenarios. Presenting 12 of them would not be very helpful; it is more reasonable to operate the aforementioned mergers that allow diminishing their number to four, as illustrated in Table 8.1.

Scenario I is marked by the absence of a US-Russia grand alignment and by the transformation of the deeper-integrated European Union into a strong international actor. The USA will either continue its present moderate tensions with the Kremlin or will succeed in reaching a limited degree of cooperation. Yet, in either case it will be unable and unwilling to disengage from the East European security complex. In turn, this will only allow for an irrelevant Obama-style ‘pivot to Asia’ as diplomatic and military resources will continue to be allocated to Europe. Post-Brexit Britain will have a chance to intensify the special

Table 8.1 Medium- and long-term possible consequences of Brexit and of foreign policy changes under President Trump for the East European regional security complex

Post-Brexit EU scenarios / **Russiagate/ US foreign policy scenarios**	1. Deeper European integration leading to a strong EU	2. The EU dominated by the Franco-German axis or/ followed by 3. The geopolitical irrelevance of the EU; Germany becomes the main West European actor
	Scenario I	*Scenario II*
A. 'Russiagate' continues; – no significant US-Russia agreement is possible; – continuation of present moderate US-Russia tensions; – irrelevant Obama-style 'pivot to Asia;' – US support for East European states preserved; or B. President Trump cleared but a grand alignment cannot be reached; – limited US-Russia cooperation; – irrelevant 'pivot to Asia;' – US support for East European NATO members preserved; – US support for CIS republics considerably weakened	– the USA remains a significant actor in Eastern Europe; – the UK assists the USA in its East European policies; – communitization of the EU member states' foreign policies; – the EU becomes a strong international actor; – close EU-Russia political and economic partnership; – Russia gives up any expansionist plan against Eastern EU member states; – CIS republics' ability to resist absorption into Russia's sphere of influence depends on the USA; – possible EU use of Russia as a counter-weight to American hegemony	– partial and then complete renationalization of the EU member states' foreign policies; – Eastern Europe becomes the arena of a mainly three-cornered rivalry whose actors are Russia, the Franco-German axis and later Germany, and the USA in alliance with the UK and certain East European states (either within NATO or, more likely, through US-UK-Poland-type trilateral alliances); – if/when the Franco-German axis is replaced by Germany, France also plays a role as an independent actor; – taking advantage of the weakness of the EU, Russia tries to expand its sphere of influence in both the CIS and the eastern part of the EU but is kept in check by the USA; – despite hybrid wars and reignited frozen conflicts, tense episodes alternate with more peaceful ones, allowing for the survival of substantial economic cooperation

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

Russiagate/ US foreign policy scenarios \ **Post-Brexit EU scenarios**	1. Deeper European integration leading to a strong EU	2. The EU dominated by the Franco-German axis or/ followed by 3. The geopolitical irrelevance of the EU; Germany becomes the main West European actor
C. President Trump cleared; short-lived grand alignment with Russia; – no relevant long-term consequences	–	–
D. President Trump cleared; fully fledged grand alignment with Russia; – complete US pivot to Asia leading to major tensions and possibly to a Cold War with China (under President Trump and, with a high degree of probability, afterward)	*Scenario III* – Russia becomes a key US ally and takes an active part in the containment of China; – the USA ceases to be a relevant actor in Eastern Europe; – NATO irrelevant or dismantled; – communitization of the EU member states' foreign policies; – the EU becomes a strong international actor; – the East European security complex becomes bipolar (EU-Russia); – the EU friendly toward Russia but able to seriously hamper its expansionist plans; – as Russia also needs to transfer resources to Asia, it negotiates an agreement with the EU that recognizes its sphere of influence within the CIS; – East European members of the EU stop being threatened; – the UK becomes irrelevant in Eastern Europe	*Scenario IV* – partial and then complete renationalization of the EU member states' foreign policies; – Eastern Europe dominated by Russia and the Franco-German axis and later by Russia and Germany; – France (in the second case) and perhaps the UK play a certain role as independent actors; – taking advantage of the weakness of the EU, Russia uses hybrid wars and frozen conflicts to expand its sphere of influence in the CIS and in the eastern part of the EU; – however, Russia cannot use its entire potential in Eastern Europe as it needs to transfer resources to Asia

transatlantic relationship by assisting the USA in its East European policies. As already mentioned, depending on the degree of cooperation between Washington and Moscow, the former's support for CIS republics might vary; but the recognition of a Russian sphere of influence will be out of question, while American support for the Eastern members of NATO can be taken for granted. For its part, the European Union will take advantage of Brexit and of the implicit end of London's eternal veto to accelerate the integration process and to turn itself into a strong international actor. The preference of its major members for a close political and economic partnership with Russia will be turned into reality despite the opposition of Poland and the Baltic states; yet, this will be done from a position of relative force toward Moscow that will prevent sacrificing too many of the Eastern member states' interests. In addition, deeper integration will imply the communitization of the foreign policies of all EU members. Having their interests at least in part protected by Brussels and being unable to develop independent or even autonomous foreign policies, the EU 'cold warriors' will likely downscale their anti-Russian activism. For their part, the CIS republics will find themselves in a rather difficult position. Unable to rely on the European Union to confront Russia, their ability to resist absorption into the latter's unrecognized but very real sphere of influence will depend on the ups and downs of the Washington–Moscow relationship. 'Hard' interactions might follow, with Brussels possibly trying to act as a mediator. Of course, this will turn neoclassical geopolitics into the only imaginable geopolitical approach within the CIS, where no Kantian idea will survive. However, the latter will remain dominant within the entire European Union, including its eastern part. On a global scale, the EU will make efforts to bring about a multipolar world and to emancipate itself from American hegemony. In this context, it might even use Russia as well as other emerging powers as a counterweight to Washington's influence. This will most likely be done in a 'soft' way, but less friendly episodes reminiscent of the 2003 Iraq War crisis cannot be excluded.

Scenario II brings together the absence of a US-Russia grand alignment and European Union's control by the Franco-German axis likely followed—as explained in Sect. 4.4—by the geopolitical irrelevance of the EU, with Germany becoming the main West European actor and a fully fledged great power. The situation of the USA will not differ from that of the previous scenario. Relations with Russia might range between moderate tensions and limited cooperation, but Washington—supported

by the post-Brexit UK—will continue to play an important role in the East European security complex. In turn, this will prevent any ambitious anti-Chinese move. The situation of the European Union, on the contrary, will differ greatly from that of Scenario I. The identity crisis presented in Chapter 4 will be overcome due to the leadership—soon perceived by many as nothing less than a 'dictatorship'—of the Franco-German axis. One of its first actions will be the imposition of a close partnership with Russia that will fully satisfy German, French, Italian, and Spanish interests but will have very little concern for those of post-communists EU member states. This and other similar actions will make the communitization of foreign policies impossible. On the contrary, member states unwilling to follow Berlin's and Paris' line will progressively renationalize their foreign policies and try to fight Russian pressure with the support of the USA and Britain, which will use the institutional framework of NATO or—if the latter's working is blocked by France and Germany as in the case of Georgia's and Ukraine's intended accession—of trilateral alliances. In fact, in certain regards the geopolitical situation of post-communist EU member states will not be different from that of CIS republics. Moreover, when tensions within the Franco-German axis will start to hamper its actions as well as the working of the EU institutions (see Sect. 4.4), the dominant role of Germany will become increasingly difficult to accept. This will lead to the total renationalization of member states' foreign policies, which will make the European Union geopolitically irrelevant. At that point, as explained in Sect. 6.1, despite strong domestic opposition Berlin will be compelled to turn itself into a 'normal' great power, which will replace the Franco-German axis as the main West European actor. France will try to balance it by playing a less important but still relevant role as an independent actor in Eastern Europe. For its part, Russia will be advantaged by the fact that it will not need to face the strong European Union of Scenario I. The Franco-German axis will lead a weaker *Europe à géométrie variable* that will further decline until possibly turning itself into little more than a Customs Union and being replaced geopolitically by Germany-as-a-great-power. Moscow's superior potential will give it obvious advantages that it will use in order to expand its sphere of influence. It is not difficult to predict that Kremlin-orchestrated hybrid wars and reignited frozen conflicts will occur quite frequently within and even outside the CIS. Accordingly, the neoclassical vision of geopolitics will be triumphant in Eastern Europe and possibly in the rest of the continent. However, the

active role of the USA will prevent Russia from turning the region into a Hobbesian arena. In addition, new forms of decentralized economic cooperation will probably develop, embracing an area larger than the present EU single market and possibly including parts of the CIS and Russia itself.

Scenario III sees the USA leaving Europe in order to engage China with the total support of Russia. It is important to note that a fully fledged Washington-Moscow grand alignment might occur once every fifty years; it represents such a unique opportunity that nobody with President Trump's temper and ideas would fail to entirely exploit its potential. This translates into escalating tensions with China from threats of trade wars to actual containment, with the associated package of trade embargos, military incidents, and proxy conflicts. I do agree that all this is not very likely to happen—but mostly due to the difficulty of a US-Russia grand alignment. Not everybody shares this view. When I presented this scenario at a recent conference in Singapore, somebody in the audience skeptically asked (1) what if China doesn't want a Cold War, and (2) how can you have a Cold War in an interdependent world?. My response to the first question was the famous quote from Trotsky: 'you may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you.' There are obvious limits to Chinese tolerance of American hostility and in the case of President Xi Jinping they do not seem very generous. For interdependence, Norman Angell sold millions of copies of his book, *The Great Illusion*, aptly explaining that in a globalized world war is obsolete. The problem is that he wrote the first edition of the book—which had a slightly different title—in 1909, at the height of the first wave of globalization (it should be remembered that it was only during the mid-1990s that the pre-1914 level of globalization was reached once again). Five years later, when foreign language editions of the book were avidly read worldwide, World War I put an end to that wave of globalization. Angell and his liberal colleagues were eventually labeled 'idealists' and 'utopians.' More recently, speaking precisely about the chances of a US-Chinese Cold War, John Mearsheimer expressed his conviction that 'economic interdependence does not have a significant effect on geopolitics one way or the other' and used the same WWI example to support his claim (Mearsheimer 2010: 393). Furthermore, as explained in Sect. 5.6, Cold Wars have their own dynamics and succeed in reshaping the international system and participating superpowers in ways beyond the latter's control. This is to say that, once started, a

Washington-Beijing Cold War will not be easily stopped and might well continue for decades. Most of the action will likely take place in Asia and perhaps in the Middle East, with European states not playing an active role (ibid.: 389–393). However, the East European security complex will be critically affected by the departure of the Americans, who will need to use all their resources in the Pacific, and by Russia's transformation into one of the most important allies of the USA. In exchange for taking an active part in the containment of China, it will obviously be given a free hand in Eastern Europe. Yet, in this scenario Moscow will have to face the same friendly but robust Scenario I European Union, whose member states' foreign policies will be fully communitized. It is likely that the Kremlin—which will also need to transfer resources to Asia—will acknowledge the strength of such an adversary by choosing to negotiate a balanced compromise that will result in the recognition of a Russian sphere of influence in most or all of the CIS, but certainly not inside the eastern part of the EU. This will have dramatic effects for the CIS republics but will bring a remarkable degree of stability to the East European security complex as a whole, which will become a EU-Russia bipolar one. In this context, the UK will find it difficult to play a significant role and will probably focus on regions where its assistance will be more useful to its American ally, such as the Middle East. The Kantian vision of geopolitics will certainly survive within the EU but will lose any chance of expanding in the CIS.

Finally, Scenario IV associates the Scenario III American withdrawal from Europe with the Scenario II evolution of the weakened European Union from the domination of the Franco-German axis to geopolitical irrelevance accompanied by the transformation of Germany into the main West European actor. Once more, after the conclusion of a grand alignment with Moscow, President Trump will not resist the temptation of escalating tensions with Beijing, which will result in a US-China Cold War. The USA will direct all its efforts toward Asia and leave the East European security complex, where Russia will have to face only the weak European Union led by friendly Franco-Germans. They will be quick in concluding a partnership with the Kremlin that will recognize the latter's sphere of influence; but the fact that they encounter little opposition will make Russians continually press for new concessions that will expand their control inside the European Union. Similar to Scenario II, deeply frustrated eastern EU member states will renationalize their foreign policies, but the American departure will make them unable to rely on a

major external power. At best, post-Brexit Britain might try to play a role on its own, but this will hardly be comparable with the stabilizing influence of the USA in Scenario II. The main choice for the East Europeans will be that between the Franco-German axis (progressively replaced by Berlin) and Moscow. The aforementioned TV series, *Okkupert*, describes the early phase of this scenario, when the axis and the European Union still are used to mask the German hegemony. Eventually, the EU will become completely irrelevant from a geopolitical point of view and Germany-as-a-great-power will replace it, with France also playing a less important role in Eastern Europe. Russia's only problem will be the need to transfer resources to Asia to help the USA contain China; but this will not prevent it from setting up inexpensive hybrid wars and more or less frozen conflicts in order to expand its sphere of influence in the CIS and in the eastern part of the EU. Neoclassical geopolitical interactions will dominate the entire East European security complex, likely bringing Europe back to some of the darkest moments in its history.

It is important to remind that these four scenarios are not the only possible ones. Still, out of the multitude of possible geopolitical trajectories of the regional complex, they are by far the most likely. Moreover, their probability of materialization is not the same. On the one hand, with no favorable end of the 'Russiagate' scandal in view, President Trump has little chance to negotiate his grand alignment with the Kremlin. On the other, as explained in Chapter 4, the legitimacy crisis of the European Union is too deep and the populist wave too strong to allow for the deepening of the integration process; the opposing trend should be expected. This means that it is Scenario II that has the highest probability of being followed. Accordingly, on the American side, things will not change significantly in the East European security complex. Despite President Trump's highly destabilizing initial statements, the present line of policy—that includes a non-negligible degree of hostility toward Russia inherited from the Obama administration—will be preserved in the context of an ambiguous and irrelevant anti-Beijing 'pivot.' As explained in Sect. 5.2, the geopolitical rise of China will continue to represent an important US foreign policy preoccupation. However, the way to address it can vary between hard countering and softer balancing. Mearsheimer-type containment is an extreme option that, at least for the time being, is hardly imperative. Less aggressive approaches can be chosen that have the considerable advantage of not requiring a

massive transfer of American resources to Asia, which will implicitly allow for Washington's continued involvement in the East European security complex.

Major change in the latter will come from a different source: the internal dynamics of the post-Brexit European Union, with the Franco-German axis—now unbalanced by Britain—replacing the ineffective and delegitimized EU institutions as the Union's engine. This will bring about a more intergovernmental structure, based on some sort of 'differentiated integration' or 'flexibilization' (Wahl 2017: 157–158) that will represent a combination of multi-speed EU, *l'Europe à la carte*, and *l'Europe à géométrie variable* (see Sect. 4.4). The emergence of a Franco-German 'dictatorship' will be paralleled by the diminishing influence of peripheral member states on the decision-making process. East European 'cold warriors' deprived of British intra-EU support will be unable to prevent the conclusion of a close EU-Russia partnership desired by and useful to the leading powers but hardly tailored to fit their own interests. They will take advantage of the *géométrie variable* dimension of the new European construct to renationalize much of their foreign policy and use US and UK support—within NATO or US-UK-Poland-type trilateral alliances—to face Russian pressure. Basically, this is what Boris Johnson, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, hinted to during his October 2017 talks with representatives of eight eastern EU member states (Kirby 2017). The foreign policy renationalization will generalize when internal tensions of the Franco-German axis (mainly due to the lack of balance between Paris and hegemonic Berlin and to opposing views on the key issue of the EU common commercial policy analyzed in Sect. 4.4) will make it dysfunctional. The Union will decline and become geopolitically irrelevant, while Germany will see itself compelled—against the will of its many Kantian-thinking citizens—to engage in power politics and sphere of influence building. The transformation into overt *diktat* of Berlin's recent efforts to discreetly bring—at Moldova's expense—a Moscow-friendly end to the Transnistrian crisis will be long, difficult, and painful; but it will nevertheless take place. For its part, completely deprived of such scruples, Russia will take advantage of all European torments to expand its sphere of influence using a wide range of instruments that will include (1) cyber-attacks, cyber-spying, the use of mass media and social media for propaganda and disinformation purposes, and any other form

of information warfare; (2) energy blackmail, financial penetration, use of corruption and undercover assets to dominate strategic economic sectors, and the development of opaque networks of patronage seeking to take control of the local economy and of critical state institutions; (3) support for extremist and for pro-Russian political parties, corruption of national leaders, penetration of key security institutions, subversion of vulnerable political systems, and undermining of national unity; (4) the instrumentalization of Russian minorities, of the impact of their political parties on local politics, and of any significant ethnic tension in the target country; and (5) hybrid wars as well as the creation and reignition of various genuine or failed frozen conflicts (Bugajski 2016: 30; Simón 2014: 67; Haaland Matlary and Heier 2016: 12). If needed, the year 2014 will repeat itself in various CIS republics. The last moment fading out of ready-to-ignite armed secessionist conflicts such as that of Moldova's Gagauzia will become highly unlikely; and Dodon-type politicians will be able to rely on muscular Russian support. Yet, the Kremlin's expansionist plans concerning the CIS and especially the eastern members of NATO will be kept in check by American power, which will prevent most crises from escalating into major wars. Like Moscow, Washington will implicitly benefit form the decline of the European Union. In Eastern and even Western Europe, it will be increasingly perceived as a benevolent protector able to stop the Germans and Russians from dividing the continent among themselves. This will help preserve its regional and global hegemony. Ultimately, tense episodes will likely alternate with more peaceful ones, allowing for the survival and even development of substantial economic cooperation as well as for ad hoc political cooperation on out-of-area issues among all the great powers involved in the East European security complex (Missiroli et al. 2014: 50).

If the recent history of this regional complex is perceived as a competition between the post-modern, win-win Kantian geopolitical vision of the European Union and the brutal neoclassical geopolitics that characterizes President Putin's and President Trump's worldviews, it is clear that the latter is in the process of winning; the former will survive, at best, only in some parts of Western Europe. It is true that the neoclassical geopolitics-inspired Berlin-Moscow-Washington triangular power game will involve only a certain level of instability, not extreme 'geopolitical recession.' Yet, the memory of the failed Kantian European project will inescapably haunt the continent's future politics.

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