

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

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**Ukrajinski konflikti v geopolitičnem trikotniku Ruske federacije,
Evropske unije in Združenih držav Amerike**

**The Ukrainian Conflicts within the Geopolitical Triangle of the
Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States of
America**

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2016

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Declaration of authorship

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Geopolitika kot *per se* produkt realistične misli predstavlja multidisciplinarno metodo opazovanja zunanje politike, ki vključuje preučevanje politične geografije, mednarodnih odnosov, mednarodnega prava itd. Pojav ukrajinskih konfliktov je ponovno postavil geopolitiko in njene vodilne postulate v središče mednarodne skupnosti. V okviru javnega in akademskega diskurza obstaja splošen konsenz, da konflikti v Ukrajini predstavljajo velik izziv za evropsko varnostno arhitekturo in glavni kamen spotike v odnosih med Rusijo in zahodom. Ta magistrska naloga prispeva k akademski razpravi v kontekstu pomena geopolitičnih paradigem v sodobni mednarodni skupnosti. Osredotoča se na razvoj geopolitične misli s posebnim poudarkom na kritiko geopolitike in njene refleksije na krizo. Naloga analizira specifične geopolitične interese (strateške, ideološke in ekonomske) Rusije, Evropske unije in Združenih držav Amerike glede Ukrajine oziroma ukrajinskih konfliktov. Cilj magistrskega dela je preveriti, kako in v kakšni meri so konflikti v Ukrajini izzvani z aktivnostmi izbranih subjektov in so pod njihovim vplivom ter poiskati povezave med konflikti v Ukrajini in geopolitičnimi interesi treh analiziranih subjektov.

Ključne besede: Ukrajina, geopolitika, Rusija, Evropska unija, Združene države Amerike.

The Ukrainian Conflicts within the Geopolitical Triangle of the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States of America

Geopolitics, a *per se* product of the realist thought in International Relations, represents a multidisciplinary method of observing foreign policy, which includes the study of political geography, international relations, international law, etc. The emergence of the Ukrainian conflicts once again placed geopolitics and its driving postulates in the focus of the international community. Within public and academic discourse there is a general consensus that the conflicts in Ukraine represent an immense challenge for the European security architecture, and the main stumbling block in the relations between Russia and the West. The present thesis aims to contribute to the academic debate in the context of the significance of geopolitical paradigms in the contemporary international community. It focuses on development of geopolitical thought, with a particular emphasis on the critical geopolitics and its reflection on the conflicts. Finally, the thesis analyses specific geopolitical interests (strategic, ideological and economic) of Russia, the EU and the United States with regards to Ukraine and the Ukrainian conflicts. The goal of the thesis is thus to examine how and to what extent the conflicts in Ukraine have been caused and influenced by the actions of the selected subjects, i.e. to seek if there is a correlation between the conflicts in Ukraine and geopolitical interests of three analyzed subjects.

Keywords: Ukraine, geopolitics, Russia, European Union, United States of America.

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List of abbreviations:

AA – Association Agreement

CFSP - Common Foreign and Security Policy

CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States

CSDP - Common Security and Defense Policy

DCFTA - Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

ECU - Eurasian Customs Union

EEU - Eurasian Economic Union

EIA - Energy Information Administration

ENP - European Neighborhood Policy

EaP - Eastern Partnership

ERI - European Reassurance Initiative

EU - European Union

GATT - General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

IMF - International Monetary Fund

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO - Non-governmental organization

NRC - NATO-Russia Council

OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PCA - Partnership and Co-operation Agreement

RAP - Readiness Action Plan

SFOR - Stabilization Force

UNSC - United Nations Security Council

WTO - World Trade Organization

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Introduction

Ukraine – the largest country by area situated entirely in Europe, with a population of around 45 million, in the Middle Ages a core of East Slavic culture, while today known as a country in which political instability and violence has become not only a topic of great interest, yet an immense geopolitical issue in the contemporary global community. Euromaidan protests in November 2013, Russia’s annexation of Crimea, skirmishes in the eastern part of Ukraine and self-proclamation of “People’s Republics” in Kharkov, Donetsk, Lugansk and Odessa draw particular attention of the international community and became a severe challenge to the European security architecture. Furthermore, the conflicts related to Ukraine are recognized by the international and academic community as the main stumbling block in relations between Russia and the West.

Even though there are domestic factors that could be labeled as causes of the conflicts in Ukraine, such as historical trends in this area and its complexity, question of ethnic groups, or internal political and socio-economic problems, one cannot neglect the ongoing geopolitical crisis related to the Ukrainian soil. Before further elaboration, it has to be underlined and clarified why the thesis is addressing the Ukrainian conflicts in plural. Namely, I would argue that there is not just one ongoing conflict in Ukraine, rather we can point out several – internal and interstate. Analysis of the selected subject matter will be in context of two conflicts that include a foreign element: 1) wider interstate conflict related to Ukraine, consisting of Russia, the United States and the European Union (EU); 2) interstate conflict between Russia and Ukraine. With that respect, this thesis will focus on foreign-geopolitical factors that are causing and influencing the conflicts. Ukrainian strategic geographic position, rich energy resources, significance as a transit country for energy, along with its importance for relations between Russia and the West, are implying that the conflicts contain a geopolitical logic that has to be thoroughly addressed.

The thesis shall be developed on the assumption that the Ukrainian conflicts are a *per se* geopolitical power-game. The research will be conducted by the search for and emphasizing the correlation between the conflicts and geopolitical interests (strategic, ideological and economic) of Russia, the EU and the United States in this area. We have selected these units of analysis

because development of the conflicts has shown that all three subjects have profound interest in Ukraine and it should be analyzed what were incentives for their geopolitical engagement.

Motives of all out three units of analysis (Russia, the EU and the United States) are multilayered, and it cover particular strategic, ideological and economic interests, which one could argue that represented an impetus for their involvement in the conflicts. Furthermore, the common standpoint within the academic and political circles is that the Ukrainian conflicts are overwhelmed with the geopolitical confrontation and that, in one hand, it represent a product of particular geopolitical aspirations. Therefore, the relevance of the thesis particularly lies in the analysis of external domains of the conflicts - geopolitical interests and behaviors of observed subjects.

However, it remains to be answered how and to what extent were conflicts in Ukraine caused and influenced by the actions of the particular subjects (Russia, the EU and the United States), while protecting and promoting their strategic, ideological and economic interests, i.e. to find a correlation between the conflicts in this area and geopolitical interests of the selected subjects of analysis. Hence, the thesis will try to point out the relevance of the geopolitical paradigms in the contemporary global politics, and I would argue that the Ukrainian conflicts represent a genuine example of the clash of specific geopolitical interests.

A research will be guided by the following hypothesis: *The Ukrainian conflicts represent a manifestation of geopolitical strategic, ideological and economic interests of the Russian Federation, the EU and the United States of America.* In order to test the hypothesis, we shall analyze whether the independent variable (geopolitical strategic, ideological and economic interests of the selected subjects) affects the dependent variable (particular conflicts in Ukraine), how and to what extent.

With the respect to the methodology, a research will be conducted by applying a qualitative desk research, based on the textual analysis method. It is a qualitative research because it analyzes the specific conflicts through the examination of various sources, in order to objectively acquire an extensive knowledge regarding the observed subjects and its actions, i.e. to gain a comprehensive and thorough understanding of their involvement in the Ukrainian conflicts. This thesis applies a desk research since the collected data is derived from a wide spectrum of secondary sources. The textual analysis method indicates that the conducted research qualitatively scrutinizes the

selected secondary sources, and the selected method would enable us to grasp the core content of a selected text by reading the parts, text as a whole and the context included in. When applying a textual analysis method, a focus reading of the selected literature could enable the research to extract the most substantial fragments of the secondary sources, with which the underlying motives for behavior and actions of the observed subjects could be revealed. This should enable us to extract from the selected sources the specific interests of Russia, the EU and the United States, as well as its actions in this context. The geopolitical theories, particularly critical geopolitics, are used as the theoretical lenses for emphasizing arguments gathered from the thorough reading and analysis of chosen literature. The thesis has chosen three categories - strategy, ideology and economy, within which it will examine and present Russia's, the EU's and the United States' motives for their behavior in the Ukrainian conflicts.

This thesis conducts a qualitative desk research with the textual analysis method in order to thoroughly examine interests and behaviors of the observed actors, based on focus reading of the chosen literature from different perspectives. However, we have to be aware that the Ukrainian conflicts are complicated subject matter to observe, due to the biased information, political opinions and angled propaganda from all parties involved. Therefore, this thesis aims to objectively analyze the interests and actions of the observed subjects, in order to gain an extensive knowledge regarding their involvement in the conflicts. Having in mind that the current debate is overwhelmed with the biased views, possible limitations of the conducted research derives from the deficiency of impartial sources regarding the subject matter. Those limitations could affect the very result of the thesis. For the qualitative analysis, it is significant that the conducted research takes into account all possible biases and personal experiences that could impact its outcome. Hence, in order to bypass the possible limitations, this thesis attempts to impartially analyze the literature and to extract the mere facts regarding geopolitical interests of the observed subjects, as well as to find and emphasize a cause-effect relationship of their behavior. Moreover, the thesis does not take into consideration writings, perception or views from Ukrainian statesmen and citizens, for the sake of objectivity of the research.

Also, geopolitical theory and its reflection on the conflicts are very important and it shall provide us with arguments in order to better understand the situation that occurred in Ukraine. Many authors differ in defining what geopolitical theory includes, but they all share the notion that

geopolitics attempts to decompose and to foresee international political behavior based on geographical variables, even though post-modern authors are claiming that it is much more than what maps indicate. The study of geopolitics also includes the study of the ensemble of relations between the interests of international political actors, interests focused in an area, space, geographical element or ways, which creates a geopolitical system. The reason for applying the geopolitical theories to this particular issue could be found in the core of the described goals of the thesis, since the multidisciplinary approach of different theorists should enable and teach us to observe and to extract strategic, ideological and economic interests of the analyzed actors in this area. I would argue that the geopolitical perspective gives an additional value in understanding actions of the chosen subjects towards protecting and promoting their geopolitical strategy. Hence, it will help to establish a coherent picture of the particular issue that this thesis is analyzing.

This thesis represents a contribution to the discipline of International Relations in several domains: firstly, it analyses and compares the theories of geopolitics as a method of studying foreign policy; secondly, it gives the theoretical framework for the particular issue that thesis is discussing by reflecting the findings from the process of analyzing the mentioned theories; thirdly it provides a thorough analysis of the external factors of the conflicts in Ukraine, which are products of geopolitical interests of the subjects that are in our focus of observation.

In addition to the introduction and the conclusion, this thesis will consist of four chapters. Foremost, the goal of the first chapter is to create a theoretical framework for this particular issue, which will provide us with a starting point, and it will lay the groundwork and provide the direction for the further analysis in the following chapters. The need for geopolitical theories could be found in the argument that it is a multidisciplinary approach of different theorists, which will enable and teach us to observe strategic, ideological and economic interests of the selected subjects in this area, and with that it will assist us in our intention to understand moves of Russia, the EU and the United States towards promoting their geopolitical strategy. This chapter will consist of an analysis of the development of geopolitical thought, with a particular focus on critical geopolitics and its paradigms. Moreover, the first chapter will elaborate on the reflection of the critical geopolitical thought on the Ukrainian conflicts. However, it has to be acknowledged that the inception of the Ukrainian conflicts was the socio-economic protests that

occurred on Maidan Square in Kiev, which afterwards evolved into political protests. Therefore, the second chapter will present the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of Ukraine, in order to gain knowledge on why Ukraine, by its internal characteristics, has been a fertile country for the emergence of the geopolitical clash between three global powers.

In the third chapter we will commence with the examination with respect to the geopolitical crisis – interstate conflicts that are emerging in Ukraine. In this chapter it is expected to achieve an answer to the question how and to what extent observed subjects are affecting the particular issue that this thesis is discussing. It is necessary to observe the impact of Russia, the EU and the United States as one coherent unit, and not separately, since their interests and actions regarding this conflicts are intertwined and overlapping. Hence, that represents an issue this thesis is trying to label as the cause of this particular conflicts. Also, the thesis will analyze how and to what extent conflicts are being influenced by the overlapping interests and actions of the selected subjects, and that is also a reason why we need to observe their impact as one coherent unit. In the subchapter of the third chapter, the thesis will discuss implications of the conflicts, which is necessary for establishing the complete and coherent picture. In this chapter we will mostly use secondary sources.

The fourth chapter has the goal to search for, observe, extract and analyze geopolitical strategic, ideological and economic interests of the Russia, the EU and the United States in Ukraine. This chapter will be composed of three subchapters, in which we will analyze the interests of the global powers in Ukraine separately. This will provide us with a knowledge why this area is important for their geopolitical strategy, it will help us understand their actions regarding the conflicts, and finally it will serve as a preface for discussing the impact of the analyzed subjects on the Ukrainian conflicts. The research in this chapter will be conducted by analyzing the secondary sources. Concluding part will firstly present the intersection of geopolitical interests of Russia, the EU and the United States and their impact on the Ukrainian conflicts, and afterward, it will provide us with a reflection of the theories of geopolitics, which were a subject of the first chapter, on this particular issue.

A thorough analysis in all these chapters should enable us to come up with an answer if the Ukrainian conflicts represent a manifestation of geopolitical strategic, ideological and economic interests of Russia, the EU and the United States.

1 Theories of geopolitics

Geopolitics, the term coined by the Swedish legal jurist Radolf Kjellen in 1899, is a multidisciplinary method of observing foreign policy, which includes a study of political geography, international relations, international law, etc. (Marklund 2014). Operational concept for our analysis of the geopolitics of the Ukrainian conflicts shall be Geoffrey Sloan's (1988, 20) definition that geopolitics represents "a theory of spatial relationship and historical causation whose perspective is the international system as a whole." In the previous years, and particularly after the Ukrainian conflicts occurred, the contemporary academic community placed the geopolitics at the center of the international politics (Marklund 2014). I would argue that the nowadays conflicts, along with those that occurred in the 1990s, represent a profound argument that geopolitics always had a major role in global politics, and that still is one of the driving forces of national states' foreign policies.

This thesis will particularly focus on critical geopolitical thinking, as a theoretical framework, which would represent a foundation for our further analysis of the Ukrainian conflicts. However, since critical geopolitics emerged as a reaction and response to classical geopolitical ideas that were dominant in the academic and political discourse from the end of the 19th century, a first part of this chapter will shortly elaborate on the fundamentals of classical geopolitics. This short elaboration on classical geopolitics is relevant because critical geopolitical ideas derive from the very notions and paradigms of classical geopolitical writings and interpretation. Therefore, understanding of critical geopolitics is directly dependent on the solid knowledge of classical geopolitical ideas.

Most scholars are arguing that the genesis of geopolitics is a particular conflagration of social Darwinism and late nineteenth century *fin-de-siecle* Europe (Dodds *et al.* 2016). Hence, the classical geopolitical thought could be divided into two segments - social Darwinism and environmental determinism, and imperial rivalries and great-power projection (Dodds *et al.* 2016). In broader terms, geopolitics could be observed through the comparison of two schools of thought - the organic state theory and geostrategy (Hillen and Noonan 1998). A number of relevant intellectuals, such as Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mahan, Friedrich Ratzel, etc., dealt with the theories of geopolitics (Ó Tuathail 1999). Their writings offered arguments on how

geographical factors, for instance resources and location, may impact the relations within the international community, as well as the prospects of development for great powers, such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States (Dodds *et al.* 2016). However, earliest writers of geopolitics were under the influence of racial and environmental determinism, i.e. imperial preoccupations and social Darwinism, which directed their writings towards the elaboration of the survival prospects of societies and states (Dodds *et al.* 2016).

The organic state theory was developed primarily by the two European intellectuals - Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolph Kjellen (Hillen and Noonan 1998). The German scholar, Friedrich Ratzel, emphasized, referring to the Darwinian Theory that states are like organisms, and, therefore, states' fundamental interest is to grow in size and resources, in order to ensure its security (Retaille 2000). Dominant paradigms in the Ratzel's writings are racial and environmental determinism, which are in line with the context of the time in which he was writing (the second part of the 19th century). In addition, he emphasized that Germany needs to secure additional land and resources, in order to ensure its existence. Therefore, Ratzel is often being associated with the term Lebensraum (living space), which was misused in the years to follow by Nazi ideology (Retaille 2000). Kjellen further developed on Ratzel's writings, since he argued that states are actual organisms. The organic state theory was, on one hand, revolutionary in that period, but, on the other, it was hazardous, since the Nazis misused it as a modus for gaining hegemony and ascendancy (Haggman 1998).

When discussing the theory of geostrategy, the first scholar to be mentioned is Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval officer, who underlined the significance of sea power as a critical element in geopolitics. He argued that the economic competition is an essence of all rivalry between countries, but that the sea power was a crucial factor for commerce and economic cooperation (Ó Tuathail 1999). Unlike Mahan, Sir Halford Mackinder, a professor of geography and director of the London School of Economics, placed a land power at the core of his theory, since he argued that the inventions, like railway, would position land power as a major factor in international politics (Knutsen 2014). He was mainly focused on the issue of the British Empire, and he wrote that Britain, as a traditional sea power, is more threatened by land powers, which are able to mobilize populations and resources using the new transport infrastructure. Also, Mackinder was highly aware of the importance of the relation between space, geography, history

and power in global affairs (Sabet 2015).¹ The most important are that the Mackinder's writings that influenced a generation of the United States politicians, and his ideas were implemented through the United States policies and strategies during the Cold War period (Dodds *et al.* 2016). Another American prominent scholar, Nicholas J. Spykman, joined the academic discussion regarding geopolitics to challenge the Mackinder's thesis. Namely, Spykman (1944, 43) emphasized that the Heartland could not be an area of the crucial geopolitical importance. Yet, he introduced an idea about the Rimland, as a strategic and influential geopolitical area.²

The geopolitical theory between the two world wars became a theoretical basis for fascist and authoritarian regimes in Germany, Italy and Japan (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006). Additionally, geopolitics was perceived as a theoretical tool of Nazis, and due to these features, it became a controversial academic field with a negative connotation and general reluctance to even use the term (Dodds *et al.* 2016). Therefore, in the post-World War II period, the term geopolitics was not present in the academic or public discourse, but was restored by progressive geographers from the 1970s (Dodds *et al.* 2016). One of the progressive geographers was Yves Lacoste, whose publication *La Géographie, ça sert, d'abord, à faire la guerre* (Geography is first and foremost about making war) from 1976 disclosed a new critical start of the historiography of the discipline (Ó Tuathail 1996). In addition, Lacoste's writings represented a critical attitude towards functioning of geography as a discipline that was a backbone for certain imperial tendencies.

Political geography within the Western scholarly and political debate was not relevant at the beginning of the seventies (Ó Tuathail 1996). However, the American security adviser and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was responsible for a comeback of geopolitics in international politics and academic circles, since he reintroduced geopolitics as a modus to oppose political strategies and policy-making based on idealism (Dodds *et al.* 2016). He reintroduced the term geopolitics in the academic discourse, and positioned it as a new generic meaning for the balance of power in the international community (Ó Tuathail 1996). Kissinger

¹ Mackinder developed a thesis that the area, defined as the Heartland, is of fundamental significance for gaining strategic geopolitical power (Knutsen 2014). The Heartland was determined as the Eurasian core with a considerable coal, oil, gas and other minerals reserves, and Mackinder wrote the well-known 'equation': "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules the World-Island commands the World" (Knutsen 2014, 843).

² Spykman underlined: "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world" (Spykman 1944, 43).

placed national interests at the centrum of the United States foreign policy agenda, and the United States establishment benefited from emphasizing the great power rivalries and connected regional dimensions, particularly in the Middle East and South-East Asia. For Kissinger, national interest always represents a product of domestic processes, as well as the particular power relations in which they are involved (Hillen and Noonan 1998). Ó Tuathail (1996, 45) argues that this has erased negative attributes and connotations of geopolitics, and, what is more important, it “foregrounded the problematic of geography and global politics anew.”

President Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, also perceived geopolitics as a foreign policy instrument. Brzezinski revitalized Mackinder’s heartland theory by arguing that Eurasia represents a crucial area for the future of international politics and geopolitical aspirations of global powers (Knutsen 2014). Therefore, he stated: “Whoever controls Eurasia dominates the globe”, and also warned that “if the Soviet Union captures the peripheries of this landmass, it would not only win control of vast human, economic and military resources but also gain access to the geostrategic approaches to the Western Hemisphere – the Atlantic and the Pacific” (Brzezinski 1998, 111). Brzezinski, who was very influential in determining the United States foreign policy course, emphasized that the United States should secure the resource supplied and territorial access, in order to preserve its leading global geopolitical position. Both Brzezinski and Kissinger were strongly leaning on Mackinder’s paradigms (Sabet 2015). Hence, even Kissinger stated that “Russia, regardless of who governs it, sits astride territory Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical Heartland” (Sempa 2009, 20).

When it comes to discussing the contemporary geopolitical thought, Marc Bassin first made its distinction on critical geopolitics³ and neoclassical geopolitics⁴ (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006). In addition, Paul Reuber introduced an argument that geopolitics is replacing ideology in the post-Cold War period, arguing that in three segments: the geopolitics of cultural difference (Huntington's clash of civilizations), the geopolitics of universalism and hegemonic superpower (Fukuyama's end of history) and the geopolitics of new bloc formations (the EU as new bloc) (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006).

³ Critical approaches towards foreign policy practices; left-wing, critical and radical academics.

⁴ Conservative and realist perceptions of international relations; right-wing politicians advocated it, especially in France, Germany, Russia and the U.S.

Critical geopolitics, as a theoretical approach between political geography and international relations, emerged in the late 1980s as an attempt to overcome described notions and predominating paradigms of the classical geopolitics (Haverluk *et al.* 2014). In order to develop its argumentation and surpass the classical perception of geopolitics, critical writers had to redefine the term 'geopolitics', as well as to distance from "the imperialist, racist, and environmentally deterministic geopolitics of the 1940s, which worked closely with the imperial state governments to achieve geopolitical goals" (Haverluk *et al.* 2014, 19). Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992) in their thesis 'Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy' analyzed geopolitics with a more comprehensive approach, while the basis of their research was the Foucauldian premise that geography, as a discourse, represents a form of power/knowledge. They argued that geopolitics "should be critically re-conceptualized as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas" (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 192). In order to thoroughly comprehend geopolitics, especially valuable is argument that "the study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic states" (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 192).

The writers of critical geopolitics analyze various phenomena, and they observe geopolitics as a set of discourses, representations and practices. Ó Tuathail (1996) is emphasizing that critical theories have to comprehend that the nature of geopolitics is discursive and contextual. As a theoretical approach, critical geopolitics starts its argumentation with underlining that geopolitics is a more complex issue than it is recognized and perceived by classical geopolitical writers. Critical writers are arguing that the classical understanding of the world political map through the reflection of their own cultural and political assumptions is superficial and even self-interested (Ó Tuathail 1999). On the other hand, a critical approach is contextualizing theoretical paradigms that raise the question of the existing structures of power and knowledge. However, the common feature of the classical and critical understanding of geopolitics is that both strive towards the political practice that aims to influence national and global politics. Yet, a distinction must be underlined, since critical geopolitical thought is more comprehensive in understanding the mere problematic of geopolitics, along with a better conceptual perception of the subject matter (Ó Tuathail 1999).

Criticism to classical or mainstream geopolitical thought represents a response on the geopolitical strands of dominant intellectual milieu (Mamadouh 1999). Critical geopolitical thought contributes to the debate with recognizing and emphasizing the necessity to contextualize geopolitical engagements (Dodds *et al.* 2016, 6). Certainly, the critical geopolitical theory made a major shift in intellectual circles, despite the classical geopolitics preserved its position in the context of extent of influence on policy-making processes. The new geopolitical writings obtained the epithet ‘critical geopolitics’ as a part of the discourse of rethinking of power (Dalby 1990; Ó Tuathail 1996). The end of the conflicts and rivalry behind the iron curtain, which continuously directed geopolitical thought towards the territorial structure, has deepened the academic interest in the spatiality of power in geography (Retaille 2000). For instance, postcolonial writers, like Edward Said, positioned themselves in the academic community because of its questioning of Western colonial discourses, along with criticism towards strategies for the Middle East and South-West Asia (Dodds *et al.* 2016).

Critical geopolitics is a subfield of human geography, and it primarily observes and analyses the geographical postulates that are involved in creating global affairs strategies (Dodds *et al.* 2016). The critical thought challenges the conventional approach, and observes geopolitics as an ideological and politicized form of analysis, and not just as a group of determined geographical facts (Ó Tuathail 1999). It is important that advocators of the critical approach are indicating that geographical claims are *a priori* geopolitical, and that international politics is also within the domain of geopolitics, since it includes geographical and spatial assumptions about people and places (Dodds *et al.* 2016). However, the objective of critical geopolitics is to allow deeper contemplation of space and power, as well as to observe the politics of the geographical specification of politics, and not to elaborate on the geography of politics (Dalby 1990). Hence, critical geopolitical thought questions the mainstream distinction between foreign and domestic, political and non-political, state and non-state (Dodds *et al.* 2016, 7).

Ó Tuathail (1999) argues that critical geopolitical writers strive to emphasize the complexities of global politics, and to disclose certain power relationships that distinguish specific understanding regarding geopolitics. In addition, Ó Tuathail (1999, 108) emphasizes that “as a reflexively Eurocentric and narrowly rational cultural practice of ‘experts’ in powerful Western institutions (from universities to military bureaucracies to strategic ‘think-tanks’), geopolitics is not about

power politics: it is power politics!” Therefore, critical geopolitics aims to disclose and decompose power politics and its paradigms. For the purposes of the thesis, we will use the Ó Tuathail’s (1999, 111) typology of geopolitics that is studied by critical geopolitics:

1. **Formal geopolitics** – focuses on geopolitical thought and geopolitical tradition; intellectuals, institutions and their political and cultural context;
2. **Practical geopolitics** – focuses on the everyday practice of statecraft; practical geopolitical reasoning in foreign policy conceptualization;
3. **Popular geopolitics** – focuses on popular culture, mass media and geographical understandings; national identity and the construction of images of other people and places;
4. **Structural geopolitics** – focuses on the contemporary geopolitical condition; global processes and contradictions.

In order to draw conclusions, this new wave of perceiving geopolitics conducts an analysis by observing the practices with which political subjects would primarily spatialize international politics, and present it as “a world characterized by particular types of places” (Agnew 2003, 2; Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 190). Critical geopolitics does not base its research on a single theoretical or methodological approach, yet it heavily criticizes the conventional analysis of global affairs. The specific focus of the critical geopolitics is on processes that produce the perception and significance of territories, borders or actors, and not just on mere geographical facts (Haverluk *et al.* 2014). Therefore, the objective of critical geopolitical scholars is not to focus analysis based on just sources and structures of power, but on the specific characteristics of power relations among global political subjects.

Dodds, Kuus and Sharp (2016, 7) added that critical geopolitical approach by “conceptualizing geopolitics, as an interpretative cultural practice and a discursive construction of ontological claims prioritizes the contextual, conflictual and messy spatiality of international politics.” Critical geopolitical thinkers also underline the phenomena of mainstream geopolitics in which main focus was on Global North as the pivotal part of its analysis (Haverluk *et al.* 2014). Hence, critical geopolitics attempts to decompose paradigm which placed the main focus of analysis of geopolitics on the major Western states, most notably the US, which also explains the interest in the post-Cold War United States global hegemony.

The particular contribution of critical geopolitics to the academic debate lies in its involving and understanding of spatiality and subjectivity in international politics (Dodds *et al.* 2016). Regarding the issue of spatiality, scholars of critical geopolitics are moving forward from the territorialized towards more complex, but also specified perception of geopolitics and spatiality of power relations. Therefore, a focus of critical geopolitical theory is to decompose the conventional territorial presumptions in observing geopolitics, in order to introduce a more comprehensive approach that corresponds to the new political and social habitus. Within that discourse, the critical geopolitical approach opens a room for innovative academic debate and political actions (Mamadouh 1999).

When discussing subjectivity in international affairs, critical geopolitics introduces the particular analysis that shifts from the state-centered approach towards non-state actors and its specific paradigms (Ó Tuathail 1999). Therefore, the critical geopolitical approach opens a debate in terms which groups are relevant practitioners of geopolitics, i.e. how they influence and shape global affairs. Moreover, critical geopolitical scholars are questioning the state-centric model and emphasize that state is no longer the fundamental unit of analysis. Also, it does not neglect the considerable position of states in the contemporary international affairs (Haverluk *et al.* 2014). However, the focus of analysis is directed, as Dodds, Kuus and Sharp (2016, 9) identify clearly, towards a conglomerate of “inside and outside formal political institutions, from presidents and foreign ministers through a wide range of journalists, government officials and activists to the so-called average people.” Therefore, critical geopolitics is observing the specific processes of creating political agents, and not just its activities or identities as particular pre-given subjects.

It should be also noted that geopolitics is in general aligned with a conservative and realist perception of international relations (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006). Therefore, IR scholars are observing geopolitics as a particular form of realist view, which use the geographical determinants and features to emphasize specific interests of one state in global affairs. On the other hand, critical geopolitics is more linked with the constructivist approach in analyzing international relations, which mainly underlines the formation of international and security identities, as well as the strategic culture (Haverluk *et al.* 2014).

It is important to mention Ó Tuathail’s (1996, 1–2) observation, referring to the world geography, that it “is not a neutral construct of nature but rather an outcome of powers’

competition over the organization, occupation and administration of space.” Therefore, while discussing geopolitical theories, it could not be forgotten that geopolitics mainly gravitates around the paradigms of power, power relations and hegemony (Sabet 2015). In addition, the particular historical context is of crucial importance for the geopolitical contemplation of global affairs (Mamadouh and Dijkink 2006). Thus, geopolitics represents an academic area characterized by the multidisciplinary approach of observing foreign policy, with a particular focus on the spatial relationship, historical causation, resources and location. Moreover, geopolitical thoughts highly influenced foreign policy courses of great powers, particularly during the Cold War period. However, contemporary global politics could not avoid the impact of geopolitical paradigms, and Ukrainian conflicts represent a particular example of that correlation.

This thesis puts a special emphasis on the following three categories of critical geopolitics representing the reflection of critical geopolitics on Ukraine: space, identity and statecraft. As abovementioned, space represents a substantial notion to critical geopolitical writers, and they challenge every causal relationship between geographical space and international politics. Moreover, critical geopolitics analyzes modus within which space is perceived through various geopolitical actors and their specific ideas, i.e. it observes the specific social construction of space. For instance, the significance of Ukraine does not primarily derive from the material characteristics, such as access to the Black Sea or geographical position in general, but from the particular ideological framework and understanding of geopolitics itself, such as power politics between NATO and Russia.

A critical approach to identity is built around the similar paradigms as the critical understanding of space. Within theorizing, the critical geopolitics identities are not recognized as pre-given, i.e. as something particular that states or nations have. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that critical geopolitics contributes the academic debate regarding identity by concentrating on the spatial construction of social identity. For instance, critical approach examines modalities in which spatial communities (ethnic groups, nations or some third spatial organization, such as the EU or NATO) structure and develop identities while referring to a spatial ‘We’ *vis-à-vis* ‘Them’. In the process of building identity within the spatial construction, ‘We’ (the Western or ex-Soviet

countries/Russia and its allies) is often opposed to a hostile or belligerent ‘Them’ (Russia and its allies/the Western or ex-Soviet countries), which further on establish foreign policy activities.

Regarding statecraft, critical geopolitics emphasizes that the ideas of classical geopolitics historically represented the guidance for different statesmanship, and consequentially the mere foundation for the ideology that legitimized foreign policy strategies and imperial aims of particular countries. In addition, it is underlined that these geopolitical paradigms are produced in relevant institutes, such as government bodies, universities, think-tanks and other. However, in order to comprehend the totality of particular geopolitical knowledge, critical approach distracted the focus from classical geopolitical subjects to the role and position of ‘intellectuals of statecraft’ – who develop ideas regarding places that have influence on the political behaviors, as well as the policy choices; those ideas also impact how people process their own notions regarding particular place or political processes. The Ukrainian conflicts are a profound example of how relevant scholars (Brzezinski for the United States for instance) and practitioners (Putin, Yanukovich, etc.) could construct the ideas that establish particular political course and direct global politics - in this particular case to form the determining political strategies and choices that caused, developed and directed the conflicts.

2 Relevant internal aspects of Ukraine

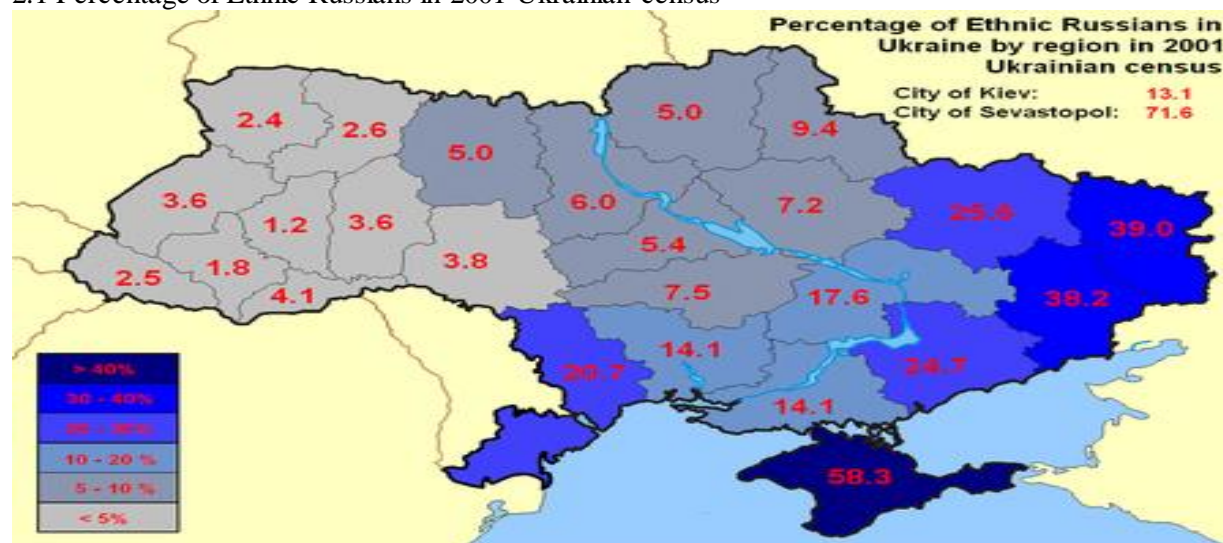
Ukraine, located between Poland and Russia with the access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov on the south, is of great strategic importance due to its specific geographical feature as the crossroad between Europe and Asia. With its land boundary of 4,663 km and the coastline of 2,782 km, Ukraine shares borders with Belarus to the north, Russia to the east, Romania, Moldova, Hungary and Slovakia to the west, and Poland to the northwest. In addition, with a total land area of 603,628 km², Ukraine is by far the biggest country which entire territory is in Europe (World Population Review 2016).

It is estimated that the population of Ukraine in 2015 was 44,823,765 while some data are indicating that in 2016 the population is 44,624,373 which is equivalent to 0.61% of the world population, and that places Ukraine in the 31st position on the list of countries by population

(Worldometers 2016). The complexity and peculiarity of the national structure of the population in Ukraine lie in its multinational composition, since the representatives of more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups live on the territory of the country.⁵ The last census from 2001 indicates that Ukrainians form 77.8% of the total population, while 17% of the populations are Russians. Regarding other minorities: Belarusians – 0.6%, Bulgarians 0.4%, Hungarians 0.3%, Crimean Tatars 0.5%, while Romanians and Poles both are 0.3% and Jewish residents make up 0.2% of the total population. Other minorities make 1.8% of the population (Ukrcensus 2001). It is important to grasp that the ethnic structure of Ukraine varies heavily on the territorial division. Namely, next figure is underlining the percentage of those that declared as Russians in 2001 census, which is a figure that is highly important for any social analysis of Ukraine. In Crimea, 58.3% declared as Russians, while 24.3% were Ukrainians and 12% Crimean Tatars. The highest percentages of Russians are in Luhansk (39%), Donetsk (38.2%) and Kharkiv (25.6%). With respect to language, which is again a sensitive issue and a category that has particular importance in social analysis, 67.5% have stated that their mother tongue is Ukrainian, while 29,6% of the population named Russian as their mother tongue. The remaining is composed of various other languages.

⁵ All data regarding demography are collected from the last census in 2001 (Ukrcensus 2001). It was planned that the next one will follow in 2010, but it was postponed until 2020. We are aware of the possible limitations with respect to the possible changed structure of population due to the fact that they are 15 years old. However, presented data are part of the only official census that has been conducted, and we have decided not to incorporate unofficial data in order to avoid propaganda and biased material, since the data regarding population and ethnic structure are often being manipulated with.

2.1 Percentage of Ethnic Russians in 2001 Ukrainian census



Source: Pereltsvaig (2014).

In addition to the presented demographic data, results of a survey of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems regarding public attitude towards the future of Ukraine, which was published in December 2013, are showing that 37% of Ukrainians were in favor of joining the EU, while 33% are favoring joining the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union (ECU). On the line of the mentioned territorial division, in the west of Ukraine 73% of people expressed support for the EU, and only 5% for the ECU. On the contrary, in the eastern part results showed that 46% of public supports the EU, and 20% ECU. In the south of Ukraine, 62% supported the EU and 14% the ECU (Smith and Harari 2014, 51).

In order to discuss the current state of the Ukrainian economy, firstly we have to look back in the past and to point out the outlook and basis of its economy in the previous period. Generally, a large part of Ukraine is a fertile land for the development of agriculture, therefore it has produced more than one-fourth of the total agricultural output of the Soviet Union (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2004, 8).⁶ In its economic history, Ukraine has evolved and developed foremost as an agricultural, and afterward as an industrialized country. In the 1930s Ukraine had a rapid and comprehensive industrial increase and growth, which was intensified the most in Donetsk and Kryvyi Rih that were rich in minerals. In addition, main industries included coal, electric power, machinery, chemicals, food processing, woodworking,

⁶ Ukraine was also known as the 'breadbasket of Europe.'

and tourism (Business Reference Services 2014). However, besides an inherited major industrial potential from the Soviet Union, Ukraine lost its capacity for the industry because of its high inefficiency due to the obvious need of modernization. Also, an immense impact on the collapse of its industrial potential derived from the ongoing internal political and economic crises, now well-developed institutional and social infrastructure and corruption, as well as major dependence on Russian energy supplies (Cohen and Graham 2009). Also, it has to be noted that this ex-Soviet country is rich in natural resources, which will be particularly elaborated on in following chapters.

In the 1970s and 1980s Ukraine was faced with the continuing economic deterioration. The rates of growth declined, and major problems occurred in the field of ferrous metallurgy and coal mining industries as well. Then, the collapse of the Soviet Union triggered an enormous increase of energy costs, followed by the reduction in demand for the Ukrainian products. That was accompanied by the high rates of inflation and lack of good management resulting in the increase of the number of private ownership over enterprises. However, inflation was notably reduced in 1995 and 1996, while relevant economic reforms were implementing significantly faster. In addition, the United States, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international organizations secured a number of grants and loans for Ukraine (International Monetary Fund 1996).

Privatization, along with the liberalization of commercial activity and macroeconomic stabilization, represents the key element of the post-socialist transition to a market economy. Hence, a debate regarding the process of privatization firstly began among Ukrainian politicians around 1990, and in two years Ukraine adopted principal legislative that defines privatization (Snelbecker 1995). In the period 1995-1998, the Government privatized 9,240 medium and large-scale enterprises through auctions for privatization certificates.⁷ Furthermore, a significant progress in privatization of agricultural and agro-industrial enterprises occurred in 1999, while

⁷ Auctions for privatization certificates represent the open sale of shares in medium-sized and large state-owned enterprise. Certificate auctions were held simultaneously, usually for several hundred enterprises in every region of Ukraine. There were two types of certificate auctions in Ukraine: 1. Certificate auctions for Privatization Property Certificates, which first auction took place in February 1995; 2. Specialized certificate auctions for Compensation Certificates, which the first auction was held on 15 April 1996. Objective of the program was equitable distribution to the public, to limit large share concentration in hands of one owner, as well as to develop capital markets (Elborgh-Woytek and Lewis 2002).

the total pace of privatization accelerated in 2000 (Elborgh-Woytek and Lewis 2002). However, even after the mass privatization in the 1990s, Ukraine still manages a large portfolio of companies in different sectors – from heavy industry to banking (Hontz 2016). Therefore, reform of the state-owned enterprises still represents a major issue in Ukraine, primarily due to the problematic corporate governance and great problems with transparency. In addition, one more feature of the economic transition in Ukraine is significant for understating the subject matter – the emergence of oligarchs. Namely, the oligarchs occurred along with the process of privatization of state-owned assets in the 1990s, and became tremendously rich on the newly established liberal market, primarily because of the connections to the corrupt government in Kiev. Unfortunately, the predacious oligarch elite was more interested in dismantling the state assets, rather than in transforming the economy into the one that could be competitive at the world markets.

The contemporary economic picture of Ukraine also has major problems of sustainability and competitiveness, and its features are even more deteriorated due to the conflicts that occurred. As the following chart indicates, since the beginning of the conflicts the Ukrainian economy entered a severe recession, with a rise of public and external debt. Ukrainian economy even before faced the slow growth, or no growth at all, and the current conflicts only pushed the country into recession. The same goes for the Ukrainian trade, which is presented in the chart 2.3. Namely, Ukrainian import registers a ‘free fall’ after the emergence of the conflicts at the end of 2013, which has a clear economic logic – entrepreneurs do not perceive Ukraine as a safe area for placing their products, therefore they are halting exports to Ukraine. In addition, Ukrainian export had a significant drop, amounting to around 15 billion dollars in the period from 2014 to 2015.

2.2 Overview of the Ukrainian economy in the last five years

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| GDP (USD billion) | 163 | 173 | 180 | 131 | 87.0 |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| GDP growth (%) | 5.5 | 0.2 | 0.0 | -6.6 | -9.9 |
| Public Debt (% of GDP) | 36.4 | 36.7 | 39.9 | 69.4 | 79.4 |
| External Debt (% of GDP) | 77.3 | 78.0 | 78.9 | 96.2 | 137 |
| Industrial production | 8.0 | -0.5 | -4.3 | -10.1 | -13.0 |
| Unemployment rate | 7.9 | 7.5 | 7.2 | 9.3 | 10.5 |

Source: FocusEconomics (2016).

2.3 Overview of the Ukrainian trade in the last five years

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Exports (USD billion) | 62.4 | 64.4 | 59.1 | 50.6 | 35.4 |
| Imports (USD billion) | 80.4 | 86.3 | 81.2 | 57.7 | 38.7 |

Source: FocusEconomics (2016).

The presented data are indicating that balance of trade in Ukraine averaged -14.48 USD billion from 2011 until 2015 (FocusEconomics 2016). In addition, it shows that the Ukrainian economy is still facing tremendous negative trends, as a continuation of the previous period. As for 2016, an effective recovery of the country's economy still remains uncertain. Preliminary estimate of the State Statistics Service Ukraine records GDP growth of 0.1% in the first quarter over the same period last year, while in the second quarter of 2016 country's GDP growth was 1.3%

(FocusEconomics 2016). However, economic turmoil and risks are expected to remain until political stability and long-lasting peace are reached and maintained.

3 Impact of the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States of America on the Ukrainian conflicts

As indicated in the introductory part, there are several conflicts in Ukraine that deserve a particular attention of the international community and a thorough academic approach and analysis. For instance, Bebler (2016) recognized two internal conflicts, along with the interstate conflict between Russia and Ukraine and wider interstate conflict related to Ukraine. We shall use Bebler's classification and develop our research in context of two interstate conflicts, with a particular focus on the geopolitical reasoning behind them. It is important to conduct the analysis coherently in context of these two conflicts, since not any part/segment of the ongoing clashes is in correlation with first or second interstate conflict. Such example could be found in war in Donbass, which could be dominantly determined and explained with an analysis of the interstate conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian conflicts could not be defined as a geopolitical clash without *de facto* involvement of the foreign actors and their impact on the development of the conflicts. I would argue that two elements are pivotal to define a conflict with geopolitical elements: foreign activities on a soil of an independent and sovereign country (1), which are driven by the particular geopolitical interests (2). The first element will be in a focus of our analysis in this chapter, and we shall observe the impact of Russia, the EU and the United States through the duality of soft and hard power - segmented in two periods (point of intersection – beginning of Euromaidan protests, 21 November 2013):

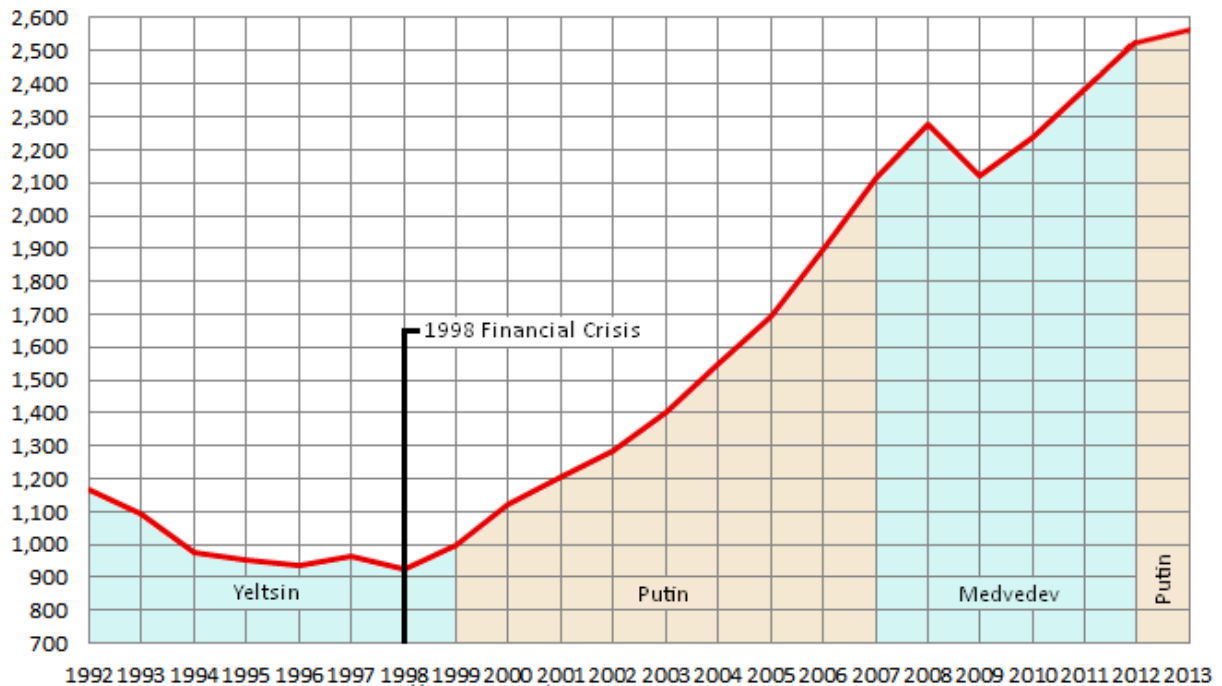
- before the open manifestation of the conflicts (how their influence has separately contributed reaching the political and social stage for the emergence of conflicts);
- after the open manifestation of the conflicts (how the selected subjects impacted the course and development of the conflicts).

When it comes to the Ukraine-Russia relation, primarily it has to be comprehended that different political tensions burden, or even determine their relations since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁸ Russian attitude towards Ukraine could be observed as a part of its larger foreign policy platform regarding the relations with the Western countries and neighboring countries since the mid-2000s (Tsygankov 2015). For understanding the Kremlin's official position, particularly valuable is a speech of president Putin after the annexation of Crimea: "Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades. After the dissolution of bipolarity on the planet, we no longer have stability. Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right" (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

MacFarlane and Menon (2014) are arguing that the Kremlin was emphasizing constantly, since the break of the Soviet Union, Russian tendency to control, or at least to have a privileged position in countries that traditionally belonged to its sphere of influence. However, Russia could not meet those targets under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin, and he left his successor, Vladimir Putin, that legacy. During Putin's mandate, those regional priorities became achievable, firstly because of the resurgence of the economy, which established a basis for Moscow's tendency with respect to global politics and its position in the international community. Namely, when Putin was first elected, Russia was in the process of emerging from market reforms in the 1990s and the financial crisis that occurred in 1998 (Luhn 2015). From that period Russian economy was in constant growth, which is also indicated in the figure below.

⁸ Division of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet and with that the basing rights of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, along with the use of military facilities on Crimea by Russia and the issue of the status of the Russian military on the soil of Ukraine (Bebler 2015, 39).

3.1 Russian GDP since the break of the Soviet Union



Source: Rapoza (2012).

In a short period of time Ukraine had radical and thorough shifts of its foreign policy course, because of the country's strategic position between West and East and global geopolitical struggle. The Orange Revolution in 2004⁹ was a genuine example of how foreign subjects are impacting the internal processes of one country, which produced long-term implications on the country's foreign policy and the development of society as a whole. Namely, the Orange Revolution was overwhelmed with the involvement of Non-governmental organizations (NGO) with an American background, while, on the other hand, Russia was financially supporting Yanukovich's campaign (Pridham 2014). Kremlin perceived the colored revolutions as a Western geopolitical strategy to diminish its status in ex-Soviet countries and Eurasia as a region of essential geopolitical importance. Therefore, Russia's assertive policy towards Ukraine was a reflection of its overall foreign policy strategy in the region.

⁹ Protests and political gatherings (from November 2004 to January 2005) that occurred after the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election between leading candidates Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich. Demonstrators were accusing authorities of massive corruption, direct electoral fraud and voter intimidation in favor of Yanukovich. The Ukraine's Supreme Court decided that the revote should be conducted, after which Yushchenko was declared the official winner with 52% of votes.

Ukraine went through the presidential election in 2004, where Kremlin's favored candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was defeated (Rywkin 2014). However, Pridham (2014) presented an argument that Moscow achieved to, by using soft power, get steadily involved in Ukraine at different levels of the society, such as business, social and cultural environment, media, Orthodox church, etc. Those activities are not something new, since that kind of strategies and open channels are also used in a number of different countries in which Russia has some particular interests. However, Russia's stance towards Kiev could be segmented and observed through two categories – one concerning the Ukrainian Euro-Atlantic integration, and other with regards to the energy issues between the two parties (Tsygankov 2015).

Not long after the Orange revolution, Ukraine's newly elected president Yushchenko clearly stated the country's commitment to join the Alliance, while in April 2005, foreign minister noted that Ukraine is hoping to begin talks about NATO membership in 2008 (Varfolomeyev 2005).¹⁰ In addition, Ukrainian Minister of Defense, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, just before the Riga Summit in 2006, emphasized that country's "defense and security policy, entailing NATO membership for Ukraine, was unchanged and irreversible" (Tsygankov 2015, 282). The United States and Russia recognized the Ukrainian foreign policy tendency of development and responded accordingly. Namely, Washington focused on developing relations with the ex-Soviet countries that demonstrated the will and interest to become part of the Alliance, such as Ukraine, Georgia or Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Moscow repeated its standpoint that it perceives the possible enlargement to the East as a threat to national security and the route for the deterioration of relations within the international community.

After the period of the rehabilitated post-Cold war relations between Russia and the United States, which were additionally strengthened with the common fight against terrorism, Kremlin's foreign policy started to distance from the West in 2004, as a direct respond to colored revolutions. Moreover, a direct product of the shift in Russian foreign policy was the Kremlin's

¹⁰ In the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine (1990) article IX defines: "The Ukrainian SSR solemnly declares its intention of becoming a permanently neutral state that does not participate in military blocs and adheres to three nuclear free principles: to accept, to produce and to purchase no nuclear weapons." Constitution (calls upon the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine (1991), which is based on the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine) in Article 17 states: "The location of foreign military bases shall not be permitted on the territory of Ukraine."

more rigorous behavior towards the countries in the ex-Soviet area that have proclaimed its strategic interest in joining the Alliance (Morozova 2009).¹¹

Russia saw a strategic interest to stop the NATO's enlargement to its borders¹², which was particularly evident during NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, where Ukrainian and Georgian issue was discussed. Moscow was openly opposing the potential Ukrainian membership to NATO, which perfectly fitted general Russia's disapproval of the NATO eastward enlargement (Taylor 2014). Moreover, President Vladimir Putin threatened openly that possible membership to NATO would mean that Russia would have to start considering Ukraine as a foe.¹³

Russia had a strategic geopolitical interest to stop the NATO's eastward expansion, therefore the Kremlin was forcing strongly to block the issuance of the MAP to Georgia and Ukraine at the NATO summit in Bucharest (Tsygankov 2015). Nevertheless, Russia's firm signal to the international community was meaningful, which resulted in NATO's decision not to offer the MAP to the two countries (Walker, 2015). This had a great influence, along with the Russo-Georgian conflicts that followed the summit in Bucharest, the course of Kiev's foreign policy course, as well as the tendencies of development of the internal processes and society, as a whole.

The Kremlin did not establish constructive relations with Ukraine during the mandate of president Yushchenko, since the focus was on developing and strengthening the cooperation with opposite political options in the country (Tsygankov 2015). A heyday of strained relations between Russia and Ukraine was a president Medvedev's diplomatic precedent to delay dispatching a new Russian ambassador to Ukraine in August 2009 (Harding 2010). Moreover, Dmitry Medvedev accused president Yushchenko of developing and fostering anti-Russian policy, and particularly for interfering with Russia's Black Sea fleet and supporting Georgia during its conflicts with Russia (Tsygankov 2015). Also, the Kremlin was vocal in criticizing

¹¹ Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2006 sent a clear message to the international community by stating plainly that "Ukraine's or Georgia's membership in NATO could lead to a colossal shift in global geopolitics" (Volten and Tashev 2007, 48).

¹² In the time of negotiations over the issue of German reunification in 1990, the United States vowed that NATO would not expand to the Eastern Europe.

¹³ He added that "It is horrible to say and even horrible to think that, in response to the deployment of NATO missile facilities in Ukrainian territory, which cannot theoretically be ruled out, Russia could target its missile systems at Ukraine" (Harding 2008).

Ukraine for the obstruction of Russia's gas deliveries to Europe and for bad treatment of Russian businesses, which irreversibly deteriorate the relations between the two parties.

The Ukraine-Russia relations changed in February 2010, when a new pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was elected a president (Kuzio 2010). Namely, Russia succeeded with the mix of high oil prices and soft-power policy to reverse results of the color revolutions in Ukraine, which was largely perceived in Russia as a destabilizing factor for the region and with numerous effects on its national interests. Therefore, Russia's well-organized and long-term strategy turned out to be successful, and a government that was malicious or even hostile, towards Russia, was replaced with a pro-Russian establishment. The Kremlin used the newly-elected political elite to promptly improve its influence in Ukraine, for the sake of promoting and securing its fundamental geopolitical interest in the region (Tsygankov 2015). Namely, Ukraine and Russia reached an important agreement to extend the Russia's Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory for 25 more years, while in return it would obtain the reduction of gas prices by 30% (Charap and Darden 2014).

With the pro-Russian political elite in power in Ukraine, Putin had an open geopolitical context to tighten and intensify the relations among countries of the CIS, i.e. to introduce and develop the idea of establishing the EEU (Tsygankov 2015). Indirectly, Russia's pushing for Ukraine to become a part of the EEU represented the important incentive for triggering the Ukrainian conflicts later on. In 2011, Russia officially invited Ukraine to become a member of the ECU, which represented an institutional arrangement towards establishing the EEU (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). Ukraine was of crucial importance for the relevance of the EEU, due to its size and geopolitical position. Therefore, Russia was constantly stressing the economic benefits of joining it, particularly an increase in trade and other projects of joint interest (Tsygankov 2015). With an official invitation to join the ECU, Ukraine also received promises regarding another significant discount on gas prices (Kropatcheva 2011).

Besides what has been mentioned, Russia thought that the cooperation is not at the expected level and that relations among the two parties could be improved significantly. Nevertheless, Yanukovich rejected the offer to join the ECU, but also, what is more important for Moscow's national interests, refused to sell the controlling shares of Ukraine's national oil and gas company, Naftogaz, to the Russian-controlled global energy company Gazprom (Tsygankov

2015). However, Russia was not giving up easily from the perspective of controlling the Ukrainian political and social habitus. The Kremlin understood correctly and profoundly the geopolitical context, and, therefore, used properly the EU's indecisiveness to act accordingly. Primarily, the Russian authorities offered Ukraine another capital discount in energy prices, along with 15 billion dollars as a financial aid (McElroy 2013). The Yanukovich's response was in November 2013, at the EU summit in Vilnius, where he stated that Ukraine postpones the AA with the EU (Traynor and Grytsenko 2013). Suspended preparations for the implementation of the AA with the EU represented a primary motive and incentive for the emergence of the conflicts (Samoilenko 2014). Therefore, one could notice that Yanukovich's decision, based on a changed Russian attitude towards Ukraine, triggered the mass protests in Kiev, which lead us to the contemporary geopolitical conflicts on the territory of Ukraine.

The EU's stance towards Ukraine in the recent years has been precarious and characterized by the many upheavals in their policy course. It is legitimate to argue that the Ukrainian conflicts could be managed or even prevented if there was more proactive and determined presence of the EU in this country. After the dissolution of Soviet Union, the EU warmly welcomed the Ukrainian desire to create and build a state around the values that are aligned with the modern European established postulates, i.e. modern liberal democracy. Even though Ukrainian establishment, after its proclamation of independence, has dedicated its foreign policy to the EU integration process, primarily it was necessary to conduct effective reforms in a political, economic and legislative spectrum, as well as in overall Ukrainian political and social habitus. The EU has noted that the basic aim of adopted instruments is to introduce a complete internal metamorphosis of the Ukrainian system, which would represent a deflection from the recurrences of the past communist system. Yet, MacFarlane and Menon (2014) are arguing that Europe's approach to Ukraine has long been questionable and an issue of many disagreements.

Conclusion of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) as of 14th of June 1994 (came into force on the 1st of March 1998) initiated cooperation on broad range of political, economic, trade, and humanitarian issues, and introduced a legal mechanism of cooperation between the two parties (Partnership and co-operation agreement between the European communities and their member states and Ukraine 1994). The conclusion of the PCA allowed establishing a regular bilateral dialogue between Ukraine and the EU on political and sectorial levels, as well as

introducing trade regulations based on the principles of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/WTO and to determine the priorities of Ukrainian legislation adaptation to the European norms and standards (*acquis communautaire*) in main sectors of the Ukrainian economy.¹⁴

The EU's main requirement for signing PCA was that Ukraine joins Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, as well as to annihilate nuclear weapon. Also, one of the highlighted issues was closing of Chernobyl AES and ensuring the nuclear security of new reactors. Afterward, a signing of the Agreement between the USA, Russia and Ukraine regarding withdrawal of nuclear from Ukraine in 1994 established the basis for signing the PCA and to put in place relations between EU and Ukraine (Pridham 2014).¹⁵

Further, the EU-Ukraine relations were designated by the EU's permanent hesitance and denial to offer a membership perspective to Ukraine. However, Pridham (2014) argues that this EU's policy was particularly salient since the period of Orange Revolution (2004-2005). As an alternative, the EU's relations with Ukraine were maintained and shaped through the model of the ENP and EaP. The aim of the ENP and EPP was to broaden and enhance the EU's cooperation with the neighbors on the East¹⁶, while the later represents a specific repercussion of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). On the other hand, one could perceive two foreign policy frameworks of cooperation as an EU's *modus operandi* for avoiding to face the issue of possible future membership of the states of the region (Pridham 2014). Therefore, it could be stated that the EU used the two complementary Eastern policies to postpone the potential enlargement to the east, and in return the administration in Brussels is guaranteeing close political ties, DCFTA, and the possibility of visa liberalization (Costea 2011). And with that, the EU has also shaped the development of Ukrainian internal policy, as well as

¹⁴ Seven priorities were listed in the PCA, such as: industrial co-operation, investment promotion and protection, public procurement, standards and conformity assessments, mining and raw materials, science and technology, education and training, agriculture and agro-industrial sector, energy, civil nuclear sector, environment, transport, space, telecommunications, financial services, money laundering, monetary policy, regional development, social co-operation, tourism, small and medium-sized enterprises, information and communication, consumer protection, customs, statistical cooperation, economics and drugs (Partnership and co-operation agreement between the European communities and their member states and Ukraine 1994).

¹⁵ The Budapest Memorandum was adopted on 5 December 1994 by the US, Russia, and the United Kingdom that agreed to respect the independence, sovereignty and existing borders of Ukraine, to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine, to refrain from economic coercion of Ukraine and to seek immediate UN Security Council action to provide assistance if Ukraine should become a victim of an act of aggression (Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances 1994).

¹⁶ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

its foreign policy course. Since the 10-year term of the PCA was expiring in March 2008, the two parties, on 5th March 2007, started with the process of negotiation on the new document. On the 15th Ukraine-EU Summit in 2011, the two parties stated that the negotiations regarding the AA were finished (Costea 2011).¹⁷ Also, two parties had started negotiations on establishing a free trade area in 2008, with which they have opened the way towards the liberalization of movement of goods, services, capital and non-tariff instruments of economic regulatory policy (Kuzmin and Maksymenko 2012).

It should be comprehended and underlined that the EU's policy towards Ukraine is also affected by specific internal processes. Regarding the EU, some meaningful problems occurred after the big enlargement in 2004, and especially after the acceptance of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. In addition, institutional crisis and rising of Eurozone crisis impacted the EU's stance towards the new enlargement (Pridham 2014). Also, there was no unity among the member states regarding the question of Ukraine, even though the European Parliament and some states were strongly advocating offering a membership perspective (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). However, Larrabee (2006) is underlining that the prevailing attitude, especially backed by Germany, was that relations with the Kremlin are of greater significance, i.e. that Ukrainian integration process would infringe the existing links between the EU and Russia. Therefore, there is an ongoing academic debate what would be the EU interest in enlargement to Ukraine, with which it would import in its community all Ukrainian ongoing economic and social issues.

The EU was constantly insisting that Ukrainian authorities should conduct thorough institutional reforms, in order to make progress on their EU integration agenda. Nevertheless, it must be understood and mentioned that Ukraine has undergone some radical political shifts in last decade, which was not particularly in compliance with the EU's requested reforms. Namely, Ukraine was prior to the Orange Revolution, as Pridham (2014) defines it, a hybrid regime with inadequate democratic features to envisage advancing from the PCA. However, the Orange Revolution has brought a promising chance that the EU-Ukraine relations would begin to steadily advance and be cooperative, constructive and mutually beneficial. Yet, a shadow on that relation emerged because of the slow pace of reforms (especially in judicial branch), without expected democratization of the system and particularly because of the allegations of widespread

¹⁷ The AA, alongside with the DCFTA, was the substance of long standing negotiations in the period 2007-2011. The EU and Ukraine signed the concluding provisions of the EU-Ukraine AA in Brussels on 27th June 2014.

corruption within the society (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). Furthermore, Victor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian politician, became a president in 2010 and has bolstered the political course of gradual rapprochement with Russia, while preserving a *status quo* with the EU (Kuzio 2010).

The first time when the EU, followed by the timely Russian geopolitical move, directly fueled the upcoming Ukraine conflicts was at the Third EaP summit in Vilnius in 2013. The EaP confirmed its character, as well as EU's tendency to offer existing resource-poor policy, but rhetorically outstanding (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). Namely, the EU proposed signing the DCFTA, which product would be immediate economic and financial shock to Ukraine, for the sake of the future sustainable economic growth (Centre for European Policy Studies *et al.* 2006). Moreover, the opposition in the eastern part of Ukraine, which is traditionally of pro-Russian attitude, was vocal regarding the suggested EU prospects. Besides their political preferences, the people of the eastern part of Ukraine were against the DCFTA because they are arguing that it would affect the rust-belt mining and metallurgical industries, which would have been among first to go through the required structural adjustment (Pridham 2014). As stated above, the Kremlin reacted promptly with a generous offer: a lifting of restrictions on Ukrainian exports to Russia, price reduction on Russian gas and direct financial support of 15 billion dollars (Freedman 2014, 8). Therefore, Yanukovich's establishment decided to give Russia a priority over the EU, which represented a fundamental and direct impulse for the Maidan protests on the night of 21st November 2013 (Samoilenko 2014). A constructivist approach could be useful at this point, since the public perception was that Ukraine abandoned membership prospects, even though in reality membership was not on the table.

The impact of the United States on Ukraine in the pre-conflicts period should be observed primarily through the perspective of NATO's policy, particularly because the United States still represent a major and most influential member state. The first NATO's impact on determining the contemporary Ukrainian political and social environment dates back to the accession of Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland in 1999 (Agnew 2001). Namely, this round of enlargement has transformed the security architecture in Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, and the issue of Ukraine, as the largest country in the region, represented an important part of this new geopolitical context. Certainly, one cannot neglect that Ukraine has been collaborating with NATO since the 1990s and thus was involved in sending troops to support the Alliance's

missions in Iraq (Bebler 2010). Accordingly, NATO developed models of cooperation with non-member states, where, for instance, Ukraine was involved in the operations of the Stabilization Force (SFOR) (Albright and Appatov 1999, 199).

When President Leonid Kuchma was in power, Ukraine became the first member of the CIS to join the Partnership for Peace (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). Further, the basis for strengthening the NATO-Ukraine cooperation was the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine, which was signed in 1997. The Charter underlined that NATO will “support Ukraine in its efforts to safeguard its sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and inviolability of frontiers”, as well as to “promote its democratic development and economic prosperity” and, what is more important, “to facilitate Ukraine’s integration within all-European and Euro-Atlantic structures” (Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine 1997). In addition, the Charter has envisaged broad areas of cooperation with NATO, such as armaments cooperation, defense planning, civil-military relations, as well as democratic control of the armed forces (Larrabee *et al.* 2015).

On line with the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership there was also the State Program for Ukraine-NATO cooperation for the period 1999-2001, which was described as an influential document regarding Ukraine’s international security issue (Dwan and Pavliuk 2015, 167). The State Program envisaged the complete alignment with NATO’s security system as the Ukraine’s strategic objective.¹⁸ The Program, which also mentioned involvement in peace operations and joint exercises, was disputed by the leftist parties in the Ukraine’s National Parliament (Dwan and Pavliuk 2015). One can argue that forging ties with NATO represent a deliberate geopolitical act by president Kuchma. Namely, it is legitimate to argue that president Kuchma used NATO factor to strengthen the leverage of Ukraine in relations with Moscow (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). Further, in 2002 Ukraine stated that they will opt for the accession to NATO, with which, at that time, Kiev abolished its policy of nonalignment (Larrabee *et al.* 2015).

Due to the internal issues of Ukraine (which will not be further elaborated, since they are not related to the subject of the thesis), NATO took a standpoint to postpone decisions regarding Ukraine and its enlargement process until the end of 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine. After

¹⁸ Meeting the conditions required for NATO membership, ensuring security guarantees to Ukraine, involving direct assistance in implementing military reform, as well as policy coordination with regard to the NATO enlargement.

the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko and his establishment pledged that Ukraine would distance itself from the Russian Federation (Taylor 2014). Having that in mind, Yushchenko perceived NATO as the most effective model for achieving that objective, i.e. strategic interests for Ukraine's security. Hence, NATO proposed Intensified Dialogue status to Ukraine in 2005, which was a sort of a step toward a MAP (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). However, besides that, the cooperation between Ukraine and NATO was never intensified or even genuinely defined in practical terms of future membership.

The United States and its highest officials openly backed and welcomed Yushchenko's strategy. President George W. Bush even stated on his official visit that Ukraine has made a bold decision and that the United States strongly supports their aspirations (Taylor 2014). On the other hand, the consensus regarding Ukrainian issue, along with Georgian, could not be reached among NATO member states. The Kremlin's firm stance regarding the NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia, as well as possible implications on geopolitical map evoked the disunity among member states. A particular sublimation of the opposing arguments represents the statement of French Prime Minister François Fillon, who noted that: "We are opposed to the entry of Georgia and Ukraine because we think that it is not a good answer to the balance of power within Europe and between Europe and Russia" (Taylor 2014). An evident disunity among NATO member states was a strong and meaningful geopolitical message to Ukraine, Russia, as well as to the international community as a whole.

The issue of Ukraine's potential membership to NATO was particularly discussed at the NATO summit in 2008, held in Bucharest. The United States and President Bush personally were advocating and lobbying strongly for offering the MAP to Ukraine and Georgia (Erlanger and Lee Myers 2008). However, the United States were not able to establish a stable consensus, and, at the end, opposing voices, especially vocal from France and Germany, prevailed and NATO did not offer the MAP to Ukraine (Taylor 2014). It could not be neglected that the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, which was a direct product of the rapprochement between authorities in Tbilisi and Brussels, contained also a strong signal to Ukraine and the international community that such a behavior on the Russian borders will not be tolerated.

The Ukrainian prospects of joining the Alliance were finally minimized when Yanukovich replaced Yushchenko at the presidential elections in 2010. In the same year, Yanukovich said

that he does not see a necessity for further integration with NATO, since he was convinced that it represented an unrealistic prospect for Ukraine (Taylor 2014). In addition, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a bill that defined the Ukrainian nonaligned status, which *de facto* meant stopping the NATO integration process. As emphasized above, Yanukovych advocated and fostered stronger ties with the Kremlin. Therefore, one could note that NATO's hesitance and disunity affected the Ukraine's internal processes and, subsequently, the current Ukrainian conflicts and geopolitical crisis.

After the mass protests against the Yanukovych's decision not to sign the AA with the EU have begun on 21 November 2013, the geopolitical confrontation over Ukraine did not have to be conducted behind the curtain anymore. In the early stages the EU was often criticized that its internal complex procedures cannot keep pace with the accelerated development of the conflicts on the ground (Rywkin 2014). Even though the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton¹⁹, and the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Stefan Füle, intensified its diplomatic activities in Ukraine, the first concrete move of the EU was to initiate the talks on creating the agreement on settlement of political crisis in Ukraine, which was signed on 21st February 2014 (Charap and Keith Darden 2014). Namely, a troika of the EU foreign ministers was acting as a mediator between Yanukovych and the leaders of the parliamentary opposition, in order to, *inter alia*, ensure early presidential elections and the formation of government of national trust (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). However, the reached agreement lost its sharpness with the Yanukovych's sudden escape to Russia and the turmoil that occurred later on (Pridham 2014).

The changed political context in Ukraine²⁰ represented an open possibility for the EU to apply concrete measures, along with the IMF, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Pridham 2014). Hence, the EU promptly decided to sign the

¹⁹ It is worth mentioning that social sciences acknowledge that nonverbal messages are as important as those which are stated clearly. We can put in the first group one distinct and rather peculiar event (especially from the perspective of diplomacy, customary law and positive practice) that occurred on 10th of December 2013 when Catherine Ashton, in charge of the EU foreign policy, and other high-level European politicians joined the demonstrators on Maidan square. With that, the EU sent a firm and a clear message to the international community that they support demonstrations and their aims. Also, the US Assistant Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, was photographed while distributing cakes to protesters on Kiev's Independence Square

²⁰ Removal of Yanukovych, an interim pro-EU government in power and more than 100 casualties (both protesters and police officers) during the Euromaidan protests. In addition, the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada, a day after it voted to dismiss President Viktor Yanukovich, abolished the 2012 Law On State Language Policy, which allowed the regions to use and practice more languages if they were spoken by over 10% of the population.

political chapters of the AA and temporarily remove tariffs with Ukraine. Moreover, the newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko advocates pro-European course, which additionally enhanced and facilitated implementation of the EU policy towards Ukraine (Shaheen Zafar 2015). Therefore, the EU's strategy in Ukraine from the beginning of the conflicts had some meaningful results²¹, but, however, the most important and decisive part represents signing of the AA, which furthermore establishes the DCFTA between the two parties. The DCFTA also touches upon reforms in the political, economic and administrative areas, followed by emphasizing the need for establishing a society that promotes and ensures human rights, rule of law and democratic values (Centre for European Policy Studies et al. 2006).

The EU's soft power policy represents one operative part of its respond to the Ukrainian conflicts, and it is complementary with its strategic geopolitical interests in the country, which will be elaborated in the following chapter. However, it should be underlined that, besides the understanding of the possible geopolitical implications of the Ukrainian conflicts, the EU was constantly repeating its concerns regarding the political conditions to be fulfilled, particularly over the selective justice, as well as on release of Yulia Tymoshenko from the imprisonment (Åslund 2013). Furthermore, Catherine Ashton, confirmed the EU's need for protecting its geopolitical interests in Ukraine, by emphasizing openly that "the EU cannot lose Ukraine and several new member states from post-Communist Europe were pressing for signing the AA for geopolitical reasons" (Pridham 2014, 58).

On the other hand, Yanukovich's escape from Ukraine meant that the Kremlin does not have a relevant political option in Ukraine any more, and that the soft power strategy could not be an effective instrument in addressing the Ukrainian issue. Hence, Moscow was emphasizing that the Western countries should take responsibility for the breakdown of the agreement between political subjects in Ukraine (Tsygankov 2015). Subsequently, Russia did not recognize the new government in Ukraine, while accusing it of conducting an open anti-Russian policy and carrying

²¹ For instance, an agreement from March envisaged to embed the EU officials in an advisory capacity on certain ministries level, especially those concerning justice and energy; that Ukraine shall cooperate closely with the EU's anti-fraud agency; to prevent embezzlement; to create a support group for Ukraine by the European Commission to mobilize expertise from member states and promote coordination with donors and international financial institutions; a support package for Ukraine including technical assistance on constitutional, judicial and electoral matters and a plan for accelerating visa liberalization. Moreover, in June a decision was adopted that envisages that the EU shall establish a mission to assist Ukraine in the field of civilian security sector reform embracing the police and the rule of law (Pridham 2014).

out a coup in contrast to the agreement between the president and the opposition mediated by the EU 'troika'. Moreover, Moscow adopted a stance to apply the economic measures towards Ukraine, which additionally deteriorated already fragile economic momentum in country. Namely, Russia decided to cancel the energy discount and financial aid for Ukraine, which had an immense impact due to its large economic dependence on Russia, and particularly because of the large Ukrainian debt to Gazprom (Åslund 2013).

After the Euromaidan's unrest, an escalation of the conflicts occurred on 23rd February, when the pro-Russian demonstrations were organized in Sevastopol (Amos 2014). Following the protests, on 27th February masked troops without insignia, which are believed to be Russian troops, seized the Supreme Council of Crimea (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014). On the next day, as Bebler (2015, 41) noted, Russian forces, accompanied by armed militias, promptly took over the strategically significant Perekop Isthmus, interrupt land, sea and air connections between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine, seized all ports, airports, radio and TV stations, and introduced a blockade of all Ukrainian Army's and Navy's positions across Crimea. Those activities enabled establishing the pro-Russian government in Crimea, which secured the path for Russia to promote and ensure its strategic geopolitical interests in this area that will be singled out in the following chapter.

Scholars and different experts share the view that military intrusion in Crimea was professionally prepared, managed and accomplished. In addition, Bebler (2015, 41) emphasized that for this action were assembled around 2,000 marines (stationed in/around Sevastopol), 7,000 special troops that were brought in Crimea and around 15,000 troops that came to Kerch Strait that connects the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Moreover, he is introducing an argument that the Russian operational headquarters, presumably stationed in Rostov, had around 30,000 troops (Bebler 2015, 41). All this is implying that Russia openly supported Russian-speaking separatists in their illegal activities, which contributed at large scale to the following annexation of Crimea.

Particularly indicative and significant move from Russia occurred on the beginning of March 2014, when the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation accepted president Putin's appeal to allow the Russian armed forces limited military contingent on the Ukrainian soil (Bebler 2015). The Western countries swiftly emphasized that the Russian activities represent a severe violation of all most important legal and political documents, the

1994 Budapest Memorandum and the 1997 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and Ukraine that envisaged protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.²²

Over 20 members of the Russian Duma presented a draft amendment to the constitutional law on 28th February 2014, which envisages admitting of new territories to the Russian Federation, and particularly advocates the incorporation of parts of Ukraine due to the discrimination against Russian national minorities (Bebler 2014). The Supreme Council of Crimean and the Sevastopol City Council adopted on 11th March the Declaration of independence of the Republic of Crimea, underlining an intention to vote in favor of independence on the upcoming referendum. Hence, on 16th March referendum was held in Crimea, and the 95% of participating voters voted in favour of seceding from Ukraine and becoming part of the Russian Federation (Harding and Walker 2014).

Russian authorities were prepared and responded promptly in protecting its interests of the highest strategic importance. Namely, on 18th March a Treaty on annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol was signed in Moscow, while the Federal Constitutional Law On Admitting to the Russian Federation the Republic of Crimea and Establishing within the Russian Federation the New Constituent Entities of the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Importance Sevastopol swiftly went through the Parliament's procedure, then signed by president Putin on 21st March and, subsequently, put into force (Siddique and Yuhas 2014). With the annexation, the Kremlin has conducted an unprecedented geopolitical move in the post-Cold war period, which certainly thoroughly affected the conflicts and postponed its eventual resolution.²³

²² Official position in Moscow was explained with a necessity to support and defend their ethnic minority in Ukraine. President Putin also emphasized that in his speech after the secession of Crimea: "Those who opposed the coup were immediately threatened with repression. Naturally, the first in line here was Crimea, the Russian-speaking Crimea. In view of this, the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol turned to Russia for help in defending their rights and lives, in preventing the events that were unfolding and are still underway in Kiev, Donetsk, Kharkov and other Ukrainian cities. Naturally, we could not leave this plea unheeded; we could not abandon Crimea and its residents in distress. This would have been betrayal on our part" (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

²³ President Putin explained the secession of Crimea by underlining 'historical justice', and he stated: "After the revolution, the Bolsheviks, for a number of reasons – may God judge them – added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. This was done with no consideration for the ethnic make-up of the population, and today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine. Then, in 1954, a decision was made to transfer Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol, despite the fact that it was a federal city. This was the personal initiative of the Communist Party head Nikita Khrushchev. What stood behind this decision of his – a desire to win the support of the Ukrainian political establishment or to atone for the mass repressions of the 1930's in Ukraine – is

The annexation of Crimea inspired the Russian separatists in the east and south of Ukraine, who rejected to recognize the legality or legitimacy of the newly elected government in Kiev (Tsygankov 2015).²⁴ Furthermore, the separatists have organized, with the different form of assistance from Russia, large-scale anti-Kiev demonstrations, followed by the mass turmoil, tearing down state symbols of Ukraine and seizing the government buildings.²⁵ However, it has to be understood that the skirmishes in the Donbass region have different background. Namely, besides open opposition to “Ukrainian ultranationalists who staged a coup in Kyiv”, demonstrators gathered around resistance to the Kyiv centralism and the defence of Russian language rights²⁶ (Bebler 2015, 47).

Furthermore, rise of the national units and attacks on the Russian minority represent factors that certainly did not contribute to decreasing the aggressiveness of the conflicts. It is estimated that Russia assembled around 30,000 military forces on the border with Ukraine, while some data are indicating that its number was around 45,000 troops, composed of the contingent from the Western, Southern and Central Military District (Menkiszak *et al.* 2014). In addition, Bebler (2015, 47) wrote that over a third of the insurgent forces consisted of Russian, Chechen and others from Russia and other countries. Moreover, the insurgent forces received economic,

for historians to figure out. What matters now is that this decision was made in clear violation of the constitutional norms that were in place even then. The decision was made behind the scenes. Naturally, in a totalitarian state nobody bothered to ask the citizens of Crimea and Sevastopol. They were faced with the fact. People, of course, wondered why all of a sudden Crimea became part of Ukraine. But on the whole – and we must state this clearly, we all know it – this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state. Back then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states. However, this has happened” (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

²⁴ Which was in line with the Kremlin’s official position. President Putin emphasized that: “It is also obvious that there is no legitimate executive authority in Ukraine now, nobody to talk to. Many government agencies have been taken over by the impostors, but they do not have any control in the country, while they themselves – and I would like to stress this – are often controlled by radicals. The new so-called authorities began by introducing a draft law to revise the language policy, which was a direct infringement on the rights of ethnic minorities. However, they were immediately ‘disciplined’ by the foreign sponsors of these so-called politicians” (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

²⁵ For instance, violence in Odessa in May reached a frightening point - there were more than 30 casualties in chaotic skirmishes as pro-Ukrainians attacked an Odessa’s large Soviet-era trade union building. Police reported that deceased choked to death on smoke or died from jumping out of windows when the building was set on fire (Amos and Salem 2014).

²⁶ The day after Verkhovna Rada adopted a decision to dismiss President Viktor Yanukovich, members of the Ukrainian Parliament decided to abolish the 2012 law on state language policy, which allowed regions to use more official languages in addition to Ukrainian, if such language was used by over 10% of the local population. Under that law, Russian was chosen as a second official in 13 out of 27 regions, mostly in the eastern part of Ukraine (RT 2014). However, that decision was vetoed by interim President in the following period and never went into effect.

logistic, humanitarian, information, intelligence and other different forms of help support from Moscow (Bebler 2015).

Pro-Russian separatists seized government buildings in Kharkiv, Luhansk and Donetsk on 6th April 2014. Woehrel (2014) noticed and underlined that it is indicative that the separatists seized the institutions in those cities within the 24 hours, while applying the same tactical specifics. Furthermore, the most striking example of Russia's open involvement in the Ukrainian conflicts occurred in the morning on 24th August, when Russian regular units of the armed forces crossed the border with Ukraine and interfered in the combat in the Donbas region (Menkiszak *et al.* 2014). The Russian attack resulted in occupying the areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As a specific aftermath of the conflicts in the east and south of Ukraine, the People's Republics were declared in Kharkov, Donetsk, Luhansk and Odessa, which has irreversibly affected the Ukraine's internal processes of consolidating, as well as the tendency of conflicts development (Tsygankov 2015).

Moreover, the Russian offense was carefully followed by the intensified operations of the separatist's troops in other parts, which were, as Menkiszak and others (2014) argue, also backed by the Russian Airborne Forces. The Kremlin was able to conduct a military offense in Ukraine since it was assessed that the firm standpoint and response from the international community are not expected in the due time. Therefore, the Ukrainian geopolitical battleground was open for Russia in its pursuit of protecting and promoting strategic geopolitical interests. Certainly, Russia has repeatedly denied a military presence in the conflicts. However, in responding to the Ukrainian reporter regarding the two Russian military intelligence officers captured by Kiev and currently on trial in Ukraine, president Putin said: "We never said there were not people there who carried out certain tasks including in the military sphere" (Walker 2015). He added that this is not the same as regular Russian troops.

The tendency of development of the conflicts, and particularly downing of the Malaysian MH17 airplane in July 2014 also provoked the West to move from the soft to hard power - imposing a various sets of economic sanctions to Russia (Foxall 2015). The United States and the EU recognized the Ukraine's new government, and offered an economic and political support, while also requiring from Russia to pull out its forces from Ukraine, as well as to stop supporting separatists on various levels. Western countries responded to Moscow's course of action with the

only non-military method which had at its disposal, in order to change its approach towards Ukraine and, subsequently, to diminish its military achievements. Hence, the US, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Japan applied sanctions to Russia, and the first three rounds were mainly directed towards individuals (Russian officials, businessmen, etc.) or institutions with the freezing of assets (Wang 2015).

Western countries blamed Russia for the downing of the MH17 airplane in July, which caused death of 289 people, and imposed additional sanctions that targeted the Russian economy. For instance, the EU restricted the access of Russian banks to European capital markets, along with prohibiting sales of the energy-related equipment and dual-use technologies that could be used for military purposes (Eremenko 2014). Furthermore, in December Western governments implemented a new round of sanctions with which it was forbidden doing business in Crimea and Sevastopol (Wang 2015). The EU also required that travel agencies stop conducting business activities in Crimea. In order to discuss the mere aims of the introduced sanctions, Bebler (2016, 170) argues that the purpose was to: 1) return Crimea to Ukraine; 2) halt Russian support to the separatists in the Donbass region; 3) force Moscow to accept further enlargement of the EU and NATO; 4) overthrow Putin's regime.

On the other hand, Moscow firstly responded with boosting the price of natural gas in Ukraine, along with decreasing export of natural gas to Poland and Romania (Stulberg 2015). Moreover, Moscow prohibited imports of meat, fruits, vegetables, and dairy products for Western countries that are applying sanctions to Russia, including the US, Canada, Australia, Norway and the EU (Wang 2015). The primary purpose of the agricultural sanctions was to make a strong impact on the European economies that are highly dependent – before the sanctions Russia was Europe's second biggest market for exports of agricultural products, amounting to 15.8 billion dollars in 2013 (Moret *et al.* 2016, 11).

After persistent diplomatic activities and contacts that were undertaken in the following period, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe a Minsk Protocol was signed on 5 September 2014 in order to stop the clashes in Donbass. The signatories were Ukraine, Russia, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic. However, Minsk Protocol failed to halt war hostilities in the eastern part of Ukraine. Afterwards, the

French-German diplomatic plan led to a summit in Minsk on 11 February 2015, where leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany adopted measures to mitigate skirmishes in the region and to revitalize the Protocol.²⁷ However, armed combats in Donbass continued and implementation of Minsk agreements remains a disputable issue in relations between involved parties.

3.1 Implications of the conflicts

The Euromaidan demonstrations and skirmishes in Kiev, followed by the annexation of Crimea, and afterwards clashes in the east and south of Ukraine, which in overall caused the great loss of life and destabilized the country for the years to come, with the decisive involvement of the foreign subjects turned out to be conflicts with a multiplicative geopolitical implications on the contemporary international community. The Ukrainian conflicts directly challenged the European security architecture and with its repercussion contributed to the complexity of the geopolitical environment. The contemporary international community is being pulled back into the time of *realpolitik*, in which big powers are shaping the global geopolitical picture and determining the overall political and social course of development.²⁸

Russia's reestablished predominance in the Black Sea represents an example of real geopolitical implication of the annexation of Crimea. Namely, Moscow currently controls the strongest position in this strategically highly important area, not just a minor part of the Black Sea's eastern shoreline, and the Black Sea Fleet has the opportunity to develop swiftly and gain an important advantage (Trenin 2014).

Furthermore, any civilian and military cooperation under the NRC was suspended in April 2014, due to the Kremlin's illegal activities on the Ukrainian territory (Belkin *et al.* 2014). The common issues related to global terrorism and fight against Daesh, along with the tireless conflicts in Syria, forced Russia and the Western countries to bring together all the capacities in order to properly address these issues. Therefore, NATO and Russia agreed to meet under the NRC in April 2016, two years after the last meeting. However, according to the statements of

²⁷ On behalf of Ukraine, former president Leonid Kuchma signed the Minsk agreements.

²⁸ The Kremlin's perception of the contemporary geopolitical reality was sublimated in the statement of the Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, who bluntly said in April 2014 that Russia is "a big and independent power that knows what it wants" (Gander 2014).

high officials after the meeting, the two parties have just recognized the differences that exist in perceiving international security and global trends, but it did not contribute to reaching the *détente* in their relations (Borger 2016). Hence, the Ukrainian conflicts produced a period of the increased and continued mistrust between the Western governments and Russia, which is thoroughly changing and impacting the architecture of the post-Cold war system.

The implications of the Ukrainian conflicts could also reflect on the ex-Soviet countries, which are now particularly worried about Moscow's neo-imperialist aspirations, conducted under the argumentation of protecting Russian national minorities (Trenin 2014). This Kremlin's blueprint, often being applied in its pursue of defending and promoting strategic national interests, represents a major question for the security of countries in the region, such as Moldova, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and others. Furthermore, as a result of strained relations between the Western countries and Russia, the Baltic States asked for the deployment of NATO forces on their soil, due to the fear of the neo-imperialist Russian Federation (Trenin 2014). In response to those claims, NATO decided to extend its combat air patrols on the border between the Baltic States and the Russian Federation, as well as to increase the number of warships to the Baltic and Black Sea (Dibb 2014). Also, the United States deploys to Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia small army units, composed of around 150 troops each. Also, as stated previously, in June 2016 the Alliance reached an agreement to deploy four multinational battalions to the Baltic States and Poland, in order to additionally bolster security in the region (Dahlburg and Baldor 2016).

The Ukrainian conflicts also represent an impetus for a genuine geopolitical regrouping, characterized primarily with the deepening of cooperation between China and Russia and aligning their foreign policies and interests. Namely, in order to alleviate Russia's economic dependence on Europe, China and the Russian Gazprom have signed an immense natural gas agreement, worth 400 billion dollars in the next 30 years (Dibb 2014). Moreover, Trenin (2014) has noted that China and Russia are advocating to double their bilateral trade to 200 billion dollars by 2020, which at the moment amounts to around half of their current turnover with the EU. On that line, it is worth mentioning that in October 2014 Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Russian Prime Minister Medvedev signed 38 major agreements, including a currency swap and tax treaty (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, two countries in May 2014 began with the joint naval exercises in the East China Sea, which represents a highly disputable territory between

China and Japan (Keck 2014). Having those data in mind, it could not be neglected that Beijing and Moscow share a primary interest in opposing supremacy of the United States and unipolarity in international politics, which could eventually lead to the establishing of one vigorous geopolitical bloc.

4 Geopolitical interests in Ukraine

As we elaborated in the previous chapter, in order for one conflict to be characterized as a geopolitical conflict, it envisages that foreign activities on the territory of an independent and sovereign country are being driven by particular geopolitical interests of other subject(s) of the international law. Therefore, after we have observed specific foreign activities in the Ukrainian conflicts, now we need to understand thoroughly what were the motives and incentives for Russia, the EU and the United States for their geopolitical involvement in Ukraine.

4.1 The Russian Federation

Russian geopolitical interests in Ukraine are broad, complex, inter-connected and historically rooted. Thus, Ukraine represents an area of paramount strategic importance to Russia, and the first argument lies within its geographical features. Namely, Ukraine and Russia share more than 2200 km of borderline, while Ukraine is also close to the notable industrial and political center of Russia – the Volga region (Gotz 2015). In addition, Ukraine with the population of around 45 million people represents a significant market for the Russian businesses and its goods and services (Singh 2015). Therefore, security and economic issues are core geopolitical arguments for Russian political elites in opposing the Ukrainian accession to the military alliances or supranational organizations.

Before we begin scrutinizing the Kremlin's interest in Ukraine, it has to be acknowledged that the monumental part of Russian tradition and history is located in the capital of Ukraine. Namely, the cradle of the Russian civilization is the medieval state of the Kievan Rus - a

federation of Slavic principalities on the soil of today's Ukraine (Gotz 2015). Also, it represents a sacred place for many Russians since the origins of the Russian Orthodox Church derive from the medieval Kievan Rus, where Christianity was accepted in 988, which became the cradle and foundation of today's modern nation-state. Furthermore, after the Ukrainian independence, Russia lost a number of sites with a great historical value, including the first Orthodox monastery and graves of legendary medieval knights.

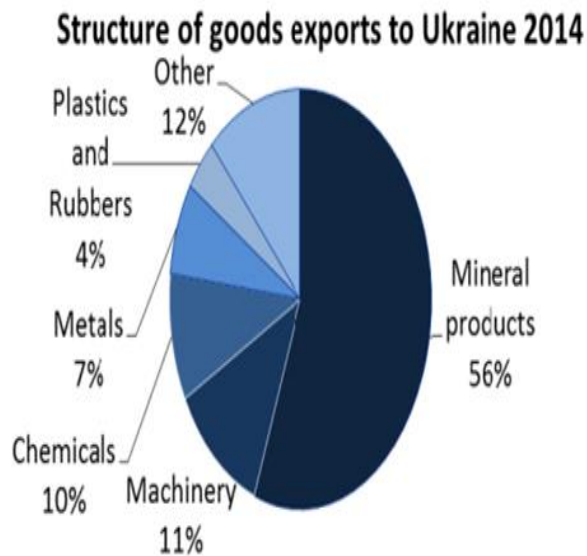
President Putin underlined the Russian sentiment for Ukraine, particularly for Crimea, while addressing the Federal Chamber after the annexation of Crimea by saying: "Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol – a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valour." He added: "In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th century" (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

With respect to the analysis of Russian economic interests regarding Ukraine, first, we have to look into the economic relations between the two states. As mentioned above, Ukraine is an immense and important market for the Russian economy, and Charap and Darden (2014) are underlining that their relations in this domain are still under the solid influence of their common Soviet history since the two countries have developed close ties over the years with a common market of goods. For instance, in 2014 Russia exported to Ukraine 2.5% of its total export, which represents 0.67% of its GDP for the analyzed year. Comparing the previous years, it could be noted that from 2011 to 2014 Russian export to Ukraine dropped by 1% (Giucci *et al.* 2015).

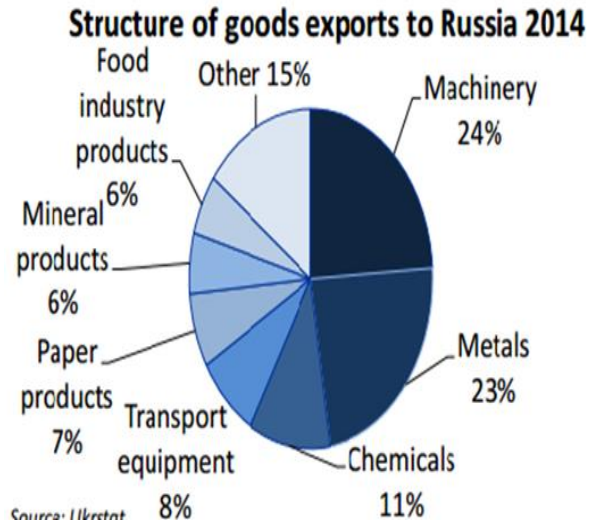
The chart below indicates that dominant export category in this domain is energy, in particular natural gas. Also, machinery amounts to 11% of export to Ukraine, while chemicals make 10%

of it, which constitutes the most important categories that are important in this context for Russia. On the contrary, in 2014 Ukraine exported to Russia 18.2% of its total export, which amounts 7.5% of its GDP for that year. In addition, Ukrainian export to Russia also declined for 10.8% from 2011 to 2014 (Giucci *et al.* 2015). Having these data in mind, we could argue that a negative trend of trade between the two countries is manifested, or even apparent. With respect to the structure of goods that Ukraine exported to Russia in 2014, the following chart shows that machinery and metals together amounts for almost 50% of exports, while chemicals add another 11%.

4.1 Structure of goods Russia exported to Ukraine/Ukraine exported to Russia in 2014



Source: Giucci *et al.* (2015, 5).



Source: Giucci *et al.* (2015, 4).

In order to preserve its economic interests, the Kremlin strongly strives to halt the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA), since it would have multiple negative effects on the Russian market. One can even argue that the implemented AA would eliminate this market, because numerous Russian goods are not in accordance with the EU safety conditions and technical requirements (Gotz 2015). Therefore, the Russian export to Ukraine would be reduced greatly.²⁹

²⁹ Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian Duma, joined the debate by saying that “the EU represents an emerging hyper-power, which, like a gigantic whirlpool, is slowly but surely sucking in our neighbors” (Gotz 2015, 5).

Another aspect of the economic relations between Russia and Ukraine, the more important one for the perspective of both countries, is related to the energy sector and it is of profound geopolitical importance. Namely, Ukraine is the key transit country for transport of natural gas to Europe from Russia and Central Asia, and around 80% of Europe's gas imports from Russia go through Ukrainian pipelines (Cohen and Graham 2009). From those arrangements, Gazprom acquires two-thirds of its profit from gas that goes through this energy corridor. It has to be mentioned that Ukraine is also heavily double-dependent on Russia's energy – a consumption of natural gas from the Russian producers, as well as earning most of its foreign income is from providing the services for the unobstructed transit of energy (Braithwaite 2014).

Russia is permanently exploiting energy dependence as a foreign policy instrument against states that would adopt some political course that is not on the line with the Russian national objectives (Cohen and Graham 2009). Namely, energy resources are used as a tool to accomplish not only economic objectives, but security and political ones as well. Energy policy allows Russia to exercise power beyond its borders and to influence the policies of other countries that are dependent on its supplies. Hence, the Kremlin has the possibility to coerce countries that impede its foreign policy objectives – for instance, in 2002 Russia cut oil deliveries to Lithuania and Latvia after the two countries prevented Moscow from purchasing major energy holdings (Weitz 2014). The energy potential of Russia was also an indispensable part of relations with Ukraine, which, for example, could be viewed in a deal from 2010 to extend the Russian Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory for 25 more years, while in return it would obtain the reduction of gas prices by 30%.³⁰

A permanent intention of the Kremlin was to have control of the pipelines that go through Ukraine. Because of that, Russia put Ukraine's authorities under pressure to accept the joint ownership of Naftogaz, Ukrainian state-controlled gas company (Ivzhenko 2011). To recall once more chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian Parliament, Konstantin Kosachyev stated "the idea was for Ukraine and Russia to become a single transit space between

³⁰ Energy disputes between Russia and Ukraine were and still are a great burden for their relation. Because of the energy significance of Russia (exporter) and Ukraine (transit country), these disputes have an international dimension, since it impacts a great part of Europe. The most severe dispute occurred in 2009, when two parties could not reach an agreement regarding price for Russian gas and a tariff for the transit to Europe. Because of that, exports to Ukraine were cut off on 1st of January, whereas further exports to Europe were also cut off in following days. Dispute was resolved and delivery of gas continued when Vladimir Putin, then Prime Minister, and his counterpart Yulia Tymoshenko reached an agreement covering next ten years (Pirani *et. al* 2009).

Europe and China, between European and Asian markets” (Wegren 2013, 250). Therefore, Ukraine, as an energy transit country, is of unique geopolitical importance for Russia, its economy and business, as well as for conducting the foreign policy.

Regarding Russian strategic geopolitical interests, with the annexation of Crimea, Moscow has shifted from soft to hard power in order to secure its geopolitical objectives in the naval bases in Sevastopol and surroundings (Gotz 2015). More precisely, the occupation of Crimea, with the continued impact in Abkhazia, ensured Russian effective control over the substantial part of the Black Sea, particularly the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov (map 3.1.2), which was always considered as a strategically vital area (Chossudovsky 2014). Moreover, Russia obtained roughly 36,000 miles of territory around Crimea, establishing the maritime borders with Romania and Turkey (Biersack and O’Lear 2014). The annexation confirmed the firm Russian stance when its strategic objectives and geopolitical interests are endangered.³¹

4.2 Crimean geostrategic position



Source: BBC (2014).

³¹ However, within the public discourse there is an ongoing debate regarding what Russia gains from Crimea and Sevastopol. It has been also emphasized that the Crimean peninsula, with an economy that is built around tourism and military facilities, is dependent on the massive resources and utilities from Ukraine. Hence, the Kremlin will have to address this issue with the billions of dollars of subsidies and investments in infrastructure (Biersack and O’Lear 2014).

One of the fundamental motives of Russia in the annexation of Crimea that could be pointed out was to protect the most important naval assets – the Black Sea Fleet, based outside of Sevastopol and with a smaller facility in Novorossiisk, Russia (Tsygankov 2015). Ukraine and Russia formally divided, after years of negotiations, the Soviet Black Sea fleet by signing a Treaty in 1997, with which the Russian Black Sea Fleet obtained basing rights in Crimea until 2017 (Charap and Darden 2014). Defining of the Black Sea Fleet was perceived as a major incentive for the bilateral tensions between Russia and Ukraine in that period. Furthermore, in 2010 the two states signed the Kharkiv Accords in order to extend the Russian Black Sea Fleet presence in Crimea until 2042 (Sharples and Judge 2014). The Kharkiv Accords defined that Russia will be paying decreased rent to Ukraine for the Black Sea Fleet's bases, in return for the discount on natural gas consumption.³²

However, it has to be underlined that the Black Sea Fleet's significance, as a specific geopolitical interest of Russia, is not within its prominent military power. Namely, Gorenburg (2014) has noted that the Fleet is composed of 40 active duty combat ships a number of seaworthy vessels, which are supplemented by a variety of sea and land units around the Crimean peninsula. Rather, it is valuable because it secures access to the Black Sea, along with the historical (since the late 18th century) and regional importance of its presence. Yet, Russia has stated that it will increase its naval military units in Crimea with a new ship and submarine construction, since it does not have obligations under the treaties that have regulated this issue, which limited the number of troops and military hardware in the peninsula in the past (Socor 2014). With that, Western fears about Russia controlling the whole Black Sea again become a part of the dominant public and political discourse.

Another particular benefits that Russia acquired from the annexation of Crimea and its maritime territory are energy supplies that are beneath the Black Sea (Biersack and O'Lear 2014). Namely, some experts are claiming that Russia gained much of Ukrainian oil and gas reserves that are located in the Black Sea (Stulberg 2015). Also, it has been claimed that in the Black Sea there are considerably large resources of hydrocarbon, and the Ukrainian company responsible for the Black Sea's energy potentials, Chornomornaftogaz, was nationalized by the Crimean separatists

³² Sherr (2010, 15) commented on those arrangements that envisage cheaper gas for Ukraine for the continued Russian military presence in Crimea, by saying that the Kharkiv Accords continued fostering Ukraine's inefficient hydrocarbon consumption and the country's political and economic dependency on Russian energy resources.

after the annexation (Biersack and O’Lear 2014). Furthermore, after the referendum in Crimea and its integration into Russia, Chornomornaftogaz began to function under the auspices of the Russian Gazprom (Socor 2014). Because of the seizure of military facilities and oil and gas potentials, officials in Kiev estimated that Ukraine will have, in near future, a significant financial loss amounting to 300 billion dollars, including their assessment of around 2.3 million tons of oil equivalent (Daly 2014). In addition, the repercussion of this geopolitical power-play represents the further strengthening of Ukraine’s dependence on Russia’s energy sector.

In addition to the strategic interest, one should not forget about Moscow’s particular interest regarding the defense area, i.e. aerospace and defense industry of Ukraine. Even though share of Ukrainian exports in Russia’s total military imports are between 2 and 4%, the Russian defense industry would suffer a great shortage of substantial components without Ukrainian products (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). In the period from 2009 to 2013 Russia was the third-largest consumer of products of the Ukrainian defense industry, and some parts and services Russia is importing only from Ukraine. For instance, McLees and Rumer (2014) are indicating that segments of the Russian military is heavily dependent on products from Ukraine – helicopter engines (Motor Sich in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhia); transport planes (Antonov plant in Kiev); more than half of the components of Russia’s ground-based intercontinental ballistic missile force come from Ukraine; a Ukrainian state-owned aerospace manufacturer Yuzhmash designs, manufactures and services rockets and missiles, which is also of pivotal importance for Russia. Furthermore, it is estimated that around 30% of Ukraine’s defense-related products in Russia could not be replaced by its domestic production (Larrabee *et al.* 2015). Hence, for Moscow that would mean additional investments in the defense sector, which would further impact already fragile economic situation.

The ideological geopolitical interest of Russia in the Ukrainian conflicts could be observed as a part of the Kremlin’s overall foreign and security policy course. It has been noted that the Russian Federation is building its ‘great power’ status around following: permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), i.e. veto power; nuclear arsenal (Deyermond 2014); rich energy potentials; and regional dominance - the latter will be in our focus of analysis. Hence, Tsygankov (2015) is arguing that the main Russia’s regional security policy objective was, and still is, to ensure its security, as well as preponderance and control over the countries of

the former Soviet bloc. In that particular geopolitical perspective, the main focus was always on Ukraine and the direction of its foreign policy.

It has often been emphasized that Ukraine, in the public perception of Russia, is observed as the most significant foreign and security policy issue (Charap and Darden 2014). As elaborated above, Ukraine is of immense and substantial importance to the Russia's geopolitical objectives in the region, especially to those related to the security matters. Kremlin has been often emphasizing that NATO enlargement, which could specifically be observed as both strategic and ideological interest, represents a security threat for Russia, therefore essential geopolitical interest of Russia is to ensure its security by eradicating the perspectives of the NATO enlargement to Ukraine. In addition, security matters are also a specific reason for the Kremlin's opposition to the Ukrainian EU integration, since it envisages further integration into the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) (Gotz 2015). Even though Ukraine was never offered membership by the EU, pro-EU government in Kiev is making clear initial steps, materialized in signing the AA on 21st March 2014, towards possible membership, which in perspective would also mean becoming part of still undeveloped CFSP and CSDP.

The Kremlin's offensive policy towards Ukraine needs to be understood as a part of its comprehensive geopolitical policy of ensuring security and preserving regional dominance. However, Ukraine is not an isolated example in this context. Namely, the history of the Kremlin's conduct of foreign policy is filled with similar offensive policies towards surrounding countries – military invasion of Georgia, interference in the internal affairs of Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, etc. (Gotz 2015). The NATO enlargement is perceived by the officials of the Russian Federation as a major threat and security issue, and that is in accordance with the known Kremlin standpoint that NATO expansion to the countries of Eastern Europe is part of a project to isolate Russia and constrain its strategic interests (Stapleton 2015).³³

Officials in Moscow were very vocal in highlighting that the overall system of global security needs to be redefined in order to properly address the new complex challenges in the

³³ Recently, Dmitry Peskov, the spokesman of the President Putin, repeated this Kremlin's attitude by emphasizing that "the continued eastward expansion of NATO and NATO's military infrastructure cannot but result in retaliatory actions from the east, i.e. from the Russian side, in terms of ensuring security and supporting the parity of interests" (BBC 2015).

international community. Russia's well-known standpoint is that NATO lost its purpose after the Cold War, dissolution of the Warsaw pact and the collapse of communism (Benedikter 2014). Moreover, the Kremlin is constantly repeating that in the post-Cold war period it was promised to Russia that NATO would not extend to the countries that are traditionally perceived as a part of Russian sphere of interest (Braithwaite 2014). Hence, Russia's substantial geopolitical motive is to stop the NATO expansion to the east and its borders.³⁴ President Putin presented that particular Kremlin's position in the Federal Chamber after secession of Crimea: "We understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration. On the contrary, they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders." Further, he emphasized: "...we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory. I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors" (Address by President of the Russian Federation 2014).

Having in mind such particular geopolitical setting, it is clear that NATO enlargement to Ukraine is perceived as a fundamental security issue and a threat to Russia and its strategic interests, as well as to the stability in the whole region (Gramer 2015). Therefore, Kremlin's firm opposition to NATO enlargement to Ukraine is important in two aspects. Primarily because possible Ukrainian accession to NATO could not be observed as an individual issue, since for Russia it would mean a significant loss of influence in the whole ex-Soviet area. Or to simplify it – it would be the profound geopolitical defeat for Russia. Secondly, with that firm opposition the Kremlin is sending a message that Russia is still a significant global subject, which is able to preserve its regional dominance, and, more importantly, to protect its strategic security interests when they are challenged.

To put it in a more practical sense, the Kremlin's determination to halt the NATO enlargement to Georgia and Ukraine was finalized successfully. Namely, Russia managed to influence blocking the Membership Action Plans (MAP) to Georgia and Ukraine at the summit in Bucharest in

³⁴ An additional argument represents the statement of the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Vladimir Titov, on June 9 2014, who underlined that "Russia would see the increase of NATO troops at its borders as a demonstration of hostile intentions, to which it would respond with political and military measures in order to protect itself" (Benedikter 2014).

April 2008, primarily with a developed paradigm that the NATO enlargement to those countries would have a great impact on relations with Russia (Lieven 2008; Walker 2015). Efforts of President Bush, who strongly advocated the enlargement, were disregarded by Germany and several other member states, who mostly worried about not to provoke Russia with the accession of Georgia and Ukraine (Triantaphyllou 2013). Hence, argumentation of the countries that neglected the MAP primarily was motivated with the idea to protect and maintain economic relations with Moscow.

From the perspective of Russian national interests, its strong opposition to the NATO enlargement is complementary to the trend of the ideological perspective of the Euroasianism in the Russian foreign policy. Namely, the political establishment, as well as society, is considered to be under the severe influence of the neo-Eurasianism, or even more that Russia derives its geopolitical strength from the position between Europe and Eastern Asia (Biersack and O’Lear 2014; Morozova 2009). Therewith, the Russia’s fundamental ideologically geopolitical objective related to Ukraine is twofold – to block it from accession to NATO and to place it in the centrum of its Euroasianism policy (Trenin 2014). The latter will be elaborated in the next subchapter through the relation between the EU and the Eurasian economic union (EEU).

4.2 The European Union

The EU, with evident debt and financial problems, intertwined with the current migration crisis and the threat of terrorism that have shaken the member states' policy towards EU, is currently faced with multilayered complex issues that need to be addressed with comprehensive and unified approach. In addition to this, the rising of euro-skepticism, the prevailing right-wing parties, identity crisis and the crisis of confidence, Trenin (2014) argues that it is obvious that the EU is in need of reenergizing and acquisition of fresh vitality. With all these open issues in mind, a question of enlargement is something that has been pushed under the carpet for a while. However, within the political and academic discourse, it could be heard that the accession of Ukraine would import an outstanding economic and social problems that permeate this country. Therefore, Ukrainian EU future remains a disputable issue, yet it has to be noted that it is

obvious that this question is not one of the EU's foreign policy priorities - rather, it is closer to the bottom of the agenda.

In order to discuss the EU strategic interest in Ukraine, the first issue to be noted is that officials in Brussels have acknowledged the importance of Ukraine, its size and geopolitical significance as an integral part of Eurasia. Therefore they have established particular forms of cooperation through bilateral agreements and European program of assistance and cooperation (Kuzmin and Maksymenko 2012). Foremost, the EU's strategic interest in Ukraine is linked to the sustainability of the European security architecture, within which Ukraine has a pivotal role. The foothold of the first reason lies in the basic geographic parameters of Ukraine, which is a country with the second-largest joint border with the EU (over 1,300 km). Moreover, Ukraine is the largest country in Europe after the Russian Federation, therefore any instability and internal conflicts have a strong spillover potential. In addition, its specific geopolitical position between the post-Soviet and the Euro-Atlantic realm is also a subject matter that concerns the EU security perspective (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). In addition to strategic interest, Ukraine is also important to the EU in the domain of effective functioning of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) (Wolczuk 2009, 191). However, Shumylo-Tapiola (2013) underlines that the Ukraine's poor governance and problems with corruption and rule of law have the potential to erode the sustainability of the EaP for the whole region.

In order to discuss the EU economic interest in Ukraine, it is of the utmost importance to notice that the EU is the Ukraine's largest trading partner and the main source of FDI. But our question is what the Union gains? Generally, the EU imported 12,770 million euros from Ukraine in 2015, which ranked this county at 28th position on the list of the EU's trading partners, making 0.7% share of total imports. Major products that Ukraine exported to the EU were raw materials (iron, steel, mining products, agricultural products), chemical products and machinery. On the other hand, the EU exported 13,924 million euros to Ukraine in the same year, with which Ukraine was 25th EU's exporting partner, making 0.8% of its total exports. The main group of products that EU exported was machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, and manufactured good (European Commission 2016).

Many argue (Centre for European Policy Studies 2006; Van der Loo 2016) that the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)³⁵ has a great potential, taking into account that at the stake there is a country with a market of 45 million consumers. However, in order to fully utilize its potentials, Ukraine has to put a lot effort to improve the existing business climate. For instance, in Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016 of the World Economic Forum, Ukraine was ranked 79 of 140 countries, which indicates that a lot has to be done in order to fully explore its economic potential (The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016).

In addition to the EU economic geopolitical interest, it has to be underlined that Ukraine is of outstanding importance for its energy policy, due to the Russian gas and oil pipeline route, which are permeated through the Ukrainian territory (Stulberg 2015). Four out of ten of international transport corridors, which are part of the European net, go through the territory of Ukraine, as well as two out of five of Eurasian transport corridors. Moreover, twelve EU member states acquire gas through the Ukrainian transit system (Shumylo-Tapiola 2013). Therefore, Ukraine represents the momentous country for ensuring energy needs of Europe, also because of their participation in the reconstruction of the gas transport system of Ukraine, in the project of Eurasian oil transport corridor and exploitation of oil pipeline Odessa - Brody – Gdansk – Plotzk (Samoilenko 2014). In addition, Ukraine is important for EU because it is one of the biggest producers of electricity in Europe, and it supplies four member states – Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Romania (Shumylo-Tapiola 2013). Also, we could not forget Ukrainian large potential of natural gas and shale gas, and the fact that the EU could easily find its interest in this domain as well.

Regarding the EU's specific ideological interest, this thesis found arguments in the necessity to counteract the Russian strong and immense steps towards establishing a 'second pillar of Europe' – the EEU.³⁶ Namely, Ukraine represents a great example of the change in Russian foreign policy, which utilizes the EEU for direct competition to the EU in geopolitical terms. The EEU, which operates through supranational and intergovernmental institutions, is established to gather and integrate post-Soviet states around Russia, and subsequently to enhance Russian

³⁵ DCFTA between the EU and Ukraine entered into force on 1 January 2016.

³⁶ The EEU was signed in 2007 between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, and came into existence on 1 January 2010. On the basis of the EEU, a treaty regarding the establishment of the EEU was signed on 29 May 2014 by Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, and came into force on 1 January 2015. Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined the EEU afterward.

bargaining power *vis-à-vis* Europe and the rest of the world in political and economic terms (Ditrych 2014). Therefore, the Kremlin's motive was to start to confront Brussels in the institutional and normative arena.

The EEU represents an instrument with which Russian Federation takes the position in the normative rivalry with the EU within the so-called 'shared neighborhood' (Popescu 2014). With the functional and solid EEU, Russia has shifted its policy from relying on 'soft' power, military strength, energy conditionality, towards the establishment of an institutional regime for promoting its interest in the post-Soviet space. Brussels's discomfort with the progressive development of the EEU could be noted in the statement, dated just two days after signing of the Treaty aimed at establishment of the EEU, made by the EU commissioner for enlargement Stefan Füle: "If we are serious about transforming the countries in Eastern Europe, we have to use the most important tool for transformation: the enlargement" (Fraczek 2014). This is the return of geopolitical paradigms in the contemporary international relations at its finest.

Russian authorities are trying to take advantage of the EU's standpoint, in which integration is defined as an offer of the AA, DCFTA, Visa Facilitation Agreements, but not membership (Centre for European Policy Studies *et al.* 2006). Economic integration of the post-Soviet region was usually perceived as the Russian traditional power politics play for the neighboring states - colored by the crude power, without institutional strength, and largely permeated with a discourse that belongs to the past. However, the EEU has a more focused institutional structure than any other previous instrumental attempts of gathering the ex-Soviet countries. The EEU operates as a rule-based organization, aligned with the modern international postulates, as well as with the rules and principles of the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Popescu 2014).

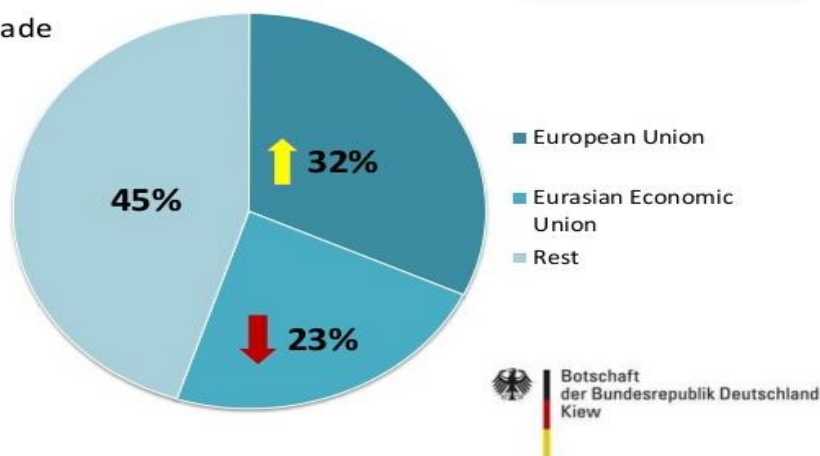
In order to regain its influence and secure interests in the post-Soviet sphere, the Kremlin has introduced the policy which should establish an economic integration based on a regulated institutional regime (Ditrych 2014). Strengthening and fostering relations between the countries of the ex-Soviet regime is not any more emphasized by the emotional discourses about common history and religion, but by the pure economic pragmatism. Therefore, Russian authorities underline the specific economic benefits coming from the closer relation with the EEU, which is additionally supported by the solid institutional organism. The intent of establishment of the operative EEU was to challenge the EU normatively and to create a unique alternative for the

Brussels's set-up in the post-Soviet sphere. This is especially notable in the case of Ukraine, where Russia is openly advocating the EEU as an alternative to the EU integration process (Popescu 2014).

The accession of Ukraine to the EEU would, due to its size and geopolitical significance, bolster this relatively new institutional setting in economic, geographic and political terms. Ukraine found itself fastened between both the EU and Russia. For instance, in 2012 share of Ukrainian total foreign trade, both imports and exports, with the EU member states was 33%, while with the ECU it amounted 29% (MacFarlane and Menon 2014). Next figure points out the data regarding the partition of Ukrainian total foreign trade in 2015. Namely, comparing with the presented data from 2012, it could be noticed that the bigger share of total trade is still with the EU. Also, it is important that in three years Ukrainian trade with the EU in comparison with its trade with the EEU increased by 5%, which indicates that Ukrainian economy and its entrepreneurs have more confidence to conduct business with the EU countries, rather than with those within the EEU. Moreover, one can argue that it also means that Ukrainian economy is, even more, leaning on the EU, than on the mentioned group of countries.

4.3 Ukraine's foreign trade with the EU and the EEU

UKRAINE
Foreign trade



Source: Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Ukraine (2015).

Furthermore, it is obvious that within the EU there exists a division among the member states with respect to the prospects of enlargement to the countries of the Eastern neighborhood, especially after the inception of the Ukraine conflicts. Poland and Baltic countries are calling for

a vigorous common European reaction, mostly because of existing fear of neo-imperial aspirations of Russia. On the other hand, some member states, such as Germany or the United Kingdom, have fear of endangering the long record of financial, investment and trade relations with Moscow (Pridham 2014).

4.3 The United States of America

Foremost, in order to thoroughly analyze and grasp ideological interests of the United States in Ukraine, a precondition is to comprehend that political establishment and analysts in the White House perceive Ukrainian conflicts as a part of Putin's larger foreign policy platform to restore regional hegemony (Michta 2015; Contributor 2014). As elaborated above, Ukraine is of immense security and strategic importance for the Kremlin, and according to the game theory and geopolitical features, it is apparent that United States' strategic geopolitical interests in Ukraine are in collision with Russia's. Therefore, a mere substance of the White House's foreign policy in Ukraine is built around the paradigm to preserve a *status quo* in the region – a balance of power and with that to hinder possible Russian regional ascendancy.

The basis of United States' ideological imperative to preserve its influence in Eurasia could be elucidated with the writings of Zbigniew Brzezinski, former national security advisor to Jimmy Carter from 1977 to 1981. Brzezinski (1998, 30) wrote that Eurasia represents “the chief geopolitical prize” for America, given that its “global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained.” Brzezinski placed Eurasia at the centrum of American geopolitical strategic interests, since he believed that global affairs were always dominated by the relations within this particular region. In addition, contemporary United States' geopolitical strategy could be observed through the Brzezinski's concept that Eurasia represents a region where the global primacy is being determined. Therefore, the United States' fundamental geopolitical interest is to prevent the emerging of any more influential or even dominant power in Eurasia.

The geopolitical significance of Ukraine for the United States of America derives from its vital geostrategic point between Europe and Eurasia (Balmaceda 2004). Moreover, Brzezinski (1997) argues that for the political elites in Washington, Ukraine is a substantial pivot for ensuring its

ascendancy within the Eurasian region. He introduces an argument that Ukraine represents a very significant part of the geopolitical game within the 'Eurasian chessboard' since Russia without Ukraine ceases to be 'Eurasian empire' and would have become a predominantly Asian imperial state (Rifenbary 2014). However, Brzezinski (1998, 46) continues by underlining that if Russia restores control over Ukraine, with its around 45 million people, major resources and access to the Black Sea, then "Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia." Therefore, without Ukraine, Russia's strategic geopolitical objectives and a tendency for the regional hegemony, based on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or the Eurasia platform, are not likely to be achieved (Balmaceda 2004).

Rifenbary (2014) is arguing that the former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton shared with Brzezinski a perspective that the Russian Federation as a regional hegemon is not a viable option for the United States' geopolitical objectives. Therefore, Russian devotion for the development of the EEU is in direct clash with the Brzezinski's American strategy on the Eurasian Chessboard. Separating Ukraine from the EEU is a key geopolitical target for the United States, with which Russia would be practically forced to move from the Eastern Europe towards unstable and Muslim dominated Central Asia (Girgin 2015). A particular confirmation of the importance of Ukraine for the United States' foreign policy could be noted in its investing over 5 billion dollars to ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine, which was affirmed by the high-profile United States diplomat Vitoria Nuland during the speech at the National Press Club in Washington after the emergence of mass protests at the Maidan Square (Ahmed 2014). Moreover, the Guardian (2014) indicates that the Bush administration in 2004 provided the opposition leaders and political activists with 65 million dollars for democracy training. Having that in mind, it has to be noted and acknowledged that the United States have specific interests in Ukraine, and it attempts to protect them with the already tested strategy.

Regarding the United States' strategic geopolitical interests in Ukraine, this thesis argues that it should be observed through NATO's platform for this particular country, as well as for the region of Eurasia as a whole. NATO's premise in this context is that Ukraine is of fundamental importance for the Central and Eastern Europe's regional security (Ditrych 2014). Therefore, the most effective NATO's geopolitical asset is the enlargement policy, which in previous years

represented a stumbling block between Russia and the Alliance, and, as mentioned, could be perceived both from the perspective of strategic and ideological interests. President Bush was advocating that Ukraine, along with Georgia, receives the MAP at the Summit in Bucharest in 2008. However, this initiative was rejected primarily by Germany and France, who argued that it would cross Russia's red line and even offer Russia an incentive for strong and prompt reaction (Lieven 2008; Walker 2015). Nevertheless, it was underlined in the final conclusion of the Summit that NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO.³⁷ With that, NATO's enlargement policy was fastened within the geopolitical clash between the United States and Russia and represented just one of its tools in pursuing strategic objectives.

The Ukrainian conflicts indicated that the European security architecture is facing severe shifts and challenges that should be promptly addressed (Rühle 2015). Hence, the United States and other NATO member states have one substantial security interest in Ukraine – to preserve a sustainable neutral zone between the military forces of NATO and the Russian Federation (Ditrych 2014). Nevertheless, Russian military aggression in Crimea, along with its activities in Donetsk, Luhansk, or even Georgia, has been questioning NATO's coherence and unity. Therefore, the Ukrainian conflicts also represent a question of the mere future of NATO, as well as the European stability and security (Michta 2015). In addition, NATO officials introduced the notions in the discourse, such as 'game changer' (former NATO Secretary General Rasmussen) or 'paradigm shift' (General Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander), which confirm that NATO perceives the Kremlin's activities as a part of the wider Russia's policy shift towards the West (Rühle 2015, 80).

A particular geopolitical situation in the region, which is highly impacted and shaped by offensive and military acts of Russia, compelled NATO to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the collective defense, especially to the eastern member states. The Baltic, Nordic and some Central European states were insisting on permanent NATO bases on their soil, but member states could not reach a consensus at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 regarding this matter (Michta 2015). Nevertheless, NATO Summit in Wales produced with the Readiness Action Plan (RAP),

³⁷ "We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO... Therefore we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications" (Bucharest Summit Declaration, Art. 23).

which purpose is to ensure a rotational military presence in Eastern and Central Europe (Rühle 2015). The RAP, consisted of Assurance Measures and Adaptation measures, envisages enhancing the readiness level of NATO's reaction forces and pre-deploying equipment, along with the more intensified military exercises in the Central and Eastern Europe.

In the framework of the RAP platform, around 4,000 Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, with a land, air, maritime and special operations forces, would be able to deploy and act within a matter of days. The RAP additionally defines the multi-national NATO command and reception facilities in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (Rühle 2015). Moreover, the United States demonstrated the will to be involved actively in ensuring security in Eastern Europe, while president Obama stated in his speech in Poland that he planned to submit a request to the Congress to provide 1 billion dollars in the framework of the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) (Brzezinski 2015). However, it is questionable to what extent would those actions affect or deter Russian policy in the region. In the light of strained relations between Russia and NATO, it is worth mentioning that in June 2016 the Alliance reached a common standpoint to deploy four multinational battalions to the Baltic States and Poland, in order to reinforce and bolster its security (Dahlburg and Baldor 2016).

When it comes to elaborating on the third category that we are observing – economic interests, foremost we are introducing the argument that the United States shares with the EU and Russia the profound interest in the Ukrainian energy potential. The first dimension of those particular interests lies within the Ukrainian key role as an energy transit country, due to its strategic geopolitical location, extensive transit network and underground gas storage capacities (Stulberg 2015). Moreover, it is often being mentioned that Ukraine is going to be even more important in the energy industry, and Balmaceda (2004) underlines that the Western European countries' needs for the Russian and Caspian Sea gas and oil are likely to grow in future. Nevertheless, Ukrainian energy dependence on Russia has negative repercussions for the United States' geopolitical strategy in the region. Therefore, Ukraine is fastened in the midst of the ongoing geopolitical clash for controlling the Eurasian energy corridors.

As elaborated above, Ukraine has significant natural gas resources, as well as mineral resources, coal and oil, which is the reason (the second dimension) for the United States' intention to extend its market and capital to this ex-Soviet country (Katz 2014). In addition, the United States

Energy Information Administration (EIA) noted that Ukraine has third largest shale gas in Europe (not taking into account Russia), amounting to the 127.9 trillion cubic feet, as well as 1.1 billion barrels of tight oil (U.S. Energy Information Administration). Moreover, Ukraine is particularly interesting to the American oil companies, since the Ukrainian government and society would not introduce significant obstacles for their operating, unlike Poland, Bulgaria, the Great Britain or France where they are facing numerous critics from the interest groups that are concerned about the impact of the shale gas extraction on the environment (Rühle 2015).

Gazprom, a Russian state-owned company that possesses almost one-fifth of the global gas reserves, provides more than a half of Ukrainian gas on the annual basis and often has been abusing this energy leverage for various political conditioning (Parry 2014). This Russian energy giant was halting gas supplies many times over the last years (winters of 2005-2006, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009), which affected not just Ukraine's, but the Western Europe's energy policy as a whole (Stulberg 2015). Hence, in order to preserve and protect its geopolitical interests, the United States took steps towards challenging Russia's energy ascendancy in the region.³⁸

Chevron, the second-largest integrated energy company in the United States, signed on 5th November 2013 a 50-year agreement with the Ukrainian authorities to explore oil and gas in the western Ukraine, where was estimated to have 2.98 trillion cubic meters of gas (Ahmed 2014). It was stated that Chevron would invest 350 million dollars in the exploratory phase of the project, while the investment would amount up to 10 billion dollars (Parry 2014). President Yanukovich commented on those arrangements by emphasizing that it will enable Ukraine to fulfill its gas needs entirely and “under the optimistic scenario, export energy resources by 2020” (Parry 2014). Therefore, the United States’ energy companies are getting involved in the territory where Gazprom has the inviolable monopoly, with which they are becoming an important asset in this particular geopolitical clash in Ukraine.³⁹

³⁸ The United States’ concerns about the Ukraine’s energy issue could be also noted through the diplomatic channels. Namely, the United States ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, gave a statement in which he emphasized that he is “very determined to cooperate with the Ukrainian government in strengthening Ukraine’s energy independence” (Parry 2014).

³⁹ As a curiosity and characteristic indicator, it is worth mentioning that the youngest son of the United States Vice President Joe Biden was appointed to the Board of directors of Burisma, a private oil and gas company in Ukraine, which is involved in drilling shale gas in East Ukraine (BBC 2014).

4.4 Ukrainian energy significance



Source: East European Gas Analysis (2014).

On the map presented above, one can visually comprehend the position and importance of Ukraine within the Eurasian geopolitics of energy sector. Pink arrows represent entry points for the transition of gas, while blue ones point out in which country gas is being transported. In addition, small green triangles show where are underground gas storages located in Ukraine, while blue and red quadrates indicate the position of compressor stations. Moreover, this visual perception is valuable since it discloses (yellow circles) gas fields on the territory (land and maritime) of Ukraine. As indicated, a notable number of gas fields are located on the Ukrainian east, as well as in Crimea and Azov and Black sea.

Regarding Crimea, some high-profile oil companies, such as Chevron, Shell and ExxonMobil, have shown interest in exploring offshore energy assets, while the Ukrainian government was also discussing with a consortium led by ExxonMobil the possibility to explore the hydrocarbons off Ukrainian western Black Sea coast (Parry 2014). An additional argument represents the fact that Shell has signed a 50-year production sharing agreement in order to explore the territory of

1.2 trillion cubic meters (Yuzivska shale gas in the Donetsk region), amounting 410 million dollars (Ahmed 2014). Nevertheless, major oil and gas companies, often supported by the state policy, have invested considerable funds and through that aspect are strongly involved in the Ukrainian conflicts.

Conclusion

The objective of the thesis was to observe, analyze and underline geopolitical paradigms within the Ukrainian conflicts, and, as indicated in the introductory part, the research has attempted to prove the hypothesis: *The Ukrainian conflicts represent a manifestation of geopolitical strategic, ideological and economic interests of the Russian Federation, the EU and the United States.* Therefore, the aim was to emphasize a particular correlation between the conflicts in Ukraine and specific geopolitical interests of those three significant subjects of global affairs. However, main conclusions are implying that geopolitical interests of Russia, the EU and the United States, which were stimulus for their further foreign policy activities and geopolitical engagement, could be segmented into the mentioned categories of interests - strategic, ideological and economic, which are interrelated with some common/overlapping points, but still represent important factors *per se*.

Ukraine, with a market of around 45 million consumers, represents a significant economic market for businesses and goods and services of all three subjects of the geopolitical triangle that we were analyzing. However, Ukraine is of unique geopolitical importance for economy and business due to its strategically important position as an energy transit country. It was indicated that a struggle to exercise control over Eurasia's energy corridors is a very significant factor in the Ukrainian conflicts. As it was mentioned above, Ukraine is situated amidst the transport corridor of oil and natural gas reserves from the Caspian basin to the European markets, i.e. four from ten international transport corridors, which are part of the European net, go through the territory of Ukraine, as well as two from five Eurasian transport corridors. That means that Ukraine is the pivotal transit country for transport of natural gas to Europe from Russia and Central Asia, and around 80% of Europe's gas imports from Russia go through Ukrainian pipelines.

The United States and Russia share the same substantial interest in the Ukrainian energy potential - strategic geopolitical location, extensive transit network and underground gas storage capacities. For instance, Gazprom obtains two-thirds of its profit from gas that goes through Ukrainian energy corridor, and it provides more than a half of Ukraine's gas on the annual basis. Hence, Russia has been often exploiting Kiev's energy (and overall economic) dependence as a foreign policy instrument to ensure its specific national interests, which was elaborated in

previous chapters. On the other hand, Chevron, Shell and Exxon, US-based oil and gas multinational companies, are progressively challenging Gazprom's regional monopoly, as well as the Kremlin's energy supremacy on European soil. As stated previously, Chevron signed in 2013 a 50-year agreement with Ukraine to explore oil and gas in the western Ukraine, where was estimated to have 2.98 trillion cubic meters of gas, and the total investment would amount to around 10 billion dollars. Also, as mentioned, Shell has signed a 50-year production sharing agreement in order to explore the territory of 1.2 trillion cubic meters (Yuzivska shale gas in the Donetsk region), which shall amount to 410 million dollars.

Economic and strategic pillars of Ukrainian geopolitical significance share the common point regarding the country's energy potential. Namely, Ukraine is strategically and economically important due to its substantial mineral, coal and oil resources, along with the notable energy supplies that are beneath the Black Sea. Furthermore, it was underlined that the United States EIA noted that Ukraine has the third largest shale gas in Europe, which amounts to 42 trillion cubic feet.

Russia, the United States and the EU also share the perspective of Ukraine's strategic geopolitical importance as an integral and fundamental part of the Eurasian region. For instance, even though it could be stated that United States does not have security related vital interests in Ukraine, the administration in Washington perceives Ukraine as a very important figure on the Brzezinski's Eurasian chessboard. Namely, the contemporary geopolitical strategy of the United States towards Ukraine is under the severe influence of the Brzezinski's geopolitical notions regarding Eurasia and Ukraine's place in the region. Eurasia represents a region where the global primacy is being determined, and without Ukraine, Russia's strategic tendency for the regional hegemony could not be accomplished. Therefore, Washington's strategic geopolitical interests in Ukraine are to preserve a *status quo* in the region and to hinder possible Russian regional ascendancy, or emerging any other dominant power in Eurasia.

Separating Ukraine from the EEU is a pivotal geopolitical objective for the United States and the EU, since that would force Russia to move from the Eastern Europe towards unstable and Muslim dominated Central Asia. Furthermore, Russia could not become Eurasian empire, and could turn into a predominantly Asian imperial state. However, if the United States and the EU fail to achieve that key geopolitical aim, mentioned Brzezinski's divination that Russia

automatically regains to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia, might come true. That particular geopolitical outcome terrifies most administrations in Brussels and Washington. Moreover, that possible Russia's geopolitical triumph is a reason why the United States and the EU are strongly opposing Ukraine's membership in the EEU, which would significantly strengthen this relatively new institutional setting in economic, geographic and political terms. As elaborated previously, Russia's strategic goal is to challenge the EU normatively through the functional and operative EEU, i.e. to offer a unique alternative to the EU integration process to the countries of post-Soviet space.

The geopolitical strategic importance of Ukraine is also in the domain of its specific geographic position as a buffer zone between the EU's eastern neighborhood and Russia. Moreover, it could not be forgotten that Ukraine is especially significant for both aspects due to the naval bases in Sevastopol and surroundings, particularly the Black Sea Fleet, which was previously emphasized and elaborated. Hence, strategically, but also observed through security perspective, the EU and the United States are concerned because of Russia with the occupation of Crimea, along with the continued impact in Abkhazia, ensured its effective control over the substantial part of the Black Sea, which is considered to be a strategically vital zone - the Kerch Strait and the Sea of Azov.

Ukrainian specific geopolitical position, which was analyzed and emphasized in previous chapters, makes this ex-Soviet country particularly important for the European security architecture, which is an issue that concerns Russia and the EU, but also the establishment in the White House through NATO engagement in this area. Hence, the Kremlin's essential and pivotal geopolitical interest is to ensure its security by eradicating the perspectives of NATO enlargement to Ukraine. As stated above, NATO enlargement to Ukraine is perceived in Moscow as a principal threat and security issue, as a part of overall Kremlin's attitude towards NATO expansion to countries of Eastern Europe. Therefore, Russian firm antagonism for the NATO expansion to Ukraine has notable geopolitical repercussions, both strategically and security. On the other hand, this issue is of great importance for the EU's security aspect as well, since Ukraine has the great potential to hinder the establishment of the overall sustainable European security architecture. In addition, I would argue that the United States does not have vital security interest involved in Ukraine since they are mostly concerned regarding its strategic geopolitical position in the region, which are depicted in Brzezinski's writings.

In addition to presenting the geopolitical picture of the Ukrainian conflicts, the purpose of the thesis was to contribute to the academic debate in the domain of significance of geopolitical paradigms in the contemporary international and scholarly community. Critical geopolitics, as an approach that observes geopolitics as a set of discourses, representations and practices, assisted the thesis to contextualize paradigms that raise the question of the existing structures of power. Moreover, in the first part of the thesis three categories of the reflection of critical geopolitical thought on Ukraine were extracted and elaborated: space, identity and statecraft.

An everlasting characteristic of the critical geopolitics represents its tendency to impact the political practitioners, i.e. to influence and direct national and global politics. However, it has to be acknowledged that the most decisive impact on the post-Cold War academic thought on geopolitics was the tendency of theories of globalization to neglect the significance of the basic analytical component of classical geopolitics – nation-state. At the end, I would argue that contemporary global challenges and conflicts require a comprehensive and analytical geopolitical approach and that the analyzed conflicts has proven that geopolitics and its paradigms still have a major role in contemporary global politics.

Povzetek v slovenskem jeziku

Konflikti v Ukrajini, s potencialom velikih reperkusij na celotne mednarodne odnose, so ponovno vrnili geopolitiko, multidisciplinarno metodo opazovanja in preučevanja zunanje politike, v fokus mednarodne skupnosti. V okviru javnega in akademskega diskurza obstaja splošen konsenz, da konflikti v Ukrajini predstavljajo monumentalni izziv za evropsko varnostno arhitekturo in hkrati glavni kamen spotike v odnosih med Rusijo in zahodom. Delo je naravnano k opazovanju, analizi in izpostavitvi geopolitične paradigme v okviru ukrajinskih konfliktov, s poudarkom na povezavi med konflikti in specifičnimi geopolitičnimi interesi treh pomembnih subjektov v mednarodnih odnosih – Rusijo, Evropsko unijo in Združenimi državami Amerike.

Analiza konceptov geopolitike kot teorije prostorskega odnosa in zgodovinskih vzrokov bo služila kot teoretični okvir, ki proučuje mednarodni sistem kot celoto, s posebnim poudarkom na kritično geopolitiko in njene refleksije na konflikte v Ukrajini. Raziskava temelji na trditvi, da strateški, ideološki in ekonomski interesi Rusije, Evropske unije in Združenih držav Amerike povzročajo in vplivajo na konflikte v Ukrajini. Posledično je analiza osredotočena na razlago omenjenih treh geopolitičnih interesov Rusije, Evropske unije in Združenih držav Amerike v Ukrajini, s ciljem poskusa racionalizacije in kontekstualizacije njihovega vpliva na konflikte. Poleg tega delo daje poseben pogled na genezo njihovih vplivov na samo povzročitev in razvoj konfliktov v Ukrajini.

Osrednji sklepi kažejo na to, da geopolitični interesi Rusije, Evropske unije in Združenih držav Amerike predstavljajo vzpobudo za njihove zunanjepolitične aktivnosti in geopolitično angažiranje ter jih lahko razdelimo na tri opazovane interesne kategorije: strateške, ideološke in ekonomske. Poleg tega imajo ti interesi nekatere skupne in preklapljajoče se točke, vendar kljub temu predstavljajo pomembne faktorje *per se*.

Cilj dela je prispevati k akademski razpravi v smislu pomena geopolitičnih paradigem v mednarodni in akademski skupnosti. Treba je upoštevati, da sodobni globalni izzivi in konflikti zahtevajo vseobsegajoč analitični geopolitični pristop in v tem smislu so analizirani konflikti v Ukrajini pokazali tudi, da ima geopolitika z njenimi postulati in paradigmi še vedno veliko vlogo v sodobnih mednarodnih odnosih.

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