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European Security Challenges to the East. Oligarchic Democracy and Russian Aggression

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Diversités

**Mihaela Daciana Natea
Maria Costea
Simion Costea**



**EU Security
and Multicultural Societies**
Dealing with a Russian Empire Revival

Preface by Hedi Saidi

L'Harmattan

Collection « Diversités »

Dirigée par Hedi SAIDI, historien.

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GEORGE EMIL PALADE
UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE,
PHARMACY, SCIENCE, AND
TECHNOLOGY OF TARGU MURES



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Table of Contents

Preface (Hedi Saidi).....	7
Argument: Pour une Politique de Sécurité de l'UE Réaliste et Forte (Mihaela Natea).....	10
Argument: For a Realistic and Stronger EU Security Policy (Mihaela Natea).....	17
Chapter 1 European Security in the Context of Russia's Imperialism (Simion Costea).....	24
1.1 The Russian Empire is back with the Tsar Putin the Terrible. What does Russia want?	25
1.2 The underlying factors behind Russia's hostility towards the EU's Eastern Partnership.....	31
Chapter 2 European Security, Human Rights and Multicultural Communities (Mihaela Daciana Natea).....	44
2.1 From "War in T-Shirt" to a "War in Suit" - The physiognomy of a changing world.....	47
2.2 The return on of the war on terror.	51
2.3 Russia use of human rights as a basis for disinformation	55
2.4 Human rights in the context of security. Case study Russia	66
Chapter 3 Science Diplomacy and European Security in the Context of Russian Hybrid Wars (Mihaela Daciana Natea).....	85
3.1 Research diplomacy – state of play in the European Union	86
3.2 The Horizon Europe correlation with other EU programmes.....	92
3.3 The architecture of the HE programme.....	96
3.4 Science Diplomacy in the EaP states.....	106
3.4.1 National policies and reforms	108
3.4.2 Human resources in R&I.....	120
3.4.3 International cooperation in R&I.....	123

Chapter 4 The Kremlin’s Imperialist Eurasian Union Project (Simion Costea, Maria Costea)	134
4.1 Russian soft power and hard diplomacy tactics.....	135
4.2 Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia	138
4.3 The Eurasian Customs Union Summit in Minsk (2013)	139
4.4 EU Security in front of Kremlin’s hard diplomacy and hard power.....	146
Chapter 5 European Security Challenges to the East. Oligarchic Democracy and Russian Aggression (Simion Costea, Maria Costea).....	152
5.1 European aspirations, external and internal challenges for the Trio Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.....	153
5.2 Russian pressure and hybrid war.....	154
5.3 European security and the 2022 EU membership perspective for the Trio Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia..	159
5.4 Oligarchic capitalism and oligarchic democracy.....	161
5.5 Realistic solutions for dismantling Ukraine’s Moldova’s and Georgia’s oligarchic systems.....	163
5.6 Problems to be solved in doing business.....	166
5.7 EU possible step by step strategy: quick rewards for quick reforms.....	167
Chapter 6 For a Realistic EU Foreign and Security Strategy in the European Neighbourhood (Simion Costea).....	174
6.1. The EU has no magical powers to solve all the problems in the world.....	175
6.2 The issue of European values and interests in ENP....	179
6.3 EU member states’ crucial role.....	180
6.4 For a knowledge-based EU foreign and security policy, closer to the citizens.....	181
6.5 StratComm.....	183
6.6 ENP highlights in EU security context.....	184
6.7 EU enlargement highlights in EU security context	185
6.8 EU security and the southern neighbours	187
6.9 Migration management and multicultural communities highlights	190
Conclusions.....	195

CHAPTER 5

European Security Challenges to the East. Oligarchic Democracy and Russian Aggression

Simion Costea

Maria Costea

5.1 European Aspirations, External and Internal Challenges for the Trio Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova¹

Ukraine, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova entered into Association Agreements/DCFTA with the European Union in 2014, initiating their implementation with the ultimate goal of EU Membership. The reluctance of EU Member States to articulate a clear EU membership perspective until 2022 was a mistake, in our opinion. But the historic decision in 2022 to grant them a European perspective and even candidate status to Ukraine and RMD is crucial to the trajectory of these three republics.

They are possessing market economies, albeit not fully functional or competitive, and democratic regimes, albeit not meeting EU standards. We think these republics could draw valuable insights from the experiences of Central-European countries like Poland and Romania, which successfully transitioned to EU membership. Poland and Romania, having originated as post-communist states, signed Association Agreements, undertook comprehensive reforms, and eventually joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, respectively. Poland's noteworthy success in implementing reforms positions it as the most active among the new EU member states.

However, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova confront more substantial challenges in their transitional journeys toward EU integration compared to Poland and Romania. These challenges encompass Russian pressure, evident in the illegal invasion of

¹ We have published electronically an earlier version of this text in our 2014 e-paper Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, „Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations”, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization. Approaching National Identity through Intercultural Dialogue. Proceedings of the International Conference „Globalization between Intercultural Dialogue and National Identity”* (editor Iulian Boldea), Targu-Mures, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015. *Disclaimer: The responsibility for the information and views set out in this publication lies entirely with the authors. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of any institution they work for, or they collaborate with. This is true for all our publications.*

2022, hybrid warfare², unresolved conflicts in regions such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea, an oligarchic system pervading economy, politics, and media, widespread corruption, and pervasive poverty. Additionally, ingrained "homo sovieticus" mentalities in politics and business, stemming from Soviet heritage, contribute to the complexity of these nations' reform agendas.

5.2 Russian Pressure and Hybrid War

Ukrainian, Moldovan Georgian reforms have a strong external enemy - Russia, a situation that spared the Central-European³ countries in 1991-2007. Russia has acted aggressively against the EU and NATO membership of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, especially in 2008, 2014, 2022. Russia has used hard power and soft power instruments. Using soft power instruments, Russia has developed its own Eurasian Union integration project, as geopolitical instrument of Kremlin's influence over ex-Soviet republics. The President Putin has clearly stated that Russians and Ukrainians are one nation⁴, that Russian World covers many

² Natea, Mihaela Daciana, Fabricating truth: from a hybrid war to political fake news. Study case on Romanian illiberal parties' discourse in the context of the Ukrainian war, *Civil Szemle*, Special Issues V/2023, pp. 155, Natea, Mihaela Daciana, Mihai Daniel Aniței, Reshaping European and national security in a post COVID – 19 context, *Acta Marisiensis, Seria Oeconomica*, 2020, vol II, Natea, Mihaela Daciana, A New European Philosophy on Recovery and Resilience. The Recovery and Resilience Facility and the Impact over Member States. *Acta Marisiensis, Seria Oeconomica*, 2021, vol II, Natea, Mihaela Daciana, *Reshaping European Security in a Post COVID-19 World*, L'Harmattan, Paris France, 2023, Natea, Mihaela Daciana, "Is the EU strategic communication good enough? Why does the war in Ukraine prove the need for a more complex approach towards Disinformation?", in coord. Mihaela Daciana Natea, *Disinformation crossing borders. The Multilayered Disinformation Concerning the War in Ukraine*, L'Harmattan, Paris France, 2022.

³ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland 's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁴ (*Odin norod*). Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

ex-Soviet republics. Putin stated that Russia can develop its own relations with BRICS and other players in the world outside Western influence and based on other values (like nationalism, paternalism, traditional family, Orthodox church etc.).⁵ What Russia wants is to re-establish its superpower in the world and is toxic hegemony in ex- Soviet area. Russia asks for equality with World Powers but does not accept the equality in relation with the smaller countries in its neighborhood, near abroad. Russia claims that NATO Enlargement and EU Enlargement disrespected Russia's interest. By saying that, Russia itself disrespects the interest of smaller countries which wanted to join NATO and EU. What Putin wants is to generate in Russia a war-time attitude of the Russian society, in order to mobilize the society around him and consolidate his power.⁶ In the years 2014-2015, President Putin gained considerable popularity among

⁵ Costea, Maria, *The Crimean Crisis, National Identity and Territorial Integrity. Moscow's and Brussels' Arguments in 2014*, p.330-338, in vol. *Globalization and intercultural dialogue: multidisciplinary perspectives* (ed.: Iulian Boldea), Tîrgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2014, <http://www.upm.ro/gidni/?pag=GIDNI-01/vol01-Pol> . Putin views: „Odin norod, „Russian World etc. in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxTLkCl6fBA>.

Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁶ GMF, *Speeches at the conference: "25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Security Challenges in a New World Order and Strategic Insights from the Cold War"*, organized by The German Marshall Fund of the United States on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, at Residence Palace, Rue de la Loi 155, Brussels. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁴ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland 's transition?* in *PISM, no 5 (107)*, March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁵ GMF, *Speeches at the conference: "25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Security Challenges in a New World Order and Strategic Insights from the Cold War"*, organized by The German Marshall Fund of the United States on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, at Residence Palace, Rue de la Loi 155, Brussels. [See further info about "the hybrid warfare" on <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/russia-ukraine-nato-crisis/Russia-Ukraine-crisis-war/EN/index.htm> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvZ0Q9ZonFg>]

Russian citizens by framing NATO and the EU as threats, characterizing the Maidan Revolution and the Ukrainian Government as fascist, and annexing Crimea to Russia. While acknowledging the historical and identity significance of Crimea for Russia, we assert that its annexation is both illegal and unacceptable, as it contravenes the fundamental principle of respecting the territorial integrity of states within their internationally recognized borders.

Our assessment is that the Eurasian Union offers limited benefits to Russia's neighbors due to the insufficient modernization and competitiveness of the Russian economy. Despite these limitations, Russia wields significant power and has the capacity to inflict severe consequences on its neighbors attempting to distance themselves from its influence. Moscow possesses a diverse toolkit for destabilizing Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, hindering their democratic transformation processes. This toolkit includes manipulation of gas prices, fueling protracted conflicts in areas such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, Ossetia, Crimea, engaging in oligarchic corruption, supporting selected political representatives (e.g., Renato Usatii, Plahotniuc, Dodon, Voronin, Shor), and acquiring control over strategically important companies. Russia has also utilized tactics such as blocking access to markets in the Eurasian Union, imposing restrictions on mobile/migrant workers from Ukraine and Moldova.

Russia's unwavering determination is to keep Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia vulnerable and dependent, hindering their European integration processes. While acknowledging that military conflicts rarely contribute positively to addressing transformative challenges, President Vladimir Putin's strategy of engaging in a low-intensity war in Donbas since 2014, although toxic, was rational from a strategic standpoint. This approach provided a pretext for Kyiv to delay transformative measures. Russia also exploits issues in Transnistria and Gagauzia to constrain Moldova, and manipulates Abkhazia and South Ossetia harass Georgia. The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a significant turning point in this strategic landscape.

In the context of its 2014 and 2022 aggressions⁷, Russia has exponentially intensified the use of its “hybrid warfare” with modern technologies. The hybrid warfare includes several elements: cyber-attacks, the 5th column, special operations, and intelligence forces (GRU and Spetsnaz), media propaganda⁸, isolating the enemy, paralyzing the enemy (both psychologically and physically), pre-emptive depopulation, economic pressure, energy pressure, and artillery to achieve imperial goals.⁹ The contemporary geopolitical tensions, often characterized as a new Cold War, have been notably intense within the Ukrainian context since the Russian aggressions in 2014 and 2022.

In 2015, the Russian Ambassador to NATO, Alexander Grushko, asserted that Russia was not engaged in any hybrid warfare in Ukraine. Instead, he contended that NATO and the EU were orchestrating hybrid warfare against Russia through means such as economic sanctions, Western propaganda, and military readiness exercises in Baltic States¹⁰. Grushko emphasized the imperative of implementing the Minsk Agreements, expressing

⁷ Concepts used by experts: the Cold War II, the hybrid war; permanent cold war; never-ending Cold War at planetary scale; never-ending war, Russia’s never-ending neighborhood or never-ending near abroad.

⁸ Natea Mihaela Daciana, *Reshaping European Security in a Post COVID-19 World*, L’Harmattan, Paris France, 2023, Natea Mihaela Daciana, ”Is the EU strategic communication good enough? Why does the war in Ukraine prove the need for a more complex approach towards Disinformation?”, in coord. Mihaela Daciana Natea, *Disinformation crossing borders. The Multilayered Disinformation Concerning the War in Ukraine*, L’Harmattan, Paris France, 2022, p. 11-24

⁹ GMF, *Speeches at the conference: "25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Security Challenges in a New World Order and Strategic Insights from the Cold War"*, organized by The German Marshall Fund of the United States on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, Brussels. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015. Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015.

¹⁰ Topic developed also in Natea Mihaela Daciana, *Reshaping European Security in a Post COVID-19 World*, L’Harmattan, Paris France, 2023

his view that Ukraine had not fulfilled its obligations, specifically in failing to withdraw heavy weaponry from the Donbas region.¹¹

The instances of Russian aggression in Ukraine in both 2014 and 2022, coupled with the hybrid warfare tactics employed, prompt a reconsideration of the significance of NATO and EU Enlargement, as per our assessment. NATO and the EU, in our view, play pivotal roles in ensuring the stability and prosperity of the European continent. The decision of Central European States to join NATO and the EU reflected a prescient political will, anticipating the resurgence of Russia as an assertive power posing threats. Consequently, we assert that other European countries have a legitimate right to pursue accession to NATO and the EU. Beyond the conventional security guarantees provided by Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, European countries require strategic insurance to safeguard their vital security interests.¹²

The EU and several EU MS were shocked in 2014 and 2022 to see that Russia is not only a trade partner, but an aggressive geopolitical actor. As the Russian economy is not enough modernized or competitive, the main exports of Russia are energy, nuclear technology, and weapons.¹³

Armed conflict has deleterious consequences for the economic landscapes of Ukraine, Russia, and the European Union. The hybrid warfare and invasions in Ukraine during 2014 and 2022 have particularly exerted a profoundly negative impact on Ukraine's economy, with the looming possibility of collapse

¹¹ Hanns Seidel Foundation, *Speeches at the conference: Europe 's Security Order – De-Construction or Re-Construction? The event was organized by the Hanns Seidel Foundation, on Tuesday, 31 March 2015, at the Goethe Institute, Rue Belliard 58, 1040 Brussels. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations, p.44-53, in vol Debates on Globalization, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.*

¹² GMF, *Speeches at the conference: "25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Security Challenges in a New World Order and Strategic Insights from the Cold War"*, organized by The German Marshall Fund of the United States on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, Brussels.

¹³ GMF, *Speeches at the conference: "25 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall: The Security Challenges in a New World Order and Strategic Insights from the Cold War"*, organized by The German Marshall Fund of the United States on Tuesday, February 17, 2015, Brussels.

preceding any substantial decline in the Russian economy. Given the economic challenges faced by the Western nations amid crises, there is a reluctance to allocate substantial resources for Ukraine, especially among Trump supporters in 2023- 2024. The peril of social unrest and political upheaval is considerable, in 2023-2024, not only in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova (RMD), and Georgia but also within Russia, ENP countries and some EU Member States.

In such a precarious situation, the implementation of EU standards outlined in the EU Enlargement Copenhagen criteria and Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AA/DCFTA) in Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia encounters significant hurdles. The primary imperative for these nations is to prioritize peace and stability, recognizing that the attainment of EU standards must be approached in a context conducive to overall societal well-being.

5.3 European Security and the 2022 EU Membership Perspective for the Trio Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia

Regrettably, up until 2022, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia lacked an EU membership perspective. The European Union did not categorize them as enlargement countries but rather as ENP/EaP countries until 2022. While the EU-Ukraine, EU-Moldova, and EU-Georgia DCFTA/Association Agreements provided robust frameworks, they failed to deliver a prospect of EU membership as a reward for the pro-European efforts and sacrifices made by these nations. Without a tangible EU perspective, the incentive for pursuing and implementing reforms was insufficient, posing a significant challenge in our assessment.

Over a span of more than two decades, this absence of a clear EU trajectory left many pro-EU citizens in these countries disheartened. The overarching objective for these nations should be the development of their countries to align with EU standards, with the understanding that EU membership becomes attainable when their countries are sufficiently prepared and when the EU is ready. The mobilization of Poland and Romania to implement reforms was considerably driven by the explicit prospect of

joining the EU and NATO.¹⁴ The European Union (EU) and NATO garnered widespread regard as formidable, prosperous, and prestigious organizations among the majority of Polish and Romanian citizens, a sentiment shared by citizens across Central-European countries. In contrast, NATO faced limited popularity in all the former Soviet republics, due to persistent Soviet and Russian propaganda. The Russian invasion in 2022 significantly fueled the desire among Ukrainians to pursue NATO membership. The aspiration for EU membership found favor among a substantial portion of citizens in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, particularly during the period spanning 2008 to 2024.

Conversely, this enthusiasm was less pronounced in Western EU Member States, characterized by discernible EU enlargement fatigue and an anti-immigration trajectory, especially during the years from 2008 to 2022. The EU grappled with challenges stemming from the 2008 global economic crisis, which not only engendered public disillusionment and anti-immigration sentiments but also intensified pressures from Eurosceptic and anti-EU movements, contributing to EU enlargement fatigue within Member States. This fatigue manifested in political positions adopted by EU Member States, imposing constraints on EU actions. These limitations were further accentuated by the constrained toolbox of the EU in its Foreign Affairs and Security Policies, notably highlighted during the Russian aggression in Donbas and Crimea in 2014, and in 2022.

In response to these challenges, the EU undertook several strategic initiatives, including the publication of its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) review in 2015, a new Foreign Policy Global Strategy in 2016, a revamped Trade Strategy, a Strategic Compass, and various other strategies. However, the efficacy of these endeavors remains contingent upon the political will and engagement demonstrated by individual EU Member States.¹⁵

¹⁴ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland 's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015.

¹⁵ EC, *Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy: the EU launches a consultation on the future of its relations with neighbouring countries*, Brussels, 04 March 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-15-4548_en.htm. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and*

5.4 Oligarchic Capitalism and Oligarchic Democracy

Several EU officials and experts stated that after the 2013 Euro-Maidan, Poland constitutes a good pattern for Ukraine's reforms. In 1991, Poland and Ukraine started their transformations from a similar development level.¹⁶ They had had a similar GDP per capita in 1991. Decades later, e.g., in 2014 the Polish GDP per capita was three times higher than in Ukraine.¹⁷ Moldova followed an experience like those of Ukraine. According to Eurostat, in 2013 GDP per capita in EU-28 (25700 Euros per inhabitant), which was 9 times higher than in Ukraine (3014 Euros per inhabitant) and 15 times higher than in Moldova (1686 Euros per inhabitant).¹⁸

Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, akin to Poland and Romania, undertook reform initiatives. The outcomes, however, differed markedly in Ukraine and Moldova, resulting in hyperinflation, reduced production, increased unemployment, and heightened poverty—a trajectory reminiscent of the challenges faced by Poland and Romania during their

European Aspirations, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

¹⁶ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine 's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, Brussels, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

¹⁷ Johannes Hahn, *How to help Ukraine's Economy Reform and Grow*, Speech at Bertelsmann Stiftung event, Brussels, 15 April 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4786_en.htm. Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine 's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilize the economy of Ukraine. Final Report*, Vienna, April 2015. <http://wiiw.ac.at/wiiw-study-analyses-economic-support-and-reform-agenda-for-ukraine-n-85.html>. The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies is long respected for its analysis of Europe 's Eastern neighbors. This report inter alia rejects the notion that Poland 's shock therapy reforms of the early 1990s, which helped consolidate that country's post-Communist transition, could be applied to Ukraine of today.

¹⁸ Eurostat, *ENP East countries. Key economic statistics*, 2014 edition, Bruxelles. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

reformative phases. The distinguishing factor lies in the thorough institutional reforms carried out in Poland, accompanied by the presence of a robust civil society facilitating the transition. Poland maintained a clear separation between political entities and business interests, a contrast to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia where the state has been perceived as being under the sway of oligarchic interests. In other words, “the state has been captured by the oligarchic interests.”¹⁹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union (1991), the new rich clans appeared (often originated in old nomenklatura), captured the economy and developed their economic and political power, becoming oligarchs, moguls, and local barons. These oligarchs and local barons invested in political parties and media. In this legal way they have bought political legitimization, and in fact have captured the Ukrainian, Moldovan Georgian states, central, regional, and local administration, companies, parts of the media and some political parties (or regional organizations of parties). The oligarchs’ powers and local barons’ power are based on quasi-feudal relations in the country’s regions, with friendly officials and businesspeople involved. The conduct of the state’s economic policy has been directly controlled by the business “moguls” whose fortunes derive, primarily, from shameless and unpunished looting of public assets, extortion of huge underserved subsidies, etc.²⁰ The economy declined, and the poverty extended in large parts of the population. The oligarchs and local barons are not interested in the rule of law, in fighting against corruption, in fair competition. At a smaller scale, this

¹⁹ Camil Kallus, *An appropriated state? Moldova ‘s uncertain prospects for modernisation*, OSW, 2015. Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine ‘s Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilize the economy of Ukraine. Final Report*, Vienna, April 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²⁰ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine ‘s Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilize the economy of Ukraine. Final Report*, Vienna, April 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

phenomenon of oligarchs (called moguls and local barons) was partially present also in Romania in the transition period.

In our opinion, the President Putin is a powerful oligarch. In his way, the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is a powerful oligarch, in Hungary, in our opinion.

After 1989 Romania and Poland had an easier situation, because they dismantled the major communist institutions and because a sentiment of no-return to the old regime has started to dominate the public opinion. Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia have a bad capitalism in an oligarchic system that corresponds well to both the pre-modern past of the manor economy and authoritarian-paternalist “homo sovieticus” system, which left a much stronger mark there than in Poland or Romania.²¹

In Poland, a shock therapy was implemented in the transition towards democracy, market-economy, and euro-Atlantic integration. Ukraine’s and Moldova’s citizens suffered two decades of shock without the therapy, when the oligarchic systems have developed. Many citizens are scared by the social cost of liberal reforms. Many citizens are nostalgic about the stability of the communist time, when they enjoyed state jobs, state apartments, state schools, state social protection, a sense of hope and the joy of being younger.²²

5.5 Realistic Solutions for Dismantling Ukraine’s Moldova’s and Georgia’s Oligarchic Systems

In confronting the substantial challenges presented by entrenched oligarchic systems, how can Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia navigate towards success? Ukraine, particularly burdened by the consequences of the 2014 and 2022 Russian

²¹ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland’s transition?* in PISM, no 5(107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²² Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland’s transition?* in PISM, no 5(107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

aggressions and macroeconomic instabilities, requires a strategic exit from the severe crisis it currently faces. The imperative for Kyiv is to establish a peaceful environment conducive to meaningful work. Even a state of frozen conflict, akin to that observed in Transnistria, is considered preferable to an active conflict. However, any resolution to these conflicts necessitates the collective engagement of Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and the European Union.

Insights from Polish experts suggest that oligarchs are likely to remain influential political and economic entities in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia for the foreseeable future. According to this perspective, a plausible approach involves offering these oligarchs a transformative path, affording them the opportunity to transition into constructive roles as responsible business figures and democratic politicians. This transition involves embracing new norms of governance and actively participating in the broader processes of positive change. This strategic approach, in essence, mirrors the methodology Poland employed in dealing with the nomenklatura (apparatchiks) during its transition period, after 1989.²³

Numerous notable measures were implemented in Ukraine, such as the introduction of tele-justice and the arrest of high-ranking officials during a government meeting, including the removal of oligarch Kolomoisky from Naftogaz and his position as governor of the Dnepropetrovsk Region in March 2015. However, it is crucial for anticorruption policies to be systematic and persistent, steering clear of selective justice and refraining from instrumentalizing legal mechanisms for political purposes. A negative example in this context is the imprisonment in Georgia of former President Saakashvili and other prominent opposition and media figures who had criticized the government and the oligarchic system, notably influenced by the **oligarch Ivanishvili**.

²³ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

Under the regime of President Maia Sandu, efforts were made to prosecute several **oligarchs or local barons, including Plahotniuc, Shor, and Usatii**, although some managed to evade legal consequences. Another facet of this anti-oligarchic endeavor entails fostering a business-friendly environment in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, characterized by openness to foreign companies and the cultivation of new local enterprises, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The expansion of such entities has the potential to diffuse the influence of oligarchs and accelerate the democratization of governance. Transparent regulations are pivotal to facilitating fair competition for newcomers vis-à-vis deeply entrenched oligarchic conglomerates.²⁴

Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia should put together a coherent package to attract foreign direct investment and by setting up business and industrial parks with clear ownership rights, good infrastructure as well as the support of the competent local/regional administration. They need to develop a long-term modernization strategy including an industrial policy to improve competitiveness and restructure sectors.²⁵

This business-friendly approach must be complemented by a social aspect: a strong policy against income inequality.²⁶ This should be a lesson learnt from Poland's and Romania's transitions. Even the Vienna Institute criticized in 2015 the insufficient social protection of the citizens in Central Europe. The impact of IMF inspired policies on ordinary Ukrainian, Moldovan, Georgian citizens should be carefully considered so as not to erode the necessary reform support.²³ The governments

²⁴ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5(107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Țirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²⁵ The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilize the economy of Ukraine. Final Report, Vienna, April 2015*, Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Țirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²⁶ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5(107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Țirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

of Ukraine Moldova, Georgia adopted large price increases for gas, heating, and electricity. The risk of social explosion is huge in these countries, sooner or later.²⁷

5.6 Problems to be Solved in Doing Business

According to some analysis by the EBRD in partnership with World Bank (BEEPS V), published in 2015, the top three business environment obstacles identified by Ukrainian firms were political instability (because of uncertainty in relation with Russia and the EU); corruption; and competitors' practices in the informal sector.²⁸ Large firms, younger firms and manufacturing firms were more concerned about access to finance than the practices of informal sector competitors. In BEEPS IV, tax administration was in third place. Closely tied to politics, corruption also remained a major issue. The informal payments that firms reported paying to secure government contracts drastically increased from 3.8% to 14.2% of contract value. Overall, firms had to pay on average 5.0% of their annual revenue as informal gifts to public officials —to get things done! — by far the largest payment among the covered countries.²⁹

The business environment in Republic of Moldova also identified corruption and political instability (due to the fragility of the Government coalitions since April 2009, preventing the country from passing judicial reforms as big challenges), and workforce skills.³⁰

²⁷ Content Consulting, *Ukraine is moving to Social Explosion*, April 19, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²⁸ EBRD&World Bank, *The business environment in the transition region*, 2015 <http://ebrd-beeps.com/reports/> Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

²⁹ EBRD&World Bank, *The business environment in the transition region*, 2015 <http://ebrd-beeps.com/reports/> Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tirgu-Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁰ EBRD&World Bank, *The business environment in the transition region*, 2015 <http://ebrd-beeps.com/reports/> ; Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war;*

Large firms also felt constrained by electricity issues, while young firms placed labor regulations among the biggest obstacles. In BEEPS IV, the three major constraints were access to land; workforce skills; and access to finance.³¹ Since BEEPS IV the severity of corruption for Moldovan firms has significantly increased, moving from eighth place in BEEPS IV to first place in BEEPS V. Moldovan firms were much more likely to report that an informal payment was expected than an average firm in eastern Europe and the Caucasus region. Lack of skilled workers is a point of concern for firms, because —nearly 285,000 of Moldovan migrants live in Russia (about 8% of the total population), 170,000 in Ukraine and 90,000 in Italy.³²

5.7 EU Possible Step by Step Strategy: Quick Rewards for Quick Reforms

We think that Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are able to go through the transformation only with strong external support, both in dealing with Russia and in implementation of the reforms. Meaningful EU support should involve a credible political strategy, which should better define the status of associated membership to the EU and give it obvious substance. EU should continue to actively support the European choice of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

Not only symbolic political statements about EU membership are needed, but concrete achievements on the field to bring Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia closer to EU standards, including the standard of life. We can agree with PISM expert, that on an operational level this means implementing a variety of

Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³¹ EBRD&World Bank, *The business environment in the transition region*, 2015 <http://ebrd-beeps.com/reports/> ; Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³² EBRD&World Bank, *The business environment in the transition region*, 2015 <http://ebrd-beeps.com/reports/> ; Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

projects in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, which require quick reforms, but which are combined with quick rewards in the form of financial assistance and access to EU benefits. This is a silent, technocratic extension of the association agreements' areas of energy, transport, agriculture, and education.³³

The financial and material assistance of the EU and IFIs for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia should be strongly tied to the progress on dismantling the oligarchic interests. This will require legal system reforms, the severance of relationships between business and politics, proper taxation of oligarchic assets and confiscation of illegally amassed wealth.³⁴ In our opinion, the EU institutions should promote and manage directly as many projects as possible, not to leave them in the hands of the Ukrainian, Moldovan, or Georgian politicians populating their national corrupt authorities. The EU should use the existing ENP instruments and collaborate with IFIs and donors. A Marshall Plan for Ukraine was proposed by the Vienna Institute.³⁵

Vienna Institute also proposed to forgive a large part of Ukraine's external debt and allow the Ukrainian National Bank enough foreign exchange reserves to move to a more stable exchange rate regimen.³⁶ However, in our view, the external creditors of Ukraine might refuse such a request/suggestion, as happened in the case of Greece's Tsipras government in 2015. Vienna Institute suggests a delay of the full implementation of the DCFTA and hence temporarily shield the fragile

³³ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁴ The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilise the economy of Ukraine. Final Report, Vienna, April 2015*. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁵ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁶ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

domestic market from the EU import competition, while still maintaining free-market access to the EU, as currently arranged.³⁷ Actually the EU refused such a delay demanded by Yanukovych in 2013 (under the Russian pressure), but accepted it when it was demanded by Yatsenyuk Government in 2014, under an increased Russian pressure (in the context of Russian hybrid war in Donbas). The implementation of DCFTA started in 2015 and has produced superior results. The Vienna Institute also proposed that longer transition periods as regards approximation to the EU regulations should be negotiated to ensure orderly adjustment to a more competitive market environment.³⁸

Apart from fostering EU Enlargement/integration process, Vienna Institute suggested in 2015 to Ukraine to restore, as much as possible, trade relations with Russia and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) via trilateral negotiations³⁹. In our opinion, the Commissioner Hahn was right when he very clearly answers to this suggestion: The Association Agreement, along with its trade part, with the European Union leaves Ukraine free to determine its own trade policy. Ukraine already had preferential trade relations with the members of the Eurasian Economic Union within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States Free Trade Area. These were perfectly compatible with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and there was no reason they should not be maintained. So, the EU-Ukraine bilateral DCFTA did not impose a false choice on

³⁷ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁸ The Vienna Institute for Economic Studies, *How to stabilize the economy of Ukraine. Final Report*, Vienna, April 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

³⁹ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

Kyiv.⁴⁰ We can add that this statement was true also for Moldova and Georgia.

Regarding the suggestion of trilateral negotiations (EU-Ukraine-Russia), the idea was clearly proposed by Yanukovych in 2013, under Russian pressure, but refused by the EU. In 2015, under an increased Russian pressure (including the hybrid war), the EU really pursued such trilateral negotiations. A round of trilateral trade talks with Ukraine and Russia took place in Brussels on 20-21 April 2015, to no avail.

However, in our opinion, Russia should never have a veto right over EU- Ukraine and EU-Moldova and EU-Georgia relations and that is essential. Anyway, the legitimate trade concerns of Russia should be discussed and taken on board, case by case, in our opinion. From a historical perspective, we underline the incompatibility between the Russian-led Eurasian Customs Union and the EU AA/DCFTAs with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. A customs union (like the Eurasian one) has a common external trade policy (for example a common external tariff), and an individual member country can no longer have sovereign control over its external trade policies.

Conclusions

There is a long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's RMD's and Georgia's oligarchic, mogul, and local baron's system.⁴¹ It is going to require an enormous political and economic EU commitment to turn Ukraine around. And it is going to take a long time. RMD could work faster, if well supported by the EU. It might be a longer process than in the case of the EU members

⁴⁰ Johannes Hahn, *How to help Ukraine's Economy Reform and Grow*, Speech at Bertelsmann Stiftung event, Brussels, 15 April 2015, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-15-4786_en.htm Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁴¹ Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war, Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

Bulgaria and Romania. In Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia the pro-European civil society does everything possible to keep justice reform, transparency, and the fight against corruption at the top of the political agenda. That was the case in Romania and Poland. Without the rule of law and a strong civil society, sustainable political and economic reforms are not possible. That is an important lesson emphasized by Carnegie's expert Judy Dempsey.⁴²

The EU should be involved because what can be lost is stability in the EU. The EU still needs a ring of friends and not a ring of fire. An unreformed Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia may turn into failed states, exporting conflicts and millions of refugees to the European Union. The EU Member States should learn from the lesson of the ex-Yugoslavia of the 1990s. Even more, the threat of expansion of Kremlin's hegemony and of its hybrid war should be contained. Finally, a successful Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia with democracy and a prosperous free market economy would pose a direct challenge to Putin's dictatorial system, vertical of power or managed democracy, with a potentially contagious effect.⁴³

The EU should promote a smart power policy in the ex-soviet area to deal with the huge challenges there. Not only symbolic promises, but concrete achievements in the field are needed. The EU should diversify its list of partners in those countries, including more stakeholders and targeting the citizens. The aim of Ukrainians, Moldovans, Georgians should be to develop their countries at EU standards, knowing that they could be EU MS when their countries will be prepared and when the EU will be prepared.

⁴² Judy Dempsey, *The Long Road to Dismantling Ukraine's Oligarchic Democracy*, Carnegie, April 16, 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

⁴³ Sebastian Plociennik, *Can Ukraine mimic Poland's transition?* in PISM, no 5 (107), March 2015. Costea, Maria, Costea Simion, *Hybrid war; Oligarchic Democracy and European Aspirations*, p.44-53, in vol *Debates on Globalization*, Tîrgu-Mureş, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2015.

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