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Frozen and Freezing Conflicts in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus: Implications for Regional Security

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Frozen and Freezing Conflicts in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus: Implications for Regional Security

Abstract: The paper focuses on the process of frozen or freezing conflicts in the post-Soviet area and how they influence regional security in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The key argument advanced is that the almost three-year-long war in eastern Ukraine (Donbas) will become another frozen conflict in the post-Soviet space. The reasons for this are the lack of agreement between Ukraine and Russia on the future of the region and Russia's support for the Donbas administration. The main consequences of those conflicts are destabilization, devastation and militarization of Eastern Europe. Russia has experience leveraging conflicts of this type and using them to further its foreign and security policy aims. Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine are affected by the problem of frozen conflicts, which influence their internal political, economic and social situation.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, regional security, frozen conflicts

Introduction

As the war in eastern Ukraine continues and—by now—displays all characteristics of a frozen conflict in the making, and the security and socio-political stability of the entire region are at stake. From this perspective, it is timely to inquire into the nature of frozen conflicts, explore the literature and case studies, and seek lessons they offer with a view to navigating the war in eastern Ukraine and possibly preempting the worst-case scenario. This objective of this paper is to do just that. To this end, the argument is structured in three parts. First, a critical review of the debate on frozen conflicts is presented. Here, it is argued that the definitions of frozen conflicts are unclear and this phenomenon must be seen from the perspective of the process of the creation of quasi-states, which are used by the stronger power in in-

ternational relations (for example, Russia¹ vis-à-vis Moldova). In the next part, the genealogy of the war in eastern Ukraine is explored as a new frozen conflict in Europe. Here, we can observe the promotion of quasi-states in the Donbas territories, where authorities received not only military support from Russia but also gained a diplomatic voice in the peace process (Minsk talks). On the other hand, Russia does not want to incorporate these territories into the Russian Federation (unlike Crimea) because it would lose leverage against Ukraine in the long-term perspective. The third part of the paper examines the problem of how frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area influence regional security in Eastern Europe. Special attention is paid to the destabilization and devastation of counties affected by frozen conflicts (Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine), explore the militarization of Russia's foreign policy, the arms race in the region and challenges to energy supplies. Each of these are briefly explained in the broader context of the destabilization of the eastern neighborhood of the European Union (EU).

1 Definition of "Frozen Conflict"

● The phenomenon of frozen conflicts is associated with a never-ending peace process due to the contradictory interests of the many actors involved in the dispute. A characteristic feature of a frozen conflict is the formation of a "quasi-state," with its own administration, territory, and population, but without full international recognition.² According to Pal Kolsto,³ for a political unit to qualify as a quasi-state, it should meet three criteria. First, its authorities must control (most) of the territory they claim. Second, they have to strive, even unsuccessfully, for international recognition as a state. Third, they must have

- 1 According to the Article I of the Constitution of the Russian Federation from 1993, the names Russian Federation and Russia are equivalent in law. Конституция Российской Федерации [Constitution of the Russian Federation], 12 December 1993, <http://www.constitution.ru/> [2017-07-01].
- 2 M. Kosienkowski, 'Quasi-państwo w stosunkach międzynarodowych' [Quasi-state in international relations], *Stosunki Międzynarodowe* [International Relations], Vol. 38, No. 3-4, 2008, pp. 154-155; P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud, 'Living with Non-recognition: State- and Nation-building in South Caucasian Quasi-states', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 3, May 2008, pp. 483-509.
- 3 P. Kolstø, 'The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2006, p. 725.

existed for at least two years.⁴ The issue of international recognition is therefore a distinctive feature in distinguishing these geopolitical entities. External and vital factors that guarantee the existence of quasi-states include neighboring powers that benefit from the existence of these geopolitical entities. Quasi-states are largely unable to function without a stronger protector. In the post-Soviet space, it is Russia, but another example is Turkey and North Cyprus. Without the protector's political, military and economic support, they would have disappeared from the political world map.⁵ In the post-Soviet space, the researchers have identified four frozen conflicts, based on disputed territories after a war: Nagorno-Karabakh (1988-1994), South Ossetia (1991-1992), Abkhazia (1992-1994), and Transnistria (1991-1992).⁶ As a result of military action, Abkhazia and South Ossetia claimed independence from Georgia, Transnistria from Moldova, and Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. Since the beginning of 2014, the conflict in Ukraine has been heading towards "frozen". The area in dispute has been called the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic of (LRL). They include the eastern regions of Ukraine (Donbas) and their boundaries have been determined by the ongoing military action.⁷ There is some misunderstanding about Russia's annexation of Crimea, because some scholars call this a frozen conflict, too.⁸ But Crimea constitutes a highly special case. Since 2014, the peninsula has been *de facto* controlled by and within the jurisdiction of Russia, a full-fledged recognized state that is a member of the Council of Europe (CoE).⁹ Crimea also is not a quasi-state used as leverage in Russian foreign policy. According to international law,

4 Ibid.

5 P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud, op. cit., pp. 483-509.

6 J. Solak, *Moldawia. Republika na trzy pęknięcia. Historyczno-społeczny, militarny i geopolityczny wymiar „zamrożonego konfliktu” o Naddniestrze* [Moldova. Republic on three cracked. The historical-social, military and geopolitical dimension of the "frozen conflict" of Transnistria], Toruń: Europejskie Centrum Edukacyjne, 2009, p. 58; A. Legucka, *Geopolityczne uwarunkowania i konsekwencje konfliktów zbrojnych na obszarze poradzieckim* [Geopolitical factors and consequences of the military conflicts on the Post-Soviet area], Warszawa: Difin, 2013, pp. 20-33.

7 J. Felsztynski, M. Stanczew, *Trzecia wojna światowa? Bitwa o Ukrainę* [Third World War? The Battle for Ukraine], transl. J. Redlich, Poznań: Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, 2015, pp. 273-342.

8 A. Racz, *The frozen conflicts of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood and their impact on the respect of human rights*, European Parliament, Directorate-General for External Policies, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578001/EXPO_STU\(2016\)578001_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578001/EXPO_STU(2016)578001_EN.pdf) [2017-06-12].

9 Ibid.

Crimea remains a territory occupied by the Russian Federation, but in this case, there are no peace talks and Russia claims that the peninsula is an integral part of its territory. That is why Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 cannot be considered a frozen conflict.

Sometimes the definition of a "frozen conflict" is unclear and researchers use the term a "protracted" conflict in the sense that military confrontations are still a regular occurrence, claiming lives on both sides, including civilians (as in the Nagorno-Karabakh case). Those, who do not like the term "frozen conflict" argue it "per se is a preposterous oxymoron because the association it proposes between 'conflicts,' by their nature dynamic, and 'frozen,' a physical state suggesting immobility."¹⁰ But the definition of these conflicts becomes clearer if we see them in the perspective of the process of the creation of quasi-states. Second, these conflicts are used as tools in international relations. To sum up, a frozen conflict is a situation in which active armed conflict has ended but there is no possibility to solve the root of the conflict. At the same time, in the disputed territory a quasi-state has been created, supported by a stronger power from the outside, and used as leverage in the outside agent's foreign policy.

Three phases in the formation of frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area can be distinguished: the chaos phase (armed forces), the negotiation and ceasefire phase, and the frozen conflict phase, in which the quasi-state is consolidated with the support of the external power(s).

In the chaos phase (1988-1992), there was the collapse of geopolitical order in the Soviet Union (USSR), and the outbreak of the first armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Then, Georgia disintegrated (first in South Ossetia, then in Abkhazia), and so did Moldova (in Transnistria). Russia's reaction to the outbreak of armed conflict on the edges of the empire was chaotic and at that time strongly "decentralized" due to the disintegration of political and military structures.¹¹ Officially, Russia proclaimed respect for the territorial integrity of each state in the armed conflict, but unofficially it supported the separa-

¹⁰ F. Morar, 'The Myth of Frozen Conflicts', *Per Concordiam*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 2010, p. 16.

¹¹ А. Зверев [A. Zvieriew], 'Этнические конфликты на Кавказе 1988-1994 г.' [Ethnic conflicts in Caucasus 1988-1994], in: Коппитерс, Б. (ed.) [Koppiters, B.], *Спорные границы на Кавказе* [Dispute borders in the Caucasus], Москва: Весь мир, 1996, p. 34; D. Lynch, *Peacekeeping Strategies in CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000, pp. 13-14.

tists.¹² This was not a “top-down” recommendation but often was due to the lack of control over military units stationed near the conflicts, especially when some local troop units were active (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria).¹³

In the second phase (1992-1994), the regional leader—Russia—was able to “put into practice its geopolitical project,” that is set up new institutions to apply and impose a new order in a given area.¹⁴ In terms of armed conflict, most fighting was stopped, and Russia became a mediator, a guarantor of peace, or a stabilizing party that sent soldiers to peacekeeping operations. During this period, largely thanks to Russia’s involvement, military action was ended in the most important post-Soviet conflicts in South Ossetia (June 1992), Transnistria (July 1992), Nagorno-Karabakh (May 1994), and Abkhazia (May 1994).¹⁵ None of these conflicts have been resolved, though, because no peace agreements, only ceasefires, have been signed.¹⁶ On the other hand, Russia’s actions, despite contributing to the end of the local wars, generated ambiguous assessments in the West. Russia has turned to a form of military intervention that does not follow the guidelines and standards of the UN peacekeeping system.¹⁷

The third phase (1994-2008) is characterized by the strengthening of the quasi-states. Local authorities began to control the political, economic, and social life of the region with the support of the Russian Federation. For this purpose, a passport policy was implemented, infrastructure, railway, and energy connections created, and currency exchanges established, most often exchangeable with the Russian ruble. When beneficial to Russia, economic blockades were introduced

12 A. Bryc, *Rosja w XXI wieku. Gracz światowy czy koniec gry?* [Russia in the 21st Century. World player or end of the game], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2009, pp. 62-87.

13 A. Зверев [A. Zvieriew], op. cit., p. 34.

14 P. K. Baev, ‘Russia’s Policies in Secessionist Conflicts in Europe in the 1990s’, *Security Policy Library*, No. 11, 1998, pp. 3-40.

15 R. Yogiaveetil, ‘Fighting the Phantom Menace: Applying the Model of Taiwanese WTO Integration to the Problem of South Ossetia Autonomy’, *The George Washington University International Law Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2, pp. 437-475.

16 S.L. Clark, ‘Russia in a Peacekeeping Role’, in: L. Aron, K.M. Jensen (eds.), *The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy*, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994, p. 137.

17 D. Sagramoso, ‘Russian peacekeeping policies’, in: J. Mackinlay, P. Cross (eds.), *Regional Peacekeepers: the Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping*, Tokyo & New York & Paris: United Nations University Press, 2003, p. 13.

against quasi-states to enforce its demands on the local administration. After a period of passporting (that is, granting the citizens of these quasi-states Russian passports), a new visa regime was introduced between Russia and the separatist territories.¹⁸ The peacekeeping troops sent to the conflict area then took the position of one of the parties and *de facto* lost their neutral (“mirotworcieskij”) status.¹⁹ So far, Russian peacekeeping operations have been concluded in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (until 2009), leaving only the mission in Transnistria.

It is important to underline that the peace processes in the four cases of post-Soviet area conflicts have since the beginning of the 1990s involved external actors (United Nations, or UN, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, and Russia). The reasons why these conflicts have endured are complex. On the one hand, Russia became “part of the problem” in the peace process or in the recovery of lost territories. Russia’s strategic policy paradigm concerning protracted conflicts has been described as “controlled instability”. On the other hand, the wars consolidate the nation around the political elite, which use this term as an excuse for postponing reforms and ignoring the domestic problems.

2. Ukraine

The three phases of the emergence of frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area have occurred in eastern Ukraine. Military operations began in Donbas in March 2014. This was the chaos phase, the first in the creation of a quasi-state. After one month of fighting, the DNR was proclaimed on 7 April, and then the LRL on 27 April. Russia initially missed the chance to expand its “Novorossiya” project, which was based on the unification of several regions of southern and eastern Ukraine. That is why it then started to promote local representatives to represent the Donbas community in the peace talks.

18 P. Oleksy, ‘Federalizacja powraca’ [Federalization’s back], *Nowa Europa Wschodnia* [New East Europe], 11 July 2012.

19 S. Secieru, ‘Protracted Conflicts in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Between Averting Wars and Building Trust’, *Neighbourhood Policy Paper*, The Center for International and European Studies, Istanbul, No. 6, January 2013, p. 2; M. Kosienkowski, ‘Federacja Rosyjska wobec Naddniestrza’ [Russian Federation toward Transnistria], *Analizy Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* [Analyses of East-Central Europe Institute], Vol. 21, Lublin 2008, p. 13.

This was the second phase in freezing the Donbas conflict. Russia recognized the DNR and LRL as parties to the conflict and started lobbying for the inclusion of their leaders among the signatories of the Minsk agreements. Russia's intention was not just to change the Ukrainian military's behavior but mostly to force President Petro Poroshenko to the negotiating table to create what would later be called Minsk I. As Vladimir Lukin, the former Russian ambassador to the US, who has been involved in Ukraine policy in several capacities since 2014, said: "Forget about the DNR and LRL. The objective [of the August 2014 counteroffensive] is to explain to Poroshenko that he will never prevail ... [The Kremlin] will send in however many troops are necessary to make Poroshenko understand this and sit down at the table with whomever Putin wants."²⁰

The third phase in freezing the conflict in Ukraine began when Russia rejected a proposal to incorporate the territories into the Russian Federation. Thus, the Kremlin made no territorial claims against eastern Ukraine, allowing Russia instead to play the role of mediator of a conflict to which it is a party. Without Russian military support, the DNR and LRL troops would have been defeated in the summer of 2014.²¹ The Russians contributed heavy weapons and regular armed forces to the separatists in Donbas. It is estimated that in the year since the beginning of the conflict, the separatist military manpower increased from 10,000-15,000 to 35,000-37,000, and the number of Russian soldiers among them increased from 3,000-5,000 to 8,000-10,000.²²

Compared to other post-Soviet area conflicts, it is much harder for Russia to act as a mediator and stabilizing force in Donbas. However, thanks to its participation in the peace talks within the Normandy format (Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany), appointed to implement the Minsk agreements (Minsk I and II), Russia can push its own proposals to resolve the situation in Donbas. It promotes the decen-

20 S. Charap, 'Russia's Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool. Is There a Logic?', *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, No. 443, October 2016, p. 2.

21 R.N. McDermott, 'Brothers disunited. Russia's use of military power in Ukraine', in: J.L. Black, M. Johns (eds.), *The Return of the Cold War. Ukraine, the West and Russia*, London & New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 77-99.

22 A. Dyner, 'Russia Beefs Up Military Potential in the Country's Western Areas', *Bulletin PISM*, No. 35 (883), 13 June 2016.

tralization and federalization of Ukraine, in which regional authorities would have strong influence on both domestic and foreign policy. Ukraine's leaders reject this, believing that the Donbas regional representatives would hamper the country's independent policy toward Russia. Thus, Russia promotes the Minsk agreements to the minimum degree possible while attempting to ensure that no progress is made in their implementation. In addition, Russia will continue to support and supply the DNR and LRL administrations. This was confirmed by a decree signed by the Russian president on February 18, 2017, recognizing the validity of documents issued by the Donbas authorities. This means that Russia is seeking *de facto* the legitimization of the Donbas "administration" and may be preparing to freeze the conflict there.

3. Implications for Regional Security

The armed conflicts pose a threat to the security of the states and the region of Eastern Europe. The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (according to various data) has claimed 17,000 to 35,000 victims.²³ The number of refugees is estimated at 750,000.²⁴ There is still fighting between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Last year, there was a resumption of hostilities and the so-called "four-day war" (2-6 April 2016). In addition, the wave of refugees reached neighboring states, exacerbating Azerbaijan's relations with Iran, which at some point even triggered military intervention in that country (1993). The situation of internally displaced people (IDP) in Azerbaijan is also unsettled. There are more than 600,000 IDPs living in Azerbaijan who were forced to move in an earlier Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict (1988-1994), which remains unresolved. Displaced people represent 6% of society and are the poorest social group.²⁵ The authorities are reluctant to grant them full civil rights so they can use the issue of returning the refugees to Nagorno-

23 T. Świętochowski, *Azerbejdżan* [Azerbaijan], Warszawa: Trio, 2006, s. 171; R. Łoś, J. Regina-Zacharski, *Współczesne konflikty zbrojne* [Modern military conflicts], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2010, p. 343.

24 *Ibid.*, s. 165.

25 A. Wirowska, 'Status prawny uchodźców wewnętrznych w Azerbejdżanie' [The Legal Status of Internal Refugees in Azerbaijan], *Studia Politologica Ucraino-Polona* [Ukrainian-Polish Political Studies], Kraków-Kijów, Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and University of Kiev, Vol. 4, 2014.

Karabakh in the international arena, even though the war has been over for more than 30 years.

The stiff relations around Karabakh prevent normal trade in the region. Since April 1993, Turkey has had an economic blockade against Armenia. During the war, Iran was the only country to trade with the narrow territory on the map, becoming Armenia's "window to the world" and a "way of life" that allowed it to survive (only survive because it did not have the necessary infrastructure and Iranian trade with Armenia never became significant).²⁶ Between 1992 and 1994, half a million Armenians (15% of the population) fled the country.²⁷ Between 1993 and 2008, Ankara's position was clear: it would open the border in exchange for concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh. A breakthrough occurred after the war in Georgia. In 2008, Turkey and Armenia started a new chapter in their relations called "football diplomacy," focused on establishing diplomatic relations and developing bilateral relations,²⁸ but in view of the normalization of Armenian-Turkish relations, Azerbaijan has the sharpest attitude. As a result of opposition from Baku, negative sentiment in both Turkey and Armenia (including the position of the Armenian diaspora) has become obsolete. On April 22, 2010, Armenia's president announced that his country was suspending ratification due to the prolongation of a trial in Turkey, but that did not stop talks on normalizing relations with the western neighbor.

The creation and existence of frozen conflicts in international relations has several common features. The quasi-states are "information black holes" in international relations, meaning there is a lack of data on what is happening within their political structures.²⁹ Common features are the depletion of these territories, depopulation, and

26 D. Suwała, 'Czy Armenii jest po drodze z Iranem?' [Does Armenia and Iran are on the same track?], *Portal Spraw Zagranicznych* [International Relations Portal], 9 October 2008, http://www.psz.pl/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=13975 [2013-03-23].

27 H. Mikaelian, 'Armenian Foreign Policy: Coordinating the Interests of the U.S., the EU, and Russia', *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (57), 2009, p. 119.

28 There were voices of treason of national interests on both the Turkish, Azerbaijani and Armenian sides, especially the Armenian Diaspora. D.N. Goksel, 'Turkey's Policy Towards Caucasus', in: A. Iskandaryan, *Caucasus Neighborhood: Turkey and the South Caucasus*, Yerevan: American University of Armenia, 2008, p. 23.

29 B.H. Stanislawski (ed.), 'Para-States, Quasi-States, and Black Spots: Perhaps Not States, But Not "Ungoverned Territories," Either', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 366-396.

a mafia-like clan political system. A stew of illegal trafficking of arms, drugs, alcohol, people, and human organs bubbles in these areas.³⁰ Because of their inability to fully participate in international relations, quasi-states, unlike small states, cannot promote their interests in international organizations, which would increase their prestige and strengthen them internally and externally. They are doomed to need the strong protector and pursue its interests in international relations. These territories have embraced capitalism to varying degrees, but in almost every case their economies have been dominated by a class of oligarchs that took control of the best parts of the Soviet economy when the USSR collapsed. These oligarchs have indulged in corruption on a grand scale, suborning courts and law enforcement agencies and using them against their rivals, buying votes and then buying politicians. They have often maintained murky links with equally corrupt groups in Russia: the gas trade between Russia and Ukraine was a notorious area in which oligarchs on both sides got rich at the expense of the national interest.

For Ukraine, both the annexation of Crimea and the situation in Donbas have negatively impacted its economy. Over the period 2014 and 2015, Ukraine recorded a GDP decline of 16.5%, thus the Ukrainian government was forced to introduce a series of structural reforms under pressure from the International Monetary Fund, which had lent it money. Some economic measures have hurt Ukrainian society, specifically those that have resulted in rising inflation and decreasing the value of the currency, the hryvnia. Only in 2016 did the government achieve its goal of improving macroeconomic indicators. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, more than 10,000 people have been killed. The regions consumed by the war were the industrial areas of Ukraine. A blockade has hit the metallurgical sector, responsible for 25% of Ukrainian exports, and energy resources (anthracite from the occupied territories).³¹ The EU Association Agreements signed with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine will, if the three countries

30 P. Kolstø, H. Blakkisrud, op. cit., pp. 500-502.

31 On 15 March 2017, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko approved a decision by the National Security and Defense Council to introduce a temporary prohibition on the movement of goods across the separation line in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. D. Szeligowski, 'Donbas Trade Blockade Poses a Challenge to Ukrainian Authorities', *Bulletin PISM*, No. 38 (978), 19 April 2017.

implement them thoroughly, enable them to meet European standards, which will give them some benefit in trade with third countries that recognize European standards, as well as with the EU itself. But they will have to make reforms that will be difficult and will challenge established ways of doing business in the region.

3.1. Militarization of Russia's Foreign Policy

In terms of the security of the region, of crucial importance is Russia's instrumentalisation of the frozen conflicts. They have proven to be a relatively easy and effective instrument of pressure and control over parts of post-Soviet states. This instrument has persisted in modeling Russian policy towards the CIS states, based on hard-power mechanisms. At the same time, Moscow has tried to use the frozen conflicts to build its image as a guarantor of peace and a regional leader that can stabilize the post-Soviet area. Nevertheless, of the counties affected by a frozen conflict, only Armenia has pursued a singularly pro-Russia policy and in fact remains in military alliance with Russia. The other states are trying to strike a balance between the EU, the US, Turkey, Iran, and Russia. The situation in eastern Ukraine cannot currently be described as a frozen conflict, primarily due to the ongoing military operations. However, Russia, by supporting separatist troops in Donbas, has achieved its goals and blocked Ukraine's prospects for accession to the EU and NATO. The Russians have also hampered Western support (political, financial, and economic) for Ukraine, and gained a permanent instrument of influence on the country.

The existence of Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, and for many years also Abkhazia and South Ossetia, means Russia maintains a permanent influence on the foreign and security policy of the region while not allowing closer contact between some states (Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and European and Euro-Atlantic institutions of cooperation. The conclusion is that these conflicts are "hostages of global competition."³² The Russian Federation is particularly keen on limiting the expansion of the West towards the East.³³ This applies pri-

32 F. Ismailzade, 'The Geopolitics of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict', *Global Dialogue*, Vol. 7, No. 3-4, Summer-Autumn 2005, pp. 104-111.

33 J.L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion. Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms?*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, pp. 5-105.

marily to the US and NATO, and most recently to the EU. The armed conflicts in post-Soviet states have hampered NATO enlargement. The frozen conflict in Transnistria guarantees Moldova's neutrality.³⁴ When Georgia got a promise it could join NATO, the Russians, through the war in August 2008, effectively undermined NATO's willingness to join the Georgian side. Russia thus eliminated the prospect of NATO enlargement to other CIS countries, especially Ukraine, which also had expressed such ambitions.³⁵ As late as August 2008, it seemed that the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia would result in its reluctance to influence Georgia through the quasi-states. The value of the frozen conflict, though, lies in its suspension between a state of war and peace, forcing a need for constant crisis management and sense of unfinished business, a constant sense of threat, and uncertainty about the stronger state-protector of the quasi-state—Russia.³⁶

3.2 Militarization of the Region and Regional Arms Race

The war in Ukraine has implications for the whole of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Russia's military engagement in the region was complemented by forces in Crimea (about 24,000 Russian soldiers) and in the Southern Military District (about 72,000 soldiers) ready to be deployed to Donbas.³⁷ While many point to a process of freezing the conflict in Donbas, it does not diminish the fear of escalation. Neighboring states, fearing aggressive Russian actions, are strengthening their armies and increasing their defense potential. As a result of the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the need to militarily strengthen the so-called Eastern Flank of the Alliance has been confirmed. From

34 Moldova.org, *Moldovan Minister of Defense: Cooperation with NATO does not violate the Constitution*, 26 November 2012, <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/moldovan-minister-of-defense-cooperation-with-nato-does-not-violate-the-constitution-234101-eng.html> [2012-12-30]; Report of the members to the Committee of Foreign Relations United States Senate, *Will Russia and Eastern Europe's Last Frozen Conflict? A Report to the Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate*, 8 February 2011, United States Senate, Washington, D.C., <http://lugar.senate.gov/issues/foreign/pdf/report/Moldova.pdf> [2013-01-01].

35 A. Legucka, *Perspektywa członkostwa Ukrainy i Gruzji w NATO. Praca naukowo-badawcza* [Ukraine and Georgia membership in NATO perspective. Research project], Warszawa: Akademia Obrony Narodowej 2010, pp. 5-55.

36 S. Secrieru, op. cit., p. 2.

37 A. Dyner. op. cit.

January 2017, multinational combat groups (1,000 soldiers each) have been deployed to Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States. The concentration of NATO forces triggered a very negative response from Russia, which has shifted additional armaments to Kaliningrad Oblast, as well as reinforced its Western Military District (including *Zapad 2017*, its largest military exercise, held in western Belarus).

In the South Caucasus, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh prevents the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and has led to a regional arms race there. It triggers a classic security dilemma, expressed as the increase in the security of one state automatically decreases the another's sense of security.³⁸ The arms race involves both the transfer of arms and military equipment to the region as well as an increase in military spending in Armenia and Azerbaijan. After 2001, the arms race started, with Azerbaijan using oil sales to invest heavily in its army. After 2008, Armenia reduced its armaments expenditure, mainly due to the global financial crisis that hit its economy worse than any other CIS country (-15% of GDP). While both countries spend 4% of GDP on armaments, Azerbaijan spends three times more than Armenia (although down from 2017's \$1.305 billion, it stands at \$427 million).³⁹ Given the difference, the Armenian authorities have decided to increase their security by getting additional security guarantees from the Russian Federation. Armenia is thus trying to counterbalance the threat through a closer strategic alliance with the Russian Federation, within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, but above all in bilateral agreements as well. The Russian 102nd military base in the city of Gyumri (and partly in Yerevan) has been rearmed for several years now and trains professional units. In 2010, a protocol to extend the base lease until 2044 was signed, and a year later in June 2011, it was ratified by Russia. In addition to the tasks of protecting the Russian Federation, the base was given the task of protecting the security of Armenia, though not Nagorno-Karabakh. Although the 2015-2016 collapse of Azerbaijan's economy due to the fall of oil prices worldwide will most prob-

38 J.H. Herz, 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1950, pp. 158-180.

39 SIPRI data.

ably prevent Azerbaijan from further strengthening its armed forces, the military situation is still tense and likely to remain so.⁴⁰

Russia is also militarily present in Moldova (Transnistria). On the one hand, there are Russian troops within the trilateral Russian-Moldovan-Transnistrian peacekeeping forces. On the other hand, only 1,000-1,500 are deployed there through the Operational Group of the Russian Army (GOWR), established in 1995.⁴¹ GOWR mainly protects artillery sites and more than 20 tons of old Soviet ammunition in Transnistria (Kolbasnaja and Tiraspol). In 1996, GOWR became a personnel training base from which soldiers were recruited to the peacekeeping troops in Transnistria. Russia has thus failed to meet its bilateral commitments regarding the withdrawal of Russian troops from Moldova. It also has not accepted the commitments of the Istanbul summit in November 1999 concerning withdrawal.

3.3 Challenges in Energy Supply

The issue of frozen conflicts is related to two trends. On the one hand, the outbreak of armed conflicts near gas or oil transit routes and the resulting economic blockades have made it impossible to fully exploit the raw material potential of the Caspian Sea region. On the other hand, the outbreak of war in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 have made those countries more independent from Russian natural gas supplies.

Nagorno-Karabakh first became a bargaining unit in Caspian power projects. Initially, the president of Azerbaijan proposed the strategic Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline to Turkey through the territory of Armenia in exchange for the return of the disputed territory, which Yerevan did not accept.⁴² The pipeline then followed a longer route through Georgia, which increased the costs but bypassed Armenia. Difficult relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia with Russia on the separatist conflicts in the region brought the two Caucasus states closer together, mainly in the energy sphere. The construction of the

40 A. Racz, op. cit., p. 10.

41 This formation was created on 14th USSR Army.

42 Z. Baran, 'Turkey and the Caucasus', in: I. Bal (ed.), *Turkish Foreign Policy in Post-Cold War Era*, Florida: Brown Walker Press, 2004, p. 273; A. Ananicz, 'Rosja po dwóch małych wojnach' [Russia after two little wars], *Sprawy Międzynarodowe* [International Affairs], No. 1 (LXII), 2009, pp. 13-26.

BTC pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline (2006-2007) has enabled these countries to pursue strategic objectives, reach out to western markets, and find alternatives to Russian routes and supplies.⁴³ These investments proved decisive during Russia's conflict with Georgia over gas supplies in 2006⁴⁴ and then again during the war in August 2008, when Azerbaijan became a "new energy patron." Georgia wanted to make the country dependent on Azerbaijani raw materials, thus cutting off Armenia from Russian supplies (Georgia is a transit state) and force Yerevan into concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴⁵ After 2008, there were some corrections of relations in the South Caucasus region: The approximation of Armenia and Georgia, and the deepening of cooperation between Azerbaijan and Georgia on economic issues (energy). Finally, the Georgian president could say "Georgia is not dependent on the Russian gas supplier."⁴⁶

A similar problem was faced by Ukraine which, before the conflict broke out in Donbas, had its Russian gas supplies cut off in 2006 and 2009. It can be said that, like Georgia, Ukraine's war with Russia has led it to try to become energy independent from its foe. In 2014, Russia's Gazprom supplied 14.5 bcm of gas to Ukraine and 5.1 bcm came from the EU, but in 2015, the proportions were reversed—the EU supplied 10.3 bcm and Russia 6.1 bcm. This change is the result of effective action to increase the opportunities to import gas via reverse connections with EU member states, mainly Slovakia, as well as the favorable situation on the European gas market.⁴⁷

- 43 K. Zasztoft, 'Aspekt energetyczny polityki zagranicznej Azerbejdżanu wobec państw region Kaukazu Południowego i Morza Kaspijskiego' [Energy aspect of the Azerbaijan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus and Caspian Sea], *Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe* [National Security], No. 7-8, 2008, p. 268; L. Jervalidze, 'Gazprom in Georgia. Some Aspects of Gas Supply Security', in: J. Hetland, T. Gochtashvili (eds.), *Security of Natural Gas Supply through Transit Countries*, Dordrecht & Boston & London: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004, pp. 355-367.
- 44 D. Perashvili, 'Russia Set to Retain Hold on Georgian Gas Supplies', *Eurasianet.org*, 13 February 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav021406a.shtml> [2017-06-28].
- 45 H. Kjærnet, 'The Energy Dimension of Azerbaijani-Russian Relations: Maneuvering for Nagorno-Karabakh', *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 56, March 2009, pp. 3-4.
- 46 S. Cornell, 'Pipeline Power. The War in Georgia and the Future of the Caucasian Energy Corridor', *Georgetown Journal on International Affairs*, Winter-Spring 2009; N. Kassenova, 'Kazakhstan and the South Caucasus Corridor in the Wake of the Georgia-Russia War', *EU-Central Asia Monitoring*, No. 3, January 2009; A. Shelest, 'The Georgian-Russia Conflict, Energy Project and Security of the Black Sea-Caspian Region', *Central Asia and the South Caucasus*, No. 4-5 (58-59), 2009, pp. 192-199.
- 47 T. Iwański, 'Ukraine: successful diversification of gas supply', *Analyses OSW*, 3 February 2016.

Conclusions

The security of the CEE depends on the settlement of frozen conflicts. Their existence and the appearance of quasi-states on the map destabilizes the situation, adversely affects neighborly relations, and strengthens the position of Russia, which instrumentalises them in its external policy. This results in increased militarization of the region, leading to an arms race, emerging security dilemmas, and even the prospect of an enlargement or eruption of armed force.

Today's frozen conflicts are deeply rooted in the reality of the states and societies of post-Soviet states, becoming a constant element of everyday life, a state of peace and war, a gray zone of criminal prosperity. Security comes at the expense of a democratic process. Political leaders use the moderate destabilization to legitimize their strong authority, leading to the consolidation of authoritarian and semi-authoritarian governments in these states. This is the case in Azerbaijan. In Armenia and Georgia, constitutional changes were carried out last year to increase the role of the parliamentary system, but in fact, they strengthen the influence of specific parties in the governance of the state. In turn, the policy of Moldova is influenced by oligarchs and varies depending on their interests. The situation in Ukraine is of decisive importance since the war has, on the one hand, undermined the country economically, but on the other hand, has in many respects strengthened the nation-building processes and forced Ukrainian political elites to make internal reforms that could benefit society in the long run. Much depends on the determination to implement them and EU foreign assistance.

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