Nina Paulovicova* and Tomasz Stępniewski**

Central and Eastern Europe: Imaginary Geographies, Geopolitics and Security Issues

Abstract: The following editorial offers a reflection on the situation of Central and Eastern Europe with a special focus on the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia. In the past few years, we have witnessed the divisive impact of neoliberalism, economic recession, Britain's departure from the EU, the refugee and migrant crisis which further shattered societies along cultural lines, the aggressive expansionism of Russia exploiting the weakness of the West, and more recently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with an unprecedented impact on societies, global health and economy. The editorial reflects on how Central and Eastern Europe scores among the imaginative geographies and how these imaginative geographies translate into geopolitics concerning hard and soft power application in the Eastern European Neighbourhood.

Keywords: Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Neighbourhood, Russia, Ukraine, geopolitics, security

Streszczenie: Poniższy artykuł zawiera refleksję na temat sytuacji w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wschodniego sąsiedztwa Unii Europejskiej i Rosji. W ciągu ostatnich kilku lat byliśmy świadkami dzielącego wpływu neoliberalizmu, recesji gospodarczej, wyjścia Wielkiej Brytanii z UE, kryzysu uchodźczego i migracyjnego, które jeszcze bardziej zrujnował społeczeństwa wzdłuż linii kulturowych, a także agresywnego ekspansjonizmu Rosji wykorzystującego słabość Zachodu oraz ostatnio wybuch pandemii COVID19 o bezprecedensowym wpływie na społeczeństwa, zdrowie i gospodarkę na świecie. W artykule redakcyjnym zastanawiamy się, jak wygląda Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia w wyobrażonej geografii i jak te wyobrażenia geograficzne przekładają się na geopolitykę dotyczącą stosowania twardej i miękkiej siły w sąsiedztwie Europy Wschodniej.

Słowa kluczowe: Europa Środkowo-Wschodnia, wschodnie sąsiedztwo, Rosja, Ukraina, geopolityka, bezpieczeństwo

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Introduction

In the past few years, we have witnessed the divisive impact of neoliberalism, economic recession, Britain's departure from the EU, the refugee and migrant crisis which further shattered societies along cultural lines, the aggressive expansionism of Putin exploiting the weakness of the West, and more recently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic with an unprecedented impact on societies, global health and economy. Europe has been facing the crisis of cultural identity and the upsurge in the identity discourse in social media, print, radio broadcasts and popular culture.[1] One of the accompanying symptoms of the cultural crisis is an upsurge in Europe being re-imagined along the conflict lines. Embedded in "material, discursive, and performative practices," imaginative geographies articulate the belongingness and play an essential role in "politiciz[ing] Europe."[2] The following is a reflection on how Central and Eastern Europe scores among the imaginative geographies and how these imaginative geographies translate into geopolitics concerning hard and soft power application in the Eastern European neighbourhood.

1. Imagined Geographies

The fall of communism allowed post-Soviet states to re-define their belongingness and re-imagine geographies from the West to the East. The West, empowered by the collapse of the Soviet Union, has seen itself as an unshaken, uniform and "organic West,"[3] whereas Eastern Europe was marked by a struggle over embedding a cultural image that blurs the differences and "radically destroys identities."[4] Not only was Eastern Europe, i.e. East-Central Europe, Central Europe, South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans, continuously negotiated against the

1   B. Ganesh, C. Froio , 'A "Europe des Nations": far right imaginative geographies and the politicization of cultural crisis on Twitter in Western Europe', *Journal of European Integration*, no. 42, vol. 5, 2020, pp. 715-732.
2   Ibidem, p. 717.
3   M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 142. Todorova refers to Jenö Szücs, 'The Three Historic Regions of Europe, An Outline', *Acta Historica Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol. 29 (2–4).
4   W.D. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality. Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, p. 22.

"organic" West,[5] but Eastern European countries themselves were also pitted against one another.

Central Europe was approached as "an idea" rather than a place.[6] After 1989, Central Europe was associated with the emergence of civil society, activism and anti-politics as an anti-thesis to communism[7] – the topic partly tackled in Andrzej Friszke's study of the struggle of the 1980s Solidarity movement in Poland published in the present volume. Václav Havel's "living in truth" as a warning against mass indifference, Jan Patočka's take on Central Europeans' experience as "the solidarity of the shaken"[8] along with the region's cultural diversity historically tied to the Habsburg empire, were seen as distinctive features of the region. Despite the effort to demarcate Central Europeanness along the lines of historical experience, there was always an all-pervasive notion of the region "in flux," indicating its instability, insecurity and geopolitical skepticism as the region was perpetually trapped amid the dominant West and Russia.

Judi Bodnar claimed that the regions of Eastern Europe "are semi-periphery, semi-colony, or "ferry land" as poetic, journalistic language captured the constant move of Hungary between east and west at the turn of the twentieth century so aptly that the term has stuck ever since."[9] Maria Todorova underscored Eastern European countries' "semi-colonial status" marked by their "transitory position," ambiguity, and in-betweenness.[10] Furthermore, Norman Davies, in his seminal study on the history of Poland, noted that "Poland has been a butterfly, gone today but here tomorrow, flitting from one mode of existence to the next." This condition applies to Poland's neighbours as well.[11] Cen-

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5   M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans…*, p. 142.

6   O. Dhand, *The Idea of Central Europe: Geopolitics, Culture and Regional identity*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, p. 1.

7   P. Blokker, 'The Ruins of a Myth or a Myth in Ruins? Freedom and Cohabitation in Central Europe', in: *The Inhabited Ruins of Central Europe*, eds. D. Gafijczuk, D. Sayer, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 43.

8   Ibidem, pp. 45, 48.

9   J. Bodnar, 'Shamed by Comparison. Eastern Europe and the Rest', in: *EUtROPEs. The Paradox of European Empire*, eds. J.W. Boyer, B. Molden, Parisian Notebooks, no. 7, Paris, France, Chicago, Illinois, 2014, p. 262.

10   M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans…*, p. 59.

11   N. Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland. The Origins to 1795*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, p. 24.

tral Europe was seen as being amid a tug of war, "culturally in the West, politically in the East"[12] or as a "kidnapped West *returning to Europe*."[13] The region was approached as a "measurement of approximation to the Western liberal ideal"[14] signalling departure from Eastern Europe, yet implying that Central Europe is "not quite there yet." Central Europe was a path, a journey of transition from the East to the West, "a kind of 'waiting room' for becoming the West,"[15] or a "waiting room for the inclusion into Western economic and security structures."[16]

Europeanization represented a significant shift from the apolitical politics of the 1980s to what Zygmunt Bauman described as "political Europe" embedded in the values of democracy and liberalism.[17] The European Union, a first postmodern superpower "framed as the project of peace,"[18] has implemented soft power by disseminating the values of openness, peace, prosperity and stability via generous aid. Post-communist countries agreed to embed EU values as they came with the promise of the marketization of centrally directed economies and higher living standards. Nevertheless, despite its efforts to unify the East and West around the core values of democracy and liberalism, the EU has never managed to fully solidify the identity of Europeanness and overcome national states' resistance to the transnational identity. The resistance towards the transnational identity can be partly explained by the West, Central and Eastern Europe's different nation-building stages at which Europeanization proceeded. As fragile post-communist states' painstaking search for identity intersected with Europeanization and its neoliberal policies, the responses to Europeanization were rather mixed. More voices expressed concern regarding "status loss," and loss of control over national

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12   O. Dhand, *The Idea of Central Europe*…, p. 2.
13   Ibidem, p. 3.
14   Ibidem, p. 188.
15   Ibidem, p. 4.
16   Ibidem, p. 189.
17   Z. Bauman, 'What is Central in *Central* Europe?', in: *Yet Another Europe After 1984: Rethinking Milan Kundera and the Idea of Central Europe*, ed. L. Donskis, Value Inquiry Book Series, Amsterdam: Brill, Rodopi, 2012, p. 3.
18   C. Nitoiu, M. Sus, 'Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood', *Geopolitics*, vol. 1, no. 24, 2019, p. 3.

economies.[19] Certain voices began questioning Western democracies' cultural norms.

2. Intermarium in the 21ˢᵗ century realities

Resistance to Western cultural norms, Euroscepticism and increasing tension between Brussels, Poland and Hungary over the adherence to the rule of law, as well as the EU's failure to cope with the conflict in the Eastern Neighborhood, opened the path for yet another re-imagining of Central Europe as *Intermarium* (*Międzymorze*) – a block of allied countries between the geopolitical West and East. *Intermarium*, as an expression to create a closer cooperation of Central European states, is not new. In the late 1930s, two Polish statesmen, Józef Beck and Józef Pilsudski, promoted *Intermarium* as a federation of states in Central Europe as a response to emerging German and Soviet threats. Pilsudski's *Międzymorze,* which has never materialized due to the lack of Central European states' interest, was ideologically embedded in nationalism, conservative politics and an anti-communist stance. The notion of *Intermarium* revived in the 21ˢᵗ century tends to be pro-Atlanticist, pro-US, supporting NATO's presence in Central Europe. It is more conservative and less pro-West as it resists embracing Western cultural values.[20]

The idea of *Intermarium* feeds on the deepening rifts between Brussels, Poland and Hungary and the developments in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Firstly, Brussels is concerned that Poland and Hungary are violating the rule of law in their illiberal democracies. On the other hand, Poland and Hungary are concerned that the EU applies double standards and is unfair to both countries.[21] Victor Orbán compared the disillusionment with EU values to "the rebellion against

19   U.M. Vieten, S. Poynting, 'Contemporary Far Right Racist Populism in Europe', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, no. 6 (37), 2016, pp. 533-540.

20   M. Laurelle, E. Rivera, 'Imagined Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe. The Concept of Intermarium', *IERES Occasional Papers, Transnational History of the Far Right Series*, no. 1, March 2019, https://www.illiberalism.org/imagined-geographies-of-central-and-eastern-europe-the-concept-of-intermarium/ [2020-11-26].

21   L. Gehrke, 'The two countries say they want to ensure they're not treated unfairly under Brussels' *double standards*', *Politico*, 29 September 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-and-hungary-charge-brussels-with-double-standards-on-rule-oflaw/?fbclid=IwAR0w93XxDPLbFyq6q993GU3bAJ7nwclRNfq2fhNmgmgkBlR4d5qOkrU62W8 [2020-11-19].

liberal intellectual oppression," which, in his view, is "not only widening but also deepening."[22] Conversely, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, made it clear that the "breaches of the rule of law cannot be tolerated" and that the European Commission "will continue to defend it and the integrity of our European institutions. Be it about the primacy of European law, the freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary or the sale of golden passports – European values are not for sale."[23]

Secondly, the concept of *Intermarium* feeds on Central European countries' disillusionment with the EU's response to the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, the EU's inadequate response to Russia's annexation of Crimea, the EU's failure to prevent the escalation of the conflict in Donbas as well as the slow response of the EU to the situation that evolved after the rigged presidential election in Belarus in 2020. The realization that the EU might not be the strong guarantor of Central and Eastern European states' security opened space for considering alternatives and prompted Central European states' closer cooperation in the region, as well as stronger ties with the USA. More specifically, Łukasz Jureńczyk's study in this volume points to the prevalent view concerning the USA being "the most credible ultimate guarantor of security" as a factor determining the prioritization of NATO in the region.[24] At the same time, Karolina Gawron-Tabor's comparative analysis reveals that Poland's perception of security threats is identical to those expressed by the USA.[25] Tadeusz Zieliński contributes to this debate and concludes that NATO's and the EU's perception of security threats are "essentially identical."[26] However, Zieliński cautions

22 L. Bayer, 'How Orban broke the EU and got away with it', *Politico*, 24 September 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/how-viktor-orban-broke-the-eu-and-got-away-with-it-hungary-rule-of-law/ [2020-11-19].

23 M. De La Baume, 'Poland Joins Hungary in threatening to block EU's budget and Coronavirus Recovery Package', *Politico*, 18 September 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-joins-hungary-in-threat-to-block-eus-landmark-budget-and-recovery-package/ [2020-11-20].

24 Ł. Jureńczyk, 'The 2019 NATO Summit in London in the context of Poland's military insecurity', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 43-59.

25 K. Gawron-Tabor, 'Challenges and threats to the security of the Visegrad Group countries: intensification of relations with the United States as a means to overcome risks?', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 99-115.

26 T. Zieliński, 'The perception of security threats in EU and NATO strategic documents: implications for the countries of the Eastern flank', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 25-42.

that "the priorities in the scope of reducing the risks associated with the occurrence of specific threats are perceived differently, including the Eastern flank countries."[27]

The heightened sense of a security threat was a significant factor behind the revival of 2015 Central European regional cooperation as a response to what Agnieszka Orzelska-Stączek describes as "the erosion of the Euro-Atlantic system."[28] In her contribution, Orzelska-Stączek argues that the cooperation consolidated Central Europe's voice in the EU and NATO.[29] Calls for closer cooperation have emerged, especially in the energy sector - the topic raised by Justyna Bokajło in this volume.[30] A collaborative effort of V4 to balance energy security, as well as an effort to implement the digitization of the energy sector, as Anna Kucharska underscores in her study in this volume,[31] are critical in the long term securitization of the region.

3. Russia's imaginary geography

Russia's imaginary geography in the 1990s was built around the idea of "Greater Europe" dominated by Germany in the West, and Russia in the East. The idea excluded the USA from European affairs.[32] The "Greater Europe" was complemented by the concept of "Greater Eurasia," which underscored Russia's economic and political relations with the Eurasian Economic Union, ASEAN countries, China, and the EU.[33] Recently, Russia has seen the revival of traditional geopolitics and the revival of Panslavism - the topic briefly tackled in Paulovicova's study in the volume.[34] The discourse presenting Moscow as

27 T. Zieliński, 'The perception of security threats...'

28 A. Orzelska-Stączek, 'New wave of regional cooperation in Central Europe as a response to new threats', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 79-97.

29 Ibidem.

30 J. Bokajło, Polish energy strategy – in the quest for economy. Reflections on the Polish energy policy in the perspective of endogenous growth theory and global trends within the context of Visegrad cooperation', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 117-139.

31 A. Kucharska, 'Cybersecurity challenges in Poland in the face of energy transision', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 141-159.

32 *Russia as Civilization*, eds. K. Mjør, S. Turoma, London: Routledge, 2020, p. 39.

33 Ibidem, p. 40.

34 N. Paulovicova, 'The far right ĽSNS in Slovakia and its reconstruction of the nation', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 177-197.

"The Third Rome," or the idea of Russia as Byzantium, have been fluctuating in the geographic imagery.[35] Moreover, Vadim Tsymburskiy, a modern geopolitician and philosopher, introduced the concept of "Great Limitrof" (Latin: *limitrophus* – borderland), which imagined Russia as "Euroasian Atlantis," an island with a distinctive cultural archetype. Great Limitrof suggested the control be maintained along the Kaliningrad and Crimea direction to prevent the confrontation with Western powers' influence.[36] At the core of all of these imagined geographies is Russia's desire to be regarded as a respected and equal player among the global powers.

Russia's imaginary geography can be negotiated along with Russia's moves on the geopolitical chessboard. Russia's goals have not been altered since the fall of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Block. Its strategy consisted of maintaining control in the post-communist Europe, boosting its security by creating a buffer zone in Central Europe, increasing its influence in NATO while diminishing the USA's role in the alliance.[37] Russia's effort to be accepted as an equal member of the European collective security system has been pushed forward via multiple initiatives since 1989. For example, 1989 Gorbachev's idea of a "common European home," 1994 Pan-European Partnership Concept, or 1996 European Security Charter, the idea at the core of "Medvedev Initiative" to organize a Pan-European conference. They all shared the same goal – to discuss a new security model in Europe where Russia would have essential influence. Russia has not achieved any of its objectives and has perceived the EU policy in the eastern neighbourhood as a threat that prompted the Federation to resort to a more aggressive and confrontational approach in 2008 in Georgia and in 2014 in Ukraine. The July 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw further exacerbated Russia's concerns as the summit concluded to strengthen the military presence and deploy four NATO battalions

35 L. Sykulski, 'Russian geopolitical doctrine of "Velikiy Limitrof" , *European Journal of Geopolitics*, no. 7, 2019, pp. 67-79.
36 Ibidem, pp. 67-79.
37 M. Menkiszak, 'A strategic continuation, a tactical change. Russia's European security policy', *OSW Point of View*, no. 76, October 2019, p. 6.

in Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and base the Ballistic Missile Defence in Romania.[38]

4. Europe's division over the European Union's eastern policy

EU member states are divided over Russia's neo-imperial policy manifested in the annexation of Crimea and support for southern and eastern Ukraine's separatisms. The division is determined by geographical factors: 1) countries invested in the affairs around the Mediterranean (southern countries and those constituting the final destination for migrants and refugees: Germany, Austria, and the states of northern Europe), and 2) countries focused on the eastern neighbourhood (Poland, Central Europe in general, Baltic states, Sweden), whose security may be compromised due to the Russo-Ukrainian war. These EU divisions are not without impact upon the EU's policy towards its neighbours, just as political developments in the EU neighbourhood are not without impact on EU power constellation.

At present, the division over Ukraine's situation and reactions towards Russia have a slightly different character than before. Up until now, the division of the EU ran along East-West lines.[39] It is currently reflected in the North-South division, partly also the result of the eurozone crisis, which further exacerbated the issue. The North, including Baltic states, and the majority of East-Central European countries, perceive Russia as a threat. However, these countries face difficulties in establishing a joint course of action for taking countermeasures. The United Kingdom, for example, views the threat differently than, e.g. Poland and Sweden, which is a result of their respective geopolitical locations. Southern countries are more alerted to developments in North Africa and the Near East, and are more vulnerable to developments in Syria and the refugee and migration crisis.

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38 M. Laurelle, E. Rivera, 'Imagined Geographies of Central and…'
39 The migration crisis resulted in the East-West division of the EU becoming significantly distinct. Towards the end of 2015, several countries of East-Central Europe denied welcoming migrants, majority of whom originate from Muslim states, and thus contradicted the idea of European solidarity. The case becomes even more complicated by the fact that in Western European countries, divisions concerning the reception of migrants have also emerged.

Two European Union's projects, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership, unfortunately, have not changed the quality of relations between the EU community and its eastern partners.[40] The lack of the ENP's effectiveness and crises in the EU's southern and eastern neighbourhood motivated the European Commission and European External Action Service to issue a review of the ENP on 18th November 2015. The review emphasized the necessity of highlighting three critical issues of the neighbourhood policy: security, economic development, migration. On the other hand, the Russian Federation has undertaken actions impeding the emergence of the ENP countries' independence from Russia's influence. To this end, the Federation has maintained a state of temporariness, insecurity and tensions in the form of "suspended conflicts" (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria) in the post-Soviet states.[41] Ever since the outbreak of the Euromaidan[42] in Ukraine, Russia's policy focused on destabilizing the country internally. The objective was to be achieved by the following means: 1) rebellion and the uprising of the Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine, 2) military actions (officially, Russia is not involved in the conflict, but only supports Luhansk and Donetsk separatisms). These have not fully materialized. To this end, Marcin Orzechowski and Janusz Jartyś' study in this volume analyzes the hybrid war and multidimensional strategy that Russia launched to incapacitate Ukraine. The authors bring to perspective the notion of "soft power" as understood by Russia and the EU.[43]

5. A change or continuation of Russia's foreign policy?

Some analysts claim that Russia's neo-revisionist policy[44] does not attempt to destroy the current international order but rather im-

40 See: T. Stępniewski, 'The EU's Eastern Partnership and the Way Forward After Riga', *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, vol. XXIV, no. 1-2, 2015, pp. 17-27.

41 A.D. Rotfeld, 'Porządek międzynarodowy. Parametry zmiany', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, no. 4 (LXVII), 2014, p. 37.

42 K. Fedorowicz, 'Ukraińskie rewolucje a parlamentaryzm', *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2014, pp. 57-76.

43 M. Orzechowski, J. Jartyś, 'Annexation of Crimea and federalization of Donbas as the exemplification of hybrid warfare in Ukraine. Implications for Poland', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2020, pp. 61-78.

44 R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine. Crisis in the Borderlands*, London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 30.

pels superpowers to recognize Russia as an equal and respected partner.[45] The roots of Russia's bolder approach can be traced back to the autumn of 2008 when the international context in which Russia defended its interests changed. First of all, the Russo- Georgian war of August 2008 broke the USA and Europe's monopoly for applying military force in global politics. Secondly, Europe's position was further compromised as the global financial crisis revealed a critical gap in the West's economy.[46] Thirdly, the ideology of "democratism," which differs from the practice of democracy itself, represents another vital catalyst behind Russia's neo-revisionism. Russia believes that, for the West, the promotion of democracy constitutes an excuse for the realization of its strategic objectives.[47] The democratization and export of Western values in the region neighbouring Russia caused the gradual deterioration of Russia's relations with the EU and the subsequent breakdown of the pan-European security system, where Russia acted as an autonomous partner cooperating with the West.

In addition to the eurozone crisis, the Ukrainian crisis resulted in tectonic power shifts in the EU, with Germany taking the leader's role somewhat involuntarily.[48] On the global political chessboard, Berlin emerged as a new epicentre of power representing the EU and its eastern neighbours while taking on the role of a key mediator of EU-US and EU-Russian relations.[49] In the past two decades, the EU enlargement to encompass East-Central European states boosted Germany's authority as the "New Europe" perceived Germany as a regional leader.[50] Nevertheless, the perception that encourages the European Union to be taken for granted can be potentially risky. Ivan Krastev warned that taking the EU for granted poses a "higher… risk of its disinte-

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45 Ibidem, p. 34. Also: A. Szabaciuk, 'On the Verge of a New *Cold War*? The Anti-Western Dimension of Vladimir Putin's Eurasian Integration Project', *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 11, no. 6, 2013, pp. 196-202.

46 A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy. Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 2nd ed., Lanham 2010, p. 201.

47 R. Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine…*, pp. 31-34.

48 P. Buras, 'Dylematy państwa status quo. Nowa kwestia niemiecka w Europie', *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, LXVII, no. 4(LXVII), 2014, p. 131.

49 U. Speck, 'Power and Purpose. German Foreign Policy at a Crossroads', *Carnegie Europe*, 3 November 2014, http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/11/03/power-and-purpose-german-foreign-policy-at-crossroads [2020-10-15].

50 U. Speck, 'Power and Purpose…'

gration. The belief that something cannot collapse leads to high-risk behaviour."[51] This is of concern in the face of a growing division over the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Adam D. Rotfeld opined that "Russia has not come to terms with the new political and legal reality resulting from the fall of the USSR and emergence of 15 independent states in its place," which, in his view, is one of the major reasons of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, as well as February/March 2014 events in Ukraine.[52] More importantly, following the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russia missed the opportunities to transform into a state under the rule of law.[53] Nevertheless, even though the West and Russia departed as regards the rule of law being upheld, the economic cooperation pushed both towards mutual respect. Shevtsova opines that the West's cooperation with Russia at the cost of western values being forsaken diminished the allure of liberal democracies in Russia's eyes. In Shevtsova's view, the West's naïve belief that support for Boris Yeltsin would contribute to Russia's democratization further deepened disillusioned Russia's anti-West sentiments.

Tsygankov asserts that if we are indeed dealing with a relative decline of the West's significance in international politics and a change of leaders (superpowers) in global politics, defined as "the rise of the rest," the situation exerts a significant impact upon Russia's foreign policies.[54] Dmitrij Trenin aptly observed that "Russian leaders believe that a perfect world order emerges when a few great actors play significant but more or less equivalent parts in the global system, and satisfy their interests, but recognize these in mutual relations."[55] As Russia's place on the global power chessboard was slipping to the margins, Putin pushed back with a bolder foreign policy. In turn, Russia's bolder approach to safeguard its interest, and China making its way

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51   I. Krastev, 'How to Avoid Europe's Disintegration', *New Eastern Europe*, no. 5, September–October 2015, p. 8.

52   A.D. Rotfeld, 'Porządek międzynarodowy…', p. 35.

53   L. Szewcowa, 'Polem gry Kremla jest chaos', trans. A. Ehrlich, *Gazeta Wyborcza/Magazyn Świąteczny*, 27 June 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,145325,18248326,Polem_gry_Kremla_jest_chaos.html#TRwknd [2015-06-27].

54   Ibidem.

55   'Jak Rosja chce wrócić z peryferii do centrum globalizacji. Rozmowa z rosyjskim politologiem Dmitrjem Treninem', *Europa. Miesięcznik Idei*, no. 6, Fundacja im. Immanuela Kanta, p. 40.

as a new superpower, contested America's claims of „uniqueness" and global leadership. However, Edward Lucas argues that Putin's goal is *not* "to be the grand, flourishing economy, nor the centre of a significant geopolitical coalition."[56] Putin aims to oust America as a significant geopolitical player and cripple the West. Lucas supports this reasoning with a straightforward calculation: with their [America and EU] 800 million citizens and 40 billion GDP, it would easily trump Russia and its 140 million citizens and 1,6 billion GDP. Therefore, Putin's chief goal will be to divide the West and instigate unrest."[57]

6. Closing remarks

The Eastern policy's effectiveness, the shape of Eastern European countries' political systems, and the balance of power in this part of Europe depend on the EU's (and broadly, the West's) active involvement in the East. The weaker the West's involvement in Ukraine's transformation and modernization, the more the country will be dependent on Russia. Therefore, despite the Euromaidan and its aftermath,[58] the question of these countries' (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia) foreign policy direction (European or Eastern) remains open. The emergence of illiberal democracies in Eastern European states casts a shadow upon the region and decreases EU decision-makers' interest in it. The EU's internal problems such as the economic and migration crisis, the growing significance of nationalist and far-right parties, a decline of European solidarity, the crisis of cultural values, the crisis of capitalism and deepening social rifts as a result of neoliberalism, result in the neighbourhood policy being pushed to the background despite a pressing need for a change of the ENP. The weaker and more divided the EU becomes, the more likely it is that Russia emerges as a global superpower. The EU is comprised of 28 independent states. Frequently, such a conglomerate weighs the EU down as an efficient actor on the international stage. Therefore, Judy Dempsey's statement

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56 'Obama, Clinton, Putin, Merkel, Kaczyński… Jak urządzą nam świat w 2016', *Gazeta Wyborcza/ Magazyn Świąteczny*, 2 January 2016, http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,149896,19419244,obama-clinton-putin-merkel-kaczynski-jak-urzadza-nam.html [2016-01-02].

57 Ibidem.

58 More on the subject in: *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 12, no 2, 2014.

is worth remembering: „a strong Europe means having a coherent and united foreign, security and defence policy. Europe lacks these three essential elements that would make Europe think and act strategically. Without them, Europe is weak."[59]

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[59] J. Dempsey, 'Doubletake. Does Russia Divide Europe?', *New Eastern Europe*, no. 5, September-October 2015, p. 23.

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