

## ***EU'S RELATIONS WITH STATES EXPERIENCING FROZEN CONFLICTS: FOSTERING STABILITY OR INSTABILITY?***

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*Abstract: Taking into account the recent crisis at the Eastern border of the EU, the present research demarche is mostly focused on the security evolutions in the Wider Black Sea Area. The study argues that the measures EU implemented within the framework of its relations with the states in this area can be compared to a two edged sword. On the one hand, these actions were directed to increasing stability through developing these states' self-governing capacity and, on the other, the same actions can be a factor determining Russia's negative reactions with serious impact on these states' stability and security. The premise laying at the basis of this analysis is that these conflicts present a high complexity and they are difficult to solve, as they suppose, among other features, an overlap of incompatible interests of regional major powers. A second premise consists in the soft nature of EU's actions, of EU being rather a normative power carrying out actions with effects on long term.*

Keywords: interests; strategies; Eastern Partnership; Russia; incompatibility.

As far as EU's Eastern vicinity is concerned, instability is deeply anchored in the existence of frozen conflicts, a phenomenon affecting in a negative manner the security of this space not only through the risk of a new military escalation, but also from the perspective of other security dimensions. For instance, this state of facts hinders the states experiencing such conflicts to implement the necessary reforms for stabilization, for building and developing democratic states, with viable free market economies, capable of ensuring the respect for

fundamental human rights and state of law. Additionally, these states become fertile grounds for organized crime, illegal traffic or even for the development of international terrorism<sup>1</sup>.

### 1. EU's interests and strategies in its Eastern neighbourhood

When the current frozen conflicts in Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA) were passing through their most acute phases, European Community was completely absent. This happened because, on the one hand, European Community lacked the political framework allowing it involve in such situations (CSFP was created through the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and the ESDP has been paid serious attention only in the late '90s). On the other hand, the crises determining the dissolution of Yugoslavia represented a much higher security challenge in the immediate proximity and concentrated at a greater extent the attention of the European leaders.

After the successive waves of enlargement, EU came to have direct borders with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova and common sea borders with Georgia, East European and South Caucasian spaces becoming a point of Brussels' foreign policy priorities.

*The European Security Strategy* (2003) mentions among EU's strategic objectives "building security in our neighbourhood"<sup>2</sup>, an idea reiterated within the *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy* (2008) as it provides for the necessity of extending the engagement with the neighbouring states: „The ENP [European Neighbourhood Policy] has strengthened individual bilateral relationships with the EU. This process now needs to build regional integration (...) The Eastern Partnership foresees a real step change in relations with our Eastern neighbours, with a significant upgrading of political, economic and trade relations. The goal is to strengthen the prosperity and stability of these countries, and thus the security of the EU. The proposals cover a wide range of bilateral and multilateral areas of cooperation including energy security and mobility of people"<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently, the two strategic

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a wider scientific demarch – „The Role of the European Union in the Management of Frozen Conflicts in its Vicinity”, „Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> A Safer Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy. Providing Security in a Changing World, Brussels, 11 December 2008, p. 10.

documents mention beyond any doubt that the stability of the states at EU's border are among the Unions' interests, a fact based on at least two main reasons.

A first cause of EU's major interest unto stability and security in its neighbourhood, especially in the East, resides in the geo-economic value of this space, mostly from the energy security perspective. Black Sea Basin includes energy relevant states, especially for the transit of hydrocarbons from Central Asia to Europe. As a consequence, security evolutions in Black Sea Basin have often been determined by energy geopolitics, by EU's efforts to reduce its dependency on Russian hydrocarbons and by Moscow's countermeasures in this respect. Decisions to develop gas pipelines such as Nabucco, South Stream and Nord Stream are eloquent in this regard. A second cause is related to the existence in EU borders' proximity of actors with low economic development, marked by major flaws of good governance, unstable, experiencing secessionist conflicts rooted in the ethnic sphere, thus making the EU more vulnerable to transnational risks and threats such as the various forms of organized crime, international terrorism etc.

Overall, Black Sea region became, in EU's vision, a space cumulating considerable challenges and opportunities. The Communication of the European Commission to the Council proposing the creation of Black Sea Synergy (BSS) contains a significant outline both of this space strategic value and of EU's interest in this respect: "The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area rich in natural resources and strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. With a large population, the region faces a range of opportunities and challenges for its citizens. The region is an expanding market with great development potential and an important hub for energy and transport flows. It is, however, also a region with unresolved frozen conflicts, with many environmental problems and insufficient border controls thus encouraging illegal migration and organised crime"<sup>4</sup>.

Regarding ENP and BSS, the specific of the current period is a wide awareness on the need for their adaptation to the new evolutions of partner states. It is one of the Ukrainian crisis'

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<sup>4</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Black Sea Synergy – A new regional cooperation initiative, Brussels, 11.04.2007, COM (2007) 160 final, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com07\\_160\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf), accessed at 3 September 2015.

consequences, which underlined that „the evolving situation requires the policy to respond better to the current expectations and needs of each partner country and, at the same time, offering a vision for their economic integration and political association with the EU in the long term”<sup>5</sup>.

## 2. EU-Russian Federation relation

In the course of time, the EU has made considerable efforts to develop a viable strategic partnership with its biggest neighbour, having in view their interdependency in economic and energy terms. The basis of their cooperation was the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1994), followed by the setting of four main cooperation political domains (economy and environment; freedom, security and justice; foreign security; research and education). EU’s strategy regarding the cooperation with Russia in foreign security area mentioned that the EU had the major interest in engaging Russia in enhancing stability in the European continent, especially in the regions adjacent to EU’s and Russia’s borders – the common vicinity<sup>6</sup>.

EU-Russia relations stand out through their complexity, difficulty and ambivalence, given the fact that cooperation programs and projects, such as EU-Russia Partnership or the Partnership for Modernization<sup>7</sup>, are often accompanied by tensed relations, especially regarding their interests in their close neighbourhood, common to both of them, as well as regarding EU’s energy dependency on Russia and Russia’s economic dependency on EU. The existence of these sources of tension was visible in Moscow’s reactions to Brussels’ efforts to attract WBSA states towards European standards (especially, Ukraine and Georgia), as well as within the official security related documents issued by Kremlin – the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008) and the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2010). Thus, when it comes about their common vicinity, relations between EU and Russia slide into the area of

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<sup>5</sup> European Neighborhood Policy – Publication of annual progress reports, 27.03.2014, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/top\\_stories/2014/270314\\_enp\\_package\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2014/270314_enp_package_en.htm), accessed at 5 September 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Black Sea Synergy – A new regional cooperation initiative, Brussels, 11.04.2007, COM (2007) 160 final, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com07\\_160\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/com07_160_en.pdf), accessed at 3 September 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *The EU-Russian Partnership – basic facts and figures*, MEMO/11/104, Bruxelles, 22 February 2010, URL: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_MEMO-11-104\\_en.htm#PR\\_metaPressRelease\\_bottom](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-11-104_en.htm#PR_metaPressRelease_bottom), accesat la 30 august 2015.

geopolitics, fall under a realist logic of the relations between them, each one of them following their own interests both in economic terms and in the area of strategic influence in the region. The Military Doctrine issued by Kremlin in late 2014 illustrates this vision, as the war in Ukraine is presented as the result of the intensification of global competition and of the rivalry in terms of value orientation and development models<sup>8</sup>. The document reveals the same Russia's major interest in the states in its close vicinity, especially Ukraine, but the rhetoric is more virulent, indicating at the same time the increasingly tensed relations with the West, as a consequence of the opposed interests in this space.

In 2013, Brussels and Moscow were engaged in a process of attracting the states in their common vicinity in enhanced integration formats: the EU through the Association Agreements (AA), and the Russian Federation within the Euro-Asian Union. The subsequent events happened on the Ukrainian scene determined the relations between Brussels and Kremlin to block, showing their completely different visions on security and stability in this region. One of the major causes resided in the fact that what EU's documents refer to as "our common vicinity" represent for Russia the sphere of privileged interests. Incompatibility between Western actors' vision and interests, EU included, and the one developed in Moscow generated instability as the realist John J. Mearsheimer argues in an article about Western actors responsibility in the emergence of the Ukrainian political-military crisis<sup>9</sup>. In opinion, NATO and EU eastward enlargement, the promotion of democracy and the development of relations with states at Russia's borders fuelled a crisis waiting to happen, Russia's reaction being comparable to Washington's in the hypothetical situation in which China would have built an impressive military alliance and would have tried to include Canada and Mexico.

### 3. The Republic of Moldova and Transnistria

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<sup>8</sup> Dmitri Trenin, „Russia's New Military Doctrine: Should the West be Worried?“, in *The National Interest*, 31 December 2014, URL: <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/russias-new-military-doctrine-should-the-west-be-worried-11944?page=2>, accessed at 30 August 2015.

<sup>9</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, „Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault. The Liberal Delusion that Provoked Putin“, in *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, URL: <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-west-s-fault>, accessed at 15 September 2015.

Moldova is considered the main success story both of Eastern Partnership (EaP) and ENP overall<sup>10</sup>, and the Transnistrian conflict – the Black Sea area frozen conflict with most chances of being resolved<sup>11</sup>, the potential starting point for the resolution of all the conflicts in this space. This because the odds for a new re-burst of the conflict are almost void, despite the continuing tensed relations between Tiraspol and Kishinev and the Russian military presence. Moldova is one of the states where the attractiveness of the European integrationist model has functioned, as it is supported by a significant part not only of the population, but also of the political class. Even more, this is defined as the irreversible strategic objective of the foreign and domestic politics of Moldova<sup>12</sup>.

Through ENP and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (2007-2013)/European Neighbourhood Instrument (2014-2020), EU has supported reform programs. In 2005, it sent its first Special Representative for the Republic of Moldova (the content of his mandate is briefly presented within the table). The position of the EU Special Representative for the Republic of Moldova has taken birth in the context of the initiation of ENP and the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) and was ended in early 2011, when Moldova had already begun the negotiations for the Association Agreement (AA).

	<b>The Republic of Moldova</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Armenia</b>	<b>Azerbaijan</b>
<b>Programs benefitting of bilateral EU financial assistance through ENPI,</b>	-Development of democracy; -Development of the rule of law; -Respect of fundamental human	- Strengthening the rule of law; - Respect of fundamental human rights; - Sustainable	- Reform of judicial area; - Modernization of public finances; - Trading	- Energy policy reform; - Rural development and

<sup>10</sup> Nicu Popescu, „Moldova’s star: shining or falling?“, EU ISS, Brief Issue, no. 21, July 2015, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Stanislav Secrieru, „The Transnistrian conflict – new opportunities and old obstacles for trust building (2009-2010)“, in *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, vol. 11, No. 3, September 2011, p. 242

<sup>12</sup> \*\*\*, Integrarea Europeană, Republica Molodova. URL: <http://www.moldova.md/md/europa/>, accessed at 25 Septembrie 2015.

<b>2007-2013</b>	rights; -Economic reform and improvement of living conditions; -Increasing the mutual trust between Kishinev and Tiraspol.	economic development; - Development of legal system; - Resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons; - Building trust between the government in Tbilisi and the two breakaway republics.	reform plan; - Educational reform.	agriculture; - Financial sector management; - Legal system reform.
<b>Financial support (2007-2013) in relation with the population of the beneficiary state<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>560.9 mil. euros/ 3,546,847 inhabitants</b>	<b>452.1 mil. euros/ 4,931,226 inhabitants</b>	<b>281.5 mil. euro/ 3,056,382 inhabitants</b>	<b>143.5 mil. euros/ 9,780,780 inhabitants</b>
<b>EU CSDP Missions</b>	EUBAM	EUJUST Themis EUMM	-	-
<b>EU status within peace</b>	Observer in „5+2” negotiations	- Main negotiator of the	-	-

<sup>13</sup> For the identification of the estimated number of the population for July 2015, was used the data provided by CIA World Factbook, URL: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>, accessed at 30 September 2015.

<b>negotiations</b>		Agreement in 6 points; - Co-chair of Geneva Talks;		
<b>Mandate of the Special Representative</b>	<p><b>EU special Representative for the Republic of Moldova</b></p> <p>a) contribution to the peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian conflict and the implementation of a viable solution, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders;</p> <p>b) contribution to strengthening democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental human rights for all citizens of Moldova;</p> <p>c) promote good relations between Moldova and the EU</p>	<p><b>EU special Representative for South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia:</b></p> <p>a) contribution to the peaceful resolution of conflicts, including the crisis in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh;</p> <p>b) encourage regional cooperation;</p> <p>c) enhancing the efficiency and visibility of the EU in the region;</p> <p>d) contributing to strengthening stability and security in the region.</p>		

	based on common values and interests; d) support the fight against trafficking in human beings, arms and other goods from and through Moldova; e) contribution to strengthening stability and security in the region; f) enhancing the efficiency and visibility of the EU in the region.			
<b>AA/ DCFTA</b>	2013	2013	-	-

*Comparative table of EU actions in the states in its eastern neighbourhood experiencing frozen conflicts*

A milestone in the evolution of relations between Moldova and the EU is the replacement of the former policy frameworks of cooperation with the AA, which includes *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area* (DCFTA), despite Moscow's pressure directed to preventing the conclusion of this agreement and to attracting Kishinev towards the Eurasian Union. AA was signed during the summit in Vilnius in November 2013.

According to the Association Agenda between Moldova and the European Union<sup>14</sup>, AA priorities are clustered in the following areas: a) political dialogue and reform; b) foreign and security policy; c) justice, freedom and security; d) economic cooperation; e) trade and trade-related matters (DCFTA).

<sup>14</sup> Association agenda between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, Brussels, 26 June 2014, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/moldova/pdf/eu-moldova-association-agenda-26\\_06\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/moldova/pdf/eu-moldova-association-agenda-26_06_en.pdf), accessed at 9 September 2015.

Foreign policy and security cooperation focuses on issues related to crisis management and conflict prevention, regional stability, non-proliferation, arms control and arms exports<sup>15</sup>. Provisions on the AA application throughout the entire territory of the country reveal that both Kishinev and Brussels hope the advantages brought by AA, especially by DCFTA, to operate as a factor of rapprochement between Kishinev and Tiraspol and, by implication, a stimulus of the reconciliation between the parties.

This strategy was in fact red thread of the entire relationship between the EU and Moldova, including on the Transnistrian conflict settlement. No matter if it was about the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, or about ENP, EaP or AA, the solution for the Transnistrian conflict was feasible rather on the long term, consisting in the political and economic development of Moldova and, thus, attracting Tiraspol to mutual trust development and strengthening relations with Kishinev.

Another direction of EU action with effects on Transnistrian conflict is EUBAM (2005). Its mandate includes the contribution to the development of the capacities of Moldova and Ukraine in border and customs management and in fighting organized cross-border crime, as well as in moving these states closer to EU standards and contributing to Transnistrian conflict peaceful resolution<sup>16</sup>. Strengthening border control and restricting cross-border trade with Ukraine, EUBAM has had a major role in determining Tiraspol to participate in Moldova economy and pay taxes to the authorities in Kishinev. Another consequence of the presence of EUBAM is the registration of 90% of Transnistrian companies in Moldovan, plus a 19% export growth<sup>17</sup>.

If we consider that Transnistria focuses much of Moldova's industrial capabilities, these results can be interpreted positively in terms of the development of Moldovan economy as a result of EU action. Moreover, the decrease of illegal trafficking, cross-border organized crime are also security advantages not only for Kishinev, but also for the EU.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> EUBAM Mandate, URL: [http://www.eubam.org/en/about/what\\_we\\_do](http://www.eubam.org/en/about/what_we_do), accessed at 15 September 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Anna Matveena „Conflicts in the wider Black Sea Area”, in *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: strategic, economic and energy perspectives*, edited by Daniel Hamilton, Gerhard Mangott, Center for Transatlantic Relations, The John Hopkins University/Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Vienna, 2008, pp. 203-204.

In conclusion, EU strategy regarding Transnistria was focused on increasing the attractiveness of Moldova to Tiraspol, supporting both economic and political development of the country and the trust building. Basically, paraphrasing EU Special Representative in Moldova, the EU took an approach in which the resolution of Transnistria frozen conflict and the European integration were interconnected<sup>18</sup>.

#### 4. Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Relations between Brussels and Tbilisi date from the period following soon after the declaration of independence of Georgia from USSR, but have deepened particularly after 2003. In that context, when the EU was preparing to launch ENP and put into practice a new wave of enlargement to the East, is appointed the first EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus. In the period 2008-2011, Georgia had two EU Special Representative as, to the function mentioned above, was added a Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia and, since 2011, the two functions merged under the name of EU Special Representative for South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia (the content of his mandate is briefly presented within the table).

In the context of 2008 war, EU was one of the main actors involved in the mediation process, announcing that it would send a joint EU and US delegation in Georgia to negotiate a cease-fire. It was concluded after a mediation of France, which at that time also held the EU presidency, the result being known as “the Agreement in six points”<sup>19</sup>. The document illustrates one of the most relevant EU positions on a crisis in full swing, based on its member states’ consensus.

Following the conflict, EU appointed a committee to identify the facts of the Russian-Georgian war, which published its findings in September 2009, the document being known as the

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<sup>18</sup> <sup>18</sup> \*\*\*, Infotag’s interview with European Union Special Representative for Moldova Kalman Mizsei, „In the Transnistrian settlement process interests of both Chisinau and Tiraspol are important”, 2 July 2010, URL: <http://www.moldova.org/in-the-transnistrian-settlement-process-interests-of-both-chisinau-and-tiraspol-are-important-210572-eng/>, accessed at 15 September 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Council of the European Union, Press Release. Extraordinary meeting. General Affairs and International Relations, Brussels, 13 august 2008, pp. 6-7, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/eu\\_georgia/13august\\_2008\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/documents/eu_georgia/13august_2008_en.pdf), accessed at 20 September 2015.

“Tagliavini Report”<sup>20</sup>. Among others, the report concluded that Russia failed in its role as peacekeeper and honest mediator between Georgia and its two breakaway republics and even used these conflicts in its own interests as, besides the peacekeepers, there were other troops illegally present in South Ossetia, but Georgia’s military action in Tskhinvali was illegal. The report also indicates EU’s failure in preventing the war and its reluctance to intervene in support of Georgia. One of the reasons of EU’s failure, as reflected in that report, lies in the cautious policy approach: “over the years [after Georgia’s ENP inclusion] there was a gradual increase in European involvement in Georgia, which may be called forthcoming in terms of economic aid, politically friendly on the bilateral side, cooperative but cautious on contentious political issues and, except for some bilateral support from very few EU members, mostly distanced in terms of military support and sensitive security issues”<sup>21</sup>.

After the 2008 war, EU launched a civilian monitoring mission (EUMM), whose priorities are to: ensure that hostilities will not be resumed; facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for local communities on both sides of the administrative boundary lines with Abkhazia and South Ossetia; build trust between parties of the conflict; inform about EU policies in Georgia and the wider region<sup>22</sup>. EUMM is conducted exclusively on the Georgian territory, and not on that of the separatist republics, as Russia opposed the EU presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. EUMM is not the only EU mission in Georgia. In the period 2004-2005, EU conducted another civilian mission focused on rule of law issues – EUJUST Themis, whose purpose consisted in providing support for Tbilisi in the drafting the criminal justice strategy plan, the judicial reform and the fight against corruption. The time frame of this mission’s execution is relevant for the meaning the EU had in these conflicts’ context. EUJUST Themis was conducted in the early years of Saakashvili’s presidency, in the context in which he proposed a clear orientation of Georgia’s foreign policy to the Euro-Atlantic integration and to

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<sup>20</sup> \*\*\*, *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, September 2009, URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/30\\_09\\_09\\_iiffm\\_gc\\_report.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/30_09_09_iiffm_gc_report.pdf), accessed at 25 September 2015.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, *Our Mandate*, URL: [http://www.eumm.eu/en/about\\_eumm/mandate](http://www.eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate), accessed at 29 September 2015.

address Georgia's major vulnerabilities in relation with the two separatist republics and Moscow, a context in which endemic corruption played a central role.

As with all states in its close proximity, Georgia was also subjected to economic pressure from Moscow, aimed at discouraging Tbilisi to sign the AA and at drawing it to the Customs Union. However, at the summit in Vilnius (2013), Georgia, together with Moldova, signed AA, and a framework agreement for the participation in crisis management missions under EU aegis. This dimension of EU-Georgia security cooperation carries great importance, with significance not only for their joint action in crisis management, but also for training Georgian experts in this regard.

The AA, with its DCFTA component, involves deepening political and economic relations between Tbilisi and Brussels, contributing to Georgia's European integration. Similar to Moldova, in the area of foreign policy and security cooperation, the Association Agenda between EU and Georgia promotes the peaceful resolution of the conflict and international security and stability, based on effective multilateralism.

Many of the solutions proposed by the Association Agenda for the frozen conflicts resolution follow the same logic of long-term solutions, of the comprehensive approach focused on increasing contacts between populations living on both sides of the administrative boundary line<sup>23</sup>. The major challenge is the process of building borders by these republics' authorities, which constitutes a physical impediment to achieving many of the goals of the cited document, endangering their feasibility.

## **5. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh issue**

In this case, the aim of EU conflict management has been focused on supporting the development of an environment conducive to resolving the conflicting state, within the framework of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (1999), and subsequently within ENP and EaP. Settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is mentioned in ENP Action Plans of both countries. As far as Azerbaijan is concerned, specific actions consist in: a) intensification of diplomatic efforts, including through the EU Special Representative, and the maintenance of the

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<sup>23</sup> \*\*\*, Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/georgia/pdf/eu-georgia\\_association\\_agenda.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/georgia/pdf/eu-georgia_association_agenda.pdf), accessed at 29 September 2015.

support for the peaceful resolution of the conflict; b) increasing political support for resolving the conflict within the Minsk Group/OSCE; c) encouraging interpersonal relations; d) enhancing EU dialogue with the states involved in order to speed up negotiations to resolve the conflict<sup>24</sup>. The text of the Action Plan for Armenia is very similar. Regarding Nagorno-Karabakh issue, EU's involvement has had a limited character by comparison with the other three frozen conflicts previously addressed. The words in which Nagorno-Karabakh settlement is put in these documents is demonstrative, as the key words are "support" and "encourage". Moreover, for the entire South Caucasus region, EU's interests, values and policies are promoted through a sole Special Representative, who has a unique mandate for all the three countries here. However, at comparative analysis of his roles in the conflict mediation process and the EU missions in these countries (see the table), one could conclude that the Union has more solid levers of action and influence in the case of Georgia, by comparison with the ones available and applied in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Also, unlike the fields to which ENPI financial assistance has been channelled for Moldova and Georgia, in the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan there is no special allocation for conflict management. Furthermore, by comparing the size of budgets in relation with the population of each state, there is a major discrepancy between investments in reform and conflict management in Moldova and Georgia, on the one hand, and Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the other (see the table).

EU action in the context of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has often been described as limited, ambiguous, trying to keep a political equidistance between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which, under the conditions of irreconcilable interests formulated in Yerevan and Baku, has led to a situation in which EU approach on Nagorno-Karabakh mediation became unclear and.

However, the minimum role played by the EU in Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict management is not just the result of the insufficient coordination in the area of foreign and security policy in Brussels, but is also the result of several factors. First, it is necessary to take into account Azerbaijan major geostrategic role in terms of European countries energy security.

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<sup>24</sup> EU/Azerbaijan Action Plan, URL: [http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action\\_plans/azerbaijan\\_enp\\_ap\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/action_plans/azerbaijan_enp_ap_final_en.pdf), accessed at 19 September 2015.

Consequently, many of them have established their own strategies in relation to this actor<sup>25</sup>, which made it difficult to be harmonized within EU common framework. As far as Armenia is concerned, there should be also added the major influence of Russia's foreign policy decisions, given the stationing Russian troops on the Armenian territory.

### Conclusions

In Ukraine, we cannot talk about a frozen conflict yet, but about one that meets a series of factors that can favour its transformation into a conflict of this kind. The fact that Donetsk and Lugansk are currently under the leadership of authorities distinct from those of Kiev, without being recognized as state entities, and that there is still sporadic violence at the western border of Donbass is eloquent.

The conditions under which this crisis appeared are similar to the context having preceded 2008 Russian-Georgian war if one takes into account Kiev tendencies of getting closer to European structures (the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, where Ukraine was expected to sign the AA), but differ notably as far as the further developments are concerned.

Except for Ukraine, the first case when EU intervened at the peak of a conflict with a tendency to freeze, Brussels' approach is predominantly a long-term one, based on its normative power and on its ability to generate stability, security and development by exporting norms, values and principles that underpinned its creation. Direct involvement in frozen conflicts management in its neighbourhood is, at a first glance, reduced. At a deeper analysis, EU's efforts aim to foster the development of these countries in the political, institutional, economic areas as well as of their security apparatus, which could equal to a long-term development of these states, making them able to manage the separatist issues. Nonetheless, the problem consisted in the entrance in a vicious circle in which instability related to frozen conflicts, Russia's massive involvement in maintaining the state of conflict, smouldering or not, made it impossible or difficult to implement the measures envisaged by EU.

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<sup>25</sup> Nicu Popescu, *Stealth Intervention: the EU in Post-Soviet Conflicts*. Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science, Central European University, International Relations and European Studies Department, Budapest, February 2009, p. 251, URL: <http://sar.org.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Stealth-intervention-the-EU-and-post-soviet-conflicts.pdf>, accessed at 31 September 2015.

The preservation and even the accentuation of regional instability is due to the increased Kremlin's influence in this area and to the type of instruments used to promote its interests regarding these actors. Thus, unlike NATO and the EU, which have harnessed instruments effective rather on the long term (democratization, institution building, reform, liberalization, human rights), trying to consolidate those entities so as to be able to cope with Russia's pressures, Moscow developed military bases on these states' national territory, tried and often succeeded to promote the leadership of pro-Russian political leaders, and fully capitalized its ability to exercise various forms of economic blackmail (especially in energy and trade areas).

Basically, the West and the Russian Federation have competed more or less tacit for the influence in this space, through stabilization and development in the case of Western actors or through destabilization in the Russian Federation's case, making use of *soft* instruments for promoting interests, in the case of Western actors, and *hard* instruments, in the one of Moscow. Western actors didn't accompany diplomacy with hard tools as they aimed at maintaining a certain strategic balance in this space, necessary not only from the perspective of risks and threats that could emerge from this region is serious destabilization, but also for geo-economic reasons, especially if we consider the high degree of Western actors' dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, which transit many states in the Black Sea Basin to reach European importers.

The main EU advantage – the benefits resulting from the Euro-Atlantic integration – do not work at the expected extent in the case of frozen conflicts at its eastern borders. Paradoxically, it is precisely these benefits brought by EU action that can be considered a factor of political, political-military, economic and social destabilization, as any strengthening of the relations between Brussels and the states in its eastern neighbourhood, any step taken by the latter towards democratization and strengthening their institutions, any progress on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration trigger either economic sanctions from Moscow (bans of certain goods, major increases of oil and natural gas prices) or political-military pressure (war in Georgia, annexation of Crimea, war in eastern Ukraine), assumed or not.

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