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Policy: The consequences of the Georgia
and Ukraine crises

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Abstract:

Relations with the neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus were always of pivotal importance for the development of European Union-Russia bilateral relationship. Since 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy has provided a framework for European relations with its Eastern border. However, the progressive assertiveness shown by Moscow has pushed the European Union to assume a greater geopolitical approach towards the Eastern region. This paper addresses the interrelation that exists between both powers within the configuration of their foreign policy regarding the shared neighbourhood and how Georgia and Ukraine crisis have reshaped the perception of each other, fostering the reconfiguration of European neighbourhood policies.

Keywords:

European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, European Union, Russia, Foreign Policy.

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Rusia y la Política Europea de Vecindad: las consecuencias de las crisis de Georgia y Ucrania

Resumen:

Las relaciones con los países vecinos de Europa del Este y el Cáucaso meridional siempre fueron de vital importancia para el desarrollo de la relación bilateral Unión Europea-Rusia. Desde 2004, la Política Europea de Vecindad ha proporcionado un marco para las relaciones europeas con su frontera oriental. Sin embargo, la progresiva asertividad mostrada por Moscú ha empujado a la Unión Europea a asumir un mayor enfoque geopolítico hacia la región del este. Este artículo aborda la interrelación que existe entre ambos poderes dentro de la configuración de su política exterior en cuanto a la vecindad compartida y cómo las crisis de Georgia y Ucrania han reconfigurado la percepción de cada uno, fomentando la reconfiguración de las políticas europeas de vecindad.

Palabras clave:

Política Europea de Vecindad, Asociación Oriental, Unión Europea, Rusia, política exterior.

Introduction

Located in the crossroad between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, Eastern Europe is a significant economic hub for trade of goods and energy as well as a focus of potential instability due to the ethnic tensions as well as the spread of organized crime and religious extremism. Therefore, the fact of having a common neighbourhood has significantly impacted the regional dynamics of power, transforming actors' perceptions of each other, and consequently, influencing the frame of their policies towards the common vicinity. For that matter, the effects that the Russian policy has had on shaping EU policies with regard of their shared neighbourhood will be addressed. Therefore, firstly, a general approach of EU-Russia relations will be introduced in order to, lately, draw the main lines in the reconfiguration of the EU policy towards the region after the Georgian and Ukrainian crisis.

General framework of EU-Russia relations

A neo-realist approach of the Russian Federation

For Moscow, the current world order is characterized by a turbulent shift from unipolarity to multipolarity and the incapability of Western system to respond to emerging challenges¹. In this transition to multipolarity, the competition between multicivilizational and Western-centric world is inevitable. Thus, Russia is trying to become an alternative to Western system with the promotion of the concepts of *Ruskiy Mir* and sovereign democracy, the advancement of regionalism over the Western globalization, and the development of security alliances to counterbalance NATO expansion. In this context, following the neorealist approach, Kremlin is trying to ensure its control over its "near-abroad" in order to influence the spread of the external actors' clout over the region.

¹ Kremlin, "National Security Strategy", December 2015, available in <https://bit.ly/3ncZ7Di>

Kremlin, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2016, available in <https://bit.ly/3eQCRMH>

Kremlin, "Military Doctrine", The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Islands, December 2014, available in <https://bit.ly/3lwJVAF>

This can be explained from Russia's historical self-perception as a Great Power, and the reluctance of the West to recognize it as such, as well as regional hegemon. Moreover, Russian domestic political system which fits into Limited Access Order have a significant impact on the configuration of this policy².

Moscow highlights its "near-abroad" as paramount area and the development of Russia's bilateral and multilateral cooperation, within the organizations such as Commonwealth of Independent States, Collective Security Treaty Organization and Eurasian Economic Union, with post-Soviet states as a priority of its foreign policy³. The policy towards the Eastern Partnership states is characterized by flexibility, imposition of conditionalities and trend toward bilateralism, allowing to reduce the predictability of Russian behaviour and to maximize the negative impacts on the targeted states⁴. Furthermore, a variety of tools is used in the engagement with these states: economic/trade⁵, energy (changing prices, cutting supplies⁶, using energy debts as leverage⁷) and migration (unilateral introduction/withdraw of visa regime, restrictions in the access to Russian labour market, expulsion of migrants)⁸ dependencies, socio-political influence⁹ as well as military power (including "active measures")¹⁰.

² NORTH, Douglass, et al., 2009, 2012; cited in JONAVICIUS, Laurynas, et al., "Russian interests, strategies, and instruments in the Common Neighbourhood", EU-STRAT, n°16, pp. 6-7, March 2019, available in <https://bit.ly/32wwR6x>

³ Kremlin, "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2016, available in <https://bit.ly/3eQCRMH>

⁴ MAROCCHI, Tania. "EU-Russia relations: towards an increasingly geopolitical paradigm", Vocal Europe, August 2017, available in <https://bit.ly/3eSMnyH>

⁵ Punitive trade measures towards Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia due to countries' engagement to AA/DCFTA with Brussels.

⁶ An increase of energy price for Kiev after the Orange Revolution and the stoppage of supplies in middle of winter in 2006 and 2009.

⁷ Moldova, Belarus and Armenia are particularly vulnerable. Gazprom gained the property rights of gas and pipeline infrastructure of those countries using their energy debts.

⁸ In this regard it can be mentioned the introduction of visa obligations to Georgian citizens, except these from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the expulsion of its migrants in 2005. Furthermore, citizens from countries who are closer to EU (Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) have more restrictions to get into Russian labour market than the one integrated in EAEU (Belarus and Armenia).

⁹ Creation of *Rossotrudnichestvo* and provision of support for anti-EU parties and NGOs that support the idea of *Ruskiy Mir*.

¹⁰ Destabilization of regimes in Georgia and Ukraine, maintenance of frozen conflicts, killing of opposition figures, etc.

According to its neorealist approach and zero-sum logic, the EU's push for EaP after the Georgia crisis was perceived by the Kremlin as a geopolitical initiative to gain influence in the region. Consequently, Moscow launched the Economic Custom Union that fits into EAEU, to maintain its sphere of influence. In this regard, Brussels considers the bloc as incompatible with AA/DCFTAs because of legal impediments; this implies that states in the region must opt for one or the other, creating division lines, and at the same time reinforce the Russian impression of it as a geopolitical initiative¹¹. Moreover, the recently launched "Three Seas Initiative" that aims to create a north-south energy corridor in Eastern and Central Europe can have an important consequence for EaP (for instance, Belarus already showed its interest for the project in order to diversify its partners). Thus, Russia perceived itself encircled by the EU, with its promotion of EaP that has geo-economic and geopolitical implications, and NATO. Furthermore, the EU-Russia "Common Spaces" framework (cooperation in economic; security, freedom and justice; and research and education spheres) failed to integrate Russian demands to be treated as an equal partner and most of the talks and processes for cooperation were cancelled (except on cross-border cooperation and people-to-people contacts) after the crisis in Ukraine¹².

European attitude towards Russia: increasingly geopolitical

The turn of the century meant a period of positivity when it came to EU-Russian relations. Putin talked frequently about Russian Europeanization and European integration. This was short-lasting. As Russia saw the 'colour-revolutions'—mainly Ukraine's Orange Revolution—unfold in its vicinity, as well as NATO's advancing expansion, 'European values' became incompatible. The Russian president turned his

JONAVICIUS, Laurynas, et al. "Russian interests, strategies, and instruments in the Common Neighbourhood", EU-STRAT, n°16, pp. 23-27, March 2019, available in <https://bit.ly/32wwR6x>

¹¹ This impression also was strengthened with the negative of the Commission to carry trilateral dialogue with Russia on the EU-Ukraine AA.

EU Committee, "The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine", House of Lords, 6th report of session 2014-15, pp. 45-47, February 2015, available in <https://bit.ly/3n8t4V5>

¹² DAMEN, Mario. "Russia, Fact sheet on European Union", European Parliament, November 2019, available in <https://bit.ly/3paPDKF>

head towards Eurasia supporting the creation of the EEU, together with Belarus and Kazakhstan, in a bid to counteract the European presence in the post-Soviet space, which inevitably had an impact in EU-Russian relations¹³.

As Belarus has continued to strengthen its ties with Russia and distanced itself from the EU, it is the only state who has not asked for or has been offered accession to the EU. Belarus was also excluded from the ENP¹⁴. This Policy, born after the 2004 enlargement, consisted of a new model of political and economic integration between the EU and its 16 immediate neighbours, with its own financial instrument (ENI) that has, however, been unsuccessful in tackling Russia's hard power politics and in preventing the corruption of democracies¹⁵. The ENP has been conceptualized as part of an ambitious governance agenda by the EU, expanding its ability to exercise external governance over its neighbours through the expansion of its institutional and legal order. Furthermore, it is important to stress in this respect that the EU exercises governance dynamics over its neighbours that are a combination of 'hard power' and 'soft power'. The latter when it comes to generating attraction for its norms and values and an example of this is the process of enlargement of the Union, which in turn generates a process of socialisation in its neighbouring states, as they must adapt to the *acquis Communautaire*, to all these norms and values, transforming their own. As for "hard power", it is exercised through negotiations and negotiating packages, based on hierarchies, negotiations, and conditionality¹⁶.

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 saw the inception of its predecessor, the EaP, a joint initiative involving the EU, its member states and its six Eastern neighbours: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, and Ukraine. It is aimed at strengthening economic, connectivity, governance, and societal ties. The Partnership has evidenced that the EU's engagement in the region continues to deepen¹⁷ continuing

¹³ HAUKKALA, H (2015). From cooperative to contested Europe? The conflict in Ukraine as a culmination of a long-term crisis in EU-Russian relations, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 23(1), pp. 25-40.

¹⁴ KOROSTELEVA, E.A (2009) The limits of the EU governance: Belarus' response to the European Neighbourhood Policy, *Contemporary Politics*, 15(2), pp. 225-245.

¹⁵ INAYEH and FORBREG (2015). The issue and recommendations, *Europe Policy Paper 4/2014*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States.

¹⁶ Ibid. 14.

¹⁷ EU Neighbours East (2020). *The Eastern Partnership*, European Union. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2KNelbD>

its approach of combining 'hard power' and 'soft power' in response to Russian tactics. However, EaP is often underestimated in terms of its successes and overestimated in terms of what it can achieve, meaning that while it has been able to make profits around political and economic partnership as well as regulatory issues, it has not succeeded in removing any of the security concerns that concern the six states on the eastern border of the EU, nor has it helped resolve any of their territorial disputes¹⁸

On the other hand, Russia has tried to maintain a hard grip on Ukraine as it considers Ukraine to be the origin of the Russian peoples and both countries to be inextricably linked. Ukraine has been, and continues to be, an extremely important border for the Russian state both for its national identity and for its relations with Europe. Kiev is the birthplace of the Russian Orthodox Christian identity and President Putin has been heard saying on many occasions that Russians regard Ukrainians as part of the same people, or family of peoples, as themselves¹⁹. The occupation of Crimea seems to have been a culmination of the crisis that had been building up in the EU-Russian relations. After the occupation many were quick to conclude that EU-Russia relations were at an all-time low, to the point of saying that a complete breakdown was on the horizon. In fact, Moscow's intentions from the beginning were undoubtedly to try to break the European unity that existed on the matter²⁰. The EU was also determined and succeeded in signing the Association Agreement (AA)²¹. In this line, it is important to highlight how the EU has been forced to move towards a more strategic, geopolitical role, abandoning the soft power that it had always advocated for and was founded on, in favour of more of a hard power approach. In 2016, Mogherini decided to replace the outdated 2003 European Security Strategy towards a Global Strategy (EUGS) that combined both soft power and hard power, because:

¹⁸ BLOCKAMNS, S. (2019). *The Eastern Partnership at 10*. CEPS Europe. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2JTKM04>

¹⁹ FIGES, O. (2016). *Russia and Europe*, BBVA Open Mind. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3aYXZwl>

²⁰ SÁNCHEZ, A. y De Pedro, N. (2015). *Spain and the European Union-Russia Conflict: the Impact of the Sanctions*. CIDOB. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/38xpMql>

²¹ HAUKKALA, H (2015). From cooperative to contested Europe?... ref. p. 5.

'Russia uses all available tools, from state-run propaganda to energy delivery blackmail and from 'little green men' to traditional military force in confronting the West. Geopolitics is back, but Moscow has widened the set of instruments to pursue its objectives. The response to hybrid threats had to be hybrid as well'²².

In addition, as Russia has proved to be an unstable and unreliable actor, the EU is looking to diversify its gas supplies away from Russia. The alternatives for new suppliers include: the MENA region, the countries in the southern corridor (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) or importing liquified natural gas from the US, East Africa and Australia²³.

The reconfiguration of the ENP after Georgia and Ukraine crisis

After the eastern enlargement, European borders became closer to Russia's traditional sphere of influence, and the new assertiveness shown by Moscow pushed to Europe to assume a more active role in the eastern border, since it became more evident that the neighbourhood had a direct impact in European internal order²⁴. Thus, following the wave of democratization protests that came up in the colour revolutions, the EU launched the ENP in 2004 with the aim of spreading its values and norms over the eastern and southern border²⁵. However, regardless of the EU's discourse of democracy and region building, Russia—which did not want to be included in the ENP—perceived those efforts as a geopolitical move and a desire to impose one unilateral region building project in its sphere of influence²⁶.

²² ZANDEE, D (2016). *EU Global Strategy: From design to implementation*, The Netherlands Institute of International Relations. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3bWuWWe>

²³ European Council on Foreign Relations (2015). *Europe's alternatives to Russian Gas*, ECFR, Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2zGxKxR>

²⁴ AMANDO DIAS, V. (2013). The Russian Factor in EU policies towards the 'shared neighbourhood'. *The EU and Emerging Powers*, Brussels. p. 3,7. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/35kt9xg>

²⁵ RAIK, K. and SAARI, S. (2016). Key Actors in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood: Competing perspectives on geostrategic tensions, *FIIA Report*, 47. p. 55.

²⁶ NITOIU, C. and SUS, M. (2019). Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU's Approach in its Eastern Neighbourhood, *Geopolitics*, 24(1). p. 7.

From the very beginning, the ENP was lacking a common strategy towards Russia and this absence of a comprehensive contextualisation created a decoupling between the objectives that the ENP wanted to achieve and the effective application of those policies²⁷. This became more obvious with the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008. Russian intervention worsened the relation between the EU and Russia and encouraged the constitution of Russia as a threat to Europe stability. Nevertheless, the interference in Georgia became the momentum for the EU to play a greater role in the region at the same time that the aggressive energy policy of Russia gave a justification for deepening its relations with Eastern Europe and South Caucasus as an attempt to find alternative energy supplies that could circumnavigate Russian energy monopoly²⁸.

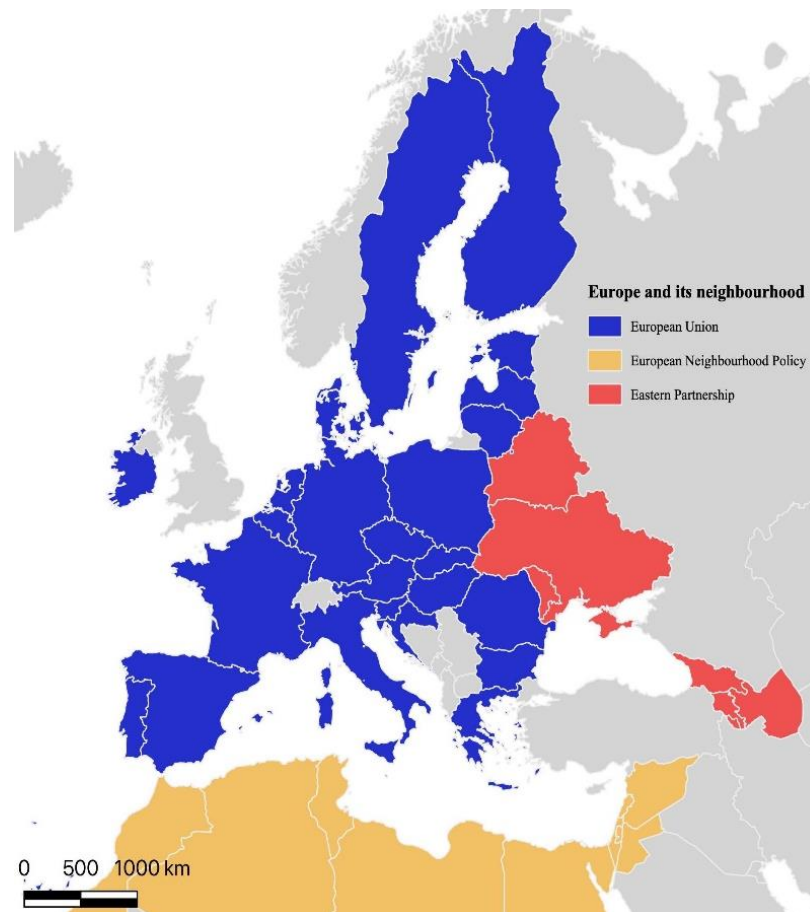


Figure 1. Europe and its neighbourhood. Source. Elaborated by the author based on European Parliament.

²⁷ KAPITONENKO, M. (2015). The European Neighbourhood Policy's Eastern Dimension: The impact of the Ukrainian Crisis, *Neighbourhood Policy Paper*, Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has Üniversitesi. p. 1.

²⁸ AMANDO DIAS, V. (2013). The Russian Factor... *op.cit.*, p. 10.

The EU launched the EaP in 2009 as a political response for Georgian aggression, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This policy tried to accomplish stronger security rhetoric, but it remained weak since it brought stronger ties regarding economic integration through AA and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), meanwhile those countries' priorities were about security concerns²⁹. Nonetheless, the EU showed a significant reluctance to be politically involved in the region and assume its security interests since this could jeopardize its relationship with Moscow³⁰. Thus, it could be said that the main failure in EaP was to ignore the broader geopolitical context and its implications in the implementation of policies such as the promotion of political reforms and economic integration while avoiding direct confrontation with Russia. Moreover, the lack of membership offering to those countries involved a lack of motivation for political reforms, and gradually since 2008 the region saw degradation in political and economic terms³¹.

Country	Start (2005)	End (2015)	Absolute Change	Relative Change
Belarus	-7.00	-7.00	0.00	0 %
Moldova	9.00	9.00	0.00	0 %
Ukraine	6.00	4.00	-2.00	-33 %

Table 1. Political Regime Evolution from 2005 to 2015. Source. Prepared by the author based on OurWorldinData based on Polity IV and Wimmer & Min.

The Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 put an end to the notion of Wider Europe. The EU was pushed to become a geostrategic actor, without political preparedness, and it was obligated to reconfigure their approach to the region^{32,33}. Many scholars argue that the EU's soft response to Georgian war in 2008 was interpreted by Moscow as a signal that the West was accepting Russia's dominant role

²⁹ RAIK, K. and SAARI, S. (2016). Key Actors in... ref. p. 57.

³⁰ AMANDO DIAS, V. (2013). The Russian Factor... ref. p. 11.

³¹ KAPITONENKO, M. (2015). The European Neighbourhood... ref. p. 2.

³² Ídem.

³³ KOSTANYAN, H. (2017). Assessing European Neighbourhood Policy: Perspectives from the Literature, *Centre for European Policy Studies*. p. 109.

in the post-Soviet area and it encouraged Russia's further aggression towards Ukraine³⁴.

The imposition of realpolitik in its eastern borders was particularly challenging for the EU due to the lack of internal cohesion regarding Russian aspects and its inability to formulate a common policy³⁵. Nonetheless, Ukraine meant a significant shift from normative priorities to short-term challenges. In 2015, the European Commission and the High Representative presented a review of the ENP whereby they were setting the basis for a more effective policy with significant changes from the last review in 2011. The EU embraced a more pragmatic view of the neighbourhood where democracy was less of a priority and security took the prominent place³⁶.

One year later, the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) was launched, which added to the Eastern Partnership an active guiding principle: strengthen the resilience of neighbouring states and societies giving the ability to better defend themselves and pursue their chosen path³⁷. Thus, the new approach to European Eastern Neighbourhood countries reflects the defensive strategy that the EU wants to build; whereas good governance has positive connotations, resilience implies feeling threatened and having to resist³⁸. Hereafter, the ENP has been transformed in a toolbox in which differentiation and mutual ownership are the main features. Thus, differentiation replaced conditionality and the EU pursued more engagement with those countries willing to deepen in integration; this also implies cooperation with undemocratic countries, leaving aside the democratization aim of the ENP and EaP.

³⁴ RAIK, K. and SAARI, S. (2016). Key Actors in... ref. p. 16.

³⁵ Ibid, 21.

³⁶ PERTUSOT, V. (2016). The European Neighbourhood Policy: A Bureaucratic Phoenix? *Notes de l'Ifri*, French Institute of International Relations. p. 22.

³⁷ EEAS (2016). *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. p. 33.

³⁸ PERTUSOT, V. (2016). The European Neighbourhood... ref. p. 25.

Conclusions

Throughout this article the interconnection between Russia and the EU regarding the configuration of the ENP has been acknowledged. The EU has used several times Russian assertive stance as a justification to reinforce its own footprint in the eastern region. The isolation of EU-Russia relations from EU-EaP relations has constituted a permanent weakness in both the ENP and the EaP, because until the EUGS there were no comprehensive context analysis that addressed the main concerns of Eastern countries. Since both the EU and Russia's security concerns are interconnected, the configuration of their policies is mutually influenced. The Russian action over its 'near abroad' has pushed the EU towards an increasingly geopolitical position in the region and, conversely, Russia's perception of the EU's eastern enlargement together with ENP and EaP initiatives has precipitated an increasing assertiveness by Moscow's foreign policy approach. Since the EU and Russia perceive each other more as competitors than co-operators this situation seems to be also the prospect for the near future.

Nevertheless, the unstable nature of international relations encourages us to venture some trends that have been observed in recent years and that can be added to this final analysis.

In 2018 Russia exhausted one of its sovereign funds (the Reserve Fund) and since then, it has been slowly losing its attraction as an economic hub³⁹. There is a risk that Russia cannot meet its political ambitions in economic terms, and therefore jeopardize its leverage in its 'near abroad'. For that reason, Russia could seek to maintain its influence by "low cost measures" such as misinformation to uphold instability in current frozen conflicts.

In the medium term, Russia-EU relations will be characterized by cooperation in combating common threats such as terrorism and extremism and geo-economic and geopolitical competition in the shared neighbourhood. In this regard, the post-Soviet states in Eastern Europe will have to leverage between both partners.

³⁹ SECRIERU, S. and SAARI, S. (2019). The Eastern Partnership A Decade On: Looking Back, Thinking Ahead, *Chaillot Paper*, 153, Institute for Security Studies. p. 9.

The “Three Seas Initiative” can have a significant cross-border impact on the common neighbourhood, reducing the EU’s members dependency on the Russian hydrocarbon exports and, consequently, providing an opportunity to play a more proactive role in EaP countries. Moreover, it can be considered as a signal to the Kremlin that the Polish-Ukrainian border is a line and crossing it will trigger the Trans-Atlantic alliance. Nonetheless, it should be seen how this project will evolve and if it will suppose a challenge for EU integrity and cooperation with EaP states. Considering this initiative, together with the NATO decision to strengthen the military presence in eastern flank, it should be seen how Russia will react and if it will take actions to reduce its impact on the region.

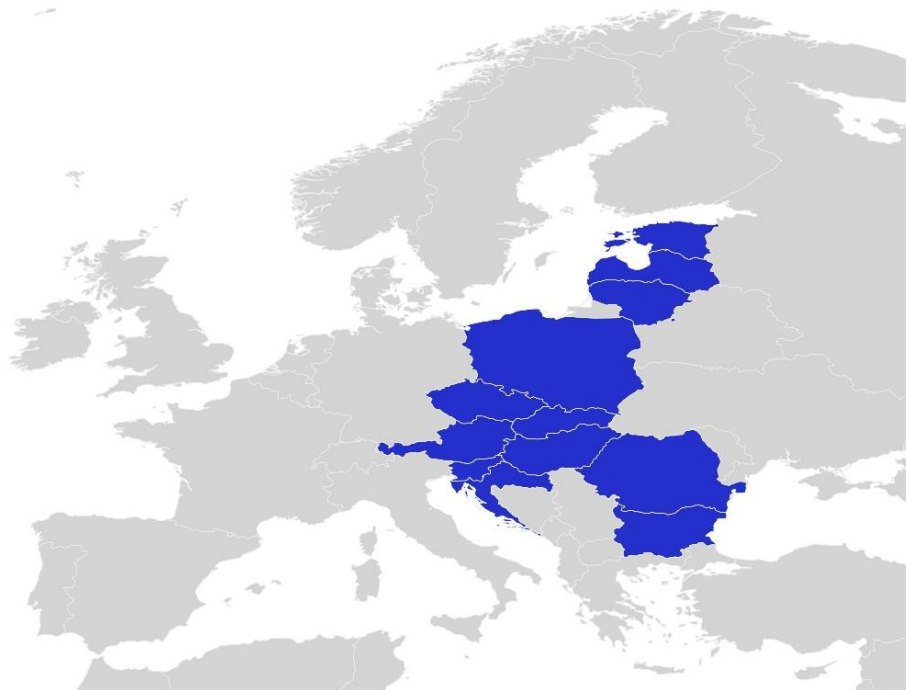


Figure 2. Three Seas Initiative. Source. Prepared by the author based on Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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