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## **UKRAINE: FROM THE UPRISING OF MAIDAN SQUARE TO CRIMEA – CONSIDERATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES**

To express unconditional evaluations or final anticipations is nearly impossible in the political analysis of events, especially if such events are still developing as is the case with Ukraine; it is possible, instead, to advance pondered considerations and grounded hypotheses on the possible developments of the aforementioned events. When faced with such an intricate situation – as is often the case – it is firstly necessary to explain the lines along which events are unfolding.

The energetic blackmail that Europe is undergoing on the part of Russia is by now known to most; what is less evident is the active role played by Europe that landed its member states into this trap. In fact, in order to secure Russia's cooperation and to guarantee energetic security for its future, Europe has thought it wise to sign – during the past years – extremely long-term accords for the procurement of gas (and not only gas) with Moscow, while trying to exclude the possible intervention of other suppliers present on the market. Only after signing such accords did Europe realize that it had tied the noose around its own neck and that it had placed the other end of the rope in the hands of Russia, which can jerk the cord as it likes in order to strangle the EU and make it act according to its will. Ukraine is the territory through which the Russian gas destined to Europe and to Ukraine itself flows, rendering it the battleground between the sides; a battle in which they have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

### **European short-sightedness**

Behind the clashes in Kiev there hides the confrontation between Brussels and Moscow for the procurement of gas. The goal of the failed accord of “Association” between Ukraine and the EU of November 28, 2013, in Vilnius (Lithuania) was that of, on the one side, releasing Kiev from Moscow's grip and, on the other side, of injecting the interests of European policy within the Russian sphere of influence: Russia's reaction therefore shouldn't come as a surprise.

However, as is often the case in Europe – and not only in Europe, i.e. see the US – the reckoning had been done without one's host (in which case the host would be Vladimir Putin): Europe tried to destabilize Ukraine with an anti-Russian purpose, inciting the insurrection of Maidan square (in Romanian and Ukrainian, “Maidan” is the open space where children are sent to play so that they don't ruin the home; it would therefore be more appropriate to call the starting place of the Ukrainian revolt “Maidan Nezelezhnosti”,

meaning “Independence square”) without evaluating the consequences thereof; and, in fact, faced with the unsettling reaction of Moscow, Europe decided to hide their hand after throwing the stone, thus leaving the filo-European Ukrainians defenseless.

But let's proceed with an order. At the eve of the Vilnius accord, the EU had offered the modest sum of 200 million euro of aid to Ukraine, asking Kiev to “do its homework” (as was stated by the Italian foreign ministry's undersecretary Lapo Pistelli). The President of the Ukrainian republic Yanukovich, whom is probably not the most correct and honest of politicians, but certainly a person who can count straight, could not have found a better pretext to send the uncomfortable deal head-over-heels.

When faced with the figures, the real reasons for the Ukrainian President's change of heart appear quite clear: Ukraine, on the brink of bankruptcy, had accumulated 2,7 billion dollars of debt with Russia; they had signed an agreement with Moscow on December 17, 2013, which stated that Russia was going to acquire 15 billion dollars' worth of Ukrainian government bonds and was contemplating a reduction on the price of Russian gas by 33%, bringing it from 400 dollars/sqm to 268,5 dollars/sqm, thus allowing Kiev to save roughly 4 billion dollars per year (they usually import at least 30 billion square meters of gas each year). It is thus clear why the filo-Russian option carried out by Yanukovich was not merely propaganda but rather a substantial economic safety net.

The EU had also dug its heels on the release of Yulia Timoshenko, presenting it as an inalienable condition (she was released on February 22, 2014). Timoshenko, the “pasionaria” of the “orange revolution” of 2004, has been imposed by Europe as the only possible interlocutor in the EU's relations with the Ukrainian government. Once again this shows, in our modest opinion, political shortsightedness on the European part: Paradoxically enough she could become the privileged interlocutor of her arch-enemy (but only on paper) Vladimir Putin. We should not forget that the champion of anti-Russian spirit and former Prime Minister Timoshenko ended up behind bars on August 5, 2011, for “abuse of office” following the lucrative and advantageous (for her, not for Ukraine) deals landed with Gazprom in 2009, in virtue of which the Ukrainian state ended up paying a decisively onerous price for Russian gas.

With these antecedents in mind and in the light of the inopportune emergent leaders on the Ukrainian political scene it is safe to suppose that it will be Timoshenko – perhaps under the counter – that will be left to negotiate a dignified capitulation with the “tsar” Putin.

### **The inopportune leaders**

Let's now shed some light on the “inopportune” authors of the coup d'etat – because that is exactly what happened – which has led to the ousting of Yanukovich: A President elected through free elections (even though there are suspicions of fraud) and surely not a dictator; the representative of a vast majority of the filo-Russian population and especially the guarantor of the dirty interests of a number of “oligarchs”, holders of the real power in Ukraine.

Ukraine is not a monolithic nation, it is rather a “triune” one.

- in the western part, which revolves around L'viv, the ancient Leopolis, people speak Ukrainian (a sort of archaic Russian); the culture is influenced by Poland, Romania and “Austria-Hungary” and the population feels “European” (but just in words, not in deeds).

- in the central part, which revolves around the capital Kiev and along the banks of the Dneper river, there are a number of “pure” (again just in words) Ukrainians and Russian speaking peoples.

- in the eastern and southern part, in particular in the peninsula of Crimea (an autonomous Republic of Ukraine) there is a net majority of Russian speakers, very close to Russia not only for their origin and geographical nearness, but especially on the “spiritual” level.

Speaking of the “purity” of the Ukrainian identity, it must be noted that there are a whopping 40 different ethnic groups within its borders. If we consider the facts objectively, putting aside the solidarity for the “patriots behind barricades” of Maidan square, we will see that the only common denominator of the anti-Yanukovich front is Russian-phobia.

To define this front heterogeneous is but a euphemism: Behind the facade of so-called “leaders” there hide upstart politicians that are just puppets in the hands of the “oligarchs”, the real protagonists of the struggle for power that is setting Ukraine ablaze. Nationalism, religion and Europeism are just different faces of the same Russian-phobia.

If we take a closer look at the “heroes” of Kiev and of L'viv; the same that have ousted the special forces of the police, taking prisoners in the process, we will find that for the most part they belong to groups of the extreme right-wing, such as the ultra-nationalists of the “Svoboda” party and the neo-nazis of the “Pravy Sektor” movement, which are not only Russian-phobic, but also racist, xenophobic and antisemitic.

In this regard, it should be noted that on January 27, 2014, while celebrations were ongoing in Auschwitz for the commemoration of the holocaust, in L'viv the neo-nazi, which boasted to be the “diamond point” of anti-Yanukovichism, were displaying swastikas and singing the praises of the pogrom against Jews (but this is something that the media did not mention). These people do not care about Ukraine's adherence to Europe, which they look upon with hostility and contempt in the name of the precept “Ukraine to Ukrainians”. This is why all of these individuals have not managed to agree on a common program and why they will all run at the coming elections (May 25<sup>th</sup>) on their own.

There is something to be said about the proven anti-semitism of the Ukrainian right-wing and the ambiguous behavior of Israel (it wouldn't be the first time this happened) in its regards. In a recent interview, the international entrepreneur/speculator George Soros expressed his unmasked views about the Ukrainian uprising without mentioning the fact that such uprising has been funded in good part by himself. Also, an Israeli General has recently declared that he has personally carried out the assembly and training of 40 Ukrainians: A sort of elite unit to be used against Yanukovich's police forces.

This seems to confirm the perplexities of those that doubted the “spontaneity” of the militiamen (because that is what they are) that enacted the uprising when, faced with their typically military training and equipment – which allowed them to defeat the special forces of the Ukrainian police (anything but inexperienced), and the suspicion that the Ukrainian revolt was – like many others – orchestrated by others.

### **A part of Russia**

As far as the “religious factor” is concerned, it must be observed that the two orthodox churches of Ukraine, created exclusively as anti-Russian entities and excommunicated by the patriarch of Moscow because of their schism (they are not recognized by any of the other orthodox churches) have demonstrated their bad faith in the past days when, through an anachronistic *auto da fe*’, they forced the imprisoned police agents to beg pardon on their knees in front of the crowd and of the orthodox icons and crucifixes.

It is the “religious factor” itself which goes to show just how much Ukraine is tied to Russia; the autocephalous Russian orthodox church was, in fact, founded during medieval times in Kiev and later moved to Moscow; it is the Rus' of Kiev that is considered to be the mother of Russian identity and, more generally speaking, of the Slavs of orient. It is not a hazard that the empire of Kiev (850-1240) was the first instance of the Russian state.

It is not surprising that some continue to define Ukraine as “the most Russian of all Russias”; if we wanted to simplify the concept we could state that “Ukraine is to Russia just as Kosovo is to Serbia”; it is in the interest of all parties – and of Ukraine (or what would be left of it) in particular – that Ukraine not follow the same fate of the tiny and novel Balkan state.

Not to mention the project of adhesion of Ukraine to NATO, which was prudently avoided by Germany (and by France and Italy) during the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. Something that Sakashvili's Georgia was not willing to give up, ingenuously confiding in an American intervention in their aid, and which brought about their defeat in the war against Russia in the same year; a war which was little more than a drill for Russia with the launch of paratroopers and the disembarking of Navy riflemen. There exist profound Geo-strategic reasons – and common sense – which obstruct the enlisting of Ukraine into the Atlantic alliance, not to mention the imposing Russian naval base in Sebastopolis, Crimea.

After Kiev, Crimea is now under the spotlight of the media and of international diplomacy. In fact, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea is practically a Russian enclave in Ukrainian territory since, 60 years ago, it was “donated” by Khrushchev (who was Ukrainian himself, just like Brezhnev) to Ukraine which was, at the time, one of the 15 Republics of the Soviet Union.

It is therefore not surprising if the escalation of the Russian military presence in the Crimean peninsula (first with armored vehicles on the streets, then with 2000 paratroopers “without insignia”, which were increased to 6000, then to 15000 and which have taken control of the key locations in the peninsula – airports, the seat of the government, a missile base, etc. - without mentioning the disproportionate “military drill” of the Russian

army along the border with Ukraine) was welcome with enthusiasm by the Russian population that dwells Crimea.

In the past few days there has also been news of the passage of the new Ukrainian navy chief of staff to the Russian side; speaking of the navy, many ships belonging to the Ukrainian navy, which were anchored in the Russian base of Sebastopolis, have taken to the seas – probably in order to avoid being sunken in the harbor by the Russians in case of a full-blown war.

### **The options on the table**

The breakup of Ukraine with the Ukrainian-speakers on one side and Russian speakers on the other, is not very probable option.

If there will be a breakup, it would not be enacted along this non-existent, net line; it would be much more fragmented: The division of the former Yugoslavia should serve as an example. There would be no net separation but rather the loss, on the Ukrainian side, of some territories, such as Crimea, the separation of which from Ukraine and subsequent annexing by Russia are not to be ruled out ahead of time.

Another possible separation of Ukraine could see the western part entering the European Union and Crimea joining Russia. This hypothesis is even less probable than the preceding one. Russia would not accept an enlargement of the EU over part of Ukraine; and the EU would have nothing to gain from the straining of tensions between Kiev and Moscow, since it is through the Ukrainian territory that transits a good part of the Russian gas that keeps Europe afloat. Poland, for one – which cannot be suspected of harboring filo-Russian sympathies – is working to avoid a degeneration of the crisis which would produce a closer – and angrier – Russia along its borders.

A full-blown war between Ukraine and Russia would be suicide for Ukraine. The lesson given by Georgia in 2008 is – or should be, seen the rashness of the actors on stage – clear to all: Just like Georgia which, after a “solemn defeat”, has lost Abkhazia and southern Ossetia – the two states, under the guise of independence, have become Russian “protectorates” - Ukraine is bound to be annihilated on the military level – the stakes are much higher – and strongly reshaped geographically, with vast chunks of its territory (especially the east) which would shift, more or less formally, under the control of Moscow. As we have mentioned, this is a plausible perspective for Crimea even in the absence of a military clash between Ukraine and Russia, seen that there is a popular referendum asking for independence and/or annexing by Russia. The referendum was initially proposed by the new government of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in conjunction with the Ukrainian political elections of May 25<sup>th</sup>, then it was anticipated to March 31<sup>st</sup> to “strike while the iron is hot”, thus riding the wave of enthusiasm and the presence of the Russian army on the territory of the Crimean peninsula.

Until now Putin has used the policy of the “carrot and stick” with regards to Ukraine, alternating the threat of shutting down gas supplies, showing their muscle on the military level and through the donation of economic aid without so much as a flinch. Up to the

present Russia has paraded its force in order to avoid using it; if Putin were to dispose of the carrot to beat down with the stick, it would surely be inconvenient to both parties.

The truth is that Putin, in his attempt to rebuild the Soviet sphere of influence (or the “tsarist” one), has very precise plans with regards to Ukraine:

- their entry into the customs union, together with Belarus and Kazakhstan;
- their entry into the more ambitious Eurasian union guided by Moscow, to permanently squash any vain Europeist and/or Atlantic ambition.

The problem is that Ukraine finds itself in a battlefield of a war that is not (completely) theirs; a war for which the interests of other countries come together and clash; a bit like what happened during the “cold war” with its dreaded “proxy wars”. This has persuaded some observers to speak of a new cold war.

Some have even hypothesized that behind the Ukrainian crisis there lie the byzantine vices of American foreign policy, the aim of which would actually be to weaken the European Union by spreading it thin across Ukraine and Turkey: A perspective which, although fascinating from the political/theoretic point of view, is less than credible from the political/pragmatic one; beyond being a hypothesis difficult to demonstrate, it would entail uncontrollable risks with regards to the Russian reaction.

To make it simple, Ukraine is “in the wrong place at the wrong time”: condemned by geography to be within the gravity pull of Russia at a time when a man like Putin is at its helm; just like the former colonel of the KGB that he is, he spares no one.

In fact, the reactions of Europe and the United States – in the improbable scenario of a military clash (exactly as with Georgia in 2008) – are limited to threats of sanctions and boycotting of the next G-8 summit. Faced with such “threats”, a man like Putin can sleep soundly.

Meanwhile, to draw an advantage from the controversy between the West and Russia, while keeping its usual low profile, another player is stepping to the plate: China, which has already acquired, and is planning to acquire further, large chunks of land (“entire territories” would be more appropriate) in the Ukrainian republic. As usual, China acquires without imposing any pseudo -humanitarian conditions: While two dispute, the third enjoys.

Europe has delayed all initiative, save for some attempts to mediate the crisis, because it lacks a common strategy: it appears divided not only on the political level but on that of its energy needs as well. Each European country attempts to bring grist to its own mill. We must remember that, notwithstanding the Nabucco gas-duct – perhaps permanently foundered by now – various European countries, with Italy in the forefront, are participating in the Russian South Stream project.

A chronic Russian-Ukrainian conflict is detrimental to all sides, even to those “third parties” that have various interests at play in the juxtaposition (exception made, perhaps, for Israel). That which should have been, in the “obscure” plans of the architects of the

Ukrainian trap, the designated victim, Vladimir Putin, through determination, initiative, the ability in changing the cards on the table and to “accelerate” the events; after a much needed (because of the particular circumstances of our times) “normalization” of the situation in Ukraine – with or without the use of the military, even if limited to Crimea alone – could actually come out reinforced from this whole story.

## **PUTIN'S AGENDA: THE RECOVERY OF SOVEREIGNTY OVER RUSSIAN TERRITORY AND "IMPERIAL" AIMS**

As the title suggests, we will try to examine to preeminent aspects of Russian President Vladimir Putin's agenda: the recovery of the sovereignty over its territory and the "imperial" goals of a policy that looks at the past, at the Tzar's Empire on whose ashes the Soviet Union was built on December 22, 1922 at the end of World War I.

### **From the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation**

Following the Belaveža agreement, the 15 republics of the Soviet Union formed the Community of Independent States to then become the Russian Federation. Here is a brief chronology of events:

- On December 30, 1922 the Soviet Socialist Republics merged to form the Soviet Union. They were the FSSR of Russia and the SSRs of Ukraine, Belarus and Transcaucasia.

The Soviet Union, whose acronym was USSR, lasted 69 years and survived World War II and the Cold War. It dissolved, or rather imploded, following the Belaveža agreement (December 8, 1991) signed by **Mikhail Gorbachev**, then president of the Soviet Union, and by the presidents of Ukraine, **Leonid Kravchuk** and Belarus, **Stanislav Šuškevič**.

The deal imposed:

1. the disaggregation of the Soviet Union
2. the formation of the "Community of Independent States" (CIS), whose ties were not comparable to those of the Soviet Union and largely insufficient to create a new "common home".

Among the causes of the USSR's dissolution were Gorbachev and his political reforms enacted since the half of the 1980s. They were based on the criteria of glasnost (transparency) and on the perestrojka (renewal) and were probably ahead of their times. In that precise historical moment:

- the central government had abdicated several of its core functions;
- the country's economy had fallen in the hands of a limited number of individuals, the so-called "oligarchs";

In short, the USSR was not capable of controlling a vast territory, infiltrated by criminal and terroristic organizations and as such had fallen into chaos.

- The 15 republics of the Soviet Union then formed the CIS with the exception of the three Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, that opted out for historical, cultural and ethnic reasons. The move from the CIS to the

Russian Federation was instead considered a natural and logical outcome because:

- it was the largest of the independent republics of the CIS;
- its population (145 million people) represented more than half of the people of the former Soviet Union;
- Russians represented the majority of the members of the Armed Forces and of the members of the now dissolved Communist Party;

### **The Putin-Medvedev relay**

Since the year 2000 until today, the Russian Federation has been systematically ruled by a relay and handover of power between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. The two men at the helm are Vladimir Putin and Dmitrij Medvedev.

<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC</b>	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b>
2000-2004	VLADIMIR PUTIN	DMITRIJ MEDVEDEV
2004-2008	VLADIMIR PUTIN	DMITRIJ MEDVEDEV
2008-2012	DMITRIJ MEDVEDEV	VLADIMIR PUTIN
2012-2016	VLADIMIR PUTIN	DMITRIJ MEDVEDEV

The presidential mandate is of four years as written in the Constitution approved in 1993 and can be confirmed only once. But after a four year leap, a candidate can run for president again and therefore a handover is to all effects possible.

The Russian policies have gone along the following guidelines:

- the recovery of the sovereignty of the State over the entire territory of the Federation, as the campaigns waged since 1999 against the independentist and terrorist movements in Chechnya prove. At the time Vladimir Putin was only the Prime Minister;
- the improvement of the economy and the de-privatization of resources: previously they had been under the control of the oligarchs.

To this effect, both Russian rulers have each contributed with their specific background and knowledge:

- **Putin** (61 years old) was formerly a director of an important branch of the Russian Secret Services, the KGB, with responsibility over military policies; he is a "conservative" as far as traditional values are concerned with a propensity towards the past Tzarist Empire;
- Medvedev (48 years old) has a considerable experience in the management of energy resources and of the technologies employed in this specific sector; ideologically he is definitely more "liberal" than Putin is.

When the two switched posts at the presidency for the first time in 2008, several commentators wondered whether the handover was truly effective, or whether Putin still pulled the reins. The latter seems to be the most reasonable answer, as Medvedev has on more than one occasion publicly stated he would "consult with Putin" with regard to key decisions.

### **Putin's imperial goals**

- In December 2013 during a speech to the country on the anniversary of the first post-Soviet Russian Constitution unveiled his aspirations and stated:
  - o Russia is ready to become a super-power once again, as it did during the Cold War;
  - o there is no pressure on Ukraine with regard to its intention to join the European Union and regardless of the fact that it was invited to adhere to the Customs Union (a project that saw the light in 1994 between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan); the aim of the invitation, said Putin, was rather to help the Ukrainians avoid the mounting influence of China and the United States. In that context, Putin labelled the EU as the "graveyard of human rights".
  - o Vladimir Putin has also claimed the successes of his renewed "Great Power", including:

- The Russian mediation to block the bombing of Syria (when the US military was already deployed to strike);
  - The Russian stance in favor of Iran's role during the Syrian negotiations and the failure of the "Geneva 2" rounds proved Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's remarks on the "hypocrisy" of talks without the Iranians;
  - The Snowden case, whereby the Datagate scandal's whistleblower has been granted asylum for a year on Russian soil to spare him from persecution in the United States (where treason and espionage are handed the capital punishment). Putin has underlined at the same time how this act of clemency is not one of weakness as he went about to harshen the laws against homosexuals and has acted heavy handed against the Pussy Riots and Greenpeace activists.
- With regard to Putin's imperialist dream, we should also note:
- The choice of Sochi as host of the Winter Olympics in a locality close to the Caucasus and on the Eastern shores of the Black Sea is there to remind Russia's success against Chechen independentism (Second Chechen War), whose place has been taken by Islamic extremism lead by Emir Doku Umarov and his war on the Olympics that resulted in two terrorist attacks in Volgograd prior to the games that caused 36 deaths;
  - President Putin thus aims at rebuilding the Soviet-era sphere of influence with the following goals and methods:
    - the goals are the safeguard of the strategic areas on the Black Sea, with Crimea and the naval base in Sevastopol in the forefront, in the Caucasus menaced by terrorism and in the so-called Stan Countries (the former Soviet republics who are trying to manage their energy resources without external interferences and who look to China as a privileged trade partner);
    - with regard to the "methods", Russia has put in place a series of alliances with the above mentioned countries spanning from security deals, to the fight on terrorism, to military cooperation (joint military exercises and so forth). These agreements should, at least in Russia's intentions, pave the way for an increased commercial collaboration (and specifically with regard to energy resources);
- The above mentioned alliances, who often date back to the post-Sovietic period, have taken the following form:
- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), between Russia, China and the Stan Countries (with the exception of Uzbekistan);

- The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) involving Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan;
- The Eurasian Union, launched by Kazakh President Nazarbayev in 1994 and initially comprising Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Similar to the EU, it will commence operations in 2015 and aims at re-uniting all former Soviet countries. It's first step will be the Customs Union, that received a new push following Ukraine's decision to suspend its negotiations to join the European Union in November 2013. This has lead several countries interested in the Eurasian Union (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine) to take the following steps:
  - Armenia, Tajikistan and Kirghizistan will join the new union starting off from the Customs Union;
  - Georgia will wait for Ukraine's next steps with regard to energy supplies, the issues of Ukraine's Russian speaking population and Russia's trade policies.

### **The Russian Orthodox Church and Russia's foreign policy**

On a last note, it is important to underline the role played by the Russian Orthodox Church, whose main role should be to help the cohabitation of different people, religions and cultures. To this effect, the Russian Orthodox Church has created in 1998 an Inter-religious Council of the Russian Federation and a similar organism for the CIS.

The Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church has played a key role in the dialogue among the Christian orthodox and is well aware that his aims have to take into account the process of integration going on in Europe, the muslim's search for international recognition and hence the geopolitics of the orthodox church necessarily have to go hand in hand with Putin's foreign policy.

Who are and how many are the Christian orthodox? According to the Patriarchate in Moscow, they are overall 230 million (70% of whom belong to the Russian church) and can be divided into three main groups:

- α. The traditional orthodox countries: Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine (with its own national orthodox church in contrast with the Patriarchate in Moscow);
- β. The orthodox minorities in the following countries: Albania, Czech Republic, Finland, Poland, Slovakia, in the Middle East and in the Americas;
- χ. the Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe;

It is important to underline how the recent persecutions of the Christian Orthodox in the Middle East have also brought upon the support and solidarity of the Vatican and of Pope Francis, who recently stated:

- There is no Middle East without the Christians;
- The muslims have the obligation to respect the Christians of the East in the same way the West respects the muslims;

## A NEW COLD WAR?

Can we consider the policies of Vladimir Putin as a new Cold War? The term was used to define the confrontation between the two super-powers that won World War II, the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR), following the untying of the "great alliance" against Nazism. This was a struggle between two ideologies, capitalism and communism, a race for armaments to strengthen the opposing blocks (East vs West), while conflicts were fought on the outskirts of each block because both super-powers could not engage in a direct war because of their nuclear weapons stocks.

### The menace to Russian national interests

The menace involves the following sectors:

the sovereignty of the State over the entire Russian territory;

the management of energy resources (oil and gas);

the oligarchs;

media and the *intelligenzia* as propaganda tools against the country's rulers;

lastly, on the strategic level, the interference of foreign powers on former soviet territories and Putin's dream of rebuilding the Tzarist empire.

To this effect, here are some considerations:

- a.** The recovery of the State's sovereignty over the territory of the Russian Federation.

We are talking about 17 million square kilometers with a population of a mere 145 million people; Russians are a multi-ethnic people with widespread independentist aspirations based on social, ethnic and religious grounds. The Caucasus is an example of an area where independence claims have been taken over by Islamic extremism. The Emir of the Caucasus, Doku Umarov, leads the struggle in what had been labeled as the "War of the Winter Olympics", waged to punish the Kremlin for imposing the Olympic games in a high risk environment. The conflict in the Caucasus is a true war, killing over 700 people per year, and one which President Vladimir Putin is trying to conceal, reducing the spreading of news from the area.

- b.** The management of energy resources.

Overall, by the end of Putin's third mandate whose term will expire in 2016, the Russian oligarchs will have been deprived of their control over Russia's resources; the "dissidents" have either all fled in exile or been jailed. The recent liberation of Mikhail Khodorkovskij, the billionaire who decided to compete with Putin in the struggle for power, could come as a surprise. He was detained in 2003 for tax fraud and freed in December 2013, eight

months before the end of his prison term. He is currently getting back in shape in Berlin after a decade in Russian detention.

The entire energy sector and the supply to European countries is exposed to the competition and interference from several external actors:

- the United States point their finger against Europe's excessive dependence on Russian supplies and propose to shift the demand to "shale gas", regardless of its setbacks (pollution of water basins and so forth).
- Ukraine, the country owning and hosting the pipelines to Europe, has bargained its influence with cheaper oil and gas supplies. The Ukrainians also host the Russian fleet on the Black Sea at the Sevastopol naval base. For these reasons, Moscow has decided to promote two alternative gas pipelines to circumvent Ukraine: the North-Stream and South-Stream pipelines to which the West has responded by building yet another gas duct, the Nabucco.

### **C. The strategic clashes between the United States and Russia**

The issue of George W. Bush's missile space shield on former Soviet-satellites such as Poland and the Czech Republic lead to a high degree of tensions with Moscow. Officially to defend Europe from Iran's intercontinental missiles, the project pushed Russia to menace the deployment of "Iskandar" ballistic warheads in Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave in Poland. Moscow did not go ahead with its plans, also because the new US President Barack Obama gave up on the space shield project in favor of the deployment in the Mediterranean of warships equipped with the Aegis missile interception system.

Another moment of tension between Americans and Russians has been the August 2008 conflict in Georgia, when the Georgians tried to take over the autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, at the time controlled by Russian peacekeeping forces. The attack took place during the opening hours of the Beijing Olympics and prompted a reaction of the Russian Armed Forces deployed in the Caucasus. It should come as no surprise that Vladimir Putin, who was then hosted by the Chinese, immediately left the games to lead the military operations from his army's HQ.

The answer to the questions: are we facing a new Cold War?

The definition of Cold War implies:

- two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, who have clashed on the ideological level (capitalism vs communism), lead an arms race, including nuclear weapons;

- the creation of a bipolar world based on two opposing blocks, East vs West, who never entered a direct conflict, but rather fought proxy wars on their outskirts.

These two conditions do not apply in today's globalization. Economy, for one, has been de-nationalized and is not under the strict control of individual nation states anymore. Political parties based on the ideological contraposition of capitalism and communism have lost their function; they have been replaced by movements with common goals, from human rights, to freedom of expression and so forth.

With the end of the Soviet Union, the bipolar world has come to an end. It was not replaced by a unipolar globe, but by a globalized one. If the free market rules almost everywhere, the winners of the Cold War, the U.S., now have to face Vladimir Putin's imperial dreams. The Russian Federation is seeking to extend its control over its own territory and, where possible, to influence the former Soviet countries.

On a global level, the Russians are also playing along with the so called BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and with other emerging countries (Mexico, Nigeria, Vietnam): they will take their chances to expand their market, defend their home-ground and chase out external interference in what could resemble Cold War tactics. We have seen that in the recent past with the immediate and forceful reactions against the space shield and in Georgia; we are witnessing it again in Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin has tried to improve his tarnished image by pardoning the oligarch Khodorkovskij, the Pussy Riot and the Greenpeace activists that attacked a Gazprom platform in the Arctic. The one year political asylum granted to the US whistleblower Edward Snowden is another example of an aggressive PR campaign.

In the end, we might not be facing a new Cold War, but definitely some of the policies and actions undertaken by the Russian presidency remind us of old times.