Navigating the Legacy of Westphalia: The European Union's Role in Managing Russian-Ukrainian Relations

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Abstract

This article explores how the principles established in the Treaty of Westphalia continue to shape contemporary geopolitics, particularly in the context of the EU's efforts to maintain stability in its eastern neighbours. Focusing on the volatile relationship between Russia and Ukraine in the 1998-2021 period, this article aims at analysing the complex dynamics between the Westphalian concept of international order, the EU and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, shedding light on the complexities of contemporary European geopolitics. Ensuing from the research goal is the threefold research focus: 1/ Assessment of the influence of the Westphalian principles on modern European geopolitics; 2/ Assessment of EU efforts and policies to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between Russia and Ukraine; 3/ Identification of challenges and opportunities faced by the EU in its aspirations to promote peace, stability and democracy in the region.

The study puts forth the hypothesis that while the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty continues to influence international relations, the supranational model of the EU offers a unique approach to managing conflicts and promoting cooperation between European nations. By early 2022, the EU, through its diplomatic initiatives, legal mechanisms and integration efforts, is said to play a central role in mediating Russian-Ukrainian tensions and promoting the principles of peace and democracy in Eastern Europe. Methodologically, the study builds upon a comparative approach to analyse the historical context, political frameworks and diplomatic commitments related to the role of the EU in Russian-Ukrainian relations.

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Introduction

The 1648 Treaty of Westphalia is often considered the foundation of the modern state-centric international system. Its core principles, including state sovereignty, non-intervention and the recognition of territorial boundaries, have lasting implications for European politics and beyond. Their impact on contemporary European geopolitics is profound, even as it unfolds in the context of globalization, regional integration, and changing power dynamics. In this regard, contemporary globalization challenges state-centric structures of governance and promotes the potential emergence of a post-Westphalian world order in which the Westphalian regime of state sovereignty and autonomy undergoes a significant change (Bellamy et al., 2004; 18). The European Union (EU) itself can be interpreted as Europe's return to the Westphalian international system – created then now spread around the world, criticized and exemplified for most of the modern era – this time as a regional rather than a national power, as a new entity in a now global version of the Westphalian system (Kissinger, 2022: 92).

Many countries continue to argue that the principles of the international Westphalian society should be preserved. These principles continue to shape contemporary geopolitics, particularly in the context of the EU's efforts to maintain stability in its eastern neighbours. Added to this is the view of proponents of a post-Westphalian world order, who argue that democratic states will not only not fight each other, but will also reduce the likelihood of conflict within their own borders. Therefore, in their view, the more democratic states exist, the more stable peace there will be (Bellamy et al., 2004: 32).

Today, one increasingly looks at this global version of the Westphalian system and the basic principles it proclaims, especially following 2014, when for the first time in recent European history, state borders were forcibly changed. The return to power politics was further reinforced by Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. All this cast doubt on the ability of the international community to ensure compliance with these basic principles, and in particular the EU's stated ambition to become a global player with strategic security responsibility. In this regard, the relevant questions one might ask are: "How does the EU, as a unique supranational entity deviating from Westphalian notions of sovereignty, deal with this situation, navigating through the bequeathed legacy of Westphalia?"; and "Is the EU succeeding in offering a unique approach to managing conflicts (specifically such as the one between Russia and Ukraine) by promoting cooperation between European nations?"

All this predetermines the topicality of the present study, related to the complex interaction between the Westphalian concept of the international order, the EU and

the ongoing tension between Russia and Ukraine. Focusing on the volatile relationship between Russia and Ukraine in the 1998-2021 period, this article aims to provide an analysis of the complex dynamics between the Westphalian concept of international order, the EU and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, shedding light on the complexities of contemporary European geopolitics. The formulated study goal thus leads to the following research tasks: 1/ Assessment of the influence of the Westphalian principles on modern European geopolitics; 2/ Assessment of EU efforts and policies to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between Russia and Ukraine; and 3/ Identifying the challenges and opportunities for the EU to promote peace, stability and democracy in the region.

The hypothesis that the present research advances is that while the Westphalian concept of state sovereignty continues to influence international relations, the supranational model of the EU offers a unique approach to managing conflicts and promoting cooperation between European nations. By early 2022, the EU, through its diplomatic initiatives, legal mechanisms and integration efforts, is said to play a central role in mediating Russian-Ukrainian tensions and promoting the principles of peace and democracy in Eastern Europe. To prove his hypothesis, the author uses a comparative approach to analyse the historical context, political frameworks and diplomatic commitments related to the role of the EU in Russian-Ukrainian relations.

The Peace of Westphalia and its enduring influence on the international system

The impetus for the Peace of Westphalia was decades of bloody, highly destructive warfare, as it was for the League of Nations and the United Nations (Timberman, 2015). The Peace of Westphalia was a series of peace treaties signed between May and October 1648 in the Westphalian cities of Osnabrück and Münster that ended the Thirty Years' War. The end of the war was not achieved by a single treaty, but instead by a group of treaties collectively called the Peace of Westphalia. These treaties were the Peace of Munster (between the Republic of the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Spain), the Treaty of Munster (between the Holy Roman Emperor and France and their respective allies), and the Treaty of Osnabrück (between the Holy Roman Empire and Sweden and their respective allies) (*Lumen Learning*, 2017). However, each of the three treaties included what we might today call "confidence-building measures" that would discourage interstate aggression (Timberman, 2015). These treaties had a profound impact on the architecture of international relations and the international order as a whole (*TutorChase*, n.d.).

Along with ending open warfare between the belligerents, the Peace of Westphalia established several important principles in international relations (*Lumen Learning*, 2017: 2198-2200), which can be briefly outlined as follows:

- *State supremacy* – this means that each state becomes the supreme authority within its defined territorial boundaries and no external entity could impose dominance or dictate the internal functioning of a sovereign state;

- *Equality of states* – taking into account that states are not economically equal, as well as that they are different in terms of territory, this principle lays the foundations of the idea that every state is equal in the terms of international law;

- *Non-intervention* – defined as a cornerstone of the Westphalian model, this principle strictly prohibits states from interfering in the internal affairs of other states;

- *Territorial integrity* – the consequences of this principle were enormous – the territory of a sovereign state could no longer be annexed by aggressive means and the inviolability of state borders became sacrosanct (Ibid.).

As a generalization to the principles outlined above encapsulated in the Westphalian concept, what the Peace of Westphalia bequeaths to descendants is the precedent for peace achieved by diplomatic congress (*Lumen Learning*, 2017). The Westphalian order imposed formal channels of communication between states, leading to the institutionalization of diplomacy (Ibid.). In addition, a new system of political order emerged in Central Europe, later called the Westphalian Sovereignty, based on the concept of co-existing sovereign states (*Lumen Learning*, 2017). Sovereignty is internally and externally directed. Each country is free to choose its own way of governing and this choice is entitled to respect and non-interference from other countries (Ginsburg, 2010). In turn, this gave birth to the state-centric model, where states became the dominant players with primary international legal personality, relegating other actors to the margins of global politics (*TutorChase*, n.d.). And as states became the primary actors in the international system, the international order was to be based on their consent (Ginsburg, 2010). Of no little importance is the emphasis on interstate aggression, which had to be contained through a balance of power (*Lumen Learning*, 2017). As a result of the above, it can be argued that the Peace of Westphalia laid the foundations of the modern European state. It helped to give rise to international law, which is based on numerous international principles and laws that regulate international relations between states in order to control the worsening situation and prevent the use of force. It emphasized the principle of international balance and made it a necessity, and so this principle was to create a balance between states and would prevent the use of the politics of violence and force and domination in international relations. Since these principles formed the basis of the international political, economic, and legal system for the next three centuries (Ginsburg, 2010), a reasonable question one might ask is, "How have the Westphalian principles influenced the behaviour of nation states in the modern era?"

In the modern era, the Westphalian principles continue to exert a significant influence on the behaviour of nation states, albeit in a nuanced and evolving way. As European influence spread around the world, these Westphalian principles, especially the concept of sovereign states, became central to international law and the prevailing world order

(*Lumen Learning*, 2017). The principle of state sovereignty established by the Treaty of Westphalia remains a cornerstone of the modern international system. This principle is reflected in the UN Charter, which upholds the sovereign equality of states and prohibits the use of force or interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Nation states assert their sovereignty over their territory, population and government by resisting outside interference in their internal affairs.

As for the principle of non-interference, as a fundamental aspect of state sovereignty, its application in the modern era is subject to debate and interpretation. States often invoke non-intervention to resist external pressure or criticism, particularly on issues related to human rights, democracy and governance. It is generally accepted that Westphalian sovereignty has been diminished by the post-war UN system and related human rights instruments, which purport to make the domestic treatment of citizens a matter of international concern. For the first time, the international system as a whole identified human rights as a central goal of global institutions. Led by the US, liberal internationalism involved opening states to external control (Ginsburg, 2010). However, attempts by Euro-Anglo-Americans to impose democracy, rule of law and human rights on societies with other cultures, traditions and power structures did not fare so well in the Middle East, Afghanistan, etc. (Timberman, 2015). Furthermore, supporting the claim that the concept of non-intervention cannot be defined as absolute is the emergence of doctrines such as the *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P), which allows intervention in cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Territorial integrity and the inviolability of state borders, as part of the Westphalian principles, also remain relevant in the modern era. Today, any attempt to change existing borders or annex territory is met with strong condemnation from the international community. Territorial disputes, such as those in Crimea or the South China Sea, not only raise concerns, but are also a clear indicator of violations of the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Since the end of the Cold War, reports of the death of the Westphalian concept of international order have increased in frequency and intensity (Ginsburg, 2010). The collapse of the bipolar system at the end of the twentieth century changed interstate relations (relations in the system of international relations). Many definitions are offered for the new configuration of these relations: a unilateral system led by the US; multipole system; post-bipolar system. The lack of a unified and specific name for the current system of international relations after the Cold War is one of the signs that this system has not yet been formed and is often referred to as a new global order. However, the possibility of forming a system of interstate relations in the conditions of transformation of the Westphalian system itself remains in question (Lebedeva and Marchetti, 2016). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, power was seen as unipolar with the US in absolute control, although the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the rise of Japan, the EU, the Middle East, China and a resurgent Russia began to recreate a multipolar political environment (Lumen Learning, 2017). This shift from single or dual

hegemonies to a multilateral power structure presents the Westphalian principles with new challenges, requiring states to navigate the delicate balance between protecting sovereignty and promoting international cooperation (*TutorChase*, n.d.).

Today, the international system is at an unknown stage (Zreik, 2021), and it is often argued that the erosion of Westphalian sovereignty is increasing with the phenomenon of global political transformations, commonly known as globalization (Ginsburg, 2010).

The sweeping tide of globalization often blurs the rigid boundaries defined by Westphalian sovereignty. Economic interdependencies, international agreements, and transnational bodies began to influence domestic policies, thereby blurring the clear lines of non-intervention (*TutorChase*, n.d.). This is perhaps because, according to Lebedeva and Marchetti (2016), the Westphalian system allowed another country that became part of the system to be organized very differently, and this was its "sovereign right". According to them, this kind of tolerance of the Westphalian system towards the internal organization of its structural elements allowed many different states to unite. This has implied wider communities of shared or common interests in which states cooperate to advance those areas that benefit all involved. These communities already exist. Examples that can be cited are the UN and its agencies, as well as other regional groups, such as the EU, OSCE, ASEAN, NAFTA, NATO, and others. They are organized around specific categories of interests: economic, financial, security, justice, development and other more specialized ones. The tension between ceded sovereignty and organizations that exercise it on behalf of all is most evident in the EU (Timberman, 2015), which is the paradigm of regional organizations that have transformed nominally sovereign nations into members of regional blocs (Ginsburg, 2010).

In conclusion, we should point out that, in general, Westphalian sovereignty, although born in the 17th century, remains extremely relevant. It offers a foundational lens through which to view the interactions of states even as the world grapples with challenges that test the very essence of its principles (*TutorChase*, n.d.). The Westphalian system is not just a set of principles, not just a combination of international treaties, a set of states, regimes, institutions, etc. The Westphalian system is above all a system that organizes all these elements and creates some kind of wholeness (Lebedeva, and Marchetti, 2016). The Westphalian principles continue to shape the behaviour of nation-states in the modern era, influencing concepts of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention, and international law. While these principles provide the foundation of interstate relations, they also require adaptation and reinterpretation in response to the evolving challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

The European Union: a unique supranational entity

Any debate on sovereignty is incomplete without considering the EU (Kayaoglu, 2012). In the beginning, the EU was designed as the new governance structure that gradually destroyed the state concept under the 1648 Peace of Westphalia. Its emergence redefined the new model of sovereignty in relation to the Westphalian model (Ulum, 2022), turning

the regional organization into a unique model of shared sovereignty at the world level. In this type of order, referred to as *sui generis*, power relations between national and supranational levels are in constant development. The Treaty of Lisbon introduced changes to clarify and more effectively distribute responsibilities between Member States and the EU (Bifulco and Nato, 2020).

Although defined as sui generis, the EU has often been compared to a confederation or federation, as in most policy areas policy-making powers belong partly to the Union and partly to its Member States. This is what makes the EU look like a state, but at the same time it is very different from a state (CES, n.d.). Although the EU shares commonalities with confederations and federations, it is ultimately distinct and, more importantly, it cannot be defined as a nation-state. On the one hand, the difference is functional, as the Union is simply not responsible for a number of policy sectors over which the states have come to exercise ultimate control. On the other hand, structural features distinguish the Union even from federal states (Menon and Weatherill, 2007). In federal states, foreign relations are the responsibility of the national government. Thus, the federal government has delegated authority on behalf of the government regarding international relations to satisfy the interests of the local and federal governments. Therefore, although the federal system adopts a system that gives more power to the local or regional government, it retains the external relations that are retained by the federal government (Ulum, 2022). This clearly shows that although the phenomenon of progressive transfer of competences to the Union is evident in a diachronic perspective, the union process is still far from adopting the forms of federal organization. Unlike other successful federal processes, the EU remains a *sui generis* experience (Bifulco and Nato, 2020).

Today, the EU is defined as a supranational organization that is the only one of its kind in the world. The supranational organization is different because member states delegate authority in certain areas to the higher organization (CES, n.d.). In this regard, the variety of competences granted by the Member States to the EU, as well as the different role played by the EU institutions in the decision-making process (for the realization and implementation of these competences), reflect the dual nature of the EU – supranational and intergovernmental (Zaharia and Pozneacova, 2020).

Regarding the supranational characteristics of the EU, first of all it should be mentioned that the transfer of some competences from the Member States to the EU is defined in some areas as exclusive competence and in others as shared competence (Savaşan, 2009). In this sense, the evolution of the EU goes beyond the traditional sovereignty of Westphalia, and the analysis shows that at the core of the supranational character of the EU are its institutions, such as the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament (EP) and the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU). These institutions have powers that go beyond those of traditional nation states, including the power to propose legislation, make regulations and settle disputes. For example, decisions are often taken collectively by EU institutions and member states, but supranational bodies

such as the EC and EP play an important role in shaping EU policies and legislation, sometimes overriding national preferences. EU decision-making processes thus involve the complex interplay of supranational, intergovernmental and national elements. But of all the EU institutions, in fact the CJEU is the "most unequivocally supranational" institution (Sweney in Savaşan, 2009: 98). The role of the CJEU is to ensure that EU law is interpreted and applied equally in all EU countries, and that Member States and EU institutions respect Union law, which predetermines its impartiality with regard to national interests.

In addition, the supranational characteristics of the EU include the legal framework of the EU, characterized by the supremacy of EU law over national laws. This also represents a fundamental departure from Westphalian sovereignty. The primacy principle established by the ECJ in the landmark case *Flaminio Costa vs. E.N.E.L.*, argues that EU law takes precedence over conflicting national laws, thereby limiting the sovereignty of member states (see Judgement of the Court, 1964).

The EU has exclusive/supranational authority in strictly limited areas. Sovereignty is shared with the EU institutions, which have executive powers for most economic areas (Zaharia and Pozneacova, 2020). It should be emphasized here that domestic policies were gradually redirected towards supranational power. The EU, which comes as a regulator of common policy between states, increases sovereignty between member states. And this is one of the phenomena that the globalizing world inevitably redefines state sovereignty (Ulum, 2022). In this regard, the competences of the EU extend beyond the traditional areas of interstate relations, covering a wide range of policy areas such as trade, competition, agriculture, environmental protection and consumer rights. In these areas, the EU exercises regulatory powers and adopts common policies that bind member states, often superseding national laws and regulations.

Regional integration should be added to the EU's supranational characteristics. The EU's regional integration project goes beyond traditional Westphalian notions of sovereignty by promoting deeper economic, political and social integration between member states. Through mechanisms such as the single market, the euro and the Schengen area, the EU promotes greater economic cooperation, mobility and interdependence, blurring the lines between national and supranational governance.

Last but not least, beyond its institutional framework, the EU exercises normative power by promoting democratic values, human rights and the rule of law within its borders and beyond. The conditions attached to EU membership and accession processes incentivize countries seeking to adopt reforms that are in line with EU norms and standards, thus extending the EU's influence beyond its immediate borders.

Regarding the intergovernmental characteristics of the EU, one of the examples cited by Savaşan (2009) is the European Council. According to him, it is accepted as an intergovernmental institution and defender of national interests, since its members – the heads of state and/or government of the member states, negotiate as representatives of their own countries, which distinguishes it from the EC. As the author also points out,

the European Council ultimately deals with important issues that can lead to significant results in terms of the direction of EU policy, such as treaty reform, the accession of new countries, the principles of the CFSP, the formulation of a common defence policy, the necessary conditions for adopting the single currency, etc. (Savaşan, 2009). On the other hand, the Council of the EU (the Council) represents the member states' governments. It is where national ministers and experts from each EU country meet to negotiate and adopt EU laws, conclude international agreements on behalf of the EU, develop the EU's foreign and security policy, and coordinate member states' policies in specific fields (European Council and Council of the EU, n.d.).

Over time, the EU has become more supranational and less intergovernmental (CES, n.d.). This is dictated by the fact that in this globalized world the state cannot survive alone. Each country needs cooperation in accordance with the interests of other countries for peacekeeping and economic reasons. This confirms that states cannot avoid cooperation and friendly relations in establishing global peace (Ulum, 2022). In the process of EU development, most policy areas have come under European jurisdiction, and policy making in most areas comes from a combination of EU jurisdiction and the national jurisdiction of member states (CES, n.d.). The EU thus provides a degree of welcome reinforcement to nation states struggling to meet the efficiency challenge by 'domesticating' them within a complex multilateral institutional framework that not only prevents them from exporting evils to their neighbours but it offers them an arena for both finding common solutions and common problems and increasing their capacity to meet the expectations of their citizens (Menon and Weatherill, 2007). In addition, it is necessary to conclude that the development of the EU as a supranational organization represents a profound transformation of the traditional Westphalian notions of sovereignty. By consolidating sovereignty, creating common institutions and promoting regional integration and normative values, the EU transcends the boundaries of traditional state-centric geopolitics, shaping a new paradigm of governance and cooperation in Europe. All of the above outlines the EU's role in promoting cooperation and integration between its members, but also provides the basis for analysing its role as a key player in shaping European geopolitics, contributing to a more stable and united Europe. In this regard, it can be seen that the EU plays a central and multifaceted role in shaping European geopolitics, exerting influence through its unique combination of economic, political and normative power. In short, the role of the EU as a key actor in European geopolitics can be presented in the following main aspects:

   - Economic power: The EU is the largest single market in the world, with a combined GDP exceeding that of the US and China. Its economic influence extends beyond its borders, shaping global trade, investment flows and regulatory standards. The EU's economic influence allows it to negotiate trade agreements, impose sanctions and use economic incentives to promote its interests and values in the international arena.

   - Policy integration: The EU's policy integration process, characterized by the pooling of sovereignty between member states, is transforming European geopolitics by promoting

peace, stability and cooperation between former rivals. The creation of common institutions, such as the EP and the EC, facilitated decision making and policy coordination between member states, thus reducing the risk of interstate conflicts and strengthening Europe's collective voice on the global stage.

- Normative power: It is expressed in the EU's ability to promote democratic values, human rights and the rule of law both within its borders and beyond. The EU's enlargement policy, which offers candidate countries the prospect of EU membership in return for democratic reforms and adherence to EU standards, serves as a powerful stimulus for political and economic transformation in neighbouring regions. The EU also promotes its values through diplomatic channels, development aid and support for civil society organizations.

- Security and defence: Although the EU's security and defence role has traditionally lagged behind its economic and political integration, recent efforts to strengthen European defence cooperation signal a growing ambition to play a greater role in European geopolitics. Initiatives such as the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) aim to enhance Europe's strategic autonomy and collective defence capabilities, reducing dependence on external actors such as NATO.

- Regional and global diplomacy: The EU is an active participant in regional and global diplomacy, participating in multilateral fora such as the UN, G7 and G20 to promote its interests and values. Through diplomatic initiatives, mediation efforts and crisis management operations, the EU seeks to advance peace, stability and conflict resolution in regions affected by instability, such as the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Overall, the EU's role as a key actor in shaping European geopolitics derives from its economic strength, political integration, normative power, security ambitions and diplomatic engagement. By using these assets, the EU aims to uphold its principles, promote its interests and contribute to a more stable, prosperous and peaceful Europe and world.

EU-Russia-Ukraine relations: The Bermuda Triangle of the Old Continent

In the 1990s, the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe and the concept of a single market provided new dimensions to the "four freedoms" (movement of goods, services, people and money), emphasizing Europe's economic competencies (Keinis, 2017). This trend and the then-followed European policy of "open door" turned the EU into a centre of attraction for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The EU offered the newly independent states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union a new instrument – Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). They were to replace the 1989 agreement governing trade with the Soviet Union. In 1994, Russia and Ukraine were the first countries to sign PCAs with the EU (Zagorski, 2003). But in the process of the creation and enlargement of the EU, its regional policy and the positive image of modern Europe defined as "prosperous, so secure and so free" was tragically

marked by the dynamics in Russian-Ukrainian relations. Namely, the relationships in the EU-Russia-Ukraine triangle demonstrated that globalization as a process has not only economic, but also cultural, military and political influence. This changed the historical concept of the nation state (Keinis, 2017).

Examining the EU's diplomatic efforts and policies towards Russia and Ukraine, we can point out that they are characterized by their versatility and complexity. Moreover, they reflect the dual objectives of the EU – on the one hand, to maintain stability in its eastern neighbours and, on the other hand, to uphold its principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

As Zagorski (2003) points out, the concluded PCAs offered neither future membership nor any association with the EU. The final option to consider, pending significant progress in the transition, was to develop free trade with the EU. However, taking into account the growing differentiation between the former Soviet bloc countries and the different goals that the EU pursued in relation to them, the Union gradually tried to differentiate its policies towards these countries. This is materialized in the form of common strategies of the CFSP in relation to some of them, two of which are the key documents that set the stage for the strategic relations between the EU, Russia and Ukraine – the Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia[2] and the Common Strategy of the European Union on Ukraine[3].

It is clear from the two common strategies that in matters related to cooperation with Ukraine and Russia, the EU focuses more on building economic, social and legal security. This is dictated by the fact that in these areas the Union is best developed and best functioning. Although security issues were touched upon, here the EU was still laconic in its aspirations for the two countries, because by the year of the adoption of the two common strategies, the Union was still searching for its identity as a global player in the field of security and defence.

The language in both common strategies is similar, yet the EU's attitude towards Russia and Ukraine is observed differently, given the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the two countries. This also determined the different approach of the EU towards the two countries.

Relations between the EU and Russia

Russia is an important international actor both regionally and internationally. It is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a current member of the Human Rights Council and the EU's largest neighbour (EPP, 2021). In Kissinger's (2022) words, everything about Russia – its absolutism, its scale, its globally-reaching ambitions and insecurities – stands as a constant challenge to the European conception of an international order built on balance and restraint. Given this, in the 1990s and early 2000s the EU embarked on a path of engagement and dialogue with Russia, believing that it could become

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[2]   For the full text see Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council (1999).
[3]   For the full text see Council of the European Union (2000).

a democratic state respecting the rule of law, human rights and its international obligations (EPP, 2021). The declared objectives of EU policy towards Russia included: promoting political and economic stability; contributing to strengthening the rule of law through the development of effective institutions as well as effective legislative, executive and judicial systems; the introduction of supporting measures for a better investment climate in Russia; strengthening legislative harmonization with the EU; and cooperation in combating "soft" security threats in the above areas (Zagorski, 2003). And in this regard, the EU followed the policy of engagement with Russia, recognizing its strategic importance as a neighbour and a major actor in European geopolitics. This, in turn, has been accompanied by the creation of dialogue channels, such as the EU-Russia Summits and the EU-Russia Strategic Partnership, to address common interests and concerns, including energy cooperation, trade relations and regional security. Under the PCA, a complex structure for cooperation and integration was created – far more extensive than the EU originally envisioned because Moscow wanted to be more ambitious (Bildt, 2015).

Russia's eventual membership in the EU was not on the agenda because Moscow clearly pursued a policy of non-integration into the EU to preserve freedom of action (Zagorski, 2003). Moscow wanted to be treated as an "equal", which in effect meant that it did not want to join Europe by accepting the EU's principles of behaviour, but that it wanted to be an equal partner with whom Europe had to negotiate these principles of first place. At the time, Russia had not yet articulated this clearly, but the attitude was increasingly present in Russia's vision of the world and began to complicate its relationship with Western organizations (Bildt, 2015).

To describe this trend, Schmidt-Felzmann (2014) points out that, in general, EU policy-making towards Russia has always been characterized by the push and pull factors of various national (i.e. domestic) level incentives and constraints EU. The author emphasizes two points that are important to understand the way in which the common policy of the EU towards Russia has developed. First, different domestic priorities and power differentials between member states following the EU's eastward enlargement have led to internal conflicts over the most appropriate course of action to take with regard to Russia. Second, large member states, notably Germany, France and the United Kingdom, have often been most influential in EU–Russia relations, but they do not share the same history with Russia as member states from Central, Eastern and Northern Europe.

From a geopolitical point of view, the EU and Russia are the two main political powers in Europe. They strive to maintain relations of normal cooperation, as this positively affects not only the stability and security of the entire continent, but also contributes to the economic development of each of the countries. Peace between Europe and Russia is beneficial for all, while a fight between them will lead to the defeat of both (Dzhandun, 2019). Therefore, the "strategic partnership" approach corresponds to Russia's self-perception as a regional power that does not want to be fully integrated into the EU's

multilateral framework, but at the same time should develop closer cooperation with it. The EU, for its part, seems to have understood the limits of the impact it can have on Russian development and is generally fine with the idea of a cooperative partnership that helps make cooperation in specific areas more operational and more focused (Zagorski, 2003.). For example, the first draft of the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003 singled out three Eastern countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus) for enhanced political and economic cooperation, but the second draft of the ESS omits references to any specific country, presumably so as not to violate what Russia still considers its sphere of influence given the EU's ambition for a strategic partnership with Russia (Andersson et al., 2011).

Since the EU's eastward enlargement, EU-Russia relations have continued largely as "business as usual", due in part to the fact that problematic issues related to the new member states were addressed in the EU-Russia joint statement of 27 April 2004 (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2014). But Russia was not destined to find itself in confrontation with the EU (Bildt, 2015). An important factor in the emergence of the conflict between Russia and Europe became two landmark events: the first was the "five-day war" between Georgia and Russia in August 2008, and the second was the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014. These two events turned out to be a turning point in the transition of Russian-European relations "from warming to cooling" (Dzhandun, 2019). And here it should be noted that while European policies remained more or less the same for years and even decades, Russia's view of the EU fluctuated, repeatedly changed and eventually crystallized into an aggressive and confrontational position ((Bildt, 2015).

With regard to Georgia, the main objective was to "punish" it for its active attempts to join NATO, as well as to prevent further eastward expansion of the pact. Moscow's actions in the course of the Ukrainian crisis are part of its general strategy for striking a counterattack against the EU and NATO, following a policy of "containment" in relation to Russia (Dzhandun, 2019). As Kissinger (2022) puts it, Russia sees itself above all as a blessed outpost of civilization whose security can only be guaranteed by extending its absolute will over its neighbours. This finds expression in the conclusions that Bildt (2015) formulates regarding the "five-day war" between Georgia and Russia in 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014, in which the author emphasizes that Russia has a lower threshold than most previously believed to use military force in its immediate neighbours. In addition, Russia began to create a doctrine of the right to military intervention under the pretext of protecting Russian citizens or other interests. Finally, the author highlights the fact that Russia has demonstrated a clear disregard for international law by moving quickly to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations. At the same time, the EU used normative conditionality to encourage Russia to respect international norms and values. However, the effectiveness of this strategy is limited, especially in the face of Russia's assertive foreign policy and domestic authoritarianism.

In the Westphalian system of order, the European statesman perceives security and balance of power as one, temporarily accepting his own limitations. In Russia's historical

experience, limitations of power are interpreted as a catastrophe (Kissinger, 2022). And in this regard, the goals of Putin's authoritarian regime are clear and they are stated in the EPP position paper adopted by the Political Assembly on June 28-29, 2021. The paper states that with its foreign policy, Russia aims to: be recognized as a great power; to consolidate the regime's influence in post-Soviet countries and beyond; to place the sovereignty of powerful states above the right of sovereignty of other states; to build a Eurasian Economic Union as a counter to the EU; to undermine the model of liberal democracy and present Russia as morally superior and the West as morally inferior; to use the concept of "protecting ethnic Russians abroad" as a justification for hybrid warfare and disinformation; to use the falsification of history as a tool of influence; to use frozen conflict zones as a strategic element to influence the affected state and prevent the exercise of sovereign choice (e.g. by moving closer to the EU and NATO); and to use energy resources as a tool for manipulation and blackmail (EPP, 2021).

An important emphasis of the EPP position paper (2021) is that these elements of Russian foreign policy contradict both the Westphalian concept of international order and Russia's own obligation to respect the basic norms, principles and commitments of the United Nations, the Security Organization and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CoE); and they contradict EU values and principles and leave little room for cooperation.

Makiaveli (2016) tells us that every disease is treated while it is still curable. Tuberculosis is easy to treat at first, but difficult to recognize, and after a while, as long as it was not known and treated, it is easy to recognize, but difficult to treat. We observe the same in state affairs. These insights of the Italian philosopher, historian and diplomat can be applied to the situation in relations between the EU and Russia. As Schmidt-Felzmann points out, after the turn of the century it became increasingly apparent that cooperation with Russia did not preclude the possibility of renewed military aggression, at least not from the Russian perspective. Nevertheless, EU decision-makers assumed that decision-makers in Russia would share their understanding of the "new European order" and take the EU's commitment to peace and security at face value. They also assumed that Russian decision-makers would act in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation with their neighbours simply because it was the 'right' and 'logical' thing to do – from the EU's point of view. It is concluded that the approach to Russia that guides the engagement of the EU and various member states with Russia, as well as the political and practical difficulties associated with the nature of the EU as a special kind of international actor, helps to explained why and how EU-Russia relations hit rock bottom in a way that many EU politicians did not foresee. Russia's actions towards Ukraine have unmasked the Putin regime and revealed its true face. This allowed the EU to understand the Kremlin's policies and, above all, to refute those who were still considered to be able to continue with "business as usual" (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2014).

Relations between the EU and Ukraine

Like the Russian case, the EU's common strategy speaks of a "strategic partnership" with Ukraine. Apparently seeking to please the Kiev partner, the EU's Common Strategy on Ukraine of 1999 set out a number of broadly defined "strategic objectives", such as: achieving a stable, open and pluralistic democracy in Ukraine governed by the rule of law and supporting a stable functioning market economy (Zagorski, 2003).

From the perspective of Central Europe, it was obvious that Ukraine was not the main focus of the EU countries, despite the fact that Ukraine would be one of the most important future neighbours of the EU. The secondary importance of Ukraine was due, among other things, to the low level of knowledge and interest in Ukrainian issues in the EU countries. The result of this is the misunderstanding the situation, the development, as well as the mentality of the people in Ukraine. Ultimately, this led to the fact that European countries were not sufficiently capable of responding to Ukraine's needs (Europeum, 2002).

Ukraine sought to keep open the possibility of eventual EU membership, but the member states, and therefore the EU itself, were not at all responsive to their membership aspirations (Zagorski, 2003). This made it necessary to take an initiative on the practical transfer of the transformation experience from other post-communist countries of Central Europe. For example, the Czech Republic considers that:

1. Ukraine should be among the EU's key foreign policy priorities given the country's geopolitical, military-strategic importance, as well as the future potential for cooperation (economic and political).

2. Ukraine plays a crucial role as a stabilizing factor in the region.

3. The ultimate goal (starting point) of any strategy towards Ukraine is to cultivate the Ukrainian economic situation (Europeum, 2002).

Although Ukraine's path to EU membership remained uncertain, the EU continued to offer support and encouragement for further reforms. The Union has gradually become a key supporter of Ukraine's reform efforts and democratization process since the country's independence. The EU developed comprehensive policies towards Ukraine which were aimed at supporting its democratic transformation, promoting economic development and strengthening cooperation between the state and the Union. Key elements of EU policies towards Ukraine include the Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreement.

The Eastern Partnership has always been an important part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and relations with the Eastern neighbours are an element of the EU's strategic vision in the field of regional security (Rabohchiyska, 2023). As an EU initiative, the Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009 and aims to deepen political association and economic integration between the EU and six Eastern European countries, including Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Eastern Partnership seeks to promote political reforms, economic development and people-to-people contacts in the region. The main goals of the Eastern Partnership regarding Ukraine include promoting democratic governance, promoting the rule of

law, supporting economic reforms and sustainable development, enhancing energy security, and facilitating visa liberalization and mobility for Ukrainian citizens.

The other key element of EU policies towards Ukraine is the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which by its legal nature is a comprehensive treaty aimed at establishing a closer political association and economic integration between the EU and Ukraine. Negotiations on the association agreement began in 2007 and ended in 2012, ending with the signing of the agreement in 2014. The Association Agreement includes provisions for political dialogue and cooperation, economic integration and sectoral cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, justice and security. The agreement also includes commitments to carry out political reforms, strengthen democratic institutions and respect human rights and the rule of law. The Association Agreement is being implemented gradually, with provisions on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Ukraine being applied provisionally from 2014. The agreement also includes provisions for visa liberalization for Ukrainian citizens traveling to the EU, subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions related to reforms and cooperation in the field of migration and border management.

Overall, the EU's policies towards Ukraine, including the Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreement, reflect a commitment to supporting Ukraine's democratic transformation, promoting economic development and strengthening EU-Ukraine cooperation. These policies provide a framework for deepening political association, economic integration and people-to-people contacts between the EU and Ukraine, while promoting stability and prosperity in the region.

Relations between Russia and Ukraine

The EU's engagement with Ukraine within the Eastern Partnership association process has met strong opposition from Russia. The result of this, as well as Russia's premeditated annexation of Crimea (February 22 – March 16, 2014), was the induced rift in EU-Russia relations. But it was also a catalyst for greater unity among the then twenty-eight EU members. All agreed that the annexation was completely unacceptable and that the EU should respond with measures that went beyond the usual diplomatic statements of "deep concern" (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2014). In this regard, it should be noted that Ukraine, which is the largest country in Eastern Europe, has a special strategic importance for Russia, as it represents the only "buffer zone" and a kind of strategic shelter of its southwestern regions from the EU and NATO (Dzhandun, 2019). Therefore, strained Russian-Ukrainian relations have become the contemporary challenge for the EU and the world, the prerequisites for which are rooted in the complex interplay of historical, geopolitical and cultural factors that have shaped their interaction for centuries.

Historically, Ukraine has been a region at the crossroads of European, Russian, and Eurasian civilizations, with a rich and complex history of statehood, cultural identity, and geopolitical competition. Throughout history, Ukraine has been part of various empires and states, including Kyivan Rus, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian

Empire, the Soviet Union, and finally an independent nation state after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But the Soviet era left a profound impact on relations between Russia and Ukraine, with the legacy of Soviet rule continuing to influence political, social and economic dynamics in both countries, shaping perceptions of identity, language and historical memory.

Territorial disputes, especially over Crimea and eastern Ukraine, are the other source of tension between Russia and Ukraine. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, following the Euromaidan protests and the ouster of Ukraine's pro-Russian president, escalated the conflict and sparked international condemnation. The ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, fuelled by separatist movements and Russian military intervention, has further strained relations between the two countries. It was the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine that were the two key flashpoints that significantly escalated tensions between Russia and Ukraine, changing regional geopolitics and drawing international condemnation[4]. Despite diplomatic efforts to resolve these conflicts, tensions persist, underscoring the complexity and volatility of the situation in Eastern Europe. In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the EU implemented a series of sanctions targeting individuals, entities and sectors of the Russian economy. These measures aim to deter further aggression and demonstrate the EU's solidarity with Ukraine and other Eastern European partners.

Energy dependence, especially on the supply of Russian natural gas, is also a contentious issue in the relations between Russia and Ukraine. Disputes over gas prices, transit charges and energy security have led to periodic gas crises and supply disruptions, exacerbating tensions between the two countries. Efforts to diversify energy sources and reduce dependence on Russian gas remain key challenges for Ukraine's energy security and sovereignty.

Last but not least, the geopolitical competition between Russia and the West, especially with the EU and NATO[5], contributed to the tension in Russia-Ukraine relations. Ukraine's aspirations for closer integration with the EU and NATO, expressed in the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the pursuit of NATO membership, have been met with resistance and hostility from Moscow, which sees these developments as a threat to its sphere of influence.

In conclusion, the strained relationship between Russia and Ukraine is shaped by a complex interplay of historical legacies, geopolitical competition, territorial disputes, energy dependence, and cultural differences. Resolving these tensions and building constructive relations between the two countries requires addressing the root causes of

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[4] Regarding the impact of the war in Ukraine on the world order and on the fate of Russia see Babanov (2023).

[5] Russia has several more important geostrategic projects to which it attaches primary importance and for which it is ready to oppose the West, including the G7 countries, the entire EU, NATO member states, high-tech eastern neighbour Japan and even the US. For more information see Ivanov and Kozarski (2022).

the conflict, promoting dialogue, and fostering mutual understanding and cooperation. In this regard, the EU's approach to Russia and Ukraine is characterized by a combination of engagement, conditionality, sanctions and support for democratic reforms. While the EU seeks to maintain constructive relations with Russia, it also stands firm in its support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while actively supporting its efforts for democratic transformation and resolution of the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Summarizing all that has been said so far and in order to represent the full complexity of the relationship in the EU-Russia-Ukraine triangle, we will use the metaphor as a stylistic device to say that the dynamics within the EU-Russia-Ukraine relationship have a striking resemblance to the complex geological phenomena, observed in the Bermuda Triangle, where the cold Labrador and warm Gulf Streams meet. This gives rise to unpredictable eddies and recurring fog formations exhibiting significant force vectors that impede marine navigation and impede movement.

An assessment of the EU's efforts to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between Russia and Ukraine

The EU has played a significant role as a mediator in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, using its diplomatic channels and political influence to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between the parties involved. Through initiatives such as the Normandy format and the Trilateral Contact Group, the EU has sought to bring together representatives from Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany to discuss ceasefire agreements, prisoner exchanges and other confidence-building measures.

The EU has consistently supported diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine by peaceful means. The EU endorsed the Minsk agreements, negotiated under the auspices of the OSCE, as a framework for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The EU provided political support, financial assistance and technical expertise to support the implementation of the Minsk agreements and promote stability in the region.

In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggression in eastern Ukraine, the EU imposed a series of targeted sanctions on Russian individuals, entities and sectors of the economy. These sanctions are intended to put diplomatic pressure on Russia to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and to encourage constructive participation in the peace process. Although the sanctions were controversial and did not lead to a resolution of the conflict, they demonstrate the EU's commitment to respect international law and promote peace and stability in the region.

Last but not least, the EU has provided strong political and financial support to Ukraine, both in response to the conflict in eastern Ukraine and as part of wider efforts to support Ukraine's democratic reforms and European integration aspirations. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, signed in 2014, represents a milestone in EU-Ukraine relations, promoting closer political association and economic integration between the two countries.

Overall, the EU's diplomatic efforts to mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between Russia and Ukraine have been characterized by a combination of diplomatic engagement, support for peace processes, sanctions and assistance to Ukraine. Although the EU's efforts did not lead to a resolution of the conflict, they expose the EU's commitment to promoting peace, stability and democratic values in Eastern Europe and supporting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The exploration of potential ways to strengthen the EU's engagement in the resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict shows that a comprehensive and multilateral approach is needed that combines diplomatic efforts, political commitment, economic incentives and support for conflict resolution mechanisms.

Conclusion

In summary, the evolving dynamics of the international order in the context of the EU's engagement with Russia and Ukraine are characterized by geopolitical changes, regional instability, normative competition, economic interdependence and multilateral diplomacy. Navigating these dynamics requires a nuanced and multifaceted approach that balances security interests, democratic values, economic considerations, and diplomatic commitment to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in Eastern Europe and beyond.

But ways to strengthen the EU's engagement in resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are also paved with the challenges the EU faces in balancing its commitment to Westphalian principles of sovereignty with its goals of promoting stability and democracy. The conclusions in this direction can be outlined as follows:

The Westphalian concept of state sovereignty remains a fundamental principle shaping international relations, but its application is nuanced in the context of European integration and supranational governance. But it should also be noted that the EU's commitment to Westphalian principles of sovereignty is often at odds with its goal of deepening integration and supranational governance. Member states jealously guard their sovereignty and are wary of ceding too much power to EU institutions. Balancing the need for collective decision-making and coordination with respect for national sovereignty is a delicate task, particularly in areas such as foreign policy, defence and immigration.

Externally, the EU faces challenges from actors who seek to undermine the Westphalian principles of sovereignty and rule-based international order. Authoritarian regimes, revisionist forces and non-state actors can take advantage of divisions within the EU or engage in aggressive behaviour that threatens the sovereignty and stability of neighbouring states. Responding effectively to external challenges while upholding the Westphalian principles requires a coordinated and principled approach. In this regard, the EU serves as a key mediator and stakeholder in the management of Russian-Ukrainian relations, using its diplomatic channels, economic incentives and regulatory authority to promote dialogue and conflict resolution.

The EU's promotion of stability and democracy in its neighbours may sometimes conflict with the Westphalian principles of non-intervention and respect for sovereignty. Balancing the promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law with respect for national sovereignty and cultural diversity requires careful navigation of normative dilemmas. Finding the right balance between intervention and non-intervention, between promoting values and respecting diversity is an ongoing challenge for the EU. As it became clear, the EU faces challenges such as diverging national interests and external pressures, yet the EU has demonstrated resilience in its actions to achieve its goals of peace, stability and democracy in Eastern Europe.

The EU's continued engagement, combined with multilateral cooperation and diplomatic initiatives, offers a path to sustainable peace and reconciliation in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, while strengthening the principles of international law and cooperation enshrined in the Treaty of Westphalia. To this end, the EU should maintain pressure on Russia through targeted sanctions, while offering incentives for constructive engagement and compliance with international norms. Sanctions should be calibrated to encourage Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while avoiding measures that could harm European business or further escalate tensions.

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