

**Russian Foreign Policy towards Ukraine:  
a Case of New Imperialism?**

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Both the terms “empire” and “imperialism” are highly controversial, and their meanings have changed over time. Defining a policy as imperialist always had a political character, either praising the power of a country, or criticizing it for the exploitation of the dominated state. In the era of the Helsinki principles<sup>1</sup> – which, inter alia, proclaim the sovereign equality of states, the inviolability of their frontiers, non-intervention in their internal affairs, and the right of nations to determine their destiny – any perceived incarnations of imperialism are viewed negatively.

The government of the Russian Federation (RF) is frequently accused of new imperialism with respect to the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries. US Vice president Dick Cheney accused Russia of using energy as “tools of intimidation and blackmail.”<sup>2</sup> The former head of Special Security Service of Poland Zbigniew Siemiatkowski said, “What Russia does in the Eastern Europe is a new economic imperialism. Yesterday tanks, today oil and gas!”<sup>3</sup> Russia has been warned that “it would be impossible to build another empire within the borders of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the usage of the term “new imperialism” in political practice, it has been fashionable in the mass media to describe Russian foreign policy as “neo-imperialist.” This term is used not only by journalists, but also by experts on Russian foreign policy with backgrounds in the disciplines of political science and international relations. There have also been a number of publications on the new Russian imperialism.<sup>5</sup>

Nationalist political groups in Russia still openly dream of creating a Eurasian empire, as, for example, Eduard Limonov, the leader of the National Bolshevik Party, who proclaims, “Yes, we do want an empire!”<sup>6</sup> Philosopher-Eurasia scholar, Alexander Dugin, says: “The rejection of imperialistic functions is equal to the death of the Russian nation as a historic

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<sup>1</sup> The Helsinki principles are taken from the Helsinki Final Act, which was signed by 35 states at the CSCE meeting on 1 August 1975. These helped to reduce Cold War tensions and have since then become the guiding principles of international relations. The full text of the declaration is at: [www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mcs/1975/08/4044_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> US Vice President's Remarks at the 2006 Vilnius Conference, [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060504-1.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060504-1.html).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Polen macht Front gegen russische Ostseepipeline [Poland is forming a front against Russian Baltic Pipeline]. *Financial Times Deutschland*, 3 August 2005, [www.ftd.de/politik/europa/16953.html](http://www.ftd.de/politik/europa/16953.html).

<sup>4</sup> NATO Parliamentary Assembly President Pierre Lellouche, cited in: NATO official slams Lavrov statement. *Interfax*, 7 June 2006, [www.interfax.ru/e/B/politics/28.html?id\\_issue=11531593](http://www.interfax.ru/e/B/politics/28.html?id_issue=11531593).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example: Afanasyev, Yuri. 1994. A new Russian Imperialism. *Perspective*, 4 (3), [www.bu.edu/iscip/vol4/Afanasyev.html](http://www.bu.edu/iscip/vol4/Afanasyev.html); Simes, Dmitri K. 1994. The Return of Russian History. *Foreign Affairs*, January-February, 67-82; Cohen, Ariel. 1996. *Russian Imperialism: Development and Crisis*. Westport. Con.: Praeger; Bugajski, Janusz. 2004. *Cold Peace: Russia's New Imperialism*. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<sup>6</sup> Limonov cited in: Ignatow, Assen. 1996. Das russische geschichtsphilosophische Denken: Grundmotive und aktuelle Resonanz [Russian historic philosophic thinking: the main motives and the present resonance]. *BIOst, Köln* (5).

reality.”<sup>7</sup> Dmitri Trenin also notes that imperialist features have not disappeared in Russian politics. According to him, the Russian post-Communist political elites have subconsciously wanted to return to the imperialist and autocratic pre-Communist past. The imperial eagle, with three separate crowns, has been chosen as a symbol of the new Russia, rather than the “democratic” eagle, used by the temporary government in 1917, from which all symbols of autocracy (crowns, sceptre, and shield) had been removed.<sup>8</sup> However, the official representatives of the RF deny accusations of conducting an imperialist foreign policy towards the FSU. In the words of Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov: “The theory of a revival of imperialism in Russia is fanned by several politicians in the West and is a myth.”<sup>9</sup>

This paper takes on the challenge of considering what “new” Russian “imperialism” is, and asks whether this term could reasonably be applied when analysing Russian foreign policy, using the example of Russian-Ukrainian relations.<sup>10</sup> I look first of all at some of the definitions of imperialism, pointing out its different dimensions – economic, security, “ideational” and geopolitical. In the sections which follow, I move on to consider each of these four dimensions of imperialism with respect to Russian-Ukrainian relations, drawing parallels between theoretical definitions, Russian imperial policy of the past and the “new” Russian imperialism. In all sections Russian-Ukrainian relations are analysed both at bilateral and at multilateral levels, and the role of the “West”<sup>11</sup> in the framework of Russian-Ukrainian relations is also summarized. Finally, a conclusion is drawn about whether “imperialism” in the context of Russian foreign policy is an applicable term within the academic sphere.

### **Imperialism: Theoretical Explanations**

The word “empire” derives from the Latin word “imperium,” denoting a “legitimate authority or dominion” over a certain territory.<sup>12</sup> Michael Doyle defined empire as “a system of interaction between two political entities, one of which, the dominant metropole, exerts

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<sup>7</sup> Dugin, A. G. 1998. *Rossiia nemisleva bez imperii* [Russia is impossible without an empire], *Hrestomatiya Vneshnyaya politika i bezopasnost sovremennoy Rossii* Tom I, 96-117, here p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Trenin, Dmitri. 2004. Identity and Integration: Russia and the West in the XXI century. *Pro et Contra*, 8 (3): 9-22, here p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Imperialism isn't reviving in Russia. *Interfax, David Johnson's Russia List* (9016), 14 January 2005.

<sup>10</sup> The analysis does not include the period after the parliamentary elections in Ukraine in March 2006. Because the period of forming a new government was prolonged, and Victor Yanukovich was named as the new prime minister only in August 2006, it is too early at this point to give assessments of the developments in Russian-Ukrainian relations.

<sup>11</sup> In this work the term “the West” is employed to denote the EU and NATO states as an international community representing the values and the principles of liberal democracy. Although the “West” is not a unified actor – not only is it represented by the EU and the US, but the EU is also split into the “old” and “new” Europe – nevertheless, in the case of Ukraine using the generalized term “the West,” is justified since the positions of the EU and the US are similar and are usually the reverse of Russia’s stance.

<sup>12</sup> Lieven, Dominic. 2000. *Empire. The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*. London: John Murray Ltd. See also on the differences between “empire” and “imperialism”: Motyl, Alexander J. 2001. *Imperial ends: the decay, collapse, and revival of empires*. New York: Columbia University Press.

political control over the internal and external policy – the effective sovereignty – of the other, the subordinate periphery.”<sup>13</sup> The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines imperialism as “a state policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas.”<sup>14</sup>

In the classical sense,<sup>15</sup> imperialism refers to the historic period, which began approximately in the 1880s and was characterized by the gradual colonization of Asia, Africa and Latin America by the European powers, the US and Japan. It was the period both of direct territorial acquisition as well as expansion of economic interests. The Russian Empire was different from the traditional empires in that gradually a single state was formed. This is why there are many debates on how to classify the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

Although classic imperialism ended with the waves of decolonisation in the 1960s, this does not mean that the great powers stopped exerting influence on their former colonies, or that the practice of direct intervention has ceased. The studies on neo-imperialism have come to the conclusion that a state can dominate other territories, without giving them the status of a colony. After the end of the Cold War, post-colonization and globalization theories also dealt with the influence of great powers over the weaker states. The policies of spreading influence and different economic, security and political approaches into other countries are also frequently viewed through the prism of “new” imperialism.<sup>17</sup>

There have been different explanations of imperialism, which emphasized either an *economic, a security, an “ideational” or a geopolitical* dimension as the primary cause of it.<sup>18</sup> In a nutshell, the proponents of economic arguments for imperialism, from the liberal economist John Hobson<sup>19</sup> to Marxist theoreticians, as Vladimir Lenin,<sup>20</sup> interpreted it as driven primarily by economic needs and ambitions: to gain access to human and natural

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<sup>13</sup> Doyle, Michael W. 1986. *Empires*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> Imperialism. 2006. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042213](http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042213).

<sup>15</sup> For more information on imperialism theories see: Heinrich, Michael. 2003. Imperialismstheorie. In Schieder, Siegfried and Spindler, Manuela, editors, *Theorien der Internationalen Beziehungen*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 279-307.

<sup>16</sup> For more information see, for example: Lieven, Dominic. 2000. *Empire. The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*. London: John Murray Ltd. Motyl, Alexander J. 2001. *Imperial ends: the decay, collapse, and revival of empires*. New York: Columbia University Press. Arbatov, Alexey. 2004. *Evropeyskaya Rossiya: eres, utopiya, proekt?* Moscow: Probel-2000. Trenin, Dmitri. 2002. *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*: 293-295.

<sup>18</sup> This classification is offered by the Encyclopaedia Britannica. For a more detailed overview of different other classifications see, for example, Deutsch, Karl. 1974. Theories of Imperialism and Neocolonialism. In Rosen, Steven and Kurth, James, editors, *Testing Theories of Economic Imperialism*. 2nd ed. Toronto, London: Lexington Books, 15-35. Gilpin, Robert. 1981. *War and Change in World Politics*: Cambridge University Press; Etherington, Norman. 1984. *Theories of Imperialism. War, Conquest and Capital*. London and Canberra: Croom Helm.

<sup>19</sup> Hobson, J. A. 1965. *Imperialism: A Study* (1902). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

<sup>20</sup> Lenin V. I. 1939. *Imperialism. The highest stage of capitalism*. New York: International.

resources, to open up new markets and new investment opportunities in foreign countries, to sustain industrialism or to solve economic instabilities, thus, to realize different economic interests. Additionally, Lenin also noted that imperialism was fostered as a result of the competition between a relatively small number of giants, who were able to control large sectors of national and international economies. Moreover, the rivalry was intensified because of the uneven development of different nations.

A second group of arguments, for example those of Machiavelli and Francis Bacon as well as Hitler related imperialism to the nature of human beings and human groups, such as the state. For them, imperialism is a part of the natural struggle for survival. This argument could be also connected to the security argument:<sup>21</sup> nations try to obtain bases, strategic materials, buffer states, “natural” frontiers, and control of communication lines for reasons of security, or to prevent other states from obtaining them, and to be able to resist them in the conditions of international competition. Expansion is seen as the best defense. These arguments are connected to the Realist school of International Relations,<sup>22</sup> which presents “security dilemma” as the cause of international conflict. Thirdly, throughout centuries different rulers gave moral or “ideational” arguments as excuses for their imperialist policies. Imperialism was presented as a way to liberate nations from tyrannical rule, and it aimed to bring them a superior way of life. Finally, imperialism could be also explained in terms of geopolitics, which measure the state’s international strength by its size, by the territories it controls and by their location. The geopolitical argument for imperialism is that nations become imperialistic in the search for power and prestige.

Additionally, traditionally there have been three main views on imperialism – metrocentric theory (Hobson, Lenin), which focused on dispositional features of imperial states, pericentric theory (John Gallagher, Ronald Robinson) that emphasized the conditions in peripheral states, and territories systemic theory (Benjamin Cohen, A.J.P. Taylor) that highlighted competition between the great powers in a competitive international system.<sup>23</sup>

Although each of these approaches alone has drawbacks and inconsistencies, together they complement each other and create a basis for a foreign policy analysis, especially in the light of the fact that imperialism has always been based on a combination of different motives and preconditions. For this reason, the paper considers those factors, underlined by each of the

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<sup>21</sup> For more information see: Jack Snyder. 1991. *Myths of Empire. Domestic Politics and International Ambition*, Cornell University Press. Ithaca and London.

<sup>22</sup> See the overview in: Burchill, Scott. 2001. Realism and Neo-Realism. In al, Ders et, editor, *Theories of International Relations*. London, 70-102. Grieco, Joseph. 1997. Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics. In Doyle, Michael W. and Ikenberry, G. John, editors, *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*. Boulder: Westview, 163-77.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Doyle, Michael W. 1986. *Empires*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 22-30.

approaches. It concentrates on Russia's goals and interests, but also pays attention to Ukraine's perceptions and responses. Russian-Ukrainian relations are considered from the economic, security, "ideational" and geopolitical point of view. Finally, throughout the paper, Ukraine is presented as a bone of contention between Russia and the West, to emphasize the importance of the international environment.

### **Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine: Is it economic imperialism?**

According to the definitions introduced in the previous section, Russian imperialism of the past could be partially explained in economic terms, because expansion provided it with access to natural and human resources, fertile soils, control over the main points and routes of trade, and was a means of securing its financial interests.

Like in the past, the RF continues to have strong economic interests in Ukraine. The primary importance of Ukraine, a country with the second largest territory in Europe, located on the Black Sea between the "East" and the "West," is its strategically vital economic function as a trade link between the FSU and the West and most especially as a vital export route for Russian energy resources to the EU. In 2005, Russia's share of European natural gas imports was about 50% (equal to 26% of total gas consumption in the EU) and its share in European oil imports was almost 33% (equal to 25% of total oil consumption in the EU).<sup>24</sup> Over 80% of Russia's gas to the EU is transported via Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> Ukrainian pipeline routes account for 75% of EU oil imports from Russia and Central Asia.<sup>26</sup> Besides Russia's primary economic interests in controlling the energy infrastructures and transit routes in Ukraine, it also aims to secure investment opportunities for its companies and to develop trade relations with Ukraine. Both Russia's bilateral and multilateral strategies towards realizing these interests are usually viewed with apprehension and characterized as imperialism. The next paragraphs explain the reasons that account for this perception.

Starting with bilateral relations, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has hoped to become completely independent from Russia, but the old legacies of Ukraine's dependency on Russia, the post-Soviet crisis, lack of Western investment, the distorted trade with other FSU republics have brought it back into the Russian sphere of influence and have made Russia an important and indispensable partner. As Paul D'Anieri argues, after 1993,

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jean-Claude Schwartz, cited in: European Commission is against energy imports from Russia. *Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections: News & Trends: Europe*, 10 (23), 2005, [www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/nte54972.htm](http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/nte54972.htm); see also: David Ferguson. EU's Russia energy dependency. *EU business*, 5 October 2005, [www.eubusiness.com/Energy/russia.2005-10-05](http://www.eubusiness.com/Energy/russia.2005-10-05).

<sup>25</sup> EU seeks new supply routes in wake of Russia-Ukraine gas row. *Alexander's Gas & Oil Connections: News & Trends: Europe*, 11(3), 2006, [www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/nte60632.htm](http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/nte60632.htm).

<sup>26</sup> Engdahl, William. 2005. Ukraine: Oil Politics and a Mockery of Democracy. *Asia Times*, [www.atimes.com/atimes/Central\\_Asia/GA20Ag01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/GA20Ag01.html).

“the policy of cutting ties with Russia” was “reversed as the price of economic independence has proved too high.”<sup>27</sup>

Ukraine’s dependency on Russia remains relevant. Russia is Ukraine’s largest single foreign trade partner, accounting for approximately 18% of Ukraine’s exports and for 40% of its imports,<sup>28</sup> while, by comparison, Ukraine ranks sixth in Russia’s overall exports and eighth in its overall imports.<sup>29</sup> Ukraine benefits from its geographical and economic closeness to the Russian market. The products, which Ukraine exports to Russia in the areas of machinery, metallurgy, agriculture and food-processing, are generally technologically inferior and serve as spare parts for Russia’s production capacities. They would not be competitive in the EU or the US markets.<sup>30</sup> Ukraine’s dependence on Russia is especially significant in the energy sphere, where Russia supplies it with 86.6% of its total oil imports as well as 51% of its total gas imports, the rest coming from Turkmenistan through Russia.<sup>31</sup> Ukraine is also dependent on Russia for nuclear energy: “Not only is Russia the sole source of Ukraine's nuclear fuel, but it is also the recipient of Ukraine's spent fuel, and the provider of 85% of equipment used at Ukrainian power plants.”<sup>32</sup> Additionally, Russia is Ukraine’s single biggest creditor in the Paris Club. So despite Ukraine’s post-Communist period of political independence, it remains tied to Russia in the economic sense.

This dependency of Ukraine gives Russian companies important economic leverage, enabling them to take over Ukraine’s strategic enterprises. For example, by 1999, by the time Ukraine’s energy debts to Russia had accumulated, the economic crisis had made Ukraine especially receptive to Russian energy companies’ offers to take over Ukrainian enterprises in “debt-for-shares deals.” This policy continued later as well. In the course of six months in 2002, the six largest of the eight Ukrainian refineries had come under the control of Russian oil companies; by 2003, Russian companies did 90% of the refining.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> D’Aneri, cited in: Abdelal, Rawi. 2002. Interpreting Interdependence: National Security and the Energy Trade of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In Wallander, Celeste and Legvold, Robert, editors, *Swords and Sustenance. The Economics of Security in Belarus and Ukraine*. London: The MIT Press, 101-28.

<sup>28</sup> Ukraine’s trade balance with main partners (2004). DG Trade data, 18 May 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Data on foreign trade of the RF with its main partners is available at the official webpage of the State Statistical Committee at: [www.gks.ru](http://www.gks.ru).

<sup>30</sup> Astrov, Vasily, in collaboration with Zdenek Lukas and Josef. 2006. *The Ukrainian Economy between Russia and the enlarged EU: the consequences for trade and investment*. Vienna: WIIW, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ukraine Country Analysis Brief. 2006. *Energy Information Administration*, [www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Ukraine/pdf.pdf](http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Ukraine/pdf.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Supreme Rada Fuel and Energy Complex, Nuclear Policy and Safety Committee Chairman, Aleksandr Gudyma (10 February 2001), cited in: Country Overviews: Ukraine: Nuclear Overview. *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, [www.nti.org](http://www.nti.org). This data remains relevant. See, for example, report on Ukraine, published by World Nuclear Association in August 2005, [www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf46.htm](http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/inf46.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Balmaceda, Margarita. 2006 (forthcoming). Russian Business and Conflict and Co-operation in the New Eastern Europe: the Case of Russian Energy Business in Ukraine and Belarus. In Wenger, Andreas

The presence of Russian capital serves not only the interests of individual companies, but the Russian state as a whole. The state is strongly present in the Russian economy. As *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* wrote, in 2005 the state had control over the nine largest companies, including the energy sector, which account for 40% of the country's GDP.<sup>34</sup> President Putin's regular meetings with business representatives show that the state uses regulatory and legislative tools to affect the way the companies conduct their business.<sup>35</sup> In 1999, he published an abstract of his candidate of science dissertation, in which he argued that Russia's natural resource base would not only secure the country's economic development but would also serve as the guarantor of the country's strong international position.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Russia's foreign policy concept (2000) is based on the connection between Russia's economic and political interests: "Russia must be prepared to utilize all its available economic levers and resources for upholding its national interests."<sup>37</sup>

This is why, Russian economic presence is viewed with apprehension as a political instrument. For example, in May 2003, the US Ambassadors in Ukraine and Georgia expressed their concern over the increase of Gazprom's influence in these states.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the EU, whose own dependence on Russia's energy resources is growing, has concerns not only about Russia's influence on Ukraine, but also about Russia's abilities to exert pressure on its own member-states.

As a result, economic relations between Russia and Ukraine are strongly politicised. A good example in this context is the gas conflict between the two countries in winter 2005, when Russia decided to raise prices for its gas deliveries to Ukraine from \$50 to \$230 per 1,000 cubic metres.<sup>39</sup> Russia's decision was criticized for its political intent to "punish"

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Perovic, Jeronim and Orttung, Robert, editors, *Promoting Prosperity or Cultivating Conflict? The Role of Russian Business in Foreign and Security Policy*. Routledge/Curzon.

<sup>34</sup> Zahlreiche russische Spitzenunternehmen befinden sich in Staatshand. Deformierung der russischen Wirtschaft befürchtet [Many of the Russian leading enterprises are in the hands of the state]. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (172), 27 July 2005, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, a report: Putin to Renew Dialogue with Big Business. *RFE/RL Russian Political Weekly*, 4(18), 13 May 2004.

<sup>36</sup> Olcott, Martha Brill. 2004. *The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy. Vladimir Putin and the Geopolitics of Oil*. The James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University, 16-17.

<sup>37</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept of the RF. 2000, [www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm).

<sup>38</sup> Saprykin, Vladimir. 2004. Subjekt oder Objekt? Die Ukraine und der Gastransit in die EU [Subject or object? Ukraine and the gas transit in the EU]. *Osteuropa* (September-October): 250-62, here p. 256.

<sup>39</sup> In January 2006, after long uncompromising debates, Russia briefly cut off gas supplies to Ukraine when the latter refused to pay world market prices for its energy imports from Russia. Although the new gas agreement between Russia and Ukraine was finalized on 2 February 2006, all the discussions on the shady aspects of this deal and on its terms indicate that this dispute has not been definitively resolved. See, for example: Maksymiuk, Jan. 2006. Ukraine: Terms Of New Gas Deal Unclear. *RFE/RL*, February 3.



Ukraine for its Western-oriented political course after the “Orange Revolution.”<sup>40</sup> The Russian government was accused of using energy as a political instrument of pressure. Yulia Tymoshenko, one of the leaders of the “Orange Revolution” and the former prime minister of Ukraine, said:

The gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine has been a wake-up call for many in Western Europe and Washington, and attracted great attention to the use of energy as a post-Soviet neo-imperialist weapon.<sup>41</sup>

According to US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Russia acted as it did “with an obviously political motive,” putting political pressure on Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> The European Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, also decried “the use of energy resources as an instrument of political coercion.”<sup>43</sup> These accusations had their grounds. Already in May 2004, Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister of the RF, said that only “friends of Russia” could count on economic and political benefits such as low prices on energy, while the rest had to be prepared for relations based on market principles both in trade and in policy.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Russia’s decision to augment the price of its gas deliveries to pro-Western Ukraine had political motives.

On the other hand, in the past, Russia’s earlier cheap energy prices were also viewed negatively as attempts to “buy” Ukraine.<sup>45</sup> However, as soon as Russia decided to change its “bad” behavior, its policy was criticized even more strongly. Russia’s conflict with Ukraine became one of the negative determinants of Russian-US relations. Sergei Karaganov, chairman of the Russian Council for Defence and Foreign Policy, commented in an interview,

There were even more bad politics and corruption in the decades-long practice of selling natural gas to Ukraine at below-market prices...For the past few years we have been subsidizing the Ukrainian ruling class to the tune of more than \$4.5 billion a year – probably 30 times as much as what the United States provided to Kiev. So, is the transition to market prices, abandonment of paternalism, and the treatment of Ukraine as a completely sovereign state...anti-American?<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The “Orange Revolution” signifies the mass protests over the falsified results of the presidential elections in November-December 2004, which led to the formation of a new pro-Western government, led by President Yushchenko.

<sup>41</sup> Yulia Tymoshenko. 2006. Speech “Where is Ukraine going?” at the Chatham House, 2 February, [www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/meeting\\_transcripts/020206tymoshenko.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/meeting_transcripts/020206tymoshenko.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> 2006. Washington tries to put pressure on Russia. *WPS Russian Media Monitoring Agency*, 11 January.

<sup>43</sup> Charap, Samuel and Hecker, Johannes. 2006. Enough megaphone diplomacy. *International Herald Tribune*, May 12, [www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/11/opinion/edcharap.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/05/11/opinion/edcharap.php).

<sup>44</sup> Lavrov, cited in: Sokov, Nikolai. 2005. The Withdrawal of Russian Military Bases from Georgia: Not Solving Anything. *PONARS Policy Memo* (363), p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> One of the examples is presented at p. 10-11.

<sup>46</sup> Karaganov. 2006. Russia-US: back to peaceful co-existence? *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 24 March 2006, *David Johnson’s Russia List* (79), 3 April 2006.

Nikolai Sokov explains that “instead of trying to bully Ukraine into the Russian sphere of influence, Moscow apparently had given up on it.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, in the context, in which Russian-Ukrainian relations are so politicised, the economic aspects of Russian foreign policy are frequently neglected, and Russian motives are perceived one-sidedly as imperialism. The fact that these policies could, in the long run, also contribute to Ukraine’s further independence is seldom considered.

Because bilateral relations between the RF and Ukraine have been undermined, the same pattern of perception and interpretation of Russia’s policies is also relevant at multilateral level. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF has aspired to preserve the CIS states as an integrated region economically, culturally and in the area of security, where Russia would act as the only leader. For example, the Russian foreign policy concept considers the “development of regional and sub-regional integration as an important factor” and accentuates the importance of the CIS.<sup>48</sup> Anatoly Chubais, head of the Unified Energy System of Russia, even introduced the concept of a “liberal empire,” the formation of which would empower the RF to take on the role of leader in the CIS with the aims of promoting its interests and creating a basis for Russia’s participation in important economic areas in the region. This implies Russia’s economic expansion abroad and support for Russians and Russian culture beyond the country’s borders with, however, the precondition that such a policy would be built on liberal postulates.<sup>49</sup>

The Single Economic Space (SES) could be considered as one of the ways to lay a foundation for this liberal economic “empire.” In 2003, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Russia signed the SES Treaty. Its main purpose was the creation of a single regional market in the territories of the participating states. This included free movement of goods (and later of services, capital and labour), harmonization of legislation and creation of a customs and a currency union, co-ordination of accession efforts to the WTO and, in the long-term, co-ordination of external trade policy.<sup>50</sup> If co-operation within the framework of this treaty were successful, an economic organization or union, open to other interested states, would be formed. In the short-term the RF was experiencing more losses than gains from this “union.” For example, it cancelled the VAT tax for Ukraine to encourage its participation in this

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<sup>47</sup> Sokov, Nikolai. 2005. The Withdrawal of Russian Military Bases from Georgia: Not Solving Anything. *PONARS Policy Memo* (363), p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept of the RF. 2000, [www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Lavelle, Peter. 2003. Chubais-Illeberal Vision Thing. *Pravda, David Johnson's Russia List* (7349), 1 October.

<sup>50</sup> The SES Treaty is available at: [www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2003/09/52478.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2003/09/52478.shtml).

initiative, resulting in Russia losing \$800 million in tax revenue annually.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Russia's policy looked like an attempt "to buy" the loyalty of the participating states.

Ukraine from the start was interested only in a free trade zone with Russia and in cheap energy deliveries. Instead, it was offered the whole SES package. Euro-Atlantic integration is more auspicious for Mr. Yushchenko, and the SES is considered as an "intermediate station for Ukraine" on its way to Europe. The pro-Western groups interpret Ukraine's participation in the SES as undermining the country's independence. At the same time,

They beg – virtually on their knees – for Ukraine's entry into NATO and the EU, which assumes the obligatory transfer of many functions of a sovereign state to the ruling bodies of the structures named. This does not confuse nor worry them. Their stance is "Away from Moscow!"<sup>52</sup>

This indicates that Ukraine faces a choice of either closer economic relations with Russia or with the EU and Western states. Russian representatives criticize Ukraine's strategy of "be[ing] in the SES but not for long."<sup>53</sup> The EU at the same time promises "baneful consequences" for Ukraine if it joins the SES. For example, the EC commissioner Gunter Verhuegen, who is responsible for relations with EU neighbour-states, said:

In case SES becomes a type of customs union, this could be fraught with certain consequences that may influence the nature of relations between Ukraine and EU and will also affect Ukraine's entering the WTO...The process of Ukraine's integration into the EU could be slowed down or even stopped.<sup>54</sup>

The US also gave its reaction to Ukraine's signing the SES agreement, saying that if Ukraine had aspirations of joining the Euro-Atlantic community, it would have been in its interests "to take no steps that would complicate this integration."<sup>55</sup> Thus, Ukraine is a bone of contention between Russia and the West, and, according to the Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister on European Integration, Aleksandr Chaly, "in the short run the struggle between

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<sup>51</sup> Vladimir Putin cited in: EEP zhdet viborov v Ukraine [The SES is waiting for the elections in Ukraine]. *Korrespondent*, 29 August 2005, [www.korrespondent.net/display\\_print.php?arid=129322](http://www.korrespondent.net/display_print.php?arid=129322).

<sup>52</sup> Heorhiy Kriuchkov, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine Committee for National Security and Defence, cited in: Kriuchkov, Heorhiy. 2005. Searching for ways of rapprochement between Ukraine and Russia. *National Security and Defence*, 4 (64): 15-17.

<sup>53</sup> Victor Kuvaldin. 2005. Problems and Perspectives of the Ukrainian Choice. *National Security and Defence*, 4 (64), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> Gunter Verhuegen, cited in: National Investment Council. 2004. *Report on the Effects of the EU Enlargement on Russia's Economy*. Moscow, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Ambassador Herbst Press Remarks at the Conference on Freedom of Speech and Human Rights in Ukraine National Taras Shevchenko University, 2003, [kiev.usembassy.gov/files/030918\\_herbst-press-remarks\\_eng.htm](http://kiev.usembassy.gov/files/030918_herbst-press-remarks_eng.htm).

bigger powers for Ukraine's geopolitical and geo-economic orientation is expected to increase dramatically."<sup>56</sup>

To summarize, on the one hand, Russian economic policy towards Ukraine, both at bilateral and multilateral levels, could be explained from the point of view of "economic" imperialism. While Ukraine has been aspiring to independence from Russia, the latter has been focusing on extending its economic power and influence. The presence of Russian capital in Ukraine has not only economic but also political implications, because of the strong participation of the state in the Russian economy. As a result, Ukraine's political conduct is intertwined with Russia's policy of using its instruments of influence. This generates mistrust and apprehension not only on the side of Ukraine, but also on the side of the large, strong but energy-dependent EU. Finally, imperialism is created under the conditions of international competition, and this section has demonstrated that Ukraine has turned into a source of competition between Russia and the West. Closer co-operation between Ukraine and one of the actors precludes close relations with the other, as is in the case with the SES. In these conditions, any economic policies of Russia, no matter whether Ukraine wins or loses, could be interpreted as new imperialism, especially if they have a political sub-text of either bringing Ukraine back into its orbit or letting it go.

On the other hand, Russian foreign policy could be also explained from a different angle. Economic problems in Russian-Ukrainian relations, as Ukraine's dependency on Russia, especially in the sphere of energy, are legacies of the past. The post-Soviet "divorce" has not been completed and both countries still face the task of learning to treat each other as independent states rather than fraternal nations. For Russia it is difficult to leave behind the legacy of having control over Ukraine; Ukraine at the same time is still expecting "fraternal" prices and benefits from Russian economic services.

### **Security aspects of the new Russian imperialism**

The previous section has considered economic arguments in respect to Russian "new imperialism." Russian-Ukrainian relations could be also analysed from the point of view of security. Russian imperialism of the past is frequently presented as having been generated by the choice of either conquering expanding inimical nations or being conquered by them. Thus, expansionism was connected to the need for survival. In addition, through expansion, Russia acquired access to important military and strategic locations, for example, to mountains and to the sea.

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<sup>56</sup> Aleksandr Chaly, cited in: National Investment Council's Report, p. 62.

From the beginning of the post-Soviet phase, it has been important for Russia to maintain control over strategic military bases, materials and communication lines as well as “natural” frontiers. Alexey Arbatov notes that the widespread perception in Russia is that the CIS constituted external “cover,” which protected the “core” – Russia – from external threats and guaranteed its inviolability and security. This is why the presence of external actors in the “cover” area is perceived negatively – because it could endanger the stability of the system. As a result, it is essential to use all available tools to oppose external actors interested in dominating this sphere, who might create lures of a material, political or ideological nature.<sup>57</sup> In accordance with this logic, Russia has been trying to unite the CIS states within the framework of a political and military alliance – first within the Collective Security Treaty (1992) and later (since 2002) within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

However, Ukraine only agreed to have observer status in the CSTO, preferring integration with NATO instead. Any closer relations with Russia were interpreted as undermining Ukraine’s independence, while co-operation with NATO in Ukraine was perceived a priori as a guarantee of independence from Russia. According to Arkady Moshes, NATO was also interested to prevent Ukraine’s interest in security co-operation with Russia.<sup>58</sup> NATO’s policy could be best explained in Henry Kissinger’s words: “It is not that important whether Ukraine becomes a democratic state or not: what matters is that it is on our side.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, while Russia was trying to integrate the CIS space within the framework of a political-military alliance, Ukraine was strengthening its relations with NATO vis-à-vis Russia.

All discussions about the possibility of NATO’s further enlargement raise new questions for Russia about the motives for this move: “Russia needs a clear answer to the question of how it should regard NATO: as a potential front in an all-out war at some future date, or as a reliable ally if a war is fought somewhere else...”<sup>60</sup> Potential NATO enlargement not only involves regional policies in the FSU area, but also impacts Russian-Western relations, raising the question of whether Russia and the West are real partners, competitors or even enemies.

Secondly, Ukraine’s policy directed at membership in NATO could contribute to the withdrawal of the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF), located in Ukraine’s city of Sevastopol. As

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Arbatov, Alexey. 2004. *Evropeyskaya Rossiya: eres, utopiya, proekt?* [European Russia: is this nonsense, utopy or a project?] Moscow: Probel-2000.

<sup>58</sup> Arkadiy Moshes. 2003. Ukraine in Tomorrow's Europe. *Fiiia Report* (4), Helsinki, UPI.

<sup>59</sup> Kissinger, cited in: Verne, Daniel. 2004. L'avenir de la Russie se joue aussi à Kiev. *Le Monde*, 30 November, [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr).

<sup>60</sup> Dmitry Danilov. 2005. Russia and European Security. In Lynch, Dov, editor, *What Russia Sees*. Paris: EU Institute for Security Studies, p. 85.

was agreed in the Russian-Ukrainian “big” Friendship Treaty in 1997 and the BSF accords, the Russian BSF may stay in Ukraine until 2017. The presence of the Russian BSF has been interpreted as undermining Ukraine’s independence, and, this is why, officialdom in Ukraine is interested in Russia withdrawing its BSF after 2017. Having the support of NATO would make it easier for Ukraine to induce Russia to leave. Russia’s Sea Doctrine states, however, that among the tasks of the RF in the Black and Azov Seas are: improving the legal basis for the BSF functioning on the territory of Ukraine and maintaining the city of Sevastopol as its main base as well as enhancing Russia’s potential and rights in the Black and Azov Seas.<sup>61</sup> According to the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov, the loss of its main base in Sevastopol would be “like a death”<sup>62</sup> for the Russian BSF. Thus, to leave Ukraine would be perceived as a blow to Russian national interests vis-à-vis NATO.

Thirdly, Russia could experience losses in the military-industrial sector, where both countries have a long history of co-operation. President Putin has warned that should Ukraine join the Alliance, Russia would have to close down certain productions in Ukraine since Russia’s relations with NATO are at a level, which does not allow it to have certain sensitive technologies and productions in a NATO country (potentially in Ukraine). This would require additional resources from the RF to bring these technologies, sciences and production facilities back to its territory.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, while some representatives of the Ukrainian military-industrial sector complain that the military industry has become “a puppet with strings connected to the Kremlin,”<sup>64</sup> the majority of them are apprehensive that the US will have too much political influence in the country, and that in the long-term, US subsidies and assistance would cost too much both politically and economically.<sup>65</sup> Thus, Ukraine faces a choice between closer military-industrial co-operation with NATO states or with Russia, which is “a direct reflection of the broader geopolitical situation with its constant interplay between the East and the West.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The Sea Doctrine of the RF. 2000, [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru).

<sup>62</sup> Ivanov, cited in: Geopolitichesky sdvig. Chto neset Ukraine chlenstvo v NATO [Geopolitical Shift: what does Ukraine’s membership in NATO mean for the country]. *RIA Novosti*, 7 June 2006, [www.rian.ru/review/20061001/index\\_24.html](http://www.rian.ru/review/20061001/index_24.html).

<sup>63</sup> Vstuplenie Ukraini v NATO otrazitsya na rossiysko-ukrainskom voennom sotrudnichestve - V. Putin [Ukraine's membership in NATO will impact Russian-Ukrainian military cooperation - V. Putin]. *Defense Express*, 12 May 2005, [www.defense-ua.com/rus/news?id=16727&prn=yes](http://www.defense-ua.com/rus/news?id=16727&prn=yes).

<sup>64</sup> Barabanov, Mikhail. 2005. Ukraine's Defense Industry: a Mirror of the Nation. *Moscow Defense Brief*, January, [www.mdb.cast.ru/mbd/1-2005/di/ukraines\\_defense/?form=print](http://www.mdb.cast.ru/mbd/1-2005/di/ukraines_defense/?form=print).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Mikhail Barabanov. 2005. Zachem Washington pitaetsya perevooruzhit Ukrainu [Why is Washington trying to re-equip Ukraine]. *Yugo-vostochnie regioni Ukraini*, [www.yugovostok.info/print.php?id=278](http://www.yugovostok.info/print.php?id=278).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

To summarize, on the one hand, the “security” explanation of imperialism could be attributed to Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine. Although having no illusions about whether Ukraine will ultimately join the CSTO, Russia continues to promote its security as well as its economic interests – maintenance of its BSF base and military-industrial co-operation – in Ukraine. Moreover, Russia opposes the perceived penetration of NATO into Ukraine also because it does not want to lose its “external cover,” which guarantees its stability and inviolability.

On the other hand, all these incarnations of “new” imperialism could also be considered as the remnants of the past. As in the case of economic relations, the problems of military-industrial co-operation and the BSF are the legacies of the past. The post-Soviet divorce has not been completed, and this process is complicated by the new security and political realities and integration processes. While Russia’s influence has gradually been diminishing, the influence of NATO on Ukraine’s policies has been growing. Because Russian-Western relations are characterized by the mistrust of the Cold War era and new geopolitical competition, each actor’s policies are considered by the other as “imperialism.” Different groups in Ukraine could give different answers to the question of whether Russian foreign policy is a “new” imperialism: while some political and economic groups are supporting its independence from Russia, others are afraid of losing the state’s sovereignty to NATO.

### **“Ideational” factors in Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine**

To remind, the third group of arguments, after economic and security considerations, explains imperialism in missionary and moral or “ideational” terms. According to the widespread position, in the past, Russia was fulfilling its mission of freeing other nations from despotic rulers or other calamities and bringing them the boon of its civilization. Ukraine was perceived as a fraternal nation, as Russia’s “little” brother. The Russian-Ukrainian relationship was presented as a continuous tutelage of stateless Ukrainians by statist Russians.<sup>67</sup> Russia expelled foreign aggressors, liberated the country from dependence on external powers, and frequently presented its role as “a natural ally and reliable defender” of the Ukrainians, who would have been doomed to perish as a nation, were it not for Russian help.<sup>68</sup>

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these missionary traits could still be seen in Russia’s hopes of becoming a “bridge” between the CIS countries and the West. While this

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<sup>67</sup> Molchanov, Mikhail A. 2002. *Political Culture and National Identity in Russian-Ukrainian Relations*. Texas A&M University Press, p. 61.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.: p. 67.

could be still claimed with respect to some of the CIS countries, for example, Central Asian states, others, such as Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, have found their own ways of co-operation and integration with the West.

Russia, for its part, sees a “missionary” stance in the policies of the US and the EU towards the CIS area. While Russia insists that the CIS states have the right to develop their own kind of democracy, “managed” or “sovereign,” taking into account their unique historic experience and domestic realities, the US and the EU are expanding their economic and political influence in the region with the aim to promote the establishment of liberal democracies. Paul Starobin, for example, writes that the satellites that broke away from the Soviet Union influence the negative perceptions of Russia, which exist in the US, and America regards them as countries it has to protect and recruit.<sup>69</sup> The EU states have also adopted this protectionist attitude. For example, in relation to Ukraine the European Parliament in a resolution of 13 January 2005 pledged

its continuing support, assistance and commitment to the Ukrainian people’s establishment of a free and open democratic system, their creation of a prosperous market economy and their country’s assumption of its rightful place in the community of democratic nations.<sup>70</sup>

The Polish Foreign Minister, Anna Fotyga, said that the EU wants to create a belt of democratic countries on its eastern borders, and Ukraine must become a part of it. Moreover, Warsaw needs to retain its role as the expresser of Ukrainian interests in Brussels.<sup>71</sup> According to Folker Rühle, the Head of the German Committee of Foreign Affairs, Europe has to support Ukraine and to search for ways to develop the European potential of Ukraine.<sup>72</sup>

As for Ukraine, striving for independence from Russia, it welcomes the Western support and interprets Russia’s policies as new imperialism in contrast with the beneficial influence of the Euro-Atlantic actors:

To all those once dependent on Russian resources and protection and once vulnerable to the vicissitudes of Moscow’s politics, Russia is an obvious and favorite scapegoat. New national identities of Russia’s former satellites can be forged in clear and deceitfully uncontroversial juxtaposition to Russian “imperialism” past and present.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Putin: A Man of Several Different Dimensions. An Interview with Paul Starobin. *Washington Profile*, David Johnson’s *Russia List* (9106), 29 March 2005.

<sup>70</sup> The European Parliament’s support for the “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine is a step towards an ambitious Wider Europe – Neighbourhood policy. 2005, [www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/focus\\_page/030-985-255-9-37-903-20050819FCS00984-12-09-2005-2005/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/focus_page/030-985-255-9-37-903-20050819FCS00984-12-09-2005-2005/default_en.htm).

<sup>71</sup> Cienski, Jan. 2006. Warsaw leaders scramble to retain influence in Kiev. *Financial Times*, 9 August, [www.ft.com/cms/s/e6b90c16-2743-11db-80ba-0000779e2340.html](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/e6b90c16-2743-11db-80ba-0000779e2340.html).

<sup>72</sup> Evropa dolzhna ukrepyat Ukrainu - Folker Rühle [Europe must strengthen Ukraine – Folker Rühle]. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Inosmi*, 10 February 2005, [www.inosmi.ru/print/217108.html](http://www.inosmi.ru/print/217108.html).

<sup>73</sup> Molchanov, Mikhail A. 2002. *Political Culture and National Identity in Russian-Ukrainian Relations*. Texas A&M University Press, p. 59.



The image of a hostile and imperial Russia is used by Ukraine in order to receive support for its membership perspective in the EU and NATO. Russia is presented as a country, which endangers Ukraine's democratic development. For example, Oleksandr Sushko, research director of the independent Institute for Euro-Atlantic Co-operation in Kiev, contends,

The Kremlin is interested in the failure of the Ukrainian model...Russia will do whatever it can to end this example of openness, pluralism, and transparent governance on its frontier.<sup>74</sup>

Dmitri Trenin, however, writes in this context:

Ukraine's problem is not so much Russian neo-imperialism as the country's marginalization because of the elites' inability to go ahead with reforming the economy, state and society. The initial political choice ("Ukraine is not part of Russia"), essentially negative, was comparatively easy to make and...also to carry out. The positive choice ("Ukraine is part of Europe") was even easier to make, but is extremely difficult to realize. Right now, Ukraine is caught between the two: it is no longer part of Russia, but not yet — and this is a long yet — part of organized Europe.<sup>75</sup>

In sum, Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine are presented as a way to escape Russia's imperialism and to protect Ukraine's democracy, and the West supports Ukraine in its attempts to resist "imperial" Russia.

Thus, Russian-Western relations are characterized by the "ideational" differences regarding Ukraine, as was especially obvious during the "Orange Revolution." While Western politicians encouraged Ukrainians to protest against the falsified presidential election results and supported Victor Yushchenko, the Russian President, after having visited the country twice on the eve of the elections, congratulated the supposed winner Victor Yanukovich, insisting on non-interference in the domestic affairs of Ukraine. Besides standing for the values of liberal democracy – free and fair elections, respect for rule of law, and fight against corruption, this was also Ukraine's march towards the West and further away from pro-Russian influences, "which was an important by-product of the revolution."<sup>76</sup> After the victory of the "Orange Revolution," President Yushchenko reaffirmed Ukraine's aspiration to become a part of "Western civilization," promising to wake up his country – "a wise, strong

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<sup>74</sup> Oleksandr Sushko, cited in: Weier, Fred. 2006. After Ukrainian vote, Russia aims to limit West's pull. *Christian Science Monitor*, *David Johnson's Russia List* (80), 4 April.

<sup>75</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. 2001. *The End of Eurasia: Russia on the Border Between Geopolitics and Globalization*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p.170.

<sup>76</sup> Yulia Tymoshenko's speech "Where is Ukraine going?" at the Chatham House, 2 February 2006, [www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/meeting\\_transcripts/020206tymoshenko.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/meeting_transcripts/020206tymoshenko.pdf).

but sleeping elephant” – through reforms and “ride” into the EU as well as into NATO.<sup>77</sup> Russian representatives at the same time spoke of a loss. Konstantin Zatulin, director of the CIS Institute and a deputy from the United Russia party, said “This is undoubtedly a defeat of our policy in Ukraine, and we must draw serious conclusions from this defeat.”<sup>78</sup>

Although the “ideational” competition between Russia and the West has, since then, taken a more latent form, and Russia and the West try not to interfere (at least not so directly) in Ukraine’s internal policies, nevertheless it remains relevant. The EU still has doubts whether Russia will be a full democracy in the way it is seen in the EU,<sup>79</sup> and it criticizes Moscow’s assertive approach to its neighbours and idea of dividing Europe into “spheres of influence.”<sup>80</sup> In Russia, the EU’s policies in relation to the FSU are frequently viewed as “methods from the Cold War arsenal.”<sup>81</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the Moscow-based *Russia and Global Affairs* magazine, says that although “the official line from Vladimir Putin is to stay calm and co-operative,” “the Kremlin’s new line, following events in Ukraine, is that the EU is an expanding empire of a new type.”<sup>82</sup>

“Clashes” of values are also occurring between Russia and the US. The National Security Strategy of the US (March 2006) warns,

We will seek to persuade Russia’s government that democratic progress in Russia and its region benefits the peoples who live there and improves relationships with us, with other Western governments, and among themselves. Conversely, efforts to prevent democratic development at home and abroad will hamper the development of Russia’s relations with the United States, Europe, and its neighbors.<sup>83</sup>

In February 2006, during the international security conference in Munich, one of the leading US senators, John McCain, stated that Russia was seeking to export authoritarianism, and that “the Kremlin...continues to pursue foreign and domestic policies strongly at odds with our

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Victor Yushchenko, cited in: How I Am Going to Wake This Great Sleeping Elephant and Ride into EU. Viktor Yushchenko tells Anthony Browne and Robert Thomson how he plans to fulfil his mission and revitalise Ukraine. 2006, *The Times*, [www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1463679,00.html](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1463679,00.html).

<sup>78</sup> Ostrovsky, Arkady and Parker, George. 2004. Russia’s Liberals Hail Ukraine’s Poll Result. *Financial Times*, 27 December, [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com).

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Manuel Barroso, cited in: Castle, Stephen. 2006. *Russia is not a democracy, says Barroso*. 13 July, [news.independent.co.uk/europe/article1174107.ece](http://news.independent.co.uk/europe/article1174107.ece).

<sup>80</sup> Malmstroem, Cecilia. 2005. *Report on EU-Russian relations 2004/2170* (INI). European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs.

<sup>81</sup> Sergei Yastrzhembsky, cited in: Belien, Paul. 2005. Russia Returns to a Dictatorship. *Brussels Journal*, 28 December, [www.brusselsjournal.com/node/602](http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/602).

<sup>82</sup> Wagstyl, Stefan. 2005. Putin glosses over tensions between EU and Russia: Russia’s president meets EU representatives in London today to discuss sensitive issues. *Financial Times*, [www.ft.com/cms/s/9c9e4a96-3474-11da-adae-00000e2511c8.html](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/9c9e4a96-3474-11da-adae-00000e2511c8.html).

<sup>83</sup> The National Security Strategy of the US. 2006, [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss/2006/nss2006.pdf).

[US] interests and values."<sup>84</sup> Russian defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, however, objected to these accusations:

I wonder where and why we should do that? We have long stopped exporting ideological postulates, and we are not exporting democracy, either. This is a pointless attempt. Democracy is not a potato that grows wherever you plant it.<sup>85</sup>

Russia's position was briefly explained by Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, responsible for foreign policy across the former USSR, in an August 2005 interview with "Rossiyskaya Gazeta:"

We cannot accept methods of forcibly "democratising" the whole post-Soviet area, whether these methods are colour revolutions or putting pressure on incumbent authorities via media and politics. This inevitably destabilizes the region...forcible methods of democratisation should be countered with the "competition of ideas."<sup>86</sup>

In short, the West is interested in promoting the establishment of liberal democracies in the CIS states. At the same time this policy is also directed at containing Russia's support for the status quo regimes. This is why, the more active the Western policies towards this contested area become, the stronger the Russian reaction against them. Vice versa, the more Russia tries to support these regimes and integrate them into its own space of a special kind of democracy, the more active the Western actors become, trying to save or to promote democratic developments in the CIS. Even though the imperialism arguments could be applied to Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine in the "ideational" sense, even to a larger extent these arguments could be attributed Western actors in their conduct towards Ukraine. This would satisfy another criterion for imperialism – that it emerges under the conditions of international competition.

### **Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine: a new geopolitical imperialism?**

Coming to the last explanation for imperialism, in terms of geopolitics, in the past, the Russian policy of expansion was governed by the principle that a large state is a strong actor in international relations. As Russia was "collecting" its lands and its territory was increasing (in 1462 the grand prince of Moscow ruled over 24,000 sq. km; in 1914 Nicolas II ruled over 13.5 million sq. km<sup>87</sup>), it was gradually recognized and accepted as a "fully-fledged great

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<sup>84</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, 10 (22), 6 February 2006, [www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/02/1-RUS/rus-060206.asp?po=y](http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/02/1-RUS/rus-060206.asp?po=y).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Glikin, Maksim. 2005. Against Democratization. *Vedomosti, David Johnson's Russia List* (9226), 17 August 2005.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Lieven, Dominic. 2000. *Empire. The Russian Empire and Its Rivals*. London: John Murray Ltd., p. 262.

power.”<sup>88</sup> As a result, Russia achieved partnership relations with other great European powers, which contributed to Russia’s security. Hence, being a great power is associated with being able to exert control over large territories and has historically been very important for Russia.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia, even though weakened, continued to define itself as a great power. Since 1992 Russian representatives have been firmly declaring Russian “vital strategic economic, political, and security interests in the CIS.”<sup>89</sup> Evgeniy Primakov claimed that CIS countries had to integrate with Russia, and that Russia should have an exclusive position there.<sup>90</sup> This policy has continued and has been strengthened in President Putin’s foreign policy – and it is supported by the population. Surveys<sup>91</sup> in 2004 indicated that Russians gave quite contradictory assessments of Putin’s domestic achievements during his four years of presidency. However, his foreign policy, directed at re-establishing Russia’s status as a great power, was assessed positively as a big success.

The West is partially accountable for this policy of the RF. Even by 1992, Russia had sensed that it was being pushed out from the post-Soviet regions by Western actors, and that the territory of the former Soviet Union was a source of “post-imperial expanse,” where Russia, in competition with the West, expected to establish its interests using all possible means.<sup>92</sup> The perception emerged that the West wanted Russia to remain weak and dominated by it. Dmitri Trenin, writes,

From the beginning of the post-Cold War era, the West saw Russia as a special case. Armed with nuclear weapons, its great-power mentality shaken but unbroken, and just too big, Russia would be granted privileged treatment but no real prospect of membership in either NATO or the EU. The door to the West would officially remain open, but the idea of Russia’s actually entering through it remained unthinkable... In the meantime, what was important was that Russia would pursue a generally pro-Western foreign policy. Moscow found such an offer unacceptable.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> Andrey Kozyrev, cited in: Pankin, Alexey. 1992. Whom Does Foreign Policy Represent? *International Affairs Moscow*, 24-30, here p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> Cohen, Ariel. 1997. *The "Primakov Doctrine": Russia's Zero-Sum Game with the United States*. The Heritage Foundation, [www.ciaonet.org](http://www.ciaonet.org).

<sup>91</sup> For example, see the survey in *Novaya Gazeta*: Golov, Alexander. 2004. Moral padayet, optimism povishaetsya. Ozenki deystviy Vladimira Putina za chetire goda ego prezidentskogo pravleniya (VZIOM, 19 April 2004) [The assessments of the results achieved by Vladimir Putin during his four years of presidency]. In *Novaya Gazeta*, [www.2004.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2004/27n/n27n-s.shtml](http://www.2004.novayagazeta.ru/nomer/2004/27n/n27n-s.shtml).

<sup>92</sup> Speech by the Russian foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev at the December 1992 Stockholm Ministerial Council Meeting of the CSCE, cited in: Hurlburt, Heather. 1995. Russia, the OSCE and European Security Architecture. *Helsinki Monitor* (2), [www.spn.ethz.ch/static/osce/h\\_monit/hel95\\_2/hurlburt.htm](http://www.spn.ethz.ch/static/osce/h_monit/hel95_2/hurlburt.htm).

<sup>93</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. 2006. Russia Leaves the West. *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, *David Johnson's Russia List* (31), 22 July.

In the geopolitical context, Ukraine plays an important role for Russia, because of its size, strategic geographic location and economic capacities and potential. Thus, to be able to exert influence on Ukraine is one of the measures of the geopolitical power of Russia vis-à-vis the West. In this sense, the explanation that Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine is a case of “new” imperialism is justified. Nevertheless, by the same token, the policies of Western actors towards Ukraine are perceived by Russia as imperialist. In a nutshell, in the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ukraine is “a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard,”<sup>94</sup> where Russia and the West are playing the game for geopolitical influence and strength.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated once again how controversial and complicated the question of whether Russia’s foreign policy is imperialistic can be. It could be interpreted in both ways – as imperialism and as something different. Moreover, the policies of the US and the EU could be also presented as new imperialism.

Russian foreign policy could be interpreted as new imperialism, due to the four main factors. First of all, Russian conduct is assessed by Western actors and Ukraine against its imperial identity of the past. The more reproductions of imperial identity are found in contemporary Russian policy towards Ukraine, the more Ukraine tries to secure its independence, and Western actors support it. Secondly, Russia’s internal policies influence its international image. Because autocratic legacies in Russian domestic policies are not obsolete – for example the legacy of strong domination of the state in Russian economic and socio-political spheres – and because Russia still has difficulties in proving that it is a democracy of the Western type, its influence on Ukraine is perceived negatively. Thirdly, Russian policy is described as imperialism by Western actors because of the economic, geopolitical, security-related, and, most importantly, “ideational” competition between Russia and the West with respect to Ukraine. The country is confronted with a choice between the two actors, and both Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Western relations are fraught. Fourthly, Ukraine’s own interpretation of Russian policy as imperialism in its search of independence is important.

On the other hand, although not all imperial legacies are obsolete, as Dmitri Trenin writes, “Russia today is not, and is not likely to become a second Soviet Union. It is not a revanchist and imperialist aggressor bent on reabsorbing its former provinces.”<sup>95</sup> Russian foreign policy could be also characterized not as a “new” imperialism, but rather as one still overcoming legacies of the imperialism of the past. Most problems in Russian-Ukrainian

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<sup>94</sup> Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard*, p. 46.

<sup>95</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. 2006. Russia Leaves the West. *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, *David Johnson's Russia List* (31), 22 July.

relations exist not because of “new” Russian imperialism, but rather because the post-Soviet “divorce” has not been completed. In fact, sometimes Russian foreign policy could be interpreted as giving more independence to Ukraine in the long-term perspective rather than as present-day new imperialism. Moreover, Ukraine is internally divided on this issue, and those, with long experience of beneficial and constructive relations with Russia tend to characterize the policies of the Western actors, the EU and NATO states, as imperialist. Finally, the competition with the West in different areas demonstrates that Russian geopolitical decline is not over, and since the end of the Cold War it is still in the process of losing more influence in the FSU region vis-à-vis the West, what undermines the imperialism arguments.

In political practice, the notion of “imperialism” is used to exert influence or pressure on a country, in order to provoke some reaction or to achieve personal political goals. However, in the discipline of political science or international relations, this term should only be used after careful consideration and theoretical elaboration. The way the term is most commonly defined nowadays, it could be applied to any country’s foreign policy and to any asymmetrical relationship, especially in the conditions of international competition. Paraphrasing Rogers Brubaker, it is possible to say that “imperialism” is “a category of practice...not a *category of analysis*.”<sup>96</sup> Thus the problem with applying the term “imperialism” while analysing Russian foreign policy is that such an analysis adopts “*categories of practice as categories of analysis*.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Brubaker, Rogers. 1996. *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, Cambridge, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.