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Svetlana Cebotari¹
Moldova

Sergiu Plop²
Moldova

ELEMENTS OF RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR IN THE EAST-EUROPEAN SPACE AND CAUCASUS

Abstract:

As a result of the geopolitical metamorphoses of the 1990s, the Russian Federation is trying to regain its lost positions. One of the most debated topics was undoubtedly the issue of Russia's new role on the international arena. Within a decade since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former USSR, the Russian Federation is trying to restore its status as a great power, re-launching a policy of restoring the zone of influence in the post-Soviet space. This paper analyzes the strategies of the Russian Federation to maintain in its sphere of influence the East-European and South-Caucasian space.

Keywords:

Russian Federation, geopolitical interest, strategy, power, influence zone, space

As a result of the geopolitical metamorphoses of the 1990s, the Russian Federation is trying to regain its lost positions. One of the most debated topics was undoubtedly the issue of Russia's new role on the international arena. In the early 1990s, the dominant idea was the one that started from the existence of a single superpower, but did not realistically assess the multiple consequences of promoting the new order based on this indisputable political

¹ Svetlana Cebotari, PhD, Asst. Prof. in „Alexandru cel Bun” Armed Forces Military Academy; Moldova State University, Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences, Department of International Relations, email: svetlana.cebotari@mail.ru

² Sergiu Plop, „Alexandru cel Bun” Armed Forces Military Academy Commandant (rector).

reality. In a much more complicated situation, there is the Russian Federation, which claims that the US assured that after the collapse of the USSR, the former Soviet republics as well as the former USSR states would remain in its sphere of influence or at most adopt the status of neutrality. It is known that the states that were part of the Warsaw Treaty joined NATO and/or the EU. Even the three Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, former union republics, did the same. Russia perceived NATO membership of these states in 2004 as a great loss and a direct threat to its integrity and security³.

Geopolitically, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) space is not a monolith. It is the factor of Russia that determines the geopolitical division of mentioned region. Analyzing from a geopolitical point of view the position of the CIS states, in relation to the Russian Federation, they can be divided into two categories - 1) states oriented in their foreign policy to a great extent towards cooperation with Russia - Belarus, Armenia and the states of Central Asia, and 2) states which tend towards autonomy in their foreign policy and independence from the Russian Federation - Georgia (until 2008 when it was part of CIS), Ukraine, Azerbaijan and the Republic of Moldova. The first category of states created, at the initiative of Russia, various organizations within the CIS - the Euro-Asian Economic Community, the Union of Central Asian States, the European Economic Area, the Collective Security Treaty Organization or the Shanghai Collaboration Organization. The states of the second category were organized in GUAM⁴.

A decade after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former USSR, the Russian Federation has been trying to re-establish its status as a great power, re-launching a policy of restoring the zone of influence in the post-Soviet space. In relations with the neighbouring countries in order to secure a future and the international arena, Russia has its own *modus operandi*⁵.

Analyzing Russia's main foreign policy objectives and directions set out in the Russian Federation's Security Strategy by 2020, approved by Presidential Decree 12th May 2009, we can conclude that Russia's long-term strategic interest is to turn the Russian Federation in a global power, and the international system - in a multi-polar one. The nearby neighbourhood (*blijnee zarubejje*), which in fact is the post-Soviet space, is seen by Moscow as an exclusive influence zone, in which the Russian Federation manifests geostrategic interests⁶.

³ M. Atanasiu, M. Calopăreanu, *Capacitatea combativă a forțelor militare ale Federației Ruse. Mit sau realitate. Revista de Științe Militare*. Secția de Științe Militare a Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România, nr. 2 (43), anul XVI, 2016, pp.68-80.

⁴ I. Tăbîrță, V. Berbeca, *Proiectul CSI: anatomia unui eșec*. Politici Publice, Institutul pentru Dezvoltare și Inițiative Sociale (IDIS) „Viitorul”. nr.7, 2009, p.13.

⁵ K. E. Sorokin, *Geopolitika sovremennosti i geostrategiya Rossii*, Moskva 2009, p.170.

⁶ J. Nye, R. Kagan, *Le Smart power américain au XXI^e siècle* <<http://lebulletindamerique.com/2011/03/14/joseph-nye-et-robert-kagan-le-smart-power-americain-au-xxie-siecle-i/>> (22.03.2018).

For a better understanding of the foreign policy and the geostrategic interest of the Russian Federation, it is necessary to analyze these phenomena through the use of *hard power* or the so-called hard policy, exercised through military or economic, but also through *soft power* or loyal policy pursued through non-military means - media, television in order to exert pressure⁷. Thus, in order to achieve its objectives, the Russian Federation uses a series of traditional or *hard power* measures, such as military actions, just like in Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 or economic sanctions (Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus).

Vladimir Putin, who became president of the Russian Federation in 2000, through his actions, demonstrates that he wants to reconstruct as much territory as possible from the former Soviet Union. Obviously, a step in this direction was the reintegration of Ukraine into the area of influence of the Russian Federation. So, through his policies, the President of Russia is trying to rebuild the Russian influence in the geopolitical space, the former Soviet space, to bring Russia back to the status of a great global power, and to promote this newly recreated Russian civilized identity on the international agenda. To this end, President V. Putin uses all the political, economic, diplomatic, imagistic and military instruments available to him, in order to achieve the goal that many specialists call “imperialist”. Thus, Russia has resumed to actively promoting its interests in worldwide, which has led to direct confrontations with international influential powers. In this context, Russia's economic revitalization, political and economic elites have begun to support President Putin's expansive policy. Russia has shown that it does not hesitate to use the armed force if it believes its interests are at stake⁸.

Thus, on August 8th, 2008, Russian armed forces entered South Ossetia using tanks and a mechanized infantry supported by aviation. South Ossetia was unofficially allied with Russia, which acted to prevent Georgia from absorbing the region. The counterattack was rigorously planned and executed competently, and within only 48 hours the Russians managed to defeat the Georgian main force. On August 10th, the Russians strengthened their position in South Ossetia and on August 11th they expanded their offensive to Georgia, attacking two directions. One direction was south from South Ossetia to the Georgian town Gori. Another direction came from Abkhazia, second secessionist region allied with Russian Federation. This attack was designed to cut the road between the capital Tbilisi and the Georgian ports. At this time, the Russians bombed the military airports of Marmeuil and Vaziani and apparently shut down the radar at the international airport in Tbilisi. These movements

⁷ G. Friedman, *Războiul ruso-georgian și echilibrul puterii*, <<http://inlinedreapta.net/razboiul-ruso-georgian-si-echilibrul-puterii/>> (08.03.2018).

⁸ N. Afanas, *Consecințele confruntării geostrategice Rusia-NATO pentru securitatea Republicii Moldova*, <<http://realismpolitik.wordpress.com/2014/02/13/consecintele-confruntarii-geostrategice-nato-rusia-pentru-securitatea-republicii-moldova/>> (20.03.2018).

brought Russian forces only 40 miles from the capital of Georgia, making it difficult to supply material and provide Georgian reserve forces.

In order to understand the Russian way of thinking, we must appeal to two events. The first is the Orange Revolution of Ukraine. From the point of view of the United States (US) and Europeans, the Orange Revolution represented a triumph of Western democracy and influence. From the point of view of the Russian Federation, the Orange Revolution was a CIA-funded domestic affair of Ukraine, which was meant to attract Ukraine into NATO and add it to Russia's encirclement. US Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton have promised Russia that NATO will not expand into the former Soviet empire. This promise has already been violated in 1998 through NATO expansion in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, and in 2004, by expanding not only the rest of the former Soviet allies in what is now Central and Eastern Europe but also in the three Baltic States, which were part of the Soviet Union⁹.

Although the Russian Federation has tolerated the waves of NATO's expansion to the East, talks on the inclusion of Ukraine in NATO have been a fundamental threat to Russia's national security, which would have made Russia undependable and would have even provoked a destabilization of the Russian Federation. The US intention was to suggest that Georgia can become a member, which would have brought NATO to the middle of the Caucasus, prompted the Russian conclusion, which was that United States in particular intends to encircle and defeat Russia. The second, no less important event was the decision of the European Union (EU) and the United States to support the separation of Kosovo from Serbia. The Russians are the friends of Serbia, but Russia's firm intention was the following: since World War II, the principle of Europe was that, in order to prevent conflicts, national borders must not be changed. If this principle was violated in Kosovo, other border movements – including demands from separatist regions in Russia – could follow. The Russians have asked, both publicly and in private talks, not to grant Kosovo independence, but continue with its autonomy, which was almost the same in practical terms. But Russia's demands were ignored.

The Russian Federation was convinced that the United States engaged in a strategic encirclement plan of Russia. With Kosovo's experience, the Russians have come to the conclusion that the US and the EU were not prepared to take into account the wishes of the Russian Federation, even in the smallest aspects, which can be considered as the turning point in the Russian-Western relations. When the West fails to take account the interests of the Russian Federation, even in minor situations, the confrontation between them was obvious. Getting no response in the case of Kosovo, Russia has decided to attack where it has all the strengths - in South Ossetia. Based on this context, Moscow can justify its actions for two reasons, the least important being to make it equal to the West

⁹ G. Friedman, *Războiul ruso-georgian și echilibrul puterii*, <<http://inlinedreapta.net/razboiul-ruso-georgian-si-echilibrul-puterii/>> (08.03.2018).

after the Kosovo episode. If Kosovo's independence was declared under the sphere of Western interest, then South Ossetia and Abkhazia, may be declared independent under the protection of the Russian Federation¹⁰.

Analyzing the actions of president Putin, one can observe not the intention of restoring the Soviet Union, but the desire to restore the sphere of influence of Russia in the post-Soviet space. In order to achieve this goal, Russia responded based on two arguments: first, the restoration of the credibility of the Russian Armed Forces as a fighting force, at least at the regional level and secondly, to ensure that the US guarantees, including the NATO membership, is nothing in the face of the Russian Federation power. Also, the Russian president, by avoiding a direct confrontation with NATO forces, through another Georgia-aligned geopolitical actor, has tried to confront these two power centres. In this context, Georgia was the perfect choice.

Thus, by invading Georgia in August 2008, as it was done (in a competent, if not exemplary way), V. Putin restored the credibility of the Russian army. That is why the war in Georgia can be considered as return of Russia to the status of great power. The events in Georgia are the exemplification of whole process that had developed since the moment when Putin had come to power. Russia's goal is to use *hard power* tools to assert its geostrategic interests in the new reality in the South Caucasus¹¹.

The occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 proved to be the most dangerous geopolitical event in the post-cold war period and perhaps even after the Cuban missile crisis. Fighting Crimea could trigger two types of actions, both of them were detrimental to Europe's long-term stability. The first option was Russia's regaining the influence on region; the right to withdraw borders and to exercise its veto power over the governments of the neighbouring states. The second possibility was to provoke the Ukrainian government to a backlash, supported by Westerners. This reaction could lead to a Yugoslav-style civil war, basically demonstrated by events in the eastern area of Ukraine - Donetsk and Lugansk. An "anti-terrorist" operation was launched by officials in Kiev in April 2014 in order to stifle pro-Russian armed insurrection in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. Petro Poroşenko, the president of Ukraine, said in a speech that he would refuse any "compromise" with Russia on his country's European orientation and Crimean membership of Ukraine. NATO officials said they "are concerned that Russian troops at the border with Ukraine may pose a threat to the southeast of Ukraine". Moreover, after massive Russian troops concentrated on the border with Ukraine, V. Putin said that "Russia is now counting on equal relations with Western states, after defending its geopolitical interests in the Ukrainian crisis, and will continue to defend the interests ethnic Russians from other states". This statement by the

¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹ J. Nye, R. Kagan, *op. cit.*

Russian President only confirms the plan to regain Russian influence in the former Soviet states¹².

In analyze of the events in Ukraine, three interrelated levels can be identified in the Russian Federation's military strategy:

Level 1 - doctrinal unilateralism. Russia has relied on the principle that successful use of force generates legitimation of action. The weak US and EU reaction has validated this principle.

Level 2 - strong (apparent) adherence to legalism. Beyond the real aspects of the legality of the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, they have been permanently supported on some valid legal acts, creating the appearance of legality, thus:

- President Putin has asked the Russian Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, to "authorize" the use, if necessary, of military power in Ukraine. On 1st March 2014, the use of the Russian army in Ukraine was authorized. Subsequently, for reasons of promoting a legalistic-pacifist image, at the request of V. Putin, the Council of the Russian Federation revoked the resolution authorizing the use of the Russian army in Ukraine. The decision was taken with 153 possible votes out of 154 and entered into force on the date of approval;
- the non-use of military power in the Crimea, along with the authorization given by the Council of the Russian Federation, is used by V. Putin as a sign of his pacifist intentions;
- the fact that the Russian troops in the Crimea did not exceed the limits set by the agreement to station the Russian Federation's fleet in the Black Sea in the Crimea, even if their number increased, is presented by the Russian Federation as an argument on the assertion that it did not occupy the Crimea by military force.

Level 3 - supporting the referendum promoted by the pro-Russian political forces in the Crimea. The Russian Federation supports its intervention, arguing for the right to self-determination of the Crimean population, similar to the case in Kosovo. The recent campaign of Russia in the Crimea was an impressive demonstration of strategic communication, one that, despite having many similarities to those in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, nevertheless presents a number of specific features, reflecting the operationalization of the new military directives of Russia that are hoped to be implemented by 2020. The success of this campaign is due to the fact that in just three weeks the morale of the Ukrainian military was so badly affected that all 190 units capitulated. Instead of relying on the massive deployment of tanks and artillery, Russia used assault forces worth less than 10.000 soldiers - already stationed in Crimea, mostly marine infantry, supported by several battalions of airborne troops and Special Forces Commands - Spetsnaz. In addition, the heaviest vehicles used

¹² N. Afanas, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

the TAB-80 Armoured Conveyors (Armoured Carriers). They fought a force of about 16.000 Ukrainian soldiers¹³.

In the newly created geopolitical context, it is possible that a new type of war - the hybrid war - will somehow satisfy Moscow's aspirations, in view of the fact that a potential tension in the relationship with the West is believed to bring Russia back to political importance and the lost superpower status after the dismantling of the USSR, also giving it the opportunity to talk on a par with the US. All these confrontations will take time to establish a new balance of power on the international arena.

The Russian Federation will not surrender Ukraine to the West and will not be willing to leave Crimea and Sevastopol. Ukraine, in its current territorial format, has no chance of joining the EU or NATO, regardless of the enthusiasm of the new leaders in Kiev or even the will of the majority of the Western population. Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia is in the same situation, where the prospect of joining the Euro-Atlantic structures of the states that hold them formally is limited. The restoration of the sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia in former Soviet states is the overriding objective of Russia's policy, an objective that can be achieved through the support of ethnic Russians inhabiting those territories¹⁴.

Another Russian *hard power* tool is the economy, very often used by the Russian Federation to achieve geostrategic interests in Eastern Europe. Oil and gas are the most valuable resources of Russia. After his inauguration, president Putin used the energy dependence of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and many European states to bargaining and blackmail. Thus, in 2006 and in the winter of 2008-2009, as a result of some misunderstandings, the Russian Federation stopped Ukraine's gas supply for a while. The decision to take over Crimea is considered to be the result of a cumulus of factors, one of which is that in September 2013 Ukraine signed concession agreements for the exploration and exploitation of the Black Sea gas fields, a step that would reduce energy dependence on Russia. The agreements concerned the "exploitation of a North-western gas perimeter, a gas field estimated at almost 8-10 billion cubic meters".

At the same time, Russia started the economic project of building Eurasian Economic Union that would include as many of the former USSR satellites as possible. At present, in the union prefigured to launch in 2015, only Belarus and Kazakhstan were attracted by Russia. Bringing Ukraine into this Eurasian economic circle would have followed President V. Putin's plan to bring Russia back to the stage as an essential actor on international scene¹⁵.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 133.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 159.

¹⁵ I. W. Andronova, *Vneshneekonomicheskiye aspekty natsionalnykh interesov Rossii na postsovetском prostranstve*, Moskva 2010, p. 383

Economy is one of the tool in international relations and one of the main strengths of Russia. Rich in raw materials Russian Federation is an energetic power primarily (with more than 18% of world gas reserves, ranked second in the world, and 5% of world oil reserves). Russia's strategy is articulated over a project aimed at maintaining the influence over former Soviet states that it was in conflict with (Moldova, Georgia, 2014 Ukraine, which have a Euro-Atlantic orientation)¹⁶. Analyzing the energy aspect, it is noteworthy that Gazprom's tough behaviour towards Ukraine has a (geo) political and (geo) economic connotation, in line with the pro-Soviet orientation of official authorities in Kiev. At the level of official statements and actions, Moscow makes it clear in an explicit manner that it will never accept the proximity of pro-Western military structures in the closest neighbourhood. Thus, the energy blackmail against Kiev and Chisinau is only a pressure tool to ensure Russian national security. On the one hand, it is a signal for the West to extend its influence to the East (especially political and military), which undermines Russia's geostrategic interest in the region. On the other hand, these actions are permanent warnings for Ukraine and including the Republic of Moldova, prompting them to review their own position on accession to Western structures. Moscow's intent is to influence the domestic political situation in Ukraine, but also in the South Caucasian states, which is unstable due to differences in positions and disagreements between different political forces¹⁷.

The geographic position of Ukraine and the pipeline network built during the Soviet Union have determined that this state plays a rather important role in the continental energy sector. Consequently, Ukraine is now positioned as an important actor in European energy security, so Russian-Ukrainian energy disputes are not only a Ukrainian or Russian problem, but they get a geopolitical character. It was mentioned that through the Ukrainian territory about 80% of the natural gas resources imported from Russia by the EU is transited, which represents 25% of the total volume imported by the community states. Similarly, the Ukrainian region transits the West-East corridor, constituting an axis of connection between mainland Europe and Central Asia and the Caspian region. At the same time, this space forms the North-South corridor, a demonstration in this respect being the Blue Stream gas pipeline connecting Russia and Turkey. Obviously, there is a competition between these two axes, characterized not only by geopolitical but also technical aspects.

There is now a diplomatic struggle between the West and Russia for this region, given that Ukraine provides access to a rich area with energy resources. Moreover, if we take into account the Turkish route, then we note that it does

¹⁶ *La stratégie russe dans l'espace post-soviétique: entre soft et hard power. Le cas de l'Ukraine*, <<http://www.justicepaix.be/?article591>> (22.02.2018).

¹⁷ A. Tinguy, *Russie: le syndrome de la puissance*, <<http://ceriscope.sciences-po.fr/puissance/content/part4/russie-le-syndrome-de-la-puissance?page=3>> (22.02.2018).

not reduce Ukraine's importance in terms of hydrocarbon transit. The Ukrainian card could serve as an alternative to possible negative developments in the Turkish region, for example escalating the conflict around the Kurdish minority.

Gazprom's tough policy, which has had a negative impact on both Kiev and Brussels, explicitly expresses political and geopolitical connotations on the basis of Russia's geopolitical interests in its immediate neighbourhood. Moscow has repeatedly made clear that it will never accept the proximity of pan-Western military structures in the immediate vicinity, and to prevent such a situation, Russia is able to act in the most drastic way. Thus, the energy blackmail to Kiev is only a first step of Russia to ensure national security. Also to signal the US and NATO to disengage from the policies that go against Russia's interest, which in Ukraine's case is a vital one. At the same time, it is also a warning to Ukraine, causing it to revise its own position regarding its accession to Western structures. Obviously, the Kremlin also pursues certain trade and energy interests. In this context, it would be better to draw attention to a nuance. The official cause of the gas conflict between Ukraine and Russia was not the failure of Kiev to pay the gas debt. However, it cannot be forgotten that the debt of Transnistria is much higher, it clearly show that the real reason for the conflict between Kiev and Moscow had no financial connotation, but geopolitical and geo-energetic¹⁸.

Republic of Belarus like the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine is dependent on the energy resources of the Russian Federation. Gazprom acquired 50% of Belarus's shares in Beltransgaz. In response to this step, Minsk demands the observance of two conditions: the first is that the pipelines used for Russian gas transit are always full and the second condition is that the gas price for Belarus is the same as for Russia. Belarus paid 150 dollars for 1000 cubic meters of Russian gas (the price for the Russian region near the border, Smolensk, is much lower). Since 2011, Minsk has been buying gas at the European average, minus the transit and export taxes. With regard to oil, President Lukashenko is ready to sell assets held at oil refineries to buy fuel without charging taxes. At present, only 6.3 million tons of Russian oil imported by Belarus is exempt from customs duties, with the Russian authorities periodically threatening to cancel all fiscal facilities. Also, the Russian authorities frequently interrupted the oil supply of the main refineries in Belarus as a result of the repeated refusal of the Minsk regime to accept the conditions imposed by Moscow on the taxation of the delivered oil and the sale of the main Belarusian refineries to the Russian companies. According to the

¹⁸ A. Baltag, *Arma energetică a Rusiei ca instrument de presiune și de influență în spațiul ex-sovietic* (cazul Republicii Moldova și al Ucrainei), Asociația pentru Politică Externă, <<http://www.ape.md/doc.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=1139>> (02.02.2018).

“Karadeniz Press” press agency, the energy conflict was triggered by Lukoil and the oil giant’s intention to purchase the Naftan refinery in Belarus¹⁹.

The Russia-Belarus relations can be examined in the light of the latest events in eastern Ukraine and the reaction of the international community to the actions and policy of the Russian Federation regarding the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, it is worth mentioning that these have recently become contradictory. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Belarusian president A. Lukashenko pursues a policy of supporting Ukraine’s territorial integrity, a policy that does not suit the Kremlin. Russia’s response to Lukashenko’s statements does not remain unnoticed, Russia again appealing to the use of the *hard power* strategy towards Belarus - imposing embargoes on Belarusian products. Taking into account the situation created by the imposition of embargoes on the Russian Federation by the US and European countries, Belarus could have served as a connecting link between the Russian Federation and the EU. Belarus is willing to buy products from other states, then to expose them to Russia’s markets. This scheme of action is not in contradiction with the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU on the Russian Federation or the international agreements, these transactions would only be beneficial to Belarus²⁰.

The Minsk Summit with the participation of Western Leaders Angela Merkel - Chancellor of Germany, Francois Hollande - ex-President of France, Barack Obama ex-US President, P. Poroshenko - President of Ukraine, respectively V. Putin - President of the Russian Federation, brings Belarus to the international community’s attention. In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Belarus serves as the pacifist side between the conflicting parties - the Russian Federation and Ukraine. The Minsk Forum became the arena of East-West confrontations between the Russian Federation and the West, and the Belarusian authorities are trying to take advantage of the situation created to intensify their relations with the West, which, after the Minsk Summit, has become more open towards Belarus. In the European space, Belarus’s pacifist image in Russian-Ukrainian relations is rising. NATO forces on the Belarusian border pose a threat to Russia’s security, and this situation will lead to increased Russian presence in the region, and without the support of Belarus, this plan is harder to achieve²¹.

Another tool of Russia’s *hard power* to achieve geostrategic interests through the use of the economic weapon is to impose embargoes on different products. Since March 2006, Russia has introduced various sanctions against

¹⁹ V. Goncharov, *Președintele belarus Lukașenko, înșurubată de Gazprom*, <<http://karadeniz-press.ro/kara/belarus-sclava-gazprom/>> (02.02.2018).

²⁰ W. Li, *Teoriya mezhdunarodnogo prognozirovaniya: Nauchnaya kniga*, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/book/n_1596> (20.02.2018).

²¹ W. Odinochenko, *Sovremennaya Belarus mezhdru Vostokom i Zapadom: politicheskiy aspekt problemy*, <<http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=7212>> (01.03.2018).

exporters in Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus and Republic of Moldova. The analyze of these sanctions factors, brings only one result, that the reason in every case was the disobedience or intent of the former Soviet states to leave the sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Thus, the embargo imposed by Russia on 1.000 Belarusian dairy products in 2008 would have been caused by the Minsk authorities' failure to recognize the independence of the two separatist regions of Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia ²².

Similar sanctions were imposed on a large number of post-Soviet countries. In 2004, when Mikheil Saakashvili came to power, Georgia refocused its foreign policy vector to a pro-European and pro-Atlanticist course. In this context, Russia began to use its infallible instruments. In 2004, South Ossetia's forces, the separatist region of Georgia, arrested several Georgian soldiers. In 2005, the main pipeline transiting Russian gas to Georgia exploded in the middle of winter in the North Caucasus region. Another instrument used by the Russian Federation was the expulsion in 2006 of tens of thousands of Georgian emigrants working in Russia, and in the same year, Russia forbids the import of Georgian products²³. The ban on Russian imports of Georgian and Moldovan wines started at the end of March 2006 and created a major diplomatic conflict between the Republic of Moldova and Georgia on one hand and Russia on the other. The wine trade with Russia at that time occupied 80-90% of all wine exports between the two countries. Russia's chief health inspector Gennady Onishchenko said that heavy metals and pesticides were found in Georgian wines and that they falsified alcoholic products labelled as wines. The Russian consumer protection agency argued that it had examined 21 Georgian wine varieties sold in Moscow and concluded that 85.7% did not meet the sanitary requirements. The ban on wine imports has come at a time of worsening diplomatic relations between states in the context of the changes brought by the Revolution of the Roses and the transition to pro-NATO and pro-EU direction in Georgia²⁴.

In the same context can be consider the embargoes of the Russian Federation in the fall of 2013 imposed on Ukraine's chocolate products. By making a careful analysis of the conditions in which these sanctions were imposed by Russia, it is obvious that all these actions had a geopolitical and geostrategic character. The Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, 28-29 November 2013, where ex-soviet states Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia were

²² V. Gonciarov, *Embargo comercial extins al Rusiei asupra unor produse lactate din Belarus*, <<http://www.europalibera.org/archive/news/20090610/445/445.html?id=1750739>> (02.03.2018).

²³ *Embargoul rusesc sau un șut în fund este întotdeauna un pas înainte*, <<http://bloguvern.md/2013/09/12/embargoul-rusesc-sau-un-sut-in-fund-este-intotdeauna-un-pas-inainte/>> (02.03.2018).

²⁴ *Embargoul rus asupra vinurilor din Republica Moldova și Georgia*, <<http://www.culiuc.com/archives/2008/03/agriculture4.phtml>> (22.02.2018).

expected to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, precipitates the geopolitics of the post-Soviet space. Russia resorted to all the instruments available to obstruct the European course assumed by these states. Russia's pressures have grown with the intensification of the relations of these states with the European Union and the finalization of the negotiations on the Association Agreement, implicitly the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.

By analyzing the *hard power* strategies, it is worth mentioning that the Russian Federation does not have enough levers to achieve its interests in the Eastern European member states of the EU, as opposed to the former Soviet republics. Relations of the Russian Federation with the former member states of the Warsaw Treaty, some *hard power* of Russia can be revealed. In this context, can also analyzed the imposition of the embargo by the Russian Federation on meat products of Polish origin in 2005. According to the Polish Agriculture Minister Andrzej Lepper, the Russian-Polish relations were more of a political nature, Russia's actions being conditioned by the location of the US missile shield in Poland. According to N. Volcikova, the chief economist at the Centre for Economic and Financial Studies, the Russian Federation does not want to cool relations with Poland, its actions are dictated by the fact that the imported meat of Indian origin is imported through Poland. N. Volcikova also believes Russia's reaction to Polish products is conditioned by the location of the anti-missile shield in Poland. In this context, the Russian Federation's decision of 1 January 2007 to impose an embargo on meat products from the EU states, especially those from Bulgaria and Romania, fell under the pretext that the animals are bred in unsanitary conditions. However, the prime cause of the embargo was more a political decision, since Romania and Bulgaria become EU members²⁵.

Aware of the risk of Russia's marginalization around the world, the state leadership is looking for ways to bring the Russian Federation back, to impose influence on the international arena. Lately, Russia has noticed that the use of traditional means is not enough to achieve geostrategic interests. Thus, in addition to the *hard power*, characterized by the use of military and economic resources, the Russian Federation, in order to maintain the former Soviet states in its sphere of influence, also calls on the ability to influence others through *soft power*. The *soft* concept is the antonym of the *hard* one, which is the coercive, military and economic force. *Sensu stricto* the *soft power* in the opinion of Joseph Nye, is the ability of a state to get what it wants from another state. Thus, a state, through *soft power*, develops without using its military defence capability²⁶. Russia's *soft power* focuses on a mix of means including nationalist ideology, symbol manipulation, and nostalgia for the past, an

²⁵ V. Goncharov, *op.cit.*

²⁶ *Soft power, hard power et smart power: le pouvoir selon Joseph Nye*, <<http://www.slate.fr/story/88487/soft-power-hard-power-smart-power-pouvoir-joseph-nye>> (22.11.2017).

economically and politically attractive genre for emigrants in former Soviet states²⁷. If *hard power* is an actor's ability to achieve its goals by military means, *soft power* can be defined as the ability to achieve goals through attraction, persuasion or seduction²⁸. *Soft power* focuses on attracting cultural, ideological, foreign policy values of the state²⁹.

The wars in Georgia and Ukraine launched the issue of Russia's position on the international arena, using, besides *hard power*, new *soft power* tools such as electronic warfare, intimidation, bribery, Internet propaganda, the media, seeking to undermine Ukraine's resistance and avoid the use of military power³⁰. The result was a clear military victory, through the operationalization of a well-organized strategic communication campaign, using political, psychological and information tools - what the military writers call "the war of the new generation". To avoid inducing the erroneous impression that we are discussing about new generation of wars that would have been inaugurated by Russia on the occasion of the Crimean actions, should be pointed out that the military actions included in this category are in fact known as the generic category of the "fourth generation war". In American documents it is known as "irregular warfare", which covers but is not limited to, terrorist/anti-terrorist actions and insurgency/counterinsurgency. Therefore, Russia's vision of modern war is based on the idea that the main space of struggle is the human mind. As a result, the war of the new generation will be dominated by confrontations in the information and psychological field. Superiority to the enemy's troops and weapon systems will be accomplished by affecting the psyche and morale of the armed forces and its civilian population, the primary objective being to minimize the need to displace hard power by determining the military and the opponent's civilian population to support the attacker's actions, to the detriment of their own governments and countries. In this context, it is interesting to observe the notion of "permanent war", as it implies a "permanent adversary". In the current geopolitical structure, the clear enemy of the Russian Federation is the *Western civilization* - values, culture, political system and Western ideology³¹.

For the specific case of Crimea, at the centre of the operational planning, the Russians placed the idea of influencing. To exploit this idea, they used all

²⁷ G. Friedman, Războiul ruso-georgian și echilibrul puterii, <<http://inlinedreapta.net/razboiul-ruso-georgian-si-echilibrul-puterii/>> (08.09.2017).

²⁸ *Sur le Soft (et Hard) Power: les deux faces de la médaille*, <<http://terrealalune.blogspot.com/2011/07/sur-le-soft-et-hard-power-les-deux.html>> (22.11.2017).

²⁹ *Logiques et ressources élémentaires du «soft power»*, <<http://www.inaglobal.fr/idees/note-de-lecture/joseph-s-nye-jr/soft-power/culture-et-soft-power>> (22.11.2017).

³⁰ *Putin y el "soft power"*, <<http://ar.bastiondigital.com/notas/putin-y-el-%E2%80%9Csoft-power%E2%80%9D>> (22.11.2017).

³¹ M. Atanasiu, *Rolul Ucrainei în politica expansionistă a Federației Ruse*, „Gândirea militară românească. Revista de teorie și știință militară editată de Statul Major General al Armatei Române”, București, nr. iulie-august, 2014, p. 132

the tools they had in mind: ingenious internal communication methods, misleading operations, psychological operations, well-built external communication. Misleading operations were carried out on the territory of the Russian Federation in the form of military exercises, including in the Kaliningrad region, to increase the degree of insecurity of the former Soviet republics, Poland and in the Baltic States. In terms of strategic communication, the Ukrainian media became inaccessible, and the Russian channels strongly promoted the Russian Federation's version, building a parallel reality that, in public perception, legitimized Russia's actions. Of crucial importance was the inborn understanding of three target audiences, particularly their likely behaviour: the Crimean-speaking Russian *majority population*, the Ukrainian *government leadership* and the *international community* - specifically NATO and the EU. Armed with these means, the Russian Federation has thus demonstrated that the old Soviet art of *reflexive control* is present. By *reflexive control* can be understand the control over the opponent by influencing the relationship he has with himself: determining that he voluntarily takes the predetermined and desired decisions of the initiator of the action³².

For this purpose, since 2003-2004, Russia has been looking for new means of action that have the objective of influencing and gaining access to its ideas and theses: to restructure RIA Novosti, the main Russian information agency, to modernize external audiovisuals, creating a network of programs such as Russia Today (RT), with a 24-hour broadcast (broadcasting in English since 2005, in Arabic – since 2007, in Spanish – since 2009), create the Valdai Discussion Club, NGO's and foundations that have the mission to strengthen Russia's presence on the international arena. Of a significant importance is also Runet – the Russian Internet. In order to strengthen its presence in the field of innovation, it initiates a branding policy through the Skolkovo project³³.

In order to achieve its goals in foreign policy, Russia needs to improve its perception on the international arena. V. Putin uses in his game a new tactics, that of *smart power*, which includes in the nearby neighbouring countries influence through popular means controlled by the Russian Federation, including Russian-language television channels broadcast abroad, which are much more famous than the local ones³⁴.

By developing *soft power*, Russia faces a number of problems. The transition from the ubiquitous propaganda from the time of the former USSR to the information on the aspects concerning the image of the Russian Federation is monopolized by the image of President V. Putin³⁵. Partnerships in the cultural

³² *Ibidem*, p. 133.

³³ *Quand la Russie montre sa puissance... douce*, <<http://fortune.fdesouche.com/296173-quand-la-russie-montre-sa-puissance-douce>> (22.03.2018).

³⁴ *La stratégie russe dans l'espace post-soviétique: entre soft et hard power. Le cas de l'Ukraine*, <<http://www.justicepaix.be/?article591>> (22.02.2018).

³⁵ A. Tinguay, *Russie: le syndrome de la puissance*, <<http://ceriscope.sciences-po.fr/puissance/content/part4/russie-le-syndrome-de-la-puissance?page=3>> (22.11.2017).

and scientific field are another aspect of the humanitarian direction and its main purpose is to stop the process of changing history in the post-Soviet space. Thus, with the creation of “Ruskii Mir” Foundation Centres, Russian literature, history books and other materials meant to prevent any other interpretation.

Mass media is also one of the main sources of information for most of the CIS population. The Russian press is used as one of the tools by which the Russian Federation promotes its policy in the region. A proof of this is also the case for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus where over the years several Russian media attitudes have been observed, which took place at the same time as the Russian official speech to these countries. In addition to traditional propaganda tools, through news bulletins, analytical broadcasts and talk shows, indirect instruments such as films, concerts, sports and other non-political broadcasts popular outside the Russian Federation are often used. These are often more effective than those with a political character.

Events caused by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, resulting in the annexation of Crimea and the city of special status Sevastopol, as well as the serious destabilization of the security situation in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, had a special impact on the states in the vicinity of Russia³⁶.

Almost 25 years after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the Russian Federation is trying to re-establish its status as a major power. Since the second half of the 2000s, Russia has re-launched its policy of restoring the superpower status. The main objective of Russia is to have influence in the post-Soviet space, which remains an area in which the Russian Federation has geostrategic interests. In order to achieve geopolitical and geostrategic interests, the Russian Federation resorts to a wide range of power: from *hard* to *soft* power.

Taking under consideration the use of soft power, the city of Sochi as the arena of the Olympic Games can serve as an example. By organizing the Winter Olympic Games, the Russian Federation again tried to manifest itself as an important geopolitical actor on the international arena. The costs of preparations for 2014 winter competitions exceeded \$ 53 billion, being the most impressive in the history of the Olympic Games. For the first time in the history of the Olympic Games a unique Olympic park was created, with the capacity to host 75.000 guests. At the same time, participants were provided service by 25.000 volunteers trained in 26 educational institutions. During the competitions 2.800 media representatives were accredited; 3 billion viewers

³⁶ W. Usloviyakh, *Kogda Rossiyskaya Federatsiya sozdayot Respublike Moldova ekonomicheskije problemy, Yevropeyskiy soyuz otkryvayet svoi granitsy dlya moldavskoy produktsii*, <<http://point.md/ru/novosti/politika/kogda-rossiya-sozdayot-moldove-problemi-es-otkrivaet-svoi-granici>> (01.03.2018).

across the world have been able to watch the broadcast of the Olympic Games, which have been the most innovative in the history of Olympic competitions³⁷.

Currently, Russia is trying to regain its international prestige and influence, which it lost in the years after the collapse of the USSR through its policies in the relations with the West. As an objective of the Russian strategy, it is the ambition to conquer, not just through the economic and political influence, the close proximity and part of Eastern Europe, but also through the social-cultural aspect. The Olympic Games have become not only the most important social event of the last decades, but also a good way of displaying Russia on the international arena.

In addition to preparing competitions, it was also important to ensure the security of the Games and preserve the public order. For the successful unfolding of the event, the security of Sochi borders has also entered remote control - televisions, modern control points at the airport, ports, entry permit on the territory of the city, especially the control of the crossing point on Mzimta river, the control of the crossing points of the Soci-Abhazia railway³⁸.

More than 20.000 rescuers³⁹, including the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, were involved in the Olympics. Also, the armed forces were involved in operations to maintain public order and ensure security for the preparation and running of the Sochi Winter Olympics held in February 2014. Thus, according to the commander of the Russian Land Forces, General Vladimir Cirkin, as reported by Mediafax, "The security Guarantee for Preparing and Running the Olympic Games (7-23 February 2014) and Soil Paralympics" (7-16 March 2014) was part of the army's missions in operations aimed at "new threats to internal security".

While analyzing the geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, it is worth mentioning that they remain present. Given the presence and manifestation of the US and NATO interests towards the Eastern European area, the Russian Federation is making efforts to maintain the former Soviet republics in its sphere of influence. The events in Kiev that resulted in the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, a geostrategic point by which the Russian Federation expanded its presence in the Black Sea Basin, represent Russia's tendencies to maintain in its sphere of influence the Eastern European and South Caucasian regions. Russia's use of the *hard* and *soft power* strategies in order to maintain the Eastern European area in its sphere of influence shows us the tendency of Russia to diminish the impact of the US, NATO and the EU in the area, considering it as threat to national security. The interest of the Russian

³⁷ *Minoborony RF budet obespechivat bezoposnost zimnikh Olimpiyskikh igr v Sochi*, <<http://www.versia.am/minoborony-rf-budet-obespechivat-bezoposnost-zimnix-olimpijskix-igr-v-sochi/>> (20.02.2018).

³⁸ *Jocurile Olimpice de Iarnă 2014 de la Soci, amenințate deschis cu atentate teroriste*, <http://stiri.tvr.ro/jocurile-olimpice-de-iarna-2014-de-la-soci-amenintate-deschis-cu-atentate-teroriste_32413.html> (14.03.2018).

³⁹ *Bezopastmost Olimpiyskikh igr Sochi - 2014*, <<http://sochi2013.com/zimnie-olimpijskie-igr-y-sochi-2014/organizaciya-igr-v-sochi/bezopasnost-olimpijskix-igr-sochi-2014/>> (21. 07.03.18).

Federation towards the Eastern European and South Caucasian states, especially the former Soviet republics, is to create a buffer zone at its borders in order not to admit the neighbouring direction with the EU and NATO.

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