Diploma Thesis’ Title:
“Frozen” and active conflicts in Black Sea region and beyond:
A study of the recent “battle” of interests and cultures

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**Introduction**

At the beginning of my diploma thesis, having studied carefully all its relevant sources, I had some brief thoughts created in my mind, in which I would like to be mentioned in my introduction, namely how and why there were so many conflicts among the states surrounding the Black Sea region and which are concerned particularly to Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Russia (Chechnya), Moldova (Transnistria), Armenia-Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and Ukraine-Russia. So my first indicative assumption is that very important role in all these states was playing their geostrategic place, their energy sources (oil and gas sources), their transit role (pipelines), various financial interests, territorial claims, ports, etc. The result of all these was the conflicts’ emergence for different reasons for each side separately, which usually had a regional character, whereas some others, had a more serious evolution, like in the case of Ukraine, where the Russian engagement - the non-agreement between Yanukovych and the EU - the Maidan revolt - the annexation of Crimea and the USA engagement in a diplomatic sense, resulted in the emergence of a civil war in the eastern part of Ukraine and there were fears of a major expansion of this conflict so that it becomes a major issue in a global sense.

A second assumption of mine was that another factor that played a major role was that the great powers like the EU, NATO and USA engaged on purpose; first of all to protect their interests in various sectors like geopolitics – energy – pipelines - ports and in other financial and territorial issues, each one of them for its own reasons trying to play its own role in the Black Sea region: and secondly, the great powers knew very well that the Black Sea region is a quite neuralgic strategic place in the global map, which unites Europe and Asia, something known from ancient times as far as the significant role it was playing, like in trade with the Silk Road - the colonies - commercial ports, the geopolitical issues and later on, the energy sources (oil - natural gas - transit pipelines), thus each one of them wanted to be the major player in all sectors mentioned above, resulting to the emergence of conflicts for separate reasons for each side among these states of the sensitive Black Sea region. So after these first brief thoughts of mine, I will go on to the more extensive analysis of the various aspects that had a great significance for each of these conflicts separately.
Abstract

The Black Sea region is a dynamic and complex area in which many national and international actors have key interests, including Russia and the US. The European Union stretches to the sea’s western coast where it meets former Soviet territory as well as EU candidate Turkey. Regional tensions include those over NATO enlargement, access to the Black Sea, democratization, spheres of interest and the conflict zones of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria. In addition, the region’s close proximity to the Caspian basin offers the prospect of alternative energy resources and routes to western states. The Black Sea Region is one of the main factors in the make-up of security and stability in Europe and Asia. In addition to the numerous other issues in the region, ethnic conflicts, ongoing state building processes, the presence of vast natural resources, and strategic transport and energy corridors mean that the region is an extremely important and sensitive area.

The Black Sea region has always played a specific role in the foreign policy of Ukraine. Security in the Wider Black Sea region is one of the core elements of European security, and Ukraine, as one of the major actors in this region, had a potential to unite efforts of different states and international organizations to enhance cooperation in this region. The Ukraine crisis appears to be a potential turning point in Euro-Atlantic security that could be categorized as an active conflict though between Russia and Ukraine. Having come as a surprise to many, some senior Western officials and politicians have talked of a changed European security landscape, and that the crisis both creates new security realities for the twenty-first century and demands a significant response from NATO. At the same time, however, the crisis is the crystallisation of a number of wider and longer-term problems that have been increasingly visible for some time, most notably the intensifying sense of strategic dissonance between Russia and the West.

That poses questions. Is regional integration ineffective in dealing with the conflicts of identity or separatism? Or is there something special about the conflicts themselves or the environment they are developing in? How can these conflicts affect the economic, external or defence policy of the countries involved in this battle of interests in the area? Concerning NATO and the EU the question is: will joining both or either of these organizations help solve the “frozen” or active conflicts? These are some of the research questions that I am going to tackle during this paper.
The Abkhazia-Georgia conflict

I will start my analysis with the Abkhazia-Georgia conflict. Abkhazia is a Black Sea region which seceded from Georgia after the 1992-1993 war. Its geographic range is 8,700 km2, borders Russia and which before the war was an autonomous republic of the Soviet Union into Georgia. Its population was 500,000 people from which 45% are Georgians and 17% are Abkhazians whereas the rest are Armenians and Russians. Its currency is the ruble and the official language is the Abkhazian. The Russian influence was obvious whereas its laws restricted the foreigners and Russians from buying land or buildings, because from the profits of these investments especially from Russians, there were fears that they would sponsor the opposition parties.

Regarding its history, it had its own ancient culture which was common with the Georgian one, but simultaneously differed. However Georgia, during the 1990 decade was a country whose political situation was characterized by great corruption, authoritarian regime, governmental malfunction, whereas its huge problems were the separatist tendencies of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but the incoming refugees from Abkhazia as well. When we refer to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict we could say that it is rooted in the Abkhaz perception of itself as a separate ethnic group with its own distinct culture, while ethnic Georgians see Abkhazia as part of Georgia. This conflict has been sharpened by human rights violations by both sides during two wars and intermittent violence over the last two decades. The conflict has resulted in the expulsion of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, and ethnic cleansing. The 2008 War and Russia’s subsequent recognition of Abkhazia’s independence and security guarantee have not resolved the conflict, but only served to make it even more rigid. Since the 2008 war, and Russia’s recognition of Abkhazia, the entity has become increasingly dependent on Moscow. Half of the entity’s budget comes from Moscow, and new Russian military installations are being built in the Black Sea coastal area. Almost all Abkhazia residents hold Russian citizenship and almost all the trade is with Russia. At the same time, many ethnic Abkhaz are wary of their over-reliance on Moscow. The future for the international status of Abkhazia is uncertain. Only four countries, including Russia, have recognized its independence. The conflict thus remains unresolved and remains a “frozen conflict” with the very real possibility of unplanned escalation. Around 212,000 ethnic Georgians remain displaced. While
some ethnic Georgians have been able to return to the Gali district, Abkhaz officials stated that returns to other parts of the entity would not be authorized.

The conflict story started during the 1990 decade when the dissolution of the Soviet Union started up, Georgia tried to establish itself as a state. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union however, secessionist tendencies started emerging in Abkhazia (and South Ossetia), with the first one demanding its independence. Alongside these events however, Georgia was engaged in a civil war among the supporters of Zviad Gamsakurdia and Edward Shevardnadze and in this acute and electrified environment, Georgians attempted to get the military control of Abkhazia, performing a military operation in 1992. However, after a hard war from both sides that lasted until September 1993, Abkhazia, with the support of Caucasian volunteers and some Russian troops, took over the whole area. The battle in Abkhazia was violent and cost the life of 10,000 people within a year from 1992 to September 1993 thus there were and many fatalities. After the war, the Georgian troops and a large part of the Georgian population were exiled from Abkhazia but there were also ethnic cleansing policies against Georgian citizens, especially in the Gali region, from one of the hardest groups that was the Islamic unit of Chechnya, which was supported during that time by Russia. In 1994, after the UN intervention, there was a ceasefire agreement which lasted until 2008. Since then 50,000 Georgians were allowed to return to Gali region, which was mainly Georgian, but there are still some small rebel units mainly in the Gali area. Also, Georgia and Abkhazia were isolated for years from each other thus Abkhazians cannot travel to Georgia or Georgians to Abkhazia whereas Abkhazia was showing desolation marks as from the 500,000 Abkhazians before the war, there were approximately 200,000 remaining.

After the Russian-Georgian war though, the independence of Abkhazia is declared at 20th August 2009, (from Russia and Nicaragua); as well as in Georgia in November 2003 with various demonstrations that were strengthened and then we had the “Rose revolution”, leaded by Mikhail Shaakashvili who later on became its president in 2004 and who, at the beginning of his presidency, started a process of sweeping changes bringing foreign investments, reduced the corruption, introduced a better governance system, thus bigger welfare of the population. Later on though, he could not control his government, which had a more centralized policy that led to weakening of the community of citizens thus developing contradictions between the government and the opposition parties. Also, the Georgian government tried to
shorten the processes for its accession to NATO in order to bring back Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) under Georgian control thus there was a great intensity in its relations with Russia, which escalated dangerously and peaked during the war of the August 2008.

International efforts to mediate between the two parties to the conflict started during the 1992-1993 war and continued thereafter. After all these events, there was the first financing of the EU for the peoples that participated in the battles since 1997 but during the 1990 decade the EU avoided having a substantial role in general for the battles emerged in South Caucasus because at first it was far away and second it had a low external policy. In this way, it avoided various vital subjects of high policy that were related to these battles, but tried to contribute to the peace protection with various proposals and regulations for the conflict resolution in Abkhazia (and South Ossetia). Peace efforts were aimed at reaching a comprehensive settlement, including the political status of Abkhazia, the return of refugees, security issues and economic reconstruction.

However, at 2003-2004 when things started to change the EU started showing a greater interest for the region. So in 2006 it signed an Action Plan with Georgia, which anticipated cooperation on issues regarding the conflict of Georgia with Abkhazia (and South Ossetia). In this plan the EU was facilitated as it was thought to be more neutral comparing to USA and Russia which were more politicized on the conflict issue. Also, it offered important financing for the restoration of the damages from the battles between Georgia and Abkhazia, mainly at Zugdidi region of western Georgia and Gali region of Abkhazia whereas in 2004-2005 the financial support increased for various tasks, programmes for food supplies for refugees in Abkhazia and for the deported who were living in Georgia. So in 2006, EU became the greatest sponsor of Abkhazia with programmes of cooperation of decentralized people, which were targeted to people outside of the war zone as well. As it seems the EU focused on two categories of activities; in the first on the support of citizens, in the second on its support to those NGOs that were representing the displaced people into Georgia and in others which were promoting the dialogue between the two sides of the battle.

Furthermore, in these years, the NGOs played a very important role in Abkhazia, which was in deep poverty and geographical isolation, with unresolved secessionist battles, thus developed their activities and their influence both inside and outside Abkhazia, in subjects like the psychological and body restoration of the
victims, many regular meetings for disappeared people in cooperation with the NGOs of Georgia, the governance, mass media, human freedom, security, confrontation of domestic violence, the promotion of sex equality and the freedom of access to information. The most reliable and popular NGOs were the Centre for Humanistic Programmes, the Women’s Club of Abkhazia, the Sokhumi Media Lab, the Entrepreneurs’ Union, etc.

Furthermore, in the conversations for the issue of Abkhazia and security of the area of South Caucasus, with the participation of Georgia, Russia South Ossetia and the EU but and the foreign minister of Abkhazia, there was stagnation because Georgia refused to sign an agreement on no usage of violence in Abkhazia as it considered this region as a possessed place of it and it didn’t want the return of Georgian refugees in Gali region and a compensation for their houses. So, all the attempts for the battle resolution ended up being unsuccessful. After all these, the relations of Russia with Georgia started being in a low level and every few months Russia tried to engage giving financial support to Abkhazia and Russian passports to its citizens but to bring together military forces in the Abkhazia borders as well, while Georgia tried to be reinforced militarily and to be incorporated the quickest in NATO with the thought on the return of Abkhazia under Georgian control, to blame Russia that it encourages a secessionist action in its area and Abkhazia gradually to be isolated fearing a Georgian invasion. All these had as a result the dialogue to be done more isolated, the competition to increase and the results to be very limited for the restoration of the effects of the battles. However many international factors were supporting that it is worth to be pursued by both sides an effort of strong political commitment on the highest level, in order not to exist any aggravation of the battle for this to end up to a “frozen conflict”.

The Georgia-South Ossetia conflict

Another intensive conflict that emerged was in South Ossetia. South Ossetia is located within the recognized borders of Georgia and was an autonomous periphery of the USSR after the dissolution of which was self-declared as democracy, declaring its independence. Its separation though, was not recognized by other countries except Russia – Venezuela – Nicaragua as it is thought to be a part of Georgia and which does not recognize it as a different entity. According to some estimation, in Ossetia there are approximately 20,000 Georgians living at one half of the area and 25,000 Ossetians at the other half, most of which had Russian passports, Russian nationality that had been given to them and which wanted to be part of Russia.

The present-day conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia is rooted in a different understanding of historical facts and developments. Whereas Ossetians consider South Ossetia as part of Ossetian territory from ancient times and argue that the Ossetians were always closer to Russia than to Georgia, the Georgians hold that the ancestors of the Ossetians have migrated from their homeland north of the Caucasian mountains. The tensions in this area between South Ossetia and Georgia started at approximately the 1920 decade, when the first one made some unsuccessful efforts to gain its independence but the only thing it achieved was to become an autonomous region of Georgia into the USSR. A disagreement about the status of South Ossetia within the Soviet federal system was the starting point for the violent conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia, which evolved in parallel with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1989 South Ossetia together with North Ossetia pressed to be incorporated in Russia or gain its independence, but this action caused in 1990 the battle as the former Georgian president Gamsakurdia didn’t accept it thus in 1991 there were hostilities among them, so 2,000-4,000 people died and many others were displaced.

In June 1992, with the Russian mediation we had a ceasefire and the establishment of peace units in a security zone around the Ossetian capital Tchinkvali which were made up of 1100 soldiers from which 530 were Russians and 300 from North Ossetia, whereas at the end of 2003 Michail Shaakashvili took the power during the “Rose revolution” and became president in 2004. Shaakasvili immediately after he took over he promised to apply democratic and economic reforms and also he grew pressure on South Ossetia about stricter controls along its borders for the
confrontation of smuggling which had by its side the Russian organized crime and corrupted Georgian dignitaries as cooperators. Also, he sent military police and secret agencies’ officers and approximately 500 soldiers which were the allowed limit according to the ceasefire agreement, with the excuse to preserve the peace.

In July 2005, president Shaakashvili announced a new peace plan for South Ossetia in which he was giving important autonomy and which had three stages like the demilitarization, the economic restoration and the political adjustment. However, the South Ossetian president Kokoiti denied the plan, claiming that the South Ossetia citizens are also Russian citizens. In mid-2005, Kokoiti on his turn deposited a peace proposal that anticipated the key points, but with the presupposition that South Ossetia will be independent, but in November 2006 a referendum took place in South Ossetia for its independence, in which, as autonomists mentioned, 95% of the 55.000 subscribed citizens approved of the independence, although State Department refused to recognize this voting. In March 2007 president Shaakashvili suggested another peace plan for South Ossetia, which anticipated the creation of transitive administrative districts all over the area and the creation of a committee that would exercise the South Ossetian regime as part of Georgia. The meeting that took place in Tbilisi for this issue in October 2007 produced no outcome and no further meetings were arranged.

In July 2008, Russia performed a military exercise with the code name “Caucasus” in which 8.000 soldiers participated and took place near the Russian-Georgian borders. However, at the same time with the Russian exercise, almost 1000 USA soldiers and 600 soldiers from Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine performed an exercise with the code name “Immediate Response” 2008. The scenario that was spreading for this Russian exercise was that hypothetically, there was an attack that took place in the secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and that the Russian troops counter-attacked through the air, sea and land in order to protect the “peacekeepers” that occupied these areas, but the Russian citizens as well. The Georgian foreign ministry though was protesting that this exercise was a threat for invasion and after a few weeks proved to be indeed a rehearsal from the Russian troops for that reason. After all these tensions that started from 1920, we are at 2008 for a violent battle between Russia-Georgia, with the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions as a stalking horse, but substantially Russia wanted to protect its geopolitical interests.
So the tensions started to escalate with various excuses like in 3 July 2008 with the death of the police leader and the head of the pro-Georgian government of South Ossetia Dmitriy Sanakoyev, who avoided a mine injury, thus artillery attacks started in villages from both sides. In 8 July 2008 four Russian militant planes flew over the aviation area of South Ossetia, with the excuse to discourage Georgia from attacking South Ossetia, thus Georgia recalled its ambassador to Russia for “consultations”. After the air invasion, the USA foreign minister Condoleezza Rice arrives at Georgia in order to find ways of defusing the situation and Russia to respect the independence of Georgia and stressed the strong USA commitment for the territorial integrity of Georgia.

In the evening of 7 August 2008, South Ossetia and Georgia accused each other that there were artillery attacks, from the one hand Georgia in Tchinkvali whereas Ossetia in Georgian villages. At the same night Shaakashvili declared the one-sided ceasefire and called South Ossetia to do the same, but S. Ossetia continued bombing the Georgian villages, thus compelling Georgia to send land troops to Ossetia and declare the end of the ceasefire. The Georgian troops were soon in control of a large part of Ossetia and Tchinkvali city, thus the Russian president Dmitri Medvedev called an urgent meeting of the Russian Security Council in 8 August to arraign the Georgian invasion in Ossetia, supporting that there are children, women and elderly people being killed, most of which are Russian and those who are responsible for this will be punished. So in 11th August he declared that Russia is the permanent guarantor for the Caucasian security and never a passive observer.

Onwards, in response to the Georgian invasion to South Ossetia, Russia unleashed air attacks in the area, sending troops with experienced professionals. In Ossetia, the same day, the Russian militant planes destroyed Georgian airports and airbases near the Georgian capital Tbilisi, whereas thousands of Russian soldiers recaptured Tchinkvali and the biggest part of Ossetia arriving to the borders with the rest of Georgia. The Russian ships debarked troops in Abkhazia and took places in the open of the sea of Georgia. Shaakashvili, declared the country in war situation, activating all the reservists as well whereas at the 10th of August the foreign minister of Georgia announced at the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov that all Georgian troops withdrew from South Ossetia and asked for a ceasefire, but Lavrov claimed that Georgian troops remain in Tchinkvali and with this excuse, at the 11th August Russia bombarded Gori city and claimed it.
After this war, the existing effects harmed both countries. In the case of Georgia and Ossetia the battles had as a result the death of hundreds of soldiers and many civilians, the scale of damages to be very long and to exist thousands of displaced, destroyed Georgian villages and houses that emanated from civil protectors of South Ossetia in an effort of them for ethnic cleansing. Also, the military infrastructure of Georgia was deconstructed at least temporarily, in such an extent to need huge military support from USA and NATO in order to retrieve them, whereas the railway transportations with Azerbaijan were temporarily interrupted towards the Black Sea ports and some oil and gas pipeline delegations, although there were no damages reported from the battles. Concerning Ossetia, the military operations cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, with Russia to declare and commit for the restoration of its area. In the Russian case however, after its disproportionate battle with Georgia, the one-sided recognition of the independence of South Ossetia, its refusal to negotiate directly with Shaakasvili, the interception of diplomatic relations, trade, transportations, the demand of Russia to Georgia in order to abandon its efforts to be incorporated to NATO, as well as lustrate Shaakasvili from president, all these harmed its image as a reliable and peaceful member of the international community.

In general though, this war, according to the report of the World Bank had as a consequence the shrinkage of liquidity in the bank system, in public finances, huge damages in material infrastructure and huge problems for the displaced people. The damages occurred were estimated at $394,000,000 which had to be restored immediately, whereas the financial development for 2008 declined from 9% to 3% and according to the bank report, the low paces of financial development will endure for several years.

So in the 13th August, former USA president Bush confirmed that Condoleezza Rice will visit France and Georgia and together with the defense minister Robert Gates, will announce a multiannual plan for humanistic help as relief for Georgia. In the 30th September 2008, Congress members visited Georgia, the independence and territorial integrity of Georgia is signed and an additional help is given for its restoration of about $365,000,000. In the 12th August noon, the Russian government declared that Medvedev called Javier Solana who was the supreme ambassador of EU for the common foreign policy and security in order to announce to him the end of hostilities, the restoration of civilian population with the assent of Georgia for peace, which he wanted to sign as well. In contrast to all these, in the
meeting he had with his generals, he ordered them to continue the purging with bombings from the militant planes in all over Georgia, for the detriment of military bases, bridges, industries and other strategic points.

Later on, in the 12th August, he met up with the French president Sharkozy, who was acting as the EU president and had the role for an agreement between Russia and Georgia. The French president showed a peace plan for ceasefire from the EU part in which in many points the Russian president agreed and so the French foreign minister flew to Tbilisi in the evening 12-13 August to show the plan to the Georgian government. Medvedew and Shaakasvili talked in the evening and initially they agreed in a six-point plan. Later in his interview Sharkozy announced a peace plan that calls all the members of the battle to stop the hostilities, to withdraw all the troops back to the positions they had conceived before the battle, it addressed an appeal for humanistic help and the return of the displaced people, excluded any report for the Georgian integrity, the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia but it let Russian “peacekeepers” to stay and patrol in a security zone outside South Ossetia which will include a strip of Georgian territory alongside its borders. Russian peacekeepers were allowed to take additional security measures. Furthermore, it was agreed to launch international discussions on security and stability arrangements for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. 

The plan also involved opening of international talks for the security and stability of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and a greater international role in peace talks for the preservation of peace. In the 13th August, an urgent meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU approved of the possible participation of EU observers; in the 14th August Medvedev accepted the presidents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Moscow and signed the peace agreement, in the 15th August the French foreign minister visited Tbilisi and Shaakasvili signed the agreement thus in 8th September Sharkozy negotiated an agreement, that 200 EU observers will develop in the battles zone and almost all the Russian troops will be withdrawn from the border areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia till the midnight of 10th October.

The reactions naturally that existed were many by leaders and organizations of the world, who rushed to mediate in this conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, whereas many of them thought that the responsibility for this battle was shared in both sides but the main issue was the ceasefire and humanistic help. So these governments criticized Russia for the excessive violence and the recognition of Abkhazia and
South Ossetia against to the territorial integrity of Georgia, but Georgia as well for the recovery of South Ossetia with violence, while for the European leaders there should be immediate compliance with the regulations of the peace plan. Also, we had statements from many leaders like Angela Merkel who characterized the recognition as unaccepted and that the conversation still could open with the use of international mechanisms for the conflict resolution; Sharkozy with the quality of the EU president who condemned the recognition as contrary to the principles of independence of dominance and of territorial integrity of Georgia and that EU will examine the effects for Russia; and the Italian foreign minister Franco Fratini, who warned for a western reaction of isolation of Russia.

Also, this recognition was widely condemned from the United States and the international community, but also many observers warned Russia that it was in danger because of its behavior, with international isolation from all states and elimination of its membership in the global trade organization of G8. However, certain concerns were expressed by the former Soviet Union states like Ukraine, as if Russia encourages the secession of its eastern part and of the Crimean peninsula. Also, Azerbaijan appeared to be hesitant about the problem of secession of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, if it should be solved with violence, whereas Armenia by its side, because of its good relations and strong ties with Russia, was concerned if the latter was to intervene in its security. Finally, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, although they refused the diplomatic recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, approved very quickly of the humanistic help to these areas. So, after all these events, in the 17th September 2008 Russia signed an agreement of Friendship, Cooperation and mutual help with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which anticipated that their peripheries would decide for the number of troops accommodated, would let Russia establish military bases and develop army along the borders to help their defense if necessary, their citizens would enter Russia and its embassies freely when traveling abroad, whereas they will pledge that their policies on tax issues, social welfare issues, pension bank laws, energy, transportation, communication issues, all these would keep up with the Russian systems. After all these, in February 2009, the Russian headquarters announced the construction and restoration of the facilities of Tchinkvali in South Ossetia and Gali of Abkhazia and the delegation of 3700 soldiers in each area, as well as that some ships from the Black Sea fleet will remain in Abkhazia port.
The divisions between the parties on matters of principle are enormous. The United States, the EU and Georgia have a clear understanding of where Georgia’s borders are and a clear conviction that Abkhazia and South Ossetia lie within them. The conflict in the Caucasus has also created divisions in the EU over how to deal with Russia—a key energy supplier to the EU. Some EU member states, led by France and Germany, have pushed for a diplomatic solution to the situation in Georgia. Others, including Poland, Italy, Sweden and the UK, have advocated a stronger stance against Russia. They see Russia’s military presence there as a violation of the principle of host-nation consent and thus illegal. Russia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have a different read on Georgia’s borders, with all three calling the latter sovereign states, which permit the Russian military to operate there on a consensual basis. Regardless of the merits of either view, one thing is for certain: After two years of holding firm, neither side is likely to change its stance anytime soon. But after discussing the issue in both Moscow and Tbilisi and visiting areas affected by the conflict in recent days, we believe that the parties can and should move ahead on important steps on humanitarian and security matters despite these differences.

The crisis over South Ossetia between Georgia and Russia that took place in August 2008 highlights the volatility of the Black Sea region as a new flashpoint in the common neighbourhood between Russia and the European Union. What has made the conflict in Georgia so crucial to the EU is the fact that this is not to be seen as an isolated occurrence. The incidence has repercussions throughout a region that is marked by a framework of challenges to political stability and democratic consolidation – factors that directly affect European security and welfare. Abkhazia and South Ossetia intensified their calls for the recognition of their independence by Russia, the United Nations and other international organisations following Kosovo’s recognition of independence.

The consequences of the conflict in South Ossetia are not only debated in international law, but also in international politics, above all as the reactions to the hostilities. The recent conflict in the Caucasus has strained Russia’s relations with some Western countries. NATO–Russia relations, which have in the past achieved cooperation on significant issues, such as Afghanistan and counter-terrorism, have also been affected. Russia’s prospective membership of the WTO is also now in
doubt. The Russia–Georgia military confrontation has had a significant impact on Georgia’s political and strategic outlook and that of the immediate region. It has contributed to the increase of Russia’s influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Long-term impacts of the conflict are still to be assessed. The assumption exerted from many observers was that the agreement created a complete dependence of these Georgian regions from Russia thus it is unknown at the moment what will happen in the future, in this battle and so to be considered temporarily as a “frozen conflict”.
The Russia-Chechnya conflict

Another conflict that emerged was in Chechnya region. The so-called republic of Chechnya is located in the North Caucasus and borders in the north with Russia and south with Georgia and Azerbaijan and the citizens of Chechnya are approximately 1,000,000. Chechnya took its name from the name of a lowland village, where Russians as well met them for the first time. Its area however, was called from the tsarist period as Chechnya. Its territory is squared and lies between the rivers Terek and Suza at the west and north, at the eastward is expanded to the Andi Mountains that separate it from Dagestan and in the south to Caucasus. Its land is covered with dense forests and is crossed by many currents that spring from the mountains of the south. Chechens were living in their region for at least 6,000 years and their language belongs to a Nakh subcategory that stems from Caucasian languages. Russians though call Chechnya the western part of the region because the southwestern part was occupied by Ingush people.

It is mentioned that during the Stalinist era (1924-1953) Chechens were exiled along with other minority groups in Siberia and Central Asia, whereas in 1950 the Soviets let them go back to their country, which they had been missing for decades, as well as their land and the financial resources and for that reason Chechens were pursuing their independence. So, when we had in 1991 the dissolution of the USSR, there were secessionist battles in North Caucasus thus the secessionist tendency of Chechnya was gaining ground to contribute to the dissolution of the former Democracy of Chechnya-Ingushetia. Then Boris Yeltsin who was president of Russia put pressure for the application of a federal system that would allow the autonomy in governance and taxes and most Caucasian democracies accepted it, whereas Chechnya was the first one that demanded its independence, thus in December 1994 the Russian troops invaded in the autonomist democracy of Chechnya. During the period 1994-1996, Russia fought against the Chechen autonomists and two years of harsh battles followed in a bloody campaign that had thousands Russian and Chechen casualties and hundreds of thousands displaced people. All these happened until August 1996, when Aslan Mashadov, the Chechen rebels’ leader and Russian general Alexander Lebed negotiated an agreement for ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops. This agreement remained, and the decision concerning the constitutional regime that imposed until 2001, whereas in the next winter Mashadov became
president of the autonomist government by winning the elections and after six months of his presidency, along with Boris Yeltsin signed an official peace treaty for the end of the Russian attacks in Chechnya. That’s how they ended the first war, leaving open though the issue of Chechnya independence but Russia as well agreed to comply with the international law. Chechen independence fighters faced one of the largest and best-equipped military forces in the world. They chose to use urban guerilla tactics against Russia’s tanks and automatic weapons. Though after only six months of fighting, Russia occupied all the large towns in Chechnya, Chechen fighters used the time to regroup, and then fought their occupiers from within. When Russia gained the upper hand, Chechen’s captured hostages in Russian cities and forced Russia to negotiate with OSCE supervision.

Furthermore, the organized crime and the Islamic extremism increased in Chechnya and other borderland places of Russia but existed and bombing actions in cities like the bomb attack in Moscow blocks from Chechen terrorists, which had as a consequence, the resurgence of the battle in August 1999. So, Prime Minister Putin in 15 September 1999 ordered to military and police forces to enter again Chechnya at the end of 1999 whereas at the beginning of 2000 the Russian troops claimed the larger part of the area and there were huge numbers of losses to civilians and displaced citizens.

However, the most notable battle, which evolved in this war and was called fairly as the hardest one, was the Grozny siege by Russian troops. So, it is mentioned that in 4 December 1999 Russians compassed Grozny and after they warned the remaining citizens throwing leaflets from the sky to abandon it, started the attack with the Thunder Task force in which the soldiers were trained in new tactics and techniques of military operations, supported by a combination of various weapons like artillery air force and missiles SS-21 Scarab type. Furthermore, they began the destruction of most buildings in order to decrease the coverage of the warriors who used them as a defense. Also, many free marksmen participated in this battle from both sides, which had the mission mainly to control basic junctions and it was said that it was a free marksmen’ war. While the battle was evolving from house to house and Chechens were losing ground, suddenly it seemed that they found ways for their replenishment and being reinforced with new warriors, thus at the beginning of January to counterattack and win back their territories.
Suddenly though, at that moment Puslam Gebayev (known as Black Angel), withdrew the force of his 1500 men without any order, leaving the rest of Chechen forces. So in the beginning of February, because of the increasing losses and the decreasing supplies, the instruction given was to evacuate Grozny, during a snowstorm – big fire - with constant ambushes and through minefields. However, Russians at the beginning had not realized that Chechens were evacuating Grozny and thought it was a trick; then, when they realized their mistake they tried to destroy the various routes to the villages of Chechnya, so that the Chechen warriors cannot escape to Chechnya so what followed was a big massacre with the number of victims to be detrimental.

Despite all these that happened, their heavy losses, the bad weather conditions, the minefields and the Russian attempts to exterminate them, the Chechen warriors managed to escape through the canyons in the countryside where they interspersed and started creating rebel groups against Russians. So, Grozny was declared by the nations as the most destroyed city in the world, as well as the 4th February as one of the best documented violations of human rights by the Russians. It is mentioned though that the reasons for the nasty events evolved in Chechnya were many. The main one though was the mid-period of the wars (interwar) during which there was a fragile state power, the institutions that were dissolute and replaced by criminal ones, the armed criminality, the snatch of enterprises but mainly the competition of the war leaders for power, who were interested for the war economy, namely for the illegal profits and who, when threatened by the establishment of a polity and a control system, managed without difficulties to resort in violence. Furthermore, other factors that played a primary role were the vast oil resources, the pipelines passing through the Chechnya territory, its strategic position in Caucasus and the fear of its secession that would constitute a precedent for other republics as well to secede. In the 3rd March 2000 though, Russia declared the end of the 2nd war, whereas the first had taken place in 1994-1996.

The effects of the war in Chechnya were huge for both sides in human losses mainly of civilians, many displaced people, destructions and damages in the infrastructure, and there were committed many ferocities by both sides as well. Russia suffered heavily from the war, not only in terms of the number of soldiers' coffins. The war encouraged and revivified all the forces opposed to Russia's brief flirtation with liberal democracy. There was a return to heavy-handed media censorship and the
persecution of supposedly unpatriotic elements worsened. The power of the military and security apparatus grew. Russia emerged a less democratic country. Meanwhile, it has become clear that Russia's victory had a pyrrhic character, and that while Chechnya was bound and gagged for a while, its desire for revenge has remained. Russian army focused more on the civilian population, committing mass murders, tortures, beatings in the popular “filtration camps”, arbitrary arrests and interments, tortures and systematic rapes. Also, there were flagrant infringements of the humanistic law in the “filtration camps” which were located in rough establishments where women and kids suffered systematically from rape, were beaten, tortured violently with electric shock and tear gas, but and the indiscriminate bombings and bomb attacks and the three big scale civilian massacres confirmed through interviews of 500 witnesses, as well, in Alkhan-Yurt village the Russians killed 17 citizens, plundered and burned houses and raped women; whereas in Grozny area Russians murdered 50 civilians; in Aldi area of Grozny Russians shot 60 citizens that waited for the soldiers to check their documents and in 24 October 1999 a Russian air attack in the Martin district hit a humanistic convoy.

However, on the other side as well, that of Chechens, there were also various crimes committed, like the fact that Chechen warriors were using civilians as human shields, executing compendiously Russian soldiers against the international humanistic law. But we should not forget that Russia has many victims from the 2002-2004 period by the worst terrorist attacks ever happened in the world and have been committed from Chechens so that Russia to become the terrorism centre of the world, whereas the bomb attacks of 2010 in the Moscow metro remind to West, that Russians suffered from the terrorist attacks of the Chechen rebels and it is mentioned that they were acting in the whole area and were having connections with Muslim extremist organizations.

Considering how the Chechnya conflict has changed over the last ten years, it now requires international attention. Unfortunately, too many agendas have been projected on to the Chechnya conflict by a variety of outsiders including Western commentators, most of which are of little interest to the Chechen or Russian populations. These include the agendas of the global jihad and western interests. Although the Russian government insists that the Chechnya conflict is a front of the international war on terror, it has persistently refused any international involvement. Continuous human rights violations in Chechnya demand worldwide
attention, especially since Russia is a signatory to various human rights treaties pertaining to the OSCE and the Council of Europe. Besides, Russia has failed to solve the conflict on its own and the current corruption of the Russian Federal Security forces is creating further instability in the region. Russia has failed to constructively engage the local populations to promote stability in the region. The international community should work with Russia on addressing its huge security problem in Chechnya, while giving the Chechen people a rightful place on the agenda of the European Community.

Concerning the reactions that existed from the West for this war between Russia-Chechnya, these were contradictory - without indication of any determination – with some European countries remaining silent, whereas the unique specific measure that existed was in 2000 by the European council, which showed its contradiction for the Russian actions in Chechnya, so it suspended the voting right of the Russian representatives. In 25th March 2001 the European council restored the voting right of Russia when Putin announced a decline in troops and approved of a new structure for the governmental policy of Chechnya, thus substantially there were no binding decrees for the issue of human rights in Russia by the West and it avoided asking for accountability for all these events that happened during this war and Russia to claim that the battle is over. However, there have been few serious efforts at peace negotiations throughout the conflict. During the first phase, Russian and Chechen delegations met on a few occasions. In the second phase of the conflict, Russia refused to recognize President Maskhadov’s authority and therefore all efforts at peace negotiations at official and unofficial levels have been ineffective. As of now, Russia maintains a certain control over the Chechnya territory while rebels continue to be active.

Politicians and analysts are divided between those who consider economic interests to be the principal source of the conflict and others who see a geostrategic U.S. plan to gain influence in the region. Both explanations indicate that the tragedy is far from over. Just the opposite: If the major powers do not change and the charade continues, the conflict is only certain to get worse. The war shows no sign of ending soon and international factors are stating that the violence is ready to erupt again as a “frozen conflict”.

22
**The Moldova-Transnistria conflict**

Another conflict that emerged was between Moldova and Transnistria. Transnistria is a secessionist democracy which consists of a narrow land strip of 4.163 km² between the eastern banks of river Dniester of Moldova and the city of Bender with the surrounding areas that are located westwards and Ukraine in the east. Transnistria is occupied by 500,000 people from whom 59% are Russians – Ukrainians and Slavs and by Moldavians – Romanians who constitute 32% of them. Its capital is Tiraspol, a city with 203,000 citizens, which by the three quarters is Russian and Ukrainian. Transnistria though is plagued by corruption – organized crime – smuggling and it has been accused of weapon sales and money laundering, while its president is the Ukrainian nationalist Yevgeny Shevchuk who won the elections in December 2011.

Transnistria is an autonomous geopolitical unit which declared its independence in 1990 and which supports its right on the land of Bender’s city and the surrounding regions in the western bank and the area at the eastern of Dniester. Today it maintains its independence, thanks to the military support from Russian army, which is located there from 1950 when the whole region was part of the USSR, but it grants to it financial support as well.

Officially, the Moldavian authorities recognize it as an autonomous unit with special regime, but consider almost the whole of its territory as part of the Democracy of Moldavia. Moldavia though, has a vibrant history. It is about a Romanian-speaking place known historically as Bessarabia, which after the First World War was claimed by the Soviets in 1940 and was reconstructed as Moldavian Soviet Socialistic Democracy, but Moscow added the Russian-speaking area of Dniester which was a former autonomous part of Ukraine, adding to it future ethnic problems. So in the end of 1980, when Soviet Union was dissolute, Moldavia faced an identity problem because its citizens came from different ethnic origins. Also, nationalism in Moldova was increasing and a new law in 1989 declared the Moldavian language as official one and made it obligatory for all citizens to speak the two languages but there was a huge reaction from the Russian-speaking and the Ukrainian-speaking as they considered it as discrimination.

Transnistria has been linked to Russia since the treaty of Jassy, signed in 1792 when Moldova was still part of the Ottoman Empire. From 1945 to 1991, the
Dniester’s east bank was part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, one of the 15 republics of the USSR. In June 1990, as the Soviet Union was breaking up, the Slavonic language-speaking population revolted against the Moldovan parliament’s adoption of a law making Romanian the sole official language. In February 2014 the new government of Ukraine, formed after the Maidan protests in Kiev, made the same mistake by proposing to abolish Russian as a regional official language, a move seen as provocation in the east of the country. In both Moldova and Ukraine, these laws have played a key role in the escalation of political conflicts between ethnically heterogeneous regions, leading to civil war.

After all these, Transnistria decided on its secession from the Moldavian SSR in September 1990. A year later, when the Soviet Union fell apart, the Moldavian SSR declared its independence as well as Transnistria. However, after World War Two because Transnistria had a heavy industry and despite it had only 17% of the population of the old Soviet democracy, it contributed in 40% of the GDP. So, the new independent state of Moldova with the 3.6 million citizens who were very poor, tried to regain Transnistria thus a brief war emerged between March and July 1992. In 29 March 1992, after the event that the paramilitary officers of Transnistria during the previous months had taken control of the left bank, Moldova declared emergency and in 2 April the battle erupted with serious battles, which were mounted in May and June 1992 and which stopped after the Bender battle in 19-21 June, when the former soviet army which continued to have a strong military body of 1200 soldiers in Transnistria, interfered and leaded the Moldavian army out of the Bender city setting up the end of the battle.

The results of this battle were the loss of 1000 warriors from both sides, 51.000 domestically displaced people and 80.000 refugees who resorted in Ukraine, as well as the internationalization of this conflict because of the Russian participation on the side of autonomists. After the ceasefire, a tripartite mixed control committee was created, which consisted of Russia, Moldova and Transnistria in order to supervise the demilitarized security zone in both banks of river Dniester. But Moldova and Transnistria started negotiations and we had the meeting of the Moldovan Prime Minister Iurie Leanca and Shevchuk, with Moldova to announce that its parliament will examine the obviation of the travel limitations for the Transnistrian citizens who had Russian or Ukrainian passports. In September 2006 the Transnistrian citizens voted with overpowering majority for their independence and created their
own regiment, flag, national anthem and coat of arms, but and military, police, postal system and currency.

Later on, Moldova as well signed a free trade agreement and a treaty of political connection with EU which offered 3.5 million for the citizens of this poor country as well as to travel without visa in the group of the 28 nations. Russia though showed its dissatisfaction on this action through an indirect threat that it could stop the gas supply to Moldova, while the foreign minister of the United States visited Moldova announcing that the Obama government would support trade cooperation between Moldova and the United States.

However, during the first half of the year 2013, because of their territorial differences, the tensions raised again, as in 10 June, Transnistria president Shevchuk published a decree concerning the border security. This document anticipated that in the next months the PMD area will expand in Varnita city and in many villages controlled by the Moldovan government and the Transnistrian army will undertake their control, as well as this decree anticipated the creation of a service that will be responsible for the border protection. The consequence to all these was the tensions to increase during the night of 26-27 April in the security zone in Moldovan borders, thus the president of Moldovan Democracy Niculae Timofti to express his great concern which at this point was justifiable and to criticize in an intense style this action but also to consider it as a territorial threat for the unity in his country. But the Russian diplomat Sergey Gudarev observed that «it’s better to have ten years of negotiations than a day of war». His words leaded to the hope that these tensions will not escalate in a war.

The role of the EU in this conflict, after the configuration of its European policy in 2003-2004 and the signature of the Action Plan EU-Moldova in 2006, became more active on the issue of Moldova including Transnistria for the resolution of the in-between them conflict. This new EU policy and its mediation attempts resulted to its increasing engagement in the conflict issue between Moldova and Transnistria. The major part of the EU engagement in the conflict resolution in Transnistria operated through official communication channels in the form of direct conversations between EU and Moldovan authorities, but there were also informal contacts of the EU officers and with the Transnistrian leadership. However, EU set the issue of the Transnistrian conflict in conversations it made with Russia and Ukraine, as both were important factors for the conflict resolution but and to various
summit meetings. Also, EU was and an observer in the 5+2 talks (OSCE, USA, EU, Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Transnistria) for the conflict resolution where EU, OSCE, Russia and Ukraine were the mediators and USA the observers but these talks were postponed in February 2006, while other negotiations for the border conflict in Transnistria took place in Vienna in 2011 and in Odessa in 2013. Moldova has not given up its sovereignty over Transnistria, making the conflict solving a critical issue in its efforts to move closer to the European Union. On the other hand, Transnistria wants to move closer to Russia, which has raised concerns in Moldova and abroad after the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula – and after Russia has voiced its own concern of Moldova’s strengthening ties with Western Europe.

Moldova has significant economical reasons for approaching EU. The Association Agreement between EU and Moldova goes significantly further than classical forms of economic integration, offering not only improved trade and investment opportunities but also assistance in trade-related reforms with the aim to contribute to economic recovery and growth and to better integration of the Moldovan economy with the world markets. Moldova will benefit from new trading opportunities and easier access to the EU market. The Agreement will allow the Moldovan economy to catch up with the EU in terms of competitiveness and thereby gradually find its place in the world economy. This will open up new opportunities not only in EU-Moldova trade, but in Moldova’s trade with the rest of the world, given the worldwide recognition of EU norms and standards. The most sensitive sectors will benefit from long transitional periods to ensure the smooth adaptation of Moldova’s economy. The issue of Transnistrian independence can thus puts a spanner in the works of Moldova’s movement towards the European Union. The presence of Russian troops in Transnistria does not make the situation any simpler. Later on, EU appeared as a mild power, giving sufficient motives through the Action Plan EU-Moldova, which had to do with the encouragement for democratization, the freedom of the visa regime, the local trans-border traffic, the student exchanges, the trade and the Transnistrian citizens to can easily apply for passport in Moldova in order to travel or study more easily in the EU but and the Transnistrian growers to export their products in the EU market with the same favorable terms of Moldova. In these ways the EU tried from the one hand to relieve poverty in Moldova to be able to be incorporated in the EU and on the other hand it would make Moldova more attractive to people and enterprises in Transnistria, that even their politicians not search for
another solution to change the conflict regime. In the end, the EU stated that it is ready to support a financial package suggested by Moldova in 2006 for trust construction and would consist of a total of works between the right and left bank for both sides, which would contribute to the amelioration of people’s life in Transnistria region. But the first installment would be directed to works of the community of citizens like health, environment and education, which would take place in Transnistria.

The purpose though, of all these works was the reinforcement of the regime in brief time and the amelioration of the status of the relationships between them. Also, especially in the Moldovan side many NGOs were activated in the field of battle resolution, with special programmes on this issue. In many cases, they were calling the Moldovan and Transnistrian authorities for works that would contribute to the creation of bridges or networks among the community of citizens in both banks of river Nistru, in order to build ties on issues that were influencing both sides at the same degree. Other NGOs in Transnistria tried to confront various issues like poverty, human rights but also educational and social policies which occurred from the situation created by the conflict. The result of all these was that the democratization would be possibly a gradual process. So, the opinion of many analysts of the international community and other experts on policy construction for the conflict of Moldova with Transnistria, was that this secessionist battle was one of the several ones that go on in the former Soviet Union but it was the easiest, the briefest and least violent in the whole USSR, as well as it was not nationalistic as no nationalistic group pivoted against each other, there was no ethnic cleansing but it was more of geopolitical nature and is connected to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Furthermore, other reasons were that the organizations of the international community were late to engage and failed to offer any alternative solution for the conflict, thus the autonomists to use the lack of progress for the resolution of the battles, for the consolidation of the status quo in the area with state characteristics and distinctive national identity because they supported the legitimacy of their request for independence and which would be based on a distinctive regional identity of Transnistria with tight ties with the USSR. Another reason was that the consolidation of the autonomists with the support of Russia during the period and after the battle
obligated Moldova to believe that only Russia could bring this issue on the negotiations table. However it was opposed to the independence of Transnistria because it was supporting in these negotiations that it would be better to create a state inside Moldova, whose regime to remain permanently neutral. While OSCE who was the main responsible for the peace, on 16 years had proven that it was insufficient for the arrangement of this conflict in the area. However, there was agreement from all its members for the continuation of its mediation and appeal to the EU for a more active engagement of it in these negotiations. So, after all these years of negotiations the conflict remains unsolved and more specifically a “frozen conflict”.
The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

Another notable conflict was in the Nagorno-Karabakh region between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh is a region located in Caucasus, its range is 4,388 km² and has a population of 188,000 citizens, from which 158,000 are Armenians and in the 1991 census they constituted 85% of its indigenous population while its capital is Stepanakert. Despite the fact that its population declined with the years passing by, Nagorno-Karabakh continues to maintain its Armenian homogeneity in a high level. Nagorno-Karabakh has a long history and as it is proved by many historical documents, archaeological and architectural monuments that relate to Armenian history, witness that Nagorno-Karabakh was part of Armenia for many thousand years.

The name Nagorno-Karabakh (often called simply Karabakh) is a relatively recent combination of the Russian word Nagorno, meaning mountainous, and the Turkic-Persian word Karabakh, meaning black garden. The de-facto authorities of Nagorno Karabakh as well as most Armenian sources use the historical name of the region: Artsakh, meaning strong forest. The origin of both names seems to be linked to geographical features: elevation, cooler climate and, in ancient times, forests rich in game and fruit. Azeri sources report that the term "Nagorny Karabakh" is a Russian translation of the original name in Azerbaijani language - "Dagliq Qarabag" (pronounced as "Daghlygh Garabagh"), which literally means mountainous Garabagh.

The conflict concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh region is really a conflict between two principles: territorial integrity and self-determination. On the one hand, the borders of Azerbaijan were internationally recognised at the time of the country being recognised as independent state in 1991. The territory of Azerbaijan included the Nagorno-Karabakh region. On the other hand, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh (the majority even before "ethnic cleansing" in 1992-1994) claim the right of self-determination. They are supported by Armenia. Armenians from Armenia participated in the armed fighting over the Nagorno-Karabakh region besides local Armenians from within Azerbaijan. Today, Armenia has soldiers stationed in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the surrounding districts, people in the region have passports of Armenia, and the Armenian government transfers large budgetary resources to this area. However, in our times many leaders of Azerbaijan were afraid
of making this historical analysis, as in this way they would undermine their own positions.

Azerbaijan is a country that is located to the eastern Transcaucasia, its capital is Baku; its range is 86,600 km², including Nagorno-Karabakh and Nachichevan, its population is approximately 7,000,000 citizens, from which 90% are ethnic Azeris. Its Language is the Azeri one, regarding its religion, 93% of the citizens are Muslim Siis and Sunnis and the rest in majority are Armenians with their own religion (Armenian Christian church), while it is rich in mineral wealth. Finally Armenia is the smallest and southernmost Eurasian country, which borders Turkey in the west, Georgia in the north, Azerbaijan in the east and Iran in the south. Its capital is Yerevan, its range is 228,900 km² and its population is approximately 3.5 million people, with the 68% of its population to be urban. The extremely though high percentage of religious and linguistic ties has consequently configured a strong ethnic identity. Its presence in Transcaucasia dates back to 6th century BC and had a unique alphabet that belonged to the Indo-European language. The Armenians are culturally different and as far as ethnicity and culture is concerned; they do not resemble anything with their Azeri neighbors.

The story of Nagorno-Karabakh starts from the old times before at least 3,000 years of regular presence, during which various events took place, coming up to the more recent ones, with their constant evolution. So we come up to 1918, when Azerbaijan declared its independence in May 1918 and Nagorno-Karabakh as an integral part of its territory, a decision that was denied by Karabakh Armenians. Since then, after its incorporation, it never abandoned its reunification target with Armenia, which was imprinted in the national memory of its citizens, as this reunification, after the end of the foreign domination, would fulfill the presuppositions, so that the historic Armenian lands to unify and improve the needs of the whole population for a material welfare.

However, in 1918-1920 the common offensive of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, led to a destruction and the departure of at least half a million Armenians, thus the Armenian people to not forget this ethnic cleansing, even though the general assembly of the United Nations adopted the treaty of its Genocide and exercised prosecution for these crimes in 1948. Azerbaijan of course, has not signed the current convention until today, however the well-documented Armenian genocide would be enough by itself to support the cause of Nagorno-Karabakh to become an
independent state. But in 7 July 1923 Azerbaijan officially declared the incorporation of Nagorno-Karabakh which got the name “autonomous district” liable to Azerbaijan.

After this event, Azerbaijan started applying an anti-Armenian policy in Karabakh, which was proved from crushing facts. So, many concerns started about forced migrations, for reduction of the Armenian population with corresponding increase of Azeris, for lack of financial development, and till 1930, 118 Armenian churches to be closed, clergymen to be arrested, school books of Armenian history to be banned in schools, 28 Armenian schools in 1960 period to close, churches and cemeteries to be destroyed whereas in 1970 decade, Azeris were appointed in the law and finance body of the organizations. So, this political and cultural mistreatment in Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan, through the decades, as well as the unequal share of economic resources, the demographic manipulations, the infringements in regional administration, the breach of cultural ties with Georgia and the threats for the body security of Armenians, was the reason to deepen the rivalry among Armenians and Azeris, so that ethnic groups were created. The result was Nagorno-Karabakh to be in a disadvantageous position in relation to demographic characteristics, because many historical foundations that existed for high level learning lost their glamour because of sovietization and the area becomes rural with a soviet educational system.

Instead, Azerbaijan was an urban and industrialized democracy with many educational foundations. The assumption though that extracted was that if the confrontation of its population from Azerbaijan was not that hard and the population of Nagorno-Karabakh was more satisfied as persons but as ethnicity as well and its region had some autonomy as well as absence of political, financial and cultural limitations, possibly the Armenian irredentism could decline a lot. Despite though the fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh population during these years declined, it continued having an Armenian composition and a high level of homogeneity.

So, the political, social and cultural mistreatment and oppression from Azeris and the future threats, re-confirmed the national aim of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians for an independent state. After all these in Nagorno-Karabakh a nationwide referendum took place for the state independence in 10 December 1991 where 98% of its population voted for it. However, the situation changed drastically in 23 December and it was the key point that escalated the militarized crisis and the war. So the regional council of Nagorno-Karabakh set its right to defend national aims and stop the Azeri offensive and declared its independence in 6 January 1992.
A little bit later, the Armenian dignitaries of the regional council of Nagorno-Karabakh started to be replaced from Azeri ones, but in the 31st of January, Armenia announced that it has no territorial claims and a policy of deference was followed by Nagorno-Karabakh in 11 February 1992 and made a peace proposal to Azerbaijan that it was ready to negotiate, however a sudden strategy change of Nagorno-Karabakh occurred in February 1992 when Armenian forces started a strong offensive against Azeris both in the external Nagorno-Karabakh and also inside Azerbaijan. So in between February and May 1992 the Armenian forces attacked Azerbaijani cities and in the domestic Nagorno-Karabakh and claimed the Lachin city of strategic importance in order to create an open corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, but in Azeri positions in Nachichevan as well, thus in May 1992 the Armenians to have the total control of Karabakh, while the population of the Azerbaijani area stayed either voluntarily or by force; but the speed with which a large territorial range of it was lost, caused great political unrest and political instability in Azerbaijan. So, in 13 June 1992 Azerbaijan started a counterattack to reclaim the territories lost in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Armenian threats as well stroke the political status of Nagorno-Karabakh; consequently, under this pressure, its government resigned in 15 August, while another Azerbaijani attack started in 18 September, which was fronted by Nagorno-Karabakh in 6 February 1993. Despite the many appeals for ceasefire to stop this bloodshed, the war continued until spring 1994. The losses in this war were the death of 30.000 people, the creation of approximately 1.000.000 refugees and the cause of many material damages.

After all these very nasty events, the agreement for ceasefire was signed from the three generals in 27 July 1994, who were then the Armenian defense minister Serge Sarkisian, his Azerbaijani corresponding Mamedrafi Mamedov and the army commander of Nagorno-Karabakh Samvel Babayan and for the first time the battling sides signed for immediate postwar truce, on the direction of a constant peace and international security. The three generals expressed their will to intensify their attempts for the signature of a political agreement during the 30 days of August 1994 which would arrange military and technical issues including peace forces and OSCE observers. This of course never happened, because both sides had as a main purpose the ceasefire signature to stop the fight, as from that point onwards their aims were different. From the Armenian side this fact was important, namely the ceasefire, for the reason that it would create a more stable environment in this region so that
Armenia to consolidate its new conquests to security zones around Nagorno-Karabakh and Yerevan but expressed its special satisfaction as well for the Moscow attempts, which sent forces for the maintenance of peace in the region. Azeris though from their point of view desired to maintain the ceasefire line as a pressure point against Armenians, but they didn’t want peace forces from Russia with the ceasefire line many times to be violated with various minor incidents and there were victims like in 2009 which had reached 19, whereas in Azerbaijan the dominating thought was that at some time will pursue to overrule this regime with the use of heavy equipment.

So an intense military competition was created between Azerbaijan and Armenia, mainly from the side of Azerbaijan because of its vast incomes from oil and gas supplies; consequently its defense budget to be in 2009 approximately $1.4 billion, three times bigger of Armenia’s which was $400 million. Azerbaijan was fueled by Russia with missiles S-300 to strengthen its defense and to protect its energy infrastructure which would be targeted by Armenia if Azeris tried to get Nagorno-Karabakh by violence whereas its army consisted of 67,000 soldiers. The army though of Armenia had 47,000 soldiers; and what is not estimated is the Nagorno-Karabakh army which was approximately 20,000 soldiers.

However, the Armenian forces were considered more trained for a prolonged fight, while as experts were saying Azerbaijan did not have the ability to predominate in the battle arena. Also Armenia on its side had got important amounts of Russian weapons in low prices but the ceasefire line and the mounds on its mountainous territories were a natural defense, where the Armenian forces have built many fortifications from the side of their line.

Furthermore, many diplomatic attempts were made for the battle resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh like the attempts of Washington which for many years tried to solve this issue through the Minsk Group, the organization for security and cooperation in Europe, in which the USA, Russia and France co-preside and which discussed a political solution that anticipated the withdrawal of Armenia from the seven regions around Nagorno-Karabakh, return of the displaced Azeris in these regions and gradually into Nagorno-Karabakh itself, development of an international peace force for the prevention of new violence and a referendum for the regime of Nagorno-Karabakh with a future date. Also, another attempt made for this conflict which took place by Medvedev in six tripartite meetings with the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan since November 2008. All these attempts though didn’t have
much success. This was debt on the one hand to the Armenian side, which was uncompromising in relation to the maintenance of Nagorno-Karabakh control and the seven regions of Azerbaijan but to every territorial compromise of huge importance as well; on the other hand Azerbaijan though on its side which did not trust the international community that would apply the decrees and its law commitments and so it pivoted to increase its military power to press Armenia to abandon the occupied territories. For all these that happened, many special negotiators and the Minsk leaders as well accused the Armenia and Azerbaijan presidents of not preparing their people for peace thus to end up to failure of an agreement.

Nevertheless, the most notable absence from the peace process for Nagorno-Karabakh was that of EU, which was only interested in disposing more resources and expertise and contributing significantly to the attempt of stability and restoration of Nagorno-Karabakh region, as it did in Balkans. Also, the EU tried to secure a more active role in the area through its special representative in South Caucasus Peter Semerby for the peace in it, but the Minsk group claimed that EU had posed its role to France despite that it has undertaken a different duty of high diplomacy, thus EU didn’t manage to undertake a useful duty in this conflict until today.

So, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, even if it has been in the centre of international attention from 1988 and there had been many international diplomatic attempts for many years concerning the conflict resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh, all these attempts for the attainment of a viable solution have failed until now, disappointing the heads of the mediators. The two basic impediments that were existing in between them, according to the opinion of many analysts for the effective resolution of the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh, are on the one hand the denial of Azerbaijan leadership to participate in direct talks with Karabakh, as possibly such a commitment would mean the independence recognition of Karabakh; while on the other hand from the Nagorno-Karabakh side the argument is that there are no warranties for its security from the international community which is a significant issue for Karabakh, thus justifiably its leaders were cautious, fearing that a wrong move in a dashing decision-making framework would bring a new era of concession of its territories.

However, there were other reasons as well which make it difficult to solve this conflict; like that the battle of Nagorno-Karabakh was remaining in low priority for the international community, with the thought that there was no direct war danger, so
there was no significant pressure on the local leaders to obligate them to be receptive in some peace plan. Also, the co-presidents of Minsk Group in a diplomatic level were trying to bridge the differences in the difficult issues with two suspicious leaders who were denying almost all the proposals with the other side thus the process to be prolonged for acceptance of a peace agreement. Despite though the good work that the Minsk Group did and had success in several cases, in contrast only six observers existed to notice the Line of contact that separates the Armenian and Azeri forces, a fact that means that the ceasefire is maintained with the two sides showing their good will.

Furthermore, another reason was that the organizations of the United Nations, the World Bank and other developmental services, had a silent agreement among them that this battle was not of high priority for huge international resources to be disposed for the restoration of these areas. In these regions though the needs were very huge, like in the seven peripheries of Nagorno-Karabakh which are controlled partially from Armenia and were completely destroyed with the entire basic infrastructure and its region was full of mines, while it would need many years of work before they are suitable for habitation in order for the refugees to return. So there was a hope that these organizations with their experience and skills would accomplish these works and if they are asked, to contribute to the signature of a political agreement, because in an opposite case their non-participation in these attempts will have as a result the negotiations to be transferred in the next years. For that reason a restoration programme should start to be planned by all services.

So, probably the real reasons should be searched, that might not be in sectors of ideology or social and ethnic psychology, but in the geostrategic sector. The result though of all these was that Armenians followed the tactic of a regularized status quo and a de facto situation in this region, whereas Azeris tried to support with global statements from their various lobbies their own territorial integrity but the formation as well of their military forces as an indirect threat of them that they have the right to recapture their territories.

So the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh is not an inactive conflict as regularly several soldiers are killed in incidents on the Line of Contact. However, there could be negotiations between the two presidents of Armenia - Azerbaijan for a successful peace strategy of long duration, which could include the recognition of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic with international law features of the international law. So the
final assumption which is excluded from all these facts, is that the unresolved battle of Nagorno-Karabakh continues to be in the long term a certain issue of the wider area, between Azerbaijan and Armenia, that makes it temporarily a “frozen conflict”.
The Ukraine-Russia conflict 2014

Another conflict that can be characterized as the biggest one is that of Ukraine-Russia, with the major part of the world attention to be turned to it. So Ukraine is a country of Eastern Europe which borders Russia in the east and northeast, Belarus in northwest, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary in the west, Romania and Moldova in southwest whereas it is doused from the Black Sea and the Azov Sea in the south and southeast correspondingly. Its range is 603,628 km2 so to be the second biggest country of Europe after Russia. Its capital is Kyiv, its official language is the Ukrainian and its currency is grivna. In regards to the energy part, Ukraine plays a decisive role for Russia because in the one hand it is the first consumer of Russia with 60% of its imports in natural gas and on the other hand it is an energy transit state because of the pipelines that pass through its territory for the 80% of the Caucasian natural gas that is exported from Russia to western Europe.

Historically, Ukraine was founded in the 9th century by the Rus’ of Kiev and it existed as the first strong eastern Slavic state that was dissolved in the 12th century, but in the middle of the 14th century the Ukrainian territories were found under the Golden Horde domination, the big dukedom of Lithuania and the kingdom of Poland. After the great north war (1700-1721) Ukraine was divided and its major part was incorporated in the Russian empire and the rest to the control of Austria-Hungary. Afterwards though of a long period of attempts to become independent after the First World War (1917-1921) and the Russian civil war in 30 December 1922 it becomes a democracy of the Soviet Socialistic Democracy and expanded westwards a little before the Second World War and southwards in 1954 transferring Crimea in the Ukrainian territory while in 1945 it becomes one of the founding members of the United Nations.

However, in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it became independent again, while during this period its economy passed eight years of huge recession, and in the first years of the 2000 decade its economy recovers and increases its GDP significantly but again its economy sunk after the 2008 crisis with its GDP declining 20% from 2008 to 2009 and in the process to recover again. So, the country of Ukraine was for many centuries in partial or total domination by Moscow, whereas in its population, one in three people is a Russian nationalist and speaks the Russian language and two out of three the Ukrainian, but a major part as well of the briefing is
in Russian. Also, another issue is the bisectional mentality that occurs among the people of Ukraine is that many citizens of the western part of Ukraine see Russia suspiciously and to want to be incorporated in the EU and become European citizens and so to exist many protests, thus in every elective confrontation this part to vote candidates with European policy. While in the eastern side of Ukraine the citizens vote politicians who were friendly to Russia as it was in the case of Yanukovych, that his origin was from the eastern of Ukraine and to want their unification with Russia.

So in 2004 after the massive demonstrations that were made well-known as “Orange Revolution” Yanukovych won the presidential elections but there were huge protests because there was fraud in them and he couldn’t take over his duties but in 2010 he wins the elections which seemed to be legal. So, in November 2013, president Yanukovych refused to sign the treaty of connection with the European Union and in 21 November 2013 started the demonstrations for the agreement with Europe in the Independence Square of Kiev with the name Maidan, for that is called “Euromaidan” as well. The first reason for the demonstrations was that president Yanukovych denied the agreement with the European Union, getting a rescue package from Russia of $15 billion, whereas many Ukrainians believed that the agreement with the European Union would help the problematic economy of Ukraine and because they wanted tighter ties with the European Union in cultural and political issues. The second reason for the demonstrations was that Yanukovych had a government unable to handle the economy, with big corruption, authoritarian, that had taken harsh measures for the repression of the demonstrations but and was a dummy of Russia. So the denial of this agreement was the reason that the demonstrations expanded so quickly with the request to resign from power the president.

In the months that followed, Yanukovych wanting to curb these demonstrations, sent the domestic security forces, the dreadful “Berkut”, announced a series of laws for the limitation of basic rights of Ukrainians for free speech and gatherings; these laws though worsened more the protests thus they expanded and in other cities as well. After the 16 January 2014 these events became more violent, the anti-governmental demonstrators proceeded in captures of governmental buildings in Kiev while during the riots from the 18 to 20 February 98 people were killed and thousands were injured. In 21 February Yanukovych signs an agreement with the opposition party under the pressure of the events for the termination of violence and declared early elections for December, with the demonstrators to want his resignation.
In 22 February the Ukrainian parliament declares Yanukovych fallen and announces presidential elections for the 25 May 2014, whereas Yanukovych escaped to Russia asking for asylum. For that reason, many Ukrainians were happy whereas the Russian-speaking in the eastern side of Ukraine and in Crimea considered it illegal and anti-democratic. So the power is taken over by a temporary government which consisted of the center-right party of Batvakina and its leader, the far-right Svoboda, independent deputies and other parliamentary coalitions, but from many commentators there were various comments for the far-right Svoboda.

So with this rapid evolution of events, in 1 March Putin asks for and gets the approval of the Russian parliament for delegation of Russian troops specifically for the Crimean peninsula while in the next days the soldiers of the Russian army, with the order to not wear insignia of Russia so that it is not accused, very quickly control the greatest part of Crimea. In 16 March 2014, the parliament of Crimea declares a referendum for the autonomy of the region and its unification with Russia. The referendum was for the unification with Russia with a very big percentage around 96% which of course later on was validated, while the transitive government of Ukraine characterized the Russian actions as a war reason and declared mobilization.

Furthermore, the United States and the European Union imposed financial sanctions to Russia as a punishment for this issue, but there was no indication of Crimea return in Ukraine. After this event, many Russian provinces in the eastern part of Ukraine were asking as well for their independence and unification with Russia whereas in May 2014 Petro Poroshenko was elected as president who took over his duties in June. The reason why Putin made this quick move in Crimea was that its region is of vital importance for Russia as it secures its outlet in the Black Sea and its ports for the Russian fleet. The significance of the Crimean peninsula for Russia was that its region historically for 200 years was under the Russian domination but it is granted by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Democracy and in 1991 in the referendum of Ukraine for its independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Crimea remains part of Ukraine with important autonomy, its own laws and its own president, as well as the majority of its population is Russian. Geographically, it is located in the northern side of the Black Sea which is surrounding it and territorially is located in the south of Ukraine in a significant geostrategic place. On its territory it has huge military bases and in its marine place its important port was Sevastopol where the Russian fleet was located, the issue of
which was solved during the summit meeting of Sochi in 1994, when Ukraine sold the major part of its fleet in Russia and in return Russia donated it the debts it had from the natural gas provision. However in 1996 Ukraine, based on its regiment of 1996 lapses the parking of Russian troops and Russia threatened to increase the price of natural gas. So in May 2007 Russia hired the port for 20 years in return to the 10-year postponement of the payment of the debts of Ukraine from the natural gas and later on made a renewal of the port hiring in September 2010 for 30 years in return for the reduction of gas price by 30%. So for all these issues (geostrategic – important ports), which were of vital importance for Russia, it seemed that Putin substantially wanted to take Crimea back again. As always, there is no consensus about what will happen next. The population in Crimea is mixed, with Tatars (Turkic ethnic groups), Ukrainians, and Russians all living together. It is unclear how Russia is going to handle Crimea, given the shifting demographics.

So after all these events that happened – Yanukovych governance - revolts in Maidan - annexation of Crimea, had as a result in winter of April 2014 various battles to start to outburst of low intense at the beginning between the Ukrainian army and the autonomist rebels mainly from the Russian-speaking of the eastern Ukraine, who occupied some cities like Slaviansk and Donetsk in the eastern area which was known as Donbass. These started escalating in the east with the excuse that circulated that the citizens of the eastern region lacked their elective right from the Ukrainian authorities. One of the most important leaders was Igor Cirkin who was a Russian citizen and military veteran who had withdrawn from the internal security services of Russia just a few weeks before he takes over to lead the rebels and it is believed that he included Russian Special Forces without insignia in order to show them as rebels, whereas thousands of Russians had crowded near the borders. Ukraine though for many months had not moved menacingly against the rebels fearing if maybe is accused for any deaths thus to be accused from Russia that it violates the protection of the Russian-speaking of eastern Ukraine. Substantially namely, none of the two wanted to show up in order to be able to negotiate a peace agreement at the given moment.

The things though changed to worse when the Ukrainian government at the beginning of July, ordered to start an attack to push back the rebels once and forever and to recapture its various territories. So, at the beginning of August, the rebels started to lose ground thus Russia to start equipping them with weapons of high technology and ground-air missiles for their support whereas Ukraine intensified its
attack thus in the middle of August Russia to escalate its support to the rebels and in an obvious way the Russian military forces to invade. However Ukraine started to protest that in 16 August it caught Russian tanks and that in 21 August the rebels’ leader got reinforcement of 1200 soldiers from Russia. Since then though after these events an undeclared war escalated between Russia and Ukraine, despite the ceasefire was agreed in 5 September 2014.

After all these that happened, the attempts started in a diplomatic level, in which a decisive role was played by the U.S. and the European Union which wanted the punishment of Putin for the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of the eastern Ukraine. So they started imposing gradually various and very difficult financial sanctions which were targeting Putin, his internal political cycle but and the huge Russian economy which was on the verge of recession. By continuing the sanctions the European Union which although is in a large degree dependent from the exports of Russian natural gas and it would harm its economy and despite the cautious behavior of the German chancellor Angela Merkel, supported some of them.

The current conflict in Ukraine has spawned the most serious crisis between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. It has undermined European security, raised questions about NATO’s future, and put an end to one of the most ambitious projects of U.S. foreign policy—building a partnership with Russia. It also threatens to undermine U.S. diplomatic efforts on issues ranging from terrorism to nuclear proliferation and in the absence of direct negotiations; each side is betting that political and economic pressure will force the other to blink first. Caught in this dangerous game of chicken, the West cannot afford to lose sight of the importance of stable relations with Russia.

Onwards, the United States and the European Union isolated diplomatically Russia from the group of eight (G8) which is an annual conference of the biggest industries and democratic states of the world but NATO as well suspended every cooperation with the Russian leadership. However, the United States and the European Union avoided some military reaction fearing some further escalation of the events because Russia has one of the biggest armies and nuclear in the world, but and did not have any mutual defense treaty with Ukraine, whereas the EU and USA declared their commitment for the defense of the borders of other eastern countries. With these sanctions, the EU and USA wanted to prevent Russia from a further invasion and to achieve its deference and withdrawal from Crimea, but on this issue
was not shown any deference from the side of Russia. However, the United States and the European Union avoided some military reaction fearing some further escalation of the events because Russia has one of the biggest armies and nuclear power in the world, whereas the United States and the European Union do not have any mutual defense treaty with Ukraine but they showed some commitment as well for the defense of the borders of other eastern countries with which they wanted to prevent Russia from a further invasion and to achieve its deference and withdrawal from Crimea something that in this subject had not been sighted.

However, in these sanctions Russia reacted immediately with the infliction of various measures in the sectors of energy, defense and mainly in the money-credit sector declaring the inhibition of imports of fruits and vegetables from the European Union, the United States, Australia, Canada, Norway, etc. as well as the imports of apples from Poland, but and with the announcement of various dignitaries and the prime minister Medvedev that these measures are under examination, as well for the industrial sector (cars and the airplane production). However, all these limitations that are imposed are in a very bigger scale than the sanctions that were imposed from the United States and the European Union because Russia is the largest foreign market for the sales of fruits and vegetables from the European Union and the second larger for the American poultry. The effects though that will exist from these ambivalent sanctions in these countries will be serious for the interests of each side.

So, from the side of Russia the short-term effects could cause the increased prices of the products striking many Russian consumers and the group that possibly would have problem from this inhibition would be the middle-class consumers as well as the Russian population to blame the West for these shortages and the increased prices that were caused by the banning of fruits and vegetables, thus Russia to decrease the import of foreign foods and return to a more self-contained policy similar to that of the Soviet Union during the era of the Cold War, but simultaneously to create a geopolitical competition with the West.

On the other side, these evolutions would have a decisive meaning for the tight cooperation of the United States and the European Union, because it would make the cooperation more difficult due to the different interests between them on the issue of Russia. Because Europe depends much more on the Russian energy than the United States but and a large part of its external trade made it with Russia but and its European members, mainly Germany and Italy were more hesitant for the infliction of
sanctions in Russia, despite these Germany and Italy agreed on a third round of sanctions in the sectors of energy, defense while in the money-credit sector it was only in the case of the Malaysian plane demolition. However, from the side of the United States the problem would be smaller because with the exception of its poultry, it exports very little agricultural products and foods in Russia and this is approximately the 11% of its exports to it.

The situation however was different because the big losers would be the European Union members like the eastern Europe Poland and Lithuania which would be affected as well as Germany and Netherlands together with Spain and Italy, but not so much as the eastern countries. Furthermore, after the Minsk agreement in 5 September 2014 for the ceasefire, the manipulation of the relations with Moscow was a difficult challenge, because Putin, having the huge support of the people and with his popularity reaching 85% in August, it seemed that he was not in a mood to abide by this agreement, starting to press on various levels like in military – financial – political. So in a military level he continued to send secretly heavy equipment in the Russian-Ukrainian borders as well as 200 to 300 soldiers of the Special Forces for the support and training of the rebels in the areas of Donetsk and Luansk that remained outside of the Kiev’s control.

Furthermore, in a financial level, he pressed Ukraine in June 2014 with the interruption of natural gas supplies due to its debts thus in winter to freeze the apartments in its blocks, leaving the issue open for more drastic measures if no solution is found on their problem. So Ukraine is obliged to sign a new agreement in October 2014, under the term that it will pay the $5.3 billion for its unpaid debt till the end of December 2014 with money that it has been borrowed from the International Monetary Fund. In a political level though, he escalated his nationalistic rhetoric in the public mass media that the government of Ukraine is a Nazi regime which with the support of the United States threatens the world as it had done previously in a security conference in Munich when it had stated that he was directly opposed to the Washington policy which tries for its own interests to set up its own autocracy. After all these, it seems that this agreement is fragile with the danger to collapse while the policy of Putin is aiming with these pressures to a viable energy policy, probably though and he wants to transform the eastern Ukraine and its secessionist areas in a “frozen conflict”.
The Russian invasion of February 2014 was seen as a cruel act by many people around the world. But for the people in Ukraine, this invasion was nothing but a call for the war and some people termed this cruel invasion as the act of salvation for the Russians. With every passing day, the feeling of hatred is growing and there is no mutual admiration left between the people of two countries. The Black Sea region today stands with a set of challenges for Ukraine and its foreign policy – challenges of lost opportunities and increased competition. Ukrainian foreign policy in the Black Sea region will not be successful until the Black Sea region is seen as a complex and interconnected system rather than a set of bilateral relations. It is time for Ukraine to elaborate an independent security policy in the Black Sea region, taking into account new tendencies and its own national interests. The most acute phase of the eighteen-month-old Ukraine war is over, at least for now. But nothing is settled yet.
**My personal thoughts**

Let’s be honest. The framework of conflicts in the entire area of the Black Sea and beyond, is a characteristic one of the situation that evolved since Antiquity. It is true that from the ancient years until today, the interest for the natural sources of the area was astonishing and the will for domination was unstoppable. The process of colonization indicates the will and hope of people from around the world, the merchants, warriors and navigators to find out natural wealth in order to exploit it for their own or their countries’ good. Russia from medieval times onwards ad USA from the 19th century onwards have been engaged in an ongoing battle of interests in this area, attempting to impose their power and get to exploit the natural wealth of the area. These superpowers are constantly trying to accumulate power, equip armies, create propaganda against each other and develop a feeling of domination against the entire world system, but in recent years the areas of Black Sea and Middle East are of most importance for them, especially on the energy and natural wealth sectors. Great powers since Antiquity have been attempting to dominate over weaker states of these areas in order to get what they want and make profits, so Russia and USA could not constitute exceptions. It is a common secret that since their stabilization among the most powerful countries of the world they are trying to make an exhibition of power to every other country in the world and make it clear that they do not want competitors. The European Union is somewhere in the middle in this story and has mainly the role of the passive observer, who can be active in certain cases if there is a threat against security or interests of the weaker European countries. The truth is that EU does not want to take the main role player in this story of battles, as it knows that it does not have the equipment the armies and the infrastructure that is strong enough to compete or confront these great powers. In addition Russia especially, which is the most interested country as it is closer than any other to the Black Sea region and is actually a part of it, tries to clarify that it will not tolerate actions or sanctions that will harm or threaten its interests in the area and this is the basic disagreement between Russia and USA-EU. Russia is playing a hard poker game in the area, letting the other surrounding countries to fight against each other, using their battles as coverage for its real intentions. So subsequently, only if there is a kind of compromise or peaceful coexistence in this area, should we have a feeling of stability there, it can reassure that we are going to have a kind of stability and security in the entire area. Everything is fluid and temporary and a matter of time as well.
Conclusion

At the end of my diploma thesis and after my analysis for the conflicts of the states and the engagement of the current super-powers in the wider region of the Black Sea, I ended up to some assumptions in which I would like to be mentioned briefly for each one separately. The first though assumption that is exerted is that the wider area of the Black Sea owes a neuralgic geostrategic point on the global map with rich energy sources (oil - natural gas - pipelines) which unites Europe with Asia. Concerning the conflicts of the states that existed in the area, others were erupting for territorial claims, whereas others mainly for energy issues, thus due to the geostrategic position of the region and its energy resources, to engage and the current super-powers for their own interests each of them.

Furthermore, the second assumption is that to all these conflicts main role played on the one hand the reasons I mentioned previously and on the other hand the governments they had, which were corrupted – authoritarian with complex policy whereas their political leaders were incompetent to govern in order to pursue their peoples that peace wants compromises as well. Also, various political analysts blamed them that probably wanted to dodge from the Russian orbit and be incorporated in the European Union and become European citizens; for that and they were continuing the secessionist tendencies.

A third assumption is that each one of the super-powers was following its own policy in this area. So the USA wanted to isolate Russia in various sectors like the economy, the geostrategy, the energy and the politics, in order to impose their autocracy. In men financial sector they tried to strike the Russian economy and its internal political cycle but and helped Ukraine, giving her financial loan through the IMF. To the diplomatic sector they tried to isolate her from G8 (world trade council), whereas on the military sector to cut her away from every cooperation with NATO. However on the politics sector, they offered openly their support to the eastern countries (Georgia – Baltic – Ukraine) for the battles that were happening to the eastern Ukraine but and the annexation of Crimea.

From its side though, the European Union followed a milder policy in most sanctions because of its financial recession, its weak policy, its dependence on the energy sector from Russia but as well because the largest part of its exports in agricultural products was directed to Russia, while it avoided the military intensities because Russia is a powerful military power. As a consequence of all these was
Russia to react immediately, with the blockade in imports in agricultural – livestock products from the European Union and the United States – invaded the eastern Ukraine – annexed Crimea on purpose to protect its energy sector, its outlet in the Black Sea, its ports where the Russian fleet was parking, because all these were of vital importance for it, as well as to curb every secessionist conflict in order not to have hostile governments near its borders but to preserve the control in the wider area of the Black Sea.

The final general assumption is that the conflict states as well as the superpowers, for all these that happen without quarrels and dichotic rivalries should try to ameliorate their relations and to defer, each one by its side in some of their demands in order to predominate the logic because many things will depend from them for the wider area of the Black Sea, because in an opposite case this constant secessionist crisis will be maintained thus to continue these “frozen conflicts”. The time will show.
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