

Shaping Strategy for Comprehensive and Effective Western Policy in Eastern Europe

FEBRUARY 2018 MAKSYM KHYLKO

In 2008, amid rising frustration with military campaigns in Afghanistan¹ and Iraq,² a deteriorating economic situation, and a tough presidential race, the United States responded to the Russian invasion of Georgia in August, but not in a manner strong enough to make Moscow reverse the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The European Union (EU), under a French presidency at the time, negotiated a ceasefire agreement but maintained business as usual with Russia, thus actually letting Moscow get away unpunished with its violation of Georgia's territorial integrity. The lack of resistance emboldened Moscow to continue forcefully restoring its sphere of Soviet-era influence.

In the years that followed, Russia illegally annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea and waged undeclared war in eastern Ukraine by providing financing, arms, volunteer fighters, and regular troops to the Donbas region.³ Russia sharply increased the militarization of the occupied Crimean peninsula by expanding its anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Black Sea region, thereby jeopardizing NATO's ability to operate there.⁴

Russia also maintained its occupation of the Transnistrian region of Moldova and used the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to put political

The Eurasia Center's mission is to enhance transatlantic cooperation in promoting stability, democratic values and prosperity in Eurasia, from Eastern Europe and Turkey in the West to the Caucasus, Russia, and Central Asia in the East.

- 1 Pew Research Center, "Rising Environmental Concern in 47-Nation Survey. Global Unease with Major World Powers," June 27, 2007, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/pdf/256.pdf>.
- 2 Pew Research Center, "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," March 19, 2008, <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/03/19/public-attitudes-toward-the-war-in-iraq-20032008>.
- 3 Maksymilian Czuperski, et al, *Hiding in Plain Sight. Putin's War in Ukraine*, Atlantic Council, May 2015, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/Hiding_in_Plain_Sight/HPS_English.pdf.
- 4 Ridvan Bari Urcosta and Lev Abalkin, "Crimea: Russia's stronghold in the Black Sea," European Council on Foreign Relations, September 1, 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/essay_crimea_russias_stronghold_in_the_black_sea.

pressure on Armenia and Azerbaijan, while selling weapons to both sides.⁵

As further means of extending its influence, Russia uses its military exercises to threaten NATO member states with nuclear weapons⁶ and to practice offensive actions against NATO allies, as was recently seen in the “Zapad-2017” military drills.

Failing to deter Russia has consequences that go far beyond Eastern Europe, and which call into question Western solidarity and credibility as vital pillars of a rules-based democratic international order.⁷ Russia’s ambition to once again divide the world among major powers with corresponding spheres of influence⁸ jeopardizes the West’s worldwide partnerships, especially in the light of rising Asia-Pacific challenges.⁹

Frontline of Freedom or Russia’s Backyard?

Following the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics’ (USSR’s) collapse, the West and Russia behaved differently toward the newly independent states. While the United States and the European Union believed they could build mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia and other nations in the region, Moscow fluctuated between striving for inclusion in the Western liberal order as represented by membership in European institutions, and pining for empire lost while meddling in the affairs of the newly independent states in its “Near Abroad.” When Vladimir Putin became Russia’s

president, Moscow’s preference for restoring its sphere of influence in post-Soviet states became obvious.

NATO’s inclusive approach to post-Soviet relations was shaped through the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 as a forum for security dialogue with new partners including Russia. In 1994, NATO also launched the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. It is noteworthy that NATO cooperation with PfP countries, including those from Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, focused more on democratization and economic reforms than military issues.¹⁰

The NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed in May 1997,¹¹ more than a month before the signing of the NATO-Ukraine Charter on Distinctive Partnership.¹² Taking into account Moscow’s tough opposition to NATO’s eastward expansion,¹³ the Allies, in 2008, rejected Ukraine’s and Georgia’s aspirations for NATO Membership Action Plans.¹⁴

In the 1990s, the European Union entered into partnership and cooperation agreements with the majority of post-Soviet countries, including Russia, aiming “to strengthen their democracies and develop their economies through cooperation in a wide range of areas and through political dialogue.”¹⁵ In 2004, the EU proposed that the post-Soviet East European countries cooperate with the other partners within the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), launched “to reinforce existing forms of regional and subregional

5 Stepan Danielyan and Knar Babayan, “Nagorno-Karabakh: The edge of Russia’s orbit,” European Council on Foreign Relations, September 1, 2016, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/essay_nagorno_karabakh_the_edge_of_russias_orbit.

6 “Russia threatens to aim nuclear missiles at Denmark ships if it joins NATO shield,” Reuters, March 22, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-denmark-russia/russia-threatens-to-aim-nuclear-missiles-at-denmark-ships-if-it-joins-nato-shield-idUSKBN-OMIOML20150322>.

7 Ash Jain and Damon Wilson, “Strategy of ‘Constrainment: Countering Russia’s Challenge to the Democratic Order,” Atlantic Council, March 2017, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/AC_Russia_StrategyConstrainment-ELECT-0313.pdf.

8 Ely Ratner and Thomas Wright, “How the United States can counter the ambitions of Russia and China,” *Washington Post*, November 21, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-america-can-counter-the-rise-of-russia-and-china/2014/11/21/f9bfabd0-5949-11e4-8264-deed989ae9a2_story.html.

9 Matthew Kroenig and Miyeon Oh, A Strategy for the Trans-Pacific Century: Final Report of the Atlantic Council’s Asia-Pacific Strategy Task Force, Atlantic Council, October 2017, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/Strategy_Trans-Pacific_Century_web_1019.pdf.

10 NATO, “Ukraine-NATO Action Plan for 2003,” last accessed January 9, 2018, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicxt/b030324u.pdf>.

11 NATO, “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation signed in Paris, France,” May 27, 1997, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.

12 NATO, “Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine,” July 9, 1997, https://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/official_texts_25457.htm.

13 “Russia Talks Tough in Response to NATO’s Eastward Expansion,” *Deutsche Welle*, April 11, 2008, <http://www.dw.com/en/russia-talks-tough-in-response-to-natos-eastward-expansion/a-3261078>.

14 Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, “NATO Got Nothing From Conceding To Russia In the Past, Why Should It Cave To The Kremlin Now?,” *Interpreter*, May 23, 2016, <http://www.interpretermag.com/nato-got-nothing-from-conceding-to-russia-in-the-past-why-should-it-cave-to-the-kremlin-in-2016>.

15 “Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs): Russia, Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia,” EUR-Lex, last updated September 29, 2010, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:r17002>.



The fourth Eastern Partnership Summit convened in Riga, Latvia on May 21-22, 2015.
Photo credit: Secretariat of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

cooperation” and “to reinforce stability and security.”¹⁶ In contrast to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, Russia rejected participation in the ENP,¹⁷ and five years later Moscow accused the EU of extending its “sphere of influence”¹⁸ by launching the Eastern Partnership project (EaP). This accusation

reflected Moscow’s continued perception that former Soviet regions fell within Russia’s backyard.

Unable or unwilling to propose alternative mutually beneficial integration and development projects, Moscow resorted to intimidating and weakening its neighbors. Russia imposed groundless trade restrictions,¹⁹ supported the backsliding of ruling regimes into authoritarianism in neighboring countries, exported political corruption that helped degrade public institutions, infiltrated countries with agents of influence, and fueled separatist movements.²⁰

16 Commission of the European Communities, “European Neighbourhood Policy. Strategy Paper,” May 12, 2004, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf.

17 Joan DeBardeleben, “Revising the EU’s European Neighborhood Policy: The Eastern Partnership and Russia,” in *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 246-265, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230293168_13.

18 Jeanne Park, “The European Union’s Eastern Partnership,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 13, 2014, <https://www.cfr.org/background/european-unions-eastern-partnership>.

19 Giorgi Menabde, “Is Russia Resuming a Trade War Against Georgia?,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 11 Issue 144, August 6, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/is-russia-resuming-a-trade-war-against-georgia>.

20 Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, (Yale University Press, 2016).

Plainly, Moscow has rejected the West's attempts to respect both Russian interests and the sovereignty of its smaller neighbors. The idea of turning Eastern Europe into a buffer zone²¹ or a bridge²² between the West and Russia did not work. The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances to Ukraine (1994) and the legally enshrined non-alignment status of Ukraine (2010) failed to prevent Russian aggression. Moscow does not seek a buffer zone, nor does it require one;²³ instead, the Kremlin has tried to undo the collapse of the USSR, an event Vladimir Putin called "a major geopolitical disaster of the century."²⁴ Helping nations withstand Russian assertiveness is necessary to prevent a rollback to the past and preserve the rules-based international order.

A Chance for the Region Stuck in Transit

While the United States and EU collaborated to integrate Western ideals in Central European and Baltic post-socialist countries, such collaboration was modified for the post-Soviet Eastern European and Caucasian nations. Rather than, for example, offering EU membership to these countries, "Old Europe" considered the 2009 Eastern Partnership as a viable substitute.²⁵

An inability to join the EU and NATO deprived the post-Soviet Eastern European and Caucasian nations of strong incentives to reform. Russia's interference in internal affairs, weak state institutions, and the lack of experience of the newly independent countries, along

with growing corruption slowed their transition to democracy.

Attempts to reform have had mixed results. In Georgia, for example, the leadership of pro-Western President Mikheil Saakashvili (2003-2013) helped liberalize its economy and significantly reduce corruption; Georgia's Corruption Perceptions Index ranking position improved from 133 in 2004²⁶ to 51 in 2012,²⁷ and Georgia achieved the eighth spot in the World Bank's 2014 Doing Business ranking.²⁸

But radical reforms and authoritarian tendencies in government without simultaneous improvements in quality of life opened an opportunity for populist politicians, and the 2012-2013 Georgian elections resulted in the party headed by Bidzina Ivanishvili, one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, winning nearly unilateral control. Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream party won in free and fair elections. However, his net worth amounts to half of Georgia's gross domestic product,²⁹ meaning he holds outsized power. In late 2013, he voluntarily resigned from the position of prime minister, but actually continued to maintain almost total political and economic control over the country through the Georgian Dream party. This phenomenon, known as a "state capture,"³⁰ was previously detected in Central Asian and Latin American countries where oligarchic groups used their influence over government officials in order to strengthen their own economic positions.³¹

In early 2010s, Moldova achieved partial reforms as a prerequisite to signing its association and free trade area agreement with the EU (2014), but the reformist government bore the political backlash of a \$1 billion

21 Boris Toucas, "Russia's Design in The Black Sea: Extending the Buffer Zone," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 28, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-design-black-sea-extending-buffer-zone>.

22 Henry A. Kissinger, "Henry Kissinger: To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html.

23 Benjamin Denison, "No, Russia Doesn't Require Buffer States for Its Own Security," *National Interest*, December 3, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/no-russia-doesnt-require-buffer-states-its-own-security-14494>.

24 Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, April 25, 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.

25 In the "European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper" of May 12, 2004, it was stated: "The EU has emphasised that it offers a means to reinforce relations between the EU and partner countries, which is distinct from the possibilities available to European countries under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union," https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf.

26 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2004: Results," last accessed January 9, 2018 https://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2004#results.

27 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2012," <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

28 World Bank, "Economy Rankings," Doing Business, last accessed January 9, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140624200924/http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>.

29 Julia Ioffe, "Nobody's Bigger Than Bidzina," *Forbes*, March 7, 2012, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliaioffe/2012/03/07/nobody-is-bigger-than-bidzina>.

30 Vladimir Socor, "Electoral Democracy: Path to State Capture in Georgia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 10 Issue 48, March 14, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/electoral-democracy-path-to-state-capture-in-georgia>.

31 John Crabtree and Francisco Durand, *Peru: Elite Power and Political Capture* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2017).

theft from the state banks.³² Moldova's richest man, Vladimir Plahotniuc, took effective control of the government in another "state capture."³³

Armenia and Azerbaijan have made limited progress in market-based economic reforms, including the liberalization of customs and taxes,³⁴ but their Freedom House democracy scores have declined due to semi-consolidated and consolidated authoritarian regimes, respectively.³⁵

In Ukraine, the Revolution of Dignity (2013-2014) spurred the ouster of its corrupt ex-president, Viktor Yanukovich, and accelerated energy reform, decreased public expenditures, stabilized the banking system,³⁶ began anticorruption and judicial reforms,³⁷ and led to the adoption of laws on pension, medical, and education reforms.³⁸ Completing the anti-corruption reform remains Ukraine's most urgent task because it, along with other countries in the region (except Georgia), remains at the bottom of the 2016 Corruption Perceptions Index.³⁹ The slow and inconsistent pace of reforms does not excuse the West's frustration or fatigue with post-Soviet Eastern Europe, though perhaps it helps explain it. The United States and EU have thus far provided episodic, rather than systemic,

assistance to the region. Simply, the West has not focused enough resources and attention on giving this region a real chance.

More US Engagement Is Needed

In the early 1990s, the United States focused on removing from Ukraine the world's third largest nuclear arsenal, which it inherited from the Soviet Union. Washington was neither prepared to offer Kyiv security guarantees nor active in supporting reforms.⁴⁰ Over the ensuing decades, the United States signed charters forming strategic partnerships with Ukraine (2008)⁴¹ and Georgia (2009),⁴² good first steps in theory but a far cry from the active strategic relationships maintained by Washington with its major non-NATO allies.

Although the United States has taken steps to strengthen assistance, more can be done to support these countries. Between 2014 and 2016, Kyiv received \$0.6 billion in US security and defense assistance (tenth most) and Georgia received \$0.16 billion (twenty-fifth most). To put this in context, over the same period, the US military offered \$13.3 billion to Afghanistan (first), \$11.1 billion to Israel (second), and \$3.9 billion to Egypt (third).⁴³ These countries are strategically more important for the West and larger in size. However, the recommendations of prominent US experts on the necessary amount and specifics of military assistance to Ukraine⁴⁴ have not been met.

At the same time, the region is important for Russia's plans to undermine the US-led liberal democratic international order. Experts⁴⁵ have observed that

32 Ivana Kottasova, "How to steal \$1 billion in three days," CNN, May 7, 2015, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/05/07/news/economy/mol-dova-stolen-billion>.

33 Vladimir Socor, "Moldovan Billionaire Overthrows Coalition Government from Within," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 12. Issue 199, November 3, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/moldovan-billionaire-overthrows-coalition-government-from-within-part-one>.

34 Richard Giragosian, et al., "The South Caucasus 2018. Facts, Trends, Future Scenarios," Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, September 10, 2013, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_35353-1522-22-30.pdf.

35 "Nations in Transit 2017. Armenia Country Profile," Freedom House, last accessed January 9, 2018, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/Armenia>; "Nations in Transit 2017. Azerbaijan Country Profile," Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/azerbaijan>.

36 Anders Åslund, "2017 Should Be the Year Ukraine's Economy Takes Off," *Ukraine Alert*, Atlantic Council, January 3, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/2017-should-be-the-year-ukraine-s-economy-takes-off>.

37 Marek Dabrowski, "Ukraine's unfinished reform agenda," *Bruegel*, September 2017, <http://bruegel.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PC-24-2017-1.pdf>.

38 Brian Mefford, "Pragmatism Prevails over Populism in Ukraine," *UkraineAlert*, Atlantic Council, November 2, 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/pragmatism-prevails-over-populism-in-ukraine>.

39 Transparency International, "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016," https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016.

40 Steven Pifer, *The Eagle and the Trident. U.S.—Ukraine Relations in Turbulent Times* (Brookings Institution Press, 2017).

41 "United States-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership," US Department of State, December 19, 2008, <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/142231.htm>.

42 "United States-Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership," US Department of State, January 9, 2009, <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/121029.htm>.

43 "Pivot Table by Recipient 2014-2016," Security Assistance Monitor, <https://securityassistance.org/data>.

44 Ivo Daalder, et al., "Preserving Ukraine's Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do," Atlantic Council, February 2015, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/files/UkraineReport_February2015.pdf.

45 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997); "Lilia Shevtsova: Without Ukraine, Russia is an incomplete empire, or even not an empire at all", *Voice of America* (in Russian), August 31, 2015, <https://www.golos-ameriki.ru/a/shevtsova-russia-ukraine/2939188.html>.



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko meets with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in Kyiv, Ukraine on July 10, 2017. Photo credit: The Presidential Administration of Ukraine.

without Ukraine, Russia would not be able to reclaim its imperial status. The possible victory of the Russian authoritarian and anti-Western governance model over pro-Western Ukraine and Georgia would have dramatic implications far beyond the region. Twenty-five years of progress spreading democracy might unravel.

An insufficient Western presence in the Black Sea region amid Russian militarization renders NATO member states vulnerable—particularly Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. Ankara has already demonstrated alarming cooperation with Russia, thus increasing the urgency of Western action.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “Turkey and Russia cosy up over missiles,” *Economist*, May 4, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21721665-their-friendship-should-worry-nato-turkey-and-russia-cosy-up-over-missiles>.

The West’s failure to respond to Russia’s breaches of international law demonstrates weakness and undermines US credibility. It is no surprise that countries like North Korea have become emboldened by this perceived weakness.

Policy Recommendations

The United States and EU must develop a long-term strategy in the Eastern European and Caucasian region to fortify defenses, prevent democratic backsliding, and encourage reforms. Separately, the United States should enter into bilateral cooperation with regional countries to help resolve issues that the EU is not prepared to address due to a lack of political unity or other reasons.

A diversified approach is necessary to consider each country’s circumstances and ambitions, with full

deference to their sovereign right to make foreign policy choices without external pressure. Countries that seek NATO and EU membership in accordance with Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty⁴⁷ and Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union⁴⁸ should be given a fair opportunity to join.

Enhancing Security

Existing mechanisms of cooperation between NATO and the Eastern European and Caucasian countries, such as the Annual National Programs (ANP) of cooperation, should be implemented more effectively.⁴⁹ Given that Ukraine and Georgia are not being provided with NATO Membership Action Plans (MAP) for political reasons, ANPs should assume the role of MAPs and actually prepare these countries to meet the membership criteria. Each ANP should focus on clear goals for achieving concrete NATO standards and interoperability with verifiable annual indicators of fulfillment, instead of obscure wording such as “to continue studying experience,” “to extend opportunities,” and “to establish the proper conditions for effective cooperation.”⁵⁰ NATO working groups on defense reforms and NATO Trust Fund projects and programs that address issues such as professional development, building integrity, defense education enhancement program, and dedicated trust funds for Ukraine, which were established after the NATO 2014 Wales summit,⁵¹ should continue working until NATO standards are met in the recipient countries.

The tailor-made cooperation within the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership established at the 2014 Wales Summit and granted to Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan, and Sweden could now be extended to Ukraine.

47 NATO, “The North Atlantic Treaty,” April 4, 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm.

48 “Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union,” EUR-Lex, October 26, 2012, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012M%2FTXT>.

49 Yuriy Mikhailov, “NATO frowns at pace of Ukraine’s adaptation to Alliance standards – envoy,” LB.ua, November 9, 2017, https://en.lb.ua/news/2017/11/09/4882_nato_frowns_pace_ukraines.html.

50 “Annual National Program of NATO-Ukraine cooperation for 2016” (in Ukrainian), President of Ukraine, February 12, 2016, http://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/00/19/46/14ef5e3929d64d178061b12d73e39fff_1455291632.pdf.

51 NATO, “Summary of Ongoing NATO Trust Funds – October 2017,” last accessed January 9, 2018, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_10/20171025_171025-trust-funds.pdf.

Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova should be invited to cooperate closely with the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats⁵² established in 2017 in Helsinki for EU and NATO member states. Eastern European and Caucasian countries need support to counter hybrid attacks, and in return their considerable experience in facing such threats could be useful for EU and NATO countries.

The Individual Partnership Action Plans and NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) programs should help Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Armenia to establish democratic control of their armed forces and develop a regional framework to support NATO-led operations. The work of NATO information centers in these countries should be intensified to help inform local populations and debunk myths of Russian propaganda.

Until Russia withdraws its military and restores Ukraine’s sovereignty, current sanctions should remain in effect and additional sanctions should be explored.

Economy and Reforms

The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the European Investment Bank should increase financial assistance to the region. Likewise, Western countries, particularly Germany, should invest in major privatization projects. This will stimulate local economies and lessen their dependence on Russia, thus reducing Moscow’s ability to use business as leverage for political goals.

The EU should assist Ukraine with anti-corruption reforms, including the establishment of independent anti-corruption courts. Successful reforms, such as the new police patrols created in Ukraine (2015-2016), will help maintain the commitment to widespread change.

US Global Leadership Exceptional Responsibility

The United States considers itself a global leader. Given the reluctance of certain NATO members to pursue closer relations with post-Soviet Eastern European and Caucasus countries, the United States should emphasize bilateral military cooperation with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova and assist their efforts to meet NATO membership criteria. Specifically, the United States should expand military education and training

52 The European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, last accessed January 9, 2018, <https://www.hybridcoe.fi>.

programs, offer anti-terrorism training, and assist in the improvement of cybersecurity to protect critical infrastructure.

Until NATO is ready to accept Georgia and Ukraine, the United States should consider granting them major non-NATO ally status, which opens the possibility for greater financial and defense cooperation.⁵³ Doing so would expand possibilities for military cooperation and serve as an effective political instrument to contain Russian aggression. To that end, the United States should provide Ukraine with lethal and non-lethal weapons to weaken Russia's stronghold in Donbas and deter Russia from any further encroachment into Ukraine.

The United States could also assist in decreasing the region's dependence on Russian energy through the introduction of energy efficient technologies and alternative energy sources, and by promoting alternative sources of gas, oil, and nuclear fuel supply including US gas and nuclear fuel.

Europe Can and Should Do More

European allies should take more responsibility for strengthening the security and defense of their neighboring countries. In particular, the EU should strive to resolve protracted conflicts in the Eastern Partnership countries, as outlined in the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (2016).⁵⁴

In addition, the EU could more actively implement its May 2017 Council Conclusions on Security and Defense in the Context of the EU Global Strategy⁵⁵ to assist partner countries with hybrid threats, cybersecurity, security sector reform, border security, preventing radicalization, and countering terrorism. Broader engagement would mutually benefit the security and stability of all European countries.

The EU must more actively protect human rights, especially by strengthening international mechanisms to monitor violations in territories involved in protracted conflicts. Support for civil society and free media remains important and should include mechanisms for continuous mid- and long-term support.

Explicit differentiation of what partners would gain as they progress with each stage of reform is also needed for the Eastern Partnership policy to maintain the "more for more" incentive-based approach. The prospect of EU membership would incentivize countries to demonstrate strong commitments to reforms and adherence to European values.

In Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, visa liberalization proved to be an effective incentive to implement important reforms. The same could be used to encourage reforms in Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Germany's Particular Role

Germany's leading role is crucial for EU unity and solidarity, including in support of Eastern European and Caucasian nations. Berlin promotes the idea of European strategic autonomy in security issues, and therefore Germany should be ready to take more responsibility for the safety of European Union borders and its neighborhood. Berlin, along with Paris, is a guarantor in the "Normandy" format negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow and should preserve sanctions on Russia until the latter demonstrates respect for its neighbors' boundaries.

Given its economic power and position in Europe, Germany is well-equipped to invest in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, thus assisting the countries of the region to become more resilient both to external economic pressure and to internal social instability.

53 "22 USC 2321k: Designation of major Non-NATO Allies," US House of Representatives, last updated January 9, 2018, [http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=\(title:22%20section:2321k%20edition:prelim\)](http://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=(title:22%20section:2321k%20edition:prelim)).

54 "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy," European Union External Action, June 2016, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf.

55 Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on Security and Defence in the context of the EU Global Strategy," May 18, 2017, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24013/st09178en17.pdf>.

Conclusion

The lack of Western engagement in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan amid significant Russian military and economic intervention created a power imbalance in the region and incentivized Moscow to become more assertive. Russian invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, blatant breaches of international law, disinformation, and cyberattacks against the EU and NATO member states, among others, attempts to influence elections abroad, and nuclear intimidation are links in a chain of global destabilization that aims to ruin the rules-based democratic and liberal international order. The current Kremlin regime considers destabilization as a necessary element of its efforts to regain Russia's status as a global power and to ensure its continued stranglehold over its domestic politics.

To combat this challenge, the West should prepare to enter long-term commitments to stabilize the grey security zones in the East of Europe. Ukraine and Georgia are especially important to these efforts. Despite enduring Russian invasion, these two nations remain committed to Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Helping them develop democracy and a liberal marketplace represents the best answer to the battle of narratives imposed by the current corrupt and revanchist Kremlin regime.

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Reasserting Democratic Values in the Post-Soviet Space:

To ensure that Eurasia's path toward reform continues, civil society leaders from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine met with European and US policy leaders in Tbilisi. The group worked to develop recommendations to reinvigorate the European project with a view toward Eurasia. Some policy recommendations from the first of three workshops are outlined in this brief; however, this final brief and formal recommendations are solely the work of the author.

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