

# FROZEN CONFLICTS ON THE EAST VICINITY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: NEW RISKS AND THREATS (A TRANSVERSAL ANALYSIS)

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## Abstract

The article reveals a cross-sectional analysis on frozen conflicts in post-Soviet space. The case studies on frozen conflicts identify the causes and consequences, the risk of activation in the context of dynamic developments at international level. Based on the synthesis of relevant sources, the author concludes on the risks determined by frozen conflicts. Frozen conflicts in post-Soviet space continue to be a source of insecurity (human, economic, political, social, military, ecological, etc.) in the eastern neighborhood of the European Union.

**Keywords:** *Frozen conflict, post-soviet space, cross-sectional study, Transnistria conflict, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Abkhazia conflict, Georgian-Ossetian conflict.*

## 1. ARGUMENTATION FOR A TRANSVERSAL-ANALYSIS

International relations show a dynamic and ascendant evolution. The emergence of new neoclassical actors, of unconventional conflicts and asymmetric risks makes it necessary to reconfigure the security architecture at national, subregional, regional and global levels. On the background of the challenges faced by the modern world, frozen conflicts continue to generate insecurity. Frozen conflicts, according to the OSCE vocabulary (OSCE, 2017), are far from frozen. They generate effects with an international impact, such as: consuming resources of states and organizations involved in solving them; baffling economic development plans; obstruct democracy by giving national leaders pretexts to delay democratic reforms by invoking national security concerns; make possible the existence of uncontrollable areas, etc.

Long-lasting conflicts in general, but also their variety and complexity, are a continuing concern

of international and regional security organizations, of the states involved and also, the scientific community. Being a native of the Republic of Moldova, I have witnessed the evolution of the Transnistrian conflict, its impact on me, my family, and the whole generation since 1990. Today, this frozen conflict continues to be a source of national and regional insecurity, a lever in the hands of lobbyist for geostrategic interests, but not the least, of financial interests. Interviewing national and international experts on a sample of 15 respondents conducted by the author in 2017, shows a lower appreciation of the structures involved in solving the prolonged conflict in the Transnistrian region. The assessment of the conflict situation by international experts with the massive involvement of the local NGO sector implies that the conflict is in favor of all parties involved in its settlement with budgets and wages more than generous, international prestige and visibility. But nobody refers to the population's opinion - the most versed experts of the problem, who are carrying the burden of a conflict triggered 28 years ago with a Stalinist inception in 1924. At the same time, the minimal involvement of national experts from local academic and university backgrounds, de facto connoisseurs of the situation, speaks of a lack of training of those specialists, which does not correspond to the international conflict assessment standards.

Addressing frozen conflicts from the point of view of a transversal analysis will allow us to realize their typology; to present the historiography of the bibliographic sources, different points of view; to reflect on the causes that led to the outbreak of conflicts and their consequences; to note the evolution and delay of

their sustainable political resolution; to identify the actors involved in the negotiation process, to identify the new risks and threats that arise as a result of dynamic changes in international relations; to apply research methods and techniques to accumulate empirical material; to reflect on these processes on today's positions, but also to produce forecasts for the future. Finally, we will come up with conclusions and recommendations, which will elucidate the diversity of opinions and ways of resolving conflicts; results and perspectives.

## **2. DEFINING FROZEN CONFLICTS IN POST-SOVIET SPACE**

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The fall of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of a significant number of intractable problems, which are a natural consequence of the disintegration of a previously unified state. In addition to the general political and economic difficulties of the transition period in state building for the former Soviet republics, issues such as rethinking the status of the center and regions, fuzzy and controversial boundaries, as well as a huge conflict potential based on previous migration policies and the emergence of large diasporas. The process of establishing sovereignty over its own territory and the integration of ethnic minorities into the new state, often settled compactly, has become one of the most significant contradictions of the post-Soviet era.

The widespread destabilization that accompanied the transitional period often led to political mobilization on various regional issues, in the context of which the regions were considered both as contested territories and as important political actors. Almost in all such conflicts, ethnic rhetoric was widely used, and therefore, in analyzing post-Soviet ethnic conflicts, it is more appropriate to speak of an ethno-regional conflict as a conflict between the center and the region, during which certain requirements are demanded for reviewing the status of the region, including its full separation, and the main cause of the mobilization of the masses is the criterion of ethnicity.

In today's world, armed conflicts are ubiquitous. Since the Second World War, more

than 100 different armed conflicts have occurred in different regions of the world. Most of them were of an ethnic character. In some regions of the world ethnic conflicts are very difficult to separate from confessional, clan, tribal, political confrontations. Clear distinction of ethnic armed conflicts is possible only on an analytical level.

In modern political science, conflicts have long been interpreted as a norm for any society and its political system. The positive functions of many confrontations outweigh their negative consequences. Without conflicts, social development, the emergence of pluralistic political practices, competition between power and opposition, parties and movements are impossible.

Ethnic armed conflicts cannot be called a positive phenomenon. Each of them kills civilians, numerous refugees appear, many civilian objects are destroyed, damage monuments of world culture and the environment, not to mention the actual military losses. Therefore, for a given type of conflict, the conditions for their possible institutionalization, the cessation of armed clashes, the settlement or resolution of confrontation are very important. The prevention of the armed stage in ethnic conflicts is an important task for various political actors of a national and international level. Any interethnic confrontation should be regulated by peacekeeping procedures, which offers the possibility to find a political solution to a particular problem.

Traditionally, Africa is the most conflictual region of the world. Countries in Latin America, Asia are also characterized by a rather high conflict rate. A special place in the system of local conflicts belongs to post-communist countries. Post-communism is a phenomenon of the last almost three decades that arose as a result of the fall of a number of communist regimes in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe of the former Soviet Union. Ethnic armed conflicts are an important system characteristic of the post-communist era in the states of the European periphery. Until recently, it was believed that all ethnic armed conflicts of post-communism were "frozen" or settled. Post-communism at the present stage is the construct used by most

modern political scientists to systematize the analysis of those phenomena, processes and institutions that arose after the collapse of the world socialist system.

It seems that the emergence of new ethnic armed conflicts is currently possible, but this probability is not very high. The post-communist space includes a number of territories characterized by ethnic tensions and conflicts that have not acquired the character of an institutionalized armed confrontation. Such can serve, for example, the confrontation in Crimea. Russia occupies a special place in the post-communist space, pretending to be a "world great power", "regional superpower", "energy empire", "CIS integrator", etc. Authoritarian practices of the political regime clearly prevail over the democratic in the political life of the country, but the religious and sociocultural spheres of Russian society remain relatively free. For Russia, in order to maintain internal stability, its role in post-communist states as an intermediary and peacemaker in ethnic armed conflicts is important, and also being forced to solve such confrontations on its own territory (the North Caucasus region) with some degree of success.

At this stage, the role of ethnic armed conflicts in post-communist states at the European periphery has changed. Their number and intensity decreased. However, with the emergence of new risks and challenges, it becomes necessary to rethink and assess the security of truly frozen conflicts.

### 3. CASE STUDIES ON FROZEN CONFLICTS

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#### **The Transnistrian conflict**

The Eastern Territory of the Republic of Moldova, located between the most important Dniester River and the western border of Ukraine, is geographically located at the confluence of geostrategic interests between the West and East. Bessarabia, the historical name of the Republic of Moldova, is annexed by the USSR on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 1940 as a consequence of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact after the end of the Second World War. The Republic of Moldova proclaimed its

sovereignty on 27 August 1989, within the Soviet Union. Two years later, on August 27, 1991, the Parliament of Chisinau approved the "Declaration of Independence", which reconfirmed the previous steps, after 1989: August 31, 1989 - proclaiming Moldovan as a state language in the Moldovan SSR and reintroducing the Latin alphabet; April 27, 1990 - The tricolor with the head of a bison is adopted as a national flag; May 23, 1991 - RSS Moldavian becomes the Republic of Moldova; June 23, 1991 - The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova proclaimed the sovereignty of the Republic, and on August 27, 1991, the state independence. The Declaration of Independence proclaims the Republic of Moldova a sovereign and independent state free to decide the present and the future of the Homeland without any interference from the outside in accordance with the holy ideals and aspirations of the people in the historical and ethnic space of its national becoming. The new independent state - Republic of Moldova - has rapidly ascended to the international arena, being welcomed in the UN, OSCE, CoE, integrating within subregional structures, etc. (BĂDESCU, 2012).

The genesis of the conflict began in 1990, along with the efforts to survive the soviet system, the independence movements in the Baltic Republics, Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and the promotion of positions of national emancipation. The defining feature of this phase was the proclamation of the independence and sovereignty of the respective republics.

In the Republic of Moldova, the line aimed at asserting the independence of the new state and promoting national democratic values within the framework of the European integration process has awakened a hostile reaction from the pro-Soviet and chauvinist forces. On the left bank of the Dniester, in Transnistria, where the Russians and the Ukrainians were the majority population (54%), fearing the possible unification with Romania, the Supreme Soviet called for the autonomy, and later on September 2, 1990, the independence of the Transnistrian Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (subsequently the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic) was proclaimed, having its capital in Tiraspol. This secession act triggered sporadic violence in Gagauzia and Transnistria, which

lasted until 1992, when Chisinau made an effort to disarm the separatist militia and declare the state of emergency in the country. Chisinau's attempts to take control of secessionist areas resulted in the escalation of violence, which led to the onset of a civil war. The central government of Moldova proved powerless to Tiraspol's armed resistance supported by the 14th Army of Russia. On March 2, 1992, the Republic of Moldova became a member of the UN, being the day when the violent conflict on the left bank of the Dniester, caused by a diversion of separatists from Transnistria to Dubasari, began. The authorities in Chisinau had the information about preparing for a diversion, but they hesitated or did not try to defuse it in time (BĂDESCU, 2012).

The 14th Russian Army, the Cossacks of Don brought in, mercenaries and former rightwing jailers were involved in releasing into Transnistria a terror of unimaginable cruelty, attacking villages, schools, kindergartens, institutions, homes, accidentally killing defenseless civilians. The cease-fire agreement signed between the authorities in Chisinau and Tiraspol was signed on June 21, 1992, although violent or tension outbreaks continued after that date. A process of peaceful resolution of the conflict, in different formats and involving different actors, has been triggered, without major success, for 25 years, of finding a lasting, political solution.

Let us mention in this context that the reaction and involvement of Western Europe came late and not decisive. At the time of the outbreak of violence, the Republic of Moldova was a member state of the CSCE/ OSCE, admitted on January 30, 1992, and a member of the United Nations (2 March 1992). President Snegur addressed both international forums for support, but the period for using the conflict prevention mechanisms was already over. The decisive noninvolvement of the international community in the pre-conflict phase could be explained as follows: the international community at that time was particularly concerned with the evolution of the Gulf crisis and the former Yugoslav area; the new OSCE mechanisms for conflict prevention and management were in the drafting phase; concerned by the evolution of the situation in the former Soviet space, following the disintegration

of the USSR, the West hesitated to put pressure on Russia (BĂDESCU, 2012).

The OSCE's involvement in the crisis in Transnistria reflects the recognition of the regional and global relevance of this conflict. Unfortunately, it was not enough to consider another aspect of the crisis: the criminal dimension. Transnistria finds shelter for organized crime networks operating under the protection of separatist authorities. Transnistria has become an uncontrollable area, where forces from the former Soviet space and from other parts of the country are being operated. It is an area of illegal entry and exit of immigrants, transit of illegal money flows that are linked to different types of organized cross-border crime, constant violation of human rights. Since 2005, at the request of the Republic of Moldova, the format of the conflict negotiation mechanism has been broadened by including the US and the European Union as observers, being known as the 5 + 2 negotiation format. However, this format has not proven to be very effective either. Since 2006, it has been more than three years for an informal meeting to be held in Vienna on 6 November 2009, with the aim of discussing practical issues such as social cooperation, infrastructure development, etc. than finding an all-embracing political solution. Compared to other frozen conflicts in the OSCE area, the conflict in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova, in the opinion of many analysts, was more likely to reach a sustainable solution. However, efforts in this direction have lasted for 20 years, with some positive steps, but without a lasting political solution. After all the efforts made by different actors, the progress is modest. Moldova, supported by Western countries and beyond, insists on the withdrawal of Russian troops from its territory, and Moscow refuses, pretending that the presence of its contingent is indispensable for the prevention of violence. At the OSCE Summit in Astana in December 2010, the debate on frozen conflicts highlighted this difference in approach, support for Moldova's position and the continuation of 5 + 2 negotiations.

The conflict in Transnistria and its consequences have also been an obstacle to developing closer ties between the EU and the

Republic of Moldova. The EU's reserved approach to engaging in conflict settlement processes in the Eastern Neighborhood is counterproductive. A more active EU involvement in the sustainable political settlement of the conflict in Transnistria - and other unresolved conflicts in the region - could help prevent them from escalating and preventing other conflicts by ensuring greater visibility of the EU's common foreign and security policy, a regional and global impact (BĂDESCU, 2012).

### **The conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh**

Nagorno-Karabakh denotes a mountainous region with an area of approximately 4400 km<sup>2</sup> in western Azerbaijan, inhabited by a large proportion of ethnic Armenians. The self-proclaimed state of Nagorno-Karabakh, unrecognized by any other state in the world, is *de jure* from Azerbaijan, but *de facto* is an autonomous region. Over time, there have been a series of bloody wars between Armenians and Azeri. The conflict is not fully solved today, which is why it falls into the category of frozen conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union, alongside those in Transnistria, Abkhazia or South Ossetia. All these frozen conflicts aimed at creating and maintaining tensions between various ethnic groups in order to increase Russian influence in those regions. In the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, it all began immediately after the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia. In 1923, following a policy of destabilization of the states that formed the USSR, the Soviet leaders decided to form the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh in the territory of the Azeri Socialist Republic, whose population was mostly Armenian.

The Nagorno-Karabakh war began in the true sense of the word in 1988, when the Armenians of the region claimed territories that were part of the Azerbaijan Socialist Soviet Republic. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former Soviet republics, including the two conflicting Caucasian republics, became independent. At that time, the Armenian inhabitants of Nagorno-Karabakh, supported by Armenia, have proclaimed the independence. This has intensified the fighting in the region. Armenia, which has always acted as if the

autonomous territory belonged to it, sent troops to fight against the Azeri. The war ended in 1994, resulting in the occupation by Armenia of the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. The consequences of the war were as severe as possible: 30,000 dead, mostly Azeri, hundreds of thousands of refugees from both ethnicities forced to leave their homes and live in poverty. The armies of the separatist region and Armenia continue to occupy an important part (around 20%) of Azerbaijan's territory today. Although the conflict is considered frozen, from the end of the war to the present, about 3,000 people have lost their lives in ambushes.

The situation in the South Caucasus has not yet been resolved. The autonomous region wants independence, but it is hard to believe it will get it in the near future. On the other hand, the Azerbaijani leaders have threatened violence if Armenia does not withdraw troops from the region. With the help of important oil revenues, Azerbaijan has considerably increased its defense budget. Armenia, in turn, though having a much smaller budget than its neighbour, has increased military spending. The Caucasus region, by its positioning between Russia and the Islamic world, has always been in the sphere of influence of several regional powers. Regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Soviet Union, and later Russia, always supported Armenians of Christian Orthodox religion, while Azeri, a Turkish Muslim population, found an ally in Turkey. Moreover, the rich oil and gas resources of Azerbaijan make other major geopolitical actors, such as the US, the EU, China or Iran, have a special interest in this conflict.

The military escalation in April 2016 comes at a time when Russia, which supports Armenia, and Turkey, a traditional ally of Azerbaijan, is crossing a serious diplomatic crisis amid the war with Syria. Turkey, which has strong cultural and linguistic ties with Azerbaijan, is a key ally for Baku. It has no diplomatic relations with Armenia because of the Armenian mass dispute of 1915, under the Ottoman Empire, described by Erevan as genocide, but which Ankara refuses to recognize. After 22 years of armistice, just over a few days, more than 36 people died. Russia, Iran, the United States,

Turkey, the UN and the OSCE have called for the immediate cessation of violence.

Beyond political issues, the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be seen in another way. The South Caucasus and, in particular, Azerbaijan as an energy supplier are of strategic importance for Europe. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and South Caucasian pipelines pass near the conflict zone and any escalation will endanger them. The big stake for Russia is to stifle European plans to diversify energy supply sources by creating the Southern Corridor to bring gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe, reducing dependence on Russian gas. Another player trying to expand their influence in the region is Iran, which, after lifting the economic sanctions imposed by its nuclear program, has signed hundreds of millions of dollar contracts with Armenia in energy and construction.

Although the conflict was “frozen” in 1994, when a truce negotiated by Russia and OSCE mediated came into force. In spite of the ceasefire agreement, a peace treaty was not signed and along the demarcation border a series of military incidents occurred, but without the intensity recorded in the spring of 2016. Both Azeri and Armenians have in recent years been in the possession of sophisticated, state-of-the-art weapons, ready to fight at any moment, generating insecurity in the region (IVANOVSKY, n.d.).

### **Abkhazia Conflict**

The self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia is situated on the northwest coast of the Black Sea, has an area of 8,700 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of approximately 240,000 inhabitants, most of them having the Christian-Orthodox confession. The official language is Abkhaz, Cyrillic alphabet being used. The history of this entity dates back more than twelve centuries, during which the ethnicity resisted or underwent more empires, trying to preserve its identity, language and culture.

On March 17, 1991, the referendum on the preservation of the USSR took place at the initiative of Gorbachev. Georgia refused to attend, but in Abkhazia the referendum took place, the ethnic Abkhaz voting for staying within the USSR. On April 9, 1991, the Georgian Supreme Soviet adopted the declaration of

independence, Georgia becoming the first republic to separate from the USSR. The election of the Georgian nationalist leader, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, on May 26, 1991, was viewed by the Abkhaz community as a direct threat to the national identity of Abkhazia. The Abkhazians hoped to keep the USSR desiring Abkhazia to be incorporated into the Russian Federation. Things have worsened because Gamsakhurdia has proved to be an incapable president, which was deprived of power by the opposition in an armed action on January 2, 1992. A military council took over power in Tbilisi, and Gamsakhurdia's supporters regrouped in western Georgia to continue the civil war. Later, in March 1992, former Foreign Minister of the USSR, Eduard Shevardnadze, was invited by the new Tbilisi government to take over the position of President of Georgia's State Council.

Georgia's abolition of the Soviet Constitution was perceived by the Abkhaz as a decisive element that threatened their autonomy, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet adopting a declaration of independence on July 23, 1992. The declaration led to the displacement of the Georgian National Guard forces in Abkhazia and violent clashes with the Abkhaz National Guard, beginning August 14, 1992. A tense period followed, marked by the beginning and cessation of the hostilities between Georgians and Abkhazians in Abkhazia on several occasions, with the direct involvement from the Abkhazian side of the Russian Federation and groups of Caucasian fighters.

The Abkhazians set off a powerful offensive and managed to occupy the capital of Sukhumi on September 27, 1993. The advancement of the Abkhaz forces to the southeast led to the displacement beyond the Enguri River of approximately 240,000 Georgian civilians living in the southern districts of Abkhazia, a humanitarian catastrophe remaining unresolved until now. Frustrated by the prospect of the failure of Georgia, Shevardnadze called for the Russian Federation to help defeat the internal insurgency and settle the conflict with Abkhazia. As a result of this, Georgia became a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), reentering Russia's sphere of influence, and Abkhazia was imposed to sanctions by the CIS.

The conflict was temporarily frozen, and Russian military units were deployed under a CIS peacekeeping operation, internationally monitored by a UN mission called UNOMIG.

The presence of Russian troops in Abkhazia complicates the security situation in the region and the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Georgia. Through its intervention and military presence in the breakaway regions of Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Russia has created a precedent for its direct involvement elsewhere. The weak reaction of the West to Georgia's intervention has given Russia wings, the policy of regional interference in Transnistria and Ukraine continued in recent years, culminating with the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the support of the Russian separatists in the conflict in eastern Ukraine (COPPIETERS, 2004).

### South Ossetia Conflict

South Ossetia, located on the southern slope of the Central Caucasus, is a strategically important territory linking the south of Russia with Transcaucasia and Asia Minor. After the construction of the Trans-Caucasian highway its importance has multiplied many times. And it is not surprising that the Georgian leadership has always aimed at establishing its control over this important region, including through ethnic cleansing in the given territory. As of 1989, the South Ossetia Autonomous Region had a population of about 100,000 people, of whom 66.2% were Ossetias and 29% were Georgians. Ossetias are descendants of ancient Alan tribes of Iranian origin. Most of them are Orthodox Christians. On April 20, 1922, after the sovietization of Georgia, the South Ossetia Autonomous Region was formed. The Georgian-Ossetia feud goes back to 1918-1921, when the Menshevik government of Georgia ruthlessly, in fact using genocide, suppressed the South Ossetian insurgent movement supported by the Bolsheviks (Ossetia's were mostly landless peasants who lived on lands owned by Georgian aristocrats).

In the history of the South Ossetian conflict, the stage of the "revolutionary struggle" began around the end of 1988 when the Ossetian national-democratic movement "Adamon Nykhas" emerged. The conflict, which had been

brewing since 1989, began in January 1991, after the South Ossetian parliament announced the creation of the republic, then as part of Georgia. The Georgian parliament not only abolished this decision, but also liquidated the autonomy. After the block "Round table" won the elections in Georgia in October 1990, Gamsakhurdia announced that the autonomies in Georgia will be preserved. Nevertheless, on December 11, the Supreme Council of Georgia violated this promise and passed a law on abolishing the South Ossetia Autonomy. In response, a referendum was held, where more than 98% of the population stated their desire to unite with North Ossetia. The Kremlin imposed a state of emergency in Ossetia-populated areas of South Ossetia. Gamsakhurdia's decision to abolish the autonomy of South Ossetia was perceived as politically unjustified. In December 1990, Georgia began the blockade of South Ossetia, which lasted until the end of July 1992. Opposition has survived for many years.

On the night of 7/8 August 2008, following challenges from South Ossetia, followed by Georgian political errors, the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia re-erupted, with the Russian Federation intervening immediately in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia and penetrating deep into Georgian territory. Russia has intervened militarily since 8 August 2008 to meet strategic objectives such as de facto annexation of Abkhazia, the weakening of Saakashvili's regime, and, most importantly, the hindering of NATO's expansion into the region. On August 12, through the mediation of the European Union (represented by President Sarkozy), the parties accepted a six-point agreement on the cessation of hostilities. The deal opens the way for international negotiations on the security situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The provisions of the document could only be implemented in part because Russia recognized the independence of the two secessionist entities on 26 August 2008.

The Abkhaz and Ossetia conflicts have led to the creation of two largely unrecognized states within the internationally recognized territory of Georgia. The 1991-92 South Ossetia War and the War in Abkhazia (1992-93), followed by the Russian-Georgian War of August 2008, have left the Russian-backed Republic of South Ossetia

and Republic of Abkhazia in de facto control of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions in north and northwest Georgia (SAPAROV, 2014).

### **The conflict in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine: a future frozen conflict?**

The conflict in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine represents new risks and threats in the eastern neighborhood of the European Union. The Euromaidan events, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, and confrontations in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine have conditioned a new outbreak of insecurity. In spite of the attempts by the international community to control this outbreak, fire breaks are still occurring, and the fighting continues.

According to the United Nations from the start of the conflict in mid-April 2014 up to 15 May 2017, at least 10,090 people, including 2,777 civilians, have been killed, and at least 23,966 injured. More than 1.6 million people fled their homes and became internally displaced, while some three million remained in territory controlled by armed groups. Among these people, there is growing despair and uncertainty (United Nations of Human Rights, 2017). Though the Crimean conflict and East Ukraine are not reported as frozen, experts say that it will be categorized that way in the future.

### **The European Union and the geostrategic situation in the Eastern Neighborhood**

The case study on frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space provides a necessary contribution to acknowledging and understanding how the EU has addressed on geopolitical developments in this area, but also how it has joined the international community, intervening with autonomous crisis management tools, and conflict prevention. Some current research into the EU's involvement in this area is plagued by unilateral, predominantly Eurosceptic approaches, starting from the wrong premise: for example, as it did not act by military intervention to enforce and maintain peace, the EU is not a relevant actor in frozen conflicts; or all EU actions in the Eastern Neighborhood are based only on the concern to guarantee the security of the EU space. These reductionist interpretations do not allow the understanding of the complexity of the

internal and external factors that have led the EU to act in frozen conflicts or not, and by what means it has chosen to manage the relationship with the post-Soviet states of the Eastern Neighborhood. Some erroneous or insufficiently grounded perceptions are also generated by the fact that the eastern neighborhood of the EU is a recent concern both on the European political and security agenda and in the academic environment for reasons related to the endemic features of the post-Soviet space and the sensitivities of some new EU member states towards Russia. The context that has catapulted international attention to this area was mainly created by the concerns about the security of the EU space before the accession of ten new member states to the EU in 2004, including former Soviet (Baltic States), Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The EU's eastern neighborhood has also gained geostrategic significance for the EU in the context of the need to diversify its sources of energy supply (STRAT, 2011; POPESCU, 2013).

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

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In the 21st century, new factors emerged in the political life of the countries, connected with the substantial involvement of all states of the world in the processes of globalization. Modern ethnic-political separatist conflicts should be considered through the prism of these factors, which are integral elements of the global security system and cannot be ignored in the study of the conflicts. The current model of the world order is characterized by extreme instability and is influenced by at least two different polar tendencies of world development - integration, manifested in the striving for the formation of supranational regional and global structures, and disintegration taking place in states that are complex in polyconfessional and civilizational terms. In this regard, it is necessary to take into account the fact that with the growing interdependence of various parts of the world and the ongoing intensification of integration processes in it, especially towards civilizational centers, in the future, the danger of ethnic-political separatist conflicts remains and



intensifies. This largely determines the essence of another global trend, reflecting the centrifugal, separatist phenomena. On the other hand, these processes should be perceived as links in the current trend of aggravation of inter-civilizational contradictions, including the struggle for energy resources.

This is clearly evidenced by recent events, which clearly demonstrate the collapse of illusions regarding the conflict-free world political development with the disintegration of the bipolar system. Instead of the expected world order, a sort of new disorder arose, triggered by international terrorism, progressive nationalism, religious intolerance, and again asserting territorial claims of states.

The transversal study of frozen and latent conflicts demonstrates that they continue to be a source of insecurity (human, economic, political, social, military, ecological, etc.) in the eastern neighborhood of the European Union. Which determines the need to interpret frozen conflicts, find remedies before they acquire the capacity to escalate.

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