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A strategic communication at the service of a shared development project between the EU and Russia. Utopia or reality?

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1-Strategic communication: recent EU acts towards Russia

The starting point for an adequate reflection on the role of strategic communication in the relationship system between the European Union and Russia as well as on a possible contribution to improving cooperation between the two worlds lies in the analysis of the important acts approved on the matter by the European Council, the Commission and the Parliament in 2015 and 2016.

1.1-European Council : East StratCom Task Force

It is known that, on 20 March 2015, the European Council promoted the establishment of a specific body, the *East StratCom Task Force*, a new operational structure composed of a team of experts in strategic communication with the specific aim of tackling the misinformation campaigns organized by external actors in Europe, in particular by Russia, and instructed the High Representative of European Foreign Policy and its EEAS service to set up an action plan on this subject.

This plan has been elaborated and formally presented in June 2015: it pursues three specific objectives: (i) communicate and promote effectively the EU's policies and values between the countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), underlining the positive aspects as well as the concrete benefits that the European action can have on people's daily lives and their communities; (ii) strengthening the support to independent media in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and in the same EU member states; (iii) strengthening the EU's ability to foresee, face and respond to external misinformation campaigns. The counter-propaganda initiative is excluded.

The concrete actions envisaged by the plan and carried out by the team of experts, which became operational in September 2015, are mainly the following: the organization of proactive communication campaigns on the most important political issues for the EU; analysis and

assessment of the trends that characterize the disinformation campaigns organized from outside, with weekly collection and publication of the misinformation elements in a special *Disinformation Review* (commentary on facts and news, not on opinions); support to the media system in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the promotion of a new, specific regional communication program called *OPEN*. The team of experts consists of more than 400 members, has diverse competences and extensive knowledge of foreign languages, including Russian, and works with reference to the budget provided by the European program for strategic communication. To inform the millions of people who speak Russian, in the world and in Europe, EEAS has organized a dedicated website, *EEAS Russian language website*. The EEAS action plan also urges EU member states to strengthen the support to media independence in the Eastern Partnership' countries in connection with the *Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe - OSCE* and the *Council of Europe*.

Obviously, all this activity program, like other similar initiatives of active EU promotion, was decided after the explosion of tensions for the Ukraine crisis and the annexation of the Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014.

1.2-European Parliament: the Landsbergis Report

In support of the initiative taken by the European Council and the Commission, the Committee for Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament adopted on 13 May 2015 the *Report* (2015/2001 (INI), presented by *Gabrielius Landsbergis* (Lithuania, member of the parliament). The document highlights the many violations made by Russia of international law and international security, of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in a blend of denunciations ranging from Russia's direct or indirect participation in numerous conflicts in the bordering states to the media control, with the limitation of freedom of expression, the repression of homosexual organizations, specifically the LGBTI League, on the basis of Russian law that criminalizes the so-called "homosexual propaganda" and the criminalization of civil society organizations through the "Foreign Agents Act". The document welcomes the decision of the European Council to promote an action plan to counter Russian propaganda and denounces the dangers of Russian support initiatives, including financial ones, to populist, radical and extremist movements in Europe.

The European Union - this is a first comment that comes spontaneously - has relations in all major geopolitical areas in the world; therefore also with regional realities and nation-states with dictatorial systems characterized by forms of particular repressive violence; but it does not result that none of these realities or nation-states have ever been subjected to such strong political denunciation, extended to the various areas of collective life, such as this EU document dealing with EU-Russia relations; a clear signal of the severity of the deterioration in the situation created between the two systems.

The long document also sets out the conditions for recovery of the EU's cooperation with Russia, which will be possible only on the basis of shared values and principles, concerning democracy, the rule of law and common interests. These are the aspects that we are interested in for the purpose of our reflection aiming at the search for the elements useful to recreate a possible convergence lines between the two realities, both Russian and European.

In this regard, the European Parliament's report is very clear and straightforward: as long as Russia continues to pursue an aggressive policy towards the neighboring countries, a return to normal relations, to the "business as usual," as it is commonly said, it is not imaginable; as well as it is not even conceivable that the EU will re-launch with Russia the "strategic partnership" system, that was in force in the recent past. Under the current conditions, the document states, a constructive relationship between the EU and Russia can be thought in the interest of both parties only in the

long run and in relation to the need to address "common global challenges such as climate change, new technological developments, the fight against terrorism, extremism and organized crime". Other areas of intervention where it is desirable to act with mutual benefits, always in a long-term perspective, are indicated in trade, transport, energy, contacts and exchanges between people, through *Erasmus Plus* programs and *Common Steps* on visa for short travel, cross-border cooperation. The report also recognizes that EU-Russia cooperation has "positive outcomes in some fields such as Northern dimension and cross-border cooperation; whereas Russia has been constructive in the recent Iran negotiations".

1.3-European Eastern Partnership: the Riga declaration

Also in the *Joint Declaration* adopted at the Eastern Partnership Summit, held in Riga on 21-22 May 2015, incidentally a document in which Russia is never quoted, the European Union has confirmed, inter alia, the commitment to support "territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all partners". "The actions against Ukraine and events in Georgia since 2014 - the final text states - have shown that the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders can not be considered as guaranteed in the 21st century on the European continent". In the commentary on the Summit's work, the President of the European Council Donald Tusk confirmed the value of this approach: "The main message of this summit is our strong, constant and consistent commitment to the Eastern Partnership and each of our partner countries. And it is a necessary message in the light of the tumults, the aggressions, the intimidation and even the war that in recent years have hit this part of Europe". Finally, the Summit' document supports the above mentioned initiatives undertaken in Europe in the area of strategic communication.

1.4-European Parliament: the Fotyga Resolution

An year later, on November 23, 2016, the European Parliament approved a *Resolution* on "*Strategic EU communication to counteract propaganda against it by third parties*" (2016/2030 (INI)). The final vote of the document - approved by 304 votes to 179 with 208 abstentions - is indicative of the significant contrasts on the value and merit of such initiative. Also in this case, the premise of the Resolution concerns the complaint that "the EU, its Member States and citizens are under growing, systematic pressure to tackle information, disinformation and misinformation campaigns and propaganda from countries and non-state actors, such as transnational terrorist and criminal organisations in its neighbourhood, which are intended to undermine the very notion of objective information or ethical journalism, casting all information as biased or as an instrument of political power, and which also target democratic values and interests". In this context, Russia is explicitly accused of promoting a true information war, a kind of initiative that has been widely used by the Soviet Union at the time of the Cold War, defined as "a combination of military and non-military measures of a covert and overt nature, deployed to destabilise the political, economic and social situation of a country under attack, without a formal declaration of war". An aggression that is "targeting not only partners of the EU, but also the EU itself, its institutions and all Member States and citizens irrespective of their nationality and religion".

This first complaint adds another: "the propaganda and the intrusion of Russian media is particularly strong and often unmatched in the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood; whereas national media in these countries are often weak and not able to cope with the strength and the power of Russian media". In this situation, the EU institutions are invited "to recognise that strategic communication and information warfare is not only an external EU issue but also an internal one, and ... concern ... the number of hostile propaganda multipliers existing within the Union". An entire paragraph of the Resolution (points 7-15) is devoted to a specific denunciation of the aggressiveness of the Russian government in this field and the title clearly illustrates the content of the articles: "Recognizing and exposing Russian disinformation and propaganda warfare".

The subsequent paragraph - which has raised many objections – is dedicated to the "information warfare, disinformation and radicalization methods of the ISIS / Daesh", as if the two realities were comparable. According to a minority official opinion (expressed by the parliamentary group GUE/NGL, European Left-Nordic Green Left) this sequence is simply "irresponsible".

Among the main proposals to contrast and protect the integrity of the European system, the document presents those relating to the strengthening of EU-NATO cooperation on strategic communication; the coordination of existing instruments, including the ENP (European Neighborhood Policy), the European Fund for Democracy (EED), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), the Media Freedom Watch (the instrument for monitoring the freedom of the media); the promotion of cultural and social exchanges between local communities as key platforms for combating the prejudices of populations; media education (Media Literacy), the training of a quality journalism. Finally, the document concludes that one of the most effective measures against Russia's misinformation campaigns would be the existence of independent and free media within Russia itself; and, accordingly, stresses that achieving such a result should be the EU's goal.

The President's Putin comment to the document approved by the European Parliament is known: "We are witness to a political degradation of democracy in Western countries". But also in Europe widespread have been criticism and perplexity about this Resolution. As an example, we can call the statement by the European Journalism Federation (EFJ) who denounced "the confusion and the lack of consistency" of this act which "equates the Russian media with terrorist organizations as the Isis; does not distinguish between independent Russian media and those controlled by the Kremlin; confuses strategic communication, state propaganda, terrorist propaganda, counter-propaganda and independent information". In Italy, several commentators have highlighted the risk that behind the "support to the independent press" the European Union would arrange for a European censorship service to hinder the circulation of free information. According to some other comments, "the Resolution is a concentration of the neo-maccartism of fifties and ignorance of the media functioning, especially of social networks" (Il Giornale, Dec. 1, 2016); for others, such as the daily newspaper La Repubblica, "the document approved in Strasbourg obviously marks a point in favor of those who advocate for the hard line against the Kremlin".

1.5-European Parliament: the Global Trendometer

As an appendix and complement to the illustration made so far as well as a further confirmation of the key to reading the EU approach to relations with Russia, even in the next future, in term of strong opposition, we can mention the study "*Global Trendometer. Essays on medium and long-term global trends*" elaborated by the European Parliament's Research Service in the autumn 2016. The study presents the possible scenarios of the major challenges that the European system will face in the 2030-2040 projection: world tensions caused by water scarcity, increasing economic inequality among world population, questions about the primacy of US military power, the economic growth of the Asian continent, the ITC and technology revolution. Concerning the changes in the international relations system, a fundamental reference is made to the possible evolution of the current rapprochement and cooperation between Russia and China; and in this regard it is interesting to note that this possible, future alliance is defined in very restrictive and summary terms as an "authoritarian alliance" followed by the statement that all "global and regional actors will be forced to adapt to this situation". Among the elements of uncertainty, the European Parliament's study highlights the fact that "Russia's aggressive foreign policy endeavors could endanger the future partnership with China. Neither the willingness of China to support Russia in this, nor the level of Chinese leverage over Russian foreign policy, is clear". In essence, the messages and communications of the studies prepared by the European Parliament's services in

support of the decisions of the EP members and disseminated to the general public do not hesitate to define the Russian system and its initiatives at international stage in terms of authoritarianism, anti-democracy, aggression, even in a mid- and long-term evaluation.

2-Rationality – Irrationality in the EU' acts

In order to contribute to change this kind of approach and building desirable synergies in strategic communication between the EU and Russia, the key-elements of the two political acts approved by the European Parliament should be carefully considered. That because, unlike the above-mentioned Landsbergis Report, approved by the Committee for Foreign Affairs on May 13 2015, the Fotyga Resolution approved by the Assembly on November 23 2016 is a political act that does not offer any element to link any possible common EU-Russia verifications, a step that is indispensable for starting to rebuild - given that there is a real political will by the parties - a climate of mutual trust and cooperation between two systems that are complementary in many respects and which, however, both play a fundamental role on the international scene.

Hence the fundamental question: how many elements in the approval of this important European political act, the Fotyga Resolution on 2016, as well as of other similar acts, we may find as logical and rational or, on the contrary, illogical or irrational? How much the emotional, rhetorical, mythological elements have influenced the decision of European parliamentarians? The issue is not at all out of place, because for many years now many scholars, experts and protagonists of European life, facing the current system crisis - defined as a "existential crisis" by the same Commission's president Junker in his report on the state of the Union in 2016 - have raised the following question: to what extent the rhetoric and mythology of Europe, practiced by its protagonists, prevented the promotion of concrete and realistic policies that could really respond to the true interests and needs of European peoples .

Moreover, also the report accompanying the Resolution on Strategic Communication and presented by the EP rapporteur Anna E. Fotyga, a member of the Parliamentary Group "Conservatives and Reformists", educated in USA, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, makes legitimate such a question. "Allow me first to strike a very personal note – she stated in this way at the beginning of her presentation - because this issue is also important for me personally. My whole public life – a large part of it under communist rule and afterwards – has been dedicated to countering the narrative exerted first by the Soviet Union and then by the Russian Federation of its special traditional sphere of influence. I always considered it very dangerous for our joint sovereignty because this same issue refers to many nations of Central and Eastern Europe; so I am very privileged to present it here today before Parliament".

These words call for precise objective facts: the feelings, emotions, vicissitudes experienced by the rapporteur of the Resolution are a real fact, as a real fact are his security needs, which become needs of the whole European system. But to what extent these real facts prevent the entire European system from identifying possible way out and from working in building more positive scenarios? In essence, we are facing with the central, not yet untied knot, which has been blocking the Union for years, since the time of great enlargement to the East. An enlargement by which the new member states have brought visions, stories, needs, very different from those of other member states, starting with the idea of sovereignty and national security. And it is no a coincidence that the entry into the EU's political and economic system for many of these countries went hand in hand with NATO membership.

This is an unprecedented situation of different visions, experiences, feelings and needs that the European Union has not yet been able to harmonize with the consequence of constantly finding

obstacles and difficulties in building effective and positive external relations. It is with respect to this not recomposed situation that, for instance, the constant remind made in recent years to the need for "more Europe", or for a "political Europe", proved to be a rhetorical recall, to the myth of a united Europe more than to its concrete reality, which is still today characterized by very different fundamental needs. And the makeshift solution linked to the political hypothesis of a European Union that will proceed at different speeds in its integration's process between member states in the near future - a hypothesis also confirmed by the commitments made by European leaders at the recent 60th anniversary summit of the Treaties of Rome (March 25, 2017) - is the confirmation of the mythological more than realistic character that has so far been followed by European authorities in the fundamental choices.

Undoubtedly, the decision of the great enlargement to 27 member states in 2004 and 2007 was a positive thing that the Union's protagonists experienced as a "historical duty", according to the words that a sincere European as the President of the Italian Republic, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, addressed to the Italian Parliament in July 2005; a duty above all to those peoples "who saw in their accession to the EU the guarantee of their renewed freedom, the crowning of a half-century wait". "The costs of enlargement will be enormous," stated European Commission' President Romano Prodi on the eve of the new states' accession to the Union - but they are nothing compared to the cost of not proceeding to enlargement". In general, we can add that the choice of enlargement was taken by European leaders on the basis of unanimous consensus. However, for completeness, it should also be reminded that after around ten years from those events, in the midst of the crisis of the European system, many authoritative exponents have expressed strong rethinks on those choices. We can recall, for example, the words of former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, expressed in an interview with the Italian daily newspaper, *Il Corriere della Sera*, shortly before his death. According to Schmidt all the problems of today (2013) "sank in 1991-1992 when enlargement overlaps with the rise of the euro. Then we made the double ridiculous mistake of inviting everyone to be part of the Union and at the same time to adopt the euro".

In the same interview, former German chancellor Helmut Schmidt invited European leaders to find a way out by recovering what he called the "European rationality", with a new institutional set-up to ensure the efficiency and real democracy of the Community system, in order to address also the problems of national sovereignty, worsened by the enlargement process, beyond the generic character of Europe's formula as a union of states and peoples. Indeed, as the current crisis of the European system demonstrates, still open today is what another former German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, one of the founding fathers of the Union, identified as the main problem: building a common horizon for all people of the continent: "we all are living under the same sky - he stated - but we do not have the same horizon".

The problem has long been open. "Now the clash begins between reality and myths": this was the comment by the British premier Tony Blair at the end of the European Council that in June 2004 approved the draft Treaty for the European Constitution, afterwards rejected in 2005 by the popular referendums of France and The Netherland. This comment hit the target: it is also valid in the current situation, about thirteen years later, and brings us to the center of the tangle of many still open issues that prevent the European Union from acting promptly, transparently, effectively and consistently. In 2007, Antony Giddens, in his reflections on Europe in the global era, had no hesitation in denouncing the "bad faith" of political leaders who continued to promote the traditional project, refusing to address the reality of the great transformations of the contemporary world. "In the light of these changes - the scholar pointed out - we are forced to rethink the purpose and the identity of the European Union", realistically considering that peace in Europe is "more thanks to the presence of NATO than to the role of the EEC / EU" as demonstrated by the wars in the Balkans in the nineties; that in the global age "sovereignty has changed nature"; that "security

issues come from weak states"; that in all continents there is "a revival of the nation state"; finally, that we must operate on the basis of an adequate understanding of the "nature of the contemporary world".

If the main open problem in the European system is to recover European rationality in order to act with realism and real chance of success both in the internal integration process and in the relationship system that the EU has with the outside world, therefore how is possible to link to this European rationality the choices to do in the field of strategic communication?

3-For a strategic communication between EU-Russia inspired by the principle of rationality

Strategic communication is, essentially, a top decision which gather around itself the whole activity of an institution, authority, association, company, including the objectives that such institution or entity is pursuing; and the choice of goals, rather than the methodology to be followed as well as the tools to use, is the real key step of any action to be taken. To what vision of the future, to what values and ultimate purposes, to what historical and political sense should the goals of strategic communication between the EU and Russia be linked? Is it possible that the confrontation between two geopolitical and geo-economic realities that are so important, close to each other, with so many common histories, can not find elements on which to converge and build a situation useful to verify the real targets and meaning of their respective initiatives in the field of strategic communication? It is just the principle of rationality that rejects any idea of closure and impossibility to operate in this direction; also because there are areas and situations where this cooperation between the EU and Russia is a living, continuous, constructive fact. For example, the common commitment to the definition and approval of United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the building of a new global growth model, the shared commitment in G20 Summits for new world governance, the promotion of fundamental human rights within the Council of Europe.

In this respect, we must recognize that while the Resolution of the European Parliament approved in 2016 objectively does not provide useful indications for identifying areas of possible renewal of EU-Russia co-operation, being entirely oriented towards the harsh and rigid contraposition, on the contrary, the Report approved by the Committee for Foreign Affairs in 2015, despite its equally rigid and strong denunciation and logic of contrast, however does provide positive indications on which to start a constructive confrontation. Where the document indicates that both the EU and Russia are committed to providing a long-term response to the great challenges of the contemporary world, from climate and demographic change to the technological revolution, in fact it opens up a door to a cross-check: what future EU and Russia want to build? What idea do they both have of a possible future?

In both systems, laws and programs are trying to overcome the current crisis and create conditions for the recovery of a steady and balanced progress. But as one of the leading promoters of strategic planning stated, the Turkish-American scientist Hazan Ozbekhan (1968), co-founder and first director of the famous Club of Rome, "planning a truly sustainable economic and social progress is not to project the present in a future that we wish to build, but, conversely, to trigger in the present time an idea of the future that we imagine as possible and worth living ... the main subject of planning is the willed future". Hence the question: what ideas of the future express the initiative in the field of strategic communication promoted so far by the EU and Russia? And again, what idea of alternative direction, what idea about the recovery of a positive historical sense of such activities might emerge with the launch of common comparisons and checks on the ultimate goals of strategic communication organized in the two realities? It is sure that a check of the goals pursued in this area of communication could bring important positive elements of novelty because the two systems, the European one and the Russian one, certainly do not represent alternative models: we are,

therefore, facing two genuinely capitalist models, even though each of them practices democracy and organizes the functioning of the institutional system and the rules of internal cohesion on the basis of constraints stemming from numerous factors such as, for example, historical experience, geographic size and location, ethnic diversity of the population. In short, Russia of today is no longer an ideological alternative model to that of the European Union. And it is precisely starting from this consideration that the application of the principle of rationality to the goals of strategic communication' activities could bring the two realities into finding convergent paths on shared goals.

After all, more and more frequent and widespread are the questions about the value of the real aims that contemporary man is pursuing with his actions. These are questions that concern, of course, politics but also economic and social progress. In this sense, the trinomial Information - Communication - Knowledge should be integrated with a fourth factor: Wisdom. And that's just to try to give a valid answer to the basic questions: where are we going? Where can we go? What is the real meaning of things we're doing? The things we are doing make any sense?

With the EU and Russia, we are facing with two complex systems, two decisive players of world progress: as a result, the fundamental moment in defining the goals of strategic communication can not fail to take up this kind of questions as well. And it is precisely with reference to these questions that it becomes possible to overcome the limits of an emotional and irrational approach and replace it with a more proper and valid: that is, the rational approach, with clear benefit for both.

We have come to a crossroads, stated recently a great international communications expert, the Finnish Tapio Varis, who cooperates with UNESCO: building a new world order requires among other things "to block the temptation to militarize our mind and use the language of war; on the contrary, we have to seriously propose to create a mentality of peace and to promote educational programs in this direction "(2017).

4-F.E.S. (Germany) : an example of a rational approach

An example of recovery a rational approach in the definition of the strategic communication goals is offered by an important initiative set up by a German foundation, the Fridrich Ebert Stiftung, promoted in 2013-2015 for "A Shared European Home" between EU, Eastern Partnership countries (EaP) and Russia.

In 2014, the German foundation organized a team of experts with the task of drawing up scenarios on the future of relations between these three systems by 2030. In 2015, these scenarios were presented and discussed in thirteen capitals in Europe and North America with the involvement of over than nine hundred researchers, experts, diplomats, politicians, journalists, and students. Scenarios propose four different types of "common home":

"1) a *Shared Home*, in which pragmatic cooperation characterizes relations between the EU, Russia and the six countries "in between". A commonality of interests, but not of values, leads to a gradual rapprochement among all concerned after the deep crisis of 2013-16; 2) a *Common Home*, characterized by interest-driven cooperation and a communality of values; 3) a *Broken Home*, where a European Home as such no longer exists, instead by 2030 Europe is back to a Cold War-like situation with confrontation instead of cooperation, without common interests, and clearly without common values; 4) a *Divided Home*, also called Cold Peace, where the current status quo continues, with a few common interests, some conflict and increasing divergence in values".

The result of this verification is very interesting because offers important suggestions also on the matter of possible tests and common actions in strategic communication, particularly with reference to the definition of its goals.

According to the final report, “one consensus that emerged from all these debates was that – against the backdrop of the deep crisis in EU-Russia relations – the Common Home scenario was unlikely to materialize by 2030. It could, however, serve as a vision to guide policymakers in the EU in their long-term strategy. As one participant in the Bucharest debate remarked: “the Common Home is like the North Star – it can show us the way, but at the same time we know we will never reach it”.

Many interlocutors expressed the view that the current status of EU-Russia relations may be related to the scenario described as Divided Home, with real risks that the open crises, such as the Ukraine crisis and the crisis in Syria, by their nature and their characteristics may over time further deteriorate the relationship between the two realities and recreate a Cold War situation, already lived in the past, with very serious risks for the peace.

In any case, the conclusion of all debates on possible future scenarios is as follows: “if the Common Home seems out of reach for the moment, then the EU should avoid the Broken Home, stabilize the Divided Home we currently seem to be heading for, and try to achieve the Shared Home as a medium-term policy goal”.

Once identified for the European Union the medium-term strategic objective in building a scenario defined by a Shared Home, the German foundation's report defines the conditions to be met to achieve it. “The aim for the next five to ten years would be the return to pragmatic cooperation not only with Russia, but also with all the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), based primarily on shared interests”.

The hypothesis of a pragmatic cooperation to stabilize relations, make them more predictable and address them on a path that can produce widespread benefits, does not hide the big differences between the systems both in domestic and international politics; but in any case it creates a platform to start a cooperation surely from somewhat limited boundaries but able to start a constructive process of positive future evolutions.

This requires the European Union, for example, to clarify well and communicate in full transparency, what are its objectives and priorities to be pursued in the medium and long term, with regard to border security, but also to economic and social development. In particular, the economic interdependence, currently existing between the EU, the countries of the Eastern Partnership and Russia, must be strengthened to the utmost in order to avoid the possibility of a further deterioration in the political relations between the three systems. It is precisely this economic interdependence - the report emphasizes - which has so far prevented the explosion of even more serious conflicts than the present ones.

In addition, the EU is required to carefully assess its own initiatives and to take into account the sensitivities and requests of the countries involved, including Russia; in particular to consider the requests from local communities and civil society organizations. Finally, the German foundation's report presents some concrete proposals to advance this pragmatic cooperation, such as: correcting the asymmetries that exist in the economic interdependence between the three systems, the EU, the EaP, Russia; to establish an economic cooperation plan linked to the implementation of the Minsk agreements, inspired by a post-Minsk vision, in which also a shared reconstruction plan for the Donbas region must be included; the institutionalization of a forum for the dialogue between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). In conclusion the report recommends that the formula

“let us agree to disagree on some issues, but still try to find common grounds on others” should be the guiding principle for EU policy vis-à-vis Russia, also when confronting global policy challenges”. “This principle – the report states – should be the cornerstone of the attempt to build the Shared European Home. It would prove its value especially if the EU and Russia were able to create – smaller or bigger – success stories of cooperation despite the current, deep disagreement over Crimea and eastern Ukraine”.

A final comment

Strategic communication is a constituent, essential factor to the success or failure of this political hypothesis aimed at promoting cooperation that privileges a system of “pragmatic interest-driven relationships”. The form of cooperation deemed to be the most appropriate way of reconstructing an effective dialogue between the EU, EaP and Russia. The rational approach on which this hypothesis is based requires coherent actions; consequently, that even the strategic communication’ initiatives leave aside every emotional and mythological element to concentrate, conversely, on actions defined, namely, by rational goals and developed on logical paths; on elements, in short, that is difficult to find in the documents approved so far by the European Union.

Appendix

The last EU enlargement: the historical profile of some new member states

Croatia, 28th EU member state since July 2013, is an independent state since June 25, 1991, that is only a little more than twenty years, a goal achieved at the cost of a war. In 2009 it joined NATO. Throughout its history, Croatia has never had a true independence. From 1102 to 1918 it was member: first of the Kingdom of Hungary; then, from 1603, of the Habsburg Empire. After the World War I, in 1918, was incorporated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929 and then, after the World War II, Republic of Yugoslavia in 1947, until 1991.

Slovenia became a member of EU and NATO in the same year, 2004. Slovenia also, such as Croatia, achieved its independence in 1991, that is only a little more than twenty years; and, as Croatia was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg Empire, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the Republic of Yugoslavia.

Slovakia, a member of the EU since 2004, is an independent state since 1993, exactly since twenty years. Throughout its history, it has never had a full independence only for a few days in 1918, at the end of World War I. Annexed to Czechoslovakia, it was a satellite state - Slovak Republic – in the German area of influence from 1939 to 1945, before being re-absorbed into Czechoslovakia.

Even the **Czech Republic** has shared the same experience of Slovakia: member state of the EU since 2004, it is independent only since January 1, 1993. For centuries, under the Habsburgs, was considered a personal property of the emperor. As Czechoslovakia had a short period of independence after the World War I from 1918 to 1938 (1st republic), as German satellite state from 1938 to 1945 (2nd republic), again as an independent state from 1945 to 1948 (3rd republic) again as a satellite state of the USSR. Only in June 1990 was able to perform free elections. A special witness of the sensitivity of this population regarding the protection of national sovereignty has occurred in 2007, when Parliament has asked the Supreme Court to establish a ruling and clarify if the Lisbon Treaty violates national sovereignty or less; and only after a positive ruling by

the Court and the overcoming of the strong resistance from the President of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Klaus, it was possible to achieve the approval of the treaty.

Fully independent since 1989, with President Lech Walesa, **Poland** joined first NATO in 1999 and then the European Union in 2004. Independent kingdom in the fifteenth century, the history of Poland is characterized by a series of annexations (the Polish Lithuanian Confederation was promoted in 1569), divisions (in 1772 and in 1793 between Prussia, Russia and Austria; in 1939 between Germany and Russia) as deletions as sovereign state (in 1795, followed by the French protectorate of the Napoleon over the reduced Dukedom of Warsaw). As republic was independent only about twenty years after the World War I, in the period from 1918 to 1939, then under the control of the USSR after the World War II, for more forty years.

Lithuania also, like other states of Eastern Europe, joined in the same year 2004 both NATO and the European Union. Independent Grand Dukedom in the Middle Ages, for centuries was united to Poland, in the first instance with the personal union of the sovereign, then, from the fourteenth century, in the form of Polish Lithuanian confederation and again, in 1569, as Republic of the two peoples. Lithuania has achieved full independence only after the World War I, on April 4, 1919, before being annexed by the USSR in 1940. It was the first Baltic republic to regain the independence on March 11, 1990.

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