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THE NEW GLOBAL SPATIAL AND GEOPOLITICAL ORDER TRIGGERED BY RUSSIA AFTER THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE: WHAT PERSPECTIVES FOR EUROPE?

Abstract

With the start of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022, the world is moving towards a multicentric geopolitical configuration that calls into question the old balances, with no possibility of returning to the pre-conflict situation. In retrospect, the wars in the Balkans at the time of the dissolution of Yugoslavia can be seen as a manoeuvring ground for the unipolar spatial order imposed on Europe by the United States, and is now called into question by the conflict in Ukraine. Against this backdrop of the emergence of a new geopolitical configuration, what are the options and prospects for EU Member States, but also for the European Balkan states that are not members of the EU but are engaged in a rapprochement with the EU, such as Serbia? Having analysed the international situation from a geopolitical perspective, we can consider which scenario would most likely stem the escalation of this conflict. The promotion of a more stable Europe with a reduced risk of conflict necessarily requires an agreement

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between the different States to negotiate a new European geopolitical architecture, a prerequisite for more room for manoeuvre and independence for European nations in the context of great power rivalry. In this analysis, geopolitical cartography will be used to illustrate the issues but also to emphasise the spatial angle as an analytical tool.

Key Words: *Geopolitics, Russia, Ukraine, Europe, EU, Serbia, Republic of Srpska, USA, China, NATO.*

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW SPATIAL AND GEOPOLITICAL ORDER: THE GEOPOLITICAL TRIAD OF THE USA, RUSSIA, AND CHINA – AND THE EU AS A PERIPHERY

The conflict in Ukraine reinforces the thesis that the new geopolitical configuration on a global scale is characterised by a struggle for the distribution of geopolitical spaces between major powers. On a global scale, this conflict is part of the clarification, by means of military but also geo-economic tools, of the global geopolitical balance and its new configuration in the twenty-first century dominated by three main poles, the United States, China, and Russia, and in Europe the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia. Following the transformation of the spatial order resulting from the crisis in Ukraine, a new balance of power is emerging in the world, characterised by the re-emergence of Russia and the rise of China, causing the fragmentation of the old unipolar spatial order.

The United States and its NATO allies, who make up the West, have exercised supremacy in the depths of the European continent since the demise of the USSR, with successive enlargements of NATO. The Russian army's special military operation is above all the consequence of NATO and its military bases moving closer to Russia's borders with the aim of encirclement. This development has of course been perceived as a threat by Russia, which is seeking to rebalance geopolitical forces. Russia's strategic stance is also an extension of the long European tradition of the balance of power and as "the balance of power in the world has been upset" (Putin 2022), Moscow felt that it had to be re-established. This crisis is also the consequence, linked to the previous one,

of Washington's refusal (Arms Control Association 2022) to negotiate a new European security architecture proposed by Moscow in 2021 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2021), with the main demand being a halt to NATO enlargement.

There are many other recent factors at the root of the conflict. First of all, there has been the failure to implement the Minsk agreements, which were supposed to overcome the crisis in Ukraine since 2014, both because of the refusal of successive Ukrainian governments following the change of regime in 2014 to implement them, in particular the federalisation of Ukraine to grant autonomy to the Donbass republics, and because of the inaction of the French and German diplomats, who were the guarantors of the process, to put pressure on Ukraine. It is now clear that the aim of the new regime in Kiev was not to find a lasting way out of the fighting, but to gain time and strengthen its military position with a view to a confrontation with Russia, as the new Ukrainian President, Petro Poroshenko, has admitted. (Porochenko 2021). It was confirmed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel (*Die Zeit* 2022) and French president François Hollande (*The Kyiev Independent* 2022.) interviews.

It is a geopolitical error of judgement to believe that Moscow would not at some point react to the expansion of the United States and NATO over the long term, especially as the Russia-Georgia war demonstrated that NATO enlargement was a red line for Moscow (Thomann, 2008). In 1997, the man who designed the policy of containing the USSR during the Cold War, George Kennan (Kennan, 1997), like many other experts (Los Angeles Times. 1997)¹, warned that "NATO enlargement would be the most fatal mistake in American policy in the entire post-Cold War era" (Map 1: Ukraine conflict: a consequence of NATO expansion).

The decisive battle for world order that is taking place in Ukraine has largely been provoked by Washington, which is pursuing its geopolitical strategy of fragmenting the Russian world (with a fratricidal war between Moscow and Kiev) but also Europe, in order to torpedo any potential European or Eurasian agreement on a Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis extended towards Beijing, and to pursue its grand strategy of encircling Eurasia against Russia and China. By waging a proxy war in support of the Kiev regime against Moscow (*Washington Post*, 2023), the aim is to preserve Washington's supremacy in Europe and the world, since

¹ Many American strategists have warned of the risk of conflict if NATO were to be enlarged at Russia's expense: George Kennan, Henry Kissinger, Jack F. Matlock, Bill Burns, Thomas L. Friedman, Stephen Cohen, William Perry, John Mearsheimer...

an alliance between Germany, France and Russia would be able to counterbalance the United States and its loyal second-in-command the United Kingdom. With remarkable continuity, the United States seeks to prevent the emergence of a power that could challenge its status as a world power on the Eurasian continent. This geopolitical constant, the Wolfowitz Doctrine, was re-emphasised at the end of the Cold War in 1992 (Tyler 1992). The vision of “Euramerica from Vancouver to Kiev” has been imposed as opposed to the “Europe from Brest to Vladivostok” that General de Gaulle had anticipated as he spoke of “Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”).

It would be difficult for the United States to wage a conflict on two fronts against Russia and China, which have been designated as its adversaries (The White House 2022). It is therefore in their interest to prolong the conflict and make Russia the enemy of the European member states of NATO and the EU, so as not to overextend their manoeuvre to encircle Eurasia. Hence the torpedoing of negotiations between Kiev and Moscow in March 2022 according to President Vladimir Putin (*Tass* 2023)

In view of the massive financial and military aid provided by Washington to Kiev, which far exceeds that of other contributors (Masters J, Merrow W. 2023), everything seems to indicate that Washington considers Russia (even if opinions differ) the most serious threat because Moscow challenges American hegemony in Europe, its last remaining exclusive zone of influence in the world. Moscow is proposing a European and Eurasian civilisational model as an alternative to the Americanised West, in phase with the multipolar world (Putin 2022). However, China cannot allow Russia to lose this conflict, nor can it allow Washington to accelerate its geopolitical encirclement, as it would end up caught between an expanding Euro-Atlantic front in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific front.

On a global scale, however, since the launch of its military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, Russia has made the most significant geopolitical gain by accelerating a shift in alliances towards a more multicentric world, definitively calling into question the unipolar vision of Washington and its close allies. Indeed, most Eurasian, African and Latin American states are refusing to align themselves with the “collective West” in a geo-economic war against Russia (map 2: Sanctions against Russia after its military operation in Ukraine, Rise of Eurasian globalization). This has also led to the weakening of multilateral institutions, which are incapable of applying international law because it is subject to contradictory and unilateral interpretations. To sum up, since 1991, when

the USSR came to an end, we have moved from a bipolar to a unipolar and finally a multipolar configuration.

The distribution of power within the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical order, on the other hand, is increasingly hierarchical in favour of the United States. If we look at a world map, only the EU is aligned with the United States when it comes to sanctions against Russia. By deciding to deliver arms to Ukraine in synergy with NATO and in co-belligerence with Ukraine, without a clear strategy and without identifying common geopolitical interests independently among Europeans, this means a geopolitical subjugation of the EU Member States to the United States, the opposite of strategic independence. If the EU sees itself as complementary to NATO, it reinforces its marginalisation and its status as a periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area. Following in the footsteps of Washington and NATO, with its support for Kiev against Moscow, the EU is being transformed into a second front line under NATO leadership, with the United States manoeuvring behind Ukraine against Russia.

The President of the European Commission, Ursula Von der Leyen (Von der Leyen 2019) stressed in 2019 that Europe needed a geopolitical commission. The European Union is merely positioning itself as an instrument of Washington's geopolitical strategy. From the geopolitical angle, the EU does not object to being a Rimland, the theatre of operations for Washington's great manoeuvre to encircle Eurasia (Brzezinski, 1997, Florian L. 2014, Mitchell, 2018)². Since the EU rejects the model of a multicentric world (European Parliament 2019)³, *de facto*, under the guise

² This geopolitical vision focusing on the Rimland finds its source in the doctrine of Nicolas Spykman. The Rimland, according to the geopolitical theory of Nicholas John Spykman (1893-1943), professor of international relations at Yale University in the United States, is the heavily populated coastal strip to the west, south and east of the Eurasian continent. This area is decisive for the control of the Eurasian continent to prevent a rival power of the United States from controlling the entire space. According to him, the state that controls the Rimland can control the Heartland (the area of central Eurasian lands previously identified by Sir Halford Mackinder as decisive) and therefore the world. The containment policy of the USSR during the Cold War was inspired by this theory, but also the dominant geopolitical representations in the United States until today. The Rimland is thus the main theatre of the geopolitical strategy of the United States and its close allies which consists in enveloping this Eurasian continent by the East European and Indo-Pacific fronts. The Brzezinski doctrine then aimed to detach Ukraine from Russia to reduce Russia to the status of a regional power. Finally, Wess Mitchell under the presidency of Donald Trump, stressed that the United States has always sought to protect the European Rimland against Russia

³ In the European Parliament's resolution of 12 March 2019 on the state of political relations between the European Union and Russia, it is stated that "Considering that Russia's polycentric vision of the concert of powers contradicts the Union's belief in multilateralism and a rules-based international order; that Russia's adherence to and support for a rules-based multilateral order would create the conditions for a strengthening of relations with the Union."

of promoting multilateralism, it is in favour of a unipolar order dominated by the West. The West is a geopolitical representation that stems from the Cold War and the unipolar period that followed the demise of the USSR and refers to the states that make up the Atlantic alliance with the United States as its leader. The EU is aligning itself *de facto* with Washington's geopolitical priorities, seeing Russia as a strategic challenge and China as a systemic challenge (European Council, 2022). The apparent unity within the European Union is merely a sign of its subservience to the United States and NATO, the ultimate stage in the Americanisation of Europe through its lack of an independent geopolitical strategy. The European Union's new strategic compass (European Council, 2022) is merely a subset of the strategy of the United States and NATO in Europe. The Europeans of the EU thus become the adjustment variable of world geopolitics, because EU Member States do not identify their own common geopolitical priorities separate from Washington's geopolitical priorities, particularly regarding Russia. The EU, driven by growing internal divisions - between southern and northern Europe on economic issues, between eastern and western Europe on values and migration, Brexit - has found a convenient enemy in Russia to mask its growing internal geopolitical fragmentation and its marginalisation in the great power rivalry. The objectives to be achieved by supporting Ukraine, whether to contain or, for the most ambitious, to break up Russia into several states (European Conservatives and Reformist Group 2023), are the subject of disagreement between the Member States.

According to this scenario, the European nations will be placed under the guardianship of a Euro-Atlanticist bloc exclusively dependent on flows to the United States and cut off from links with Russia, perhaps soon even China. Washington is putting increasing pressure on the EU to impose sanctions against China. This situation is distracting the EU from the real jihadist threat in the South and from the challenges posed by migratory pressures. However, this drift did not start with the crisis in Ukraine, but with the Balkan wars in the 1990s.

THE BALKAN WARS, A FIELD OF MANOEUVRE FOR THE UNIPOLAR SPATIAL ORDER CHALLENGED BY THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The process of "*NATO-issation*" of the EU, i.e., the European project under the cross-control of Washington by virtue of its complementarity

with NATO, began with the wars in Yugoslavia and NATO's military operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1995) and Kosovo (1999). These first military operations in NATO's history constituted a geopolitical laboratory for the unipolar order project of Washington and its allies, Berlin in particular. This unipolar spatial order has today reached its limit with the crisis in Ukraine.

In Yugoslavia, the capitals of the external powers responsible for aggravating the crisis and escalating the conflict in accordance with their geopolitical interests were Berlin and Washington. Paris, because of the geopolitical priority given to the Franco-German couple in the negotiation of the Maastricht Treaty, did not reactivate its historic alliance with Serbia as in the First World War, and aligned itself with German American priorities (Gallois 2011), while the United Kingdom did the same because of its special relationship with the United States. Russia, weakened following the dissolution of the USSR, was unable to oppose the priorities of Berlin and Washington and their instrument NATO.

Ideologies change but geopolitical tropisms remain. As far as the Balkans are concerned, the Germans' objective, following their plans to dominate the Balkans during the First and Second World Wars (Korinman, 1990), was in fact to dismantle Yugoslavia as early as the 1960s (Schmidt-Eenboom, 1995), with persistent support for separatist factions in Yugoslavia. During the Yugoslav crisis, Berlin unilaterally recognised Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, prompting other previously reluctant EEC members, particularly France (Stark 1992), to follow suit after this *fait accompli*. Berlin's objective was to continue the dismantling of the spatial and geopolitical order resulting from the Treaty of Versailles, but under cover of the EEC and NATO. Indeed, the creation of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia after the First World War had been promoted and supported by the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, to contain Germany in Central Europe and the Balkans. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Washington, after supporting Yugoslav unity, changed its position and contributed to the torpedoing of the negotiations under the aegis of the Europeans. On 18 March 1992, the Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović, encouraged by Washington, rejected the Carrington-Cutileiro plan (the Republic of Srpska, 2020) to continue the war against the Serbs in Bosnia. Washington then supported a Muslim-Croat federation (Washington agreements in March 1994) against the Serbs of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia, which aggravated the conflict and led to the Dayton agreements (1995). In Kosovo, the United States

and NATO intervened to force Yugoslav troops to withdraw (1999). These successive interventions inaugurated a process of enlargement of NATO and the EU and thus an expansion of the Euro-Atlantic area into the former Yugoslavia under Washington's direction. Croatia, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia are now members of NATO. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo aspire to membership, only Serbia has not applied to join NATO.

As far as Ukraine is concerned, the major factor in the conflict is also the attempt to extend the Euro-Atlantic space into the former USSR, particularly into Ukraine. From the point of view of geopolitical tropisms, for Germany, the objective of the Nazi regime was already to seize Ukraine (Franc 2018), as an extension of the Pan-Germanist plans to extend Germany's *Lebensraum* (living space). Today, the dominant view in Germany is that Ukraine should be westernised, i.e., oriented towards the Euro-Atlantic area according to German American priorities. For the United States, the objective is to detach Ukraine from Russia in accordance with the Brzezinski doctrine (Brzezinski 1995).

However, unlike the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, Russia has once again become the central power in Eurasia and will no longer tolerate the unlimited expansion of the Euro-Atlantic area into its immediate neighbourhood (Finland and Sweden are already *de facto* part of the Euro-Atlantic area and were never part of the USSR).

Since NATO's interventions in the Balkans and their consequences, the *ex-nihilo* creation of states such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, played a fundamental role in the implementation of the unipolar spatial order, it is not surprising that they are taken as a reference in controversies about the war in Ukraine in relation to international law. Moscow's reference to the NATO operation in Kosovo in 1999 serves as a mirror for the special military operation in Ukraine (Putin 2022). This argumentation accompanies the transition to a multipolar spatial and geopolitical order, superimposed on the unipolar spatial order that favoured the supremacy of the United States.

From a legal point of view, the crisis in Ukraine echoes the crisis in Kosovo, where a unilateral interpretation of international law was imposed by NATO member states. Today, as there is no agreement on the spatial and geopolitical order between the major powers, there can be no agreement on the interpretation of the international normative regime, according to the key idea of Carl Schmitt in his book *The Nomos of the Earth* (Schmitt 2012). In the absence of a multilateral consensus, there are only unilateral interpretations of the law. This legal *no man's*

land is above all the consequence of the unilateral interpretation, or non-compliance, with international law by the United States and its NATO allies during its previous crises: the NATO operation in Kosovo in 1999, but also the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The principles of the United Nations Charter, the right of peoples to self-determination and the territorial integrity of states, have been instrumentalised to suit the geopolitical interests of the United States and its NATO allies during their period of world domination (the unipolar moment) following the demise of the USSR. Following NATO's military operation against Yugoslavia, the United States made it clear that the principle of the territorial integrity of States did not prevent the secession of a territory in the case of Kosovo (International Court of Justice, 2009). Today, this argument logically reinforces Russia's case for legitimising the border changes in Ukraine.

From the point of view of the war of communication, we can observe the same phenomenon of bias in the media of NATO member states, against the Russians in the case of the current conflict in Ukraine, and against the Serbs during the conflicts in former Yugoslavia (Republic of Srpska 2020). The history of the wars in former Yugoslavia needs to be rewritten, and this will also be the case for the conflict in Ukraine, because the non-explicit geopolitical issues are being glossed over and the media are producing biased narratives that do not reflect reality. The disinformation that has prevailed to this day, and which justified NATO's intervention in former Yugoslavia, has not been called into question and is still the subject of an omerta of geopolitical realities in the Western media and academic world, apart from a few exceptions (Halimi, Rimbart 2019). More recent expert reports highlight the biased view of events in former Yugoslavia, which led to only one side, the Serbs, being blamed in a strategy of demonisation and ostracization that continues to this day (Republic of Srpska. 2020).

A NEW, UNSTABLE, CONFIGURATION FOR EUROPE

The new emerging geopolitical configuration is characterised by uncertainty but will in any case be highly complex and fluid. Behind the term multipolar world lies a far more complex configuration than this geopolitical representation suggests. It is not a multipolarity resembling the concert of nations in nineteenth-century Europe, but a global fragmentation with different geopolitical orders competing not

only in terms of geostrategy, but also in terms of values, the cement of the regional geopolitical order (Orford 2021). These spatial and geopolitical orders will compete and clash on the territory because their ideal territorial envelopes will overlap. With a fluid geopolitical situation on the horizon, there will be no respite from the fixed borders of the Cold War. The new confrontation between the powers in Europe could reawaken all the historical conflicts and disputes around Europe's geographical perimeter. After the Black Sea and Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Balkans, North Africa, the Near and Middle East and the Arctic are likely to be destabilised in a highly dynamic process. At the same time, the multilateral system based on the geopolitical balances of 1945 (UN, OSCE, Council of Europe) and controlled by the Atlanticist West, because of disagreements between States, is increasingly inoperative, because it is based on an old spatial order that no longer exists (there is no acceptable international legal system between major powers without a spatial and geopolitical order).

Against this backdrop, and opting for a headlong rush, Ukraine was granted EU candidate country status at the European summit on 23 June 2022, to anchor Ukraine to the Euro-Atlantic area in accordance with the vision of the spatial order of the unipolar period of US domination after the demise of the USSR. Yet Ukraine's potential accession to the EU is a poisoned chalice⁴. In the current balance of power, overcoming the Ukrainian question will require a partition of its territory and will constitute a major obstacle in the accession negotiations if the new borders and the attachment of the new territories to Russia are not recognised by the EU. What's more, the EU as it operates today will not be able to absorb Ukraine because of the financial burden that it would entail. A far-reaching reform of the EU accompanying this enlargement would be dangerous because of the profound disagreements between states. Moreover, Kiev would seek to take advantage of its status as a Member State to torpedo any relations with Russia⁵, further fracturing the EU

⁴ Giving in a hurry to political promises such as the enlargement of the EU to include Ukraine and Moldova, or even Georgia and all the countries of the Eastern Partnership later, will aggravate tensions and disappoint the people. Continuing the headlong rush towards enlargement will strengthen the geopolitical rivalry between France and Germany, further fragment the EU into rival sub-groups that risk being exploited by external powers, reinforce the division in favour of Washington's hegemony and aggravate the systemic conflict with Russia. These enlargements are conceived as a manoeuvre to encircle Russia and China, not as a reinforcement of the European project, based on greater strategic independence and a reunification of European civilisation.

⁵ NATO's enlargement to include the former USSR states is now a *casus belli*. Pushing Ukraine and Georgia into a bloc policy has turned these countries into frontline states rather than bridges

between Poland and the Baltic States, which are the closest to the United States, and France, Germany, and Italy, which are keen to maintain links with Russia in the post-conflict period, as well as Hungary, which rejects sanctions. This possible enlargement would reinforce the Franco-German geopolitical rivalry (Thomann 2022) because it would also accelerate a shift in the EU's centre of gravity towards Germany and the east of the continent, absorbing funding to the detriment of Latin and Mediterranean Europe. The result would be to lock EU's external relations into a systemic rivalry with Russia, in alignment with the interests of Washington and London and therefore to the detriment of the long-term priorities of Germany and France. The European political community initiated by Paris (Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, 2022) undoubtedly has the implicit aim of slowing down the enlargement process or torpedoing it. Is the accession process stillborn and will it get bogged down as in the case of Turkey?

The main trend scenario is therefore for the situation to continue to worsen, with the future European and global space order at stake, hence the growing co-belligerence in support of Ukraine against Russia and under pressure from the military-industrial complex. The current conflict is taking on the dimensions of a systemic geopolitical conflict on a global scale between the promoters of the multipolar world (Russia, China, and the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation members) and those who are seeking to slow down this development by clinging to the unipolar illusion (Washington/London/Brussels...), with a whole range of intermediate positions for the middle powers. This development goes against the interests of the peoples and nations of Europe in achieving greater stability, by leading the EU and NATO Member States towards Atlanticist priorities against Russia and China. This development means that the EU, rather than drifting towards a continental European area of cooperation, gradually extended to Eurasia, is instead drifting towards the status of a periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area dominated by the United States. How then can we limit the rise to extremes for Europeans who are located on one of the theatres of confrontation (the European Rimland)?

for stabilising the continent. As a result, the buffer zones that are crucial to continental stability are the focus of destabilisation attempts that will affect the whole of Eurasia: the European Balkans, the Caucasian Balkans, Central Asia and Afghanistan, as well as the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the Arctic, the rivalries between the major powers in these areas affect the security of the whole region

DEVELOPMENT SCENARIOS

If we think in terms of scenarios, we can identify two different trends for simplicity's sake. The trend scenario is the continuation of a rise to extremes and the widening of the geopolitical conflict, with increasing co-belligerence (geostrategic and geo-economic) on the part of the States of the collective West, which are refusing the emergence of a multipolar world to weaken Russia. This process is leading to a deepening rift between the Atlanticist Western states and Russia and China, while the Global South and the Eurasian countries are coming closer together to build an alternative form of globalisation to the Americanised liberal West. These irreconcilable geopolitical rivalries are leading to a situation of permanent global conflict, affecting all areas of confrontation, and causing fractures in Europe as the stakes increase. This scenario is the most dangerous, because the situation could slide into other high-intensity conflicts between major powers. A ceasefire or a temporary agreement on the Ukrainian question (partition of Ukraine as in Korea, a frozen conflict) could also freeze the military situation precariously, but the war could reignite in the short to medium term because the pause would be used to rearm Ukraine (scenario 1).

If the NATO/Ukraine war against Russia were to escalate into a permanent systemic conflict, there would be a risk of spill-over into areas of confrontation in the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel. Now in overdrive, the Washington/NATO/EU continuum in confrontation with Russia is putting pressure on European states such as Hungary and Serbia, but also on countries in Eurasia, Africa and South America that refuse to align with its geopolitical priorities. The result of this process is to fracture and destabilise Europe and its margins through the persistence of Washington/NATO/EU in seeking to impose a unipolar spatial and geopolitical order.

Washington/Brussels could seek to speed up the enlargement of the EU and NATO, with the aim of redirecting the candidate countries away from Russia and China, since the EU is positioning itself as Rimland, as part of the US strategy of encircling Eurasia. The EU's priority in the Western Balkans is to act in synergy with Washington and NATO to counter Russia, not to integrate Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo into a geopolitical strategy designed to make the EU an independent geopolitical power or to promote the strengthening/national renaissance of the candidate countries. However, the EU is likely to become increasingly

divided on the question of enlargement to include Ukraine/Moldova, because the EU, as mentioned before, does not have the absorption capacity for the integration of Ukraine as it operates today. Because of the size of Ukraine's territory (a territory larger than France) and its large (albeit shrinking) population, Ukraine would absorb a huge proportion of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and regional policy, and this would make negotiations between the Member States very difficult. However, before thinking about enlargement, given the current state of the conflict and the seemingly inevitable territorial partition of Ukraine, the recognition of new borders will have to be considered *de facto* or *de jure*, i.e., the acceptance of the attachment of Crimea, Donbass, and the oblasts of Zaporizhzhia and Kherson to Russia. The example of Cyprus is a reminder that importing unresolved issues before joining the EU leads to blockages later. Such a development could provoke a major diplomatic crisis with Turkey and the Western Balkan states, if Ukraine/Moldova were given priority for funding and the speed of enlargement negotiations, resulting in a blatant case of double standards. NATO, for its part, is very divided over the possible enlargement of NATO to include Ukraine (which territories? aggravating the *casus belli* with Russia).

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS?

In this geopolitical context, do the Western Balkan states have a geopolitical interest in joining the EU, or even NATO? For countries such as Serbia and the Republic of Srpska, (entity of Serbs in Bosnia) which are neither in the EU nor NATO and are seeking to preserve their autonomy, the situation will inevitably become tense as considerable pressure will be put on them to choose sides. If Serbia seeks to join the EU, or even NATO, Belgrade would *de facto* be placed at the service of Euro-Atlantic priorities against Russia and China, while Turkey continues its entryism in the Balkans because it is a member of NATO and remains useful for destabilising Russia in the theatres where it is present (Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.). There is a risk that the Balkans will once again become a theatre of hybrid wars between Russia and the United States and its allies. In the context of the current systemic geopolitical rivalries, Serbia risks losing its room for manoeuvre, and for the Republic of Srpska within Bosnia-Herzegovina, the pressure would be even greater.

The current geopolitical situation in the Balkans is characterised by interlocking configurations, with a strategy of triple encirclement of Eurasia, the Western Balkans, and the Serbian world by NATO. As part of Washington's grand strategy of encircling Eurasia and turning Europe into a Rimland against Russia, the geopolitical strategy of encircling the Western Balkans and Serbia by the Washington/Berlin/NATO/EU continuum continues at regional level. The aim of maintaining a united Bosnia-Herzegovina is simultaneously to detach the Republic of Srpska from Serbia and, combined with Kosovo's independence, to prevent the unification of the Serbian nation. This is in line with the German and American strategy of encircling Serbia to prevent Russia's return to the Balkans. According to the scenario of increasing pressure and dominance from Washington/Berlin/NATO/EU, the ultimate objective is then to absorb the various states of the Western Balkans into the EU and NATO, once the policy of balkanising Yugoslavia has succeeded, after separating Montenegro from Serbia to cut off Serbia's access to the sea. (Map 4, NATO concentric and multi-scalar geopolitical encirclement strategy).

Brussels, supported by France and Germany (*Euractiv* 2022), is pushing for the normalisation of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which would lead to the *de facto* recognition of Kosovo. The EU is also demanding that Belgrade apply sanctions against Russia, to cut off its historical links with Russia. The aim is also to distance the Republic of Srpska from Serbia and Russia to torpedo any counterweight to the supremacy of Washington and its NATO allies. Serbia, which does over 60% of its trade with the EU, is being blackmailed into changing its alliances⁶. This growing pressure could eventually lead to destabilisation and attempts at regime change.

Because of the priority given to Ukraine and Moldova for the so-called pre-accession funding programmes, but also for reconstruction in favour of Kiev, there is little interest for Serbia and the Republic of Srpska for joining the EU. In the EU as it functions today, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina would only obtain the status of second-class member states (less funding but economic predation and societal colonisation by the EU (open society, no borders, immigration), very little political weight (no European commissioner, little weight in the Council and European

⁶ Investment from the EU risks being monopolised by an oligarchy and benefiting only a minority, and would accelerate the destruction of the national economy in a process of economic colonisation that would see the country suffer a brain drain of graduates to the West (as in the central European states of the EU). Societal reforms (open society), as in the West, will dissolve Serbian identity in a process of westernisation that will lead to increasing cultural alienation.

Parliament, no important posts in the EU and transition periods to reduce funding and imports manufactured in Serbia).

If Serbia wants to preserve its independence, it would be wiser to stay out of Euro-Atlantic alliances and pursue a policy of geopolitical balance and multi-faceted diplomacy. As an alternative, Serbia could promote multiple coalitions, bilateral or broader, with closer ties to certain countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, Austria, or Hungary, depending on the objective to be achieved.

A different scenario is one in which Russia emerges even stronger from the conflict against Kiev, supported by NATO, in the context of a rise in power of non-NATO states that wish to do away with the old order. Faced with a growing inability to prevent the inevitable emergence of a multicentric world, Washington, and its NATO/EU allies, instead of taking increasingly destabilising action, would be *de facto* forced to accept the multipolarisation of the world and stop raising the stakes, particularly because of the nuclear risk (scenario 2). This scenario would be favoured, for example, by the possible reduction in Washington's aid to Ukraine with the return of the Republicans in the American elections. This is the only scenario, although unlikely today, that could lead to relative stability, albeit precarious and temporary. According to this scenario, Serbia, and the Republic of Srpska have no interest in joining the EU either, which would also be weakened, unless there is a drastic reform of the way it works as well as its paradigms, which is today unlikely. Outside EU Serbia and Republic of Srpska would then take advantage of a better European and global geopolitical balance to preserve a multi-faceted diplomacy, especially by preserving their links with Russia, but also with China.

To favour the scenario most favourable to Europeans who wish to avoid a situation of permanent conflict accelerating the EU's drift towards peripheral status, we need to avoid a New Cold War and promote a new European geopolitical architecture, including Russia, which would be judicious for the European nations.

A NEW EUROPEAN GEOPOLITICAL ARCHITECTURE BASED ON THE NEW SPATIAL ORDER

Let us remember that the international system today is a struggle to distribute geopolitical spaces. As Raymond Aron has pointed out (Aron 1962), any international order is necessarily a spatial (and therefore

geopolitical) order. A new spatial order is emerging, reminiscent of the *Grossraum* described by Carl Schmitt, which structures international space (Schmitt 2012). The whole of Europe and its geographical proximity risk being the theatre of permanent confrontation and all the frozen conflicts could escalate. It is an illusion to think that every regional conflict in Europe and Eurasia can be resolved on a case-by-case basis, because they are all interlinked, and their resolution depends on the acceptance of a new spatial and geopolitical order. The condition for a shared interpretation of international law by the major powers is to reach at least a temporary and precarious agreement on the spatial and geopolitical order between them. It is therefore a systemic approach on a continental scale that would be judicious, opening the way to a new Eurasian geopolitical architecture that would be the key and the condition for the stability of the whole.

The European project faces some drastic choices in the longer term: can the EU confine itself as it does today to playing the role of Rimland in the strategy of the United States and rearm against Russia without any independent geopolitical strategy, as proposed by Josep Borell, head of the EU's external service (Borell 2023)? This suits some NATO member states, but it will lead to an arms race and a lasting European fracture with the emergence of the Washington-London-Brussels-Warsaw-Kiev axis and a loss of influence of the Franco-German axis and the strengthening of Franco-German geopolitical rivalry (Thomann 2022). Russia, for its part, will pursue its project for a greater Eurasia, and its pivot towards Asia will accelerate. Russia's geo-economic reorientation and changing alliances on a global scale are in its favour, with the EU being the big loser.

According to an alternative scenario, it is up to the Europeans to try to re-engage with Russia in the post-conflict period, as Russia will remain a geographical neighbour of the EU. Russia and Western Europe are inseparable, both geographically and in terms of civilisation. A geopolitical Europe can only reach a minimum threshold of power with Russia. A Europe cut off from its eastern flank will remain no more than a periphery of the Euro-Atlantic area under Washington's domination.

The Greater Eurasia project has never excluded the Europeans (Glaser (Kukartseva. Thomann. 2021), and Vladimir Putin's speech underlined that the Russians remain open to cooperation with the traditional West (Putin 2022), but on condition that Russia's security interests are considered in accordance with the principle of the indivisibility

of security. A better geopolitical balance in Europe is needed to avoid the hegemony of Washington, which is dragging Europeans into conflicts with Russia and China, to the detriment of the national interests of many states and to the sole benefit of the supremacist vision of the neo-conservatives in Washington and the NATO/EU-aligned bureaucracies. Balance does not mean neutrality but counterbalancing an overly dominant pole with another pole of balance. The central challenge for the future is therefore to find a way of containing conflicts in the areas of friction between these hierarchical regional alliances, characterised by a centre and a periphery. The main challenge will be to set limits to the continued expansion of the West under Washington's leadership, which is seeking to impose an exclusive Euro-Atlantic order in Europe, right up to Russia's borders and in the Balkans.

If Europeans try to re-engage with Russia in the post-conflict period, it will be difficult if not impossible to do so through NATO, but also through the EU if it is not reformed, because the member states are very divided on the issue. The Euro-Atlantic geopolitical order, which is exclusive, is obsolete for promoting continental security. The outcome of the conflict in Ukraine is uncertain, but it is clear there will be no turning back, as the global geopolitical shift towards a multicentric world has accelerated once and for all. Enlargement of NATO and the EU is probably impossible in Russia's near abroad, and the EU and NATO will no longer be able to structure the spatial and geopolitical order of the Eurasian continent. The idea of a new European geopolitical architecture with Russia could be based on more solid foundations with the model of a Europe of sovereign nations and the principle of geopolitical balance. The concept of a more balanced security for all the nations of the European and Eurasian continent could replace NATO's doctrine of expansion as a central and priority condition for stabilising Europe. Ultimately, it is also a question of rediscovering the classic negotiations on European, Eurasian, and global balances (map 3: New European geopolitical architecture: for a better European, Eurasian, and global balance).

This new spatial order, as the basis for a new European geopolitical architecture, would ideally include the following elements: a clearer delineation of reciprocal red lines, the neutralisation of buffer states, the negotiation of the geographical limits of alliances, and the avoidance of the installation of offensive military infrastructures on border territories. In the longer term, assuming a return to mutual trust, this new order would go as far as identifying common geopolitical interests such as

stabilising the crisis arc south of the Mediterranean as far as Afghanistan, the fight against jihadism, the energy issue, social inequalities and a new development model, migration, the environment, and the challenge of artificial intelligence.

A new geopolitical architecture would not necessarily take the form of new formal treaties on European security since the major powers do not currently have the same vision of the new spatial and geopolitical order. Failing this ideal option, which could nevertheless be promoted in the longer term, this new space order could emerge in a non-explicit manner, without legal formalisation. It would therefore imply a *de facto* halt to the expansion of both NATO and the EU, a “neutralisation” (neither NATO nor the EU) of Ukraine and the states of the former USSR, the identification of states’ red lines and the negotiation of zones of influence. The disagreements between Turkey and the EU over Cyprus are an example where these incompatibilities do not prevent cooperation on other issues. A way out of the crisis could therefore be facilitated first and foremost by the sending of signals by European states wishing to stabilise the situation and promising to engage in long-term negotiations with Russia. Of course, this objective is extremely difficult in the current configuration, but it is the process of gradually reducing tensions and regaining mutual trust that is most important, even without immediately arriving at a new arrangement. In a geopolitical Europe, like the world and Europe’s long history, treaties are in any case only precarious and temporary, and have never fixed geopolitical configurations that inevitably evolve.

The promotion of a Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis, to balance the Washington-London-Brussels-Warsaw-Kiev axis, would also have to coexist with the Washington-Paris-Berlin axis and the Moscow-Beijing axis. Superimposed on the emerging new spatial order is the multilateral framework, i.e., the international organisations that accompany and stabilise the geopolitical order. Acceptance of the new multipolarity is inevitable. As we have said, once the crisis is over, the necessary stabilisation of the European continent does not necessarily involve the EU and NATO, organisations that reflect and are based on a spatial order linked to the exclusive Euro-Atlanticism that emerged from the Cold War and the unipolar world that led us to the current crisis. The most effective solution would lie in a new arrangement outside the NATO/EU institutions, with smaller and more variable coalitions of states, and why not the creation of new, more appropriate structures. It

would also be essential to restructure the European project and reform the EU accordingly, as its current form is obsolete: maintain the EU as an international organisation on the single market but abandon its supranational and federal drift and question its complementarity with NATO.

If the scenario of a *de facto* acceptance of multipolarity by the Washington/Brussels continuum materialises, like France according to Gaullist vision, the Serbian world would also benefit from the prospect of a new European geopolitical architecture, based on the vision of a Europe of nations, as an alternative to integration into the Euro-Atlantic system in crisis. In this configuration, the various fragmented entities of the Serbian world - Serbia, the Republic of Srpska and the Serbs of Kosovo - would have more room for manoeuvre to draw closer together, or even reunite, in the same way as other major European nations such as Germany and Russia. This stabilisation is the alternative to a situation of permanent conflict in all areas of confrontation, which is particularly unfavourable to Europeans, but less so to Americans on the other side of the Atlantic. The central issue for Europeans, motivated by greater independence, is to become independent from Washington. This halt to the spiral of conflict could ideally lead to a new long-term security treaty, once a new generation of politicians have come to power, because the current leaders are too committed to irreconcilable positions. The worsening of the crisis in the foundations of the current space order may well be the spur needed for innovative geopolitical solutions.

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НОВИ СВЕТСКИ ПРОСТОРНИ И ГЕОПОЛИТИЧКИ ПОРЕДАК КОЈИ ЈЕ ПОКРЕНУЛА РУСИЈА ПОСЛЕ УКРАЈИНСКОГ КОНФЛИКТА: КАКВЕ СУ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЕ ЗА ЕВРОПУ?

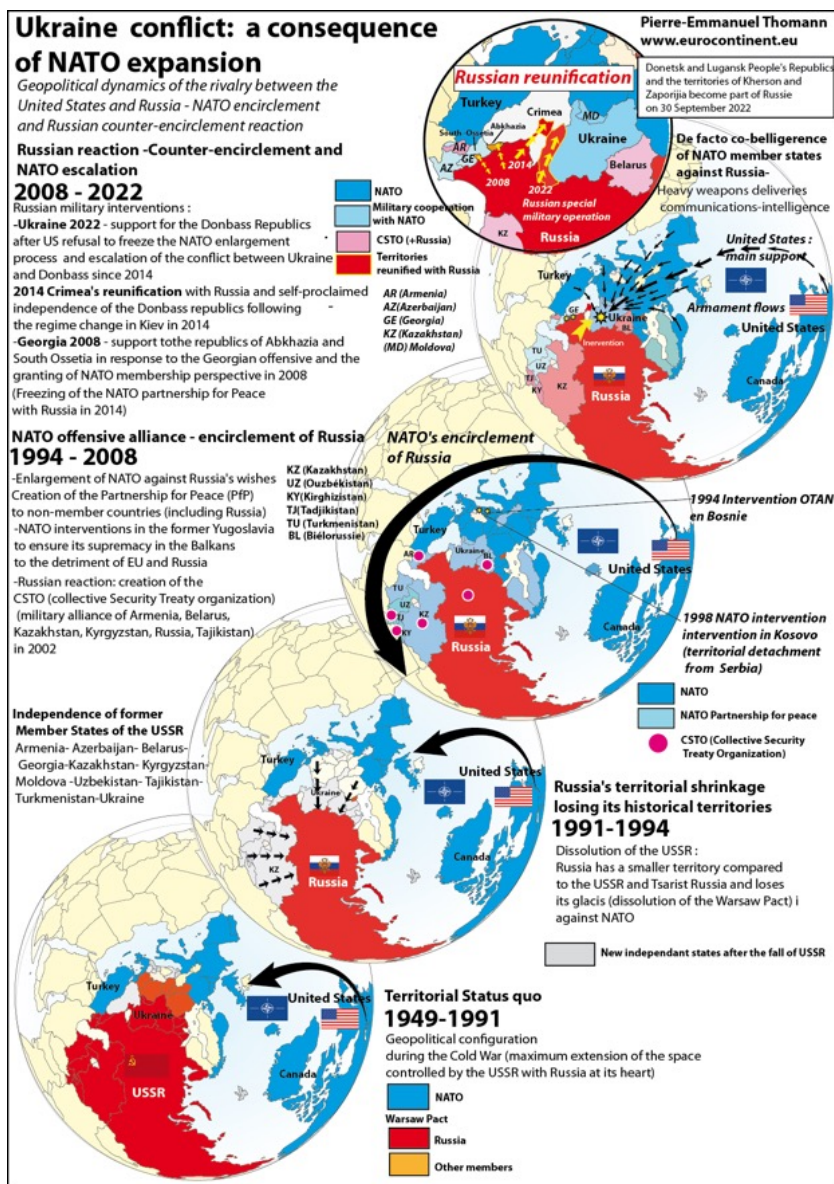
Апстракт

Са почетком руске специјалне војне операције у Украјини (СВО) у фебруару 2022 свет се покренуо према мултицентричној геополитичкој конфигурацији која доводи у питање старе равнотеже снага, без могућности повратка на пре-конфликтну ситуацију. У ретроспективи, ратови на Балкану у време распада СФРЈ могу се разумети као маневарско поље за униполарни просторни поредак који су САД наметнуле Европи и који се сада доводи у питање са конфликтном у Украјини. У позадини ове појаве нове геополитичке конфигурације, шта су опције и перспективе за државе чланице ЕУ али исто тако и за европске балканске државе које нису чланице ЕУ али су ангажоване у приступним преговорима, као што је то Србија? Анализирајући међународну ситуацију из геополитичке перспективе можемо да размотримо који би сценарио највероватније довео до ескалације конфликта. Промовисање стабилније Европе са смањеним ризиком за конфликт нужно захтева споразум између различитих држава како би се постигао договор о новој европској геополитичкој

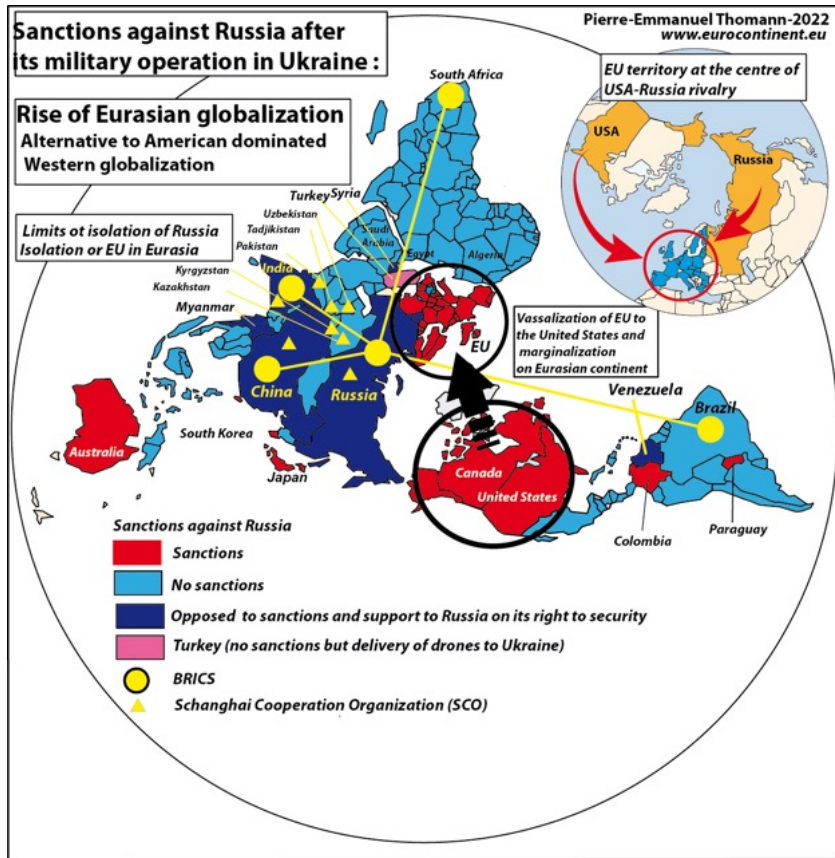
архитектури, што је услов за већи маневарски простор и аутономију европских народа у контексту ривалства великих сила. У овој анализи, геополитичка картографија ће се користити да илуструје ова питања али исто тако са циљем да се истакне просторни угао као аналитичко средство.

Кључне речи: *геополитика, Русија, Украјина, Европа, ЕУ, Србија, Република Српска, САД, Кина, НАТО.*

Map 1



Map 2



Map 3

