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Out of ice and into the freezer

THE FROZEN CONFLICT OF SOUTH-OSSETIA IN LIGHT
OF THE EU-RUSSIA RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

In 1992 a peace treaty was signed between South-Ossetia and Georgia. This seemed to be the end of the conflict that had engulfed Georgia for two years. Now, 26 years later and there still is not a permanent solution for South-Ossetia. In this thesis the idea is put forth that the changing dynamic of the EU-Russian relationship has facilitated the creation and sustainability of this frozen conflict. In order to understand more of the reasons whereof an examination is given of the six elements of the EU-Russia relationship, a theoretical background concerning frozen conflicts will be given and an inspection of South-Ossetia has been done.

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Introduction

On 13 February 2018 the Dutch minister of Foreign Affairs, Halbe Zijlstra, had to resign from his position. The reason was that he had lied about a meeting he had with president Putin. Halbe Zijlstra had told the congress of his political party that Putin had said that Putin wished to recreate a Greater Russia, “That consists of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic States. And Kazakhstan was *nice to have*.” (Righton 2018). Zijlstra had to resign, because he never had attended such a meeting. However the Dutch government repeated over and over that Zijlstra’s lie had at its core been true (NOS 12-02-2018). This event in Dutch politics showed a longer existing trend among EU-member states and the EU as whole. This trend is that Russia is viewed with suspicion and is considered to be an expansive and aggressive state. This trend is part of a relationship between Russia on one side and the EU-member states and the EU on the other side. During this thesis this relationship shall be referred to as the EU-Russia relationship and the EU-Russia rivalry.

The EU-Russia relationship has developed over the years. It has developed from a relationship in which Russia followed the EU-lead and the EU who left Eastern Europe to Russia into a sibling rivalry over who has the most influence in Eastern Europe. This development has been influenced by the changing role of Russia within the European continent and by the role of the EU within the European continent. The connection between the EU-Russia relationship and the frozen conflicts on the European continent is not only noticeable, but also noteworthy. The EU-Russia relationship has, especially in the 21st century, shaped the European frozen conflicts. A further examination of one of the European frozen conflicts allows the reader and author insight in what effects a regional/global relationship has on a frozen conflict. Therefore, the question that will guide us throughout this thesis is the following. How has the EU-Russia relationship influenced the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia? There were four frozen conflicts that could have been used as a case-study, Abkhazia, Kosovo, South-Ossetia and Transnistria. The choice for South-Ossetia has been based upon the lack of academical research into the tie between the EU-Russia relationship and the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia.

This thesis has been split up into three chapters, each chapter will answer a part of the main question. The first chapter will be centred around the EU-Russia relationship. In this chapter six elements (identification, spheres of influence, multinational platforms, economic ties, security measures and sanctions) are identified that will guide us throughout the rest of the thesis. These elements have been selected on the basis of their relevance in the EU-Russia relationship. As a result the question which determines the first chapter is what elements have shaped the EU-Russia rivalry and in what way? The second chapter will surround the matter of the frozen conflict. In this chapter a closer look will be taken at what defines a frozen conflict and how the frozen conflicts and the EU-Russia relationship have interacted, as a result the question that will guide us in this chapter is how the EU Russia relationship and frozen conflicts interact and what the results of this are? In the third and final chapter a closer look will be taken at in what way South-Ossetia has been influenced by the EU and Russia. What factors come into play with South-Ossetian independence and why has no solution, so far, yielded any results?

When examining the EU-Russia relationship there is an inevitability of encountering international relations theories. Some of which are of such an importance to this thesis that some explanation is required. Mark Galleoti promulgated the Great Game II theory in 2014 in his article, *Not a new Cold War: Great Game II*, for the International Relations and Security Network (ISN). This theory has at its core that Russia and the West are in competition with each other. This competition is defined by its struggle for influence, rather than a military competition (Galeotti 2014). The Great Game was a conflict in the nineteenth century between Great Britain and Imperial Russia for influence in Central Asia. Whereas the Cold War was a conflict between two well-

defined sides, who waged proxy-wars and contended with mutually exclusive systems. The sides in the EU-Russia rivalry are not that well defined, proxy-wars are not part of this rivalry and neither are mutually exclusive systems. The EU-Russian rivalry is a struggle for influence determined by what both sides consider to be their sphere of influence.

In the EU-Russia relationship there are several concepts that play a significant role. One of these concepts is the idea of a sphere of influence. In this thesis a sphere of influence shall be defined as a claim that a country lays on an area over which said country has a sizeable control. In this thesis we deal with two entities, Russia and the EU. The EU's sphere of influence stretches so far as EU-member states and their bordering countries. The Russian sphere of influence is defined as countries that lie in its immediate neighbourhood. We shall focus on the areas where those spheres clash and where the influence of both entities can be best seen, i.e. Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus & the Caucasian states. It is the opinion of the author that the clashing spheres of influence do indeed influence other elements of the EU-Russia relationship, but that they themselves are a point friction between the EU and Russia. As a result the sphere of influence shall be viewed as a separate element in the EU-Russian rivalry.

Another theory that plays a significant role in this thesis is that of the frozen conflict. The label frozen conflict has gained ground in the academic debate from the start of the 1990s onward. A frozen conflict, as such, is defined as a war of any sort that never achieved the stage of peace, yet is no longer a war (Bebler 2015, 9). Throughout human history many conflicts would fit this description, as a result narrowing of the field is necessary. In this thesis the focus will be on the European frozen conflicts since the 1990s. The parameters of a European frozen conflict are particularly well defined in Anthony Bebler's book *Frozen Conflicts in Europe*. According to Bebler the unique situation that occurred after the splitting up of the Soviet Union generated frozen conflict with special properties. Further explanation about the post-Soviet frozen conflicts in Europe will follow in chapter 2.

There are two other theories that come into play when considering frozen conflicts, soft-balancing and remedial secession. Soft-balancing is defined by Robert Kennedy as "Efforts that have been largely characterised by the application of non-military methods of limiting Russia's ability to exercise power." (Kennedy 2016, 512-513). In his article, 'The limits of soft balancing: the frozen conflict in Transnistria and the challenge to EU and NATO strategy', Kennedy shows the reader the limits of soft balancing, but he also shows the success that soft balancing as a tactic has had. The theory of remedial secession has been defined by Lina Laurinavičiūtė & Laurynas Biekša in their article 'The relevance of remedial secession in the post-Soviet "frozen conflicts"'. They define remedial secession as, "a set of conditions that might justify the secession of a subgroup from its parent state as a "remedy of last resort"" (Laurinavičiūtė & Biekša 2015, 67). Both theories will be used in chapter 2 to explain the trajectory of frozen conflicts.

In the third and final chapter an analysis of the South-Ossetian struggle for recognition will be given. This analysis has been made possible by the use of newspaper articles. A combination of Dutch, English and Russian articles has given this chapter its unique and less theoretical form. An article by RadioFreeEuropeFreeLiberty was used, because it presented the attitude of former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili towards Russia and South-Ossetia well. The Dutch article by Marno de Boer has been used, because it shows the animosity towards Russia and the implications of that animosity that effect South-Ossetia. The same is true for the article by Julian Borger, Patrick Wintour & Heather Stewart in the Guardian. The three Russian articles that were used in chapter three represent the Russian view. They were all taken from the book *Countdown to war in Georgia* by Ana Niedermeier. In this book Niedermeier shows the years leading up to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008.

The three Russian articles that were picked have been chosen on the basis of their importance to the conflict. The article, 'South Ossetia chooses a Russian citizen', by Gennady Sysoyev in *Kommersant* portrays the influence of Russia in South-Ossetia. The article concerns the election of a Russian citizen as the South-Ossetian president. Throughout this thesis there are references about Russia naturalising South-Ossetian citizens and the reasons thereof. The case of the Russian president of South-Ossetia that shows that point and its implications quite well. The second article that has been used, 'Georgia demands withdrawal of peacekeepers from Abkhazia and South Ossetia', by Aleksandr Iashvili in *Izvestia* shows us the rising tensions between Georgia and Russia. Furthermore, it is a perfect example of the chaos that is the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia. This chaos is caused by the interests of all the different actors involved. The third article, 'SECOND-STRING PEACEKEEPERS - Georgian and Moldovan Authorities step up efforts to push Russia out of conflict zones', by Simonyan, Gordiyenko, Babakin & Ivanov in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* was used, because it shows the frozen conflict heating up again. This moment should be seen as a spike in the South-Ossetian/Russian-Georgian relationship.

Another primary source that was used in the third chapter is the book, *Georgia: Pawn in the New Great Game*, by Per Gahrton. Per Gahrton was a Swedish politician who visited Georgia and South-Ossetia. In this book he writes about his experiences in the Georgian republic and the South-Ossetian de facto state. The reason that it was included in this thesis was that his observations about the economic, social and political state of Georgia and South-Ossetia is unique. It has to be noted that he views the conflict from a rather Western standpoint, but with the correct interpretation and ignorance of some of his more quirkier thoughts it is useful. The book provides a view of the Georgian and South-Ossetian society which is too often lacking in the academic debate. Gahrton shows the choices that the South-Ossetian people make without any concern for a broader geopolitical debate. This thesis which concerns interests of a global extent is dominated by state-actors, but there is a human element to all this. The book of Gahrton brings that human element onto the stage.

During the thesis a careful examination of the EU-Russia relationship shall be given. This relationship has in some areas transformed into something that resembles a sibling rivalry. Therefore, it is sometimes described as a relationship and at other moments specified as a rivalry. It is this rivalry what has influenced the frozen conflicts on the European continent, especially those that are in the territory that belonged to the Soviet Union. This influence on the frozen conflicts can only be understood if a closer look at the conditions of a frozen conflict is taken. Furthermore, an analysis of the problems and interests of the EU and Russia in these frozen conflicts is necessitated. It is in these problems and interests that we will find the bottom line of the EU-Russia rivalry. As a result a case study shows us the problems and interests on the ground. The South-Ossetian frozen conflict is the example that is used, because of its obscurity and its importance to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. Such as it is with a play, so it is with a thesis. The stage needs to be set before one can appreciate the actors.

Chapter 1: The elements of the EU-Russian relationship

In 1697 Peter the Great embarked on a journey through Western Europe, his goal was to strengthen ties with other European countries and to gain new insights. Peter was not the first Russian to go to the west of Europe, but it was the first time that a mission with such magnitude had been undertaken. Peter must have thought that learning from each other could strengthen each other. For many years after Peter's journey the Russian empire edged closer and closer towards the rest of Europe. Until in 1917 a rigorous break took place. The Russian Revolution and its ensuing Soviet Union tore the European relationships apart. After 74 years of Soviet Union a new Russian Republic arose. On the other side of the continent the European Union had formed. Something that had started out as a project for coal and steel had turned into a supra-national project. In the 74 year break that Russia had taken from its integration with the EU, the European continent had drastically changed. After the fall of communism, Russia was reinventing itself. Part of this reinvention meant looking towards the West. For a decade or so a relationship emerged in which Russia was no longer a rival state.

However, in the early 2000s signs started to appear that all was not well. When president Putin came to power he started to introduce reforms, he wanted Russia to be an equal and not a student to the EU. The EU meanwhile had started to enlarge, more and more members which had belonged to the Soviet Union now became part of the EU. This is how a more dynamic and complicated relationship between Russia and the EU originated and the EU-Russian rivalry came to be. The EU-Russian relationship has many facets and to cover them all is not the goal of this chapter. The goal of this chapter is one of those facets, the rivalry between Russia and the EU. Before we delve deeper into the characteristics of this rivalry, there are several things that require an explanation. In this chapter six elements of the EU-Russian relationship have been highlighted. There are many more elements, but these six have been picked, because they either represent the EU-Russian relationship or its rivalry. These six elements are identification, contesting spheres of influence, security dilemmas, the impact of multinational platforms, economic tensions and the educative element. Therefore the question which shall guide us throughout this chapter is what elements have shaped the EU-Russian rivalry and in what way?

1.1 Russia's self-identification

The first element that we will take a closer look at is Russia's self-identification. This element is more of a philosophical element. Therefore it is the first that we will look at. During all the other elements this one plays a role, albeit on the background. Russia thinks of itself as being European, this is something that the EU does not fully accept. There are certain democratic values that EU thinks are necessary to being European. This creates friction and this friction stems from the exclusivity that the element brings with it. The EU lays a claim on who is European and who isn't (Boedeltje & van Houtum 2011, 140-141). For Russia it is important to have a relationship with an equal and to have recognition of its European identity (Neumann 1996, 2). On the one hand, Russia feels that its European identity is evident. This is shown when Russia points to the long relationship it has had with the rest of Europe and the striking similarities in culture (Baranovsky 2000, 444). On the other hand Russia also points to the flaws in making up who is European and who isn't (Headley 2012, 429). For example, Norway and Switzerland are two states which are not part of the EU, yet they are easily identified as European. This is exactly where the friction stems from, in Russian rhetoric it is inconceivable that the EU is the one who determines who is European and who isn't (Kimerling-Wirtschafter 2001, 504).

On the EU's part we see a clear distinction, Russia is not part of Europe since Russia was isolated from the rest of the continent for the better part of 70 years. During the Soviet years, but even before that, Russia has been a state that on and off has taken part in European history. When the European integration project started Russia/Soviet Union stood on the sideline and did not wish to join in. This has resulted in an isolation of the Soviet Union which Russia now suffers from. Russia missed the proverbial boat (Neumann 1996, 159). Furthermore, due to Russia's poor democratic state and justice system it lacks core values that the EU identifies as European (Baranovsky 2000, 447-448). In the case of the self identification it is a lack of understanding on both sides that determines the friction. The EU treats being called European as a label that only the EU can dispense. This in turn creates frustration on Russia's part. Something that has not yet been touched upon is whether the EU's denial of Russia's Europeanness might be a conscious move. This is very difficult to say. On the EU's part lording Europeanness over Russia's head might be a bargaining chip, however that seems somewhat farfetched. Since the bargaining chip's strength is determined by Russia's dependence on the EU for identification. That level of dependence is highly questionable, therefore it seems more likely that this is indeed more an academic matter than a political. In the end it only really matters how Russia identifies itself (Baranovsky 2000, 443).

Russia tends to identify itself as not only European, but as Slavic as well (Neumann 1996, 16). This Slavic identity is what binds it to the nations surrounding it. This results in relationships that can best be typified as fraternal. As the biggest slavic brother Russia has deigned itself with the role of the first among equals, as the gravitational pole to all Slavic people. This role has several implications, but the one implication that we will be focussing on is a geopolitical one. Russia's gravitational effect works both ways, not only do slavic nations focus on Russia, but Russia also tends to focus more on them. If we combine Russia's focus on the slavic countries with Russia's focus on the former Soviet republic, a sphere starts to develop. This sphere of interest or influence is made up of countries with which Russia has a special bond and that have a privileged role in Russia's foreign policy and vice versa (Trenin 2009, 4). When considering this special bond it isn't surprising that Russia is rather defensive of this sphere of influence and does not wish another rival in these areas.

1.2 Contesting sphere of influence

Since the enlargements of 2004 and 2007 the EU now borders some states that Russia considers to be part of its sphere of influence. This meant that a more comprehensive foreign policy for countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine had to be constructed. Although, the EU did have foreign policies for these countries these foreign policies relied mainly upon letting Russia play the dominant role in the region (Tolstrup 2014, 244). This was about to change, the EU focussed on creating unilateral agreements with its new eastern neighbours apart from the existing bilateral agreements. Therefore programs such as the ENP (European Neighbourhood Policy) and the EaP (Eastern Partnership) were constructed. These programs became a blueprint for relations with non-EU countries and the later specifically for non-EU states in eastern Europe. However, what the EU did not see or did not wish to see was that Russia wasn't excited about the new EU relations with Ukraine and Belarus or the Transcaucasian states (Light 2008, 14).

Russia recognised in the EU a new big player on the field. Where Russia had gone unchallenged for so many years, it now had to deal with a new kid on the block. This was not a perspective that Russia looked forward too. Inevitable as it was, this created tension. On the one hand, Russia perceived that its sphere of influence was not respected (Yakolev 2016, 149). Russia considers the former Soviet republics to be part of its sphere of influence. As put forward in the

Russian foreign policy after the Georgian war (Trenin 2009, 3). This means that Russia feels that the former Soviet republics are connected to Russia and that no other state or multinational platform should interfere. This can partially be explained by the shared identity and partially by the historic ties that these states have with Russia. The EU on the other hand did not see this as an intrusion on Russia's sphere of influence, since there already were agreements with these countries after the fall of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the new member states already had their own bilateral relations with the post-soviet states and the EU copied these relations (Light 2008, 8). The copying of the bilateral relations resulted in a conflict with Russia. This fire might have been doused had the EU not chosen to make Russia part of the ENP (Wesselink & Boschma 2016, 6). Hereby completely ignoring the special status that Russia craves. Furthermore, this would have made Russia into a subservient state to the EU. Whereas Russia pictures itself as an equal or alternative to the EU.

Russia prefers bilateral relations with countries, instead of unilateral relations which are coordinated through the EU (Wallander 2007, 107). Within the EU framework we observe a similar trend. Individual countries prefer bilateral relations over unilateral relations (Mankoff 2009, 151). Which resulted in a strong bargaining position for Russia. They could play out different EU members against one another. Another part of the problem lies with the former Soviet republics, who are not per se inclined to only look towards Russia. In most cases the Newly Independent States (NIS) chose their own path and focussed on gaining from both parties (Babayan 2016, 2). The EU and Russia are both focussed on gaining the upper hand in their respective neighbourhood, which leads to an environment in which the NIS profit. For example, Belarus which was severely stricken by sanctions. Their sanctions were lifted, because the EU considered them too close to Russia (Babayan 2016, 3). This is a clear example of Belarus playing the field and focussing on what it is most conducive to the country itself.

We must also not overestimate the power that Russia or the EU has over its neighbourhood. Russia has taken a more passive role in these matters. They have chosen for reaction, rather than action. Case in point are the uprisings in Tallinn over the replacement of a Soviet war memorial and war graves. In which it was the local population of Russians which rose up and the Russian government chose to support the uprising (Trenin 2009, 13). The sphere of influence is a difficult concept to grasp since it can not be expressed in exact numbers, but there are moments in which we can observe when either the EU or Russia has exerted its influence over a county or region. The direct approach to gaining influence over a country or region can be done through hard power. There is also the indirect approach which involves soft power. The best example of this is the use of multinational platforms.

1.3 Multinational platforms

Russia's leading role in the region meant that entrance into the ENP or EaP was impossible. The importance of this status stems from Russia's goal to become a global power once again. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has been trying to regain this status since the fall of the Soviet Union, but especially under president Putin this has become an important goal (Wallander 2007, 110). Even if Russia is not considered to be a global force, than it still retains its status as regional power. Russia can nevertheless only be a regional power when it has states that accept its importance and gravitate towards Russia. As a result Russia started several integration projects of which the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is the most recent (Khitakhunov, Muhkamediyev & Pomfret 2016, 60). Other examples are the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), ECU (Eurasian Customs Union), CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and the Union State (alliance between Russia and Belarus). This institution is an exclusive union, just as the EU is an exclusive union.

Both the EU and the EAEU do not wish states that joined their project to have conflicting interests (Delcour 2015, 316). Therefore, states in Eastern Europe have to decide for themselves whether they wish to join the EU or the EAEU. There are some possibilities to profit from both systems, but full integration into both multinational platforms is impossible. It might seem contradictory Russia does not object to dealings with the EU. As long as all parties involved realise that Russia is the most important regional power and they respect this (Trenin 2009, 4). To clarify, a step towards the EU does not necessarily mean a step away from Russia, too many steps towards the EU do, however, mean a step away from Russia (Mankoff 2009, 151).

For example, the conflicts that occurred in Ukraine and Georgia started, because both states started to drift towards the EU. When Ukraine and Georgia actually did take too many steps towards the EU is difficult to say. Neither was eligible for EU membership they might have been on the right track, but for neither a course was laid in to EU membership (Kuzio 2017, 104). It was the initial move towards the EU that eluded towards a more prominent position of the EU in the shared neighbourhood. Russia could and would not accept this, so it started dragging its heels. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise to us that talks between Russia and the EU became increasingly difficult. In the aftermath of the Crimean conflict and the Donbas conflict talks were severely disturbed. More about this will feature in educative element.

Joining either the EU or the EAEU has severe consequences. If a state has joined one of these blocks it can no longer join the other. This does not rule out trade agreements, but as of yet there is no state that is part of either block and has access to the common market of the other block. Thereby making a win-win situation implausible. However there are states that Russia considers to be part of its sphere of influence, but are not part of the EAEU. Ukraine, for example, is considered by Russia to be part of its sphere of interest, but it is not part of the EAEU (Tolstrup 2014, 53). As of 2015 Ukraine has a new Association Agreement with the EU and in 2016 this was joined by a DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement). In 2017 a visa-free travel agreement was negotiated with Ukraine (Kuzio 2017, 105). These are serious steps towards cooperation with the EU. In turn, this meant steps away from Russia and its multinational platforms, which for obvious was not greeted with enthusiasm in Russia. However, in Ukraine it was also received with mixed feelings (Kuzio 2017, 106).

In the meantime Russia has been focussing on creating a filler for the Soviet Union and an alternative to the EU. The first attempt was the CIS, which has never truly filled the gap that the Soviet Union left. The ECU in 2012 was another attempt and although it had potential, it has never truly come to fruition. Reasons for this were the negative effect it had on GDP and the major attraction of the economical gains there were in a partnership with the EU (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2012, 2). In 2015 Russia introduced the EAEU, which is to be the new alternative for the EU. With its limited regulation and promise for stability in the region, it has attracted attention of the Central Asian states and several Transcaucasian states. Another benefit of this was the possibility of region to region trading with the EU. This has served Russia rather well after the introduction of EU sanctions. Since it could receive products originating from the EU through EAEU member states (Khitakhunov, Muhkamediyev & Pomfret 2016, 73-74).

1.4 Security dilemmas

The security dilemmas that have plagued the EU-Russian rivalry consist of two different natures. One stems from the past and the other stems from the future. The security dilemma from the past centres around NATO. The dilemma from the future is based on how the EU/Europe should pursue its military position in the future, ie. is Russia part of this future or are they actively shielded from it (Gower & Timmins 2007, 91). In the last decade the security dilemmas on the European

continent have become complicated, the Georgian war, the Crimean conflict and the situation in the Donbas are but a few of examples of military conflicts in which the EU and Russia found themselves opposing each other instead of cooperating with on another.

Let us first focus on the Soviet era and how that is still influencing modern military and security decisions. NATO was created in 1949 with the idea that if a member would be attacked other members could instantly help said member. The role of NATO is not just that of a military organisation it has also been a deterrent. It was created to form a block against the Soviet Union, but whereas the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact fell, NATO continued to exist. Within a decade of the fall of the Soviet Union NATO expanded into territories that in the past had been claimed by the Soviet Union. NATO has since started to expand more eastwards towards Russia, which has been viewed as an aggressive move by Russia (Oliphant 01-2016, Telegraph).

The reason that Russia viewed this as an aggressive move is, because there has been an alleged agreement between Russia and the US about NATO expansion (Shifrinson 2016, 7). This agreement is alleged, because NATO officially denies that this agreement was ever made (Rühle 2015). However, recent studies have revealed that it is plausible that a deal about NATO's eastward expansion was indeed made (Shifrinson 2016, 42-43). The problems that this caused is that Russia firmly believes that the US made a solemn vow that NATO would not expand eastward. Therefore Russia felt that it had grounds for the Russian-Georgian war and the Ukrainian conflict (Shifrinson 2016, 9).

The other part of this element concerns the future of European security. A significant step towards convergence was made with the signing of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). This proved to be a common ground upon which future security issues could be discussed (Gower & Timmins 2007, 101). With the creation of NATO-Russian Council (NRC) a more comprehensive and mutual forum was created in which European security issues could be discussed. The idea is that future peacekeeping missions and mutual participation would be stimulated by this (Gower & Timmins 2007, 96). Thereby making sure that Russia and the EU would edge closer to each other instead of ending up separated.

Whereas the first 15 years of the Russian Federation saw a convergence in combined military matters the last decade has been subject to a divergence in this respect. Part of this divergence can be explained by a lack in a European wide security institution. There have been attempts such as the OSCE in which Russia does take place. However, the OSCE does not have the authority that the EU or NATO have and therefore it's significance for European security dilemma's is debatable (Hækkerup 2005). The problem here lies in the fact that most EU-countries (or those strongly affiliated with the EU) already have a security position, either NATO or as part of the EU (Nikonov 2003, 24). As a result there is no direct need for them to create a combined security institution.

1.5 Economic element

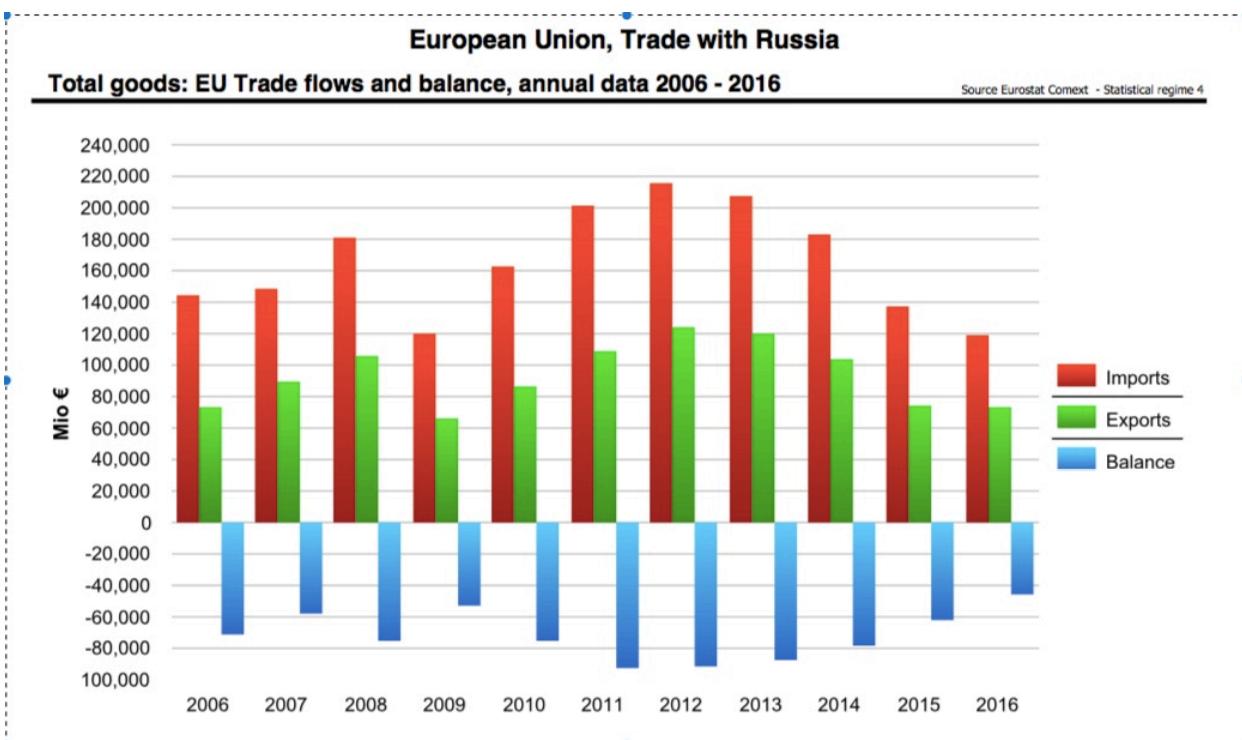
Although Russia and the EU tend to bicker over geopolitics, identification and security issues, there is one element that is of great importance to both parties. Economically speaking Russia and the EU are tied to one another. As mentioned in the multinational platforms element the EU consists of member-states which have their own bilateral agreements with Russia. These bilateral arrangements are centred around energy supplies (Mankoff 2009, 151). The bilateral arrangements have two sides, one is that whatever happens within the broader scope of the EU-Russia relations they cannot allow it to escalate. Countries such as Germany are dependent on Russian gas and therefore are prone to look towards deescalation. Countries such as Poland and the

Baltic states which have a more troubled relationship with Russia are prone to push the EU into a more confrontational approach (Mankoff 2009, 151).

This ambiguity in economic dealings with Russia can be further witnessed in Figure 1. In figure 1 there are two important years that we have to pay attention to, 2009 and 2015. In 2008 the Georgian conflict ensued and 2014 was the year of Euro Maidan. In both years we observe a relatively large drop in trade as a result of the conflicts. In 2009 trade between Russia and the EU recovered rather fast. Resulting in 2011 which already saw higher levels of trade, than 2008. This means that both the EU and Russia were reluctant to throw out the baby with the bathwater. In the sense that although there might have been a conflict this did not mean that this should degrade the entirety of EU-Russia trade. This is partially due to influence of asset swaps prior to the Ukrainian conflict (Wigell & Vihma 2016, 611).

In 2014 we observe a similar trend. From 2015 onwards we can observe the impact that Euro-maidan had on both the EU and Russia. We see both a drop on imports from Russia and exports to Russia. The trade balance changes as well, resulting in a less negative trade balance for the EU. Explanations for this have to sought in the sanctions that the EU issued towards Russia. In the period 2014-2015 the imports drop 40.000 millions whereas the exports only drops about 20.000 millions. In 2016 there is still a small drop on imports, however this could be explained as a normal trend since a negative trend was already going on since 2012. Another possibility is the impending second round of sanctions. Since once again, imports falter, but the amount of exports stays on par with 2015 levels.

Figure 1



1.6 Educative element

Another element which tends to create friction is what shall be called the educative element. This element contains two parts, the first is the ideals of the EU and the spread thereof and the second part consists of the recent implementation of sanctions. The ideas that the EU proclaims are a logical heritage of its very existence. The EU has always taken great pride in its power of democracy and its moral position. As a result the EU promotes these ideas in dealings with new

partners or in dealings with existing partners, this is not just confined to the former Soviet republics, but we will focus on the impact it has had on Russia. Russia has not felt the need to conform to this specific set of ideas. Coupled with this set of ideas comes a notion of superiority. This means that the EU actively forces its ideology on other countries, rewarding those who follow and punishing those who do not. This has been shown especially well in the sanctions that the EU used in the aftermath of the Crimean conflict.

Let us first discuss the impact of Western ideology and its active spreading by the EU. When the EU launched the ENP and later the EaP it realised that it could use its economic power to promote democratic values by creating agreements with states that were not ready for EU-membership. Democratic reforms would be traded for visa-free travel, access to the ESM and/or entrance into the ENP and EaP (Boedeltje & Van Houtum 2011, 131). Thereby creating a playing field that suited the EU. The states that chose to join the ENP saw the benefits of following the EU's democratic ideology as a trade for economic gains. Russia was also offered participation in the ENP, but Russia did not want to participate. The reason why Russia did not want to participate in the ENP or EaP lies in the demanding factor of the partnerships. In both partnerships a country is rewarded, for example, in the gains it makes in the democratic value of elections and the freedom of press (Mankoff 2007, 159). Which by itself seems harmless, but apart from the discussion whether it would be wise for Russia or for that matter the ruling establishment, to except this from an outside force creates a parental relationship.

Russia which sees itself, at least, as a regional power could never except such a role. Therefore the EU's influence on Russia's democratic developments remained limited. However the EU has used the carrot and stick tactic on multiple occasions. The carrot is generally used when Russia has aligned itself with EU policies, the stick however is the part which we are interested in. The stick in the EU-Russia relationship can be used in many forms, but the ones we will be focussing on are the sanctions that the EU issued towards Russia. These sanctions focussed on the situation that was created after Russia took over the Crimean peninsula. The EU chose to issue sanctions, because it was believed that this was an annexation of territory that belonged to the sovereign state of Ukraine. Whether it was justified or not is irrelevant for this element. How the EU responded is relevant and that is with sanctions aimed to hurt Russia enough to either back down from the conflict or choose a different political route (Veebel & Markus 2015, 167).

This form of sanctions is called the pain-gain route, which assumes that the sanctioned party will try to avoid to pay the costs of the sanctions (Giumelli 2013, 16). In the case of Russia and the Crimea, this has not been particularly successful. The idea of imposing sanctions is that the target of the sanctions has the possibility of changing the erroneous deed they have perpetrated. However, there has to be enough political viability for the targeted state to change its ways (Giumelli 2013, 18). In the case of Russia and Crimea, this seems hard to reconcile, because Putin was lauded in Russia for the way he handled the Crimean annexation. Therefore, giving up the Crimean peninsula would be detrimental to Putin's position and that of the entire political establishment. This means that it remains unlikely that the sanctions will lead to a political solution for the Crimean problem. The sanctions that have been used consist of four categories, arms embargoes, travel bans, economic measures and financial measures of which travel bans, economic measures and financial measures have been the most important in Russia (Giumelli 2013, 22). The difference between financial and economic measures is that financial measure focus on the individual, whereas economic measures focus on a national scale.

What we have to understand is that these sanctions on the one hand do have an effect. They do effect the Russian economy, but to say it has changed the Russian determination to keep the Crimean peninsula is too far fetched. It has not and will not dissuade Russia to keep Crimea.

Therefore the true reason behind the sanctions is that the EU disapproves of the Russian actions and shows it by giving Russia a slap on the wrist. This in turn creates friction between the EU and Russia, which considering all the other frictions between Russia and the EU may seem minor, but creates a bigger system of frustration.

1.7 Concluding remarks on the Russian-EU rivalry

The EU-Russia relationship is determined by elements that create a field in which tension thrives. As in any relationship, friction creates more friction which creates more friction as long as it is not resolved resulting in a vicious cycle. On its own this might not be that big of a deal, but because there are several elements of friction in the EU-Russia relationship they strengthen each other. Therefore, there is a continuous feedback loop of friction. In this chapter we have taken a look at how six elements, identification, spheres of influence, multinational platforms, security dilemmas, economic interconnectivity and the educative element, have influenced the EU-Russia relationship. Elements such as security dilemmas, economic interconnectivity and the educative element are rather practical and can be expressed in tangible results. The other three elements are of a more ideological and theoretical nature. In order to understand these elements they have to be seen within the wider context of regional politics. This context which is subject to continual development and expansion.

In the case of Russia's self-identification a trend has been observed of Russia either focussing on its European identity or its Slavic identity. Why Russia focusses on its European identity or its Slavic identity depends on the context. If it wishes to lecture the EU or manoeuvre itself into a position of the afflicted it tends to show its European identity. When Russia speaks to its neighbours a stronger emphasises on its shared identity/history is shown. This brings us to the spheres of influence, Russia considers its neighbourhood to be part of its sphere of influence. This largely consists of countries that used to be part of the Soviet Union. The interest that the EU is showing in these regions is therefore not greeted with enthusiasm and has resulted in several conflicts. In which the multinationals platforms that Russia has created clash with those that are controlled by the EU. Although, they should function as alternatives to each other, they often tend to be rivals though vying for control over their shared neighbourhood.

The more practical elements of the EU-Russia rivalry have shown that a high level of interconnectedness is part of the friction. The security dilemmas are a very clear cut example of this. On the one hand the EU-members can not ignore Russia as part of the broader European security network. On the other hand, there is so much mistrust that a complete partnership is out of the picture, for now at least. As a result the EU-members have largely focussed on NATO, which in turn Russia perceives as a threat. The economic element is different from the other elements, since it has shown that even in periods of turmoil Russia and the EU choose to cooperate. For both parties the need for trade is of the utmost importance, which is why there might be restrictions on trade, but never an all out cancelation. Those restrictions come in the form of sanctions. This is the EU's diplomatic measure for disagreeing with Russia. In the case of the Crimean Peninsula, the EU and NATO felt that outright intervention was not needed, but a slap on the wrist was necessary. The result of all these elements is a EU-Russia relationship/rivalry with many different faces and natures. Which will all return in the next chapter when we will see in what way these elements have influenced the frozen conflicts in the shared neighbourhood.

Chapter 2: Frozen conflicts

Ironically a frozen conflict is in some ways just like a volcano, just like a volcano a frozen conflict came into existence in a hot and fiery struggle. After the period of violent eruption it goes into a state of sleep and from here on it could either come back to life or it could die down to never wake again. This analogy does not pay attention to all the intricacies of a frozen conflict, but it gives a broad idea of the three stages of a frozen conflict. In the first chapter an analysis of six elements of the EU-Russian relationship has been shown. In this chapter the next step towards the South-Ossetian case study will be taken by concentrating on frozen conflicts, specifically those in Europe.

The aim of this chapter is on the one hand to give some background information about frozen conflicts and on the other hand to take a look at the link between the EU-Russian relationship and frozen conflicts. Most of the frozen conflicts in Europe have occurred in the post-Soviet space. Before we can dive into the actual conflicts and how they have occurred, we have to take a closer look at what makes a conflict a frozen conflict. So let us start by defining a frozen conflict. The definition that will be used in this chapter is the one that Anthony Bebler outlines in his book *"Frozen Conflicts" in Europe*. A conflict with a short span of time, which ended in a stalemate and is not yet resolved, it usually concerns a breakaway region of a country and fails to attain international recognition (Bebler 2015, 7-16). This definition is chosen since it focusses mainly on the European frozen conflicts which is our focus as well. Europe knows several frozen conflicts, some of which are resolved, but others are still ongoing.

On the European continent there have been two frozen conflicts which have already been resolved one way or another, Kosovo and Chechnya. The other five frozen conflicts, Northern Cyprus, Transnistria, Abkhazia & South-Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, remain in the frozen conflict stage. There are two other conflicts which are suggested as befitting the name frozen conflict, Gibraltar and Crimea. The latter one is complicated since the Crimean Peninsula was incorporated into the Russian Federation and therefore has never been an independent entity and could be considered to be a resolved conflict. The conflict surrounding Gibraltar is usually forgotten since it has been a long standing conflict. However, it has certainly not died down yet. Even in 2012 an enquiry was made among the citizens of Gibraltar whether they wanted to join Spain or wished to remain part of the United Kingdom (Bebler 2015, 9-10). Once again the conflict surrounding Gibraltar doesn't completely fit in the frozen conflict definition, therefore it is usually excluded.

This chapter will answer the question how do the EU-Russia rivalry/relationship and the European frozen conflicts interact? To create a clear understanding this chapter consists of three parts, in the first part we will take a look at what conditions are needed for frozen conflicts to occur. In the second part of this chapter we will focus on how the EU-Russia rivalry has influenced the frozen conflicts in the post soviet space. In the third and final part we will take a look at how the frozen conflicts have influenced the EU-Russia rivalry. In this chapter a second layer is added to the EU-Russia relationship to gain a more enhanced understanding of what happened in South Ossetia. Especially how the EU Russia relationship and frozen conflicts interact and how this has strengthened the rivalry between both sides.

2.1 Conditions for frozen conflict

The first point concerning frozen conflicts is about the right of separation that the quasi-states had. If a region has the right to secede it is called remedial secession. Four requirements have to be met before remedial secession can take place according to the international public law. The first requirement is that a region needs to have a shared history and as a result can be define as a group. Secondly, said group has to be denied sufficient access to the political decision making

progress. Thirdly, that group also be denied the right of self-determination. The fourth and final requirement is that all other measures of settlements for the conflict have to be exhausted (Laurinavičiūtė & Biekša 2015, 72). Kosovo met these four requirements and in 2008 remedial secession from Serbia was (internationally) accepted. Russia felt that after the secession of Kosovo the other four frozen conflicts should receive equal regard. However the international community thought that in the cases of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and South-Ossetia remedial secession was not applicable.

The reason that Abkhazia and South-Ossetia did not qualify was because although they can be seen as a distinct group, there was no evidence of being denied the right to self-determination or access to the political system. Furthermore, the Abkhazians are not a majority in their region and therefore it is complicated to conclude whether the silent majority agrees or if it is a case of the minority forcing a majority in a decision. Nagorno-Karabakh was not applicable, because no real attempts were made to seek settlements besides secession and the fact that in the Soviet period Armenia had already tried to transfer the Nagorno-Karabakh to the Armenians SSR did not strengthen the case as well. Transnistria was not eligible, since it could be hardly described as a coherent group distinct from the Moldovan populace and no manner of settlement was sought besides secession (Laurinavičiūtė & Biekša 2015, 72). In all these cases the interference of external actors (Russia & Armenia). did not help their cases. It polarised the matter of the frozen conflicts even further, as will be seen later on in this chapter.

A second point about the conditionality for a frozen conflict is that there once was a conflict. Although every conflict is different than the other, there are some similarities to observe. One of these similarities is the presence of mercenaries and Russian troops. After the fall of the Soviet Union the newly created Russian state was incapable of retaining the army that the Soviet Union commanded. This meant that former Soviet soldiers sought new employment in the form of mercenary bands. These mercenary bands fought on all sides of the conflict, hereby causing the conflict to escalate. The Russian military itself also had a hand in the fighting, fighting on the sides that suited Russia's interests. For example, the Russian military chose to help the Abkhazians in their struggle for independence. The ulterior motive for helping them was that Russia wanted their military base in Georgia to remain operational and Georgia to join the CIS. A similar case was the help that Russia indirectly provided to Nagorno-Karabakh through Armenia in their conflict with Azerbaijan (Fischer 2016, 12).

Thirdly, after the phase of conflict a state-building process takes place in the breakaway regions. The state-building process in the South-Caucasus has been strongly influenced by Russia. The Russian impact was especially significant in two areas. The first being security, since Russia had vowed to protect, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia with its military and up until 2015 Russia had a formidable army presence in the break-away regions. The second area of significant Russian impact is the financial aspect, Russia has donated large sums of money to the secessionist entities. They also copied the Russian political and judicial system. Hereby Russia has created the chance for the secessionist entities to develop a state-building process. This was of course not done out of pure altruism. Russia had realised that by supporting these de-facto states it could secure its influence in the region for the years to come (Fischer 2016, 18). However, there is also an alternative motive. Transnistria and South-Ossetia have never made it a secret that they wish to be unified with Russia. By preparing their respective political system and creating a Russian presence they are fitted to join Russia whenever such a move would be acceptable.

Fourthly, the reason that the EU and Russia are rather cautious about how to resolve the frozen conflicts is the previous experiences both parties had with so called 'failed frozen conflicts'. In the early 1990's there were two conflicts that seemed to evolve into frozen conflicts, Crimea and

the Gagauz region in Moldova. For both cases reintegration with their respective parent countries was chosen (Tudoriou 2016, 375-376). However, both failed frozen conflicts resurfaced in the last 10 years. The Gagauz issue came to the fore when Moldova opted for a more pro-EU agenda. The Gagauz region opted for closer ties with Russia instead further integration with the EU. In the end the Gagauz situation was silenced somewhat when Moldova took less tangible steps towards the EU (Tudoriou 2016, 381-385). The Crimean issue is fairly well known. After the fall of the Soviet Union there was some discussion about the Crimean peninsula, should it belong to Ukraine or Russia. Although a frozen conflict never truly occurred, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula should be considered to be a result of the way this conflict was resolved (Tudoriou 2016, 378). As a result the EU especially is careful about how frozen conflicts should be resolved, if not resolved correctly they might rise again.

Lastly, it is necessary to understand that Russia's main goal in a frozen conflict is on the one hand to remain relevant to the region and other hand to make sure they are not dragged into the conflict too much. Russia meddles in frozen conflicts, because it can expand its own role in the internal workings of a state. In this way it can retain or increase its control over a state (Fischer 2016, 5-6). Therefore most of the frozen conflicts that occurred in the post-soviet space are no coincidence. We could also argue that, because the majority of these states are relatively new at independence that this created a greenhouse for secession and separation. Point in case is that in all of the four frozen conflicts in the post-soviet space Russia is heavily involved and in every single one has gained influence. If we look at this in the context of Russia's desire for a sphere of influence, than this shall not be a surprise. Another point in this sense is that Russia does actually feel that it is justified to interfere or even intervene in the frozen conflicts since there are Russians living in these areas of frozen conflict.

However, there have been some questions about these amounts of Russians living in the areas of frozen conflict. In some occasions the total of ethnic Russians was exaggerated or Russian passports were handed out before Russia actually acted. Hereby Russia was creating a playing field in which interference or intervention would be accepted by the global community. Russia played the slavic brothers card extensively in these cases (Laurinavičiatė & Biekša 2015, 71). Russia also takes on itself the role as mediator, a role that is very fortunate for itself. Russia is in the most cases one of the party's that is involved in the conflict and therefore has an agenda. This agenda is called the revisionist agenda in academic discourse. Russian revisionism considers that we live in a multi-polar world in which Moscow is one of the centres of power and is tasked with countering the western led block (Fischer 2016, 10). The states that surround Russia are in such a way tied to Russia (economically, demographically and politically). that ignoring Russia or completely turning towards another centre of power is unwise. Therefore Russia is too much an important player in the negotiations concerning the solution of frozen conflicts. Hereby, Russia has created a seat from which they can keep a conflict running.

2.2 The influence of the EU-Russia rivalry on frozen conflicts

Russia's main goal in the post-Soviet sphere is to retain and strengthen its sphere of influence. In Abkhazia and South-Ossetia this is not different, but the way it is done does differ from the other frozen conflicts throughout the CIS. The political and economical ties that bind Russia and the de-facto states in Georgia are present on the one hand to support Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. On the other hand they are present, because Russia wants to influence the political trajectory of these two regions (Gerrits & Bader 2016, 299-300). For example, the import and export from South-Ossetia solely depends on Russia. After the signing of recent economic agreements concerning trade tariffs and customs (2009 & 2010) the Abkhazian and South-Ossetian

economies became even more interlinked with the Russian economy. Which gives Russia an immense leverage over both regions. Furthermore, after the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia an agreement was signed that incorporated Abkhazia and South-Ossetia into the same defensive sphere of Russia (Gerrits & Bader 2016, 301-302). This is of course a more symbolic agreement to show potential rivals of Russia that Russia is serious about the defence of these de-facto states. It is also a sign to Abkhazia and South-Ossetia that Russia will not abandon them easily.

An unforeseen result of the lack of recognition for quasi-states is the stimulant it has provided to the black market. The status of a state as de-facto means that trade is hampered. As a result smuggling and illegal trade is seen as one of the few ways to stimulate the economy. Added to this is the lack of governmental crack down on illegal business. The reasons for this is the lack of power within the political leadership of a quasi-state, but also because the political leadership benefits from the black market deals (Kolstø 2006, 729). The shadow economy also keeps the quasi-states in a vicious circle. For example, the EU has strict policies regarding states that are considered to rely on the black market. As a result the EU cracks down on those territories and can add trade restrictions. In turn this stimulates the black market, which reinforces the need for smuggling and this goes on and on. In the end it means that although leaders and smugglers do benefit from it for the state itself it is detrimental.

Russia's relationship with the frozen conflict of Transnistria has been subject to Russia's position concerning Moldova. In 2007 Russia wished to sway the Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin to renegotiate gas deals (Tolstrup 2014, 224-225). One of the first moves by Moscow was to renounce their unconditional support for an independent Transnistria. The financial supports were cut and reshaped as a loan. After a more pro-Western government was elected in 2009 Russia reversed this position once again and adopted the policy of destabilising Moldova and supporting Transnistria (Tolstrup 2014, 226). The EU meanwhile focussed on democratising the Moldovan republic, even going so far as forcing president Voronin to not close the independent new channel. After the accession of Romania to the EU, the EU also stepped up its game in regards to conflict resolution in Transnistria. Furthermore the EU criticised Russia for not helping in the Transnistrian conflict (Tolstrup 2014, 228-229). The relative distance to the EU made the Transnistrian conflict far more relevant for the EU than the Caucasus conflicts, which is what determines the EU's engagement in a frozen conflict.

When Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in 2008, it was backed by 22 of the 27 EU members (Whitman & Wolff 2010, 98). Russia lauded this as a positive change in EU policy and hoped that this would also mean that recognition for the Caucasian and Transnistrian breakaway regions would be possible in the foreseeable future. Currently 10 years have passed and none of the other frozen conflicts within Europe have been solved. There are several reasons to explain this. The first explanation is the geographical importance of Kosovo vis a vis that of the Caucasian republics. Kosovo is part of the Balkan which has been the part of Europe where the EU has expanded rapidly in the last two decades. Secondly, EU was already heavily invested in the troubles of the former Yugoslavian republic. After the interference during the Yugoslavian war the EU and its members could not let the Kosovo situation sort itself out. So why doesn't this hold true to the Transnistrian case?

Relatively speaking Transnistria is as close to the EU as Kosovo is, yet the independence of Transnistria has not been recognised. Partially this is, because of the ties that Russia has to Transnistria, but the EU has interfered in Transnistria with a tactic that is called 'soft balancing'. This means the usage of non-military means to limit an opponents power in a region (Kennedy 2016, 512-513). This soft balancing was used to make sure that Russia would not have a monopoly on conflict resolution in Moldova. One of the most basic ways for soft balancing is to enlarge the

trade between countries and regions. For a while the EU's ways seemed to work coinciding with high approval ratings and the majority of the Moldovan populace looking forward to EU ascension themselves. However, the EU's inability to solve the Transnistrian matter and the lack of real promises began to turn against the EU and in 2014 less than half of the population favoured EU membership (Kennedy 2016, 525). The EU did manage to achieve something though by the strengthening the ties with Moldova and Transnistria it remains unlikely that Transnistria is to be a true satellite state of Russia.

After the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008 the implementation of the EaP was sped up. It had been presented a year earlier and the idea of systematic installation was thrown out the window. Brussels wanted to show its muscles and show its neighbourhood that they had not been forgotten (Tolstrup 2014, 195). The EaP was however not extended to the de-facto republics in the Caucasus or Transnistria. This can be partially be explained by the fact that before integration within a multilateral platform recognition is required. Apparently the EU was not ready to recognise the de-facto states at that moment. Another explanation can be found if we take a look at whom the EaP was targeted. It was especially targeted at countries in EU-Russian neighbourhood that had been left out in the cold during the implementation of the ENP, two years earlier. This systematic ignorance of the frozen conflicts areas by the EU have not deteriorated the role of Russia at all. The inclusion of Georgia into the EaP soon after the Russo-Georgian war also supported the idea that EU was not invested in the breakaway regions.

The idea that integration with Russia would be an option does not appeal to the EU. They have a different vision for what should happen to the frozen conflicts (Hille 2010, 154). Although the EU has never stated what the future of the frozen conflicts exactly entails. The EU has dedicated itself to promoting peace and resolving conflicts through a political manner instead of allowing violence to erupt once again (Whitman & Wolff 2010, 88). To make sure that a conflict would no longer erupt in a military manner, the EU has chosen to focus on gaining the trust of the breakaway regions. Thereby solidifying relations to ensure that the EU has a line to all partners concerned in the conflict. In the case of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia this has been in a financial manner. The EU reportedly transferred respectively €25 million and €8 million to Abkhazia and South-Ossetia between 1997 and 2006 (Whitman & Wolff 2010, 91). This means that the EU, at least, envisions a future in which these two secessionist entities are part of a broader European neighbourhood. This in turn means that it seems unlikely that the EU would accept a unification with Russia.

What the EU-Russia rivalry has mainly done to frozen conflicts is to increase the gap between all partners. Especially in the current political climate in which someone is either pro-Russia or anti-Russia. This can be evidenced if we take a look at the most recent Ukrainian elections or the most recent Moldovan elections (Tanas & Prentice 2016). President Viktor Yanukovich was demonised for being pro-Russian after postponing the signing of a new DCFTA with the EU to next year (Molchanov 2016, 522). Whether Yanukovich was pro-Russian or not is hard to say and what is more probable is that he was neither pro-Russian nor was he anti-Russian. The tug-of-war between Russia and the EU has pulled countries in their respective neighbourhood, with dramatic results for the neighbourhood as witnessed by the events of 2013 in Ukraine. However, it has not remained with just Ukraine nor is it recent. The tug-of-war between the EU and Russia has influenced several other neighbours.

2.3 Influences of frozen conflicts of the EU-Russia rivalry

In his 2014 article, *Not a New Cold War: Great Game II*, Mark Galeotti promulgates the idea that the EU and Russia are not interlocked in a conflict over ideologies (such was the nature of

the Cold War), instead the EU and Russia are bickering over influence and importance (which resembles the nature of the 19th century Great Game) (Galeotti 2014).. An example of the Great Game nature in the present day situation can be seen when looking at the Caucasus and her oil reserves. As members of the CIS; Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are seen by Russia as part of the Russian sphere of influence and the encroachment of the EU and her members as trying to gain a foothold. However, European penetration in the Caucasus has resulted in a volatile situation. Different than the original Great Game this time it is not just about two actors. In the original Great Game Russia and Great Britain wished to gain the upper hand in Iranian/Persian oil matters. Whereas the current situation involves besides the EU and Russia, China and US as well (Karasac 2002, 17-18).

The supply of oil and gas in the Caucasus has been structured in such a way that it is able to circumvent Russia (Chang, Berdiev & Lee 2013, 333). On the one hand, this creates less control for Russia over the Transcaucasian oil supplies, but on the other hand it creates friction between Russia and the Caucasian states and between Russia and the EU. The supplying states both benefit from the circumvention, but also suffer the detrimental effects. The benefits are that the Transcaucasian states have relative free reign to whom they wish to send their oil and gas without another party being able to block these transmissions. The detrimental effects are that all these states are drawn within every conflict between the opposing parties. With Russia's engagement in the frozen conflicts in the Transcaucasian region, it brought the oil matter into an even broader geopolitical scene (Haro, 2010, 54). Precariously so when the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 waged. The presence of oil in the Caucasian region has raised the stakes for both the European Union, which is at least partially dependent on Caucasian oil, the Caucasian states and Russia.

Apart from the external pressure concerning oil there is also a certain amount of external dependence concerning political, economical and military matters. The Caucasian breakaway regions are not large enough to fend for themselves, nor is their economy stable enough. However, external dependence works both ways. The de-facto states of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia depend heavily on Russian support, but Russia's assistance also means that Russia is highly engaged in their survival. In turn this gives the Abkhazian and South-Ossetian states some leverage over Russia. This has ensured that Russia remains engaged and is pulled even further into the survival of the de-facto states (Caspersen 2009, 52-53). The other side is that to create a sustainable future de-facto states need international recognition. In order to gain international recognition, a multi-party system and democratic offices need to be created. Therefore there needs to be a certain measure of independence (Caspersen 2009, 55-56). This in turn is an explanation why the break away regions of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia have not integrated with Russia. This double-edged sword has its effects on Russia and the EU. De-facto states seek a relationship of some form with the EU in search of recognition, which Russia does not disapprove of, but monitors to make sure that the break-away regions remain dependent upon Russia.

The search for international recognition is a complicated matter. There are several aspects that define when a region has the rights to gain independence as seen in section 2.1. However, in 1960 the UN adopted Resolution 1514. In this resolution it is stated that independence can be achieved by mutual acceptance of the breakaway territory and parent state (Fabry 2012, 663). There are, as with every rule, exceptions, for example in the case of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Although Serbia and Montenegro did not agree with the initial break-up the international pressure was of such an extent that ultimately the republic could not be sustained and it fell into several smaller states (Fabry 2012, 665). The breakaway territories in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan seek a similar recognition or aid of international pressure to sway their parent countries. International recognition and support can only be achieved if contact and interests from

other countries than Russia is present. Therefore a focus on the EU and partners has to be retained and Russia can not be the sole pole of interest.

Especially Abkhazia has made clear that further integration with Russia is not its goal nor is it the wish of the wish of the populace (Sonnleitner 2016, 89). Which begs the question why Russia remains so heavily invested in the survival of the Abkhazian state. On side is that Russia will lose face internationally if it abandons Abkhazia all together. The presence of the autonomous region in Georgia also further stimulates instability in Georgia. For example, this means that Georgia is not eligible for membership to NATO and so far has not been considered for EU-membership. Russia is also able to bolster the support of those people who live in the Russian part of the Caucasus against Georgia. The usage of a feeling of regionalism has benefitted Moscow in this unstable region of Russia. Furthermore, as long as Georgia is busy with the break-away regions it is occupied in a political and financial way. This deters Georgia and its partners (i.e. the EU and the US). to restart the conflict or to seek other ways to interfere in Russia's business, thereby Russia retains the status quo (Sonnleitner 2016, 89-90).

Another aspect of influence that frozen conflicts have had on the EU-Russia relationship is that both parties seek to resolve the frozen conflicts. Both the EU and Russia have different opinions about how to resolve the frozen conflict and a coordinated strategy is not part of this solution. Russia wished to take a more gradual road in which the de-facto states would be given the time and space to develop. This does not always concur with the plans that the other actors have in mind. For example, the in 2003 elected president of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili was more impatient. His rhetoric of confrontation towards the breakaway regions was made possible, because he felt strengthened by support from the West (Hill 2009, 223). The results of this were severe and in 2008 a war was brewing. The 2008 Russo-Georgian war was disastrous for both parties. Georgia lost the war quite convincingly, but its relations with the West improved. Russia won the war, but the political backlash was severe. For the smaller states in the region it was a signal that Russia was a threat and economic and political orientating started to shift towards the US and the EU as well (Sonnleitner 2016, 87).

After the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 the EU realised that further and deeper agreements with Russia were necessary. Although, there had been talks with Russia about a common security zone, no real gains were made. In the aftermath of the war, the EU had realised that with new agreements they could influence Russian policy until a certain extent. The long time defunct PCA of 1997 needed a replacement (Fernandes 2010, 206). As seen in the previous chapter Russia was not willing to agree on Russia specific programs and agreements. This was even more complicated by the indecisiveness in the EU. Even after the Georgian war the EU was not unified in its stance on the Russian-Georgian war (Fernandes 2010, 206). Partially this can be blamed on the nature of the EU, but another part is the importance that Russia puts on bilateral agreements. As seen in the previous chapter countries that identify more with Russia or have more significant trade agreements with Russia tend to be more positive.

In the aftermath of the Crimean annexation a more unified response was visible. The EU issued sanctions towards Russia and although not every EU-member was happy with the sanctions there had been a certain matter of consensus. This level of consensus can be explained by observing the reaction towards the Russo-Georgian war as an mistake and the reaction of the EU to the Crimean annexation is therefore a sign of progress. However, a more plausible reason is that the Crimean annexation had, in the eyes of the EU-member states, less grounds. The reasons for this is that the casus belli in the case of the Russo-Georgian war was to defend the far smaller de-facto states of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. Whereas Russia was the aggressor during the Crimean annexation and played/plays an unclear role in the ensuing conflict over the Donbas. As a result the

somewhat justified Russian intervention during the Georgian war elicited a more mixed response from the EU-member states, than the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula.

2.4 Concluding remarks concerning frozen conflicts

In the introduction of this chapter the question was asked how do the EU-Russia relationship interact with European frozen conflicts? In this chapter an attempt was made to give a short overview of what makes up a frozen conflict, how the EU-Russia relationship has influenced frozen conflicts and how the European frozen conflicts have influenced the EU-Russia relationship. The red line throughout the entire chapter was that all the elements of the EU-Russia relationship which were introduced in the previous chapter could be seen in several aspects of the frozen conflicts. The conditionality's of frozen conflicts in Europe are that a war or conflict of some sort occurred during the process of independence. Whether a region is allowed to separate from the parent country depends on the extent to which said region has a separate identity and to what extent said group is repressed. The four frozen conflicts (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and South-Ossetia) that we have mainly focussed on all occur in the post-Soviet space. After the break-up of the Soviet Union a chaotic situation ensued in which the Russian federation saw itself as the most important vector in the region. When the EU started to meddle in the frozen conflicts it became clear that a simple solution was not available. Russia's plans and lack of interest in real solutions made sure that Russian ambitions were prevalent and little else.

The influence that the EU-Russia rivalry has had on the frozen conflicts is typified by ambiguity. Frozen conflicts such as Kosovo can be resolved by international recognition, the post-Soviet frozen conflicts have not received similar recognition though. This can be partially explained by the role that Russia has played. The quasi-states of Abkhazia, Transnistria & South-Ossetia are in such a manner tied to Russia politically, economically and militarily that without Russian aid they would collapse. This means that these break-away regions owe a lot to Russia. In the last decade the EU has increased investments in the de-facto states as well trying to contribute to the peace making process. Another problem is the polarisation of geopolitics. Countries and politicians are either defined as pro-EU or pro-Russia, whereas it is far more complicated. Especially when it concerns the frozen conflicts which have to focus on Russia as a chance for survival. That does not mean that a connection or future agreements with the EU are impossible. It is often wrongly assumed that de-facto states have little to none influence on the EU and Russia. In this chapter it was shown that it is the opposite actually and that the frozen conflicts have a influential role in the EU-Russia relationship.

For example, Russia uses Abkhazia and South-Ossetia to increase its influence in the Caucasus, but it is also forced to keep supporting these two quasi-states. Both sides also try to resolve the frozen conflicts, but the road towards a finalisation of the conflict differs from actor to actor. Whereas the EU does not wish the de-facto states to become independent entities, Russia does not want them to reintegrate with their parent countries. Therefore the search for international recognition is a complicated maze for the break-away regions. They can not stray too far from Russia, yet also seem open to other countries. The EU has also chosen more unified response after the lackadaisical response in the aftermath of the Russo-Georgian war. Therefore the response to the Crimean annexation was more centralised and immediate. The crackdown on the black market in break-away regions has also been part of the EU policy regarding the de-facto states. This has put them in a complicated position however, since the quasi-states do need the shadow economy to keep their legal economy running. In the last two chapters we have set the stage and in the next chapter we will see what happens when the play starts. This proverbial play will be about the events in South-Ossetia and how it handled the EU-Russia relationship.

Chapter 3: Case study - South-Ossetia

The small autonomous region of South-Ossetia has seen a troubled couple of decades. From the fall of the Soviet Union until now, a dull moment has not yet passed. When the South-Ossetia declared their right to self-determination, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia did not react with enthusiasm (Ballard 2011, 58). Georgia wished to preserve its territorial integrity and a conflict over the status of South-Ossetia ensued. In 1992 both sides agreed to a cease fire and hostilities were put to an end. A combination of Russian, local parties, Georgian and the OSCE formed committees to keep the peace and tried ensure that it would be a sustainable peace (ICG 2010, 1). The problem of this peace treaty was that it did not resolve any of the conflict points. The transition towards a long term solution was never truly made. When Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president of Georgia in 2004 a new phase had started in the South Ossetian frozen conflict (Ballard 2011, 60).

President Saakashvili began to pressure the South Ossetian leadership to act on the smuggling in the region. In the meantime Russia and Georgia started to support different politicians to increase their influence in the frozen conflict. In the Georgian case this backfired massively as the Georgian backed presidential candidate was seen as a traitor (ICG 2010, 1-2). This phase of deteriorating relations between Georgia and South-Ossetia reached a peak in 2008. The declaration of independence of Kosovo and the subsequent acceptance and even support by EU-member states triggered South-Ossetia to intensify its search for international recognition as well. In August of 2008 a war ensued between Abkhazia, South-Ossetia and Georgia. To secure the survival of the two break away regions Russia decided to intervene. On August 12th and September 8th a ceasefire agreement was signed and in the aftermath of the war Russia officially recognised South-Ossetia and Abkhazia as states. Russia and Georgia had both promised to retreat their troops from the region, but Russian troops remained in the area (Ballard 2011, 60-61).

The EU-member states had some difficulty with reacting to the Russo-Georgian war. This was partially caused by Russia's casus belli (see chapter 2) and partially by the division within the EU about how Russia should be handled (Mouritzen & Wivel 2012, 113). In the ten years since the Russo-Georgian war the status of South-Ossetia has not changed and all parties concerned are not closer towards a long term solution. In this chapter we will dive deeper into the enigma that is the South-Ossetian independence. What solutions are on offer for South-Ossetia, what factors play a role in the recognition of South-Ossetian independence and what prevents the parties concerned from reaching an agreement? The latter two questions will be answered in two parts an EU-Georgia part and a Russia-South-Ossetia part. By answering these three questions, they will provide us with pieces of an answer to the question, what factors come in to play with South-Ossetian independence and why has no solution, so far, yielded any results?

3.1 Solutions for the South-Ossetian conflict

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union the parties involved have been searching for a solution for the South-Ossetian conflict. Broadly speaking three categories of solutions can be distinguished, there is the Russian option in which South-Ossetia integrates with the Russian Federation, there is the South-Ossetian option in which South-Ossetia become an independent state and there is the Georgian option in which South-Ossetia reintegrates into Georgia. In table 1 can be seen why none of the aforementioned solutions have been implemented. The simple explanation is that none of the options suit all parties concerned. There is, of course, a more complicated explanation. This concerns the struggle between Russia on the one side and the EU/US on the other side. Furthermore, there are the intricacies of the South-Ossetian-Georgian relationship and the connection of both with Russia. All of which will be reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Disagreements to South-Ossetia solutions

Table 1	Disagreement	US/EU	Russia	Georgia	South-Ossetia
Solutions					
Georgian		O	X	O	X
Russian		X	X	X	O
South-Ossetian		X	X/O	X	O

The Georgian solution, entails that South-Ossetia reintegrates with Georgia. It becomes part of the republic with an autonomous role. The Russian solution is that South-Ossetia is incorporated with Russia, being reunited with North-Ossetia and becoming an oblast within the Russian Federation. Finally, the South-Ossetian option entails that South-Ossetia becomes a state not bound by Russian or Georgian law. So who backs what option and why? Throughout the majority of the South-Ossetian move for independence the EU has kept to the sidelines. It was only after the introduction of the ENP and especially the EaP, that the EU started to become engaged in the conflict. Before the period of multinational project integration (respectively 2005 & 2009) the EU supported the US engagement in the diplomatic situation of the Caucasus. The position of the US was that the Georgian territorial integrity should be preserved (Haro, 2010, 133). The idea is that South-Ossetia would function as an autonomous region within Georgia. Thereby retaining most of the freedom and self-determination rights that it has now, but it would lose its independence.

The main goal of the EU, after the war of 2008, has been to ensure that a conflict between Russia and Georgia can no longer arise (Jafarova 2015, 102-103). To this end the EU took a more active role in the negotiations concerning the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia. An EU Special Representative (EUSR) had been named, already in 2003, but from 2008 onward this position became more prominent. The EUSR was tasked to check and balance the role of all the actors in the frozen conflict. Thereby underscoring the role of the EU as peacekeeper (Jafarova 2015, 97). The Georgian position is similar to that of the US/EU, South-Ossetia has to reintegrate with Georgia. The difference between the EU and Georgia is that the role that Georgia is more assertive in regaining control over the South-Ossetian region. Georgia has tried to increase its influence within South-Ossetia, whereas the EU has tried to take a position above all parties. The position of the EU and Georgia is not shared by Russia, however.

The Russian position on the conflict is that South-Ossetia has to become an independent republic. There are four arguments to support this. The first is that South-Ossetia used to be an autonomous oblast within the Soviet Union and reintegration with another former Soviet republic would be counter-productive (Ballard 2010, 58). The second argument is that since Kosovo gained independence the same should hold true for the frozen conflicts of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria and South-Ossetia (Kennedy 2016, 512-513). Thirdly, reintegration with Georgia after all that has happened seems a tall order and reconciliation appears to be implausible. Fourthly and finally, the amount of Russian citizens require a more advanced role of Russia within the republic of South-Ossetia than Russia could ever have whenever the republic would be forced to reintegrate with Georgia (Gerrits & Bader 2016, 299). The South-Ossetian position is largely determined by the Russian position, although the break away region has never made it a secret that incorporation with

Russia would be preferable as well. Russia has never openly commented about this, but Moscow seems ambiguous in this regard. Integration with Russia would be possible only if and when Russia decides the time to be right.

3.2 EU and Georgian factors

Before an analysis of the factors in the South-Ossetian case can take place it has to be noted that 'recognition of South-Ossetian independence' means Western/UN recognition of South-Ossetia and not just the Russian recognition. The first factor that will be discussed is the part that Georgia has played in the South-Ossetian recognition process. The role of Georgia in South-Ossetian independence is pivotal. Georgian recognition is not per se necessary, as seen in the Serbia-Kosovo example given in chapter 2, but Georgian recognition of South-Ossetian independence is the easiest road to a permanent solution. Georgia, so far, has not seemed willing to part with South-Ossetia. The role that Russia played in this regard has been of significant importance. Georgia and Russia have had a troubled past and since the Russo-Georgian war relations have been suboptimal. However, before the Russo-Georgian war the relationship was already deteriorating. This was caused by the Georgian entrance in the ENP and EaP and the Georgian engagement with NATO which did not sit well with Russia (Bezhaniashvili 2009, 24).

The Georgian factor has played a role for South-Ossetia, but it is the global scale which has dominated it. When the EU became mixed up in this conflict it became a conflict between two rivals vying for influence in the Caucasian region. The EU has shown to be interested in conflict resolution, but it has thus far only given one serious option. The reintegration of South-Ossetia with Georgia. The choice for the EU's support to Georgia can be chalked up to the complexities of a frozen conflict, but also up to the EU's geopolitical position vis-a-vis Russia. The EU refuses to allow Russia to gain the upper hand in the Caucasus region. Although, the EU has tried to stimulate talks between Russia and Georgia, the EU has chosen the Georgian side in this conflict. This can be seen in the financial aid that Georgia received from the EU, €500 million was transferred to Georgia to rebuilt after the Russo-Georgian war (Acikmese & Dizdaroglu 2014, 319). Perhaps more indicative is the lack of funding going to South-Ossetia.

The introduction of the ENP has appeared to be a two-edged sword for the EU. On the one hand the EU has gained influence in Georgia. As a result the EU's road towards a peaceful solution for the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia has become more direct. On the other hand the actions of the EU in South-Ossetia are seen by South-Ossetia as part of the Georgian plan to reincorporate the quasi-state into the Georgian state. Furthermore, the EU tries to appease Georgia, because deteriorating relations with Georgia would harm the road towards peace. Consequently, the EU does not have the ability to gain influence on the state reform process in the de facto state (Coppiers 2007, 17). Compared with the Russian influence in South-Ossetia the EU's position is marginal. Moscow has the opposite problem, they do have influence on the South-Ossetian process of state reform, but little influence on the Georgian decision-making process. The outcome is that Russia as well as the EU does not have the influence to force a final solution for the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia.

The support that the EU has given to Georgia should therefore be seen as part of its strategy of a ring of friends. This plan was institutionalised in the form of the EaP. Since Georgia is part of the EaP the EU supports Georgia and not South-Ossetia. It has to be noted though, that the EU did in fact donate funds to the other frozen conflict in Georgia, Abkhazia. This can be explained if we take a look at the complications that the EU has encountered in its Georgian operations. South-Ossetia has so far denied EU-observers to enter the country. As a result the EU encounters difficulties in fulfilling its role of mediator in the conflict (Acikmese & Dizdaroglu 2014, 319-320).

Which leaves the Ossetian de-facto state in the hands of Russia. The Russian policy in the break away regions of Georgia has been to make sure that security demands are met (ICG 2018, 1). After the security demands were met focus has shifted towards state-building and pressing economy matters. The problems with the economical matters are that the South-Ossetian republic is completely dependent on Russia. When the Russian economy took a severe hit after the economical crisis of 2008 and the sanctions following the Crimean annexation of 2014 the Ossetian economy suffered as well (ICG 2018, 3).

Georgian actions, especially under Saakashvili, at times seem to have been aimed at goading the de-facto states of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. For example, in 2007 Georgia had organised a summer sports camp within the security zone bordering Abkhazia. The idea was that such a camp would bolster patriotic feelings. The organisation of such a camp in the proximity of the Abkhazian quasi-state resulted in the EU and the UN disapproving the move and advising Georgia to move the camp elsewhere. The camp was seen as a way of provoking the Abkhazian government. Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili disagreed with this advice and chose to host the summer camp in the planned location (Coppiers 2007, 13). This event shows us two important factors, the first factor we can extract from this event is that Georgia does not always follow the EU and UN line. The EU can try to work on a peaceful resolution or a long term solution, but it always has to deal with several other actors which do not follow her lead blindly. The second factor consists of Georgia's bullying methods. Georgia has taken a hard line concerning the break away regions, especially in the years leading up to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. This event in which the UN and the EU even warned Georgia did not deter Georgia from a provocation towards Abkhazia.

Georgia, especially Saakashvili, has also been rather vocal about the role of Russia. Even saying things such as: "We learned that Russian troops were moving through the Roki tunnel and had crossed the Georgian state boundary," he said. "I could not believe they would cross that red line.... I could not believe they would be first to take this step." (RFERL 2008). Georgia blames the Russian encroachment on its territory for the escalation of the conflict over South-Ossetia. He speaks about Russian troops entering South-Ossetia as a step upon Georgian territory. This is where it gets complicated, since South-Ossetia is not recognised as a sovereign state as a result it is technically Georgian territory. However, Russia has supported the South-Ossetian quasi-state from the beginning and a threat to its existence would be reason for Russia to intervene. The matter of Russia taking the first step is also highly debatable, since hostilities between Georgia and South-Ossetia had already assumed (Ballard 2011, 60).

3.3 Russian and South-Ossetian factors

The focus that South-Ossetia has on Russia in the economical, political and security sense has its drawbacks. Since it means that South-Ossetia will suffer all the detrimental effects that effect Russia as well. For example, the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the alleged Russian meddling in the Donbas has had its effects on South-Ossetia. These effects can be seen in the relations that Russia has with the EU which determine to what extent a solution for the South-Ossetian region remains feasible. When the relationship is considered good, it become more likely that a solution can be found. When the relationship suffers and both parties are at each others throats it becomes more unlikely that they are willing to find a middle ground. In 2018 the relationship between Russia and the EU should not be considered to be good. For example, recent diplomatic disasters concerning, the Crimean peninsula, the Donbas, the Skripal affair and flight MH17 have raised tensions (Borger, Wintour & Stewart 2018, De Boer 2018, Robinson 2016, 506-507). As result the South-Ossetian plans for independence have suffered and a peaceful solution seems further away than ever.

The South-Ossetian choice to ally itself with Russia and not Georgia has many facets. One of the most important of these facets is the economic facet. However, instead of focussing on the regional or even national scale of the economy it might be more indicative to look at the effect that economy has on the South-Ossetian citizens. The former Swedish politician Per Gahrton has an observation about pensions, which is systemic to the South-Ossetian choice for Russia. “For example while a Georgian pension was equivalent to US\$7 a month, a Russian pension, which most South Ossetians were entitled to after having adopted Russian citizenship, was ten times higher, US\$70.” (Gahrton 2010, 61). On an economic basis Georgia has less to offer than Russia has. Consequently, if South-Ossetia were to choose for Georgia its people would have to take a step back financially speaking. From the point of view of the government this seems a hard sell. Aligning the country with Georgia seems not to be in the best interest of the general populace of South-Ossetia, when concerning pensions. However, there is more than just pensions which has swayed South-Ossetia to align itself with Russia.

In the previous chapter it was described that the importance of the illegal market for South-Ossetia has been influential in its choice for Russia. Gahrton makes a similar observation: “South Ossetia, with no natural resources or unique skills, developed into a paradise for smugglers.” (Gahrton 2010, 60). Smuggling and the black market are one of the ways in which the South-Ossetian government tries to sustain their economy. Further integration with the EU or Georgia creates friction in this aspect since, smuggling is something that the EU and as a result Georgia crack down on intensively. Russia on the other hand is far less restrictive in this sense. Russia leaves its allied states/oblasts to run itself as long as they are allied to Russia. There is also the benefit that the smuggling brings to the leaders of South-Ossetia. This personal gain becomes implausible after integration within the Georgian system. In turn the lack of personal gain does not stimulate South-Ossetian leaders to propel the region towards unification with Georgia.

It has not just been economic reasons why South-Ossetia has remained focussed on Russia. In the political sense there is also a focus on Russia, as can be seen in the election of leaders of South-Ossetia who were outspoken Russia supporters. As an example, when Eduard Kokoyev was elected president of South-Ossetia in 2001 he made the following statement: “I am in favor of closer relations with North-Ossetia and broader ties with Russia. We would prefer an arrangement in which South-Ossetia has associate membership with Russia and equal, treaty-based relations with Georgia.” (Sysoyev 2001, 8). In this quote Eduard Kokoyev shows where his intentions lie. To him South-Ossetia is allied with Russia and further integration with North-Ossetia and Russia is necessary. He envisions a future in which Georgia and South-Ossetia will make bilateral relations such as equal partners make. This means that Kokoyev is more invested in good relations with Russia, than with Georgia. This should not come as a surprise since Eduard Kokoyev himself is half South-Ossetian and half Russian.

In 2005 the Georgian parliament created an ultimatum, Russia had to retreat its troops from the Georgian soil. If Russia would not respond accordingly, than Georgia would be forced to remove the Russian troops (Iashvili 2005, 5). Russia was not impressed by the Georgian threat and senators of the Russian Federation Council affirmed that the military presence of Russia would not change so quickly. “The senators said that the peacekeepers were fully carrying out the mission with which they were charged by a CIS mandate in 1994. The leaders of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia insist that the Russian peacekeeping mission must continue.” (Simonyan, Goridiyenko, Babakin & Izanov 2005, 1, 4). This episode in the Georgian-Russian relationship is indicative of the overall relationship in the 2003-2008 period. It shows the pressure that Georgia began to put on the break away regions. This event also shows the tightrope that Russia has to walk, because Russia’s ambitions for a sphere of influence also implicate that it can never support one side to heavily. In

this case Russia tries to act in a way that is conducive to both sides by referring to the legal right that the Russian troops have to remain in the region.

The Russian ambitions for a sphere of influence means that Russia can not alienate Georgia to much, but Russia can also not abandon South-Ossetia. Especially in the year leading up to the Russo-Georgian war this became increasingly complicated. A fundamental lack of understanding on both the Russian and Georgian sides about the interests of the other led to a war and the official recognition of South-Ossetian independence by Russia. The Russian demeanour of a party above the parties has been fundamental in this, because Russia gave itself the right to intervene. It is also important to note that Russia should in no way be considered to be above the parties in this conflict. Russia is too heavily implicated in this conflict to remain in a neutral position. However, before the Russo-Georgian war Russian actions were targeted at performing a balancing act. When push came to shove Russia felt it had to support South-Ossetia. Consequently, Russia has become so engaged in South-Ossetia that it is now imperative for Russia's interests in the region that the quasi-state survives.

3.4 Concluding remarks

Over the last 3 decades several options for the South-Ossetian conflict have been sought, tried and failed. In this chapter an analysis has been given about what those solutions were and what the systemic problems were that hindered the implementation of all those solutions. Three solutions were identified, a Georgian solution, a Russian solution and a South-Ossetian solution. The Georgian solution entails that the de facto state of South-Ossetia would reintegrate with Georgia. The exact position of South-Ossetia within the Georgian state differs from autonomous region to province. The problem with this solution is that South-Ossetia is opposed to this solution and with the lack of Russian support this solution never came to fruition. The Russian option consists of South-Ossetia being incorporated in the Russian federation. Whether it would become an oblast or merge with North-Ossetia was never made clear. The South-Ossetian solution meant that South-Ossetia would become an independent state free from Georgia and Russia.

The problem with all of these solutions is/was that South-Ossetia and Georgia always are on opposite sides of the solutions. When one agrees, the other disagrees. The Russian position has changed over time, after the Russo-Georgian war Russia became more engaged in creating an independent state. Moscow even went so far as to recognise South-Ossetian independence. The US and the EU took a more mediating role in this regard. Their goal was to create a lasting peace instead of a simmering conflict. However, the EU and US have always supported the Georgian position that the South-Ossetian de facto state should reintegrate with Georgia. This is where the role of the EU as peacekeeper becomes complicated. The EU has tried to influence both Georgia and South-Ossetia into a dialogue instead of an armed conflict. However, the influence that the EU has on South-Ossetia is negligible. The EU is not trusted by South-Ossetians, because the EU supports the Georgian cause.

This support is not only in terms of solutions, but also in terms of political and economical assistance in the form of the ENP and EaP. As a result South-Ossetia has tried to keep the EU out of the region and this complicated the peacekeeping role of the EU. Georgia has reaped the fruits of the complicated relationship between South-Ossetia and the EU. In the sense that Georgia received support from the EU and South-Ossetia did not. Georgia has not always followed the party-line of the international community, though. Some incidents prior and after the war of 2008 have shown that Georgia is somewhat of a provocateur and is not willing to let part with the territories of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. The South-Ossetian case in this regard is quite simple, they do not wish to be a part of Georgia, in whatever form that takes. Economically and politically South-

Ossetia is tied to Russia to such an extent that a switch to Georgia would be unfavourable for the populace and the leadership.

The Russian role in the frozen conflict is complicated. Initially Russia saw itself as a peacekeeper and mediator. The Russian troops stationed in the South-Ossetian regions were mainly there to ensure that a war would be prevented. Russia tried to combine its interests in Georgia and South-Ossetia. However the Georgian actions in the years leading up to the 2008 war, ironically, drove Russia and South-Ossetia into each others arms. As a result the Russian-South-Ossetian relationship has grown over the years and has led to Russian recognition of the South-Ossetia state. The conflict as it is now has resulted in Russia trying to ensure the survival of South-Ossetia, but it also means that South-Ossetia is subject to the detrimental effects of a relationship with Russia. Which after the last five years means that international recognition of South-Ossetia appears to be unlikely.

Conclusion

In the introduction the question was posed how has the EU-Russia relationship influenced the frozen conflict of South-Ossetia? In this thesis an attempt was made to paint a picture of a region, South-Ossetia, that struggled for international recognition. South-Ossetia needs good relations with both Russia and the EU to gain international recognition. Since South-Ossetia operates in the Russian and EU neighbourhood the support of these two regional heavyweights would help the South-Ossetian case. However, the EU has so far not given its support to an independent South-Ossetia. The lack of support for South-Ossetia by the EU is caused by the intricacies of the EU-Russia relationship. This relationship has developed into a rivalry which has complicated the search for a solution to the South-Ossetian frozen conflict. It has not just been South-Ossetia that has been drawn into this rivalry, Georgia has also suffered its consequences. Georgia and South-Ossetia are different sides of the same coin.

The Georgian side is determined by the support of the EU and the friction that existed between Georgia and Russia. Whereas the South-Ossetian case is the other way around. To create a clear picture this subject has been subdivided in six elements. The first element that was discussed was self-identification. Russia has underlined both its European nature and its Slavic nature. The European identity can be observed in situations in which the EU speaks for the entire European continent. Institutions such as the OSCE are dominated by members of the EU and as result the influence of the EU is significant. However, it has been the slavic identity which has been most influential on the frozen conflicts in the European continent. When the EU tried to solve the transnistrian issue Russia played their slavic identity trump card. Russia took an extra step in South-Ossetia by distributing Russian passports. South-Ossetia even had a half-Russian president. This was a thorn in the side of Georgia and consequently the EU.

Furthermore, Russia has put an emphasis on the shared history aspect. South-Ossetia and Georgia were both part of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union and as a result Russia feels obliged to protect weaker states from oppression and exploitation. The problem with this position is that Russia itself would benefit from the separation of South-Ossetia. Therefore, Russia can not be typified as an objective observer or a mediator. Especially, after the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 it seems unlikely that Russia would promulgate a solution that would be fair to Georgia. This role that Russia has assumed as a result of the shared history should also be seen as a direct result of Russia's need for a sphere of influence. The Russian sphere of influence is typified by Russia rewarding those countries that choose to support Russia and punishment for those countries that stray too far from Russia. As seen in the position of Russia after the election of Saakashvili and the converging of the EU and Georgia.

In this sense the South-Ossetian case has been most peculiar. South-Ossetia has been given, political, economic and military support, which has prevented the collapse of the South-Ossetian quasi-state. However, this support has also been part of the preparation of South-Ossetia for the Russian system. South-Ossetia has never made it a secret that it wants integration with North-Ossetia and as a result Russia. This is unacceptable to Georgia. Georgia wants South-Ossetia to reintegrate and is supported by the EU. This is caused by the EU sphere of influence of which Georgia is part. The EU sphere of influence in the eastern neighbourhood is expressed by the ENP and the EaP. Especially the EaP has solidified the EU position in East-Europe and the Caucasus. South-Ossetia was not offered entrance to the ENP or the EaP. The reason for this is that South-Ossetia is not recognised as a state by the EU. However, the EU has invested in the Abkhazian and South-Ossetian states, although no formal agreement was made.

The EU has also tried to take on the role of mediator in the South-Ossetian frozen conflict. The EU's role of mediator has been complicated by the lack of South-Ossetian openness. For

example, South-Ossetia has not allowed EU-observers on its territory. This secluded attitude has ensured a vicious circle of a lack of EU recognition and a lack of South-Ossetian openness. The South-Ossetian refusal is born of the relations between Russia and South-Ossetia, but it is reinforced by the lack of regional pressure. The lack of regional pressure is caused by the influence of multinational platforms. Both the EU and EAEU are determined to gain the upper hand in the Caucasian region. The EU and the Russian led EAEU are invested in the Caucasian states. The EU has invested through the ENP and EaP and the attractiveness of the European single market. Although all three Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) are part of the EaP, they are, except for Georgia, also part of the EAEU.

This participation of Azerbaijan and Armenia in the EAEU means that they will not pressure South-Ossetia into accepting a reintegration process with Georgia. Furthermore, Armenia and Azerbaijan are dealing with a frozen conflict themselves, Nagorno-Karabakh. The Russian presence in this conflict means that Armenia and Azerbaijan are hesitant in condemning the South-Ossetian separation. South-Ossetia was not offered entrance into the EAEU. This might seem strange, since Russia is a staunch supporter of South-Ossetia. That South-Ossetia was not offered membership to the EAEU can be explained by the lack of recognition of the South-Ossetian state. Although the participating states will not condemn the Russian actions in South-Ossetia they will not support it either. This means that South-Ossetia is solely dependent on Russian economic support and has little to no trade with other countries than Russia. Which brings us to the economic element of the EU-Russia relationship.

The economic element of the EU-Russia relationship is determined by two factors. On the one hand there is the willingness on both sides to make sure that a conflict does not spin out of control. This can be seen in the relative normalisation of trade during stressful times. When the EU-member states and Russia had differing opinions about the Russian role in the Russo-Georgian war they ensured that an escalation was prevented and normal trade was retained. On the other hand there is the matter of EU crackdown on the black market. The EU has a strict policy on the engagement of a state with the black market. This causes problems for South-Ossetia which heavily relies on the black market. The lack of openness towards the EU is partially caused by this reliance on the black market. South-Ossetia needs the black market out of sheer necessity. It needs the black market to supplement its lack of natural resources. The Russian economic support is significant, but it is not enough. The South-Ossetian leadership also profits from the black market personally and as a result it is unlikely that any reform should be expected.

Furthermore, the South-Ossetian leadership has profited from the ties with Russia. The South-Ossetians have also benefitted from the Russian ties. Consequently, South-Ossetians seem reluctant to rejoin Georgia, because this would mean a drop in living standards. At least it stands to reason that the economic pull from Georgia is not significant enough that South-Ossetians are tempted to reintegrate with Georgia. However, there has also been a downside to the Russian support. This can be explained by the sanctions that the EU and other international partners have issued. These sanctions have had their effect on the Russian economy, but they have also had an effect on the South-Ossetian economy. Perhaps even more significant are the diplomatic implications of these sanctions. The nature of the sanctions is that they are a low level form of disapproval. This disapproval has resulted in a growing gap between Russia and the EU. The growing gap means that the EU and its members seem even more reluctant to recognise South-Ossetian independence.

South-Ossetian independence would mean that the Russian influence in the Caucasian neighbourhood would not diminish. In the last couple of years there have been a couple diplomatic incidents between Russia and the West, the Crimean annexation, the Skripal affair and the MH-17

disaster. All of which are connected to an EU-member state or occurred in the European neighbourhood. These incidents are exemplary of the current EU-Russia rivalry and consequently they are also indicative of the faltering EU-Russia relationship. The end result is that a diplomatic resolution for the South-Ossetian frozen conflict seems further away than it has ever been. Especially now that the EU seems more concerned about the conservation of its sphere of influence and the newfound Russian assertiveness. The newfound Russian assertiveness has its implications for the European security matters. Which brings us to the final element that we will pay attention to, the security dilemmas.

Most of the EU-member states are also part of NATO and as a result an EU military has never been created, since there was not need for it. However, Russia is not part of NATO and it seems unlikely that they will join NATO anytime soon. This means that Russia and the EU-members do not have coordinated military platform. Russia and the EU do, on occasion, cooperate in some areas or at least except the others lead in some scenarios. An example of this is the presence of Russian troops in South-Ossetia. They acted as peacekeepers, although it seems more likely that the presence of Russian troops was to dissuade a Georgian attack. It did not in fact dissuade the Georgian army to attack South-Ossetia and the Russian army chose to act on it. The result was the Russo-Georgian war in which no intervention of NATO or a condemnation of the EU occurred. This in turn shows the willingness of the EU and its members to ensure a localised conflict and to make sure that an all-out war is prevented. There have been some security matters in which Russia and the EU have cooperated, most prominently is the OSCE.

The overall trend of EU-Russia cooperation in security matters has been that both parties have been willing to work together as long as it suits them. Furthermore, both sides seem unwilling to allow a military conflict to escalate. The EU has tried to promote peace throughout the European continent. Which can be seen in its goal for the conflict resolutions in the frozen conflicts and the manner in which the EU has treated the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the Russo-Georgian war. In both cases the EU tried to prevent the conflict from escalating, although the EU has condemned the Crimean annexation. Russia has made some aggressive moves in the last decade, but still seems intent on keeping the focus on localised conflicts and ensuring that an all-out war with NATO is prevented.

This thesis started with the Zijlstra-affair, the dutch minister of Foreign Affairs who lied about a meeting with Putin and the image of a highly aggressive state that he created. Throughout this thesis the background has been shaped by a lack of mutual understanding, a plethora of ideas about the other side and a focus on the gains of one's own side. As Mark Galeotti says the EU-Russian relationship appears to be a Great Game II. Russia and the EU are part of each others existence and isolation from on another would be unwise. This is especially important to conflict resolution concerning the frozen conflicts. For the South-Ossetian case can only be solved if all parties agree on a solution and the search for a desirable solution can only be successful if all concerned parties work together. In the meantime South-Ossetia has to wait and bide its time, as it has done for the last three decades.

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