Russia-Eurasia Relations

Russia-Eurasia Relations:

Actors, Issues and Challenges

Edited by

Merve Suna Ozel Ozcan

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TO MY FAMILY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The purpose of the emergence of this book is to question the Russian Federation's great power status, especially regarding the developments in the international arena since the 2000s. Hence, the capacity of Russia's power in Eurasian geography is fundamental. As in the past, developments in Eurasian geography, which is one of the central regions of the international system, are gaining importance today.

Knowledge production is a socially constructed endeavour that can only be achieved in a social and academic environment shared with friends and colleagues. I would like to thank the following people for making important contributions to my academic and personal life. I would like to thank Prof. Dr Gonca Bayraktar Durgun, Assoc. Prof. Dr Mehmet Emin Erendor, Assist. Dr Emine Erden Kaya, Assoc. Prof. Dr Hatice Çelik and Lecturer Umut Kahraman for their valuable support at every step of this publication.

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—Merve Suna Ozel Ozcan
Ankara, 2023

PREFACE

There have been great power changes in world history and the international system in the last five centuries. The wars and their actors during this period point to the power of international rule-making and institutional structuring. In an unparalleled manner, the ascent and decline of dominant nations were due to striving to establish and enforce global regulations to retain their hegemonic status within the international system. This effort has created each major actor's own regional and global power field.

One example of great power is Russia. For about three centuries, the Russians competed with the other great powers of the time. In this respect, the Russians tried to maintain their position as a great power in the international arena, not only in the traditional period but also in the Cold War era. Indeed, as one of the leading actors of the bipolar structure during the Cold War period, Russia's position against the USA and the West on the axis of ideological polarisation is important. After 1945, while the effects of World War II continued, the USSR, which led the communist bloc as a superpower in the international system, tried to maintain this power until the early 1990s. As a matter of fact, with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, in 1989, the ramparts of communist and capitalist ideological polarization were also demolished. Thus, the Cold War period ended with the collapse of the USSR.

The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives was written by Zbigniew Brzezinski to analyse Eurasia and the great power. In Brzezinski's words, in 1991, the "heartland," one of the most important regions on which geopolitics is based, resulted from its being erased from the global map. At this point, the study aimed to analyse power struggles in this region, which is stated to have been removed from the map. In this context, the restoration of the power lost by the Russians since 1991, which started in 2000 (especially under the rule of Vladimir Putin), is important in terms of regaining the position of Great Russia and great power. Therefore, this book aims to analyse the great powers' challenges in Eurasia within the framework of strategic interests, conflict, and cooperation.

On the other hand, the size and impact of the global crises experienced in the 2000s also started the process that led Russia to take important steps in

its foreign policy, especially in the Middle East and the Eurasian region. In this context, Putin, who wants to show the return of Great Russia to the international arena, has shaped Russia's foreign policy with a focus on power. This situation continues with the Russia-Ukraine War that started in February 2022, which especially took place after the Georgian Intervention in 2008.

In the first chapter, Asst. Prof. Dr Mustafa Onur Tetik compares the relations of Belarus and Ukraine with Russia. In his study, Asst. Prof. Dr Tetik suggests that they protect their independence in the event of hostile tactics by the regional hegemon; the post-Soviet republics must establish security strategies to confront any challenges originating from the former master.

After the Cold War, a new era began in the region, with the countries that gained their independence from the USSR acquiring a place in the international system. After 1991, the absence of strong international gravity in Russia increased the relations of many countries with the West. In the world, there are regions caught between identity and power. In this respect, the ideological origin of the Russian Federation foreign policy goals is connected with its great power position. As I mentioned, this bond started to show itself clearly after 2000. This has led the Russian Federation to use more hard power. My colleague Ejazul Haq Ateed and I analyse this foreign policy process in the second chapter. We use "identity" in this study to refer to political identity as it is represented in the structure of Russian foreign policy behaviour. In this context, the basic argument of this study is that while Russia's foreign policy has undergone behavioural changes, its ideological core, which consists of authoritarianism and the ideal of great power, has remained intact. As a result, conflicting identity narratives emerged in the Kremlin after the independence of the nations in this region. Moreover, a variety of political, economic, and security challenges are part of the regional order. Though, at first, the Eurasian nations leaned towards the West and raised significant doubts about the regional Eurasian order in what was known as Russia's backyard, Moscow’s supremacy in the region cannot be diminished.

In the third chapter, Dr Yusuf Abubakar Wara examines Russia’s hard power policy with a theoretical framework. This study critically accounts for Putin's enthusiasm for Russia's geopolitical clout via a rigid power approach that defies Western admonition and somewhat confrontational actions. Dr Wara states that the concentric circle of Putin's foreign policy has been on a pendulum between his country's peregrination for

geopolitical might and maintaining excellent power status. Also, he indicates that Putin's invasions of Georgia, in 2008, and Ukraine, in 2022, are prime examples. However, Dr Wara's study suggests that in the contemporary global village, hard power by itself cannot be a perfect and sole prescription for obtaining and/or maintaining great power status. Hence, in the Russian context, soft power should also be preferred to its counterpart.

On the other hand, the Russian Federation improves its status by regional cooperation, as it can be a successful step for the interaction process created by globalisation for new empires. The Russian Federation continues to maintain its power, especially in its immediate surroundings, which it defines as its geography. However, this does not mean that it is a mere regional power. China is one of the main actors in Eurasian politics. Although China and Russia have distinct perspectives and goals for the international system, they both agree on the importance of a multipolar world. Dr Saroj Kumar Aryal and Dr Simant Shankar Bharti analyse the changing nature of geopolitical power in Central Asia in the fourth chapter. In this study, the authors focus on the evaluation of the region, and this study turns its attention to the question of what the escalating geopolitical conflict between China and Russia means for their bilateral ties. Also, Dr Aryal and Dr Shankar analyse the engagement strategy and geopolitical objectives of both Russia and China independently.

The fifth chapter on China's and Russia's great power positions was written by Assistant Professor Dr Mukesh Shankar Bharti. Dr Bharti analyses China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the roles of Russia and India. With China's growing power in the international and regional system, China has constructed the BRI project. This project spans a wide geographical area, which includes Africa and Eurasian regions. Also, this study aims to analyse Russia's crucial position in the tense situation between China and India.

Nonetheless, China, India, and Russia are not the only powers in the Eurasian region. In this region, especially after the Second World War, its relations with the USA attracted attention from Japan, which is a remarkable actor. In the sixth chapter, Lecturer Dr Yusuf Avci analyses Japanese foreign policy towards Central Asia between 1997 and 2022. Dr Avci states that, after the fall of the USSR, Japan's diplomatic relations with the countries of Central Asia commenced gradually. Also, Japan has been shown to be a desirable partner for emerging nations all over the world due to its third-largest economy and development experience. In

addition to this favourable position, the Silk Road Diplomacy of Prime Minister Hashimoto was the first attempt to develop a framework for Japan's strategy in the area.

Another regional actor is the Republic of Korea. Associate Prof. Dr Hatice Çelik explains Russia's and South Korea's relations in the seventh chapter. Dr Çelik states that, since the country's establishment, the rivalry and struggle among the regional powers has had a considerable impact on Korea's foreign policy; Russia is also one of those powers. In her study, Dr Çelik also analyses Russian-Korean relations in the context of the Russia-Ukraine War.

The African continent has been important geographically throughout history. The power struggle that exists, here, also affects world politics. In this respect, the region has gained even more importance, especially with China's BRI. So much so that the bond between Eurasia and this region has been strengthened enormously. Another important work was written by Associate Prof. Dr Mursel Bayram. In the eighth chapter, he analyses Russia-China relations by employing the concept of Myanmarisaton. This study focuses on Russia's and China's rivalry in the African continent. Associate Prof. Dr Bayram states that Myanmar is located inside China's natural area of influence and related is that China views other Great Powers and its neighbours as being of "key importance." Also, according to him, Chinese influence in Southeast Asia and Africa are different scopes. So, in this chapter, he examines the systemic change between Russia and China in Myanmar.

In the ninth chapter, Dr Selcuk Efe Kucukkambak studies the changing fiscal policy and power in the Eurasian region while highlighting the rivalry between the great powers as one of the subjects in international affairs that has received the greatest study over the past century. The USA fell behind its two main competitors, China and Russia, as a result of some developments in the nineteenth century. He focuses on Russian-dominant policy in the region. He also analyses the Russian Federation's relations with the US, Eurasia, and Europe in the New World Order.

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CHAPTER ONE

SLAVIC (UN)COUPLING? COMPARING THE RELATIONS OF BELARUS AND UKRAINE WITH RUSSIA

MUSTAFA ONUR TETIK

Introduction: Bandwagoning, Balancing or Hedging?

New independent states emerged following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. The post-Soviet nations' policy preferences in their relations with their former master, Russia, have been one of the important questions of international politics. The structural intertwinement of these countries in different fields, such as the economy and military, called into question whether those countries can act autonomously in the international system. Political history revealed to us that some countries were able to go their own way to some extent whereas some are still stuck in the orbit of the Russian Federation (RF). Russia's official withdrawal from the former Soviet Republics did not terminate its interest in those countries and regions. Russia's "near abroad policy" has been a priority in its agenda of international affairs.

In the RF's near abroad plans, Slavic countries Ukraine and Belarus have a special place because of the supposed unity of identity. They were considered integral parts of the greater "Russian World," not only because of their common Soviet or imperial past but also their national identity and ancient history. According to the hegemonic Russian elites, this "fact" bestows privileges to "*Velikorossi* / the Great Russians" (Russia) to intervene in the domestic affairs of "*Malorossi* / Small Russians" (Ukraine) or "*Belarossi* / White Russians" (Belarus). Mother Russia can reward, punish or limit the "kids" as she desires. The question, here, is how the smaller/weaker post-Soviet Slavic nations responded to that attitude and how their policies stemmed from this mindset. In this study, we attempt to

address this question by employing the concepts borrowed from neo-realist literature in international relations: "bandwagoning," "balancing" and "hedging." This study compares the foreign policy preferences of Belarus and Ukraine vis-a-vis the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It shows the effect of certain variables (national identity, economy, military, regime) on a weak country's choice between the policies of bandwagoning, balancing and hedging against a powerful neighbour, in the post-Soviet case.

Weak states pursue various foreign policies, such as "hiding," "transcendence" and "specialization" (Ian 2003, 2; Schroeder 1994), to cope with threats perceived from powerful states. Nevertheless, there are two main courses of action that a state follows when it confronts a superior power in the realist literature of international relations: balancing and bandwagoning. "*Balancing* is defined as allying with others against the prevailing threat; *bandwagoning* refers to alignment with the source of danger" (Walt 1990, 17). The existence of a great power imbalance between two states, especially in the same neighbourhood, will lead a small state to pursue certain alliance strategies to enhance its national security. The first thing that comes to one's mind to increase the sense of security in a realist environment is the weaker side's maximisation of its power by either internally or externally balancing against the powerful state (Waltz 1979, 118).

However, it is not always the case. The weaker states sometimes bandwagon to guarantee their survival by appeasing the stronger state's demands and ambitions to a certain extent. The weaker state may not have the resources and capacity to internally balance the greater power or, in the case of external balancing, the weaker state's allies either "may not be able to provide assistance quickly enough" (Walt 1990, 25) or may not have an appetite to disturb the stronger state. Besides, factors like the weaker states' particular history with the stronger state (Güner 2017, 21) or drivers like common identity have the potential to impact which course of action will be pursued. In addition to these two policies, states sometimes prefer the policy of "hedging." Although it has several definitions (Ciorciari ve Haacke 2019), hedging is simply the policy where a state strengthens itself, mainly militarily, while it maintains cooperation with a potentially adversarial powerful state to prepare for a possible confrontation in the future (Koga 2018, 634). Therefore, it is a form of a temporary "insurance" policy of a smaller state against a greater and "necessary evil" until the powerful state does not honour its promises or security guarantees and turns against the smaller state (Lake 1996, 15).

Then, the question stands: Which variables impact the alliance decisions of a weaker state when it confronts a more powerful state? Why do weaker states prefer to balance, bandwagon or hedge? It is primarily better to look at power elements and their distribution between the states. According to Kenneth Waltz, the components of power in international politics are "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence" (Waltz 1979, 131). The distribution of these variables can determine the choice of a smaller state because the function of an alliance is a mechanism for aggregating capabilities (Sangtu 2007, 151). Besides, factors like the level of interdependence, regime types, identity issues, personal interests of elites, the benign or malign character of the powerful state, etc., might also influence such a choice. All these elements might be variables of foreign policy actions and they can be tested accordingly. In this study, we will employ the impacts of (1) regime type, (2) economic power/dependency, (3) military capacity/dependency and (4) national identity to reveal why post-Soviet countries either balance or bandwagon vis-à-vis the Russian Federation (RF). The post-Soviet states have to develop security strategies to counter the potential threats emerging from the former master to secure their independence in the cases of belligerent policies of the regional hegemon. We will assess the strategies of Belarus and Ukraine against the potential Russian threat.

Imperative Coupling: Belarus and Russia

During the early post-Cold-War days, the newly established Belarus was in political and economic turmoil, and its industry and economy were heavily dependent on Russia because of the USSR's integration with the economies of the Soviet republics (Robertson-Major 2019, 37). Belarus's unique position among the post-Soviet republics is its location and identity that lies between Russia and Europe (Allison, White and Light 2005). This gave Belarus the chance to construct its foreign affairs via a balanced course. Although Belarus desired to pursue a neutral position between the East and the West and independent foreign policy at the beginning (Robertson-Major 2019, 37), it joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a founder in 1991. In 1992, Belarus ratified "the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty" and entered the military alliance being built by Moscow with the other post-Soviet countries (Kłysiński 2018). In the political realm, there was structural chaos and competition between political camps, which paved the way for the authoritarian rule of Alexander Lukashenko (Silitski 2003, 38–40). As a poorly armed country,

with a dependent economy, that shares common Slavic identity, and that failed to democratise, Belarus bandwagoned with the RF in its early days.

Belarus adopted a new national constitution, empowering the presidential leadership, by transferring powers to this position and Alexander Lukashenko was elected the Belarusian president, the position that he still maintains (Polglase-Korostelev 2020, 39). This was a turning point in the history of Belarus to properly lay down the internal and external political prospects of the new independent republic. Although "Belarus possessed the structural foundation on which democracy could have been built" (Korosteleva, Lawson and Marsh 2003, 4), an authoritarian regime was built gradually, by Lukashenko, like in the RF. The proximity between the two countries' regime types has remained to this day. The presidency of Lukashenko "significantly sped up the expansion of Russian influence to include Belarus" and Russian-Belarusian integration (Kłysiński 2018). This act of bandwagoning was mainly dependent on the Slavic brotherhood, namely the shared identity. A distinct "Belarusian" national identity, separate from Slavic/Russian identity, has not been popular among the population. Russian was elevated to a state language in 1995, "effectively as the language of government and business, and in the politics of the present leadership of the country, which does not recognise any distinctive Belarusian traits" (Marples 2003). This governmental stand on the national identity enabled this foreign policy behaviour.

Nevertheless, Belarus's economic weakness and dependence also played an important role in the choice of bandwagoning. Belarus was uninterested in economic reforms and strengthened the administrative control over the market economy (Lawson 2003, 126). Belarus's GDP could not reach the level of 1990 until 2004 (The World Bank Data 2022a). Likewise, the military spending (The World Bank Data 2022b) and the number of military personnel (The World Bank Data 2022c) of Belarus stayed low until the 2000s, in parallel with its economy. All these variables are the indicators of the foreign policy actions of Belarus vis-à-vis the powerful RF. Eventually, the Union State, an international institution seeking "a politically and economically integrated union" (Information Analysis Portal of the Union State 2022) between two states was established in 1999. This was the step that institutionalised Belarus's bandwagoning with the RF. However, this did not mean that Lukashenko made significant concessions from Belarusian sovereignty because the Union neither required sovereignty-sharing nor turned into a supranational institution (Polglase-Korostelev 2020, 40). Some argued that Belarus became a sort of "vassal" of the RF at the end of the 1990s (Robertson-Major 2019, 39),

and Belarus definitely has bandwagoned with Russia, but it also protected its independence and sovereignty.

During the early 2000s, the nature of the relationship between Belarus and the RF began to change. Vladimir Putin's attempts to completely subjugate Belarus through the mechanisms of the Union State received backlash from Lukashenko:

> Even though Lukashenko never formally withdrew from the scheme for integration with Russia, out of fear of losing sovereignty he successfully blocked the development of that process, while at the same time trying to retain the highest possible level of Russian subsidies, which were vital in order to shore up Belarus's outdated centrally controlled economy. (Kłysiński 2018)

Lukashenko perceived the organisation as a union of equals, whereas Putin pressured Belarus into incorporation into the RF, which would mean the suicide of an independent entity. Thus, Lukashenko started to block the process. Due to this stalemate, Putin planned to move relations with Belarus to the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), in 2000, to integrate post-Soviet nations into the RF (Polglase-Korostelev 2020, 40). At this point, the European Union (EU) appeared as a potential balancing power for Belarus against the RF (Gökırmak 2010). However, Lukashenko did not put close relations with the EU on the opposite pole of the RF. He portrayed Belarus as a "bridging country" between the RF and the EU, and did not want such policies to occur at the expense of its relations with the RF (Allison, White and Light 2005, 490–91).

Nevertheless, there were critical obstacles for Belarus to use the EU to balance the RF. Besides Belarus's economic and military dependence on the RF, the EU's normative foreign policies seem to hinder such a policy choice because of the regime type issue. For instance, the EU condemned the Belarusian constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections in 2004 (Lobjakas 2004). While the EU was blocking Belarus from the West, due to supposed authoritarian policies, offering "conditional" economic incentives and supporting the opposition, Russia still remained their main ally because Putin was not pressuring Lukashenko for democratisation (Ambrosio 2006, 417–18). Besides, the failing integration process between the two countries in the political area was comparatively successful in the military field and deepened the military cooperation (Deyermond 2004). Belarus did not want completely alienate the EU but it still bandwagoned with the RF throughout the 2000s.

Although "Belarus has given its support to Russia's often controversial international positions, such as non-recognition of Kosovo in 1999" (Robertson-Major 2019, 39), Belarus's reaction to the 2008 Russo-Georgia War did not satisfy Moscow. Lukashenko declared that "Russia had no other option" (Tardieu 2009, 21) but Minsk also refused to recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as the RF expected, which "perplexed" Moscow (Reuters 2008). Following this development, the relations between the two countries began to be strained in different fields like the supplies of gas, banning of exports and media (Parfitt 2010). In those days, the EU initiated the "Eastern Partnership Project" towards countries, including Belarus, for democratisation and to remove Belarus from the RF's orbit via economic incentives. However, Belarus still did not prefer to politically ally itself with the EU and attempted to use the EU option as leverage. Lukashenko stated that Belarus "flies with two wings: Russia and Europe" (Tardieu 2009, 22). These policies cannot be considered as balancing against the RF. The policy of Belarus was "hedging," in which Belarus sought to "navigate triangular relations" with the EU and the RF, and pursued "limited or ambiguous alignment vis-a-vis one or more major powers" (Ciorciari ve Haacke 2019, 368). Despite all these developments, the RF's overwhelming domination of Belarus's international trade, high-level military cooperation, common identity discourses and similar regime types prevented to removal of the Russian anchor from Belarus.

The annexation of Crimea, by the RF, in 2014, shook the relationship between Minsk and Moscow because of the ambivalent attitude of Belarus towards the case and its non-recognition of the self-proclaimed independence of the breakaway quasi-states of Donetsk and Luhansk. These developments culminated in Lukashenko approaching the EU out of fear of invasion by the RF. For instance, in 2015, Lukashenko freed political prisoners and the EU suspended most of its sanctions against Belarus. These were tactics to improve relations to counterweight Russian influence over the country. Unsurprisingly, Russia took countermeasures to avoid such a move and economically punished Belarus, whose economy predominantly relied on the RF (Polglase-Korostelev 2020, 40–41). One should bear in mind that Belarus has already partly surrendered its military and economic autonomy to the RF (Robertson-Major 2019, 52–53). Since it was still relying on the RF economically and militarily, Lukashenko blamed Ukraine for the crisis, albeit with non-recognition of Crimea (Radio Free Europe 2014) or the breakaway republics as Russian.

Belarus played a careful diplomatic game between Russia, Ukraine and the EU, trying to avoid the wrath of any side, which helped to improve its relations with the West (Shraibman 2016). Lukashenko even knocked on the door of the International Money Fund (IMF) for loans to help the Belarusian economy, which was hit by the developments in the RF (Ayres 2017). Even though relations between Russia and Belarus turned into a soft clash in different fields (e.g., Russia banned some imports from Belarus) and Lukashenko expressed his discontent with the Russian expansionism (Anishchanka 2015), Belarus could not move away from the orbit of the former master because of structural restraints. Regarding regime type, Lukashenko's unwavering grip on power hindered the convenient conditions for the proper support of the EU. Therefore, timid attempts for rapprochement with the West cannot be categorised as balancing since Belarus, still, took official foreign policy steps in parallel with the RF, like saying no to the UN resolution 68/262 about the territorial integrity of Ukraine, with only ten countries including Russia (UN Digital Library 2014). Lukashenko kept bandwagoning with and appeasing the RF along with weak attempts to diversify policy options to prevent any possible loss of Belarusian sovereignty because of Russian expansionism.

Despite minor frictions and Belarus's humble steps toward the EU, Russia remained as the staunchest ally of Belarus. Besides structural restraints and the lack of willingness, the EU was not "actively trying to remove Belarus from the orbit of its powerful neighbour" and a majority of Belarusians were "in favour of alliances with Russia" (Zogg 2018, 4). In 2018, the RF started to work on the revitalisation of the Union State project to integrate Belarus more tightly into the RF by using both carrot and stick policies. New agreements were signed to deepen the economic integration of Belarus into the RF, although Belarusian officials showed their discontent with the process due to Russian pressure. Meanwhile, the EU also took weaker steps, like visa facilitation agreement, to increase its influence. Belarus also attempted "to reduce Russian influence by having denied Russia permission to host an air base on its territory, in September 2019" (Polglase-Korostelev 2020, 42). Belarus did not want to share its sovereignty with either Russia or the EU, but to stay as an independent nation.

However, Lukashenko's crackdown on the protestors after the 2020 presidential election brought Western condemnation and sanctions, and Belarus's responses to the West (Chernyshova 2022). Lukashenko's fear of Western intervention to oust him from his post gave new breath to the

Belarus-Russia integration process. Belarus and the RF signed new agreements, including a joint military doctrine that is one of the ultimate manifestations of military bandwagoning with Russia (Radio Free Europe 2021). Therefore, predictably, Belarus clearly sided with the RF in the ongoing 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, although it did not send its own troops. Lukashenko also declared, for the first time, that annexed Crimea is "legally" Russian territory (AlJazeera 2021). Today, around 60 % of Belarus's exports are going to Russia (Trading Economics 2022a) and around 45 % of imports are coming from Russia (Trading Economics 2022b). This is a clear indication of economic dependence. Common technical infrastructure, joint doctrine and the level of interoperability of the militaries of the two countries show that their military cooperation is very strong (Pugačiauskas 2019, 247–48). The authoritarian rules of two strong men also resemble the regimes of the two countries along with Slavic common identity discourses. Although Belarus rarely attempted to pursue "hedging" vis-a-vis the RF, it has never been in any condition to "balance" the RF with any other power. All the variables examined in this study push Belarus to bandwagon with the RF.

Painful Uncoupling: Ukraine and Russia

Ukraine's relations with the RF have been thorny since the declaration of its independence. Ironically, the shared Slavic identity is one of the most important sources of frictions. Although the RF under Boris Yeltsin recognised the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine, Russian elites and people are reluctant to recognise that fact and perceive Ukraine as part of Greater Russia (Zaborsky 1995). The shared identity does not automatically create warm relations between subjects of international politics. Sometimes, they may be sources of tension, as in the case of Ukraine and Russia. This attitude of Russia provoked the Ukrainians to prove themselves as a distinct sovereign nation and pursue foreign policies accordingly. Ukrainian elites have highlighted the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian identity from Russianness since the very early days of independence (Kuzio 1998). Ukrainian officials also declared their interest in membership in Western institutions (Dahlburg 1991). Their understanding of the CIS, which was supposed to replace the Soviet Union with loose ties, diverged (Olszanski 2001) from Russia's and most of the others.' Besides, in the early days of the post-Cold War era, some major disputes occupied the agendas of the two countries, regarding each other. Ukraine's denuclearisation and the Crimea question, including the Black Sea Fleet dispute, were two of the most important ones. Russia pressured Ukraine

for partition of Crimea and the unilateral control of the Black Sea Fleet that was under Ukrainian jurisdiction, along with some territorial claims over Ukrainian soil. To enforce its will, the RF applied economic leverage to harm Ukrainian industry and attempted to impose diplomatic isolation (Brzezinski 1994, 74).

In the early years of independence, the Ukrainian economy was very weak and its international trade was highly dependent on Russia, who made almost half of its imports (The World Bank WITS 2022a) and 40 % of its exports (The World Bank WITS 2022b). The Ukrainian economy experienced contraction, hyperinflation, budget deficit and production decline until the 2000s (Sutela 2012, 3–4). In the field of the military, the army that Ukraine assumed after the collapse of the Soviet Union was one of the largest in Europe. However, Ukraine did not have enough economic might to maintain this army, thus, it decided to reform the army by modernising it and reducing military structures and personnel (Kiryukhin 2018). Ukraine gave up its nuclear arsenal, under the security guarantees of great powers, reduced the number of its military personnel and cooperated with NATO in peacekeeping operations (Polyakov 2018). Ukraine tried to block military and economic integration with Russia, by sabotaging the CIS's processes, because Ukraine was apprehensive that Russia would dominate the post-Soviet republics via this security structure (Ham 1994). Ukraine also did not join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (the Tashkent Treaty) consisting of former Soviet republics. Besides, "Ukraine signed a document to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program in February 1994," which was a manifestation of its foreign policy posture.

Despite all its flaws, such as the absence of strong political parties and oligarch-controlled distribution of power in the 2000s, Ukraine developed a "more" democratic system compared to most of the post-Soviet republics, in which political power can be transferred via elections (Minakov and Rojansky 2018). It does not mean that Ukraine developed a full-fledged democracy, but Ukraine distinguished itself from the Belarusian or Russian model of authoritarian politics. Considering the variables that affected the Ukrainian foreign policy, mentioned above, Ukraine did not bandwagon with the RF. However, non-bandwagoning behaviour did not mean a directly open balancing policy.

> Since its independence, Kiev has oriented itself towards the West (with the slogan Nasha meta: Evropa!—Our goal: Europe!), trying to forge close ties with Western and Central Europe, as well as with the United States. But

> reality has made it necessary for Ukraine also to maintain close economic, and hence political, links with its former hegemon. (Ham 1994).

Instead of balancing one with another, Ukraine pursued hedging policies as a way of addressing "specific strategic and economic vulnerabilities" and "fallback security measures as a form of insurance" (Ciorciari ve Haacke 2019, 368) in a transitional and chaotic era. It was extremely difficult for Kyiv to adopt a policy completely separate from Moscow, despite the desire of some Ukrainian circles and timid attempts to approach the West (Olszanski 2001, 34). Despite the political clashes with the RF, who could not digest an independent Ukraine, the two states signed a friendship treaty, in 1997, which envisaged political and economic cooperation and solved major problems like the ownership of the Black Sea Fleet (Specter 1997). Ukraine agreed to the division of the armaments and bases of the Black Sea Fleet, and the basing of the Russian Fleet in Crimea under certain conditions. In 1994, Ukraine "gave up its nuclear weapons and sent the warheads to Russia for destruction" (Ivanova and Olearchyk 2022). Ukraine also shied away from joining NATO, which would have probably caused serious backlash from the RF. Ukraine desired to hold the Western card in its hand while managing the expectations of the RF.

In the 2000s, Ukraine attempted to approach the West in small steps. During this time, Ukraine showed substantial economic growth, extensive privatisation, and an increase in budget income and Western standards. The foreign policy doctrine of Ukraine considered both Russia and the US as strategic partners, and the European choice was not properly realised (Olszanski 2001, 39–41), despite the growing portion of European countries in Ukraine's international trade replacing Russia. The 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine gave new momentum to the westernisation endeavours of Ukraine that ultimately aim at balancing the RF to guarantee its survival. The Ukrainian politicians became bolder in showing their appetite for integration with the West. The Orange Revolution caused a re-evaluation of Ukraine's position in the international system, membership in the Western institutions seemed a possibility and Russian ambition to control Ukraine was decisively rejected (D'Anieri 2005, 83). Ukraine began to seek a formal alliance with NATO and the EU, which was perceived by Russia as geopolitically hostile behaviour (D'Anieri 2019, 140–41). Ukraine made significant, but not revolutionary, changes in its political regime. Nevertheless, the democratic gap between Ukraine and Russia widened as a consequence of the developments following the Orange Revolution (D'Anieri 2005, 89–90).

In the field of the military, in 2005, a new defence program was adopted, which envisaged using NATO standards and the Western approaches to military education. Since Ukraine had the ultimate desire to be part of NATO, it intensified cooperation programs with NATO and bilateral programs with individual Western countries (Polyakov 2018, 95–97). Although these programs could not realise their original aims, still, they were important sources of militarily balancing their powerful neighbour. Regarding national identity construction, Ukrainian elites maintained the Ukrainianisation of the public sphere, maximisation of differences between Russian and Ukrainian identities and legitimisation of the Ukrainian national self (Henke 2020, 5–6; Janmaat 2000). De-russification of the economy, military and identity, and small steps in democratisation, via westernisation, enabled Ukraine to balance the RF with the US and the EU.

In 2008, Ukrainian President Yushchenko officially sought NATO membership via the Membership Action Plan that, supported by the US, was a major steppingstone to militarily balancing the RF against a possible invasion (Ivanova ve Olearchyk 2022). In the Bucharest Summit, in April 2008, NATO members declared that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO" (NATO 2008). Yet the RF, via Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, declared that "Russia will do everything it can to prevent the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO" (Kramer 2008). Later in the same year, the Russian invasion of Georgia demonstrated the imminence and probability of such a belligerent move by the RF. Nevertheless, "the fast-track strategy to NATO membership failed" and domestic political events, which ended up with Viktor Yanukovych's—deemed as pro-Russian—rise to the presidency, caused "disillusionment" with the ways of westernisation policies (Kuzio 2012, 398–403). On the other hand, regarding the economy, Ukraine became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), in May 2008, which helped to balance the RF economically as well.

During the term of Yanukovych, "in April 2010, the 'Kharkiv Accords' extended the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol to 2042–47 and in July 2010 a new foreign policy was adopted that ruled out NATO membership" (Kuzio 2012, 405). Ukraine's trade with the RF saw its peak during this time (Ivanova ve Olearchyk 2022). Yanukovych was criticised for democratic backsliding and seemed hesitant about integration with the EU. However, one cannot argue that, during his time, Ukraine bandwagoned with the RF.

> While Viktor Yanukovych sought Russia's help in establishing his domestic hegemony, he did not seek to become a vassal of Russia. Instead, he sought to gain both the domestic political and economic benefits of an Association Agreement with the European Union and the benefits, including less expensive energy, from a positive relationship with Russia. (D'Anieri 2019, 251)

Ukrainian policy was hedging and trying to keep non-alignment and balance between the West and Russia, which was a much more preferable option for the RF, instead of a Ukraine allied and integrated with the West. However, the "Revolution of Dignity," the 2014 pro-Western protests and clashes with security forces in Ukraine that culminated in the impeachment of President Yanukovych, in February, changed the scene completely. Just one month after ousting him, the RF declared the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea, which was already de facto controlled by Russia. In the next month, April, Russian-backed separatists in Ukraine declared the independence and secession of Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic from Ukraine.

The Western countries and institutions sided with Ukraine and condemned and sanctioned the RF. However, no military action was taken to defend the Ukrainian territory against the aggressor. Even some countries who have special relations with Russia, like Germany, were reluctant about the sanctions. Russian diplomacy exploited the discord between Western powers. The response of Western states revealed the weaker side of the external balancing policy for the smaller country. Although the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine cases turned into a form of low-intensity warfare, Moscow failed to subjugate the Ukrainian government and Kiev did not bandwagon with the RF to alleviate the consequences. On the contrary, the annexation of Crimea and the developments in Eastern Ukraine significantly accelerated cooperation with NATO (Renz ve Whitmore 2022). Ukraine launched a new and more vast military reform, in coordination with Western partners, to raise the Ukrainian military to NATO standards. Besides, Western countries, mainly the US, "have provided Ukraine with material and technical support and assisted in training military and medical personnel" (Kiryukhin 2018). Although it is not deemed sufficient by some experts (Renz and Whitmore 2022), "Ukraine has mobilized, equipped, and trained a substantial force, which looked much more able to fight and resist invading Russian forces and to inflict serious damage to them" (Polyakov 2018, 108).

In the field of economy, Ukraine's international trade with the RF significantly fell, while trade with the EU increased, after 2014 (IMF Data

2022). Ukraine economically balanced its trade with the RF with the Western states and China. In the field of democratisation of the regime, despite an ongoing war in its territory, which generally empowers authoritarian tendencies, Ukraine kept reforming and democratising the system, especially through "the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the modestly successful reform agenda, and the support of Western partners" (Minakov and Rojansky 2018). Finally, regarding national identity, the 2014 protests and the annexation of Crimea helped reinforce the borders of Ukrainian identity from Russianness and anti-Russian rhetoric became an important factor in Ukrainian national identity discourses (Henke 2020). The RF elites also used the "Russian minority" card, more than presenting the Ukrainians as "*Malorossi* / small Russians," which they think justifies the intervention in Ukrainian domestic affairs. The situation in these variables empowered the balancing attitude of the Ukrainian state against the RF, which increased the discontent of the Russian state, which does not desire a country to be economically and militarily integrated with the West so close to its borders.

Russia's aggressive attitude within its vicinity, especially because of "post-imperial syndrome," (Kailitz ve Umland 2019) Ukraine's refusal to bandwagon with the RF, and Ukraine's balancing the RF with the Western powers heralded a new crisis between the two countries. The low-intensity conflicts and tensions, built up over years, culminated in Russia's full-fledged invasion attempt of Ukraine in February 2022. The power asymmetry between these governments and militaries and Ukraine's resistance to the invasion inevitably pushed the Ukrainian government, under President Volodymyr Zelensky, toward the Western powers. Although there had been no Western boots on the battleground by mid-2022, the US and the EU inflicted unprecedented sanctions on the RF and sent significant military support to Ukraine. The RF's attempt at *blitzkrieg* failed against Ukraine (Pekar 2022) and the ongoing conflict turned into a war of attrition that might take much longer than expected.

Conclusions and Implications

Two post-Soviet Slavic countries have followed very different paths in their relations with their former master, Russia. This study showed some variables that caused this outcome. Firstly, while Belarusian perception and depiction of national identity clung to the pro-Slavic understanding that approaches it to the *velikorossi*, the Great Russians of the RF, Ukrainian officials mostly highlighted national differences to justify

sovereignty as an independent nation. This demonstrates national identity is not a given phenomenon but is contingent, depending on how it is constructed and perceived. Today, discourses in Ukraine not only underscore distinctness but also anti-Russian rhetoric has been adopted due to the invasions. Therefore, while the national identity discourses of Belarus enabled bandwagoning as a course of foreign policy, Ukrainian discourses made the policy of balancing possible.

Secondly, dependence and economic power are important factors that influenced the choices of these two states. In the beginning, both countries were highly dependent on the RF because of the inherited intertwined economic architecture of the Soviet Union. However, over the years, Ukraine reduced its commercial dependence on Russia, which gave it a freer hand in its interrelations with the RF. Its trade and economic relations with Russia did not completely end but decreased significantly. That's why Ukraine was able to change its hedging policy, from the early days of independence, to balancing, later. Belarus, on the other hand, always stayed dependent on Russian economic support and trade relations. This inescapably enabled Russia to have more say in the policy preferences of Belarus. By failing to overcome its structural economic dependence on the RF, Belarus did not have much choice, other than bandwagoning with Russia, today.

Thirdly, in the field of the military, both countries had dependency and strong bonds with the RF. Ukraine inherited massive military infrastructure, personnel and equipment from the Soviet Union that it could not economically maintain. As part of reforms in the military, firstly, it reduced the capacity to sustainable levels and, secondly, via cooperation with NATO programs, it began to transform its army to Western standards. These developments enabled Ukraine to pursue a balancing policy against the RF because had the country stayed as militarily dependent on Russia, carrying out such a political manoeuvre would not have been an easy task. When it comes to the Belarusian state, it could not disconnect itself from the Russian domination in the field of military as well. On the contrary, Russian and Belarusian unification efforts in military matters deepened over time, which ended up with a common military doctrine. This dependence on the powerful side inevitably prevents the smaller state from acting independently in international politics.

Fourthly, the apparent divergence between Ukrainian and Belarusian regimes is another factor that influenced their attitudes towards the RF.

This might be the most important element between Belarus and the RF that also affected the other variables. Belarusian leader Lukashenko's ambition to retain his political power and position, which necessarily consolidated the authoritarian regime in his country, hampered Belarus from developing strong relations with the Western countries that would have helped the country to become more economically and militarily independent from Russia. The RF itself developed a more authoritarian regime and did not have a problem with Belarus's authoritarianism. The EU's conditional approach and the RF's unconditional embrace of Belarus's regime contributed to Belarus's bandwagoning with the RF. On the contrary, despite all its flaws and setbacks, Ukraine slowly but steadily walked on the way to democratisation. Ukraine is a country where the peaceful transition of presidential powers can take place, whereas the presidents of Belarus and Russia have clung to power through authoritarian practices for years. As of today, Lukashenko has controlled the power in Belarus for twenty-eight years and Vladimir Putin, in Russia, for twenty-two years including the temporary prime ministry term. The regimes of these two strong men drove Belarus to bandwagon with the RF.

One of the most problematic sides of the bandwagoning policy to ensure national security is that current bandwagoning increases the level of bandwagoning in the future. It becomes harder and harder to pursue alternative policy paths over time. It may turn into a vicious circle. It seems hard to change policy towards the powerful neighbour from bandwagoning to balancing. The small country might try to follow a hedging policy as a transitional period unless the powerful country compels it to subjugate or to be entangled by brute force. This potential aggression of the powerful state might receive different reactions. On the one hand, Russia's belligerent behaviour in its neighbourhood, for instance, made Ukraine look for solutions for its national security in alternative options, like Western countries and institutions. The fear of loss of sovereignty, a legal demise, can be counted as the most effective impetus for a such quest. On the other hand, Belarus became anxious about such physical aggression by the RF and mostly tried to appease the former master by giving tolerable concessions that were sometimes perceived as being a vassal country. Therefore, Russia's bellicose inclination, because of the Russian elites' imperial mindset, became an intervening variable in the relations of Belarus and Ukraine with Russia. Besides, the change in governments and presidents is also an important intervening variable in the case of Ukraine, which influenced foreign policy preferences of the Ukrainian state and Russia's approach to Ukraine. This is development that has not been experienced in Belarus yet.

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