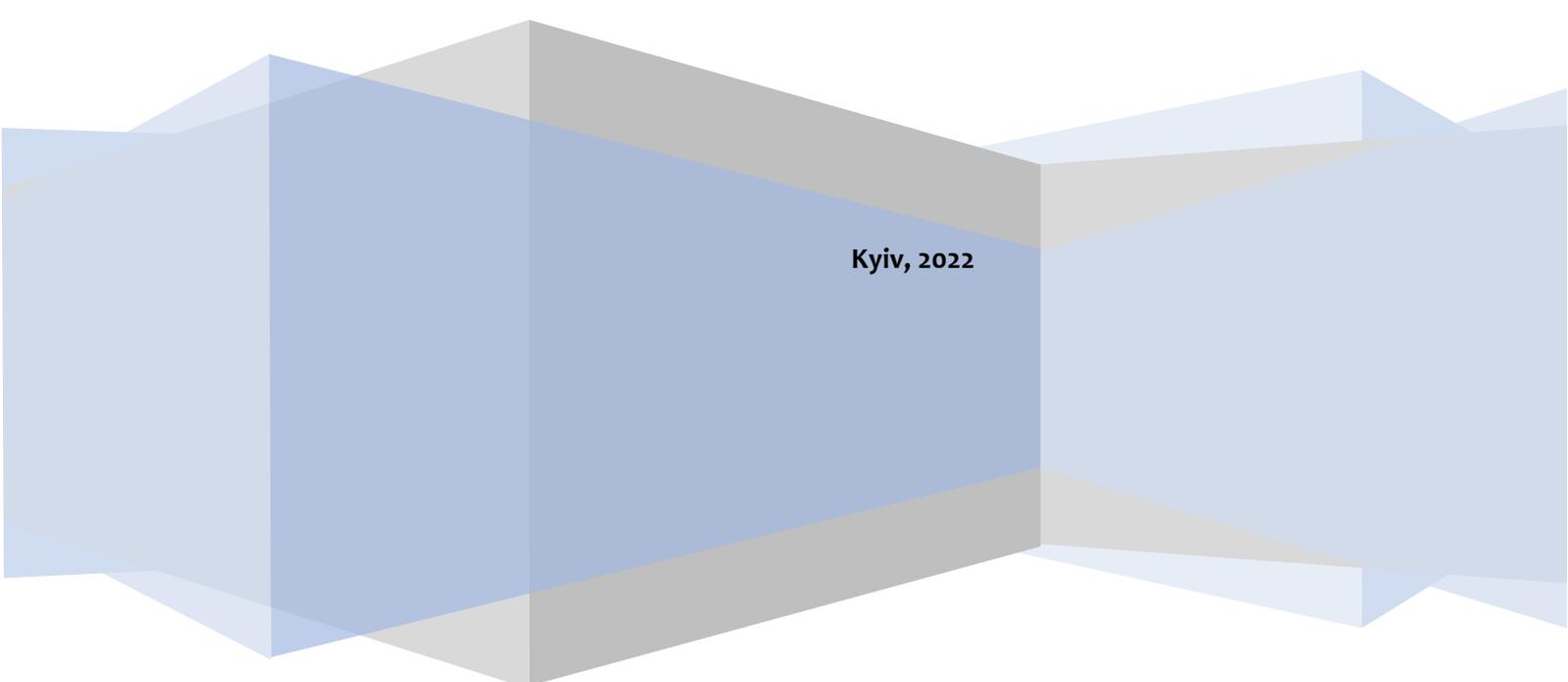


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**The Place of Romania in the Foreign Policy of Russia:  
Conclusions for Bucharest from the Perspective of Kyiv**

**Policy brief**

**Yaroslav Matiychyk**



Kyiv, 2022

# The Place of Romania in the Foreign Policy of Russia: Conclusions for Bucharest from the Perspective of Kyiv

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The Russian war against Ukraine has become another wake-up call for the West<sup>2</sup>. The taboos on criticizing Russia are being gradually lifted bearing in mind demonstration of total disrespect to any rules by Moscow. Stigmatization of the critics of Russia as Russophobes is not trendy anymore although Russia does its best to return to “good old times” when pro-Russian narratives were dominating. Such situation opens a window of opportunity for rethinking and better understanding of Russian intentions, strategies and tactics and the place of other countries and regions in these strategies as well as reshaping of attitude towards threats coming from Russia. Also, the situation has increased interest to Ukrainian experience and expertise since the patterns Russia is applying in Ukraine may serve as a lesson for the neighboring countries endangered by Russia as well as for a wider international community.

In this regard, the place of Romania in foreign policy of Russia is relatively clear: Romania is perceived as an object of diplomatic, economic, ideological, cyber and military pressure in the Black Sea regions and such approach goes in line with the general policy in South-Eastern Eastern Europe. There are no indicators of any tactical changes in this approach. On the contrary there are plenty of indicators that such approach will sustain - it is proved by the realities on ground, current situation in the bilateral relations of Moscow and Bucharest, and security situation on the South-Eastern Europe. Romania alongside with the other countries of the region is under mass hybrid attack by Russia (similar to the attack that Ukraine faced beforehand). It's only issue of time and Russian military potential when hybrid aggression will convert into armed one. Such invasive geopolitical strategy has historical continuity<sup>3</sup> and can be illustrated by the modern times<sup>4</sup> Russian malign influence operations starting from the war in the Caucasus, on Balkans, in the Middle East and finally in the Eastern Europe when Russia was directly fueling the wars. Besides, Russia never hesitated to get engaged into the terrorist wars. And these complex efforts are in full compliance with the paradigms of «Moscow Horde», «third Rome», «Pan-Slavism», or «Soviet communism», «Neo Eurasian» approach, and «russkiy mir», the concepts often mixed and initially rooted in the ideologies of chauvinism and imperialism.

It is quite understandable and the truth is that Russia has existential war not only with Ukraine. Historically Moscovia more than often demonstrated its appetite to dominate the territories up to Gibraltar, Rome, Constantinople (Istanbul), Scandinavian fiords, Red Sea shores and Indian Ocean.<sup>5</sup> That is proved by

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<sup>2</sup> This policy brief is developed within the project “Romanian – Ukrainian Civil Society Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation. Third edition”, implemented by the Experts for Security and Global Affairs Association, Romania, in partnership with Strategic and Security Studies Group and Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian PRISM”, Ukraine, with the support of Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, a project of the German Marshall Fund. The views expressed in this policy paper are those of the author and do not necessarily coincide with those of ESGA partners

<sup>3</sup><https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/vechnaya-geopolitika-rossii/>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.pnp.ru/politics/geopoliticheskaya-osnova-budushhego-rossii.html>

<sup>5</sup><https://www.pnp.ru/politics/geopoliticheskaya-osnova-budushhego-rossii.html>

numerous studies.<sup>6</sup> Another truth is that both recent and not that recent plans and intentions are not in the past. They have been activated<sup>7</sup> and inserted into the modern geopolitics of Russia<sup>8</sup>. Russian leadership does not perceive this invasive Eurasian dominance as something utopian. Rather it perceives it as a mission and real way to glory of the “Great Russia”.<sup>9</sup> (And there is no clear vision where are the boundaries of Russian expansive ambition. We cannot exclude that it considers even global dominance (in Soviet times Russian communists had such ambition)).

Sustainability of this ideological model and the attempts to implement it on practice by each next generation in power in Russia is almost automatic and does not demand too many additional efforts since corresponds with the deeply rooted political instincts notwithstanding ethnic background, education or religious views of the politician. Russia remains a rare place in the Earth for those who want to serve the Empire, for the hypocrites and adventurists who are systematically mainstreaming, for those who are not hesitant to apply force to the weaker once and neglect human rights and can be rewarded for that and make a successful career in police or armed forces, for those who want to join the club of global players and do not expect to perform any kind of responsibility.

Those who once tasted this idea of impunity, irresponsibility and power can never get out of its gravity. This is particularly true bearing in mind that once you join the club of Russian elite or its proxies it is also supplemented with an easy access to uncontrolled power, wealth and luxury. This combination assures the mystery of Russian sustainable political legacy, which becomes dominant on the Russia’s political agenda each time when Moscow gains enough force and means for the new waves of invasion.

Therefore, now as well as beforehand the current Russia causes historical and global threat to the world order in most areas and domains. Russia as a state-carrier of such malign/monstrous ideology has to be reloaded. However, the historical process proves that such reload into something ideologically and politically acceptable for the rest of the world cannot be driven by Russia itself.<sup>10</sup> The best achievement one can expect is rotation of one violent regime by another one with the same ideological roots. However, such rotations do not hamper chauvinist and imperial essence of the Russian state although it can adapt, and deceive the world with the false demonstration of friendliness and commitment to peace of the unfortunate Russia and such approach proved to be feasible and more than once preserved the Russian state from destruction and catarsys (reload).

Bucharest should not have any illusions regarding the behavior of Moscow in the Black Sea area and regarding the plans for the region, for Romania and for South-Eastern Europe that Moscow is cherishing while expecting Ukraine will fall. Readiness for the compromises and even for any sort of capitulation may hardly prevent Romania as a state as well as Romanians as the people from the fate of the other enslaved peoples of Ural, Siberia, North and Far East.<sup>11</sup> The pressure will be growing to unacceptable and unbearable and there are clear side that the two choices Russia suggests are either total war aimed at extinction of its

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<sup>6</sup>[http://resource.history.org.ua/cgi-bin/eiu/history.exe?&l21DBN=EIU&P21DBN=EIU&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=eiu\\_all&C21COM=S&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=TRN=&S21COLORTERMS=0&S21STR=Rosiiia](http://resource.history.org.ua/cgi-bin/eiu/history.exe?&l21DBN=EIU&P21DBN=EIU&S21STN=1&S21REF=10&S21FMT=eiu_all&C21COM=S&S21CNR=20&S21P01=0&S21P02=0&S21P03=TRN=&S21COLORTERMS=0&S21STR=Rosiiia)

<sup>7</sup><https://all-politologija.ru/knigi/politologiya-uchebnoe-posobie/geopoliticheskie-interesy-rossijskoj-federacii>

<sup>8</sup><https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/neoevraziystvo-i-traditsionalizm-kak-primery-fundamentalistskoy-ideologii>

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/36838498/\\_%D0%9D%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE\\_%D0%90%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%B0\\_%D0%94%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0\\_%D0%B8\\_%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE](https://www.academia.edu/36838498/_%D0%9D%D0%B5%D0%BE%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE_%D0%90%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%B0_%D0%94%D1%83%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%B8_%D0%B5%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B9%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE)

<sup>10</sup>[https://lb.ua/blog/volodymyr\\_viatrovych/522313\\_monstr\\_frankenshteyna-rosiya.html](https://lb.ua/blog/volodymyr_viatrovych/522313_monstr_frankenshteyna-rosiya.html)

<sup>11</sup><https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/features-62409319>

enemies (genocide)<sup>12</sup>, or repressions up to total subordination and pressure up to cultural anemia.<sup>13</sup> That is applicable to all the states and peoples that get under the imperial influence of Russia.

The understanding of the aforementioned challenges and threats has to mobilize all European parties to support Ukraine in a war with Putin's Russia. Ukraine is the place where it's being decided where Moscow will stop and what will be its potential for the further expansion to the West and active hybrid aggression.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, Bucharest should be interested on strengthening its efforts in this direction, combine efforts with the EU and NATO allies, and support their respective efforts. It is getting crucially important bearing in mind that Moscow while noticing the indicators of defeat that causes its political hysteria, in order to prevent such "catastrophe" even threatens to use nuclear weapons. It even neglects the fact that it will inevitably affect its own armed forces and may affect armed forces and territories of its ally - Belarus.

Moscow constantly threatens (although often denies the respective accusations) not only with a nuclear strike (tactical), but also with the provoked technical disaster at Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). Besides, Russia pretends it does not consider the factor of the Dnieper River. In case of explosions at the NPP or any other kind of similar troubles it can lead to release of a large amount of radioactive materials into the river, and if not via the channel then through the Dnieper estuary may reach Crimea and destroy life on the peninsula, including its population. Also, it can extremely pollute the Black Sea. Obviously, Zaporizhzhia city and everything within 150 km range will also be affected. The Dnieper waters without asking the occupants permission would reach Crimea. In such comparison the missile nuclear strike seems to be even less destructive. Because, one thing is shelling the troops and their reserves with the tactical nuclear weapons and it is quite different thing to risk the explosion at the one of the biggest on the continent NPPs. Such explosion would cause extreme damage and that should have motivated Russia to be more cautious. However, Moscow demonstrates quite an opposite behavior and such behavior indirectly indicates that even Crimea can be at stake on a "great chessboard". In case of an accident at Zaporizhian NPP highly radioactive materials will spread in a Black Sea area. It will have an impact on Ankara as well as Mediterranean countries, and even Gibraltar. Besides, it is necessary to remember about the specifics of the Black Sea bottom<sup>15</sup>: if the bottom gas mixes<sup>16</sup> get inflamed from radioactive parts of Zaporizhian NPP the power of explosion of gas conglomerate will totally destroy Crimea, ruin the black Sea shore and have an impact on the Caspian Sea. The power of explosion may even result in orbital changes. These are not fantastic assumption of the author but rather the assumption of the international group of profile scientists, who studies this issue at the end of previous century.<sup>17</sup> And Moscow is well aware of this hypothesis (although Russians reject the relevance of this problem<sup>18</sup>), as well as European, Asian and American capitals are well aware of the problem. That is why Kyiv is surprised with underestimation of such global problem and reacts to it only by infamous "disturbance" and not by direct decisions and acts.

Putin's Russia is not pretending to be expanding, it plays an impressive gambling game. Putin is not crazy - he is very logical and practice-oriented in his expansion strategy. His voluntarism, arrogance and cruelty are not only the signature features of the organization he headed before the presidency, it is also reflection of

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<sup>12</sup>[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQPJkWqXZoU&ab\\_channel=Espresso.TV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQPJkWqXZoU&ab_channel=Espresso.TV)

<sup>13</sup>[https://historybooks.com.ua/prosmotr\\_podrobnuy.php?id=2860](https://historybooks.com.ua/prosmotr_podrobnuy.php?id=2860)

<sup>14</sup><https://meta.ua/uk/news/politics/51636-ukrayina-porushila-imperski-plani-putina-schodo-zahoplennya-evropi-duda/>

<sup>15</sup><https://www.dw.com/uk/%D0%B3%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%BB%D1%96%D0%B4-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BD%D1%96-%D1%87%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%80%D1%8F-%D0%B0-%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BF%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BC-%D0%B2%D1%96%D0%BD-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%83%D1%82%D0%B8/a-2480324>

<sup>16</sup><http://mapme.club/poradi/10206-chorne-more-naynebezpechnisha-u-sviti-skhovishche-sirkovodnyu.html>

<sup>17</sup><https://uofa.ru/uk/chernoe-more-gaz-na-dne-chem-opasny-vody-chernogo-morya/>

<sup>18</sup>[https://zn.ua/ukr/science/chi\\_nebezpechniy\\_sirkovoden\\_u\\_chornomu\\_mori.html](https://zn.ua/ukr/science/chi_nebezpechniy_sirkovoden_u_chornomu_mori.html)

the political culture of Russia – imperial and chauvinist, with the paradigm of «russskiy mir» in imperial crown. Moreover, Putin himself is just an instrument of this political culture, who has the mission to fix «the mistakes made» by ancient and recent tsars and emperors as well as recent leaders – Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev and Gorbachev, and to play his personal role in Russian and global history. Political logics of the historical development of Russia is the lesson to be learned: as soon as Russia gains the necessary potential it immediately starts the respective expansion. By the way, there are many observers who suggest that Putin ‘cosplays’ tsar-emperor Peter I, although in the authors opinion the image of Zhukov is more relevant. It was he, who was thinking of coup d’état in order to get rid of Khrushchev and after heading the USSR to start a nuclear war against the West to implement the historical meta-idea of Eurasian domination of Moscow (with the paradigm of Soviet communism in imperial crown).

Bearing in mind the strategic goals and foreign policy priorities of the late Russian emperors and leaders of the USSR it can be assumed that Russia has not rejected the idea of absorbing European way of life and accepting Europe, but on the condition of at least partial control over the European continent.<sup>19</sup> Obviously it refers to the Black Sea region – trade routes, searching and extraction of mineral resources, development of production etc. The same approach is relevant for the Mediterranean region. Initially Putin’s Russia expected to gain such control by means of soft power, then by means of business acquisitions in the critical domains of economics – in particular in the energy sector. In this regard Moscow was using political corruption among the European elites as a tool, converted European states into subordinated clients, aimed at gaining political control over the EU in general, collapse of Trans-Atlantic unity and pushing the US out of the EU and European affairs. And Moscow has gained a lot but has not reached all of its goals. When it turned out that soft power is not feasible anymore Moscow has decided to apply brutal force and blackmailing including nuclear strike threats.

All these facts are mentioned in order to illustrate total and universal strategy of Russian expansion and Eurasian domination, which is equally relevant for Ukraine, Poland, and Romania as well as the other countries. There should be no illusions that the non-reloaded and non-refounded Russia will ever reject these ambitions. Everyone, at least on the European continent, should understand that the meta-idea of the Eurasian domination also contains the narrative of the “mystic Russian soul” of not only elites but also “deep people”.<sup>20</sup> And «such soul» cannot be liberated from the frame of barbarian invasionism and leaning to the attempt to ruin developed and rules-based order.

It is noteworthy, that paradoxically even in Russia invasion-oriented approach there is an idea of common future for all European people and nations. And for Bucharest it should be clear that Romania is only one of the components that chauvinist Russia aims to invade in Europe.

On the one hand, Moscow in order to explain certain failures in the war for the domestic elaborates on the false victim narrative of «Russia as a victim of international conspiracy and NATO aggression», whereas on the other hand by all means tries to deceive European elites and politicians regarding its current activities, further plans and goals, ways of reaching them and costs for the victims; it aims at chaotization of political discourse and breaking unity of the consolidated Europeans who are getting less shocked but still are not ready for the straightforward decisions. It is supplemented by the bold behavior at the UN and OSCE platforms and efforts aimed at gaining support from China, North Korea, India, Iran and other countries with a noticeable military, industrial or economic potential. Moscow takes active measures to ruin the policy of sanctions and isolation of Russia and to destroy the policy of multidimensional support to Ukraine.

Moscow proposes to European elites (or their certain factions) different corruption ‘carrots’ and invigorates them to cooperate by ‘sticks’ of energy and nuclear blackmailing. Moscow mocks and stigmatizes

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<sup>19</sup><https://armyinform.com.ua/2022/06/30/yak-putin-hotiv-zahopyty-vsuyu-yevropu-j-chomu-ukrayina-zrujnuvala-jogo-plany/>

<sup>20</sup><https://www.ng.ru> › 5\_7503\_surkov

as incompetent those who try to contain Russian efforts, personally threatens all those who do not support Putin's regime, and from time to time even commits crimes and sabotage. Counteracting this can only be possible by joint efforts of the diplomatic, intelligence, counterintelligence, anti-terrorist and police bodies: counter-intelligence regime has to be significantly strengthened. Intensification of such activities can be initiated by Bucharest if not at the EU level, then at least at the level of Bucharest Nine. Such efforts would correspond with the national security and defense interests of Romania and with the Romanian interests in the region and in the EU as a whole.

Another important task is containing malign influence of the Russian propaganda channels. Russia has proved the efficiency of its propaganda 20 years ago when the issue of energy diversification in Europe was debated. Back then Russian propaganda strengthened by analytical and corruptive efforts distorted the essence of diversification of energy supplies. Instead of understanding diversification as diversification of sources, routes and agents of supplies, the discussion was limited to the discussion on mostly if not only routes of supplies. One of the key theses of Russian propaganda of the recent time focuses on stigmatizing those who reject Russian propaganda as Russophobes, marking them as losers who are unable to implement their policies and ideas, cannot support each other and are not worth of each other's support. This challenge of negative labeling of all those who disagree with Moscow at the international arena demands serious attitude from European and Western elites, as well as from regional and national leadership in Romania and Ukraine. The widely spread content and narratives of Kremlin strategists is grounded on the deep knowledge of the drawbacks of the political, legal, historical and cultural environment they are working with. The victims of such aggression should be aware of these circumstances as well as should make efforts to fix the drawbacks and to get less vulnerable and more resilient. This should be done in all possible formats; the response should be relevant to aggression and its total nature.

The analysis of the European political landscape proves that dignity and self-respect still remain in deficit, whereas without dignity all other purports also lose their sense. Security, democracy, freedom and solidarity are also challenged in such circumstances. What is important, you cannot buy dignity – you have to fight for it intellectually, ideologically, politically. You have to sacrifice: never sell up, never betray and never become cynical. These are the key components of resilience, ensured development, historical perspective and by facing this challenge Romania and Ukraine can give the example to the others.

In this particular historical moment, it is important to be deceived by Moscow again as it had happened many times before. Economic revenues cannot prevail over the necessity to cement sanctions pressure and isolation of Moscow. Such isolation should be total. The response to the military blackmailing should be: «Do not frighten and you won't be scared». The political regime of Putin has to fall and imperial and chauvinist Russia should face catharsis. Only such catharsis should grant relatively «eternal peace» in Europe and Asia. Bucharest may and can contribute in this regard. Otherwise in the next decade Europe will face another military aggression headed by a “new putin”.

Among the key and most feasible dimensions of activities aimed at counteracting Russian expansion to Europe and at fall of Putin's regime that can lead to the democratic catharsis of the imperial Russia there are the following:

### ***Baltic Sea-Black Sea Quartet***

In order to support and strengthen NATO's capacities on the Eastern and Eastern Southern Flank, except for the Bucharest Nine a new grouping Baltic Sea-Black Sea Quartet has perspective and potential. In this context it is necessary to take into account the necessity to ensure correspondence between the capacities and the initiatives.

Within the process of the development of the bilateral relations Bucharest and Kyiv have to strengthen the level of mutual trust, to work on building sincere dialogue, and to ensure permanent consultations. The format of such consultations should also include Polish and Turkish partners in order to launch the Baltic Sea-Black Sea Quartet of Ukraine-Poland-Romania and Turkey which face similar Russian voluntarist threats. It is clear that quartet should be open to cooperation with the bordering countries. Permanent diplomatic consultations for avoiding intrigues, transparent elaboration of common policies and delivering joint messages at the international platforms should be prioritized. In perspective quartet may become not only the tool on the war of narratives but something more – sort of security alliance able to play additional defense role on the NATO's Eastern flank and may not only strengthen Bucharest Nine but also guarantee “free security zone without exclusions and limitations” for its participants. It may have a sobering effect for the Russian expansion plans in Europe aimed at affecting democracy and freedom and at ruining the EU, NATO etc.

### ***International Anti-Putin Coalition of States and Peoples***

Besides, it seems that such a challenging task as organization of the international response to hybrid (and military) aggression of Putin's Russia in Europe, in the Middle East and in Central Asia demands an adequate and relevant solution which can be launching (under the UN umbrella) of the international anti-Putin coalition of states and peoples. By launching such coalition the world would have given a significant response to the narrative bred by Moscow and rooted in the XIX century regarding the right of the great states to apply power, while labelling the rule of law as a historical anomaly or part of the game of the great states. Such coalition could have aimed at three goals:

- support to Ukraine in its war with Russia aimed at Russian fiasco in a military campaign;
- support to the democratic opposition in Russia aimed at undermining the ruling Putin's regime;
- support to the democratic catharsis of the imperial and chauvinist Russia.

In order to gain the support of the UN it makes sense to sponsor the respective decision of the General Assembly of the UN. Such initiative can be co-sponsored by the wide range of countries from Southern, Central, Northern and Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Middle East and Central Asia, which are most vulnerable for the hybrid and military aggression of Putin's Russia.

Additionally, there are few promising dimensions that can be highlighted from the perspective of counteracting and ruining Putin's Russia:

- the Black Sea: deployment of the international (B9+ or NATO's) defense forces and weapons in order to contain Russia A2/AD and for creating the preconditions (defined as a goal of the Crimea platform) for de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula by Ukraine;

- trade and investments: Joint business with the Russian partners has to shut down, it should remain on political pause till the time Russia will convert into secure for the world state;

- border – firewall: both Russian elites and «deep people» have to fact preconditions for knowing each other better and staying alone. In this regard the activities of the Embassies and Consulates of the EU and NATO states should be aimed at the decrease of the possibilities for Russians to travel and to do business. «Iron curtain» which Moscow was trying to build with the other countries in the previous times now should be applied to Russia itself, – a strict regime of the migration limitations should be applied;

- shutting down of the cultural exchanges since they make no sense – chauvinists cannot praise another culture, they are just mocking it. Also, by means of cultural contacts Moscow can build its positive image which is irrelevant; Besides, such cultural exchanges can be used by Russia for the intelligence operations and other malign influences;

– propaganda platforms: Russian aggressor should have no chance to spread the word. It is necessary to find out and shut down the activities (that cause the threats in the political, humanitarian and informational domains) of all the structures that broadcast the narratives of Russian propaganda. In this regard, it is also necessary to limit public informational and analytical activities of the Russian Embassies in the EU and NATO, when they broadcast false statements, disinformation and misinformation and pure Russian propaganda, – the process of further spreading of propaganda should inevitably result in expulsions of diplomats and in breaking diplomatic relations.

- le field for such rampant actions is the South China Sea and/or Eastern China Sea.

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