

# Influences on East European Politics: Russia

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Doc. Marek Rybář, PhD.



# The state of relations between Russia and CEE

- The relationship between Russia and Eastern Europe one of the most troubled in the world
- relations with the post- Soviet states range between difficult to catastrophic
- from the 2008 Russo-Georgian war to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine
- a diversity of relations with the region, with historic roots

# The new Eastern Europe

- the 'borderland' countries of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova
- differences between them but they share common aspirations to confirm their independent statehood
- links that embrace not only Russia but also their western neighbors (Poland and Romania)
- attempts to distance themselves from Russia

# The new Eastern Europe

- Belarus - the deep cultural and economic interpenetration with Russia
- Lukashenko moving between Russia and the EU to gain advantage from both
- Moldova: the Russian- backed separatism of Transnistria prevents effective statehood
- Ukraine: a powerful strain of nationalism emphasizing the need to recreate Ukraine both culturally and economically separate from Russia, the 2022 Russia's full-scale invasion

# Russian Invasion of Ukraine

- NATO expansion has not been a *constant* source of tension between Russia and the *West*, but a *variable*
- the salience of the issue has risen and fallen not primarily because of the waves of NATO expansion, but due to waves of democratic expansion in Eurasia
- Russian's complaints about NATO spike after democratic breakthroughs

# Russian Invasion of Ukraine

- the core objective of Putin's policy has been to establish an exclusive sphere of influence across the territory of the former Soviet Union
- He believes his goals have been threatened by democratization episodes, e.g. Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, the Arab Spring in 2011, Russia in 2011–12, and Ukraine in 2013–14
- Putin has pivoted to more hostile policies toward the United States, and then invoked the NATO threat as justification for doing so

# The Baltic states

- Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania (in EU and NATO)
- part of the Russian Empire in the 18th century, independence between 1918 and 1940
- the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the states absorbed into the Soviet Union in 1940
- a destruction of the old ruling classes, mass deportations, and the influx of Russian military and industrial settlers

# The Baltic states

- Lithuania declare its independence in March 1990, followed by the other two republics
- small proportion of Russians (and Poles), Lithuania declared that all permanently resident in the republic were granted automatic citizenship
- In Estonia and Latvia, only those who could trace their ancestry to the inter-war independent republics gained automatic citizenship



# South-Eastern Europe

- the region where Russia first came into confrontation with the west over the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo
- NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 and independence of Kosovo in 2008
- traditional allies Serbia & Bulgaria, recently more strained with the latter
- relations with Romania remain complicated

# The Visegrád Countries

- Poland most consistently hostile to Russia
- the crash near Smolensk of a Polish Air Force plane in 2010 that killed all people on board, including the president L. Kaczynski, added to tensions
- Hungary pursued an independent path, challenging many of the EU's policies
- mixed signals from leading politicians and governments of the Czech Republic and Slovakia (government changes matter)

# Economic issues

- the post-1989 CEE economically tightly bound to Russia:
- The Baltic republics and Central Europe depended on Russia for gas supplies
- Hungary and Slovakia most dependent (80%); Romania is almost completely self-sufficient
- all EU countries now have the infrastructure that makes buying gas from Russia a choice, not necessity

# Competing Projects of Political and Economic Integration

- The key factor shaping Russia's engagement with the region is the emergence of competing aspirations and organisations of regional integration, namely
- the EU and its Wider Europe ambitions and various forms of Eurasian integration
- EU's engagement based on conditionality, Russian-centred integration projects make a point of stressing state sovereignty and diversity of modernisation paths

# Competing Projects of Political and Economic Integration

- The EU Eastern Partnership from 2009
- a reaction from Russia that in the end took violent forms following the ouster of Ukrainian President Yanukovich in 2014
- In 2007 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan announced a Customs Union (CU) within the Eurasian Economic Community
- the two combined to create the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015

# Security Issues

- the post–Cold War period as a massive security dilemma in relations between Russia and the region
- Western institutions after 1989 made efforts to bring Russia into an expanding Atlantic community.
- Russia initially receptive but with interests in Eurasia and with global ambitions it did not want to become part of an existing order which it had not shaped

# Security Issues

- NATO's eastward enlargement and the promise of membership to Georgia and Ukraine were AT TIMES perceived in Russia as a threat
- the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 was the first war to stop NATO enlargement, and the destructive dynamic culminated in the 2022 Russia's invasion to Ukraine

# Security Issues

- Russia's alternative security system: the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty (CST)
- agreements in 1992, which in 1999 was transformed into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)
- The CSTO at that time united Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, while Uzbekistan periodically joined and left



# Russian Regime under Putin

- has gradually evolved into a fully authoritarian (personalist) regime
- Putin has weakened institutions so that they cannot constrain him,
- however, he cannot rely on them to generate economic growth, resolve social conflicts, or even facilitate his peaceful exit from office
- Putin faced the dual threats of a coup from elites around him and a popular revolt from below

# Personalist autocracies

- power over important personnel or policy decisions always resides with one person at the top
- higher levels of corruption than one party or military autocracies and slower economic growth, greater repression, and less stable policies
- Rulers in personalist autocracies also have a common toolkit:

# Personalist autocracies

- anti-Western sentiment to rally their base,
- distort the economy to benefit cronies,
- target political opponents using the legal system, and
- expand executive power at the expense of other institutions
- personalist autocrats who lost power have tended to end up in exile, in jail, or dead

# Governing without Reliable Institutions

- By undercutting the kinds of political institutions that constrain executive power, Putin has reduced certainty about policy and increased the vulnerability of elites
- relies on his personal popularity
- must delegate some decision-making authority to lower level officials,
- since Russia's state institutions are weak, Putin must also work with powerful businesspeople

# Domestic trade-offs

- two main threats to their rule: coups by the political elite and protests by the public.
- In Putin's first decade in office, high energy prices obscured this trade-off
- due to economic pressures Putin had to choose between rewarding his cronies and reforming the economy.
- The protests in 2021 in support of Navalny, were rooted as much in economic dissatisfaction as in opposition to Putin

# Foreign affairs trade-offs

- policies needed to generate economic dynamism (opening the economy to foreign trade, reducing corruption, strengthening the rule of law, increasing competition, and attracting foreign investment) impossible to reconcile with regime's foreign policy,
- initially, they have primarily benefited hard-liners in the security agencies and firms in import-competing sectors

# Foreign affairs trade-offs

- the confrontational foreign policy toward the West has brought Russia back as a global force
- it has also impeded much-needed economic reforms that would strengthen the country's position abroad over the longer term
- it also failed to satisfy Russian citizens who care more about their living standards than their country's great-power status

# Sanctions and Repressions

- U.S. and EU sanctions have slowed the economy, scared off foreign investors and reduced access to foreign technology and financing
- Authoritarian regimes that resort to repression typically come to rely on it more and more because of its tendency to perpetuate the problems that generate opposition in the first place