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## **FOLLOWING CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: ITALY'S VIEW ON EUROPEAN NEIGHBORHOOD POLICY TOWARDS UKRAINE**

*Current EU economic and security challenges on the territory of the EU's 'ring of friends' open a new page of its history influencing European security and stability framework of development. Therefore, it's crucial to understand circumstances that favored to the catalyst progress of unstable neighborhoods. The article presents an analysis of the Italy's position towards European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern dimension of this policy — Eastern Partnership. A special interest is focus on its view towards Ukraine, being a reality-check for the European Union officials after the Revolution of Dignity, the illegal annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war of Russia.*

*This article is presenting the ideas that ENP was created by the EU as an instrument for the democratization which couldn't prevent conflicts in the geopolitically diverse regions. Italy, being one of the founding members of the European Union, was reluctant advocate a balanced approach towards the neighborhood regions. It merely focused on the Southern dimension of the ENP, almost taking apart Eastern Partnership.*

*In the first part, the article demonstrates the development process of the ENP with a special attention that it coincided with the EU 5<sup>th</sup> enlargement preparation. This dualism influenced on the ENP tailoring and subsequent implementation. The second part focuses on the of the Italy's opinion development from ENP launch till 2009 when its Eastern dimension — Eastern Partnership — was introduced. The third part analyzes Italy's perception of Eastern Partnership and its attempts to reschedule EU's attention to the South flank of the ENP in the post-Crimea annexation period.*

**Keywords:** *Italy, European Neighborhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, Ukraine.*

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## ЕВОЛЮЦІЯ ПОЗИЦІЇ ІТАЛІЙСЬКОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ ЩОДО УКРАЇНИ В ПРОЦЕСІ РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ СУСІДСТВА

*У статті репрезентовано погляд на еволюцію викликів, що пов'язані з Європейською політикою сусідства (ЄПС), та місце й роль України в ній. Дослідження цієї проблеми подано в контексті аналізу італомовних джерел та літератури, що становить особливий інтерес для розуміння позиції Італії щодо участі України в ЄПС та у її «східному вимірі» — Східному партнерстві.*

*У першій частині статті показано еволюцію ЄПС із особливим наголосом на те, що цей процес співпав з підготовкою до 5-го розширення ЄС. Другу частину присвячено еволюції сприйняття Італією політики ЄС щодо своїх сусідів у період, коли було запроваджено Східне партнерство. У третій частині аналізується сприйняття Італією Східного партнерства та ЄПС після незаконної анексії Криму та війни на Сході України. Розкривається взаємозв'язок між інтересами Італійської Республіки та Європейського Союзу щодо консолідованого майбутнього ЄС, пов'язаного з шляхами подолання безпекових загроз.*

**Ключові слова:** *Європейська політика сусідства, Східне партнерство, ЄС, Італія, Україна.*

### **Introduction**

Since the Soviet Union dissolved and the global community had a task of building a New Global Order, European Union made various attempts in transforming the countries of Eastern Europe through political and economic reforming assistance. Europe's dream of building a 'ring of friends' surrounding EU borders and, thus, protecting them, could become realistic via European Neighbourhood Policy launch at the beginning of the 2000s. However, the perspectives for the EU to view closer its Eastern and Southern neighbours had a cardinaly different background in comparison with other integration projects. It can be explained that this step put in unbalance EU political dynamics headed by French and German axis which fostered to the political, economic and cultural division in the EU itself.

The article aims to analyze the evolution of Italy's role and behavior in what concerns its approach to Ukraine in the ENP and its Eastern dimension — Eastern Partnership. It stems from the need to reassess the role of the ENP itself in order to try to understand current challenges that European 'ring of friends' are having especially after Arab Spring, subsequent Syrian crisis (to the South from the EU). However, a particular importance such an analysis has in view of the Revolution of Dignity, the illegal annexation of Crimea and the hybrid war of Russia (to the East from the EU).

This article will try to argue about three issues: 1) that ENP created by the EU as an instrument of neighbors democratization didn't contribute enough in preventing conflicts in neighbors being drafted from enlargement process; 2) the perception by Italy, one of the founding members of the European Union, of ENP and Eastern Partnership on the example of Ukraine wasn't positive enough in order to understand crucial challenges it had during its path of democratization and reforms transformation; 3) the disputes between different EU member-states advocating their own interests and not focusing on the differences the neighbourhood regions had (Italy's specific focus on Southern dimension of ENP).

Therefore, the article is divided into three parts. In the first part, it tries to demonstrate the evolution of the ENP drafting with a focus that ENP coincided with the EU 5<sup>th</sup> enlargement preparation. The second part focuses on the evolution of the Italy's perception from its launch till 2009 when Eastern Partnership was introduced. The third part analysis Italy's perception of Eastern Partnership and its attempts to reschedule EU's attention to the South flank of the ENP in the post-Crimea annexation period.

### **ENP: From Enlargement to the “Ring of Friends”**

The European neighborhood policy is considered to be launched in 2003 by the European Union before one of the biggest EU enlargements was realized with joining of 10 countries from Central and Eastern Europe. It was perceived to be a political and economic framework for presenting an alternative to those countries bordering the EU. Classical accounts of EU discourse were presented by the President of the European Commission Romano Prodi with the focus to circle the EU with “friendly-oriented countries”. The main idea was for EU “to share everything except the institutions” remaining “a pole of attraction” for its neighbours<sup>1</sup>. Other positive initiatives towards creating such a circle of friendly-related countries were presented by Javier Solana in the European Strategy for Security<sup>2</sup>.

The ENP was designed to continue on building the further path of democratization process regarding CEE by fostering stability and prosperity located on the EU's new border after its fifth enlargement. Specifically, this process went far beyond the instrumental, cultural and geographic scope of

neighbors circle. It involves 16 countries such as Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunis and Ukraine.

Following the geographic framework to analyze ENP, it was initiated by Great Britain oriented to the future Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Ukraine) in 2002. However, a year later, Italy as well as France and Spain came with an idea to include also Mediterranean region when all of them had strategic interests<sup>3</sup>. However, in 2004 Georgia joined the ENP group and fostering Russia to come out of the neighbouring circle.

The initiative “Wider Europe — Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours” substantially transformed and supplemented the model of relations between EU and CIS formed in the 90s. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that ENP is a unilateral EU initiative for the countries from Southern Mediterranean region, Middle East and Eastern Europe with which EU aims to develop its relations. EU places the mission of its neighbours’ “democratization” in order to reassure stability, security and prosperity of the entire European continent. The ENP interprets the EU’s idea to build on common interests with its partner-countries to cooperate jointly on key areas such as democracy promotion, rule of law, human rights and social cohesion<sup>4</sup>. Such a framework of operating with CEE countries could foster to entertain closer relations with the objective to reinvigorate its systemic approach of cooperation. Both processes — the preparation to the EU enlargement and forming of the new policy towards states-neighbors — has developed almost in the parallel and ended up in 2004. The European Commission final document, marking the end of the ENP process forming, was published almost in few days after EU accession of the 10 new member-states. Therefore, in the program document approved in May 2004, the European Commission developed an idea for its neighboring states aiming at presenting so-called a beneficial alternative to the accession process<sup>5</sup>.

The ENP got interests from many scholars from Italy and other European countries. Priority in its evolution and rationale was given by Gwendolyn Sasse<sup>6</sup>, Antonio Missiroli<sup>7</sup>, Rosa Balfour<sup>8</sup> to the importance of its implications and strategies — Serena Giusti<sup>9</sup>, Andreas Marchetti<sup>10</sup> as well as its compliance to EU values — Sarah Poli<sup>11</sup>, legal effects — Marise Cremona and Gabriella Meloni<sup>12</sup>. However, some of the scholars got the idea about ENP’s merely benefits for Moldova and Ukraine (Benita Ferrero-Waldner<sup>13</sup>, Antonio Missiroli<sup>14</sup>) and whether the EU values will be followed in the ENP countries (Natalie Tocci)<sup>15</sup> while others focus on the concepts of EU borders and its possible changes (Michele Comelli, Ettore Greco, Natalie Tocci)<sup>16</sup>. A special interest to the EU sanctions policy towards Russia and its impact on the Italy’s role in the EU analyzed Giovanna De Maio and Daniele Fattibene<sup>17</sup>. Under the

general title “The Crisis in Ukraine” Grianfranco Tamburelli made an overview of the Ukrainian current challenges in the context of the Russian aggression<sup>18</sup>. The perception of the Crimean annexation in accordance to the international law analysis was done by Antonello Tancredi<sup>19</sup> e Maurizio Arcari<sup>20</sup>.

In this article we rely on the importance of the Frank Schimmelfennig’s classification of the mechanisms of the EU impact beyond its member-states<sup>21</sup>. According to it, conditionality presents EU impact of the government of the ENP country and serves being an extra incentive in order to stick to the good governance principle by financial aid, market access. The priority is given to the importance of complying with the EU demands on capacity-building. In case of Ukraine as well as other Eastern Partnership countries, the model of positive conditionality was elaborated with annual Action Plans system. Moreover, F. Schimmelfennig presents here that EU will support conditionality principle unless its credibility is being proven<sup>22</sup>. Conditionality supports ENP countries to have lower expenses on the domestic implementation than EU assistance. This rationale of the conditionality principle received a lot of critique till its elaboration by the European Commission. Therefore, it was controversial also for the EU member-states to accept the most efficient format of it for the ENP. France, Germany advocated towards softer conditionality principle while Great Britain argued on the stronger approach. Italy followed its French and German partners as well as the decision of the European Commission towards ‘positive conditionality approach’: the more an ENP country conducts effective reforming process, the more assistance it will be granted.

F. Schimmelfennig also explains the idea of EU socialization by which he understands the EU efforts to demonstrate partner countries how to fulfill EU policies (so-called ‘teaching process’). In such a way, EU continues to influence on partner countries stemming from the need for them to choose EU policies as being necessary for good governance conduct. This type of ‘social impact’ focuses merely on the constructive dialoguing and further EU policies complying<sup>23</sup>. However, it touches upon values to be perceived as “European” because socialization assumes to involve those partner countries who would like to identify themselves with ‘Europe’. In such a way, it explains Ukraine’s aspirations to follow and support European values. All other EU mechanisms of influence and involvement of the third countries are the varieties of mentioned conditionality and socialization because its impact cannot be directly seen.

At the same time, the liaison between processes of enlargement and ENP development and the fact, that they were put in parallel, influenced on the framework and perception of the ENP itself by member-states. The majority of its constituent instruments, in particular the principle of political conditionality

and socializing were taken from the enlargement process experience. This phenomenon was called by Fabrizio Tassinari ‘the main peril of the ENP’ ‘cause it leads towards further ENP ambiguity perception and vague future outcomes<sup>24</sup>.

Crucial for understanding and analyzing Ukraine’s participation and involvement within ENP is so-called idea of participation. This principle is interconnected with the partnership and decentralization principle. Being decisive in the sectoral integration, it serves to be one more EU mechanism to provide assistance in the third countries. The sectoral integration offers opportunities for the ‘people to people’ cooperation projects in the field of education, science and culture<sup>25</sup>.

### **Italy’s approach towards Ukraine in the ENP and Eastern Partnership**

In the view of the subsequent democratization of the European neighbours, foreign policy of Italy has been characterized as very flexible and variable (see more Vdovychenko 2015)<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, it is believed for Italy to have quite a low degree of influence on European decision-making process. At the same time, the geopolitical calculations of the influence on the ENP region as well as challenges related to the internal and regional conflicts in the post-cold war period were crucial for Italy. The EU’s position regarding the further “democratic anchoring of ENP countries” influenced quite positively on the Italian government that it started to look for its political and economic interests there<sup>27</sup>.

Referring to the EU enlargement to the East, Italy’s governmental and opposition parties presented rather optimistic views in regard of political and economic importance and strategic impact of the CEE region. In its speech to the Senate on July, 26, 1989 Giovanni Andreotti stipulated that ‘in Europe being presented by 12 countries, we are looking hopefully to our Eastern neighbours’<sup>28</sup>. Besides, the prime-minister underlined the role of the Italian government in fostering political cohesion for these countries via economic instruments.

The minister of foreign relations G. De Michelis stipulated on the importance of the “Central-European” axis being one of the EU priorities alongside with “Western-European” and “Mediterranean” where Italy had more of the strategic ambitions. The minister insisted on the priority of the step-by-step cooperation with the states of CEE region, starting from economic cooperation till cultural, scientific and educations which could, finally, lead to closer political cooperation<sup>29</sup>. Even not being its top priority, the EU enlargement to the East was perceived by Italy as partially beneficial process for itself as could influence on the geopolitical ambitions of the European powers.

Fabrizio Tassinari stipulates that EU’s periphery practice played a crucial role in developing the practice of “othering” approach towards neighbours<sup>30</sup>.

Primarily, aimed at contributing towards more security circle around EU borders, it created further challenges due to EU's seeing itself as a mission-taker to spread European integration achievements not taking into consideration the peculiarities of the regions themselves<sup>31</sup>.

It is an interesting coincidence that the European Commission appointed the same Commission experts in the EU enlargement policy to the East for the ENP development. The Wider Europe Task Force created in 2003 for the ENP elaboration was formed with the experts from General Directorate on Enlargement. Such a decision of this Task Force creation was taken during Italy's Presidency in the EU. Prime-Minister of Italy Silvio Berlusconi presented its own program for the EU's enlargement policy to the East titled as "Wider Europe" where the major focus was trajectored towards Balkan states, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Israel and Turkey. However, the primarily interests for these countries he claimed to be the further prospective of the EU accession<sup>32</sup>. However, during the Presidency, this issue was taken aside due to the fact that Italy made a crucial focus on the South-Eastern countries. Such conclusions were presented by the minister R. Buttiglione. During its EU Presidency, Italy took part in the informal meeting for the ministers from EU new member-states and those from Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Russian Federation. This meeting was initiated by Ukraine and conducted in November, 2003 in Kyiv. The meeting was made in line for the "New Initiative for the EU Neighbors" where the ideas of further and wider dialogue principle were presented between enlarged EU and member-states. The participants made a conclusion that with the enlarged EU, Europe shapes new geopolitical and geo-economic issues. Understanding new challenges presented by the EU enlargement, the discussion confirmed the participants to see the transformation regarding the border of the enlarged EU to the border of the overwhelming cooperation with its neighbours.

Italy's analytical centers started to conduct joint events in order to contribute to the ENP principles explanation. Moreover, it was important to organize these meetings with the new EU member-states. It was coinciding with one more process characteristic for a period 2004–2006 — EU started to develop Country Reports together with Action Plans for the ENP implementation agenda in Ukraine as well as in other partner countries. In such a way, the IPALMO (Institute of the relations between Italy and African countries, Latin America, Far and Middle East) together with IAI (Institute of the International Relations of Italy) made a joint conference with the Polish Institute of International Relations (PISM) half a year after ENP launch, in November, 2004. The major conclusions were in determining ENP not as a different EU policy but as a CFSP part. Besides, the participants discussed the election proceedings in Ukraine<sup>33</sup>.

In general, Italy's society position towards EU Eastern enlargement was diverse. According to the Italy's foundation "Fundazione Nord-Est", only 29.3% of the Italians were regarding EU's Eastern enlargement as 'necessary and beneficial'. The major threats Italian perceived due to the flows of 'low-paid labour force' from Eastern Europe ready to make a competition on the market for the local workers. Moreover, it could contribute to the rising unemployment and crime as well as general decrease in the prosperity level due to the EU redistribution of funds towards new member-states.

Such tendencies, in general, marked Italy's position on Ukrainian European integration aspirations. The elections in Italy with subsequent Prodi's premiership lowered the level of Italy's support for Ukraine. Italy didn't simply see it realistic to enlarge the EU to Ukraine's membership in the nearest future. Italy perceived ENP as a EU instrument merely focused on the Mediterranean region where Italy had strategic interests. However, it opposed the EU relations enhancement referring to the Eastern neighbours of the ENP as a strategy for further EU accession.

The privilege of the Italy and Russia bilateral relations both political and economic influenced on the Italy's general perception of Ukraine's European integration aspirations. Moreover, it becomes evident that Italy stems from the need to continue to have mutually beneficial relations between EU and Russia at the expense of other Eastern European countries<sup>34</sup>.

The ENP initiative comprised 16 countries from various regions and was designed to serve as a long-term cooperation framework in the sectors of energy, civil society development<sup>35</sup>. Meanwhile, Eastern partnership, elaborated merely for the countries of the post-Soviet space, didn't present the prospective of the EU accession remaining exclusively enlargement policy instrument.

Ukraine remained apart in the Italian academic discourse as a country of the Eastern Partnership countries till the very crisis on its territory. As far as it was not Italy's idea, but a political proposal from Poland and Sweden to the neighbouring region next to Russia, Eastern Partnership didn't have a special interest for Italian politicians or participants of civil society<sup>36</sup>. One of the possible explanations comes from the usage of differentiated approach that Italy tried to measure various ENP countries and regions integrated there. The Eastern Partnership as an Eastern dimension to the ENP was viewed by Italy as an outcome to put apart "Southern" dimensions. Thus, it could mean less EU funds and more attention to the Eastern borders of the EU. Therefore, Italy perceived Eastern Partnership as an instrument not being anchored enough within ENP.

Another explanation of a merely 'frosty pragmatic', but, at the same time, 'reluctant' position of Italy towards Eastern dimension of the ENP lied in

Italian understanding of Russian negative reaction towards any regional formats without its participation or without its leading role in them. This new EU policy instrument, on the opinion of Italian experts, was developed as an initiative where Russian Federation wasn't and couldn't be shaped and, thus, Italy could foresee its arduous response<sup>37</sup>. Franco Frattini, who was Italy's Minister for foreign affairs at the time of ENP and Eastern Partnership launch, expressed his idea that EU made a serious mistake to start partnership agreements with neighbours without including Moscow in the discussion<sup>38</sup>. Moreover, under his guidance, already in 2009 Italy tried to advocate on the European Union level to invite Russian Federation for the Eastern Partnership Summit in Praha<sup>39</sup>.

The explanation of such a behavior comes from Italy's wanting to have more privileged relations with the EU regardless its own uncertainties in the EU decision-making. Being frequently called as a 'medium-power', it was affected by a 'syndrome of marginalization'<sup>40</sup>. In such a way, Italian experts analyze the attempts of its own country to count every opportunity to be present regardless its own message delivery<sup>41</sup>. This tendency was an attempt to overcome insecurity produced by the global disorder and new global players come to the international scene<sup>42</sup>. This insecurity is rooted into Italy's historical attempt to compete with other global powers. It happened during World War I and World War II when international institutions provided assistance to the future Italian Republic<sup>43</sup>.

The Eastern Partnership sought to prevent new declining lines by working on democracy and good governance, convergence with EU policies and further economic integration, energy security and civic engagement. However, such a platform list, according to the Italy's opinion, was more the response to the EU tasks in Eastern Europe than coincided with priorities of the participating countries. The conditionality principle "more for more, less for less" sought countries to facilitate reforms, development and integration throughout the region. However, Italy's experts feared that such a policy could have a reverse effect — the declines for the participating countries with the low level of democratic development<sup>44</sup>.

Serena Giusti explains that the major benefits for Ukraine as a member of Eastern Partnership could be seen in the long-term run: cooperation on migration policies, visa-free regime, full liberalization and further created of the free trade area followed by DCFTA after the AA signing<sup>45</sup>. Maurizio Saccone, Minister of Social Policy of Italy signed together with other EU member-states EU Common Declaration during Praha Summit about Eastern Partnership launch. Big interest from the part of Italy's mass media this event didn't have because Italy was preparing for the G8 Presidency to be held in July 2009.

The initiative to include Russia to Eastern Partnership from Italy was influenced by the gas war between Russia and Ukraine in January 2009. It proved energy sensitivity and fragility of Europe and importance of Eastern partnership countries — Ukraine and Belarus — serving as transit countries, and Azerbaijan — as gas supplying country — to the EU energy security perceived as pivotal for Italy. Italian academic circles stipulate on the idea that through Eastern Partnership mechanism, Ukraine seeks to receive simplified and preferential relations with the official Brussels after the start of the Association Agreement (AA) negotiations. Moreover, Ukraine was reluctant to make progress in the regional dimension of integration crucial for the ENPI compliance.

In February 2010, when Ukraine chose the pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, Italy and other EU countries expected the weakening of its pro-European foreign policy vector. However, the thesis of the President of Ukraine on the continuation of the benchmarks for the EU and European integration as a consequence of the long-term process of "compromise and mutual concessions" reduced the level of Eurosceptic expectations. Yanukovich's main political idea was perceived by European countries as an attempt to make Ukraine a "bridge" between Europe and Russia. Ukraine was perceived as a country with dysfunctional governance and contingent economic interests presented by oligarchs. Understanding these challenges, it was the same period when official Brussels proposed Ukraine to establish a free trade zone, sign the Association Agreement and introduce a visa-free regime<sup>46</sup>. Commissioner Stefan Fule also identified seven priorities of the national reform agenda (political governance, macro-financial stability, business climate improvement, mobility, energy security, environmental protection, civil aviation). Among 6 European Partnership countries, Ukraine started to negotiate about AA already in 2007 and had substantial results on its way. However, negative indexes of the democracy levels speeded down this tendency. AA agreement with Ukraine will be initialed only in March, 2012. Meanwhile, the negative signals on poor civil society involvement were not taken enough into consideration by the EU institutions as well as by EU member-states. It foreseen as a low interest in stimulating the transformation of the country on the domestic level.

At the same time, Italian scholars acknowledge that not only Ukraine had a variety of challenges while joining to the Eastern Partnership. It was inextricably linked to the global processes, especially those of the world economic crisis putting into unstable conditions financial and economic policies. Meanwhile, the marker line for global affairs understanding was inevitable and unresolved agenda with Russian Federation which was trying to fortify its global positions and interests<sup>47</sup>. The responses of the EU to these challenges

were weak and quite ineffective leading to spreading to lack of trust and inevitable negative outcomes for the Eastern Partnership effectiveness<sup>48</sup>.

### **Italy's View of the Eastern Partnership and ENP in post-Crimea period**

Professor S. Poli stipulates that the deepening of the ENP cooperation with EU has evaluated since its revision in 2011 and 2015. This process can be explained not only because of the political conditionality presence. She presents the idea that the principles of differentiated integration had a changing progress while analyzing ENP agreement with its partner countries. According to this idea, the closest form of contractual relations and, thus, cooperation EU had with Ukraine analyzing subsequent results of the AA<sup>49</sup>. The final outcomes were that conditionality principle led to the vague perception of 'enhanced agreement' in the Action plans for Ukraine. However, Ukraine hasn't even received a concrete perspective of the EU membership in the short-term or long-term future<sup>50</sup>.

The scholar introduces the idea that ENP was modified also due to external challenges which, in fact, had an influence in the ENP countries. In order to comply with EU policies and ENP agenda, EU introduced new restrictive measures with every partner counties not taking into consideration its geopolitical challenges and implications<sup>51</sup>. In such a way, can be explained EU's reaction (lack of reaction) to the Russian aggression on the territory of Ukraine when Victor Yanukovich escaped from the country and Russian Federation used this momentum in order to illegally annex Crimean peninsula. EU member-states were divided in their understanding of the Russian steps on the territory of Ukraine.

According to Giovanna De Maio e Daniele Fattibene, in the two-year period 2014–2016, Italy followed a 'double-track strategy' referring to the conflict in Ukraine. On one hand, it stood together with its Euro-Atlantic allies, condemning the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the annexation of Crimea<sup>52</sup>. As a prove, we can follow the words of Matteo Renzi together with his French colleague Francois Hollande expressing the position from the West and calling this referendum "illegal and a shame"<sup>53</sup>. However, on the other side, Italy insisted in the EU level not to isolate Russia and make severe tension on it<sup>54</sup>. Moreover, the scholars explain this position leading to a more pragmatic and dialogic approach in order to prevent the limits Italian domestic damage could possibly have in the future<sup>55</sup>. This position evidently comes from the need to protect Italy's fruitful bilateral relations between Italy and Russia, especially in what concerns energy supplying. However, it is important to mention that the tensions between Ukraine and Russia influenced on the ratification by Italy of the AA agreement. It finally happened only in December, 2015<sup>56</sup>.

Enough of rule of democracy and law was presented by some of the Italian Europarliamentarians who considered Crimean referendum legal. Thus, for example, Fabrizio Bertot from EPP, claimed that such a referendum was conducted in a calm situation and with due respect of the European law. Moreover, he added, that ballot boxes were as transparent as in Italy<sup>57</sup>. Some of the Italian mass-media were commenting on the legal effects of the Crimean annexation making arguments whether such a step had legal grounds and comparing it to the Scottish referendum in the UK<sup>58</sup>. However, there was even a debate in mass-media on the assertion made by Russia of the integration of independence of Kosovo as a precedent of what has happened in Crimea. On this point, the opinion of Italian lawyers was contrary to the assertion of Russia due to several reasons they've found incomparable with Kosovo case<sup>59</sup>.

Moreover, the possible application by Russia of "Crimean model" to other territories of Ukraine was also discussed. In such a way, some of the Italian mass-media hypothesised about further possible escalation of Russian aggression on the East<sup>60</sup>. The other mass-media sources focused on the pro-Russian model of thinking and even changed the borders of Ukraine marking the borders of Crimea belonging to Russia on their maps inside the articles. That was the case for the *Limes* journal when describing Russian military actions in 2015, Crimean peninsula was including as an integral part of Russia. The answer of the editor-in-chief Lucio Caracciolo to the Ukrainian Ambassador Yevhen Perelygin was quite simple in explaining such a reason: the map demonstrated *ex post facts* about Ukraine<sup>61</sup>.

Starting from 2014 the EU imposed economic sanctions on trade with Russia in specific economic sectors. In March 2015, EU leaders decided to tighten up the existing sanctions regime for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements scheduled for late December 2015. Since the agreements had not been fully implemented by December 31, 2015, the European Council is extending economic sanctions every half a year. However, the EU decision to impose sanctions against Russia was determined partially due to a strong advocacy of the USA. Moreover, the sanction policy touched upon both enterprises and selected authorities.

The sanctions for Russian Federation concerned EU's primary and secondary capital markets for the largest Russian financial institutions owned by the state and their subsidiaries as well as the major Russian companies active in the energy and defense sectors. The sanctions imposed a ban on export-import of the arms trade as well as on the use of goods for military purposes<sup>62</sup>. Furthermore, the sanctions influence on the economic cooperation. The implementation of EU bilateral and regional cooperation programs with Russia has been reviewed and some programs have been suspended<sup>63</sup>. The EU sanctions were not welcomed by Russia and, of course, it was quite arduous in

its willingness to discuss their implications. The following step from Moscow was contrasted one — retaliation sanctions on goods produced in the EU member-states, US and other countries. The ban on products touched upon Italian producers and importers to Russia.

However, according to the idea of Federica Mustilli and Daniel Gros, the EU steps to impose exclusively economic sanctions as a reluctant and still the unique instrument to react on the Crimean illegal annexation and Donbas conflict demonstrates the limits of the EU to use its foreign policy instruments only relying on the soft power<sup>64</sup>. Thus, it can be understood, that with the increased differentiated integration approach and at the expense of the democratization, EU is trying to survive in promoting stability and security. Moreover, the authors come to the conclusion that EU sanctions only slightly influence on the trade policy of Russia. EU's share in the imports didn't shift much<sup>65</sup>. The share of the Russian imports from Italy has not changed dramatically since the sanctions policy imposing the same as the US share in the imports of Russian Federation increased as for the 2015<sup>66</sup>. Thus, on bilateral level Italy and Russia are having great achievements, especially in the energy sector. As an example, in May 2017 during Paolo Gentiloni's visit to Sochi, 6 agreements merely on oil and gas cooperation have been signed. Among the important names, Russian Rosneft, from one side, and ENI, Pietro Fiorentini, Tecnoclima, PMI Italia, from the other<sup>67</sup>.

On the EU level, the Russian aggression against Ukraine forced EU leaders to rethink its geopolitical and security situation prompting to develop a new comprehensive vision of its foreign and security policy and bring it to a higher global level. Thus, in June 2016, EU Global Strategy was launched. It is still too short to analyze its outcomes and progress, however, for the first time, EU is trying to address its security challenges as a consolidated attempt to protect common European future. In such a way, this Global Strategy is trying to consolidate various foreign policy views referring to the internal and external security policy for EU member-states towards a single vision of the EU's external priorities<sup>68</sup>.

For Italy the priority of security dimension is foreseen in the challenges that Ukraine is having. The raising uncertainty produced on the Eastern borders of Ukraine make not only this country vulnerable, but impact on the stability of the regional and international levels<sup>69</sup>. In the field of energy, Ukraine is being a part of the Energy Community where Italy is having a leading role. The escalation of the Ukraine-Russia relations since 2014 aggravated energy security in the region creating new vulnerabilities on the border of the EU. Italy understands the challenges that Russia's temporary suspension of gas supplies in 2006 and 2009 to Ukraine and, thus, to Europe, have for the energy stability and security<sup>70</sup>.

Therefore, it initiated Italy-Ukrainian Joint Commission on Economic, Industrial and Financial cooperation and implemented its visits in 2015<sup>71</sup>. The same interests in enhancing mutually beneficial economic relations, especially in the field of energy and SME, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Vincenzo Amendola expressed during his visit to Kyiv on March, 2017<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, Italy provides certain continuity in what concerns energy security towards EU Global Strategy goals. Reliability of energy supplies, market competitiveness, energy diversification of suppliers, climate protection are the aspects for the strategic approach to the Italy and European energy challenges<sup>73</sup>.

As far as the central government hasn't taken full control of the Eastern and South regions, Italian scholars dwell on the continuous predominance of security threats and chaos. However, Italy understands that Russia is not going to abandon the idea of fomenting separatist movements under the idea of national interests to protect Russian-speaking population. Moreover, Italian scholars express the true idea that the Eastern part of Ukraine has been turned into the grey zone<sup>74</sup>.

Italian scholars positively see the role of its country in the promoting the effectiveness of the OSCE in Europe where starting from 2017 Italy is going to have its Presidency and Russia is participating in monitoring the ceasefires<sup>75</sup>. However, it didn't present autonomous initiatives that could strengthen NATO's role in Central and Eastern Europe or advocate projects in order to weaken Euro-Atlantic consistency of sanctions. The efforts of the Normandy format and the work of Trilateral Contact Group have been strongly supported by the Italian government<sup>76</sup>.

Analyzing program goals of Italy in the EU from 2013 till 2017, we can see a tendency that Italy stands on the need to follow the continuity in what concerns South European countries and its long-term support<sup>77</sup>. One of the goals for Italy was to ensure that the programming of the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENPI) for 2014-2020 would also stick to the centrality of the Mediterranean region, believing that it is necessary to optimize the use of financial resources European Union is providing for the ENP countries<sup>78</sup>.

Italy advocated this dimension due to the belief that the main systemic challenges and risks to it come from the Mediterranean countries shaping North Africa and Middle East. Following Italy's Presidency in the EU, it continues its commitment to further promotion of establishing "healthy" democracies at the Southern borders of Europe<sup>79</sup>. Moreover, in 2017 within the framework of the priorities set by the EU's Global Strategy, Italy will continue to promote the "new ENP" on the basis of differentiated approach involving effectively its Southern countries<sup>80</sup>. The special focus will be made for Tunis and Morocco as far as migration challenges come from these countries. Italy

puts into its priority to support the EU funding scheme: 2/3 of the funds — to the ENP Southern partners; 1/3 — to the Eastern ENP countries<sup>81</sup>.

At the same time, the priorities about continuation of the EU policy towards Eastern Partnership and its Italy's support were not fully realized. Italy understands that its special interests in what concerns bilateral relations with Russia influenced on its position in the EU about progressing of the Eastern Partnership. The Russia's assertiveness in Ukraine is perceived by Italy as a 'medium concern' and 'a critical context' in which Ukraine is operating. In continuity of Italy's EU Presidency in 2014, it will try to cooperate with Ukraine as well as other Eastern Partnership countries fostering economic integration, political dialoguing in order to promote freedom of movement between EU and these countries. This commitment Italy was reaffirmed by supporting AA/DCFTA for Ukraine and ratifying it in the Italian Parliament chambers<sup>82</sup>.

In what concerns Italy's position on Ukraine, Paolo Gentiloni already in 2015 underlined the importance of renewing territorial integrity, the applicability of Minsk Agreements. At the same time, institutional reforms in order to fight with systemic corruption are more than needed, both economic and constitutional. Italy sees the solution of the Donbas conflict only by granting autonomy to this conflictuous region<sup>83</sup>. To be precise, Italy has proposed the model of "Valle d'Aosta" and "Trentino Alto Adige" regional building as possible solutions for Donbas.

Another challenge coming from the Eastern Partnership countries is related to migration. According to the data, about 11% of the non-EU population coming to Italy is originally from Eastern Partnership, in particular from Moldova and Ukraine. At the same time the data of 2016 are presenting a slight progress of increase of Ukrainians to Italy (1.5%)<sup>84</sup>. However, the aggravating situation with migration comes from Mediterranean partners of the ENP where the numbers are 8.6% are for the citizens of Morocco and 2.5% — Egypt and Tunis<sup>85</sup>. These challenges prove the presence of uncontrolled areas or flexibilities in the political decision-making. Romano Prodi argues that the threat for Italy in the Mediterranean region remains not in the migration flows themselves but that since 2014 they are becoming more and more uncontrolled, especially from the Southern flank of ENP countries<sup>86</sup>.

### **Conclusions**

To sum up, as a result of the patchwork policy, ENP wasn't applicable for all the partner countries being geographically and geopolitically diverse. Being designed as an outcome of the enlargement policy, ENP as well as its Eastern dimension (Eastern Partnership) were not successfully efficient due to their inconsistent and heterogeneous nature. Therefore, EU's approach towards addressing Ukraine's challenges was based on the political conditionality

principle but not truly on the differentiation approach enhancing the confusion in understanding and valuing relations with Ukraine as a neighboring country. EU's neighborhood policy towards Ukraine lacks a degree of coherence and pragmatic foreign policy priorities.

Secondly, analyzing Italy's approach to view Ukraine as an ENP country, it's not in the priority list of this country. As far as the driving force of the European integration remains economic integration, Italy will prioritize economic and especially trade relations not narrowing its views on the sensitiveness of the conflictuous countries. The evolution of the Italy's position towards ENP demonstrated that it is interested in maintaining trade relations on the bilateral level both with Ukraine being a part of ENP and Eastern Partnership as well as with other countries, such as Russia. At the same time, the changing nature of the Italy's foreign policy in the EU-Russia-Ukraine format demonstrated its great reluctance in promoting Eastern Partnership as an ENP dimension. Thirdly, Italy is promoting more the Mediterranean countries of the ENP due to its leading role in the region. It also means that within the EU Italy would like only to increase its role in the South European region and thus chart its road ahead to be perceived further more than an EU medium power. Such an interest can be explained also by the created 'ring of fire' from which Italy face related to the challenges of terrorism and migration. Therefore, it doesn't properly advocate policy instruments necessary to be discussed on the EU level in order to recharge Eastern Partnership as a project. The reluctance to promote ENP in general can be explained financially, when Italy promotes the majority of EU funds to be addressed to the Mediterranean region, and politically, when since its Eastern Partnership launch, it could preview Russia's negative reaction to it.

Finally, ENP is now up to the review. From the 'partnership for democratization' it turned into the 'partnership for challenges and risks'. Moreover, the focus on the Eastern Partnership as its Eastern dimension should be more balanced as far as EU member states are seeking greater security in the face of threats and external challenges. Thus, the imperative should be rooted into the common understanding that Europeanization beyond Europe is possible when Europe stands politically united in addressing security challenges.

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