POWER PERCEPTION AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

IN THE BLACK SEA REGION:

THE EU, RUSSIA AND TURKEY

Doctoral Dissertation (PhD)

Neli V. Kirilova

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

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Power perception and conflict prevention
in the Black Sea region: The EU, Russia and Turkey

Neli V. Kirilova

International and Security Studies Doctoral Program

Doctoral School of International Relations and Political Science

Corvinus University of Budapest

&

Doctoral School on CSDP / CFSP

European Security and Defence College,

European External Action Service

Supervisors:

Dr. Christopher Walsch, PhD

Dr. Anna Molnár, PhD

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Neli Valentinova Kirilova

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Dedicated to:

Bulgaria.

In the EU.

To be surrounded by stable, secure and peaceful Black Sea region and Western Balkans.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research topic, relevance, significance and aimed contribution

Aimed research contribution: to academia and for EU diplomacy

This dissertation is written with the aim to provide two main contributions: to the academic knowledge on conflict prevention and to the practical application of EU diplomacy. First, it aims to contribute to the academic knowledge of regional conflict prevention. It elaborates a conceptual construct of power perception in IR theory and its relation to conflict. This academic contribution can be tested in different regions in which conflicts happen due to power competition. Second, it aims to contribute to the work of EU diplomats in conflict prevention by bringing the empirical case study of the Black Sea region.

Research contribution to academia: IR theory and methodology. This dissertation is created to contribute to the knowledge of conflict prevention. It proposes a new conflict prevention concept. I assume that competition leads to conflict. The starting point of my research is that detecting the potential reaction of competition in advance can prevent the escalation of a conflict. To assess it, I take a case study of regional conflict prevention. Namely, I suggest that the perception of power by regional competitors can be addressed before a conflict escalates. I develop a classification of six elements of power in IR theory. The perception of each regional competitor in a specific case study region is assessed over these six power elements. Thus, their reaction to compete in certain areas is recognised before they actually escalate a conflict or initiate a security crisis.

A theoretical contribution on the meaning of power in international relations is developed in the theoretical chapter. A conceptual contribution of how power perception can be assessed and how this relates to conflict prevention is developed in the conceptual framework. A contribution on the example of the Black Sea region is developed in the case study chapter. An empirical contribution tests the theory for three selected regional competitors - the EU, Russia and Turkey.

Research contribution for EU diplomacy: conflict prevention in the Black Sea region. Apart from the academic purposes, this dissertation has a second, practical aim. It is written to contribute to the foreign and security policy of the European Union. Particularly, it suggests how its conflict prevention could be strengthened, how it could stabilize the neighbouring regions, in particular the Black Sea region, and how its relations with Russia and Turkey affect regional stability.

Personal motivation of the author: I, the author, have selected the Black Sea region as a case study because I am acquainted with the local dynamics. My aim is, as a Bulgarian and as a researcher, to maintain the security and stability in the two regions neighbouring my own country - the Black Sea region and the Western Balkans. This is currently of primary importance for the European Union, as well.

Research topic

This dissertation is written in the field of international relations. It contributes to the broad knowledge of security studies, in particular, to conflict prevention. Some parts relate to the psychological concept of perception, the conceptualisation of power, and regionalism.

As conflict prevention, I refer to external interference before a security crisis escalates. To prevent a conflict, different types of intervention exist. This research examines structural intervention, the purpose of which is to prevent the escalation of a conflict. For structural intervention, the root causes of a conflict shall be identified. I admit that the competition for influence is a precondition for regional security crises and conflicts. So far, two main groups of root causes, or areas of competition, are known - ideological and resources. I relate them to the concept of power in international relations. As a result, I develop a categorisation of six power elements, comprising both ideological and resource values. I relate them to individual interests of competitors in a case study region. As a result, I establish and test the relation between power perception and conflict prevention.

Crises and conflicts challenge international security, as the reality in 2023 proves with ongoing war in Ukraine, around the Black Sea. The time I refer to is broadly after 1989, when the bi-polar world transformed to multipolarity and regionalism arose. In a multipolar world, the competition for influence is within regions. I admit that regional powers compete in projecting influence over regional political entities - states or territories. Throughout this research, I use the terms regional hegemons, regional powers and regional competitors with equal value. The specific time I examine is 2016-2021, between two major crises.

The *theoretical findings* could serve any international actor who aims conflict prevention. The logic of the research can be applied to different world regions, where conflicts are the result from competition for influence between powerful neighbours. The *practical findings* could mainly be beneficial to one international actor - the European Union (EU). The case study I develop is in the EU's near neighbourhood - the Black Sea region. I exclude from my analysis any potential competitor who is not physically located in the region

- particularly, the USA. I examine the complex meaning of power, not only its military aspects, which makes NATO irrelevant to this analysis.

I empirically test the new theory in the case study of the Black Sea region with competing actors the EU, Russia and Turkey. Their perception of different power elements leads to direct involvement, indirect interference, or neutrality. I assume that the likelihood to react in initiating a conflict or a security crisis depends on the importance given on each power element by the IR actor at a certain time. Their reaction types are neutral, competing or cooperative. My presumption is that the reaction of competition results in regional security crises and conflicts. Therefore, this research tries to identify in advance the potential reaction of competition. That could contribute to regional conflict prevention. It can be applied locally to the case study of the Black Sea region, or globally as a theoretical concept of conflict prevention.

Relevance of the research topic and the case study

The current research attempts to assess the perception of power, which results in competition and therefore, conflict. The means of competition include soft, hard, smart and sharp power, developed in the theoretical chapter. A conceptual framework proposes the relation between power perception and conflict prevention. This new theory is empirically tested for the EU, Russia and Turkey, assessing their foreign and security policy strategies. This research shows how assessing the perception of power contributes to regional conflict prevention. The conceptual framework could be applied to other world regions. It aims to generate new knowledge on conflict prevention. I examine conflict as the result of competition to impose influence within an external political unit. This research admits that the basic unit over which regional hegemons compete is influence. It examines the case study of the Black Sea region.

Conflict prevention in the Black Sea region is important for the EU's security in the long term. The Black Sea has a strategic location, which raises the interests of its bordering neighbours - the EU and NATO as the West, the post-Soviet countries as Russia and the East, and Turkey as the South / Mediterranean. The Black Sea region and its belonging political entities are a zone of perceived competition for influence by three IR actors - the EU, Russia and Turkey. In the EU's terminology, this region consists of the Eastern Partnership countries, located in the EU Neighbourhood. In Russia's terminology, this region is a zone of influence in its post-Soviet space. In Turkish terminology, it is a zone of influence in the post-Ottoman space, associated with the political thought of neo-Ottomanism. Therefore, this research

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admits that three regional powers compete to exercise external influence in a region of their close proximity - the Black Sea region.

In the context of the BSR, I understand power as the intention to exert external influence. The elements of power are developed in the theoretical chapter, and tested through empirical findings. The identified six power elements are examined for a fixed time period in the foreign and security policy strategies of the three actors - the EU, Russia and Turkey. The assessment of the results shows their potential to react in competition. I presume that the competitive reaction increases the likelihood to initiate regional security crises or conflicts at that time period.

Significance

This dissertation is significant for developing the knowledge of conflict prevention. Detecting the relation between power perception and conflict prevention can contribute to preventing regional security crises and conflicts. It contributes from two perspectives - as a theoretical conceptualisation, and as a selected case study. First, this research is important for the academic knowledge of conflict prevention in international relations. It shows how building up the theory of power perception, and detecting in advance the reaction of competition serves conflict prevention. As power, I refer to the relative influence projected by the regional hegemons in external to them political entities. This research can be applied to specific regions, with the purpose to improve regional stability. Second, as a case study, I selected the Black Sea region, in close proximity to the EU. This case study could contribute to improving the role of the European Union as a conflict prevention actor in the region.

1.2. My approach: basic terms, presumption, findings, novelty

Brief research outline and basic terms

This research explores the relation between conflict prevention, the competition for regional influence and the power perception of the regional competitors. To address this relation, in the next chapters I develop details on both the perception of power in IR and the case study region, followed by empirical analysis of power perception for three regional competitors.

I create a theoretical framework of six elements of power, over which regional actors compete. I develop a case study region, in which I select equal power status competitors and I outline some of their interests. Then, I apply the conceptualised six power elements to the

selected regional competitors the EU, Russia and Turkey. Finally, I measure their perception over the six power elements and assess their reaction to competition, leading to conflicts.

The main **terms** in this research are split in **three** categories. The **first** category is related to conflict prevention, root causes of conflict, regionalism and competition, resources and beliefs, and the EU as an intervening actor. As conflict prevention, I refer to interference in the period before an international security crisis escalates. The **second** category is related to the case study. I take as an example regional conflicts, typical for the broad time after the end of the Cold War. This time is relevant, because the competition transforms from bi-powar world to regions. I select the case study of an EU neighbouring region, the Black Sea region. Major competitors in the selected time in this region are the EU, Russia and Turkey. Details on their interests, bilateral relations and power status follow in the case study chapter. The **third** category is related to the IR theory on power and conflict. As the most relevant theories for the selected case study, I identify the security dilemma theory and the balance of power theory. A gap between them is found - the unclear meaning of power and the lack of knowledge on power perception. As power, I refer to the externally projected influence in the competition between powerful IR actors over external political units in a region.

Main presumption of the research

The main presumption is that actors in the international relations system attempt to exercise external influence by projecting power. This results in changing the behaviour of external actors favouring the power projecting IR actor. However, it inevitably leads to competition between actors who attempt to project influence towards the same external region at the same time, over the same elements of competition. The competition leads to conflict.

In this dissertation, I argue that the reaction of competition can be detected in advance. For this, it is necessary to measure the perception of the regional competitors about the elements over which they compete. Knowing in advance which element is perceived as highly significant and by whom can contribute to preventing their reaction to competition.

I developed the categorisation of six power elements. Through it, I compare the power perception of the regional competitors in the Black Sea region - the EU, Russia and Turkey. After indicating the importance that each competitor attributes to the same elements of projected power, their perception can be compared.

This research has been written with the purpose to serve the general knowledge of conflict prevention. This is the purpose of my academic contribution, both through theory,

conceptualisation and empirical testing. In addition, a second goal is the contribution to the practical knowledge of EU foreign policy making in the area of conflict prevention, and specifically towards the Black Sea region. Details on the results and their contribution towards each of these goals is explained in the main body of the dissertation. The conclusion assesses how the results meet the initially set research goals.

My approach to the research problem

In this context, I explore the relation between power perception and conflict prevention for a specific case study region - the Black Sea region. This research approaches power as externally projected influence by competing IR actors. I examine the power competition as a main reason for conflict. Other reasons for conflict remain out of the scope of the current dissertation.

The literature review examines the relation between power, regional competition and conflict. The **research gap** shows the need to clarify the concept of power perception in IR and its relation to regional conflict prevention of the EU. It suggests a **hypothesis** that once a meaning of power is selected, its perception could be assessed. The assessment can contribute to generating knowledge of whether a specific regional competitor would initiate a reaction of competition in a specified region, in a selected time. My basic understanding is that competition leads to conflict in international relations, therefore preventing the competition might contribute to conflict prevention. I have written this dissertation with the purpose of contributing to EU conflict prevention, and strengthening the EU role as a conflict prevention actor in world regions characterised by security crises.

I theoretically analyse power, as a result of which I derive two main categories. The first category relates to the power status of IR actors, among which I select those with comparable power status as regional powers. For my case study, these are Russia, Turkey and the EU. The second category relates to power elements as areas of influence over which the IR actors compete. I identify six power elements - Military/Security, Economy/Investment, Energy/Climate, Diplomacy/Politics, Governance/Society and Information/Access.

I conceptualise the relation between power perception and conflict prevention. This is a new concept which I created with the purpose to contribute to conflict prevention. It consists of the theoretically derived three regional competitors, their perception over the six power elements for a fixed time period, and their likelihood of reaction. My presumption is that the perception of a power element by a regional competitor defines their likelihood of reaction, if another regional competitor attempts to influence the region of competition over

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this element. A higher level of importance, perceived by a regional competitor on a power element, corresponds to a higher likelihood to trigger a conflict.

I empirically apply the concept in the example of the main competitors in the Black Sea region - Russia, Turkey and the EU, for a fixed time period, 2016-2021. This shows the different perceptions of projected power by the competing IR actors. The results show which of the regional competitors would react at the certain time on which of the power elements[1]. This research suggests that the intention of initiating a security crisis could be prevented early enough by timely identifying the perception of the regional competitors over power elements, which might trigger their reaction to conflict.

Approach to IR theory and measuring power (after Baldwin, 2016). The theoretical approach I have selected for the current study is based on the gap between balance of power and security dilemma. Namely, the need to identify the perception of power in international relations. The meaning of power depends on how and by whom it is interpreted. Creating a common categorisation of power allows its measurement. For this purpose, I analysed the conceptual meaning of power and identified *six power elements*. In order to measure how these elements are perceived, I select a case study region with three actors of comparable power status - regional powers. As the regional powers compete for influence in this region, I call them *regional competitors*. My argument is that the perceived value of power can be measured. Preconditions are to define the power elements, the IR actors with equal power status, and a fixed time period. This is the conceptual framework of this research. This dissertation argues that assessing power perception could contribute to conflict prevention.

Approach to the case study Black Sea region (after Lund, 2009). A regionalist approach is important for the achievement of targeted results in conflict prevention, suggested by Lund (2009) in the literature review. Recognising the diversity of countries in a certain region is needed for appropriate action towards them. Different nations and people in different countries create different perceptions of identical concepts. Misunderstanding due to differing attitudes lead to undesired by either side conflict. The understanding could be defined by conceptualisation and assessing how the derived concepts are perceived by different actors. As appropriate case studies, two regions with intense security crises form the EU near neighbourhood – the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region. The author has selected to examine the Black Sea region as a continuous own research interest and an urgent EU crisis.

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[1] Even though this dissertation has been submitted during the war in Ukraine, it was initiated prior to it with the purpose to prevent conflict escalation in the Black Sea region.

Findings and novelty

The theoretical novelty of this research is the definition of six power elements. Over these elements, the perceived value of power could be measured for regional competitors with comparable power status. This knowledge contributes to identifying their perceived significance per power element, and their likelihood to react in competition. This could be applied for prevention of security crises and conflicts early enough.

I propose the concept of power perception for conflict prevention, assessing the six power elements. This aims to better explain security crises in international relations theory. I invented it after comparing a number of existing theoretical perspectives. All of them missed to address the exact value of perceived power over which IR actors compete. Based on conceptual analysis of power in international relations, I suggest decomposing power to six elements. I measure the perceived value of power elements for each regional competitor. This shows on what element each IR actor would be competitive in case that another regional competitor tries to impose influence. Thus, knowledge is produced for expected reactions in regional conflicts and security crises. I relate power to externally projected influence in a region of shared interest.

The newly introduced division of six power elements addresses the meaning of power in international relations. I apply it to the case study of the Black Sea region. In it, I justify the selection of three regional competitors with comparable power status. The status of IR actors and the types of IR actors are also examined. I briefly outline their basic interests in this specific region. In the theoretical chapter, the research defines which are the *power elements* over which regional hegemons compete to externally project influence. It is based on theoretical assumptions in neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. The differentiation between power and influence is explained in the IR theory chapter. The conceptual chapter suggests a new concept of perception of *power elements*. It suggests that understanding the relative value that each hegemon applies to each power element could contribute to preventing regional security crises. This new theory can contribute to preventing international conflicts and security crises in a region. As a case study, I have explored the Black Sea region, with regional competitors Russia, Turkey, and the EU.

1.3. Integrative literature review: conflict prevention, Black Sea region, power perception

Summary

First, the literature on conflict prevention identifies the relation between conflict prevention and competition. As such, it aims to further develop criteria of measuring the perceived competition, so that it could be prevented. Second, the literature on Black Sea region defines the geopolitical competition between hegemons aiming to maintain influence as one of the main reasons for security crises and conflicts. The reaction of competition is a result of a highly valued area of competition. Third, the literature on international relations theory, power and conflict, identifies two problems in maintaining stability in a system. The first one is the lack of balance. The second one is the misperception. A gap in the knowledge is the lack of unified perception of the meaning of power. Therefore, I further examine the relation between the perception of power and conflict prevention.

Integrative literature review: conflict prevention, regionalism and power in IR theory

The literature review explains the relation between power, conflict and the Black Sea regional security crises. It clarifies the research problem, the gap which this research aims to fill in, and the research questions. It shows what is done and what is not done by scholars so far, and explains why this research is important.

I develop an integrative literature review, combining three topics: international relations theory and regionalism theory, aiming to contribute to the knowledge of conflict prevention theory. It provides an initial perspective on the research problem, which is later developed throughout the study. For every subtopic, I explain what the concerned problem is and how it relates to the next chapters.

Literature group 1. Selection of a research topic: Conflict prevention and the EU. This is the body of literature, for the topical purposes of which this dissertation is written - EU conflict prevention. The first literature set examines conflict prevention in the cycle of conflict (Lund, 2009), as well as the significance of conflict prevention for the EU. It shows some main characteristics of conflict assessment, such as conflict cycle, types of actors, reasons for conflict, main areas of competition, resources and beliefs, time and place. A conflict assessment table, combining these characteristics, is drawn. It is referred to throughout the research.

The reasons for conflict could be split in two main subgroups - tangible material resources and intangible people's beliefs. These subgroups are referred to in the theoretical chapter as types of power. In IR theory, developed over the theoretical framework chapter, I

relate soft, hard, sharp and smart power to either material resources or beliefs of people. Based on these subcategories, a framework of six power elements is suggested.

This literature set also discusses the double role of the EU as either a regional competitor or an actor preventing conflicts. In the Black Sea region, both EU roles could be examined. The purpose of the dissertation is to contribute to EU conflict prevention and the EU foreign and security policy. However, throughout the dissertation I examine the EU as a regional competitor.

Literature group 2. Regionalism and a case study selection: The Black Sea security crises and power competition. This is the body of literature on which I build the case study. The second literature set examines the geopolitical factors of a conflict. It suggests that conflict is the result of competition between powerful IR actors over a certain territory (Mackinder, 1904). It finds that conflict can be examined as a result of competition for power. As a contemporary and significant to the EU case study, I select the Black Sea region (BSR). I approach conflict as a result of the competition between regional hegemons. In a separate case study chapter, contemporary security crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region are outlined. The case study chapter has two main aims. *First,* it identifies the main regional competitors, Russia, Turkey and the EU. It explains the relation of the EU to the post-Cold war concept of the West, and its meaning for the regional dynamics around the Black Sea. It also explains why NATO could be examined as a global security actor, but not a regional actor of multidimensional power competition. *Second,* it provides details of the bilateral relations and shows some specific areas of competition and interests of the regional powers. It follows the justified in the theoretical framework comparable power status of the EU, Russia and Turkey as IR actors - regional powers in the Black Sea region.

Literature group 3. Selection of IR theory on power, security and conflict: Balance of power and security dilemma (misperception). This is the body of literature on which I construct the theoretical and conceptual framework. The third literature set on IR theory examines the relation between power competition and conflict. It discusses IR theories on the reasons for conflicts and security crises. Among the theories that address the competition between hegemons, particularly applicable to the Black Sea region, *security dilemma* and *balance of power* are selected. According to balance of power, conflict is the result of lack of balance. According to the security dilemma, conflict is the result of misperception.

The term 'balance of power' has unclear meaning, with the only universal agreement that it relates to 'distribution of power' (Wolfers, 1959:1). In balance of power theory, the power of an IR actor – a state or an organisation, is controlled by checks and balances of the

other IR actors in the system (Schweller, 2016). The logic of 'balance of power' theory has been guiding foreign policy and structurally defining international relations for over 300 years (Sheehan, 1996). In the earlier use of the concept of balance of power, alliances and armaments were concerned, while in the nuclear era, deterrence went to focus (Sheehan, 1996). In a realist approach, 'balance of power' is attempted either establishing alliances, or increasing the arms, or both (Schweller, 2014). Balance of power is a realist theory, criticised by liberals who suggest institutions, democracy, peace and globalization to be transforming the politics of power competition (Schweller, 2016). Balance of power is also criticized by constructivists, who suggest that not only the material but also the 'ideational factors such as norms and identities' have a significant role into defining the 'threats and alliances' (Schweller, 2016).

My approach to power is mainly constructivist, although I decompose power to elements including the founding principles of different IR schools. Some debates refer to such an approach as hybrid. The power competition is continuously ongoing. Currently, in the digital era, communication and competition to advance technologies and to reach open space are ongoing. The meaning of power remains complex and is explained further in the research.

For security dilemma theory, *perception* is a key. In the security dilemma, conflict is the result of the attempt of a state to increase its security by 'armies and alliances', which results in other states perceiving themselves as 'less secure' (Jervis, 1992:717). Any 'attempt to dominate the international system' results in a 'counter-balancing coalition' to restrain the dominating IR actor, which is called 'balance of power' (Jervis, 1992:717). One of the possible reactions is competition due to fear of perceived threats, described in the 'Prisoner's dilemma' (Jervis, 1992:720). I refer to *power perception* in the conceptual framework. To power elements perceived as high value, I relate the triggering reaction of competition and conflict. Another possible reaction is the cooperation on matters, perceived as less important (Jervis, 1992:720). I refer to this in the conceptual framework as the low perceived value of a power element, allowing cooperation. Jervis suggests that '*cooperation is most likely when the gains from exploiting the other and the costs of being exploited are relatively low, when mutual competition is much worse than mutual cooperation, when exploitation is not much better than mutual cooperation, and when being exploited is not much worse than mutual competition*' (Jervis, 1992:720).

1.4.Research gap, questions, aim and objectives

Research gap

The research gap in the set of literature on conflict prevention identifies the need for a regionalist approach towards conflict (Lund, 2009). The literature on the Black Sea region confirms that power competition is the reason for regional conflicts, which corresponds ot the starting presumption of this research. The literature on IR theory discusses two main theories, related to power competition. The concept of *balance of power* is applicable to the regional conflicts after the Cold War. *Perfect competition* meant stability between two hegemons in a bi-polar system, which is barely possible in a multipolar international system. The differing perception as a reason for conflict was suggested in the security dilemma. The research gap between the main theories, balance of power and security dilemma, is that neither the meaning of power is clarified, nor its perception. A number of scholars examined the possible meaning of power, but there was no agreement on a unified, universally applicable meaning of power. The vague meaning of power in IR shows the necessity to clarify it conceptually. Furthermore, the meaning of power, the perception for whom, when, how to decide what elements, how to measure it need to be clarified.

Research questions

1) How does power perception relate to conflict prevention? If the perception of power affects the reactions of the regional competitors, leading to either competition or cooperation, then how to prevent conflicts? These questions are addressed in the literature review.

2) What is the possible impact of defining power perception by RU/ TR/ EU on the regional security crises and on conflict prevention in the Black Sea region? This question is established on the basis of the literature review, developed through the case study and the theory. It is tested in the empirical part. Its answer aims to prove how understanding power perception of the EU, Russia and Turkey can be used as a tool for conflict prevention. This knowledge can contribute to preserving the regional stability in the Black Sea region.

Sub-questions:

*3) What is **power***? *Which exact power elements should be addressed? Who are equal power status regional competitors?* These questions are addressed in the theoretical chapter.

4) How to assess the perception of power? How knowing the potential reaction of geopolitical competition is related to conflict prevention? These questions are addressed in the conceptual chapter.

5) In the case study of the Black Sea region, which are the perceived interests of the regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey? These questions are addressed in the case study chapter. *Sub-questions:* Which are the selected time and selected actors? Why? Which are their perceived interests in general? Which are their perceived interests for the selected time? Why are the EU, Russia and Turkey comparable as regional actors? What kind of IR actors are they (modern or post-modern, a state or a state-like organisation)? What is their power status (super power, middle power, small power)? Which are their general interests in the region, and which areas in their bilateral relations relate to competition or cooperation?

6) How is power perceived? What is the perceived value of the same power elements for the EU, Russia and Turkey in a fixed period of time? This question is addressed in the empirical chapters, which examine their foreign policy strategies.

Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the perception of power could be assessed. This assessment could contribute to conflict prevention. It can be applied to the Black Sea regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey. Knowing how power is perceived by a regional competitor could prevent their reaction to competition, which is the major reason for regional conflicts. My presumption is that identifying the potential triggers for each regional hegemon on each of the six power elements might show whether they would react in competition, leading to crisis escalation in their perceived zone of influence.

A hypothesis is the assumption of the expected results. My assumption is that Russia, Turkey, and the EU have different perceptions of power. This leads to misunderstanding between them, and a reaction to initiate conflict. I assume that if an IR actor considers an element of power highly important, this actor would aim to prevent other actors influencing this element. The reaction, driven by competition for influence, might lead to regional security crises and conflicts. I do not have an initial presumption of what power element is important for whom and when. Therefore, the aim of this research is to find out what is the perception of power for the three regional competitors in a fixed time period and how this contributes to conflict prevention. In the *theoretical* chapter, I develop a classification of power over six elements, in which I try to include all possible aspects of the power competition in IR. In the *case study*, I examine literature over the strategic interests of the

three main competing actors in the Black Sea region. Thus, I examine categories, interrelated to the concept of power for the regional actors. In the *empirical* chapters by content analysis of strategic documents, I compare the perception over the same six categories of power by the three actors. I do so on an equal basis in their latest foreign and security policy strategies. Thus, I evaluate their aimed intention to exercise external influence in the region on each of the power elements, and therefore the perceived importance of each element.

My presumption is that regional competitors react to different stimuli. Misperception is the result of their differing expectation of the other's intention. The expectation of the other to increase its influence on an interest, perceived as vital, is the trigger to regional security crises and conflicts. Therefore, I assess how different aspects of power are perceived, aiming to identify which one is vital for which IR actor at a selected time.

I suggest that assessing the perceived importance of power might contribute to preventing the escalation of a conflict. Even though this dissertation does not provide actual interference in a conflict, it develops a theoretical model and empirically tests it to a selected case study. I test the suggested theoretical model to the case study of the Black Sea region. As a result, two main contributions of this dissertation are derived. First, it could help for conflict prevention in the region, and therefore serve the political goals of the EU. Second, it could be used in the academic knowledge of conflict prevention. The concept could be extrapolated towards other regions, considering their specific characteristics, actors and interests.

Research aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to clarify the meaning of power in IR, to examine how power perception relates to regional conflict prevention, and to test this new concept in the case study of the Black Sea region, particularly in the foreign policy strategies of Russia, Turkey and the EU.

I address the obscure definition of power throughout the research. I try to clarify the meaning of power through conceptual analysis in the theoretical chapter. As a result, six elements of power are suggested. Then, I develop a conceptual framework to relate the meaning of power and to propose a way to assess how power is perceived. I address it through the selected regional competitors in the case study, and apply it empirically to their foreign and security policy concepts. In the empirical chapter, their perception is assessed for the EU, Russia and Turkey. The derived knowledge can serve the literature on conflict prevention.

The main presumption of this dissertation is that the competition for power leads to conflict. The types of reaction are competition leading to conflict, cooperation leading to peace, and neutral reaction, leading to continuation of the status quo. The reactions depend on power perception. This research is designed to measure the perceptions of power by regional competitors, so that the reaction of competition can be prevented before a crisis escalates.

The basic assumption is that perceived high importance of a power element triggers a reaction of competition. Competition is the reason for conflict. However, the perception of power can be evaluated only on fixed areas of competition for IR actors with comparable power status. To evaluate it, I first identify the comparable regional hegemons, then identify the elements of power over which they compete, and finally assess their perception in the foreign policy strategies for a fixed time period. As a result, I assess their potential to trigger regional security crises and conflicts over six areas of power competition - power elements.

My research objective is to develop a concept in contribution to conflict prevention and to test it empirically for the Black Sea region. The expected result of this research is to measure power perception for the three regional competitors in predefined categories. I measure the importance of six power elements for three regional competitors. Based on it, I assess their likelihood to compete, cooperate or remain neutral.

1.5. Theoretical approach and conceptual framework

The theoretical framework of the research aims to conceptualise the meaning of power in IR. It clarifies who are the actors with comparable power status in a region, and over what exact power elements they compete. As a result, six power elements are identified, as well as three regional competitors. Based on this, a conceptual framework is established. The perceived importance of the six power elements for the three regional competitors is empirically assessed in their foreign and security policy strategies.

My approach to theory: conflict prevention through power measurement (Baldwin, 2016) and regionalism (Lund, 2009). The reaction of competition is presumed to lead to conflicts. The perceived importance of each element of power or area of competition defines the potential reaction. The purpose of this research is to detect in advance a potential reaction of competition. This way, it could contribute to conflict prevention.

The recommendation for a regionalist approach (Lund, 2009) is addressed. The case study chapter examines the Black Sea region, selecting the actors and outlining some of their interests. As a result, it suggests three regional competitors to be examined. These are the EU, Russia and Turkey.

The recommended measuring of power (Baldwin, 2016) is also addressed. The theoretical chapter develops a conceptual analysis on the meaning of power in international relations. It relates the root causes of conflicts and crises to the areas of competition. As a result, it suggests the *six elements of power* framework.

The IR approaches, over which this study is designed, combine neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. In neorealism, balance of power in the international system means equal competition, while lack of balance is a reason for security crises. According to neoliberalism, the competition for regional influence is economic and could grow into cooperation. My approach is constructivist, according to which the perception is more important than the actual action.

The meaning of power in international relations: a conceptual analysis

This research conceptually analyses power in international relations (IR). It is examined in the context of international security crises and conflicts. The research approaches the meaning of power in IR from several perspectives. *First,* the relation between power and conflict is identified in the literature review. *Second,* the power status of IR actors is examined in the case study chapter, with the purpose to identify IR actors with equal power status. The case study chapter suggests three basic levels of power status categories, within which I select the EU, Russia and Turkey as regional powers. *Third,* power is explained as a combination of security and influence in international relations in the theoretical chapter. The meaning of power is examined in the different theoretical schools of international relations. These include realism, constructivism, liberalism, with definitions of hard, soft, sharp, smart types of power. As a result, the theoretical chapter proposes regrouping of power in six elements. The conceptual framework chapter suggests empirical testing of the perception of power for three regional competitors with comparable power status in IR over the same six power elements.

To avoid confusion in the terminology, I refer throughout the research to power as externally projected influence. In previous academic literature, classification of security in IR corresponds to the basis of my conceptualisation of power. I refer to the IR actors competing for influence in a region as regional competitors. In the literature, these could be found as regional powers or regional hegemons. In the case study chapter, I justify their comparable power status as regional powers. After that, I refer to them as regional competitors. This provides a sound interpretation of the term *power* throughout the text.

In the theoretical chapter, I split the concept of power to separate sections. My categorization combines hard, soft, smart and sharp power. Within it, I differentiate six power elements: military/security, economy/investment, energy/climate, diplomacy/politics, governance/society, information access/exchange. I measure the values per each category for each regional competitor in a fixed time. Thus, I explore the current perception of each power element for each regional competitor - Russia, Turkey and the EU. As a result of the perceived power value, I assess their likelihood to react in competition. This knowledge can contribute to preventing regional security crises and conflicts.

Conceptual framework: proposal of a new theory

The conceptual framework applies the theoretical construct of six power elements to the selected in the case study three IR actors with comparable power status. It proposes an empirical measurement of their perception on each power element. The measurement of the perceptions aims to detect the potential for reaction of competition. Knowing in advance the potential areas of this reaction for each separate actor at a certain time contributes to preventing it.

Therefore, the conceptual framework has two groups of aims, theoretical and empirical. *Theoretical group of aims:* First, to identify regional competitors with comparable power status. Therefore, equal power potential of the reaction to compete is expected. Second, to identify a theoretical frame of the concept of power in international relations. As a result, it derives six power elements. Third, to combine them in a concept which corresponds to the literature review goals, in contribution to conflict prevention. *Empirical group of aims:* First, to select comparable documents for the three regional competitors. It identifies the foreign and security policy strategies in a fixed period of time. Second, to analyse them. For the EU, it applies discourse analysis. For Russia and Turkey, it applies comparative content analysis. Third, to discuss the results towards the application of the new theory. Fourth, to discuss the results towards the goals set in the literature review.

1.6. Methodology and methods: analytical and empirical choices

1.6.1. Abductive approach, grounded theory: case study and theory building

The theory builds on conflict prevention through regionalism and power perception. The methodology to measure it is through a case study approach to regional security crises and power competition.

My methodological approach is abductive, qualitative. I apply the grounded theory method, which relies on a case study to construct and test a new theory. First, a stable body of literature is developed. Then, a new theory is suggested through conceptual analysis of power, which identifies comparable regional competitors and outlines some of their areas of competition. I develop a theory by conceptualisation of power. Then, I create a conceptual framework and suggest its empirical testing. As a result, the research analyses the relation between power perception of three regional competitors on six power elements. Based on this, it assesses the likelihood for them to initiate regional security crises.

I identify comparable regional hegemons in a case study region. I develop conceptual analysis on power, to identify six measurable power elements. I explain the concept of how this contributes to conflict prevention. I empirically measure the perceived importance of the six elements of power for the three regional competitors.

As a result, this provides knowledge of how measuring the perception of power could contribute to preventing the reaction of competition in a selected region. This is the contribution of the current research - theoretical, methodological, and empirical, to the theory on conflict prevention.

1.6.2. Empirical choices: new theory, case study Black Sea region, expert interviews, foreign policy strategies

Case study Black Sea region - the EU, Russia, Turkey. Expert interviews.

The current competitors in the Black Sea regional conflicts are: 1) direct conflict Russia-Ukraine, indirect conflict NATO/USA vs. post-Soviet Russia. 2) The EU as a part of the Western block against post-Soviet Russia. 3) Turkey as a post-Ottoman successor. The main regional competitors around the Black Sea are contemporary Russia, Turkey and the EU. They compete to exercise influence over the post-Soviet countries, before they define to which zone of influence each belongs. Their pattern of interaction shows both competition and cooperation, depending on outer circumstances. For its explanation, a theoretical approach towards power is developed in the theoretical chapter. Later in the empirical chapter, this model is tested to the three regional competitors. As a contribution to the case study and theory testing, the method of expert interviews has been conducted.

Selection of time and strategic documents

The wider timeframe I chose is after the end of the Cold War, and more specifically, between two major crises in the Black Sea region. The dissertation covers the period 2016-2021, between major geopolitical security crises. It has been selected as a relatively calm period, in which the perception of the three IR actors could be compared. Therefore, the likelihood of their reaction to competition can be assessed in advance per power element.

The time period on which this research is focused is between the years 2016-2021. This time starts with the 2016 EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy and ends with the 2022 Russian invasion in Ukraine, when the West mobilized measures against Russia and the 2022 EU's Strategic Compass was finally issued. While these events undoubtedly impacted the regional competition-cooperation dynamics, I do not examine particularly the war, but the structural preconditions of regional competition. I assess the ambitions for influence over the countries around the Black Sea by three regional hegemons, the EU, Russia and Turkey, and the regional security crises and conflicts resulting from their competition.

Type of IR actors, type of analysis: discourse and content

The reactions of regional competitors can be assessed as comparable only if they have comparable power status. Around the Black Sea, the contemporary regional competitors are the EU, Russia and Turkey. Their internal structure differs - one republic, one federation and one supranational organisation. However, only their external action is relevant for this research - each of them has a united external foreign and security policy and behaves as a separate actor in international relations. Their global impact differs - Russia is a traditional great power, Turkey is a regional power, and the EU is a relatively new global power. However, I am interested only in their potential to act in the context of regional competition. As such, I refer to them as regional powers with comparable power status.

I examine Russia and Turkey as post-imperial regional competitors. I explore the EU as both a regional competitor for influence but also a global power aiming conflict prevention. Due to their different structure, the types of strategies they produce also differ. Russia and Turkey have strategies on different topics, which strategies last for a longer time period. This allows content analysis. The EU, due to its internal dynamics, has regularly changed its strategies, and makes amendments on yearly basis for the selected period. This allows discourse analysis.

1.6.3. Suitability of the methodology, feasibility of methods

The selected methodology best suits the research aims, because considering the time and resources constraints of this research, and based on my personal knowledge and abilities, this is the most efficient way to address the research questions in depth. As a result, the current study has the potential to contribute to the theory of conflict prevention, and also to regional conflict prevention in the Black Sea region, and to the role of the EU as a conflict prevention actor. Particularly, it provides knowledge on perceptions of the elements of power by regional hegemons. As a result of their likely reaction, they either maintain balance and stability of the status quo, or initiate security crises resulting from competition, or initiate cooperation. The created conceptual framing of the theory on conflict prevention can be further applied to other regions, where conflicts and security crises are the result of competition between regional powers.

Feasibility. It is achievable to examine the perception of three regional hegemons over six power elements in a fixed time. The perceived importance per power element leads to likelihood of reaction as competition, cooperation, or neutral. This provides a theoretical contribution to the knowledge of conflict prevention. The methods are feasible, as the values of time, documents and actors are selected by common criteria, corresponding to the restrictions of a PhD dissertation. The types of analyses, namely conceptual, content and discourse, best correspond to the selected sets of data, with the purpose to fulfill the research objectives.

1.7. Structure and next chapters

This research consists of the following parts - introduction, integrative literature review, abductive methodology, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and empirical application in case study, expert interviews, and foreign policy analysis.

The ***Literature review*** chapter has an integrative approach, with three bodies of literature. *Topic 1: Conflict prevention and the EU.* It identifies basic characteristics of conflict prevention. It also outlines its significance for the EU. *Topic 2: Regionalism and case study Black Sea region.* It examines the competition for power, security and influence in the Black Sea region. Three regional competitors with equal status are identified – the EU, Russia and Turkey. It is located in the context of recent security crises or frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region in Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. *Topic 3: IR Theory.* The selected relevant IR theories on competition for power between regional hegemons in the region are balance of power and security dilemma. A gap in the theory is the missing definition of power, and the unclear perception of power. The *hypothesis* suggests

that the different perception of power between regional hegemons is the reason for reaction of competition, leading to regional security crises and conflicts. Therefore, assessing the perceived meaning of power by the regional competitors could contribute to regional conflict prevention.

The **_Research design, Methodology and Methods_** chapter shows the selected approach. _Methodology:_ abductive approach, grounded theory with a case study and developing a new theory. It repeatedly changes the focus from the case study to the theory. The knowledge is deducted, then inducted, repeatedly, until the results serve the initially established research aims. Namely, it generates a new theory towards conflict prevention and tests its empirical application. _Methods:_ I develop the theory on conflict prevention and power in IR through integrative literature review. Then, I apply conceptual analysis of power in the theoretical framework. The conceptual framework constructs a new theory of six power elements, three regional competitors, and conflict prevention by power perception. The empirical chapters test the application of this new theory. I apply the case study Black Sea region, with competing IR actors the EU, Russia and Turkey. Expert interviews identify some initial concepts. The next chapters test the new theory to the foreign and security policy strategies of the selected regional competitors. I measure it through discourse analysis for the EU and comparative content analysis for Russia and Turkey.

The **_Theoretical framework_** chapter develops a new conceptualisation of power, six power elements, equal power status IR actors, three regional competitors. The aim of the theoretical chapter is to develop conceptual analysis on power in international relations. It examines power as externally projected influence by an IR actor. It conceptualises power, based on the main IR theoretical schools, in new six power elements. These are military/security, economy/investment, energy/climate, diplomacy/politics, governance/society, information access/exchange.

The **_Conceptual framework_** develops a new contribution to theory, power perception and conflict prevention, which could be empirically tested. In this new contribution to theory, I establish the relation between the six elements of power and the three regional competitors. This concept is used to measure their perception of power. By identifying in advance the potential areas, where reaction of competition will follow, this reaction can be prevented early enough. The main presumption of this research is that competition leads to conflict. Therefore, detecting the perception of power contributes to conflict prevention.

The **_empirical application_** tests the newly conceptualised theory in a case study, via foreign policy strategy analysis. I test this concept by examining the latest foreign and

security policy strategies of the three regional hegemons – EU, Russia and Turkey. I try to measure the importance of each of the six elements of power for each of the three hegemons. Therefore, I identify which regional power would react in competition on which power element in the Black Sea region.

The ***Case study*** chapter examines the Black Sea region. It identifies the three regional competitors, Russia, Turkey and the EU. It defines what type of actors they are, their power status in international relations, and interests in the BSR. Expert interviews discuss some of the areas of competition and cooperation between them. Through expert interviews, I examine the expectation of EU policy makers and academics for possible competition vs cooperation on the six elements of power between the three regional hegemons. Also, I examine to what extent the EU experts are indeed engaged with the topic, whether it only covers their professional occupation or they are personally engaged in long-term solutions.

The chapter on the ***EU Foreign and Security Policy Strategy*** assesses the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy from 2016, and its annual assessments from 2017, 2018, and 2019. I apply discourse analysis. The chapter on ***Russia and Turkey*** analyses their corresponding to the period 2016-2021 foreign and security policy strategies. Through comparative content analysis I assess the perception of Russia and Turkey over the six power elements in their foreign and security policy strategies. The selection of documents corresponds to the same time period. The results from each empirical chapter are discussed at its end.

The ***Conclusion*** chapter discusses the process of the research. It comments correspondence of the findings of each chapter towards the initial research objectives. A section in the concluding chapter discusses the *limitations* of the research and *recommends* areas for further research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The literature review as a research method

The purpose of this method is to integrate the bodies of literature, which will be later developed throughout the research. This research integrates three bodies of topical literature: conflict prevention, the Black Sea regional security, and power in IR theory. Apart from that, it contains a separate body of literature on the selected methodology and methods. Therefore, an integrative literature review is applied.

Literature review types

The literature review provides a background of the research, clearly defines the existing knowledge and gaps, and locates the literature in historical and scholarly context (John et al, 2018 in Mahrool, 2020). A literature review shows solid familiarity with prior research, relevance of theory and themes, comparison of methodologies, studies, perspectives of a country and context, and therefore identifying knowledge gaps (Martin, 2016 in Mahrool, 2020). All decisions taken throughout the literature review should be explained before the actual review – how the selected articles were 'identified, analyzed, synthesized, and reported' (Snyder, 2019:337). Then, a figure is drawn to show authors, topics, years. The literature review might contribute for development of theory, or propose a new conceptualization (Snyder, 2019:334), such as the current research does. The literature review is based on purposeful selection and analysis of resources.

Some literature review types identified so far are systematic, semi-systematic and integrative (Snyder, 2019:334). A contribution of the semi-systematic review might be, among others, the identification of themes, which might serve the theoretical concept, proposing further research (Snyder, 2019:335). The integrative review assesses existent literature so that a new theory to be proposed (Torraco, 2005 in Snyder, 2019:335). Another classification of literature review types includes: integrative, historical, theoretical, methodological, systematic (University of Southern California, 2014 in Almadi, 2020).

A contemporary literature review needs a specific methodology, selection of type and evaluation (Snyder, 2019:333). The elements of a literature review include: purpose, research questions, strategy of searching suitable texts, characteristics of selecting samples, techniques of analysing and evaluating the texts, contribution (Snyder, 2019:334). The basic steps in the process of reviewing any kind of literature are: design, conduct, analyse and write up the results (Snyder, 2019:336). The strategy of searching suitable texts, characteristics of

selecting samples, technique of analysing and evaluating the texts, contribution (Snyder, 2019) are explained. The primary research strategy of this research is a snow-ball method for searching literature on the case study - Black Sea region, as a majority of the texts came from one to another. I used common research engines such as online library catalogues. Later, three different bodies of literature were integrated, aiming to serve the research goals - conflict prevention, Black Sea regional security, and power in IR theory.

Selected: integrative literature review, theoretical gaps

The current research is built on an integrative literature review. The purpose of the integrative literature review is to critique and synthesize research articles, books and other texts, with non-systematic search strategy, qualitative analysis and contribution through theoretical model or classification (Snyder, 2019:334). The integrative review first addresses a research question, the terms are sampled, the literature is collected, and then critically analysed (Souza, Silva & Carvalho, 2010). The steps are: formulation of a problem, collection of literature, evaluation, analysis, interpretation and presentation (Russell, 2005).

The integrative review contributes to identifying problems and creating new linkages between existing knowledge, proposing theories or conceptual framework, and addressing relevant methods (Russell, 2005). An integrative literature review creates new knowledge by updating and challenging previous knowledge, and suggests future perspectives of policy and of further research (Torraco, 2016). After identifying a matrix, the discussion of integrative review evaluates the relation between the findings, the literature and the questions, discusses the relevance of results, reflects and critically evaluates the whole process (Toronto & Remington, 2020:71).

The integrative review generates new perspectives, while the theoretical finds gaps of appropriate theory (Almadi, 2020). I have chosen an integrative literature review, combined with elements of theoretical literature review in one of the three bodies of literature. The combination of these two approaches best serves the scientific goals of my research. Namely, I integrate two approaches to address conflict prevention in international relations. I further examine conflict through the literature on geopolitical regionalism and on power in international relations. As a result, I identify a gap which serves the theory of conflict prevention. Namely, conflict prevention accepts that conflict is the result of competition. In geopolitical regionalism, exact values of the competition need identification. In international relations the meaning of perceived power needs clarification. I examine this gap in the case

study of contemporary Black Sea regional competition and the theoretical analysis of the concept of power. The three bodies of literature are marked in red bubbles in the table below.
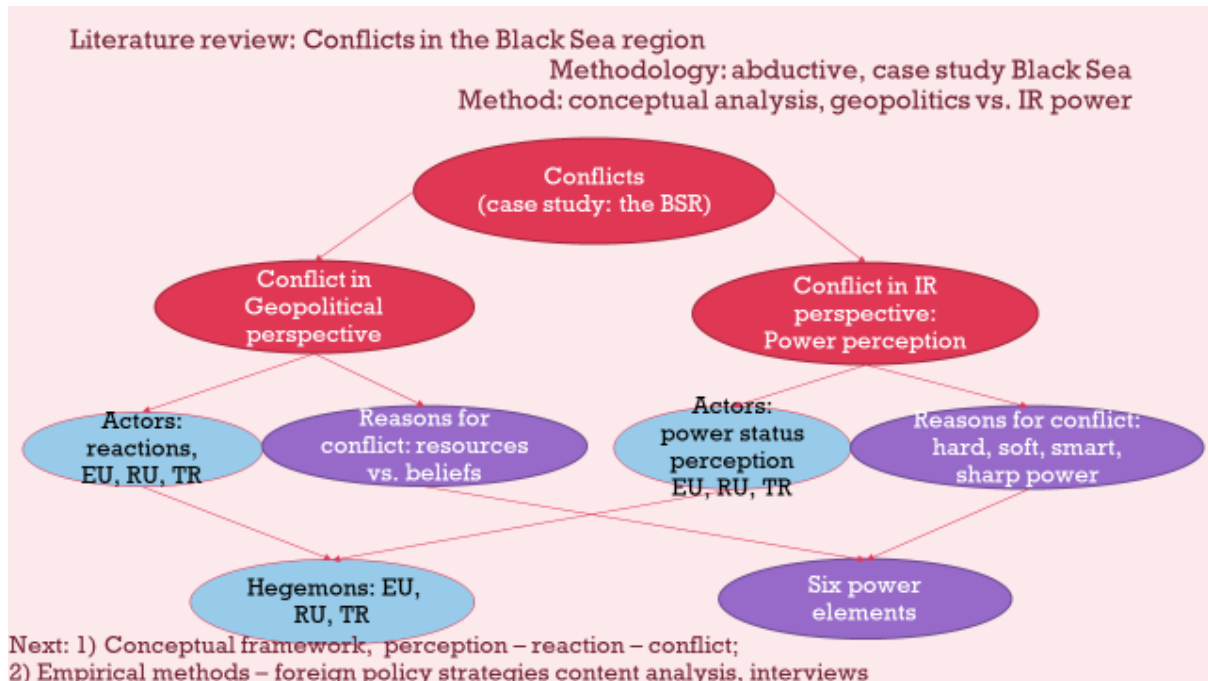
Figure 1. Integrative literature review in three components. (Source: the author)

The red bubbles show the three integrated bodies of literature. The uniting body of literature is conflict prevention. From it, two perspectives are developed - geopolitical regionalism, shown in blue bubbles, and power in IR theory, shown in purple bubbles. The geopolitical perspective continues to the case study of the Black Sea region, resulting in three regional hegemons. As a result of the geopolitical perspective, three regional competitors with comparable power status are derived. These are the EU, Russia, and Turkey. The international relations perspective is developed in conceptual analysis of power, resulting in six power elements.As a result of the IR theory perspective, measurable categories of external competition for influence are derived. These are the six power elements.

Purpose of the selected literature review type

The integrative literature review method is appropriate for the current research, because it can show how three concepts are related: power perception, conflict prevention and regionalism. Based on it, I develop a case study of the Black Sea region and a new theoretical framework of power analysis. As a result of them, a new conceptual framework shows how the derived knowledge of perception of six power elements by three regional competitors could be empirically tested. This knowledge can contribute to conflict

prevention, but also can strengthen the role of the EU as a conflict prevention actor in the Black Sea region.

The literature review introduces three topics: conflict prevention, regionalism and international relations theory on power. I examine contemporary security crises and conflicts as a result of power competition.

My research aim is to develop a theory and a conceptual framework through which to detect the reaction of competition prior to the escalation of a crisis. In the case study of the Black Sea region, I justify the selection of regional competitors with comparable power status. In the theoretical part, I decompose the concept of power to six measurable categories. In the empirical part, I measure the perception of the three regional competitors over the six power elements. Thus, I empirically test the created framework.

The purpose of the complete literature review, introducing the topic, geopolitical perspective and IR perspective, is to create the foundation for the newly proposed conceptual framework. This new analytical grid consists of reaction types – cooperation/competition/neutral, by three regional hegemons – Russia, Turkey, the EU, over six power elements. The main presumption in this research is that competition leads to conflict. Knowledge on the areas which provoke competition for each actor in a certain time period brings a contribution to both the conflict prevention theory and the empirical case study of the Black Sea region. For this purpose, the six categories of power are empirically tested for the three main competitors in the Black Sea region through two empirical methods – foreign and security policy analysis and expert interviews. Before the reader reaches this conceptual and empirical development, the theoretical explanation on geopolitical and international relations perspectives towards conflicts and crises in the Black Sea region are presented.

Contribution of the literature review and of the research

The contribution of this literature review is theoretical and thematic, while the contribution of the methods is empirical, thematic and theoretical. The thematic contribution relates to the Black Sea regional conflicts and crises. As a result of this literature review, knowledge is produced on the gaps of reasons for existing crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region. The theoretic contribution of this literature review refers to the competition resulting in conflict and power perception, as well as the newly proposed concept of six elements of power. The empirical contribution is based on the specific power perception of three regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, and the resulting regional security

crises and conflicts. It is achieved through methods of foreign policy strategies comparative content analysis. The overall contribution of the research is to the knowledge of conflict prevention in a regional context. It could be applied towards policy making of the EU, Russia and Turkey if their aim is regional cooperation around the Black Sea.

Process of data collection for the literature review: publishers, journals, access

This research consists of several bodies of literature. There is literature on the methodological and research approaches. There is literature on the international relations theoretical terminology, related to conflict, power, perception, influence and security crises. There is literature on the topic of Black Sea regional competition. I have created tables and figures to show the dependence between some of these bodies of literature. The different bodies of literature have been acquired in different times and places. The body of literature related to epistemology, ontology and power is from 2020-2021, acquired at the University of Kent – Brussels School of International Relations online library and Corvinus University of Budapest. Due to the quickly developing digitalization after 2020 it became possible to reach a vast majority of literature via online search engines and online libraries, including Google Scholar, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Scopus, SAGE publications, Cambridge University Press, Princeton University Press, Yale University Press, Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Praeger, Palgrave Macmillan, Springer, Springer Nature, Routledge, Carnegie, Chatham House, Cornell University Press, Taylor and Francis Group, Ashgate Publishing, Oxford Academic, Brookings, APA, John Hopkins University Press, Columbia University Press, Oxford University Press, SAGE Open Journals, Ontos, EUISS, institutional websites, think tanks and others.

Apart from these main publishers, I have collected analyses from a number of high-ranked journals. These include: Cambridge Studies in International Relations, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, Romanian Journal of European Affairs, Security Studies, Journal of Regional Security, Journal of Peace Research, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Foreign Affairs, International Journal of World Peace, Insight Turkey, Contemporary Politics, Cooperation and Conflict, European Foreign Affairs Review, Journal of International Relations and Development, Defence and Peace Economics, World Politics, Review of Economics and Political Science, Global Affairs, Max Weber Studies, International Politics, International Studies Quarterly, Geopolitics, Peace and Conflict, Harvard International Review, Security and Human Rights, Ukraine Analytica, Journal of Regional Security, Journal of Democracy, Political Science Quarterly, International Organisation, The Hague

Journal of Diplomacy, Health Psychology, Journal of Business Research, Terrorism and Political Violence, and others.

The additional analyses which I have used have been published, among others, by the following sources: Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, Atlantic Voices, Russian International Affairs Council, Geopolitics, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Egmont Institute, Global Affairs, European Union Institute of Security Studies.Among the institutional websites, from which I collected data, include the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the European Security and Defence College, the European Parliament, NATO, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria, the United Nations, and others.

The latest literature was collected mainly through digital search. However, prior to 2020 not all literature was accessible online, so physical books were consulted earlier. I used previously collected literature, from earlier studies on different aspects of the Black Sea regional cooperation which I have been researching since 2014. For the body of literature on the Black Sea region, I consulted editions from the libraries of Central European University, University of Glasgow, Lobachevsky State University of Nizhni Novgorod, Ilia State University in Tbilisi-Georgia, Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy in Baku, European Security and Defence College in Brussels.

Through collecting literature and understanding the diverse points of view within different countries around the Black Sea region, my understanding about it acquired several perspectives – that of the European Union from Brussels, Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, also Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania. I referred to collected text databases over since 2014. For the current dissertation project, I only focus on the competition-cooperation dynamics between Russia, Turkey and the EU and the conflict escalation resulting in regional security crises. I try to identify the perceived power for the three IR actors, so that their competitive reaction, leading to the escalation of regional security crises, could be prevented.

Type of collected data: selected type of edition, year range, countries, authors

For this study, I have examined more than 51 books, 56 book chapters, 103 journal articles, and 49 additional analyses such as policy papers, reports, discussion papers, policy proceedings, strategic papers and over 30 institutional websites.

The year range for the literature review varies from 1904 when the first theoretical incentives for regional control by hegemons were created, until 2023, when the topic is continuously vivid due to the competing geostrategic interests over the Black Sea and the war

in Ukraine. The majority of examined work is published between 2000-2021. The place of publication is dominantly in the UK, USA, Turkey, Russia, Germany, Belgium but also in different parts of the world, including Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Singapore, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Ukraine, and others.

The year range for the methodological literature is between 2002 - 2023, with a majority of selected sources between 2014-2020. The place of publication is dominantly the UK, Hungary, France, Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, USA, including also Austria, Brasil, Bulgaria, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, The Netherlands.

Among the authors in the literature review and thematic literature, there are Greek, Turkish, Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Ukrainian and Western researchers. Among the authors with several selected publications are Aybac, Aydin, Bechev, Biscop, Buzan, Casier, Celikpala, Chaban, Delanoe, Fiott, Huntington, Keohane, Kortunov, Lemke, Lund, Manoli, Mattelaer, Nitou, Pierini, Schweller, Sheehan, Shelest, Singer, Taussig, Tolksdorf, Toucas, Triantaphyllou, but also classical theorists like Baldwin, Deutsch and Singer, Haas, Keohane, Nye, Morgenthau, Mackinder, Walt, Waltz, Wivel, Wolfers.

Among the authors selected for the literature on methodology and methods are Almadi, Braun, Buitrago, Charmaz, Drisko, Dubois, Dyner, Emerson, Eris, Fiott, Grant, Hansen, Hay, Hudson, Lindstrom, Maisenbacher, Mattelaer, Maurer, Missiroli, Morin, Purnell, Pynnoniemi, Radaeli, Russell, Samokhvalov, Secrieru, Simon, Snyder, Tahtinen, Tocci, Toksoz, Toronto, Wosolsobe.

Selected disciplines

The disciplines are selected in the context of Black Sea regional politics, theories of international relations, security and conflict studies. The crossing literature themes include international relations, regionalism, and international security. The theoretical approaches in international relations which assess these aspects, particularly realism, neorealism, liberalism, neoliberalism, and constructivism are discussed in the ontology and epistemology part of the research.

The topical literature on the Black Sea regional security case study inclides the post-Soviet space, the current European neighbourhood, national and international security, Cold War history, political science, sociology, military studies, international relations. Articles and books of primary importance examine the Russian, Turkish and EU foreign policy towards the Black Sea regional countries.

The theoretical literature examines balance of power, classical war studies, hegemony, status quo, geopolitical competition and cooperation, geography, contemporary regional security complex, power and influence, classification of the power status of states and conceptualisation of power.

The authors, by their respective disciplines of geopolitics, realism and neo-realism, start from the understanding of geopolitical order of Mackinder 1904, going through classical Haas 1953, Deutsch 1964, Keohane 1988, Baldwin 2016, and contemporary theorists such as Lemke 2004, prominent Turkish, Greek and Russian scholars, until the global world order changes after the end of the Cold War and dissolution of the Soviet Union. Based on that, I examine regional conflicts as a result of power competition and influence in zones of strategic influence between Russia, Turkey and the West, comprising the EU and NATO. Among the latest scholars I approach are those writing for the Egmont Institute in Brussels (Mattelaer 2016, 2019; Biscop, 2021), SAGE Journal Cooperation & Conflict (Casier, 2018), Palgrave Macmillan New Security Challenges series (Casier, 2016a, 2016b), EU Institute for Security Studies (Fiott, 2020), the Security Studies Journal (Simon, 2017), Global Affairs, Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Journal (Aydin 2009, Glebov 2009, Larrabee 2009, Ozdamar 2010, Tsantoulis 2009, Wilson and Popescu 2009, Triantaphyllou 2009), Russian International Affairs (Kortunov 2019, Delanoe 2016), some editions of Cambridge University Press (Afler and Barnett 1998, Sinor 2008), and others. They discuss power possession within a geographic region, and the influence which strong international political actors - countries or unions, have on less powerful political actors - countries, and how that affects regional stability. A major difference is visible in the perspective towards the Black Sea region, for example those of Russia, the EU, Turkey, or a less powerful regional state. While regional powers aim to expand their influence, for less powerful regional states characteristics is nationalism, both favorable conditions to international conflicts.

I have divided my literature review in three categories, related to the three parts of my study. These are, respectively, conflict prevention, regionalism and IR theory. The body of literature on conflict prevention and the EUt contains 18 sources. The body of literature on regionalism and the Black Sea region contains 69 sources. The body of literature on IR theory - power, influence, security and IR actors contains 101 sources.

2.2. Purpose and structure of the integrative literature review

The purpose of this chapter is to develop the initial concepts related to conflict prevention. The type of selected actors are regional competitors. The type of reactions are

three - competition, cooperation or neutral, out of which the competition is assumed to lead to conflict. To identify the areas of competition, I briefly discuss potential options in the case study. After that, I develop a comprehensive analysis on the perception of power in the theoretical chapter. I apply the framework to the case study of the Black Sea region, particularly to the participants Russia, Turkey and the EU. However, the study is applicable to any region, characterised with security crises and conflicts as a result of competition.

This literature review is an introduction to the topics, with which the current research deals. The methodology towards constructing the literature review is explained in detail in the Methodology chapter. The actual literature belongs to this chapter. It shows why this dissertation is important for the general knowledge of conflict prevention and to the EU in particular as a conflict prevention actor. The literature review has an integrative structure in three parts.

First, it examines conflict prevention. It starts with defining the meaning of conflict prevention and the stages of a conflict, based on the IR scholar Michael Lund. To prevent a conflict, the expected reaction of an IR actor needs to be assessed in advance, prior to actual initiation of competition. This requires a case study analysis within a suitable theoretical framework. It could be designed for the use of a specific IR actor in the role of a preventer. I designed the current research to serve EU conflict prevention, for which I selected the Black Sea region as a case study. The results of the research could be applied in the practice of EU foreign policy making, aiming to improve the EU role as a regional actor. Finally, a table of conflict assessment factors is produced. It is further applied throughout the research.

Second, it examines regionalism and the competition for influence. It draws the Black Sea region as a case study and shows its importance for the EU. My perspective is that international conflicts are a result of power competition between strong IR actors. The competition for influence has different perspectives - it aims to control ideologies and resources at a certain time and place. I focus on the period after 1989, when regionalism arose. As a case study, I select the Black Sea region as subject of the competition for influence, which is of high importance for the EU. Later, a separate case study chapter outlines some contemporary regional security crises and selects the relevant competing actors. It outlines some areas of competition in the region, as well as some particular interests of the participants.

Third, through the theory of power competition and conflict in international relations I discuss the meaning of power. It shows the basic theories that deal with the relation between

power and conflict in international relations. It selects the two most relevant for the case study theories, balance of power and security dilemma.

I identify the gap which this research aims to fill. It is the unclarified meaning of power, its relation to the areas of competition, and the relation between power perception and conflict prevention. I apply the concepts into a detailed case study, as proposed by the conflict prevention scholar Michael Lund. I suggest following the power measurement steps proposed by the IR scholar David Baldwin. For this purpose, I conceptually develop the meaning of power, and then empirically test it. A separate theoretical framework chapter analyses the concept of power. The conceptual framework chapter proposes how the relation between power perception and conflict prevention could be assessed. And I test its application in an empirical chapter.

This literature review addresses the initial questions:

1) How does power competition relate to conflict prevention? What is the role of the EU? These are the general questions over which the research is built through the first body of literature. The proposed relation in the literature review is the basic presumption of this research. My main assumption is that competition leads to conflict. But we do not know who, when and over what competes. We need to create this knowledge for the purpose of conflict prevention.

2) *How is regionalism related to power competition and conflict? Why is the case study Black Sea region important for the EU? Why the selected time?* These questions are established in the second body of literature. It is the basis of a separate case study chapter.

3) *How power relates to conflict? What is power and can it be measured? How is the perception of power related to conflict prevention?* This gap is identified through the theoretical body of literature.

The research gap shows again the complete problem, identified by the three bodies of literature, and explains how I will address it. The research gap I have found is the unclear definition of perception of power by the three regional competitors in the Black Sea region, and how their power perception relates to conflict prevention. Filling this gap has three purposes. First, it aims to inform the theory on conflict prevention with an example of how it could be applied. Second, it aims to provide extensive knowledge about the meaning of power in IR. Third, it aims to provide evidence of how the Black Sea regional conflicts could be prevented, if conflict is a result of the regional power competition. As such, I measure the power perception of the main regional competitors at a certain time.

Based on the literature, the following **research question** is identified:

What is the impact of power perception on conflict prevention? Can it be measured? How the measurement of power perception by the EU, Russia, and Turkey, relates to conflict prevention in the Black Sea region? This is my main research question. It aims to show how understanding power perception of the EU, Russia and Turkey can be used for conflict prevention. The aim of this knowledge is to contribute to preserving the stability in the Black Sea region. The EU, as a conflict prevention actor, could use it.

The gap identified in this literature is later addressed in the chapters of case study, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, and empirical chapter. Each of the next chapter addresses relevant **sub-questions:**

1) *To the theoretical chapter: Which exact power elements should be addressed? How is that related to the areas of competition?*

2) *To the conceptual chapter: How can their perception be measured? How does it relate to conflict prevention?*

3) *To the case study chapter: Over what interests the EU, RU, and TR compete in the BSR? Why are they compatible IR actors? Competition-cooperation patterns, interviews.*

4) *To the empirical chapters: What is the value perceived by the EU, Russia and Turkey of the same power elements for a fixed period of time?* This question is addressed through their foreign and security policy strategies.

Finally, my discussion shows how the found perceived value of each power element for each of the three actors relates to their reaction of competition, and how this can serve to regional conflict prevention in the Black Sea region.

Main research proposition and hypothesis

Competition for power and influence. As a result of the literature review, I assume that competition leads to conflict. As power competition, I refer to the attempts of a regional actor to dominate in a zone of influence. In the context of this research, I understand as power the externally projected influence. Influence means intention to persuade another international actor to align with the standards of the first one. The result of influence is change of the behaviour of the external actor in favour of the regional competitor. If several competitors exercise external influence over the same political entities, this results in competition. Therefore, I assume that the competition for external influence is a major factor

for conflict. For this reason, I suggest that understanding power perception is significant in the conflict prevention stage. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the perception of power by the regional hegemons, the EU, Russia and Turkey. This contributes to the knowledge of conflict prevention. It assumes that competition for external influence results in international conflicts.

Conflict prevention. This research refers to *international conflicts* as situations in which more than one nation is involved on opposing sides of a conflict. A conflict can happen within a country, between countries, between regional clusters of countries, or between world blocs. As *a conflict* is understood the increased tension and violence which escalates over several phases. The type of intervention depends on the phase of conflict which is selected for action. The intervention by external actors might differ in its type, time scope, and expected effect. As *conflict prevention*, this research refers to a timely intervention in a conflict situation, before any violence escalates.

The intensity of geopolitical crises depends on the world order at a certain time in history. It is directly tied with the strength of the most powerful geopolitical actors during the observed time period. As a starting point of new types of international conflicts, this research takes the Cold War period and the years afterwards. In this time period, the understanding of contemporary regionalism is developed.

Involvement type. The type of involvement by the participants can be: directly involved in a conflict situation, externally intervening, or neutral. The directly involved participants bear the consequences of the conflict in a direct form, independent of whether they are a side of a conflict against another participant or the conflict is entirely internal. The externally intervening participants interfere in the conflict situation through external means. For example, the global powers, if not involved directly in a certain regional conflict, might support a side in the conflict through indirect means. An IR actor could undertake each of both roles separately or together.

The EU. The European Union as an organisation is an international actor, regional and global leader. In the global world order, the EU aims for conflict prevention and solution of existing crises. Security crises and regional conflicts happen constantly throughout the world, including in the European Union's neighbouring regions. The EU is embedded between several regions with high potential of crisis escalation. The most concerned regions of geographic proximity by the EU are the Black Sea region, consisting of the Eastern Partnership, Russia and Turkey, and the Western Balkans.

On the one hand, the EU aims to achieve peace in conflict intense regions. On the topic of EU conflict prevention, a gap exists between theoretical expectations and actual strategic documents. While theory suggests early intervention, the EU strategy is directed towards intervention during the peak of a crisis. This research addresses this gap in the current EU foreign and security policy. It shows the importance of the conflict prevention stage for intervention before a crisis escalates. Also, it proposes ways to fill this gap through developing the knowledge of conflict prevention. As such, I propose the measurement of power perception between regional competitors in a region of high interest for the EU.

On the other hand, in its near regions the EU could also be directly involved as a participant. For the purpose of the current research, I examine the EU in both roles - as a peace provider and as a directly involved participant. First, I create this research to serve the needs of EU conflict prevention in its foreign and security policy not only in a selected region, but in any world region intensified by security crises. Prioritising conflict prevention requires a structured way of analysing conflicts, based on which international organisations could interact. I further elaborate this through a table of conflict analysis factors. I apply this table in a case study region. Second, I examine the EU in the selected Black Sea region, along with the other regional competitors Russia and Turkey. Measuring their perception of power contributes to better understanding of regional conflict prevention. I do this through elaboration of power elements in the theory, and then empirical application in their foreign and security policy strategies.

Reaction type of directly involved participants. I identify three basic reactions by the directly involved regional strong actors - competition, cooperation or neutrality. The reactions of *competition, cooperation and neutrality* lead respectively to three main outcomes. These are: 1) initiating a war/ conflict/ security crisis, 2) constructing peace, or 3) continuing the status quo. The competition feeds the conflict situation and results in a war. The cooperation could interrupt the conflict, which results in peace. The neutral reaction means that the actors abstain from any action, which leads to a continued status quo of the existing situation.

My main *hypothesis* is the following: Knowing the likelihood of reactions by the directly involved IR actors, contributes to preventing violent conflicts. However, their potential reactions should be assessed in advance, early enough. For this, some indicators leading to competitive reaction should be developed. These indicators should be applicable particularly for those IR actors which might have interests to intervene in a particular region. The reaction type, whether cooperation, competition or neutrality, depends on the perception

and interests of each participant at a certain time. These are developed through the next chapters of the dissertation.

I assume that the main reason for conflict is the competition for power. Power can mean control, security, influence. I outline the basic areas of competition. Control over resources and beliefs is aimed by regional competitors. The theoretical chapter decomposes the concept of power. It regroups some competition categories as elements of power.

For the selected case study region, I examine individually the countries or IR actors who are identified as regional competitors. In their foreign and security policy strategies, I assess certain areas of competition. I evaluate the intentions of the Black Sea regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, by assessing their foreign and security policy strategies. To guarantee validity of the results, I use the original language in which they are issued. Details on this assessment are present in the empirical chapter on content and discourse analyses.

2.3. Conflict prevention and the EU

The purpose of this subchapter is to explain conflict prevention and its importance for the EU. It consists of three parts. First, it identifies the conflict stages and outlines the prevention stage among them. As types of involvement between international actors, it shows prevention and intervention. Second, it shows the EU as a conflict prevention actor and a peace provider worldwide. It underlines the importance of conflict prevention for the EU's foreign and security policy. Furthermore, it shows the double role of the EU as also a competitor in regional conflicts. Third, for efficient conflict prevention, it suggests some assessment factors of a conflict to be defined – place, time, participants, interests. This table is used as an analysis base in the next chapters. It is applied to the case study participants, their interests and the dependent variables of power perception.

Conflict prevention

Conflict stages and moment of intervention: the Curve of Conflict. A major study on the Cycle of Conflict (Lund, 2009) suggests that the phases in a potential violence escalation are surrounded by preceding and following periods, which could repeat. The eminent scholar Michael Lund (2009) has drawn the cycle of conflict in three major stages – prior to a crisis, during a crisis, and after a crisis. Each phase corresponds to a different type of intervention,

as shown below. Corresponding to these phases, the *Curve of Conflict*[2] (Lund, 2009) suggests three basic stages of external intervention in violent conflicts and wars – prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding.
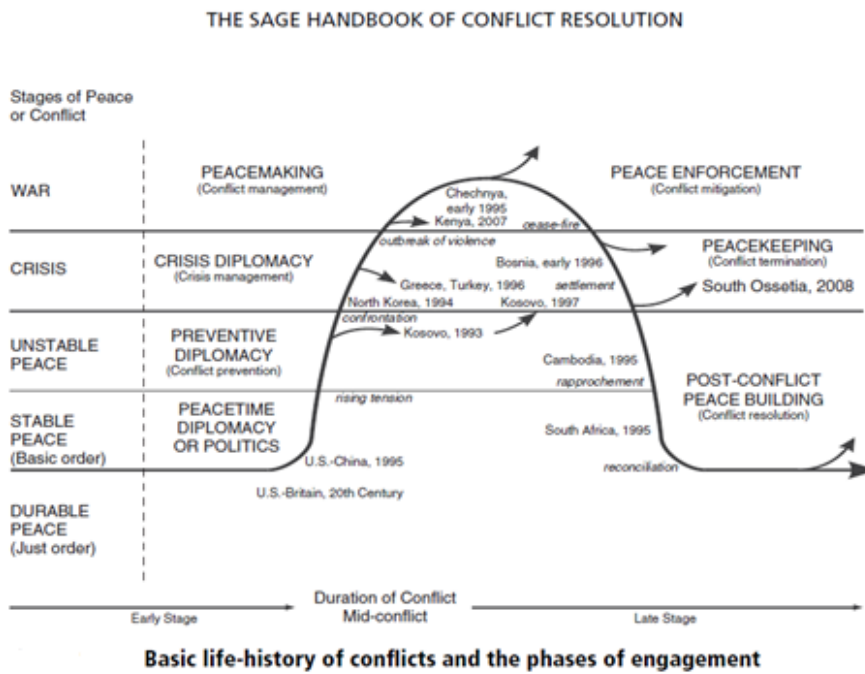
Figure 2. Curve of Conflict (Source: Lund, 2009, p.290. The SAGE book of Conflict Resolution. 'Basic life-history of conflicts and the phases of engagement')

While prevention and peacebuilding relate to the phases of relatively low tensions, crisis management relates to the phase of high escalation of violence. Among the actions of intervention are: preventive politics, preventive diplomacy, crisis diplomacy, peacemaking, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peace building. The more preventive diplomacy in the initial stage of the conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding after the highest intensity of the conflict are done, the less need for crisis diplomacy, peacemaking, peace enforcement and peacekeeping (Lund, 2009). Different levels of prevention are needed in the following types of conflict: latent, limited manifest, escalating violence (Lund, 2009:291).

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[2] The Curve of Conflict shows the stages of a conflict and possible intervention per stage. It is used by the US Institute of Peace.
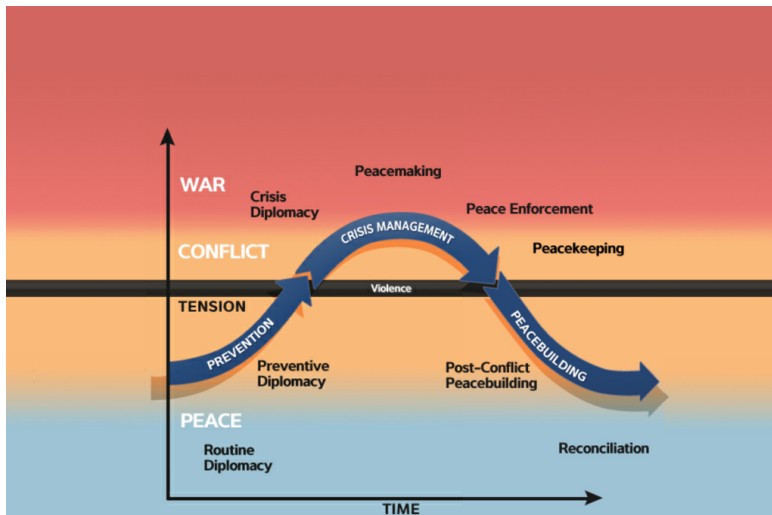
Figure 3. Curve of Conflict. (Source: US Institute of Peace, adapted from M.Lund 2012)

Concept and methods of conflict prevention. The UN developed international intervention ideas during the Cold War (Stewart, 2006:23). The concept of 'preventive diplomacy' was introduced by the UN Secretary General Hammerskjold in the 1960s (Lund, 2009:288; Ackermann, 2003:340). Conflict prevention is a derivative concept in IR, developed significantly during the 1990s (Ackermann, 2003:339). This concept is important for regional and international organisations interested in global governance and security (Ackermann, 2003:339). Diplomatic action prior to conflict intensification is preferable than involvement during its peak (Mial, 1992:126; Berkovitch, 1986, 1991, 1993; In Lund, 2009:287). Conflict prevention is considered the most important stage in settling and preserving peaceful regional relations.

The UN in the 1990s suggests prevention through 'institutional, socio-economic, and global (…), humanitarian aid, arms control, social welfare, military deployment, and media' (Lund, 2009:289). Some of these methods are currently applied by the EU. Methods of prevention, selected by Boutros-Ghali, include 'early warning, mediation, confidence-building measures, fact-finding, preventive deployment, and peace zones' without military (Lund, 2009:289; Ackermann, 2003:340). Mediation is considered an efficient tool of conflict prevention, as the mediator provides diverse information, but some characteristics remain unclear (Kydd, 2010:101). Some authors claim that 'effective prevention requires integrated strategy across different sectors (diplomatic, military, political, economic, social) and periods of engagement' (Hampson & Malone, 2002:6). The peace and security research has been widened to health, along with social, economic, and developmental problems (Hampson & Malone, 2002:8). The areas of action depend on the specific situation and the

basic reasons for conflict existence. Throughout the research, I elaborate the root causes of conflict from the literature as internal and external factors of conflict.

Type of intervention: structural or operational. The scope, timing and depth of the preventive action also need to be specified (Ackermann, 2003:341). The type of intervention differs, based on the specific reasons for conflict, their depth, and the time of action. As corresponding tools, two main sets are found: structural and operational.

Type of intervention	Time scope	Moment of intervention	Effect
Operational	Immediate	Escalation, Early Warning	Short-term
Structural	Planned	Prevention, Reconciliation	Long-term

Table 1. Intervention in conflict/crisis – structural and operational tools. (Source: the author.)

Prevention is concentrated on the time of preliminary intervention, aiming to keep peace in a potentially hostile environment. The process of preventing escalation and resolving imminent crises ranges 'from long-term or structural policy, to short-term operational policy (preventive diplomacy and civilian or military crisis management)' (Stewart, 2006:14). The prevention stages refer to three main groups: 'structural or long-term; early warning and analysis; and operational' for short term results (Stewart, 2006:14). The tools for prevention are classified as either structural, such as 'societal conditions', institutions and governance, or direct, both types being implemented either through a priori or ad-hoc reaction (Lund, 2009:291). Operational or direct prevention refers to imminent interaction, early warning refers to analysing the potential of escalation, structural prevention refers to advance planning. The tools to prevent (ethnic) conflicts can be operational and structural aiming respectively short-term or long-term results (Cordell & Wolff, 2011; Ackermann, 2003:341).

The type of measures depends on the type of conflict and its time. Conflict prevention during the Cold War was related to mutual deterrence of the superpowers US and USSR, helped by NATO and the Warsaw Pact, in nuclear and military terms (Stewart, 2006:23). For the post-Cold War conflict types, structural prevention is preferred over operational (Wallensteen, 2002), which includes addressing people's beliefs through educating youth in a new value system. The intervention also depends on the participants in a preventive action, their interests, and the root causes of a conflict.

Efficient prevention - factors of a conflict, regionalist approach. Conflict prevention is aimed through different countries and organisations, including the EU, UN, G-8 (Molak,

2005:G8; In Lund, 2009:287). Beyond the UN, practitioners of conflict prevention include non-governmental organisation and development donor projects (Hampson & Malone, 2002:5). The number of involved external actors and the effects from their intervention has been widely debated. Some authors suggest that all involved actors should contribute - 'national, regional and local governments, the UN, regional and civil society organizations, research institutions, and the private sector' (Cordell & Wolff, 2011). Others express doubts on the effect of intervention by third parties – whether it is provoking, deterring, indifferent or with multiple effects to the conflict (Kydd, 2010:101).

The knowledge of conflict prevention should identify how and why conflicts are initiated and continued, also which measures could prevent happening, escalation or repetition (Hampson & Malone, 2002:2). To prevent a conflict, the reasons for it should be identified and addressed prior to the escalation of violence (Stewart, 2006:14). Defining the root causes requires thorough understanding and also a consensus if multiple actors are present (Stewart, 2006:28). A conflict can be addressed correctly only if the exact reasons for it are clarified.

Three steps are suggested for efficient prevention (Lund, 2009:307): *1) Structured knowledge on the situation, dependent variables and suitable framework; 2) Specific local knowledge on emerging conflicts by local stakeholders and dissemination of roles; 3) Additional basic prevention research.*

In contemporary terms these might be applied through different tools. Conflict in a state could be approached from two main directions - either as a result of internal process, or as a result of the competition between regional hegemons (Kirilova, 2015). This research assumes that regional conflict is a result from the hegemonic competition for influence. It could be a result of internal changes of a hegemon or due to external conditions. I focus only on the external factors. I follow the recommendation of Lund in the following order: First, the structured knowledge on the situation in a specific region requires a regionalist approach, which I suggest in this literature review chapter. I prepare the necessary framework through developing the theory on power competition. Second, I develop the local knowledge both through the case study chapter and in the empirical examination of the strategic documents from the three selected participants. In addition, I support the regionalist approach, proposed by Lund, with a realist measurement of power, proposed by Baldwin. I relate the roots of conflict to the areas of competition, and then regroup them in the theoretical chapter as power elements. My own contribution is to add a psychological constructivist perspective on

perception of power and conflict. Third, explain how my research is related to the global competition for power and how the results might serve the EU's foreign and security policy.

The EU and conflict prevention

The latest developments in the EU's foreign and security policy do not particularly focus on conflict prevention. The EU Common Security and Defence Policy – CSDP, is part of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy - CFSP. The CSDP addresses security crises close to their peak through civilian and military missions. Crisis management is a central aspect of the EU CSDP, while the low-tension phases are not the current focus. This research suggests that the EU's CSDP and CFSP could benefit if the focus moves towards the conflict prevention phase. This suggestion could be implemented in the next versions of its Strategic Compass. The Strategic Compass, as a new politico-military response to security crises, focuses as well on the crisis management and post-conflict situation. However, the efficacy of instruments to tackle conflicts prior to the emergence of security crises, as prevention measures, and their application within the CFSP need deeper regional focus.

External EU dimensions – CSDP, CFSP, Global Strategy, Strategic Compass. The current EU's foreign and security policy mainly addresses security crises in their peak, while not specifically focusing on conflict prevention. This was previously aimed by the EU, then abandoned until the recent lasting security crisis in Ukraine. The Treaty of the European Union regulates the EU policies related to crises and conflicts abroad.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU, initiated with the Maastricht Treaty 1991, marked the end of the previous security order, bounded around the idea of conflict prevention (Hill, 2001:315; Gross & Juncos, 2011:3; Stewart, 2006:40). It has been reaffirmed with the Lisbon Treaty 2009 (Council of the EU, 2011). The CFSP developed a CSDP (Howorth 2007 in Gross & Juncos, 2011:3), parts of which evolved to a Global Strategy in 2016 and a Strategic Compass in 2022.

The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the EU is a part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). It allocates abroad missions of civilian and military character, for the purpose of 'peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security' (TEU, 2008, Art.42). It is implemented through cooperation and coordination between the EU Member States (European Parliament, 2021).

The EU Global Strategy from 2016, annually reviewed by the Council, Parliament and Commission, prioritises five areas – security, state and society in South and East, integrated approach towards conflicts, regional cooperation, global governance (European

Parliament, 2021). It is essential for the EU to address the root causes of security crises early enough, and a timely tool in that respect is the EUGS (Tocci, 2016). It has yearly assessment reports since 2017, 2018, and 2019. In addition, in 2016 the HR/VP F.Mogherini also initiated CARD, PESCO, EDAP, EDF (European Parliament, 2021).

The EU Threat Analysis after 2020. With the next HR/VP J.Borrell, a new development of the CSDP was initiated in three steps – analysis of threats, discussion for common understanding between Member States, enabling European security and defence culture (European Parliament, 2021). The EU threat analysis is on since 2020. It falls out of the timescope of my research. Most of the documents are with restricted access (eu2020.de). However, I briefly mention some of the ideas it incorporates, which are publicly available. This is the direction in which the EU foreign and security policy has recently developed.

The threat analysis is the preparation for a Strategic Compass of the EU, which is the strategic document of foreign and security policy issued with the new leadership of HR VP Joseph Borrell. The preparation of threat analysis and Strategic Compass has started before the pandemic of covid-19 and before the war between Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, it reflects only some perceptions of EU member states about potential EU threats before these actual crises have taken place. The EU threat analysis has been developed at three levels - global, regional and cross-state (EEAS, 2020). The main identified groups of threats on each level include: 1) *global rivalry* between global powers, scarcity of resources, migration, growing military force, 2) *regional rivalry* between regional powers, increased conflicts, influence, competition for resources and influence, 3) *cross-country* hybrid threats, technology, terrorism (EEAS, 2020). Among the expected global threats is the technological rise of China (EU Parliament, 2021).

The EU Strategic Compass: missing conflict prevention, missing regionalism. The transition between threat analysis and Strategic Compass of the EU is organised in four groups - crisis management, defence capabilities, resilience and partnerships (European Parliament, 2021). However, what is missing is conflict prevention. This research claims that conflict prevention is a significant aspect of international crises, which is important for maintaining peace worldwide. The idea of the derived Strategic Compass comprises '*four baskets – crisis management, resilience, capabilities and partnerships*' (Fiott, 2021). They do not particularly involve conflict prevention. The finalised Strategic Compass has four pillars – 'Act' for crisis management, 'Secure' for intelligence and resilience, 'Invest' for developing capabilities and technology, and 'Partner' for setting common aims (Strategic Compass, 2022:6). Conflict prevention is indirectly concerned by 'ability to anticipate

threats', which is addressed through 'intelligence capacities', 'situational awareness and strategic foresight' (Strategic Compass, 2022:12). It is focused on the hybrid field, externally manipulated information and attempts to interfere, as well as fields of cyber, maritime and space domains. Conflict prevention is addressed through the EU definition of crises and integrated approach – diplomatic, economic, sanctions, military (Strategic Compass, 2022:24). Women peace and security (Strategic Compass, 2022:28) is mentioned, while youth as a construct of the next generations is missing.

Specific regional dimensions, showing the specific characteristics of each different region, are also missing. Regionalism is mentioned over two pages only, and broadly includes Western Balkans, Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia, Arctic, Southern Neighbourhood and Libya, Syria, Eastern Mediterranean and Turkey, Africa, Sahel, Central Africa, Gulf of Guinea, Horn of Africa, Mozambique, Middle East, Gulf Region, Indo-Pacific and China, Asia, Latin America (Strategic Compass, 2022:19-20), Central Asia is missing. Regions are mentioned only as part of potential partnerships – multilateral or bilateral, and a tailored approach towards the Western Balkans, the East, the South, Africa, Asia, Latin America (Strategic Compass, 2022:13). I argue that for successful conflict prevention, as Lund suggests, strong focus is needed for each separate region, based on its own characteristics. And this was the main flaw in the EU 's approach towards the Black Sea region. As a result of the ignorance towards regional characteristics, crises and frozen conflicts have been never ending in the Black Sea region. Due to lack of successful conflict prevention, today, a war is ongoing between Russia and the West, in the soil of Ukraine. Apart from these competitors, others are also currently ignored. This does not exclude their further involvement in conflict intensification.

To fill in these gaps, I elaborate conflict analysis through specific factors, applied to a region of EU importance. The aim of this research is namely to serve regional conflict prevention of the EU.

2.3.1. Assessment factors of a conflict: time, location, actors, interests, reaction

To understand conflict prevention, we need to define the basic factors about conflict. An example of such a chart, over which later values could be entered, is shown below. I outline some basic factors of a conflict: time, place, actors, interests, reaction. Still, it is missing the relation between perception and reaction. I developed this concept further.

Assessment factors of a conflict	Time (geopolitical shifts or crises) *lit review, empirical*	Location *lit review*	Actors *case study*	Interests *theoretical*	Reaction (Result) *concept*	External measurement *empirical*
1.General framework	before 1945/ Cold War/ after 1990	Between world blocks/ regions/ countries / groups	Power Status: Great/Middle/ Small power Involvement type: direct (competitor) vs. external (mediator)	Material resources (tangible) / People's beliefs (intangible)	Competition (conflict)/ Cooperation (peace)/ Neutral (status quo)	Latest concept of strategic interests
2.Selected framework	Post-Cold War competition for zones of influence	Black Sea region	Regional[3] powers Directly involved[4]	Areas of competition: resources and beliefs	Competition (conflict)/ cooperation (peace)/ neutral (status quo)	Latest foreign and security policy strategies

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[3] An interpretation of the EU and Russia as great powers would be applicable if this research was not related to a specific region. However, this research is related to a specific region, and in its regional context, only the capacity of the IR actors as regional powers is important. Their further capacities for influence above this region fall out of the scope of this research. So, they will not be assessed in their world power capacity, but on an equal basis as regional powers aiming to increase their influence within the region.

[4] Indirectly influencing are also the USA, China, Iran and other IR actors. However, these actors fall out of the scope of this research. This research is only about the direct competition over perceived power elements between Russia, Turkey and the EU. Only these three actors have littoral access to the Black Sea and historical regional leadership.

3.Applied framework	Between: 1991 (dissolution of the Soviet Union) and 2020 (Pandemic covid-19; war in Ukraine 2022)	Black Sea region (competition for influence over political entities - states)	The EU, Russia, Turkey	Six power elements (hard, soft, smart, sharp)	Competition (conflict) due to the perceived value of the six power elements	Latest foreign and security policy strategies of RU, TR, EU (EUGS and its assessments, RU-security, foreign, energy policy, TR-entrepreneurship foreign policy)

Table 2. Conflict assessment factors: selected values in the case study BSR. (Source: the author.)

This table is the basis over which I develop my further research. Among the factors, associated with defining a conflict, are: historical time (between geopolitical power shifts or crises), location (between world blocks, regions, countries, groups), actors (involvement type, comparable status), root causes (interests, areas of competition, power elements), reaction type (competition, cooperation, neutral), result of the reaction (war or conflict, peace, cooperation). In the literature review, I select the time and location. In the case study chapter, I select the place, actors and interests. In the theory chapter, I develop the six elements of power. They correspond to the interests of the involved actors. These are also related to the root causes of a conflict, and to the areas of competition. My conceptual framework suggests how to assess the dependence between conflict in IR and the perception of power. In the empirical chapter, I assess the power perception of the three selected actors - the EU, Russia and Turkey. I analyse their latest foreign and security policy concepts between two major crises, in the period 2016-2020. I apply my newly developed grid of six power elements.

2.4.Theoretical approach

The main IR theories, related to conflict, are: regionalism, neorealism, constructivism. This subchapter establishes the relation between conflict prevention and regional security crises. It discusses the selected theoretical foundation of conflict prevention and geopolitics

and explains how conflict is related to regionalism. Based on time, regionalism is drawn as a key conflict prevention factor after the Cold War. The most active actors at a certain time are indicated. The EU and its near region are briefly outlined for the purpose of selecting a case study. Based on types of interests, it identifies competition for resources and beliefs as the two main groups of triggers. These are later developed in the theoretical chapter as elements of power within the competition for regional influence. The neorealist IR perspective discusses the balance of power and security dilemma to identify the research gap. My approach is constructivist and relates to the psychological concept of perception and reaction. It is explained afterwards, in the next subchapter.

2.4.1. Regionalism and competition for hegemonic influence. Power as influence

Power shifts, either global or regional, destabilise the existing order and create preconditions for intense competition. To develop this knowledge, I begin with an overview of regionalism, which brings in realism, liberalism and constructivism. Among the key literature on regional divisions worldwide are the *Grand Chessboard* (Brzezinski, 1997) and the *Clash of Civilizations* (Huntington, 1996). These theories are related to the two areas of competition - over resources and over people's beliefs, which I develop in my theoretical chapter as elements of power. The hegemonic competition is initially suggested by the *heartland theory* (Mackinder, 1904), whose logic I find applicable to the Black Sea region nowadays.

More than a century ago, the *heartland theory* suggested that the geopolitical location and shifts of balance are a driver for regional security crises and conflicts (Mackinder, 1904). The logic of the *heartland theory* is that geopolitical interests in a region considered of high importance for hegemons around it are a driver of the regional security crises (Mackinder, 1904). Eurasia, consisting of Central Asia and Europe, is the heartland over which great powers compete (Mackinder, 1904). According to the *heartland theory* (Mackinder, 1904), Eurasia is a core region of key interest to the great powers at that time Russia and the US.

In the period of the Cold War, the heartland theory is still considered alive. The *Grand Chessboard* for the USA means maintaining supremacy, blocking any rival superpower from emerging over Eurasia (Brzezinski, 1997). Allowing any other country to control the resources of Eurasia would devalue the monopolist position of the USA. Eurasia consists of Europe, Russia, Central Asia and East Asia, including the Balkans and the Caucasus (Brzezinski, 1997). Rival powers are Russia, Turkey, Japan, China, the UK, Germany, France or any other potential competitors in the region (Brzezinski, 1997). The competition between

potentially interested powers is concentrated in a geographic area, which area is considered to possess significant resources.

Due to more than hundred years since its origin, some might have argued that this theory could have lost its original value. This was the case before the war in Ukraine in 2022. It proved that the logic of a core territory – heartland, over which regional powers compete is relevant for other geographical regions. As such, I select the Black Sea region as particularly relevant. Within it, a number of ongoing security crises continue after the end of the Cold War. The strategic importance of the Black Sea is its location, which provides access between the West, the East, and the South. The more control over its territory a hegemon has, the better connected this hegemon would be, and the better protection to its internal security it could provide. I explain this further in the case study chapter, which examines the regional competition between Russia, Turkey and the EU over the Black Sea region.

2.4.2. Selecting a case study: EU's interests in the Black Sea region and the Western Balkans

Conflict prevention has been tried after the Cold War by involvement of third parties in places with high risk for conflict, including the Republic of North Macedonia, Baltics, Crimea (Lund, 2009:288). Due to the regional context, some low intensity conflicts impact the neighbouring countries, for example in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Yugoslavia (Stewart, 2006:26). These countries belong to two regions of the contemporary EU's South-Eastern neighbourhood - the Western Balkans and Black Sea region. But regional conflict prevention has been temporarily successful for some cases only (Molak, 2005:G8; In Lund, 2009:287). This indicates a lack of sufficiently punctual analysis on the specific reasons for each conflict. Some scholars highlight that prevention should correspond to the specific country and context of the emerging conflict (Cockell, 2002:190; Ackermann, 2003:343). 'A country-specific approach tailored to the conditions in a particular country rather than a' unified approach is necessary (Lund, 2002a,b; Cockell, 2002 in Ackermann, 2003:243). I support this argument, with the suggestion that a regional approach might be valuable in regions with similar characteristics.

Regionalism is important for understanding the dividing lines between different cultures, as the Clash of Civilizations (Huntington, 1996) explains. The Grand Chessboard shows the dividing lines between East and West over the Balkans and the Caucasus (Brzezinski, 1997), which increases the potential of repetitive conflict to happen. The Balkans and the Black Sea consist of a variety of nations, religions, population, languages,

territories, even geographic conditions, which are a precondition for changing behaviour of differing population groups. The interest of several regional leaders, belonging to divergent civilizational groups such as the EU, Russia, Turkey and even China and Iran, have been feeding the differences in these countries for centuries. After the end of the Cold War, both regions fell into the competition for influence between regional strong actors.

EU conflict prevention can be studied in regions of strategic importance, such as the Western Balkans and the Horn of Africa (Juncos & Blockmans, 2018:131), by analysing the particular local situation. Scholars compare the EU integration of two regions, 'Balkan and Eastern European' countries (Emerson et al., 2021), mainly through economy, governance and law, norms, but also people. The EU's interest in the conflict-intense neighbouring regions, the Black Sea region and the Western Balkans, increased during the post-Cold War period. It rapidly jumped up with the war in Ukraine in 2022. But this could have been prevented, if earlier the attention of the EU was drawn towards the Black Sea. The Black Sea region is characterized by instability and geopolitical competition vs. cooperation, changing over different time periods (Grotzky & Isic, 2008; Volten & Tashev, 2007). This has been lasting for centuries. For this research, I only examine the case study of the Black Sea region, with regional competitors Russia, Turkey and the EU.

2.4.3. Power, security and conflict in IR theory. Power as security

The main theories related to conflict in international relations, applicable to the post-Cold war competition in regions, are: *balance of power* and *security dilemma*. They introduce my theoretical approach towards power, security and conflict in international relations, in the context of changing world order. I refer to power as influence, despite its neorealist primary meaning of security. The international relations theories, which I suggest towards the case study of the Black Sea region, are the neorealist *balance of power* and the *security dilemma*. I explain their meaning among other theories on conflict, power, security and hegemony in international relations. These include *nested security, power transition* in the geopolitical context of the *grand chessboard, heartland, and clash of civilisations*.

Conflict as a result of competition: *balance of power theory* during the Cold War

After 1945 'the empires (in Europe) became spheres of influence of the superpowers (USSR and USA)' (Cooper, 2000:13). During the Cold War tensions between the USSR and USA, they would expand the conflicts indirectly within other ally-states (Cooper, 2000:13). According to *power transition theory* a war is less likely to happen, because the stability of

the system depends on **one** regional hegemon only (Lemke, 2010). If multiple competitors are present, the chance for conflict escalation increases, as was the case during the Cold War. '*Geostrategic balancing exercises were the hallmark of the Cold War era. Crises arose primarily between the great powers or their surrogates and were usually the culmination of strategic ventures prepared in secret and executed with stealth*' (Hampson & Malone, 2002:1).

Used during the Cold War, in the *balance of power* concept the lack of balance is called *imperfect competition*, which leads to security crises (Haas, 1953). In the *balance of power theory*, several actors with relatively equal power regulate a global or a regional system between them to preserve the balance, performing 'perfect competition' (Kaplan, 1957 in Boulding, 1958:331). The system is stable and characterized by balance among the actors through 'territorial integrity' and 'political independence' (Deutsch & Singer, 1964:390). Applied to a region, this means that preserving a relatively equal balance of power maintains regional stability. Each balance shift results in regional destabilisation. Stability is achieved by perfect competition between several hegemons, while conflicts happen during redistribution of power among the hegemons. Any change of the power capacity of a regional hegemon could lead to a crisis or a conflict initiated by another hegemon. Regional hegemons prevent each other from gaining more influence.

Balance of power is achieved through methods such as 'divide and rule', 'compensations', 'armaments' and 'alliances' (Morgenthau, 2005). The reasons for forming alliances, particularly US-NATO oriented or USSR oriented during the Cold War, is related to attempts to balance the power of the perceived adversary (Walt, 1985). In a unipolar world, 'hard balancing' is possible if the leader attempts expansion, while alliances with the leader are aimed by weaker states who try to strengthen their local security (Walt, 2009).

A change of the conditions of one actor leads to change of the configuration between regional hegemons. If a regional hegemon is weakened, it might search for support to improve its power status unless balance is achieved again. For example, after the balance shift in the Black Sea region in 1991 by dissolution of the Soviet Union, a changing configuration was observed as Turkey, a historical opponent of Russia, suggested their cooperation by creating the OBSEC. It was a win-win situation for both regional competitors, as its aim was to block the West from further influence, and not to allow any other potential competitor to enter the region.

The *balance of power* concept, applied to the regional context of the Black Sea, means that imbalanced influence between the regional hegemons, Russia, Turkey, and the West (EU

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or NATO), over the less powerful regional states - Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan results in security crises. Therefore, Romania and Bulgaria, despite becoming members of the EU since 2007 and NATO since 2004, remain vulnerable to the competition for influence between the EU/NATO with Russia and Turkey. However, not a specific conflictual country is subject of this research, but the competition between regional hegemons. Imperfect competition between several hegemons results in a conflict. The exact components of competition are not punctually defined. This research attempts to identify clear categories of the competition. These are elaborated in the theoretical chapter, as the six groups of *power elements.*

*Post-Cold war competition for zones of influence, **regional** conflicts.* Differently from conflicts between competing blocs during the Cold War, in the period after 1990 conflicts concern smaller entities. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the global conflicts decrease their escalation risk (Hampson & Malone, 2002:2). The scope later changes from between world blocks to regions. Some claim a transformation from inter- to intra-state level, escalating tension between and within communities (Mearshimer 1990, Huntington 1991 in Stewart, 2006:27). Others see mutual existence of three conflict types - interstate, intrastate or related to formation of a state (Wallensteen, 2002). But the focus of this research is not on the internal situation of a conflict. Instead, it examines the conflict as a result of power competition between regional competitors.

The year 1989 marks the change of order between 'spheres of influence', but also 'the European state system' (Cooper, 2000:7). It marked the end of both the Cold War and the 'balance-of-power system in Europe' (Cooper, 2000:7). After the end of the Cold War the crises undertook regional aspects. At that time, regionalism became important. A common understanding on the approaches to the post-Cold War conflicts is that they are embedded in 'regional security complexes' (Buzan 1991:190 in Stewart, 2006:27; Hampson & Malone, 2002:3). The theory of *nested security* suggests that regional stability is needed for successful conflict mediation (Jenne, 2015:25). According to it, 'unless internal conflicts are nested in stable bilateral relations, which in turn are nested in a stable regional and hegemonic environment, there can be little hope for de-escalating communal tensions on the ground' (Jenne, 2015:179). The assumption is that 'domestic peace can be built from the outside in, even when conditions on the ground are suboptimal for conflict mediation' (Jenne, 2015:13). Stability can be created through common investment by the regional powers (Jenne, 2015:194) through economic cooperation. But only if the regional hegemons have interests in the outcome (Jenne, 2015:27) of a conflict. Most often than not, in the regions of high interest

between Russia and NATO, which are the dividing line of their spheres of influence, conflicts still repeatedly happen. Therefore, I suggest that the *balance of power* theory could be applied to separate regions, still in the post-Cold war period.

Conflict as a result of misperception: the *security dilemma theory, zero-sum*

The system after the collapse of balance of power in Europe becomes 'post-modern' (Cooper, 2000:9). Europeans make 'a new model of security' internally, while the world globally 'continues to operate on the old rules' (Cooper, 2000:9). This creates misunderstanding in the global competition, due to the differing perception about world order of each regional competitor. Some probably still follow neo-imperialist ambitions. The different viewpoints create a basis for incorrect understanding of the intentions of the other.

The security dilemma refers to risk 'from being attacked, subjected, dominated or annihilated' by others (Hertz, 1950). Aiming to reassure their own security, groups, including states, try to gain more power (Hertz, 1950). The others, in response, try to prepare with more power in order to protect themselves (Hertz, 1950). This was valid in the context of the Cold War, but also much earlier in history (Hertz, 1950).

"(T)he key to the *security dilemma* is misperception" (Roe, 2005:1). According to it, a lack of clear communication leads to misperception. "In essence, the *security dilemma* defines a situation whereby one actor (…) in trying to increase its security, causes a reaction in a second, which, in the end, decreases the security of the first. As a result, a (spiral) process of action and reaction is manifest in which each side's behaviour is seen as threatening" (Roe, 2005:1). For example, the perceived threat by Russia and the EU, due to the creation of Eastern Partnership and Eurasian Economic Union, respectively as regional integration structures, results in their competitive zero-sum reaction (Charap & Troitskiy, 2013, p. 50 in Casier, 2016a).

According to the neorealist *zero sum* concept, more security for one is less for another actor, while states are 'trying to maximize their absolute gains' (Powell, 1994:336). The 'zero-sum concept of power' means that the total amount of power is limited, therefore if one actor increases their power, another actor decreases it (Parsons, 1966 and Dahl, 1957 in Baldwin, 2016:38), in a closed system. The change of *status quo* is a possible reason for security risks (Baldwin, 1997:11), as it changes the previously established balance. If the actions of a state are perceived as a threat to the security of another state, it reacts (Baldwin,1997:22). This provokes a defensive reaction with potential to grow as a conflict.

The *security dilemma* suggests that the misperception of how power is distributed between the regional hegemons is the main reason for insecurity.

Through the '*security dilemma*', 'irresolvable sort of war' might happen (Roe, 2005:3), such as frozen conflicts. This could explain why Russia and Turkey, as historical regional hegemons, might react with aggression over their commonly perceived zone of influence in the Black Sea region. The EU, despite being a different type of competitor, still participates in the competition. If one competitor perceives that another competitor begins to increase its projected power through approaching regional states, then the first competitor might react by initiating a regional security crisis.

A 'domain of influence' is the targeted sphere where a stronger actor would like to exercise their influence (Baldwin, 2016:51), for example Russia over post-Soviet countries or Turkey over post-Ottoman territory. The countries of the Black Sea region are such domains of influence for Russia and for Turkey from the past, and for the EU from the present. The perception of both Russia and the EU regarding the zero-sum choice of the countries from their shared neighbourhood being 'either with Russia or with the EU' determines their actions towards the other one as bad, and itself as good (Casier, 2016a: 21). The EU-Russia have direct interaction of power and indirect in the neighbourhood (Casier, 2018), which indirect interaction is a competition to project influence.

Realists identify themselves with 'national security', however the definition of the 'national interest' remains ambiguous (Wolfers, 1952:481). Wolfers defines wealth to 'the amount of a nation's material possessions', power to the 'ability to control the actions of others', while security to the objective 'absense of threats to acquired values' and the subjective 'absense of fear' of those values being attacked (Wolfers, 1952:485). ***Neorealism*** accepts security as a primary source of power. But security as a neo-realist term is 'objective and subjective' due to which the ***perceptions*** of states might 'overestimate or underestimate' the risks (Baldwin, 1997:14). As a result, states might over-react or undervalue possible threats to their own security. In security dilemma, **"defensively motivated actions are misinterpreted as offensive moves, thus requiring some kind of countermeasure"** (Roe, 2005:1). Respectively, if actions are perceived as defensive instead of offensive, then counter-reaction is not provoked and, most probably, a crisis or a conflict would not happen. Furthermore, there is no clear dividing line between the concepts of power and influence. Both relate to control and dominance, but neither is completely defined.

2.5. Research gap and approach

2.5.1. Research Gap: the unknown meaning of power

I identify a gap between *security dilemma* and *balance of power.* Both theories neither define the exact meaning of power, nor its perception. According to the *security dilemma,* stability is possible if misperceptions are solved, and trust is built. According to the *balance of power*, regional stability exists during perfect competition of equal powers. Therefore, a regional hegemon might destabilise a region motivated either by an attempt to preserve balanced power, or by misperception. In both the *security dilemma* and *balance of power*, a gap exists that a common understanding of power is missing, neither it is related to the concept of influence. I argue that such a common understanding of power perception is needed for regional stability.

The perception of power is not a universal concept. Power might be perceived differently by different hegemons, which might result in conflict. Also, values might change in different time periods for each IR actor. This has not been studied yet and the current research aims to address it. I suggest that measuring the perception of power over fixed groups of elements contributes to preventing regional security crises and conflicts.

The power perception might lead to competition, and the result of the competition is conflict. However, several gaps remain open: 1) It is not known what power is. 2) It is not known how power is perceived, so what is power perception. 3) It is not known whether and how this perception of power could be measured. The aim of this research is to generate knowledge of: 1) How to measure the perception of power? 2) If the perception of power is measured, then how does it relate to the reaction of competition? 3) How to apply this measurement to regional conflict prevention? I begin with the case study of the Black Sea region, then I develop my theory and apply it to measure the power perception of the selected actors for a selected time.

I address the gap by examining power perception and the competition for influence. Particularly, I try to identify when the reaction of a regional hegemon would be competition. My initial assumption is that competition leads to conflict. For this purpose, I measure the perception of power by the EU, RU, TR in the case study of the Black Sea region. This requires a common measurement scheme of power, which I develop in my theory of six power elements. By measuring the perception of power, and identifying which components lead to competition, I suggest that the reaction can be prevented early enough. This approach of assessment detects in advance the potential escalation into a security crisis. Therefore, it contributes to regional conflict prevention.

In a geopolitical perspective, power competition is related to areas of competition. In the hegemonic competition for regional influence, the perceived threat to reduce one's own influence results in the reaction of competition. The perception of increased power of the other in an area of one's own interest leads to such perceived threat to one's own influence. But it is not known how to measure power, because a clear definition of power is missing. The areas of competition should be defined as well. Therefore, I clarify the meaning of power perception and areas of competition in a separate theoretical chapter.

Furthermore, it is not known how to measure the perception of power. It should be applied to a specific case study region, time, and actors. In the case study of the Black Sea region, I select relevant contemporary competitors - Russia, Turkey and the EU. In the empirical chapter, I measure their perception over the elements of power. I do so in their foreign and security policy concepts, corresponding to the selected time. Finally, I explain the contribution of the identified relation between power perception and conflict prevention to the general knowledge of conflict prevention.

2.5.2. Power as influence and security: a constructivist approach, combining all IR schools. Measuring power perception

'(T)he reality of power in the mind of the observer can be as important as the reality of power itself' (Morghentau 1965 in Chaban & Holland, 2019:2).

This research assumes that the competition for regional leadership results in security crises and conflicts. Therefore, it aims to identify which international actor is competitive on what, when, where and why. I establish the relation between perception (about the actions or intentions of the other) and reaction (competition, cooperation, neutral). The relation between perception and reaction is the basis of this dissertation. I try to measure the perceived power by the three regional competitors.

Consequently, I propose a new theoretical concept of perception of *power elements* by the regional hegemons. My *hypothesis* is that a hegemon initiates a security crisis, according to its own perception of the value of a power element. Its competitive reaction is triggered, if another hegemon endangers its influence over a power element perceived as highly important. The perceptions might change over different times for different actors.

The aim of my research is to identify the relation between perceived importance of power elements and triggered by that reaction of competition. Previous studies apply the

concept of perception-reaction to personalities. Instead, my innovative approach is to examine the concept of perception for state-like IR actors, through their foreign policy strategies. Prior to that, I discuss some main concepts: power, perception, measurement.

My research approach: constructivism and regionalism

This research, based on the selected root causes of conflict, takes a mixed approach. It combines neo-realist, neo-liberalist, constructivist and regionalist views. I develop this combined approach in several separate chapters.

I relate the regionalist approach to the specific case study - the Black Sea region. In the case study chapter on the Black Sea region, I elaborate the discussed regionalist perspective. I examine regional conflicts as a continued competition for influence between Russia and the West, after the Cold War. As 'West', I discuss the combined concept of NATO and the EU and justify my choice to examine only the EU further. I also discuss the role of Turkey as a regional competitor. I justify the compatibility of the selected three regional competitors.

In the theoretical chapter, I outline the tangible and intangible reasons for conflict as elements of power. These are a continuation of the main reasons for violent conflict of either material resources or human beliefs. Respectively, they combine several IR schools of thought, within which I focus on neorealist and constructivist ideas. I develop a conceptual analysis on the meaning of power. The areas of competition correspond to the developed framework of power elements. I locate the areas of competition, based on their origin, within six groups of power elements in the theoretical framework.

My conceptual framework shows that measuring the perception of each competitor on each power element provides knowledge of competition triggers. I measure them in the empirical chapter. There, I apply my theory to a selected time between two periods of crises to the foreign and security policy strategies of the three competitors.

This framework contributes to the knowledge of conflict prevention. Corresponding measures can be taken on each category of drivers early enough. An advance understanding of a potential reaction could contribute to preserving the stability in a region. For the Black Sea region, it can contribute to prevention of security crises by the competing IR actors Russia, Turkey, and the EU. This framework could be applied to other regions, characterised with post-Cold war conflicts as a result of continued competition for influence. By adjusting to the specific situation of other selected actors and time, this knowledge can be used for preventing international conflicts and security crises.

Power as soft, hard, sharp, smart (new conceptualisation: six elements of power)

The six elements of power could be referred to the wide understanding of hard, soft, sharp and smart power. Power has been defined as 'the ability of a state to use its resources (...) in a way that will influence the behaviour of other states' (Stoessinger, 1969 in Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021:325). In this article, I keep the definition of power as the ability of an IR actor to exercise international influence and therefore, to change the behaviour of another IR actor (Kirilova, 2022:55). International competition has been previously examined as simultaneously happening on military, economic and soft power levels (Brzezinski, 1997 in Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021:326). Hard power in realism refers to its material forms - military and economic, while the soft power of Nye refers to its non-material shape expression, such as diplomatic, political and societal relations (Bilgin & Elis, 2008:6). Among the updated concepts of power in the realist school are Schelling's communication, Baldwin's relational views on power, Walt's replacement to 'balance of threat', Gilpin's economic perspectives on power (Bilgin & Elis, 2008:7). Nye considers a main asset of soft power the attraction expressed in 'culture, political ideas and policies' from a strong IR actor for other actors (Bilgin & Elis, 2008:11). Soft power, separately, can be expressed in three main types - culture, political values and foreign policy, related to the attractiveness of an actor in IR (Nye, 2007 in Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021:326).

Smart power has been considered a combination of soft and hard power (Wilson III, 2008:110). Smart power attempts to combine the traditionally used hard military power and economic power of IR actors with the softer diplomatic efforts to change the behaviour of other countries (Wilson III, 2008:113). It is not a new idea that 'good diplomacy can prevent bad military conflicts', but it needs a combination of soft and hard power approach (Wilson III, 2008:122). Smart power means an effective combination of resources of both soft and hard power into strategies (Nye, 2013:559). Later, Nye refers to information as a separate smart power instrument, claiming that not only an army achieves a victory, but also the created story (Nye, 2023:66).

The concept of sharp power is later developed as a specific tool through which authoritarian regimes project international influence, restricting the freedom of expression, generating confusion and questioning the democratic order, recently done by Russia and China (Walker, 2018:9). Authoritarian regimes use quick information to manipulate public opinion in their own countries as well, creating obstacles for democratic messages to enter (Walker, 2018:9). Technology is also attributed to sharp power, as authoritarian regimes

quickly cross borders, polarise discourses, spread disinformation and undermine democracies (Walker, Kalathil & Ludwig, 2020:124). Among the instruments of sharp power are: information warfare, supporting 'political elites and social organizations', history politics, elections manipulation, scientific cooperation, international economic initiatives, hybrid conflict (Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021).

Perception of power, reaction of competition

The zero-sum competition for power, usually in 'military, economic or political terms' lead to escalation of conflict (Seymour, 2003). However, if the perception from zero-sum changes to positive, then the conflict might be successfully managed (Seymour, 2003). Borrowing the idea from psychology, my argument is that the perceived competition might transform in either cooperation or in a neutral reaction. But we first need to identify the perception of what exactly, for whom, and when, leads to the reaction of competition.

In realism, conflict is the consequence of power shift and demonstration 'of relative strength', while in psychology, conflict is triggered by 'the perception of power, rather than the actual possession of power' (Seymour, 2003). According to psychology, the perceived power, alternatives, own identity and image of the others leads to different reactions in conflict (Kaufman, Elliott & Shmueli, 2017). Perceptions relate to lasting interaction among nations or groups (Seymour, 2003). Perceptions are based on 'values (...), threats (...), power distribution, and resource control' (Seymour, 2003). The frames of perception, leading to conflict, might be changed through 'communication, understanding, and trust' (Kaufman, Elliott & Shmueli, 2017). These belong to a constructivist approach in IR.

I borrow the concept of perception from psychology. Perception - 'it is how we make sense of the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). Perception is the process between 'stimuli and responses' (Garner, Hake & Eriksen, 1956). The relation between perception and following after that reaction has been studied by a number of scientists (In *Noe, 2004:17* - Ballard 1991, 1996, 2002; Thompson, Palacios, and Varela 1992; Thompson 1995; Humphrey 1992; Churchland, Ramachandran, and Sejnovsky 1994; Kelso 1995; Cotteril 1995, 2001; Clark 1997, 1999; Hurley, 1998; Jarvilehto 1998a,b, 1999, 2000; O'Regan and Noe 2001a,b,c; Noe 2002a,b). Perception is 'the guidance of action' in living organisms (Noe, 2004:18). I argue that the perceived competition is the trigger for conflict. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify also the concept of competition, so that its further assessment can be possible.

In psychology, competition is triggered in people for several reasons: 'need to win', 'improving their own performance', 'to put forth greater effort that can result in high levels of

performance' (Franken & Brown, 1995:175). Competitiveness is characterised with 'aggressive', 'forceful', 'dominant', 'masculine' behaviour, which is typical for males (Franken & Brown, 1995:177). Applied to international relations, this refers to the behaviour of aimed dominance or hegemony. Therefore, the competition for influence is a competition to dominate over certain areas in the choices of an external state. Consequently, the relation with influence should be established. Also, definition of measuring the perceived areas of competition is necessary.

Power as influence

My understanding of *power* in the context of this research is the externally projected influence of an IR actor over another IR actor. This is applicable to the regional competitors over a dependent country. My preferred model follows the ideas of Baldwin 2016, and Casier 2016a,b, 2018. I build on the idea of a ''negative' compulsory power, as a way of preventing control by competing parties' (Casier, 2018:114), which means that more influence by one hegemon is less for another, and therefore, the less influential hegemon tries to either decrease the influence of the others, or to increase their own influence. This research adds on offensive realism.

Power measurement: areas of competition

Classifying categories of power in international relations is challenging. Most scholars agree that power is multidimensional and difficult to measure. The definition of power depends on the constantly changing international environment. Furthermore, its dimensions depend on the specific actors and their own perception of power at a certain time. I do not attempt to measure power in IR through the known quantifiable categories. I do not relate power to material resources, which would be a realist approach. My research does not rely on statistics. Instead, I aim to conceptualise power in an attempt to categorise the areas of competition. Then, I measure its perception for selected actors and time.

For measuring power, scholars need conceptual clarification and multiple dimensions (Baldwin, 2016:75). In attempts to measure power, main pitfalls are 'inadequate conceptual specification' a 'single-dimension', and perceiving 'power-as-resources' (Baldwin, 2016:75). There is a lack of 'a standardized measure that allows one to reduce the various dimensions of power to a single dimension' (Baldwin, 2016: 75). The measurement of power in the BSR has been partially studied in terms of military balance (Ozdamar, 2010) and maritime security (Sanders, 2014). But if the differing understanding of the regional states and hegemons lead

to "miscomprehension" (Kirilova, 2015), it is not known whether the misperceived intentions of a regional hegemon are the reason for other regional hegemons to initiate security crises and conflicts. In this research, I suggest an assessment of perceived power values by each regional competitor in the Black Sea region.

The recommended by Baldwin, a classical IR theorists, steps in measuring power are:

'1. Clear specification of the concept of power to be measured. 2. Statement of the proposed operational measure. 3. Reasons why this measure is preferable to alternative measures. 4. Acknowledgement of the ways in which the operational measure is deficient, that is, the aspects of the concept that it fails to capture' (Baldwin, 2016:78).

Not only measuring power is needed, but measuring its perception by certain actors. Therefore, first the elements of power should be defined clearly, second, specific time to which the definition refers should be selected, and third, the competing actors shall be selected. Only then, their understanding of power could be measured and compared.

I apply this recommendation in my theoretical chapter as follows: 1. I decompose the concept of power into six basic categories. These groups are based on existing definitions of power in IR. 2. Then, I compare the perception of three actors - Turkey, Russia and the EU over the six power elements. I assess how they perceive power, based on the same classification of power elements. I measure it through content analysis in their latest foreign and security policy concepts. I compare the number of words in the contents of each document, belonging to each of the six power element categories. 3. The measurement of words by the same six categories in their latest foreign and security concepts has several advantages. First, I examine identical documents, issued at the time scope between two major crises. Second, the documents are identical, because they represent the foreign and security image that each of the actors would like to project in both international relations and as a regional power. Third, the division of six power categories is aligned, because it is identical for each actor. Therefore, their perception could be compared over the same components for the same time. As a result, the comparison shows similarities and differences in the perception. The perception is a precondition respectively for reactions of competition leading to war, to cooperation leading peace, or to neutral reaction preserving the status quo. 4. The measurement has its deficiencies. For example, it does not examine the progress of perception of each actor through a sequence of concepts. On the contrary, it only measures the perception in a fixed time period. I only partially do that for the EU, due to its yearly

assessments of the same strategy for that period. Also, it does not examine other power categories, except those located in the six power elements. If a new meaning of power appeared during the research, I placed it in one of the six already defined categories.

As a result, I suggest that the perceived importance of different areas of competition (which I call *power elements*) results in a different reaction by each regional competitor. Perceived high importance of an area of competition leads to increased competitiveness and, therefore, to conflict. Perceived low importance of an area of competition reduces the likelihood of conflict. To be able to measure that, I need to accomplish several steps. First, I need to define the exact competitors in a region for a certain time. I do it in the case study chapter by selecting the three recent competitors. Second, I have to define what exact categories they compete in. I do it in the theoretical chapter by elaborating *six power elements,* which correspond to the areas of competition. Third, I need to measure their actual values. I do it in the empirical chapter via analysis of strategic documents for the selected actors in a fixed time.

Therefore, this research develops a common understanding of *power elements,* through which to assess the perception of the three regional actors. This could contribute to preserving regional stability and preventing conflict escalation in the region. The logical framework could be applied to other regions as well. It contributes to the knowledge of conflict prevention.

2.6.Conclusion and next chapters

This chapter establishes the key for this research relation between the reasons for IR conflict and perceptions of the regional competitors. It examines how the perception of power in IR relates to conflict. The selected case study is the Black Sea region, which is later examined according to the created framework on power and conflict. The double role of the EU as both conflict preventing actor and a regional competitor is explained, along with the other two regional competitors - Russia and Turkey.

This literature review established the relation between conflict prevention, geopolitics and IR theory. It suggested its application to the case study of Black Sea, for which a separate chapter identifies as regional competitors the EU, Russia and Turkey. It established a theoretical background in international relations, related to power perception and conflict, as well as geopolitical competition. As a result, it identified the research gap and main goals. The research gap is that the meaning of power remains unclear, as well as the measurement of its perception. Perceptions change constantly. A change of perception can influence the

outcome of a conflict. For this reason, I suggest measuring the perceived value power, which corresponds to the areas of competition in a region. The research goals are: to identify the actors in the case study with brief overview of their individual interests; to develop a comprehensive understanding of power in the theoretical part; to assess their perception about power in the empirical part through analysis of strategies; and to evaluate how this relates to their attitude towards initiating security crises in the region in the discussion chapter. As a result, this research upgrades the knowledge of the relation between power perception, competition for influence, regional security crises, and conflict prevention.

The literature review identified that security crises and conflicts happen because of the competition for power between regional leaders. The case study of the *Black Sea region* was selected as neighbouring to the EU. *The EU aims to be a conflict-prevention actor.* It opens the research question: *What is the relation between power perception and conflict prevention in the BSR? How the assessment of power perception for the EU, Russia and Turkey contributes to regional conflict prevention?* Different theories partially explain the dependence between power and international conflicts. The literature suggests two perspectives to theoretically approach conflicts and crises in the Black Sea region: *geopolitical and IR theory.* These two approaches are further developed as a case study and a theoretical framework.

Regionalism concerns a certain geographic area, consisting of territory and people. Regional hegemons compete to control the resources of the territory and the ideology of the people. The competition for resources as a reason for conflict is physical, tangible. It relates to neorealist and neoliberal perspectives. The competition for ideologies, on the contrary, is intangible and relates to constructivism. Over different time, different actors become regional hegemons or regional competitors. This research aims to identify the relevant regional competitors, their areas of competition and the corresponding time, which is done in the case study chapter.

I address the regional security crises in the Black Sea region by comparing two of the most relevant theoretical approaches. The *security dilemma* points out misperception as a main reason for security crises and regional conflicts. The *balance of power* theory outlines the perfect competition as a stability guarantee, while the imperfect competition as a main reason for regional security crises. The misperception is a reason for conflict in the security dilemma. The lack of balance of power is another reason for conflict. A gap exists between these theories. Power perception and the competition for regional influence are not clarified.

The relation between perceived value of power by the regional hegemons and their reaction to compete, which results in regional crises, has not been studied.

The meaning of power in IR has multiple aspects. I relate power to the areas of competition. Power perception is directly corresponding to the reaction of the regional competitors. The reaction of competition is the generic reason for conflict. Power could also relate to the status of IR actors - in the case study chapter I justify the comparability of the selected regional competitors. Power could relate to the elements over which IR actors compete, as shown in the theoretical chapter. Furthermore, power could relate to the perception of an IR actor regarding the intention of another IR actor to project influence in a zone of competition. As a result of this perceived intention for influence of another actor over the zone of competition, they react. The reaction of competition results in initiating regional security crises or conflicts.

This shows the necessity for a classification of measurable elements of power. Furthermore, power perception from the perspective of each regional competitor should be assessed. Such understanding informs in advance what is the possible reaction of each regional competitor on each power element. Possible reactions are competition, which leads to regional security crises, cooperation, which leads to peace, and neutrality, which leads to continued status quo. The power elements correspond to the areas of competition for influence between the regional hegemons. I measure this perception in their strategic concepts at a certain time.

The concept of perception in psychology might refer to several viewpoints. Those include - how each actor perceives themselves or how each actor perceives the others. I try to find the specific areas of power competition, towards which each of the actors would react by competition, if another actor tries to enter their perceived zone of influence. And I measure it over the perceived importance each actor attributes to the six categories of power, related to that actor's own ambitions for external influence. I am not writing about the perception of the self or of the other, therefore I am not going to use statistical data on possessions or material power. I am writing about the perceived intention of the other competitor, leading to own reaction in competition. Therefore, I examine the value that each actor attributes to different power elements.

Through identifying the perceived importance of an element, the expected reaction might be competition, cooperation, or neutral. The competition leads to conflict, so the primary goal of this research is to find which actor would react via competition on which power element. This knowledge contributes to regional conflict prevention. To understand

which actor reacts on which element of power, I examine the perception of power elements for each competitor in the Black Sea region. This is developed through the chapters of case study, theory and conceptual framework. Then, I empirically test the power perception by the three regional competitors in the Black Sea region.

Next chapters

The *literature review* chapter discussed the geopolitical reasons for conflict. It showed why close examination of the power perception by regional competitors is key for conflict prevention. It selected the case study of the Black Sea region, for which the case study chapter identifies three main competitors. The security crises and frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region (BSR) are directly related to the competition for regional influence after the end of the Cold War. A gap was found between balance of power and security dilemma. Namely, the perception of power is missing in the literature. I assume that the perception of power elements relates to three basic reactions, among which competition. I refer to power competition as the primary source of conflict. The aim of this research is to measure the power perception for the EU, Russia, and Turkey. This knowledge contributes to preserving stability in the Black Sea region.

The *methodology* explains how I address the research problem. My methodology follows a grounded theory approach: it starts with a case study, followed by theory, then concept, and finally empirical findings through content analysis of strategic documents. It is a qualitative methodological approach with qualitative methods - case study, interviews, content and discourse analysis.

The *theoretical chapter* develops a framework of assessment power. It justifies which exact *elements* should be addressed in measuring power perception. The theoretical chapter searches for the epistemological roots of power in international relations. Due to the complex concept of power, I try to logically construct subcategories, which cover the components of hard power, soft power, smart power, sharp power. After regrouping the meaning of power, I suggest six power elements. The power status of IR actors is discussed, aiming to justify the comparability of the three actors. Later, the perception of power, which corresponds to the areas of competition, is empirically tested for Russia, Turkey and the EU.

The *conceptual framework* establishes the relation between power perception, expected type of reaction by each of the three competitors, and conflict. The logical connection between perception, reaction and conflict for the Black Sea region is developed. The case study identifies three regional competitors - Russia, Turkey, and the EU. The

theoretical chapter outlines six power categories. I attempt to assess the value of perceived power for each of the six elements by each of the three actors. Based on the perception, a reaction of either competition, cooperation or neutrality are expected. The aim of this research is to identify early enough the reaction of competition, so that regional security crises and conflicts can be prevented.

The *case study chapter* identifies perception by whom, when, why, and which are the basic areas of competition for them. As reasons for conflict around the Black Sea it identifies the location and resources. As currently competing actors are identified Russia, Turkey and the EU, based on historical presence in the littoral territory. Their individual interests in the competition and their bilateral relations are outlined. Expert interviews show accents of the areas of competition and of cooperation. These are later related to the power elements. The interviewed experts present an EU perspective.

The *empirical chapters* measure the perception of power for the EU, Russia and Turkey.   I do so for a fixed time period in compatible strategic documents - their strategies of foreign and security policy. I apply comparative discourse analysis and content analysis. The values which each regional competitor attributes to different power elements are detected as a percentage of the whole document. Based on the results, by showing the measurement in percentage, I find what importance each regional competitor attributes to each power element. As a result of this perception, a reaction is likely to follow as either competition, cooperation, or neutrality. Therefore, I identify which regional competitor has the reaction *competition* for which power element. This reaction indicates high likelihood for the IR actor to initiate regional security crises or conflicts, if another IR actor attempts to impose influence on the particular power element. Each of the empirical chapters discusses how this could contribute to conflict prevention.

The *conclusion chapter* outlines how the derived knowledge on perceived six power elements for the three regional competitors could contribute to conflict prevention in the Black Sea region. It draws the attention of the reader to the particular case study region, actors and time. It reminds again why detecting the possible reaction of competition for the regional powers is of key importance. As a result, it derives a framework to contribute to conflict prevention and maintaining regional stability. It discusses the applicability of this framework of analysis to other regions, time, and actors.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

3.1. Research structure and methods

Structure of the research

In the literature review, I identify the need to develop conflict prevention theory, and the regions within which security crises and conflicts happen. It is located between the knowledge of regionalism and IR theory. I selected the Black Sea region as a case study region. Simultaneously, I opened the discussion of IR theory on conflict prevention and power perception.

The sequence in which I follow the grounded theory is: first, in the theoretical chapter I develop the exact grouping of areas over which regional powers compete. These areas belong to the general IR knowledge and can be applied to any region.

In the case study chapter, I examine the regional competitors and some of their interests in the Black Sea region. The purpose of the chapter is to identify IR actors with comparable power status, whose reaction in competition in the region might trigger regional security crises and conflicts. Data from the expert interviews contributes to clarifying the EU perspective on these relations.

Next, in the empirical chapters, I return to the three regional competitors in the Black Sea region, to measure their actual perception of power over the selected power areas. As a result, I identify the level of prioritisation each of them has for each of the power areas. In each of the chapters, a discussion shows how the findings related to the conflict prevention in the selected region. I discuss how the perceived value of each of the three regional competitors over each of the six elements of power relates to their potential reaction to trigger a conflict or a security crisis in the region.

In the conclusion I assess the implementation of the research objectives, their applicability and validity. I discuss the overall contribution of the research to the knowledge of conflict prevention.

Methods

My research design is of multiple methods. I examine a case study region with three main regional competitors at a certain time period. Some of their areas of competition and cooperation are discussed via expert interviews. The theoretical framework develops the concept of power and deducts it to six measurable categories. The new conceptual framework

derives six elements of power, over which each regional hegemon has different attitudes of cooperation/confrontation/neutrality shown in its strategic documents at a certain time. The empirical method through which I test the likelihood for the regional competitors to initiate security crises in a certain time period is: qualitative comparative content analysis of their foreign and security policy strategic documents. I selected content analysis of foreign and security policy of the three regional hegemons. By comparative content analysis, I assess their potential to react via cooperation, competition, or neutrality on each of the six power elements in a fixed period of time.

The methods that follow are: literature review, case study, expert interviews, theoretical framework, conceptual framework, empirical application to the foreign and security policy concepts. In a section on each separate method, I explain in detail how I collected the data, how I interpreted the data, and how this contributes to the discussion addressing the research questions. The type of data which I assess is qualitative, expressed in words. Due to the fact that the analysis is entirely qualitative, the methods were used to assess the acquired data in a non-numerical way, providing meanings of perception in the six categories of power, related to cooperation, competition or neutrality.

The tools to collect data were combined, online and in person. I collected and analysed both secondary and primary data.I collected and analysed secondary data in the literature review, the case study of the Black Sea region and the theoretical chapter on power in IR. I assessed primary data of foreign policy concepts in the empirical chapter through comparative content analysis. For the expert interviews, I collected primary data during a diplomatic internship at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU at the time of the Bulgarian Presidency to the Council of the EU 2018. I later analysed the data.

3.2.The theoretical framework: a conceptual analysis of power in IR theory

The purpose of this method is to create an analytical framework of analysis over the perceived areas of competition. As such, it produces six power elements. I recognise the different perspectives from the different schools of international relations, and I undertake a mixed-method approach.

Constructivism vs. positivism in a theoretical framework

Theoretical framework or paradigm refers to the way knowledge is interpreted (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). Paradigms depend on the origin, methodology and validity criteria of specific knowledge (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), closely connected with the

epistemology and ontology. Positivism tests a theory 'through observation and measurement in order to predict and control forces that surround us' (O'Leary, 2004:5 in Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), assuming that the logic of natural phenomena can be applied to humans. Contrary to that, constructivism examines human experience as unique, due to which it refers to identities and interpretation (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), through qualitative data. This research uses the interpretativist/constructivist paradigm to explain the perception of countries or actors in international relations.

Conceptual analysis - a qualitative method

The method of conceptual analysis relates to definitions, classification, explanation, measurement, categorisation of concepts (Radaelli & Pasquier, 2008). The method of conceptual analysis critically assesses definitions of concepts which refer to the same phenomena (Tahtinen & Havila, 2018). Conceptual analysis contributes to the clarification of meaning for concepts, examines conceptual models, suggests new assumptions in discussions, assesses whether a theory is consistent (Machado & Silva, 2007). Conceptual analysis decomposes concepts into their simplest components (Olsthoorn, 2017:153). It is a systematic examination of concepts (Olsthoorn, 2017:154).

Problematic for conceptual analysis are the unclear primary intentions, incomplete understanding and formation of definitions (Kipper, 2012:109). Concepts should be coherent, and not vague (Olsthoorn, 2017:158). Some scholars suggest eliminating confusion around concepts and the conscious choice of theoretical language, applicable for emerging fields of research (Tahtinen & Havila, 2018). Proposing new concepts is possible, while suggesting new meanings of already existing ones is only possible if the readers accept and understand them (Olsthoorn, 2017:158). New concepts should be coherent, short, memorable, clear (Olsthoorn, 2017:171). These are the problems which I initially faced throughout the current research. It took time and effort to clarify the exact concepts around which the research to be formulated, due to the overlapping meaning attributed to some of them. However, finally a clear schematic understanding was drawn.

Through conceptual analysis, theories explain politics and policies (Radaelli & Pasquier, 2008). The conceptual analysis, differently than the pragmatic analysis, produces analytical truth rather than empirical truth (Ogden, 2003). The conclusions achieved in conceptual analysis depend on the reached definitions, not on observations (Ogden, 2003). Conceptual analysis does not describe existing phenomena, but creates new cognition

(Ogden, 2003). The conceptual analysis can later be amended by empirical findings (Radaelli & Pasquier, 2008).

This method is appropriate, because I conceptualise the meaning of power in six elements in the theoretical chapter. Later, in the empirical chapter, I assess this concept by measuring the power perception over the six power elements. I test my conceptualisation of the power elements by assessing their perception. I do so through empirical application to the selected from the case study of the Black Sea region equal power competitors. These are Russia, Turkey and the EU. I assess their perception of the power elements in their foreign and security policy strategies in a fixed time period.

Conceptualising power

In the interpretative theoretical part, I examine the concept of power through IR theory. Power can be related to both security and influence in international relations. I briefly discuss the overlapping between security, power and influence. *Security* means the capacity of a country or hegemon to survive and to maintain its existence. *Influence* means the capacity of an IR actor to change the behaviour of another IR actor in favour of the first one. As *power* in the regional competition, I refer to the capacity of an IR actor to exercise influence over external countries or political entities. The problem is not the actual external influence, but the competition between several powerful actors, or regional hegemons, who are interested to influence the same external country on the same element of power. For this, I needed to create a conceptual regrouping of measurable power units. Therefore, I examine IR concepts of power through neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. Based on them, and combined with areas of competition from the case study, I identify six categories of power.

I examine power as the ability to influence another IR actor. For the purpose of this analysis, the following three presumptions are admitted: 1. Power (internal possession of qualities) does not guarantee influence (external impact on other actors). 2. Influence is not necessarily exercised by the most powerful actor (the one who possesses the most resources). Therefore, the influence depends not only on the possession of measurable characteristics, but also on the ability and will of an IR actor to use them. 3. However, more power contributes to having more chances to exercise influence. 4. The actual power and the perceived power might differ. I am interested in the perceived power only.

Result. Theoretical framework: new proposal of six power elements

Type of power	Smart power (hard + soft)					
	Hard power (resources)			Soft power (people)		Sharp power (information)
Compo-nents	Military / Security	Economy / Investment	Energy / Climate	Diplomacy / Politics	Governance / Society	Exchange / Information access
New Coding: Power Elements 1-6	Power Element 1	Power Element 2	Power Element 3	Power Element 4	Power Element 5	Power Element 6

Table 3. Types of power and Power elements. (Source: the author.)

The detailed explanation of arriving at this framework is explained in the theoretical chapter. The result of it is the framework of six power elements. They were derived after a thorough analysis of the concept of power in international relations. Currently, I undertake a division of the following six elements of power: 1) Military/Security; 2) Economy/Investment; 3) Energy/Climate; 4) Diplomatic/Political; 5) Governance/People; 6) Exchange/ Information access. This is the final structure of my selected categories of power elements.

Furthermore, I derive the comparable power status categories of of IR actors. As such, I identify the IR actors within the category of **regional powers** as suitable to theoretically examine regional conflicts. As such, I select three actors in the Black Sea region: the EU, Russia and Turkey.

3.3. The conceptual framework: organising research ideas

The purpose of this method is to organise the identified variables from the case study and the theory, in a way that they can be empirically assessed. The result of the empirical assessment contributes to the initially set goals from the literature review.

General knowledge

A 'conceptual framework' and a 'theoretical framework' could overlap in the existing literature (Almadi, 2019:488). The conceptual framework should contain several characteristics – narrative, images, explanation 'why the subject under study matters', connection with previous 'theories, findings, contexts on the subject', 'research gap, problems and biases', the exact subject within wider concept, a review of disciplines, gradual narrowing (Almadi, 2019:489). This method serves to create the conceptual framework of terms through which the current research is developed. It seeks the relation between conflict prevention, cooperation and competition, power elements in six categories, and the current perception of three regional competitors.

Selected variables

Several terms need clarification. As **IR actors** I refer to states and supranational organisations behaving internationally like states, such as the EU. As **power** I understand the ability of an IR actor to guarantee its internal security and to exercise external **influence**. In this research, I only refer to the second meaning of power - external influence.

The conceptual framework relates the six power elements, the areas of competition, areas of cooperation and perception by the regional hegemon. Based on three types of perception, the likelihood of three types of reaction is assessed. Therefore, identifying the perception of power elements by the regional hegemons shows their likelihood to initiate regional security crises and conflicts.

Likelihood of reaction: competition/neutrality/cooperation (strategic documents)

This knowledge is created with the aim to contribute to preventing international conflicts and ensuring regional stability. I assess the latest foreign and security policy strategic documents of the three regional competitors, according to the preliminary chosen framework of six elements of power. Consequently, my research contributes to the existing literature by providing a common understanding of *power perception* by a regional hegemon - it shows the level of importance per power element for a regional hegemon. Based on this information, the likelihood of a regional hegemon to initiate regional security crises if another hegemon attempts to influence the region could be assessed. I distinguish between the likelihood of reaction in three stages: competition and confrontation leading to a crisis, neutrality leading to status quo and stability, and cooperation leading to peace and prosperity.

Competition/ Cooperation/ Neutral	Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4	Element 5	Element 6
EU						
Russia						
Turkey						

Table 4. Likelihood of reaction: competition/ cooperation/ neutral. (Source: the author.)

3.4. Methodology: an abductive approach, grounded theory and case study

The methodology chapter explains my research strategy and evaluates the reliability and validity of my research choices. The research strategy I have selected is to assess the likelihood for each regional hegemon to initiate security crises and conflicts. Aiming that, I assess the potential reaction of competition by each equal status regional competitor on predefined elements of power.

The current research is abductive. Initially, it sets the background knowledge of why a conflict might happen and how it could be prevented. Then, it starts with the inductive example of crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region, to later deduct the dynamics of a conflict and based on the perception of power theory. Due to the abductive nature of the current study, it is suitable for conceptual framework building and its empirical testing. While the study recognizes authors and topics from different disciplines – those related to Black Sea regional competition, conflicts and crises, power in IR theory, it follows the threat between ideas not to deduct a concept, but to describe the interconnectedness between ideas. Namely, it defines the relation between power, conflict, competition, cooperation, perception. Based on these concepts, a framework of new understanding about the nature of conflict is constructed, relying on the interrelatedness between perception, power, and competition.

A theoretical corpus is the knowledge on a topic, while theory and empirics interact to logically complement each other (Almadi, 2020). Theory refers to the deductive justification, while empirics refers to the inductive example or testing the theory (Almadi, 2020). The empirical results serve to test the validity of a theory, while the theoretical constructions develop previous theories (Almadi, 2020).

Grounded theory method is abductive - it starts inductively with an example, then repeatedly applies deductive logic, to test the theory, and again inductive logic, until no new

concepts appear (Oktay, 2012:17; Charmaz, 2014:1; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). Abductive logic serves to theorise and to provide qualitative results (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014:8). The abductive logic is explanatory, with analytical models (Haig, 2018).

Abductive research is suitable for a case study, used for development of theory in a grounded method (Dubous & Gadde, 2002). The grounded method constructs theory by developing categories and relationships between them, where the literature review follows the analysis (Charmaz, 2014:7-8; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014). During the process of this research, I first selected some basic literature in three groups - conflict prevention, Black Sea region and international relations theory on power and conflict. Then, I developed the case study to outline the exact participants and some of their interests in the region. Then, I collected the interviews, which show some of the areas of competition and of cooperation. Then, I developed the theoretical part on power and influence in IR, power perception, epistemology and ontology. Then, I selected and analysed the foreign and security policy strategies of the three actors, EU, Russia and Turkey. After that, I returned to the initial starting point of the research, collected additional literature on conflict prevention and located the case study within this literature. Finally, I wrote the methodology and analysed the interviews. This process of back-and-forth research made it difficult to figure out the exact structure in the beginning. Finally, I decided to start with brief integrative literature, followed by the methodological explanation, after which to present the abductive study.

The Grounded Theory: from a case study to theory development

Grounded theory was invented as a method to develop theoretical construction based on empirical findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Oktay, 2012:14; Tavory & Timmermans, 2014; Haig, 2018). Its positivist approach is based on 'objectivity, generality, replication of research, and falsification of competing hypotheses' (Charmaz, 2014:6). An empirical research measures 'memory, **perception,** personality, emotion, intelligence' and behaviour through 'tests, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations' (Christensen et al., 2015 in Almadi, 2020). The current research studies empirically the current perceptions of three actors in international relations – the EU, Russia and Turkey. It examines their perception of a power over which they compete in external regions. However, at the same time I develop a theoretical framework to clarify the meaning of power in international relations. As a result, their perceptions can be measured over a fixed framework.

Among the values of grounded theory is its applicability towards practice and policy (Charmaz, 2014:14). Grounded theory can be applied to situations of real life, including in

the study of sociology and nursing (Oktay, 2012:14; Charmaz, 2014). This research applies it to international relations. Social interaction is symbolic, dependent on shared meanings and language, either spoken or not (Blumer, 1969 in Charmaz, 2014:266). In the current research, I presume that interaction between states and international relations actors is based on the specific perceptions as it could be between people. Interpersonal relations might end in either competition, or cooperation, which affects the results of a study (Almadi, 2020). I transfer this logic towards the relations between IR actors, with the presumption that relations of competition between them lead to international conflict. However, there is an interpersonal aspect that I do not particularly consider in the relations between states. Namely, if separate personalities are examined separately - the leaders of governments, ministries and working groups, based on their relations, then different results might be achieved for the competition-cooperation dynamics between countries or IR actors. I examine not the personal factor, but the characteristics of three geopolitical actors – Russia, Turkey and the EU.

Grounded theory method is achieved through comparison, based on which theory is constructed via sensitivity, sampling and saturation when no new concepts appear (Oktay, 2012:15). The repetitive transition from theory to empirics happens through analysis at multiple stages (Haig, 2018). The new theory developed through the grounded method is aimed to be applicable to similar situations to that in which it was originally created (Oktay, 2012:17). As such, I refer to different regions in international relations where similar configuration between competing regional powers and conflict in regional dependent states is present.

In the grounded theory method, the theoretical assumptions are a result of simultaneous data collection and data analysis, for example through interviews or observations (Oktay, 2012:14). The grounded theory strategies of sampling, memos and coding are transferable to other methods (Charmaz, 2014:9). This research relies upon the methods of expert interviews and analysis of the current foreign and security policy strategies of three regional competitors. These are applied for the case study of the Black Sea region.

The **case study** is a research method in abductive reasoning. The purpose of this method in the current research is to identify regional competitors with comparative power status. As comparable regional powers in the Black Sea region, I identify the EU, Russia and Turkey. After that, I assess their power perception to identify perceived areas of competition. Based on this, this research provides contribution to conflict prevention. I use the case study as a research method, suggested by the grounded theory approach. The purpose of the case

study method is to identify regional competitors with comparative power status. As comparable regional powers, I identify the EU, Russia and Turkey.

Limitations of the selected methodology

The selected qualitative methodology shows in depth analysis of the understanding about conflict prevention, regionalism, power, and the importance of perception of the regional hegemons for preserving the regional stability. However, it does not include any statistical or quantitative data. For optimal assessment of the perception of power elements, further analysis might explore in detail the statistical information of its indicators. In this case, the perception will be supported by numerical data rather than strategic attitudes. Due to the limited scope of time and resources for my research, it is only qualitative. This does not exclude the opportunity for future research to extend to quantitative assessments.

Difficulties of the approach – the selected qualitative approach required very strict validation of the selected topics and themes. This did not happen in the very beginning, but was developed throughout the process of writing, collecting new data sets, and removing previously developed ones. A main challenge for me was to organise the relation between all selected subtopics – the Black Sea region, security crises and conflicts, three regional hegemons, perception of six power elements, theory on power and perception. Despite some challenging attempts, finally I succeeded to establish and follow the same threat throughout the study. However, I could further research topics which interfered through the process.

Difficulties of the data analysis were generated by assessing a huge volume of information in a qualitative way. Differently from quantitative studies, where the analysis is in a program, in the qualitative analysis I could only introduce the selected topics and themes, and then to establish the relationship between them based on preliminary conceptual and theoretical framework. This process took a significant amount of time.

3.5. The expert interviews as a research method

This methodological part explains the purpose of selecting the expert interviews method, its expected impact, validity, reliability, limitations, ethics and consent, data collection process, criteria to select participants, population, contact and conduct, observation. The data analysis, sampling criteria, data interpretation, and results are separately discussed, in the empirical part.

Purpose of selecting this method and expected impact

The purpose of selecting this method in the dissertation is to provide an insight from EU high level civil servants, researchers and diplomats. This method is a contribution to the case study on the Black Sea region, and also to testing of the newly built in this dissertation theory. The interviews show the perspective of EU experts on the relations between Russia, Turkey and the EU over their shared neighbourhood. In particular, they discuss some areas of competition and cooperation between the three regional powers. I place these findings within the newly built concept of six power elements, and assess the applicability of the concept to the regional powers. Also, I discuss the actual findings on the areas of competition and cooperation, related to the potential for each regional power to trigger a conflict. This line of thought is further continued with assessment of the foreign and security policy strategies of the three actors, respectively via content and discourse analyses.

The expected impact on the expert interviews method is: to test the applicability of the concept of six power elements to the Black Sea region, to discuss some actual findings on the areas of competition and potential conflicts, and to summarise the engagement of the experts with the topic. However, it only presents the perspective of EU experts, and not from other regional powers.

Validity and reliability: access to experts, ethical considerations

To guarantee external validity, I worked within a governmental structure which provided access to EU experts. I was an internal administrative servant, in the role of a diplomatic trainee at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the European Union. This is the diplomatic mission from a member state country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the EU. My diplomatic traineeship lasted for nine months. A favourable condition was that during that time Bulgaria took the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. As a result, I had access to information, experts, and the ongoing process of foreign policy making in the European Union. From the position of a colleague, I had the opportunity to meet excellent experts - EU civil servants and high level diplomats. As a result, I undertook the research method of expert interviews, in support of my dissertation.

At the time of conduct, I was not completely aware of my dissertation structure, but I decided to assess how the areas of geopolitical competition are perceived by the EU, Russia and Turkey, because I thought that this information could contribute to conflict prevention in the Black Sea region. For this reason, I first collected the data and later designed the analysis, corresponding to the research streamline. I selected the topics and assessment values at a later

stage. My personal perspective of the different perceptions of power was acquired, among other activities, by participating in the process of EU foreign policy making.

Due to the information restrictions and ethical code of conduct, I cannot disclose the professional information I had access to. I can only use data from the expert interviews, under the condition that it corresponds to the ethical choices of each participant. To have validity of the interviews data, I required from the participants prior to the interview to fill in a consent form, showing their preferred level of involvement.

Ethics and Consent

The ethical concerns of data collection and assessment were respected. The people were fully informed about the aims of the study in advance. I provided a Consent Form indicating the purpose of the research and the way the information will be used. I provided different options, from which the person could choose. These included consent to be directly quoted, consent of relating them as a representative of the institution they work for, and consent of their individual opinions as an expert on the topic to be indicated. All options contained a possibility for a positive or a negative choice. The sample of the Consent Form is attached as an appendix.

The interviewees filled in the ethical consent form prior to the interview. According to their preferences, 5 agreed to name reference and 8 rejected it, 7 agreed to direct quotation and 6 rejected it, 8 agreed to be referred to as representatives of their organisation and 5 rejected, 10 expressed personal views and 3 rejected them, 5 agreed to audio recording and 8 rejected it. Based on these choices, the researcher decided to not disclose the relation between statements, people, and working places. Instead, the researcher points out the institutions, some of the departments, and some of the positions of people. The information is generated and synthesized, without linking an idea to a person.

Limitations

This approach has two main limitations. First, the data was collected before the war, therefore it excludes the current situation. However, the dissertation serves the initial purpose of conflict prevention. This means assessing the situation before crisis escalation, therefore data sets from the time prior to the war correspond to the research purposes. Second, the data only shows opinions from EU experts. Instead, the perspectives of experts from the three regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey could have been compared. However, such extensive work would require more time and effort, and could be the subject of further

research. Furthermore, this research is designed to serve the EU diplomacy purposes, and it needs expert views from EU practitioners.

It could have been suitable to collect an equal amount of data from representatives of the EU, Turkey and Russia and to compare their position. Instead, I only examine the EU perspective. This is valuable as well, because the data from the interviews provides insights on the EU position, which serves the research goals. Although this research examines the EU as an equal competitor, along with Russia and Turkey, the research is written to serve EU conflict prevention. The data from EU experts contributes to the assessment of EU views on the Black Sea region prior to the war.

Data collection process

I conducted the interviews during the period 2017-2019, in person. I approached the experts during my traineeship at a diplomatic mission in Brussels, and during thematic conferences. I collected the interviews in person, before the pandemics of covid-19, particularly in the period 2017-2019. It was a good timing, because I had the chance to work in Brussels at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU as a diplomatic intern during the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the EU 2018. This gave me the opportunity to contact EU officials from the position of a profession working in the same field. This experience also allowed me to better understand how the EU shapes its foreign and security policy and how the EU Member States participate in this process.

Criteria to select participants

The criteria to select the participants were several – to be experts on EU foreign policy of the EU, and to currently work or to have worked in the EU administration or acadmia. Most participants were EU officials, government servants, diplomats, or academics, sometimes with more than one profile. Some participants were in the NGO sector, dealing with some elements of power for which they provided in-depth knowledge.

My initial aim was to conduct interviews with minimum twenty government officials, academics, or NGO leaders, out of which at least 10 EU and 10 non-EU regional representatives. However, this initial concept changed. I contacted more than 50 suitable representatives, out of which I conducted interviews with 13 people. Despite my intention to collect data from EU and non-EU[5], only 1 person was not from a country in the zone of

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[5] If non-EU members were selected as case studies, the new interview results could be compared with my previous research database. In my MA thesis 'The role of Russia within BSEC. Implications for regional

competition for influence outside of the EU. Aiming to have a compatible data set, I decided to exclude it and to assess only the 12 interviews with representatives as EU experts. If I had the time to undertake more interviews with experts from countries outside of the EU, then the decision for data assessment could be different.

Population

I contacted more than 50 people, experts in EU foreign policy, diplomats, EU civil servants, academics and NGO leaders. From them, I received positive response and interviewed 13 people. All were experts in EU foreign policy, with sometimes overlapping profile with several occupations – academic researcher, national diplomat, EU civil servant, EU diplomat, EU researcher, NGO leader, and one person from a country outside of the EU. The institutions with which the interviewees affiliate are: MFA Mission to the EU, EEAS, DG.NEAR of the European Commission, NATO, FPI research institutes - Economic Institute, Black Sea Institute, and others, MEP, diplomat. At the time of the interview, some of the participants were active in their job, while others were retired which allowed them to speak more freely. Some participants had several occupations at the same time and decided to affiliate to a less politically sensitive one.

From the interviewees, 12 were from the EU, and 1 was from a Black Sea regional country with a conflict. From the 12 EU nationals, 6 were Bulgarian and 6 were non-Bulgarian. This is one of the aspects based on which I will assess their assumptions. From the participants, 3 were female and 10 were male. In the age group of 25-40 were 4 people, 40-50 were 6 people, 50-65 were 3 people. The language of the interviews was Bulgarian in 5 cases and English in 8 cases. All candidates have higher education, 6 of which have a PhD, while for the other 7 I have no information. As their job belonging, 7 selected EU institution, 1 selected NATO, 1 selected NGO, 3 selected academic titles. However, they had multiple job belongings, and at some cases they preferred not to mix them.

Contact and conduct

I reached the experts via e-mail and arranged meetings in person. Each meeting lasted between 40-60 minutes. The interview data was collected between 2018-2019. I interviewed 9 of the people during my diplomatic traineeship at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU during the Presidency of the Council 2018, in my quality of their colleague

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diplomacy' I collected data by experts in Georgia, Russia and Azerbaijan. However, for the current research, I only analyse the EU interviewed experts collected in the indicated period.

diplomat, and 4 of the people during regional and academic conferences as colleague experts on the Black Sea region.

I collected the expert interviews data in person. Some of the texts were digitally typed, others were digitally recorded and manually typed, and part of them were only manually typed. This corresponded to the preference of each interviewee. I analysed the data collection process and the actual data from answers of the interviewees through Excel.

All interviews were conducted 1 to 1, except one where an additional expert was invited by the interviewee, and this person provided specific punctual data. The environment of 10 interviews was quiet, 2 were semi-quiet, 1 was relatively noisy. The location of 7 interviews was at an office, 6 were conducted in an open area environment with possible distracting factors, which indeed happened in 4 of the cases. However, they were quickly managed. This was the best possible opportunity to meet the people at that moment, due to the unavailability of a quiet office where we could talk.

Observation

Most of the interviewees were very open and willing to share their expert views. Very few - two, were preserved. The reason for openness was speaking from the position of equals, colleagues in our job of diplomacy, academia, and regional relations. This allowed free conversation on the questions. However, in one of the cases there was a confusion as the person initially expected a bibliographic interview, and later understood that it was not an interview about them as a person, but about their views on my topic. In one of the cases a fly was a distracting factor, in another case music started nearby, and in a third case an acquaintance of the interviewee appeared in the open area of our meeting. After a slight interruption, we continued our conversation. However, in most of the cases the line of thought of the interviewee was not interrupted, the conversation was very professional. Most of the experts were flattered that I am interested in their topic, as at that time the Black Sea region was not among the most popular topics in the public space, but I was highly involved in researching it. My lasting deep interest in the topic brought the conversation closer to the expert.

The process of data analysis and the actual results are discussed in the empirical part of the dissertation.

3.6. Comparative content analysis of foreign and security strategies: a research method to empirically test generated concepts

This method provides empirical testing of the created conceptual theory. The result can serve the initially defined in the literature two goals. First, it can contribute to regional conflict prevention, which can be implemented by the EU diplomats. Second, it shows an application of the developed conceptual framework towards the general knowledge of conflict prevention. This framework, therefore, can be applied to other regions.

This method serves to gain empirical findings on the proposed concept of six elements of power. It shows whether and to what extent these categories are relevant for the foreign and security policy of the regional hegemons, whether they are measurable and applicable in the wider understanding of conflict prevention. Also, it shows how they are perceived by the three regional competitors. In the empirical part, I test the invented six power categories for the three regional hegemons. Particularly, I measure the perceived importance of the different components of power by each of the regional hegemons at a certain time period.

I apply two steps. First, it is the method of content analysis to the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey. These strategies correspond to the selected time between two major regional crises. It aims to show the value of the different components of power per each hegemon. Second, a comparative analysis shows their differing perception per power element. It identifies the potential reaction by a regional competitor to trigger a conflict. The reaction of competition happens if another regional competitor advances its influence on a vital power element.

Content analysis as a thematic analysis

Content analysis, as a thematic analysis, is used to identify, analyse and report patterns and themes in a text (Snyder, 2019:335). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method which identifies patterns and themes, related to the selected type of origin of ontology or epistemology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis suggests that patterns of ideas with similar meaning are searched for and identified across texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The steps of conducting thematic analysis are: understanding the data, selecting initial codes, searching themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, producing finalized report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis as a post-structuralist approach towards foreign policy is related to knowledge on the political background, connection between current and previous documents,

and institutionalised terms (Hansen, 2016:106). Discourse differs from content, which merely measures the frequency of words or topics within a document (Hansen, 2016:106). The current research uses content analysis for Russia and Turkey, while discourse analysis for the EU.

Foreign and security policy analysis

Some authors suggest that foreign policy analysis could undertake three main approaches – methodological, theoretical and conceptual (Morin & Paquin, 2018). Foreign policy is defined, interpreted, decomposed to measureable ideas, to which meaning is attributed, followed by types of explanation (Morin & Paquin, 2018:17). Contrary to this suggestion, the current research does not analyse foreign policy starting from zero. Instead, it first defines the themes over which the content of certain strategies is analysed.

Constructivism in foreign policy analysis

Contemporary foreign policy analysis has several levels besides the structure, including: individual actors, groups, and societies (Hudson, 2016:31). Some cultural elements have a significant role in foreign policy analysis – identities, norms, organisational and strategic discourses – all contributing to a constructivist interpretation (Morin & Paquin, 2018:255). Constructivism relates to transforming rivalry through institutions, identities, interests, (Flockhart, 2016:92). Constructivism admits that people react due to their own perception of the meaning of something (Flockhart, 2016:92). Instead of people, in this research I examine the perception of state-like international relations actors. In constructivism, structures are either material or ideational, which agents follow (Flockhart, 2016:92). This relates to the two groups of competition areas, identified in the literature review - material resources or people's beliefs. In the theoretical chapter, these relate to the elements of power as hard, soft, smart and sharp. In constructivism, the relation agent-structure is constructive, except in the cases when agents repeat the ideational principles of a structure (Flockhart, 2016:92).

Deficiencies of foreign policy analysis

Among the challenges of foreign policy analysis is the need for theory upgrading, after its empirical testing, through: connections between theories, national comparisons, new actors, inclusion of practitioners (Morin & Paquin, 2018:241). For this purpose, the current research combines empirical testing of the theory of power perception plus expert interviews

with practitioners. The theory created in this research can be replicated to other case studies and further tested in different regional contexts.

Content analysis on the latest strategic documents

The qualitative content analysis includes review of the official foreign and security policies of the concerned regional hegemons in the following order: the EU Global Strategy and its following three yearly reports, the Strategic Compass, both in the context of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. Then, the respective foreign policy strategy of Turkey, and the foreign policy strategy, security strategy and energy strategy of Russia. These strategies refer to the Black Sea region as an area of their strategic competition.

The content analysis of foreign and security policy examines the attributed importance over six groups of predefined categories of power in IR theory. This approach allows further comparison with the attributed importance over the same categories of power by other regional actors. I study the perception of each regional competitor, aiming to compare their perception on the power elements.

Data collection

In my method of foreign policy content analysis, I test the perception of the three regional competitors on the six groups of elements of power. I collected the data from websites providing official strategic documents for the EU and Russia in English and Russian languages. I only analysed the partial information translated in English in the governmental websites of Turkey. For the EU I also commented on scholars' views regarding its tools to project influence. This limits my research to discourse analysis of the EU foreign policy, content analysis of Russia's foreign policy due to using original language sources, and content analysis on Turkey's foreign policy by original language sources translated in English. This could be improved by adding views of scholars on tools to exercise external influence for Russia and Turkey, and using original Turkish language sources.

For the content analysis on foreign policy, I used the latest available documents, on official webpages of the EU, Russia and Turkey. I analysed the content of the documents, and the percentage of volume devoted to each element of power, as well as the development of new topics related to the power elements.

Language

Using the original languages of a strategy provides more punctual information than using its translation in any other language, in the context that the English version of a strategy might not comprise all its original nuances (Fiott,2020). I used mainly English language, with the exception of the Russian foreign policy strategy, security strategy and energy strategy in Russian language, as well as the Turkish foreign policy strategy in Turkish language, translated via online tools.

Measurement of variables

The foreign policy analysis is only qualitative. Even though it measures the number of pages per document devoted to each category, it aims to show as a share of the volume the balance of perception of each hegemon for each category of power elements. Namely, it aims to show which power element each regional competitor considers as significant. This increases its likelihood to react in competition. An exception exists if two regional competitors negotiate to cooperate on a high priority area, but this is not the subject of research. I only try to identify the potential reaction of competition, so that it can be prevented.

I apply qualitative content analysis on the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey. I assess the foreign and security policies of the three actors. I created a system of categorising the elements of power within IR theory. I assess how the EU, Russia and Turkey perceive the elements of power in the same framework. This comparison allows assessing on an equal basis their power perceptions. I only look at their foreign and security policy strategies at a fixed time period, because in different times the perceptions might change.

Comparative analysis by sectors

In the neorealist zero-sum assumption power is a full unit. Similarly, I examine it as a full unit, but I divide it into six elements. I measure the perception of these six elements as one full unit. Therefore, I compare the relative value attributed to each of the six power elements, compared between each other. I do so for each IR competitor. Then, the higher value of a perceived power element means higher likelihood to react in competition.

I assess the perception of the three regional competitors of the six elements of power – military/security, economic/investment, energy/climate, diplomatic/political (agreements), governance/social (history, culture, education, youth), information/ exchange (foreign access, media control, languages, internet, travel). I assess it in the foreign policy of the three

concerned regional competitors. I compare the perceived value of each power element separately, within one strategic document, and then for one regional competitor. Thus, I identify the high priority areas in their strategic documents, which show their perceived importance of external influence over different areas.

The high priority areas lead to competition and then to conflict. It is based either on separate elements of power or a combination of them. If two or more regional competitors give high priority to the same power element, they are likely to compete over it.

Data interpretation

This part explains the processing and analysis of data, its preparation, software, words, language, interpretations, categories of responses, themes, and patterns. I analyse the data in an attempt to reply to my research questions.

The categories of words and meanings slightly varied. Even though my theoretical and conceptual framework distinguish between the general categorization of hard, soft and sharp power, and I identify six categories of elements in total, indeed some of the elements in some categories might switch to another category in specific cases. For example, I consider the environment as a neutral area of competition, and an area of mutual interest for cooperation. This is how it is presented in the expert interviews. However, in the EU foreign policy environment is part of climate change, which is related to investment for green energy and decreased dependence on energy security, which is another power element.

The interpretation of all results was aimed to address the created conceptual framework. Most of the time, this was successful. I categorised the data from the foreign and security policy concepts of the 3 regional competitors in the 6 categories of elements of power. The findings on perceived importance per power element I related to the previously categorised three options of reaction – competition/cooperation/neutrality.

This method addresses the secondary research question: *What is the relative share of each power element in the foreign and security policies of the EU, Russia, and Turkey?*

For the EU, I also provide a discourse analysis. The literature by EU experts aims to check the applicability of already selected six categories of power to the EU context. The empirical analysis is focused on the EUGS 2016 and its revisions only. It does not cover any of the previous establishing documents, for example the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, the 14 November Council Conclusions, the 2015 Strategic Review by HRVP Mogherini, the Council's Strategic Agenda, or the EU Treaties. Its goal is not to revise all EU foreign policy documents, but to examine the EU's attribution to already established groups

of elements of power in IR and to check the latest progress of the EU definitions regarding these groups of elements of power for the period 2016-2020.This will allow a comparison on equal basis with other IR actors, where the same pre-selected categorization of elements of power could be used. However, the purpose of the content analysis is not in-depth study on how the EU Global Strategy was written and what was the intention of its authors. Instead, it aims to clarify what message the EU Global Strategy transmits to the reader, to the external world, without prejudice of hidden intentions. The purpose of this type of assessment is to compare it later with the same type of assessment of the foreign policy of other regional powers. Using the same framework avoids any bias, which might be created during in-depth study on the intentions behind each strategy of different IR actors. Therefore, despite the small overview of the discourse of forming EU foreign policy, I mainly focus on the content of its corresponding strategies for the selected time period.

The EU decision-making is complex, due to the autonomous status of its members. Other IR actors – states – face different challenges: intense political fragmentation or huge area of territory where the country needs to respond to its specific needs. I assess the elements of power in a comparable framework for the EU, Russia and Turkey as competitors for exercising influence. This means that despite the internal issues which the EU faces due to its composition of 27 Member States, this will not be the focus of the current study. Instead of internal debates, I attempt to clarify the elements of power, over which the regional actors compete when they externally project influence. A major challenge is how to produce a security strategy of EU response to common external threats, while different MSs identify individual threats. Attempts of common action are: ESS 2003, EUGS 2016, Strategic Compass 2022.

For the EU: Based on the content, I assess the elements of power from the EUGS by the number of pages devoted to each category and the specific terms attached to it. Then, I apply the method of qualitative comparative analysis between the elements of power in the original EU Global Strategy 2016. The analysis relies on categorisation of the words by their meaning in pre-defined 6 categories of power elements, and qualitative measuring of the frequency of categories used per document, according to the number of pages per category and as a share of the whole document. This aims to show the transformation per given value to each element of power in each of the 4 examined documents – the EU Global Strategy and its early assessments 2017, 2018, 2019. This shows the development of external EU attitudes regarding its foreign and security policy.

Discussion: How the results contribute to conflict prevention? And to the region? In the discussion part, I assess how the perception of power elements by the three regional hegemons affects their reaction of competition or cooperation. I discuss how these findings contribute to preserving regional stability in the Black Sea region. Also, I discuss how the complete research contributes to the general knowledge of conflict prevention.

Limitations

For the EU, the analysis is mainly qualitative assessment of the content of its 2016-2019 EU foreign and security policy strategies. This creates possibilities for a variety of interpretations. In addition to the qualitative assessment of the elements of power in the EUGS and its annual reports, a quantitative measurement could be added in another study. It can measure each of the power elements in the documents. The interpretations would be numerically strengthened. I do apply such a measurement for the foreign and security policy strategies of Russia and Turkey.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

4.1.Purpose and structure

This research aims to contribute to the knowledge of conflict prevention in a region. It assumes that conflict is the result of power competition. The current theoretical chapter, aiming to contribute to that knowledge, develops a conceptual analysis of power. It distinguishes between the concepts of power, security and influence in international relations. Also, it derives a measurable categorisation of power elements, based on the definitions in the theory of international relations.

This research examines the power competition as a main reason for conflict. In *balance of power* theory, conflict is a result of unequal competition. In *security dilemma* theory, conflict is a result of misperception of the intentions of the other. It is based on the interpreted actions of the other, without clarifying their actual intentions. Therefore, this research assumes that the perception of power affects the reactions of the regional competitors, leading to either competition or cooperation.

The literature identified as a gap the lack of a single definition of power. A second gap is the lack of knowledge of the perceived meaning of power. The theoretical gap this research addresses is: *What is the meaning of power in the IR competition for regional influence?* Examining power in IR is split in two approaches. In the case study I identified some measurable components to assess the comparability of power status for competing IR actors. In this chapter, I develop a comprehensive definition of power components over which IR actors compete. I deduct the concept of power to six measurable categories. Later, in the empirical chapter the perception over these categories is assessed.

The theoretical chapter answers the research questions from the literature review: *Which exact power elements should be addressed in the power competition? How is that related to the areas of competition?* It also clarifies the difference between power, security and influence in international relations. I explain the selected meaning of power as external influence. As such, the power competition is a competition for external influence.

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a theoretical framework for the current research. It is based on international relations theory. My approach is mainly constructivist. I also incorporate ideas of (neo-)realism and (neo-liberalism). This chapter is exclusively focused on the meaning of power in IR. It produces an up-to-date review of IR theory on power and external international influence. It discusses the basic types of power in the IR

schools of thought - hard, soft, smart, sharp. Also, it relates the IR schools of thought to the areas of competition. It explains the difference between examining power indicators without context and assessing power in the context of perception for certain IR actors. As a result of this chapter, a chart of power perception over six power elements is drawn. These six power elements are a basis of the conceptual framework.

The theoretical chapter aims to clarify the meaning of power in IR. Its structure contains: Actors in IR: comparable power status. Epistemology: power in IR theory: hard, soft, smart, sharp. Power and influence in IR. Perception of power competition: Areas of competition, Perception of power. Approach: Power as influence. Six power elements.Next: Measuring power perception over the six power elements.

I assume that regional hegemons compete over the territory of a subordinate state, which is external territory to their own. The competition is implemented via different means of power. This theoretical chapter attempts to outline some of the main categories of power elements. The theoretical framework decomposes the concept of power and influence to measurable units. The result of the theoretical framework is regrouping of six elements of power. Based on it, a conceptual framework is suggested. The conceptual framework is later tested in the empirical chapter. It develops an approach towards preventing conflicts and structurally solving crises in international relations.

4.2.Power and influence in international relations: internal vs. external

This part clarifies the difference between power and influence in international relations. It discusses the relation between possession of power and capacity to exercise influence.

Power can be explored as an externally projected influence. Power and influence are used as interchangeable terms by Baldwin (2016), Dahl (1957), Nagel (1975), while Lasswell and Kaplan (1950) explore 'power as a subtype of influence' (Baldwin, 2016:6). Power is seen 'as the capacity to influence' (Singer 1963, 1988 in Baldwin, 2016:76). Power is also 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want' via stick, carrot, or 'attraction and persuasion that makes others want what you want' (Nye, 2020:94). The meaning of both terms could be interchangeable in international relations, if power is understood as ability to influence.

Among the main reasons for contemporary international security crises and unresolved conflicts is the competition for power between international relations (IR) actors. However, neither the comparability of status of IR actors is defined, nor the areas over which

they compete. In the case study I discussed some factors in ranking IR actors. These depend on their power possession and influence capacity in the international system. The case study chapter showed by what components IR actors are attributed less or more power in the international ranking. But the possession of measurable power components does not necessarily mean the ability to influence other IR actors. This part discusses power as their capacity to exercise external influence.

Despite agreement among scholars that power is multidimensional, a comprehensive definition of power possession and the capacity of states to project influence does not exist. Previous research neither shows which exact components define the status of an IR actor in the international system, nor the belonging components to the concepts of *power* and *influence*. The definition of exact criteria of what *power* is for each actor, and how *influence* is distributed are missing. For these reasons, it is significant to clarify the contemporary definition of power and influence among actors in international relations. But also, to measure how these capacities are perceived and how this affects conflicts.

As recommended by Baldwin in the literature review, for measuring the perception of power this theoretical chapter aims to identify clear, measurable categories. It builds on neorealism, which is introduced in the literature review. It also adds components of neoliberalism and constructivism. Thus, it aims to provide an exhaustive measurable definition of power elements. These power elements correspond to the areas of competition between the regional hegemons. The further aim of the research is to define these categories, and then to measure the perception of regional hegemons about these categories of power.

Power: measurable, internal

The measurable power indicators relate to the material resources in the conflict assessment chart. This is related to the ideas of neo-liberalism and neo-realism in the IR schools. Instead of using the existing division of power to hard, soft, smart and sharp power, discussed in the theoretical chapter, some scholars try to operationalize the measured components.

The case study examined some measurable indicators of the power status of IR actors. Its purpose was to identify the relatively similar status of regional competitors. I decomposed some elements of power to find out how they relate to positioning IR actors in the three-level status categories. I outlined exact power components attributed to higher or lower status of states. Highlighting measurement components, I compared the current measurable power status of the selected IR actors. As a result of these findings, the possession of resources by

states can be measured. I identified three main categories of power status. My grouping in three basic categories – superior, intermediate and inferior. Three main regional competitors belong to the same higher power status level in the case study of the Black Sea region - the EU, Russia and Turkey. Nevertheless, the possession of resources does not mean power alone (Baldwin, 2016:75). The pure possession of resources does not mean that they are used in a way that guarantees international influence. The capacity to exercise external influence was not considered. This discussion establishes the relation between the concepts of power and influence.

Influence: unmeasurable, external

The unmeasurable influence indicators relate to the perceptions and beliefs in the conflict assessment chart. This is related to the ideas of constructivism in the IR schools.

There is no guarantee that the influence ambitions and influence capacity correspond to their measurable power possessions. Instead, their influence capacity depends on the level of importance to which they perceive a certain element of power. This is further explained in the conceptual framework. Here, I explore conceptually the relation between influence and power in international relations (IR). I discuss whether and how power and influence could be differentiated.

The power status, therefore, depends on the combined possession of resources and ability of IR actors to project external influence. This ability might be related to possession of resources, but also to their capacity to convince others of their own ideology. The power status does not necessarily correspond to the capacity to exercise influence. The possession of measurable resources is not actually the trigger for a regional competition. Instead, the perceived intention of how this power can be used to exercise external influence in a zone of shared interest is problematic. The possibility for another competitor to increase their influence over areas of perceived interest is the actual threat to a hegemon over a region.

Power or influence in IR?

A distinction between power and influence for defining the status of IR actors is present. I accept the concept of power as equal to influence for some cases only. For example, influence is one IR actor to project external action, due to which another actor changes its behaviour according to the wishes of the first one. However, an IR actor could impose power and influence through different means - both through resources and through beliefs. In the different IR schools, the definitions of power and influence suggest different means. Among

them are hard power components - measurable resources of military, economic and geopolitical nature, but also soft power components - information access, people, and networks, and sharp power components - propaganda and disinformation. Influence is possible without hard power resources, but via instruments of soft and sharp power, related to skilful use of information, society and networks. Inevitably, those actors who possess the most resources, also have the most potential to influence others, but only if they simultaneously develop information campaigns and networks, engaging more people in pursuit of their interest.

Here I discuss the relation between power status, defined by measurable resources, and the actual influence, implemented over areas of competition. My presumption is that the intention to exercise external influence depends on the perceived importance of an area of the competition. It is unknown whether or not there is a direct link between an area of the competition and the possession of resources in this area. In this context, my understanding of power is the ability of an IR actor to provide its own security and to exercise external influence. As external influence of an IR actor over another IR actor, I refer to the intended change of the behaviour of others. This is different from power as internal possession of resources. Although the possession of resources might predispose external influence, there is no direct link that an actor would decide to actually use its measurable resources for imposing external influence. Therefore, as external influence I mean the actual intention and implementation to change the behaviour of others, irrespective of the possessed material resources.

My selected approach towards the general meaning of power in this research is power as perceived external influence in IR. However, it remains questionable how exactly the states exercise international influence, by what specific components. According to FBIC – Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity, states project international influence by either relatively equal interaction on security, economic, political issues, or by dominance-dependence on crucial security or economy issues, measured in GDP, military spending, and with increasing importance of networks of influence (Moyer, Sweijs, Burrows, Van Manen, 2018). This defines relations of either equal interdependence, or dominance. But measuring 'the amount or weight' of influence or power (Baldwin, 2016) remains questionable.

Next, I differentiate specific categories of power as areas of competition, as well as the power status of IR actors. In my understanding, the competition is for external influence, not for internal attribution of resources. Therefore, in the competition areas I differentiate between the measurable resources vs. difficult to measure information, people and networks.

As a result, I create a differentiation between the categories over which power is perceived. It is based on the IR theory schools - (neo)realism, (neo)liberalism, constructivism.

4.3. Power status of IR actors: the EU, Russia, and Turkey as regional powers

From the conflict assessment grid in the literature review, this subchapter addresses the comparability of the participants as regional powers. The power possession depends on internal, measurable factors. The areas of competition relate to their external interests. They will be assessed in the empirical chapter.

This subchapter discusses the power status of IR actors in a theoretical perspective. Power could be related to the areas of external competition or to the internal possession of strength. This subchapter identifies criteria based on which actors in international relations receive higher or lower power status. The definition of power status might locate regional actors in a comparable category. This can contribute to elaborated measurement for the prevention of regional crises and conflicts.

The purpose of this subchapter is to identify the comparability of power status between the EU, Russia and Turkey. It is particularly related to their regional competition for influence in the Black Sea region. *Questions: Why are the EU, RU and TR comparable as regional actors? What kind of IR actors are they (modern or post-modern, a state or a state-like organisation?) What is their power status (super power, middle power, small power)?*

This subchapter identifies some general categories of measurement of the power status. These include: territory, population, literacy, years of existence, years of presence in the BSR, GDP, GDP per capita, military, nuclear, political system and stability, regional strategies, participation in regional forums, foreign policy strategies and ambitions. Based on these criteria, actors in international relations are attributed to higher or lower power status categories. I compare the three competitors by some internal power indicators. I comment on the comparability of power status for the regional competitors in the Black Sea region, the EU, Russia and Turkey. Defining their relatively equal power status of competitors for regional influence allows further measurement of their perception of power.

4.3.1. Actors in IR

How to assess whether the status of IR actors is comparable? The status of a state in the international system is broadly understood to depend on power and influence. But this creates some conceptual problems – the definition of *a state*, the exact meaning of *power* and

its relation to *influenc*e. Next, I discuss the power measurement based on internal factors. In the theoretical chapter, I discuss the relation between power possession and influence capacity. But prior to that, here I discuss the definition of IR actors.

The contemporary meaning of an IR actor includes different variables. The role of the state among IR actors has evolved. Due to dynamic changes in international relations, new actors appear. A distinction between IR actors follows. The concepts of a state, non-state IR actors with the characteristics of a state, and non-state actors are compared.

Several types of actors exist in the international system. Traditionally in the school of realism, the main actor has been the sovereign state, while contemporary trends argue about increasing importance of non-state actors (Weenink, 2001). A specificity of the state is its limited sovereignty and undefined intervention boundary (Chong, 2005), as well as the interdependence between states. R.Aron sees states as political units whose power means 'ability to act – create or destroy' (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:14), which makes them a united actor on the international stage. '(T)he international distribution of power (…) between states' as primary actors of IR (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9) is important. But, currently this refers also to multi-national organisations composed of several states, who act together on the international scene as a foreign policy actor.

Depending on the strength of internal boundaries and their external image, two types of organizations exist. First, the international organisations, either governmental or non-governmental, in which several participating states arrange their internal relations (Matignon, 2019) are not considered as separate IR actors. Second, the supranational organisations which concern the united behaviour of the involved states towards the outside world and could create binding norms for their members, for example the EU or the World Bank (Matignon, 2019) are considered as IR actors. The EU consists of 27 Member States (MS) and has a status between a state and an international organisation (Tocci, 2016:3). I examine it as a supranational organisation and an equal regional player, as compared to traditional IR actors – the states.

My approach to **structure – agency** is holistic. This means that I accept that collective groups, such as states, act on their own (Hay, 2011), independent of the exact actors which are involved in a certain moment of time. Also, I accept some supra-state organisations as state-like actors in IR. For my analysis, I accept as main IR actors both states and supranational organisations, with the condition that they possess sovereignty and interdependence with the external world. On this basis I accept the EU, Russia, and Turkey as international relations actors, each of whom behaves as a single actor in their foreign policy.

The division according to a *historical timezone* as pre-modern, modern and post-modern (Cooper, 2000) shows the choice of states to stick to either strict empire rules or chaos (Cooper, 2000:16). The post-modern EU 'is a highly developed system for mutual interference in each other's domestic affairs' (Cooper, 2000:20). This relates to rule of law and democracy as well. The EU 'represents security through transparency, and transparency through interdependence', being 'more a transnational than a supra-national system' (Cooper, 2000:26). For this research, not the internal processes are important, but their external expression. Therefore, as long as the EU has foreign and security policy, independently of the process through which it creates it, it falls within my definition of IR actors. In post-modern states, to which Cooper relates Russia, 'security can be achieved more by cooperation than by competition' (Cooper, 2000:35). Contrary to that, the behaviour of Turkey and Russia in the Black Sea region has been primarily guided by competition. This relates them to the modern state definition. Nevertheless, I am not arguing on the level of internal modernity of any IR actor, I only recognise its capacity to exercise external influence. The different internal processes of an international actor are precondition to its perception. But I am not interested in these processes, rather than in the result of them in the international system.

Context: time and place

The selected time scope of the further research is justified by locating the regional security crises in the Black Sea region within the global and regional security context. A relatively calm period is chosen between two major security crises or power shifts. The exact selected period of research is 2016-2021. This period is selected as a time window between two major security crises or global power shifts. During that time, action could have been undertaken by the regional competitors. The corresponding to that period foreign and security policy strategies of the three regional competitors are assessed.

Selected time: 2016-2021

Year	Security crisis / Power shift	Impact: Type (regional vs. global)	Main actors
1991	End of the Cold War, Dissolution of the Soviet Union	global: balance of power shift	Russia, USA, post-Soviet states
2001	US Terrorist attack	global: security crisis	Terrorists, US

2004/200 7	10 new countries in the EU/ BG and RO in NATO and in the EU	regional: balance of power shift	EU, post-Warsaw pact countries
2008	Georgia-Russia war	regional: security crisis	Russia, post-Soviet country
2014	Crimean annexation	regional: security crisis	Russia, post-Soviet Ukraine (indirect: NATO/EU)
2015	Syrian war, migration crisis EU	regional: security crisis	Syria (indirect: Turkey, Russia)
2016	EU terrorist attacks; Brexit	EU: security crisis; regional: power shift	terrorists, EU; UK, EU
2020	Covid-19 Pandemic	global: security crisis	worldwide, virus (indirect: China, USA, UK)
2022	Ukraine-Russia war	regional: security crisis; global: value competition	Russia, post-Soviet Ukraine (indirect: NATO, EU)

Table 5. Recent security crises in the Black Sea region, within world transforming events. (Source: the author.)

This table shows the wider context of time – the world crises before and after the selected period. It presents a wider picture of the undergoing tectonic movements. Namely, the crises and conflicts that have happened in the Black Sea region are shown in a context of global power shifts and world crises. The general historical time selected in this research is within the post-Cold War period, after 1991. It is characterised with geopolitical competition between NATO, mainly driven by the US, and Russia, the leading successor of the USSR. In the Black Sea region, the three main regional competitors at that time are the EU, Russia and Turkey. The Black Sea is perceived as a zone of influence by each of them, which is a precondition for conflict.

The exact selected time to examine the perceptions of the Black Sea regional actors is 2016 - 2021. It is selected as a relatively calm period between major world crises. More

specifically, I take the period between post-Crimean (2014), post- migration crisis (2015) post-terrorism rise (2016), and post-Brexit 2016. The end of the selected period is marked by two major world crises – covid-19 (2020), prior to the Russian invasion in Ukraine (2022). The war between Russia and Ukraine from 2022 falls out of the scope of the current research, as well as the pandemic. I examine the strategies prepared before the last two crises affected the political thought.

In the empirical part of this research, I examine the corresponding to that time latest foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey. I assess them via comparative content and discourse analysis.

4.3.2. Power status: superior, intermediate, inferior

This part addresses: *How to apply a measurement of the power status to the regional competitors?* Such measurement is needed in this research only for one purpose: to justify their comparability as regional competitors.

The latest categorization of power attribution to IR actors dates back since the beginning of the Cold War. However, in 2023 which is 34 years after this period ended, in a multipolar world the categorization created after 1945 needs an update. At that time, in the prism of realism, main IR actors were the sovereign states. Nowadays other categories of IR actors exist, on state and non-state level, on global and regional level. Their relocation to power status categories in international relations needs contemporary update.

In a bipolar world, *great powers* were the USA and the USSR, while all other countries were considered *small states*. There are no criteria of middle power status, which correspond to the global power competition of the XXI century. For this purpose, I first have determined the role of the state among IR actors. Further, I locate some overlapping power status definitions in my three-level classification of superior, intermediate and inferior ranking. This grouping contributes to better contemporary evaluation of the power status of IR actors.

A clarification is needed of how each IR actor is situated in a scale of power status – from a small state to a great power. A number of overlapping definitions regarding the power status of states and IR actors exist. The status of IR actors greatly varies due to the lack of contemporary ranking of their capacities. The basic division came in the beginning of the Cold War, with two *great powers* and all of the rest being *small states*. Later, some middle power status actors appeared, but to locate IR countries accordingly, a systematised approach

is needed. A combination of criteria which define the power status of an IR actor. These criteria, if measurable values, allow comparison to other IR actors.

Depending on measurable values, the power status categories can be grouped as: superior, intermediate, and inferior.

Superior power status: self-sufficient, highly influencing others

Currently, several overlapping terms refer to the most capable actors in IR of a given time – *great power, global power, super power, big power*. In a unipolar world, it is the US, in bi-polar world during the Cold War the *great powers* were the US and the USSR. Due to change in different criteria between 1992 and 2018, the US is seen as a military power both in a unipolar and a bipolar system, while China is seen as an appearing economic power in a bipolar system (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020). The types of power status for IR actors, if referred to America, have been classified as 'weak power, great power, super power, hyperpower' (Mandelbaum, 2022). Some scholars find four contemporary *global powers* – Russia, US, China, and the EU aiming to position itself accordingly (Biscop, 2019:3). In the multipolar picture of 2022, also the UK is present as a separate actor after Brexit, while Russia and the West enter in a new phase of competition with the war in Ukraine. The G7, existing since 1975, comprises leading economic powers – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, the US, while Russia was in G8 until 2014 (European Commission, 2021). Hegemony of empires was the static authoritarian rule, while dynamics of small states was the idea of Europe and the UN (Cooper, 2000:10). In this research, I only relate to IR actors with capacity to exercise regional influence. I see them in the prism of regional competitors.

The UN classification of world *superpowers* is in five Permanent Security Council Members – the UK, the US, the Russian Federation, China, France, ten non-permanent Security Council Members with 2-year mandate (UNSC, 2008) and the rest of the countries are *small states* in different groupings, out of 193 member countries and 2 observers since 2011. This means that, according to this classification, 180 countries belong to small states status. But *small power* and *small state* need consistency as terms (Kassimeris, 2009), because both terms are sometimes used with the same meaning. The largest part of the states are *small states* or *small powers*. The remaining 180 countries possess diverse capabilities and resources, too different from each other. For example, putting New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, San Marino, Andorra, Djibouti, Costa Rica (UNSC 2008) under the same definition of *small state* is inappropriate, due to their different levels of development and capacity on different criteria. This requires new definitions to be invented in a detailed classification.

Intermediate power status: independent, limited influence on others

In the contemporary multipolar world, a superior status could also refer to *rising economic powers* like BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa. It could overlap with the definition of *regional powers* or *middle powers,* which have limited influence, situated between superpowers and poor mass new states at the end of the Cold War (Wood, 1987). They have fragmented internal divisions, but external economic investment, and usually are dealing with a neighbouring super power (Wood, 1987). The *emerging powers* overlap with *middle power* or *regional power* terms, and in some cases also with *small power*. Unclear differentiation exists between *small power* and *middle power*, where low capabilities refer to lack of influence, while increased capabilities refer to possible influence, but still restricted by stronger powers (Baba & Onsoy, 2016), such as in Turkey, India, Brazil. The intermediate power status group comprises actors who do not have enough capacity to act on the world stage completely independently. They could be strong regional players, if not interrupted by a superior actor. As such an actor, I relate Turkey in the context of the Black Sea regional competition.

Among the behavioural factors, related to the middle status of states, are 'mediation, coalition-building, multilateralism, compromise brokerage' (Cooper, 1997; Cooper, Higgott & Nossal, 1993; Holbraad, 1971; in Molnnár & Takács, 2020:49). The tactical tools of 'compromising, building coalitions, participating in international organisations, forging consensus and maintaining international order', and the status of middle power depends on both the capabilities and the behaviour, assessed together (Stephen, 2013 in Molnár & Takács,2020:49). As such, I here measure the capacities. And later, I comment on their relation to the possible behaviour leading to influence.

Inferior power status: dependent, influenced by others

Small states, according to the World Bank definition, 'due to their small population and economic base (…) are particularly vulnerable to exogenous shocks, such as natural disasters and climate change. With limited economic opportunities and significant migration, they often face capacity constraints' (World Bank, 2020). There is disagreement regarding exact criteria - definitions in time, lack of power, vulnerability, questionable resilience due to nonsufficient hard components or political strength to generate quantity or international performance (Maass, 2009). As IR theory lacks definition of their perceived potential, some European authors claim that *small states* can influence in UNSC by qualitative specific

competence in 'knowledge, initiative, diplomatic coalition and leadership' or image of neutrality and quantitative 'population, territorial size, GDP and military capacity' (Thorhallsson, 2011). Others assess as tools of influence that *small states* use in UN policy-making the institutional structures, strategic alliances, priorities and practices, funds, agencies and programs, but without hard security (Tarp & Hansen, 2013). Countries with the definition of *small states* are grouped in several organisations, so that their voice in the UN would be stronger. For example, the Forum of Small States, 108 in total, since 1992 is led by Singapore (MFA Singapore, 2020), which in 2009 established a Global Governance Group of 30 UN members with medium and small size (MFA Singapore, 2020). Therefore, the power status of small states depends on some geographic and population factors, but also ability to cooperate and innovate. As such, I relate the countries in the Black Sea region within which security crises and conflicts happen. However, these countries are not the subject of my research.

The only clear definition is of the Small Island Developing State, which is a less-powerful status unit. *Small Island Developing States,* according to the UN definition, are 38 UN members and 20 non-UN members/associate members of regional commissions (United Nations, 2020). However, for all the other countries in the world, a clear division is necessary to be created. This should be based on the components of power and influence attributed to each IR actor, not only states, but also supranational organisations.

Result

A three-level power status classification was derived: superior, intermediate and inferior. The superior power status means that an actor defines the trends in world politics. The intermediate power status means that an actor could define regional policies, if a superior actor does not prevent them from doing so. The inferior power status means that an actor is dependent on both the superior and the intermediate actors. The inferior power status category has two branches – small powers could survive independently, if a middle or a superior power does not interfere. The small states cannot survive independently, they need support by a middle or a superior actor to survive.

4.3.3. Comparable power status: measurable indicators

This part referes to the internal possession of power of an IR actor. The power status of IR actors depends on their ability to demonstrate power and to exercise influence on the international stage. This ability might change over different time periods. To compare the

abilities of IR actors to demonstrate power, some indicators are needed. I further overview some measurements of power in the literature. Based on them, I show the case study of the EU, Russia, and Turkey in defining the belonging to a power status category. However, to project influence in international relations, these components might not be enough. This difference is discussed in the theoretical part.

The variety of indicators over which the status is measured might change, according to different world trends and over different times. Among the current indicators are the achievements of each country according to the Global Development Goals, set by the United Nations. Detailed data per country can be found at the UNESCO Institute for Statistics[6]. Attempts to classify the belonging of a state to a power status categories comprise several types of criteria, starting with economic, population and GDP (Holbraad 1971 in Molnár & Takács, 2020:49), followed by behaviour factors such as diplomatic presence and external interests (Biscottini, 2016 in Molnnár & Takács, 2020:49), and finally combining both. A proposal for economic measuring the status of an IR actor is 'population, geographic area, military expenditure, GDP, GDP real growth, value of exports, GNI per capita, trade as a percentage of GDP and life expectancy at birth' (Ping, 2005 in Molnnár & Takács, 2020:49).

In 'National Power Rankings of Countries 2020', Kiczma and Sulek (2020) suggest criteria for measuring the attributed national power to countries and its distribution. They argue that power is distributed internationally over time at different speeds, changing geopolitical configurations, competition over interests or influence spheres (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020). Possible ways of measuring power possession are powermetrics in geopolitics, with interaction from economics, game theory, computer science, and the post-WWII multipolar division and redistribution among rulers and society (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9). The Sulek model measures military, geopolitical and economic components (2020:10), which is basic but not exhaustive. The economic power includes GDP, population, space, while geopolitical power is considered a combination of average economic and doubled military (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:15). A militarization power (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:10) comprises military GDP expenditure as a share of GDP and demographic share of active soldiers within the population. Despite some measurable dimensions by time and space, collective action results, and people (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:14), this ranking is limited. Some measurement indicators have a too obvious result, others are too difficult to measure, so they are omitted. Two factors, the non-state actors and nuclear weapons are considered to give no value to the power

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[6] UNESCO Institute for Statistics, https://uis.unesco.org/en

measurement (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9). With nuclear weapons, the one who possesses more control over all, and those who possess a minimum enough to diminish each other are equally dependent (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9). Non-state actors act independent of state borders, which is unmeasurable (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9) and makes the central role of the state irrelevant. However, some of the intangible elements such as influence on people and societies, as well as exchange and distribution of information have a significant effect on the ability of an IR actor to exercise influence.

4.3.4. Power status of the EU, Russia and Turkey: regional powers

Here I discuss some of the individual power characteristics of the three selected competing IR actors. I justify the comparability of the current power status of the EU, Russia and Turkey. Distinguishing the belonging of an actor to a power status category requires measurable data. This is provided below.

	The EU[7]	Russian Federation	Turkey
Territory (km²)	4 000 000	17 100 000	783 562
Population (ppl)[8]	447,199,800	143,449,286	84,775,404
Literacy of the population (2020, % ppl aged 25-64 with high level education)[9]	32.8	24.1	22.00
Current geopolitical entity established in (current entity at the Black since)	1945 (2007)	1991 (1991)	1922 (1922)
Historical presence at the Black Sea	By individual member states (*BG since 681, RO[10] since 1918*)	Russian Empire: 1721- 1917[13]	Ottoman Empire: 1324-1922[16]

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[7] Source (vertically): European Union
https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/key-facts-and-figures/life-eu_en
[8] Source (horizontally): World Bank https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=EU-RU-TR
[9] Source:
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_education&oldid=548962
[10]Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Romania/Greater-Romania (01.09.22)
[13] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Russian-Empire (01.09.22)
[16] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Ottoman-Empire (01.09.22)

		USSR – Soviet Union: 1917/22-1991[14] *Russia:* 1991-onwards[15]	*Turkey:* 1922-onwards[17]
	Byzantine Empire: 330-1453[11] (inherited by BG and GR) Bulgarian Kingdom I: 681-1018; II: 1185-1396; III: 1878-1944[12] Republic of Bulgaria: 1989 –onwards		
GDP[18] (US$, mln, 2021)	17,177,419.6	1,778,782.6	819,035.2
GDP per capita[19] (US$, mln, 2021)	38,411.1	12,194.8	9,661.2
Military (armed forces, ppl, 2019)[20]	IT 342000, FR 304000, ES 199000, PL 189000, DE 184000, GR 147000, RO 126000, PT 52000, NL 41000, HU 40000, BG 37000, LI 37000 (etc.)	1 454 000	512 000
Military in the world[21] (by order, 2023)	FR 9, IT 10, PL 20, ES 21, DE 25, GR 30, SE 37, PT 41, RO 47, CZ 48 (etc.)	2nd (after the US)	11th

[11] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Byzantine-Empire (01.09.22)
[12] Vasilev, 1981
[14] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Soviet-Union (01.09.22)
[15] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia (01.09.22)
[17] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/place/Turkey (01.09.22)
[18] Source (horizontally): World Bank
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=EU-RU-TR
[19] Source (horizontally): World Bank
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=EU-RU-TR
[20] Source: https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/armed_forces/Europe/ The EU countries are measured separately, not together.
[21] Measured by 60 military components. The EU countries are measured separately, not together. Source: Global Fire Power, https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php (01.25.2023)

Nuclear weapons[22]	FR (290), other NATO members could share (with US 5,550, UK 225)	6,257 (1st in the world)	NATO member (could share with US 5,550, UK 225)
Political system and governance	representative democracy (economic and political union) 'The European Union (EU) is a unique economic and political union between 27 European countries.'[23] 'By this Treaty, the HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES establish among themselves a EUROPEAN UNION, hereinafter called 'the Union', on which the Member States confer competences to attain objectives they have in common.' (Art.1) 'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination,	democracy (post-authoritarian) 'The Russian Federation - Russia is a democratic federal law-bound State with a republican form of government. The names "Russian Federation" and "Russia" shall be equal.'[25]	democracy (post-authoritarian) 'The State of Turkey is a Republic.' (Art.1) 'The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by rule of law, within the notions of public peace, national solidarity and justice, respecting human rights, loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the preamble.' (Art.2)[26]

[22] World Population Review, https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nuclear-weapons-by-country (01.25.2023)

[23] European Commission - The EU - What it is and what it does, https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/eu-what-it-is/en/ (01.25.2023)

[25] Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993, Chapter 1, Art.1, http://www.constitution.ru/en/10003000-02.htm (01.25.2023)

[26] Turkey's Constitution of 1982 with Amendments through 2017, Art.1 & Art.2 https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Turkey_2017.pdf?lang=en (01.25.2023)

	tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.' (Art.2)[24]		
Participation in regional forums, regional strategies	Black Sea Synergy, Danube Strategy, Eastern Partnership	BSEC (partner, 1992), Eurasian Economic Union	BSEC (founding member, 1992)
Strategic documents, related to external influence	EU Global Strategy 2016, Annual Assessment 2017, Annual Assessment 2018, Annual Assessment 2019. Strategic Compass 2022	Foreign Policy Concept 2016[27], National Security Strategy 2021[28], Energy Strategy 2020[29]	Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy 2020[30]
Freedom of expression, 2021[31] (World index, 2022[32])	For separate MSs, the min and max values: HU 0.52, DE 0.99 (For separate MSs, the min and max values: 2/180 Denmark - 108/180 Greece)	0.28 (155/180)	0.19 (149/180)

Table 6. Some indicators of the power measurement for the EU, Russia and Turkey (Source: the author.)

Based on these factors, the three actors could be comparable. The EU is a democratic actor, while Russia and Turkey show tendencies of post-authoritarian regimes, based on their freedom of expression and political system. Also, the strategic documents of the EU, as a dynamic organisation, constantly change, while Turkey and Russia maintain stable foreign policy strategies. The three participate in regional organisations, while Russia and Turkey together form BSEC, the EU has its own strategies EaP, Danube Strategy, Black Sea Strategy. The historical presence in length of years is longest for EU member states, followed by Turkey and then Russia. Russia and Turkey had imperialist periods, but separate member states of the EU as well, particularly Bulgaria and Greece. The current geopolitical entity in

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[24] Consolidated version of the Treaty of the European Union, 2016. Official Journal of the European Union, C 202/1. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12016M/TXT (01.25.2023)
[27] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Federation, 2016.
[28] President of the Russian Federation, 2021.
[29] Government of the Russian Federation, 2020.
[30] Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Turkey, 2020.
[31] V-Dem, Freedom of expression 2021. https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/freedom-of-expression?country=ARG~AUS~BWA~CHN (01.25.2023). Min.value 0 (worst, less free) and max value 10 (best, most free).
[32] Reporters without borders, https://rsf.org/en/index (01.25.2023). It compares 180 countries. In this measurement, 1 is considered the best, 180 is considered the worst.

its current form was first established for Turkey, then for the EU, and then for Russia. Their presence at the Black Sea in their current geopolitical entity is oldest for Turkey, then for Russia, and then for the EU. In comparison to one another, the biggest territory belongs to Russia, followed by the EU and then Turkey. The size of population is highest for the EU, then Russia, then Turkey. The literacy of the population is highest for the EU, then Russia, and then Turkey. The GDP and GDP per capita is highest for the EU, then Russia, and then Turkey. The Nuclear capacity of Russia is first in the world, while Turkey and some EU members could share within NATO. The military order in the world is second for Russia, after the US, eleventh for Turkey, while the EU member states have different ranking from 9th to 48th. The military armed forces, if combined from separate member states, are the most for the EU, then Russia, and then Turkey.

The Russian Federation maintains the image of a great power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The country possesses an enormous territory of 17 098 242 square km, which makes it the biggest country in the world[33]. The population, however, is less than that of the EU, which creates a necessity to engage the people with a strong sense of belonging to that huge territory. These two components, among others, are later discussed in the chapter of Russia's foreign and security policy concept.

Russia and the EU are world powers, but this does not directly concern the regional context. I recognise their world power capacity, but in the case study of the Black Sea region I examine them as regional powers only. Russia and Turkey are states with a history of regional empires. Under different shapes of their governance, they have been on the Black Sea territory for centuries. Therefore, interference by any external actor in their perceived zone of influence might trigger each of them to initiate a conflict. The EU is a suprastate organisation with state-like behaviour in the Black Sea region. It has been on the Black Sea's littoral territory since 2007, when Bulgaria and Romania entered the EU. The EU does not initiate regional conflicts, but it initiates the transition of regional states. This could be perceived by Russia and Turkey as a threat to their previous regional influence. However, Bulgaria has a lasting historical interest in the Black Sea region, based on its historic past. Also, Greece might have some interests on the same basis. Romania is currently an active actor in the Black Sea region, too. Due to that, the interest of the EU based on its member states is, actually, also lasting for centuries.

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[33] Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/262955/largest-countries-in-the-world/

Based on the three identified types of power status - superior, intermediate and inferior, three levels of the capacity to project external influence are possible. These are: *influencing independent, influencing dependent, non-influencing dependent.* These levels depend on the ability to use the resources in an optimal way. I will discuss the relation between influence and power in the theoretical chapter. Here, I only discuss the relation between measurable resources and the definition of power status. I apply this classification to the Black Sea region case study, relating the corresponding influence capacity to the three categories of power status. The superior power status corresponds to influencing-independent, and belongs to: Russia and the EU. The intermediate power status corresponds to influencing-dependent, and belongs to: Turkey. The inferior status which corresponds to non-influencing dependent and belongs to: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus. A detailed research could be done on any of the dependent countries, but I am not interested in that. My focus is, instead, the competition for power projection and external influence perceived by Russia, Turkey and the EU.

Power status	Superior	Intermediate	Inferior
Influence capacity	influencing independent	influencing dependent	non-influencing dependent
Actors in the BSR: belonging	Russia, the EU	Turkey	Other regional states

Table 7. Relation between power status and influence capacity. (Source: the author.)

Currently Russia and the EU belong to the superior power group. Turkey belongs to the intermediate power group concerning its policies in the Black Sea region. I assume that the three selected regional competitors in the Black Sea region, the EU, Russia and Turkey, belong to the group between intermediate to superior power status. They are able to exercise influence on the countries in the Black Sea region, and therefore to change their behaviour. And this external influence, leading to reaction of competition and regional security crises is what I examine in this research. Therefore, I assume that the EU, Russia and Turkey belong to a comparable power status of regional competitors.

Based on these factors, which define their world power status, but also based on their regional interests and regional capacities around the Black Sea, I consider the EU, Russia and Turkey as regional powers. This makes them comparable in their perception of power

projection of each other in this particular region. But the exact categories over which they compete remain unclear. These factors of measuring the power status relate to internal possession of an IR actor only. Its external projection of influence might depend on these factors, or not. Next, I develop a conceptual analysis on power. Based on theoretical concepts, I define six categories of power, over which the regional superior actors compete. After that, in the empirical chapter I measure their actual perception.

4.3.5. Deficiency of measuring power status: capacity to influence

External expression of power

The method of forecasting foreign and security policy has limited effect due to unpredictable future crises. The comparison of increase/decrease of military, economic and geopolitical power over 1992-2018, and forecast for 2050 via scenario method shows power changes in the long term on economic components, while in the short term on political decisions and military action (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:75). But doubts in its validity rise with unexpected challenges in the international system, such as the covid-19 pandemic which completely transformed the lifestyle worldwide. It was followed by the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, which changed again the perception of military intervention in the civilised world.

Prior to covid, the world was open, communicative and democratic. The pandemic since 2020 returned realism into world politics. It converted the countries into self-sufficient units of operational existence. Borders were closed, travel and meetings between people were restricted, isolation was the norm. In such a situation, the external influence in countries highly decreases, while the influence of the local government in a state is strengthened. Countries strengthen their internal popularity by decreasing external communication, restricting the access to information, limiting the internet access, decreasing the interpretation of foreign languages. In a closed international system and limited communication, the strength of actors depends less on international influence, but more on internal capabilities of the country and on its measurable resources. In a closed system, back to realism, the international status of IR actors depends on their own physical resources. Foreign countries have access to the local population only through digital means, which the local government could restrict. New critical resources increase the status of an IR actor - their ability to guarantee health protection of their population, ability to develop innovative medicines - the vaccines, and ability to maintain networks.

However, the world re-opened again in 2022. And a war, continuation of the post-realist competition for power, followed. The measurable components of resources are

sufficient for a realist definition of the power status. But in the contemporary world, these are not enough. Apart from military and economic factors, power includes technological advance compared to other countries, research and innovation, capability to protect the population's health and life, geographic size, *usable*[34] territory, total number of people, density of the population - number of people per square metre, demography – birth rate, literacy and level of education of the population, percent of people with higher degree of education. It also includes economic benefit per year per person, GDP of the state, military capacity in weapons and army, provision of critical resources for survival of the state such as energy, water and food, as well as governance factors such as level of corruption and rule of law. Furthermore, a strong asset of power is the skillful diplomacy with neighbouring states, with equal status states, with inferior states, and with superior global and regional powers. This combination of factors defines not only the physical survival of a state, but also its durability in times of crises, and its capacity to maintain stable and productive relations with other states. But a contemporary distinction between the attribution of power and influence to a state remains missing.

4.3.6. Summary

I justified their current power status as comparable. I identified as unclearly defined the influence and power relation. Also, I identified the need to draw clear areas of the competition for power and influence. This is done in the next theoretical explanation of power in IR.

As a result of this subchapter, the main actors were selected and their basic interests in the Black Sea region were identified. This was related to the conflict assessment grid from the literature review, where the two generic reasons for conflict belong to either material resources, or people's beliefs. These two groups are related to the basic root causes of conflict. The problem that this subchapter identified is the (mis)perception of power in the Black Sea region. It is based on the differing nature of the regional competitors, their differing specific interests, and the context of time.

Power status of IR actors

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[34] I underline *usable*, because the territory of an IR actor could be huge without any added value. For example, a desert or ice give less value than fruitful land. Even though all could be considered as a resource, not on every surface human beings can live. I assume that an IR actor consists of both territory and people in a joint political unit. Therefore, as *usable* territory I refer to territory on which people can live with acceptable conditions.

This subchapter had the purpose to justify the comparability of the selected three actors. For this purpose, it accomplished: overview of the types of IR actors, overview of the categories of power status, comparability by measured indicators. It was identified as missing the relation between possession of measurable power indicators and actual capacity to influence in international relations. These are further discussed in the theoretical analysis on power.

Types of IR actors. The state has the central actor in international relations through a realist perspective. However, other types of IR actors exist, among various types of organisations of states and groups irrespective of the state borders. The type of IR actors I select is states or groups of states, organised in a way that has common foreign and security policy within the world. As such, I assume the three selected actors, Russia, Turkey and the EU.

Power status of IR actors. Different categories of power status of IR actors exist. The types of power status over different time periods around the globe are overlapping. The categories of IR actors in different ranking systems include: small states, small powers, regional powers, middle powers, emerging powers, great powers, super powers, global powers. These definitions depend on whether the world is seen as a unipolar, bipolar or multipolar IR system. The latest grouping is done by the UN, the most widely populated international organisation. However, some categories overlap and the grouping needs updating.

I attempt to find the contemporary definition of power status distribution among the states based on past interpretations and current trends. Although some agreement existed on measurable resources to contribute to a higher power status in the past, in contemporary terms the power status highly depends on information, people, innovation and networks as well. To find out how the exact place of an IR actor is defined in a scale from small state to global power, the specific historical time plays an immense role. Currency, the power status of IR actors depends both on their power possession as material resources and their capacity to influence the regional or international system by supply/deny of resources, by people and information, or the combination of both. In addition, innovation and research, networks, and protection of the health and life of people are also factors which contribute to the power status.

My suggestion is first, to divide it into three basic groups: superior, intermediate and inferior. The belonging of an IR actor to a certain category depends on two main factors: its possession of measurable power resources and its capability to project international influence.

The resources can be measured by exact values. However, the relation to influence is more difficult to measure. I discuss the relation between the two concepts, power and influence, in the next theoretical chapter.

A list of criteria for defining power status in the international system can be selected. Among them, measurable components of power can be compared. Based on the comparison, their power capacity can be justified to belong or not to an equal power status. A deficiency is the unmeasurable actual capacity to exercise regional influence.

Comparability by measurable indicators. Some criteria for measurement of status in the international ranking were outlined. I applied these measurable categories to the current state of Russia, Turkey and the EU. As a result of the comparison, I justify the three as regional powers, and respectively, regional competitors in the Black Sea region.

Deficiency. I outlined some indicators which define the power status of the actors in international relations. However, I found that not only their possession of resources, but their capacity to exercise influence is essential. Therefore, in the next theoretical chapter I discuss the concepts of measurable power and influence capacity in IR. Based on it, I continue with a conceptual analysis on power in the theoretical chapter.

Next. I identified the compatible status of the three actors as regional powers. But their **perception of power remains unclear** for the current moment. I explore how Russia, Turkey and the EU, each of them a regional leader, perceive the importance of different material and ideological power elements in the Black Sea region. This knowledge, showing their perception of power, will allow their possible reaction to be known in advance. My presumption is that a highly valued element of power is a precondition for competition. The competition leads to conflict, so knowing in advance the triggers of this reaction is needed for conflict prevention. I do this in several steps.

In the *theoretical approach to power in IR* I aim to conceptualise power and to deduct its concept to measurable categories. First, I will clarify the relation between the concepts of power and influence. Power is measurable, influence is not measurable. Second, I decompose power into six power elements. In the *conceptual framework*, I establish the exact relation between power perception and conflict prevention, in measurable values, applied to the selected case study.

In the *empirical part* I measure the perception of power for the three regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey. I apply the selected six elements of power as assessment categories. I justify the selected time of measurement and corresponding to that time strategies where the content analysis serves the need for measurement.

As a result, I assess how the EU, Russia and Turkey interpret the value of power elements in their foreign and security policy strategies. My main presumption in this dissertation is that competition leads to conflict, and I aim to prevent international conflicts and security crises. I try to identify *If power perception leads to competition, and then to conflict, then what is the perception of power as external influence for the EU, Russia and Turkey?* By this measurement, I address the misperception of power in the Black Sea region, in an attempt to prevent the reaction of competition. In the next chapter, I elaborate a theoretical analysis of power and derive the six power elements over which I later assess the perception of the regional competitors.

4.4. Epistemology. Power in IR theory: hard, soft, smart, sharp

Here, a discussion over the types of power in the founding theory of international relations follows. The main IR schools of thought are (neo)realism, (neo)liberalism, constructivism. The main types of power are hard, soft, smart and sharp. I further develop the discussion over the epistemological meaning of power in international relations.

According to R.Aron, 'the most important feature of every international system is the distribution of power' (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:9). However, the concept of power in international relation is in constant progress, and its clear definition is currently missing. Despite the differences in the tradition of 'Lasswell, Kaplan, Dahl, Simon, March' to conceptualise power, agreement is achieved that it is casual, relational, multidimensional, based on a variety of components without hierarchy (Baldwin, 2016). A number of scholars agree that 'power' is multidimensional, for example in the 'taxonomy of power' (Barnett and Duvall, 2005), four groups are outlined – 'compulsory, institutional, structural and productive', the latter related to 'hegemony of constructive norms and producing identities' (Casier, 2018:101). But a common straightforward meaning of power has not been identified yet. The reasons for that could be various - different perceptions of different actors over different time and in different places.

The epistemology explains under what conditions we know the existing theory on the meaning of power, exploring the explanation of the different founding IR theoretical approaches to power. Realism, neorealism, liberalism, neoliberalism and constructivism show power from different angles. Power can be related to hard, soft, smart, sharp or a combination of power categories. I relate in this research the concept of power as externally projected influence. However, the influence could also correspond to different categories. For this

reason, I examine the meaning of power in the different IR schools, and then create a common categorisation of its elements.

Hard power in (neo-)realism: security and survival

Classical realism relates power to survival and security. Security can be explored as the ability to guarantee the survival of an IR actor, and also their ability to either strengthen or endanger the survival of others. During the Cold War from 1945-1989, the main asset of the great powers, the US and the USSR – nowadays inherited by Russia – was their nuclear weapons and military capabilities. At that time, power was measured in terms of military destructive might. My assumptions are not based on the realist theory of power as military dominance only. I build upon the neorealist concept of power (Waltz, 1979), which broadens up the traditional realist understanding of power as military capability with new structural causes. Although the concept of power has not been classified so far into categories, a classification exists on the concept of security. A division of the concept of security has been created by the Copenhagen School – security through the prism of 'national, environmental, societal' aspects (Weaver, 1995). The theory of securitization of the Copenhagen School is authored by 'Barry Buzan, Ole Woever, Jaap de Wilde and others', who write for the Conflict and Peace Research Institute since 1990 (Stritzel, 2014). The classification of security elements by the Copenhagen school distinguishes between: traditional political and military issues, as well as new for their time economic, environmental and social issues (Buzan, Weaver and Wilde, 1998). Other aspects have been suggested later, such as migration and cyberthreats by 'Balzacq, 2011; Vuori, 2008; Stritzel, 2007; 2012; Floyd, 2010', identity 'McSweeney, 1996; 1998; 1999', bureaucracy 'Huysmans, 2006; Bigo, 1996; 2000; 2002', ethics 'Aradau, 2004; Floyd, 2007', agency 'Stritzel, 2007; 2012', silence 'Hansen, 2000', audience 'Balzacq, 2005; Leonard and Kaunert, 2011', non-democratic securitization 'Vuori, 2008', images and visuals 'Williams, 2003; McDonald, 2008; Hansen, 2011, Vuori, 2010', all referred to by Stritzel (Stritzel, 2014). This understanding of power as security is typical for a state-centric international system.

As security, I understand the ability to preserve the whole territory and population of the own country. Neorealists add the structure of state-society relations to the military and nuclear deterrence of a state (Waltz, 1979). Within the context of including people, means of power are also 'propaganda (symbolic means), diplomacy, economic statecraft, and military statecraft' Baldwin (2016:55). While realists and neorealists see hard power as the balancing

factor in the international system, I argue the need to distinguish between *power elements*, which consist of both hard and soft power, perceived by specific actors at a certain time.

Power in my conceptualisation corresponds to security in the conceptualisation of other authors. For example, Shelest refers to power as the impact of the OSCE in the Black Sea region - namely by hard power (2022:7), normative power (2022:8). Shelest (2022:23) refers also to the security types in the '1994 Human Development Report' - 'economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security'. The soft, hard and smart security in the Black Sea region, referred by Shelest (2022), correspond to the larger groupings of the elements of power in my research.

Shelest (2022:1) makes an interesting reference to the meaning of the word security in several of the local languages. I would do so with the term *power*. The perception of security in the Black Sea region, examined by Shelest (2022) corresponds to my concept of power perception. As Shelest (2022) suggests, perceptions and misperceptions derive different expectations, based on the specific context of an IR actor. Different perceptions of power by IR actors, which I suggest. are referred as different cultural and linguistic interpretations of security (Shelest, 2022:7). Undoubtedly, the different perception of the same term in the countries of the Black Sea region affects the formulation of policies and understanding of threats (2022:7).

Hard-soft power in (neo-)liberalism: resources

Power can mean possession of resources. Resources are measurable, contrary to the security and influence which are difficult to measure. According to some scholars, power is seen as material resources, structures and interests, interdependence and institutions, norms (Long, 2017). A presumption exists that scarcity of resources leads to either war (military power) or cooperation of people (civil power) due to rivalry to gain more access to resources (geopolitical power) (Kiczma & Sulek, 2020:13). However, the possession of resources does not mean power alone (Baldwin, 2016:75). Efficient power needs strong political will, because the mere possession of capacity does not guarantee implementation (Deutsch, 1963:124). In this research, the possession of resources is not a guarantee of power, but the perception of competing actors and their reaction. Therefore, my focus is not the possession of resources of the selected regional competitors, but on evaluating their perceptions about the significance of areas of competition.

Liberalism suggests that interdependence leads to absolute gains for each actor through cooperation. Such an approach is implemented in the creation and subsistence of the

European Union. However, this idealist view is difficult to apply to the Black Sea region, which is driven by the competitive nature of the regional hegemons, Russia and Turkey. I argue that the differing value systems between the regional competitors might be a reason for them to initiate regional security crises.

Neoliberals Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane (1977) introduce the idea of soft power's balancing role via cultural values and ideology, using instruments such as diplomacy, creating cultural values, and access forms of information which contribute to the implementation of political goals. Later, they develop their idea opposing classical realism and claiming that power is situated in a system of 'complex interdependence' (Keohane & Nye, 2012). The interdependence consists of 'multiple channels', 'absence of hierarchy among issues', 'minor role of military force' (Keohane & Nye, 2012). In the work of Keohane & Nye, the political processes of interdependence consist of strategies to connect on different levels – between nations, between governments, within international organisations. I explore the role of state-like international actors in the regional competition and their connection abilities through international relations. In neoliberalism, states interact on high policy for security and political matters and on low policy for economic and cultural matters.

Soft-sharp power in constructivism: ideas, people and networks

Constructivism highlights the role of ideas, without denying the need for some material, but considering the restrictions of hard material (Hay, 2011) resources. Importance is given to the power of words, claiming that 'victory may sometimes depend not on whose army wins, but on whose story wins' (Nye, 2020:97). Such informational war is observable in 2022-2023 between Russia, Ukraine, and the West. Public diplomacy means 'selling a positive image' and 'building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for governmental policies' (Nye, 2020:99). It could be achieved via daily communication and crisis response, strategic communication in campaigns, and 'lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels' (Nye, 2020:100). Examples of the latest are the growing numbers of scholarships by the EU Erasmus program, but also by the Chinese government, the Russian Federation, the UK research fellowships and the US government. These scholarships are an attempt to attract bright minds from other countries, and possibly to either incorporate them as workpower, or to acquire primary source information from their societies, or to convert them in supporters of the interests of the scholarship-providing state.

A related type of power is the network – 'the ability of actors to increase their power by enhancing and exploiting their network positions, and the fungibility of network power', where the international system is equated to a society (Hafner-Burton, Kahler & Montgomery, 2009). The power of networking might be applied between states through diplomacy or between people on a social level. The communication of ideas is in several directions. First, from the own government towards the own population, which is closer to an authoritarian model and guarantees stability of the own state. Second, from a foreign government towards its own population, which opens space for foreign influence. This might create a lack of stability and competition between foreign competitors. Third, it is a direct communication between the population in their own state and the population in a foreign state. It is a way to address ideas and change concepts and perceptions within the population, again through either promoting competition or cooperation.

Constructivism accepts that foreign policy is shaped by the ideas and norms in society, rather than by the realist matters of security. This would mean that the agent defines the structure, which is not an absolute truth for the Black Sea region.

Soft power: perception. Sharp power: information, communication

Among the division of power into soft, sharp, and public diplomacy, 'information provides power, and more people have access to more information than ever before – for good and for ill', because it allows an increased role of non-state actors (Nye, 2020:94). The difference between sharp and soft power (Nye, 2020) is that soft power is the way to convince generations in certain concepts through a slow process with long-lasting result, while sharp power is the quick propaganda leading to immediate results, but not very stable in time due to quick counter-propaganda tools by opposing IR actors.

According to Nye, "sharp power – the deceptive use of information for hostile purposes – is a type of hard power" (2020:105), due to the quick use of propaganda and disinformation for convincing certain audiences, even the population of countries, in deceptive ideas which could harm their state. However, other states can quickly respond by opposing tools. Examples of sharp power are the communication during covid-19 and the information war between Russia and the West, informing the audiences in different viewpoints. Due to the covid-19 pandemic, during 2019-2022 physical presence was replaced by on-line format, including diplomatic meetings. This brought new opportunities for technological diplomatic interaction, contributed to maintaining continuous distant dialogue, but created difficulties to maintain as stable relationships as in person, with obstacles to

transparency and legitimacy (Maurer & Wright, 2020:564-565). The increased disinformation led to weaker EU economy, health and geopolitics, decreased trust in institutions, and a need for a strong new type of online governance (Vériter, Bjola & Koops, 2020:577). Externally, the opposing information campaigns have been extended in the post-pandemic period, during the war in Ukraine after 2022. Both the West, Ukraine and Russia continuously present opposing information on the same issue. Such action is confusing the audience and obscuring the border between truth and false.

Conclusion

In summary of the IR schools, security, resources, information and influence can be grouped as part of already existing categories. Security and resources are related to hard power. Resources alone could refer to both hard and soft power. People refer to soft power. Smart power is a combination of soft and hard power. Information and networks refer to sharp power. The distinction between influence and security as categories of power exists. Influence refers to the ability of an IR actor to change the internal and external decision-making of another IR actor. This is related to soft power, or sharp power, which can be associated with constructivism or neoliberalism. Differently, security refers to the ability to preserve the whole territory and population of the own country. This can be related to hard power and can be associated with (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism. For the purpose of the current study, I refer to the concept of power as the ability to exercise external influence. It can be implemented through different means from all IR schools.

The categories of power status can be related to the actual ability to exercise influence through each of the discussed types of power. The power status categories of superior, middle and inferior status are related to the possessed resources by an IR actor, but also their abilities to exercise external influence. Therefore, the four types of power affect the behaviour of IR actors in the international system. *First,* hard power is derived from measurable resources and survival capacity. Through it, an IR actor can influence external actors who need it by providing or cutting military support, covering economic and energy security needs. But it cannot influence external actors who are not dependent on these three critical resources. *Second,* soft power could be accessed through people and information, bringing certain ideas to the society and increasing their popularity levels, both by diplomatic agreements, by local governments, or by direct contact with the population. It is related to the constructed values and perceptions. *Third,* combined soft and hard power tools, also called smart power, can increase the international influence of an IR actor. This is possible under two conditions – the

external actor is dependent on critical resources and the power-projecting actor uses both its dominant resources and the people and information to strengthen its influence. Smart power is related simultaneously to resources, survival, values and perceptions. *Fourth,* neither power nor influence could be achieved if an external actor is not dependent on critical resources and if different information cannot reach the local people. For example, non-accessible language and data sources, closed societies by harsh borders, isolation due to geographic distance, or lack of enough technological advance and literacy can prevent the access to information. The quick access to information and exchange of information is related to sharp power.

4.5. Perception of power competition

4.5.1. Areas of competition: resources and beliefs

The main presumption of this research is that the power competition is a main reason for regional conflicts in IR theory. The areas of power competition can be grouped to two main categories: resources and beliefs, as mentioned in the conflict assessment table in the literature review. The areas of competition are defined by the individual interests of every regional power. But, also, on their perception of importance to these areas. Here I outline the basic areas of competition and relate them to the IR schools of thought.

In regionalist views, conflict is a result of the geopolitical competition for resources and for beliefs. Among the main contemporary world challenges are also security and ideological concepts. These include terrorism, confrontation between West and Muslim, resource competition, nuclear confrontation of Iran and North Korea, arms control, internal state conflicts, wars, unstable democracies, climate change, overpopulation, poverty, inequality (Lund, 2009:287). After 2019 a global health crisis affected the security of states, while in 2022 a full-scale war developed in the Black Sea region. The concept of regionalism relates to the specific characteristics of different regions as a tool for conflict prevention. The Grand ChessBoard (Brzezinski, 1997) and the Clash of Civilizations (Huntington, 1996) show the relation between high risk of crises due to cultural differences and early conflict prevention. This corresponds to the constructivist IR school, where predominant are the soft and sharp power elements.

The reasons for wars could be divided as interests or ideologies (Cooper, 2000:35), where interests mean acquisition of territory or subordinate population or resources. This can be referred to as the hard power components in (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism. Growing

violence is a main concern both on material state level, related to resources, and cultural ideological level, where nationalism and religion justify a conflict (Galtung, 1990 in Stewart, 2006:22). Based on the root causes - resources or beliefs, external actors could try to prevent international conflicts by either material means or information (Kydd, 2010:101). Based on competition for resources and beliefs, the areas of involvement correspond to soft or hard power elements.

Competition for control over resources: neo-realism, neo-liberalism

Control over the resources is the first major aspect of competition. Material resources, resulting in conflict escalation, can be lack of food, water, overpopulation, insufficient resources or territorial disputes, or abundance of natural wealth – minerals, oil, diamonds (Hampson & Malone, 2002:3). Conflicts can originate from a combination of structural inequality and decreased power of some groups in economic, political or social terms (Stewart, 2002). Each tangible aspect could be related to the neorealist approach in IR. As a resource could be considered the geostrategic location, therefore it could be a source of conflict because of a specific territory and its natural resources. This is explained through regionalist views in the case study chapter.

Competition for control over beliefs and perceptions: constructivism

Control over perceptions and beliefs is the second major aspect of the competition. The change of world order is a result of incompatibility between values and development models which raise conflicts (Pynnoniemi, 2019). People's beliefs, as a reason for conflict escalation, are driven by: 'insecurity, inequality, private incentives, and perceptions', historical background, change in political and economic structures, or external and regional dynamics (Gardner, 2002 in Hampson & Malone, 2002:5). Each intangible aspect could be related to the constructivist approach in IR. According to Huntington (1996), conflicts happen either between major states of different civilizations, or between borderline states or even within a state consisting of different civilizations.

The *Clash of Civilizations* suggests that the West should rethink its democratic rules of the international system and the UN, considering the differences of nine competing civilizations of different world regions after the Cold War - Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Latin American, Sinic, African, Buddhist, Hindu, Japanese (Huntington, 1996). The differences between civilizations range from language, culture, religion, history and tradition (Huntington, 1996). The main reason for conflicts is based on differing beliefs, and therefore

the competition is for controlling the source of beliefs. Some sources of constructing beliefs are teaching and school systems, history, religion, ideology, language, all of which refer to structural action of a state towards its population, corresponding to the soft power instruments.

Other sources of reshaping beliefs are the media and information access. They relate to quick waves of information which change the attitudes of a certain population. Governments can use such sharp power instruments both towards foreign countries and towards their own population, aiming to convince the audience of certain ideas. The *'belligerent groups (...) many of which are elites acting concertedly with government forces or on behalf of the state itself (...) to foment and perpetuate violence. Their ability to manipulate populations through the instrumental use of ethnicity, religion, history, and myths in support of the goals they seek is one of the key factors that determines how a conflict will unfold, and hence what can be done to arrest it.'* (Hampson & Malone, 2002:3). The two components of sharp and soft power, which affect the perceptions of a population either rapidly or gradually, can be used both for conflict escalation, but also for conflict prevention.

4.5.2. Perceived power by the regional competitors

Perception of power

All 'great powers' – the EU and China, Russia and the USA, have world order strategies to cooperate on certain issues and to compete on others (Biscop, 2017). However, the areas over which they compete or cooperate can differ for different actors and at different times. Depending on the actor's own perception of power, 'everyone can gain ('win'), and everyone can lose' (Baldwin, 1997:22). Perceptions are based on 'values and interests' and can be used to build trust by 'social experience (...), exchange programs and group workshops, (...) open communication' (Seymour, 2003) in psychology between people, but also between states or IR actors. The estimation of values depends on the perception of different actors and different time periods. This research argues that the main reason for security crises is the misperception about the value that each actor attributes to separate power elements. This suggestion has been reached after careful examination of IR theories on power and conflict.

This research partially agrees that 'Europe would be more prone to experience major crises and war in the absence of a clear balance of military power between hegemons' (Mearsheimer, 1990 in Piet and Simão, 2016). Therefore, as long as a balance of power is

present, conflict is less likely to happen. However, a clarification is needed not only about the military component of power, but the relation between several power elements perceived by the regional hegemons as vital security interests. Based on their perception, their reaction to compete for influence in a regional country can be evaluated. Then, the dependences between regional security crises, power elements, and competitors can be explored.

'Traditional political science has emphasized the role of power. Indeed, 'balance of power' and 'spheres of influence' are basic terms in much descriptive analysis.' (Alcock & Newcombe, 1970). It has been suggested that 'all politics is by its nature power politics' (Catlin,1962:79 in Alcock & Newcombe, 1970). The war is examined as a result of change of power possession (Organski, 1958:332 in Alcock & Newcombe, 1970). It is recognised that 'perceived power' differs from 'real power', being either subjective or objective (Alcock & Newcombe, 1970). A 'quantitative definition of national power' is suggested, as well as its measurement (Alcock & Newcombe, 1970).

The EU - Russia, identities and norms

The overlapping interests of several global or regional IR actors over an external region might accelerate the conflict. Therefore, clarifying what elements of power each competitor projects over a selected part of the world is the basis for further analysis. In the EU-Russia relations, 'diffuse power', means the overlapping interests of the EU and Russia in their common neighbourhood and 'distinction between positive and negative compulsory power' is needed (Casier, 2018:102). Applying this concept to the Black Sea region would achieve a clearer definition of power if Turkey is also considered. Different definitions of perceived power have been identified for the EU, Russia and Turkey. For example, elements of structural power are the '(non-) recognition of the Other's identity' (Casier, 2018:110), and 'capacity to create socially accepted categories of identity, such as genuine Europeanness or great power status' (Casier, 2018:111). This creates a challenge for a dependent state over which two neighbouring powers compete.

Currently, the EU-Russia regional competition concerns 'identity production and institutional arrangements in the neighbourhood' (Casier, 2018:102), imposing contradictory institutional norms, '(non-) recognition of the Other's identity'(Casier, 2018:110), and the 'capacity to create socially accepted categories of identity, such as genuine Europeanness or great power status', (Casier, 2018:111). Power is measured as an ability to influence societies and governmental norms.

One of the areas over which the regional actors around the Black Sea compete is identity. The lack of regional identity (King, 2008; Grotzky & Isic, 2008) between all states in the BSR creates obstacles to define a common set of power determinants. As a result, 'the projection of power in the post-Soviet space' is seen as a 'core issue of competition' between the EU and Russia (Casier, 2018:102). Russia 'lacks the capacity to project a clear identity which is attractive to its neighbours', and the EU tries to do so with questionable success (Casier, 2016b:27). This affects the hesitant choices of the previously subordinate states. In this context, a concept of positive liberty means freedom of choice to do something, for example to join or to leave a political union. On the contrary, the concept of negative liberty means freedom from a burden, for example from the limitations within a political union. The choice of past subordinate states is sometimes a positive liberty based on their aim for democratic development. But it can also be a negative liberty - the attempt to escape from externally imposed influence. In a concept of negative liberty, their attitude towards any of the regional actors might be seen as an attempt to prevent the burden of security crises, which another actor might initiate.

Some scholars consider the multidimensional aspects of power in the EU-Russia relations as misunderstood – it is highlighted that Russia aims to build bilateral relations and to control the energy supply of EU members, but it is skipped that the EU has normative power over the countries (Casier, 2018:106). This means that both the EU and Russia are competing for influence, but through different means. For example, an element of the power competition in the 2014 Ukraine crisis is the contradicting institutional norms imposed by the EU and Russia (Casier, 2018:110). A 'systematic power analysis' is often omitted in the definitions of identity and 'institutional arrangements' in the 'EU-Russia relations' (Casier, 2018:102). Some dimensions of power in the EU-Russia competition for regional influence are: 'military, economic, normative', perceptions and understanding, strategy and will, context (Forsberg, 2013). But the EU-specific characteristics like 'identity production and institutional arrangements in the neighbourhood' are not systematically analysed in the EU-Russia relations (Casier, 2018:102).

A possible reason for war is the self image as good, and the image of the other as bad as suggested by Deutsch (Kelman, 1978; Druckman, 1994 in Seymour, 2003). This relates to the discussion on images (Casier, 2016a), developed in the case study.

Russia and the West (NATO and EU)

An example of perceived power is the transformation between 'reassurance' and 'deterrence' leading to increased hard power of the US/NATO approach (Simon, 2016:22). Since the end of the Cold War, Russia perceives as a problem any closer relations between countries from its perceived zone of influence and the West. Any approximation to the EU, if it could develop into an approximation to NATO, is undesired by Russia. Russia reacts by fostering regional competition and initiating security crises. Such examples can be found in the Balkan countries and the Black Sea region countries, both perceived as a zone of competition for regional influence.

For the EU, the approach is pragmatic, neoliberal. Attempts to group together the countries in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership as EU's partnerships remain mostly on factors such as economy, law and governance (Emerson et al., 2021). These include a framework of political and legal factors, macroeconomic, trade, economic cooperation, and urge from status quo to new momentum, policies and programmes, participation in the EU institutions, conditionality (Emerson et al., 2021). All factors are related to institutional or governmental arrangements. The major focus falls on neoliberalism elements of economy, political development, and law, only partially mentioning the social factor – education, employment, gender and civil society. In both regions, the EU prioritises economy, political and legal integration, while only barely mentioning the social factors. The EU could be most efficient in the countries of both the Black Sea and the Balkans if it has a unique approach towards each specific country, which relates to the local knowledge recommended by Lund (2009) in his analysis of conflict. Grouping countries from different cultures under the same conditions might create obstacles for their mutual understanding. And local conditions might require divergent approaches.

For Russia, the approach is neorealist. In realism, the reaction is driven by the actual presence of action on any power element. As (Pitcher, 1971:14) writes, 'in normal sense experience, one must always be directly aware of nothing by sense-data', which is acquired by the senses of a human. Transmitted to international politics, this means that an IR actor reacts only if another IR actor directly acts in the zone of competition for influence. For example, if Moldova starts a negotiation process for NATO membership, then Russia would react. Contrary to the realist view, we observed in Ukraine a reaction by Russia due to its perception of possible NATO approximation. There was no actual action of the West, which would be the realist argument, prior to Russia bringing its soldiers at the border and starting a war. Russia reacted to Ukraine's positive attitude towards the West, aiming to prevent an approximation of the EU and, potentially, of NATO. The membership to both organisations is

not automatically related, but in Russian perspective both could be interpreted as the West. This interpretation provokes a defensive reaction.

The Western European countries suggest measures towards Russia 'mainly through economic sanctions and diplomacy' (Simon, 2016:20), considering them as a main strength of EU power. At the same time, European politicians are cautious of 'geopolitical conflagration between Russia and the West' (Tolksdorf, 2015A). Furthermore, each EU member state perceives the foreign policy threats differently, and a unified approach is attempted.

The EU MSs' perception of foreign policy threats

For the EU, the challenge is that 'some countries may accept relative losses on some issues (security) in exchange for gains on others (economic)' (Simon, 2017). An approach towards the individual perceptions of each EU MS leading to their common understanding of EU threats has been conducted (Fiott, 2020). These perceptions have been assessed according to the latest security strategies of the EU MSs (Fiott, 2020). Threats could mean 'a set of choices that reflect security concerns, values, culture and identity' (Fiott, 2020). It is claimed that according to 'a conceptual understanding, threat perception can nourish a state's strategic culture or identity. According to this theory, a state's threat perception can illustrate how it may think or act in a given situation and show us what values and interests it purports to defend' (Fiott, 2020). Among the identified mostly repeated threats in the EU MSs strategies are: 'geopolitical rivalry, growing authoritarianism and an erosion of multilateralism', 'China, Russia or other states as threats', terrorism, technological uncertainty, supply disruptions, public insecurity, proliferation, organised crime, instability in the EU, insecurity in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe, in Asia, in Africa, illegal migration, hybrid threats, health, global commons, geopolitical rivalry, espionage, erosion of multilateralism, development, cyber attacks, critical infrastructure protection, crisis and conflict, climate change (Fiott, 2020). Their intensity has been classified within a scale of 'threat, risk, challenge, tension, problem, pressure, vulnerability', showing the level of intensity of perceived danger by each country on each topic (Fiott, 2020). As a result of the threat perception analysis, it sets for the EU the common aims of: 'responding to international crises and conflicts', 'capacity building of partners', 'protecting the EU and its citizens' (Fiott, 2020). This is an interesting approach to identify the key areas of interest of an IR actor. My approach is slightly different - I first classify the possible areas of power competition, and then check the perception of each actor on each group of elements.

Perception of risk or threat - reaction of competition

The perception of each regional competitor about power which can be extended externally or related to their perception of threats to their internal security. A threat means that an IR actor is concerned about the effect by another IR actor on its internal state. This is not indeed the subject of my research, so I am not going to further examine perceived threads. Instead, I examine the perceived power elements. This means perceived areas of the competition for external influence, in which an IR actor would like to dominate. So, they react against potential domination of another IR actor.

Threats and risks can be related concepts. The 'perception of risks' identifies how risks are understood by the wide public, how the information is communicated, and how society reacts to risks (Renn, 2004) in psychology. In my research, the perception of the competing IR actors regarding the risk of another IR actor to increase its regional influence is a key. I do not examine perceived threats towards internal security, as it is done for the EU MSs. Instead, I examine the perceived risks of decreasing external power, due to potentially higher influence of another competitor.

I do not examine what each actor perceives as a threat to its internal security. Instead, I examine what each actor perceives as a priority area of the power competition. This could be related to the conflict root categories of resources and beliefs, or to the different power types as hard, soft, smart and sharp power. I further examine the areas of competition as elements of power, for which I develop a specific categorisation.

In the empirical chapter, I test how each of them is perceived in the latest foreign and security strategies of the three regional competitors. I examine their perception over different elements of power. I identify which IR actor considers as highly important which of the elements of power. The perception of high importance of an element is a precondition for the reaction of competition, which leads to conflict. Therefore, studying the perceptions of regional competitors adds value to conflict prevention.

4.6. My approach to power

4.6.1. Power as external influence

Power in measurable values or power as perceptions

Power could comprise plenty of ideas in international relations. These extend from survival, size and capacities of an IR actor, towards resources and ability of individual growth, as well as an ability to exercise external influence. Power can be understood in its measurable categories, or as the perception of such categories which does not necessarily correspond to measurable values. Most authors select an approach which is either materialist, or idealist, to shape their views. I combine the two groups of the components of power – the materialist related to resources and the idealist related to beliefs, which together represent a more comprehensive approach towards power. The materialist components in my work are military, economic, and energy security, while the idealist components are political, social, and information access.

The materialist resources, related to (neo)realism and (neo)liberalism, and the idealist beliefs, related to constructivism, can be examined as hard, soft and smart power components. Apart from them, I add the sharp power component of information access. In a constructivist approach of power as influence, the sharp component of information access is significant in the international system.

Power as external influence in IR

My approach towards the concept of power is the externally projected influence in the competition between relatively equal status competitors. They compete both to acquire resources from external actors and to change the behaviour of an external actor. As competitors I select the EU, Russia and Turkey. As a subject over which they compete, I select the Black Sea region - this means any countries or IR entities, comprising territory and people, which are not subordinate or belonging to any of these three actors at the current moment. As areas of competition, I further elaborate a grid of six power categories.

I accept the competition for power as a competition of the regional competitors to dominate over a dependent country or territory. The attempts to dominate might be through different components of power, applied separately or combined. I do not explore the internal power possession of a regional hegemon. I only examine the elements over which they externally project influence. This influence can be projected over other countries or regions. I create a measurable definition of six power elements. Therefore, an actor in IR could project its influence over another state not only via hard power instruments such as military superiority, binding it with economic dependency, or energy security, but via soft instruments such as political agreements, attracting its society to new values, or control over information access.

Dependence vs. competition (relation between IR actors, according to their power status). Before elaborating on the power competition, I need to clarify the relation between regional powers (or regional hegemons) and the other states in the region. My basic presumption is that the other regional states are dependent on the regional hegemon(s). They cannot survive without maintaining the relations with the neighbouring regional hegemons due to several reasons. First, regional hegemons can threaten their survival and security by military means. Second, the regional hegemons can threaten their energy security by cutting the energy delivery. Third, the regional hegemons can threaten their socio-economic security by interrupting economic ties. These three vital security issues define the action of the dependent states towards the regional hegemons. Each state needs to protect their vital security interests. Due to this dependence, the regional countries remain vulnerable to the regional hegemons. The regional competitors aim to dominate over as many components of power as possible. The problem is that there is no agreement between them of who dominates on what. Instead, they compete. This competition provokes security crises and regional conflicts.

Power as perceived external influence

I refer to power not only as the capacity of a state-like IR actor to exercise influence. Instead, I refer to power as the perceived importance of each of the six elements of power by each IR competitor in a region. As value of the perceived power elements, I refer to the perception by each of the three competitors over a selected time period, of each of the six elements. I measure the perceived importance in the foreign and security policy concepts of the three regional competitors.

This understanding provides knowledge about which actor would react on what element at a certain time. The reaction of competition, by default, is expected to lead to conflict or international security crisis. Therefore, this assessment could contribute to early warning and conflict prevention.

4.6.2. New concept: six power elements

The security crises and conflicts in the non-powerful states are a product of the competition for influence. This competition might be over identities and nationalism in the Black Sea region, as constructivism suggests. Constructivism highlights the influence of states and non-state actors in the international system, such as identities. However, in a power competition there are also military, economic and energy security components. The

competition could be on material factors such as military capabilities, army and tanks, energy security and full external dependence on resources. The realist concept of power in IR crises and conflicts is military might. The concepts of realism where hard power is central to the competition in a zero-sum game, and of neo-liberalism which shows the importance of institution, combine with constructivism where the ideology is leading. Therefore, hegemons compete to project power in a dependent regional state in several areas - neorealist military, neoliberal institutions and economy, constructivist ideology. Based on this conceptualisation, I created the grouping of *six power elements*. It comprises elements of hard, soft, smart and sharp power. It includes not only the material resources, but also ideology, information access, and political agreements.

Several divisions of power into categories have been attempted so far. My work adds on the existing definitions, by proposing six power elements. They bring in concepts from all IR schools. I accept as a basic meaning of power the ability to project external influence. Therefore, I examine the elements over which IR actors project external influence. Despite some similarity in the grouping with the Copenhagen school classification, there is a significant difference. The Copenhagen school examines categories of the security or survival of an IR actor, which is an internal process. On the contrary, I examine the ability of a state-like IR actor to externally project influence over certain elements of power.

I organise six groups of elements of power, each group has similar characteristics. The elements of power which I define are: military/security (survival), economic/investment (generating wealth), energy/climate (security and survival), political/diplomacy (state level external communication, participation in regional or world forums), governance/social (norms, youth, religion, education, history, traditions), information exchange/access (communication, internet, travel, exchange, languages). They are related to the schools of thought in international relations as follows: military/security (hard power, neo-realism), economic/investment (hard and soft power, neo-liberalism), energy/climate (hard power, neo-realism and neo-liberalism), political/diplomacy (soft power, neo-liberalism and constructivism), governance/social (soft power, neo-liberalism and constructivism, implying norms and constructing ideology), information exchange/access (sharp power, constructivism).

I derived the categorisation of power in six elements as shown below:
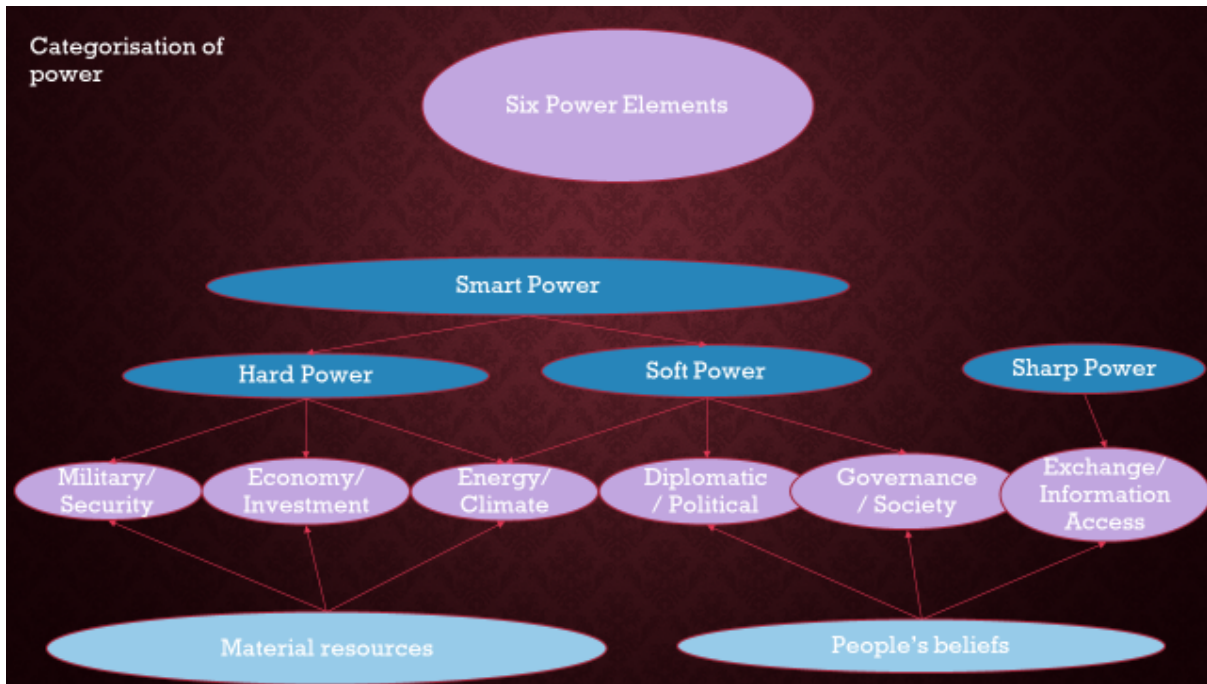
Figure 4. Categorisation of Power. Six Power Elements. (Source: the author.)

The six power elements I examine are: 1) military and security, 2) economy and investment, 3) energy and climate, 4) diplomacy and politics, 5) governance and society, 6) information access and exchange. The areas 1) - 4) are not new to examine in international relations. My newly proposed concept relates to shaping the mindset of people through two channels – in 5) it is by the own government via its available local means, such as history, religion, education, language, and in element 6) it is by external governments through foreign information access. Foreign governments might compete on elements 5) and 6) through different means - either by convincing the government of an influenced state to propagate some ideas, or by directly reaching out to the population of that country without the mediatory role of its government. In element 5) the control over information depends on the own government in an influenced state. In element 6) the control of information is external, as the population of the influenced state has direct access by the foreign provider. In that case, the control of the own government is avoided. Among the means in element 6) are access to information in foreign languages, travelling abroad, studies abroad by scholarships, or contact between people from different countries, either in person or online. The six categories of power are described in detail below, and later applied to the conceptual framework.

These six groups could be related to the IR schools as explained below.

Hard power elements relate to the competition over material resources.

1)Military / Security

First, Military / Security is the element related to weapons, land force, navy, air force, army, nuclear, and all aspects of the physical defence of the borders, violent attacks, conventional wars. As the dominating entity of the military component, I consider NATO, which means Turkey and some EU members. As a continuation of the post-Cold war competition between NATO and the USSR, it transformed into competition between Russia and the West. The goal of my research is not to compare the sole military component, but to assess a wide spectre of perceived power competition by the main regional IR actors. Therefore, I do not focus on NATO, due to its clearly military nature. On the contrary, I examine the EU, Russia and Turkey as competitors on the wide spectre of different power elements.

2)Economic / Investment

Second, Economic / Investment relates to the economic security and investment abilities, which might project external goals of an actor. This includes all aspects of fiscal relations, trade, investment, production and exchange of goods, and areas leading to economic prosperity of state-like IR actors. It includes opening of wider markets and projects for local improvement. In the Black Sea region, it is implemented by the regional economic leaders the EU, Turkey and Russia.

3)Energy / Climate

Third, Energy / Climate relates to survival and prosperity of the IR actor. As energy security is meant the ability of an IR actor to provide resources for its energy needs and also to benefit from export. The energy dependence was dominated by Russia before the war in 2022 and the EU's diversification efforts. Climate is related to the production of energy, for example through innovative means such as wind or water energy. Climate diplomacy and the green economy were dominated by the EU before the energy crisis of 2022. But climate is also related to the health and physical survival of the population. In light of the health crisis of covid-19, nature and health belong to this survival factor.

The elements 1), 2), and 3) are considered of primary importance for the survival of the state. Therefore, they refer to hard power. It corresponds to neo-realism and neo-liberalism from IR theory. From the geopolitical areas of competition, these correspond to the material resources.

The elements 4), 5), and 6) are considered main factors in the influence capacities of a state. They correspond to people's beliefs from the geopolitical areas of competition. From the types of power, they relate to soft and sharp power instruments. These are commented

primarily in constructivism, but can be found also in the neo-versions of liberalism and realism.

Soft */* Sharp power elements relate to the competition over intangible matters, including ideas and beliefs

4)Political / Diplomatic

Fourth, Political / Diplomatic agreements are related to all high-level political actions between states. These include international agreements, geopolitical unions, membership in international organisations, high-level meetings, national political parties. It also includes strategic documents of foreign and security behaviour of IR actors in the international system. This foreign policy element relates to all international actors, examined as state-like formations.

5) Governance / Society (internal)

Fifth, Governance / Society relates to the internal governance of an IR actor. It is accomplished only by the guidance and agreement of the own government of a dependent state. It includes governance, norms and society. It is the way a state or a state-like IR actor functions from within. It particularly relates to the way a society is taught which conditions and beliefs to follow. Whether to react to unsatisfying conditions in a democratic way, or to accept whatever the own government suggests in an authoritarian way. This element includes the long-term strategy of a government to build core values and beliefs in its population.

Therefore, a foreign government can influence the population only through means agreed by the government of the state. Internal influence could be achieved through constructing new social beliefs, ideology, nationalism, but also through reconstructing the governing institutions and norms within a state. The tools of internal influence include culture, youth, education, history, religion, language. Through these tools, certain values are produced and maintained in a society steadily, over a long period of time. In case that external IR actor attempts to influence the population, it is implemented through the local government as an intermediary actor.

I assume that the way to connect is state-centric, this means that the state or IR actor dictates the perceptions of the society. Therefore, if there is competition between the regional hegemons within a regional state, I admit that their competition to access the society via information, culture, and politics, is through the channel of the state governance. If the access of a hegemon to the population of a state is not approved by the state governance, or at least admitted by it, then such communication would not be possible. For example, in North Korea

or Cuba, or even China, where the information flow is controlled by the state, other external actors are allowed to interfere only with the agreement of the state government.

I admit that the competition between the regional hegemons, Russia, Turkey and the EU, over a dependent regional state, in the *soft* components of power which are political, social, and information, happens only with the agreement or at least lack of generating obstacles by the authorities of the dependent state. This means that the government of a state controls the components of power. Therefore, it can harmonise between different hegemons on hard and soft power elements. Thus, a state subject to external influence can improve its stability by balancing on several power elements projected from different external competitors. The international conflicts or security crises can depend on the ability of a dependent state to redistribute the influence projected from different competitors over different power elements.

6) Information / Exchange (foreign access)

Sixth, Information / Exchange relates to the information access and communication exposure of the local society by foreign governments. The main asset of sharp power is information, and more precisely, its rapid and overall distribution. In my conceptualisation of power, information as a tool depends on the access that the population has to it. It can be controlled by the own government, or directly approached through an external actor. It can be disseminated as a planned gradual strategy with lasting effects, or quickly with short-term effects.

This is the direct access to the population by external hegemon, excluding the intermediary role of the government. It relates to foreign information access, based on sources not controlled by the local governance, but by external powers. It can be implemented by information accessible in foreign languages over different channels of communication. These include books, media, internet, international travel, exchange programmes and studies abroad, training and education abroad, acquisition of additional qualifications abroad. Alternatively, these could also include accommodating foreign representatives in the host country for purposes of education, training, cultural or study exchanges, etc.

The access and exchange of information is aimed by a foreign government towards the own population in a dependent state. It is accomplished with or without the agreement of the local government. The local government has only limited control over the permission or ban to exchange information through a certain channel. For example, the government can ban internet access, travelling abroad and learning of foreign languages. This automatically

blocks the exposure of its population to foreign information. However, if the local government allows a channel of information to operate, it does not have control over the content of the information over it. Therefore, its own population can have uncontrolled access to information through this channel. Such communication channels include international travels, short- and long-term education abroad, access to foreign websites, access to foreign language resources such as books, news channels, tv or radio emissions.

A slight overlapping between soft and sharp power exists. Some of the elements in groups 5) and 6) can be considered sharp power instruments in the cases where the information is accessed rapidly through information campaigns, which quickly drive the perception of the local population to a targeted direction. Not only foreign governments may attempt to use disinformation and propaganda towards the local population, but also the local government can create quick and flooding disinformation campaigns for its own population. Therefore, it should not be confused that only foreign governments could use sharp power, but the own governments of dependent states could use sharp power as well. The difference between soft and sharp is in the time period during which the population is exposed to certain ideas and beliefs. Also, the scope of the informing campaigns and the time of expected results differ. In soft power, all processes are time consuming and long-lasting. While in sharp power, the results are quick but temporary. Respectively, the counter actions of competing hegemons are as well either consistent and long-term, or short-term and non-consistent.

These six power elements can be used as basic groups over which the perceptions to be assessed.

4.7. Conclusion

The result of this theoretical chapter is a suggestion for the operational meaning of power as perceived six power elements. These six elements are related to the areas over which regional IR actors compete for influence. The conceptual framework proposes how to measure the perception over the power elements. Later, the empirical chapter examines the perceived value of each of the six power elements for the three regional competitors.

Power or influence - external or internal

In international relations, the meanings of power, security and influence might overlap. I make the following clarification: Security relates to the survival of an IR actor. It is internal. Influence relates to the ability of an IR actor to change the behaviour of other IR actors. It is external. Power can be understood as security and influence together. In this

research, I refer to power as external influence only. Therefore, the regional hegemons compete to project external influence, which I call competition for power. I am not interested in the internal power components defining the material state of a competitor, but in its ability to influence the others. The material possessions are important in this research as long as they show the comparability of equal power status to regional competitors. This was done in the case study chapter.

Measuring the perceived threats has a different purpose than measuring the perceived power. Threats are perceived towards the areas which an IR actor considers as vulnerable, mainly internally. As a result of a perceived threat to the security of an IR actor, they are likely to prevent the other actor from reacting. But this is not the subject of this research. The three competitors are in strong positions, and they are not threatened by the others towards their internal security. Instead, they aim to project their external power in certain areas. Therefore, they try to prevent the others from doing so by initiating external security crises and conflicts.

Power in IR - six elements

I explored different IR schools and literature to provide clear meaning of the concept of power. Hard power relates to resources and survival, soft power relates to values and perceptions, smart power combines soft and hard, sharp power relates to information and perception. Despite many possible definitions, some of which overlapping while others completely diverse, I developed a system to classify the six main power elements. It is not exhaustive, but it is an attempt to logically decompose and reconstruct the meaning of the power concept in IR, while considering available resources at the time of writing. As a result, six categories of power elements are identified. I suggest applying the new classification of six power elements to measure the perception of power by regional competitors. This is explained in detail in the conceptual framework.

Perceived power - actual values or perception of them

I accept that the actual trigger of competition is the perception that another actor might impose influence towards an area which a regional competitor perceives as highly important. Therefore, a regional competitor is not threatened by the material possessions of another actor. Instead, it is threatened by the potential of another actor to impose influence in certain areas, considered a high priority. As a result, the perception as highly important of

both an area of external influence and the ability of another actor to act on it, trigger competition leading to regional security crises and conflicts.

Next: The concept of perceived power in external influence

This theoretical chapter addresses the question: *What is power? To what measurable categories can power be deducted?* The next conceptual framework chapter suggests a construct of *How can the perception of these power elements be measured?*. It uses the values, derived from the theoretical framework and from the case study. The ability of an IR actor to exercise influence through the six elements of power is not the subject of this research. Instead, the perceived risk by other actors, according to their own attributed value on a certain power element, is the subject of further analysis.

By establishing these dependencies, the research aims to generate knowledge in response to the literature review. The conceptual framework is later empirically applied to test the model of measurement. It shows how assessing the perceived value of power can contribute to conflict prevention.

As a result of the theoretical chapter, I propose the following conceptual framework.

5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

5.1. Purpose and structure

The purpose of the conceptual framework chapter is to draw the connection between the literature, the case study, the theory, and its practical application in the empirical chapter. As such, the conceptual framework establishes a measurement scheme of the perceived power for the regional competitors in their competition to project external influence. The conceptual framework discusses the three same level competitors, the six areas of competition and then suggests their further measurement of reactions in order to prevent regional security crises and conflicts.

This research addresses the general question*: How power perception relates to conflict prevention? How to measure the perception of power? Which elements exactly? For whom, when, where?* The relation between power and conflict was established in the literature review - competition leads to conflict. But the meaning of power remained unclear, as well as its perception. The case study identified three regional competitors with comparable power status. It was accepted that their power perception leads to reaction of competition, which is a precondition to conflict. The theoretical framework restructured the knowledge on the meaning of power in international relations. It developed six power elements, which allow further assessment. It also discussed the meaning of power perception by regional competitors.

This conceptual chapter develops the following questions from the literature review: *How can the perception of power be measured? How does it relate to conflict prevention?* Particularly, I address in this chapter: *How the perception about the six power elements can be measured for the EU, Russia and Turkey? How does this relate to conflict prevention and preserving regional stability in the Black Sea region?*

This research aims to serve conflict prevention. For this purpose, it took a combination of regionalist approach after Lund, and theoretical approach of power measurement after Baldwin.

Regionalism: In the case study chapter I identified the relevant IR competing actors for the selected region. I justified their comparable IR status as regional powers, competing for influence in the region. I distinguished between internal power possession, accessible in measurable values, and external power, which means ability to impose external influence. I am not further interested in their internal power possession. Instead, I assume that they compete to impose external influence over the same countries in the Black Sea region. I am

interested in the external influence, which is the reason for competition, and therefore, for conflicts in countries belonging to the zone of competition. However, the areas over which they compete remained unclear. A clarification of these areas was done in the theory. Furthermore, the perception of each actor about their significance might differ. This is assessed in the empirical chapter.

IR Theory: In the theoretical chapter I developed a scheme of power assessment over six power elements. These are based on the main IR founding schools. They are also related to the main root causes from the literature review - the areas of competition as resources and beliefs. My basic presumption of power is as an externally projected influence. However, there is a difference between power in general and power perception by a specific actor at a certain time. Although some measurable values of power might be equal, the perceived importance for each area of the competition might differ for different actors.

The conceptual framework establishes the relation between the six elements of power, the three regional hegemons, their perception of power, based on which their likelihood of react via competition/cooperation/neutral. Also, it shows how to empirically apply the concept of six power elements in the foreign and security policy strategies of three regional competitors.

The higher importance is attributed to a power element, the higher chance to trigger a reaction of competition. Therefore, only after measuring the perception, I could compare the value of importance they attribute to each power element. I further examine the perception of the power elements in the foreign and security policy strategies of the three regional competitors for a fixed time period.

As a result of measuring the power perception and potential reaction, I suggest early assessment of forthcoming security crises. This knowledge is aimed to serve conflict prevention. The scheme of assessing power perception, the reaction of competition and conflict prevention can be applied to different regions worldwide.

The conceptual framework consists of six elements of power from the theoretical framework, three regional competitors with comparable power status from the case study of the Black Sea region, applied to a certain time period through their respective foreign and security policy strategic documents in the empirical part.

Structure: Research perspective, Identified variables, Conceptual proposal, Conclusion. The aimed empirical goal of the next chapters is to assess perception-reaction. The expected impact of the complete research is to contribute to the knowledge of conflict

prevention. Also, it could contribute to preserving regional stability in case study of the Black Sea region, and specifically, to support the EU foreign and security policy towards that goal.

5.2. Research perspective

Competition for influence in IR

This research assumes that regional conflicts and security crises are a result of the competition for power by regional IR actors. Power can mean security, which is internal to an IR actor, or influence, which is external to an IR actor. I examine power as external influence. I assume that regional competitors have interests to dominate in an external zone.

As power, I refer to areas over which regional actors with relatively equal status compete to exercise influence. They compete for influence over the same external zone, perceived as important. Their competition leads to conflict, and the current research aims to serve conflict prevention. Thus, I examine conflict as a competition for power, and more specifically, a competition to project power in an external political entity. As a zone of competition, I refer to countries in the regional proximity of a powerful IR actor. As a power competition, I refer to the competition to project one's own influence abroad, by making the other actor behave in a way, desirable by the powerful competitor. As conflict, I refer to a situation with potential to escalate into a security crisis in an external political unity. I accept that conflict is the result of the competition between several powerful actors to project influence in an external region of common interest. As such, my selected case study is the Black Sea region. As powerful current regional competitors, I identified Russia, Turkey and the EU.

Double role of the EU

I explore the competition for influence over power elements between Russia, Turkey and the EU in the Black Sea region. In this region, the EU has a double role - as a regional competitor and as a world peace provider. I write this research with the purpose to serve the EU foreign and security policy as a world peace provider, and an intervening actor in a conflict. Simultaneously, I examine throughout the research the EU in its role as a regional competitor, along with Russia and Turkey.

Conflict prevention for the EU can be examined internally, between its member states since its establishment, or externally, where the EU is a potentially intervening actor in external conflicts. I recognise the achieved internal unity and lasting peace in the EU. In this context,

regionalism can be internal for the EU internal regions, which is not the subject of the current research. Regionalism is also external to the EU neighbouring regions, which I do examine. Therefore, I assess the EU external policies only, not its internal structure and functioning. The foreign and security policy strategic documents of the EU are: Strategic Compass, Global Strategy, CFSP, CSDP, EU Security Strategy. I only assess those of them corresponding to the selected period. On the same time principle, I select the respective strategies for the other regional competitors, Russia and Turkey.

IR theory and conflict

The approach of realism suggests that material resources, including threatened security and insufficient resources, are the reason for conflict. According to it, the system predefines the actions of the actors. In the *security dilemma*, the reason for conflict is misperception. In the *zero sum* concept, more for one actor means less for another actor. The presumption is that resources are limited. The competition happens in any political unit within their aimed zone of influence. Applied to the Black Sea region, this suggests that more externally projected influence by one of the actors, Russia, Turkey, or the EU reduces the possibility of the other two regional competitors to project power on the same power element. However, this could be assessed only if power is measured in fixed units. To assess power perception, I developed a combination of realist competition in hard power components, and constructivist soft power components, with some sharp power components such as quick information access. The result is six elements of power.

This conceptual framework establishes the relation between power perception, reaction, and conflict. The correlation between the competition for regional influence around the Black Sea, implemented by the three regional competitors, and the constant security crises and frozen conflicts has not been thoroughly studied. The perception of *power elements* for each regional hegemon and the respective likelihood of reactions to initiate security crises has not been identified. For this reason, the current research explores the perception of power elements in the cooperation – competition dynamics in the EU – Russia – Turkey relations. It aims to identify the perceived importance of each of the six *power elements* for the EU, Russia and Turkey. Based on the perceived importance of each power element, the likelihood of reaction to compete can be assessed. The reaction of competition, based on the initial literature, is related to the likelihood to initiate security crises in vulnerable countries of the region. By developing this concept and further testing it into an empirical example, this

research contributes to the knowledge of conflict prevention, and to the particular stability of the selected Black Sea region.

5.3. Identified variables

Reactions

In the literature review, I identified three basic reaction options - competition, cooperation and neutrality. These reactions lead, respectively, to conflict, peace, or status quo. In the conceptual framework, I relate the perception of a regional competitor to their reaction. My aim is to identify the importance each of them attributes to each of the power elements.

Three regional competitors, comparable power status, comparable reaction of competition (case study)

The Black Sea is geopolitically important for three main regional players - Russia, Turkey, and the EU. These three actors are selected in the post-1989 context. This research examines their strategic interests, which predefine some of their current foreign and security policy strategies. Their main interest, related to resources from the conflict analysis table, is control over the straits. Their main interests, related to ideologies from the conflict analysis table, is post-Cold war competition for zones of influence between the West and the East.

The case study chapter of the Black Sea region justified the selected actors corresponding to the current time, Russia, Turkey and the EU. It explained the decision to exclude NATO from further comparison of the regional actors. Their individual interests and bilateral relations, together with their compatibility as regional competitors, were discussed. They were identified to have currently comparable power status. As a result, their reason to compete is accepted as equally possible and, therefore, comparable.

The selected three regional actors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, have comparable power status in the Black Sea regional competition. I refer to the three as regional competitors. Therefore, I assume that their reaction to compete leads to regional security crises and conflicts. My aim is to identify by what factors their reaction to potential competition can be detected in advance. This introduced the necessity to clarify areas of the competition, which I did through the theory.

Six power elements (theory)

I examine the concept of power as perceived influence, which is directed externally to a common zone of competition. To be able to measure this influence, I categorise several groups of it. The theoretical framework organises the areas of power competition as areas over which the perception could be measured. This classification of power elements is derived from IR theory and is applicable to any region. My division of interaction areas between state-like IR actors distinguishes areas in each category: for realism, military and energy security, for liberalism - economy and investment, and for constructivism, political cooperation and diplomacy, governance of a state, social factors of education, history, culture, and information access through communication, language. I derive the six power elements.

5.4. New theory: power perception and conflict prevention

The concept of this dissertation is based on the relation between **power perception** and **conflict prevention**. The values which I organise in a new measurement scheme are: three comparable actors (case study) which is a precondition for a comparable reaction, over six power elements (IR theory) applicable to any region, and three reaction types (competition, cooperation, neutral from lit), based on their perception. I assume that the reaction of competition leads to conflict, so my attempt is to identify over what power elements their perception of high value would lead to a reaction of competition.

The gap this research further addresses is: *How power perception relates to conflict prevention? How power is perceived over its six elements by the three regional competitors? How does this knowledge contribute to regional conflict prevention?*

My theoretical proposal combines the identified factors in the literature review, the case study and the theoretical framework, towards achieving the aimed goal. I further explain what the concept is, how it is applied, and how it contributes to science.

As a result of the theoretical framework, a new conceptual proposal is derived. It suggests assessment of the perceived value of each of the six power elements, for each of the three regional powers. The measurement of their perception could provide understanding of a possible reaction of competition. My presumption, based on the literature review, is that competition in a region leads to conflict. I presume that the high importance of a certain element during a certain time means high likelihood to compete. Therefore, knowing in advance the perceived value of each power element by each hegemon provides knowledge of their likelihood to compete.

This part relates to the conflict assessment table in the literature review. There, the reactions and the subsequent result were identified as Competition (conflict)/ Cooperation

(peace)/ Neutral (status quo). Here, I broaden the reaction types and the expected result. Particularly, I add the value of perception into the assessment scheme. First, I assume that the power elements perceived as high priority areas will trigger competition. The competition leads to conflict. Therefore, these are the areas which I aim to detect in the assessment of perceptions for the regional competitors. Second, I assume that the middle priority areas lead to a neutral reaction as there is no urgent need to act on them. Therefore, they contribute to maintaining the status quo, which is not my subject of interest. Third, I assume that the low priority areas are those that the regional competitors might try to gain benefits on. Therefore, these areas are the most likely to lead to cooperation, which is a guarantee of peace and stability. However, I am not interested in these areas either. The purpose of my research is to identify the high priority areas, and to detect in advance the reaction of competition. Therefore, it could contribute to preventing the escalation of conflicts.

Perception	Reaction	Result
high priority	competition	conflict
middle priority	Neutral	status quo
low priority	cooperation	peace

Table 8. Perception - Reaction - Result. (Source: the author.)

Perceiving an element of power as high, middle or low priority: likelihood of reactions

To understand the potential reaction, I classify the value of perceiving power elements in three categories. These are: high, low, or middle. Respectively, the reactions they lead to are competition, cooperation or neutral. Perceived low priority means likelihood to cooperate. Perceived middle priority means likelihood for continuing the status quo. Perceived high priority means likelihood to compete.

Low priority areas. Elements of power to which the regional hegemons attribute low priority are not potential areas of conflict. For example, if a hegemon is not interested in the access to information of the local population proposed by another hegemon, then this is not a potential area of conflict. If neither hegemon is interested in the possibility that other hegemons inform the local population about their differing values, then it is not likely to raise a conflict. Even if other external competitors are interested in the low priority areas, a regional competitor might try to benefit from that and be more open to cooperation. This type of reaction is a precondition for peace and stability.

Middle priority areas. These are areas with changing value. If it becomes a low priority, it might contribute to cooperation. If it becomes a high priority, it might trigger competition, and therefore, conflict. But, as long as it remains in a middle priority domain, the most likely reaction is neutral. This would lead to continuation of the status quo.

High priority areas. If a certain element of power is perceived as high priority for one or more hegemons, it is a potential area of conflict between them. For example, if two hegemons are interested in keeping high shares of energy dependence in a country, a potential for conflict appears due to their competition.

If the value of a power element increases at a certain time, then the regional competitor is more likely to react in competition. If another hegemon tries to dominate a power element which is already perceived as highly prioritised by the first hegemon, this might be a trigger for the first hegemon to initiate regional security crises or international conflicts.

If different hegemons prioritise the value of different elements of power, then their likelihood to compete over the same element is low. But, if two or more hegemons give identical high value in one or more elements of power at the same time, then it is very likely that their reaction to compete will result in a crisis or a conflict.

If all regional competitors compete over an element of high value, then their attempt to influence the dependent country creates potential for conflict. Such competition raises the uncertainty and instability within the dependent country. This is valid for power elements to which more than one regional hegemon attributes high priority.

Limitation: the political will and diplomatic negotiations. An exception can happen if the three regional competitors agree to cooperate on their influence over a high priority element of power. Then, the potential for conflict decreases. For example, if both hegemons agree to cooperate on the energy influence over a dependent country, then the potential for conflict escalation is low. I do not examine exceptions due to negotiations between the actors. Instead, I examine the primary importance they attribute to each of the power elements. This is further tested in the empirical part on the foreign and security policy strategies of Russia, Turkey and the EU in the Black Sea region. Similar studies could be implemented for other regions and with other hegemons, so that the validity of this new concept can be checked. Another limitation is that the values might change over different times. To address this limitation, I only assess the values of the three regional competitors at a certain time.

Combination of power elements and severity of reaction. A reaction to compete might be triggered in one of the elements or several of them, depending on the value that the

hegemon attributes to it. I am not going to study the combination of elements, but only the relative value of each separate element. However, I recognise that the severity of reaction depends not only on one perceived element, but on their combination.

The perception of the power elements together can change the final reaction. The perceived importance of each power element individually affects the combined perception. If a hegemon considers one power element as a high priority, while the others as low priority, it is likely to react with competition on this element. But if a hegemon perceives several power elements as high priority, and another hegemon affects its influence on all of them, then the reaction of competition is likely to be more severe. For example: hegemon A considers energy security of high priority, as well as economic and internal governance elements. Hegemon B has the same perception of high priority elements and enters into competition to influence the same several areas in a dependent country. Inevitably, the result is a severe conflict or a war. On the contrary, if only the element of imposing governmental norms is a high priority for two hegemons, then their competition is still going to last, but with lower intensity. In this research I am not assessing the severity of reaction based on the combined high value of power elements. I only assess the perceived value of each of the six elements individually.

Assessing the likelihood of reaction. In the next chapters, I measure the perceived value by each hegemon on each component (military/security, economic/investment, energy/climate, political/diplomatic, government/social, and information access/exchange on specific sub-components - language, youth exchange, diplomatic visits, publicity of media). Then, I compare the perception of each hegemon. This shows the likelihood of reaction by each hegemon to either compete, cooperate or remain neutral. As a result, the research suggests the possible areas of conflict, of cooperation and of neutrality for each of the three regional competitors in the selected case study for the chosen time. As a result of the research, the respective possible reactions can be filled in for each of the three regional competitors.

Competition/ Cooperation/ Neutral	Element 1	Element 2	Element 3	Element 4	Element 5	Element 6
EU						

Russia						
Turkey						

Table 9. Likelihood of reaction: competition/ cooperation/ neutral. (Source: the author.)

Visualisation of the concept

I selected a fixed set of power components to be assessed, as recommended by Baldwin. These are the six elements of power, over which I examine the competition between the regional hegemons. Next, the actual perception over these elements is assessed per each regional hegemon. I compare how each regional hegemon perceives each element of power in a given time. This shows their potential reaction to compete. The high value attributed to a power element means high likelihood of competition. Knowing in advance the potential reaction of competition contributes to preventing regional security crises and conflicts.

RQ: How to measure the perception of power (as external influence) for the EU, RU, TR?

How to measure the perception of power within a strategic document?
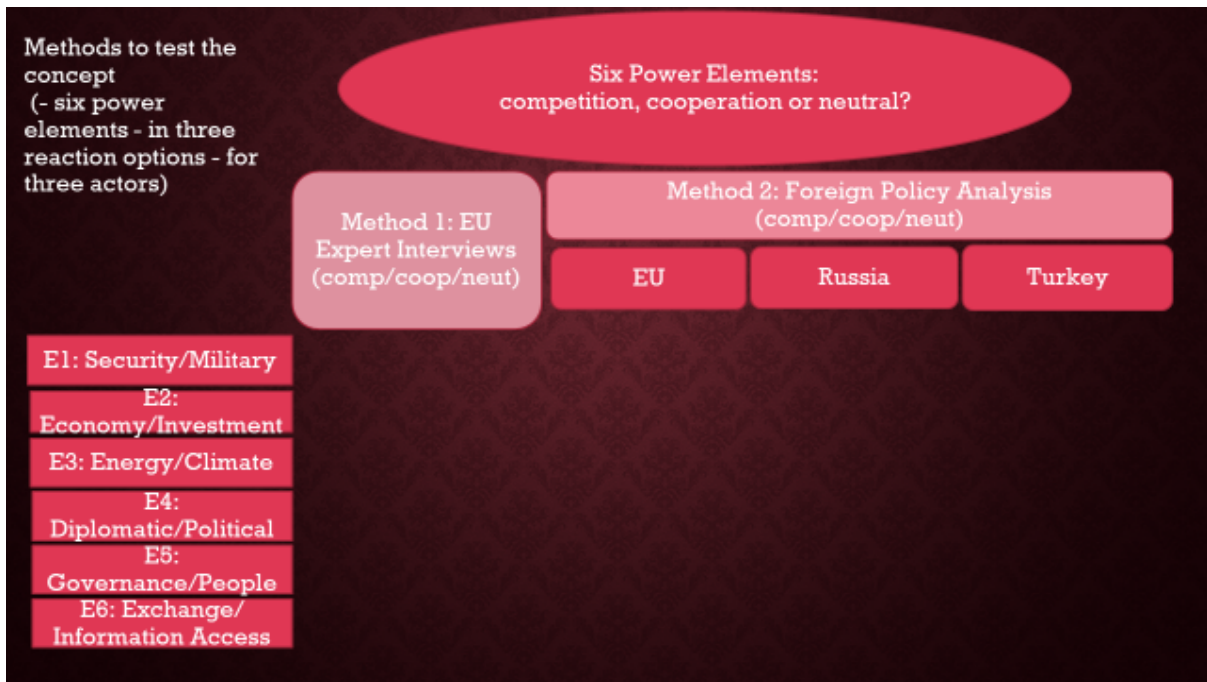
Figure 5. Empirical application of the new conceptual proposal. (Source: the author.)

In the empirical chapter, I measure their perceptions through Comparative Content Analysis of their Foreign and Security Policy Concepts. It tests which of the six elements of power are perceived as areas of competition, cooperation and neutral for the three regional hegemons, the EU, Russia and Turkey in a certain moment of time (2016-2021). Assessing the areas of perceived competition shows their likelihood of reaction in case that another

actor reaches the zone of competition. The reaction of competition might result in regional security crises and conflicts. This understanding contributes to early warning and conflict prevention.

5.5. Conclusion

This research elaborates on the relation between *power perception*, *reaction of competition* and *conflict prevention*. It assumes that the reaction of competition leads to conflict. Therefore, to prevent conflicts, knowledge is needed before the reaction of competition is triggered.

Therefore, it is necessary to select a region of potential crises and conflicts, where competition happens. Also, actors with comparable powers status should be selected. In the case study of the Black Sea region, I identified three current regional competitors. I justified their comparable status as regional powers. Due to their comparable status, they are expected to have comparable reactions of competition, cooperation or neutrality.

Their perception over the areas of competition should be assessed, with the purpose to understand who and when would tend to the reaction of competition. I discuss the reaction types in the conceptual framework, based on their perception of the importance of each power element. The perception of high importance triggers a reaction of competition, which I try to identify.

The areas of power competition depend on two factors: first, the meaning of power, and second, how power is perceived by the regional actors. The meaning of power is developed in the theoretical chapter, as corresponding to six power elements. They correspond to the root causes of conflict. Once the categories of power are clarified, their perceived value can be measured for each regional competitor at a selected time. The perception of power depends on the own interests of the IR actors. I assess it in their foreign and security policy strategies. This measurement and comparison of the power perception follow in the empirical chapter.

Next: empirical application

The empirical application of the created concept is through the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey. I examine the competition for external influence in a shared sphere of influence. Therefore, a conflict is likely to happen if several regional competitors perceive it as highly important to project the same power element towards the same region. I assess the foreign and security policy concepts of the three leading

regional powers in the Black Sea region - the EU, Russia and Turkey. I compare their perception over the six power elements in their foreign and security policy concepts in a fixed time period. This shows how each regional competitor perceives the value of each power element.

The relation between power perception and conflict prevention is that perceiving a power element as highly valued possibly leads to the reaction of competition. The perception depends on internal processes in each hegemon, as well as on the regional and world security environment at a certain time. The internal factors could differ for each selected case study and for each IR actor, I am not dealing with that. The external factors depend on the current security environment. The current conflicts in the Black Sea region are located in a time context of world crises. To select the comparable regional strategies in a fixed time, I examine a relatively calm period for the region. This period is between two major crises. In this period, I examine their latest active foreign and security policy strategies. In them, I measure the perceived value of each element of power, compared to the others.

The measurement and its results are explained in detail in the empirical chapters.

6. CASE STUDY: THE BLACK SEA REGION. POWER COMPETITION BETWEEN THE EU, RUSSIA AND TURKEY

6.1. Purpose and structure

Purpose

The main presumption of this research is that conflict is a result of competition. The Black Sea region is selected as a case study. Due to its geostrategic location, several regional competitors are identified over different time periods. This chapter justifies why competition for influence around the Black Sea is significant. The main current competitors are Russia, Turkey and the EU. This chapter identifies their strategic interests in the Black Sea region and why they interact in competition-cooperation patterns. Also, it justifies why the three actors are comparable in the regional competition and what are their characteristics. It shows some of the areas of competition between the three. These areas are further developed in the theoretical chapter as six power elements. The empirical chapter analyses the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, and shows how they currently perceive each of the six power elements.

This chapter addresses: *How are security crises and frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region (BSR) related to the competition for regional influence? Who are the regional competitors, when and why do they compete? What is the dynamics of their relations (patterns)? Is their IR power status comparable and why?*

The purpose of this chapter is: to select contemporary competitors in the Black Sea region, to comment on their interests and relationship patterns in the region, and to justify their comparable power status. As a result, their perception of power can be compared in the next chapters.

This research assumes that conflict is the result from the competition for power. In the literature review chapter, conflict prevention is related to the reaction of competition by regional actors. The general time related to regionalism, according to the literature review, is after the end of the Cold War. Since that time, due to restructuring of the world order, a number of regional security crises have escalated. Those are a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and continued Russia-West rivalry for zones of influence. The Black Sea region (BSR) as a post-Cold war zone of competition for influence was briefly introduced in the literature review. This chapter elaborates on the reasons for competition in the region, the participating actors, their interests and relations.

An analytical table of conflict assessment in the literature review showed some of its basic factors - time, location, actors, interests, reactions. Following these categories, this chapter relates the interests of regional competitors to the two root causes of conflict - material resources and people's beliefs. This chapter also explains the selection of regional competitors, justifies their power status as comparable, outlines their individual interests and bilateral relations, and discusses some of the areas of their competition and cooperation.

The literature review identified as a theoretical gap the lack of systemised measurement of the common perception of power. To address the lack of definition and measurement of the perception of power, first, a definition of power is needed. I relate power to the areas of competition. The concept of power is developed in the next theoretical chapter. This case study chapter outlines some of the areas of competition in the region. The areas of competition from this chapter are later related to the power elements in the theoretical chapter. In the case study chapter, these areas correspond to the individual interests of the actors. The particular competitors, the EU, RU, and TR, as well as their interests and comparability status, belong to this case study chapter. Their exact perception is assessed in the empirical chapter.

This case study chapter addresses the selected competitors in the Black Sea region Russia, Turkey and the EU. It poses three sub-questions: *1) Why the EU, Russia and Turkey, as main competitors, compete in the Black Sea region? Which are their perceived individual interests?* This part justifies some specific areas of competition for the case study region. The geostrategic location and geopolitical interests in the BSR are discussed. *2) How are their relations constructed? Why competition-cooperation? How do EU experts see the areas of their competition-cooperation?* This part shows some nuances of the competition and cooperation over different areas. Later, these areas contribute to the theoretical framework of six power elements. 3) *Why are these three actors comparable as regional competitors?* This part justifies the selected actors as regional competitors through IR theory on power status. As they are comparable IR actors, then their reactions could be assessed on a comparable basis.

Structure

The selection of time post-Cold war and place Black Sea region has been explained in the literature review. This chapter adds information on 1) the corresponding actors, their individual interests in the region, 2) the dynamics of their relations, supported with data from

expert interviews, and 3) their comparability as regional competitors. Respectively, this chapter consists of three parts.

First, the subchapter on the Black Sea region provides some descriptive literature on the current crises and conflicts, and proposes three contemporary competing actors - the EU, Russia, and Turkey. Their *individual areas of interest* in the Black Sea region are discussed. Second, the subchapter on their *bilateral relations* provides information of the evolution of these relations. It shows some patterns of competition and cooperation. Aspects of their areas of competition and cooperation are outlined. Through exploratory semi-structured interviews with EU diplomats, some of the contemporary competition-cooperation areas for the EU, Russia and Turkey are discussed.

Third, the subchapter on *power status of IR actors* outlines some main characteristics of belonging to a power status category. It discusses some of the characteristics of the EU, Russia and Turkey. It justifies their comparability as contemporary regional competitors. Also, it introduces the difference between measurable power categories and capacity to project external influence. Thus, it establishes the opening for the theoretical chapter.

6.2. The Black Sea region: geopolitical actors and strategic interests

The selected time of regionalism in this research is after the Cold War. *RQ: Which are the corresponding to the selected time competing actors in the BSR? What are their interests in the region? Why do they compete? Why does this research assume that the EU, Russia, and Turkey compete for influence in the Black Sea region?*

The countries around the Black Sea are part of the 'near abroad' for Russia, the EU foreign policy towards its 'Eastern Partnership', and the Black Sea region, considered as an external lake for Turkey. This initial perspective predefined the theoretical implications of power competition for the EU, Russia and Turkey towards the countries around the Black Sea.

I consider the competition between Turkey and Russia over the Black Sea region as a repetitive process, lasting over centuries. It has been continued with the current regional competitor – the EU and could continue with other competitors in the future. The starting time of my study is the end of the Cold War. As a background of the current situation in 2022, I look at three recent balance of power shifts in the Black Sea region. First, with the end of the Cold War, in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, in 1992 Turkey initiated BSEC as an organization of regional cooperation with Russia, aiming to prevent further Western approach. Second, in 2004-2007 NATO and the EU entered the Black Sea regional

competition through accepting Bulgaria and Romania as members. No crises followed at that time. Third, during 2008-2014 Russia prevented NATO's approach towards Georgia and EU's approach towards Ukraine by initiating security crises respectively in South Ossetia/Abkhazia and Crimea. Complementary crises which indirectly impacted the region are the 2015 migrant crisis in the EU after the war in Syria. In it, Turkey accepted the major flow of migrants. A following crisis was the 2016 Brexit when the UK left the EU, 2016 terrorist attacks in Europe, and the covid pandemic in 2019-2021.

6.2.1. Contemporary security crises in the BSR

The presumption of this research is that competition leads to conflict. The competition can be over different geopolitical aspects of security and influence. In this part, I overview the contemporary security crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region. I discuss the time and the corresponding actors.

The selected time of regionalism in this research is after the Cold War. Q: *Which are the corresponding to the selected time actors in the BSR? Why? Geopolitical interests leading to conflict: competition for security and influence (the straits, NATO).* The selection of the Black Sea region among other EU neighbouring regions was justified in the literature. It explained why the Black Sea region is a suitable case study for research on conflict prevention. It explained that throughout the dissertation, the EU is examined both as a regional competitor in the Black Sea region, and also as an intervening regional power aiming for conflict prevention. In this chapter, I examine the EU as a regional competitor. The general time, as identified in the literature review, is after the end of the Cold War. This subchapter justifies *What is the geopolitical importance of the BSR? For whom, when, why?* It reminds how the competition relates to the contemporary security crises and conflicts in the region. Then, it addresses who, when and why compete for influence in the case study region.

In close proximity to the European Union, in the Black Sea region frozen conflicts exist and security crises repeatedly happen. In 2022 a high intensification of the relations between **Russia** and **Ukraine** erupted in a war. It is a continuation of the post-Cold war competition for zones of influence between Russia and the West. The side of Ukraine was supported by NATO and the EU, both qualified as the West in a post-Cold war style of thinking.

The Black Sea region is continuously unstable. Security crises occur as a result of unresolved conflicts between: *Ukraine - Russia* expressed in a War in 2022, the Kerch Strait

incident in 2018, Crimean annexation in 2014; ***Armenia – Azerbaijan*** tensions in Nagorno Karabakh in 2020; ***Moldova - Russia*** in Transnistria; ***Georgia - Russia*** in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008; ***Turkey – Greece*** tensions in Cyprus in 2020. The war in ***Syria*** also affected the region, causing in 2015 migration flows through Turkey towards the EU. The pandemic of covid-19 during the period 2019-2022 did not have a specific military conflict effect. But it was a precondition for alienation between civilizations and people, including between the West and Russia, which resulted in a war. Ukraine turned into a field of current competition for territory, people and values.

Map 1. Frozen conflicts in the Black Sea region. (Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017)

The security crises and frozen conflicts show regional instability (Grotzky & Isic, 2008; Volten & Tashev, 2007), which is constant. Major challenges in the Black Sea region and its belonging countries concern regionalism, nationalism, rivalry for power and leadership, all leading to frozen conflicts and security crises (Blank, 2008). Classicists in neorealism claim that 'international politics remains highly constant, patterns recur, and events repeat themselves endlessly' (Waltz in Keohane, 1988:174). The logical sequence of security crises in the BSR raise questions of why regional actors compete and remain interested in its constant instability. Despite the possibility to examine separate countries or specific conflicts, my approach is to examine the regional competitors who provoke these conflicts to happen.

Regional competition in the BSR: security and influence

In the BSR conflicts happen as 'states are mutually dependent in their **security** relations'(Baldwin, 1997:26). To preserve *balance of power* in the BSR, 'local rivals (…) call in outside help, and by this mechanism the local patterns of rivalry become linked to the global ones' (Buzan & Weaver, 2003:46). Power in neorealism means security. The regional leadership around the Black Sea is performed by Turkey (Balcer, 2012; Celikpala, 2013; Sonda, 2015; Tanchum, 2014), NATO-US/EU (Draitser, 2015; Petersen, 2011; Larrabee, 2009) and Russia. Different patterns in their relations recur. Their relations are defined as 'rivalry, balance-of-power, and alliance patterns among the main powers within the region (...) *affected by* penetrating external powers' (Buzan & Weaver, 2003:47). The regional partnerships have been defined as rivalry, conflict, fragmentation, strategic, economic and energy goals (Hamilton & Mangott, 2008; PontusGroup, 2010; Bozkurt, 2013; Aydin & Triantaphyllou, 2010).

The ongoing competition between Russia, Turkey and the West creates risks over existing frozen conflicts, continuation of the Cold War and energy security (Glebov, 2009) as well as transnational security challenges (Dubien, Vaquer & Fanés, 2010:4). The post-Cold war hegemonic interests of Russia and the West combine with interests of the regional powers (Buyukakinci, 2004; Aydin, 2009), Turkey and the EU. The geopolitical interests of Russia and Turkey meet over the Black Sea region for several critical issues – security, energy security, trade, and migration (Chatman House, 2009). The geopolitics of the Black Sea has been defined by Russia-Turkey relations (Seidov, B. 2019) for centuries, it is not new. This research questions the reasons for unstable partnerships between the three main regional competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey and their individual motivation. It admits that other IR players might attempt to interact as well, but further external influence is not the focus of the study.

The geopolitical location raises competing interests of the regional powers, which result in instability. This is constant in the Black Sea Region not only after the Cold War, but also centuries earlier. The Black Sea region (BSR) is characterised with geopolitical competition vs. cooperation between the regional powers, distributed over different time periods. The cooperation-conflict dynamics (Aybak, 2001) and patterns of cooperation for security (Buyukakinci, 2004) repeatedly happen. In terms of geopolitical competition, some authors question the sub-regional aspects of the strategic changes (Manoli, 2012; PONARS, 2008; Klus, 2014; Tsantoulis, 2009). I relate it to the post-Cold War competition for zones of influence, but also to previous interests of the competing actors.

Historically, the competition between regional powers has been the reason for numerous wars. In the latest centuries these are mainly between Russia and Turkey, and later also the West which consists of NATO and contemporary the EU. For example, the war in Ukraine 2022 underlined the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for several regional actors. But this interest is not new. The control of the territory around the Black Sea has been a subject of competition for centuries. This includes, over different time periods, the Roman Empire, the Mongol Empire, the Bulgarian Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the USSR, and the EU. A complete historical overview is not the subject of this research, but the lasting interest of some competitors remains a reason for repetitive conflicts. The roles of Russia and Turkey as post-imperial actors are later developed in subchapter on status of IR actors. The EU members who have strong interest in the region due to historical presence - Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, are briefly mentioned.

Main competitors, but also partners around the Black Sea, are Russia and Turkey. Russo-Turkish wars happened between the Ottoman and the Russian empires during the centuries 17-19, more precisely in: '1676–81, 1687, 1689, 1695–96, 1710–12 (part of the Great Northern War), 1735–39, 1768–74, 1787–91, 1806–12, 1828–29, 1853–56 (the Crimean War), and 1877–78' (Britannica, Russo-Turkish wars)[35]. Several Russia-Turkey wars over the centuries mark their attempts to preserve a lasting leadership position over the Black Sea. Among them is the Crimean War of 1853-1856, at a time when the Ottoman Empire was declining while Russia was gaining influence (Badem, 2010).

Currently, Turkey is a regional power, 'a natural heir of the Ottoman empire' (Szigetvari, 2018:14), while Russia is the leading state of the dissolved Soviet Union, preceded by the Russian Empire. Both Russia and Turkey, in relatively recent history, have spread control over the Black Sea regional territories, including its current sovereign states and their belonging maritime waters. For example, the Crimean annexation in 2014 has been interpreted through various angles, including as the people living on the peninsula and their historical origin, their language and culture, their will of belonging, and sense of ownership by Russia (Gerstel, 2017).

The countries around the Black Sea are the borderline between three civilisations: the post-Soviet Russia, the Western EU, and the post-Ottoman Turkey. The recent conflicts and crises happen in post-Soviet space countries which are still not members of the EU and NATO. These countries are in a state of transition from one sphere of influence towards

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[35] Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russo-Turkish-wars (01.09.22)

another after the Cold War. Due to their internal uncertainty, the regional powers around compete to impose stronger influence and to project power over them.

Wars happen, because regional competitors have common resources to redistribute. I outline some of the resources and beliefs over which they compete, as well as the main competitors. In the context of this research, in the Black Sea region I examine three actors - Russia, Turkey and the EU as regional competitors. Turkey and Russia have been regional hegemons over previous centuries. NATO appeared in the regional competition during the Cold War. I do not examine it as a separate actor, but only briefly overview its presence. The EU has been present in the littoral territory since 2007. Each of the main competitors, their individual interests of why they compete, and their relations patterns are further outlined in detail.

6.2.2. Conflicts and actors: hegemonic competition in the BSR

Here I discuss the context of the hegemonic competition for influence, which leads to security crises and international conflicts in the Black Sea region. I identified the need to discuss the context of the hegemonic competition for influence in the Black Sea region, which competition leads to international conflicts and security crises. For this purpose, I discuss some individual interests of the EU, Russia and Turkey, and I also comment on the role of NATO. I identify why they compete, why the BSR is important, and how this relates to the root causes of conflict in the conflict assessment table.

This research presumes that the competition for influence leads to security crises. However, the context within which each actor competes has a major impact on their action. To clarify that, next I outline the main interests of each of the main competitors.

Why do the EU, Russia and Turkey compete for influence in the BSR? Their competition for influence results in conflicts in countries of the region now. *But what is the origin of their perceived interests in particular areas of the competition? What is the strategic importance of the BSR for the EU, Russia and Turkey?* This is related to the **conflict analysis table** from the literature review, which identifies material resources and people's beliefs as basic roots of conflict.

As suggested in the *conflict assessment chart* in the literature review, here I discuss the geopolitical importance of the Black Sea region. It relates to the two main suggested areas of competition - the *material resources* and the *beliefs of people*. **The resources,** I assume, are related to the physical or geographical aspects of the location. The location of the Black Sea region can be examined as a resource of power. For this reason, I outline the competition for

control over the Straits, where Turkey and Russia are historical competitors. ***The beliefs,*** I assume, are related to the belonging of a political unit to a certain ideology. The selected time has been post-Cold War. It is characterised by zones of influence after 1991 – between Russia and the West, combining the EU and NATO. At this time, the competition is about ideological control. This ideological control leads to, as well, control over resources. I assume that both the resources and the beliefs predefine the dynamics in the bilateral relations. Therefore, I first need to identify the origin of their interests. Only then, I could comment on the patterns of their relations, leading to regional security crises and conflicts.

Further I provide examples of the strategic interests of the EU, Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea region. Their individual interests define their ambition to control certain aspects of the regional relations, leading to competition. Later in the research, the theoretical chapter elaborates a systematic way to measure these perceptions over six power elements. These power elements correspond to the general categories of power competition. After that, the empirical chapter tests the perception of current interests of each of the three actors - the EU, Russia, and Turkey, over these six power elements. These are measured in their foreign and security policy concepts for a fixed time period, between two major security events.

6.2.3. Resources: strategic control of the Straits. Turkey and Russia

The geostrategic location of the Black Sea region is among the resources over which regional hegemons compete. *This part comments the geostrategic importance of the BSR for* Turkey and Russia. Their competition has been historical, prolonged as current rivals. The aim of both is to control the Black Sea Straits. The strategically important Black Sea Straits are three - Dardanelles, Bosphorus and Kerch

The Black Sea is strategically important, because it is landlocked, accessible through the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, both currently controlled by Turkey. The Black Sea has access to the also landlocked Azov Sea via the Kerch Strait between Crimea and Russia. The waters of the Black Sea allow warm water access between the North European Russian territory through the Kerch and the World Ocean via the Mediterranean, accessible through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits. Due to the strategic importance of these straits, for both Russia and Turkey, they continue historical rivalry to control them.

Map 2. The Black Sea. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018)

Turkey: the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits

Regulated by the Montreux Convention of 1936, Turkey controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits of the Black Sea. The Montreux Convention of 1936 is the latest of several conventions that arrange the opening of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits for shipping of international vessels. It regulates the free movement of ships from and to the Black Sea. In particular, merchant vessels are allowed to pass freely through the Straits, but war vessels are restricted depending on the states to which they belong - those not belonging to riparian states are further restricted according to tonnage and duration of stay in the Black Sea (Montreux Convention, 1936). It gives Turkey full sovereignty over the Dardanelles, Marble Sea and the Bosphorus. Holding the control of the Straits, Turkey decides the free entrance of trade vessels and imposes special regulations for military vessels. Thus, Turkey possesses huge power in waterway access of ships from Russia and from the Mediterranean both for military and trade purposes.

Turkey uses its location as a geostrategic player of the Black Sea (Toucas, 2018), who possesses huge coastal territory on the southern shore. From a geostrategic perspective Turkey is the regional power that decides which military vessels to cross between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea towards the Mediterranean Sea, including in case of military action. Control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles guarantees a key position of Turkey over the passing of international vessels towards and outside of the Black Sea. Regulating the access between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea enhances the

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strategic importance of Turkey. According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs[36], the Montreux Convention is tightened to the 'Black Sea security and stability', and its current implementation guarantees the balance of relations. Turkey's role of a major player in the Black Sea is guaranteed as long as the Montreux Convention of 1936 is in force. Therefore, Turkey is an important actor who is interested in the outcome of the regional security crises and maritime security. For these reasons, after the Kerch Strait incident from 2018 and the Ukraine-Russia war from 2022, Turkey could enter negotiations for possible solutions.

Russia - Turkey agreement and the straits

Control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles defines a leading position in the geopolitical processes of the Black and Mediterranean Seas (Seidov, B. 2019). Russia has been perceiving the Black Sea of geostrategic importance since the XIXth century, currently competing with the US and NATO, aiming for access to the Mediterranean via the Turkish straits (Toucas, 2017a). A main challenge is achieving Russia-Turkey agreement, as Russia sees the Black Sea straits as part of its own sovereignty (Global Security, 2019). If Russia and Turkey agree on mutual control over the landlocked seas, only vessels allowed by them could cross the Black sea. Russian control over the Kerch Strait means that only ships given access by Russia could reach from the Azov Sea to the Black Sea. An agreement between Russia and Turkey could arrange their absolute control of the access between the Azov and the Mediterranean Seas through the Black Sea. But instead of an agreement, this control has been subject of competition between Russia and Turkey, while after the Cold War the competition continues between Russia and the USA, mainly through NATO states.

Russia: the Kerch Strait (Crimea and Ukraine)

This part briefly discusses the crisis of the Kerch Strait in Crimea and Ukraine in a context of post-Cold war geopolitical competition between Russia and NATO. The geostrategic location of Crimea makes the peninsula subject of critical security for centuries. As a consequence of its geostrategic importance, the peninsula has been annexed by Russia in 2014, after a referendum in which the majority of population declared its self-recognition and belonging. Crimea was annexed from Ukraine by, according to the EU, an illegal action of Russia, and according to Russia, a legitimate referendum. Whether or not the referendum has reflected the real situation is not a subject of this research, but only the context of regional

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[36] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Implementation of the Montreux Convention, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/implementation-of-the-montreux-convention.en.mfa (12.09.2022)

competition. The narrative of the EU is that each country should develop a democracy in accordance with its will. Therefore, Russia has interfered with Ukraine's freedom of decision, bringing the country in a subordinate regime from the past Cold War. In a Western view, the effect of post-Crimea actions for Russia is domestic fear, international loss of influence, including Ukraine, and strategic defense (Biscop, 2017). According to Russian scholars, the increased militarization in the Black Sea on the NATO side is a potential threat (Delanoe, 2016). Russia has been repeating the narrative that it aims to enhance its own military power and ability to respond to a potential offense. The Russian annexation of Crimea happened at a moment when Ukraine, previously a Russian zone of influence, was approaching closer to the EU and NATO, to which Russia reacted sharply. In a pragmatic strategic view, the loss of Crimea for Russia means loss of strategic control over the straits.

6.2.4. Beliefs: geopolitical contest East - West. Russia and NATO

Which are the geopolitical reasons for regional conflicts in the BSR? In the Black Sea region, apart from the Russia-Turkey competition, also the West as a combination of the EU and NATO becomes present. Here I discuss the geopolitical importance of belonging to a post-Cold war zone of competition for influence between East and West. The Cold War is a period of bipolar rivalry between the USSR and NATO. The main leaders of these two world blocks are Russia and the USA. Their competition continues afterwards in regions, where supported by the USA actors are perceived as an ideological threat by Russia. These are: NATO, a military organisation, and the EU, an economic and political organisation. The relationship between the EU and NATO has been strengthened since 2016 by a Warsaw Joint Declaration by *'the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg'[37]*. It has been followed by Brussels Joint Declaration of 2018 and a Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation of 2023[38]. According to the EU, NATO has been the leading organisation on collective defence.

Among the 'idealist' theories is that 'the anarchy of nations can be replaced by the hegemony of a world government or a collective-security system' (Cooper, 2000:17). After the end of the Cold War, the EU aims for a new security order of collective security. 'Collective-security is a combination of two old ideas: stability through balance and stability

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[37]Source: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/07/08/eu-nato-joint-declaration/
[38] Source:
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/10/eu-nato-joint-declaration-10-january-2023/

through hegemony' (Cooper, 2000:37). I examine the regional security crises around the Black Sea in the context of a post-Cold War competition for zones of influence, but also the previous competition for strategic control. I examine the conflicting ambitions for regional leadership of the EU, Russia and Turkey. It is a continuation of the competition between the USSR and NATO over political ideologies, and the competition between Russia and Turkey over geostrategic location. During the Cold War, the regional competitors were the USSR and NATO. Later this transformed into Russia-NATO competition. Turkey, a previous regional hegemon, maintained lasting competition with Russia, which at times converted into temporary cooperation. Due to the presence of these several actors, a brief overview of their relations follows.

NATO - USA

NATO was the Western bloc organisation acting against the Eastern Soviet bloc during the Cold War, 1945-1989. NATO was the world competitor during the Cold War to counter the Soviet Union. This transformed to indirect competition after 1991 between Russia and the USA. NATO has been mainly supported by the USA since its creation. The global competition for world dominance between the USA and Russia has been spread to regions after 1989. The Black Sea region falls as an example within this competition. However, I do not focus on the global competition. Although I recognize that the global changes of world order inevitably affect local regions, my primary focus is the Black Sea region only. The USA-Russia competition for global leadership only partially relates to the current research. I focus on competition for regional leadership only. Therefore, the Russia – USA, and indirectly Russia-NATO competition does not fall within the scope of this research.

Russia towards NATO. The Black Sea as Russia's zone of influence

During the Cold War, the countries around the Black Sea were part of the Soviet Bloc and Warsaw Pact. This means that they were in Russia's sphere of influence. After the end of the Cold War in 1989, the Black Sea region became a zone of competition between the West, Turkey and Russia. Russia's actions towards the Black Sea regional states reflect the perception of this region as Russia's own zone of influence. The EU's support to regional states' sovereignty, and also potential membership of these states in NATO, might be perceived as a threat. The Black Sea region is present in the foreign policy strategy of Russia on several pillars – security, military balance, cooperation (Foreign Policy Concept of RF, 2008:15; FPCRF, 2016). It is a region of strategic importance in the Energy Security Strategy

of Russia, providing access to further markets via natural gas transit pipelines. The long-term interest and historical roots of Russian presence in the Black Sea region define its perception as a regional leader. Russia's perspective towards the region is a post-Cold war competition with NATO. The war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 showed that this competition continues in the region.

Turkey in NATO

In this context, the role of Turkey is double - both as an individual regional competitor and as a NATO member, therefore belonging to the Western bloc. Turkey is a member of NATO since 1952[39]. However, I do not examine it as a NATO member exclusively, but as a separate actor with strong interests for influence around the Black Sea. The interests of Turkey are recognised both as an ally of a Western union – NATO, as well as a historical competitor with Russia. In this research, Turkey is not examined in its capacity as a NATO member, but as a regional competitor with its own interests in the Black Sea region.

The international positions of Turkey have been ambiguous regarding the Black Sea - without any allies, but driven by interests (Toucas, 2018). As a NATO member, Turkey is concerned by the NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea region (Horrell, 2016). According to NATO's assessment of the geopolitical security in the Black Sea region, Russia is challenging the West by increased capabilities, air force, sea force and land force (Horrell, 2016). For NATO, it is crucial to keep Turkey as an ally, preventing its alliance with Russia. Turkish membership is in the interest of NATO, because it would prevent Turkey from military cooperation with Russia. In case of a potential military cooperation between Russia and Turkey, NATO's positions would weaken in the Black Sea and the Western Balkans. But it is questionable whether Turkey would cooperate over security issues with Russia. The historical competition between Turkey and Russia includes a number of wars in the Black Sea region. However, Turkey historically changed its attitude, defending its own interest through excellent diplomacy.

The role of Turkey as a NATO asset in the Black Sea has been questioned (Toucas, 2018). The paradox of Turkey's dual policy is defined by interests with different incompatible partners. The main interests of Turkey are economic with the EU, security with NATO and the US, energy and political with Russia (Pierini, 2016). As Turkey benefits from keeping good relations with both Russia and the EU, it is not interested in directly challenging either

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[39] Turkey – MFA, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/nato.en.mfa (01.09.22)

of them (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). Therefore, Turkey changes between supportive and opposing policy towards the other regional powers of the Black Sea region, Russia and the EU, with questionable interests in NATO and a strong role in BSEC. Turkey has a combinative policy towards Russia, NATO, and the EU. In the Black Sea, Turkey has its own behaviour in international politics.

Turkey and BSEC

Despite lasting historical rivalry, Turkey initiated cooperation with Russia in 1992 through the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). It is the largest multilateral regional organisation. According to H.E. Mr. Ertugrul Apakan at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018), Turkey has historical interest in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea region is a field of two opposing blocs during the Cold war – NATO and the Soviet Union, which might have continued in the post-Cold war period (Apakan, 2018). In this context, a major achievement of Turkey is the establishment of the Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which provides a platform for cooperation of the Black Sea coastal states, and of the wider region around the Black Sea. It provides an opportunity for communication between countries which are not likely to communicate without such an international platform, for example Armenia and Azerbaijan. Apakan (2018) on behalf of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, positively evaluates the achievement of Turkey to contribute to converting the Black Sea from a frontier of East-West confrontation to a path where communication is possible. The long term interest of Turkey is to protect Black Sea multilateral cooperation (Toucas, 2018), proven by its initiative and lasting support to the Organisation of Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The purpose of this organisation was to prevent the West after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Despite the attempts to provide security and cooperation, BSEC faced serious difficulties. Frozen conflicts and security crises continued. And the EU, as a Western actor, reached the Black Sea.

6.2.5. Geopolitical interests of the EU: maritime security and ideology

The EU reached the Black Sea region later, in 2007. Differently from the interest to control resources by Russia and Turkey, and the interest of ideological control by Russia and NATO, the EU has a different perspective. The EU has interests in the geostrategic location of the Black Sea, which is one among its six maritime security areas. Also, the EU is related to NATO as a Western, which creates some interests in the competition for influence. Some EU member states are also members of NATO. However, their double membership to these

organisations is not examined, nor their individual interests. All EU members, irrespective of whether some of them are also NATO members, are examined as IR actors belonging to the economic-political European Union. The EU is examined as a suprastate organisation with its own external interests and foreign policy. The comparability as regional competitors in the Black Sea region of the EU, Russia, and Turkey, is explained in another subchapter.

The EU: continuation of the ideological contradiction West-East

The Black Sea became part of the EU policies after the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007. The geopolitical importance of the Black Sea drastically increased after the war in Ukraine in 2022. The EU has recognised the importance of its strategic location recently (EEAS, 2019). The Black Sea regional security increased its importance for the EU, due to several recent international security crises and wars around the Black Sea. These include, among others, tensions in Ukraine, Russia, and Crimea. In Crimea, the EU has been calling for implementation of the International Law of the Sea, to which only Turkey is not part and therefore not obliged to follow, and the EU did not engage with the Crimean territories occupied by Russia (EEAS, 2019) after 2014. The EU's role is mainly to create regulations based on international law - judging the situation of Crimea, the Azov Sea, and Ukraine. The EU focuses on cooperation, where possible, to preserve the principles of international law as long as possible, rather than direct military involvement. Since the first half of 2022, the EU has applied several packages of sanctions towards Russia due to its invasion in Ukraine.

Preventing further escalation and convergence of the Black Sea from a frontline between Russia and the West to a region of cooperation, is achievable through interdependence rather than alienation (Toucas, 2017). Some scholars suggest the countries of the Black Sea region to cooperate via investing in common projects to decrease their natural stance of a front line between Russia and the West (Toucas, 2017c). Among the policy lines that the EU undertakes aims to unite the countries of the Black Sea around the common goals of its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, focusing on the Black Sea as a Knowledge Bridge, Blue Economy, Infrastructure, Empowered Citizens (European Commission). However, cooperation is challenging at times of regional security crises and frozen conflicts in the region. In Ukraine, the competition between the EU and Russia grew into direct conflict after Crimea 2014 (Casier, 2016a). The EU-Russia relations significantly transformed due to the situation in Ukraine since the Crimea annexation in 2014, which escalated into a war in 2022.

EU Maritime Security

The relations between Russia, Turkey and the EU affect the security of the countries around the Black Sea and Crimea, and also the Black Sea Maritime Security. For the EU, the Black Sea region is the maritime region least developed in its international policies. It is one of six maritime regions surrounding the EU– the Mediterranean, Baltic, Black, North Sea, Atlantic and Arctic Ocean (European Commission, DG MARE, 2019). While maritime policies for the other EU Seas exist - the Baltic, Mediterranean and North Seas, settling their specific needs for regulating the inter-governmental policies, the Black Sea region still needs an agreed EU sea policy. The Black Sea Synergy (2007) and the EU maritime policy do not regulate the specific needs of the states in the Black Sea marine territory. The EU does not have a strategy for Black Sea Maritime Security. It partially relates to the strategies for the Baltic Sea, with geostrategic importance crossing between Russia and the West, and the Danube region, which provides internal continental connection. The Maritime Security challenges in the Black Sea region are interrelated with the other maritime strategies of the EU, and for this reason their existence is acknowledged.

EU Maritime Security is a relatively new term in the EU policies. The common EU Maritime Security Strategy (2014) has been in a process of updating (European Commission, DG MARE, 2019). The EU Maritime Security Strategy was adopted in 2014, after Crimea, revised in 2018 (European Commission, DG MARE, 2018). It aims to maintain the rule of law, preserving peace and security, freedom of navigation, external border control, and environment (European Commission, DG MARE, 2018). It is an attempt to unite common rules for all EU sea basins, namely the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, North Sea, Baltic Sea, Arctic and Antarctic Ocean, but also the international Gulf of Guinea, Horn of Africa-Red Sea and South-East Asia (European Commission, DG MARE, 2018). The presence of numerous and variable actors creates difficulty to establish a common agreement or a strategy for all. International agreements, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, aim to regulate external actors. The EU Maritime Security Strategy is limited to allowing different actors to interact with EU sea waters.

The Baltic Sea, Russia and NATO. The Baltic Sea a strategically important meeting point of the West, represented as NATO-EU, and Russia. This might result in confrontation rather than cooperation. For this reason, the strategic role of the Baltic Sea is to regulate EU-Russia relations, and the post-Soviet sphere of influence, part of which is within the EU. Among the main security challenges for the EU in the Baltic Sea are the presence of Russia,

NATO's re-establishing deterrence, the post-Cold war relations, and Finland and NATO's renewed collective defense focus (Dahl, 2018). Since 2022, membership status of Sweden and Finland in NATO are discussed, as a result of Russia's war with Ukraine. The objectives of the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea (2009) are environment, connectivity and prosperity. Behind the common cooperation, it has a geopolitical role of blocking undesired Russian influence.

Map 3. The Baltic Sea, North Sea, English Channel. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018)

The Mediterranean Sea and Turkey

Geopolitical confrontation is possible in the Baltic and Black Seas. Differently, the main challenges of the Mediterranean Sea include maritime terrorism and piracy, military use of the sea in peacetime, in times of crisis and armed conflict, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), fisheries (Ronzitti, 2010). For this purpose, cooperation on separate issues is recommended, rather than a common framework of broader regulations (Ronzini, 2010). Among the main problems in the Mediterranean are sustainable marine environment, shipping, traffic of goods, people, drugs, waste products, pollution, biodiversity and fishing (Oral, 2009). A geopolitical challenge in the Mediterranean is the overlapping marine boundaries, an obstacle for the belonging states to claim legally their zones by international law (Oral, 2009). The adopted international agreements do not define which sea territory belongs to whom, therefore it is difficult to claim who is allowed to do what over the sea. The geopolitical actors interested in the Mediterranean marine territories are more

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complex. Interests of the EU, Turkey, Northern Africa, the Maghreb countries, the states of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel are overcrossed.

Map 4. The Mediterranean Sea. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2018)

Furthermore, the Mediterranean Sea comprises smaller seas, for some of which the EU has separate strategies – the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and the Ionian Region (2014). This strategy concerns a smaller and more manageable scope of challenges which the belonging states face, mostly related to successful cooperation within the micro-region of the two seas, located in the wider Mediterranean macro-region. Among the Mediterranean regional powers are the EU and Turkey, while Russia is not a major player.

Other EU Sea strategies are those for the North Sea, the Arctic and Antarctic Ocean. However, due to the different nature of geopolitical actors and their ambitions, these regions are not in the scope of the current paper.

The Danube river and internal EU states. From the West, the Black Sea water is accessible through the Danube river. The Danube concerns mainly in-land territory and waters of the EU member states, so the active international agreements are limited to the Danube Strategy (2011) of the European Union. It aims for connectivity and prosperity of states, strengthening the Danube region. The Danube is a waterway connecting the EU countries with non-EU countries in the Black Sea. Thus, it raises security concerns such as illegal import and export, traffic of people, traffic of weapons, and vulnerability of internal continental territories. Its geopolitical role provides access of people and goods between the continental European states with Russia and other regional actors such as Turkey in the South-East. The Danube region is strategically important for trade access of Europe with the

sovereign states of Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, through which to Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan and towards Asia. This access is an advantage if legitimate, but it brings risks of illegal activities.

Corresponding strategies. The EU creates a number of regional strategies, including the Eastern Partnership, the Black Sea Synergy and the Danube Strategy. The Eastern Partnership is directed mainly towards institutional, juridical and economic reforms of the belonging states. The Black Sea Synergy (2007) concerns mostly the relations between states. It tackles common problems of the surrounding countries, providing an EU-guided platform for reform in economic and political matters. The Danube Strategy (2011) is indirectly related to maritime security, because the Danube river enters the Black Sea basin, bringing environmental issues and transporting goods. Towards the Black Sea, the EU has also a revised Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan, and an EU Global Strategy (EEAS, 2019).

6.2.6. Regional competitors: the EU, Russia and Turkey

BSR in regionalism

The time selected in the literature review corresponds to the development of regional security crises after the Cold War. These crises are a result of regional competition for power between the strongest actors in a region. This is a continuation of the previous bipolar competition for influence, but with the newly involved regional competitors. The corresponding actors for the Black Sea region are several, among which I have selected three: the EU, Russia and Turkey. I have selected them, because their interests are strongest in the two basic groups of competition areas.

The areas of competition in the Black Sea region correspond to the two groups identified in the literature review - material resources and people's beliefs. The main material resource, which is subject of the competition around the Black Sea is control over its straits. For that control, Russia and Turkey have been historical rivals. The ideological concept over which competition happens is the post-Cold war NATO-USSR competition. In contemporary means of competition, which is different from the old nuclear and military power only, Russia and the EU are the two rivals inheriting the West-East concepts. The three selected competitors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, possess littoral territory around the Black Sea. As a result of the competition, it is a field of regional security crises and conflicts. A brief strategoc background locates their current position within century-long attitudes towards the control of the region.

Resources: the straits

As resources, it relates to the geopolitical location of the Black Sea and control over its straits. The Black Sea region was selected as a region of particular geopolitical interest for three strong regional players: the EU, Russia, and Turkey. The Black Sea is land-locked, and its waters give access to countries of the EU, Russia, Turkey and smaller sovereign countries. This geostrategically important access is a reason for both cooperation and competition. The example of Maritime Security was shown as a strategic aspect of the geopolitical competition in the Black Sea region.

The individual interests of Russia and Turkey for control over the straits result in conflicts in the Black Sea region. For Russia and Turkey, the Black Sea is of geopolitical and geostrategic importance. It gives to both of them access to further territories for military actions, energy security projects, development of trade and regional influence. Control of the straits belong to this type of security. For Russia, it gives access through the Kerch Strait from the Azov to the Black Sea, and then through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits towards the Mediterranean Sea. For Turkey, it gives access through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits towards the Black Sea, and then through the Kerch Strait to Azov Sea and inner Russian territories. Controlling the straits is a major way for trade, generating wealth and blocking enemies in case of a war. Both Russia and Turkey have had historical interests in the Black Sea over different times. They could confront again if their historical ambitions repeat.

Beliefs: ideologies West-East

As beliefs, it relates to the ideological belonging of its territories and people to different regional hegemons. The ideological competition is also a factor, leading to conflict. During the Cold war, it was the meeting point between the West and the East. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union this competition has transformed to cooperation by the initiative of Turkey who established the Organisation for Black Sea regional cooperation in 1992. A majority of scholars claim that it has been created for the purpose of resisting a power vacuum to block further power influence by the West. As a result, after the end of the Cold War redistribution of the zones of influence resulted in ongoing regional conflicts - the wars in Georgia 2008, Armenia-Azerbaijan frozen conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, Ukraine war in 2014 and annexation of Crimea by Russia. The role of NATO in the Black Sea region is interesting. Some of the coastal states belong to it - Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. Others

confront it, Russia for example. Third were in a neutral, but not winning position, such as Ukraine.

Turkey would not disregard NATO presence in the Black Sea region. Even though Turkey is a NATO member who had some ambitions for EU candidate status, it does not support other powers to increase their influence in the Black Sea. For the landlocked Black Sea, Turkey has its own strategy of seeking cooperation through the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation which it initiated in 1992. Turkey demonstrated resistance against third powers by offering this common regional partnership to the weakened Russia. This established a bond against possible power vacuum in the region, blocking new regional competitors. This organisation reallocated the balance among Russia and Turkey, the two historical hegemons in the Black Sea.

The West: choice between the EU and NATO

Selected: The EU. The Black Sea region is important for the EU as a neighbouring region with constant instability and regional security crises. This directly affects the internal processes within the EU, based on the internal-external nexus. The EU is interested in stabilising the region due to the need to preserve its own regional stability and security. The EU in the Black Sea could be explored from several perspectives. First, the EU is a united supranational organisation, with some characteristics of a state, particularly in its foreign and security policy. Details about its foreign policy follow in the empirical chapter. As such, it is a conflict prevention actor. I examine the EU as an IR actor with unified foreign and security policy towards its neighbouring regions. Second, the EU is a regional competitor who proposes the Western values to the continued East-West competition. Therefore, the EU is both a regional competitor and a world power who aims for regional stability. Third, it could be through some of its member states, whose location and interests extend towards the area. These EU member states could be explored as part of the union, or as individual current competitors - successors of previously hegemons of the territory around the Black Sea. For the purpose of this research, I examine two roles of the EU in the Black Sea region.

In the context of post-Cold War NATO-Russia competition, I only examine the EU as a representative of the West. The reason for that is because NATO is primarily a military organisation. The purpose of this research is to identify the areas of competition and to measure the perceived values of power in different areas, not only the military one. Measuring power indicators in numbers, such as military components, is achievable. But measuring the perceptions of power, in different aspects of power different than military, is

the actual challenge with which this research deals. That being said, I remind the reader that I intentionally measure the perception of power of the EU, but not of NATO.

Non-selected: NATO. During the Cold war 1945-1989, NATO and the Soviet Union have been in opposing blocks, East vs. West. In the post-Cold war period this has changed, as more regional players intervened. The 2022 security crisis between Russia and Ukraine is supported by the West through NATO and the EU. Thus, the competition in the Black Sea cannot exclude NATO. However, this research has been initiated and developed prior to this crisis. Its scope is only towards the relations between the EU, as the strongest successor of the Western values on the European continent, whose nations possess territory on the Black Sea region, and Russia and Turkey, as the successors of empires historically interested in the region.

NATO is directly linked to the military component of the power competition between Russia, Turkey and the EU in the Black Sea region. However, the current research compares six categories of power elements, only one of which is the military element. NATO is recognised in this military element, but the primary comparison is between the perception of Russia, Turkey and the EU. The other five elements of power are not directly related to NATO, so it is not exclusively studied. Indirect links might exist for example the US influence on energy and climate. However, this is not the focus of the current research. With this, I explained the decision to exclude NATO as a possible competitor and to select the EU.

Next: Bilateral relations and Power Status of IR actors

The main regional competitors around the Black Sea are three – Russia, Turkey and the EU. Their current power competition over the Black Sea region is related to the strategic interests in material and ideological areas. I showed two examples - the control of the straits as a material asset and the control of beliefs as an ideological asset. Therefore, I select the EU, Russia and Turkey.

Next, their bilateral relations are discussed through their foreign policy patterns of behaviour. The individual interests and bilateral relations of the current main competitors are outlined. Their attitudes of competition-cooperation are discussed through expert interviews. Also, the comparability of Russia, Turkey and the EU as regional powers are discussed in context of IR status. Their current power status compatibility is justified.

6.3. Competition-Cooperation between the EU, Russia and Turkey in the BSR

The relationship patterns between Russia, Turkey and the West - NATO and the EU are examined as a result of their individual interests over resources and beliefs. Conflicts between Russia, Turkey and the West are not new, as they repeatedly happen in the latest centuries. In the literature review I discuss how international relations theory explains the patterns of the regional dynamics. The aim of the current discussion is to provide details of their relations, which correspond to the patterns of competition-cooperation. It also shows the key priority areas for each of them. It is explained how further development of this knowledge, done over the next chapters, might serve for regional conflict prevention. My initial view is that all three competitors try to control certain areas of the competition. Also, they try to prevent each other from such control. But it remains unclear what is important for whom exactly, and whether they compete over the exact same categories, or over different ones. To clarify that, I further discuss some of their competition-cooperation patterns. The geopolitical competition vs. cooperation between the EU, Russia, and Turkey is over two basic predefined categories, outlined in the *conflict assessment table* in the literature review. These are: **material resources** (straits) vs. **ideological beliefs** (belonging to a world block).

6.3.1. Bilateral relations: foreign policy attitudes

This part clarifies the bilateral relations between the EU, Russia and Turkey. It comments on their foreign policy attitudes. This is later, in the empirical part, connected to their latest foreign and security policy strategies. (*How each actor sees itself in relation with the other actors*? *What is their relation between each other?*) It discusses primarily their bilateral relations after the end of the Cold War. However, it locates these relations in a context of competition vs. cooperation over the geostrategic location as a security asset and the ideological adherence as an influence asset.

Turkey and Russia

The foreign policies of both Russia and Turkey are based on "internal decision-making processes, (…) powerful individuals, (…) ability to affect regional and global stability" (Taussig, 2018). Their inherited imperial thinking makes both alike in trying to subordinate states on their regional territory. Both aim to accomplish their own incompatible interests, which makes them rivals. But they support each other in the presence of additional opponents. They share a negative attitude to prevent the West from approaching, which makes their partnership unstable (Taussig, 2018). The conflictual interests of rivalry and partnership are the reason for their **competition-cooperation attitudes.**

Depending on rising security challenges, Turkey could turn towards Russia in several areas. First, the Turkish energy dependence from Russia and the presence of Turkish business on the Russian market deter Turkey from challenging it (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). Despite aiming for energy resources diversification, Turkey increasingly relies on Russia (Taussig, 2017), which is a positive signal for Russia, and a negative one for the West. Furthermore, Turkey undermines the EU's diversification via participating in alternative gas projects proposed by Russia (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). Second, contrary to the EU's sanctions after the Crimean annexation, Turkey openly trades with Russia which undermines the EU's interest (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). Third, in terms of geopolitical security, Turkey benefits from the partnership with Russia despite its EU and NATO partnerships, while through Turkey, Russia has positions in NATO (Taussig, 2017).

For Russia, Turkey is both a competitor and a partner. The perplexing nature of their relations is expressed via "counterterrorism campaigns, (…) *but* directly conflicting interests over Syria's trajectory and the future of political Islam in the region" (Taussig, 2017). Paradoxically, despite Turkey's participation in "U.S.-led alliance against the Islamic State, and thirty months into Russia's military intervention in Syria, Ankara acts in far closer coordination with Moscow than with its (…) Western allies" (Pierini, 2018). The relations Turkey-Russia develop are favourable despite Turkey's Western allies. A challenge for the Turkey - Russia cooperation is their differing position on the regional frozen conflicts and Syria, leading to higher involvement of Turkey with the EU through trade and business (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). Despite their competition for influence, in times of Western approach towards their zone of shared interest, or during external security threats for both, they are likely to cooperate.

The EU and Turkey

Turkey is a needed partner for the EU in terms of security, but the accession of Turkey is not possible due to many challenges (Pierini, 2018). Turkey is a member of NATO and its accession negotiations for EU membership have been open since 2005, frozen since 2018 (European Commission, ENPEN, TR, 2022), which demonstrates its ambiguous role. But the security risks for Turkey are both internal and external. It lacks external security partially due to regional instability and the changing political situation in the country.

Turkey was concerned about terrorist attacks, border crossing of ISIS and Syrian migrants (Haid, 2016). The EU and Turkey both needed security cooperation against the threat from "jihadists returning from Syria and Iraq", who Turkey treats as migrants, raising

caution in the EU (Pierini, 2018). After the international crisis of 2015, Turkey accepted migrants for which it received EU funding. However, the attitude of Turkey was inconsistent towards the EU, "critical of EU contributions" after receiving "3 *plus* 3-billion-euro" support for the Syrian refugees (Pierini, 2018). Despite the economic benefits, Turkey changed its attitude by conducting an accusative policy towards the EU, disregarding the EU support. This example of Turkey's dual policy towards the West decreased its trustworthiness as an EU partner.

The combination of Eurosceptic authoritarian Turkey sharing common interests with the EU leads to a stalemate - neither its accession, nor its foreign policy redirection (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018). The political leadership unrest in Turkey in 2016 and 2017 raised doubts about the further action of Turkey on the regional arena. A challenge for the cooperation was the 'deterioration of the rule of law' and EU's negative assessment on Turkey's political progress (Pierini, 2018). The ENP required reform, unfulfilled within the regional countries receiving Turkish loans (Demirtas-Bagdonas, 2018).

For the EU, Turkey is a partner who could host refugees from Asia and the Arab states if needed, due to its geostrategic location. Also, Turkey needs cooperation to cope with terrorism and migration. Economic cooperation and sector-based dialogue are ongoing well between the EU and Turkey, while political cooperation is not improving.

Russia and the West (NATO and the EU) in the BSR

Despite the end of the Cold War, "according to Russia's military doctrine, NATO is still seen as the main potential adversary" (Dyner, 2017). However, after the Cold War ended, new types of threats appeared, including terrorism. This created a dilemma for Russia regarding cooperation vs cooperation with its previous adversaries over the new threats. "The new Foreign Policy Concept stresses the need to create an international coalition to fight terrorism" (Dyner, 2017), as a universal cooperation value between Russia and other countries. For Russia, a dilemma remains between cooperation against terrorism and caution against NATO. Russia's ambivalent approach continuously exposes an image of a great power, opposing NATO, but calls for cooperation against international threats. This makes Russia simultaneously a geopolitical opponent for the West, but an attractive security partner in times of common external threats. Undoubtedly, if the threat concerns Russia's primary security interests, such as NATO approaching or nationalist sentiments change over its perceived zone of influence, aggressive defence is not excluded.

Russia aims to establish permanent influence in its 'near abroad' by power dominance through all means, including military, and without sharing power (Biscop, 2017). Among the strategies which Russia applies towards the Black Sea region are controlling, reuniting, or dispersing (Toucas, 2017). To keep control over its past dependent states, Russia uses different tools to exercise influence – bilateral dependencies via energy, migrants, debt, initiated by Russia regional organisations like the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Eurasian Economic Union (Cooley, 2017). For example, Russia provides stimulus of fractured identities to escalate conflict, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and Crimea in Ukraine (Toucas, 2017; Chatman House, 2009). Russia, possibly, does not exclude further changes of the geopolitical belonging of the Black Sea regional countries – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, wider Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and even the Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia.

For Russia, conventional and nuclear deterrence is the means to achieve strategic stability nowadays, following the Cold War logic (Pynnoniemi, 2019). Russia's contemporary foreign policy is based on *Realpolitik* (Pynnoniemi, 2019), marked with *zero-sum* game between competing for resources and power states. Analyses of strategies of Russia for the period 2014-2016, suggest that Russia perceives world politics as endangering competition for resources and power, thus it approaches conflicts *asymmetrically* by all means (Pynnoniemi, 2019). Achieving strategic stability via asymmetric approach includes security, economic dependency, diplomatic and political sanctions, aiming to prevent further deepening of conflicts threatening the domestic stability and sovereignty of Russia (Pynnoniemi, 2019). A complete list of such diversified actions is not available, and it might change with time. The current research attempts to identify some categories of power competition, so I initially list potential areas for the three selected participants. In the theoretical chapter I systematise them as elements of power. Later, in the empirical chapter I measure the importance of each category for each regional player.

The EU and Russia

From an EU perspective, the current research refers to the Black Sea region, as the Eastern Partnership countries, Russia and Turkey. The geopolitical EU approach towards the Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia is also hybrid due to the nature of the EU itself (Nitoiu and Sus, 2019). The EU identifies itself as a normative power (Manners, 2002; Klinke, 2012 in Casier, 2016a). Russia perceives 'the EU normative hegemony' as interfering with its own domestic policy (Casier, 2016a). A miscomprehension between the basic concept about the

Black Sea exists between Russia and the EU. For Russia, the Black Sea region is important as maritime security and military balance. It brings security risks, in a post-Cold war way of thinking. Presence of the West in the Black Sea of the EU might be possible, but NATO is unacceptable. For the EU, the Black Sea region is a perspective for cooperation and enlargement.

Two models of EU-Russia relations can be compared: geopolitical confrontation and horizontal cooperation (Kortunov, 2017). First, the confrontation model between international players is "expensive and outdated, (…) *but* provid*ing* sufficient stability and predictability, (…) *mutual respect,* (…) recognized hierarchy" (Kortunov, 2017). Second, the horizontal cooperation model among non-state players expands "common spaces (..) *of* (…) education, science, and culture", leading to long-term prevention of "unconventional security risks such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, cross-border crime, energy security, and cybersecurity" (Kortunov, 2017). The first model guarantees stability through governmental respect, while the second model is based on cooperation through different levels of non-governmental stakeholders. Kortunov (2017) assesses the soft power cooperation on a regional level as an instrument to achieve hard power coordination on higher levels. Russia perceives EU's engagement with its civil society as aggression towards its domestic policy (Taussig, 2018). As a result, instead of building mutual trust through soft-power, mutual mistrust and prejudice is grown.

The EU-Russia relations have been studied in three stages - 'asymmetrical cooperation (1992–2003)', 'pragmatic but increasing competition (2004–2013)', 'conflict (2013–present)' (Casier, 2016a). A driver of the competition between the EU and Russia is 'the images they have formed of the intentions' of the other, as social psychology might suggest (Casier, 2016a). Russia aimed enlargement towards the post-Soviet and the Baltic States (Casier, 2016a). A geopolitical pillar for the EU to create regional strategies is to prevent Russia from assertive actions towards its zone of influence in the post- Soviet space (Cooley, 2017). To respond geopolitically to Russia's ambitions, the EU implements its own strategy for geopolitical stability of the concerned states. It regroups them and tries to assure their fluent communication between each other.

The EU presented its external integration policies as 'an open choice and not an anti-Russian move', which indeed decreased the capacity of Russia 'to exert influence in the former Soviet space' (Casier, 2016a). The response from Russia to the EU regional units is "find*ing* allies in the EU, in order to gain influence on policies such as the lifting of sanctions" (Dyner, 2017). Due to differences in 'perceived norm driven foreign policy of the

EU, and the perceived Realpolitik of Russia', the EU denies any geopolitical reasons or consequences, underestimating the ENP and EaP impact (Casier, 2016a).

The EU-Russia game for neighbourhood influence cannot provide stable EU-Russia relations while their strategies are not agreed (Wilson & Popescu, 2009). Further analysis on the strategies not only of the EU and Russia, but also of Turkey, will show their specific attitude towards different aspects of power. For the EU, it is the EU Global Strategy of 2016, together with its yearly assessments of 2017, 2018 and 2019 are analysed in the empirical part of the dissertation.

Conclusion

The EU sees itself as a normative power, directed towards human security and personal security. Russia perceives itself as a global power against NATO in military aspects. Later, in the foreign policy strategic documents of Russia I identify also its strong focus on energy security and identity. Turkey has its own perspective towards the Black Sea region. Due to their different intentions towards the region and their different perception of themselves, misperception of the intentions of the other might happen. Their attempt to contra-react to a perceived threat by the others leads to a reaction of competition. The competition is an attempt to preserve one's own superior power status and to prevent the appraisal of a power status of another actor. This reaction is the reason for conflict. My statement is that not only the competition for power, but the misperception of power leads to conflict. In this complete research, I further try to clarify what are their perceptions of power and how this relates to conflict prevention. Next, I overview some data from expert interviews on the competition-cooperation dynamics.

6.3.2. Expert interviews: competition and cooperation, six power elements

The justification of this method and the data collection process were described in the methodological part. This empirical part discusses the data analysis and the results. I conducted qualitative data analysis. Through interviews, I collected non-measurable data from people as subjective sources. This provided perspectives of practitioners on my research topic. The purpose of this method is to discuss practical insights of the foreign policy behaviour of the three selected IR actors, the EU, Russia and Turkey. The data shows a perspective from EU experts on the areas of competition and cooperation between the three actors. It also discusses the applicability of the new theoretical framework.

I examine the applicability of the theoretical framework of six power elements as areas of competition and cooperation. The expert interviews show some practical aspects of cooperation or competition areas between the three regional competitors. Its potential development in 10 or 50 years is also mentioned. This method addresses secondary research questions: *How relevant are the six elements of power to the areas of competition and cooperation for the EU, Russia and Turkey in the BSR? How does this contribute to the new theory of conflict prevention through identifying perceived competition? What are the views of EU experts on the areas of competition and cooperation for the three actors?*. Embedded in the new theoretical framework of six elements of power, invented in this research, the interviews data shows the applicability of this theory. The views of high level professionals show some specific interests of the three regional competitors. Later, content and discourse analyses of the foreign and security policies of the three regional powers assess the importance that each regional competitor attributes to each power element at a certain time.

The interviews outline expert opinion about areas of competition or cooperation between the three regional competitors. I locate them within the framework of *six elements of power*. The data is mostly subjective, and it provides a combination of personal and professional expert views. The interviews have high added value, as EU diplomats and high-level civil servants shared their views. A precondition for the open discussion was the approach of the researcher to the interviewees as colleagues, in respect of all ethical considerations. As a result, the collected data is a valuable contribution to the research.

The interviews have been conducted with the purpose to collect primary data on the EU, Russia and Turkey. The assessed categories include: applicability of the framework of six power elements, applicability of the theory on power perception and conflict prevention, areas of competition and cooperation, bilateral and individual interests, engagement of EU experts. It discusses the opinions of EU diplomats about the perception of power elements as areas of competition or cooperation by the EU, Russia and Turkey. Particularly, I examine the six power elements as competition or cooperation areas. As a result of the expert interviews, areas of competition and cooperation between the EU, Russia and Turkey are outlined. I discuss how this corresponds to the applicability of the new concept of six power elements. Also, I assess how these findings contribute to the new theory on power perception and conflict prevention.

Data assessment: experts and consideration

The method of expert interviews presents perspectives of EU high level officials. The interviewed experts are diplomats, policy-makers, NGO leaders and academics from the EU. The researcher decided to assess the data collected from 12 EU representatives. All representatives were either government officials, diplomats or EU civil servants, academics, and a NGO representative, expert on one power element. Among the interviewees, there are administrative servants in the EU/NATO, diplomats, NGO leaders and researchers. Some of them were PhDs, but this was not a prerequisite. Some of the interviewees had multiple roles, including academic and research, political and diplomatic, institutional. They were mostly choosing one role, under which to present their views. Some of them decided to speak in personal capacity only, others in professional capacity only. I collected interview transcripts – taking notes in meetings in person. Some of the interviewees agreed a recording to be taken, while others preferred to speak without audio recording. In respect to the preferences of the interviewed experts, the researcher has shared some information related to their names and institutions, and related it to their answers only in the discussion of prospective relations between the EU, Russia and Turkey. The results showing information on competition and cooperation areas are not affiliated with the experts by specific criteria.

A distinguishing criteria of the experts is that some are with experience in a littoral state while others not. A difference in the responses was present between data collected from EU experts on the criteria of having or not experience of working in a littoral state in the Black Sea region. Some of the experts were from EU member states with a littoral presence at the Black Sea, others had working experience in such littoral states. Some experts were from Bulgaria, which has the longest historical presence in the Black Sea region, dating back since 681. Bulgaria is an EU country directly involved in the regional dynamics in the Black Sea region. Its interest in regional relations lasting for centuries is a precondition to its current action. The representatives with a local understanding of the regional dynamics were more engaged in the topic.

The number of valid interviews is not high, 12, but they are with high-quality professionals, experts in the dissertation topic, which makes them an excellent selection. Some of the interviewees preferred to stick to the formal statements of their organization. Some decided their views not to be referred to by their name, which shows a preserved attitude of not exposing personal views in official service. This is completely understandable, considering the high professional positions they undertake. Some were speaking openly, but not agreeing to the conversation being recorded. Most of the interview data is collected in the form of notes. The subjective views of some experts provide interesting directions of thought

and discussion. The presented views are not always in the capacity of an institutional representative, but often in personal capacity. This contributes to inventing new perspectives. The researcher, aiming to respect the preferences of all the interviewed experts, decided to not disclose any names, not to relate any statements with any person or institution. This is intentionally done, with consideration of data protection.

Questions and process

The respondents received a total of 10 questions. They were informed about the possibility of deciding whether to answer all questions or not. Most respondents answered all questions. There was an expert from a Black Sea regional country outside of the EU, who specifically focused on it, omitting some of the questions. One expert was particularly focused on one of the elements of power, related to their job profile, and omitted some of the other questions. However, both provided complete details on the topic corresponding to their expertise.

The questions were grouped in two categories – dependency resulting from competition and dependency resulting from cooperation. This was aimed to relate the interaction between the EU, Russia, and Turkey to the frozen conflicts and security crises in the region. My aim was to examine their views regarding the six elements of power and the potential of competition or cooperation by the three regional competitors. The collected data shows views on the relation between the three regional competitors, their interaction on areas of competition or cooperation, and the regional security crises and conflicts.

Sampling criteria

Through the method of expert interviews, I tested how the elements of power are viewed in relation to regional competition and cooperation. The expert interviews bring in information on areas of either competition or cooperation between Russia, Turkey and the EU. I assess the expert views regarding possible competition and cooperation areas of common interest in the Black Sea region. It also shows the level of engagement of EU experts in regional security and conflict prevention in the region. It is important to note that the data has been collected before the war in Ukraine, therefore it shows the interest of EU experts in the Black Sea region before the region became highly popular.

The interviews are semi-structured, containing 10 questions with an open ending. The aim is to measure the value that interviewees give to different elements of power. Specifically, to assess the potential for cooperation and competition of each power element.

The sampling of their views is based on the six elements of power framework, and the three regional competitors. I evaluate potential areas of competition, cooperation, and neutral areas.

In sampling the data, I apply three stages of coding of the grounded theory. First, through open coding I reorganise data into categories of six power elements and three regional competitors. Second, through axial coding I recognise relationships between the categories with the three possible reaction types - competition, cooperation, neutral and the three regional powers - the EU, Russia, Turkey. Third, through selective coding I integrate categories aiming to produce a theory of power perception and conflict prevention and to test the applicability of the six elements of power concept.

Data collection and data interpretation

I first collected the draft data in Word files, and created tables with the variables in Excel, and then I structured it to identify areas of competition and cooperation, corresponding to the six power elements. I categorised the expert interviews data in the same six categories of power, with the nuance of potential for competition and cooperation over a category, or remaining neutral. The division between EU experts was by country of origin or work experience, gender, position in the administration, as they were expected to show different attitudes of long term engagement. Assessing the potential for cooperation, competition or neutrality by Turkey, Russia and the EU shows their likelihood to trigger a conflict if another competitor advances on a power element.

Previously, in the concept of six power elements, I identified six areas in the competition-cooperation bilateral relations of the three actors. Then, I grouped the responses, aiming to answer the following questions: 1) Which power elements are associated with cooperation for each of the three actors? How does that correspond to the literature? 2) Which power elements are associated with competition for each of the three actors? How does that correspond to the literature? 3) What are the expected tendencies of competition and cooperation in their bilateral relations? 4) What is the level of engagement of EU experts prior to the war in 2022? How interested are the EU experts? 5) What is the applicability of the six power elements framework? How do the results relate to the power perception and conflict prevention new theory?

Data analysis steps

The analysis is deductive. Its structure is planned in advance. It identifies the predetermined categories of power in the views of the experts, and discusses their views

according to the framework *six elements of power*. It shows their understanding of the potential of each power element as a tool for cooperation or for competition between the three regional hegemons. It also identifies the perception of the experts related to the role of each regional competitor – Russia, Turkey and the EU, regarding potential for competition and crises or cooperation and regional stability. It draws examples of shared interest of the three regional hegemons, showing possible developments in the specific country situation.

First, I transcribed the text and organised my notes. I apply the inductive method of thematic content analysis. I read the transcripts to make a first impression, and then again read carefully each one. *Second,* I labelled words, phrases, sentences and sections, which correspond to each of the six themes of power elements as part of my coding. I underlined the parts which are repetitive in the views, and the parts which are unexpected, also those that the interviewee suggests are important. I use the concept from my theoretical framework - six elements of power. I aim for conceptualisation of underlying patterns. *Third,* I examine how the views of competition and cooperation on each element of power on each element of power differ. *Fourth,* I discuss the applicability of the elements of power framework to assessing the competition areas by expert interviews.

The new knowledge shows how each power element relates to either competition or cooperation in the relations between the EU, Russia and Turkey. It shows the engagement with the topic of EU experts prior to the war. The sequence of examination is as follows: initially, I compared the expert views on each element of power related to competition. Then, I compared their views on each element of power on cooperation. In both cases, I showed their attitude towards the role of the EU, Russia and Turkey in each category. Afterwards, I discussed their views on competition and cooperation areas between the three hegemons on the six elements. Also, I outlined their views regarding specific case studies.

Visual presentation of the results

Based on the findings in the expert interviews, I distinguish areas of competition vs areas of cooperation in the relations between the EU, Russia and Turkey. These areas are identified in the views of EU experts only, so possibility exists of different views if experts from Russia or Turkey are interviewed. As I collected the interviews prior to the covid pandemics 2020 and the Ukraine crisis 2022, the expressed opinions do not reflect these events. Also, I collected the data before I developed the framework of six elements of power. As a result, I first gained information on competition vs cooperation areas, and later matched these areas with the framework of six power elements.

As shown on *Table 10,* the main areas of competition for the three actors are in elements of power 1-5. The main areas of cooperation are in all six elements of power. The main areas of neutral relations are in elements of power 2-5.

Areas of competition vs. cooperation (EU expert views)

EU/RU/TR	Competition	Cooperation	Neutral
Element 1	Military conflict is a turning point. NATO extension - diplomatic conflict, geopolitics, military, frozen conflicts, arms and weapons, security dilemma, RU-TR zero sum, geopolitics, military/political doctrine NATO, vacuum, national security, military deployment leads to conflict, US aim to dominance, chemical weapons, nuclear, atomic energy	Geostrategic partnership is preferable than wars. EU-RU, military support of EU/TR in S.Ossetia, return Crimea,	
Element 2	The EU uses economy to change behaviour of RU, economic development, not rich in BSR so limited capacity, conflicts resulting from economic power, business is interested in political decisions so-oligarchs,	economic interdependence, EU-RU, RU-TR energy, trade, investment, highway ring, cross-border trade, tourism, diplomacy, power-money-influence, RU-TR economy, RU-EU ec agreement,	research, technology, developmen, systematic thinking how to influence,
Element 3	more conflicts than cooperation, Az-Ge-Tr-EU electricity, different views, Azeri, Turkmen gas, energy as a political instrument to obey, energy security, resource competition, nature, environment vs. beauty, energy export and trade,	railway Baku-Tbilisi, gas, oil, industrial extraction, transport corridor, ecology, environment, regional projects, stability by infrastructure, connectivity, cross border cooperation, fisheries, technology, hydrocarbons opposite to conflict, Do not destroy energy. Energy.	pollution, fisheries, ecology,
Element 4	leadership, not good coordination for common strategies, win-win	RU-EU pol.agreement, 3-sided cooper, 2013 EU-RU	The decision model

	partnership for modernization, top leader recognition, RU-TR well prepared diplomats, Europe, Asia, Balkans, Middle East, Africa, R.N.Macedonia, Albania, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, leadership in the BSR, closed sea, ambition to dominate. Conflict as a result of power projection, RU bilateral negative impact on EU,	strategy,leadership defines it, growing influence China, USA, Eurasian Union unrealistic, Customs Union sets a frame, BSEC by TR, dialogue, selective engagement, G8, G20. Trilateral cooperation, not regional. Eurasian Economic Union,	changes the action. Different decision-making, different values and aims,
Element 5	In the BSR, each country is on its own, they do not understand each other. individual interests of MSs, history USSR Ottoman, people and capacity, radical nationalism, lack of trust, democracy vs. authoritarian, strategic planning in short or long term, values, identity, culture, history RU-TR, not changed mentality so constant competition,	culture, science, overcome enmity/hate stereotypes, people closer to politicians, national strategies, elites decide,	the leader forms the governance, historical trauma to all, education,
Element 6	antagonism Abkhazia-Georgia,	youth, mobility, ppl to ppl, Erasmus+, RU projects, exchange of values, BS NGO Forum civil society,	

Table 10. Areas of competition vs cooperation - EU expert interviews. (Source: the author.)

As shown on *Table 11*, the main interests, with high potential of competition for the EU per power element are in elements of power 1-5. A special attention is given to the economic logic behind the political decisions of the EU. Also, the democratic decision making is shown in contrast to the authoritarian one. The main interest, with high potential of competition for Russia per power element in elements of power 1-6. Special attention is devoted to the post-Soviet Union, namely the identities and people in the belonging countries. The main interest, with high potential of competition for Turkey per power element are 1, 4 and 5. Specific is the post-Ottoman legacy, as well as the people with Muslim religion or Turkic languages.

Areas of competition – high likelihood to provoke regional security crises/conflicts (war)

	EU	Russia	Turkey
Element 1	Problematic euro-atlantic values, NATO, CSDP missions, arms, PESCO, deterrence cannot be measured, cyber, hybrid,	Creates frozen and open conflicts. Crimea, Transdnistria, Nagorno K., problem NATO (not EU), military spending, capabilities, NATO in Kaliningrad and Baltics,	Syria, assertive, NATO - TR-GR conflict, capabilities,
Element 2	Sanctions are not efficient. Economic logic differs from political logic. Economic power, DCFTAs, FTAs, financial assistance, not strong ties with RU and TR, EU wants to play a defining role,	restrictive measures, economy impacts action, competitive economy in Ukr is not ok, economically independent GE'92 MD'92,	currency instability- lira,
Element 3	energy, new technologies, North Stream,	best engineers, leading roquets, gas as a political weapon,	Turkish Stream,
Element 4	BS Synergy incomplete RO-BG, EaP now bilateral, Mediterranean, requires sovereign choice of states contradicting RU decisions, foreign policy needs consensus,	post-Soviet countries, autocracy, authoritarian Kremlin, stability, constant strategic interest, Central Asia, EaP-EU-RU, Caucasus, N.Karabakh, S.Ossetia, Abkhazia, US competition,	autocracy, neoOsmanism, authoritarian Erdoghan, constant strategic interest, priorities WB, Black Sea, Mediterranean, N.Karabakh, Cyprus,
Element 5	Political decisions based on economic logic, qualities of political leaders change, individual MSs. Values. Norms. Defining a political class,	Soviet, RU to Crimean tatar, Ukraine - identity is the problem, culture to divide, separative regimes Donetsk Donbass Trandsnistria, inacceptable legislation Crimea, Akhazia, South Ossetia, oligarchs, obedience, influence through frozen conflicts, fake documents, elites,	Ottoman, indirect Gulf, Quatar, WB, support, radicalisation, Armenia genocide, gagauzia, Muslims, Kurdish aggression in Syria, Balkans unknown,

		educated children in UK, fake news	
Element 6			

Table 11. Areas of competition: regional hegemons/ power elements. (Source: the author.)

As shown on *Table 12,* the power elements with potential for cooperation for the EU are 1-4. Specific is the strategic planning and the economic power.The power elements with potential for cooperation for Russia are 1-6. Underlined is the role of the leaders and elites. The power elements with potential for cooperation for Turkey are 1-5. Specific is its attempt to establish the regional cooperation initiative BSEC, despite the many differences between the states around the Black Sea.

Areas of cooperation – high likelihood to construct regional stability (peace)

	EU	Russia	Turkey
Element 1	military to defend,	counter-terrorism, Iran, Syria,	byes inefficient military from RU
Element 2	trade- Armenia, successful economic partnerships	Eurasian Union, CEPA, WTO rules, tourism to TR	Customs Union, economy and business with RU
Element 3	gas dependence on RU, coal and steel	energy, WU-RU, Vladivostok transit, gas pipeline of RU, rich resources	energy, nuclear power plant in TR
Element 4	A strategy requires goals, needs, ideas, implementaiton steps, finance. Minsk Group, OSCE	deterriorating, political will needed, Minsk, new leaders	difficult, BSEC
Element 5		elites	cultural networks, assertive, domestic elections, migration
Element 6		education, ppl to ppl, no access to information, brainwashing	

Table 12. Areas of cooperation: regional hegemons/ power elements. (Source: the author.)

As shown on *Table 13,* the main neutral areas for the EU per power element are 1, 3-6. Specific is its lack of political experience and changing leadership. The neutral areas for Russia are power elements 1-5. Specific are the unilateral political decisions, attempt to diminish nationalities and to keep control through frozen conflicts. The neutral areas for Turkey are power elements 2-4. Specific are the non-rational economic governance of Erdogan, as well as the attempts for political balance in the region.

Neutral areas – likelihood to preserve regional stability (status quo)

	EU	Russia	Turkey
Element 1	defence, hybrid, cyber, no military	arsenals since Peter I,	
Element 2		political goals through economy, influence through Gazprom, instability through economy, weak economy	Erdogan not rational on economy,
Element 3	climate and ecology to get RU closer	no energy, no resources, no know-how, USSR industrialisation destroyed ecology,	extra industrialisation, chemicals, needs food,
Element 4	New-born political entity, EU Global Strategy, strategic development, fragmented, no single response, transforming system	unilateral decisions,	political balance, US, candidate for membership in the EU
Element 5	Balkan Christian orthodox - why	diminish nationalities in autonomous republics, frozen conflicts are non democratic deterrence	
Element 6	lack of information and experience		

Table 13. Neutral areas: regional hegemons/ power elements. (Source: the author.)

Future perspective

An EU official discussed the future perspective of the relations, the opportunity of EU single policy, and the internal tensions in Russia and Turkey. The unclarity of the future internal situation in each of the three IR actors was pointed out. As an unpredictable factor

for each actor was suggested the change of government. It was supposed that Russia is most probably remaining in its line of interests, while Turkey could change quickly. *Another expert* suggested that more cooperation of the EU with Russia depends on the leadership of both actors. The principles of internal existence and maintenance of an IR actor define its external policies. *An MFA diplomat* from a littoral state, sharing personal opinion, suggested that the Black Sea is poluted, because it is a closed basin, and the rivers Dnestr and Danube bring in unclean waters, which changes the flora and fauna. The EU could use soft power to make it cleaner. The EU needs to control the entry of fatal plankton and the fisheries. The Black Sea could be a transport corridor for the EU between Constantsa, Varna, Burgas, Odessa, Batumi, connecting it with Central Asia. It could provide small states with traffic of goods and people, alternative access to Iran through Armenia to the Caspian Sea. This depends on the political will of the EU, Russia and Turkey, with the agreement of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. An alternative transport way is through Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria. Recognition of independence to local frozen conflicts could repeat the case of Taiwan. *An expert from the EEAS* shared that future relations in 10 or 50 years could be examined with caution. Individual MSs have bilateral relations, which is not good for the EU. It could be changed through open relations between the governments of the MSs. The EU is slow, it could operate better. Russia and Turkey are weak if they are divided, while the EU could be strong if it maintains its values. As a key, civil society was pointed out. *Another expert, PhD,* suggested that personality of the leaders defines all future action and relations, therefore it depends on the personalities in power on how the EU, Russia and Turkey would behave.

Prospective relations in 10 years

An EU official suggested that the EU would be directed towards the Mediterranean and Africa, with priorities of security and cooperation. It was unclear whether Turkey, the Western Balkans and the Black Sea would be an EU priority. Russia was deteriorating the cooperation. Turkey was a different partner. *An expert* suggested that the EU develops a modernized Customs Union with Turkey, while cooperating with the Eurasian Union with Russia. *An EU official* suggested that the development in the EU would depend on the new personalities, deciding the new solutions and their radical ideas. The future of Russia would similarly depend on the personalities in power, but the welfare of the people would prevail over the economic power of the state, while building military capabilities remains important. A problem for the EU is the lack of information and experience, as well as different personalities. The EU Global Strategy 2016 is a result of the crises, including Ukraine 2014.

The Strategy was not drafted by MSs, but the EEAS, PESCO is related to <u>defense, hybrid and cyber</u> are going to be developed. *Another expert* suggested that in 10 years, the <u>frozen conflicts</u> would remain as Russia prefers to control through them, not to act and solve them. Mr. *Viktor Bojkov,* PhD, representing DG.NEAR of the European Commission suggested that in 10 years new policy and <u>new strategy</u> of the EU would exist towards the Black Sea region. In the EU, all regional instruments are united. Some more active countries in the EU might take shares from the less active ones. Defining for the near solution of the conflicts are the <u>elites in the Eastern Partnership countries</u> and their preferences. In personal views, *Mr. Anton Gerassimov* shared that the energy relations, particularly the Turkish Stream project between Russia, Turkey and the EU would depend on the <u>political will</u>. Russia has its own energy projects, it is very quick. The US influenced the behaviour of Bulgaria to agree, sign and then stop the South Stream project. Russia and Turkey cooperate on energy grounds, while the US and the UK extend their influence to prevent countries from participation. *Mrs. Marussya Lyubcheva, PhD,* shared that in 10 years the cooperation is reasonable. <u>A strategy of partnership</u> might exist, <u>or a war, as</u><u> the one would follow the other</u>.

Prospective relations in 50 years

An EU official suggested that the EU would grow <u>militarily,</u> if it still exists in its current shape, while the USA would decrease. Russia and Turkey could cooperate more closely on <u>economy and security</u>. Turkey remains an open question, as it is unclear whether it would choose East or West. *An interviewee* suggested that cooperation is good, but not realistic, because <u>the EU expects Russia and Turkey to align with EU rules</u>, while <u>Russia uses culture to divide EU countries</u>, and the power in Russia is kept by Kremlin. *A MFA diplomat* in personal views, suggested that asking about prediction in 50 years is not serious, because no one could know. The EU could use <u>soft power</u> in the Black Sea region. *Another expert, Mr. Boris Iarochevitch,* sharing personal views, explained that most probably the next 50 years would <u>depend on the behaviour of Russia</u>, as it would choose on what side to stay. A risky conflict is the one in Abkhazia, in Nagorno Karabakh is local but could degenerate, Azerbaijan might try to impact it. The EU could keep them frozen through the <u>Minsk Group and OSCE</u>. The next superpower is China. Free trade agreement is suggested with Georgia, Azerbaijan is interested, the <u>stability</u> in Eastern Europe is kept by <u>infrastructure and presence</u>. The EU tries to connect Azerbaijan and Georgia through agreements. The <u>Muslim </u>population in Azrebaijan and Turkey, as well as the <u>Turkish and Turkic</u> speaking population is a strong factor in the regional relations. Turkey and Azerbaijan might unite against Armenia in

Nagorno Karabakh. Turkey controls the functioning of the <u>Southern Gas Corridor, TAP, TANAP</u>. *Another expert* suggested that strategic planning in 50 years is impossible, as it is not clear what will be the <u>internal state</u> of each of the three IR actors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, in the future. According to *Mr. Viktor Bojkov, PhD,* representing DG.NEAR of the European Commission, it is not clear what the EU will possess in 50 years. It might generate new agreements, after smooth political change. Russia and Turkey might change, depending on the <u>leaders</u> who inherit the power. The solution of the conflicts would depend on whether they would be opponents or not. Mr. Anton Gerassimov suggested that cooperation in 50 years is possible, but unlikely. The supply of gas depends on the <u>instability in the Middle East</u>, the tactical advantage of countries. The <u>markets depend on power, money and influence.</u> Conflicts are decided by power. Moving away hydrocarbons from the US dollar is bad for the US, because enormous US debt would reduce domestic consumption, which is not an acceptable option. A <u>unified EU strategy</u> would strengthen its position, but it lacks military segments. Turkey is the second largest NATO member. The EU could learn from Turkey, but this idea opposes the current trends in the EU. To be stronger in the Black Sea region, the EU needs a united <u>military.</u> *Another expert, PhD,* sharing personal views suggested that the relations in 10 years would depend on the <u>internal transformations</u> of the EU, while in 50 years would depend on whether it is still existing. *Mrs. Marussya Lyubcheva, PhD,* suggested that in 50 years a new EU would exist, constructed without war, and wars not to happen. Now the EU is constructed on an old model. The Soviet Union was built on republics. The EU was built to counterstand the Soviet Union, and it was successful. But, currently the EU is weaker while Russia gets stronger[40]. The Soviet Union had a model of specialization, each country was producing the best according to its own characteristics. The EU, differently, tries to make the countries equal. The countries are rich in human resources, but weak in human capital, from which the EU loses. After the '90s, the EU refused to plan, which was a mistake. Centralisation prepares capacity, while <u>planning is a process.</u>

The opinions about the future development of the relations are united around some basic foundations. *First,* the personality of the leaders and the leaders in power in each IR actor define its action. The change of government defines the internal stability and the external behaviour of the IR actor. New leaders come with new ideas and new strategies. *Second,* transport, infrastructure and energy are important, especially for Turkey and Russia. The Southern Gas corridor, TAP, TANAP, Turkish Stream are among the aspects to

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[40] This opinion is from 2019, prior to the existence of a war in Ukraine.

reconsider. Ecology is important for the EU in the Black Sea. It requires soft power action by the EU, as well as political will by all actors. *Third,* the military capacity of the EU is weak, while Russia and Turkey are better prepared on this ground. Security and cooperation of the EU are important, but are directed elsewhere, towards the Mediterranean. Defense combines also hybrid and cyber. The EU needs military growth, while Russia and Turkey need cooperation on economy and security. *Fourth,* the political relations between the EU and Turkey might be supported by the Customs Union, while between the EU and Russia with the Eurasian Union. The EU needs a new strategy. It might happen before or after a war. The behaviour of Russia is defining for the future relations, as well as that of Turkey. It depends on how they would choose to act. OSCE and the Minsk Group are favourable for the EU. *Fifth,* civil society is also important, elites in the EaP define the course of action. An IR actor is strong if united and weak if divided. Russia uses culture to divide. Turkey uses Muslims and Turkic language as its own assets. Frozen conflicts are kept by Russia as a tool to control. *Sixth,* planning and human capital is a key to the future transformation of the EU. The internal transformation of each IR actor defines their action.

Conclusion on the results of expert interviews

The information I collected for the competition, cooperation and neutral power elements corresponds to the framework of six power elements. Most of it corresponds to the literature and current debates. Based on the opinions of the experts, some new areas of competition and cooperation could be added. To each area of interest, I shared pieces of interesting information. While some experts discuss the main ideas, related to the international behaviour of the three actors within the six power elements, others suggest new topics. The overall agreement among experts is discussed as future prognosis of the strategic cooperation. Some specific suggestions and observations were pointed out.

In conclusion, the results confirm that the division of six elements of power in the selected categories is suitable to the case study of Russia, Turkey and the EU in the Black Sea region. The newly built concept of six power elements to the areas of competition and cooperation is applicable to the case study. Findings on the areas of competition and cooperation were discussed.

A limitation of this method is that from the three regional competitors in this research, they show mainly the EU perspective, while discussing some potential attitudes of Russia and Turkey.

6.4. Conclusion and next chapters

In this chapter, I selected the contemporary three competitors in the BSR. I outlined their bilateral competition-cooperation dynamics in the region. A brief summary of each of the subchapters follows.

Actors and interests in the Black Sea region

The Black Sea region has been a zone of competition for influence by different actors during different times. This is not a historical analysis, but it only suggests three of the most active competitors and outlines some of their basic interests in the region. The Black Sea region has been selected as a case study where competition for redistribution of the zones of regional influence happens in the post-Cold War period. This period pre-defines the selection of the most active regional actors at that time - the EU, Russia and Turkey.

Historically, Russia and Turkey perceive the region as a zone over which each of them dominates. Control over the resources and beliefs attracts them. Russia's strategic interest is to control the Black Sea straits, which is also Turkey's interest. Their basic interest of both, leading to competition, is control over the straits. Due to their strategic location, this provides military security, energy security and economic benefits.

In the post-Cold War period, Russia and NATO continued the previous competition for influence in the region. This was a contradiction of the East vs. the West. In the South, Turkey might have further historical interests, but I am not going to explore it. However, belonging to organisations in the region has effects on their capabilities to react. Turkey is both a NATO member, therefore competing with Russia, and a BSEC founder, therefore partnering with Russia. This double attitude of Turkey shows that it has a separate interest, different from each of these two sides.

The EU is another actor on the side of Western values. As such, it might prolong the competition between East and West, or even South. This competition has progressed in the countries where current international conflicts and security crises happen. Since the ideological war in Ukraine, the EU has increased its current interest in the region. Prior to that, for the EU the Black Sea region is a maritime security interest, the least developed of its six maritime regions.The EU has been at the Black Sea coast since 2007, due to its new member states with littoral territory, Bulgaria and Romania. The historical presence of these countries in the region is: Bulgaria since 681, while Romania only since WWI, 1918. Apart from them, Greece also had historical interest in the region. However, I do not examine these states separately, but as EU members, who contribute to forming the EU common foreign and

security policy. The EU, as a single IR actor, enters the competition in terms of economy, governance and norms.

Bilateral relations, competition-cooperation areas

The geopolitical interests of the EU, Russia and Turkey in the Black Sea region define their key areas of competition. Due to the dynamics of different actors and interests in the region, their patterns of relations change between competition-cooperation. As a result of the different interests for different actors, other areas of interaction in these relations appear. I here discuss some of these areas. The bilateral relations of the three selected participants, Russia, Turkey, and the EU, are discussed in this context. These include both ideological and material areas of competition-cooperation.

In the theoretical chapter, I develop these areas through conceptual analysis of power in international relations. I call the derived units *elements of power* and group them into six basic categories. In the empirical chapter, I assess these groups of interests of the three actors in their foreign and security policy strategies

7. THE EUROPEAN UNION: SIX ELEMENTS OF POWER IN THE EU GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY. A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Due to the double role of the EU as a regional competitor and a peace provider, I examine several aspects in this chapter. First, I briefly outline the internal structure of the EU and how this affects the construction of a foreign and security policy strategy. Then, I justify the selected strategic documents and assessment method. Third, I assess them and discuss the results.

7.1. Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to assess the value the EU attributes to the elements of power. I have selected the strategic document that shapes its external image for the period between the two major security crises. It is the EU Global Strategy from 2016. I analyse briefly the 2016 EUGS, and then its yearly progress reports from 2017, 2018 and 2019. As a result, the yearly changes in the perceived importance of each element of power are noted. The findings highlight the changes in EU perception of each power element. It is embedded in the research questions: *If power perception leads to conflict, then what is power as external influence for the EU, Russia and Turkey?How are power and influence perceived in the security strategies of the regional competitors*? The specific subquestion, addressed in this chapter, is: *How has the EU changed its perception of the six power elements, measured in the EU Global Strategy and its yearly progress reports?* I assess it through discourse analysis. I assume that the six power elements show the external influence aimed by the EU.

This empirical chapter follows the analytical framework of six elements of power. Within them, it assesses the EU perception of power. First, I outline some of the specific characteristics of the European Union foreign policy making. Then, I analyse the relevant for the selected period foreign and security policy strategies of the EU. I assess the change of attributed value to the six elements of power.

The EU has two perspectives in this research - as a world conflict prevention actor and as a regional competitor in the Black Sea region. I am writing from the perspective within the EU. This research is created, in support of the EU's role as a regional peace provider. However, within the research I examine the European Union as an equal regional power in the Black Sea region, along with Russia and Turkey.

The EU as a conflict prevention actor

The consequences of recent security crises in close proximity of the European Union (EU) directly affect it. These are: the 2022 war in Ukraine, the 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russia-Ukraine conflict, the 2008 war in Georgia; the 2016 terrorist attacks, the 2016 Brexit referendum; the 2015 migration crisis following the Syrian war; the 2020 intensification of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan supported by Turkey; the 2020 violation of the Cypriot Exclusive Economic Zone and Turkish revisionism as regards the 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea; and the world health crisis covid-19.

I explore the regional security crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region. For the EU, its South-Eastern neighbourhood is affected by the dynamics of relations between Russia and Turkey. Their competition for influence intensifies the crises while their cooperation enhances stability. Aiming for regional stability, the EU needs to identify in advance the strategic interests of the other regional competitors. Then, it could project its own external interests.

The EU as a regional competitor

The EU should position itself in the competition between the great powers, along with Russia and China (Biscop, 2019:3), and the regional powers such as Turkey. Some geopolitical competitors only recognise hard power, despite the EU's attempt to combine it with soft power (Biscop, 2016:3).A main EU challenge is to find identity and a role in international relations, transforming it from a civilian and normative power to a 'normal international actor' (Tereszkiewicz, 2019). It is significant for the EU to clarify its own foreign and security policy priorities. To be perceived as an equal, the EU needs to strengthen its hard power capabilities. The Strategic Compass redefines the EU as a 'type of security and defence actor' (Fiott, 2020:8) in the context of the 'geopolitical competition' (Fiott, 2020:2). The Strategic Compass is a 'politico-military' component of the EUGS (Biscop, 2019:4). I do not assess it, but the process of transforming the EU foreign and security policy concept - the Global Strategy.

Indeed, I assess the perception of power of the three actors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, in their respective foreign and security policy strategies. Prior to that, I briefly outline the process of foreign and security policy making of the EU.

Structure

The structure of this chapter is in two parts - literature review on the specifics of the EU in the process of foreign policy making and assessment of power perception in the EU foreign and security policy strategy.

EU Foreign Policy Making. First, the foreign policy making process of the EU is briefly outlined. This is necessary, because of its functioning as a united foreign policy actor composed of 27 member states. I outline the main academic debates regarding the EU strategy for foreign and security policy, including the European Security Strategy (ESS) 2003, the EUGS 2016 and the Strategic Compass 2022. Second, literature by EU foreign policy experts shows the importance of the power elements from the IR theoretical framework. It identifies other EU-specific elements of power.

Elements of Power in the EU Foreign and Security Policy Strategy. The methodology explains the selected six elements of power in IR theory. I refer to the power elements as the areas over which international actors exert external influence. I select the corresponding strategy to be assessed and method of assessment.

7.2. The EU Foreign and Security Policy Making

7.2.1. Internal characteristics: unity, members, leadership

The first challenge in the EU foreign and security policy is its unity. Some internal EU debates of all MS affect it: their unified decision, the choice of perceived threats, common action (Biscop, 2014), time and initiative (Tocci, 2017). After the European Security Strategy in 2003, a new goal was for Member States to 'feel ownership of the EUGS' (Biscop, 2016:6; Tocci, 2017). As a result, despite internal Euroscepticism the EUGS 'was agreed, line by line by all 28 Member States' at that time (Tocci, 2016:5).

The EU needs analysis on the threat location and crisis-prevention tools. Its foreign and security policy strategy should combine vital security interests with the MS' common action (Biscop, 2014:25). Three corresponding terms are created in the EUGS. Firstly, the '*strategic autonomy*' to decide and act upon decisions (Tocci, 2016:3). Secondly, a '*comprehensive approach*' of using all available instruments coherently, with the local and regional conflict dimensions approached by acting locally and internationally (Tocci, 2016:3). Thirdly, '*defence cooperation*' meaning 'enhanced cooperation as well as permanent structured cooperation between groups of willing and able Member States' (Tocci, 2016:4).

The second challenge in the EU foreign policy is time and members. EU foreign policy is affected by time and status change between internal/external countries. For example,

the UK's constructive participation in the EUGS challenged its legitimacy (Tocci, 2016) after the UK became an external actor. Some external to the EU countries within the neighbourhood might become new members. This would bring new perceptions of security and power. Different Member States were in place in 2003, 2016 and 2020.

The third challenge is the change of leadership. Global challenges and the internal EU structure both changed over time. For example, J. Solana created a concept of entirely Security Strategy in 2003, while due to changed HR/VP duties F. Mogherini created a broader concept of Global Strategy 2016 (Tocci, 2016). In 2022 the next HR/VP Josep Borrell created a newer version of foreign and security policy strategy - the Strategic Compass. I examine power as consisting of security and influence. The EU initially created a security strategy in 2003, which relates to the internal meaning of power. The EU created a Global Strategy, related to its external influence, in 2016. And, again, it returned its threat analysis of security perceptions for the Strategic Compass in 2022, also including the external aspects of influence.

Security depends on the type of perceived threats, geographical proximity and how they affect the EU. It can address internal or external threats, natural or man-made disasters, calamities, flood, fire, pollution, resource scarcity, international political crises, military conflicts, wars, terrorism, disinformation, etc. A security strategy aims to respond efficiently by preserving geographical borders, human beings, governance regimes and the natural environment. External influence is further examined in the strategies, which refer to it.

7.2.2. External characteristics: strategic image, threat response, geopolitical influence

This literature shows views of EU foreign policy analysts - D. Fiott (2020), A. Mattelaer (2016), S. Biscop (2014;2016;2019), G. Lindstrom (2014), and N. Tocci (2016;2017), the EUGS author and adviser of the HR/VP F. Mogherini. It outlines some EU-specific characteristics in the EU's foreign and security policy strategies: the EU Global Strategy 2016, the European Security Strategy 2003, and the Strategic Compass 2022. I briefly mention the process underlying the creation of each strategy. However, my focus is not the internal process, but the external perception of power for the EU, shown in its Global Strategy.

The main goals of the EUGS and the Strategic Compass are to address external threats and to promote internal EU stability (Biscop 2019; Fiott 2020). The number of times a specific threat appears in the security strategies of the MSs shows their different perception of threats (Fiott, 2020:5), which in turn leads to different priorities. The different perceptions are

a challenge to forming a united foreign and security policy. I relate the threats for MSs identified by Fiott (2020), to my analytical framework of the elements of power. Then, I add academic views on external challenges for the EU. Also, I comment on some tools to address them. I later examine them through the content of the EUGS.

Military / Security. Threats perceived by MS (Fiott, 2020): weapons, proliferation, violent conflict and military, frozen conflicts, terrorism, radicalisation and extremism, maritime security, piracy. Challenges for the EU: security and defence, terrorism (Tocci, 2017:86), WMD proliferation (Lindstrom, 2014:17), 'hard power capacities' (Boeing, Kremer&vanLoon, 2013), military capabilities, crisis prevention, intervention and stabilisation, NATO, civilian infrastructure, commitment, defence cooperation, situation awareness, rapid response, capacity-building (Andersson, Fiott & Missiroli, 2016), security, war and crises (Biscop, 2016:2), type of forces, tasks and timing in defence planning (Mattelaer, 2016:35), defence and military cooperation with NATO(Wosolsobe, 2016), 'military planning and conduct capability' (Missiroli, 2017:6). *Tools:* the German Presidency of the Council 2020 proposed an updated EU security and defence strategy clarifying the 'threats and challenges' with common EU objectives - 'crisis management, resilience, capabilities and partnerships' (German Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2020).

Economy / Investment. Threats perceived by MS (Fiott, 2020): economic instability, critical infrastructure, access of goods, poverty, health, social exclusion. *Challenges for the EU:* trade, development (Tocci, 2016:2), connectivity (Andersson, Fiott & Missiroli 2016), reducing poverty and stimulating equality (Biscop, 2016:2). *Tools:* financial instruments (Tocci, 2017:86; Missiroli, 2017:6), 'context-specific, conflict-sensitive (…) understanding of situations and risks', 'mobilisation of resources and responses' (Missiroli, 2017:6), financial stability and common research as defence instruments (Mattelaer, 2016:36).

Energy / Climate. Threats perceived by MSs (Fiott, 2020): resource scarcity, energy, climate, environment. *Challenges for the EU:* energy, climate, migration (Tocci, 2016; Biscop, 2016:2). *Tools:* sustainable development (Tocci, 2017:86).

Diplomacy / Political agreements. Geographical location is a substantial factor when defining threats (Mattelaer, 2016:36). The most important for the EU external actors are those with geographical proximity. These include the Eastern Partnership countries, the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East; the great powers Russia, the USA and China; the regional power Turkey, and all countries on the European continent.

Threats perceived by MSs (Fiott, 2020): espionage and intelligence, EU disunity, the international order, North Korea, the Western Balkans, North-Atlantic, Russia, the Black Sea

region. *Challenges for the EU:* indecisiveness, non-unified MS, 'authoritarian regimes', 'unresolved conflicts' (Eris, 2013:61), coherence, 'differentiated integration' (Boeing, Kremer & vanLoon, 2013), diplomacy, joined up internal-external topics (Tocci, 2017:86), third countries, strategic autonomy, Russia (Andersson, Fiott &Missiroli, 2016), neighbourhood, stable regions, global governance (Biscop, 2016:2), 'resilience in the EU neighbours and surrounding countries' (Missiroli, 2017:6). *Tools:* EU neighbourhood stability building, international multilateral partnerships, and regions of action (Lindstrom, 2014:17).

The EU concerns in its neighbourhood include cyber, infrastructure, diplomacy, state-building, EU coherence, prevention, climate, reconciliation, security, economy, demography, democracy, nationalism, elections, reforms, peace, sovereignty, pragmatism, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, oligarchy, authoritarian, military, policy, intelligence, political – all of which open space for external influence (Gaub & Popescu, 2017:94). The challenge over EaP and Central Asia is the perceived Russian sphere of influence, while in the Western Balkans the challenge is from corruption, economic risks, disinformation, destabilisation, possible 'civil conflicts or failed states', to which the EU responds through diplomacy, economic policy, military security, and strategic communication (Missiroli, 2017:8). The Middle East and North Africa are perceived as vulnerable also in politics, climate, energy, cyber, environment, demography, economics, food, conflict (Missiroli, 2017:8). This differentiation shows that the EU should specify the geographical regions attracting its interest, so as to provide appropriate measures to address the specific regional needs. The diplomatic attitude of the EU is demonstrated through its connectivity with China and EU-ASEAN, dialogue with Iran, patience towards Russia, strategic trade with Japan, the US, Mercosur and India, but its diplomatic initiatives to deal with crises need improvement (Biscop, 2016:4).

Government/Institutions/Norms. Threats perceived by MSs (Fiott, 2020): illegal migration and human trafficking, organised crime, state failure, demography. *Challenges for the EU:* organised crime, regional conflicts and state failure (Lindstrom, 2014:17) migration, international crime, bottom-up approach, institutionalisation (Andersson, Fiott & Missiroli, 2016). *Tools:* According to the first version of EU Security Strategy '*spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order*' (European Security Strategy, 2003:11). A substantial element of EU power is the ability to change 'norms, standards and prescriptions of world politics' (Manners, 2008 in Eris, 2013:55). The normative power of the EU towards its

neighbourhood has reinforced its own security, by addressing 'the threat of neighbourhood disorder spilling across its border' (Eris, 2013:70).

Society (identity, education, religion, nationalism, beliefs) and **Information Access (language, media, I-net, websites, travel/exchange).** Threats perceived by MSs (Fiott, 2020): hybrid threats (disinformation, election interference, propaganda), digital, technological and cyber threats, values, nationalism. *Challenges for the EU:* hybrid, cyber, communication (Andersson, Fiott & Missiroli, 2016), 'common values and interests' (Missiroli, 2017:6). *Tools:* How power is perceived in the receiving entity is of strategic importance for a global actor. Addressing 'images and perceptions' in 'EU public diplomacy' is a key element of 'public opinion and media framing' in the EU's interests (Chaban & Holland, 2019:2).

7.3. Methodology and methods: discourse analysis

The selected methodology follows an inductive approach. It starts with a conceptual differentiation between the six elements of power in IR. It is slightly different for the EU from the one for Russia and Turkey. It justified the selected Global Strategy and its yearly assessments as the foreign and security policy concept of the EU. It justifies the selected discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis.

Analytical framework: six elements of power

I assess the perceived external influence of the EU through the six power elements. My definition of power follows the classical IR theorists such as D. Baldwin (1997; 2006), K. Waltz (1979), R. Keohane (1977; 1988; 2012), J. Nye (1997; 2013; 2020; 2023) and contemporary scholar T. Casier (2016; 2018). I developed a framework of six power elements in international relations. My interpretation of power is: a set of tools that provides IR actors - states or supranational organisations - with the ability to guarantee internal security and to exert external influence over external political entities. My grouping of the power elements is valid for the XXIst century. The hard power elements relate to the physical survival of a state, its security and its defence. This refers to the material root causes of conflict: 1) *Military/Security*, 2) *Economy/Investment* and 3) *Energy/Climate*. The soft power elements relate to influence through the political choices of a state, its governance and people. This refers to the ideological root causes of conflict: 4) *Diplomatic/Political Agreements*, 5) *Government/Institutions/Norms*, 6) *Society* (constructing consciousness, education, religion, nationalism) and *Information Access* (language, local media, internet sites, travel/exchange).

Documents and time: the EU Global Strategy and its yearly assessments

I examine the text of the EUGS and its yearly assessments. In them, I identify the relative share of each of the six elements of power in the EU Global Strategy 2016 and its annual assessments from 2017, 2018 and 2019. The chapter concludes with a discussion over the findings for each power element. The discussion shows how the perception of each of the six elements of power has transformed in the subsequent three years. Later, I compare the EU perception over the six power elements with the perception of Russia and Turkey.

This analysis only assesses the EUGS as the strategic image that the EU presents to the world, and its yearly reviews for the selected time period. I recognise the complicated process of creating an EU foreign and security policy strategy, due to the complex structure of the EU consisting of 27 Member States, and having constant leadership changes. However, this analysis does not enter into internal details, for example whether and which parts of it were endorsed by the EU member states, whether the HR/VP initiative is implemented or whether it served interests of specific EU member states. The analysis is based on the presumption that a document called *EU Global Strategy* presents the self-image of the EU in the global stage. I further assess foreign and security policy strategies of other IR actors. Therefore, it is not necessary to enter into details of who was exactly involved in the writing or how many people were consulted. The document acts as a strategy of an IR actor being announced and implemented, which is an equal basis of comparison between the strategies of the selected regional competitors.

Assessment method: discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis

This chapter aims to find out how the perception of each of the elements of power changes for the EU. As such, it examines its EU foreign and security policy strategies corresponding to the selected time. A discourse analysis shows the changes of EU attitude towards each power element. I follow the discourse of change on each power element within each next strategy. This indicates the yearly changes in a four year period, 2016-2020.

Through the method of qualitative content analysis, I assess the relative weight of each of the six power elements in each of the four documents. Within each document, I assess the changing value of perceived power elements. I assess each separate document by measuring the corresponding number of pages per power element. I examine the number share as a percentage of the whole document. I assess the change in each next document. This shows the progress by the EU on each power element and the suggested further areas for

improvement per year. As a result, the value attributed by the EU to each element of power is measured. The tendencies of the EU to strengthen its external influence over certain areas is indicated.

I apply the following analytical steps, typical for content analysis (Elo et al, 2014:2):

First, I selected the unit of analysis. These are six elements of power, assessed in the foreign and security policy strategies of the three competitors. The power elements are, for the EU: military, economic/investment, energy/climate, diplomatic/political, governance/institutions/norms, society/information access. For Russia and Turkey: military/security, economic/investment, energy/climate, diplomatic/political, governance/society , information access/exchange. There is a difference in elements 5 and 6, because of the nature of the IR actor. For the EU, the governance is separate from the society, while the society is together with information. For Russia and Turkey, the society is together with the governance, while information is a separate power element.

Second, I tested the coding of elements of power by reviewing academic literature specifically for the EU. It is focused on EU foreign and security policy strategies – the European Security Strategy 2003, the EUGS 2016 and the Strategic Compass 2020. Searching for correspondence to the pre-defined six elements, I identified a new EU-specific power element – unity.

Third, I collected suitable empirical data sets – the EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy 2016, and each of its annual assessments in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Fourth, in the four documents, I examined how each selected power element changes. I examine it as a share of the content of the whole document. Then, I compare it with the other documents.

Fifth, reporting the results, I explained the proportional change represented by each element of power in each document. I detect three types of changes: in the number of pages per power element, in the meaning encoded in a power element, or by new elements added. This showed the gradual change of the EU perceived value of each power element.

The analysis is trustworthy as it only assesses the very specific progress of the EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy. Its internal validity is limited, because it does not examine all processes, internal debates and preceding documents which led to a Global Strategy. It only assesses the image projected by the EU to the world through this strategy. Its external validity is high, as it could compare the perceived power elements in the foreign and security policy strategies with other regional or world competitors. I compare the perception

based on the same sample of years, 2016-2020, and the same framework of six elements of power.

7.4. Results: the EUGS 2016 and its annual assessments in 2017, 2018 and 2019

The results show the changing perception of strategic external influence elements for the EU. The six elements of power serve as an analytical framework. I examine the relative weight of each element of power in the EUGS 2016 and its annual assessments from 2017, 2018 and 2019.

7.4.1.   Volumes and key messages

The EUGS was published in June 2016 soon after the terrorist attacks in Brussels from March 2016. It provides a vision of the EU's foreign and security policy in 57 pages. Its main message is the unity of the union, with a concluding 7 pages on converting 'vision into action' through shared assessment, joined-up union, thinking further than soft power, and using different types of diplomacy focusing on the economic, cultural and energy spheres (EUGS 2016:44-51). The main principles of external action are outlined on 2 pages as 'principled pragmatism', unity, engagement, responsibility and partnership (EUGS 2016:16-18). The external priorities are outlined on one page and address: 'security of our union', democracy and prosperity, terrorism, cyber, climate, economy (EUGS 2016:18). This optimistic view on the future of the EU and the global arena focuses primarily on diplomacy.

The 2017 EUGS report is 35 pages long, less than 2/3 of the size of the original Global Strategy. The foreword by HR/VP Mogherini in the first 9 pages addresses the fast changes in the world order which led to the Brexit vote, and also the UN development cooperation and global alliances. The EU aims to prove itself as a global power by providing security globally. Its actions are directed towards the SDGs, prevention of wars, coping with humanitarian disasters, refugee crises, cooperation, neighbourhood policy, migration and terrorism. A key message for the EU again is that '*together, we*' are strong (EUGS, Year1.2017:1-9). The priorities include NATO, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, climate, unity between the MS and the EU institutions, and internal-external stability. The new message, conveyed over 7 pages, is that the world is changing quickly with more wars and insecurity, and the EU should unite its institutions - Council, Commission, Parliament - and its Member States in responding through investment in Syria, Turkey, Africa and Libya, and addressing migration, terrorism, trafficking, smuggling, organised crime and cybersecurity,

whilst aiming to achieve the UN 2030 SDGs (EUGS 2017: 25-32). The next steps are security and defence, public diplomacy, and continuity in the common action.

The 2018 EUGS report is only 17 pages long, relatively half of the year 1 report and 1/3 of the full text of the strategy. Its introduction takes just 1 page, to outline the unpredictability within the international institutions, the constant challenges to the international order, the declining respect for human rights and democracy, the lack of a solution for Syria, conflicts in Yemen and Gaza, but the territorial defeat of Da'esh. It underlines the strengths of the EU in multilateral diplomacy: lasting solutions, cooperation, international rules guarantees, the Iran nuclear agreement, closer Western Balkans, and strong global governance aiming for climate and migration solutions. The new final message hints about a 'European Security and Defence Union', openness towards Asia, the Americas, the WTO. It reaffirms the need for unity to demonstrate credibility both to EU citizens and external partners.

The 2019 EUGS assessment substantially changes from the previous ones. It contains 59 pages, 33 of which are a report, while 26 pages show the practical achievements of the EUGS in figures. The foreword of 2 pages is focused on UN peacekeeping, the UN Security Council, multilateralism, negotiations, NATO, Africa, ASEAN, Syria, Venezuela, Libya, Afghanistan, trust funds and political will. It suggests transforming in a more credible, responsive and joined-up union, described over 3 pages. Its main goals relate to the international financial institutions, the development banks of the MS, visibility through public diplomacy, communication against disinformation, implementing the UN SDGs through combined efforts on humanitarian development and peace actions, and, lastly, coordination of the EU's internal and external images on migration, diplomacy in the economic, cultural and digital dimensions (EUGS 2019:26-29). The next EU strategic goals are intelligence, strategic culture, defence cooperation, command and control, technology, access to routes and networks, an autonomous EU and principled pragmatism.

The preamble of the EUGS 2016 highlights the EU's internal strength as a key element of power, constantly affirmed through terms denoting mutual commitment, such as 'we', 'us', 'our unity', 'shared' (EUGS, 2016:8), 'our principles, our interests, and our priorities', signaled by the HR/VP at that time F. Mogherini (EUGS, 2016:3). They attribute ownership to and promote a mutual approach by all Member States. These words indicate that acting alone is not sufficient, while together they are strong. The vocabulary of mutual ownership is regularly used in the EUGS 2016, while in the assessment reports for 2017 and 2018 it slowly decreases, and is limited in 2019.

The transformation between 2016 and 2019 was from an optimistic to a pragmatic view. This reflects the constant security crises in the rapidly changing world. While in 2016 various diplomatic tools are highlighted, together with the importance of internal unity, in 2018 more pragmatic action is suggested, which requires multilateral partnerships with international organisations and different IR actors. Other types of multilateralism are sought, aiming to address the different types of security challenges worldwide. Unity is needed by the EU both internally and externally, to demonstrate strength. Funds with significant budgets are allocated to support these purposes.

	2016 EUGS	2017 EUGS Year 1	2018 EUGS Year 2	2019 EUGS Year 3
Total pages	57	35	17	59 (33 report/ 26 results)
Opening	13 (vision)	9 (SDGs)	1 (unpredictability)	2 (UN, NATO, multilateralism, trust funds)
Military	4 (NATO) 4 (conflicts/ crises)	4 (integrated approach, PRISM), 4 (sec/def, PESCO)	2 (def. research) 2 (investment, legal migration, UN, NATO, OSCE, CoE, CSDP, Europol, Frontex)	5 (Security Union, funds, CARD, MPCC, EDF, Atalanta, SIAC, EDTIB)
Economy/ Investment	n/a	Sec/def, dev/co, UN, WB, Colombia TF	Nat. def. spending, EU def. fund, EU peace facility	EUR 27 bln , variety of funds
Energy/ Climate	n/a	12 (climate, Africa, Middle East, Lat.Am)	n/a	n/a
Diplomacy/ Politics	5 (East-South), 7 (cooperative regional orders)	2 (public diplomacy)	3 (EU transformative power, econ. dipl., Youth/Women, Peace and Security)	1 (Brexit, W. Balkans, Iran) 7 (transforming multilateralism)
Governance/ Institutions	5 (international law)	7 (res./ integr. appr.)	3 (resilience/ integr.appr./reg.order)	4 (res/integr. appr)
Society/ Information access	4 (citizens' interests)	12 (SDGs, youth, education, health, empl.)	1 (int-ext, social groups inclusion)	1 (connected, contested, complex – disinform., cyber, pol. narratives)
Final/ Next steps/ Way of work	7 (vision/action, dipl.)	10 (sec./def., dipl., continuity)	4 (European Security and Defence Union)	5 (credible, visibility, fin. inst.)

| Main message | Unity of the Union | Insecurities, Together we are strong | EU credibility internal/external | Intelligence, EU autonomy, principled pragmatism |

Table 14. Key priorities in the EUGS and its yearly assessments: proportional allocation of pages to the six elements of power. (Source: the author. Published in: Kirilova, 22)

7.4.2. Perceived elements of power

Military / Security

In the EUGS 2016 only 4 pages are devoted to security and defence, NATO, counter-terrorism, cyber, energy and strategic communication (EUGS 2016:19-23). 'Conflicts and crises' are located in additional 4 pages, where the EU aims concern peacebuilding, pre-emptive peace, stabilisation, rapid crisis response, conflict settlement, protecting human lives through health, education, basic goods, employment, and 'restrictive measures' (EUGS 2016: 28-32). Such action could be implemented only from a position of power, if recognised by the vulnerable state and by the aggressor in international relations. The progress on priorities is substantial during the 2016-2019 EU foreign and security policy strategy development.

In the EUGS 2017 Year 1 assessment, the SDGs have key importance, including security and defence, but also enlargement, development, trade, migration, climate, environment, culture, resilience and East-South relations (EUGS 2017:12-16), also wars, humanitarian disasters, Iran, Tunisia, Latin America, Caribbean, early warning, prevention, resilience. The term 'Integrated approach to conflicts and crises' is introduced, addressing Syria, Colombia, Afghanistan; a diplomatic push for PRISM (prevention of conflict, rule of law, security sector reform, integrated approach, stabilisation and mediation); necessity to develop multilevel local, national and regional dialogue; a crisis response mechanism to address Sahel, Libya, CSDP missions; introduction of conflict analysis, embassies on the ground, geographical interests in Jordan, Egypt, Burundi, Central African Republic, Mali, Somalia, Nigeria (EUGS 2017: 16-20). Particularly to security and defence, 4 pages are dedicated, introducing PESCO, permanent planning, civil-military operations and battlegroups (EUGS 2017:20-24), which shows interests in military development and Arab and African crisis regions.

The EUGS 2018 Year 2 report devotes 2 pages to security and defence, outlining research on defence, strong EU unity aiming to provide internal safety via global peace, for

which it needs: national defence spending, operative PESCO, movement of troops and vehicles, common missions and operations, joint military training and mobility, maritime surveillance, cyber information sharing, addressing terrorism, organised crime, border security, radicalisation, smuggling, training Libyan coastguards, saving lives, in partnership with NATO, UN Central Africa, Mali, Sahel, Libya, Somalia, operation Sophia, Women, Peace and Security (EUGS 2018:6-8). Additional 2 pages are devoted to changes in addressing the security challenges via investment, legal migration, protection, UN, NATO, ASEAN, OSCE, CoE, CSDP missions, Justice and Home Affairs agencies, Europol, Frontex, Radicalisation Awareness Fund, a new budget for development and cooperation in the EU neighbourhood, public diplomacy and strategic communication (EUGS 2018: 14-16). This shows a tendency towards partnership with international organisations, joined military efforts and spending for military conflict zones worldwide. But less attention is given to milder methods in the EU neighbourhood.

The EUGS 2019 Year 3 assessment introduces the term 'Security Union', described over 5 pages. It lists particular actions in 16 civilian and military missions, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, Military Planning and Conduct Capability, operational readiness of 25 MSs, European Defence Fund, aiming to provide military peace support, maritime security, the Atalanta operation, piracy in the Horn of Africa, Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity, European Defence and Technological Industrial Base, and defence cooperation covering space, air, land, maritime, and common training (EUGS 2019:10-14). These specific actions in the area of security and defence increase constantly showing a different face of the EU – that of a security power.

Economy / Investment

The EUGS 2016 limitedly mentions economic security which the EU provides to external regions as a main power tool. However, this changes considerably up to the last evaluation in 2019. In the EUGS 2017 assessment, different types of funds are identified – security and defence, CSDP missions, development and cooperation, partnership with the UN and the World Bank, Colombia Trust Fund (EUGS 2017:16-20). The specific funds in the EUGS 2018 report are European Defence Fund in the Multiannual Financial Framework for research and capabilities, European Peace Facility with new budget (EUGS 2018: 6-8). In contrast, the EUGS 2019 annex shows examples of about EUR 27 billion invested in security and defence via different funds, and particular steps to generate joint funds for specific issues in conflict and war zones worldwide, which brings hard power credibility to the EU through

its strongest asset – economic investment. But there is no guarantee on how exactly the funding is implemented, by whom and for what purposes it is spent, which might devalue the EU's image from a strong actor to a weak donor.

Energy/ Climate

Surprisingly, not much attention is devoted to energy dependence as a security challenge in EUGS 2016. However, a number of MSs are highly dependent on external energy supply, which is critical for their security. In the 2017 EUGS assessment, the importance of energy security rises, together with climate change and insecurities in the Middle East, Northern Africa and Latin America (2017 EUGS: 12-24), because resource scarcity is considered a reason for global migration. During the next years energy and climate remained aside on the EU foreign policy agenda, due to military security crises, wars and violent conflicts. However, during the war in Ukraine in 2022, it became evident that energy security is a significant vulnerability of the EU.

Diplomacy / Politics

The EUGS 2016 addresses 'state and societal resilience' in the East-South over 5 pages, listing enlargement, neighbourhood, SDGs, humanitarian, development, migration, trade, investment, education, health and research policies (EUGS 2016:23-28). The biggest share of 7 pages is for 'cooperative regional orders' addressing democracy, rule of law, human rights, free choice, disagreements and cooperation with Russia, 'peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa', terrorism, demography, migration, climate, 'closer Atlantic', 'connected Asia', China, and intellectual property (EUGS 2016:32-39). These priorities portray an optimistic view towards the world, which changes over the next few years. From aiming for peace and prosperity, the EU focus turns to managing security crises. The EUGS 2017 assessment addresses public diplomacy over 2 pages, including a geopolitical approach towards Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Arab world, Morocco, Algeria, Beirut, Tunisia, the Western Balkans, and thematic dialogue with youth, inclusion in decision-making, public diplomacy, partnerships, and capacity of delegations (EUGS 2017:30-32).

The EUGS 2018 assessment introduces cooperative regional orders with EU transformative power in the Western Balkans, the Sofia Declaration promoting good-neighbourly relations between Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, EaP, addressing disinformation, corruption, youth, Russian civil society,

African humanitarian and development issues, US common objectives, CETA with Canada, MERCOSUR with Latin America, a number of LA and Asian countries, China, India, Australia and New Zealand, ASEAN, and specific funds for economic diplomacy (EUGS 2018:9-12). In providing a mutual rules based order for the 21ˢᵗ century, the EU aims for partnership with the UN, achievement of the SDGs to reduce poverty, a joint plan for Iran, security in the Middle East, equality between men and women, Youth/Women Peace and Security, peacebuilding, International Court for migrants and refugees, clean water, election observation in Gambia, Kosovo, Tunisia and Honduras. This shows inclusion of different social groups in the process of providing peace. The EUGS 2019 assesses in 1 page the implications of Brexit, the Western Balkans, Iran, agreed strategic priorities, and a collective capacity to act autonomously and in cooperation. The EUGS 2019 assessment addresses global governance and cooperative regional orders in 7 pages, highlighting multilateralism, the UN, Good Human Rights Stories, democratic change, natural resources, climate, human rights, North Macedonia agreement, Turkey, Middle East, Africa, youth, democracy, education, sustainable investment, trade, Asia, China, ASEAN, Central Asia, Latin America, MERCOSUR, Venezuela, Russia and the Arctic (EUGS 2019.15-22). It aims to reform multilateralism and refers to the UN, WTO, CoE, G7, G20, OSCE, adapting to changes, consistency, ASEAN, EaP, MERCOSUR, trilateral EU-UN-African Union cooperation, sub-regional approach to Sahel/Maghreb, the Horn of Africa, local implementation of the SDGs, updated digitalisation, democratic change in Tunisia and Global Tech Panel teaching entrepreneurs. Global governance success is achieved in UN Syria-Libya peace talks, Canada trade, Mercosur, 72 countries with FTAs, the Iran deal, 25% of the EU budget 2021-2027 on climate change, digital diplomacy, 20 countries in political dialogues. A number of actions are implemented on the EU's second strongest element of power after investment - the diplomatic and political agreements.

Governance/ Institutions/ Norms

In the EUGS 2016, 'global governance for the 21ˢᵗ century' occupies 5 pages, highlighting international law, UN, reforming, investing, global trade, economic diplomacy, international norms, regimes and institutions, WMD, protection and empowerment of civic actors, human rights defenders (EUGS 2016: 39-44). The optimistic EUGS perspectives require all other international actors to share the same perception of cooperation. In the EUGS 2018 assessment, resilience and integrated approach deliver a key message regarding the need to rebuild countries and societies destroyed by conflicts, and suggest early warning

risk assessment (EUGS 2018:8-9). Resilience and an integrated approach in surrounding regions are outlined in 4 pages, addressing fragility and conflict, promotion of democracy via strategic communication, supporting state and society, differentiating the needs of the Western Balkans and Africa, adding results of the EU Conference on Youth, Peace and Security for conflict prevention (EUGS 2019:22-26). The investment of EUR 23.1 billion in the integrated approach has led to more than 8000 people accessing jobs and studies, with their basic needs covered.

Society (identity, education, religion, beliefs) and information access (language, media, Internet, travel/exchange)

The EUGS 2016 (14-16) outlines interests of the citizens over 4 pages, including 'security at home', prosperity, democracy, the rule of law, justice, the 'rule-based global order', UN human rights, and global connections. The following year, the EUGS 2017 assessment (12-24) highlights the UN SDGs, including youth, education, health, research, culture, policy dialogue, infrastructure and employment. The EUGS 2019 assessment describes the world as 'connected, contested, complex', quickly changing, in need of cooperation to address disinformation, cyberattacks, political narratives undermining democracy, demography. As a result of EU action, EUR 65 billion are invested, 390 000 people recruited, 31.6 million people reached. Besides the tools of power aimed at society and information access, an urgent EU priority remains international security, stability, and the lack of peace.

7.5. Conclusion – EU's perception of external influence

In international relations, the EU is a united IR actor and acts as such. Assessing the elements of power is a challenge, especially for an international actor consisting of 27 Member States. The EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy clearly differentiates the need for an internally strong EU, security guarantees, and external geopolitical influence. The current chapter shows how the EUGS 2016 and its three yearly reports 2017-2019 transformed over six power elements. The conclusions point at some tendencies in the EU changing its global image. I comment on some areas which could strengthen its external influence.

The internal unity has been debated as a challenge to projecting a strong external image of the EU. Rather than losing focus on internal debates, the next foreign and security policy strategy needs to demonstrate confidence in the EU's external action. This can be

achieved through the rhetoric of *us, we, together, united*. Such rhetoric of the EU needs publicity and support by the EU citizens. It can be achieved as the EU leaders consistently demonstrate internal unitedness, through words and action. An individualistic style of leadership, therefore, decreases the projected external strength.

Related to the elements of power, the following conclusions are derived:

Firstly, the EU significantly changes its foreign policy narrative from governmental norms and human rights to military security, defence and saving human lives. Among other global players, the EU needs military security. This contributes to recognition as an equal partner. The EU highlights a new image of partnership engagement in crisis management, conflict prevention, military training and equipment. The interpretation of power in the EUGS continuously evolves to security and defence areas.

Secondly, the strongest EU element of power is economic. It relies on funding and investment as tools to exercise influence. But its external image depends on how investments are accomplished. More instruments to track the funding results are needed. Punctuality is missing to detect any double funding of similar projects by EU/UN/NATO, or by different EU instruments. Funding could increase the EU influence in external beneficiary countries. But if not monitored, it could derogate the image of the EU as exclusively a funding source. To project a serious power image, the EU needs to monitor the funds it invests externally. It should clarify by whom and for what exact purposes the money is spent.

Thirdly, energy and climate were not top priorities for the EU, except in relation to global migration. Energy security needs to be a top priority, in respect to the vital security interests of the EU MSs.

Fourthly, the perception of diplomatic partnerships transformed. Urgent security challenges required a search for strong partners. The EU's attempt to manage evolving world crises led to increased diplomatic and political agreements. This is the EU's most valuable soft power instrument. Its multilateralism resulted in strengthened global cooperation, including with the UN, OSCE, NATO, ASEAN, MERCOSUR, the African Union. It reached cooperation with individual IR actors on issues of mutual interest, despite their different attitudes on other issues.

Fifthly, the priorities of world governance changed during the years 2016-2019. From constructing norms and social inclusion in the neighbouring countries, the focus turned to resolving military conflicts and wars.

Sixthly, civil society and disinformation were prioritised in 2016 and 2019. This element of power enables the full spectrum of society to be reached. It is the foundation of building trust and changing the behaviour of countries.

Finally, the EU's skilful diplomacy efficiently approaches world challenges. Gaining the trust of civil society is significant for maintaining constant influence. To be a credible world investor, the EU needs to track how the funds are used. To be perceived as equal in the global power competition, the EU might need some military advances.

8. RUSSIA AND TURKEY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY STRATEGIES. SIX ELEMENTS OF POWER

8.1.Introduction

Contemporary security crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region are a result of the ongoing competition between three regional hegemons – Russia, Turkey and the EU. I argue that the main reason for them to initiate conflicts is the perception of non-acceptable interference by another regional hegemon in a state of mutual interest. However, this depends on the different value that each hegemon gives to the elements of power. As historically Russia and Turkey have been competing to gain more influence over the same territory, around the Black Sea region and the Balkans, my current research explores their current aspects of competition.

Research questions

What is the value that Russia and Turkey give to six elements of power in their foreign and security policy strategies? How are these values situated in comparison to each other and how does that affect the regional security crises and conflicts?

Based on these findings, and more specifically on the level of value that each hegemon gives to each power element, I suggest the possible level of likelihood that each hegemon initiates security crises and conflicts if another hegemon interferes on this specific element.

This research is an empirical study on the already defined framework of six elements of power, which are based on the theoretical analysis in my PhD dissertation. I divide power into six relatively measurable groups: military/security, economic/investment, energy/climate, political/diplomatic, social/governance, information/exchange. Briefly explained, each of them includes the following topics[41]: The element *1) Military/Security refers to the physical survival of a state and its military capacity for defense. The element 2) Economy/Investment refers to any foreign economic and investment projects. The element 3) Energy/Climate refers to natural gas, green deal, coal, environment, and similar topics. The element 4) Political/Diplomatic refers to international organisations, geopolitical interests, high-level meetings, political agreements. The element 5) Social/Governance relates to local governance through local society. It concerns internal social influence through constructing social beliefs, ideology, nationalism. Its tools include: culture, youth, education, history,*

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[41] The listed description of the elements is part of my dissertation's theory.

religion, own language. The social construction is designed by the own government. It could be used as a way to exchange information only after the approval of the own government. The element 6) Information/Exchange refers to access to foreign information through different channels and all kind of exchange programs. These include: learning foreign language, books, media, internet, international travel, educational exchanges, cultural exchanges, professional exchanges, own migrants living abroad. It provides direct access of a hegemon to the population in a country through external information source, excluding the intermediary role of the own government. The information sources are not controlled by the local governance, but by external powers.

The purpose of the current paper is to compare what value both Russia and Turkey give to each of these six elements. I admit that the higher value a hegemon attributes to an element of power, the higher possibility that they would react if another hegemon imposes influence on this specific element in a country of shared interest. Also, the lower value a hegemon attributes to a power element, the lower likelihood of negative reaction and the higher possibility of cooperation.

8.2. Methodology and methods

My approach is inductive – starting with the theory and applying it to the documents. The coding is based on the six categories of power, corresponding to the six groups of elements of power which I identified in my literature review. The internal validity shows internal feedback to the results. It is high, because I presented the results to several scientific conferences, collected and added feedback. I have sent some texts for publication, the feedback of which helped me to improve parts of the study.

The external validity shows potential of the results to be generalized. It is moderate, because I am analysing only the specific latest documents related to the foreign and security policy concepts of Russia and Turkey. The results are credible and reliable for the specific documents I analysed. Through content analysis, I answered my research questions.

The methodology I selected to accomplish it is via assessing the latest foreign and security policy strategies of both Russia and Turkey. This paper compares the percentage of dedicated text length per each power element for each hegemon. The measurement is done first by proportional share in number of pages or paragraphs to each power element per document. The dedicated value is a share of the whole document, which is considered for 100%. Second, in-depth analysis of the meaning of words per categories for each power element shows the hidden meaning of the text, which could correspond or not to the first

measurement. Both are visualized in pie-charts, tables and graphs. The final result is a comparison of the value that Russia and Turkey give to each of the six elements of power in their latest foreign and security policy concepts.

8.2.1. Data collection: foreign and security policy strategies

The latest foreign policy and security strategies of Turkey and Russia are derived from their governmental websites.

Turkey

For Turkey, for me it was difficult to find the appropriate documents because of my lack of knowledge in Turkish language. For translation, I used online programmes such as Google Translate. The latest documents I have found, are as follows:

Foreign Policy: In English, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey has created a Synopsis of Turkey's Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy. It does not have a date of validity, however it refers to 2020 as present and to 2023 as future. The Synopsis is disseminated in: English, Chinese, German, Russian, Spanish, Romanian, Portuguese, Greek, Persian languages. This means that the targeted audience for this particular information is directed towards countries where these languages are understood. This is the short, representative to foreign readers version of the Turkish foreign policy. I have consulted it, but for my content analysis I used only the full version of the document, not this shorter one.

Foreign Policy: In English, the MFA of Turkey offers a very well organised division on its contents, related to the most urgent foreign policy topics of Turkey. These are: Main Issues, Regions, International organisations, Overseas promotion and cultural affairs. The divisions are based on geopolitical questions as well as bilateral and multilateral platforms. This is in the form of website content, which I have consulted but I will not use it for my documental content analysis.

In Turkish language, I found a booklet that shows the foreign policy goals of Turkey. It is the wider version of the Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy. It was issued by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mr Mevlut Cavusoglu, in December 2020. I translated it by online tools such as Google Translate and formatted it to consistent technical characteristics. The version in Turkish consists of 78 pages, while the mechanically translated version in English is 75 pages, formatted in TNR 12, 1.5, justified. This is the full version of the Turkish foreign and security policy, which I used for my content analysis.

Russia

For Russia, the latest documents are three. I am certain for their authenticity because I am fluent in Russian language:

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation was approved by the President in 2016. I derived its text from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs official website. I formatted the text in Russian and in English in two separate documents, with the same characteristics – Times New Roman 12, space 1.5, single lining, centred. The text in English consists of 31 pages, while the text in Russian consists of 37 pages, divided in 108 paragraphs. For the purpose of this analysis, aiming for consistency with the next documents, I used the Russian version.

The Strategy for National Security of the Russian Federation was approved by the President in 2021. I derived its text from the Official Website for Legal Information of the Russian Federation. The document, converted to the same format – Word, TNR 12, single 1.5, consists of 44 pages as in its original shape in .pdf and different format. It is available only in Russian language, and therefore I used this version for the analysis.

The Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2035 has been confirmed by the Government of the RF on 09 June 2020. It consists of a total of 93 pages, in Russian language.

To ensure consistency within the three documents, I used only the Russian version. I have translated the explored words for content analysis from English to Russian, to ensure consistency in the comparative analysis. However, I identified some specific terms in Russian and added them to the respective element of power. Despite possibility of slight change in the meaning, no significant deviation from the original meaning is expected in the content analysis by pages and by words.

8.2.2. Data analysis - qualitative content analysis on the six power elements

Content analysis

I analysed the results applying a qualitative content analysis technique. I selected the content analysis to systematically summarise qualitative data in a quantitative way, aiming to answer the research questions (Frey, 2018). It aims to convert the large text data into organised and manageable categories, providing empirical knowledge (Frey, 2018). In my complete dissertation, I apply a combination of qualitative methods – content documental

analysis, interviews and case study, as I expect them to complement each other (Frey, 2018). This combination of methods would prevent potential bias (Frey, 2018). For the current research, I apply the content analysis in two steps. First, it assesses the share per each element of power as a part of the 100% volume of the full document. Second, it detects frequency of words and patterns per each category of power. I use the two techniques for qualitative content analysis –first, interpretative meanings per pages as a percentage of the whole document and second, basic word count per categories, to show the hidden meaning throughout the document per each category of power (Drisko&Maschi, 2016).

Percentage of volume per power element, word count per power element

The analysis technique I use is double checking of the text – by number of pages and by number of words. Each of the results shows the importance that each of the elements of power has within the explored documents. First, the analysis per pages or paragraphs shows the proportion per element as a part of the whole document, or in case of several strategies – a package of documents. This shows the relative share per each of the elements of power on the surface level. In the cases of half-page on one topic and half-page on another, I have added a blank half and indicated both as a full page. For this reason, the final number of pages on the sum of the elements is enlarged, but it provides clarity on topics within the full strategy.

Throughout the reading by topic, some of the meanings were repetitive – even though a paragraph or a section was devoted to one main topic, other topics were crossing through it. To distinguish it clearly, I made a comparison by the number of words mentioned per each category. Second, the analysis per words shows the importance of meanings assigned to each category across the whole document. It is accomplished through grouping the most popular words attributed to each category of power. This measurement goes throughout the full text. It is not divided as the previous grouping by percentage. It is divided by categories, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the hidden meaning in the text of the document.

8.2.3. Languages

A problem that appears is that it is data in three languages – English, Russian and Turkish. This is challenging, because the meaning of the same words could differ over different political cultures (Buitrago, 2019). The interpretation and meanings in cross-cultural research depend on the role of the researcher (Buitrago, 2019).

My primary language for conducting this research is English. All strategic documents of the EU are available in English. A favourable condition is that I directly translated the Turkish text in English. However, some possibility exists that parts of the meaning have been lost in the translation. The situation with the three Russian documents is different. One is introduced in both Russian and English on the official governmental website – the Foreign Policy Concept, while the National Security Strategy and the Energy Strategy are introduced only in Russian. To ensure consistency in my analysis, I used the version in Russian for the three documents. This was possible, because I am fluent in Russian. Although I was trying to be as objective as possible in the interpretation, a slight change of the meaning is not excluded due to different political culture in different languages.

8.3. Results: The Republic of Türkiye

8.3.1. Volume shares per element of power

Power Element	Number of pages	Number of total 75 pp	Share of total 100%
Military/Security (Survival)	terrorism (1), NATO and International Security, OSCE (2), Peace mediation (1), Mediter/ Aegean (2) NorthAm (1), Syria (1), North Africa (1), S.Caucasus (1), 1915 Middle East (1), South Asia (1)	12	16%
Economic/ Investment	Economy (2), Shipping (1), Finance (3), budget/eu pres/proposal (8), entrepreneurs (1), Asian Pacific (1), EU (1) RU (1) Africa (1) Development assistance (1)	20	26.7%
Energy/ Climate	Energy (1), climate (2)	3	4%
Diplomacy/ Politics (International)	Dipl Forum/ digital (1), protocol/agreements (1), dipl. academy (1), UN (1), EU countries (3), Gulf (1), LatAm (1) EU (1), Africa (1), CoE Human rights (1), Shipping-Montreux (1)	13	17.3%

Society/ Governance (Local = addressing internal issues of an external country)	Intro–epidemic, competition, populism (1); Islam (1) Syrian migrants (1), Ed/Cult (1) Humanitarian (1), Greece (1), Cyprus (1), Balkans (2), Iraq-Turkmen (1), Iran (1), Central Asia (1) EU countries - tatars, gagauz, Islam (1) Syria-Kurds (1), South Asia-Kashmir, Afghani ministers (1) Asia Pacific Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, China Uyghur, Bangladesh, ASEAN (1) Nagorno K. (1)	16	21.3%
Information/Exchange (Foreign access)	Inform/comm (2), networks (1), citizens abroad (1), visa (1), strat. research (1), translation (1), communication (1) pandemic exchange of ppl (2), MFA Staff (1)	11	14.7%
Others	Title/contents – 3	n/a	

Table 15. Turkey: elements of power per volume shares, by number of pages in the strategy. (Source: the author. Published in: Kirilova, 2021:18.)
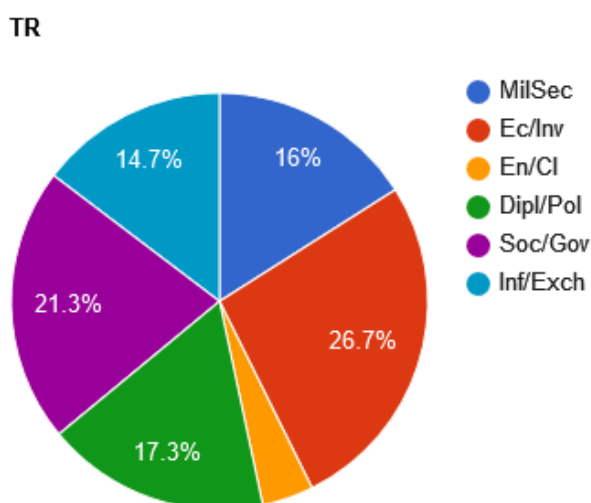
Figure 6. Turkey: elements of power as volume share (Adapted after: Kirilova, 2021:18.)

Results by number of pages devoted per power element

The results for Turkey's surface shares show primary focus on Economy/Investment, followed by Society/Governance. This corresponds to the name of *Entrepreneur and Humanitarian Foreign Policy*, which suggests that its main priorities are people, both within the country and abroad, and economy. However, it is important to note the kind of people that Turkey addresses in external countries – those are either closely tied by religion, language and history local citizens of an external country, or Turkish citizens living abroad.

The next place with relatively equal results are Diplomacy/Politics, Military/Security and Information/Exchange. The least represented is Energy/Climate. This shows that possibly, Turkey would be more reactive in a country of perceived influence, if another hegemon approaches on each of the five prioritised elements, by the listed order. Also, Turkey would possibly be open for cooperation on the element of energy and climate.

From the Elements of Power chart, the name of the strategy corresponds to economy/investment and social/governance, which are indeed on the top priority positions according to the shares of volume. Surprisingly, military/security is fourth in popularity according to this proportional division. Usually, the military survival is the first need of a state. Placing it on the fourth position shows possible tendencies of the state to accomplish its military/security goals via other means. In the case of Turkey, these are shown to be Economy/Investment, Society/Governance and Diplomacy/Politics. Maybe this is to some extent also related to the position of Turkey as a NATO member.

8.3.2. Linguistic shares per element of power: results by no. of words

The main overlapping topics from the percentage share were society, diplomacy and military. To distinguish it clearly, I made a deeper analysis showing the hidden meaning of words within the document. It provided different results for the selected categories of power elements. The result is the following:

Element	Category Code	Words EN	Turkey - No.words mentioned	Turkey - Total Words
1	Military/ Security (Survival)	NATO, tanks, navy, airdpsce, UN Security Council, OSCE, war, terrorism, peace, pandemics, stability	military (6), security (56), NATO (28), defense (13), stability (26), peace (35), navy (0), airspace (5), army (2), war (3), OSCE (8), terrorism (14), epidemic (62), crisis (13), conflict (12)	283
2	Economy/ Investment	money, budget, development aid	economy (10), investment (22), fund (10), budget (39), aid (8)	89
3	Energy/ Climate	climate, environment	energy (19), climate (2), environment (16), water (11),	48
4	Political/ Diplomatic	agreement, negotiation, high-level, geopolitics, human rights	diplomat (15), diplomacy (24), political (27), meeting (36), high-level visits (7), negotiations (9), agreement (35), human rights (13), law (18), international (83)	267
5	Society/ Governance (Local)	religion, culture, history, school, university, norms, structures, Islam, brothers, Turkic	religion (1), Islam (17), Muslim (5), Turkish (31), history (8), education (16), people (25), refugees (8)	111
6	Information/ Exchage (Foreign)	foreign language, travel, exchange, study visit, abroad, online, website, communication, research. translation.	information (16), translation (4), research (6), website (5), online (5), network (5), abroad (32), exchange (4), foreign (92), language (8), Turkic (6)	183

Table 16. Turkey: elements of power as total number of word count (Adapted after: Kirilova, 2021:19.)
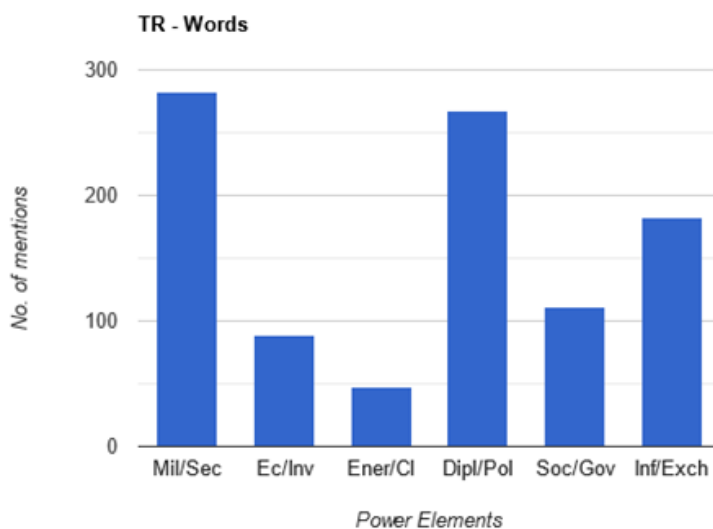
Figure 7. Turkey: elements of power by word count, comparison (Adapted after: Kirilova, 2021:19.)

This result shows that according to the number of words mentioned, the power element which prevails within the foreign policy strategy of Turkey is Military/Security, followed by Diplomatic/Political. These two elements are traditionally used in the foreign

policy of a state, guaranteeing its survival and diplomatic ties. The previous result that showed economy and people as main priorities brings Turkey in the light of a modern state, while this traditional meaning brings it back to the neorealist lenses. The second group of elements which emerged in the word count analysis are Information/Exchange and only then Society/Governance, which shows the specific essence of Turkish foreign policy. According to this measurement, Economy/Investment and Energy/Climate are the least mentioned topics, and the difference of importance given to these two is relatively similar. This means that the least important for the current foreign policy of Turkey are these two elements, economy/investment and energy/climate, despite the misleading name of the document as 'entrepreneurial'.

This double result means that on the one side, if the reader only considers the meanings by paragraph devoted, then indeed the document corresponds to its title. The Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy indeed devotes the spaces for economy and people mostly across its text. However, a deeper reading by coded words in the categories shows that military security and diplomacy are the two actual leading factors within it. It also shows that people and information have a very specific role in the foreign policy of Turkey.

The high importance that Turkey gives to people abroad is visible throughout the whole text of its strategy. People are named in different communities outside Turkey, towards which the country expresses interest via historic, religious or language features. These are: Turkish Cypriots, Turkmens in Iraq, Central Asian Muslims, Tatars in Crimea, Gagauz in Moldova, Kurds in Syria, Kashmir in India, Rohingya in Myanmar, Muslims in Bangladesh, Chinese Uyghur, Muslims in Nagorno Karbakh, Azeri, Turkish origin of three new Afghani ministers, and Islam cooperation organisation, and in the opposite direction - Syrian migrants in Turkey. This shows a very strong attitude towards the people with Turkic language or Muslim religion across the globe, as well as those with shared historical past, for example on the Balkans. As a result, one of the main tools of power for Turkish foreign policy is exactly the connection with people on these three factors – religion, language, and history.

These communities of local people with common characteristics – either by religious, linguistic or historical component, are a tool for Turkey to exercise external influence. Also, they are a tool to collect foreign information from a local perspective. Therefore, religion and language, as well as history, should not be neglected as significant tools for establishing influence in communities within foreign countries and for collecting information. Another tool for collecting foreign information are the widely spread across Europe Turkish citizens, who live in a number of countries. They could both change the local structures which they

inhabit and easily bring back to Turkey external knowledge about the specific situation in these countries. Such a presumption would not be worrisome in case that Turkey does not intend to influence these countries.

Therefore, a reaction from Turkey would not be surprising if any of the communities of people to which it relates abroad are concerned by interference of foreign hegemons. This was the reason for reaction in Nagorno Karabakh, and it could potentially be the reason for Turkish involvement in Crimea or the Western Balkans. Despite that currently Turkey is mainly busy with its Turkish Cypriot and Mediterranean conflicts with Greece, it would not be surprising if at some moment in the future, Turkey initiates a pro-active role towards engaging other of its communities abroad. This could result in two main directions – influencing the governance of the country in which the community is located, or collecting and exchanging information from that foreign country.

8.4. Results: The Russian Federation

8.4.1. Volume shares per element of power

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (RF), affirmed in 2016, consists of 37 pages through which 108 paragraphs are located. It is based on the Constitution (p.1). The division by pages is more difficult, because the text is more clearly divided by abstracts. I initially applied a relative division by pages, and for a better understanding, later added division by paragraphs, and explored the text through deeper content analysis by words in categories. Some semantic challenges appeared. For example, 'law' corresponds to ‚прав-', while 'governance' corresponds to ‚управл-'. In English, both words allow different categories like diplomatic and political governance vs. laws within the country, while in Russian the same root of the word brings them to the same category. It is notable that the words related to nation, language, values, culture and spirit are excessively used in the content of foreign policy.

The Energy Strategy of Russia refers to three topics – energy security, economy and international markets. The document from 2020 consists of 80 pages strategy and 24 pages supplements, with a total volume of 104 pages, more than doubling the volume of the other two strategies. Russia is shown as a huge producer, user and exporter of energy in the world. Among its main international partners are Asia-Pacific, China, Near East and Africa.

The National Security Strategy from 2021 consists of 39 pages, which is half of the Energy Strategy. Surprisingly, the document widely addresses people, values, culture, language as a component of security.
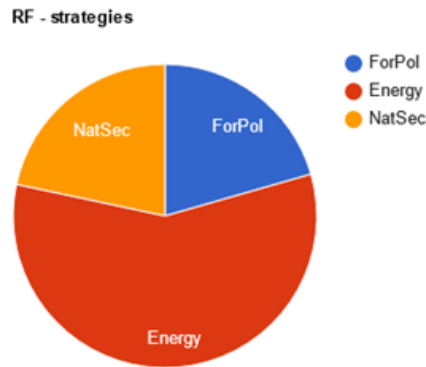
RF - strategies

Figure 8. The Russian Federation: elements of power as total volume, three strategies. (Source: the author.) *Foreign Policy Concept 2016 (referred to as ForPol), National Security Strategy 2021 (referred to as NatSec), Energy Strategy 2020 (referred to as Energy).*

Therefore, if the three strategies are explored, undoubtedly most of the results refer to energy security and energy as a power instrument. Even though my focus is not particularly on energy, I initially place it among all power elements to show its overall importance, perceived by Russia. Later, I focus on the strategies of foreign and security policy only.

Power element	Number of pages FPS/ES/NSS (Topics)	Share of total pp: 37/104/39 All - 180	Share of total 100%	FPS – paragraphs (total 108)
Military/ Security (Survival)	FPS- 8 / ES – intro 1/ NSS- Intro 5, security 2 (Terrorism, organised crime, guns, weapons, drugs, peace-making operations, NATO, US exterritorial jurisdiction, nuclear de-weaponisation, NearEast- NorthAfrica, Syria, Iran nuclear, Afghanistan, Africa, NatSec Council)	8/1/7 All -16	FP - 28.8%	6,7,14,15,16,17,27,29,30,31,32,33,35,62,64,70,72,73,92,93,94,97,99,103. All: 24.

Economic/ Investment	FPS-1/ ES world market-9/ NSS-7 (For.trade, ec, inv., ASEAN, SCO, Eurasian Union)	4/9/7 All -20	FP - 19.2%	10,12,13,39,40,82,108 All: 7.
Energy/ Climate	FPS-1/ ES-83/ NSS-2 (Environm, nat.disasters, health, Sea)	1/83/2 All – 86	FP - 7.7%	11, 36,37,41,43,44 All: 6.
Diplomatic/ Political (International law, external rules)	FPS -4-5-3-8 / ES-2/ NSS-4 (stability/cooper, UN, OSCE, CIS, Belarus, Eurasian Union, CSTO, Ukraine, Abkhazia, S.Ossetia, Trandsnistria, N.Karabakh, Minsk Group, Georgia, BSEC, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, NATO-EU, US, EU visa, EU bilateral, Council of Europe, Northern Europe, Arctic, Canada, Antarctic, Asia-Pacific, SCO, ASEAN, Asia-Europe, China, India, RIC, Mongolia, Japan, Korea N.&S., Vietnam-Indonesia-Thailand-Singapore-Malaysia, Australia-NewZealand, Persian Russia-Arab dialogue, Islamic cooperation organisation, LatAm Carribbean, President-Nat.Council-Government-MFA, Federal Agency, CIS)	20/2/4 All – 26	FP - 9.6%	1,3,4,8,18,20,21,22,23,2 4,25,26,34,42,49,50,51, 52,53,54,56,57,58,59,60 ,61,63,65,66,67,68,69,7 1,74,75,76,77,78,79,80, 81,83,84,85,86,87,88,89 ,90,91,95,96,98,100,101 ,102,104,105,106 All: 59.
Social/ Governance (Local consciousness construction)	FPS-2/ ES-2/ NSS-Cult 1, wellbeing 2, social groups 1, culture 2, social 2, implementation 1 (Religion, rules, law, own culture at home)	2/2/9 All – 13	FP - 26.9%	2, 5, 19,107 All: 4.
Information/ Exchange (Foreign access)	FPS-1/ ES-science, technology, information, security- 2/NSS-info 5, science 4 (CIS, civilizations differ – not by country borders, but by population, **values.** Foreign cultures, own culture abroad.)	1/2/9 All – 12	FP - 7.7%	9,28,38,45,46,47, 48,55 All: 8.
Others	Intro/Concl FPS-1/ES – intro-3, Indicators-18, Equipment-4/ NSS-1	1/5/1 All – 7	n/a	Basis, norms, implementation

Table 17. The Russian Federation: elements of power per share of volume, the three strategies. ((Source: the author.)
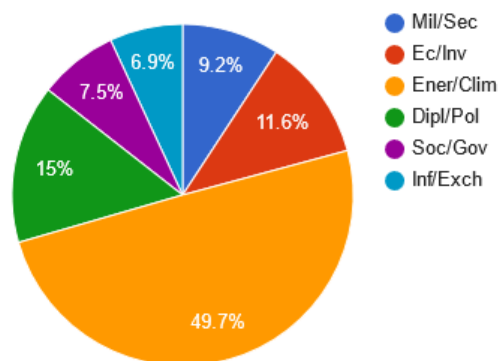
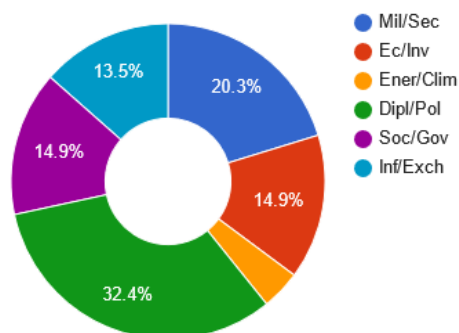RF - elements of power, three strategies

Figure 9. The Russian Federation: elements of power as volume share, in pages, three strategies - Foreign Policy Concept 2016, National Security Strategy 2021, and Energy Strategy 2020. (Source: the author). Reference of the elements of power: Military/Security (Mil/Sec), Economy/Investment (Ec/Inv), Energy/Climate (Ener/Clim), Diplomacy/Politics (Dipl/Pol), Society/Governance (Soc/Gov), Information/Exchange (Inf/Exch).

These results show that for Russia, undoubtedly, energy security is a strong priority both in its internal and external relations. Being alert on the high importance of energy security and energy as a power instrument for Russia, next is presented the share of volume by power element according to the two strategies only – Foreign Policy Concept 2016 and National Security Strategy 2021.

RF - elements of power, For/Sec

Figure 10. The Russian Federation: elements of power as volume share, two strategies - Foreign Policy Concept 2016 and National Security Strategy 2021. (Source: the author.)

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Looking at the results based on foreign and security policy strategies, the highest priorities are: Diplomatic/Political, followed by Military/Security, then Social/Governance and Economy/Investment, closely followed by Information/Exchange. Only then, Energy/Climate is present. Undoubtedly, if the three strategies are examined, energy is the highest priority, and due to the presence of its separate strategy, it is not specifically addressed in the foreign and security strategies.

The highest priorities for Russia's foreign and security policy, after diplomacy/politics, is military/security. This shows that Russia has high interest in the concept of state survival and maintaining diplomatic ties. However, this result is based on the two respective strategies, for foreign policy and security, and therefore is logically expected. The very interesting part is that society/governance and energy/investment introduce high interest in people, very closely followed by information/exchange. It is particularly impressive that culture and the spirituality of people, not exactly as religion but as a cultural construct, is placed very high in these strategies. Combined, the characteristics of governance/society and information/exchange have a total score almost as high as diplomatic/political, and much higher than military/security. For the foreign and security concepts of Russia, these two aspects could be actually combined, because the sense in which they are referred in the text overlaps. Differently from Turkey, where reference was made to any similar characteristic for religion or language or history for people in other countries, for Russia such division is not observed. On the contrary, it refers to all people with Russian origin as the same – they supposedly speak the language and/or have the religion, but more significantly, have a specific mentality to which Russia refers. And this mentality is constructed in the mindset of the people within the country, but not only – it is present in the people with Russian origin abroad, supposedly from my understanding of these documents.

8.4.2. Linguistic shares per element of power

It is possible that the linguistic shares per words are different from those by number of pages. The result is the following:

Element	Category Code	Words EN	Russia- No.Words - Foreign Policy/ Energy/Security	Russia - Total Words - Foreign/ Energy/Security
1	Military/ Security (Survival)	NATO, tanks, navy, airdpsce, UN Security Council, OSCE, war, terrorism, peace, pandemics, stability	безопасност- (78/57/90), военн- (12/0/44), риск (2/23/6), НАТО (4/0/0), террори- (35/1/15), конфликт(15/0/14), угроз(25/9/28), кризис(8/1/2), вооружени-(9/1/9), преступност-(6/0/5), криминал-(2/0/3), войн-(7/0/6), стабильност-(28/4/16), оружи-(27/0/4), оборон-(6/0/21). чрезвычайн-(2/0/7). давлени-(3/0/4)	269/96/274, For/Sec - 543, All -639
2	Economy/ Investment	money, budget, development aid	финанс-(14/13/12), валют-(3/0/2), торгов-(16/12/5), инвестици-(5/43/7), эконом-(66/94/103), рын-(7/118/14), бюджет (1/13/5), производств- (3/131/24), налог- (0/27/0), экспорт (5/68/3), производ- (4/150/26)	124/669/201, For/Sec - 325, All - 994
3	Energy/ Climate	climate, environment	энергети-(7/505/10), климат-(4/21/9), окружащ- сред-(1/16/13), транспорт (3/72/7), уголь (0/57/0), угл-(0/84/0), газ (0/239/2), топливо (0/13/0), электрическ- (0/72/0), энерги-(3/113/2), атомн-(1/45/2), возобновляем (1/22/1). нефт (0/186/0)	20/1445/46, For/Sec - 66, All - 1511
4	Political/ Diplomatic	agreement, negotiation, high-level, geopolitics, human rights	геополит- (3/1/5), двусторон-(11/2/1), многосторон-(18/1/4), мирово-(30/52/18), международн-(156/27/53), регион- (61/49/20), межправительств-(0/1/0), глобальн-(24/8/14), ООН(36/0/3), организаци- (48/n.a./n.a.)	387/141/118, For/Sec - 505, All - 646
5	Society/ Governance (Local)	religion, culture, history, school, university, norms, structures, Islam, brothers, Turkic	образован-(2/0/15), государств-(134/56/114), управлен-(3/38/11), правителсьств-(8/19/0), обществ-(29/5/53), религи- (9/0/9), культур-(18/1/33), цивилизаци-(9/0/0), духовн-(3/0/21), ценност-(7/0/24), прав-(137/0/100), этн-(4/0/2), достойнств-(1/0/2). нрав(1/0/25). здрав (1/0/4)	366/119/413, For/Sec-779, All - 898
6	Information / Exchange (Foreign)	foreign language, travel, exchange, study visit, abroad, online, website,	информ-(22/16/69), язык (4/0/9), научн-(9/29/37), обмен (1/1/0), технолог-(15/208/66), интернет (1/2/6), за рубеж (9/8/6)	61/264/193, For/Sec-254, All - 518

Figure 11. Russian Federation: elements of power by word count, three strategies. (Source: the author.)

The specific place of 'language' in this case has been clarified as belonging to the category of Information/Exchange. It is supposed that those people in countries abroad who understand Russian language could be more prone to information and ideas originating from these sources, therefore it refers to information access. Differently from the minorities speaking in Russian, the teaching of Russian language in schools in foreign countries would belong to the element Society/Governance. This element is in control of the foreign state through its education system. On the contrary, in the cases of searching for external influence of a hegemon, this channel could be used through the official education in the state, as well as through the information access by Russian speaking people from minorities abroad.

Figure 12. The Russian Federation: elements of power by word count, the three strategies. (Source: the author.)
Reference of the elements of power: Military/Security (Mil/Sec), Economy/Investment (Ec/Inv),
Energy/Climate (Ener/Clim), Diplomacy/Politics (Dipl/Pol), Society/Governance (Soc/Gov),
Information/Exchange (Inf/Exch).

This result shows that, if I consider the Energy Strategy of Russia, then the top priorities are Energy/Climate, Economic/Investment, Social/Governance. These are mainly related to economy, energy and people, which tends to some nuances of internal approach. It is followed by a close margin between Military/Security, Diplomacy/Politics and Information/Exchange, which three elements show tendencies to foreign relations. This graph is only for information, because Energy Security strategies will not be explored for the other actors, the EU and Turkey. However, I include the Energy Strategy in the case of Russia, because it uses its energy as a foreign policy instrument, contributing to the balance for power competition.

However, as the basis for comparison with other actors is only on the foreign and security policy, these two strategies are separately explored also for Russia.
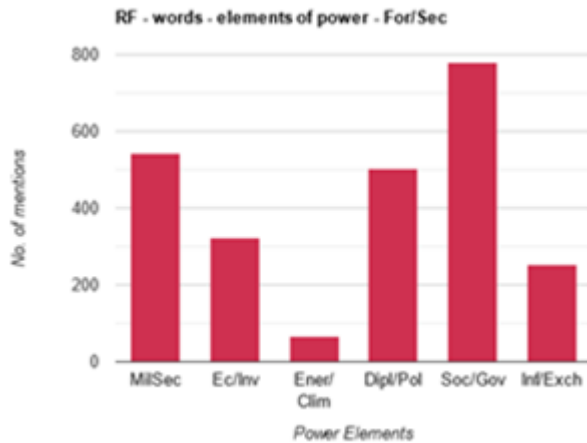
Figure 13. ***The Russian Federation: elements of power by word count, two strategies - Foreign Policy Concept 2016 and National Security Strategy 2021****. (Source: the author.*) Reference of the elements of power: Military/Security (Mil/Sec), Economy/Investment (Ec/Inv), Energy/Climate (Ener/Clim), Diplomacy/Politics (Dipl/Pol), Society/Governance (Soc/Gov), Information/Exchange (Inf/Exch).

These results show that a primary interest for Russia in the latest strategies for its Foreign and Security policy is Society/Governance, exceeding all other elements. Therefore, for Russia the approach towards the people, values such as culture, religion, language, spirituality, customs and all shaping the mindset category is extremely high. Only after that, the place of Military/Security and Diplomacy/Politics, which are the traditional elements of foreign policy of a state, take place. The next category is for Economic/Investment and Information/Exchange. Finally, Energy and Climate are not too much concerned in the foreign and security policy strategies, because a whole full strategy is devoted only to that element.

8.4.3.   Shares per article: Foreign Policy Concept 2016
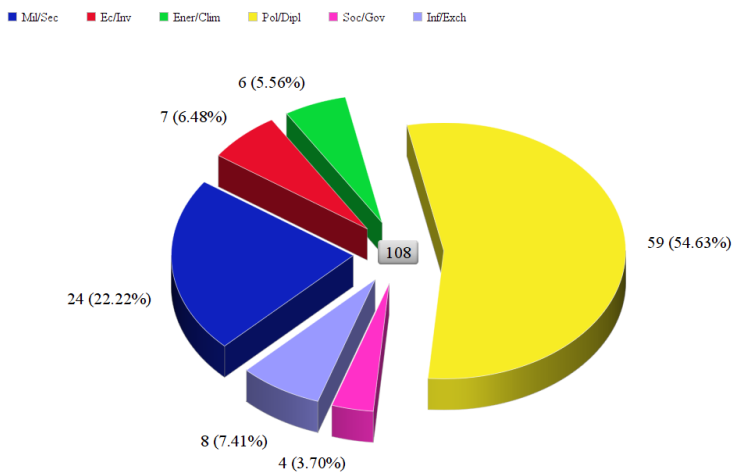
Figure 14. The Russian Federation: elements of power by paragraphs, Foreign Policy Concept 2016. (Source: the author.) Reference of the elements of power: Military/Security (Mil/Sec), Economy/Investment (Ec/Inv), Energy/Climate (Ener/Clim), Diplomacy/Politics (Dipl/Pol), Society/Governance (Soc/Gov), Information/Exchange (Inf/Exch).

The comparison was not absolutely equal, because each paragraph has different length – some are only a few sentences, while others have several bullets each consisting of several sentences. As these multiple bullet paragraphs contain several topics, therefore it is not possible to be located in one of the topics only. For this reason, I have chosen to locate such paragraphs under the topic which covers the meaning of most of its bullets.

More than half are devoted to diplomacy/politics, followed by a quarter to military/security elements of power. This shows the tendency of orienting foreign and security policy towards its traditional understanding – of foreign diplomatic/political relations and providing state survival and dominance through military/security means. The next shares with nearly 6-7% are for the Information/Exchange, Economy/Investment and Energy/Climate elements, closely followed by Social/Governance. This shows the secondary role of all supplementary elements of power, if the Foreign policy concept of Russia is considered alone, and if only the topic of its paragraphs are estimated without deeper meaning of the words by categories.

8.4.4. Power elements in the Foreign Policy Strategy of Russia

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation from 2016 consists of 108 paragraphs located over 37 pages. It is structured in five chapters – 1.General situation (1-3), 2.*Contemporary world* and Russian Federation's foreign policy (pp.3-8), 3.Priorities of the Russian Federation in *solving world problems* (pp.8-22), 4.*Regional priorities* in the foreign policy of the RF (pp.23-35), 5.Formation and realisation of the Russian Federation's foreign policy (pp.35-37). My observation on the concept shows that high priority is given to the people, both in the country and abroad, to international security, regional stability, and the relations Russia-NATO and Russia-EU.

Nations and Cultures, People abroad & Information access

In the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia, the country is seen as a world influential center, for which could contribute Russian education, science and technology (p.3). To counteract to Western countries insisting on their point of view worldwide, it is suggested 'improving the Russian positions on mass information and mass communication in the global space, leading to wider circles of world population knowing the Russian point of view on international processes' (p.3), including through management of the world communication network – Internet. The 'constructive dialogue improving agreement and mutual enrichment among different cultures and civilisations' (par.3, p.3) is a priority. A strong focus is paid on the difference between civilizations (par.5, p.4). Terrorism, as a world security threat, is explained on the basis of ideology (par.14, p.6). To block terrorism, Russia suggests inclusion of all types of civic organisation and blocking financing sources of terrorism (par.33i, p.15). The foreign policy of Russia is described as 'open and predictable', 'consequent', following for centuries the role of Russia as a balancing factor in international relations and world civilizations development (par.22, p.8). International relations and stable development of states is seen on the basis of social-economic development (par.42,p19).

Russian origin and Russian language information sources abroad are increased (par.47, p.22). The largest paragraphs with several subtopics contains information related to Russians in other countries, common care for them abroad as at home, unifying standards in external countries for this purpose (par.55, p.25).

Support for Russian language and cultural associations abroad as a world communication instrument and development of the cultural and humanitarian links between Slavic people are strategic goals (par.45zh/z, p.21). It aims to use popular diplomacy and international cultural and humanitarian assistance as means for dialogue between civilizations to reach agreement and to achieve mutual understanding between nations, contributing to the

dialogue between religions' (par.45 l,p.22). Defending rights and lawful interest of Russian children abroad (par.45, n, p.22).

Objective information abroad about the position of Russia on international problems (par.46, p. 22), influence on the population's opinion abroad, measures against information security, and state support (par.47, p.22). Widening participation of scientific and expert personnel in international politics and international security is among the priorities for widening popular diplomacy (par.48, p.23).

Regional stability: governance and foreign agents (foreign access to local people)
Human rights and international law

'Russia, as a multinational and multi religious country, having centuries of experience in harmonious existence of different nations, ethnic groups and religions, contributes to development of a dialogue and forming partnerships between cultures, religions and civilisations' (par.38, p.16).

Within several parts of the document, focus is given to the supremacy of international law. As such, the decisions of the UN Security Council are referred to, and the UN as a unique organization combining different civilizations which allows coordinated world leadership.

Priority is the respect for international law, the UN, rule of law, respect to the sovereignty of countries and their territorial integrity, right of nations to self-define, support for international security, strategic and regional stability. Russia aims 'to counteract attempts of using human rights concept as an instrument of political pressure and interference in internal policies of a country, including its destabilisation and change of the legitimate governance' (par.45b, p.20).

First weapons in Space are mentioned. Action is envisaged against uncontrolled dissemination of drugs, against attempts for interference in internal governance of states aiming unconstitutional change of government and destabilisation of states, against support for non-governmental subjects (NGOs), including terrorist and extremist organisations. Attempts for destabilisation of the state governance, by terrorist, extremist or other non-governmental actors, supported by foreign actors, are considered to have similar status. This is irrespective of the tools if these actors are funded externally or fed by external ideas.

Regional priorities and international security

Integration within Commonwealth of Independent States, strategic interaction Belarus, Eurasian economic union, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Ukraine's internal conflict, contemporary democratic states Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transdnistria and Moldova, Minsk group, OSCE based on mutual declarations of the presidents of Russia, USA and France 2009-2013; Georgia, Black Sea region, Caspian region, BSEC (par.49-60, pp.23-25).

Russia's Euro-Atlantic relations are represented by the geopolitical expansion of NATO and the EU, whom Russia perceives as showing unwillingness to form the politically claimed common European system of security and cooperation –OSCE, which increases the crises between Russian and the Western states – the aimed from the US and its allies deterrence of Russia through political, economic, informational and other pressure undermines the regional and world stability, harming the long term interests of all states during contemporary need for cooperation against transnational threats (par.61,p.24). A serious crisis in the relations Russia-Western countries has erupted and the maintained by the USA and its allies course of deterrence towards Russia through political, economic, informational and other pressure, undermines the regional and global stability, harming long-term interests of all countries (par.61,p.24). It contradicts the increasing contemporary need for cooperation and counteraction of transnational threats (par.61,p.24).

In the long term, Russian policy in the Euro-Atlantic region is directed towards forming a common space of peace, security and stability, based on the principles of united security, equal cooperation and mutual trust. Russia consequently requires juridical obligation of political declarations about indivisibility of security and membership of states in military-political unions (par.62, p.24).

For Russia, the EU remains an important trade-economic and foreign policy partner, based on the principles of equal rights and mutual respect of interests (par.63, p.26). The future development of the relations with the EU requires lawful contracts and institutional mechanisms of cooperation for mutual benefit and optimal partnership relations, including in the energy sphere, strategic shaping of common economic and humanitarian space between Atlantic and Pacific Ocean, harmonious processes in the European and Eurasian integration, which would not allow emergence of dividing lines in the European continent (par.63, p.26).

Russia is prepared to support the intensive and mutually beneficial dialogue with the EU on main aspects of foreign and practical cooperation on military-political spheres, including terrorism, non-controlled and non-lawful migration, organised crime, trade of people, drugs, psychological substances, weapons, explosives and cybersecurity (par.64,

p.26). A main barrier for development of contacts between the EU and Russia is the visa regime, without which the cooperation would be boosted in economic, humanitarian, cultural, educational and other spheres (par.65, p.26). An important tool for moving Russian national interests towards Europe and the world is through activating mutually beneficial bilateral relations with Germany, France, Italy, Spain and other countries in Europe (par.66, p.27). Russia continues its work in the Council of Europe and OSCE. Russia respects the decision of European countries not to participate in military alliances (par.69, p.28). Russia is ready to work with NATO, but it negatively relates towards its widening, closer to the Russian borders military infrastructure and its increasing military activity in neighbouring to Russia regions, seen as violation of the principle of equal and indivisible security, leading to deeper older and emergence of new dividing lines in Europe (par.70, p.28). Russia does not accept exterritorial implementation of the jurisdiction of the USA outside of the international law framework and will not accept attempts for military, political, economic or any other pressure, and Russia preserves the right to react harshly to non-friendly action, including through maintaining national defence and applying mirroring or asymmetric measures (par.72, p. 29).

8.5. Discussion: comparison between Turkey and Russia

For Russia, I have identified three relevant documents towards its foreign and security policy. These are: 1) Foreign Policy Concept of RF, affirmed by the President on 30 November 2016; 2) Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2035, affirmed by the Government of the RF on 09 June 2020; and 3) The National Security Strategy of RF, affirmed by the President on 02 June 2021. I examined this set of strategies, because the initially planned Foreign Policy concept is from 2016, and these two aspects of it were updated recently –energy in 2020 and security in 2021. Aiming to create a comparable set of documents, I adjusted the technical characteristics for all documents. Namely, these are TNR 12, 1.5, justified. The number of pages is 37/104/39. I have selected the combination of these three strategies, because each of them directly refers to the foreign policy of Russia and throughout the text of each of them, Foreign Policy is a main topic.

For Turkey, as I do not understand the language, I could not make such a deep exploration. For this reason, I only refer to the strategic document which I have found – the Enterprising and Humanitarian Foreign Policy from 2020. This does not exclude the existence of other strategic documents of the country, related to different specific aspects of foreign policy. After a specific search, I did not find a unified document of a security strategy, so I accept that such a document does not exist at the moment.

For Turkey, the latest foreign policy document is from 2020, while for Russia its latest Foreign Policy Concept is from 2016, combining also an Energy Strategy from 2020 and National Security Strategy from 2021. Even though significant updates might be present due to the time difference of 4 years between both foreign policy documents, these are the latest available editions of their strategic policy concepts. The Russian version is complemented with the supplementary security and energy strategies.

It is significant that the Foreign Policy Concept and the Security Strategy of Russia combined have 76 pages, while its Energy Strategy has 103 pages. Undoubtedly, Energy is a top priority for Russia, followed by security and only then by foreign policy, considering the volume of the three strategies.

An important observation about Turkish foreign policy is that about half of its strategy, 35 pages out of 75, are devoted to geopolitical regions and countries. This means that it pays specific attention to the different parts of the world, with the specific characteristics outlined for countries of its interest.

8.5.1. Republic of Türkiye

The reasons for different results of the Turkish foreign policy according to the two types of analyses, surface by percentage and in deep by words, could be several. First, it could be accepted by default that the founding foreign interests of every state are its military survival, security, and diplomatic and political contacts. Therefore, it might be omitted as a priority, because of its understanding by default and the focus might be driven to the next priorities. However, these next priorities in the foreign policy of Turkey according to the groping of words are people and information, which is not corresponding to the title – entrepreneurial and humanitarian, therefore economy/investment and people. Second, this delusion might be due to an attempt to present the image of Turkey as a modern and developed state – focusing primarily on investment and humanitarian aspects, as the EU does. However, deeper reading shows that this is not exactly the fact, as the investment is not the highest priority. Only the people are the very specific interest of Turkey, and especially associated by language, religion or history, as well as by current Turkish citizenship, people abroad as a channel of influencing the local governance and implementing information exchange.

Regardless of the reasons for the misleading title, the fact is that the deep current priorities for Turkey are military/security and diplomacy/politics. This means that Turkey would react harshly in the zone of shared influence with Russia and the EU – the Black Sea

region, exactly in these two directions of power. Therefore, if the EU or Russia make steps towards increasing their positions in military might, security, diplomacy and international politics in countries of the Black Sea region, it is highly possible that Turkey would react negatively. The possibility of Turkey to initiate security crises as a response is due to the fact that Turkey accepts these elements of power as significant. Therefore, systematically feeding regional crises and conflicts in regional states where Russia, the EU or other potential hegemons acquire stronger positions in military/security or diplomacy/politics is not surprising.

Relatively significant is the share of power elements that Turkey attributes to exchange of external information and communities living abroad. These are the two main tools of foreign policy influence that Turkey, as a regional power, might apply. Namely, these two elements of power – society/governance and information/exchange – as elements of comparative analysis of power with other regional hegemons, show the specific role and characteristics of Turkey. An attempt of another hegemon to monopolize the communities, which the Republic of Turkey considers a high priority abroad, would provoke a sharp reaction by Turkey. Also, an attempt to interrupt or control the channels of foreign communication, available through Turkish citizens abroad, would harshly harm the country's interests. This is the case of Nagorno Karabakh, but could potentially affect Crimea, Moldova or other places across the Black Sea and the Balkans in the future. Currently, the focus of Turkey is primarily on the Turkish Cypriot and Mediterranean interests with Greece.

The elements of power, related to economy/investment and energy/climate are less prioritized in the contemporary Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, in foreign territories where interests are competing with other regional hegemons, Turkey is less likely to react negatively if the efforts of other hegemon concern these two topics. Even the opposite, a reaction of preserving the peace and regional stability and cooperation might be expected. This is the case of Russian energy projects and EU investment projects.

8.5.2. Russian Federation

The share by the three strategies shows that the strongest element of the foreign policy and security policy of Russia is its energy, for which reason a separate strategy is devoted to that topic. To make the study coherent, I further explored the combination of two strategies only – foreign and security, followed by a division by abstracts on the foreign policy strategy.

All results from counting of pages are under the conditions that some topics are overlapping. Inevitably, if we explore the energy strategy along with the other two, for

national security and foreign policy, then the highest priority for Russia seems to be Energy/Climate. It is followed by Diplomatic/Political, Economic/Investment, and then Social/Government and Military/Security. Last is Information/Exchange. This shows that a combination of energy, diplomacy and economy have the key leading position.

However, if only the security and foreign policy strategies are explored, then Diplomacy/Politics is leading, which is very much expected from a Foreign and Security Policy. It is followed by a combination of Military/Security which is also expected, and Social/Governance, which shows a special nuance of Russia towards approaching the people on a very high level. Only after that, Economy/Investment is ordered, which shows that economic development is not a top priority for Russia, but it is only a needed element after other more prioritised ones. The final one is Information/Exchange. Despite that Energy/Climate is the last result, I accept that indeed it is a top priority due to the evidence of a full comprehensive strategy on that. The surface analysis by number of pages for Foreign Policy Concept and National Security Strategy shows the traditional tendencies towards state survival – military aspects and maintaining strong diplomatic relations.

The deeper analysis of words is more punctual, because it examines the contents in detail by categories. Some words belonging to the same category had different meanings in Russian and English, which is the reason for applying roots of the word and a wider variety on the Russian text analysis.

Similar is the result between the count of paragraphs of the Foreign Policy Concept and of pages from the combined Foreign Policy Concept and National Security Strategy. In the latter, the majority of volume, 32% is for Diplomatic/Political, followed by 20% for Military/Security. This, again, shows the attitude towards traditional understanding. The relatively equal shares of 13-15% for Social/Governance, Economy/Investment and Information/Exchange shows their rising meaning, if the volume per pages is counted in security and foreign policy.

However, the result from the deeper linguistic shares is completely different. In the case of measuring the three strategies of Russia – Energy, Security and Foreign policy, the majority of volume is devoted to Energy/Climate, followed by Economy/Investment. This is expected as part of the energy, the volume of which strategy is more than double each of the other two. However, the next component is Social/Governance, followed only then by Diplomacy/Politics and Military/Security, closely followed by Information/Exchange. Therefore, the society is considered more important than diplomatic ties and military

survival, which three are closely related to exchange of information. This means that society is understood as a way to successfully provide the other aspects of power.

The results of word count from the two strategies only – security and foreign policy, confirm the very strong focus on Society/Governance, followed with a notable difference from Military/Security and Diplomatic/Political. Then, on a next level are Economy/Investment and Information/Exchange, with a huge gap between Energy/Climate. These results reaffirm the strong role of Society/Governance for Russia, closely linked with Information/Exchange. The role of the traditional Military/Security and Diplomatic/Political remains strong, but the social impact leads the perception.

Therefore, the combination of these results shows that if the energy strategy is considered, then inevitably the strongest focus is on energy and economy. But, if only the strategies for foreign and security policy are examined, a very high value belongs to society. Military/Security and Diplomacy/Politics remain at stable positions, but the own society is more important for Russia in the country and abroad. Economy and information exchange are next on the level of importance. From these results, I could draw the conclusion that for Russia, society is the most important foreign and security policy asset, not excluding the stable importance of diplomatic and military factors. Therefore, Russia is expected to be most reactive if a society which it perceives as its own is threatened by any challenge. As *society* is understood the part of the population abroad, as well as the full population in the country, which shares the same language, culture, values and spirituality, to some extend religion, but to a larger extend belief of shared community, shared life, shared past, shared present and shared future goals.

Such a perception about the people, the society, has a very strong impact on their behaviour. Therefore, if the battle is for society between Russia, Turkey and the West, then Turkey has some advantages if it uses religion and similar language roots, but Russia has huge advantage if it uses a combination of a number of shared values.

8.5.3. Comparison: six power elements

A detailed comparison per element follows.

Element 1 – Military/Security. For Turkey it has a low share of the volume, but the most important according to the words content, together with Diplomacy/Politics. Therefore, if security and military survival is concerned, Turkey would most probably react. For Russia, the National Security strategy is almost equal to the Foreign Policy concept in volume. Therefore, it could be expected the military factor to be as important as diplomacy. The

content of volume пер пагес shows it as second most important after diplomacy, while the word count shows it second most important after society, with almost the same result as diplomacy. Therefore, a sharp reaction could be expected almost equally if military/security or political/diplomatic factors are concerned, but even sharper if energy or society is concerned.

Element 2 – Economy/Investment. For Russia it is fourth by the word count results of the two strategies, second if energy strategy is included, and third/fourth together with society if the volume share is examined. Therefore, a sharp reaction by Russia on the economic/investment element is expected mainly if it concerns energy security. For Turkey, it is the fifth element by words and the first by share of volume. Therefore, despite that a reaction might seem to be due to economic motives, most probably there are other motives as well, such as military/security, diplomatic/political, information/exchange, and society/governance.

Element 3 – Energy/Climate. Very important for Russia, if the energy security as a separate document is explored, which comprises more than double the size of the strategies for foreign policy and security. If the energy strategy is not examined, then it is almost without mention. Therefore, it is a red line for the country and most probably it would react harshly on any interference related to energy security. For Turkey, the share of energy and climate is relatively low. So, no reaction is expected.

Element 4 – Diplomacy/Politics. For Turkey it is the second highest priority by words, after military, and the third highest priority by volume, after economy and social factors, which refer to the official name of the strategy. Therefore, it could be considered of very high importance for Turkey and a strong reaction might be expected if its diplomatic or political influence in a state of interest is harmed. For Russia, diplomacy is the highest by volume after energy, and the third highest by words after social and military. This means that a strong reaction might be expected if its political interests are harmed.

Element 5 – Society/Governance. Surprisingly, for Russia, this is the highest priority by word count of the two strategies, third by word count of the three strategies, after energy and economy, and third largest by page count, together with economy, following diplomacy and military. This means that Russia would possibly be reacting very harshly on this factor. For Turkey, society is fourth by word count, following military, diplomacy and information, and society is second by shares of pages. Therefore, it might be expected that Turkey seems to react for society, while actually being more interested in military, diplomacy and information factors.

However, there is a very specific difference between the perception for *society* of Russia and Turkey. Turkey refers to language – Turkish or with Turkic origin, religion – Islam, and historic past – of the Ottoman empire for people living in other countries, and also Turkish citizens for the migrants from Turkey abroad. Russia, on the contrary, sees Russian language and culture as world leading, and relates to the people worldwide who share the same language and cultural values as their own. Differently than Turkey, for Russia it is not specifically based on history or religion, even though some references are possible. On the contrary, Russia refers to values such as spirituality not in the sense of religion, but in the sense of common experiences, common perception about the world and common judgements about the ongoing processes. Therefore, for Russia the reference to people understanding the values of Russia abroad is actually a reference to the own society, which is accepted as part of the whole Russian spirit, creating in the people a strong sense of belonging and willingness to contribute to the common goal. Exactly this value system sometimes confuses other countries where different factors are considered to be more important – such as money or career. Differently, Turkey refers to people abroad possibly related to it through certain, clearly defined factors[42], the aim for which is access to information.

Element 6 – Information/Exchange. For Turkey, this factor is fifth by shares of volume, after the strategy name of economy and society and the expected for a foreign and security policy - diplomacy and military. By linguistic shares, surprisingly, it is the third of importance, straight after military and diplomacy. Therefore, high reactivity of Turkey might be expected if information access and exchange in countries of its interest are concerned. This means, for example, that if another hegemon tries to reduce the use of Turkish language, Muslim religion or positive historical connotation in a country of interest in the Balkans or South Caucasus, Turkey might be expected to initiate security crises or conflicts. For Russia, information/exchange is the least important, but with relatively equal values with economy and society, if the two strategies are examined per volume, and with similar result per words. Therefore, if information channels or exchange are concerned, Russia is not expected to react too much. Nevertheless, Russia is highly interested in its own society, or people with Russian belonging, who live abroad.

In comparison between Russia and Turkey, the common characteristics are high interest in diplomacy/politics and military/security. Which means that both of them perceive

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[42] It is possible that the author, even though trying to be objective, is slightly biased for the reason that understands Russian language and does not understand Turkish language. As a result, the meaning of the texts from Russian is explained, while from Turkey it is according to the translation. Maybe it would be good to be examined and corrected by both, Turkish and Russian natives.

as highly important these topics, and therefore are likely to initiate a conflict or a crisis in a country of shared influence if another hegemon interacts on these topics.

The differing elements of power for Russia and Turkey are that Russia estimates energy security very high, as well as the society which it perceives as its own spread around other countries. Therefore, Russia would be very reactive on these topics. Turkey is also highly interested in the social factor, but from the perspective abroad as a source of information access and exchange. As a result, Turkey would probably be reactive on topics related to information exchange, including the aspects related to entrepreneurship and humanitarian. Therefore, both are not likely to argue on these topics, as each one could have the leadership without the other one perceiving it as a threat.

The unexpected elements are for Russia – the social factor and for Turkey – the information access. This means that Russia is expected to be highly reactive as related to perceived as its own society, while Turkey is expected to be highly reactive on elements related to information exchange.

8.5.4. Perception of the six power elements: conflict or cooperation

To be able to show with punctuality which are the lines for reaction per regional hegemon in response to the action of other regional hegemons, a number of internal and external factors should be considered. Therefore, the current evaluation of the foreign policy priorities of Turkey concerns only the current moment, analysing its latest strategy from the end of 2020. For Russia, the analysed strategies are for foreign policy since 2016, for energy since 2020, and for national security since 2021. Therefore, the combination of strategies shows the progress from the last five years. It is updated, and it concerns energy only as far as it is a foreign policy instrument.

Turkey

Based on the preliminary framework of the elements of power, the results of the surface percentage correlation of importance give leading position to investment/economy and society/governance. These are namely the leading priorities of the document titled 'Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy'. Next priorities, with relatively close results, are diplomacy/politics, military/security, and foreign information/exchange. Significantly lower are the results for energy/climate.

However, the analysis of the deeper reading of the text through word analysis by the six categories of power shows different results. Surprisingly, it shows as mostly referred to

the traditional for foreign policy of state elements – military/security and diplomacy/politics. The next position is for society/governance and foreign information/exchange. These two elements are very much specific for Turkey, due to its high interest in communities in foreign countries, to which it relates on the basis of linguistic, religious and historical ties. Another significant component is the large number of Turkish citizens in foreign countries. Therefore, these two priorities are of highest importance for Turkey. Lower place in the priorities is attributed to economy/investment and energy/climate.

The conclusions are that, from the one side, on the surface Turkey presents itself as a country oriented in its foreign policy towards investment and people. However, the deep contents of the document show that the basic red lines for the country in case of contradiction with other regional hegemons aiming influence in countries of the Black Sea region would be on the elements of military/security and diplomacy/politics. These are the traditional basic two elements of foreign policy for every state.

The power components specific for Turkey are the next two. Namely, the communities abroad and the exchange of information, or the so called society/governance and information/exchange. On the one hand, these are the contemporary Turkish citizens living abroad. On the other hand, these are communities of the local population in foreign countries, with whom Turkey connects on the basis of common linguistic, religious or historical criteria. Exactly these communities are a significant tool for exercising power abroad for Turkey. This instrument could serve for attempts to change the governance on foreign territory through its local population, and it could serve as a tool for extracting significant contemporary foreign information.

The solid importance which the Republic of Turkey attributes to the people abroad and to the access to foreign information positions these two power elements in a highly risky group. Therefore, if another regional hegemon attempts to influence these power elements in a state of shared interest with Turkey, for example within the Black Sea region or the Balkans, the possible reaction of Turkey would be in boosting regional crises and conflicts. This reaction would guarantee lasting monopoly of influence of Turkey within these states. Finally, the least significant from the six elements for the foreign policy of Turkey at the moment are ecnomy/investment and energy/climate. Therefore, an attempt for influence by another regional hegemon over these two elements would probably not result in serious reaction from Turkey. Even the contrary, cooperation is possible, as for example happens with Turkish approach Russian energy projects and EU investment projects.

Finally, for Turkey, the surface percentage share shows high priority in economy/investment and society/governance. The in depth analysis shows preliminary importance to military/security and diplomacy/politics. High priority is given to regionalism and international organisations. The very specific value that Turkey attributes is towards people as an instrument of power. This is the society/governance as a way for influencing other countries, but also the information/exchange as a channel of active communication. For this, communities with Turkic languages, Muslim religion or common historical past, as well as current Turkish citizens abroad are addressed. For Russia, the most important foreign policy assets are energy security and its society abroad. People are referred to as having Russian spirit, independently of where exactly they live –and these people are perceived as their own society. Military and diplomacy aspects are constantly highly prioritized, which is expected in foreign and security concepts.

In conclusion, for Turkey the first impression by volume shows high importance on economy and society, which is the name of the strategy. But, indeed, the deeper analysis shows primary importance of military/security and diplomacy/politics, closely followed by information/exchange. Therefore, for Turkey the most important is the expected security and foreign policy elements, followed by new information/exchange, all disguised under the cover of economy and people.

Russia

Based on the three documents, Russia is expected to be most reactive if energy security or society abroad which Russia perceives as its own are concerned. Inevitably, Russia would be reactive to the traditional elements of foreign policy and security – concerning diplomacy and military aspects. A moderate or less-intensive reaction would be expected in the case of economy/investment, if it does not concern the beliefs of the society, and the information/exchange.

Finally, for Russia, energy security is its main foreign policy asset, for which it has a separate strategy double the size of the other two ones. Energy is combined with the economy. However, if only the strategies for foreign policy and security are examined, then the strongest assets are for military/security and diplomacy/politics. Surprisingly, by words it is surpassed by Society, which seems to be the most important specific factor for Russia. Therefore, Russia would be expected to be more reactive on energy security issues or concerning society perceived with Russian belonging issues, followed by diplomatic and military.

8.6. Conclusion

Among the reasons for contemporary security crises and conflicts in the Black Sea region is the competition between regional hegemons. I argue that the perception of power for Turkey, Russia and the EU triggers the response of each hegemon when another hegemon approaches a country of shared interest. To better understand the significance that each hegemon attributes to power, I elaborated six elements of power theory.

In the current research, I empirically measured the perception of Turkey and Russia over these six power elements. The aim of this measurement was to show which elements of power are considered highly important and, therefore, potentially would trigger a reaction by each hegemon.

The methodology was qualitative – comparison of the content analyses of the latest strategy of Turkey – the Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy from 2020 and three strategies of Russia- the National Security Strategy 2021, Foreign Policy Concept 2016, Energy Strategy 2020. My first method assessed the share of each power element as percentage from the whole text per document for both Russia and Turkey. My second method assesses the application of words from each power element across the full document. The results showed that for Turkey, on a surface view most significant are economy/investment and society/governance, which create a modern vision about the country. However, a deeper reading showed that the traditional for foreign policy elements of military/security and diplomacy/politics are the most important for current Turkish foreign policy. The specific characteristics of Turkey is its approach towards communities abroad with common Turkic language, Muslim religion, and historical past. Therefore, the most important elements of power for Turkey are the society abroad, both by locals and by new Turkish migrants. These societies are a main tool to exchange foreign information and to initiate governmental change.

For Russia, if the three strategies are examined, respectively for national security, foreign policy and energy, then the highest share from the elements of power is for energy. However, if only the two strategies are examined, then the highest share of the analysis by pages is for diplomacy, followed by military, then society and economy, closely followed by information/exchange. The deeper analysis per meaning of the words shows the highest score for society, followed by military and diplomacy, then economy and information/exchange. These results show that the priorities for Russia, and respectively the reactivity to initiate crises or conflicts would be highest on topics related to energy security, then, surprisingly, towards the society perceived as its own, and only then to the expected diplomacy and

military. The percentage by volume draws the diplomacy and military factors as more important, while the deeper analysis by words shows the very high importance of the social factor attributed to Russian spirituality.

To sum up, the results show that Turkey is most likely to be reactive, initiating regional crises or conflict on the following power elements – military/security, diplomatic/political and people, serving for both society/governance and information/exchange. Possibly, Turkey would not react or even could cooperate if foreign influence is attempted at the following power elements: economy/investment and energy/climate. Examples are the Russian energy projects and the EU investment projects. Based on these results, Russia is most likely to react harshly by initiating security crises or conflicts in a state of interest if energy is concerned, or if parts of the society perceived as having Russian spirit are concerned. The factors related to diplomacy and security might provoke an expected, protective reaction within a country of perceived sphere of influence, such as the countries in the post-Soviet space. If factors such as economy/investment or information/exchange are concerned, moderate reaction could be expected from Russia.

Therefore, both could cooperate if energy and society perceived as their own are not concerned for Russia and information/exchange is not concerned for Turkey, while simultaneously both do not endanger each other by military/security or interruption of diplomatic/political contacts in a country where they compete for influence. Respectively, each would react harshly if an element of power perceived as highly prioritised in a country of shared influence is affected by another hegemon. These results might serve for successfully preventing regional conflicts in zones of shared interests between several hegemons.

9. CONCLUSION

The conclusion discusses how the results from the theoretical, conceptual and empirical chapters meet the research objectives. Also, it explains the validity, applicability and reliability of the research results. It outlines the limitations of the dissertation, and suggests directions for further research.

9.1. Summary of the research aim, objectives and contribution to conflict prevention

The main contribution of this research is the newly developed concept of international relations theory. It establishes the relation between power perception and conflict prevention. I apply it to the case study of the Black Sea region, characterised with regional security crises and conflicts. The same theoretical model can be applied to other regions with the purpose of preliminary identification of the reaction of competition. As a result, action can be implemented to prevent a conflict.

The theoretical framework begins with an epistemological approach to power. I discuss the understanding of power in neorealism, liberalism and constructivism, out of which I draw a combined classification - six elements of power. The literature on power in IR and the case study logically lead to a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework explains the relation between the six power elements and conflict in the competition for externally projected influence. It creates a model to assess the reactivity of the three regional hegemons on each of the six power elements in a fixed time period. It provides an empirical example by measuring the perception of the six power elements in their foreign and security policy concepts. A certain time period is selected, between two major crises.

Conflict prevention and power perception in the Black Sea region: the EU, Russia, and Turkey is a research which assesses the potential of regional competitors to escalate regional security crises, due to perceived power competition. This research is embedded in the general knowledge of conflict prevention. It assumes that conflict is the result of competition. It refers to post Cold-war regionalism. The international relations theories, related to security crises, conflict and power in the Black Sea region, on which I construct this research, are the *security dilemma* theory and the *balance of power* theory. Security dilemma shows as a main reason for security crises the misperception between regional powers. Balance of power outlines imperfect competition as a main reason for destabilising a region, while perfect competition as preserving the stability of a region. In this context, I explored how the perceived value of power by each regional competitor relates to their reaction of competition, leading to security crises and conflicts.

This research aimed to contribute through two simultaneous approaches - regionalism and international relations theory. The theoretical framework chapter developed the IR theory approach. The conceptual framework chapter explained how it can be empirically tested. The case study chapter developed the regionalist approach. After I examined the contribution of these approaches towards conflict prevention, I tested them in empirical chapters. The main findings, interpretations and conclusions are further outlined.

The **research impact** is on conflict prevention and power perception. The results show which elements of power are considered as more important and which are considered as less important for three competing actors - Russia, Turkey, and the EU. The findings show the perceived importance of each of the six power elements for Russia, Turkey, and the EU. As a result, their reaction to competition, leading to conflict, could be identified in advance. Therefore, it could be prevented. The assessment also shows the potential areas of cooperation and the neutral areas.

Based on the results, an active reaction would be expected by a regional competitor if another regional competitor threatens to influence a country on a power element considered highly important. A passive reaction is expected by a regional competitor on power elements considered less important. The assessment only refers to the aimed external influence by a regional competitor.

In the **literature review** chapter I explore, critique and synthetize the leading authors on three topics - conflict prevention, regionalism, and IR theory. The literature review integrates thematic case study and theoretical parts. This is a precondition for the developed new conceptual framework. It is later addressed empirically.

To assess power perception, I implemented several steps. First, I selected a case study with high conflict intensity - the Black Sea region. I identified three regional competitors with relatively equal power status - the EU, Russia and Turkey. Then, I conceptualised power, consisting of six power elements. Then, I assessed the applicability of this new concept to the three regional competitors in the Black Sea region via expert interviews. This showed whether such classification of power elements could be examined for these three competitors. I selected a peaceful time period between major international crises, for which time I assessmed the foreign and security policy strategies of the three regional competitors. Based on the perceived importance of each power element for each of the three regional competitors, I assessed their likelihood to react by initiating a crisis. As a result, I suggested which regional competitor would be triggered to initiate regional security crises or conflicts on which power element, for the selected time period.

This dissertation is written via an **abductive methodological** approach. It selects a methodology of grounded theory, which means that a case study is developed in parallel with a theoretical framing, as a result of which new theory is built and tested. A new conceptual framework is proposed. It is tested empirically in the variables, derived from the case study. Finally, the results are assessed in line with the initial theory on conflict prevention, aiming to contribute to this set of knowledge.

The **case study** chapter justifies the selected conflict factors in the Black Sea region – time, participants, reasons for conflict, interests. In the Black Sea region, I identified the EU, Russia, and Turkey as the three main regional competitors with comparable power status, as suggested in the theory. The case study aims to identify some of the interests of the regional competitors with equal power status in the Black Sea region. The case study chapter, in a descriptive way, discusses the preconditions for their perception of power elements over which they compete. I address the existence of constant regional security crises and conflicts around the Black Sea. I examine it as a result of the power competition between regional competitors. The current research examines as a reason for competition the different perception of power between the regional competitors. Therefore, it aims to define their perception of power. I assume that the competition leads to conflict. I assess potential areas of competition and cooperation. I identify the relation between power perception and the lack of regional stability. Through this approach, the research aims to contribute to the knowledge of conflict prevention for the specific region. I test its applicability through expert interviews.

In the **empirical chapters**, I assess the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia, and Turkey in a fixed time period between two crises. For the EU, it is through discourse analysis. This shows the yearly change of attitude. For Russia and Turkey, it is through comparative content analysis. It shows their static interests. This particular information can be used for EU conflict prevention.

Assessment of the methodological choices

The selected abductive methodology applies a case study, for the purpose of building and testing new theory. Relevant case study regions are those characterised with security crises and conflicts ongoing for centuries. Such examples are, among others, the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region. The general knowledge on the main conflict drivers in these two regions suggests two factors – the nationalism of the local population and the geopolitical competition between regional hegemons. I examined conflicts as a result of the external competition for influence. The main regional powers, competing for influence in

these regions, are Russia, Turkey and the EU. As a measurable aspect of this influence, I conceptualised power in international relations. Furthermore, through discourse and content analyses I assessed how power is perceived in the foreign and security policy strategies of the regional competitors for a fixed time period. This was achievable, due to the limited number of documents, the exact values of time, and the clearly established values to be measured - six power elements, for three regional competitors.

9.2. Research results: accomplishment of the research objectives

The dissertation develops the topic of conflict prevention and power perception in the Black Sea region. Further, it is explained how the results of every chapter of the dissertation meet the research objectives. The contributions of the research are discussed as: theoretical for conflict prevention, conceptual to the meaning of power in IR, empirical to the case study of the Black Sea region, particularly Russia, Turkey and the EU, and practical for EU diplomacy.

Conceptual contribution: a new theory to the knowledge of conflict prevention

The perception of power affects the reactions of regional IR actors. These reactions are either competition, cooperation or neutral. The reaction of competition leads to conflict. The aim of this research was to detect the reaction of competition in advance. Thus, it could contribute to conflict prevention. A conceptual framework was created, aiming to make such measurement possible. It consists of six elements of power and three regional competitors, whose perceptions could be measured on these power elements for a fixed time period. The *validity* is high for a selected time. However, the validity is not constant, because the values for the regional competitors might change in different time periods, depending on which IR actors possess comparable power status at a certain time. The values of power elements might also differ for different regional competitors in different time periods.

Theoretical contribution: the meaning of power in international relations

The conceptualisation of power in international relations is multidimensional, with main aspects of power as status of IR actors or as areas of competition. The estimation of perception of power is implemented through conceptual division of power in six elements. Through it, I measure the perception of IR actors with comparable power status - the regional competitors. This theoretical conceptualisation of power is created as a model to assess power perception and the reaction attitudes, leading to competition. Such knowledge corresponds to

the starting research presumption, stating that competition leads to conflict and identifying the perceived power could contribute to conflict prevention.

Empirical contribution: the Black Sea region, Russia, Turkey, the EU

I empirically test the new theory to the foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey. I examine: *What importance is given to military, economic, energy, political, social, and information components in the foreign and security policy strategies of the three regional competitors?* I refer only to their external power projection, not considering any internal factors.

This question is addressed via comparative content analysis of the foreign and security policy strategies of Russia and Turkey. For the EU, I apply discourse analysis. I compare the relative value that each hegemon gives to each power element. I assess how they perceive each power element. The perceived low value of a power element means less likelihood to compete, but higher likelihood to cooperate. The perceived high value of a power element means high likelihood to compete on that element. Defining the power perception, and therefore likelihood to compete on a certain power element at a certain time, contributes to the knowledge of conflict prevention.

I empirically test the new theory to the case study of the Black Sea region. I assess how power is perceived for the three regional competitors in the same period of time. I select their corresponding foreign and security policy concepts. Through content analysis, I identify the importance attributed to the six elements of power for Russia and Turkey. For the EU, as it has annual revisions of the same strategy, I assess through discourse analysis how the perception of the six power elements progresses. For Russia and Turkey, I select the relevant strategies to the foreign and security policy, as well as to the identified power elements. Thus, I can compare the perceived value which they attribute to the six power elements.

Based on the results, the theory of six power elements is applicable to the method of expert interviews, assessing competition and cooperation between three regional competitors. This contributes to building the theory of conflict prevention in a specific region as a supplementary method, as additional primary data is needed from other sources. Nevertheless, interesting views were found, which added new perspectives on potential development of the relations in the region. Therefore, the academic and diplomatic approach towards conflict prevention in a region needs to be developed simultaneously, aiming for optimal results on both practical and theoretical grounds.

The results from content and discourse analysis of the foreign policy strategies show that indeed, each regional competitor perceives differently the importance of the six power elements. Therefore, their reaction to competition depends on their different perception. An expectation that all IR actors compete on the same power elements with the same attitude would lead to inappropriate assessment of a conflict situation. To raise awareness and undertake appropriate action for conflict prevention, namely the specific perceptions of power for each regional competitor in a selected time need to be identified. Therefore, triggering a conflict due to the perceived high importance of a power element could be prevented.

Practical contribution: EU diplomacy

Particularly, EU diplomats and the EEAS as an institution implementing the EU foreign and security policy could benefit from the results of this research. Comparison between several EU neigbouring regions - the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region, has shown the urgent need to develop knowledge of regional conflict prevention. This can improve the EU's image as a conflict prevention actor in the selected region. Also, the newly developed framework can contribute to upgrading the next strategies of the EU foreign and security policy. It can bring new focus on conflict prevention, instead of the currently approached crisis management.

9.3. Validity, reliability, applicability

The validity of the theoretical conceptualisation is high, because measurable variables are selected: six power elements and three regional competitors. The assessment of their foreign and security policy strategies is also high, because it selects documents for the same fixed period of time. The **validity** of the results is high for the countries of the Black Sea region, because it examines their specific characteristics. However, the same theoretical model can be applied to other regions only after modifications. The empirical results are only valid for the selected time period, the selected three regional hegemons, the selected documents and the selected six elements of power. If any of these variables changes, this would probably reflect on the results. Therefore, if any variable changes, then all other components need reassessment.

The results are **measurable**, because they follow the same theoretical pattern - examining the value of each of the six power elements per each regional competitor. Time limits are settled according to the major geopolitical events before and after it.

The **reliability** of the results is high, because each method specifically addresses an aspect to be clarified. The latest foreign and security policy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey are examined in the original languages, and modifications are accepted to include relevant for each actor highly significant power elements. The type of analysis, discourse or content, is adapted to the characteristics of each competitor. The results are reliable, because I only assess the latest foreign and security policy strategies of the three regional competitors. I compare their perception on the same framework of six power elements. This approach provides high reliability of the results, as they are specifically drawn for the selected three actors, six power elements, and fixed time period. Based on the exact selection of variables, the reliability of the results is high. This means that the research can contribute to conflict prevention based on the perception of the regional competitors in the selected time period.

I have selected the Black Sea region as a case study. However, the theory can be applied to the Western Balkans, or to other regions where regional powers compete, resulting in security crises. The condition is that IR actors with comparable power status are selected, as well as a fixed time period. *Applicability to other time and competitors:* This research created a conceptual framework on conflict prevention. It has been designed and applied in the case study of the Black Sea region for a fixed time period. It could be applied to the Black Sea region in a different time period. It can be applied to other regions if the specific characteristics of the participating regional hegemons are considered. Particularly, it can be further applied to unstable world regions, with regional security crises and conflicts, where at least two regional competitors have a major role in preserving the balance. The **applicability** of the theoretical model to regions where regional hegemons compete for influence is high. However, the specific characteristics of each region, including its involved regional hegemons, needs separate examination. The conceptual results of the research are universally applicable to any region.

9.4. Limitations and further research

Limitations

The selection of IR actors: I only examined the main competitors as equal power status IR actors. Among the IR actors, I have selected states and suprastate organisations with characteristics of a state. It is possible that different results are reached if non-state actors are brought into focus. Further analysis might be implemented on the specific characteristics of each selected IR actor. Also, their relation with non-state actors might be examined.

The empirical application of new theory towards the EU. This is a qualitative assessment of the EUGS 2016-2019 for foreign and security policy, which considers the EU's strategic image. It examines the EU approaches in relation to six elements of power. It enables comparisons on an equal basis with other IR actors, if the same categorisation of elements of power and time period are applied.

The empirical application of new theory towards Russia and Turkey. Languages: The original sources from Turkish language are translated to English - Entrepreneurial and Humanitarian Foreign Policy. The original sources in Russian language for three of the documents – Energy Strategy, National Security Strategy, and Foreign Policy Concept are used. This aims to provide as authentic results as possible. *Strategic documents:* The results evaluate possible initiation of regional crises and conflicts in countries of shared interest with other regional hegemons. The results show only the latest accessible foreign policy of Turkey from December 2020, and Russia's Foreign Policy 2016, Energy Strategy 2020 and National Security 2021. If the priorities change in future documents, or if past strategic documents are compared, the results might be different.

The limitation of *time for conduct* of this research has been six academic years. However, dynamics related to the regional relations around the Black Sea after 2022, the covid-19 health crisis, as well as changes in the academic environment affected the process of conducting this research. For the time given and the constantly changing circumstances, this was the optimal result the author could achieve.

 Suggestions for further research

The current research compares the foreign and security policy priorities in six power elements for the EU, Russia and Turkey. For further research, I suggest an analysis on the sequence of foreign policy strategies per each regional hegemon, the EU, Russia and Turkey, to be implemented. This would show their tendencies for permanent or changing priorities.

Alternatively, the same theoretical model could be tested in other world regions where competition between hegemons influences regional security crises and conflicts.

Furthermore, I suggest that a separate analysis is done on the competition over the six elements of power in a country of shared interest. A narrow case study can be developed on one of the countries over which the competition for influence has been present over centuries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Romania).

Another opportunity for new research is one element of power to be examined for all regional competitors. For example, the competition for influence over diplomatic/political

power for a fixed time period (one year) can be examined in several countries. Its purpose is to show whether the same regional competitors aim identical influence on the same element in several countries.

List of abbreviations:

BSS - Black Sea Strategy

Council of the EU - Council of the European Union

EC - European Commission

EEAS - European External Action Service

EP - European Parliament

ESS – European Security Strategy 2003

EU – European Union

EUGS – EU Global Strategy 2016

HR/VP – High Representative / Vice President

MFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MS – Member State of the European Union

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

RF – Russia – Russian Federation

SDGs – Strategic Development Goals 2030

TR – Turkey - Türkiye – Republic of Turkey - Republic of Türkiye

UN – United Nations

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNSCR - United Nations Security Council

WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Annex 1. Consent Form

Name of the project: 'Geopolitical competition vs. cooperation in the Black Sea region: an EU perspective. The measure of power as a tool for regional stability' (initially planned title)

Subprogram: 'International Relations and Security Studies', Multidisciplinary Doctoral School, Corvinus University of Budapest

Researcher: Neli Valentinova Kirilova, neli.v.kirilova@gmail.com

Supervisor: Dr. László Békési, bekesi@uni-corvinus.hu (during year 1-2, when I collected the data)

The project is part of a PhD Dissertation. If information is given that makes it possible for other parties involved to be identified, for example a particular discussion, then the information will be extracted only to the limit where the other parties stay anonymous unless a specific permission by them is given.

 I, ………………………………………………………………………………………….,

representative of …………………………………………………………………………………

on the position of………………………………………………………………………………………

consent to taking part in this project. I understand that I will be asked questions on the geopolitical competition and cooperation and on the role of the organisation I represent. I understand that I am at liberty to answer these questions, or decline to do so at will.

I understand that I will be given anonymity unless I give my permission for my name to be used.

Please delete as appropriate:

- I wish/ do not wish to be referred to by name.
- I agree/ disagree to be directly quoted.
- I agree/disagree to be referred in the project as a representative of my organisation.
- I wish/do not wish to present views in my personal capacity.
- I agree/ do not agree this conversation to be recorded.

Signature: Date:

Interview questions: The questions will be tailored to the expert being interviewed. They aim to figure out any dependency between 1) the increasing/decreasing power possession of the regional powers <u>EU-Russia-Turkey</u> (EU-RU-TU), and 2) military/ frozen conflicts in <u>third regional countries</u> (not belonging to the EU-RU-TU) within the <u>Black Sea region</u> (BSR). The *measure of power* in terms of security, political stability, and economic prosperity is searched.

I. Dependency resulting from the competition

1. Which are the <u>reasons for power competition</u> between the leading actors in the BSR, namely the EU, Russia and Turkey? How would you define the <u>dependency</u> between the EU-RU-TR <u>competition for power</u> and a military/ frozen <u>conflict</u> in a third regional country? How should it be dealt with? Why?

2. Is there any <u>dependency</u> between the (unconstitutional) <u>change of government</u> in the EU-RU-TU and a military/ frozen <u>conflict</u> in a third regional country? Why?

3. What is the <u>dependency</u> between increasing/ decreasing <u>economic power</u> in the EU-RU-TU and a military/ frozen <u>conflict</u> in a third regional country?

4. Is there any <u>dependency</u> between the increasing/ decreasing <u>military power</u> in the EU-RU-TU and a military/ frozen <u>conflict</u> in a third regional country?

5. Which is the *power limit* faced by the regional power actors, EU-RU-TU, <u>under</u> which they achieve regional <u>balance</u>, but <u>above</u> which a reaction of one of them leads to a <u>conflict</u> in a third regional country? How to measure their trilateral power standards?

II. Dependency resulting from the cooperation

6. What is the position of your organization regarding the regional **cooperation between the EU-RU-TU**? Is a trilateral agreement achievable? How? Why?

7. Which spheres should be leading in the cooperation between the EU-RU-TU? Trade? Economy? Culture (traditions, heritage)? Energy diplomacy (electric energy transfer routes, gas pipelines, oil routes)? Sea routes? Food? Security? Youth? Education? Sport? Ecology? Technology development? Railway networks? Why?

8. Is the strategy for regional cooperation of your organisation coordinated with the other two regional powers? Why? How can it be harmonized?

9. How does the institution you represent assess **the EU-RU-TU cooperation vs. competition within the region** now? Why?

10. In the next 10 years? Why? In the next 50 years? Why? Is there anything else you would like to add in a personal capacity, not as a representative of any organization?

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Bibliography

Literature topics: international relations theory, conflict prevention, perception, power, competition, security, Black Sea region, Russia, Turkey, EU

Methodology and methods topics: case study, content analysis, strategic documents, power elements, ontology, epistemology, literature review, conceptual framework, theoretical framework, conceptual analysis

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