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**Tesi di laurea**

**“Maritime geopolitics and the role of port cities and international straits in a multilateral context”**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation examines port cities, maritime choke points and international straits to analyze the relevance of multilateralism and the implications of a complex interplay between power politics, balance of power and multilateral cooperation. Several case studies in the Black Sea, in the Mediterranean and in international straits can namely shed light on the transnational challenges and the need to cooperate despite a fierce competition for natural resources. Global phenomena such as the interconnectedness of international maritime trade imply the need to overcome mere power politics, even though tensions and diverging geopolitical interests persist. The analysis is based on a highly multidisciplinary approach and relies on the methodology of Global history as a tool to analyze the evolution of globalization in port cities and maritime routes beyond mere centric perspectives. The challenges in maritime choke points can be considered as the evidence that classical political assumptions such as the concept of balance of power are being reshaped and important analogies with early modern political contexts can be detected. The dissertation aims to prove that a multidisciplinary analysis of maritime straits and port cities can be beneficial to grasp the evolution of classical political concepts, starting from the historical roots of global phenomena up to the forms of multilateralism promoted by international organizations such as the OSCE and the SCO.

## **Introduction**

This year I had the chance to attend a cycle of seminars organized by the OSCE and during the last session the same research question underpinning my final dissertation has been discussed and the intervention by the Secretary General Schmid highlighted some relevant aspects which I deem crucial to be examined. Multilateralism represents the only viable solution to tackle transnational challenges and international organizations and policymakers should rely on new long-term approaches to invigorate dialogue and diplomacy again after the Russian invasion in the Ukraine. However, the international system is undergoing a period of radical transition and scholars are still evaluating the implications of these changes, which require an adaptation of classical concepts of international relations and negotiation tools. Consequently, this dissertation aims to grasp the repercussions linked to the evolution of the international system and it focuses particularly on the role of multilateralism. Even though this concept is widely employed in official discourse, efficient multilateral models must be planned, and the existing methods must be improved, in order to enhance conflict prevention and tackle transnational challenges. The crisis in the Ukraine requires a detailed reflection about this phase of transition and proves that new solutions and approaches must be designed.

While analyzing the literature concerning these issues, it can be noticed that international relations studies should be further integrated with more in-depth historical studies, as they often devote more attention to contemporary issues or historical dynamics play a marginal role in order to find general patterns and theories. De Ridder (2017) highlights the relevance of historical studies, which can provide with important suggestions for policymakers to improve the quality of peace negotiations (De Ridder 2017) and Quirk (2008) even claims that some IR studies are not underpinned by solid historiographic consideration (Reus-Smidt and Snidal 2008). The important contribution of history in IR studies is undisputed and while I was examining the available literature, I have noticed that many analogies and parallelisms can be drawn between the political context of the Early Modern Age and the contemporary transition in the international system. Global history provides namely with a challenging and interesting methodological tool on which I have decided to rely for my dissertation and the reasons are twofold. Firstly, global history deals in-depth with the origins of globalization and with the evolution of cultural, social, political and economic networks on a global scale. This approach is useful, since scholars are still realizing all the multi-faceted implications the current multi-layered world in which all regions are interconnected.

Global history can be perfectly combined with maritime history, since maritime history deals primarily with tracing the history of connections through maritime routes. Since the Early Modern Age maritime contacts have triggered the first relevant phenomena linked to transnational encounters and port cities were the first laboratories for globalization. Port cities had namely to tackle the management of vessels coming from different world regions, imported new goods coming from abroad and had to cope with the spread of infectious diseases coming from other regions. Port cities entail all the features to be defined as workshops of globalization and nowadays port cities are still part of global economic and logistic networks; consequently, my analysis will consider the implications of globalization for port cities. Moreover, the history of the main oceans and seas is marked by a complex interplay between power politics based on aggressive distributional bargaining and the need

to tackle transnational challenges through multilateral cooperation. This situation materializes owing to the presence of valuable resources and routes which embody vital national interests and when resources are scarce and crucial for the development of a community, tensions are likely to escalate. On the other hand, seas are common shared spaces in which transnational challenges such as maritime pollution, climate change or piracy have to be tackled through a joint multilateral cooperation effort, since all the parties have a shared interest in preserving the environment and the freedom of seas and cannot master these challenges alone. Therefore, it can be inferred that maritime issues embody all the basic mechanisms of international relations and as a consequence they can be conceived as meaningful case studies which can be deployed to consider the evolution of the international system. Additionally, these case studies are helpful to find the most adequate strategies to enhance conflict prevention and the most powerful incentives to foster multilateral cooperation. These dynamics mark especially international straits, which play a crucial role in economic mechanisms, and which are often employed either as catalysts for cooperation or as instruments of deterrence.

Furthermore, global history strives to overcome mere centric approaches by embracing a pluralistic method which considers global interactions from other viewpoints different from the Western and European ones. I deem this aspect particularly useful, since mainstream international relations theories are still heavily influenced by the Western stance and current international issues prove that countries such as Russia or China believe that multilateral systems must be reformed in order to include non-Western countries in multilateral decision-making. The frequent misunderstandings and the distrust between world regions and countries, which peaks in military confrontations as occurred in Ukraine, prove the importance of supporting the activity of bridge building realized by international organizations such as the OSCE, which relies on an integrated and holistic concept of security and has often managed to facilitate negotiations, for instance in Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, especially maritime history entails a strong multidisciplinary character and I firmly believe that any analysis must be multidisciplinary to fully realize the complexity of a multipolar and multi-layered international system. Consequently, I will rely on the approach of global history to examine with a multidisciplinary methodology maritime issues as meaningful case studies to understand this phase of transition in international relations and to improve multilateral strategies in international relations. Of course, this dissertation has been heavily influenced by my studies, which comprise both global studies and area studies, because I believe that multilateralism must be global but also pluralistic, so that it can really and effectively involve all world players to foster peace and security in all regions.

## Chapter 1: Early Modern Maritime global interactions and their implications

### *1.1 Global history and maritime trade networks in the Early Modern Age.*

A definition of the concept of global history is provided by Sebastian Conrad (2017), who highlights the most relevant features of global history. Even though the terms “world history” and “global history” are sometimes deemed interchangeable, world history examines the diffusion of concepts and models from the Western center to the periphery and this implies that it remains Eurocentric. On the other hand, global history focuses on connections on a global scale, and it is based on the expansion of time and space. While world history relies on comparisons and on the spread of concepts, global history studies connections, starting from international trade networks in the Early Modern Age and encompassing their economic and cultural consequences, such as the spread of diseases and migratory trends. Despite this global feature, the approach of global history includes also microhistories and considers an expanded and more interconnected concept of time and space. This is the reason why global history can be successfully combined with the study of maritime history, as maritime history per se deals with connections and is underpinned by the widening of horizons. Emphasis in global history is put on relations and connections, and this implies a focus on the synchronicity of events and a rejection of teleologies of modernization. Global history is claimed to be an attempt to overcome Eurocentrism<sup>1</sup> and other forms of positionality<sup>2</sup> and this methodological need will be addressed also in the last chapter (Conrad, 2017, pp.62-89, pp.115-140). This task is particularly complex, since the historical turn in international relations strengthened the role of history in IR studies, nevertheless it often occurs that despite the goals of overcoming Eurocentrism, it is reproduced<sup>3</sup> or there is a shift from Eurocentrism to Orientalism, which is however contrary to the main aim of global history. Consequently, global history analyzes the connections between national histories and also episodes of microhistory which shed light on the cultural changes due to social and cultural encounters between different populations. An aspect which must be critically assessed is the predominant role of English language in the historiography of global history, which might reproduce a Eurocentric and Anglocentric viewpoint and to this extent it is important to further integrate other scholars and languages in global history studies (Drayton and Motadel 2018). According to Polónia (2012), maritime history and global history can be easily combined, and maritime history is unique as it encompasses all dimensions of human activities at sea and cannot be limited to only a few sectors. Additionally, it is clearly

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<sup>1</sup> The paper by Bilgin contributes to the debate regarding Eurocentrism by developing the considerations by Buzan and Lawson in their book “The Global Transformation” and by highlighting the need to examine othering practices in international relations (Bilgin 2016)

<sup>2</sup> An interesting analysis regarding the global history of science and the attempt to overcome Eurocentrism and other types of positionality, such as postcolonialism, can be found in the work by Raj (Raj 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Tolay studies why Eurocentrism is inadvertently reproduced even though global historians want to avoid all forms of positionality and the author outlines four types of inadvertent reproduction, which are rhetorical critique, deconstruction, decentering and dehierarchizing (Tolay 2021). Overcoming Eurocentrism would be however very beneficial for IR studies as it would be useful to compare the evolution of political systems in Asia and in Europe. In East Asia hierarchy and hegemony marked historical political organizations, and this differs from Western models based on Westphalian sovereign equality and balance of power (Kang 2020).

international, as it comprises not only different technical sectors, but also regards all regions in the world, which are interconnected, and which make maritime history international in its scope. Furthermore, the link between maritime history and modern history is strong, as maritime history entails a relevant explanatory power of the evolution of the modern world and the mechanisms of the past shaping our societies unfolding in the Early Modern Age and this regards not only traditionally maritime societies, but also those communities which seemed more focused on land issues. Furthermore, maritime history is instrumental to the study of global history due to its emphasis on global networks and on its ability to connect populations, cultures and economic systems and it is per definition cross-cultural and based on local, regional and global networks. There is also a methodological complementarity between maritime history and global history, since the former is defined mainly by the object of its study, which is the sea and all the aspects linked to it, while global history is defined by its peculiar epistemological characteristics and its capability to consider the evolution of global dynamics and changes in numerous sectors (Polónia, 2012, pp.1-20). As it has already been stated, the first discipline global history is connected with is economic history, therefore economic networks emerging in the Early Modern Age should be studied. First and foremost, early modern international trade differs from the current model of international trade as the modern pattern was polycentric and a fluctuation in one regional market did not originate the same trickle-down effect which we witness in nowadays' markets. Furthermore, during the Early Modern Age only a small fraction of European counties' GDP stemmed from international trade, while today's percentage is much higher<sup>4</sup>. However, the relevance of international trade in the Early Modern Age cannot be neglected due to its power to shape the modern world and to anticipate modern trends and again maritime routes can be regarded as a very powerful catalyst of transnational exchanges. Long-distance networks emerged and the Indian Ocean represented the area with the liveliest port cities<sup>5</sup>, which linked China, Indonesia, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea and Africa. The main Asian port cities of this powerful network were Macau, Guangzhou (Canton), Melaka, Aceh, Surat, Bengal, Calicut and Goa. On the Arab coast we must mention Hormuz, Aden and Mogadishu. Several routes intersected in the same region: cotton and indigo from the Arab region were exchanged with Chinese porcelains, silk and spices, African goods were imported from Swahili regions to the Indian port of Gujarat and these maritime routes were reinforced by the cosmopolitan commerce through the Silk Road and encompassed also slaves from Africa or from Slavic regions and Crimea became one of the most important gateways of the European slave trade. After the collapse of the Mongol empire and in spite of the political instability of the region, the Silk Road represented a hub of trade between Russian, Ottoman, Indian, Armenian and Persian merchants. Moreover, European seas were crucial nodes of global trade, both in the South and in the North. Mediterranean routes were namely controlled by merchants from Venice, Genoa and Florence who bought goods from North Africa, Egypt and from China, while trade in the Northern Seas was based on commodities such as grain from the Baltic and wool from

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<sup>4</sup> A detailed analysis of the limits of globalization can be found in the paper by De Vries, who analyzes the difference between hard and soft globalization and the differences between Early Modern and current international trade (De Vries 2010).

<sup>5</sup> The case studies of Banten, Ayutthaya and Banjarmasin should be further studied in the paper by Hall so as to become aware of the intense and lively contacts between European, Islamic and Asian merchants and people in Southeast Asia (Hall 2014).



England. These routes were under the hegemony of the Hanseatic league and English merchants connected the Baltic with the Netherlands and the French coasts. Trade was lively also in Africa and the focal points were based in port cities linking the Sahara with the Mediterranean, in the coasts of West Africa in which gold from Senegal, Niger and Gambia rivers was traded and in the east coast of Great Zimbabwe which brought African goods to the coasts of the Indian Ocean. Finally, the Mesoamerican region represented another crucial gateway of global trade. Port cities have been at the center of the two most important trade networks of the Early Modern Age, which were located in the Indian Ocean and in the Atlantic Ocean. Trade in the Indian Ocean Basin flourished thanks to the agricultural policies of the Ming dynasty and in the Indian region, which led to higher yields both in food crops and in commercial crops including indigo, cotton and sugarcane. Population growth was boosted thanks to the higher agricultural yields and trade was fostered also by the high European demand for Asian spices and goods. Portuguese hegemony started after the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut in 1498 and after the conquest of Goa by Alfonso de Albuquerque in 1510, it was violently maintained until other forces counterbalanced Lisbon's fleet in the region. Firstly, The Ottoman Sultan Selim I thought that Egypt and Aden could challenge Portuguese hegemony, which was further challenged by the Venetian and Ottoman interests in the Red Sea and by the alliance between the Sultan of Aceh (Sumatra) and Ottoman forces, which directed trade through the Strait of Sunda rather than through the Strait of Malacca controlled by the Portuguese fleet. The aforementioned event must be further stressed, since it proves that Straits were already strategic during the Early Modern Age and in this period the patterns of competition between port cities and trade powers started to emerge and resembled current models. Already in the Early Modern Age maritime straits were regarded as strategic tools employed in commercial warfare and negotiations and this is the reason why I would like to further stress the political importance of straits, which is sometimes neglected. Trade in the region of the Indian Ocean was fostered also by silver imported from Japan and from America, until it underwent a phase of decline due to several reasons. The crop failures owing to the so-called little ice age and the restrictive Japanese trade policy by the Tokugawa shogun Iemitsu, who outlawed trade with foreigners except for the privileges granted to Dutch merchants to trade only with the island of Deshima in 1638 marked the beginning of a phase of decline in trade in the Indian Ocean Basin. The crisis of maritime trade was caused also by the decline of the Ming dynasty and by the increased Dutch presence through the VOC. The VOC successfully curtailed Portuguese influence in the region, obtained Melaka in 1641 and gained hegemony over spice trade between Asia and Europe by controlling and disrupting intra-Asian trade and cultivation patterns. Waterways contributed to the success of trade also in Eurasia and to this extent the opening for trade of the Volga River Basin in the mid-1500s by Ivan IV made the city of Astrakhan become a regional hub for Russian, Indian, Persian and Tatar merchants. Furthermore, the Russian port city of Archangel (Archangelsk) was built in 1584 with the decision of Ivan IV after the exploration voyage of Richard Chancellor in 1553, who opened a new commercial route linking Europe and Asia which was soon exploited by the Muscovy Company. The White Sea became the focus of Dutch and Scottish merchants, who aimed to establish trade relations both with Asia as well as with Russia and the intense economic exchange between Europe and Russia is considered as one of the reasons explaining the establishment of the city of Saint Petersburg by Peter I in 1703. Competition

concerning the Straits continued in 1623, when the English East Indian Company together with Shah Abbas stopped Portuguese hegemony in the Strait of Hormuz, which was part of a cosmopolitan Levantine route which brought Siberian furs, American sugar, Asian spices and African slaves to Europe and to the Eastern Mediterranean (Parker, 2010, pp.68-98). One of the most interesting and well-known examples of global trade networks regards the Early Modern Atlantic Trade, which represents a meaningful and powerful example of globalization as it connected Europe, America and Africa. It differed from the European trade in Asia, as in America European merchants very soon gained economic leverage in a coercive way by controlling people and resources, while in Asia European merchants cooperated with other Asian and Arabic merchants, gained importance in 1600s and 1700s and aimed at controlling trade routes. Both in Asia and in America, European merchants became key agents in the distribution of global goods. The model of the triangular trade became soon important and relevant, bringing manufactured European goods to Africa, slaves to America and sugar, molasses and other American goods in Europe. European powers always attempted to regulate and control trade, which was nearly impossible owing to piracy, contraband and to the frequent violation of rules, such as the Spanish *asiento* which was often violated by English merchants during the slave trade. Africa became a key actor in global maritime trade, and this gave on one hand important development opportunities to African people, while on the other hand the control of resources increased conflicts which were coupled with the competition of European powers in the western coast, who built fortresses to protect the nodes of trade in Elmina, Arguin, Cape Verde, Loango or in the coast of Guinea. Slave trade became unfortunately very lucrative both for European and African merchants and remained under African control<sup>6</sup>(Parker, 2010, pp.98-106). As I have stated at the beginning of the chapter, during the Early Modern Age the first relevant global commercial networks were established and since they encompass maritime routes, the link between the approach of global history and maritime history is clear and reinforces the analysis of global phenomena which I will consider in this dissertation.

### *1.2 Port cities as workshops of globalization and maritime empires in the Early Modern Age.*

The previous paragraph described the relevance of maritime routes as the engine of global commercial networks, since land routes in Asia had always played an important role in Eurasian trade, but maritime long-distance routes in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans really reshaped trade patterns and provided with a new and more meaningful model of globalization. Therefore, port cities should be considered as the first workshops of globalization<sup>7</sup>, and this is one of the reasons which have led me to focus on maritime history and geopolitics in this dissertation. Firstly, the expansion of global trade networks led to the

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<sup>6</sup> It must be noticed that slave trade did not take place only in the Atlantic Ocean, but Van Rossum highlights that there were forms of slave trade also in the Indonesian Archipelago. This implies that during the Early Modern Age economic models could easily spread and be replicated (Van Rossum 2022).

<sup>7</sup> There is a great amount of case studies and aspects that can be cited to prove the importance of port cities as engines of globalization and the literature is huge. A meaningful case study which I would like to highlight is the history of the port city of Livorno and its dynamics in the Mediterranean region (Tazzara 2020).

spread of the so-called "global goods"<sup>8</sup>, such as coffee, tobacco and cocoa and port cities were the vital nodes of their circulation. Tobacco was brought for instance from the Americas through the European explorations and was firstly employed by sailors in the ports of Genoa, Livorno and Naples. Merchants brought it to England and the Netherlands and then it penetrated Russia in 1560s and Africa and Asia in 1600s. The role of Portuguese commercial relations was crucial to bring tobacco to Japan and to China through Macao and again maritime routes were the most effective ways contributing to the spread of global goods. Another example which can be cited concerns coffee, which was introduced to Europe thanks to the commercial routes with the Ottoman empire, after having originated in Ethiopia and Yemen. The Red Sea route and the centrality of Egypt as a commercial hub are regarded as vital factors in the diffusion of coffee, which was made easier also by the Ottoman conquest of the land of Mesopotamia. Trade relations with the Ottoman empire enabled the Safavid empire and Europe to know the taste of coffee and the first European who could drink coffee was the German physician Rauwolf in Aleppo in 1573. The first European coffee house was opened in Venice in 1645 and the VOC was the first European company considering coffee as one of the commodities to be traded since 1616 from Asia to Europe. Tea represented another important global good to be mentioned; it was namely prepared for the first time in Asia and the Venetian Ramusio was the first one to mention it in 1559 and it was soon discovered also by Portuguese merchants, who played a crucial role in Asian networks. It was brought for the first time by the VOC in 1607 from Macao to Bantam and the English East India Company traded this commodity for the first time in 1615. Global goods were first employed as medicines, but later they were regarded with suspicion and were sometimes restricted owing to their effects of altering the conditions of people. For instance, tobacco was soon targeted by restrictions imposed by King James I owing to the negative imbalances caused by an excessive tobacco import leading to the export of hard currency as well as moral a medical concern (Matthee, pp.24-51).

This proves that global commercial networks enabled the spread of new goods to the entire world but caused a novel impact and debate in the receiving countries and nowadays we can easily witness how fast new goods and products travel from the country in which they are invented to the entire world. Secondly, long-distance global trade favored the spread of new pathogens to new regions which caused dramatic outbreaks and the examples provided by Parker demonstrates the dramatic impact that these new infections had on non-European populations worldwide. (Parker, 2010, pp.148-155). Port cities had to be prepared to tackle the challenge of infectious diseases especially in the Black Sea, as frequent trade relations with the Ottoman empire and the lack of an effective control caused several outbreaks such as the plague in Moscow in 1771 and this aspect was managed differently in different port cities. The first quarantine hospital was established in 1423 in Venice and was soon followed by other Mediterranean port cities such as Genoa and Marseilles. In the Black Sea basin, the need to control the spread of diseases became crucial when the contacts with the Northern seas and the Mediterranean intensified after Russian expansion and they realized the need to have a quarantine system resembling the one of Marseilles, which was one of the most efficient in Europe. In Marseilles all vessels were isolated, and their status was assessed on

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<sup>8</sup> The analysis by McCants can be read to study more in-depth the impact of global goods on living and consumption standards of people and masses in the Early Modern Age (McCants 2007).

the basis of the risk of contagion in the ship itself and in the port of provenience. All ships coming from the Black Sea had to stop well before the port and had to show a document issued by the French console in the port cities of provenience in which it was declared whether the ship and/or the port were infected and there were four types of documents, from the *patente nette* up to the *patente brute*. The quarantine system in Marseilles affected both the ship and the sailors as well as the goods carried, it entailed stricter rules for vessels coming from the Middle East and the Black Sea and it was prepared to avoid corruption. Despite considering the French system as a model, in the Black Sea the quarantine system was far less efficient, as for instance the English author Edmund Spencer in 1836 declares. The quarantine period was not established on the basis of a given rule and in the quarantine stations there were even cafes, restaurants and leisure facilities in which people could have contacts with relatives or hosts and could pay to obtain a better accommodation or a reduction of the quarantine. Despite these problems, a port city could gain importance at the expense of other competitors if it had a quarantine facility, and this is the reason why the ports of Nikolaev and Kherson declined, as Odessa was equipped with a lazarette and other quarantine facilities by Russian authorities. Again, corruption was frequent, since the more severe a plague outbreak, real or alleged was, the better was the quality of the lyric season in the theatre of Odessa, but the presence of a set of rules, albeit very imperfect, to control the spread of diseases was sufficient to improve the situation in the Black Sea, coupled with a higher attention in Ottoman ports (King, 2005, pp.186-191).

Global history is underpinned by the widening of spatial and cultural horizons and the exploration of Asia had already begun not only with Marco Polo's travel, but also other merchants from Africa such as the Moroccan explorer Battuta had already travelled along the Silk Road and the Muslim Hajj represented a relevant opportunity fostering economic and cultural encounter<sup>9</sup>. Trade has always been considered as the first reason leading to explorations and widening of horizons and this is not surprising even nowadays, since the majority of economic models and theories, starting from the Ricardian model, emphasize the advantages of free trade on a global scale. Moreover, the Early Modern Age is considered as a period marked by the rise of new empires before the establishment of European colonial empires and this widening of spatial horizons and expansionist trends are a crucial feature of global history, which analyzes large, interconnected spaces<sup>10</sup>. The Ottoman, the Safavid and the Mughal empires were namely established and fostered cultural and commercial connections between merchants, while the Chinese dynasties Ming (1368-1644) and Qing

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<sup>9</sup> Two interesting documents studied by Chen can shed light on the role of non-European merchants and travelers in shaping the global world of the Early Modern Age: these documents are *Khitay namah*, written by the Muslim merchant Ali Akbar about the Ming Empire and *Xiyu* written by the Ming scholar and official Ma Li, which provides with an illustrated travel guide from China to Istanbul. These works prove that not only Europeans have widened their spatial horizons, since also Ottoman and Chinese travelers, merchants and officials were endowed with significant knowledge about the other empires in the Early Modern world. Furthermore, in these works the universalistic ambitions of both empires are portrayed and justify further expansions and conquest, because the supremacy of either the Ottoman or the Chinese Ming empire are evident in the portrayal of an Islamic China or a Sinicized Ottoman empire. Consequently, colonial ambitions underpinned by a civilizing mission were common not only in Europe, but also in Asia and in the Middle East (Chen 2021).

<sup>10</sup> This is the reason why a full understanding of the political context of the Early Modern Age must be based on the study of the interconnections between statal entities (which were not the European nation states of the 18<sup>th</sup> century) and empires and these contacts often took place in local settings, generating microhistories (Marrucci 2016). This approach is namely peculiar and multilayered.

(1644-1911) reinforced trade and commercial infrastructure in Asia by expanding in Mongolia, Turkestan and Tibet. Furthermore, the expansion of the Tsarist Russian empire through Siberia until the Pacific Ocean must be mentioned. Therefore, the Early Modern Age can be considered as an age of global empire building which caused large migrations as well as biological, commercial and cultural exchanges on a large scale (Parker 2010, pp.1-12). Even though land empires were huge and powerful, the role of maritime empires should be further stressed, as it proves the importance of maritime spaces, the need to adopt a multidisciplinary approach to examine them and to employ them as case studies to grasp the evolution of current political concepts and structures. As it was previously stated, the region of the Indian Ocean was already integrated in transnational commercial networks well before the Age of European discoveries and the Eurocentric reading of a teleological European conquest bringing modernization is challenged by the description of the Portuguese empire, which was supported by local merchants and self-organized organizations due to the weakness of colonial institutions. However, the strength of the Portuguese empire stems from port cities such as Ouidah and Macao, which were important hubs in the region and were granted a special status, as often occurs in port cities. Straits already represented relevant choke points which empowered their rulers, and this is the reason why I will focus on the Melaka empire, which controlled the region of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore, and which was based on patron-client relations which aimed to control the sea networks in the region rather than reinforcing the land empire (Strootman, 2019, pp.1-23). The aforementioned empires share important features with the forms of modern superpowers that will be examined in detail in the last chapter. Firstly, the Indian Ocean represented a particular region which was encompassed in global networks before 1498 and in which different empires, such as the Mughal or the Ming ones were connected. These examples provide with a definition of empires as polities living in a very large territory and under a leadership managing cultural and political differences. The main port cities linking Southeast Asia and the Arab and African world were Gujarat, Konkan and Malabar, while Coromandel and Bengal enabled Asian merchants from the Malay Peninsula to navigate to Southeast Asia. Arab and African merchants have always been active in maritime trade, as they bought Indian textiles and cotton for domestic use or to export them to Europe and pearls, ivory and armaments were imported in Asia. South Asian port cities were extremely lively trade hubs, despite being located far from the political and economic centers of the empires and even some local elites shared origins as maritime merchants which had mastered sailing despite the dangers and the difficulties of sailing the Indian Ocean. Maritime trade exerted a very strong influence on the shaping of the modern political and economic world in the region and this can be proven by examining the achievements of Zheng He, a Chinese mariner and diplomat of Islamic faith, who reinforced Chinese naval hegemony in the region and who explored the Indian Ocean and the South Chinese Sea between 1405 and 1433. He performed activities both as a merchant as a diplomat, dealing with emissaries and aiming to expand the influence of the Ming dynasty to the open sea. However, Chinese leadership did not strive to establish a maritime empire, as the sea was conceived as a space of free navigation which was open to people of all religions and ethnicities and the only task to be carried out was collecting tributes from emissaries. Consequently, the economic and political impact of Zheng He's mission was relevant yet limited, as the Ming dynasty reinforced its position in the Indian Ocean since it was before

insufficiently represented and obtained some tributes. Furthermore, these voyages strengthened the transnational cultural, economic and diplomatic networks between Asia and the Arab Peninsula, which are crucial in a non-Eurocentric perspective envisaging a limited role of Europe and the Western world in the processes of modernization. (Singh, 2019, pp.245-262). Port cities are places where we can witness the blurring of traditional state borders and in which rules are sometimes nuanced to protect trade interests and this can be observed both during the Early Modern Ages in Macau and Goa. The port city of Macau was namely able to react quickly to the restrictions imposed by Japan on Portuguese merchants, because it strengthened its relations with Manila, which became part of an illegal network of trade despite in Manila, under Spanish control, a ban on American silver on non-Spanish vessels had come into force. Trade relations between Macau and Japan and Macau and Manila are interesting to be examined, as they provide with the evidence of the blurring of the borders and demarcation of the Spanish and Portuguese spheres of influence. Moreover, it shows the special status and condition enjoyed by port cities, as Macau was part of the Portuguese empire but was not tightly controlled by the central motherland and furthermore both Macau and the Spanish Manila were integrated both in Asian, American and European networks, regardless of the political demarcations of jurisdiction<sup>11</sup>. This can be easily linked with the status of transnational companies, whose status often proves the weakening of the traditionally state-driven framework of international relations, and which are becoming actors in international arenas which are difficultly controlled by state powers (Antunes, 2019, pp.294-311). The political importance of the Strait of Malacca has deep historical roots and they date back to the 1400s when the Melaka empire was established as a result of a competition to obtain the control of the Straits and form a thalassocracy. Melaka provides with an interesting example of the evolution of the law of the sea, also in a comparative perspective with European and current values enshrined in the law of the sea. Melaka's maritime law was more focused on managing order on board of vessels and in the waters of the strait, while it did not emphasize provisions ensuring the control of the Sultanate, the presence of a *mare liberum* or the management of taxations, while nowadays the freedom of passage in international straits is enshrined in Article 37 of UNCLOS and the freedom of the seas has been highlighted as a pillar of Grotius' international law doctrine. However, the law of Melaka was deemed inadequate by merchants, who claimed that transactions were not properly ruled. I believe that the case study of Melaka is particularly meaningful since it proves the historical importance of straits and port cities and the special status that they have often enjoyed. Furthermore, this example enables to consider the existence of political models different from the European ones, in order to challenge Eurocentrism and to consider that the blurring of classical political concepts which we are witnessing can be tackled through a more in-depth analysis of historical models and case studies. The Melaka empire had a different understanding of the law of the sea and was namely very different from the European pattern of empires, and it was an interesting overlapping of political, cultural and commercial interests of Muslim, Chinese or Portuguese merchants (Borschberg, 2019, pp.263-293). These historical models and case studies will

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<sup>11</sup> Manila is considered also by Pérez-García as one of the most powerful engines of globalization in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as it was a hub of exchange of western and eastern goods linking the Americas, China and Europe and this trade was based on the accumulation of American silver in the hands of Chinese merchants and institutions (Pérez-García 2019).

be very useful to grasp the transition undergoing in international relations and the approach of global history enables to examine a nuanced and multi-actor context.

## Chapter 2: The Mediterranean

### 2.1 *The Role of Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean*

The region of the Mediterranean is very complex from a political, cultural and geopolitical viewpoint, nevertheless I have decided to focus on the case study of Turkey as it embodies the interconnectedness between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and it can be examined to test patterns of cooperation and confrontation based on maritime issues. Consequently, the next section will focus more on the role of Turkey and on historical, economic and geopolitical dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean, since they can be easily linked with the considerations regarding the Black Sea in the next chapter. Turkish official discourse is complex and multifaceted, and several metaphors are deployed both by domestic and foreign actors to grasp the peculiarity of Turkey in the international arena. During the Cold War Turkey was portrayed as a "buffer zone" between the Eastern and the Western sphere of influence or as a "bastion" of NATO forces, while after the Cold War the metaphors of a "bridge" and a "crossroads" were more frequent. The image of the bridge is particularly meaningful, because it is a "metaphor of vision" deployed by Turkish politicians to stress on one hand the exceptional geopolitical position of the country and on the other hand the strong political identity of Turkey. The idea of the bridge is linked to the concept of liminality, which makes a generalization and a classification of Turkey more difficult and justifies its flexible policies in Eurasia and in the Middle East (Yanik 2009). This country has a rich maritime history to be analyzed, because Turkey is namely accustomed to the management of maritime issues, since it is surrounded by the Mediterranean, the Black and the Aegean Seas<sup>12</sup> and therefore it participated actively in the UN Law of the Sea Conferences. However, Turkey did not sign the Final Act due to the ambiguity of some specific provisions concerning maritime delimitation in closed or semi-enclosed areas. Firstly, the limit of 12 nautical miles which was strictly enshrined in article 3 on the basis of the ICJ judgements of the ICJ cases *United Kingdom v. Norway (1951)*, *United Kingdom and Northern Ireland v. Iceland (1974b)* and *Federal Republic of Germany v. Iceland (1974a)* should not be applied to enclosed or semi-enclosed, to grant an equal access to the sea pursuant to article 300 of the UNCLOS and this is the reason why Turkey opposed the establishment of this rule which could become even customary. The application of Article 3 would have seriously hampered Turkish interests in the Aegean and Turkey required the application of special circumstances also concerning Article 74 and 83, which regarded respectively the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of countries with opposite and adjacent coasts. Turkey underlined the need to stress the principles of equity and equitable settlement which had already been highlighted in the North Sea Continental Shelf Case (1969), in the Tunisia-Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Continental Shelf Case (1982) and in the *ad hoc* arbitration of Court's judgement in the Channel case.

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<sup>12</sup> An analysis of the role of Turkey in the Black Sea and its interaction with the EU can be read in the paper by Aydin (Aydin 2014).



Furthermore, Turkey stressed the principles of equity and equitable settlement also concerning Article 121, which enshrined principles for the regime of islands, and which did not consider again special circumstances which should govern enclosed or semi-enclosed spaces. On the basis of these principles Turkey required a final revision advocating for the definition of special conditions, which was supported by 45 states, and which proves the lack of unanimity during the negotiations. The Country eventually decided to opt out, as the UNCLOS did not allow for reservations and Turkey wanted to reject the principles enshrined in the Convention, especially in Article 3 concerning the limit of 12 naval miles, so that they could claim that they did not form customary law and since they were not a party to the Treaty, these provisions could not be applied. In the next paragraphs I would like to consider maritime issues concerning maritime borders<sup>13</sup> in order to shed light on Turkish maritime policies, especially in the region of the Black Sea, where Georgia, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria are the other littoral states in the basin. I will examine the broader evolution of the relations between Turkey and Russia later, but I believe we should start by analyzing the disputes arising from Turkish opposition to the limit of 12 naval miles. Although land boundaries were always determined with the treaties of Moscow and Kars and were further confirmed with the Moscow Protocol of 31 March 1926, the competition for sea borders was much fiercer, since Russia claimed the respect of the 12 nm, which was enshrined in the Protocol signed on 17 April 1973, while Turkey required to curtail this limit to 3 nm territorial sea. The Ankara protocol in 1973 applied a principle which resembles the delimitation of land borders, and which differs from the rules of the equidistance line, and this allowed the two parties to find a compromise to ease tensions guided by the principle of good faith. Issues related to the continental shelf were settled thanks to the 1978 Agreement based on simplified equidistance to grant equitable access on the basis again of good faith to improve the relations between the two countries. The same delimitation line applied for the seabed in the 1978 Agreement was deployed also for the demarcation of the exclusive economic zone in the superjacent waters, as suggested by the Soviet Union in a *note verbale* on 3 May 1984 and accepted by the counterpart on 26 September 1984. From the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not stem any problem concerning the stability of land and maritime borders, as both the Russian Federation and the other countries belonging to the "Commonwealth of independent states" were committed to the stability of maritime and land borders and Russia even sent a *note verbale* on 17 September 1992 to confirm the agreements with Turkey. Consequently, in the Black Sea Turkey enjoys the benefits of its only exclusive economic zone with the limit of 12 nm, and the same does Russia. Maritime borders between Russia and Turkey are namely stable and the same occurred between Ukraine and Turkey, since the former confirmed in 1994 the legal obligations stemming from the agreements signed by the Soviet Union, despite the extreme eastern point of maritime borders needs to be determined by an agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Consequently, both countries have a territorial sea respecting the limits of the 12 nm, a continental shelf and an exclusive economic zone and these principles are applied reciprocally. The borders between Georgia and Turkey had to be confirmed through a

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<sup>13</sup> I will consider specific case studies in the Mediterranean and in the Black Sea, but I deem important to highlight that scholars have identified two strategies to address maritime demarcation conflicts. On one hand, establishing Exclusive Economic Zones is instrumental to solve bilateral disputes, while becoming a party in the UNCLOS prevents conflicts and enables third parties to intervene in case of tensions (Nemeth, McLaughlin Mitchell, Nyman and Hensel 2014).

protocol concluded in Tbilisi on 14 July 1997, which established for both countries a territorial sea, a continental shelf and an exclusive economic zone. The maritime borders between Romania and Turkey are very limited and depend on the demarcation of borders between Romania and Ukraine but apart from the Bulgarian case, the establishment of borders has run smoothly for Turkey and its partners in the Black Sea. The delimitation process of borders between Bulgaria and Turkey started with the Peace Agreement in 1913 and with the Lausanne Peace Treaty in 1923, which indicated the mouth of the Mutludere/Rezovska river as the starting point of the maritime demarcation, which was nevertheless difficult due to the geographic setting of the Begendik/Rezova bay. The Agreement concluded in Sofia on 4 December 1997 ended the disputes by establishing the principle again of a simplified equidistant line and although there were only some minor fishery cases settled thanks to the principle of good faith, any dispute will be solved pursuant to article 33 of the UN charter ( Yüksel İnan and Pinar Gözen Ercan, 2018, pp.281-289). The demarcation of borders in the Black Sea in contemporary history has not led to tensions, even though I will later consider the fierce struggle between the Ottoman Empire and the Russian empire to gain control of the Black Sea, and the recent cooperation to establish peaceful maritime relations can be considered as the evidence that cooperation is feasible and mutually beneficial even in sectors which were at the center of violent disputes. On the other hand, when resources are scarce and entail a relevant economic or political value, the dynamics of distributional bargaining are likely to prevail and this means that positions, and not interests, hamper the negotiation process aiming to find a compromise. The same process is witnessed as far as the Eastern Mediterranean is concerned, where borders between Turkey and other littoral states are not clearly defined and disputes persist, because establishing an exclusive economic zone would imply the right to deploy valuable resources such as oil and hydrocarbons. Therefore, in the next paragraph I will consider the challenges of maritime borders in the Mediterranean and in the Aegean Sea together with some economic considerations regarding energy and gas resources. If we study the role of Turkey in the Mediterranean, we must consider also the Cyprus Question, nevertheless I prefer to focus on other disputes and I recommend the reading of the chapter by Pinar Gözen Ercan (2018, pp.321-342) and other bibliographical references included in the list of consulted works. Border demarcation in the Mediterranean remains a complex issue since Turkey has not concluded comprehensive agreements and therefore the situation needs to be studied case by case and entails a strong competition to obtain oil resources and exclusive economic zones. Greece and Turkey concluded the Ankara Agreement on 4 January 1932, which established Greek sovereignty on the islands around Castellorizo and this sovereignty was confirmed in the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947 establishing the end of Italian rule over Castellorizo. Pursuant to Greek law n. 230, both Turkey and Greece apply a 6 nm territorial sea in that zone, even though Turkey applies in other areas the 12 nm rule, in order to prevent the expansion of Greek territorial sea. However, Greece requested Turkish permission for scientific explorations of the seabed in the southern shores of Castellorizo, which proves that Greece acknowledges a form of Turkish sovereignty in the area. Relations were much more conflictual between Turkey and Syria, due to the disputes concerning Hatay/Alexandretta and the demarcation of a territorial sea of 35 nm since 1964 unilaterally decided by Syrian authorities. However, the new Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad applied again a territorial sea of 12 nm and attempted to start negotiations to improve

maritime relations but despite these efforts, maritime borders are still based on the principle of equity. The principles of equity and the need to establish maritime borders in semi-enclosed areas together with the participation of all littoral countries is a key driver in Turkish foreign policy. This led for instance to Turkish criticism against the 2007 agreement between the Greek Cypriot administration and Lebanon, which has established the boundaries of a EEZ and a continental shelf which hamper the interests of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, as Ankara argued. The 2007 agreement has not been ratified by the Lebanese parliament, which means that the aforementioned agreement has not been implemented yet. Tensions concerning maritime borders have arisen also concerning the Agreement between Egypt and the Greek Cypriot administration, which has established EEZ and continental shelf areas which undermine Turkish vital interests as well as the interests of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. There is namely a big difference between the demarcation of maritime borders in the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean, since in the Black Sea borders have been defined on the basis of the principle of *bona fide* and the political will to improve relations in the basin, while in the Mediterranean disputes persist, often remain unsolved and are likely to lead to an escalation. For instance, in 2003 Turkey threatened to use military means to settle the disputes in the Aegean and the Mediterranean, while counterbalancing the practices by Egypt, Lebanon and the Greek administration of Cyprus (Yüksel İnan and Pinar Gözen Ercan, 2021, pp.281-301). Maritime disputes in the Aegean need to be studied, as the positions and interests of Turkey and Greece are often irreconcilable, are harsher due to the special conditions of a semi-enclosed maritime space and comprise not only the demarcation of the sea but comprise also the continental shelf and the airspace demarcation. Bilateral relation between the two countries had been ruled by the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty, which had established the "Lausanne balance", leading to a period of peaceful relations until the Cyprus crisis. Article 6 and 12 of the Lausanne Treaty have established the recognition of the 3 nm limit and has demilitarized the islands attributed to Greece which were too close to Turkish coasts. This new *status quo* did not tackle some critical issues such as the settlement of disputes concerning Greek and Turkish minorities and the real normalization of bilateral relations started after the settlement of these tensions in 1930 and lasted even in 1936, when Greece extended its territorial waters up to 6 nm pursuant to its domestic law No. 230. When bilateral relations worsened after the Cyprus crisis, Turkey applied the principle of reciprocity and extended its territorial waters up to 6 nm. In the early 1950s Greece started oil explorations in the Aegean and it was the first littoral state granting oil concession rights. It was followed by Turkey in 1973 and despite the attempts by both Turkey and Greece to settle these disputes concerning the continental shelf before the ICJ, the lack of a prior consensus about the jurisdiction of the ICJ has always hampered a judicial solution of these tensions and as already done by Greece, Turkey had adopted the territorial waters act on 20 May 1982 to establish the 6 nm limit for territorial waters in the Aegean, while in other regions and zones of the Mediterranean and Black Sea the limit is 12 nm. This dispute was mirrored also in the positions of the countries during the Third UNCLOS Conference, in which Greece supported the 12 nm limit, while Turkey backed the principle of equity while applying the 12 nm limit and required special circumstances for the Aegean Sea as a semi-enclosed area. Greece claimed a 12 nm territorial sea under article 3 of UNCLOS and issued an interpretative declaration of Part III to strengthen its rights pursuant to articles 36,38,41,42. On the

contrary, Turkey is not a party to the UNCLOS owing to its reservations to articles 3, 74, 83 and 121 and still claims the need to respect the 6 nm limits on the basis of the special circumstances valid in the Aegean, while Greece claims to have the right to extend the territorial sea up to 12 nm under the UNCLOS, and this hampers a long-term settlement of the disputes. The provision envisaging 12 nm of territorial sea would considerably undermine and curtail Turkish interests in the region as well as disrupt the Lausanne balance, while Greece would increase its maritime area and would solve also the dispute concerning the airspace in a favorable way. On the other hand, the application of the 12 nm limit would entail consequences also for third states, as the percentage of high seas would be dramatically reduced, although third states would be granted the transit passage regime under article 34 and 44 of UNCLOS. Turkish legal reasoning relies on a strong basis justifying the opposition to the interpretation of UNCLOS by Greece. Firstly, Turkey has always clarified and explained its reservations concerning the 12 nm limit in closed or semi-enclosed areas such as the Aegean sea, therefore the limit enshrined in the UNCLOS cannot be imposed on Turkey because the country is neither a party to the UNCLOS and pursuant to article 34 of the Vienna Convention in 1969 a third state is not bound to the UNCLOS provisions, nor this specific rule establishing the 12 nm limit has become customary, given the constant opposition and reservations by Turkey. Furthermore, an extension up to 12 nm of the Greek territorial sea should be considered as a breach of the general principle of international law of equity and it violates the duty to cooperate with other littoral states, such as Turkey. Such a decision could curtail Turkish access to high seas, and this can be interpreted as an abuse of right and a violation of article 300 of UNCLOS contrary to the principle of good faith. The disputes concerning territorial seas and the continental shelf areas are not only legal, but also political, as Gündüz (2001)<sup>14</sup> argues and competition has been fueled by the presence of valuable resources, which has enhanced for both countries the strategy of distributional bargaining, which has brought them on the brink of a war and the disruption of diplomatic relations. However, cooperation efforts can resurface when there are challenges to be mastered through cooperative and multilateral efforts. For instance, the Bern Agreement in 1976 established the need to negotiate again and the year 1999 marked a new phase of friendly relations and cooperation, underpinned by confidence-building measures promoted by the two prime ministers Papandreou and Cem and by the efforts to react to the earthquake. Political attempts to ease tensions have characterized the Greek-Turkish Forum and the Helsinki Summit, in which Greece did not pose a veto on the status of Turkey of a candidate for the membership of the EU. Moreover, pursuant to Article 123 of the UNCLOS coastal countries in enclosed or semi-enclosed areas have the legal duty to cooperate and one sector in which Greek and Turkish cooperation could thrive is the protection of maritime environment, as both countries have an interest in the preservation of the same maritime environment which has generated so many tensions in the past decades. Again, maritime spaces are catalysts of both fierce cooperation and efficient multilateral cooperation (Güneş, 2021, pp.303-320). Energy issues<sup>15</sup> are for example one of the main incentives for cooperation despite political rivalries and this can be again examined while analyzing Turkish energy policy. Turkey imports about 75% of its energy supply and

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<sup>14</sup> Gündüz is cited by Güneş (Gündüz, 2001, pp. 81-101).

<sup>15</sup> A broader analysis of energetic themes related to the theories of international relations, especially realism, can be found in the paper by Mohapatra (Mohapatra 2017).

its main importers are Russia, which deploys the Blue Stream pipeline and Iran and despite the attempts to diversify its supplies, Turkey suffers from a severe asymmetrical interdependence with its importers. Despite these facts, Turkey pursues the aim of becoming the biggest geopolitical energy hub in the world, given its geographic proximity with the main energy exporters and the BTC oil pipeline since 2006 provides with a valuable opportunity to have access to gas resources of the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, the historical tensions between Turkey and Greece were overcome to build the Turkey-Greece interconnector, coupled with the BTE pipeline, to bring Azerbaijani gas to Europe for the first time. The Nabucco project, part of the Southern gas corridor, should curtail the EU's dependence on Russian gas exports and the emphasis put by Turkish authorities on energy geopolitics is evident in the "Turkish Energy Strategy" issued in 2009 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which stresses the role of energy as an engine to improve regional cooperation based on energy interdependence, envisaging multilateral efforts to overcome regional tensions and hoping that this could ease its path towards a membership of the EU<sup>16</sup>. However, Turkey remained an observer in the EU Energy Community Treaty and since the replacement of the Nabucco project with the TANAP in 2011 it can be observed that Turkey redressed the balance and focused more on its own energy security in order to support its economic development and the Russo-Turkish memorandum of understandings in December 2014 has been issued to build the Turkish Stream, which replaced the South Stream project, and redirected gas pipelines to Turkey. In spite of these projects, some vulnerabilities in Turkish energy supplies can always be detected, for example owing to the accident in 2015 with the Russian fighter or the fall of Mosul to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Energy relations can represent a meaningful incentive to overcome political tensions, and this can be observed both after the discovery of gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the improvement in the bilateral relations between Turkey and Israel. Gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean are namely an opportunity to reduce Turkish dependency on imports and to enhance stability and prosperity in the region, as Turkish President Gül argued, but the disputes with the Greek Administration of Cyprus can hamper the realization of Turkish plans<sup>17</sup>, despite being a strong incentive to solve the problems once and for all. Moreover, the increasing gas exchanges between Turkey and Israel represented an important tool to overcome the crises in Davos in 2009 and the *Mavi Marmara* crisis in 2010 and to secure gas supplies for Turkey soon after the incident with Russia in 2015<sup>18</sup>. Recently the liberalization of the domestic energy market together with growing trade relations with countries in neighboring countries, including the Kurdish region of Iraq and the strategic agreements with Iraq, Iran and Russia have strengthened the stance by former Prime Minister Davutoğlu, who considers Turkey as the main energy hub

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<sup>16</sup> The problematic relations between the EU and Turkey can be studied in the paper by Bilgin, who considers the attempts of both the EU and Turkey to be located during the Cold War in the block of Western allies, while nowadays Turkey is portrayed by the EU as a "non-European space" and this has exacerbated the tension between the two parties. This might be the beginning of a new phase of "civilizational geopolitics" in the Mediterranean (Bilgin 2004).

<sup>17</sup> According to Proedrou the discovery of new gas deposits has sharpened tensions between Turkey, Cyprus, Greece and Egypt and has led Cyprus and Greece to back Egypt and Israel against Turkish attempts to gain control over more resources. These countries are namely implementing joint projects to strengthen their position (Proedrou 2021).

<sup>18</sup> Complex patterns of cooperation and confrontation involving Turkey, Cyprus and Israel are examined in the paper by Kim and Shin (Kim and Shin 2021).

in the region, which should become an engine for regional integration based on economic interdependence and multilateral cooperation (İpek, 2021, pp.173-194).

Even though the fourth chapter will devote more attention to the challenges of international straits, the Bosphorus Strait<sup>19</sup> represents one of the most challenging choke points in the world and its history is strictly linked to the topics of maritime geopolitics and the history of political relations between Turkey and Russia<sup>20</sup>. The details concerning the military and political competition of Russia and the Ottoman empire will be provided in-detail in the next chapter, nevertheless the role of Turkey in the control of the straits and its strategic decisions of granting the passage for either Russian or European vessels have always represented a vital interest in Turkish foreign policy which had to be preserved. For instance, the Ottomans could decide either to forbid the passage of Russian ships (as the European allies wished) or could open the Straits so that Russians could enjoy the right to pass through such important Straits. This was for instance enshrined in the Hünkâr İskelesi treaty on 8 July 1883, which opened the Strait for Russian merchant ships but did not allow the passage of any warship except for those of the Ottoman empire; these measures clearly favored Russian merchants and protected them against the access of British<sup>21</sup> and French ships in the Black Sea<sup>22</sup>. Multilateral efforts to govern the Straits prevailed in the London Convention signed on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1841, whose provisions opened the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles for all merchant ships and closed it for warships, except for those belonging to allies of the Ottoman empire/ Turkey. The Straits were namely controlled by the Ottoman Sultan and this compromise represents a meaningful example of balance of power; firstly, the balance of the region was redressed as European powers hoped, since it limited Russian ambitions in the Black Sea, secondly the Ottoman empire retained its sovereignty in a crucial territory and Russia accepted the conditions since merchant ships were not excluded. These provisions allowed the passage of British, French and Piedmonts' warships during the Crimean war, since these countries were allies to the Ottoman empire and the Paris Peace Treaty on 30 March 1856 led for the first time to the demilitarization of the sea. Moreover, in 1878 the Congress of Berlin confirmed the agreement in 1871 which established that warships could navigate through the straits only with the consent of Turkish Sultan. Turkish supremacy in the straits lasted until the first world war, when the protection offered to the German vessels *Goeben* and *Breslau* led Turkey to become a belligerent party supporting

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<sup>19</sup> I have decided to focus on the Bosphorus, yet also the Dardanelles have an interesting and challenging history. For instance, the Gallipoli campaign aimed to conquer the Dardanelles and bring it under British rule, but it failed to meet the target and worsened relations between Britain and the Ottoman empire. The evolution of the stances by Churchill towards the Ottoman empire, as well as the history of the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign are told in the paper by Dockter (Dockter 2017).

<sup>20</sup> A further in-depth analysis concerning Russia and Turkish Straits can be found in the work by Rosso (Rosso 1950) and some considerations about the flexibility of Turkish management and their attempts to defend their own interests can be found in the paper by Boldyrev (Boldyrev 2018).

<sup>21</sup> The passage through the straits was strategic for all European powers, which had a particularly tailored strategy to address the threat of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea and to be granted passage through the straits. An insight into the British Strategy can be read in the analysis by Papastratigakis (Papastratigakis 2010).

<sup>22</sup> The Russian conquest of Adrianople after the war in 1828 and 1829 reinforced the "Eastern question", which focused on the strategic need of European powers to strengthen the Ottoman empire so that it could defend itself Turkish straits from Russian threats. Nevertheless, it was clear that the Ottoman empire was too weak to resist a powerful Russian attack. The paper by Yildiz examines the complex diplomatic exchanges between European countries to assess the Russian threat and the possible scenarios to defend the straits and not to alter the Mediterranean balance of power in case of a Russian success (Yildiz 2019).

central empires, and the final defeat and dismantling of central empires curtailed Turkish influence in the straits. They were namely put under the control of an international commission, ensuring free passage for merchant and warships in peacetime and during wars. After centuries of Turkish hegemony over the straits, this represented an international humiliation. However, the growing international influence of Mustafa Kemal led to a change in the humiliating conditions in the treaty of Sèvres. Turkish supremacy over the straits was established again under the pressure of the United Kingdom, which wanted to prevent the siding of Turkey with Germany and with the political pressure of the Soviet Union, which aimed to protect its own interests in the Black Sea thanks to the protection of the straits ensured by Turkey. The treaty of Montreux<sup>23</sup> was signed on 20 July 1936 and its parties were France, the UK, Greece, Turkey, Romania and the Soviet Union and it acknowledged Turkish supremacy over the control of the straits. The provisions of articles from 2 up to 7 envisage freedom of passage for all vessels in peacetime and during a warfare, unless Turkey is not a party and in case of a war, only vessels of Turkish allies can pass. Articles from 8 to 22 allow the passage of warships, however the vessels of non-littoral states in the Black Sea cannot exceed a certain tonnage and cannot remain in the Black Sea for more than 21 days. Articles 20 and 21 granted Turkey the supremacy over the strait, as it was assured autonomy of decision whether foreign warships could navigate through the straits. Mustafa Kemal was of course satisfied with the reaffirmation of Turkish preeminence over the straits, while the Soviet Union aimed to share the status of preeminence in the straits together with Turkey in order to redress Turkish hegemony, and tensions escalated with the arrival in Istanbul of the *USS Missouri* which exceeded the tonnage allowed by the Montreux Convention and marked the beginning of the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union based on the Truman doctrine of containment of the Soviet influence. However, Turkey embraced an assertive policy towards the Soviet Union, as it allowed the passage of Soviet vessels which could not navigate according to the Montreux Convention in order to prevent a crisis with the Soviet Union. The regime of Montreux could be namely preserved thanks to Turkish ability to manage a difficult balance of concessions and prohibitions between the two superpowers. After the Cold War the regime of Montreux was maintained despite generating tensions, as occurred during the Georgia war, when Turkey let NATO warships reach the Black Sea with the justifications that they were taking part to already-planned military exercises. However, the passage was denied to the *USNS Comfort* and the *USNS Mercy*, which exceeded the tonnage allowed for military ships of non-littoral countries, but the vessels of the humanitarian aid mission "Assured delivery" were allowed the right to navigate without having notified their passage 15 days in advance, as they were involved in a humanitarian mission. Another crisis ensued the accident of the Russian jet in 2015 and tensions escalated until in 2016 Turkish President Erdogan threatened to close the straits for Russian ships and he blamed NATO of not having prevented a new Russian preeminence in the Black Sea. Tensions with Russia were soon eased but the construction of the *Kanal İstanbul* can change again geopolitical balances in the region, as it would be a huge and unique project, but it is not clear whether the Montreux Convention could be applied. This huge project can bypass the Bosphorus by linking the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara and it could allow the passage of the so-called "Suezmax" vessels, which are bigger than

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<sup>23</sup> An additional analysis concerning the navigation regime in the Turkish Straits can be found in the work by Plant (Plant 1995).

those which can currently navigate through the Bosphorus. Furthermore, it is unclear which environmental impact<sup>24</sup>, especially on the salinity of the sea, the new project could have, and if the impact would be considerable, many legal provisions concerning fishery as well as other issues such as the materials to build pipelines such as the Turkish Stream would have to be modified. Additionally, Turkey might impose the payment of a high toll and could decide to govern the new canal under domestic law, which enables Turkey to deploy its power regarding sanitary or anti-terror laws under the Montreux Convention to “force” vessels to navigate through the new canal rather than passing through traditional waterways. Despite these speculations, it is undisputed that this project will change geopolitics in this region and the aspects which I have already outlined prove that straits are still crucial in political and economic issues (Cianci, 2017, pp.109-140).

### *2.1 Bilateral relations between Russia and Turkey and complex patterns of cooperation and confrontation.*

Russo-Turkish relations are an interesting case study to grasp the evolution of international relations between two countries and Kelkitli (2019) traces the evolution of their relations through three phases. The first one took place in the early 1990s, when tension peaked during the disputes concerning the passage through the straits and the control of the Black Sea and they improved in the mid-2000s thanks to the thriving economic relations before the accident on 24 November 2015, when a Turkish F-16 fighter shot down a Russian Sukhoi bomber which had allegedly violated Turkish airspace. The relations between the two countries are based also on the complex interdependency theory outlined in the book by Keohane and Nye “Power and interdependence: World politics in transition” (1977)<sup>25</sup>, which is more adequate to explain the ongoing changes in the international system, by highlighting the role of interdependence (either sensitivity interdependence or vulnerability interdependence) and the rise of other actors, such as international organizations. The pattern of the complex interdependency theory can be observed in Russo-Turkish relations, because from the 1990s up to the incident in 2015 economic interdependence has led to an improvement in political relations (Asli Fatma Kelkitli, 2019). Russo-Turkish relations provide with an interesting example of the interplay between cooperation and confrontation in international relations and they can be examined to study the dynamics of two powers attempting to gain influence in the region and to pursue the politics of “zero problems with neighbors”. While studying the evolution of relations between two countries, grand strategies should be analyzed, and a definition of this concept is provided by Paul Kennedy in his work “Grand Strategies in War and Peace” (1991)<sup>26</sup>. Grand strategies are namely guidelines which influence the politics of especially great powers, whose grand strategy is

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<sup>24</sup> Regulations regarding environmental protection and security of navigations in the Straits were already adopted by Turkish authorities in 1994 and in 1998 in order to protect Turkish populations from maritime disasters, but these regulations were opposed by Russia, which wanted freedom of passage to be granted also to oil tankers (Joyner and Mitchell 2002).

<sup>25</sup> The work by Keohane and Nye is cited by Kelkitli (Keohane and Nye 1977)

<sup>26</sup> Kennedy is cited by Ekinci (Kennedy, 1991)



more influential than the one of medium or smaller power, as Eskenazi (2015)<sup>27</sup> argues. Trubowitz (2011)<sup>28</sup> highlights that grand strategies are defined on one hand by the position of the country within the international system, in a realist perspective, while on the other hand *Innenpolitik* has a crucial role too, consequently these two approaches should be combined. Schmidt<sup>29</sup> (2008) argues that grand strategies are the result of the assessment of the state's vital interests, of the threats, the goals and the resources which can be used to reach the goals. Russo-Turkish relations can be studied by focusing on the different grand strategies, as Turkey was keener on regionalism, on the policy of "zero problems with neighbors" and on becoming a pivot state in the region. On the other hand, Russia pursued firstly Atlanticism and Westernism and then neo-Eurasianism, entailing the Near Abroad policy<sup>30</sup>. According to Galtung<sup>31</sup> (2013), international politics are based on the curtailed US influence and on an increasing regionalism featuring multicultural and multilateral contacts and the "archipelago globalization" by Deaglio. Russia has always examined its peculiar geopolitical and cultural position and classical Eurasianists such as Trubetskoy<sup>32</sup> believe that Russia represents a *sui generis* civilization, challenging Eurocentrism and arguing that Russia was unique yet more similar to Asian civilizations. After a brief Atlanticist period from 1991 to 1993, Russia's grand strategy is marked by neo-Eurasianism, which aims to differentiate Russia from the geopolitical model of Europe and the US and which emphasizes the improvement of the relations with near abroad countries, especially those of the Commonwealth of Independent states on the basis of the logic of the "Near Abroad" focusing on the former Soviet space. The Near Abroad policy remains one of the key drivers of Russian foreign policy, striving to foster integration and mutual confidence in the post-Soviet region, while ensuring Russian primacy, the elimination of local conflicts and granting the rights of the citizens who have migrated during the Russian diaspora. Furthermore, this policy envisages the privileges of Russia in a region in which other international actors should not intervene, as Russia should be allowed to deploy military means to establish a common security framework and to render the CIS as a global region participating in multilateral organizations. These aspects are described by Aalto (2003), Kolchin (1997) and Danilov (1996)<sup>33</sup>. Turkey has always similarly focused on cooperation and peaceful relations with neighboring countries, as the doctrine of Atatürk proves, and its NATO membership has demonstrated its alliance with Western powers. However, after the collapse of the bipolar world order, it emphasized again regional relations with the Balkans, Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East, because Turkey was not strictly tied in bipolar schemes and could further develop regional relations. The doctrine "zero problems with neighbors" was highlighted by the former foreign minister and prime minister Davutoğlu, who lists in his book "*Strategic Depth*" in 2001 this doctrine<sup>34</sup> as one of the pillars of Turkish foreign policy,

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<sup>27</sup> The work by Eskenazi is cited by Ekinci (Eskenazi 2015, p.5)

<sup>28</sup> Ekinci cites the interesting work by Trubowitz (Trubowitz, 2011, pp.2-4).

<sup>29</sup> Ekinci cites the work by Schmidt (Schmidt 2008, p.164)

<sup>30</sup> The influence of Eurasianism and the concept of "Near Abroad" are emphasized also by Eriksen, who argues that Russia's *Realpolitik* in the Black Sea region can be examined also under the lens of the redefined domino theory and of the power theory of social misery by Kohr (Eriksen 2016, pp.305-328).

<sup>31</sup> Ekinci cites the analysis by Galtung (Galtung, 2013, p.25)

<sup>32</sup> Trubetskoy is regarded as one of the most important authors concerning the analysis of Russian culture through primary sources.

<sup>33</sup> These works are cited by the author of the essay (Aalto 2003), (Kolchin 1997) and Danilov (1996).

<sup>34</sup> Murinson examines in-depth the strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy in his work (Murinson 2006).

which are extensively described in 2008 and include also the balance between security and democracy, a proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy, multidimensional foreign policy and rhythmic diplomacy. The concept of "Zero problems with neighbors" was instrumental to overcome a merely realist approach to foreign policy and regionalism as well as to strengthen economic ties in order to become a "trading state", as Oğuzlu (2012)<sup>35</sup> emphasizes. Russo-Turkish relations have been marked by a complex interplay between political competition and economic cooperation and integration and this pattern is interesting to be analyzed as this dissertation aims to stress the relevance of multilateralism and the need to find proper economic or legal incentives to achieve cooperation and peace and to overcome overlapping spheres of influence and interests. Despite blooming economic cooperation, 5 moments of perilous tensions can be outlined in the history of the relations of the two countries, which managed to solve them by finding adequate compromises. For instance, the Chechnya crisis with the declared independence in 1991, the war in 1994, the postponement of a durable solution and the war in 1999 after the establishment of Russian control over Grozny marked one of the worst moments of confrontation. Russia aimed to retain sovereignty over Chechnya and its resources to preserve its territorial integrity, while the position of Turkey was more difficult and complex, as in spite of the religious links with Chechnya's Muslims, it had to remain assertive and not to challenge Russian position in order to prevent the outbreak of a new crisis with separatists in Kurdistan. However, the alleged presence of Turkish fighters in Chechnya and Turkish aid to Chechnya led to a perilous escalation in Russo-Turkish relations, which entailed also Russia's support for Kurdish separatism, which was curtailed in 1998, when the PKK leader Öcalan fled from Syria but was denied political asylum in Russia. This changed Turkish attitude towards the crisis, as in 1999 Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit did not publicly support Chechens, this issue was removed from Turkish official foreign policy agenda and Ankara became more rigid in the opposition of terrorism. An escalation of tensions regarding the issues of Chechnya and Kurdish minorities would have seriously hampered vital political issues for both countries and would have ruined economic cooperation, as for instance the Blue Stream pipeline additional protocol was not immediately signed. Another hotspot challenging Russo-Turkish relations was the Karabakh conflict, in which Turkish support for Azerbaijan and the possibility of a military intervention triggered a strong Russian reaction, as the declaration by the CIS Commander-in chief threatened Ankara with a third world war in case of a Turkish military intervention. Consequently, Turkey had to limit itself to diplomatic efforts to condemn the Armenian invasion and find diplomatic channels to solve the humanitarian crisis and contribute to the settlement of the dispute. On the other hand, Russia provided full support to Armenia, as it hoped to gain access to Caspian energy resources, and it supported the Minks peace process so that the solution of the conflict could be reached under its leadership. Tensions in the Karabakh region resurfaced after the 2015 bomber jet incident, and it is believed that Russia has fueled tensions to revenge the incident and to react to the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Davutoğlu in Baku in December 2015, when he declared that Turkey was willing to increase its cooperation with Azerbaijan. Another stress test for Russo-Turkish relations were the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in which Ankara had to maintain a delicate balance between its interests in the North Caucasus, the energetic partnership with Tbilisi, Russia as the main ally of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia

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<sup>35</sup> This work is cited by the author of the essay (Oğuzlu, 2012)

and the United States as the allies of Georgia. The crisis in 2008 sharpened again tensions in the Straits, as Turkey had to ensure compliance of the Montreux Convention of 1936, since it had to deny passage to a US warship which should bring humanitarian aid but which exceeded the tonnage envisaged in the Montreux Convention. This decision avoided a dangerous confrontation with Russia in the Black Sea region. Since Turkey could easily fall prey to the pressures exercised both by the US and Russia, it signed the Caucasus stability pact to reaffirm its neutrality and to reinforce its policy "zero problems with neighbors". Turkey was involved also in the Crimean dispute, since it is concerned about the conditions of Tatar minorities but both Russia and Turkey chose to self-restrict their declarations so as not to harm their thriving economic relations. Consequently, Turkey highlighted its stance regarding the inviolability of territorial integrity and reinforced bilateral relations with Tatar minorities. Nevertheless, it did not directly attack Russia and it refused to apply Western sanctions against Russia. An escalation was avoided and the agreement for the realization of the Turkish Stream was signed, even though Turkey has strengthened bilateral relations with Ukraine. After the invasion on 24 February 2022, Turkey relied on its positive relations with both Russia and Ukraine to act as a mediator, since it has always pursued political strategies in order not to disrupt its relations either with Russia or with the Western world, especially the NATO. Finally, the Syrian intervention represented another stress test, since Russia supported the Syrian regime, while Turkey backed rebel groups and during the Russian military intervention the accident of the Russian Su-24 bomber jet caused one of the worst crises in the two countries' bilateral relations. However, economic relations and especially energy interdependence have always favored cooperation and negotiation efforts to overcome regional tensions and several projects such as the Blue Stream in 1997 prove the intense relations between the two countries, even though Turkish trade deficit vis-à-vis Russia remains relevant. Cooperation regards also the sector of nuclear energy, as in 2010 an agreement planning the construction of a nuclear power plant in Akkuyu to produce electricity for Turkey was signed. To sum up, the pattern of conflict and economic cooperation represents an element of continuity in their bilateral relations based on the two grand strategies which have been previously outlined and it can provide with a framework for multilateral cooperation, in which escalations are avoided thanks to measured attitudes balancing credible promises, threats and incentives (Ekinci, 2021, pp.151-172).

## Chapter 3: The Black Sea

### *3.1 Maritime history of the Black Sea*

This chapter expands the multidisciplinary analysis of the challenges in the region of the Black Sea and the focus will be on the evolution of the role of Russia in the Basin. In the Black Sea Region local, regional and international stakeholders cooperate and clash with each other, taking part to what resemble a new zero-sum game<sup>36</sup>. Historical dynamics still underpin political decisions, and this is the reason why I will outline the main historical events<sup>37</sup> which shed light on the power play between Russia, the Ottoman empire and European powers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the balance of power in the Black Sea underwent some significant changes, since the Ottoman empire benefitted from the closure of the Straits and from its preeminent decisional power, while the Russian empire embraced an expansionistic policy under the leadership of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great which aimed at conquering the Black Sea. Treaties can trace the complexity of the evolution of the legal regime of these waters: the Treaties of Karlowitz and Istanbul proved the weakness of the Ottoman empire which gave some territories to Russia, Poland and Austria. Moreover, the Treaty of Belgrade in 1739 acknowledged the Russian control over the fortress of Azov and granted some additional rights in the sea and the treaties of Küçük Kaynarka in 1774 allowed Russian merchant vessels to pass through the Straits. The treaty of Hünkâr İskelesi established the closure of Straits under Russian pressure to avoid the passage of European warships through the Dardanelles and this proves the credibility of the Russian threat posed to the stability of the declining Ottoman empire. As I have stated in the previous chapter, nowadays maritime borders between Russia and Turkey are stable and no major disputes have been registered, nevertheless in the past the relations between these powers have been more tense and their rivalry was fueled by the competition for the access to the resources of the Black Sea. This proves again that water resources represent a powerful catalyst for both conflicts and multilateral cooperation. When Peter the Great ascended to the throne in 1689, the tsar strived to turn Russia into a naval power, which could count however only on the port of Archangelsk, while the Black Sea was still under Ottoman control. In 1695 he unsuccessfully tried to seize the fortress of Azov, and this became a key target of Russian foreign policy as it was located near the river Don and navigation through this river led to the seas of Azov and the Black Sea. The failure of the first attempt convinced Peter the Great to better equip his fleet and he finally succeeded in the conquest, despite he soon realized that the complete access to the Black Sea was not viable due to the control over the Kerch Strait retained by the Ottomans. Therefore in 1710 and 1711 the tsar tried to defeat Ottoman forces, but he failed and lost the fortress of Azov as a consequence of the peace treaty of Prut in 1711. In 1736 Russia conquered again Azov and Oçakov, but in

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<sup>36</sup> A general overview of the geopolitical complexity of the region can be found in the brief book review by Main ( Main 2016).

<sup>37</sup> In the Black Sea Region historical elements are still strong and shape the relations between the different regional and international stakeholders. This is the reason why historical approaches are particularly adequate to grasp the evolution of maritime geopolitics (Herd and Moustakis 2000). A broader analysis of the reasons why Black Sea issues came to prominence again can be found in the work by Boşneagu, Nedelcu and Scurtu (Boşneagu, Nedelcu and Scurtu 2018)

the peace treaty it had to accept the compromise to dismantle its Black Sea fleet. This situation underwent significant changes in 1768, when Catherine the Great at the beginning of the first Russo-Ottoman war, guided by a truly imperialistic and expansionist logic, conquered Crimea, territories in Moldova and seriously damaged the Ottoman fleet in the Aegean in 1770. The Treaty of Küçük Kaynarka ended the war and Russia obtained the fortresses of Azov, Taganrog, Kerch, Jenikale and Kinburn, which meant that it had gained control over the Strait of Kerch and the Dnepr. After the war, the Black Sea regained its crucial role in trade patterns, consequently the port city of Kherson was established and attracted European merchants such as Antoine-Ignace Anthoine de Saint-Joseph, who had the duty conferred by the French government and the Russian ambassador in the Ottoman empire to examine the feasibility of stable trade routes and relations between France and Russia. The first voyage from Marseille to Kherson took place in 1781 and it yielded excellent results, which were later spoiled by the terrible sanitary conditions in Kherson, by the constant threat to be denied the passage through the Turkish straits and by the rivalry of the British fleet, whose interests were seriously hampered by the growing Russian naval power in the Black Sea. These tensions fueled the conflict which broke out in 1787, when the Ottomans attempted to regain control of the territories conquered by Catherine the Second and due to the war and the changing balance of power in the region Anthoine had to go back to Marseille. The straits were again a key target of both the Russian and the Ottoman empire and Russia improved its control over the Straits as it conquered the Ottoman fortress of Očakov and reinforced its position in Kinburn (King, 2005, pp. 168-177). At the end of the second Russo-Ottoman war, the Ottomans acknowledged Russian rule over Crimea and the province of *Novorossija* in the northern coast was established. Trade in the region flourished and the port city of Odessa became the most important commercial node, as it granted more advantages than other port cities, as it was located in a strategic position near Sevastopol, between the rivers Dnestr, Dnepr and the Danube. Odessa was successfully ruled by Richelieu and by his successor Voroncov, who rendered Odessa an important trade center and reinforced the military, strategic and symbolic position of Sevastopol, which was protected from invasions by natural obstacles, and which carried a meaningful religious and symbolic importance, as it was near the city where ancient Rus' discovered Christianity. Consequently, Sevastopol was adequate to become the headquarter of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea (King, 2005, pp.178-186).

Crimea became the setting of the Crimean war, which was fueled by the tensions and the naval and imperialistic rivalry between Russia and the United Kingdom, and the real underlying reasons were concealed by a dispute concerning the control over Jerusalem and other holy sites in which Russian defended orthodox Christians. Even though this war started as a land campaign, the defeat of the Ottoman fleet in the port of Sinop by the Russian fleet under the leadership of admiral Nachimov showcased the power of Russian forces, which were powerful enough to conquer even Istanbul. However, in 1854 the allies of the Ottoman empire besieged Sevastopol and the Russian fleet was eventually destroyed in 1855. The Peace treaty of Paris marked the beginning of a new period in the history of the Black Sea, as the regime of the straits was governed by international treaties and not determined solely by the dynamics of balance of power, warships could not navigate through the straits and western allies had proven that they sided with the Sultan (King, 2005, pp.199-203). The Crimean war can be studied in the work by Hugh Small, whose perspective considers the

impact of Crimean war as a challenge to the European existing balance of power and portrays the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815 as a system of collective security which has been driven by the competition between Russia and Britain and has attempted to avoid a stronger Russian presence in the Black Sea, by designing a four points program in which Russia had to renounce all the privileges it had acquired. Moreover, the provisions of the 1841 Straits convention had to be renegotiated again by the Vienna "collective security" mechanism. Again, we can realize the crucial role of straits and their strategic importance (Small, 2018, pp. 31-32). The Peace treaty of Paris, at the end of the war is criticized by Small, who argues that the alliance between France, Britain and Austria to protect the territorial integrity of the Ottoman empire was not as efficient as it could be, since it did not prevent Russians from gathering troops at the borders of the Ottoman empire, it did not establish any buffer state, it did not foster defensive capacity-building for Turkey, it did not remove territories from which Russia used to attack Turkey by land and it did not allow legitimate separatist movements. The positive aspect was the protection of the allies of the territorial integrity of the Ottoman empire, which could be nevertheless threatened by separatist movements. The Crimean war marked the end of the multilateral Vienna system, based on a form of collective security and led to the beginning of the age of *Realpolitik* from which stemmed the competition, above all between France and Prussia, which fueled the tensions of the first world war. Furthermore, the author considers some interesting similarities between the Triple Treaty of 1856, granting the commitment of France, Britain and Austria to ensure that Russia would respect the territorial integrity of the Turkish Empire, with the Budapest memorandum in 1994, granting the territorial sovereign rights of Ukraine when it had to renounce to its nuclear arsenal. I will consider the Budapest memorandum more in-detail when I will examine the crisis in Crimea, but Small (2018) highlights that both the treaty in 1856 and the Memorandum in 1994 prove the weakness of the Western approach to prevent Russian aggression. In 1856 it did not envisage the rise of independentist movements in Ukraine and it did not establish a binding commitment to intervene military in case of a Russian military aggression, which materialized in 1877 when Russia invaded Turkey's European provinces to support independent movements in Romania. On the other hand, the Budapest memorandum did not establish a legal obligation to intervene, did not properly address the historical tensions between Crimea and Ukraine and resulted again in the unpredictability of Western countries (Small, 2018, pp.191-19). The analysis by Oreshkova (2021) traces interesting patterns in the evolution of territorial claims between Russia and the Ottoman empire and even though these clashes were so frequent, they were underpinned by different motivations. For instance, before the nineteenth century Russia strived to achieve a military solution of the territorial problems with the Ottomans concerning both maritime issues and land borders. However, from the nineteenth century onwards tensions with Turkey were often triggered by the pressure of European powers, which were the allies of the Ottoman empire (Oreshkova 2021, pp.395-415). From the end of the Crimean war onwards, the rules of maritime spaces were disciplined by international treaties and the consequences of the Treaty of Paris, which did not allow Russia to have a military fleet in the Black Sea, were heavily criticized by the Russian Minister of foreign affairs Gorčakov, in a period marked by the beginning of a naval militarization and widespread rivalry in Europe. This is the reason why in 1870 Foreign Minister Gorčakov denounced the Treaty of Paris and after the official recognition of the

other European parties, the Russian fleet in the Black Sea could be further built and reinforced thanks to important technological advancements. This decision was welcomed also by the Ottoman Sultan, who had to bear the demilitarization of the Black Sea and the opening of Turkish ports for commercial vessels and hoped to establish a strong and modern Turkish navy, nevertheless the efforts of the Ottoman empire did not yield the expected results and the naval disasters of the Greek war of independence and Sinop were particularly dramatic. Another Russo-Turkish war in 1877 and 1878 began when the Russian empire acted to defend Christian populations in the Ottoman empire, as they believed to be the guarantor of Christianity in the Ottoman regions, and this could be easily coupled with Russian imperialistic ambitions. Moreover, tensions were fueled by the cruel Ottoman repression in Bulgaria and triggered the reaction of Russia, Serbia and other European countries. Despite the ambitions of both powers, the naval warfare was limited but Russian forces managed to control the Danube as well as other fortresses, granting Russian control in the Aegean, in the Caucasus, in the Black Sea and in Anatolia. Port cities under Russian control in the Black Sea were reinforced with the building of the first railways in the cities of Odessa, Nikolaev and Kherson and the new infrastructure contributed to the development of the port of Novorossiysk (King, 2005, pp.205-219).

Despite the strong historical tensions in the Black Sea, economic interdependence may encourage cooperation to foster joint economic, political and social development and this occurred for the first time after the political turmoil caused by the end of the First World War, in which Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had become part of the Soviet Union, while Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria were independent and pursued a nationalistic policy. The project "Prométhée" was established so that the Black Sea could be regarded as an independent region capable of establishing cultural, political and commercial relations with other partners in the world and this highlighted their independence from the Bolsheviks in Russia (King, 2005, pp.250-254). Despite their failure, I believe that this case study is particularly interesting, as it proved that the Black Sea could become an engine for integration based on economic interdependence and this has led to the establishment of forms of regional cooperation such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which consider the Black Sea not only as an arena of confrontation between Eurasian powers, but also as a catalyst for integration and economic development and as one of the world regions integrated in the international system. Nevertheless, Russian imperial and expansionist ambitions over the Black Sea are evident and historically grounded.

### *3.2 The political and geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea*

The geopolitical landscape of the region of the Black Sea and the actors involved is extremely complex and multifaceted. Firstly, this region is influenced by the European Union<sup>38</sup> and it is therefore undergoing a process of Europeanization, democratization and regionalization

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<sup>38</sup> Due to the scope of this thesis, I will focus on EU policies in the Black Sea region, nevertheless the EU is active also in the Caspian region and supports regional and sub-regional multilateral mechanism. The work by Alieva can be useful to study in-depth EU policies in the Caspian basin (Alieva 2009).

based on the influence of EU's soft power. Europeanization is defined by Olsen<sup>39</sup> (2002) as a multifaceted process which entails five meanings, which include the membership in the European Union as well as the export of European values, and this viewpoint is shared also by Helen Wallace<sup>40</sup> (2000) in a broader sense. Democratization refers to democratic capacity-building, while regionalization regards the fostering of connections between the regional actors in the region. The EU is pursuing the strategy of democratization by engaging in a gradual process to spread liberal values and to grant its own security by establishing a "buffer zone" around its borders, and the analysis of this project proves the complexity of foreign policy in the sector. Firstly, Emerson<sup>41</sup> (2004) argues that the EU has to decide whether to offer the credible perspective of membership to all European countries and democracies or to preserve its governability by improving the quality of integration between existing members. On the other hand, the graduality to trigger reforms is criticized by the United States, which would hope to challenge Russian influence in the region more rapidly and strongly, as happened with the "color" revolutions, and which would therefore adopt a more aggressive approach. However, Makarychev<sup>42</sup> (2008) regards the efforts towards democratization absolutely not as an attempt to exercise the normative global power which the EU claims, but as an attempt to preserve its own interests based on *realpolitik*. As far as the non-EU members are concerned, they felt obliged to implement reforms to adopt the *acquis Communautaire*, which are the community laws of the European Union and to meet all the ambitious access criteria established by the EU. The European Neighborhood Policy<sup>43</sup> and its international implications confirm what Cichocki (2010)<sup>44</sup> argued concerning the revival of geopolitics and realism in the region. Firstly, great international powers often adopt the logic of power projection to maintain a global influence in a given geographic area and several scholars believe that this strategy can be applied to the EU in Eastern Europe and to the United States and can be used to describe their projection of power both in Eastern Europe and in Asia. Furthermore, Russian political reasoning is guided by the principles of neoclassical realism, which highlights the role of political perceptions especially in the realm of security, as security is conceived not only as an objective fact, but also as a subjective assessment of possible threats, and this has been one of the alleged reasons outlined by Russian decision-makers attempting to justify the invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, the Black Sea region and its political dynamics prove the revival of geopolitics in official strategies and stress the importance of gaining awareness of regional aspects, even though transnational phenomena feature a global character. As the European Neighborhood Policy did not provide with a credible perspective of membership for the countries of the Black Sea region<sup>45</sup>, the EU launched in 2007 the "Black Sea Synergy – a new regional cooperative initiative", which aims at fostering regional integration through confidence-building in the region thanks to the first political strategy targeted to the Black Sea. Cooperation is namely

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<sup>39</sup> The work by Olsen is cited by Weaver (Olsen, 2002, p.3)

<sup>40</sup> The analysis by Helen Wallace is cited by Weaver (Wallace, 2000, p.370)

<sup>41</sup> Emerson is cited by Weaver (Emerson, 2004)

<sup>42</sup> The work by Makarychev is cited by the author of the essay (Makarychev, 2008)

<sup>43</sup> Another analysis of the role of the EU in the Black Sea and its attempts to shape and define its role in the region can be read in the paper by Manoli (Manoli 2012).

<sup>44</sup> The work by Cichocki is cited by Weaver (Cichocki, 2010)

<sup>45</sup> This geopolitical inertia and the lack of a truly effective transformative power of the EU and their implications are examined in detail by Crombois (Crombois 2019).



encouraged in several cultural and political areas, resembling the mechanisms of regional integration of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and it strives to ease the solution of the “frozen conflicts”, as Tassinari (2006)<sup>46</sup> argues. Again, maritime issues are particularly interesting, since cooperation concerning fishery and other maritime issues has immediately been strengthened even though the BSEC had already coped with them, since in the sector of maritime politics resources are scarce, spheres of interests are overlapping, the logic of defensive and aggressive realism prevails until really multilateral efforts enable a mutually beneficial cooperation for the actors. I will examine the role of multilateralism as well as a possible research and policy agenda related to this issue in the last chapter of this dissertation, but the emphasis put on the concept of the “effective multilateralism” in the same section of the “Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy” in 2008 clearly highlights what Solana (2003) included in the European Security Strategy in 2003. It was namely stated that the EU should foster multilateralism together with other international organizations such as the OSCE or the Council of Europe to improve security not only at the borders of the EU but also at a global level and all regional players should have a role in the security architecture. The strategies designed by the EU such as the Eastern Partnership’s EuroNest and Civil Society Forum have namely strengthened interregionalism rather than offered a clear and credible membership perspective<sup>47</sup> (Weaver, 2016, pp.41-62). It must be noticed that the role of the EU in the region might also ease the transition to a new pattern in international relations, since in the past the rise of ascending powers and shifts in the balance of power were always coupled with violence and tensions and the recent Russian invasion seems to confirm this pattern. Nevertheless, the EU has the potential to take advantage from models of polycentric governance to stop tensions and to achieve new lasting and peaceful political models by improving the cooperation between regional partners, as it is clear that the EU can master intergovernmental and supranational mechanisms of polycentric governance (Gromyko 2015, pp.141-149). The model of polycentric and multilateral governance of the EU marks its sanctioning policy against Russia, since the tough sanctions and measures taken to react to the invasion in 2022 and to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are the result of the action of the European Council, in which complex bargaining intergovernmental processes between the single member states unfold to protect national interests (Szép 2020, pp.855-871). The complexity of these bargaining processes and the frequent deadlocks due to the constrain of the consensus can be easily witnesses also in the current sanctioning processes against Russia and the embargo on Russian fossil fuels.

As the events unfolding in 2022 prove, the Black Sea region is marked by the fierce tensions and competition between Russia and the United States, which are both driven by a realistic set of values. On one hand the United States have applied the Bush Doctrine, which includes the threat of a preventive war to ensure US interests, while Obama has tackled issues related to cooperation (Weaver, 2016, pp.63-65). On the other hand, Russian foreign policy can be grasped by reading President Putin’s initial inauguration, in which he states that the protection of Russian interests and the international prestige of the country must be coupled

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<sup>46</sup> The work by Tassinari is cited by Weaver (Tassinari, 2006)

<sup>47</sup> Efforts aimed to foster democratic capacity-building and state-building by the EU targeting Ukraine are examined in the paper by Maass, who considers that in spite of its commitment, the EU has not managed to counterbalance Russian influence in the region (Maass 2020, pp.387-406).

with the creation of a new multipolar international system which mirrors the multipolar reality of international relations after the unipolar moment of the United States. The Russian concept of multilateralism and the similarities and differences with other set of values will be examined in the last session, but the centrality of the Black Sea and of maritime geopolitics marked also Medvedev's foreign policy strategy in 2008, since he maintained the Black Sea fleet in the port of Sevastopol and he still refers to the ambition to have access to "warm waters". The majority of principles and goals in his foreign policy strategy are needless to be mentioned and examined as they have all been violated during the invasion of Ukraine, but we find the priority of avoiding the expansion of NATO, which is actually one of the alleged reasons leading to the military operation in the Ukraine (Weaver, 2016, pp.28-32). NATO enlargement has always been considered as a negative factor triggering further tensions<sup>48</sup> and Allison (2006)<sup>49</sup> *et al.* cite Yeltsin's prediction that a NATO enlargement would be followed by a "Cold Peace". Russia considers itself as a security maximizer state while the US are regarded as a power maximizer, and it is claimed that there was an agreement with Gorbachev that NATO would not enlarge after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. Russian decision-makers fear that a NATO membership is the first step towards a full EU membership, and they are concerned about the changing balance of power in the Black Sea, as NATO can control both the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles through Turkey and the majority of the coasts of the Black Sea, since Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania are already NATO members. Moreover, nearly all countries in the region are going to apply for NATO membership to be safeguarded by the mechanisms of collective security and mutual defense envisaged by article 5 of the NATO treaty and the Russian Federation considers this trend as a dangerous expansion of the US sphere of influence, threatening their access to the Black and Caspian Seas. Russia has been blamed for the attempt to destabilize the region and prevent the access to the EU and NATO by favoring pro-Russian elites which refuse to be further integrated in the EU and NATO and choose neutrality. This can be demonstrated easily by examining the fears of a Russian negative reaction, which led Ukrainian President Yanukovich to refuse the NATO membership action plan designed at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 to pave the way for the NATO membership of Georgia and Ukraine. Even several European countries feared Moscow's reaction in case of a NATO enlargement. Tensions in the Black Sea region stem from the challenges of the process of democratization, which has been marked by several revolutions, such as the "Twitter revolution" in Moldova in 2009, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose revolution in Georgia and by the Russian assumptions that the strategies to achieve and promote a democratic peace conceal the willingness of the US to enlarge their sphere of influence. The EU emphasized the need to strengthen democracy and rule of law too by deploying soft power and democratic elections, but these efforts have not yielded many results and to this extent Cornell *et al.* (2006)<sup>50</sup> argues that the EU has put exaggerated emphasis on democratic elections rather than on state-building and capacity-building and this might disrupt the democratic process by creating illiberal democracies, as we are witnessing in Hungary. These events and considerations prove that realist theories of international relations are still relevant,

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<sup>48</sup> Some technical aspects and perspectives concerning the relations between NATO and Russia can be found in the paper by Cross (Cross 2015, pp.151-177).

<sup>49</sup> This work is cited by Weaver as an insightful analysis regarding Russian foreign policy (Allison et al 2006)

<sup>50</sup> This analysis cited by Weaver further clarifies the role of the EU in the region (Cornell *et al.* 2006)

nevertheless even in the classic sector of realist policies concerning defense, there might be some multilateral incentives to enhance cooperation. Another issue fueling tensions between the US and Russia regards the issue of missile defense: the "Ground-Based Missile Defense" designed under the Bush administration envisaged the presence of Patriot missiles and US troops in Poland which could be used both for offence and defense. Russia threatened to react in retaliation with missiles in Kaliningrad<sup>51</sup>. This led to the promise that such missiles could be used only for defense purposes, that they did not target only Russia and triggered new reflections concerning the need to include Russia in the system of missile defense so as to reduce its distrust and undermine the perceived threats of a perilous NATO enlargement. This was suggested by the NATO secretary General Rasmussen at the Brussels Form Conference on 27 March 2010 and could have significantly reduced tensions between the US and Russia in the Black Sea region. Maritime issues are another topic generating strong tensions, especially concerning the Russian naval base in Sebastopol and during the Georgia war 2008. The Black Sea is namely a sea but often conceived as a lake, either a NATO lake or a Russian lake and this is the reason why Bryza<sup>52</sup> (2006) recalls that Turkey in 2006 wanted to prevent a NATO presence in the Black Sea to avoid "misunderstandings". Turkey is responsible to ensure compliance of the Montreux Convention of 1936 concerning the Status of Straits and this convention grants non-restricted passage for merchant and civilian ships, while warships of non-Black Sea powers can stay only for twenty-one days and cannot exceed a given weight. Often countries such as the US and Russia have tried to classify warships or aircraft carriers as simple cruisers to be allowed to navigate through the straits and the case study of the US warship McFaul proves that tensions can always break out, as this warship passed through the straits to bring humanitarian aid to Georgia, but it was regarded as a threat by the Russian government, as it could carry also weapons. In response, Turkey prevented the passage of other two US warships exceeding the weight limit and as a consequence it was blamed to consider the Black Sea as a Turkish lake. Another debated topic in the Black Sea concerns the role of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol, which Russia has rented and whose fleet is much stronger than the Ukrainian one, which could not protect the country from a Russian attack. The BLACKSEAFOR established by Turkey in 2001 is regarded as a catalyst for cooperation in the Black Sea, in order to bring humanitarian aid or to protect the environment. This cooperation effort could redress the balance and portray the waters of the Black Sea not only as an arena of competition, but also as an engine for cooperation to counter transnational threats, such as environmental degradation. However, sometimes the activity of this network has been undermined by political disputes, as the Russian fleet and the Georgian fleet rarely took part in the same operations and additionally Turkey and Georgia themselves did not manage to cooperate successfully (Weaver, 2016, pp.65-78).

The region of the Black Sea is plagued by contested regions and frozen conflicts, such as the ones in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria; dealing extensively with these conflicts would require an entire dissertation, but they prove that this region is marked by contrasting and opposing spheres of influence of great powers and the efforts of conflict management and conflict prevention by international organizations need

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<sup>51</sup> The role of Kaliningrad in the European Security Architecture is examined by Lopata, because this can become a dangerous hotspot in case of tensions (Lopata 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Bryza is cited by Weaver (Bryza 2006)

to be strengthened. In the previous chapter I have described how they influenced Russo-Turkish bilateral relations and it is interesting to note that regional conflicts are multi-layered, as they entail not only local consequences, but also regional and even international implications, since were involved not only local actors (for instance Armenia and Azerbaijan), but also regional players (Russia and Turkey) or even international forces, such as the United States. In South Ossetia<sup>53</sup>, national interests of the US and Russia fueled local tensions and hampered the implementation of EU's conflict prevention measures, which could have on the contrary operated more quickly. While the US are acting as power maximizers, Russia aims to be a security maximizer and the EU is striving to be recognized as a mediator. Turkey aims to become a pivot state and a mediator too and this can be observed with the creation of the "Caucasus Stability and Cooperation platform" in 2008, which inspired also the European Council, pleased to note that Russia is acting positively as this initiative does not include the EU or the US. Conflicts in the region are marked by the dispute between territorial integrity and separatist stances and to this extent Russia believes that the West is deploying double standards, as the majority of Western countries has accepted the independency of Kosovo but rejects the independency claims in Russian-speaking regions. These conflicts are often frozen or based on ethnic issues which have not been provided with a long-term durable solution, as for instance Azerbaijan still fears the "Great Armenia", while Armenian citizens do not want to be surrounded by a Muslim population (Weaver, 2016, pp.79-105). This proves that a new form of multilateralism and conflict prevention and management must be developed, and international organizations can play a key role in achieving the stabilization of the region. The presence of frozen conflict is namely perilous, as any confrontation in the region could entail a trickle-down effect and this is the reason why scholars and analysts fear that the invasion in Ukraine might expand and bring territorial instability in other regions, especially Transnistria<sup>54</sup>. Weaver recalls that Transnistria is not a Black Sea littoral area and has not been marked by a strong process of democratization, which means that it has not been so strategic in the US Black Sea strategy. However, this situation will change due to the Ukrainian crisis, as the expansion of the conflict and of the Russian sphere of influence must be avoided and a viable solution might be the plan presented by Graham Watson, the MEP rapporteur for Moldova, who argued in 2011 that there must be the proper conditions to make Moldova attractive for Transnistria, rather than striving to become a Russian region. Again, the role of the EU could be crucial to solve the conflict in this Eastern European hotspot (Weaver, 2016, pp.100). I deem it important to underline the role of the OSCE in enhancing mediation in the conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh and in the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Even though it yielded important success such as the establishment of the Minks framework, a more detailed analysis sheds light on the obstacles which hampered the activity of the OSCE, for

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<sup>53</sup> Russian interventions in Crimea and in South Ossetia are compared in the essay by Karagiannis, who argues that Russia deployed the same argumentations used by Western and NATO powers to justify the intervention in Kosovo to project its power over the territories in the Black Sea region which are likely to become NATO members. He reinforces the concept that Moscow's perceived insecurity and sense of humiliation have triggered these interventions and therefore Western countries should either punish Russia with sanctions or ease its integration in the international community by fostering a process of international socialization, which could give Russia economic incentives and security guarantees (Karagiannis 2014).

<sup>54</sup> Rogstad notes that Russia considers the Transnistrian tensions as a tool to extend its influence over Moldova and provides with a detailed analysis of this conflict (Rogstad 2018).

instance the lack of a binding legal empowerment, a weak organizational capacity and diverging interests and positions. Despite these difficulties, the role of the OSCE is crucial in containing and preventing conflicts and the recent Russian invasion is likely to force the organization to improve both its conflict prevention and conflict management tools (Guliyev and Gawrich 2021).

### *3.3 The Crimean crisis: historical, political and legal challenges*

I cannot address extensively and in-depth the historical reasons leading to the crisis in Crimea in 2014 and to the Russian invasion and aggression on 24 February 2022, nevertheless it must be highlighted that the Crimean issue entails crucial political, cultural and ethnic aspects which are vital for both countries and in this first paragraph a general overview of the academic debate regarding Crimea is provided. The myth of “Novorossiya” in the Donbass region and in Crimea is peculiar to Russian political discourse as it is believed to mark the rise of Russia both geographically and metaphorically. This can be inferred since it marks a new phase of Russian leadership in the region, it strengthens a nationalistic and messianic feeling in Russia and it reshapes the ideological and political boundaries of the Russian Federations, which feels the duty to protect Russian-speaking population in the Donbass, as this territory ideologically reunites three symbolic colors, which are red (linked to Soviet Identity), white (the color of Orthodox faith) and Brown (which is linked to fascism and to the alleged fight of Russia against fascism in Ukraine) (Laruelle 2016). Tensions in Crimea are linked to the politicization of the ethnic divide between Russia and Ukraine and to diverging political projects of nationalizations, which are totally incompatible, since Russia aims to exert and retain influence over the area after the collapse of the Soviet Union, while Ukraine strives to achieve complete independence. As a consequence, the Crimean and Donbass questions are nuanced and multifaceted, since they are not only an ethnic clash, but encompass complex historical, political and economic dynamics which are centered on territorial and maritime issues (Harris 2020). As far as the Russian political viewpoint is concerned<sup>55</sup>, the crisis was fueled by the lack of a Western recognition of its role as a hegemonic player in the region and it has been exacerbated by mutually reinforcing dynamics between Russia, the Western World and the Ukraine, which are still hampering diplomatic efforts to reconcile positions after the invasion of 2022 (Tsygankov 2015). Russian stances are namely so multifaceted and complex that finding a single pattern to analyze them is difficult<sup>56</sup>. For instance, scholars examine the three interpretations that can be attributed to Russia in the international arena after the Ukrainian crisis: it can be considered namely as a revisionist, aggressive and neo-imperial power<sup>57</sup>, as a victim of the

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<sup>55</sup> An insightful analysis of the complex relations between the viewpoints of Russian elites and the masses is provided by Buckley and Tucker (Buckley and Tucker 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Moreover, Russian annexation of Crimea marks a third tendency in regional policies, which pursues the control of geopolitically strategic territories, while classical trends in regional policies foster either the development or the harmonization of the economic situations of different regions (Zubarevich 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Scholars such as Buzgalin, Kolganov and Barashkova agree that Russia is labelled as an imperialistic power owing to its resistance to the truly imperialistic influence exerted by other Western players and they highlight Marxist heritage

expansion of the Western sphere of influence willing to maintain the status-quo or as a troublemaker which fuels tensions to divert public domestic public attention from internal problems. However, there is not a single and universally valid interpretation, and they can all contribute to the description of Russia attitude in the Ukrainian crisis (Götz 2016). The annexation has started a new geopolitical phase in which the Russian Federation looks eastwards<sup>58</sup> and in which maritime<sup>59</sup>, security and energy issues as strictly interconnected, since many of Russia's territorial claims encompass littoral areas which are strategic to enhance energy production, to control energetic deals and to empower the Black Sea fleet<sup>60</sup> in Sevastopol<sup>61</sup>. The emphasis on energy geopolitics and a retreat from the Western political world are linked to the improving partnership between Russia and China and this partnership is underpinned also by a huge gas deal which requires the control of ports and energy facilities in the littoral areas of Ukraine (Biersack and O' Lear 2015). Even though countries which have been fighting for a long time have managed to establish positive relations, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is involving also ideological aspects and this is one of the reasons why huge diplomatic efforts are required to ensure peace (Shelest 2015). The Crimean crisis has undoubtedly challenged European security governance in the region and has fueled complex systems of deterrence, containment and self-exclusion which have led to a temporary yet probably structural exclusion of Russia from the security architecture designed by the EU for the region, especially after the events unfolding the invasion in 2022 (Averre 2016). Despite the efforts to reinforce democratization in the region and the cooperation between its actors, which have been outlined in the previous sections, the power of the EU in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis seems constrained<sup>62</sup>, owing to the unwillingness to render Ukraine a full member of the Union, to the growing nationalism in

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regarding the opposition to imperialistic policies designed by the so-called center. However, this stance might be biased (Buzgalin, Kolganov and Barashkova 2016).

<sup>58</sup> A comparative study of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet space and in the Middle East, considering the case studies of Ukraine, Tajikistan, Georgia and Syria can be found in the work by Rezvani (Rezvani 2020).

<sup>59</sup> Maritime issues have always exerted a strong influence on Russian foreign policy, including during the Soviet period, in which the construction of the Baltic-White Sea Canal in 1933 and the geopolitical relevance of the Northern Sea Route showed that the Arctic region could become an arena for confrontation (Hill 2007). Broadly speaking, Russia should not be regarded solely as a continental land power due to its territorial extension, but it has always strived to have a naval and maritime dimension. This is the reason why its navy is undergoing a process of modernization and the country tries to maintain its spheres of influence by discouraging other powers to intervene in conflicts which belong to its sphere of influence (Sumsy and Kanev 2015). However, despite the emphasis on the modernization of the navy in official discourse and the geopolitical ambitions of building a competitive fleet, Russian forces remain mainly coastal defense units but in the future this situation might change again (Parnemo 2019). From a legal viewpoint, Russia has gained preeminence in the Arctic Region, because it has harmonized its national law to comply with the Polar Code, even though in the majority of areas in the Northern Sea Route the country implements its own navigation standards and law (Todorov 2021).

<sup>60</sup> The modernization of the Black Sea fleet envisaged in the Russian State Arms Procurement program between 2011 and 2020 has played a crucial role in empowering Russia and triggering the annexation of Crimea and the invasion in 2022, yet Russian hegemony in the Black Sea is hindered by some structural problems in Russian maritime planning (Delanoe 2014).

<sup>61</sup> The symbolic and historical role of Crimea and Sevastopol and its relevance as a national project for Russia are discussed by Deliagin and Suslov. The latter examines the Crimean debate in Russian social media and how it is structured to foster the constituency's support for the annexation (Deliagin 2021 and Suslov 2014). The impact of the annexation of Crimean media and on Russian media is particularly interesting and can be explored in the paper by Chobanyan, Shchepilova and Zhukov (Chobanyan, Shchepilova and Zhukov 2020).

<sup>62</sup> An in-depth analysis concerning the role of the EU and its achievements and constrains in the Ukraine crisis can be found in the paper by Karolewski and Cross (Karolewski and Cross 2017).

Russia and to the distrust of Russian decision-makers which consider the EU as a hostile actor. Furthermore, the EU might have underestimated Russian support for separatist filo-Russian movements in the Black Sea region (Kuzio 2017).

Russia and Ukraine share overlapping geopolitical interests in the region of the Black Sea which fuel their conflict. Ukraine has strong economic interests in defending its sovereignty in Crimea and its role in the Black Sea, because the region can provide with resources for economic development, can be used to link Ukrainian coasts with the main seas and oceans, triggering the development of the communication and the logistic sector. Furthermore, maritime resources for Ukraine gain a geopolitical importance as far as the national use and the conservation of the environment are guaranteed together with territorial integrity. Due to its strong interests in protecting maritime environment, Ukraine has invested in the preservation of biodiversity, in the regeneration of natural resources and in the production of green energy. These economic and geopolitical considerations are accompanied by the attempts to modernize the Ukrainian fleet so that it can defend its coasts and can counterbalance the Russian presence and defend its resources in case of an aggression. To this extent the country has become one of the main regional guarantors of stability, security and cooperation in the region of the Black Sea, which has acquired global economic and political relevance (Burkinskyi 2017). Consequently, the presence of so many resources in such a globally strategic area can explain why tensions between Russia and Ukraine concerning the management of the region have escalated since the dissolution of the Soviet Union<sup>63</sup>. The Commonwealth of Independent states was established by Gorbachev to retain the newly independent states in the sphere of influence of Russia, since he feared that Russia would lose political influence over some states, such as Ukraine, and to form a geopolitical and security buffer zone. Even though the independence and the sovereign status of Ukraine had been formally recognized in a friendship treaty between Yeltsin and Kravchuk signed in Kiev in November 1991, as the analyst Zaborsky<sup>64</sup> (1995) notes, Russians reluctantly accepted Kiev's independence, especially concerning Crimea and the control of Sevastopol, which was brought again under the control of Kiev in 1954. Furthermore, in Crimea decision-makers hoped to strengthen the cultural and political ties with Russia and, as Zaborsky (1995) remembers, the Crimean parliament had already declared its independence on 5 May 1992 and it requested a double citizenship and the organization of a referendum. However, the Parliament in Kiev had refused these requests, despite having made some concessions and tensions have reached an escalation when Meškov was elected President of Crimea in 1994 and he declared that his priority was granting the independence of Crimea. These events encouraged Russian decision-makers who realized that Crimea was permeated by a strong pro-Russian feeling, however they did not fuel the tensions between the President of the Ukraine Kravčuk and the Crimean President, since they feared an uprising by the Islamic population of Russian republics such as Tatarstan. The situation improved thanks to the election of a new President but the issue of the Russian Black Sea fleet and the Russian request to maintain key naval headquarters and to have access to infrastructures remained unsolved until 1997, when the two countries signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation and partnership and three other treaties governing the fate of the

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<sup>63</sup> The literature regarding the geopolitical actors and dynamics in the Black Sea region is very rich and challenging, and another work which can be read to study more in-depth Ukrainian policies is issued by Kushnir (Kushnir 2017).

<sup>64</sup> The analysis by Zaborsky is cited by Cella (Zaborsky, 1995)

Black Sea fleet. Article 2 of the treaty of friendship granted the inviolability of the borders of both countries, while the Black Sea fleet was divided between Ukraine and Russia. Russia retained nearly all warships and gave a compensation to Kiev, which allowed the counterpart to rent the naval bases in Crimea. The presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea raised relevant problems during the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as Russian warships actively took part in the conflict and President Juščenko threatened to break the contract, which was however renewed in 2010 by Janukovyč through the Pacts of Kharkov until 2042. The annexation of Crimea and Russian claims have strengthened Russia's position in Crimea but have violated not only the Helsinki Final Act, as the American Department of State declared in 2014 after the annexation, but also the Budapest memorandum of 1994. This memorandum was needed to convince Ukraine to give back to Russia its last 1700 nuclear warheads, because Ukraine, after having given back its first 2400 nuclear warheads in 1992, was not willing to completely renounce to its nuclear potential, unlike Belarus and Kazakhstan. Committed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom reluctantly convinced Ukraine to renounce its nuclear arsenal by granting that its independence and sovereignty would never be challenged, that no economic coercion or threat to use force or even nuclear weapons in an aggression would hamper its development and that they would have taken measures in case of an aggression or military threat. Despite guided by the logic of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, Mearsheimer<sup>65</sup> (1993) argued that a nonnuclear Ukraine represented a threat to global security, and he applied the principles of political realism which can perfectly describe what occurred from 2014 up to 2022. He believed that nuclear weapons would create a deterrence mechanism to discourage Russia to reconquer Ukraine and in case of tensions, which were not unlikely to break out again due to the historical distrust between the two countries, he believed that no country would protect the Ukraine to grant its security. The Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's accession to the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, which is the official name of the Budapest memorandum, was based on good faith and on the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act as well as in the TNP, but its provisions were violated already in 2006, 2008 and 2009 with the gas crises, which exerted a powerful form of economic coercion on Ukraine. Moreover, the annexation of Crimea clearly represents a breach of both the Budapest memorandum as well as the UN charter, but the security guarantors of Ukraine and the other Western allies have always tried to prevent an escalation which could entail nuclear threats, and this is the reason why there has never been a direct Western intervention. The lack of implementation of the security pledges made towards Ukraine entails negative drawbacks according to some scholars, who believe that the lack of implementation of security assurances by nuclear powers might pave the way for the proliferation of nuclear weapons in nonnuclear states to protect their own interest. This is the reason why the lack of a stronger Western reaction has been criticized as heavily as the Russian breaches of international law, since they have enabled Russia to act on the basis of nationalistic principles of *Realpolitik* and to threaten the use of nuclear weapons in case of serious security and existential concerns based on the ideas of neoclassical realism. The US analyst Pifer<sup>66</sup> (2016) considers the strange, alleged reasons underlying the declarations of Russian Foreign affairs minister Lavrov, who claims

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<sup>65</sup> This text can be considered as a valuable primary source cited by Cella (Mearsheimer, 1993, pp.51-52)

<sup>66</sup> This analysis is cited by Cella and can be found in the sitography (Pfier, 2016).



that Russia has not violated the Budapest memorandum owing to the fact that it has never threatened with the use of the nuclear weapon directly against the counterpart, it is acting against an illegal Ukrainian government which is violating the rights of Russophone people who must be protected by Moscow itself. Swift notices that in case of an aggression or invasion neither the US nor the United Kingdom would have a legal obligation to protect the Ukraine, as in the Budapest memorandum there was no mechanism of collective security. Furthermore, the wording "security assurances" was employed as it was a more nuanced expression which did not entail the same obligation to intervene as the words "security guarantees". The diplomat Vasylenko<sup>67</sup> (2009) in his work "On Assurances without guarantees" outlines the reasons why the Budapest memorandum is opaque and slightly binding only concerning the need to arrange political consultations in case of realistic risks. Moreover, it was preceded by some political agreements in Lisbon in 1992, when Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the START treaty and committed themselves to the liquidation of their nuclear arsenal. Consequently, the only binding principles were only those entailed in the UN Charter (Cella, 2021, pp.289-309). These considerations prove that realist theories of international relations are still relevant, although only multilateral efforts can grant security and global stability.

As I am dealing with the Crimean crisis, this issue has been widely studied from the viewpoint of international law to assess the serious breaches of international law committed by Russia<sup>68</sup> and international straits represent again a point in which strong political, geopolitical and economic interests are concealed behind legal disputes. The incident in the Kerch Strait occurred on 25 November 2018, when three Ukrainian vessels, namely the Gyrza-M-class artillery boats "Berdyansk" and "Nikopol" together with the tugboat "Yany Kapu" left the port of Odessa to enter the port of Mariupol in the Azov Sea by navigation through the Kerch Strait. They were blocked by Russian navy vessels, which later fired upon and captured the Ukrainian ships<sup>69</sup>. The description of the facts differs according to the Ukrainian and the Russian counterpart, for example the exact location of the vessels is disputed, as the Russian Federation claims that the events unfolded in its territorial waters, while Ukraine argues that the vessels were placed in international waters, outside the 12-mile zone preceding the Kerch Strait. Ukraine claims that Russia has violated the provisions of Article 37 and 38 of UNCLOS, which envisage the right of transit passage through all straits, as it qualifies the Kerch Strait as an international strait in which innocent passage is allowed. However, the qualification of the Kerch Strait as an international strait is erroneous, since the criteria to be defined as an international strait are not met, owing to the 2003 Agreements, including the Agreement on Cooperation in the use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait which proves that the Sea of Azov qualifies as internal waters of the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Therefore, the right of transit passage, the right of innocent

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<sup>67</sup> This work cited by Cella is an interesting primary source in the bibliography (Vasylenko, 2009)

<sup>68</sup> I have decided to focus on the legal disputes concerning the Kerch Strait, because this thesis is focusing on maritime geopolitics and straits, nevertheless a broader analysis concerning the impact of Crimea on international law and the exploitation of juridical argumentations by Russia has been written by Burke-White (Burke-White 2014). Mälksoo reviews two books to examine the interplay between international law and balance of power after the crisis and it is argued that when international law is rejected, balance of power politics come to prominence again (Mälksoo 2019).

<sup>69</sup> Atland argues that this incident as well as the other tensions in the region can be explained thanks to neoclassical realist theories, which are still relevant in the maritime sector, and which aim to transform the Black Sea in a "Russian lake" (Atland 2021).

passage and other provisions enshrined in the UNCLOS cannot be invoked. However, Russia violated Articles 2 and 3 of the 2003 Agreements which envisage the freedom of navigation for Ukrainian and Russian vessels and the cooperation in the maritime sector of both countries. Despite these violations, Ukraine cannot seek redress before an international court, as Article 4 of the Cooperation Agreements states that disputes should be solved through peaceful negotiations and consultations, additionally there is no compulsory dispute settlement procedure and the UNCLOS cannot be invoked as this argument does not regard the interpretation of UNCLOS, pursuant to Article 279. Furthermore, Russia violated not only the 2003 Cooperation Agreement, but also the UNCLOS. First of all, the suspension of navigation in the 12-mile zone preceding the Kerch Strait was not duly notified and therefore the breach of article 25(3) of UNCLOS can be proved. Secondly, Russia cannot invoke article 25 of UNCLOS, since the passage of the Ukrainian vessels was not prejudicial to peace, good order and security of the Russian Federation and therefore it can be deemed in breach of Articles 24 and 301 of UNCLOS. Finally, firing upon and capturing the Ukrainian ships is considered as a violation of Articles 30 and 32 of UNCLOS. To sum up, Ukraine cannot invoke the UNCLOS as the water of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait are internal waters of both countries, but it can highlight the unilateral breach of the 2003 agreements, which granted freedom of navigation but were unilaterally suspended for 2 days. However, there is no compulsory dispute settlement procedure for these agreements and Ukraine could denounce the agreements, so that the Kerch strait could be considered as strait where UNCLOS is applicable. Nevertheless, the arbitration between Slovenia and Croatia proves that even a termination of the treaty would not change the legal status of the strait and therefore Ukraine could not enjoy a stronger legal position. Therefore, Ukraine should try to find some Russian violations of UNCLOS which are not related to land sovereignty issues and for which the optional exceptions envisaged in Article 298 of UNCLOS cannot be invoked (Katuoka and Klumbyte, 2019, pp.225-243). The ongoing military tensions and the aforementioned incident might lead both Ukraine and Russia to rethink the passage regime applied to the Kerch Strait, which might be marked by a conflictual and peculiar passage regime, based on transit passage on one hand and on authorization-based passage on the other hand, on the basis of domestic law of the two parties. The coexistence of these conflicting and diverging regimes does not represent a breach of international law of the sea and there would be still the opportunity to reconcile the stances of both countries (Lott 2021). Despite this legal consideration, the incident in 2018 is particularly concerning according to Lewis, who argues that it can be compared to an open act of war which marked the *de facto* tacit Russian suspension of the 2003 Agreements<sup>70</sup> (Lewis 2019).

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<sup>70</sup> Further implications and considerations regarding the legal status and disputes in the Kerch Strait and in the Sea of Azov are outlined by Schatz and Koval (Schatz and Koval 2019).

### *3.4 Cooperation in the Black Sea region*

Despite the serious tensions in the region, stemming from both regional rivalries as well as international disagreements, some political developments make scholars foresee a future in which the Black Sea can become a security community<sup>71</sup> and a stable region integrated in the international system. This outcome is caused both by the need to tackle transnational challenges and by the strong economic interdependence and shared benefits which originate from a peaceful management of resources as well as an efficient regional multilateralism. Multilateralism can yield positive results when it is anchored in the regional dynamics of a given geographic area. The activity of international organizations such as the EU, NATO and the OSCE has paved the way for a process of regional integration between the countries which are willing not to remain solely in the sphere of influence of Russia, the US or the EU and are eager to achieve an independent and regional political dimension. As we have witnessed with the European Union, regional integration starts from an economic dimension with the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and then the spillover leads to other forms of integration even in sectors marked by a fierce competition, such as the Black Sea Naval cooperation task group (BLACKSEAFOR). Furthermore, subregional organizations were also established such as the GUAM organization for democracy and economic development with Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The key question regarding regionalization concerns the role of the Black Sea, which is portrayed by scholars such as Aydin (2005) as an "intellectually constructed region" (2005) and whose ambiguity and complexity is outlined by Ionescu, who believes that the Black Sea can be regarded either as an open space, or as a closed area, which is linked to the concept of the Black Sea as a NATO lake or as a Russian lake, implying a close and homogeneous sphere of influence. While the countries are included in several external projects such as the Eurasian Union launched by Russia or the Eastern Partnership, the BSEC is the only truly regional organization comprising all countries, even though sometimes other regional organizations seem to compete or to have overlapping interests (Weaver, 2016, pp.117-119). Scholars are discussing whether the wider Black Sea region can become a new security community and again the concepts of realism must be applied. In particular structural realism postulates that unipolarity is not durable, bipolarity is based on a balance of power between the two superpowers and multipolarity is more unstable but can be either balanced or unbalanced. When multipolarity is balanced, it means that there is a strong coalition of states which prevents a single power from waging war to obtain hegemony and according to Weaver "a necessary but not sufficient condition" for the establishment of a security community in the Black Sea is the presence of a balanced multipolarity (Weaver, 2011). Balanced multipolarity fosters security maximization strategies and countries cooperate to achieve supranational goals such as the protection of human rights, while in a system marked by unbalanced multipolarity power maximization prevail, national interests are stronger than supranational issues and a great power can decide to wage war to obtain hegemony. The definition of "security community" is provided by Deutsch and his co-authors in 1957, who consider a security community as a community of countries which combine institutional top-down and

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<sup>71</sup> According to Hajizada, given the plurality of actors in the Black Sea region it can be inferred that we will witness pluralistic security communities which differ from the traditional definitions of security communities (Hajizada 2018).

bottom-up approaches to peacefully tackle the challenges of the region and build trust between the regional parties. Furthermore, constructivists highlight the role of shared identities and values to strengthen the ties between the countries in the region and another theory which can be applied in this context is the "regional security complex theory" by Buzan and Wæver (Weaver, 2006, pp.5-6). Undoubtedly the Black Sea region is multipolar, and a model of security governance is much needed in the Black Sea region according to Sperling<sup>72</sup> (2003) *et al.* owing to the lack of a comprehensive security governance mechanism and due to the change from a Westphalian to a post-Westphalian international system, as Kirchner and Sperling believe. I will analyze the implications of the post-Westphalian international order in the last chapter. Adler and Greve<sup>73</sup> (2009) believe that the neorealist concept of balance of power and the constructivist idea of security communities can overlap in regional mechanisms of security governance, and this reinforces the thesis by Weaver that a balanced multipolarity is needed for the establishment of security communities. Even though in the Black Sea the system is multipolar and balanced, (as the poles are the EU, Russia, the US and Turkey) war is still possible and real owing to other factors, such as the lack of trust between some of the countries in the region. Therefore, the Black Sea is not yet a security community, as the distrust between some countries, rivalries and frozen conflicts persist and have historical roots. However, on the other hand the level of cooperation between regional actors is improving, for example thanks to joint projects such as the BLACKSEAFOR or the "Black Sea Ring Highway" and consequently there is the adequate potential to establish a security community. The most relevant and powerful example of a regional organization fostering cooperation tailored to the needs and challenges of the Black Sea is the BSEC. Although some tensions persist, linked to the role of Russia, which is blamed with the disruption of the activity of the BSEC and which blames Turkey to use the organization as a tool to enhance its role in the region, this organization has managed to move beyond a Russian-led model and all members have equal political weight. The BSEC includes all members of the Black Sea region and was created by the Soviet Union and Turkey<sup>74</sup> in the early 1990s, when the Permanent International Secretariat was established in Istanbul. The BSEC Charter was signed in 1998 but the basis of this organization aiming to improve security, cultural and commercial relations were laid with the "Bosphorus Statement" and the "Summit declaration on Black Sea economic cooperation" signed on 25 June 1992. The organization is currently focusing more on economic and infrastructure cooperation rather than security issues and it aims to integrate the Black Sea as world region in the global system<sup>75</sup>. (Weaver, 2016, pp.117-131). Environmental cooperation plays a key role in overcoming solely nationalistic interests and in highlighting the need to design common political frameworks to tackle transnational

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<sup>72</sup> This work cited by the author of the chapter provides with an interesting analysis of Eurasia (Sperling *et al.*, 2003)

<sup>73</sup> This interesting analysis is cited by Weaver (Adler and Greve 2009)

<sup>74</sup> Scholars claim that in the 1990s Turkey has undergone a process of Europeanization of foreign policy, which is clear if the case of the BSEC is examined (Ustun 2010). According to some scholars, it is one of the main beneficiaries of the collapse of the Soviet Union in the Black Sea, because it controls the Straits, it is a NATO member and plays a central role in managing processes of regional integration such as the BSEC (Panagoret 2014).

<sup>75</sup> Ukraine is particularly active in the BSEC, as the fora for cooperation provided by the organization are instrumental to protect strong Ukrainian interests in the Black Sea, above all in the sectors of transport, trade of goods and commodities and touristic services. Ukrainian interests in the Black Sea are very strong and vital and this clarifies why the country strives to retain sovereignty over Crimea. The work by Goncharuk and Troyan examines in detail the role of Ukraine in the BSEC (Goncharuk and Troyan 2013)

challenges such as the preservation of the environment. For instance, the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea and the Caspian Environment Program have managed to overcome nationalistic individual interests of littoral countries and to enhance a multilateral governance, in which international actors such as the UNDP, UNEP and the World Bank exert an influence on local players. Furthermore, it proves the spillover effect of cooperation, because environmental cooperation has enhanced legal cooperation to clarify the legal status of the Caspian Sea (Bayramov 2020). Additionally, also in the Black Sea region environmental issues should reinforce multilateral cooperation, which is crucial to preserve the rich biodiversity of the sea that has suffered in the last decades. In 1992 the Black Sea Regional Seas Program was established to negotiate the Black Sea Biodiversity and Landscape Conservation Protocol, which was concluded in 1996 and adopted only in 2002. Unfortunately, it took a very long time before entering into force, but it cannot be denied that such an instrument is crucial to empower local and regional actors to cooperate to preserve common, shared interests such as the environment (Nilüfer Oral 2012). I deem the case study of the BSEC as particularly meaningful in my analysis since it proves that despite the number of tensions in a region plagued by several serious and dramatic conflicts, multilateral cooperation is still possible and the sea does not represent only a resource fueling competition, but also an element enhancing multilateral governance to better manage its resources, as this organization focuses on the Black Sea specifically. As it can be clearly inferred from the analysis in this chapter, this geopolitical space is marked both by the influence of Western actors such as the EU and the US and by the influence of Eastern players, such as Russia and China. Chinese influence in the region is growing rapidly and this process might be favored thanks to the explicit support of Russia and to the assertive approach of Turkey. Even though countries such as Romania and Bulgaria are firmly siding with their Western NATO and EU allies, China is increasing its economic, political and diplomatic power through the Belt and Road Initiative and this is triggering strategic competition especially with the US. The growing Chinese influence characterizes also other maritime spaces such as the Mediterranean, Africa and Latin America and can shed light on general patterns of development in global maritime politics (Sanders 2021). The links and connections between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and the patterns of cooperation and confrontation between local, regional and international actors reinforce my thesis, which considers the role of maritime spaces as catalysts of multilateral cooperation as well as arenas in which geopolitical competition has become recently harsher.

## Chapter 4: Oceans and international straits as catalysts for cooperation and confrontation

### *4.1 Historical and political conceptualization*

Maritime choke points, straits and oceans are places where complex dynamics of cooperation and confrontation unfold and there are meaningful historical, economic, political and legal implications. The concept of sea power, which is so crucial in the analysis of maritime geopolitics, was coined by the US navy official Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890), who designed the theory of seapower<sup>76</sup> based on the control of choke points in this famous work "The influence of seapower upon history" in 1890. According to Mahan (1890) there were seven choke points, which were Dover, Gibraltar, Malta, Suez, Malacca, Saint Lawrence in Canada and the Cape of Good Hope. He soon admitted that the Panama Canal represented another choke point to be added. Nowadays global geopolitics has changed, and the main choke points are Gibraltar, the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, Suez, Bab al Mandab, Hormuz, Malacca, Taiwan and Panama (Caracciolo, 2019, pp. 9-11). The complexity of the legal and political regime of straits is outlined in the work by Oral (2019), who traces its history starting from the Corfu Canal and describes the different types of straits under the UNCLOS. Firstly, Transit passage straits are used for international navigation and link a high seas zone or an exclusive economic zone with another high seas zone or another exclusive economic zone. Secondly, the nonsuspendable innocent passage straits are the so-called "dead end" straits, which bring the vessel from the high seas or an exclusive economic zone to the territorial sea of a foreign country or are straits under Article 36 of UNCLOS, which connect similar high seas and exclusive economic zone. Lastly, there are some straits excluded from Part III of UNCLOS, such as the straits under article 35 (a) which are part of the internal waters of a country, the straits that are ruled by article 35 (c) which are governed through a long-standing international convention and the straits which are not used for international navigation<sup>77</sup> (Oral 2019). It cannot be neglected that straits are crucial economic choke points and this regards both the passage of goods and especially energy transportation. Energy transportation security, maritime routes and security of navigation in choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz or in the South China Sea are important catalysts for confrontation, because they encompass states' vital interests.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> The literature concerning sea power theories is huge and another interesting analysis can be found for example in the work by Kennedy (2004).

<sup>77</sup> The demarcation of territorial seas, internal waters, EEZ and continental shelf areas is complex and generates considerable tensions between countries, which have often developed their own theories and practices to test the classification of waters. Tensions arise not only in huge international choke points, but also in limited water spaces, such as the Salish Sea Boundary Straits between the US and Canada, which must be considered as a territorial sea ( Allen 2017).

<sup>78</sup> An extensive assessment of the energy transportation security in maritime spaces can be found in the paper by Kosai and Unesaki (Kosai and Unesaki 2016).

## 4.2 The geopolitics of straits in Africa and in the Middle East

Global choke points and straits are key gateways in international trade, as 80% of trade navigates through maritime routes and to this extent the Straits of Bab al Mandeb and Suez are the most important connection between the Red Sea<sup>79</sup> and the Indian Ocean, linking the economic giants in Asia with the markets in Europe and America. Granting the security of passage through these straits is crucial as even the tiniest inconvenience would entail important drawbacks and disruptions in global trade and this can be held true for all maritime choke points, since logistic systems are so interconnected that a disruption, the closure of a strait or a port city could entail serious problems. Disputes might arise from territorial claims of littoral states, by the projection of power of main global superpowers or from asymmetric threats such as piracy and maritime terrorism and this regards above all the areas of Suez and Bab al Mandeb. However, legal instruments have already been adopted to ensure the security of passage, such as the Constantinople Convention in 1888, whose provisions have been later confirmed by the Washington Treaty in 1979. Navigation in the Gulf of Aden is still threatened by the political instability between Yemen and Somalia and both piracy and Islamic maritime terrorism are posing a threat to vessels. Somalia is namely acknowledged as a failed state, especially after the regime of Siad Barre in 1991 and this instability has fueled piracy<sup>80</sup> above all in the regions of Puntland and Galguduung. Pirates in the region of Puntland are the result of ethnic divisions and in Southern Somalia and Mogadishu the al *shabab* pirates are involved also in Islamic terrorism. Several measures and military operations have been taken to grant the security of navigation in the Gulf of Aden<sup>81</sup>, such as the Atalanta mission under European leadership, the NATO mission Ocean Shield as well as the US ctf-151<sup>82</sup>, without yielding long-term durable results, while Turkish influence in the energy market might reshape the political balance in the region. Again, economic and political factors can be strictly intertwined, and this sheds light on the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to address and issue. Another instability factor in the region is Yemen, which is plagued by ethnic and religious divisions, exacerbated by the civil war between North and South Yemen and by the conflicts between the religious groups of the Sunnites and the Zaydites. The Zaydites, and especially the Houthi, have organized a military attack to gain control over the coast of the Red Sea and have directly threatened the city of Aden and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb. Despite the military efforts of the Sunnites coalition under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and backed by the United States

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<sup>79</sup> Conflicts to obtain the control of resources are unfortunately frequent in this region. For instance, the Red Sea region is threatened by the tensions between Eritrea and Yemen concerning the Hanish Islands and even though the dispute will be settled by an international arbitration and France is committed to guarantee security of navigation, the negotiation processes did not lead to a compromise and a solution (Lefebvre 1998).

<sup>80</sup> An analysis about the relations between Somali piracy and securitization theories can be found in the work by Carvalho Oliveira (Carvalho Oliveira 2017).

<sup>81</sup> An interesting analysis concerning the regional security complex theory, its evolution and the links between the region of the Horn of Africa and the Middle East can be found in the work by Cannon and Donelli (Cannon and Donelli 2020) and also Ulrichsen focuses on geopolitical threats in the Arabian Peninsula and in the Horn of Africa (Ulrichsen 2011).

<sup>82</sup> Together with formal and official military campaigns organized by different international stakeholders, commercial shipping companies often rely on private military and security companies to be granted security against Somali piracy, although the IMO and other international organizations oppose this practice as it could lead to further violent escalations (Coito 2013)

have attempted to ease tensions and grant the security of Aden and the Strait, these operations have not yielded relevant results. This is due to the resistance of local military groups, to the declining support provided by the US and to the lack of appropriate land missions. However, there are places in which international cooperation is thriving and in which the local government can benefit from international partnerships. For example, Gibuti has benefitted from its strategic position near the Straits to sign agreements with countries such as the US, France, China and other European countries to protect the Strait and the Gulf of Aden and on this background, China has invested in the port of Doraleh to obtain several advantages. First of all, granting the security of the Straits ensures economic prosperity for China, which needs efficient exports so as to maintain its economic-performance-based political legitimacy. Moreover, it increases its political influence in the region<sup>83</sup> (De Sanctis, 2019)

Another Strait which entails a strong global economic relevance despite being subject to regional tensions is the Strait of Hormuz, in which tensions between Iran and the US worsened during the administration of US President Trump<sup>84</sup>. Consequently, the Strait is undergoing an increasing militarization marked by incidents and by the constant threat that in case of an US ban or limitation on Iranian oil, the Strait of Hormuz could be closed by Iran. This threat is used to counterbalance, in a realistic strategy<sup>85</sup>, the hostility of the US against Iran and Hormuz has always been considered as a geopolitical tool by Iran. The importance of Hormuz is undisputed, as the Energy Information Administration argues that in 2018 every day 21 million oil barrels were carried through the strait and any disruption in the flux of oil or gas could cause the price of oil to raise up to 440 dollars per barrel, as the NASDAQ estimates<sup>86</sup>. The Strait is acknowledged by Irani scholars and decision-makers as a geopolitical tool to maximize power and security and Reza Pahlavi deemed the Strait as a way to achieve the projection of the power of Iran in the region, as the military interventions in 1973 and 1975 prove. Hormuz is regarded as a way to achieve military deterrence, to counterbalance the US presence in the Strait and to be considered as the guarantor of security in that crucial node. Furthermore, the Strait is so narrow that it can be used to defend Iran after the collapse of the Irani navy, which can organize an efficient attack with mines in the waters of such a narrow strait, requiring at least 37 or up to 112 days to free the waters and ensure a safe passage for vessels again. Iran claims to have a solid legal basis to hamper US presence in the strait, since both countries are not parties to the UNCLOS, therefore the provisions of Article 9 of Iranian domestic law in 1993 are applied and state that military vessels are not allowed to navigate through Hormuz without the

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<sup>83</sup> The competition between the US on one side and China and Russia on the other side is evident in the Strait of Bab Al Mandeb and another detailed analysis of the geopolitical tensions in the region can be found in the work by Alexandre (Alexandre António Gonçalves 2021) and in the paper by the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2018.

<sup>84</sup> The paper by James and Daniel analyses in-depth US and Iranian tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and it argues that the Carter Doctrine would be useful to protect international freedom of navigation (James and Daniel 2014).

<sup>85</sup> Patterns of competition between different international actors in the Strait of Hormuz can be analyzed on the basis of a realist perspective as well as through the evolutionary game model, which proves once again the role of political realism in explaining the complexity of international relations in the strait (Huang, Wang, Loughney and Wang 2022).

<sup>86</sup> Global maritime security is crucial to control oil prices and to grant the stability of global economy and the Competitive Homogeneity Model confirms that geopolitical risks are the most influential variable changing oil prices, whose dynamics are mirrored in the Baltic Dry Index. This is the reason why any disruption in the system of energy transportation and any geopolitical risk, stemming for instance from a possible Hormuz blockade must be avoided (Khan, SU Tao and Umar 2021).



authorization of Iran and this provision applies especially to US warships, as under the Vienna Convention of 1969 some warships have been allowed to pass through the strait. This has undermined the US leadership and influence in the region, which is counterbalanced by the presence of Chinese and Russian warships and portrays Iran not only as a regional pivot state, but also as a guarantor of security and a responsible power in such a crucial node. On the other hand, Teheran cannot adopt an aggressive and restrictive management of the Strait and preferred a more cautious style<sup>87</sup>. Firstly, Irani forces had already been defeated in the waters of Hormuz in 1507 when Portuguese took control over the island of Hormuz and in 1856 during the British invasion of the port of Bushehr during the Anglo-Persian war. Secondly, Iran's extreme dependence on this strait forces the country to adopt a cautious strategy, because 55% of Irani import and exports depend on Hormuz, which is the only gateway to sea for Iran and additionally the country has not invested in the establishment of other port cities, which means that the only important port city of Iran in the Strait of Hormuz is Bandar Abbas. Furthermore, the regions near Hormuz are plagued by poverty, Islamic terrorism and do not favor huge investments in port cities and therefore terrorism poses a threat to a safe navigation through the Strait. Moreover, the United Arab Emirates claim their sovereignty over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater and Lesser Tunb, which were given back to Iran in 1971 and Teheran argues that these claims represent a strategy to weaken Irani leadership and induce external powers to intervene in the region, especially if the Strait would be considered as not safe and would require an international intervention, undermining Irani legitimacy in the protection of such a strategic maritime gateway. Given the cautious and conservative attitude of Irani authorities as far as the real implementation of their threats to block Hormuz is concerned, it can be inferred that this strait is an instrument of deterrence (Divsallar and Pedde, 2019, pp.211-221). Despite the vital importance of this strait for international trade, already existing multilateral tools such as the Gulf Cooperation Council have not succeeded in stabilizing the region. This is due to the lack of a sincere cooperation, since member states prioritize national interests and often instrumentalize the organization to achieve their own foreign policy aims. This proves that multilateralism must be reformed and strengthened so as to reduce geopolitical risks (Elsayed Abdelkhalek 2022).

#### *4.3 Maritime geopolitical competition in Asia*

The Indo-Pacific context represents a challenging opportunity to analyze the complex balance between cooperation and confrontation involving local, regional and global actors and different interpretations of its geopolitical situation overlap. Firstly, it was considered after the Cold-War as a space where local powers had to establish forms of multilateral

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<sup>87</sup> Iran deploys the strait as a strategic tool to threaten the counterpart only when decision-makers envisage aggressive and penetrative attempts of foreign powers. On the other hand, they are aware of the constraints of implementing the closure of the strait (Divsallar 2021).

regional integration given the need to tackle challenges such as the management of choke points or the fight against piracy. Scholars such as Cohen (2003) and Gupta (2010)<sup>88</sup> have namely argued that owing to the heterogeneity of this region, littoral countries should cooperate, nevertheless cooperation is difficult to be achieved owing to the rivalries between countries such as India and Pakistan or the condition of failed states such as Somalia. Moreover, this region has experienced important military operations, such as the ones against piracy in the Gulf of Aden and nuclear threats are still present, as India and Pakistan have already fought between 1947 and 1971, Iran has tried to build a nuclear arsenal, South Africa has dismantled its nuclear weapons and all the five official nuclear powers can hit this region in case of a conflict. Nuclear competition affects also maritime capacity-building to defend both the territorial sea and the choke points and fuels reciprocal mechanisms of deterrence. On the other hand, many scholars as well as policymakers such as former Japanese Prime Minister Abe have promoted the stance of an Indo-Pacific space, because several countries have political and economic interests in both oceans and especially China and the US are striving to enhance their spheres of influence in both oceans<sup>89</sup>. The presence of the US has always been relevant, including military operations during the Gulf Wars, but the competition between China and India might become even more important and fought above all in terms of maritime politics, since both countries are investing in their navies. However, other scholars believe that the concept of Indo-Pacific is too limited, as not only the Indian and the Pacific oceans are connected, but everything that happens in the Indian Ocean has potentially a global reach, for instance regarding the consequences of the block of a single choke point. In the Indian Ocean the economic and political interests of several actors overlap and their patterns of cooperation and competition are instrumental to grasp the importance of maritime issues as a tool to understand the evolution of the international system. India is undoubtedly one of the main actors in the Indian Ocean, and both its geographic position as well as its increasing economic power are likely to make India even more important in the region<sup>90</sup>. Even though it has been considered as a reluctant superpower lacking a proper naval strategy, two strategic patterns have been developed in the last decades. Firstly, Modi's *Ostpolitik* since 2014 aims to improve relations with the countries of the Pacific Rim, to counterbalance the growing Chinese influence and to reinforce Indian influence in the Gulf of Bengal, in the Southern and Southeast Asia. For instance, bilateral relations with Vietnam have significantly improved and they entail a joint naval strategy and the monitoring of the Mekong River, in order to curtail Chinese influence. On the other hand, the second Indian naval strategy follows the steps indicated by Pattanaik<sup>91</sup> (2016) in order to strengthen bilateral relations with partners such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, the Seychelles and Mauritius. According to

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<sup>88</sup> The works by Cohen and Gupta are cited by Anzera (Cohen, 2003) and Gupta (2010).

<sup>89</sup> Japan's maritime policy is labelled by scholars as "maritime realism", which is based on realist assumptions regarding balance of power, on liberal internationalism and on the need to be granted access to the sea. Therefore, it has favored US involvement in the region, and it has attempted to enhance its maritime power through its navy (Matsuda 2020).

<sup>90</sup> India is namely the key regional actor which can balance Chinese expansionism and its naval cooperation with Japan is peculiar, because Japan focuses on the Pacific, while India has a preeminent role in the Indian Ocean. This naval cooperation has not evolved into an official military partnership and relies more on soft balancing mechanisms in order to avoid a direct confrontation with China. Moreover, this cooperation is beneficial for both countries to project their influence over Southeast Asia (Paul 2019). The economic and industrial implications of this partnership can be studied in the work by Chakraborty (Chakraborty 2020).

<sup>91</sup> The analysis by Pattanaik is cited by Anzera (Pattanaik 2016)

Pattanaik (2016), firstly joint military exercises to reinforce the partner are organized, then joint patrolling against piracy and terrorism takes place and is followed by humanitarian aid operations. After that a joint agency between India and its partner is established to pursue the same goals and finally maritime spaces and issues related to the blue economy are managed together. Experts argue that the Indian navy represents one of the most powerful forces in the Indian Ocean and it is technologically advanced and well-equipped. Another key actor in the Indian Ocean is Australia, which needs to control maritime routes due to its dependence on oil imports and exports of raw materials such as gold, diamonds and uranium. Even though it had always focused more on the naval strategy in the Pacific and its fleet is smaller than the Indian one, it is technologically advanced and now decision-makers are currently redressing the balance and the Fleet Base West enables to have a more relevant presence in the Indian Ocean. However, Australia is particularly active in the strategies of the Indo-Pacific in order to curtail Chinese influence in the region<sup>92</sup>. Other important actors in the Persian Gulf are Iran<sup>93</sup> and Saudi Arabia, involved in a religious-based rivalry and which are both investing in their fleets, to obtain modern equipment suitable to control the Strait of Hormuz. Another actor who should be examined in the Indian Ocean region is South Africa, which is the most powerful country in Southern Africa, and which is rebuilding and strengthening its fleet, because its activity in the region to contrast piracy and to protect its exclusive economic zone is too limited if compared with its expected role on the basis of its economic power. Another regional player who should be considered is Pakistan, which has established the CPEC, which is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor which aims to counterbalance the influence of India and its Indo-Pacific partners such as the US, Japan and Australia. The CPEC project grants China an access to the Indian Ocean in case of tensions and it links the Pakistani port of Gwadar with the Xinjiang province through an interconnected system of railway. This project exacerbates tensions between Pakistan and India and enables China to have access to the Indian Ocean and to transport goods to the hinterland without having to navigate through the Malacca Strait, in case of tensions. However, Pakistan's geopolitical positioning is complex, since it has established good political relations not only with China, but also with the United States and European Countries, it is in a region marked by strong instability and despite focusing more on land issues, such as its borders with India, it is building an efficient navy to pursue oceanic goals. The project of the CPEC is particularly interesting to consider the functioning of balance of power, as China and Pakistan are redressing the balance of the Indo-Pacific powers, especially India and in this competition<sup>94</sup>, they have developed a new form of cooperation based on the integration of transports and again maritime issues are powerful catalysts for both cooperation and confrontation. The Indian Ocean region attracts not only local and regional actors but is becoming the stage of a wider geopolitical competition in which both

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<sup>92</sup> To this extent the partnership with India has been strengthened to counterbalance the Chinese threat in the Indian Ocean (Dahiya 2013).

<sup>93</sup> The complex relations and the repercussion of the improvement of relations between Iran and India and the combination of geopolitical and geo-economic aspects can be studied in the paper by Ahmed and Bhatnagar (Ahmed and Bhatnagar 2018).

<sup>94</sup> A more in-depth analysis of the cooperation between China and Pakistan can be found in the work by Ali (Ali 2019).

China and the United States are competing to extend their spheres of influence<sup>95</sup>. Even though it seems that the US are withdrawing from the region, they still must protect international trade routes and their Middle East allies against piracy and terrorism. Moreover, in spite of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan their geopolitical focus is moving from the Middle East to Asia and this tendency can be observed since the Obama administration to counter Chinese growing influence. Nevertheless, the US have not developed yet a specific strategy designed for the Indian Ocean, which remains “an ocean too far” as Holmes and Yoshihara argue (Holmes, Yoshihara, 2012, pp.1-26). For instance, the V Fleet operates in the Middle East, while the VII Fleet is active above all in the Pacific and this means that there is not a specific US fleet in the Indian Ocean and the forces which can be devoted for operations in the Indian Ocean are too limited to achieve the given objectives. This might prove that the focus of the United States is mainly on the Pacific, as Hilary Clinton (2011) highlighted in the strategic document “America’s Pacific century”. Another key international actor in the Indian Ocean is China<sup>96</sup>, which aims to increase its influence to control maritime routes in the Indian Ocean, as any disruption in Asian choke points would damage Chinese economy. Consequently, it has designed the strategy of the “String of Pearls”, which implies the improvement of bilateral relations with key littoral states such as Pakistan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Gibuti and the establishment of new joint naval bases respectively in Gwadar, Kyauk Pyu, Hanbantota, Chittagong and Doraleh. Chinese naval policies have recently changed<sup>97</sup> and become more aggressive in order to protect the “maritime silk road” and to be active not only in the near sea, but also in both the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea as well as in the Indian Ocean<sup>98</sup>. The “Maritime Silk Road” is namely a huge geopolitical project involving huge Chinese investments to build infrastructures all over the World, from Australia to Kenya, envisaging an increased number of Chinese vessels and a military presence to ensure security, especially in the choke points. This resembles and further amplifies the strategy of the String of Pearls and leads to a strategic encirclement of Indian ports, which would be surrounded by competing Chinese ports<sup>99</sup>. This is the reason why India will not contribute to the project of the “Maritime Silk Road”, as it fears a stronger Chinese maritime presence and the development of the CPEC. Another factor posing a threat to India is the improvement of the Chinese navy, which is equipped with more modern instruments and is gaining experience through interventions in Africa or in the Middle East (Anzera, 2021, pp.133-155). As a consequence, India cannot be regarded as the “net security provider” and as the historically central actor in the region and this will further exacerbate tensions with China and change the regional status-quo

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<sup>95</sup> This competition is examined also in the paper by Lee, Wainwright and Glassman, who consider the perspective of Gramsci and argue that geopolitical and geoeconomic competition historicize practices of territorialization and reproduce capitalist concepts and ideals (Lee, Wainwright and Glassman,2018).

<sup>96</sup> Maritime policies of Chinese President Xi Jinping are examined by Yoon in his paper “Yoon 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Chinese naval modernization, inspired by Mahan’s doctrine, aimed to build a blue water navy to compete with the US, yet the implemented PLAN project has only addressed the vulnerability of the country in the eastern seabed, which could be easily attacked or encircled. Anti-access and area denial capabilities were namely strengthened and developed (MacHaffie 2020).

<sup>98</sup> An insightful analysis of Chinese maritime politics and its concept of maritime power can be found in the paper by Daniel Rocha and Silva (Rocha and Silva 2015).

<sup>99</sup> However, it cannot be denied that many countries have become parties to the Maritime Silk Road but are willing to retain their sovereignty, which means that the String of Pearls might be politically more invasive than the Maritime Silk Road (Barton 2021).

(Upadhyaya 2017). According to Bhagawati (2021) both China and India are embracing the doctrine and the strategies of Admiral Mahan and even though it is unlikely that a war will break out in the future to gain complete control over the Indian Ocean, the interests of the two Asian giants are becoming overlapping and affect each other so much that incidents such as those in the border region of Ladakh can become more frequent (Bhagawati 2021). The demarcation of maritime borders and overlapping jurisdiction claims exacerbate tensions between regional players and in the Indian Ocean nearly all countries have some disputes to be settled concerning maritime borders. China has several territorial arguments with other littoral countries and these tensions contribute to worsen the political situation in the Indian Ocean. For instance, the maritime conflict between China and Vietnam is interesting because on one side China regards it as a minor dispute with a smaller neighbor, which has however on the other side looked for support from other extra-regional powers, such as the US, which aim to prevent a Chinese rise. This has forced China to exert pressure and to threaten an escalation, while Vietnam considers Chinese aggressive policy as an existential threat (Ross 2021). The competition between China, India and other countries in the Indian Ocean might become either a zero-sum game on the basis of realism or it might fall within the logic of constructivism and lead to win-win solutions which could be beneficial for both parties (Khurana 2014). Geopolitical dynamics in the Indian Ocean become more complex if the interplay between maritime and continental interests of China, the US and India is considered. China can challenge American interests in the ocean since it confronts fewer continental threats and this is the reason why a possible continental security dilemma between China and India can force China to invest again more resources in its continental security, while in case of a maritime security dilemma between the two Asian superpowers this might convince China to devote more resources to the sea and further challenge American leadership (Montgomery 2013). However, the aspects of competition cannot be exaggerated, because again common, shared interests can redress the balance and mitigate aggressive policies. For example, the 10<sup>th</sup> Defense White Paper issued by China on May 26<sup>th</sup> in 2015 outlines that China will focus on "open sea protection", which might lead the country to give up a hostile policy in order not to hamper the projects of the Belt and Road Initiative, even though the principle of "offshore waters defense" is still present (Wu 2019). Maritime issues in the Indian Ocean are extremely complex and examining all of them would require an entire dissertation, nevertheless I must mention that international relations in the region are worsened due to several harsh disputes concerning islands which are underpinned by general considerations regarding maritime policies. For instance, the dispute of the Senkaku islands unveils the rivalry between China and Japan, because China does not recognize Japanese regional leadership, while Japan considers China as a country which does not suit in a multipolar landscape. Moreover, Japan and Russia are still involved in the dispute about sovereignty over the South Kuriles and the negotiations have reached a deadlock (Odgaard 2002). Even in this complex geopolitical landscape there is the opportunity to develop joint cooperative frameworks and the ASEAN might be a crucial actor so as to foster coordination between the different stakeholders. The East Asian Summit in 2015 launched namely a joint statement on enhancing regional maritime cooperation to strengthen the ASEAN after the failures of the ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting, since this form of regional integration might ease the harmonization of standards and can promote the unity of stakeholders (Damayanti

2017). This could become another success story concerning regional integration and the spillover of integration outside the EU.

The Malacca Strait represents one of the most crucial maritime gateways in the world and in the geopolitical game involving this maritime route all the major maritime powers of the past, present and future are involved. In this strait we can witness the clear confrontation between the United States and its allies and China and its allies; local actors such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore are involved and Malacca can be regarded as a catalyst of economic interests, transnational threats such as terrorism and piracy as well as cooperation efforts. Given the relevance of this strait, it was suggested to render it truly international, nevertheless littoral countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia aimed to protect their sovereignty over the waters of Malacca and rejected the Japanese and Soviet attempt in 1972 to establish an international administration and the words by the US Secretary of State Kissinger, who highlighted the importance of the strait for American interests prove that the security of this strait affects also US interests. Due to high levels of international competition, Malaysia and Indonesia are attempting not only to retain their own sovereignty, but also to maintain a certain balance of power between international superpowers, because this strait involves not only commercial vessels, but also warships and links the Indian Ocean to the geopolitical hotspot of the South China Sea. Stability in the area is ensured by the agreements in 1969 between Indonesia and Malaysia establishing the demarcation of territorial waters and continental shelf areas and since 1971 the ASEAN has declared that the area is a zone of peace, liberty and neutrality under the sovereign control of the littoral states, who have to ensure freedom of navigation and are allowed to ask for a request to let warships navigate through Malacca. The Malacca strait represents a crucial node for Chinese economy and for its naval power, but its plans to extend its sphere of influence are hampered by the strong role of the US, which have signed several bilateral agreements with littoral countries, while China is still involved in territorial disputes with coastal states. The "Malacca dilemma" described by President Hu Jintao in 2003 implies that China strives not only to be considered as a key actor ensuring security of navigation, but it is also investing in the militarization of the South China sea in case of conflicts and is attempting to find alternatives to the passage of Malacca, if the US and their allies impose a ban on the passage of Chinese vessels. The strategy of the String of Pearls, the economic partnership with Pakistan and the building of railways securing energy imports should be considered as alternatives to curtail the strategic dependency on Malacca. For example, the Chinese logistic hub of Batam will be linked through a railway to Southern Thailand and the port of Kuantan in Malaysia and there will be further links with Port Klang. Furthermore, an economic corridor between Kunming and Malaysia as well as a high-speed railway between Singapore and Malaysia are planned and China is reinforcing its bilateral relations with Indonesia, which hopes to become a global hub of navigation as envisaged by Prime Minister Widodo. Despite these efforts, China has not reduced its dependency from the Malacca strait, but the Belt and Road initiative is a powerful tool to tackle this vulnerability concerning maritime routes and Malacca. To this extent, littoral countries play a crucial role and China pursues both offensive and defensive goals, as it promotes economic exchanges, protects maritime routes to counterbalance external pressures and advocates for bilateral resolutions of disputes with littoral countries by applying the strategy *divide et impera*, which exacerbates divisions and tensions between ASEAN countries. Although littoral countries are

retaining their sovereignty over Malacca's waters, the US can exert a strong influence, as they have access to naval bases in Singapore and they can rely on Japanese support as well as on other bilateral agreements. Nevertheless, US interests in the Strait of Malacca are less crucial than for China or other actors, since only 15% of US trade transits through Malacca, despite the political will to avoid a strong Chinese influence in such a globally important choke point. The geopolitical situation is becoming always more complex, as occurred in Sri Lanka, which underwent a fierce domestic political debate when it was believed that it was about to sign a military agreement with the US, despite being traditionally under the Indian sphere of influence and after having strengthened its partnership with China in the realm of the projects of the Belt and Road initiative, which envisages a Chinese control over the hub of Hambantota as a result of heavy Chinese investments. In this geopolitical competition the role of India and Japan should be examined. India is namely trying to counterbalance Chinese influence by protecting its maritime routes through political and military agreements, as 40% of Indian trade navigates through the waters of Malacca. To this extent the reinforced Indian presence in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is a key point in both the Indian and US strategy to prevent the enlargement of China's sphere of influence. Japan is actively cooperating with India to ensure security in the Strait of Malacca, as both Japan and South Korea depend on energy coming from Malacca and even the United Kingdom is reinforcing its presence to ensure the freedom of navigation and enhance military security under the aegis of the defensive agreements of the Five Powers, which are the UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. As one of the most successful examples of regional integration, the ASEAN is committed to the security of Malacca, even though its members do not share the same stances. For instance, Singapore welcomes the presence of British and US forces in its territory, while Indonesia and Malaysia are eager to retain their sovereignty, even though they are involved themselves in maritime disputes concerning the demarcation of maritime borders in the Sipadan and Ligitan islands (Di Muro, 2019, pp.229-238). As it has already been stated, piracy represented another key challenge to the freedom and security of navigation, but this aspect proves that even the straits in which there is a fierce international competition based on power politics can become effective catalysts for multilateral cooperation. Despite being plagued by piracy in the past, piracy attacks have been drastically reduced thanks to truly multilateral efforts, and this proves the validity of my thesis, that only multilateralism can be adequate to master the challenges of a changing international society. Kaur Kang (2009) argues that multilateralism is the key to consider the differences between the success of counterpiracy efforts in Malacca and the relative failure in the Gulf of Aden. In the Gulf of Aden international operation such as the US navy's combined task force 151 are undermined by the poverty of the region and the lack of a multilateral framework provided by the African Union. On the contrary, in the Malacca strait the interests of local littoral states, regional stakeholders and international actors are overlapping, and the ASEAN has designed the Regional Cooperative Agreement on Combating Piracy (RECAAP), which expanded the definition of piracy enshrined in the UNCLOS and includes not only littoral states, but also China, Korea, India and Bangladesh. Moreover, two years before the RECAAP, MALSINDO coordinated patrols involved the naval forces of Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore since 2004 to protect the strait (Kaur Kang 2009). Legal instruments prove to be relevant again to promote multilateralism and international organizations should act as bridge builders to back these

cooperation efforts; this occurred for instance with the Batam Joint Statement issued in August 2005, which includes local, regional and international players, whose commitment is reinforced during IMO-sponsored meetings. Both hard law and soft law should converge to ensure security and already existing legal instrument such as the SUA and SAR Conventions should be ratified by all adjacent and littoral states, while the soft law provisions of the 1988 Suppression of Unlawful Acts against the safety of maritime navigation Convention should be ratified by Malaysia and Indonesia (Bateman, Raymond and Ho, 2006). The protection of the Strait of Malacca mirrors the current evolution of the international system, as it proves the diminished role of single state powers, the rise of other actors in international organizations and the role that international organizations should play and which I will consider also in the last chapter. The threats posed by Islamic terrorism cannot be forgotten and before 9/11 2001 the Tripartite Technical Expert Group on the Safety of Navigation (TTEG) guaranteed security in the Strait and ensured implementation of the Traffic Separation Scheme (TSS) in 1981 and the Mandatory Ship Reporting System (STRAITREP) in 1998. However, after 9/11 the Strait could become another hotspot of global terrorism and littoral countries were not able to bear the burden-sharing costs of the protection of Malacca, and this is the reason why the IMO coordinated security efforts pursuant to article 43 of UNCLOS, which officially envisages a burden-sharing principle. This underpins the Cooperative Mechanism of 2007, which ensures that the main users of the Strait as well as international shipping companies should support coastal countries to preserve the environment and the infrastructures of this maritime gateway. The IMO is committed to the maintenance of sovereignty and territorial integrity of the littoral states, which have signed the Jakarta Statement in 2005, the Kuala Lumpur Statement in 2006 and the Singapore statement in 2007 and the preservation of sovereignty and territorial integrity represented a key incentive to make countries accept the burden-sharing principle. This concept is further underpinned by the principle of indivisibility, which declares that the right to transit is indivisible with the obligation to share costs with littoral countries, and this can be hold true for both international users and shipping companies. Furthermore, multilateralism in the region is backed by the principle of diffuse reciprocity and it yields important long-term aggregate benefits, as cooperation in the field of security has produced a positive spillover of multilateral cooperation which regards 6 joint projects, which envisage the removal of wrecks and the protection of the environment (Rahman 2014). The model of cooperation established in Malacca has inspired other frameworks for the prevention and the protection from maritime crimes and this is the reason why I believe that it will be very effective in the future. The Malacca Straits Patrol (MS) has namely inspired the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas Patrol (SSSP), which controls the Sulu Sea and Sulawesi (Celebes) Sea by coordinating the efforts of Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. The control of maritime spaces not only in Asia, but also worldwide, is prone to be regulated through other cooperative frameworks, such as the Combined Maritime Forces and the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy and this is one of the reasons why I have decided to deal with maritime geopolitics to support my thesis concerning the interplay between cooperation and confrontation (Ikrami 2018). As it has already been stated in previous sections, environmental issues foster and effectively enhance cooperation based on the preservation of shared environmental interests and there is significant potential for cooperation in this area also in the Malacca and Singapore Straits. Pursuant to article 37 of the Law of the Sea Convention in 1982, coastal countries such as



Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia cannot deny the passage through the strait for international vessels, nevertheless this implies a strong environmental stress for these waters. Therefore, it would be advisable to consider the waters of the Straits of Singapore and Malacca as a "Special Area" under the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships of 1973, which was further modified by the Protocol of 1978. Annex I of MARPOL 73/78 would represent the most viable legal instrument to establish a special area, because both Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia signed the annex and especially oil tankers navigate through the straits. A special area would be beneficial for the protection of the environment in such a crucial maritime area and could further foster cooperation between littoral countries (Mohd Rusli, Dremluiga and Puspitawati 2018). This case study proves that maritime issues provide with an interesting framework to analyze the evolution of the international system, which includes the reduced, yet still prominent role of states, the rise of international organizations as bridge builders and the role of transnational threats which are catalysts for cooperation despite falling often pray to geopolitical power plays<sup>100</sup>. However, multilateralism is more likely to lead to long-term results rather than to inspire quick reactions to an issue (Rahman 2014).

The Asian region is endowed with several choke points, for instance the Singapore Strait and the Taiwan strait and I have outlined a rich literature in the bibliography of consulted works to further examine these issues, especially the Taiwan case, which comprises a complex status quo based on deterrence and interdependence, and which may become the arena of a direct confrontation between the US and China. Taiwan could be a stress test to apply Chinese sharp power, which could be deployed in other areas to trigger internal divisions, challenge internal democratic systems and undermine popular trust in democratic institutions. Taiwan has historical and geographic ties with China which could justify its sovereignty claims, nevertheless it has always been a territory heavily influenced by its commercial relations with both Europe and Japan and it represents a gateway for the US to maintain its political and strategic primacy over the Chinese competitor, which is however unwilling to acknowledge the independence of Taipei given the fact that this would make many of its claims of maritime sovereignty unjustifiable. Even though Chinese army and navy could easily defeat Taiwanese forces, they fear an US reaction which could hinder its access to the oceans. On the other hand, Taiwan longs for its independence but still relies on economic relations with China and the support of the US might not be sufficient to preserve its independence. A Chinese success in Taiwan can trigger a further Pacific expansion, which the US are willing to avoid, although a military and fierce direct conflict with China may be detrimental for the US themselves. This is the reason why tensions are always increasing and are on the brink of a crisis which has been averted so far by deterrence mechanisms based on realist theories (Mini, 2019, pp.239-256). Moreover, it is believed that China will reshape its strategy towards Taiwan on the basis of the political, economic and geopolitical consequences of the Russian invasion in the Ukraine in 2022, even though intelligence reports believed that an intensified Chinese activity can be the

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<sup>100</sup> Despite the successful cooperation between littoral countries in the straits of Malacca and Singapore, difficulties persist concerning maritime boundary delimitation. For example, in 2008 the International Court of Justice settled the dispute between Singapore and Malaysia by attributing Pedra Branca and Pulau Batu Puteh to Singapore and Middle Rocks to Malaysia, even though the legal status and jurisdiction over islands remains contested (Beckman and Schofield 2009).

prelude of a Chinese aggressive act. Despite the political tensions between China and Taiwan, the legal status of the strait forces cooperation between China and Taiwan, since it has changed from a strait encompassing high seas waters to a strait only with waters under the jurisdiction of China and Taiwan. This means that there might be a division between territorial waters, economic exclusive zone and the continental shelf and the cooperation and agreement between the two littoral countries is needed to ensure freedom of passage (Keyuan 2000). While Taiwan is placed at the center of the dispute between the US and China, the stance of Singapore is more assertive, as it fears the threat posed by its Muslim neighbors and has always favored the presence of foreign navies, above all the US navy, which could enhance its security. On the other hand, the robust Chinese economic development is considered as a valuable opportunity, as China is the first trading partner of Singapore, nevertheless, its aggressive maritime politics poses a threat to Singapore, which prefers to remain neutral vis-à-vis regional maritime disputes, even though it backs US stances concerning the freedom of navigation (Di Muro, 2019, p.238). The case studies in Asia shed light on the complexity of maritime issues, which are still marked by a strong geopolitical and realist competition, but which can pave the way for effective forms of multilateralism, which can be deployed also in other contexts and can establish interesting multilateral frameworks.

#### *4.4 International law and international organizations fostering cooperation*

Apart from the role of the IMO which fostered multilateral cooperation by ensuring security and freedom of navigation in the Strait of Malacca, this chapter has highlighted strong competition concerning oceans and straits in Africa, in the Middle East and in Asia. Nevertheless, the analysis of the law of the sea proves that joint interests in maritime areas as well as the action of international organizations have greatly contributed to enhance effective multilateral cooperation, which coexists together with geopolitical rivalries. The UNCLOS in 1982 represents the main instrument governing nearly all human activities related to the sea, nevertheless it often provides with a broader framework which has been adapted to technological changes and changing conditions thanks to international organizations and institutions and their activity has successfully tackled the issue of the fragmentation of law-making in international law. These specialized institutions have provided with technical expertise to update maritime law<sup>101</sup> and their efforts imply both a vertical cooperation under the aegis of the UN as well as a horizontal cooperation between these organizations, whose tasks sometimes overlap. I would like to mention the case study of the International Maritime Organization as it managed to regulate the issue of international shipping, which was very conflictual owing to its business characteristics. The IMO was established in 1948 and is conceived as a forum for countries to discuss international regulation of shipping and pursuant to Article 57 of the UN Charter it is a UN specialized agency. The IMO is responsible to control more than forty treaties and some of these treaties are still the most relevant legal instruments disciplining a sector, such as the

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<sup>101</sup> Maritime law is a very flexible and powerful instrument which can easily adjust to the needs and the challenges of a given maritime space. The flexibility and peculiarity of maritime law can be grasped for instance through the analysis of the "Arctic exception" enshrined in article 234 of UNCLOS ( Bartenstein 2011).

MARPOL Convention, which is the Convention on the Prevention of Maritime Pollution adopted in 1997 and the two SOLAS Conventions (Harrison, 2021, pp.154-165, pp.237-249, pp.278-279). The IMO is particularly active in the sector of the protection of the environment<sup>102</sup>, which is a crucial issue related to maritime geopolitics. For instance, in the Bering Strait both the US and Russia but also the IMO grant the implementation of international environmental law to safeguard maritime environment, by establishing areas to be avoided (ATBAs), by imposing oil spill control, emissions controls and by implementing other strategies to ensure the safety of commercial vessels as well as the safety and food security of indigenous populations and local biodiversity (Huntington, Daniel, Hartsig, Harun, Heiman, Meehan, Noongwook, Pearson, Prior-Parks, Robards and Stetson 2014). This framework for cooperation between national countries and international organizations to protect common interests can be regarded as a model for other geographic areas. Moreover, this means that in maritime spaces not only geopolitical confrontation, but also political cooperation fostered mainly by international organizations coexist. Additionally, law-making in the sector of international maritime law is peculiar if compared with other areas in which multilateral negotiations have reached a deadlock owing to the phenomenon of general treaty saturation and to the unwillingness of great powers to cooperate. Despite this general trend, multilateral law-making regarding the law of the sea is still developing because protecting the sea and the freedom of navigation are vital interests for all international stakeholders. Moreover, in the fora where the law of the sea is negotiated, less powerful states can build coalitions and rely on multilateralism in spite of the reluctance of greater powers and final decisions are not reached only by consensus (Kravik 2021). This proves once again that maritime issues are peculiar as they can represent an opportunity to overcome the difficulties which have marked the recent stagnation of multilateral procedures. Oceans can fuel conflictual dynamics of distributional bargaining and are often sources of geopolitical instability because nation-states strive to achieve a form of control or even hegemony by applying the same principles that are used while assessing territorial land politics. Geopolitical risks are namely one of the five categories outlined in the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report and therefore they should be studied more in-depth in the context of oceans (Suárez-de Vivero and Rodríguez Mateos 2017). However, cooperation to counter common threats can still be achieved and realist theories are namely effective in outlining mechanisms of deterrence, projection of spheres of influence and power or security maximization mechanisms. Nevertheless, given the increasing interconnection of interests, multilateral mechanisms are becoming always more influential and beneficial for all actors and the management of common maritime resources can provide with a model or a framework of cooperation under the auspices of international organizations to be applied in other regions to tackle other issues.

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<sup>102</sup> In international straits all users and littoral states must contribute to the protection of the environment and finding a balance between the need to grant the right to passage to all vessels and the protection of the environment is complex. Nevertheless, Part III of the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention might be useful to reconcile these imperatives (George 2002).

## Chapter 5: Multilateralism and the evolution of the international system.

### *5.1 The management of polar resources*

The challenges of water management are strictly linked with environmental issues, concerning for instance practices of ocean grabbing as well as changing political and legal geographies in Antarctica, which can potentially lead to harsh international competition, but which would require multilateral efforts to be managed. The Antarctic region is endowed with a huge number of valuable resources<sup>103</sup> and in order not to fuel perilous international competition to gain control over these resources, the Antarctic Treaty was signed in 1956 and entered into force in 1961. It states clearly that Antarctic cannot fall within the sovereignty of a single state, as it is considered as a common heritage of mankind and its territory can be deployed only for peaceful purposes or to conduct scientific research. Resources in this region should be employed equitably so that the entire international community can benefit from them and article 140 of UNCLOS affirms that these resources should support underdeveloped countries first. The Antarctic Treaty System however entails only a temporary suspension of all sovereignty claims, which means that countries such as Australia have not renounced their sovereignty rights and the Washington treaty provides only with a general framework which allows further codification of legal instruments if needed. For instance, the Protocol of Madrid in 1991 states that mineral resources cannot be exploited except for scientific purposes in order to preserve Antarctic ecosystem, nevertheless this legal instrument does not prohibit mining activities, but they were only suspended owing to the difficulty of arranging mining activities. However, nowadays ice melting<sup>104</sup> and technological advancements have rendered mining extraction easier, and this could trigger again international competition. Moreover, the Convention of Canberra in 1980 established a legal framework for the protection of fish resources, and it was suggested to create some marine reserves where fishing is forbidden, for instance in the Ross Sea, but

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<sup>103</sup> Both the Arctic and the Antarctic are rich in natural resources, and they will become a workshop to address market failures and the transition to a sustainable economy. The details concerning these changes in a fragile environment can be found in the paper by Kaiser, Fernandez and Vestergaard (Kaiser, Fernandez and Vestergaard 2016).

<sup>104</sup> According to Dittmer, Moio, Ingram and Dodds ice melting leads to a double-track conceptualization of the space in the Antarctic, which is both an indeterminate natural space as well as a geopolitical arena of confrontation, in which international state-building and opposing territorial claims fuel renewed tensions (Dittmer, Moio, Ingram and Dodds 2011). This pattern will mark also the Arctic and even though a neorealist competition for resources has not taken place yet, the institutional framework for the governance of the region must be improved, both in the Arctic and in the Antarctic (Keil 2014). In these polar regions we can witness namely a very interesting combination of universalism and regionalism (Quirico 2020) and there are also some similarities between the Arctic, the Antarctic and the space. For instance, both spaces are militarized but not weaponized, are ruled through consensus and international law-making and often rely on soft law and on complex interdependence (Byers 2019).

Chinese and Russian<sup>105</sup> opposition blocked this project<sup>106</sup>. Antarctic spaces can be contended again for the use of resources in the continental shelf areas, in which there are overlapping territorial claims handled by the Commission on the limits of the continental shelf. Even though extractions and mining activities are still too costly and prohibited for industrial purposes under the Madrid Protocol, states claim that their territorial rights over the continental shelf area have been suspended but not delated and owing to technological advancements 50 years after the Madrid protocol it would be possible to deploy them and renegotiate the Protocol so as to allow the economic exploitation of the continental shelf. In this region the dispute concerning the limits imposed on whaling cannot be neglected and is still unsolved, together with the issue of the increased touristic activity. Tourism was not ruled by the Madrid Protocol, consequently there are only non-binding general guidelines aiming to curtail mass tourism, to protect the environment and grant the security of tourists, as multilateral cooperation in the sector of SAR areas should be improved<sup>107</sup>. Therefore, the Antarctic case study proves that when there are valuable resources competition between states is unavoidable and even legal instruments face some problems in coping with all the interests and positions of multiple actors. Technological progress and climate change can fuel again this competition, and this means that the international community should prepare in advance to settle disputes and foster cooperation in order to avoid the depletion of Antarctic resources. Multilateral approaches are namely required also in the Antarctic sector<sup>108</sup> (Battaglia, 2021, pp.181-193). Environmental issues are strictly tied with the challenges of the management of water resources and with patterns of confrontation and multilateral cooperation and to this extent the issue of ocean grabbing can be examined. Ocean grabbing refers to the mechanisms of appropriation of water resources which deprive and impoverish local populations. Ocean grabbing, which differs from the concept of water grabbing as the latter regards mainly rivers, is a form of environmental injustice and it clearly entails a multi-layered dimension, since it has both an international dimension as well as a national dimension, because national governments start with ocean grabbing. Massive fishery and aquaculture have caused biodiversity losses and the challenge of ocean grabbing highlights the need to develop a more comprehensive framework for a sustainable sea

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<sup>105</sup> As it has already been stated in the previous chapters, both the Arctic and the Antarctic have a peculiar and special geoeconomic relevance for Russia and this is the reason why the country does not want that its interests are hampered. This can be observed also in the Arctic context, in which Russia is adjusting to Western sanctions in order to preserve the sector of offshore petroleum governance (Shapovalova, Galimullin, Grushevenko 2020) and in which the country is planning to build a Russian Arctic Port Range (Faury, Alix and Montier 2021). Some insights into Russian and Soviet naval power and ambitions in the Arctic between 1914 and 1945 can be found in the introduction by Hill (Hill 2007).

<sup>106</sup> The Arctic and the Antarctic Oceans are another field in which cooperation between China and Russia thrives and is reinforced by the perspective of the development of commercial navigation. For instance, China is planning a Polar Silk Road to differentiate its trade routes, and this implies a tight cooperation with Russia, for instance in the Northern Sea Route or to build tankers and icebreakers for the Antarctic region (Gao and Erokhin 2020). Further information concerning the Polar Silk Road can be found in the paper by Peng, Li, Zhang, Bao and Li (Peng, Li, Zhang, Bao and Li 2022) and the risks of Russia becoming a Chinese junior partner even in the Northern Sea Route are analyzed in the work by Gladkiy, Sukhorukov, Kornekova, Kulik and Kaledin (Gladkiy, Sukhorukov, Kornekova, Kulik and Kaledin 2020).

<sup>107</sup> There are important security risks linked to the navigation in polar waters also in the Northern Sea Route (Hill, LaNore and Véronneau 2015).

<sup>108</sup> A multilateral and multi-actor governance is needed also as far as the governance of the Arctic Ocean is concerned and to this extent Young and Kim notice that the effectiveness of the Arctic Ocean Governance Meeting would be enhanced also with high-level but informal meetings which involve different stakeholders (Young and Kim 2021). Other considerations regarding the governance of polar regions and oceans, with a specific focus on the Arctic Council's Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation, can be found in the paper by Young (Young 2021).

governance. The growing emphasis on the concept of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and the use of tools promoting a sustainable and green finance can represent important incentives to encourage companies to preserve the environment, but also the empowerment of local communities should be strengthened in order to avoid an external exploitation of their resources. Moreover, international organizations should again reinforce their commitment to design a new sustainable sea governance, but their role is currently too weak, as the case study of the International Seabed Authority proves. Additionally, a multilayered effort would coordinate the stances and the interests of the different actors involved, including civil society and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management and the initiative of marine spatial planning can be considered as two interesting initiatives in this sector. SDGs should be again the key drivers of policy-making and multilayered governance in the next years, not only concerning maritime governance (Soriani, 2021, pp.9-29).

## *5.2 The evolution of the concept of balance of power and a changing international system.*

In this thesis the concept of balance of power has often been recalled and in this final chapter I would like to outline some historical examples and grasp the evolution of this concept on the basis of the analysis of the global case studies highlighted in this dissertation. The historical and theoretical origins of the concept of balance of power<sup>109</sup> as well as its links with realist theories can be read in the references and works consulted, but broadly speaking the case studies outlined support the minimalist hypothesis, which considers balance of power as a tool to undermine expansionist policies threatening the existence of some countries and to maintain a pluralistic international system. This backs Waltz's theories<sup>110</sup> (1979)<sup>111</sup> which argue that a stable international system must be anarchic and does not have long-term considerable variations in the number of actors involved and this materializes when two countries do not differ too much as far as power is concerned, as Ferris<sup>112</sup> (1973) argues while studying the minimalist hypothesis applied to bilateral relations. Ferris (1973) namely claims that when the ratio of power resources of the two countries is higher than 1.45, the likelihood of a conflict increases, and mechanisms of deterrence do not work. On the other hand, Siverson and Tennefoss (1984)<sup>113</sup> test the effectiveness of deterrence mechanisms between 1815 and 1965 and they find out that despite some isolated case studies of small powers waging asymmetrical wars, the theories of balance of power are confirmed, especially if we consider coalitions of small powers and greater powers, as in 61,7% of cases war has only been threatened and only in 19,8% of

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<sup>109</sup> An insightful historical analysis of the co-constitutive links between the historical polis, its desire to grant political liberty and the external international environment can be found in the work by Blackford (Blackford, 2021).

<sup>110</sup> The theories of defensive realism are more adequate to define the phenomenon of the Concert of Europe, which limited the hegemonic ambitions of Russia, Prussia and France between 1814 and 1840 and this proves that offensive realism by Mearsheimer is not the best set of assumptions describing the Concert of Europe from the viewpoint of IR theories (Rendall 2006)

<sup>111</sup> The most important work by Waltz cited by the authors is "Theory of international politics" (Waltz, 1979)

<sup>112</sup> The work by Ferris cited by the authors is "the power capabilities of nation-states" (Ferris,1973).

<sup>113</sup> The work by Siverson and Tennefoss is "power, alliance and the escalation of international conflict" (Siverson and Tennefoss 1984).

cases limited reciprocal military actions took place<sup>114</sup>. These empirical elements have namely confirmed theories of balance of power<sup>115</sup>, nevertheless many scholars argue that similar levels of power can on the contrary trigger a war, and unbalanced level of power can discourage the outbreak of an armed conflict. This hypothesis has been confirmed too, as for instance Bremer<sup>116</sup> (1993) analyzes conflicts between 1816 and 1965 and he finds out that war is more likely when there are smaller differences of power and this stance has been reinforced by Lemke and Kugler<sup>117</sup> (1996), who claim that a parity of power may be even a sufficient condition to lead to a war between big powers, while if their powers are imbalanced, they prefer to participate in minor conflicts or to use other tools of confrontation. However, this does not mean that theories of balance of power should be rejected, as the aforementioned studies have considered war differently, as for instance the famous research by Singer, Bremer and Stuckey<sup>118</sup> (1984) has taken into account the magnitude of "war-like" events, but it should have considered the simple outbreak of a warfare or its prevention. This methodological issue needs to be clarified and Mansfield<sup>119</sup> (1992) reconciles these aspects by designing an inverted U hypothesis, which infers that when power is diffuse, the likelihood of a war decreases, but when power is concentrated and polarized, a war is a viable alternative, but when a certain threshold is overcome, military conflicts are again unlikely. Balancing occurs namely when a power tries to achieve a hegemonic position and among the strategies which can be used to counterbalance this rise there might be an external diplomatic action or the formation of a coalition, which balances the power of the rising entity and can even defeat it. Therefore, Niou, Ordeshook and Rose<sup>120</sup> (1989) established a formal model to assess the mechanism of alliances in Europe between 1871 and 1914 and they inferred that superpowers try to gain as much resources as possible without posing existential threats to other players and smaller countries entered alliances to pursue their own national interests and to counterbalance the changes in the international system. This has proven to be beneficial for the stability of the whole system, but Doyle<sup>121</sup> (1997) notices that these mechanisms have worked only in the XVIII century. In history the rise of possible hegemonic powers has always been accompanied by the formation of a counterbalancing coalition, and this occurred with the rise of Habsburg Spain, Napoleonic France, Imperial Germany<sup>122</sup>, Nazi Germany<sup>123</sup> and the

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<sup>114</sup> A brilliant analysis of the Vienna System can be found also in the research paper by Matthew Rendall (Rendall 2000) and also the paper by Kagan outlines the difficulties and the political myths related to the European Concert applied to the Eastern Question between 1821 and 1841 (Kagan 1997).

<sup>115</sup> Security and balance of power are often more complex than outlined in IR theories, as there might be overlapping strategies and mechanisms to ensure security (Adler and Greve 2009)

<sup>116</sup> Bremer's famous analysis is cited (Bremer 1992)

<sup>117</sup> "Parity and war. Evaluations and extensions of the war ledger" is cited (Lemke and Kugler, 1996).

<sup>118</sup> This is a famous research analysis (Singer, Bremer, Stuckey, 1972).

<sup>119</sup> Mansfield has issued many analyses concerning this theme (Mansfield, 1992).

<sup>120</sup> The analysis "The Balance of Power. Stability in international systems" is cited (Niou, Ordeshook and Rose 1989)

<sup>121</sup> "Ways of war and peace" (Doyle, 1997).

<sup>122</sup> Imperial Germany pursued the logic of power maximization to challenge the British navy and to be acknowledged as a superpower, but these plans eventually turned into a complete failure due to the efforts of the allies to prevent its hegemonic rise (Murray 2010). British naval policies in the same period and Churchill's attempts to gain political and military influence in the Mediterranean can be analyzed in the paper by Bell (Bell 2015).

<sup>123</sup> Despite the US intervention in the First World War has been interpreted by some scholars as an attempt to provide an offshore balancing and to prevent the rise of Germany as a hegemonic regional power, this view is challenged by

Soviet Union<sup>124</sup> and this has actually blocked their hegemonic plans. However, balancing is not the only strategic reaction deployed in the international community to address hegemonic threats<sup>125</sup>, and Schroeder<sup>126</sup> (1994) recalls that the strategies of hiding and buck-passing, for instance by declaring neutrality, the strategy of transcending, which implies the solution of the conflict through other internationally recognized means and the strategy of bandwagoning, which implies the siding with the most powerful actor are deployed more often than the strategy of balancing, which is sometimes used as the last viable solution. An empirical analysis of the current international system reinforces the critical stance by Cobden<sup>127</sup> (1867), who argues that stability is an illusion and these theories do not provide with a solution to counterbalance a hegemonic but pacific raise, linked for instance with trade and this might be the Chinese case. Several scholars argue namely that classical concepts of balance of power are obsolete, since international politics has been reshaped by new factors. For instance, the massification of politics forces states to justify their foreign policy decisions with their constituency and this leads to more stable alliances and to an ideological foreign policy, given the need to underpin actions with ideological justifications. Coalitions are more predictable, as Ikenberry (2002)<sup>128</sup> posits, as for examples democracies will always stick together despite different endowments with power and resources. Moreover, technological advancements make the assessment of resources to form coalitions less precise and while in the XVIII century wars could redress power balances and bring stability again, as happened with the Napoleonic wars, which were concluded and marked the establishment of a new status quo or equilibrium, wars nowadays are total and too destructive to pave the way for a new equilibrium. This is the reason why Ikenberry considers that stability and order in international politics are no longer brought by a balance of power but are based on constitutional negotiated agreements or on a hegemonic imposition. Furthermore, systems of balance of power have failed also in the past, as they have not averted the outbreak of the First World War and after this dramatic warfare systems of collective security have emerged<sup>129</sup>. Systems of collective security are deemed more trustworthy as they establish legal obligations and ensure protection also for the weakest partners. Unfortunately, mechanisms of collective security have failed or have

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Jackson, who highlights that more factors contributed to this political decisions, beyond mere balancing strategies (Jackson 2012).

<sup>124</sup> Soviet naval policies posed a threat to US hegemony in the oceans, because the Soviet Union could establish flexible relations in each port city and could rely on the geopolitical power stemming from its network of strategic ports (such as the port of Antsiranana, in Madagascar, to control the routes near Africa) and naval nuclear carriers ( Kullaa 2021).

<sup>125</sup> Balance of power mechanisms were not the only alternative to war and uprisings even in the past, because the paradigm of the balance of power, enshrined in the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, was already challenged by the model of perpetual peace. Perpetual peace was theorized by Abbé de Saint-Pierre in the work "Plan of Perpetual Peace" and the projects of a league of European States influenced the Treaty of the Holy Alliance in 1815 (Ghervas 2017). Moreover, there are several case studies in contemporary politics that do not envisage balancing strategies (Korolev 2018).

<sup>126</sup> The work by Schroeder cited is "Historical reality vs. Neo-realist theory" (Schroeder, 1994).

<sup>127</sup> The authors cite the work by Cobden (Cobden 1867).

<sup>128</sup> The analysis cited is "America unrivaled. The future of the balance of power" (Ikenberry, 2002).

<sup>129</sup> Even though in the majority of case studies systems of balance of power to achieve collective security have failed, Rendall considers the Belgian uprisings against Dutch rulers in the early 1830s and argues that this case study proves the effectiveness of the Concert of Europe as a mechanism fostering consensus-building and making compromises easier between the parties. These patterns of concerts of power to achieve collective security are efficient above all when cross-border aggressions take place, nevertheless they are not stable. For instance, the imposition by Britain and France of a peace agreement in 1832 contributed to weaken the mechanism of collective security which had previously worked (Rendall 2007)



yielded limited results, and this is the reason why multilateral and institutional solutions are required to avoid the comeback of instable balancing politics (Andreatta, Clementi, Colombo, Koenig-Archibugi and Parsi, 2012, pp.55-94). While dealing with collective security we must consider again the NATO case study, its implications and the role of structural realism, because states have to balance not only the rise of hegemonic powers and to cope with immediate threats, but they get prepared to react to non-imminent and probable threats. For instance, the establishment of the European Security and Defense Policy despite the reliability of NATO can be explained as the attempt of EU countries to balance the power of the US and to retain the capability to act themselves event outside the US-driven NATO framework (Posen 2006). The NATO model of collective security is still very influential, and it has been argued that an Asian NATO<sup>130</sup> could represent a viable solution to prevent Chinese threats to the freedom of navigation, but cooperation between Indo-Pacific partners such as Australia, Japan, India and South Korea is not sufficient to establish an Asian NATO. This proves once again the complexity of maritime issues, because sometimes cooperation is much needed, yet hampered by other political factors (Burgess and Beilstein 2018).

The international system is namely experiencing a transition phase in which the concept of balance of power is still relevant, even though it does not prevent wars or the escalation of tensions and in which multilateral institutions and organizations have to reinforce their function as international bridge builders between different concepts of multilateralism. According to Zielonka, the case study of the European Union proves that we are moving from an obsolete Westphalian model to a new neo-medieval international order. The EU resembles namely a medieval system, in which internal and external borders are fuzzy and more permeable due to the high economic and cultural interdependence. Furthermore, governance is polycentric and there are multiple weak power centers, as occurred in the Middle Ages, since powers are conferred to EU institutions only in certain sectors and are limited. The validity of the assumption of a neo-medieval model can be witnessed in multilateral institutions, in which there is not a unique pole, as occurred during the US unipolar moment. For example, the EU tries to be portrayed as a normative global power, while BRICS and other non-Western countries are attempting to reshape the values underpinning international society. Again, the decline of the model of the Westphalian state and the inequality of states participating in collective bargaining mechanisms to settle legal, institutional and economic issues by achieving security through soft bargaining and economic integration resemble the medieval political model (Zielonka, 2013, pp.1-18 and Keukeleire and Hooijmaaijers, 2014, pp.582-599). Moreover, Zielonka observes the presence of modern imperial powers, which are the EU, the US, China and Russia and they can be labeled as empires because they represent vast territorial unities which can exert a strong economic, cultural and political influence on a global scale in order to limit the sovereign powers of peripheral countries and to realize their civilizing missions (Zielonka, 2012, pp.502-525). Even though it is clear that modern empires do not entail the same coercive military power and the same hierarchy as ancient empires, it cannot be denied that the aforementioned superpowers are striving to expand their influence and to project their power, on a global scale as the US are doing, on the post-Soviet space as Russia does and

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<sup>130</sup> A broader analysis, encompassing not only security issues, regarding multilateralism in Asia can be found in the work by Haggard (Haggard 2019).

through normative power, as the EU is attempting with its neighbors (Zielonka, 2012, pp.502-525). The model of empires can be one of the possible alternatives which can be highlighted in the currently changing international system, nevertheless it is undisputed that the Westphalian model is declining and classical concepts such as the balance of power have to be adjusted to the new multilateral contexts, as they cannot offer completely satisfying frameworks to explain patterns in international relations. Nevertheless, they still drive some processes, as there are still realist mechanisms of deterrence and balancing and sometimes they work but tensions still persist. History provides us with effective models to assess the changes in the international system<sup>131</sup> and this can be witnessed as regards the issue of borders as well as the rise of global history as a methodological tool to enhance multilateralism. The work by Maier traces the historical evolution of the concept of borders and notes that borders in the Early Modern Age and nowadays are no longer controlled by a single-nation state, because there are micro territories, overlapping centers of power and this trend is reinforced by transnational phenomena, such as migrations. This is the reason why he recalls the transformation from a "space of states", in which borders are clear and can be effectively enforced, to the "space of empires", where frontiers are permeable and excluding people outside the empire is difficult, if not impossible (Maier, 2016, pp.277-285).

Transnational challenges and growing phenomena of interconnectedness and multilateralism emphasize the importance of global history as an interpretative tool to grasp the similarities with political contexts of the past and highlights the need to examine global international relations, as Acharya and Buzan (2019) argue. It has already been stated that mere Eurocentric approaches are not sufficient to examine the evolution of global international relations and Acharya and Buzan, after a long historically based analysis, posit that international relations are undergoing a process of deep transition which entails elements of novelty, despite being similar to patterns emerged in the past. This means that classical theories of international relations are not sufficient to describe and conceptualize these changes and international society will be pluralistic and multi-layered, with a complex interplay between local, regional and global elements. Although traditional theories and interpretative patterns are still marked by a Western-dominated conceptualization based on a state-centric system, many non-state actors are emerging, and the classical left-right pattern has been overcome by the distinction between inward-looking countries and countries more prone to globalization. Furthermore, it is interesting to witness that, as happened even in premodern times, there will be several centers of wealth and power. International relations will be more multi-layered, owing to a more diffuse distribution of power, to the desire to be acknowledged cultural and political differentiation and to the will to be granted cultural legitimacy. Globalization entails namely contrasting drivers, which imply on one hand an unavoidable degree of integration and interdependence and on the other hand it emphasizes regional and subregional differentiation. Classical theories of international relations are undoubtedly to be updated, as the majority of IR theories is based on Western experiences and assumptions, nevertheless recently scholarly debate has been marked by the rise of middle-range theories, which are useful to conceptualize non-Western stances and to unveil the perspective of scholars of the Global South, despite still entailing

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<sup>131</sup> Historical approaches should widen their horizons and devote more attention to non-European cultures. For instance, scholars such as Aissaoiu claim that early systems of balance of power emerged firstly in the ancient near East (Aissaoiu 2019). Yet this stance can be disputed

a Western bias. The recent emphasis on constructivist theories might be a positive element, as it highlights the role of ideas, concepts and not solely of material power, and this might be relevant in bridging Western and non-Western IR patterns. Buzan and Acharya aim to design a more inclusive study framework of international relations, as they notice that there is not a non-Western based IR theory, elaborated for instance by Asian scholars. Despite the similar aim to overcome a Western-based narrative, global IR are not based solely on postcolonial approaches, since these are still to a certain extent linked to the legacy of colonization. The development of new theories should not replace traditional mainstream theories, since the complexity of ongoing changes in IR can be grasped only through political multilateralism and pluralistic theoretical methods. Pluralism is namely the key to understand the current moment of transition and mutually exclusive categories should not be deployed, because global IR should be considered rather as a framework for research encompassing a plurality of theories so as to integrate different world regions and examine their interconnectedness and all the repercussions of this interdependency. Global international relations are not juxtaposed to a singular theory and given their plurality they encourage multiple and parallel debates. According to Acharya and Buzan, global IR should be based on the study of world history, as a pluralistic and universalistic framework should not focus solely on European, American or Asian history, but I would rather add that global history is more adequate, since it does not only compare different geographic regions, but it addresses the peculiarity of global connections as well as the expansion of spatial frontiers, which is clearly marking the historical period we are living in. Furthermore, area studies are integrated, and this is crucial, since globalization is coupled with processes of strengthened regional integrations and with intense contacts between regions, and this showed also by the growing importance of regional diplomacy, promoted for instance by the OSCE or the SCO, as I will consider in the next paragraph. However, some risks should be avoided during this research. Firstly, scholars cannot focus only on the strongest rising economic powers such as China or India, as global IR should encompass and consider also the role of other developing and poorer countries, otherwise Western-centered theories will be replaced by other theories centered on a different but exclusive regional area. This is the reason why for instance the Chinese IR school should be integrated in mainstream theories. Moreover, studying all civilizations and regions might lead to a superficial framework or to the reproduction of already-known patterns with minor modifications (Acharya and Buzan, 2019, pp.278-320) and this proves that regional studies must be accurate and not superficial.

### *5.3 Different concepts of multilateralism and international organizations*

Even though it is clear that multilateralism represents the key to tackle transnational challenges successfully, the model of multilateralism embodied by the majority of international Western-based organizations is not shared by key global players such as China

and Russia. Russia conceives multilateralism both as a tool and as a value<sup>132</sup>, which means that zero-sum games have been overcome and the first Russian multilateral theory was designed by foreign affairs minister Primakov. He claims that the international system is fragmented, and Russia has to pursue its interest by building flexible coalitions to counterbalance the declining hegemony of the US. President Putin has namely invested huge political resources to forge multilateral instruments, such as the Eurasian Economic Union so as to extend the Russian sphere of interests especially in the post-Soviet space and he has firmly supported the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization). However, multilateralism is regarded only as a tool to enhance the global role of the Russian Federation and to redress a Western- and US-based world order. There is considerable difference between the concept of multilateralism promoted by the EU and the UN and Russian multilateralism, since Russia conceives it as a new form of interest-based balance of power, while in the Western world multilateralism is instrumental to promote value-based cooperation, peace and dialogue. Russian multilateralism is underpinned by the principle that world politics requires a joint leadership of leading states, opposed to a unipolar hegemony such as the one of the US. Moreover, Russia acknowledges the legitimacy only of those decisions taken in fora in which the Russian Federation is a party and in which Russia could endorse its own view. This means that decisions taken unilaterally in regional organizations such as the EU and NATO in which Russia is not a party are rejected and Russia firmly believes that the only organization whose decisions must be respected is the UN, as they comprise not only Western countries, but also developing countries such as China, Brazil and India<sup>133</sup>. The system of the UN and the one of the Security Council perfectly represent the type of "collective leadership" which Russia endorses and despite veto powers have often blocked the Security Council, Russia supports this institutional procedure, as it enables to protect its own interests. It mixes bilateral and multilateral processes, because it relies on multilateralism when this could yield the desired strategic results, while it prefers bilateral solutions when this is more profitable and when this protects its regional position, as Russia wants to prevent the materialization of a situation in which neighbor states, especially in the post-Soviet space, exert pressure together or with international organizations. Russia adopts namely a selective or instrumental multilateralism, since multilateralism is instrumental to the achievement of its own goals and it prefers Eurasian fora rather than global fora, as only in Eurasian venues it can exert a stronger power and influence. Russia strives to be recognized as a global power and its role in the Security Council reinforces this stance, nevertheless, Russia is stronger in regional settings and therefore the projection of its sphere of influence regards mainly the post-Soviet space. Organizations such as the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), the EEC (Eurasian Economic Community) and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) institutionalize Russian-led cooperation with countries in Central Asia and legitimize Russian preeminence in the region. Furthermore, the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) is part of the strategy of Russian instrumental multilateralism since it makes the country a party to the process of Chinese global rise, which can be counterbalanced, mitigated or

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<sup>132</sup> Russian attitude in international organizations is namely instrumental to the country's foreign policy even though its interests clash with the needs of a multilateral international community, as can be observed in the work by Schmitt (Schmitt 2020)

<sup>133</sup> An interesting conceptualization of the Russian concept of balance of power and the attitude towards international law was provided by Kattan, yet it must be updated after the events unfolding in Ukraine (Kattan 2014).

deployed in a profitable way. Russian regional multilateralism conceals the Federation's national interests, and this is the reason why several countries in Central Asia and Russia have maximized their own economic gains without developing common policies or common actions, owing also to the huge heterogeneity of the region. An effective projection of power in Central Asia is vital as it fuels the projection of Russia as a global great power, and it is supposed to avoid a strong European penetration through instruments of mediation, soft power or peace keeping. Additionally, Russia relies on multilateralism also in the security sector and again it can be labelled as instrumental, since consensus concerning security in the post-Soviet space establishes a security buffer zone that protects the country from external perceived existential threats, such as NATO enlargements. To this extent, the Collective Security Treaty was signed already in May 1992, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the SCO started as the Shanghai Forum in 1996 to tackle security issues, such as terrorism. The SCO represents one of the preferred forms of multilateralism and it is a model of cooperation different from Western-based organizations (Lee, 2010, pp.31-49). Even though it can be argued that China is the strongest partner in the SCO, the role of Russia in this international organization is remarkable and instrumental to achieve its foreign policy aims. Russian influence in the SCO can namely contain both US and Chinese hegemonic ambitions and it proves that there are several like-minded countries which are ready to challenge the Western-based model of multilateralism. However, some structural and political weaknesses prevent Moscow from fully reaching these goals, nevertheless the model of the SCO is still crucial to push for a new type of multilateralism (Facon 2013, pp.461-483).

The idea of Chinese multilateralism is very interesting to be examined, as it entails important elements to understand Chinese foreign policy. China has managed to be integrated in the international system thanks to social learning and this integration has been fostered thanks to China's participation in the global economic and financial system, which is imbued with Western capitalist values. As far as political issues are concerned, China focuses on multilateralism in order to counterbalance traditional Western preeminence and aims to establish a more egalitarian and multipolar international society, in which international rules and standards are shaped by a collective process of bargaining and cooperation, including not only Western powers. China's peaceful rise in the international system has been accompanied by a proactive role in international multilateral organizations and institutions, such as the UN, since China considers them as the most adequate arenas to achieve a more effective form of multilateralism, even though they have not managed yet to completely reshape international order. Some scholars believe that China is attempting to exploit international institutions as a way to maximize its gains and achieve its national objectives, and this attitude can be brilliantly explained by focusing on regional historical dynamics in which China has been involved. It has namely relied on pragmatism to protect its own interests without accepting risky and burdensome commitments and it has embraced an entrepreneurial role in groups of non-Western like-minded countries which share the same interest in reshaping international society, as occurred for example with BRICS countries. China has coordinated the stances of BRICS countries not only in the economic and financial sector, but also during climate change negotiations and it is improving its position in the

regional security architecture of Asia by cooperating with the ASEAN<sup>134</sup>. The country is namely striving to be recognized as a peaceful and responsible superpower, which pursues a *hexie shijie* which is a harmonious world in which despite the differences between countries, multilateralism is effective and is instrumental to Chinese official discourse which claims that “peace is the ultimate objective” (Li, 2011). The focus can be turned again to the role of maritime geopolitics, as the projects of the Belt and Road Initiative as well as its maritime plans are a powerful geopolitical tool for China. On one hand they support Chinese economy by granting integration in the main maritime routes and by assuring constant import and export fluxes as well as energy supply. On the other hand, they reinforce economic, cultural and political ties with countries by enhancing Chinese soft power and infrastructure building, even though these huge investments might conceal a debt trap for poorer countries (Carey and Ladislaw 2019). This reinforces once again the viewpoint of my dissertation, which argues that maritime issues mirror the ongoing changes in the international system. China is namely attempting to convey the image of a benevolent power supporting economic development and the concept of a harmonious world through its maritime projects, but it is firm in the protection of its rights, as far the issues in the South China Sea are concerned. It is namely focused on enhancing its maritime power as a way to project its power abroad and counterbalance the influence of the US and the Western world. Beyond official discourse, the Chinese pattern of multilateralism resembles the Russian model of instrumental multilateralism, and this view is reinforced in the analysis of the role of China during the “Shangri-La Dialogue”. The attitude of China changes according to the issue and to its national interests and it can act as a “blocker”, as a “socialized participant”, as a “shaper” or as an “opportunistic participant” (Bisley and Taylor, 2015). This peculiar approach towards multilateralism is mirrored also in the regional fora, based on Chinese multilateral concepts, which have been established in Central and Eastern Europe (16+1), in Africa (FOCAC) and in Latin America (CCF). These platforms mirror the Chinese pattern of multilateralism based on soft law, on consensus, on the emphasis on South-South cooperation and voluntarism and are instrumental for Beijing to pursue a dual-track foreign policy combining bilateral and multilateral approaches (Jakobowski, 2018). This means that beyond official discourses advocating for a more equal and just model of multilateralism including all cultures, civilizations and world regions<sup>135</sup>, both China and Russia rely on instrumental multilateralism so as to maximize their own national gains and protect their interests even at an international level with international organizations. This clashed with the Western concept of multilateralism, even though the West too is concerned with maintaining its political and economic advantages even in a changing world.

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<sup>134</sup> Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific region can be examined in-depth in the work by Wirth and Jenne, who consider the shifting political order in the region, moving from the US sphere of influence to a more multilateral context in which regional actors such as ASEAN are involved (Wirth and Jenne 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2036506>)

<sup>135</sup> Güven studies how to overcome the multipolarity-multilateralism conundrum and he argues that this will be one of the key aspects so that to ensure the functioning of multilateral institutions and solutions must be tailored to the single international organization considered. For instance, he considers the attitude of the so-called “Big Seven” who are the main borrowers of the World Bank. These countries are Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Turkey and they are more focused on market infrastructures, while they are reluctant towards stronger political commitments, and this occurs because the World Bank embodies different ideas to accommodate different types of countries. This proves once again that international organizations must consider the stances of all countries, not only in the Western World (Güven 2022).

International organizations should namely act as bridge builders and invigorate trust in diplomacy and multilateralism, but this goal is difficult to be achieved, as there are different ideas of multilateralism, sometimes countries distrust “Western” multilateral approaches and there might be even overlapping activities which reduce the effectiveness of multilateral action<sup>136</sup>. In the post-Soviet space, the “competition” and overlapping activities of different international organizations bringing different and sometimes opposed views of multilateralism are evident and sometimes hamper the achievement of common goals. This situation is outlined in the case study by Russo and Gawrich, which enables to draw a comparison between the approach of the OSCE and the SCO<sup>137</sup>, which are two similar international organizations based on security, multilateralism and regional issues but which belong to different “spheres of interests”. The Central Asian Post-Soviet space is marked by overlapping regionalism, which means that in the same region are active both the OSCE and the Council of Europe as well as the CIS and the SCO and the background is settled by the Russian desire to be recognized as regional leaders<sup>138</sup>. Countries in central Asia have always desired to attribute regional actorness to their region, so that it could be recognized among the regions which are part of global multilateral processes and to this extent overlapping international organizations are welcomed by regional actors. This presence is considered as the evidence of the regional actorness which is going to be acquired and it supports the processes of legitimization or democratization of both weak and stronger countries. Furthermore, countries deem the presence of international organizations as a crucial element to be an integrated and accepted part of the international community and the legitimization based on the presence of international organizations can even reinforce authoritarian systems. Scholars have labelled the attitude of central Asian countries towards overlapping regionalism as a form of “forum shopping”, “strategic inconsistency” and “strategic ambiguity” and this means that countries choose the most suitable negotiation venue for their interests, the establishment of an institution can downplay the presence of another one and organizations are marked by different ideas as every country tries to obtain as much as possible and maximize its gains. Moreover, in this region the phenomenon of “overlap with contestation” has been witnessed and this contestation comes from the local authoritarian regimes, and is supported by Russia, consequently it is not exerted by external agents but by internal members or participating states. This contestation is an element which is regarded as a form of emancipation, giving the state a voice in an international system and establishing constitutive relations within and outside the organization. However, as I have already clarified, a contestation does not mean that the presence of international organizations is not welcomed, but in the fora of international organizations countries always

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<sup>136</sup> There are complex (de)legitimation strategies between great powers and international organizations, as state powers attempt to reduce the influence of multilateral international organizations such as the G7 or World Bank by establishing or joining other alternative organizations, such as the G20 or the AIIB to curtail their legitimation. These attempts have often yielded limited results. These dynamics are very nuanced and complex (Parlar Dal and Dipama 2022).

<sup>137</sup> The role of the SCO needs to be carefully examined as a relevant player in the regional dynamics of Asia; even though it has a different level of institutionalization, it entails different values and relies on a different composition, it embodies models of cooperation, a common spirit and has a security agenda which resembles the ones of the ASEAN. This comparison between ASEAN and the SCO is examined in Aris (Aris 2009).

<sup>138</sup> The emphasis on Central Asia attributed by Russian decision-makers can be explained with the disillusion concerning improved relations with the West and with the strengthening of the partnership with Beijing, which is however undermined by the Russian insecurity of being solely China’s junior partner in the region (Paikin. Sangar and Merlen 2019).

try to maximize and protect their own interests. As I have already stated, the case study of the OSCE is particularly meaningful, as this organization was established in 1975 with the Helsinki Final Act and until 1995 it was the "Conference for security and Cooperation in Europe" or CSCE. Its main goal was promoting dialogue between East and West, and it is the largest regional security organization with 57 participating states, including Russia, Central Asian countries, European countries of the EU, the US and Canada. Its activity as a mediator was remarkable in many situations such as the Minsk process to solve the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh and during the monitoring mission in the Ukraine, when the OSCE managed to include both Russia and Ukraine in projects to promote human security. Moreover, the ODIHR has very often established electoral observation missions to grant democratic elections. The organization relies namely on a holistic approach towards security, which includes three "baskets" or dimensions, which are the military, the political and the human dimension and it has issued two important documents which are the Charter of Paris, outlining basic provisions about democratic standards and the Copenhagen Document, which underpins the human dimension of the OSCE. The model of the OSCE represents in my view the best possible approach of a multilateral organization, since its inclusiveness and all the bridging activities ensure participation and are likely to bring to an enhanced form of conflict prevention based on a more effective multilateral concept, which is shaped by all players including the Western world and Russia. Furthermore, a holistic approach towards both hard and human security is much needed, due to the complexity of transnational challenges and this is the reason why I believe that the model of the OSCE will be one of the most interesting and successful as far as the activity of international organizations is concerned, as it fosters peace, democracy, dialogue and rule of law by constantly focusing on dialogue and diplomacy. On the other hand, the approach of the CIS is very different, since it focuses on having a "non-transformative impact" and on promoting a "protective integration", which means that this organization endorses the maintaining of a status quo under the Russian sphere of influence and which assures the recognition of mutual sovereignty, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the commitment to avoid external interferences. Furthermore, they are committed to the respect of human rights enshrined in UN documents, and this principle is reinforced in the Protocol to the Agreement Establishing the CIS, in the 1991 Alma-Ata document as well as in the CIS Charter. Despite this commitment, the emphasis is however put on security issues and on the preservation of their sovereignty without external interferences and these examples can be useful to witness that different international organizations can be driven by different concepts and values. The SCO is guided by similar principles enshrined in the "5 C's", which are confidence, communication, cooperation, coexistence and common interest. The SCO promotes democracy in a multipolar world which has overcome Western hegemony, and which takes into account different cultures. This proves once again that organizations such as the CIS and the SCO are guided by the values of political stability, regime security as well as the maintenance of sovereignty and domestic power systems. Many countries in Central Asia or in the Middle East are namely more concerned with sovereignty and this explains their suspicious attitude towards monitoring missions or electoral observations managed for instance by the ODIHR, which have been regarded as forms of external political interference. ODIHR electoral observation missions have been criticized not only by the hosting countries, but also by European partners, who sometimes claim that their assessments are too



assertive and somehow justify some authoritarian actions. ODIHR missions have been heavily attacked by Russia, which claims that they deploy double standards which are particularly harsh for countries "East of Vienna" and has therefore issued the Moscow declaration and the Astana Appeal to condemn the alleged interference in domestic sovereign affairs. Furthermore, it has fostered coalition-building with other Central Asian partners and has tried to curtail the ODIHR budget, which was however supported by other OSCE participating states through extrabudgetary funds. The Council of Europe is committed to the improvement of levels of democracy not only through election observations, but also through other activities aimed at democratic capacity-building, such as the support of local democracy, of a non-corrupted judicial system and the protection of human rights to ensure compliance with the European Human Rights Convention. Also, the CIS has developed its model for electoral observations and is committed to the respect of Human Rights thanks to the Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. Nevertheless, it issues only non-binding documents in order to support best practices based on consensus and the commitment is very weak. The SCO has recently adopted mechanisms for electoral observation, even though they have never challenged the legitimacy or the fairness of an election and while the CIS issued the 2008 Dushanbe Declaration to highlight a general commitment towards multilateral protection of human rights, the SCO has not emphasized this aspect yet. The sector of electoral observation is strongly marked by the concept of overlapping which I have already outlined, and this occurs because all regional organizations have their own procedures for electoral observation. Russia has applied its strategy of instrumental multilateralism to achieve both a multiplication of electoral missions (which can be labeled as forum shopping) and the reduction of funds for the ODIHR (which can be regarded as strategic inconsistency). It has namely attempted to de-legitimize ODIHR observations by explaining their negative assessment of post-Soviet countries with a Western negative bias towards countries "East of Vienna" and the political reasons behind such a criticism can be easily understood. ODIHR observations pose namely a threat to many authoritarian regimes in Central Asia, which regard the OSCE as a source of instability. Moreover, legitimizing the electoral observation procedures of both the CIS and the SCO as alternative multilateral models provide with legitimacy in the international arena for these organizations and for their practices regarding the human dimension. These four organizations embody not only different concepts and set of values concerning the human dimension, but they promote different attitudes and practices also in the field of security. The OSCE was established with the Helsinki Final Act and has a preeminent security dimension based on confidence-building, as enshrined in the Vienna Declaration and it emphasizes democracy, rule of law and bridging techniques in order to invigorate dialogue even in the most complex contexts<sup>139</sup>. Despite the OSCE efforts to overcome the division between East and West, Russia has criticized the OSCE concept of security by endorsing the negotiation of a Pan-European security treaty which should prevent a NATO enlargement and should give more importance to the security and military dimension of the OSCE, rather than the human dimension. As regards the Council of Europe, it is not focused on security issues except for measures of counterterrorism enshrined in the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. On the contrary, the CIS particularly focuses on security and on

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<sup>139</sup> An insightful analysis of the contribution of the OSCE to reinforce conflict prevention and confidence-building for security can be found in the work by Hopmann (Hopmann 2000).

the coordination of its members in case of a security threat both inside the territory of the CIS and outside, as declared in section 3 of the CIS Charter as well as in Article 12. Moreover, the CIS has supported counter-crime and anti-terrorism strategies based on widely recognized international standards and it has applied a decentralized strategy, empowering regional, trans-regional and sub-regional fora such as the Conference of Internal Affairs Ministers of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The SCO is focusing on non-traditional security, since it aims to fight against the so-called "Three Evils", which are terrorism, separatism and extremism and these principles are enshrined both in the SCO Charter as well as in the 2005 Concept of Cooperation between SCO member states in combating terrorism, separatism and extremism<sup>140</sup>. The 2005 legal instrument is particularly interesting, since it encourages the harmonization of domestic law in this sector and Article 3 supports the mutual recognition of threats between member states. However, anti-terrorism practices by SCO members have been heavily criticized by the International Federation of Human Rights, which argues that SCO measures allow to label political opposition as terrorists, grant diplomatic immunity for the officials of regional anti-terrorism agencies and establish extradition procedures which do not meet basic human rights criteria<sup>141</sup>. Consequently, the approaches towards security and its human dimension are very different and this proves that there is not a single concept of multilateral cooperation, as the multilateral cooperation envisaged by the OSCE and by the SCO are imbued with different values and priorities and this reinforces my stance that truly effective multilateralism will be achieved when a holistic and inclusive framework will be established and international organizations focusing on bridging such as the OSCE represent perfect venues for this model of dialogue, in order to preserve peace (Russo and Gawrich, 2017, pp.1-22).

Before the Russian invasion of the Ukraine, the OSCE has managed to include Russia in security processes and in mechanisms so as to improve the quality of human rights and has maintained a constant diplomatic dialogue despite huge difficulties and misunderstandings. After the crisis, this model must be further implemented and improved, as dialogue and diplomacy still remain the only viable solutions to achieve peace and of course they must be always inclusive. The so-called "concert diplomacy" must be namely improved and reformed. Meerts (2019) considers three types of concert diplomacy, and he outlines which development would be more beneficial for an effective implementation of this negotiation tool. Firstly, pragmatic concerts of diplomacy represent the best venue to combine both interests and positions of the parties and to enhance conflict prevention and management. On the other hand, positional concert diplomacy should be backed by the activity of non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors and finally procedural concert diplomacy, which is taking place in the UN Security Council, in EU institutions and ASEAN must be reformed to avoid deadlocks (Meerts 2019). Multilateralism implies also the rise of new non-governmental actors, as it has been previously stated and scholars such as

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<sup>140</sup> According to Aris, the framework and this strategy against non-traditional security threats is particularly adequate for the Asian region and the SCO has yielded success not only as an alternative to Western multilateralism, but also as it suits the values and the needs of the Asian region (Aris 2009)

<sup>141</sup> International organizations can not only support democratization processes but can also undermine democracy and foster the maintaining of autocracies and the SCO is a powerful political tool to resist global trends of democratization, according to Ambrosio (Ambrosio 2008).

Carayannis and Weiss (2021) postulate the need to foster a “Third UN”, reinforcing and improving the activities of government officials and civil servants by strengthening public-private partnerships with scholars, philanthropes<sup>142</sup> and researchers which can cope better with the changes in classical concepts of political science (Carayannis and Weiss 2021). Multilateralism needs to be strengthened also in the sector of global health diplomacy, because the Covid pandemic has generated important social, political and economic effects on a global scale and epidemiological issues have always been multilateral, since the Early Modern Age. To this extent, the efforts to reinforce health multilateral diplomacy and enhance the preparedness to react to global sanitary threats might fuel a virtuous circle in the improvement of multilateral diplomacy (Gupta, Singh, Kaur, Singh and Chattu 2021). In conclusion, after the crisis of the pandemic and owing to political events such as the BREXIT or the influence of Trump’s protectionist trade policy, multilateralism has undergone a phase of decline (Welfens 2020), nevertheless international organizations and institutions must strengthen and invigorate again trust in multilateralism. To this extent the role of the OSCE, of the UN and of the WTO<sup>143</sup> will be crucial to lead to a stronger and more effective model of multilateralism which is much needed to address transnational challenges.

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<sup>142</sup> The need to achieve inclusive economic growth can be regarded as an interesting development in international relations and international political economy. Inclusive economic growth is one of the key drivers of multilateral and multi-layered policies, involving different types of actors and it can be achieved only through a multi-layered and multi-actor process, overcoming strategies tailored only to a single country and narrow economic reasoning (Hay, Hunt and McGregor, 2020).

<sup>143</sup> An interesting analysis about the WTO and its contribution to shape the future of multilateralism is provided by Baldwin (Baldwin 2016).

## Conclusion

After a challenging discussion during the last session of the cycle of seminars organized by the OSCE the majority of panelists agreed upon the importance of relying on multilateralism despite the difficulties, the challenges and the need to refine this concept and they all highlighted the relevant role of international organizations in managing the transition to a more effective form of multilateralism. The intervention by Secretary General Schmid emphasized once more the historical roots and the initial mission of the OSCE, which is committed to multilateralism, diplomacy and dialogue since 1975, when the Helsinki Final Act was signed. These reflections have further reinforced the conclusions which can be inferred from this dissertation, and which have confirmed my initial hypotheses.

Firstly, historical approaches are adequate to grasp the evolution of the international system and they still drive the activity of international organizations and institutions. The similarities between the current international system and the multipolarity of the Early Modern Age, the permeability of borders and the model of polycentric governance prove that our future will undoubtedly require a multi-layered governance and multilateral solutions, because processes of interconnection are not going to cease despite the pandemic or the crisis in Ukraine. Historical models are consequently useful to better contextualize the ongoing phenomena of transition. These interconnections continue to be deepened and reinforced, as occurred during the Early Modern Age, when wars and pandemics did not stop the processes of global integration. The transition which the international system is undergoing will lead to an improved multilateral framework and to an increased awareness of the historical roots of phenomena.

The centrality of maritime issues as a set of meaningful case studies to understand the implications of these changes has been confirmed. Firstly, maritime spaces are an arena for geopolitical confrontation and the fierce competition in the Black Sea between Russia and Ukraine demonstrates that the control of an island or the sinking of a warship entail strong repercussions in broad war and political strategies and have the potential of changing the course of a war. Maritime routes and resources are and will be a strong factor attracting the ambition of several actors and can therefore fuel conflicts. However, the frameworks of multilateral cooperation concerning maritime issues will become inspiring models for other frameworks for cooperation in other sectors. For instance, multilateral counter-piracy plans in the Strait of Malacca have managed to foster multi-layered cooperation between local, regional and international actors which have diverging and opposed interests in the same maritime area, but the common goal to fight piracy has effectively supported cooperation. This means that common, shared, vital interests will represent the key to enhance multilateral cooperation even concerning the issues which traditionally trigger fierce competition. Additionally, the shared interest to preserve the environment has enhanced cooperation, which works despite organized hypocrisy, because many legal instruments have been designed in order to protect the sea and its biodiversity, as scientific research has confirmed that the detrimental repercussions of climate change are already affecting maritime ecosystems on which human life and activities depend.

The right incentives for cooperation must be found, consequently multidisciplinary and regional area studies will play an always more crucial role in supporting multilateralism. Diplomats have namely to acquire a detailed and refined knowledge of international law, international political economy, political science and history of international relations, since they have to find the right strategies to achieve the aim of fostering peace and dialogue and sometimes plans of credible incentives, promises and threats must be designed. Therefore, I believe that multidisciplinary analyses should be regarded as the most adequate solution to tackle the complexity of interconnected and multi-layered challenges, and this is the reason why I firmly believe in the importance of multidisciplinary studies.

The research I have realized has confirmed the initial hypothesis regarding the role of international organizations and it has highlighted the peculiarity of the approach of the OSCE. Multilateralism should be shaped through a collective process of bargaining involving all global actors and therefore regional and area studies are required so as to understand the peculiarities and the characteristics of all world regions. Solely Eurocentric approaches and other forms of centrism must be overcome so as to embrace a pluralistic understanding and this is crucial not only to improve the quality of theoretical studies in international relations but has relevant repercussion for processes of decision-making and negotiation. A pluralistic and more inclusive approach would namely prevent misunderstandings and would encourage all global players to contribute to multilateralism, as the right incentives would be provided for everyone. A historically based analysis is undoubtedly important to understand the values which matter in each region and a mutual knowledge is the key to foster dialogue even in the most difficult international crises.

During this cycle of seminars, it was often argued that despite the heinous breaches of international law, dialogue with Russia cannot cease, because the OSCE was established as a bridge builder organization and rejecting dialogue would be contrary to the history and mission of the organization, which means that other strategies to deal with Russian issues and interests must be found. Therefore, the future of multilateralism will be marked by a better dialogue and diplomacy, which are based on the awareness of the drivers of each region, and which can find viable strategies to strengthen the most important shared values of mankind, which are peace and the protection of human rights and the environment. International organizations should namely reinforce their role of bridge builders and should embrace notions of security and peace which are more comprehensive, because the future of world governance will be multilateral, multi-layered, based on nuanced and updated concepts of political science and above all it will be underpinned by shared values and dialogue.

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## Riassunto della tesi in lingua italiana

La domanda centrale della tavola rotonda tenutasi alla fine del ciclo seminariale dell'Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa (OSCE), al quale ho avuto l'onore di poter partecipare negli ultimi mesi, verteva sul futuro dell'Organizzazione alla luce della crisi provocata dall'invasione russa in Ucraina e, nell'intervento iniziale della Segretaria Generale Schmid, sono stati sottolineati due concetti, ovvero le radici storiche dell'Organizzazione e la necessità di avere una visione lungimirante per il futuro. Il collegamento tra la necessità di considerare sempre i fenomeni nella loro dimensione storica e la ricerca come strumento per comprendere il momento di transizione che sta attraversando il sistema internazionale ha sempre rappresentato un concetto chiave per guidarmi nella redazione di questo elaborato. Per questo motivo ho pensato agli strumenti metodologici più adatti e all'approccio più interessante per poter analizzare i cambiamenti nel sistema delle relazioni internazionali, nel quale continuano ad intrecciarsi dinamiche di equilibrio di potenza, tensioni basate sulle teorie realiste e tentativi di elaborare un approccio multilaterale per la risoluzione delle questioni. La partecipazione ai seminari di PoLab, organizzati dall'Università Ca' Foscari, mi ha consentito di scoprire come la storia globale e la storia del mare possano generare una sinergia in grado di spiegare i principali meccanismi delle relazioni internazionali e della geopolitica. La scelta risulta particolarmente adeguata dato che il primo *curriculum* che ho scelto è incentrato su tematiche transnazionali ed effettivamente la storia del mare si combina perfettamente con lo studio della storia globale, che indaga l'origine e l'evoluzione delle connessioni internazionali. La storia moderna è infatti caratterizzata dall'intensificarsi delle prime connessioni su scala internazionale e dalla formazione delle prime rotte commerciali che collegavano vari continenti, come la Via della Seta, ma soprattutto le vie marittime hanno dato un contributo importante all'avvio dei processi di globalizzazione. Le rotte internazionali collegavano l'Oceano Indiano, la Penisola Araba, l'Europa, l'Africa e le Americhe e questo ha determinato la creazione di città porto che si configuravano come snodi del commercio globale, come Siviglia, Venezia, Manila e tante altre. Queste città hanno dovuto fronteggiare le sfide delle connessioni transnazionali e per questo possono essere definite come primi laboratori della globalizzazione. In questo periodo si sono distinti diversi imperi marittimi, come l'impero portoghese in Asia, e l'analisi di questi imperi, caratterizzati da una pluralità di centri di potere, da sfere di influenza sovrapposte e confini permeabili, presentano delle importanti analogie con il superamento del sistema internazionale di Westphalia che ormai è una certezza per gli studiosi. Le questioni marittime consentono quindi di esaminare come nel sistema internazionale coesistano e si alternino forti tensioni per il controllo di risorse economiche, energetiche o legate al potere politico e al prestigio, con efficaci forme di collaborazione in grado di superare sfide transnazionali che si basano sull'applicazione del multilateralismo. Specialmente negli spazi marittimi emerge il contrasto tra la necessità di far fronte alle sfide transnazionali e globali, come il cambiamento climatico, e la persistente presenza di marcati interessi geopolitici e rivalità storiche. Per questo motivo ho deciso di concentrare la mia analisi sui casi di studio delle città portuali, dei mari, degli oceani e degli stretti internazionali, perché queste dinamiche convivono negli spazi marittimi e dimostrano chiaramente come l'interdipendenza e le sfide transnazionali portino inevitabilmente, nel lungo termine, a

soluzioni multilaterali che superino i meccanismi della *Realpolitik*. L'analisi del mare si coniuga perfettamente con il mio desiderio di redigere un elaborato multidisciplinare, che comprenda lo studio della storia, delle scienze politiche, delle relazioni internazionali, dell'economia internazionale, della geopolitica e del diritto internazionale. Queste discipline sono strettamente interconnesse, proprio come sono connessi gli spazi e le popolazioni nell'era della globalizzazione e non è un caso che tutti questi ambiti debbano rientrare tra le conoscenze e competenze del personale diplomatico dello Stato italiano. Il primo caso di studio che prendo in considerazione riguarda il mare Mediterraneo, con particolare attenzione al ruolo della Turchia nella zona orientale del Mar Egeo e che è connessa da secoli con il Mar Nero. Il Mediterraneo si configura come una regione estremamente complessa, nella quale si intrecciano le politiche dell'Unione Europea e le tensioni nel mondo arabo, mentre nella zona orientale la Turchia ricopre da secoli una posizione peculiare nella gestione degli stretti del Bosforo e dei Dardanelli, gestendo in modo diplomatico le pressioni russe e statunitensi per poter difendere il regime legale della Convenzione di Montreux del 1936. La storia del Mediterraneo è strettamente legata a quella del Mar Nero, nel quale si concentrano le ambizioni russe dai tempi delle guerre contro l'impero Ottomano fino all'annessione della Crimea. In questa regione si scontrano le mire geopolitiche russe, la sfera di influenza dell'Unione Europea e l'enfasi nel processo di democratizzazione sullo sfondo di complicate politiche energetiche e di un mare che riveste un ruolo chiave negli scambi commerciali globali. Nonostante queste tensioni e queste rivendicazioni geopolitiche, gli Stati della regione cercano comunque delle strade per la cooperazione multilaterale, come dimostrano i casi di studio dell'Organizzazione della cooperazione economica del Mar Nero. Il mare è quindi una fucina di conflitti e ambizioni geopolitiche, ma anche un motore per facilitare la cooperazione sulla base di comuni interessi economici e radici culturali regionali. La necessità di cooperare e le tensioni geopolitiche si concentrano in particolar modo negli stretti internazionali e già nel 1890 l'ufficiale Mahan sottolinea come il controllo degli stretti renda possibile controllare i mari e questa affermazione trova conferma nei casi di studio da tutto il mondo che ho presentato. Per esempio, lo stretto di Bab al Mandeb, pur rappresentando un collo di bottiglia fondamentale che collega l'Oceano Indiano con il Mar Rosso e poi il Mediterraneo, è penalizzato dall'instabilità politica della regione e dalle minacce del terrorismo e della pirateria, che vengono solo parzialmente mitigate dagli sforzi internazionali dell'Unione Europea, degli Stati Uniti e della Cina. La sicurezza della navigazione è una condizione imprescindibile per il commercio globale, dato che qualsiasi ritardo in uno di questi colli di bottiglia arrecherebbe gravi danni all'economia mondiale, come dimostrano le ripercussioni dei rallentamenti nei porti asiatici a causa dell'emergenza coronavirus e le problematiche nel canale di Suez verificatesi nel 2021. Gli stretti sono spesso al centro di delicati equilibri di deterrenza, come nel caso dello stretto di Hormuz e del confronto tra Iran e Stati Uniti, oppure assolvono delle funzioni specifiche in progetti nazionali o internazionali, come nel caso del Canale di Panama e dello Stretto di Gibilterra. La geopolitica del mare si basa sull'intreccio di attori locali, regionali e internazionali e nell'Oceano Indiano si sovrappongono gli interessi e le rivalità tra potenze regionali e internazionali. Questo avviene attualmente, per esempio per quanto riguarda le tensioni tra l'India e il Pakistan, e si verificava anche nel periodo della storia moderna preso in esame, in cui si accavallavano le sfere d'influenza di potenze coloniali occidentali, come il Portogallo, con le ambizioni dei regni locali. La regione dell'Indo-Pacifico è ricca di stretti internazionali



tanto fondamentali per il commercio globale quanto contesi dal punto di vista politico, basti pensare al caso dello Stretto di Taiwan. L'analisi della situazione dello stretto di Malacca risulta più approfondita, dato che si configura come il caso di studio chiave per comprendere il delicato equilibrio tra politiche di potenza e cooperazione multilaterale. Da secoli al centro delle mire cinesi e di contese territoriali, la sfida del contrasto alla pirateria ha spinto gli Stati costieri ad unire le forze con progetti veramente multilaterali come RECAAP e MALSINDO, che hanno drasticamente ridotto la minaccia della pirateria grazie all'approccio multilaterale efficace. Nonostante questo successo del multilateralismo, nel Mar Cinese Meridionale continuano a scontrarsi le proiezioni di potenza della Cina e degli Stati Uniti. Il cambiamento climatico e il progresso tecnologico potrebbero far riesplodere le tensioni per il controllo delle risorse in Antartide e questo dimostra come, in presenza di risorse scarse da distribuire, gli interessi nazionali vengano posti in primo piano, quando invece le necessità comuni dovrebbero incentivare la cooperazione. Tuttavia la necessità di gestire gli spazi marini e le risorse d'acqua, come quelle di grandi fiumi come il Nilo e il Mekong, dimostra che la cooperazione multilaterale rappresenta la chiave per superare le tensioni che attualmente caratterizzano lo scenario geopolitico di un mondo in transizione. Per questo motivo dallo studio degli oceani e degli stretti emerge l'istanza di comprendere come stanno evolvendo i concetti tradizionali delle relazioni internazionali, come l'equilibrio di potenza, e come sia necessario bilanciare la competizione per il controllo delle risorse con gli sforzi multilaterali. Il mondo post-Westphalia presenta delle interessanti somiglianze con il contesto della storia moderna, per esempio per quanto concerne la flessibilità e la permeabilità delle frontiere e la presenza di più poli e centri di potere. Per questo motivo l'approccio storico risulta prezioso per capire a fondo l'evoluzione della società internazionale. Inoltre la storia globale si prefigge l'obiettivo di superare il carattere dominante Eurocentrico che spesso caratterizza lo studio delle relazioni internazionali. L'apertura verso nuove culture e civiltà risulta di vitale importanza non solo per studiare l'evoluzione storica delle connessioni globali, ma serve soprattutto per migliorare l'attività delle organizzazioni internazionali. Non esiste un concetto univoco di multilateralismo, poiché in Russia il multilateralismo è sempre strumentale e subordinato al raggiungimento di obiettivi nazionali, mentre la Cina punta ad una maggiore integrazione di Paesi non occidentali nelle dinamiche internazionali per realizzare quello che nella retorica ufficiale è il "mondo armonioso". I diversi concetti di multilateralismo si riflettono nell'attività di organizzazioni come OSCE e l'Organizzazione per la Cooperazione di Shanghai, ed è stata proprio l'attività dell'Organizzazione per la Sicurezza e la Cooperazione in Europa ad aver ispirato la risposta che vorrei dare alla mia domanda di ricerca, risposta che dovrebbe guidare anche le discussioni riguardo al futuro del multilateralismo dopo la crisi ucraina. La sicurezza è un fenomeno che comprende diverse dimensioni, ovvero una dimensione militare, una politica e una legata ai diritti umani, e serve un impegno rafforzato per poter costruire ponti tra diverse culture e popolazioni. OSCE è stata fondata proprio con l'obiettivo di superare le difficoltà e le diffidenze tra le due parti della cortina di ferro ed anche adesso i suoi funzionari sanno gestire la complessità di un'organizzazione che comprende sia il Canada che i Paesi dell'Asia Centrale. Per questo motivo, come gli spazi marittimi sono sempre stati dei catalizzatori sia per tensioni che per efficaci sinergie, anche le crisi attuali devono diventare dei motori per migliorare il multilateralismo, rendendolo davvero globale, operativo e inclusivo. Per questo il ruolo delle organizzazioni internazionali sarà sempre più importante e le dinamiche storiche delle città porto, degli stretti e dei mari

possono ispirare soluzioni nuove, creative e basate su una pluralità di strumenti, economici, politici e legali per tutelare la sicurezza e la pace a livello globale.



