UNIVERSIDADE D
COIMBRA

Roxana Gabriela Andrei

(Re)Sources for Conflict and Cooperation in the Caspian – Black Sea region:

THE IMPACT OF ENERGY DYNAMICS

Tese no âmbito do Doutoramento em Relações Internacionais – Política Internacional e Resolução de Conflitos, orientada pela Professora Doutora Maria Raquel Freire e apresentada à Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra.

Dezembro de 2020

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To my beloved parents, Ana and Alexandru, my sources of inspiration and my strength.

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RESUMO

A anexação da Crimeia em 2014 e o conflito que se seguiu no Leste da Ucrânia pareciam ter trancado a porta entre a UE e a Rússia. Contudo, mesmo no auge do conflito político entre estes dois atores, o gás natural continuou a fluir, da Rússia, via Ucrânia, para os consumidores europeus. Além do mais, em dezembro de 2019, Kiev e Moscovo assinaram um novo acordo energético que prevê a continuação do trânsito de gás russo pela Ucrânia. Durante o mesmo período de tempo, a Rússia e a Turquia envolveram-se numa disputa diplomática e política que congelou as suas relações durante quase um ano, enquanto as suas escolhas denotavam posições opostas nos conflitos militares na Síria e na Líbia. No entanto, os dois países prosseguiram o projeto comum de construção do gasoduto Turkish Stream. Este gasoduto tem sido descrito como um rival geopolítico do Southern Gas Corridor, apoiado pela UE, mas nem Bruxelas, nem Moscovo se opuseram ou criticaram o outro projeto do outro. As narrativas em torno da dependência da UE das importações de gás russo tornaram-se cada vez mais politizadas nos últimos anos, alertando para a vulnerabilidade da Europa e potenciais ruturas e uso indevido do gás como arma por Moscovo. No entanto, a UE importa e consome menos gás natural do que petróleo em termos energéticos e prevê-se que a procura de gás diminua ainda mais. Intrigada por estas contradições, esta tese investiga de que modo dinâmicas de conflito e cooperação têm sido usadas pelos principais atores da energia na região do Mar Cáspio-Mar Negro e argumenta que o conflito e a cooperação não se excluem, ao invés coexistem no que denomino de conflito-cooperação perpetuum. Esta nova ferramenta concetual é particularmente útil para explicar por que atores envolvidos num conflito político são simultaneamente capazes de cooperar no campo da energia. Notando que nem o Southern Gas Corridor, nem o Turkish Stream respondem cabalmente às necessidades de segurança energética dos seus proponentes, a UE, a Rússia e a Turquia, proponho usar o quadro teórico da segurança ontológica para melhor compreender a camada mais profunda das suas motivações existenciais que, além de considerações materiais, informam as suas decisões e comportamento e moldam as complexas relações que existem entre eles.

Palavras-chave: conflito e cooperação; segurança energética; segurança ontológica; *Southern Gas Corridor*; *Turkish Stream*.

ABSTRACT

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following conflict in Eastern Ukraine was assumed to lock the door between the EU and Russia. Yet, even at the peak of the political conflict between them, the natural gas continued to flow in the background, from Russia, via Ukraine, and further to the European consumers. Even more, in December 2019, Kiev and Moscow signed a new gas deal providing for the continuation of the Russian gas transit through Ukraine. During the same timeframe, Russia and Turkey engaged in a diplomatic and political dispute that froze their relations for almost one year, while choosing to stand on opposing positions in the military conflicts in Syria and Libya. Nonetheless, the two countries continued with their common project and built the Turkish Stream natural gas pipeline. The Turkish Stream has been depicted as a geopolitical rival of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor, yet neither Brussels, nor Moscow have opposed or criticised the other party's project. The narratives around the EU's dependence on Russian gas imports have become increasingly politicised in recent years warning about Europe's vulnerability to disruptions and the misuse of gas as a weapon by Moscow. However, the EU imports and uses less natural gas than oil in its energy mix and its gas demand is expected to decrease further, after a short growth caused by the decline in its own production. Intrigued by these contradictions, I research in this thesis how conflict and cooperation have been employed by the key energy players in the Caspian-Black Sea region and I argue that conflict and cooperation do not exclude each other, that they co-exist in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*. The new conceptual tool is particularly useful to explain why the players engaged in a political conflict are able to simultaneously cooperate in the energy field. Noting that neither the Southern Gas Corridor, nor the Turkish Stream fulfil the energy security needs of their proponents, the EU, Russia and Turkey, I propose using the theoretical framework of *ontological security* in order to unveil the deeper layer of their existential motivations that, in addition to the material considerations, underpin their decisions and behaviour, and shape the complex relationships between them.

Keywords: conflict and cooperation; energy security; ontological security; Southern Gas Corridor; Turkish Stream.

ACRONYMS

AIOC	Azerbaijan International Operating Company
bcm	billion cubic meters
bcm/y	billion cubic meters per year
BP	British Petroleum
BTC	Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan
BTE	Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ECT	Energy Charter Treaty
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENTSOG	European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IEA	International Energy Agency
INOGATE	INterstate Oil and GAs Transportation to Europe
IR	International Relations
ITGI	Turkey–Greece–Italy Interconnector
km	kilometres
LNG	liquefied natural gas
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PCI	Project of Common Interest
SCP	South Caucasus Pipeline
SCPx	The extension of the South Caucasus Pipeline
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth Independent States
ANAP	Trans-Anatolian Pipeline
TAP	Trans-Adriatic Pipeline
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline
Tcm	trillion cubic metres
TRACECA	Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

U.S.	United States
USD	U.S. dollars
%	percent

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INTRODUCTION

I. Introducing the puzzle, the aim and the object of research

The energy scene linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe has been long depicted as a contested playground of clashing interests, dominated by the big powers' rivalry around the main natural gas and oil pipelines supplying the European markets with the much needed hydrocarbons of the neighbourhood. The wide political complexity of the region has attracted inherent debates about the vulnerability of the energy projects to regional conflicts, political instability or the misuse of energy dependence as a political weapon. The pipelines in the Caspian-Black Sea region have often been politicised, being reduced to a geopolitical interpretation of the regional dynamics seen in close connection to a wide lists of risks and threats to their viability and safety, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the regional disputes and conflicts in the South Caucasus and Ukraine, the resurge of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 in the proximity of some of the natural gas pipelines, the unpredictable relations between Russia and Turkey, and Turkey's recent assertive actions in the South Caucasus, the Black Sea and in the neighbouring Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. Natural gas in particular has been increasingly politicised and placed under a geopolitical framework in the academic and political narratives of past years and, by consequence, the main natural gas pipelines linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe have been often understood as geopolitical tools rather than commercial projects, as instruments employed by the big powers, the European Union (EU) and Russia, in their political disputes.

When this research has started, in 2015, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream natural gas pipelines were credited with limited chances to be realised or suspected to turn into geopolitical weapons between the EU and Russia, and their allies. They were also expected to forge political alliances around them that would follow the configuration of the trade partnerships behind them. It was also the peak time of the political standoff between Ankara and Moscow followed by a political and diplomatic crisis between the two countries. And, even more debated at that time, it was the high moment of the political dispute between the EU and Russia arising after the annexation, a year before, of Crimea by the Russian Federation. The research comes to an end in 2020, at the same time with the finalisation of the Southern Gas Corridor and soon after the official inauguration of the Turkish Stream.

Political conflicts have not disappeared meantime. The war in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the close vicinity of the Southern Gas Corridor infrastructure, has re-erupted in 2020, while Turkey has embarked on military-backed gas drilling activities claiming ownership over the natural gas resources in the Exclusive Economic Zones of some of its neighbours. Yet, the two pipelines followed their way and, against all politicisation around them, they became a reality in 2020, as the natural gas continued its flow unperturbed.

I started this research highly motivated to solve an unsettling **puzzle** stemming from the observations above related to the intense politicisation of the gas trade between the EU and Russia and of the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the European markets. Despite the political and academic narratives frequently charged with anxieties related to the EU's vulnerability to Russian gas imports and to their potential of being used as a political weapon against European countries, the natural gas flows between Russia and the EU, including via Ukraine, continued uninterrupted even at the peak of the Ukrainian crisis in 2013-2014 and, against all pessimistic accounts, a new gas deal between Kiev and Moscow was signed in December 2019, providing for the continuation of the natural gas transit through Ukraine. Moreover, the increased fear of Europe being defenceless because of its dependence on Russian gas imports seemed paradoxical given the fact that natural gas has a smaller share than oil in its energy mix and that demand is forecast to decrease post-2030 following the EU's turn towards greener energy and diversification, with climate policies and economic factors already leading to a decline in overall EU energy consumption since 2006. In addition to this, the natural gas pipelines in the Caspian-Black Sea region, although situated in the close proximity of more protracted conflicts, have not been yet damaged in the regional military confrontations and no significant interruptions have occurred so far that would justify their depiction in the framework of the conflicts. Even more, despite their sinuous evolution, both the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-built Turkish Stream have started to officially deliver natural gas to the European markets in 2020. Although being largely depicted as rival, geopolitical projects, neither Brussels, nor Moscow have opposed or criticised to the moment each other's pipelines. And, furthermore, contrary to the expectation that countries along the pipelines will split forming political alliances based on the energy partnerships they choose, there are notable cases where this assumption is denied, as Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria chose to engage in both EU and Russian-backed projects.

Looking at the configuration of actors on the energy setting of the Caspian-Black Sea region, I was also intrigued by its depiction as a bipolar scene, with two main powers, the EU

and Russia dominating its dynamics. The politicised narratives derived from this view did not reflect, in my conception, the reality on the ground, as a wider constellation of actors seemed to impact and shape the energy relations and the faith of the natural gas projects in the region. TANAP, the second pipeline composing the Southern Gas Corridor was realised through the ambitious efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey. And Nabucco, the predecessor of the corridor was cancelled not by the major political actors behind it, the EU and the U.S., but by the energy companies promoting it, for commercial and financial reasons. Moreover, another assertive actor, besides the EU and Russia has been actively engaged in defining the energy relations in the Caspian-Black Sea region and beyond, through forceful political and commercial endeavours in past years: Turkey.

Contemplating this puzzle that became the driver of the research, I noted that the energy relations between the key players on the Caspian-Black Sea energy scene are overwhelmingly depicted under two frameworks that seemed limited and reductionist. On the one hand, the complex relationship between the actors is understood as moving along a continuum, stretching from conflict on one end to cooperation on the other end. In this view, conflict and cooperation are depicted as opposing instances, excluding each other, in an 'either-or' approach. However, this framing cannot explain why actors engage in conflict in one area of their interaction, as in the case of political domain, while choosing to continue to cooperate in other realms of their relationship, such as the energy field. It thus fails to elucidate the intriguing situations where the EU and Russia, Russia and Ukraine, or Greece and Turkey, although caught in political disputes, chose to enforce their energy cooperation. Such a binary understanding of conflict and cooperation is also reductionist for not capturing the potential of energy cooperation to transpose also into other realms of interaction, be it economic or political, as it happened in the case of Azerbaijan and Georgia.

On the other hand, energy is understood as being an almost exclusively material issue, defined by figures and numbers related to production, transport and storage capacity, to demand and supply trends, to the technological configuration of energy infrastructure etc. Material factors do matter and are indispensable in any analysis of energy dynamics. Nevertheless, they do not manage to explain on their own the apparently contradictory and dissonant narratives and choices for conflict and cooperation, or for both simultaneously, of the energy actors.

Stemming thus from the contradiction I identify between the predominant conflict-oriented narratives around natural gas dependence and major pipeline projects, and the rather cooperative energy relations around them, I pose two main **questions**: First, if energy

cooperation endured political conflict, why did this happen? And second, if material factors fail to explain on their own the actors' choices, what else does?

In order to overcome the two limitations exposed above that triggered the motivation to engage in this research, I propose in this thesis two new tools that may be employed in order to unveil the rest of the picture. First, I developed a conceptual tool, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, in order to explain why actors choose to compartmentalise the different realm of interaction with the same 'Other' and engage in both conflict and cooperation sometimes at the same time. I treat conflict and cooperation as co-existing concepts, alternating and often overlapping each other, and not as opposing and self-excluding instances.

Second, I propose using a theoretical framework very little applied in energy studies, that of *ontological security*, for the purpose of uncovering what lies behind numbers and figures, what else besides the obvious material considerations drives the actors' motivations when they choose to engage in cooperative and/or conflictual behaviour towards each other, and in promoting new natural gas projects, which, at a first glance, seem to contribute too little to enhancing their physical energy security. Thus, I look at the deeper layer of the actors' motives, at their psychological and existential concerns that compel them to use material objects, such as the natural gas pipelines, in order to enhance their ontological security needs related to their wish to be accepted and respected, to overcome self-perceived weaknesses, stigma and shame, and to counter the anxieties of their daily lives.

As inviting as it would have been to discuss the dynamics around all the countries involved in the natural gas projects of the Caspian-Black Sea region, recognising their important role and contribution, I chose to focus on three key actors, the EU, Russia and Turkey, as they are the cases that pertain best to all the elements of my analysis: the duality of geopolitical and commercial goals, doubled by deep ontological needs, significantly impacting on the conflict and cooperation dynamics of the energy projects of the region. Throughout the thesis I acknowledge the important role that Azerbaijan has played in changing the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea by realising the Southern Gas Corridor, and I also discuss, albeit briefly, the participation of Ukraine, Georgia, Greece, Bulgaria or Romania in the most important developments of the area. Armenia is the only state of the region that is not part of the energy debate of this thesis, although I mention it when I touch the topic of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, for the reason that Armenia is the only country that does not participate in any of the major international gas or oil projects in the neighbourhood.

The **object of analysis** is thus the triad relationship between the EU, Russia and Turkey, as the relations between the three key actors in recent years expose the best the conflict and cooperation dynamics, as well as the material/non-material complex of their motivations and actions on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region. As I explain in the thesis, the segment of the energy relationship between the EU and Turkey is still to be developed, due to the novelty of Ankara's forceful claims to be acknowledged as a key regional player and to the EU being yet slow to change its own narratives and adjust its response to it. Nevertheless, it is a rich field to explore and to provide arguments that support the need to investigate deeper into the ontological needs of the actors, together with the well-established EU-Russia relationship and the challenging relations between Russia and Turkey, which I analyse further.

Therefore, I use two settings in order to explore the complex relationship between the EU, Russia and Turkey. First, I analyse their narratives as they are reflected in the energy strategies they developed and I mirror them to each other in order to reveal how they unveil their security needs, be it physical or ontological ones, and how they shape their conflict and cooperation behaviour towards each other. And second, I look at two specific projects in which the three key players have engaged, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, which evolved side by side for the past five years, for the purpose to analyse the relationship between the EU, Russia and Turkey, as it was shaped in the framework of the two natural gas pipelines, based on both their material and ontological needs, and involving both conflict and cooperation as choices of their action.

As I debate in the thesis, the natural gas pipelines linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe have often played the role of "objects of fear", a concept imported from the ontological security theory (Browning, 2018a:339), on which some actors have mirrored their wider anxieties about an unknown they cannot control. Nevertheless, I argue that for other players, feeling ontologically secure about themselves and their place in the world, these projects have proved to be what I call 'objects of opportunity', managing to use them in a cooperative way in order to satisfy their energy needs, be it of supply or demand.

I chose natural gas projects because, unlike oil, gas has been increasingly politicised in recent years, although less participating in the energy mix of Europe. And because I took the challenge of writing this thesis at the same time with the development of the two new major natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe: the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-built Turkish Stream. It was indeed a provocation, as writing had to be constantly updated, but it was the most interesting trajectory a research

could have taken, with a puzzle unveiling itself step by step, until the very last week of writing. I started this endeavour in 2015 with both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream placed under the light of the annexation of Crimea a year before, when the two were credited with being two geopolitical projects that would only exist in discourse, for the geopolitical purposes of their rival proponents, and never in practice. And I concluded it in 2020 at the time of the resurge of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh only kilometres away from the Southern Gas Corridor's infrastructure, when once again pipelines were depicted as vulnerable to geopolitical dynamics. Nevertheless, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream grew up together with this research and today, at the end of 2020, they are finally a reality.

The **aim** of this research is to overcome the anxieties as they are reflected in the widely-narrated pessimist views with respect to the conflict potential of natural gas projects. I do not dismiss the geopolitical component of energy and I analyse it in detail throughout the research. Nor do I downsize the importance of the material factors that underpin the actors' decisions. And I do not suggest that cooperation always prevails and that conflict should be ignored. Therefore, I intend to demonstrate that conflict and cooperation can co-exist, and that both material and psychological/ontological needs must be taken into account. When actors are confronted with crises they can redefine their position and reshape their narratives accordingly. The aim is thus to contribute to developing the energy- and the conflict-related literature by applying insights and expanding the theoretical framework of *ontological security* and by employing a new conceptual tool, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* allowing to better understand the complex dynamics on the energy scene in Europe and beyond.

II. Methodology

Introducing a new layer of analysis, in additional to the material one, in order to reveal the deeper stratum of existential, ontological considerations that underpin the energy actors' conflictual and cooperative choices, led to opting for a qualitative methodology that would best respond to the theoretical and empirical observations made in this research.

I found Vennesson's (2008) explanation of the role of using case studies in social sciences particularly inspiring, as the author sees the case studies embedding two major characteristics: on the one hand, the case challenges established descriptions or reasoning, provokes reflection and opens the way to the adjustment of a theoretical framework; on the

other hand, "the case requires a solution, its meaning defined in relation to theoretical frameworks and, however unique, it can be put in relation to other cases" (p. 226). Throughout the thesis, I challenge the predominant description of energy and of natural gas projects as geopolitical fields of clashing rival interests, under a prevailing material understanding of energy dynamics and actors' motivations. Through the examination of the multiple case studies I propose, namely the EU-Turkey, EU-Russia and Russia-Turkey relations, I suggest adjusting the theoretical framework, not by dismissing the material-oriented contributions, but by complementing them with insights from the field of *ontological security*. Furthermore, a case study approach that would sustain the ontological security choice allows to explore the "[...] the manner by which people, groups, and organizations make sense of stimuli with which they are confronted, how they frame what they see and hear, how they perceive and interpret this information, and how they interpret their own actions and go about solving problems and interacting with others (Lune and Berg, 2017:172). Case studies also permit, according to Vennesson (2008), to clarify relevant theoretical concepts. Thus, to this goal, they facilitate analysing the complex relations between the EU, Russia and Turkey, on the one hand, and reviewing the dominant narratives around the natural gas dynamics, on the other hand, allowing for the development of a new conceptual tool, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

I follow Lune and Berg's (2017) suggestion to use case data in order to challenge theoretical assumptions with real-life data and thus exposing unanticipated findings (p. 172) when I explore in detail the material context related to the natural gas trends in Europe in order to confront it with the dominant academic and political narratives, as well with the main theories encountered in energy literature, to see if and how the latter reflect the reality on the ground, if the evolution of the natural gas dynamics and of the main energy projects supports indeed the more pessimistic and geopolitical tone of the narratives.

I use Vennesson's (2008) classification of the various types of case study (descriptive, interpretive, hypothesis-generating and theory-evaluating) in order to choose the method most suited for the purpose of the research. Thus, I opted for the interpretive case study (disciplined configurative), which uses theoretical frameworks to provide an explanation of particular cases (Vennesson, 2008).

I opted for an interpretive approach encouraged by the affirmation that it does not reject quantitative data per se, instead it suggests that it should not prevail over other forms of data and rather allows itself to be complemented by other types of information, taking an interpretive perspective, a different reading of material evidences, in order to reveal what

various communities consider to be issues central to their identities and concerns (Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006).

An interpretive research commonly stems from identifying a puzzle, an intriguing tension between the information embedded in literature and the observations made on the ground, on the study setting (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). The idea of this thesis emerged itself from a puzzle, from the contradiction I exposed above between the dominant, conflict-oriented narratives around natural gas and the rather cooperative dynamics in the energy trade in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

I apply the interpretive methodology to a wide selection of sources I identified as central to researching the conflict and cooperation dynamics on the energy field of the region, as they are reflected in the narratives built around them, taking into account the assumption that "narratives explain actions and practices by reference to the beliefs and desires of actors" (Bevir, 2006:285) and thus investigating deeper into their ontological motivations.

Hence, I start the research by performing a thorough literature review of the main theories that engage with debating energy, conflict and cooperation in Europe, in order to identify those possible biases that limit the understanding of the complex reasons that underpin energy actors' choices for cooperation or conflict. For this purpose, I explore the main arguments and I identify the predominant geopolitical biases contained mostly by the realist, liberal and resource war-oriented strands of literature. I proceed further to debating what I call the critical reductionism, where I discuss the limitations of the critical security literature in the field of energy. Throughout the thesis, I pay special attention to the authors in the region, an exercise which provided exceptionally rich and valuable insights on the energy dynamics and on how the actors impact on the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in the Caspian-Black Sea region, revealing both their material and *ontological security* needs. Thus, I incorporate important observations from the region, from a considerable number of authors in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Turkey or Ukraine, in order to ensure a balanced representation of opinions and views both from inside and outside the region.

In addition to the literature review, I engage in researching what Weldes (2006:181) names "High Data", namely the key energy strategy and policy documents of the EU, Russia and Turkey; official speeches and declarations by leading officials and politicians; business writings, reports and forecast analyses in the field of energy and gas; media outlets; statements, data and reports from government ministries, departments, and agencies;

statements and data from commercial enterprises, such as energy companies and pipelines consortia.

I complemented the literature review and the documents analysis by conducting semi-structured interviews with a wide range of practitioners in the field of energy. Thus, I had the opportunity of interviewing 43 subjects[1], and in selecting the participants for the interviews, I followed Longhurst's recommendation to choose people on the basis of their experience related to the research topic, ensuring two important ethical issues: confidentiality and anonymity (Longhurst, 2003). All participants were sent, prior to the interview, a Guidelines document containing the description of the research, the estimated time for the discussion, a set of five ground questions on which the interview would be based, as well as contacts of the researcher and supervisor. At the same time, the Guidelines contained a "Confidentiality and Use of Information" section where the subjects were informed about the fact that participation in this research is completely voluntary, that the information gathered under it is anonymous, encrypted and safely stored, that the transcription will be kept confidential and no part of it may be shared with any third party, that the data used are guided by the established ethical standards to protect informants' personal, legal, and political safeties, and that no commercial use of the data will be pursued. All interviewees were granted anonymity by default, although half of them (21 out of 43) opted to have their name public and to be quoted in the text.

The interviews were performed in 2017, 2018 and 2020. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 impeded me to travel according to the initial research plans to Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine and Brussels. Therefore, a large batch of interviews were rescheduled and conducted online and by phone, and in this way, all the discussions planned were realised without any delay. The fact that, during the pandemic restrictions, all the officials working in international institutions (the EU, OSCE, NATO), and in embassies and diplomatic representations were working from home, proved to be an advantage, as many subjects mentioned that their schedule and setting is more flexible and thus they can offer more time for our discussion.

I ensured a balanced gender, nationality and professional distribution of the subjects. The main challenge I encountered in the interview process, however, was engaging two categories of respondents. First, I received a low level of response from all categories of

[1] The subjects were coded in the process of data analysis according to their professional field as follows: academia (A), public and private energy companies representatives (C), diplomats (D), government officials (G), international organisations and institutions officials (O), think tanks and consultancies (T).

practitioners in Turkey. And second, I faced the challenge of reaching the professionals working in the private energy companies behind the natural gas projects I discuss in the thesis. Unlike my initial expectations when I started this research, the government representatives, the diplomats and the officials working in international institutions and organisations proved to be the most accessible category of respondents.

The generous financial support offered by the Foundation for Science and Technology in Portugal for the thesis allowed me to conduct two important sets of field research. Thus, from September to December 2017 I was accepted as a researcher-in-residence at the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague, where I had the opportunity of having access to restricted and confidential documents related to the conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in South Caucasus. On this occasion, I investigated the conflict and cooperation dynamics of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, gaining valuable knowledge about the involvement of the major actors, such as the EU and OSCE in the European Eastern Neighbourhood, as well as about how countries like Azerbaijan engaged in linking energy projects to political goals related to conflict resolution.

Since April 2019 I have been participating in the EU's "Consultation Forum for Sustainable Energy in the Defence and Security Sector", implemented by the European Defence Agency in collaboration with the European Commission's Directorate General for Energy, the ministries of defence in EU Members States, and with the participation of representatives of the academia and industry. Thus, I had the opportunity of benefitting from a first-hand experience on how the EU is building its future policy and strategy in the field of energy and how the protection of critical energy infrastructure is considered under this framework. I have been taking part, on this occasion, in the Working Group dedicated to the Protection of Critical Energy Infrastructure in Europe, working on elaborating conceptual papers, such as the EU Guidance Document in the field of protecting critical energy infrastructure, and developing project ideas that would enhance the EU's resilience to energy-associated risks and threats.

Both the desk and the field experience helped shaping the thesis in its final form, by building knowledge and understanding on how the key actors shape their behaviour and actions when engaging in the conflict and cooperation dynamics around the major energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe, and how they define their roles and narratives around them.

III. Outline of the thesis

The research emerged from the puzzle identified when mirroring the highly politicised, conflict-oriented narratives around energy, and particular natural gas, to the relatively cooperative energy relations developed between the actors engaged in shaping the energy dynamics in Europe.

In order to elucidate the puzzle, I dedicate the first chapter to a thorough literature review of the main theories that engage with debating energy, conflict and cooperation. For the purpose of facilitating the debate in which I engage throughout the thesis about the material and non-material aspects of energy security, I propose imagining the main theoretical strands as displayed on a *spectrum*, as ranging from the material-based theories including various strands of realism and liberalism, as well as the two main bodies of literature on 'resource curse' and 'resource wars', going through what I call 'bridging theories' (neoclassical realism and constructivism) attempting to connect the material and non-material aspects of energy security, and ending with the critical security theories situated at the non-material, ideational end of the spectrum.

Acknowledging the fact that both material and non-material factors are essential and inter-related in shaping the energy dynamics, in the second chapter I focus on the material conditions that shape the complex energy dynamics around the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe. First, I explore the 'playfield', the arena of interaction between the main energy players discussed in this research, debating the conceptualisation of the Caspian-Black Sea region as a contested neighbourhood, as an arena of clashing interests of the rival big powers. In the second part of the chapter, I analyse the recent trends in the evolution of the gas market in Europe, in order to check whether the existing material conditions justify the politicisation and the increased anxieties around the gas imports in Europe and the regional projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe.

Chapter III is dedicated to exploring the energy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, as a necessary exercise to highlight how the three key actors narrate their motivations that underpin their cooperative and competing actions on the Caspian-Black Sea energy scene. For this purpose, a thorough investigation is performed into the main energy policy and strategy documents developed by the three actors, in order to reveal both their material, as well as their ontological considerations that form the foundation of the roles and identities they imagine for themselves on the international energy scene.

In Chapter IV, I look in more detail into how the energy dynamics analysed in the previous two chapters shaped and impacted on the faith of the two main natural gas pipeline projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe: the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, which are discussed under the concept of 'objects of fear', imported from the theory of *ontological security*, in order to check if and how the politicised narratives around them reflect the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* through which they have been realised.

The thesis concludes with Chapter V where I propose analysing the energy relationship between the EU, Russia and Turkey, and their dynamics as they were shaped along the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, under the spotlight of the *ontological security* and of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* frameworks. The purpose is to complement the research performed in the previous chapters related to the material motivations of the main energy players engaged in the natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, with challenging insights about their deeper, existential motivations that underpin their decisions and behaviour.

I. ENERGY AS SECURITY: OVERCOMING THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL REDUCTIONISM IN ENERGY LITERATURE

"Before the oil shock of 1973, the phrase 'politics of energy' would connote about as much meaning as 'politics of transportation' or 'politics of frozen orange juice trade'" (Molchanov, 2012:9).

Introduction

Unlike today, the concepts of energy security and trade wars were mostly absent from political discourses (Casier, 2011a; Molchanov, 2012). Despite the fact that, at present, the European Union (EU) is less dependent on Russian energy than a couple of decades ago, the relationship between the two actors seems to have deteriorated in the past years, with a shift of narratives more on the geopolitical side, concerned with issues of conflict, threats and security. A varied list of reasons that led to the politicisation of the energy discourse in Europe has been explored by authors stemming from different theoretical strands. Dependence, above all, has become the central point of concern and anxiety, while the gas and oil pipelines transporting Russian hydrocarbons to Europe being depicted as far as an "[...] umbilical cord" with [...] probable consequence for economic prosperity and political security" (Kirchner and Berk, 2010:864). The gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 and the subsequent gas interruptions, as well as the ongoing conflicts in the Caspian - Black Sea region have also been largely invoked as sources of discontent, mistrust and eventually politicisation of the energy relations between the EU and Russia.

The commercial disputes and the political tensions between Russia and Ukraine, the protracted conflicts in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea situated in the proximity of the main oil and natural gas pipelines, the annexation of Crimea, and, more recently, the more assertive role assumed by Turkey in the region, are considered to have altered the narratives of the energy actors in the region, with both the EU and Russia pressing for developing alternative projects for the transport of natural gas and oil. We thus witness an increased politicisation of the energy security discourse over the past two decades and a change in the public perception, considering the imports of hydrocarbons from the Caspian - Black Sea less in terms of economic interdependence and significantly more as a political risk and threat.

As such, the energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region with the European markets are often analysed in connection with the protracted conflicts in the Caucasus and around the Black Sea. On the one hand, the conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Eastern Ukraine, along with other perceived factors of risk and threats (the unpredictable relations between Russia and Turkey, the disputes between Turkey and Greece), and, more recently, the resurged conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh are depicted as a liability for the sustainability and safety of the gas and oil transit projects through the region. On the other hand, in a cyclic process, the initiation and development of competing pipelines backed-up either by Russia, or by the Western community, be it United States (U.S.) or EU-supported, is translated into a new source of division and rivalry, as the actors of the region are expected to follow political and military alignments along the energy projects. These observations are supported by a predominance in the energy-related literature of the traditional, material-focused and geopolitically-oriented approaches, mainly belonging to the neorealist, neoliberal, and resource-wars theories, where energy is placed in the context of conflicts, violence and competition.

Nevertheless, as Casier (2011a) notices, the nature of the EU-Russia relations remains predominantly economic and commercial at its core. An increased politicised and conflict-oriented discourse does not account for the non-conflicts and peaceful settlements in resource-rich and key transit areas, such as Ajaria, the autonomous neighbouring region of the breakaway Abkhazia in Georgia. Moreover, there are instances of durable cooperation in the oil and natural gas projects in the region that, although not on their own, might be expected to have contributed to the stabilisation of the political relations between states like Georgia and Azerbaijan. State actors like Turkey, Greece or Bulgaria have managed to successfully engage in both pipeline projects backed-up by Russia, as well as in those supported by the U.S. and the EU, defusing the idea of rival and mutually-exclusive projects in the energy games of the region. Most notably, despite the political tensions generated by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 by the Russian Federation, the energy trade, including the highly politicised natural gas trade between the EU and Russia continued unperturbed.

More recently, despite being engaged in an ongoing political conflict following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine, on 20 December 2019, Russia and Ukraine signed a new five-years gas transit deal, with the possibility of extending it to ten more years. The deal, complemented by a series of commercial concessions, such as the two countries' agreement to pay each other billions of U.S. dollars (USD) settlements thus renouncing legal actions filed against one another, was also sustained by conciliatory political

moves taken around the same date: granting special status by Kiev to the separatist Donbas region, the withdrawal of the Ukrainian military troops from three places on the frontline, and a full prisoners swap between Ukraine and the pro-Russian separatists (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Fisher 2019; Interfax, 2019; Khrennikova et al., 2019). These combined political and commercial actions came to contradict the highly pessimistic tone of the public and the academic discourse following the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The energy-related literature had already become increasingly populated by geopolitically-oriented views that warned about disruptive gas interruptions to Europe and about new military conflicts deriving from the use of gas an energy weapon (Smith, 2006; Baran, 2007; Klare, 2008; De Haas, 2010; Lucas, 2012). The politicisation trend in the academia went hand in hand with the evolution of energy as security for the EU, after its enlargement in 2004, with some of the new Member States, in Central and Eastern Europe, attempting to advance their historical anxieties about Russia on the energy agenda of the EU. The call for a European Energy Union thus urged for ending "Russia's energy stranglehold" (Tusk, 2014:1), aiming at putting an end to the European vulnerability in front of the hydrocarbons imports from Russia. Nonetheless, despite the calls for Europe to play a more geopolitical and interventionist role against its major gas supplier, the Energy Union adopted in 2015 focuses mostly on the single market, the environment and climate protection, even if leaving space for a more assertive role of the EU as a foreign actor.

Impelled by these apparent contradictions, I explore thoroughly in this chapter the various factors that have led to an alike shift of narratives and I investigate beyond the appearance of conflict and material circumstances, in order to reveal the vast complexity of forces that drive the energy dynamics in Europe.

I start with identifying the main reductionist biases encountered in literature concerning the energy relations in Europe, while continuing afterwards to examine in detail these various forms of reductionism. Drawing from this reviewing exercise, I then advance to the final part of the chapter where a new theoretical framework is proposed, as well as a new concept in order to counter the biases, and to better interpret and understand the complex energy dynamics in Europe, beyond a conflict-dominated and a material-based approach.

The energy-related academic work, particularly the literature concerned with the energy relationship between Russia and its European customers in the decades following the end of the Cold War, has been prejudiced by what I examine in this chapter as a double major

reductionism: the theoretical reductionism and the conceptual reductionism, each of them with two distinct self-contained biases.

I dedicate therefore the first section to debating the **theoretical reductionism**, under which I identify two main biases: the *geopolitical reductionism*, the main bearer of bias, contained mostly by the realist, liberal and resource war-oriented strands of literature; and the *critical reductionism*, where I explore the limitations of the critical security literature in the field of energy. The second section deals with what I recognise as the **conceptual reductionism**, where I review and comment on other two major biases: first, on the restrictions of conceptualising *conflict and cooperation* as binary, opposite concepts; and secondly, on the limits imposed on the concept of *energy security* by its interpretation, particularly in the past years, through predominantly material lenses, while disregarding or incompletely acknowledging the role of non-material factors that impact on energy dynamics.

Throughout the literature review I refer to what I call a theoretical *spectrum* that places the theories I discuss on a continuum ranging from the material end (theoretical strands overwhelmingly focused with material, objective understandings of energy, security and conflict), going through bridging theories that allow for both material and ideational factors to explain energy dynamics, and finally reaching the non-material end of the *spectrum* where those theories that engage mostly with the non-material, ideational aspects of security are located.

I start from the main biases identified under the theoretical and conceptual reductionism I discuss and, without dismissing the valuable contribution of the theories I review, nor of the material components of energy security, I propose the use of two new instruments that would help better explain how actors' decisions towards a more conflictual or cooperative path, or towards both at the same time, are formed and motivated on the energy scene of Europe.

Thus, in the section where I discuss the conceptual reductionism related to framing conflict and cooperation as binary, opposing concepts, I suggest a new conceptual tool, the ***conflict-cooperation perpetuum***, an instrument I developed in order to conceptualise conflict and cooperation in the energy field as co-existing concepts. I argue therefore that actors may perceive themselves simultaneously as security threats and reliable partners, that political conflict and economic cooperation, and their reverse, may occur at the same time.

The second instrument I propose is a theoretical tool, the theoretical framework of ***ontological security*** which I debate in the final section of this chapter. I engage with concepts reviewed in the first sections in the intention to correct their biases, as the application of an

ontological security approach and of psychological insights to energy and security studies and to international relations (IR) brings the added value of enriching the existing research with insights regarding the cognitive and emotional foundations of decisions security-seeking actors make in the field of energy.

I. Theoretical reductionism in interpreting and understanding energy relations in Europe

The past decades of the Cold War and the years following its end have been marked by a liberal approach to the fossil fuels imports from the Soviet Union to Europe, when members of the European Commission and other neutral states started to import natural gas and oil through the pipelines build during this period, thus transgressing the political divisions of the Iron Curtain (Siddi, 2017a). In 1993, Poland agreed with Moscow on the construction of the Yamal natural gas pipeline, while throughout the late 1990s and mid-2000s Gazprom and several European companies joined the venture of the Nord Stream pipeline. During this period, the energy relations were mostly regarded as a commercial bond, as a mutual economic dependence between Eastern and Western Europe (Siddi, 2017a). In the 1990s, the logic of the international energy relations was still predominantly an economic one. The high point of this logic was arguably the Energy Charter Treaty, which aimed to provide investment protection for western companies operating in the former Soviet Union, as those former Soviet states (including Russia) sought western foreign direct investment.

These specific energy dynamics took place within and in close connection with the general trends of the post-Cold War transformations. Thus, in the general framework of optimism at the end of the Cold War, the geopolitical preoccupations for power, sovereignty and territory of the Westphalian state were replaced by the liberal concerns of the 'competition state' for interdependence, trade and market logics (Browning, 2018b). Nevertheless, such a "[...]disjuncture between the geopolitical and the (geo)economic is overstated", as "[...](geo)economic and geopolitical worlds have actually become mutually imbricated and intertwined" (Browning, 2018b:108). This period of liberal optimism was not spared of geopolitical considerations and of politicisation of narratives also with regard to the energy trade between Russia and the EU. Russia's dominance as a single supplier for many of the post-Socialist states led the EU and the U.S. to engage in supporting the construction of

alternative pipelines that would bypass Russia, in an attempt to reduce dependency on a single supplier and seek alternative sources and routes.

The early 2000s however marked a sharp turn in the perceptions on the import of hydrocarbons from Russia. The more assertive Russia, backed by a stronger economy based on higher energy prices, began to challenge the unipolar system led by the U.S. and the Western presence in the former Soviet space, in order to restore Moscow's role and prestige in the region. The political competition mirrored itself also in the energy relations (Siddi, 2017a). As a consequence, the 2000s reflected a paradigm shift (Stoddard, 2013), a transition to a predominant geopolitical approach which gave rise to a new terminology of 'energy security', 'energy diplomacy', 'energy dependence', 'the geopolitics of energy' (Casier, 2011a). Security of supply gained wider acknowledgment, the political actors took a larger involvement in energy policy which acquired a more political meaning (Stoddard, 2013). The liberal view on energy relations as trade under interdependence gave more room to the geopolitical interpretation of energy and natural resources as a potential for confrontation and conflict.

Once again, however, there was no total disjuncture between the liberal and the geopolitical approach. The paradigm shift did not imply a total dismissal of the liberal approach, but rather a mixture of liberal and geopolitical interpretations of energy, as the liberal view persisted in alternation with the geopolitical one, until the early 2000s and it is still reflected in the European Commission's "Country Strategy Paper for Russia" (2007), where the energy trade with the Russian Federation is depicted as holding a great potential for future growth and cooperation, in a market-oriented, conflict-free approach towards the relations with Russia (Siddi, 2017a:365).

Consequently, the political and the academic discourses of the past two decades around the natural gas imports from the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe have witnessed an increased politicisation, being often linked to the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea, to the gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine and to the annexation of Crimea. As a consequence, the natural resources and the energy projects in the region have been increasingly placed in a geopolitical, material-power based view (Ross, 1999; De Soysa, 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Newman, 2004), with energy security becoming a geopolitical issue, moving from the economic sphere into a predominantly political one (Dannreuther, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Cragg, 2013; Ostrowski, 2013; Sharples, 2013; Stoddard, 2013; Dusciac et al., 2016). The literature appears thus to be dominated by a material interpretation of the energy dynamics and pipeline projects through the theoretical

lenses of neorealism, neoliberalism and of the various strands belonging to the 'resource curse' and 'resource wars' theories, which I herewith review in this chapter.

I start therefore by exploring the two main biases I identify within the theoretical reductionism: the *geopolitical reductionism* contained mostly by the realist, liberal and resource wars-oriented strands of literature; and the *critical reductionism*, where I discuss the limitations of the critical security literature in the field of energy studies.

1. Geopolitical reductionism: energy (re)sources of conflict

1.1. The (energy) security dilemma bias

If in the 1980s-1990s, natural gas and oil were regarded mainly as economic issues and analysed in the framework of market efficiency, starting with the 2000s, the hydrocarbons reached the political agenda (Ostrowski, 2013) and became increasingly politicised (Dannreuther, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Cragg, 2013; Ostrowski, 2013; Sharples, 2013; Stoddard, 2013; Dusciac et al., 2016; Siddi, 2017a), in the context of the rise of emerging powers, upsurge in the commodity price and a more interventionist presence of the state in the oil and gas markets (Dannreuther, 2013a; Ostrowski, 2013). From the mid 1990s, most of the IR literature dealing with the Caspian region has been set in a realist geopolitical paradigm (Dannreuther, 2010), analysing the region and its interaction with the international system, through the prism of the post-Cold War conflicts. In the post-Soviet space, it was placed in the framework of the 'New Great Game', a reference expression used by the journalists of the mid-1990s in order to describe the new geopolitical competition for the hydrocarbon resources in Central Asia. In the South Caucasus specifically, the geopolitical paradigm focused on the so-called 'Deal of the Century'. In September 1994, the government of Azerbaijan signed the 'Deal of the Century', a contract with the Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC), a consortium of Western companies led by British Petroleum (BP), for the exploitation of three major hydrocarbons fields at the Caspian Sea (Gulbrandsen and Moe, 2007; Kaldor, 2007; Ibrahimov, 2010) and producing 80 percent (%) of Azerbaijan's oil, in order to export it to Europe (Smith Stegen and Kusznir, 2015).

This paradigm is rooted in the broader IR literature dominated by geopolitical assumptions, mainly drawing from the realist-oriented, but also from the liberal-influenced strands of literature. For the neorealists, the debate on energy and resources in the Caspian-Black Sea region has been depicted as a zero-sum game with the EU and the U.S. on the one

hand, and Russia on the other hand, as competing protagonists (Dannreuther, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Siddi, 2017a). The gains of one party are seen to automatically imply the loss of the other, while by trying to get control over energy production and transmission, states seek to strengthen their relative position in the international system, therefore pointing to a potential energy security dilemma (Casier, 2011a). Resources have been closely interlinked with violence and war, with states as main actors concerned about their survival translated into unperturbed access to resources (Dannreuther, 2013b).

Both realism and neoliberalism start from the same point: states live in a state of anarchy and the absence of a central authority able to enforce binding agreements (Waltz, 1979; Milner, 1992; Majeski and Fricks, 1995; Jervis, 1999; Glaser, 1994; 2010; Lebow, 2007; Nye, 2007; Thorun, 2009; Dannreuther, 2010; Zartman, 2010; Levy, 2013) offers states the opportunity of pursuing their interests unilaterally (Jervis, 1999; Zartman, 2010) and showing little incentives for cooperation (Milner, 1992; Jervis, 1985; 1999).

For the offensive realism, first postulated by Mearsheimer, anarchy, or the absence of a central global authority, encourages expansionist goals of states in their attempt to maximise their economic and military power relative to other states and to survive, when the benefits of pursuing expansion outweigh the costs of it (Mearsheimer, 2002; 2006; Taliaferro, 2000-2001). This, in turn, hinders the chances for cooperation and engages states in a zero-sum competition (Mearsheimer, 2002). Mearsheimer (2006) bases his explanation of the international order on five main assumptions expected to act together: "great powers are the main actors in world politics and they operate in an anarchic system" (p.73); all states have some offensive military capabilities that allow them to potentially harm other states; states are uncertain about the intentions of other states; their main goal is survival; and "states are rational actors" (p. 74).

For Mearsheimer's offensive realism, anarchy drives states to maximise their relative power, while for Waltz's defensive neorealism, states are rather concerned with preventing relative losses (Toft, 2005). It is at this point where conflict emerges from the *security dilemma*, the situation where a party seeking to ensure its security is increasing its capabilities, but such measures are perceived by the other party as a threat and thus it will respond with its own defensive actions threatening its adversary even more in return (Jervis, 1999; Glaser, 2010; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Levy, 2013). This will lead thereby to a conflict spiral (Levy, 2013:582) in which a security-seeking state would choose a competitive strategy over a cooperative one (Glaser, 2010).

For defensive realists, the severity of the security dilemma is influenced by structural modifiers (such as the offence-defence balance, geographic proximity and access to raw materials), which may increase or decrease the likelihood of conflict (Taliaferro, 2000-2001:131). Unlike Mearsheimer's offensive realism, defensive realism dismisses the idea that the security dilemma necessarily leads to conflict and that cooperation is nearly impossible. It argues, in exchange, that "cooperation is risky, but so is competition" (Taliaferro, 2000-2001:138), as states are uncertain about the consequences of engaging in a conflict. It looks deeper into the conditions under which international cooperation and less competitive behaviour become possible (Taliaferro, 2000-2001). Offensive realism tends to predict more conflict and war than defensive realism, seeing states engaged in a limitless struggle for power and security under anarchy (Snyder, 2002). Thus, "[...] war is a legitimate instrument of statecraft" (Mearsheimer, 2002:25). For Waltz's defensive realism however, states prefer to balance power rather than to maximise it, being content with less security (Snyder, 2002). States will attempt to achieve their goals without the use of force which may foster peace (Walt, 1998).

According to Walt (1998:619), the security dilemma reflects the situation where measures that increase one state's security, even if for defensive purposes, decrease that of others. As a consequence, in an anarchic system, war occurs if all parties seek power, but also if all states seek only to ensure their own security. Thus, "war is normal" and "peace is fragile" (p. 620).

The deterioration of the political aspect of energy relations between the EU and Russia in the past years has been often placed in a realist framework of debate and analysed through geopolitical lenses based on the theoretical assumptions detailed above, stemming from the broader IR literature. It has been reflected in a change of discourse on both sides, with Brussels and Moscow committing themselves to reduce mutual dependency and look for alternative markets, respectively suppliers. As a consequence, Russia has oriented itself towards Turkey and East Asia, while the EU sought alternative sources of supply in the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus (Judge et al., 2016). The need for diversification has thus been interpreted as efforts to increase the actors' own energy security, be it the security of demand, as in the case of Russia, or the security of supply, for the EU. Consequently, it has been warned that such attempts to augment one's energy security may increment the other side's concerns and anxiety and thus lead to own efforts to build up energy security capabilities. This, in turn, may induce an *energy security dilemma* (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Sharples, 2011; Judge et al., 2016). For Kirchner and Berk

(2010), it is specifically the different understanding over what energy security is for Russia and the EU, security of demand versus security of supply, that led to a deterioration of their relationship.

Nevertheless, the energy security dilemma is one of the main biases of the geopolitical reductionism encountered in literature and I agree with Judge et al. (2016) that such an interpretation disregards the complex dynamics in the energy relations that could facilitate cooperation. Reducing the actors' decisions and adjustments to new realities, to the anxieties that drive them into conflict, ignores the vast range of options available to them and the multiple strategies they may choose to follow at different times, based on different experiences and needs. It is a conflict-centric approach that dismisses the multiple possibilities a situation of conflict or competition can generate as a follow-up. The choice a state will make, towards conflict or cooperation, or for both at the same time, is determined not only by external constraints or the distribution of power, as stated by the realists, but also by the state's ideas and goals, in a mixture of social and material nature of the environment in which states act (Thorun, 2009:22-23).

As I argue in the final section of this chapter, where I discuss thoroughly a new theoretical framework, that of ontological security, in order to explain the actors' conflictual or cooperative choices and behaviour, "persistent security dilemmas can be seen as routinised relationships" (Mitzen, 2006:5). Actors are attached to their routines, so they also become attached to their security dilemmas, which become part of their identity in relation with the others, and thus it is difficult for them to let go as this would imply a disruption of their identity, of who they are according to their narrative about the self. Therefore, "[...] this is not security dilemma anymore, it is a preference for conflict" Mitzen (2006:36), and these are "[...] not dilemmas at all, but straightforward habitual routines of enmity and amity" (Hopf, 2010:540). Nonetheless, as I explain later in more detail, although routines are hard to change, actors do not always remain trapped in habitual conflictual attachments: they may instead choose to adapt their routines to the new circumstances in order to defuse a conflict and pursue cooperation.

1.2. The 'Othering' bias: antithetic actors as opposing parts of an asymmetric interdependence

The EU's increased concerns over energy imports from the Russian Federation, despite the decreasing energy dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, led to a change in perception that

triggered a narrative shift, with the EU openly concerned about its change of status in the energy interdependence tandem with Russia, from the powerful half, to the vulnerable one. At the same time, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU opened the door to an input of different perceptions on Russian gas imports and on the EU's vulnerability to them, brought along by some of the new Member States (Casier, 2011b; Austvik, 2016; Dusciac et al., 2016; Siddi, 2018a), countries of the former communist bloc. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU has adopted a more geopolitical tone in its narratives about the energy trade with Russia. The energy security has thus been reconceptualised as the EU seems less keen on leaving it in the hands of markets and market instruments (Kuzemko, 2014) and hence adopting a more interventionist role in ensuring the security of supply (Kuzemko, 2014; Prontera, 2017).

More and more over the past decade, an antithesis between the market liberal EU and the unreliable, resource nationalist Russia has gained ground in the increasingly politicised energy narratives around the gas trade in Europe (Kuzemko, 2014; Romanova, 2016), opening the way to another frequent geopolitical reductionist bias, that of an antithetic image of the liberal EU versus the norm-breaker, realist Russia, leading to the 'Othering' of Russia.

Russia's growing energy assertiveness and resource nationalism starting with the mid-2000s has been largely depicted as a deviation from the norm, from the EU-led liberal direction, as a threat to the EU's energy security. As a consequence, it has been understood that the EU's energy relations with Russia should be "normalised", that the deviation must be corrected through a return to the market liberal path (Kuzemko, 2014:59). Under this discourse, Russia is constructed "as the object to be acted upon, the diseased that needs to be cured" (Browning, 2003:48), while the West is dedicated to its self-narratives as a civilising power, a process imported by Browning (2003) from social psychology and named "altercasting" (p. 58), a concept on which I return later in this thesis when I apply the theoretical framework of ontological security in order to understand the complex nature of these relations.

The EU and Russia have been imagined as two actors holding opposing visions of international relations and, consequently, of energy governance. Under this binary representation, the EU has been credited with holding a post-modern vision of international relations, where cooperation is seen as a day-to-day dialogue between mid-level officials, while Russia perseveres in a classical realist interpretation of international relations, with cooperation being forged between top level officials (Romanova, 2008). The opposing portrayal of the two actors is also transferred into the energy realm, where Russia is

considered to prioritise reciprocity and equality between partners under the supervision of the state, while the EU is seen as promoting a stable legal regime having energy liberalisation at its core (Romanova, 2008).

The 'Othering' of Russia has thus led to portraying it as a "liminal case of European identity" situated outside Europe (Siddi, 2018a:15). Although at the end of the Cold War the threat perception over Russia had significantly decreased and energy trade was largely regarded as the economic foundation of political cooperation (Siddi, 2018a), in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the portrayal of Russia as the enemy, as the malevolent 'Other' persisted. Historical arguments have been invoked in order to maintain the image of an enduring enemy and threat. However, Europe is not a homogeneous actor, and while the newer Member States have been striving to imprint their vision on the EU's political and energy agenda, the older Member States in Western Europe have proven less kin to sacrifice the hydrocarbons imports from Russia for the sake of historical fears which they often did not share, sometimes based on different past experiences in rapport with Moscow, and other times on different levels of dependence on Russian energy supplies (Khrushcheva, 2011; Kratochvíl and Tichý, 2013; Siddi, 2018a). Nonetheless, the 'Othering' of Russia and the antithetic representation of the EU and Russia seems to prevail in the energy narratives of the past decade.

An alike interpretation of the two actors as the opposing poles of an antithesis, the liberal EU and the geopolitical Russia is undoubtedly reductionist as it ignores the multiple roles that actors play and the interchangeability of these roles, as well as the wider global context in which they act. Kremlin's firm intervention in the energy sector follows the trend at international level where more states have adopted a state-led approach to energy governance, such as China, India and Venezuela, and where state-owned oil and gas companies control most of the world's proven resources (Kuzemko, 2014). Moreover, although Russia has undeniably used a geopolitical approach with respect to its external energy policy, especially with respect to ownership unbundling and pipelines construction (Romanova, 2016), it has also increasingly used a market approach in its relations with the EU (Romanova, 2016; Siddi, 2018b), as it happened when it accepted the EU's regulatory approach in the antitrust dispute with the European Commission (Siddi, 2018b). In its own turn, despite the fact that the EU has mostly followed the market liberal paradigm, it has also embraced a geopolitical role itself, particularly with respect to the security of gas supply, adopting a more interventionist approach and a direct involvement in pipeline politics

(Kuzemko, 2014; Prontera, 2017; Siddi, 2018b), as it happened in the case of the Southern Gas Corridor and previously in the case of the Nabucco pipeline project.

I agree here with Siddi (2018b) that both the EU and Russia have started to utilise a combined approach to energy, mixing their traditional attitudes towards energy with other strategies as well, using simultaneously different types of power. And I also subscribe to Browning's (2018b) argument that the EU's actions are also geopolitical and are based on its own need to preserve its sense of psychological security, of order and stability, adopting a geopolitical language in order to calm its own existential anxieties about the self, namely its concern about the Union's ability to become a key player in world politics (Browning, 2018b). I explore in more detail this argument later in the last chapter, where I deal with the actors' need to enforce their ontological energy security in addition to the physical security, in their relationships with the others. For the time, I conclude that clashing narratives about the EU-Russia energy roles underpin the reductionist bias of portraying the two actors as trapped within fixed, unchangeable and opposing roles, or, as Judge et al. (2016:754) have expressed it, as holding "fundamentally incompatible self-images and world views". Under this limited understanding, the EU's narrative about the self and about Russia is seen as competing with that of Russia's about the self and about Europe (Browning, 2018b; Della Sala, 2018).

I find the 'Othering' bias closely connected to the realist and liberal concerns about an *asymmetric interdependence* between the EU and Russia. Adepts of the neoliberal approach affirm that, despite efforts in the recent years towards diversification of the energy resources and transportation routes, the EU still finds itself in an asymmetric interdependence relation to Russia, as a single natural gas supplier. This is justified in the context of depletion of its own resources in the North Sea, of the enlargement of the EU and of a growing gas demand and consumption.

Neorealists too are concerned with the security threat posed by an asymmetric dependence in the energy relations, fearing that the advantaged side would use this imbalance as a leverage tool against the more dependent side (Barbieri and Schneider, 1999). Concretely, they warn against Russia's intentions to interrupt vital gas flows to Europe as a tool to leverage a political conflict in its favour. For the neorealists, interdependence is a vulnerability opening the way to conflict between states in order to secure access to economic resources (Copeland, 1996; Barbieri and Schneider, 1999; Pevehouse, 2004; Maoz, 2009; Dannreuther, 2013b). From this perspective, predominantly after the gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine (2006 and 2009) and the annexation of Crimea (2014), the

natural gas imports from the Russian Federation to Europe have been largely depicted under the 'energy weapon argument', stating Russia's intention of using its status of main gas exporter as leverage on the European consumer states and as a tool of political pressure and foreign policy instrument in its relations with the countries in its former sphere of influence (Smith, 2006; Baran, 2007; Klare, 2008; De Haas, 2010; Lucas, 2012). I return to this aspect in the next part, where I analyse the reductionist implications of the energy weapon argument on the IR literature of the past years.

As mentioned above, realism sees interdependence as a mutual dependence and thus as a vulnerability giving states incentives to choose war in order to secure access to economic resources (Waltz, 1979; Copeland, 1996; Barbieri and Schneider, 1999; Pevehouse, 2004; Dannreuther, 2013b). In a reconciling tone, Nye (2007:210) states that the mutual dependence implied by interdependence is neither good nor bad, while Copeland (1996:7) argues that "high interdependence can be either peace-inducing or war-inducing, depending on the expectations of future trade". This last approach is proposed as a bridge between the liberal and the realist views on interdependence, by assuming that interdependence may foster peace (in a liberal perspective) but only when they fear trade disruptions, states have low trade expectations (similar to the realist concerns). As a consequence, in an asymmetric interdependence, the most dependent states are expected to be the most likely to initiate war, fearing the loss of the economic wealth supporting their security (Copeland, 1996:7), while being less dependent can be a source of power (Nye, 2007).

Nevertheless, the ability of trade to impact on the cooperation and conflict dynamics of the parties involved depends on the degree of symmetry of the relations between them (Zürn, 2013). An interdependence based on a short-term sensitivity refers to how much and how fast mutual dependence makes changes in one part of the system impact in another part (Nye, 2007). Whereas a long-term vulnerability interdependence refers to the costs of disrupting the relationship by exiting the system or of changing the rules of the game (Nye, 2007; Zürn, 2013). Vulnerability is however influenced by the ability of a society to respond quickly to change, to the existence of substitutes and to the availability of diverse sources of supply (Nye, 2007).

Therefore, interdependence is relative. What the neoliberal and neorealist narratives fail to explore is the role of psychological factors in defining interdependence as a threat. There is little concrete evidence to support the justifications offered by the neoliberal literature, as in reality the Russian gas imports in the EU have decreased for the past years as a consequence of a lower demand (Yafimava, 2015; Wiśniewski, 2015; Dusciac et al., 2016).

The increased concerns over energy imports despite the decreasing energy demands have been attributed, in a constructivist approach, to "shifting perceptions and identities" (Casier, 2011b:536), as Russia has developed a more assertive self-perception after the beginning of the 2000s, being more aware of its increased material capabilities, especially in the field of energy resources, while the EU changed the perception on itself, from the powerful half, to the vulnerable one in the asymmetric dependency with Russia. At the same time, the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU did not lead to higher energy concerns due to an increased gas dependency, but rather due to an input of different perceptions on Russian gas imports and on the EU's vulnerability to them, brought along by some of the new Member States (Casier, 2011b; Austvik, 2016; Dusciac et al., 2016; Siddi, 2018a), countries of the former communist bloc. Similarly, a high interdependence does not necessarily translate into a security threat, since it relies on the nature of relations between the supplier and the consumer country. The level of perceived threat and thus politicisation is lower, despite higher energy interdependence, in the case of a beneficiary state in a friendly relation with the supplier state, as in the instance of the Georgian-Azerbaijani interdependence (Azerbaijan needs Georgia to transport its hydrocarbons, while Georgia needs Azerbaijan to supply them), which has actually led to a positive pattern of cooperation between the two. Furthermore, the diversification of the internal market and the fuel mix in the economy of the consumer states should also be taken into account. As an example, although it appears that Finland has a 100% dependency on the Russian gas, in reality, only 11% of its energy consumption is based on natural gas, nuclear power being the source predominating in its energy mix (IEA, 2014).

Therefore, as briefly exposed above, there are both material and non-material factors that come to explain together the limitations of the asymmetric interdependence bias, as part of the larger geopolitical reductionism encountered in literature. I discuss both categories of factors in the final chapter, concentrating on the role of psychological factors that drive actors' perceptions on themselves and on the others, as well as on the relationship between them.

Regarding the 'Othering' bias exposed here above, the difference does not necessarily translate into a threat and the 'Other' is not forcibly an enemy. If an actor is ontologically secure about itself, it might also treat the different other as a friend or with indifference (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010). The threatening 'Other' and stigma may occur when an actor experiences a state of insecurity regarding the self, a state of ontological insecurity about its own identity and place in the world.

1.3. The energy weapon bias

The 'Othering' of Russia debated in the previous section is a geopolitical reductionist bias that understands energy relations as part of a zero-sum game between a post-modern, liberal EU and a modern, mercantilist Russia, using energy resources to advance its power-driven goals at international level (Judge et al., 2016:754). Thus, this opens the door to another frequently encountered reductionist bias, of geopolitical influence, that of the 'energy weapon' argument.

The adepts of realism prioritise the geopolitical distribution of power and, unlike liberals, pay less attention to state-company relations and are sceptical about the role of institutions in conflict transformation (Dannreuther, 2010). The focus is rather on inter-state conflicts than on local, economic conflicts, as well as on competition among great powers to control the resources (Dannreuther, 2010; Siddi, 2017a), seen as an ingredient of national power and as a potential weapon. In the realist view, the EU's gas imports from Russia are seen as a weakness, a supply vulnerability. Nevertheless, besides proving to be reductionist by ignoring the complexity of actors, interactions and interests formation in the energy relations, such geopolitical interpretations are not supported by facts. Since 2000, the share of the Russian gas in the total EU imports decreased by approximately 10%, despite the EU's enlargement with countries highly dependent on Russian gas (Siddi, 2018a). Furthermore, the strongly politicised flow of Russian gas through Ukraine, decreased from 80% to 39% in 2015, after the inauguration of the Nord Stream pipeline (Siddi, 2018a).

It has however been widely argued, in the past two decades, that Moscow is deliberately using Europe's dependence on its hydrocarbons in order to exert influence and leverage on the importing countries and advance its foreign policy goals. Nonetheless, not all natural resources share the same potential for conflict or cooperation. It has been stated that the gas industry is much less geopolitical than the oil business (Cragg, 2013; Ostrowski, 2013), due to its "localism" (Cragg, 2013:60). Because of the fact that natural gas could not be shipped abroad as oil, in tankers, and it depends on terrestrial pipelines to be transported, it did not acquire the same international dimension as oil, until the construction of the long-distance large diameter pipelines in the former Soviet Union and the development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) (Cragg, 2013). Also, unlike oil and minerals, the European gas industry is not connected to the postcolonial conflicts, being born in the global North and developed later in Western Europe and the Soviet Union, while also failing to produce rents similar to the one generated by oil (Ostrowski, 2013:235). As a consequence, until the last couple of decades, it has not been part of the energy security discourse and of its

politicisation, being largely confined to business and trade. In the same line, oil seems to be more associated with international conflicts, while gas is more related to regional disputes (Ostrowski, 2013).

Likewise, despite the fact that the gas trade with Russia has been increasingly politicised in the past years, mainly due to the input brought by the newer EU Member States confronted with a lack of alternatives to Russian gas imports (such as the Baltic States, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia), doubled by a historically-motivated mistrust of Russia, the overall energy relationship between Russia and the EU has not been much affected by the politicisation of narratives. This happened because the majority of Russian gas exports is destined to its Western European consumers, which do not share a traumatising history of Tsarist and Soviet domination like their Central-Eastern European fellow Member States. Moreover, they have a history of uninterrupted cooperation in the gas trade with the Soviet Union, and later with Russia (Siddi, 2017a), which helps advancing their more pragmatic, economic-oriented goals.

However, Casier (2011a) and Siddi (2018a) argue that it is precisely the difference between oil and gas that makes natural gas more likely to be used as a political weapon, since oil has a larger transportation and trading flexibility, being shipped by various means which allow for alternatives in case of disruptions. Natural gas, on the other hand, is still transported mainly by pipelines, mostly from Russia, Norway and Algeria, which may display several vulnerabilities, allowing both an economic and a geopolitical leverage and influence to the transit countries, through the political control they hold over the pipelines and the fees they can charge. Thus, the dependence of gas supply to fixed networks of transportation makes it less flexible and more vulnerable than oil and coal (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Casier, 2011a).

Under the energy weapon argument, authors like Baran (2007) see the bilateral agreements concluded between Russia and various EU Member States as Moscow's strategy to employ a divide and conquer strategy, making use of the EU's lack of cohesion in the energy field. Russia's leverage has been understood as its ability to turn the European countries against each other and undermining even more the EU cohesion, by signing preferential deals with some countries (Mankoff, 2009). Thus, the different pricing argument has been largely employed to demonstrate how Russia utilised preferential prices for its hydrocarbons in order to reward and keep close countries considered to be friendly, while imposing higher prices on those who sought EU and NATO membership (Austvik, 2016). As an example, while a decade ago Georgia was charged 235 USD per thousand cubic meter of gas, Belarus was, at the time, offered a price of 46 USD and Ukraine 135 USD (Smith

Stegen, 2011). Nevertheless, as rightly noticed by Smith Stegen (2011), in order for the different pricing to become a successful energy weapon, the targeted state must change its behaviour in response to threats, or maintain its support in response to rewards, and any disruption in supply becomes a potential weapon not randomly, but in accordance to the timing chosen. Moreover, while it is true that in the past Russia has made use of preferential pricing in exchange for political gains, as it happened when it offered Ukraine lower gas prices in return for the stationing of the Russian fleet in Sevastopol, Crimea, many price augments and disruptions in the past years have been rather of a commercial nature, or a punitive measure for non-payment of debts (Smith Stegen, 2011; Siddi, 2018a).

The discussions around the use of different pricing as an energy weapon are closely coupled to the widely debated gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009, and the subsequent supply disruptions during the peak winter time of these years. On the 1st of January 2006, Gazprom decided to cut the gas supplies through Ukraine, for three days, following a ten-months dispute over the price of Russian gas supplied and the transit fees charged by Ukraine. Russia accused Ukraine of diverting gas from the pipelines, gas which was supposed to reach the European consumers, an accusation which, although initially denied, was finally admitted by the Ukrainian national gas company, Naftogaz. Three years later, in January 2009, the Russian gas transit through Ukraine was once more halted by Gazprom, following Kiev's refusal to pay the debts owed to the supplier. More accusations of Ukraine diverting gas from the pipelines followed and, in June 2010, the Stockholm court of arbitration ruled that Naftogaz must return 12.1 bcm of gas to RusUkrEnergo, a controversial intermediary company, based in Switzerland, set up by Gazprom and Centragas Holding AG (Interfax, 2010[2]). Although these have been acknowledged as commercial disputes in their nature and despite being very short as length in time, the gas interruptions which affected not only Ukraine, but also several other European countries in the winters of 2006 and 2009 were highly politicised and received large public attention. A predominance of narratives about the threat of Russia cutting the gas supplies to Europe and to its neighbours flourished.

However, economists consider that these incidents are sporadic and random, and that the market forces will follow their logic excluding this type of behaviour on the long-term (Pollins, 1989; Siddi, 2017a). Moreover, the energy weapon argument does not take into account the fact that the interdependence goes both ways: Russia is also still relying on the

[2] The decisions of the Arbitration Institute of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce are not public and they benefit from the non-disclosure option available to parties (i.e. Gazprom and Naftogaz). For this reason, only secondary sources can be used in reference to the content of the decisions. In some cases, the parties have decided to make public parts of the decisions, as it is the case of the examples here provided.

energy export routes through Ukraine, and it is as well dependent on selling its natural gas to Europe, the main importer of Russian hydrocarbons, and a suspension of its gas exports would have devastating effects on the Russian economy (Molchanov, 2012). Gazprom itself has adopted a more pragmatic approach, pursuing the maximisation of profits and reducing losses (Mankoff, 2009; Molchanov, 2012) for which stable exports and contracts with the European partners are highly important. The mutual interdependence between Russia and Europe was very clear even during the Cold War when gas supplies were never interrupted (Dannreuther, 2013b; Molchanov, 2012).

The gas transit dispute with Ukraine in 2006 was often used as an example of the Russian government using the 'gas weapon' through its proxy, Gazprom, in order to keep Ukraine in its sphere of political influence and control (Baran, 2007; Klare, 2008; Lucas, 2012). According to Roman Nitsovych[3], Research Director at the think-tank DiXi Group in Ukraine, "Gazprom is another tower of Kremlin, it is not a pure economic actor". Nevertheless, it has been counter-argued that the dispute had mainly an economic goal, aiming to establish market-based prices and to reduce the subsidies offered by Russia to the Ukrainian economy, and not to punish Ukraine, as similar augmentations of gas prices had also been requested for Russia's close allies at the time, Armenia and Belarus (Mankoff, 2009; Tsygankov, 2016). The 2009 Ukrainian gas crisis was also portrayed as a conflict in which Russia used the 'energy weapon' in order to force Ukraine to comply with Moscow's political directions. However, this dispute had far more complex reasons, also of a commercial nature, although it did have an impact on the European perceptions of natural gas imports from Russia, seen, thereafter, in a context of a security threat (Siddi, 2017a).

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Ukrainian crisis have brought the 'energy weapon' argument to even higher levels of popularity and neorealist, geopolitical approaches took the stage. However, against this argument, it has been stated that the EU-Russia energy trade increased in volume during the crisis, with the Russian gas exports to Europe and Turkey raising from 161.5 bcm in 2013 to 179.3 bcm in 2016 (Siddi, 2017a). Furthermore, the gas flow to Europe was never interrupted during the crisis as the EU-Russia energy relations continued to follow a commercial logic (Casier, 2016b; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019b; Siddi, 2020). Nevertheless, there were instances where the border between the political and the economic goals in Moscow's intentions was not very clear regarding the complex role of its natural gas exports, such as in 2010 when it offered Ukraine a discount in gas prices in

[3] T6: Interview conducted on 26 May 2020.

exchange for allowing the Russian naval troops to be stationed in Sevastopol, Crimea. Commercial and geopolitical reasons intertwined in forming the material foundations of Russia's actions.

While I disagree with the politicisation of energy to the degree of allocating it war-like connotations, for reasons I explain thoroughly in this project, I do find it useful to mention here that the use of energy exports by Russia has not been completely void of the intention to obtain, at times, various political and economic gains. Therefore, I draw the difference between using energy in order to increase one's political and economic status and, sometimes, even leverage on the markets, and the use of energy exports as a weapon, as an instrument of war and destruction against others. The difference lies in the object of the intention: in the first case, the object of using energy to advance political and economic goals is Russia itself, its need to better its status and role in the world. In the second case, the object is the 'other', in this case the importing and transit states, depicted as victims of an international energy war led by the exporting states against them.

For this purpose, I use here Balmaceda's (2008) thorough analysis of the various instances and modalities where Russia did make use of its energy exports in order to consolidate its political and economic power and to counter its competitors. One modality employed by Russia is to create new dependencies, in addition to the already existing ones inherited from the Soviet Union, such as the pipeline infrastructure. For this goal, Russia seeks to counter the diversification efforts of some importing countries, by preventing competition from the Central Asian gas on the Western European markets. Thus, when importing countries buy gas from Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan, this gas is actually marketed still by Russia, which buys it cheaper from the Central Asian countries and resells it for a profit. For the same purpose, it also tries to delay the construction of alternative pipelines through which the countries in the Caspian region would sell their natural gas directly to the European countries, bypassing Russia. Another modality is the control over transit infrastructure in the former Soviet republics, whose governments, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, gained control over the pipeline infrastructure passing through their territories. It is true that, in exchange for the debt owed to Gazprom, Russia has purchased majority ownership of energy assets, such as transit facilities, as it happened in the case of Moldova which sold 50% plus one share of its gas distribution network to Gazprom (Smith Stegen, 2011). As Balmaceda (2008) rightly notices, these efforts would not however been possible without the participation of local partners in these countries, often corrupt ones, demonstrating how "domestic conditions affect the management of the energy dependency

relationship with Russia" (Balmaceda, 2008:5). A second modality employed by Russia, and a more sensitive one, is the manipulation of post-Soviet dependencies in order to advance foreign policy ambitions. Energy dependencies have been seen as a mean to create and link other dependencies, such as maintaining some former Soviet countries within the political sphere of Moscow. In Moldova, as Balmaceda notices, energy dependency on Russia is complemented by political interdependency, given Russia's political leverage and presence in Transnistria.

Nevertheless, the energy weapon argument proves to be reductionist, as it ignores the complexity of motivations, of material and non-material factors that underpin actors' decisions and preferences. It is a "two-edged sword" (Mankoff, 2009:14), because Russia is also dependent on selling its hydrocarbons to Europe, which, despite more recent diversification to the far East, remains its main customer, and thus the most important source of revenue to its national budget. Therefore, Russia is not the beneficiary of an asymmetric interdependence with the EU, as affirmed by the realist authors, since a cut in supplies will most likely affect the Russian economy even more than the ones of its customers. The hydrocarbons exports amount to two thirds of Russia's total export revenues (Siddi, 2018a) and a halt in their flow to Europe would paralyse the Russian economy, given the compensations that the customers would claim for breaking supply contracts, which would only add to the consequences of the sanctions that have affected Russia after the annexation of Crimea. Russia is indeed dependent on selling its fossil fuels on the European markets and it is generally economically weaker than Europe. Thus, at present, the EU-Russia gas trade is not asymmetric to Russia's advantage (Siddi, 2018a:10).

Furthermore, Moscow's ability to use energy as a weapon is constrained by external factors as well, such as the worldwide decrease in energy prices partially sustained by the U.S. shale gas revolution, the opening of new LNG gas infrastructure in Europe, the higher quantities of gas sold at spot prices and the increasing interconnections developed among EU Member States, all leading to less security vulnerabilities and risks for the EU (Siddi, 2018a). Therefore, as both Casier (2011a) and Siddi (2018a) notice, in a constructivist tone, the increased securitisation of the discourses around the EU-Russia gas trade is not supported by objective facts, but is rather a consequence of a change in perception about the self and the other, complemented by the 'Othering' of Russia, particularly by the newer EU Member States stemming from the former communist bloc.

Moreover, Russia as a state is not able to act alone and it is not a homogeneous actor on the energy scene, as a multitude of other actors and subsequent interests must be

acknowledged for, such as state, corporate, but also personal interests which exist within the state apparatus and the energy companies (Aalto et al., 2012; Balmaceda, 2012; Judge et al., 2016). Each of these actors is driven not only by their own economic interests, but also by their personal cognitive frames which sometimes come at odds with those of the other actors (Judge et al., 2016).

1.4. The resource wars bias

Although the resource wars theory is generally placed outside the realm of international relations, it would be a gap of any literature review not to take account of its rather popular interpretations given to the wider regional and international implications of resource competition. One of the most preeminent representatives of the resource wars theories, Klare (2008) himself explains that the struggle to control the natural resources of a country may at any time transgress the national boundaries, as an abundance of highly desired resources, such as oil and natural gas, will attract militarisation and outside intervention, dragging the great powers within these apparently local conflicts and thus giving them an international dimension. The author uses the example of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the separatist regions of Georgia, as an example of a possible confrontation between the great powers over the local natural gas infrastructure, as Georgia is passed through by the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) pipelines. Back in 2008, Klare was thus warning that a conflict between the Georgian authorities, supported by the U.S., and the separatists, backed by Russia, would eventually lead to an open conflict between the American and the Russian soldiers. A conflict did occur, in August 2008, between South Ossetia and Georgia. Nevertheless, it did not have the spill-over effect envisaged under the resource wars theory. Oil and gas continued to flow through the BTC and the BTE pipelines, and the local conflict did not evolve into a military confrontation between great powers. Klare's vision on resource wars has therefore been criticised for containing an "alarmist account" (Dalby, 2004:243) and for largely dismissing the recent years' policy alternatives to switch from fuel fossils to alternative energy resources, that would consequently limit states' struggle for depleting hydrocarbon resources.

Klare (2001; 2008) and adepts of the resource wars theory apply a geopolitical tone to their view on a world marred by fierce competition and conflict for diminishing natural resources, be it oil, natural gas or water. They see as no coincidence the fact that many vital resources are situated in "contested or chronically unstable areas" (Klare, 2001:26-27), such

as the Caspian region. The Caspian is particularly regarded as the arena of confrontation between the great powers, Russia, China and the United States, where military consolidation efforts are considered to conceal intentions to gain control over the oil and natural gas reserves (Klare, 2008).

Regarding the potential conflictual nature of energy relations around the Caspian, I find Øverland's et al. (2016) explanation more appropriate. The authors provide a thorough analysis of the regional situation, when they draw the attention on the possibility that regional instabilities, such as the protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, would impact on the security of the pipelines traversing through or in the vicinity of conflict zones. However, I also agree with Pevehouse (2004) and Øverland et al. (2016) that these energy projects might also provide incentives for cooperation instead, by linking the participating countries in long-term frameworks of collaboration.

Although the thesis lies within the IR scholarship and does not use the comparative politics theoretical strands as a component of its theoretical framework, it could not omit briefly reviewing the inputs brought by these theoretical schools to the energy studies.

Thus, continuing from the previous considerations related to the mutual impact of international and domestic politics in the field of energy and arguing that one realm cannot be completely dissociated from the other, I consider worthwhile to summarily review here also the comparative politics theoretical approaches dealing with energy and conflict, linking them with insights from various IR theories of geopolitical orientation, since the domestic dynamics are being shaped and shape in return the regional and international evolutions in the field of energy and because the 'resource wars', 'resource curse' and 'new wars' theories advance a similar geopolitical reductionism to the neorealist and neoliberal theories, that must be considered in a review exercise.

Authors like Dannreuther (2010) for example consider that liberalism does not make a hard division between international and domestic politics or between economics and politics and thus the theoretical borders between liberal international relations and comparative politics become blurred (p. 6). As a consequence, liberalisms also informs the three literature strands dealing with illiberal practices in the international relations of the energy industry (Dannreuther, 2010) and connecting the abundance of natural resources to the propensity towards conflicts: the 'resource curse' theory (Ross, 1999; Sachs and Warner, 1999) and the factors which contribute to this, such as the 'Dutch disease' (Bruno and Sachs, 1982; Auty, 2001), the 'rentier state' state theory (O'Lear, 2004; Kaldor, 2007), the 'resource wars' theory (Renner, 2002; Ballentine and Nitzschke, 2005; Shaffer, 2009) and the 'new wars'

literature (Kaldor and Luckham, 2001; Kaldor, 2001; Berdal, 2003; Kaldor, 2007). Moreover, "energy security reflects the constant and multifaceted interaction between the domestic and the international" (Ciută, 2010:127). Putnam (1988) sees the intertwine between the domestic and international levels of states negotiating cooperation as a "two-level game": finding a deal at the international level satisfactory for the parties engaged and, at the same time, finding a solution at the national level that would prove to be acceptable for the domestic actors (Putnam, 1988; Schultz, 2013). Putnam suggests however extending the understanding of the interactions between the domestic and the international factors, by moving a step further from the simple observation that they impact on each other and by analysing them in an integrated manner, looking deeper into those areas where they merge.

What is then the role of natural resources and how are they conceptualised in the geopolitically-influenced literature? Similar to neorealists who argue that the scene of future conflicts will be dominated by the struggle for resources, rather than by ideology or the global balance of power (Renner, 2002; Klare, 2008), as the oil and natural gas reserves are reaching a peak level of production and hydrocarbons reserves tend to be located in fragile states with a background of internal and external conflicts (Klare, 2008; Dannreuther, 2013b), in the post-Cold War era, conflicts are said to be more about greed and struggle to control and plunder resources and their transit points to the markets, than about ideologies (Renner, 2002). Thus, in the 'resource wars' literature, natural resources and conflicts are seen as being trapped in a cyclic process, where resources serve as a source of funding for war, while the war assures the conditions for an illegitimate access to these resources to take place undisturbed (Renner, 2002).

Similarly, the primary driving forces of violent conflict are considered to be greed and economic motives (Ross, 1999; De Soysa, 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Newman, 2004; Dannreuther, 2010) also for the 'new wars' authors, as violence creates opportunities for entrepreneurship and profit (Newman, 2004) and "war is rather a violent enterprise framed in political terms" (Kaldor, 2013:3). The empty space left by the dissolution of state authority and power is regarded as being filled in by private criminal groups, often organised around some form of identity (ethnic, religious, tribal), that engaged in a competition for natural resources (Newman, 2004; Kaldor, 2001, 2013).

However, critics of the 'new wars' theory argue that availability and lootability of natural resources cannot constitute or explain alone a country's predisposition to engage in intra- and inter-state conflicts (Renner, 2002), as the outbreak of a conflict lies at the intersection of a complex ensemble of material and non-material factors (Renner, 2002;

Newman, 2004; Meierding, 2016) related to territorial and economic motivation, as well as to ideological and identity-based issues (Newman, 2004). Moreover, despite the widespread assumption that competition over natural resources, oil in particular, fuels war, "states do not engage in oil wars" (Meierding, 2016:258), as the political leaders calculate the costs associated to a resource war and these usually constitute strong obstacles to a relevant gain and profit from war.

Within the material-focused approaches, the neoliberal literature and the 'Dutch disease' theory retain more economic concerns and arguments in support of the political affirmations they make. If neoliberal authors are however preoccupied rather with the international interactions and consequences of energy interdependence, the 'Dutch disease' theory deals with the internal effects on the local economies of the resource-rich countries. For the 'Dutch disease' theory, considered a strand of the 'resource curse' literature, an abundance of natural resources is expected to have negative effects on the other sectors of the economy apart from the extractive ones (Di John, 2010). As a consequence, other economic sectors, such as agriculture or manufacturing are neglected although they employ most of the population, while the extractive industries attract only an insignificant percentage of the labour force, often based on skilled foreign employees (Renner, 2002). This, in return, leads to high unemployment, uneven regional economic development and high income inequality (Colgan, 2014).

At the intersection of the economic and political focus and still well-rooted in the material-based interpretation of the energy dynamics, the 'rentier state' theory, as well a strand of the 'resource curse' literature (Di John, 2010; Almaz, 2015), adds to the economic models, such as the 'Dutch disease', factors related to the role of policy-making and institutional formation. It thus emphasises the negative impact of the rents (revenues obtained from the extractive sector by countries heavily dependent on resources) on democracy and economic growth (Di John, 2010; Almaz, 2015). As such, the rentier behaviour displayed by the state triggers high levels of corruption, development of clientelistic networks of patronage and lower economic growth (Renner, 2002; Di John, 2010; Almaz, 2015). In addition, the resource rents prove to be sufficient for the fiscal needs of the state, which will thus impose very low taxation levels. As a consequence, this reduces the bargaining power of the society, making the government less accountable and less inclined to be democratic (Renner, 2002; Dannreuther, 2010; Di John, 2010; Almaz, 2015), while also investing the energy rents in patronage networks that support the followers and suppress the opponents (Renner, 2002;

Almaz, 2015), while undermining the civil society and enhancing the repressive functions of the state (Dannreuther, 2010).

However, although the leaders of the "petrostates" (Karl, 1997:17-19) may decide to use the energy revenues to take further risks and engage in wars and in "foreign policy adventurism" (Colgan, 2014:201), feeling encouraged by the lack of domestic political accountability, oil rents may also create strong incentives for peace, avoidance of international conflicts and economic growth (Di John, 2010; Colgan, 2014), since the petrostates' elites perceive stability as a necessary precondition for the uninterrupted flow of resources and the revenues they generate (Colgan, 2014; Meierding, 2016). Also, the state is a network of social relations whose leaders have subjective motivations of their own, the state is not a 'predator' or a 'rent-seeking maximiser' in itself (Di John, 2010:5).

The scope of this exercise that envisaged to temporarily bridge the gap between the IR and the domestic-oriented theories that deal with energy and conflict was to demonstrate that internal dynamics cannot be completely dissociated from regional and international political and economic evolutions, and that one can imagine these various theoretical strands reviewed above on a *spectrum* ranging from highly materially-focused to more non-material oriented approaches, transgressing the division lines between the large theoretical families: international and domestic.

On this *spectrum*, the interpretations given to the energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region, in the context of the conflicts in the area, may be imagined as ranging from the material-based approaches to theories acknowledging and encompassing also the role of the non-material factors (perceptions, identities, interests, ideological motivations). The two main bodies of literature on 'resource curse' (including here also the theory strands on the 'Dutch disease' and on the 'rentier state') and on 'resource wars' (encompassing also the 'new wars' theory) stand closest to the material end of the interpretation given to energy, placed in the context of violence, conflicts and greed-driven predation of natural resources. The focus on energy is rather on the domestic, intra-state dynamics and impact of the energy resources, describing the situation where less developed countries endowed with rich natural resources are prone to experience poor economic performance, volatile economic growth, high levels of corruption, low levels of democracy and a greater predisposition to civil wars and domestic conflict (Di John, 2010; Colgan, 2014; Almaz, 2015). Moving the analysis to the international level, but still retaining a determinist and material-based interpretation of resources in relation to conflict, neorealism and neoliberalism focus on energy and resources as closely interlinked with violence and war - in the neorealist view, while neoliberalism is

concerned with the consequences of an asymmetric interdependence between producer and consumer states. Farther from the material end of the *spectrum*, neoclassical realism and constructivism, which I review in the next section, attempt to bridge the domestic and the international level and to add non-material lenses to the understanding of security dynamics. Finally, the critical security theories lie at the non-material end of the *spectrum*, as I analyse in more detail also in the next section.

All the geopolitical-oriented theories reviewed above embed a material power-based analysis (Ismayilov, 2015) of the Caspian-Black Sea region, displaying a reductionist view on the complexity of factors and interactions that shape the conflict and cooperation instances and the energy dynamics in the area. The greed drive behind the conflicts, the competition for resources, as well as the strive to counterbalance interdependence, account for a geopolitical interpretation of the regional dynamics. These approaches ignore the complex mechanisms bringing together domestic actors and their motivations, transnational elements and international dynamics and actors, shaping regional behaviour, through a variety of material and non-material factors (Newman, 2004; Ismayilov, 2015; Meierding, 2016). As a consequence, there appears to be a tendency of ignoring the multitude of internal factors (Ismayilov, 2015), as well as the role of the psychological factors which I introduce in the theoretical framework I propose in the final section of this chapter.

In the next chapter, I debate in detail the complex conflict-cooperation dynamics around the major natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream. I look at how a conflict-prone rhetoric often goes hand in hand with an uninterrupted gas trade, in order to highlight a central idea of this thesis, that conflict and cooperation coexist, that a military conflict does not necessarily translate into an energy war and, reversely, that economic disputes do not inevitably lead to military confrontations. I propose therefore a deeper level of explanation to this argument, by researching into the psychological factors that, along with the material ones, shape the conflictual or cooperative nature of relations between energy actors.

As announced in the beginning of this chapter, I identify a double major reductionism: the ***theoretical reductionism*** (containing the geopolitical reductionism and the critical reductionism), and the ***conceptual reductionism***. Until this point, I reviewed the *geopolitical reductionism* encountered in the theories addressing energy, conflict and cooperation. I hereafter move to discussing the *critical reductionism*, where I explore the limitations of the critical security theories in the field of energy, while also passing through what I consider to be the bridging theories, linking the geopolitical and the critical literature strands.

2. Critical reductionism: construction and securitisation of energy in Europe

I have dedicated equal attention, but more space to the geopolitical reductionism I encountered in the literature dealing with conflict and cooperation dynamics in the field of energy, due to the fact that the theoretical strands adopting a geopolitical approach on energy are more abundant and prolific. They seem overwhelmingly concerned with the potential of natural gas and oil pipelines linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe of influencing the prospects for conflict or cooperation between the major energy players, such as the EU and Russia. The critical security theories I review here below deal less with how conflictual and cooperative decisions and behaviours are formed in the complex web of energy relations in Europe. Nonetheless, social constructivism and the securitization theory have been employed more in the past years in order to explain the politicisation of the energy discourse in Europe and thus they are relevant for any literature review on the topic, due to their contribution towards including more actors in the analysis and to developing the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum* discussed at the end of the previous part.

I stand by Stoddard's (2013) opinion that the theoretical approaches to energy relations reproduce the classical IR divide between the geopolitical view as expressed by realism and the rationalist one embodied by liberalism. As a consequence, the geopolitical theoretical interpretations to energy emphasise the potential for conflict over natural resources and subordinate the economic factors to national security and military objectives, often failing "[...]to consider the complex co-dependent interactions between political actors, political structures and the economic energy system within energy consumers, producers and transit countries and how these factors influence states' relations with one another" (Stoddard, 2013:444). In their own turn, the liberal theoretical approaches downplay the role of political factors and of power, focusing overwhelmingly on the role of markets and institutions, and on their potential to foster cooperation between various trade-driven actors (Stoddard, 2013). Therefore, the predominant traditional theoretical approaches to energy relations tend to enforce the politics-economics dichotomy, as well as the disciplinary divide between domestic and international politics.

These theoretical approaches display a reductionist view on the complexity of factors and interactions that shape the conflict and cooperation instances and the energy dynamics. The traditional theories generally favour a state-centric view and leave little space for assessing and understanding the role of other actors in the complex energy dynamics and their influence on the cooperative or conflictual direction of the relations developed around

the gas and oil projects. They tend to ignore the complex mechanisms bringing together domestic actors and their cognition-driven actions, their motivations, shaping regional behaviour, through a variety of material and non-material factors (Newman, 2004; Ismayilov, 2015; Meierding, 2016).

2.1. Bridging theories: from geopolitical to critical reductionism

At the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum* used to understand how resources and energy dynamics are depicted, the critical theories focus consistently on the human and individual aspects of security and challenge the role of the state as the main or single security actor. But before moving to reviewing the contribution of the main schools of critical security, I find it useful to analyse here the approaches brought along by neoclassical realism and social constructivism, which I regard as 'bridging theories' placed more towards the middle of the *spectrum* I discussed above. I dedicate a separate section to them as I consider they are at the outer limits of their main theoretical families, situated between the material and the non-material security approaches: thus, neoclassical realism, while still belonging to the larger group of realism, shares a less geopolitical tone than its fellow realist theories and acknowledges the role of perceptions and identities, marking, in this way, the transition towards the second half of the *spectrum*, the non-material one. Social constructivism is well-known for its work dedicated to the role of identities and perceptions in constructing security, being committed to the importance of non-material aspects of security, yet not exploring the role of cognitive and psychological factors that underpin actors' choices for conflict and cooperation. I decided to review the two bodies of literature together, before entering the realm of critical security theories, for their contribution to the role of non-material factors in shaping security decisions, a key aspect of this thesis that I debate in more detail in the end of the chapter when I suggest moving on a deeper level of analysing the non-material forces that drive cooperation and conflict between energy actors, by looking into their efforts to overcome their psychological insecurities and build their ontological security.

Returning to the two 'bridging theories', neoclassical realism and social constructivism, they both attempt to link the domestic and the international level and to add non-material lenses to the understanding of security dynamics. The neoclassical realists acknowledge the role of actors' interests, past experiences and search for prestige in decision-making and attitude formation towards conflict or cooperation. They do open the possibility for cooperation to occur, but remain pessimistic about its durability. For the neoclassical

realists, cooperation is rather an ad hoc phenomenon rather than an institutionalised framework, while the focus remains on states and power although mediated through the role of domestic factors (Kropatcheva, 2014:2).

Both constructivists and neoclassical realists assume that actors form their decisions based on the perceptions they have on themselves and on the others. Neoclassical realism considers that leaders define the national interest and their actions on the international scene according to their perception of the relative power and intentions of other states; however, their decisions will be constrained by domestic limitations (Kitchen, 2010). The identification of security threats takes into account not only the exogenous empirical facts and capabilities, but also the perceived intention of other actors; thus, leaders make decisions which are also affected by perceptions of other actors' strategy, culture, ideology and history (Kitchen, 2010; Kropatcheva, 2012). In order to address the threats once they have been identified, they will assess which tools to be employed, based on their availability, from the soft power of cultural norms to the hard power of military force (Kitchen, 2010).

Authors like Casier (2011b) and Siddi (2018a), writing in a constructivist tone, highlight as well the role of perceptions and of history in shaping actors' decisions and behaviour on the energy scene. They attribute the shift in the European discourse around gas trade, from a driver of cooperation to a source of conflict, less to a change in the material circumstances, and more to a change of perceptions and identities, to an increasing construction of Russia as a threatening 'Other'. I agree here with Siddi (2018a) that history and previous experiences on which national identities and discourses have been built, play a significant role for the way different European states construct their image of Russia as an energy provider, sometimes as a malevolent expansionist energy power, other times as a necessary trade partner. I return later in this thesis to how the 'Othering' of Russia impacted on the politicisation of a part of the energy discourses in Europe in the past years and to how it has been reflected in the policy changes at European level. I will also draw on the role of history and past experiences in shaping the cooperation and conflict dynamics in the energy field, while proposing a deeper level of understanding under the theoretical framework of ontological security, which will help explain how different experiences trigger different psychological responses from security-seeking actors.

In the same constructivist vein mentioned above, for Tichý (2018) it is the discourses and interpretations around the energy relations between the EU and Russia that manage to go beyond a simple reflection of the material reality and change the behaviour of actors, as well as the nature of the institutions they create (p. 3), by forming new prevailing ideas which, in

turn, determine the societal norms, values and political practices on which eventually identities are formed (p. 2).

In the social constructivist view, actors are motivated not only by material interests, but also by ideas, by their sense of identity (Nye, 2007). Identities are mutually constructed (Jepperson et al., 1996) and individuals, groups and states acquire identities only in relation with others, by attributing identities to each other, as allies, enemies, competitors or friends (Cashman, 2014). States display multiple identities in their various interactions: winners, victims, allies, leaders etc.

The fundamental structures of international politics are argued to be social rather than strictly material and these structures shape actors' identities and interests (Wendt, 1995:71). The international system is a social creation, with structure embedding rather cultural than material elements (Wendt, 1995; Lebow, 2007; Thorun, 2009; Müller, 2013; Tsygankov, 2016) and with ideas and culture playing a key role in shaping the reality and the discourse of international politics (Nye, 2007). According to Wendt (1995), this is a point where neorealism and constructivism part away: for the neorealists, structure is made of a distribution of material capabilities, while for social constructivists structure is made of social relations. The social structures include material resources but they acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded (Wendt, 1995:73). It is the shared knowledge and understandings that constitute the actors in a situation and the cooperative or conflictual nature of their relationships (Wendt, 1995:73). Thus, both material and non-material components of the international system matter, they should not be strictly separated according to social constructivists, as the international system is made of both material capabilities and ideational relationships and all material things are endowed with social meaning: the impact of the material factors depends on how the actors perceive them (Cashman, 2014:464).

In the energy realm, it is not the material value of natural resources per se that might drive various leaders to engaging in conflicts, but rather their perception on these reserves (Colgan, 2013:154) and on the benefits they can bring. The international behaviour of states is thus impacted both by ideas, treated as elements of power, as well as by imperatives of material power (Kitchen, 2010).

Social constructivism combines normative and structural aspects of the international system in what is conceptualised as normative power: the international actors' capacity to impact and influence the global politics through the diffusion of norms, rather than through military force (Becker et al., 2015). External incentives, although important, are defined and

attributed meaning based on the prior identities and interests of actors (Lebow, 2007). This may be considered as yet another meeting point between constructivism and neoclassical realism, where the latter also assumes that states will use not only military, but also political, economic and ideological tools in order to pursue their national interest (Becker et al., 2015). They do not compete only for military power, but also for status, influence and prestige (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Kropatcheva, 2012). If the discrepancy between a state's own perception on its status and role in the international system and the way the other actors perceive it may lead to conflict and eventually war, the perspective of equal status, and recognition and accommodation of the role and prestige of the rising great powers can act as a source of cooperation, peace and stability (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010; Tsygankov, 2016).

For the constructivists, the regional energy system is also characterised by a high degree of diversity in the domestic politico-economic structures whose interests are often divergent, creating energy perceptions of risks between different energy actors (Stoddard, 2013). Other times, "similar actors (e.g. governments) can pursue different policies (e.g. energy independence or diversification of supply), and different actors can have similar policy preferences" (Ciută, 2010:133).

International politics, war, conflict, threats and enemies are socially constructed (Wendt, 1995; Cashman, 2014), according to the promoters of social constructivism. And so are enmity and friendship in the international system, as they are not the product of some inherent features of the international distribution of power, as the realists claim, nor of the domestic structures of the states, as liberalism considers (Risse-Kappen, 1995:503). States interact with each other and, based on these interactions, they form perceptions on one another, either as potential enemies or friends. Amiable relations build trust, which is a functional equivalent of complete information able to reduce the uncertainty, the core of security dilemma (Risse-Kappen, 1995:504).

Ruggie's (1998) vision on the constructivist approach to interpreting international relations introduces the role of human consciousness and of its impact on the logic and methods of inquiry, when discussing how ideational factors have normative, as well as instrumental dimensions, expressing individual and also collective intentionality (p. 878-879). However, although concerned with the role of narratives, social constructivism has not preoccupied itself with the role of emotions and cognition per se in shaping the cooperation and conflict dynamics of the energy relations. As a consequence, it "has difficulties in accounting for the emotional underpinnings of identity construction" (Kinnvall, 2006:34)

which support the self-narratives of actors. In its approach to security, the constructivist stance has also been criticised for retaining a view still too close to the positivist political agenda due to its concern for objective versus subjective senses of security (Kinnvall et al., 2018). Neoclassical realism, although opening the door to the role of perceptions and identities in forming actors' decisions and to cooperation to occur, continues to be a realist, geopolitical-prone theory that holds the state as a central actor, being, at the same time, almost exclusively focused with the realm of foreign policy and remaining still pessimistic about the prospects of cooperation to happen in the long-term.

2.2. Critical reductionism: critical security literature's confined contribution to energy studies

I move here further to the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum*, to the critical theories which, unlike the geopolitical-oriented ones, focus more on the human and individual aspects of security and contest the role of the state as a central actor on the security scene. Walker (1997) was among the first authors to introduce the notion of critical engagement with security (p. 78). Ever since, the approach has expanded to include various theoretical strands and schools of thought, developing into a rather umbrella concept encompassing a large variety of understandings of what it means critical security. There is however no singular definition of what critical security studies mean (Hutchings, 2001; Booth, 2007; Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010) and there is even disagreement to what can be considered critical studies, while often the theoretical boundaries between traditional and critical studies become blurred (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006:443).

Browning and McDonald (2011), for example, consider that critical studies draw insights from Marxism, feminism, Critical theory, critical constructivism and post-structuralism. Ken Booth (2007:41) sees critical security studies as grounded in "four main sites of ideas": The Frankfurt School, the Gramscian tradition, the Marxist legacy and the Critical international relations theory. For Hutchings (2001), there are four examples of critical work in IR: the neo-Gramscian work on global political economy and international politics; the explanatory and normative theory drawing in particular on Habermas' writings; the post-modernist strand, influenced by poststructuralist and postmodernist philosophers, such as Foucault and Derrida; and finally the feminist work drawing on Marxism, the Frankfurt School and postmodernism (Hutchings, 2001:80).

While such classifications might prove themselves to be problematic and confusing, and at the same time too wide to be covered by the purpose of the present thesis, I curtailed the literature review to the work of the widely accustomed three main schools of thought in the field of critical security studies: The Welsh School, The Paris School and the Copenhagen School. Before moving forward, it is important to disambiguate between "critical security studies" with lower case, referring to the broader family of critical theories to security, and "Critical Security Studies", designating specifically the Welsh School, also named the Aberystwyth School of critical studies.

I note however that such a categorisation is problematic itself, proving unable to properly account for the permeable boundaries between different theoretical strands and the "cross-fertilization among critical approaches" (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006:443), or to exhaust the totality and large variety of approaches to security (Balzacq et al., 2016). Moreover, I consider that a classification of this type retains a Euro-exclusive tone, dismissing theoretical contributions to critical security studies emerging from scholars outside Europe or non-affiliated with the three security schools under scrutiny here, leading to a theoretical reductionism that this thesis attempts to overcome by drawing insights from a larger realm of authors and from a wider scientific area.

The three critical security studies schools mentioned above have nevertheless brought influential changes to the IR literature dedicated to security and provided an enriched view on the variety of security issues and actors, and to their interplay in world politics. Their contribution to the understanding of energy security is however rather limited and, although it offers potential for widening the approach towards a more elaborated debate on energy dynamics, it is also constrained by the limits of their own theoretical apprehension on security. The Copenhagen School and its wide input to the theory of securitization is the one that comes closer and engages up to a point with the idea of bringing energy to the security agenda, as discussed in this thesis. Nevertheless, as I explore in more detail later in this section, it proves itself limited in understanding the complexity of material and psychological factors that underpin the paradigm shift in approaching energy.

As there is no common understanding and agreement towards what counts as critical in rapport with security, what various approaches to critical security studies have in common though is the shared critique of traditional understandings to security, the concern for the political value of security, and the preoccupation for the ethics of security (Browning and McDonald, 2011). All critical approaches to security have, according to Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2010), three more core ideas in common. First, they regard security as a

"derivative concept", a concept seen as meaningless in itself, which acquires meaning only when something is secured (Krause and Williams, 1997:IX). Second, critical security theories have been militating for deepening the security agenda, in order to acknowledge also other actors, besides the state, as referent objects of security: individuals, groups, institutions (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:5), in contrast with traditional security studies that hold the state as the referent object. And finally, the third shared idea advocates for broadening the security agenda, in order to include other threats than the military ones.

I reflect here, for the purpose of the thesis, on the latter two, namely the issue of deepening the security agenda and on the proposition to broaden the security realm, identifying the main biases associated to them.

2.2.1. The bias of deepening the security agenda

The supporters of various strands of critical security studies have been advocating for deepening the security agenda in order to acknowledge other actors, beside the state, as referent objects of security, taking a stance against the statist approach of the traditional security studies, especially the realist strands, that place the state at the core of world politics, ultimately defined in terms of states interaction. For the Welsh School, this "fetishization of the state" (Wyn Jones, 1999:75) proves to be particularly problematic, as often states "are one of the major sources of insecurity for their citizens" (Wyn Jones, 1999:78), by enhancing the military race or non-military insecurities, such as food and environmental security. It is a form of reductionism which, in the energy field, ignores and excludes the role played by other actors, other than the state, in shaping the dynamics around the major energy policies and projects, and, at the same time, it falls into the bias of overlapping the interests of energy companies with those of the state, disregarding that they often pursue distinct goals, less politically-oriented than the governments of the states where they are located.

It is worth mentioning however that not all critical theorists, at least in the earlier stages of work, have supported the idea of removing the state as sole "conceptual focus of security" (Buzan, 1991:329), as the state is considered to be the main responsible for all that security entails. Ken Booth (1991:319), on the contrary, argues that "individual humans are the ultimate referent" of security, being however himself criticised by his fellow critical theorist, Wyn Jones (1999), for reducing the human beings to individualist, atomistic concepts, given the fact that individuals can only be understood within their wider social contexts and not apart from them (p. 90).

Departing from both tendencies, I argue that the state cannot be completely dismissed from any international relations of energy, as the responsibility of making any energy policy decision still lies with the national states in Europe and governments have the leading role in adopting energy policies and strategies, and in negotiating, approving or dismissing any new projects crossing their territories. Nevertheless, I agree with Balmaceda (2008) that, particularly in the post-Soviet region, the conceptualisation of energy in connection with various disputes over access to resources, distribution and transit of hydrocarbons has important international relations implications, transcending the level of state-to-state relations, along with a diverse group of domestic and foreign actors trying to make a profit from the energy trade and even from the dependency on Russia. This, in consequence, entails a multiplicity of interests, pursed in parallel by the state, the companies or by different private interest groups inside the companies, which often may diverge from the interests of the company itself (Balmaceda, 2008:7). At other times, the energy firms impact on the policies of the states to which they belong or on those of the countries where they conduct their activities, and their goals may coincide with the geopolitical objectives of their home countries when trying to secure the access to resources and the supply (Molchanov, 2012).

2.2.2. The bias of broadening the security agenda

Moving further to the other idea shared by critical security studies, namely broadening the security agenda, critical security advocates have been imagining security beyond the traditionalist approaches that used to narrow it down to issues of military and defence. As a consequence of broadening the security agenda, security policies have been reformulated worldwide in order to include topics related to economic, environmental and societal insecurity, as well as human rights, stretching the security domain beyond military issues (Balzacq et al., 2016). Energy security itself has reached the top of the political agendas in the past decades, also as a consequence of broadening the security realm (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Bridge, 2015), in order to include issues related to access and protection of natural resources and infrastructure.

In his own turn, Buzan (1991) of the Copenhagen School proposes the categorisation of security into five different sectors: military, environmental, economic, political, and societal. The Copenhagen School however retains a realist language when it considers that security is in essence about survival (Buzan et al., 1998). Thus, according to the proponents of the *securitization* theory, stemming from the Copenhagen School, when an issue becomes

an existential threat it should be treated in the same manner as a military threat and be submitted to exceptional political measures. It becomes securitised.

Broadening the security agenda has not been received without criticism, both from the traditionalist, as well as from the critical sides of IR. Buzan's proposal to include non-military issues onto the security agenda has been feared to compromise the field's intellectual coherence (Walt, 1991; *in* Wyn Jones, 1999), while representatives of the critical Welsh School warn about the danger of securitising and militarising issues as environment and migration (Wyn Jones, 1999). Peoples and Vaughan-Williams (2010) express as well concern that broadening the concept of security might lead in the end to losing its meaning, or, in the Words of Wyn Jones (1999:99), it "[...] becomes the study of everything, and hence, effectively, nothing", while creating the risk of neglecting important military issues. Ayoob too (1997:129) warns about the risk to lose meaning of security altogether, by "de-defining rather than redefining the concept". The author however goes further to bring security back into the hands of the state, arguing that, while the political realm may be informed by other arenas of human activity, be it economic, environmental, or societal, their influence should be directly relevant and become integral components of security only when they are acute enough to threaten state boundaries, institutions, or regime survival (p. 129-130). Katzenstein (1996) as well takes a reserved stance with regard to broadening the security agenda, admitting that restricting security studies exclusively to military security and to states would not be beneficial, but, at the same time, warning that new issues and actors should only be added to the traditional analysis of national security if their link to states and military concerns is obvious.

I agree here with the critics of the securitization theory when I argue that broadening the state security agenda in order to include energy issues poses the risk of overstating the implications of commercial disputes by transforming them into drivers of inter-state conflicts, instead of allowing them to remain in the sphere of trade. Moreover, a securitising approach towards energy would enhance the central role of the state as single security provider and it would add a militarised dimension to energy which not only will fail to protect trade cooperation, but it will instead hamper it. Reversely, a transposition of a political conflict into the realm of energy would have similar consequences, as securitisation of a political issue does not necessarily imply the securitisation of an economic one, between the same actors.

Notwithstanding the beneficial amendments brought to the theoretical and policy debate by the proposition to broaden the security agenda, there are significant side effects to consider when allowing for more and more economic, societal or environmental topics to be

treated in terms of security threats. In this sense, I agree with Dalby (1997:5) that defining various issues as security risks might prove to be a risky endeavour in itself, militarising them and thus leading to "dilemmas of extended security", where "in the process of providing various forms of security, insecurities are also reproduced". In a similar vein, C.A.S.E Collective (2006:460) warn about the risk of running into a "security trap": when securitising more issues or securitising a topic more, there is always the risk of militarising them and thus subordinating them to the governmental security agencies. As Dalby above, C.A.S.E Collective also agree that there is the risk of perpetuating a security dilemma, when attempts to securitise social issues will backfire into increasing the feelings of insecurity and therefore, "the politics of maximal security are also politics of maximal anxiety" (C.A.S.E Collective, 2006:461).

It is in this context that Wæver (1995) himself calls for *desecuritization*, warning about the consequences of including more and more issues on the security agenda, which poses the risk of "introduction of threat-defence dynamics and emergency politics into non-military realms" (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:84). In addition, there is also the risk that the securitised issues will be used by state elites to gain control over it, and approached through zero-sum military practice (Wæver, 1995; Bilgin, 2008:98). Nevertheless, while desecuritising an issue would mean to transfer it from a realm of survival into one of a more cooperative thinking (Wyn Jones, 1999), desecuritization theory as such, as proposed by Wæver, has been criticised for being too ambiguous. While suggesting that desecuritisation would imply a return to normal politics, it remains unclear what normal politics would represent (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006). At the same time, it has remained trapped in a state-centric approach, being concerned only with how states securitise issues in order to justify their extraordinary measures (Wyn Jones, 1999).

Ciută (2010) takes a step further by arguing that geopolitical approaches and the securitization theory both have fixed definitions of security, thus overlooking the fact that, in the field of energy, the meaning of security itself is being multiplied, not just the number of "threats, subjects and objects of security policy" (p. 125). In other words, security does not mean the same thing everywhere, instead it "permeates all sectors of activity and draws actors from all levels" (p. 126).

It is this point of debate about how to broaden the security agenda that the Copenhagen School and the Welsh School of Critical Security Studies, also called the Aberystwyth School, come at odds. Ken Booth (1997), on behalf of the Welsh School, criticises Barry Buzan for remaining within a neo-realist framework and approach, despite

expanding the internationally security studies both vertically and horizontally. Instead, he argues for a school of critical security studies that, without disregarding neither the state and the military dimensions of world politics, nor the material dimension of the world, would be more concerned with the meaning and the moral aspects of science, replacing the realist zero-sum understanding of security with a collaborative project that would place emancipation of individuals at its core (C.A.S.E. Collective, 2006). In brief, for Booth (1997:106), "security is what we make of it. It is an epiphenomenon intersubjectively created. Different worldviews and discourses about politics deliver different views and discourses about security".

Therefore, for Booth, Wyn Jones and the Welsh School, it is emancipation that produces security and thus, emancipation and security should be equated, as security is seen as the removal of constraints, threats and oppressions that infringe upon the lives of individuals. Thus, they take the individual as the ultimate referent of security and security is understood as emerging from the individual experiences of insecurity (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010; Nunes, 2012). I acknowledge the role that security as emancipation can play in a very specific segment of critical energy studies, namely in challenging the injustices faced by marginalised communities with little or no access to natural resources. Nevertheless, I agree with Ayoob (1997:126) that Booth's and Wyn Jones' assimilation of security to emancipation is limited, as it ignores situations where a group may be emancipated without being rendered secure and vice versa, such as the Kurds in Northern Iraq. I also subscribe to Browning and McDonald's (2011) opinion that by using security to advance emancipation, the Welsh School disregards the role other factors might play for the same goal, such as justice, human rights, or economic development, as well the multitude of dimensions that security can embrace.

I agree nevertheless with the opinion shared by the critical schools proponents that history plays here an important role. The existence of past traumas and hostile sentiments facilitates the framing of an issue as a security threat, and it will make it more credible and easier to be accepted by the audience as such (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010). I discuss more thoroughly this aspect in the last chapter when I deal with Europe's heterogeneity and with how different experiences shape different self-narratives and relationships among energy actors.

Focusing specifically on energy, I remark here that, while the Welsh and the Paris School do not concern themselves with topics related to energy, the Copenhagen School touches the issue of energy in the context of securitising energy and resources. While other theorists, outside the school, have also engaged with the ardent topic of energy securitisation

and its consequential labelling as a political threat, the issue of energy security under the securitization theory still remains rather underexplored (Christou and Adamides, 2013).

I notice in this review that the proponents of the securitization theory retain a rather realist tone when discussing energy, depicting it as an existential threat to survival and still revolving around the state as a main actor. In the context of the 2009 gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine for example, Christou and Adamides (2013:514) consider that the "[...] lack of energy is an existential threat for the state as a whole and not just the economy". Nevertheless, as a further proof of the mixed theoretical nature of the securitization theory, the same authors adopt a more liberal tone when admitting that "high levels of interdependence tend to favor desecuritization and normalized relationships in all sectors" (p. 515) and energy as such can contribute to the desecuritisation of the political environment and foster cooperation, but only in cases where the political and military sectors have already been previously desecuritised, as in the case of Cyprus-Israel relations, or not deeply securitised, as it happens with the Israel-Egypt relations, where energy has been a desecuritising tool for the political sector.

Although it might be tempting to analyse the past decades' shift in the discourse around energy trade in Europe in the framework of the securitization theory, I agree with McGowan (2011) that the narratives and the actions of the European decision-makers are better understood in a framework of politicisation rather than securitisation. Moreover, the securitization theory is limited in exploring beyond the material circumstances that drive a change in attitudes and discourses around energy, while also remaining attached to a rather realist depiction of international relations under the auspices of state interactions and decisions, existential threats and survival.

For all their merits, I do not engage in this thesis with postructuralism, sometimes equated with postmodernism and postmodernity, nor with the Paris School, placed by some authors under the wider realm of postmodernism (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010), for their absence of contribution to the specific dimension of energy studies I approach in this thesis. I acknowledge however the contribution of the Paris School to study security practices and the role and conduct of security professionals and private security companies in the protection of critical energy infrastructure, or on "the way bureaucracies 'do' security" (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010:10), in this case energy security. At the same time, although I do not engage here with this line of theories, I recognise the importance of the studies concerned with energy resources from the perspective of human security, climate change and environmental scarcity and I take note here of Homer-Dixon's (1994)

observations on how environmental scarcity (drawn by the depletion and unequal distribution of resources, and by the population growth), although taking place mostly at sub-national level, impacts on international security, as countries affected by internal conflict caused by environmental stress will sometimes fragment or become more authoritarian. If the resource wars literature sees energy as a primary source of conflicts over depleting resources, the strands of literature concerned with the socio-economic and environmental conditions generating a scarcity of resources regard energy as a secondary cause of conflict both at intrastate as well as at interstate level (Ciută, 2010).

To conclude the incursion through the critical security studies, I uphold and concur with their core contribution to the IR scholarship, that is the need to acknowledge the role played by other actors than the state in the realm of security, although I insist that, in the energy field, the state cannot be completely excluded or have its role diminished in any analysis of energy strategy and energy dynamics. I also agree to the fact that, when introducing a new issue on the security agenda, history plays an important role. Based on their previous shared history and past experiences, be it of amity or enmity, actors are more or less susceptible to accept a topic to be politicised or securitised. And I also welcome Booth's commitment not to disregard the role of the state and of the military dimensions of world politics, as well as of the material factors that drive them, while bringing forward and exploring the equally important contribution of the non-material forces.

Nevertheless, I share the concern of the critics of critical security studies that broadening the security agenda to include more and more issues is a perilous endeavour, risking to perpetuate the security dilemma. In the case of energy, an abrupt shift of paradigm from understanding energy predominantly as trade, to framing it in geopolitical terms as a weapon, might indeed confirm the warning that politics of maximal security may also lead to politics of maximal anxiety (C.A.S.E Collective, 2006:461).

I also agree with Nunes (2012:346) that critical security studies may prove to be limited in their attempt to "conceive security as connected with a logic of exclusion, totalization, undemocratic politics and even violence". I argue instead that one should go beyond a narrow understanding of security and acknowledge the wide range of meanings a security issue may contain. Thus, I disagree with the Welsh School proposition that security should be exclusively equated to emancipation, by reason of relinquishing the multitude of other dimensions that security can embrace.

The contribution of the three critical schools of security, and of critical security studies in general, to the understanding of energy dynamics is, for the time being, rather

limited, notwithstanding their potential to bring important added value to the topic in the future. While the Paris and Aberystwyth schools do not concern themselves with energy as a central topic, some scholars engaging with the securitization theory have attempted to look at energy as security and to explain it in the framework of energy securitisation, nevertheless remaining attached to a rather realist tone seeing energy as a potential existential threat to the survival of states and failing to engage with the non-material dimension of energy dynamics.

Although critical theories share some common concerns with the ontological security literature which I propose as a theoretical framework, a more cognitive-based approach that also integrates the material understandings of security dynamics is needed. Thus, the post-structural securitization and de-securitization theory contains similar preoccupations with the cognitive and psychological approaches to security. However, it "[…] does not always adequately account for the non-discursive norms and practices, habits and routines which provide the ontological foundations of security" (Kinnvall et al., 2018:254). In its own turn, the Bourdieusian critical theory, although also concerned with the importance of routine and habits, has been said not to manage to provide a more holistic view of security as the more psychosocial approach (Kinnvall et al., 2018). And lastly, the constructivist social identity theory is concerned with the role of identities and discourse, but it has been argued that it still retains close connections with the positivist political agenda (Kinnvall et al., 2018). Credit must be given though to social constructivism for acknowledging and insisting on the role of non-material, ideational factors in IR: perceptions, ideas, identities, interests, as well as to neoclassical realism for bringing forward the role of actors' interests, past experiences and search for prestige. However, none of the theories deal with specific cognitive and emotional foundations of security-driven decisions of energy actors, by complementing the analysis of their material-based, rational responses with cognitive understandings of how their sense of (in)security influences the choice for a cooperative or conflictual path, or for both simultaneously.

In order to overcome this reductionism, I suggest later in this chapter a new theoretical framework, that of ontological security, in order to explain the complex mechanisms employed by energy actors in order to choose and justify their relationships with one another, as well as their conflict or cooperation-oriented decisions. The conflict and cooperation dynamics of interactions between various actors must be understood through the combined lenses of both material and cognitive factors that form the bases of these relations and the decisions that underlie them.

II. Conceptual reductionism in debating conflict, cooperation and security in the energy field

I discussed in the initial part of this chapter the ***theoretical reductionism*** encountered in the literature that deals with conflict and energy in Europe. Under this, I examined the two major theoretical biases I identified, namely the *geopolitical reductionism* and the *critical reductionism*, pointing to various theoretical strands which fall under the two categories. I herewith move to the second part where I discuss the ***conceptual reductionism***, where I debate in detail two main issues I find particularly biased in the literature focused on the energy relations between the EU and Russia: first, I look at how *conflict and cooperation* are conceptualised and second, I analyse how *energy security* is understood and illustrated in the energy-dedicated literature.

I start therefore with the first conceptual reductionist bias, the conflict-cooperation dichotomy, by first looking at how the concepts are generally integrated in the literature, particularly under the geopolitically-oriented theories, but also under social constructivism, as these are the main bodies of literature that deal with conflict and cooperation in the energy field in Europe. I then advance to introducing a new conceptual tool that would help to better depict how conflict and cooperation dynamics take place within the complex relationship between the energy actors along the main projects from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, by suggesting to look at conflict and cooperation as a *perpetuum*.

1. The conflict - cooperation conceptual reductionism: overcoming the continuum and introducing the perpetuum

1.1. The conflict - cooperation dichotomy bias: conflict and cooperation as binary, opposing concepts

Although cooperation among states seems to be more common than war, there is much less conceptualisation about cooperation than there is about conflict (Zartman and Touval, 2010). Most of the accounts on conflict and cooperation in the international relations literature are debated within the realist and the neoliberal approaches. Defining cooperation can however be difficult, as it is hard to pinpoint the start and the end of an attempt to cooperate, as well as to decide which events qualify as cooperative (Milner, 1992). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in debating the various definitions of conflict and cooperation and their classification into types and categories. It aims instead to explore how the conflict-

cooperation synergy is approached by various theoretical schools and how its conceptualisation can be related to the energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

According to the main assumptions, the general realist view sees international politics as being characterised by great conflict (Jervis, 1999) and cooperation as being not sustainable, occurring only sporadically as long as benefits are in sight and up to date (Zartman and Touval, 2010), while neoliberalism sees more potential for cooperation for the purpose of states to produce mutual gains and avoid shared harm (Jervis, 1999; Dannreuther, 2013b). Thus, for liberal institutionalists, cooperation can continue even after the initial beneficial conditions that fostered it are gone (Jervis, 1999), with the help of institutions (Jervis, 1999; Acharya and Johnston, 2007; Lebow, 2007; Nye, 2007; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Dannreuther, 2013b). Unlike the more pessimistic structural realism, defensive realism, does not exclude the possibility of cooperation, when the risks and costs of cooperation are lower than those of non-cooperation (Glaser, 1994; Müller, 2013). Glaser (1994) suggests a renewed theoretical model, 'contingent realism', aimed at filling the gaps of the structural realism, while challenging neo-institutionalism (1994:52). As such, the same arguments that structural realists use as obstacles to cooperation, are seen by Glaser as opportunities and incentives for states to cooperate: the desire to avoid losses of capability, the need to overcome the adversary's uncertainties or the reliance on self-help.

For realists, cooperation occurs on a case-by-case basis and it hardly survives after the interests that generated it are gone (Lebow, 2007). As a consequence, states prefer to act unilaterally when facing the prospects of an external conflict, after balancing the options available to them: to act alone, to act in cooperation with others, or to not act at all (Milner, 1992; Zartman, 2010). In the view of the offensive realism, anarchy under which states live prevents cooperation and draws states into a zero-sum competition (Mearsheimer, 2002).

Unlike Mearheimer's offensive realism, defensive realism acknowledges the possibility for cooperation to occur, however "cooperation is risky, but so is competition" (Taliaferro, 2000-2001:138), as states are uncertain about the consequences of engaging in a conflict. If structural realists are the most pessimistic about the perspectives of cooperation under anarchy (Glaser, 1994), defensive realists consider that international anarchy does not necessarily force states into conflict and war (Levy, 2013:583), as states may attempt to evaluate the intentions of their adversaries independent of their capabilities and use defensive strategies and careful signalling in order to increase their security (Taliaferro, 2000-2001; Levy, 2013). Relatively weak states confronted with formidable external constraints, are

expected to be more likely to choose cooperation rather than conflict with the dominant powers (Thorun, 2009).

These generally more pessimistic views on the international system have led to the use of non-cooperative game theories (Milner, 1992; Majeski and Fricks, 1995; Deutsch, 2006; Odell, 2013) in order to explain the choice between conflict and cooperation. The most well-known types of games proposed by the game theories are: the 'Chicken', the 'Prisoner's Dilemma', the 'Tit-for-Tat' (Axelrod, 1984[2006]; Conteh-Morgan, 2004) and the 'Assurance' (Conteh-Morgan, 2004).

The 'Chicken' game applies to mixed-motive conflict situations involving mutual threats where two players confronting each other face the choice between two strategies before colliding with each other: to cooperate by pulling away and thus risking to be considered a 'chicken', or to defect from the common interest and confront the rival. The choice of each player depends on the decision taken by its opponent (Conteh-Morgan, 2004). The 'Prisoner's Dilemma', developed by Axelrod (1984)[2006] involves both threats and promises (Conteh-Morgan, 2004), as it allows for the players to cooperate in order to achieve mutual gains, or to have one player exploiting the others, or not to cooperate at all (Axelrod, 1984[2006]). In this game as well, each player has two choices; to cooperate or to defect in the absence of information about the other players' choice. Defection is more likely, having a higher payoff than cooperation (Axelrod, 1984[2006]; Majeski and Fricks, 1995) in a game that is based on fear, greed and lack of trust (Majeski and Fricks, 1995). Axelrod's 'Tit-for-Tat' assumes that the players, still autonomous and egoistic actors (Lebow, 2007), will start by cooperating and afterwards they will respond according to the previous move of the other player. The 'Assurance' game produces the highest levels of cooperation as each player has full information about his rival and his payoffs, and the defection of one player will be followed by the defection of the other player as well (Conteh-Morgan, 2004).

However, more cooperation occurs than predicted by the neorealist view (Majeski and Fricks, 1995). Zero-sum games are rare and a conflict may be overturned by negotiations leading to cooperation in the perspective of mutual benefits, under a non-zero-sum situation where a player does not have to do better than the other player in order to do better for himself (Axelrod, 1984[2006]; Conteh-Morgan, 2004). Similarly, game theories recognise that cooperative and competitive interests may be intertwined in conflict, as in the case of coalitions or of the non-zero-sum games mentioned above (Deutsch, 2006:16). Moreover, non-cooperation can actually have an opposite effect, by stimulating states to communicate (Milner, 1992). Cooperation can occur in the Prisoner's Dilemma even in the absence of

communication or explicit agreements, when the expectations of the actors converge, under the form of "tacit cooperation" (Milner, 1992:469). Cooperation might not even be considered desirable, as it happens in the case of corruption, a form of cooperation in itself (Axelrod, 1984[2006]).

Cooperation is usually defined in terms of costs and benefits for the parties involved, as a strategic calculation of the gains foreseen. When these gains are not available to the parties by unilateral action, at the same cost, they are expected to work together to produce new gains for each of them (Zartman, 2010; Zartman and Touval, 2010). Cooperation is thus considered to occur when its costs do not outweigh the benefits and when it has greater chances of success than acting alone (Zartman, 2010). In this understanding, cooperation has two meanings: on the one hand, an agreement between rival players to resolve punctual issues, an occasional cooperation that does not address the broader conflict, it intends to manage it, but not to resolve it as such. This understanding lies at the basis of various game theories used to describe the strategies employed by opponent players. On the other hand, cooperation is seen as a relationship where parties involve themselves in joint problem solving for the purpose of maintaining their interactions and contributing to each others' well-being. It is the view that supports the idea of security communities, where the parties reach a stage at which, while occasional conflict and competition may still occur, the resort to war and violence is unthinkable (Nye, 2007; Zartman and Touval, 2010).

For the neoliberal institutionalists, states focus on absolute gains, meaning on how much each of them receives (Snidal, 2013) and they are thus opened to prospects for cooperation, while in the view of the structural realists, states emphasise the relative gains, who gets more (Powell, 1991; Snidal, 2013) and, consequently, the prospects for conflict (Powell, 1991). As such, for the liberals, states cooperate expecting benefits from future cooperation, as well as current payoffs (Zartman and Touval, 2010:6). In a system based on relative gains, on the other hand, the states are rather motivated by envy, by the concern that the others may gain more (Milner, 1992; Müller, 2013; Snidal, 2013), which makes cooperation more difficult to achieve (Müller, 2013; Snidal, 2013).

Structural realism is thus pessimistic about the prospects for cooperation and it is wary of the tendency the adversaries have to cheat (Putnam, 1988; Glaser, 1994; Jervis, 1999; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Schultz, 2013). It is also concerned about how the benefits will be distributed among the parties (Glaser, 1994; Nye, 2007; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Schultz, 2013) and about the conflicts that arise from the unequal distribution of relative gains (Nye, 2007). Cooperation can thus occur only under the condition of a balanced distribution of

gains (Grieco, 1990). Gains, however, should be regarded beyond their material nature, as underlined by the realist and liberal views. Gains, therefore, embed a dual nature: material benefits complemented by the perception of progress towards achieving goals, such as improved security, status, freedom of action (Zartman and Touval, 2010).

Liberals however consider that cooperation is possible under the long-debated idea of peace through trade or of interdependence promoting peace (Barbieri and Schneider, 1999; Nye, 2007; Levy, 2013; Zürn, 2013). Classical liberalism affirms that capitalist states tend to be peaceful because "war is bad for business" (Nye, 2007:44), in a similar view with the one Levy (2013) attributes to the bargaining model of war, where war is regarded as a costly and inefficient tool of resolving conflict since it destroys valuable resources. Economic trade replaces war as a mean of exchange and gaining assets (Pevehouse, 2004). Trade is assumed to facilitate contacts and interactions (Deutsch et al., 1957; Nye, 2007) which in return will increase the level of mutual acceptance and tolerance and thus decrease the likelihood of conflict (Deutsch et al., 1957; Polachek et al., 1999; Pollins, 1989; Pevehouse, 2004; Kastner, 2007; Nye, 2007; Robst et al., 2007).

Liberals argue that trading partners have an incentive to avoid war and foster cooperation in order to escape losing their gains as a consequence of disrupting their commercial relations (Polacheck, 1980; *see* Barbieri and Schneider, 1999; Pevehouse, 2004; Nye, 2007; Keohane and Victor, 2013; Levy, 2013). Trade relations bind actors in a state of economic dependence. If realists consider that increasing trade and dependence may represent a vulnerability and thus a possible source of conflict, as the difference in relative gains may offer a state a source of leverage over others (Barbieri and Schneider, 1999; Pevehouse, 2004; Maoz, 2009), for liberals interdependence is regarded as an incentive for cooperation (Maoz, 2009; Zartman and Touval, 2010). Similarly, they argue that countries with conflicting political interests engage in less trade with one another (Pollins, 1989; Kastner, 2007), as an importer would choose a friendly supplier if the price and quality were similar to other offers, in order to minimise the risk of economic disruptions (Pollins, 1989).

The liberal perspective aims towards depoliticising the politics of resources and calls for building cooperation through strengthening energy and markets with the help of institutions and expansion of liberal norms (Dannreuther, 2010; 2013a; 2013b; Siddi, 2017a). There is more focus on cooperation seen as a positive-sum game (Siddi, 2017a) and interdependence (Dannreuther, 2010; Siddi, 2017a), while conflict seems to reside rather in the domestic realm than in the global and regional interactions (Dannreuther, 2010). Interdependence and trade are seen to foster peace and to reduce the incentives for conflict

(Polachek et al., 1999; Pollins, 1989; Kastner, 2007; Robst et al., 2007; Nye, 2007; Maoz, 2009; Levy, 2013; Zürn, 2013; Siddi, 2017a), being thus regarded as an incentive for cooperation (Zartman and Touval, 2010).

It is this view of the liberal ideology advocating the efficiency of the markets, the limited role of the state and the positive relation between trade and cooperation that influenced the international policy on natural gas and oil markets in the 1980s and 1990s, only to be severely challenged in the 2000s and replaced by a more active and interventionist involvement of the state in the hydrocarbons market (Dannreuther, 2013a; Ostrowski, 2013). It is also the ideology that, despite more geopolitical moves in the past years, still prevails in the EU's energy policy and strategy. While openly concerned about over-dependence on a single supplier, the EU policy still points in the direction of fostering cooperation in the field of energy with Russia and highlights the need to enhance trade cooperation in order to maintain non-conflictual political relations at the same time.

To summarise the above incursion through the main material-oriented strands of theory and link them with the field of energy relations, realist approaches insist on the conflictual nature of energy relations and are pessimistic about the prospects for cooperation, as they focus on the competition for resources, the zero-sum games and the balance of power established between exporting and importing countries, bringing forward the argument of using the energy as a weapon and as a foreign policy tool used to achieve geopolitical goals. States and state actors are at the centre of analysis and they are depicted as rational actors attempting to maximise their energy power capabilities and security, while energy is a key ingredient of national power and national interest (Kropatcheva, 2014:2). The liberal interpretations to energy dynamics see the institutions and organisations at the core of energy relations, as a main instrument of regulating these relations and thus enhancing the potential for cooperation, aiming towards a positive-sum game. World energy prices impact themselves on states' policies and energy markets define the dynamics between various energy actors, be it states or companies. Nevertheless, both realist and liberal accountings are overwhelmingly focused on the role of material factors in defining the energy relations and energy-related goals of the main actors they are concerned with, the states.

As previously mentioned in the first part of this chapter, neoclassical realism stands at the outer limits of the geopolitical-prone theories, by acknowledging the role of actors' interests, past experiences and search for prestige in decision-making and attitude formation towards conflict or cooperation. For the proponents of this theory, cooperation is possible, but they remain pessimistic about its durability, while the focus remains on states and power

although mediated through the role of domestic factors (Kropatcheva, 2014:2). By recognising the role of perceptions and ideas in forming decisions, the neoclassical realists come one step closer to the social constructivists.

For the latter, "social construction talk is like game theory talk: analytically neutral between conflict and cooperation" (Wendt, 1995:76). In the view of the constructivists following Wendt, the degree of cooperation differs according to the type of anarchy: in the Hobbesian/realist anarchy, the focus is on enmity and the self-interest of states; in the Lockean/liberal anarchy, the actors allow for neutrality and adopt conflict management strategies; in the Kantian anarchy, there is room for amity and the establishment of collective security practices (Lebow, 2007). In the constructivist view, anarchy may have different meanings for different actors, according to the intersubjective understandings and practices they developed among themselves (Cashman, 2014:463). Consequently, states and conflicts are also different and they are treated as such by constructivism (Cashman, 2014).

If neorealists consider identities to be fixed, for constructivists, states' identities and interests change in time. It is the perceptions, the socially constructed understandings among various actors, the history of interactions through which actors construct their identities and interactions in a certain way that lead to conflict or cooperation (Conteh-Morgan, 2004; Cashman, 2014). "The social relationships in which actors (states, groups, individuals) find themselves determine how they interpret events and others' actions, define interests and how they pursue goals - whether through conflict or cooperation" (Conteh-Morgan, 2004:19).

Social constructivists, although not dedicating very much work to the analysis of conflict and cooperation dynamics, do try to reconcile them. For Jepperson et al. (1996), any theory on national security needs to accommodate both cooperation and coercion (p. 4), while for Cashman (2014:464), "anarchies can be conflictual or cooperative". Threats too are socially constructed by both material and ideational factors, arising from the interactions between states (Cashman, 2014). As a consequence, perceptions are being formed and based on actors' identities. In the case of the politicisation of the energy discourse regarding the fossil fuels imports from Russia to Europe, the threat perception is rather based on the construction of Russia as a threatening 'Other' than on material factors and vulnerabilities, a perception inherited particularly in the new EU Member States due to their historical interactions with Russia/the Soviet Union (Siddi, 2018a).

In the constructivist view, identities, norms and social practices have the capacity to reduce uncertainty through the logic of reciprocity: cooperation favours cooperation, whereas conflict triggers conflict, as, through negative or positive interactions, states become certain

of other states' benign or malign intentions and thus they either exacerbate or avoid the security dilemma (Cashman, 2014). As constructivists argue, identities are constructed following the interactions, the relationships between actors; relationships foster the aggregation of interests in collective terms and, as such, actors are more inclined to cooperate with one another or with members of a community (Lebow, 2007). In the energy field, "conflicting energy policies can lead to conflicts and become barriers to regional cooperation" (Weiner, 2018:2). It is an opinion from which I depart and to which I bring counter-arguments in the next section where I argue that conflict and cooperation can co-exist and trigger each other, that anxieties generated by political conflict may have a liberating effect and foster cooperation in the end, as actors seek to avoid disrupt their peaceful routines and engage in conflict.

In the light of the ideas explored above, two contradictory trends seem to still persist in the IR approach to conflict and cooperation, in line with Holsti's argument made already back in 1967: one the one hand, one side of the IR literature sees conflict and cooperation as a changeable state of affairs, as attitudes towards enemies change over time: "[...] just as there are no permanent allies in IR, there appear to be no permanent enemies" (Holsti, 1967:17). On the other hand, the other side of the IR scholarship regards things in a more static, pessimistic manner, with hostile relationships tending to endure, "because friends are expected to be friendly and enemies to be hostile", thus aligning the view on their behaviour with these expectations (Holsti, 1967:17).

As a consequence, the theoretical approaches previously detailed, accounting for more or less cooperation prospects, converge thus on one major bias: they treat conflict and cooperation as binary concepts, separated and excluding each other. Cooperation is most often defined in opposition to conflict or competition, being regarded as opposing concepts mirroring each other. As such, cooperation assumes perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes, openness in communication, the desire to help each other, trust, focus on common interests, while competition is characterised by the use of coercion and threat, by focus on dissimilarities, opposing interests and suspicion (Deutsch, 2006). Most of the time, cooperation is misleadingly depicted as being benign, while conflict is seen as being exclusively destructive (Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Doran, 2010).

Conflict and cooperation are thus depicted as the opposing ends of a *continuum* (Mirumachi and Allan, 2007; Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Doran, 2010) where states' actions range from irrational individualistic conflict to the opposite extreme of rational

collective cooperation (Mirumachi and Allan, 2007:4), in increasing degrees of cooperation from one end to the other of the axis.

However, conflict does not necessarily equal war or violence, as it is rather about perceptions of incompatibilities (Zartman and Touval, 2010). Moreover, material-oriented theories are not necessarily about conflict, while cultural theories are not always about cooperation (Jepperson et al., 1996:3-4). In addition, conflict and cooperation are not opposite concepts, they co-exist (Craig, 1993; Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Doran, 2010; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Deutsch, 2006; Dannreuther, 2013a) and may alternate each other or even overlap in the interactions between state and non-state actors in the international system.

In order to overcome this conceptual bias, I propose, in the next part, the introduction of a new conceptual tool, the ***conflict - cooperation perpetuum***, for the purpose of offering a more complex and adequate instrument that would better explain the complex nature of conflict and cooperation dynamics in the energy relations around the major pipeline projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region and the interactions among the key supplier, transit and consumer actors in Europe.

1.2. The conflict - cooperation perpetuum: conflict and cooperation as co-existing concepts

The discourse of the past two decades around the natural gas and oil exports from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe has witnessed an increased politicisation, being placed in the context of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea, of the gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine, and of the tensed relationship of the Western community with Russia following the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In addition, the domestic and foreign policy changes in Turkey have raised concerns regarding the future of the economic and energy cooperation with Ankara, a key transit player on the route of hydrocarbons exports from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe. As a consequence, the natural resources and the energy projects in the region have been increasingly placed in a realist, geopolitical, material-power based understanding, as new threats and risk to the energy security of the consumer states.

The research does not dismiss the role of the material factors in interpreting the instances of conflict and cooperation in the region, nor does it suggest that energy projects are solely ‘stability pipelines’. It argues that conflict and cooperation should be regarded as a *perpetuum*, as the two instances occur in a continuous alternation or even simultaneously, and

as various collective actors may choose to perceive each other simultaneously as security threats and economic partners (Kropatcheva, 2012). Moreover, it looks into the argument that economic trade "[...] can simultaneously increase conflict and cooperation" (Pevehouse, 2004:250); commercial disputes do not necessarily trigger military conflict and trade ties may act to minimise costly political conflicts (Pevehouse, 2004; Øverland et al. 2016).

The exploration of the literature on cooperation revealed a predominance of generally more pessimistic views on the international system, where the overall realist perspective considers the international arena to be characterised by great conflict (Jervis, 1999) with cooperation occurring only sporadically if benefits are clear for the parties involved (Zartman and Touval, 2010). Unlike the more pessimistic structural realism, defensive realism and neoliberalism acknowledge the possibility of cooperation to emerge when the risks and costs of cooperation are lower than those of non-cooperation (Glaser, 1994; Müller, 2013), in the case of realists, or when the states see the possibility to produce mutual gains and avoid shared harm (Jervis, 1999; Dannreuther, 2013b), in the neoliberal view. However, both realism and neoliberalism build on the presumption that states live in a state of anarchy which stimulates states to pursue their interests unilaterally (Jervis, 1999; Zartman, 2010) and offers little incentives for cooperation (Milner, 1992; Jervis, 1985; 1999). Although less pessimistic about the perspective of cooperation to occur, defensive realism and neoliberalism meet each other when using game theories to explain patterns of cooperation.

The use of non-cooperative game theories (Milner, 1992; Majeski and Fricks, 1995; Deutsch, 2006; Odell, 2013) gained popularity in their attempt to explain the choice between conflict and cooperation, such as the 'Chicken', the 'Prisoner's Dilemma', the 'Tit-for-Tat' (Axelrod, 1984[2006]; Conteh-Morgan, 2004) and the 'Assurance' (Conteh-Morgan, 2004). Although reflecting the general pessimistic view on cooperation, game theories do not exclude the possibility of cooperation to occur when the expectations of the actors converge, under the form of "tacit cooperation" (Milner, 1992:469). Also, they acknowledge the role of information and communication among players, and of the 'shadow of the future' (Axelrod, 1984[2006]:129), seen as the perspective of players to meet again and repeatedly, thus enhancing the chances for a cooperative behaviour to develop over time.

Nevertheless, despite leaving space for cooperation to occur, I argue that game theories remain largely artificial models of interaction, not easily replicable in the real world. In addition, they assume chess-like moves, reaction following action, excluding the possibility of simultaneous moves. Also, they do not reveal the original intentions and choices of the players, nor the reasons for which they would choose cooperation, ruling out

social and emotional attachments and commitments (Lebow, 2007). Moreover, Axelrod's models look at the interactions between two players at a time, while in the energy dynamics, there are usually more than two players interacting and each conducts multiple interactions with several other players.

All the theoretical approaches reviewed, be it more or less inclined towards acknowledging the prospects for cooperation, share thus on one major bias: they treat conflict and cooperation as binary concepts, as a dichotomy, separated and excluding each other, at the opposing ends of a continuum (Mirumachi and Allan, 2007; Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Doran, 2010), in increasing degrees of cooperation from one end to the other of the axis.

However, conflict and cooperation are not opposite concepts, they co-exist (Craig, 1993; Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008; Doran, 2010; Zartman and Touval, 2010; Deutsch, 2006; Dannreuther, 2013a). A binary, dichotomic approach to conflict and cooperation "denies the reality that people with cooperative, highly overlapping goals can be and often are in conflict" (Tjosvold, 1998:287). Cooperation is sometimes used to compete when more actors decide to act collectively against a common opponent (Doran, 2010) and it is not a non-linear process, as it captures the variations of relations over time and in different political contexts (Zeitoun and Mirumachi, 2008). Conflict and cooperation may alternate each other or even overlap in the interactions between state and non-state actors in the international system. Conflict and cooperation are indeed not mutually exclusive or to be separated (Kropatcheva, 2012) and irrational national collective identity politics can occur simultaneously with rational self-interest (Sterling-Folker, 2002). Moreover, the cooperation-conflict options feed back into states' search for recognition and prestige (Larson and Shevchenko, 2010), as actors will be more inclined to choose cooperation in a context where the other actors acknowledge their status and when cooperation will eventually help to increase security, influence, power and power capabilities (Kropatcheva, 2012), such as the energy capabilities.

The alternation and simultaneity of conflict and cooperation in the realm of political relations, and the fact that most of the time they occur in mixed cooperative-conflictual types of interaction, is reflected also in the energy trade relations, as friendly or conflictual ties between political actors are followed by an increase or decrease in the trade among states (Pollins, 1989) and the same in reverse, from trade to politics. In the natural gas and oil relations, the various collective actors involved (states, companies, international institutions) engage both in cooperation, as well as in inevitable disputes, as they are part of an extended

network of industrial, economic and political relations (Ostrowski, 2013). In addition, cooperation and conflict are intricately linked, from the physical extraction of resources, through the production process and transportation, to the final sale and consumption of these resources (Dannreuther, 2013a; Ostrowski, 2013). Conflicts over supplies and transit are followed by alternative cooperative measures, such as the decision to build bypass pipelines in order to avoid further conflict (Ostrowski, 2013).

Taking into account the traditional theoretical approaches on conflict and cooperation in IR, it is worth observing that a large part of the cooperation literature also contains a "democratic bias" (Mattes and Rodriguez, 2014:527), as it focuses mainly on the relative advantage of democracies at cooperation, ignoring the fact that autocracies also have a cooperation potential. Non-democratic states may also engage in beneficial cooperation to avoid war (Taliaferro, 2000-2001). As Mattes and Rodriguez (2014) also notice, the autocratic regimes that display similar institutional characteristics to democracies (greater leader accountability, limited policy flexibility, greater transparency), in particular the single-party and the military regimes, as opposed to the personalist systems, are more likely to cooperate with one another and with democracies.

In the post-Soviet Caspian-Black Sea region, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* may be traced by analysing the energy policy documents, the instrumentalisation of existing pipelines, as well as the dynamics between the key actors engaged in the supply-transit-consume chain of the natural gas and oil flow. At all times, the non-material factors interplay with the material ones, and the political and economic realms of interactions work together when tracing the *perpetuum*. The *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* of the energy relations around the key pipeline projects from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe is thus characterised by two major traits which overcome the major biases debated previously in this thesis: (1) mixed forms of conflict and cooperation occur in the energy dynamics of the main pipeline projects from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, such as cooperative conflict which may define a conflict at political level between two major players overlapping with a fruitful economic cooperation between them at energy level; (2) at all times, both material and cognitive factors form the basis of the path the actors choose in approaching their energy relations, be it a cooperative or a conflictual one, or both simultaneously, a topic on which I return later in the final part of this chapter.

As discussed in the previous sections, the initial optimism at the end of the Cold War has been replaced by a more generalised perception of an ongoing and escalating crisis, facing a multiplication of enemies and threats which actors feel unable to counter (Huysmans,

1998). This has in turn accentuated the sense of both physical and psychological insecurity experienced by some collective actors, such as states. Their existential anxieties streaming from their fear of eventual nonbeing have been furthermore enhanced by recent events in Europe, such as the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, leading to the pre-eminence of more geopolitical concerns around Russia and the energy projects connected to the Kremlin and Gazprom. A more geopolitical discourse surfaced and the IR literature on energy has been mainly predominated by neorealist and other material-based approaches depicting the energy projects as being dominated by conflict and possibly war. Nevertheless, liberal approaches, more concerned with trade and cooperation did not disappear from the narratives and actions of the main actors, and realist, geopolitical views continued to co-exist with market-oriented preoccupations in the field of energy relations.

I briefly open the discussion here about instances where conflict and cooperation worked together in shaping the energy dynamics in Europe, a topic to which I return in detail in the final chapter. one of the examples where the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* can be illustrated is that of the new gas deal signed in December 2019 between Russia and Ukraine. Despite the ongoing war in Eastern Ukraine and the general state of conflict after the annexation of Crimea, on 20 December 2019, Russia and Ukraine signed a new five-years gas transit deal, allowing for the Russian gas to continue to be transited through Ukraine to Europe. Moreover, the gas deal happened in the context of more conciliatory political moves as well, with the Ukrainian president consenting to offer special status to the separatist-controlled areas of Donbas region and to withdraw the Ukrainian military troops from three places on the frontline, and with a full prisoners' swap (Deutsche Welle, 2019; Fisher 2019; France 24, 2019; Interfax, 2019; Khrennikova et al., 2019). Geopolitical pessimism cautioning about a spiral of conflict that would spill over from the military into the energy trade area was contradicted by more complex dynamics of conflict and cooperation proving to my argument in this thesis, that conflict and cooperation do not mutually exclude each other, that they may overlap in what I call a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

Another example, which I discuss thoroughly in the next chapters, is that of the evolution of energy as security for the EU. Particularly after the EU's enlargement in 2004 and 2007, energy has been framed by some of the new Member States, former members of the communist bloc, as a hard security issue, often linking the gas imports from Russia to a security threat (Casier, 2011b; Yafimava, 2015; Austvik, 2016). The threat perception was enhanced during the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 and it was linked, especially by some of the new Member States, to the alleged intention of Gazprom and other European companies to

double the capacity of Nord Stream and to pursue the Nord Stream 2 project (Siddi, 2018a). However, the Energy Union finally proposed by the European Commission in 2015, although embedding a more geopolitical tone, chose goals reflecting the priorities of the old Member States in Western Europe, mostly related to the single market, to environment and climate protection (Yafimava, 2015; Austvik, 2016) and thus disconnecting energy imports from security. Thus, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* may be observed in the preference of the EU policy for a more economic-oriented and less security-related approach, while also narrating a stronger role for itself on the foreign energy scene. It can also be traced in the heterogeneous preferences of the EU countries, some attached to more conflictual routines with Russia, and others preferring to maintain their energy cooperation with Moscow.

The *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* is also visible when looking at the instrumentalisation of the natural gas pipelines and at the way the actors participating in the energy projects choose to align along them, an analysis which I perform in detail in the next chapters. 'Ghost pipelines', projects highly politicised yet never realised, also compete and shape the discourses of the main actors engaged, while bringing state and non-state actors together and thus reflecting the impact of the political dynamics in the region on the energy projects. I detail more on the topic in the next chapters, briefly noting here that the Southern Gas Corridor project initialised by the EU is closely shadowed by the Turkish Stream supported by Russia and Turkey. The Turkish Stream is an accurate illustration of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* and of the interplay of material and non-material factors in shaping the energy dynamics of the region. The acute tensions followed by reconciliation between Russia and Turkey, in 2015-2016, have been reflected in the abandonment of the project after the escalation of the tensions in late 2015, and respectively in its relaunch and official signing during the two reconciliation meetings in 2016 between presidents Putin and Erdogan, with the project being finally inaugurated on the 8th of January 2020. The energy projects are being perceived not only as a critical source of material wealth and stability, but also as a symbolic linkage between the two politically-isolated powers at the Black Sea. The resume of the Turkish Stream negotiations thus serves as a political statement, as both Russia and Turkey claim their role of regional powers at the Black Sea, reassert their historical role in the region and fight a loss of prestige in the eyes of the international community. Material and non-material factors work together to drive both conflict and cooperation security dynamics in the region.

It can thus be argued that the actors in the Caspian-Black Sea region interpret energy according to their quest for assuming desired identities through the interaction with their

neighbours, the larger regional, global and their own internal energy players. Supplier states' views on the security of energy demand are intertwined with their pursuit of an identity of strong, reliable states, of indispensable suppliers for the regional and the European market. Transit states often use pipeline diplomacy in order to be recognised in their role of key regional players and sometimes join projects according to their existing political and strategic alignments, while at other times look for a compromise between both European and Russian-backed projects.

Therefore, there are instances of cooperation alternating or sometimes overlapping the conflict ones, in a constant fluidity, that account for the existence of a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in the Caspian-Black Sea energy projects shaping, and being shaped in return, by the regional energy dynamics. In this context, the thesis highlights the importance of looking beyond resources and energy projects in their material nature, and of exploring the role played by cognitive, psychological factors that drive the energy actors' decisions for conflict or cooperation in the region.

A more comprehensive theoretical and empirical framework is thus needed to complement the material-based approaches on the energy dynamics in relation to conflict and cooperation, not by adding new factors, but rather by offering a new interpretation of the existing ones, through non-material lenses. The importance of both material factors, such as the availability of natural resources, and that of the cognitive, non-material ones, should be acknowledged for a comprehensive understanding of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* and the energy security in their relation with the energy projects of the Caspian-Black Sea region.

2. Conceptual reductionism of energy security: the physical and ontological security of energy

2.1. Energy security and the geopolitics of energy: the material-ideational dichotomy bias

I analysed in the previous part the first of the two main biases I identified under the conceptual reductionism, namely the conflict-cooperation dichotomy bias. I propose to move now to the second disputed and often biased concept debated in the energy literature, that of the energy security. I have already initiated the discussion on the topic in the previous sections when I reflected upon the implications of politicising energy under the geopolitical debates, of securitising energy and resources through the lenses of the securitization theory, of broadening the security agenda in order to include energy in the political debate as

proposed by critical security theories, or of constructing energy security in the view of social constructivism. Without intending to repeat the arguments already made, I highlight in this section on how energy security is conceptualised under the material/non-material framework, while identifying potential biases on the way. Keeping the conclusions of this reviewing exercise in mind, I take a step further and I suggest understanding energy as security through the prism of the ontological security theory, which will allow me to analyse both the material, as well as the psychological components of energy (in)securities as they are being defined by actors for themselves and for the others.

Returning to the review of the energy security-related literature, I note that there is little agreement regarding to what energy security means, as the concept is multi-dimensional and dynamic, subject to constant re-definition by various actors in different political, social, economic or academic contexts. Its definition has been challenged by the paradigm shift (Stoddard, 2013) I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, by the transition to a predominant geopolitical approach which consequently saw the emergence of a new terminology of 'energy security', 'energy diplomacy', 'energy dependence', 'the geopolitics of energy' (Casier, 2011a), starting the early 2000s. As a consequence, security of supply and the energy security of the consumer states became the central focus, while the energy security of the exporting states, understood as the security of demand, received less attention. When brought together under discussion, the security of supply and the security of demand are predominantly depicted as the opposing interests of two antithetic actors, such as the EU and Russia, which, in their attempts to overcome their own anxieties and insecurities take measures to increase their own energy security, generating instead more energy insecurity for the other. The argument of the 'energy security dilemma' thus gained prevalence (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Sharples, 2011; Judge et al., 2016), one of the main biases I identified in the first part of this chapter.

The generally promoted definition of energy security, also accepted at the level of the EU, is the one proposed by the International Energy Agency (IEA). The IEA[4] defines energy security as the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. It distinguishes between long-term energy security mainly dealing with timely investments to supply energy in line with economic developments and environmental needs, and short-term energy security focusing on the ability of the energy system to react promptly to sudden changes in the supply-demand balance. In line with the IEA, the EU sees the energy security

[4] https://www.iea.org/topics/energysecurity/

as "diverse, affordable, and reliable energy".[5] I discuss thoroughly in the next chapter how energy security has evolved and has been conceptualised by the EU and by other major energy actors such as Russia and Turkey, from the perspective of their attempts to build and consolidate their ontological security.

Returning to the conceptualisation of energy security in the academic debate, I proposed, in the first part of this chapter where I discussed about the theoretical reductionism encountered in the energy-dedicated literature, to imagine the various strands of literature as displayed along a *spectrum* ranging from highly materially-focused to more non-material oriented approaches. The bodies of literature reviewed reveal an overwhelming conceptualisation of energy as security by the geopolitical-oriented theories, situated at the material end of the spectrum. Social constructivism and the securitization theory, located towards the middle of the spectrum, concern themselves as well with energy security, but conceptualise it in different manners, as I expose below.

Thus, as previously detailed, the political and academic discourses of the past two decades around the natural gas and oil exports from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe have witnessed an increased politicisation, being often linked to the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea, to the gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine and to the annexation of Crimea. "Under this logic, energy security is a derivative of geopolitics" (Langlois-Bertrand, 2010:11). Energy has moved from a more economic understanding to a predominantly political and politicised approach (Dannreuther, 2010; Casier, 2011a; Cragg, 2013; Ostrowski, 2013; Sharples, 2013; Stoddard, 2013; Dusciac et al., 2016). Energy as security has become mainly the concern of geopolitical-prone theories, such as neorealism, neoliberalism and of the various strands belonging to the 'resource curse' and 'resource wars' theories.

The theoretical realm of energy debates has therefore been dominated for many years by the traditional security assumptions of realism assuming that states are motivated to pursue interests derived from power, and of liberalism which sees states structuring their behaviour in order to maximise profits (Steele, 2008). As a consequence, conceptualisation of energy security as a consumer-centric concept (Sharples, 2013), focused on the security of supply, has been feeding itself the theoretical fields of both political realism, concerned with the conflictual aspects of energy relations, as well as of neoliberal economics, focused on the

5 https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/energy-security

gain-driven cooperative potential of energy relations at the legal, economic and institutional levels (Stoddard, 2013).

The neoliberals have at the core the concept of energy security, in the context of ensuring supply and price accessibility to foster win-win games and their main concern is about the threat posed by an asymmetric interdependence. The focus is on the international level, on the role of the markets, institutions and companies and it is being argued that interdependence and not competition defines energy markets, thus the goal should be extending the markets and correcting their imperfections (Langlois-Bertrand, 2010; Stoddard, 2013). For the liberals, "[...] the question to ask is not who is winning the battle [for access], but rather how the market can accommodate the divergent needs of the individual players and encourage the cooperation" (Stoddard, 2013:444).

At a meeting point with neoliberalism, the focus for the neorealists is on international politics and energy security is defined mainly in the framework of the geopolitical competition of states over depleting resources, seen as a key ingredient of national power and national interest (Dannreuther, 2010; 2013b), as a consequence of the combined effect of an increasing global demand for energy and increasing concentration of energy supply in a few countries (Stoddard, 2013). In the neorealist perspective, energy securitisation occurs in the context of a threat perception by the consumer states and it also contains a military component (Ciută, 2010; Langlois-Bertrand, 2010; Stoddard, 2013; Triantaphyllou, 2007). A brief distinction in terminology is needed while discussing energy security and the securitisation of energy. An issue, such as energy or natural gas imports from Russia to the EU, is 'politicised' when it becomes "part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocation" (Buzan et al., 1998:23). The 'opportunisation' of an issue stands for the opportunity to improve a situation that requires emergency actions (Zeitoun, 2007, *see* Mirumachi and Allan, 2007), while a 'securitised' issue is a threat requiring emergency and exceptional measures (Buzan et al., 1998; Zeitoun, 2007, *see* Mirumachi and Allan, 2007), with energy moving beyond a simple political and economic matter, to a threat to national security (Buzan et al., 1998).

Social constructivist interpretations to energy have been largely driven by the goal to challenge the realist reductionist geopolitical approaches that narrow down energy and natural resources to their material value and energy relations to a complex of power struggle and security building. For this scope, they propose focusing on the ideational dimensions of energy relations, building on the idea that material structures require meaning only in the social context through which they are interpreted (Checkel, 1998:326) and that power and

interest acquire meaning in the light of the ideas that they are constructed upon (Wendt, 1999). For Wendt (1999), social evolution is not driven by material forces as such, but by other factors for which individuals use material forces for, factors of a more ideational nature, such as ambitions, fears and hopes (p. 113).

This constructivist interpretation of the role of material and non-material dimensions of international relations has been criticised for its own reductionism by overemphasising the role of ideas and thus disregarding the importance of material capabilities. Coming to the defence of neoclassical realism, Kitchen (2010) advocates for situating ideas and material forces on the same level, without prioritising any of the two categories. However, the author clearly suggests isolating the material from the ideational and maintaining ideas and interests as conceptually distinct phenomena (p. 127). Kitchen limits the impact of ideas at the so-called unit level at three locations: through individuals that form up the state; through institutions created by individuals with shared ideas and practices; and through the broader culture of the state. Moreover, he admits that neoclassical realism remains a structural realist theory prioritising power, interests and coalition-making (p. 141).

Returning to the previous point, it is worth mentioning that constructivists themselves have taken efforts to combat the above-mentioned reductionism that gives preference to the ideational factors for the detriment of the material capabilities, arguing that material and social realities should not be divided, but one should take into account the interaction between material forces and social meanings on which the international reality is based upon, and how they influence on each other (Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1999; Greenwood Onuf, 2013). For the social constructivists, it is the shared knowledge and understandings that constitute the actors in a situation and the cooperative or conflictual nature of their relationships (Wendt, 1995:73). Thus, both material and non-material components of the international system are important and should be understood together and not separately, as the international system is made of both material capabilities and ideational relationships and all material things are endowed with social meaning: the impact of the material factors depends on how the actors perceive them (Cashman, 2014:464). In the energy realm, it is not the material value of natural resources per se that might drive various leaders to engaging in conflicts, but rather their perception on these reserves (Colgan, 2013:154) and on the benefits they can bring.

Katzenstein (1996) warns himself about the fact that one should not fall into the enticement of privileging either of the cultural context or the material forces over the other. In a constructivist interpretation, Sharples (2013) and Simão (2017) too argue that, although the

social constructivist approach is driven by a critique of materialism, it does not dismiss the role of material interests, it rather focuses on how actors interpret these in a subjective manner.

As far as energy dynamics are concerned, Casier (2011a:494) suggests a "thin Constructivist perspective" that would integrate both material factors and social processes, as "changing material circumstances -such as the rising energy prices- play a role [...] but they always require social mediation and interpretation" (p. 503). Energy security is thus seen as acquiring meaning through the understanding of different actors in particular contexts (Judge et al., 2016).

I agree here that energy security is thus a concept transgressing the level of materiality, as different actors allocate a different understanding of gas dependence, according to their own, subjective experiences and interpretations attributed to the role of energy, regardless the share of natural gas in the total national consumption. It is a flexible concept, consisting of both "[...] ideological as well as material dimensions" (Judge et al., 2016:756). I also subscribe to this point to the fact that in order to understand the energy preferences of an actor, one needs to look at the historical dimension and value of energy for that actor (Judge et al., 2016) and at the historical contextualisation of how interests and policies are built (Simão, 2017) based on previous experiences and persisting perceptions on oneself and on the others.

Nevertheless, although the social constructivist perspective comes closest to a more comprehensive understanding of energy dynamics and relations, integrating both material and social forces, ideas and objective reality together, I do consider that it reduces the role of the very factors that it brings forward, namely the role of the non-material forces that continuously transform the understanding of energy as security, by curtailing it to the social factors and contexts, and thus largely disregarding the importance of psychological dimension that I explore in this thesis.

Moving further towards the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum*, I have previously discussed in this chapter the fact that one of the core ideas shared by critical security studies, analysed in the previous part, is broadening the security agenda, in the attempt to imagine security beyond the traditionalist approaches that used to restrict it to issues of military and defence. In this realm of framing security, security policies have been credited with being extended in order to include more and more topics, as diverse as economic issues, climate change, or human rights.

Following this trend, energy security has also been seen as receiving wider coverage on the political agendas in the past decades (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Bridge, 2015), being sometimes understood as an issue of human security (Bridge, 2015). Some authors place the proliferation of energy security in the wider context of the disappointment generated by the failure of markets in allocating resources and a consequential return to the state as a stable provider of security (Bridge, 2015). With the general trend of broadening the security agenda, the definitions of energy security have themselves been stretched further and further in order to cover an increasing variety of dimensions that underpin the security of energy. Kirchner and Berk (2010:864) for example attempt a more comprehensive understanding of the concept, seeing energy security as "[...] the availability of energy in various forms, in sufficient quantity and at affordable prices, delivered in an environmentally friendly, sustainable manner which is also free from serious risk of major disruption of service". Nevertheless, despite their laudable intention of enriching the potential of the concept to tackle a wider diversity of issues, such definitions still retain a consumer-centric approach, focused rather on the security of supply and less on the security of demand prioritised by the exporting states, or on the security of supply as understood by the transit states.

In a similar note, I note that, while the Welsh and the Paris School generally ignore the topic of energy security, the Copenhagen School approaches the issue of energy in the context of securitising energy and resources, by discussing how energy becomes a securitising object when it displays features of a threat to the national security. What I do concur with is Balzacq et al's. (2016) opinion, as exponents of the securitization theory, that security issues do not always reflect the material circumstances, but often they are an indicator of how leaders understand and shape the world. Nevertheless, for the proponents of the securitization theory, energy supplies become the referent object, and the perspective of losing access to such supplies is seen as an existential threat. Therefore, the focus is overwhelmingly on the security of supply (Sharples, 2013) and on the interests of the consuming countries. Despite the fact that the topic of energy securitisation and its consequential labelling as a political threat has been fervently debated by other authors not affiliated to the school, the issue of energy security under the securitization theory remains rather underexplored (Christou and Adamides, 2013).

I agree thus with Bridge (2015:3) that "the concept of 'energy security' in circulation today has been shaped [...] by historical anxieties" experienced by energy importing states. As a consequence, starting from their own concerns, energy security has been framed to reflect primarily the need to secure against disruptions of supply, and thus energy security has

become equated to security of supply. Nevertheless, producing and exporting states have their own concerns, related to securing an uninterrupted and price-stable flow of natural gas and oil. For countries like Azerbaijan and Russia, where the export of hydrocarbons represents an important part of the revenues to national budget, such a stable flow is a source of security. Energy security is understood as the need for stability and for risk sharing among energy producers, transit providers and consumers, while for the Western countries it is mostly about diversification of supply (Molchanov, 2012:26). It is therefore the security of demand that translates as energy security for the exporting states. In the past years, concerns related to environment protection and sustainability have been raised around energy, in order to reflect interest for the environmental and social implications of using certain fuels or of building particular energy new projects; as a consequence, the concept of energy security has been enlarged in order to comprise more security components, crossing all sectors of activity and involving a large variety of actors (Ciută, 2010; Bridge, 2015).

It is at this point that I agree with Ciută (2010) that from this perspective, both geopolitically-oriented theories, as well as the securitization theory, prove to be reductionist, having fixed definitions of security which also limit energy security to the multiplication of threats, subjects and objects of security policy, disregarding the fact that the meaning of energy security itself is constantly being changed, as security in the energy domain does not mean the same thing everywhere and for everyone (p. 125). Moreover, energy security may be an element of national security, but it is not always the case, and security does not necessarily imply the securitisation of energy (McGowan, 2011), as sometimes energy security is often a technical issue, related to a wide range of factors, such as weather conditions, infrastructure maintenance, logistics and investments (McGowan, 2011).

The main reductionist bias I encounter is, however, even in the work of the critics to the geopolitical approaches to energy security, the understanding of energy security exclusively as a material need, as a concept dealing with material, objective, even numeric factors, such as: quantity of resources available, transit and pipelines capacity, national energy consume, technological features etc. While I acknowledge the importance of such material components and I support their analysis in any debate about energy security, in this thesis I take one step further and introduce an additional layer of understanding energy security: the role of psychological, non-material factors in defining energy (in)securities for oneself and for the others, that come not to exclude, but to complement the material ones.

In the IR literature, energy security has thus been submitted to rather fixed conceptualisations by the traditional theoretical schools, which see it reduced either to a

geopolitical, state-centric understanding, as in the case or realist-influenced academic work, or to the functioning of the markets, from the perspective of liberal-oriented authors. More critical approaches have attempted to expand the concept in order to reflect a broadened vision of security that would tackle other forms of security, such as environmental and human security, leading to a wider realm of actors as well. Nevertheless, they tend to overstate the importance of the ideational factors to the detriment of the material ones. Thus, the material-ideational dichotomy, if perpetuated either by the traditional material-focused approaches, or by the theories concerned with the role of non-material factors, obstructs the potential of an enriched and enlarged theoretical approach to the complexity of energy relations and their mixed nature of materiality and cognition. What most theories have in common is the attempt to pin down, to fix the concept to one definition or the other.

What I suggest in the final part of this chapter instead is to look at energy (in)securities as a subjective, multi-faceted, dynamic concept that would encompass both a material dimension, as well as a non-material, psychological one, that would allow any actor in any context to understand security in the energy field according to its own background and needs. I thus propose to employ the theoretical framework of ontological security, complemented by insights from the broader realm of the psychology of security and political psychology, in order to move beyond the material-ideational dichotomy of security and to include cognitive aspects in understanding the security of collective actors in IR.

2.2. Energy ontological security: cognitive and material foundations of conflict and cooperation dynamics in the energy field

I analysed in the first section of this chapter the main theories that engage in the debate around the conflict and cooperation dynamics around the major energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region with the wider Europe. This theoretical journey determined me to identify two main categories of reductionism in literature: the theoretical reductionism, be it the one perpetuated by the geopolitical-influenced theories, or the critical one encountered among the critical security theories; and the conceptual reductionism, where I discussed two major problematic conceptualisations: that referring to conflict and cooperation, and the one engaging with energy security.

This exercise prompted me to identify a series of frequently encountered biases in the literature that I debated and reflected upon, in order to identify the main missing elements. I conclude that there is a predominance of the geopolitically-influenced theories that approach

the energy relations in Europe, linking resources and energy projects with conflict, seeing cooperation and conflict as mutually exclusive and relying overwhelmingly on energy security as physical security, materially-determined. On the other hand, the theories dedicated to highlighting the importance of ideational factors in IR either do not engage themselves sufficiently with the study of conflict and cooperation in the energy field from an IR perspective, or they remain at the level of discussing the role of social forces and do not take the necessary leap forward, by introducing in the analysis the role of the psychological factors that drive actors' decisions and behaviour.

As mentioned above, the role of the psychological factors that would be analysed in conjunction, and not separately, from the material ones is generally lacking from the IR literature on conflict and cooperation dynamics of the energy relations in Europe. It should be acknowledged however that even the theories located farthest away from the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum*, neorealism and neoliberalism, offer attention to one important cognitive element, central to their approach towards state behaviour: fear. Under their understanding, the states, as main geopolitical actors, are trapped in a state of anarchy where threat plays a central role and conflict is the most likely option. Actors fear each other and thus they take measures to increase their physical security against each other. Suspicion, historical traumas and lack of trust feed the fear, leading to a geopolitical narrative of fear and threat.

The traditional notion of security in IR is premised on the assumption that states engage in actions based on the need to ensure their own survival in the relationships they have with other states (Steele, 2008). Both the offensive realists, through the voice of Mearsheimer, and the defensive realists, in the words of Waltz, agree that survival is the primary goal of states in a world of anarchy (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001; *see* Steele, 2008). According to this generally spread interpretation, states are mainly preoccupied with safeguarding the integrity of their territory, and thus of their physical existence. For this purpose, they develop survival strategies meant to "[...] postpone death by countering objectified threats" (Huysmans, 1998:242). In other words, states seek to ensure their *physical security*. In the energy studies, this approach led to the understanding of states as main actors concerned about their survival seen as unperturbed access to resources. Consolidating the physical security means, under this view, securing the access to resources and counterbalancing the potential leverage the other side might gain in the competition, which not rarely is regarded as leading to violence and war.

Social constructivism, on the other hand, with its work dedicated to the importance of non-material aspects of security, comes closest to the point I make in this thesis, that material and non-material factors should both be acknowledged when interpreting the energy dynamics, but it does not provide the full necessary theoretical framework needed, as it does not engage with the role of cognition and emotions and remains at the level of social relations and interactions. I agree nevertheless with Nye (2007) that actors are motivated not only by material interests, but also by ideas, by their sense of identity and to the fact states display multiple identities in their various interactions: winners, victims, allies, leaders etc. I also subscribe to the argument that both material and non-material components of the international system matter and they should not be strictly separated.

Nevertheless, as I pointed about earlier, social constructivism remains limited for lingering in the realm of social forces and social construction, and for not engaging with a particularly important category of non-material factors, the cognitive, psychological aspects that come to complement the material ones in building actors' sense of security.

In fact, none of the theories I reviewed addresses the psychological dimensions of their conflictual or cooperative security decisions in the field of energy. Both material and cognitive dimensions must be accounted for when analysing security at collective level. Power and interests, two central concepts of mainstream theories, are themselves cognitive in nature, as neither of them is objective, as they are based on the beliefs individuals hold about them (Young and Schafer, 1998). Moreover, "material interests interact with cognitive options to influence the choice of identity" (McSweeney, 2004:209).

Stemming from these conclusions, I suggest taking that step forward, by moving beyond the predominant material-ideational dichotomy and the conflict-cooperation antithesis biases. For this purpose, I do not dismiss the contribution of the valuable academic work developed by the theories I reviewed earlier in this chapter. Instead, I look at the biases I identified and I suggest the use of a different theoretical framework, that of **ontological security**, which I explore below, that will help explain at a deeper level how various energy actors choose conflictual and cooperative relations in their attempt to combat existential anxieties and insecurities, and consolidate their security. For this purpose, I reflect, from the perspective of this new theoretical framework, on key topics debated under the review section, such as conflict, security dilemma, 'Othering', identities. In addition, I have already proposed a new conceptual tool that I developed and presented above, the **conflict-cooperation perpetuum**, which will allow to understand why conflict and cooperation can coexist and how more cooperation takes place than the literature usually gives credit for. At

all time, I keep in mind that **material and non-material factors** are not mutually exclusive, that they work together in order to define the actors' security-building needs.

2.2.1. Ontological security: introducing a new theoretical framework

Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the IR literature with respect to analysing the cognitive foundations of security, it must be acknowledged that in the recent years welcomed steps have been taken in literature in order to move beyond the material-ideational dichotomy of security and to include cognitive aspects in understanding the security of collective actors in IR. Nevertheless, there are very few endeavours to apply the same interpretation specifically to energy security and energy relations.

For this reason, I introduce a theoretical framework that will complement rather than dismiss the material interpretations to security, conflict and cooperation in the field of energy relations. Thus, I support the need to use a comprehensive and inclusive framework, acknowledging the importance of both material and cognitive aspects of energy dynamics that underpin actors' choices for cooperative or conflictual relations, or for both simultaneously. To this goal, I add insights from the broader realm of the psychology of security and political psychology, while focusing more specifically on the literature dedicated to the ontological security.

One of the efforts that stands out to include cognition at collective level in IR is the one advocating for the fact that states are not concerned only to preserve their physical security, but also "their identity as a corporate actor" (Mitzen, 2006:2), their way of life (Goldgeier, 1997; Steele, 2008). States are thus preoccupied with safeguarding their ***ontological security***.

The concept on ontological security has been initially launched by the psychiatrist R.D. Laing in his book "The Divided Self" (1960) in which he introduced a social understanding, in addition to the biological one, of the mental health, in the attempt to explain how individuals narrate their lives with regard to the existential anxieties that disturb their daily routines, and to how they reflexively produce coping mechanisms to counter the crises (Croft, 2012). It was later developed for the social sciences by the sociologist Anthony Giddens. Giddens (1991) discussed ontological security at the level of the individual in the connection with the basic trust and routines. The **basic trust** represents the emotive-cognitive basis of the individuals, built in early infancy in their relation with the caretakers. It acts as an emotional support, a "protective cocoon" (Giddens, 1991:38) that will help the individuals to

go through the transitions and crises of daily life (Giddens, 1991; McSweeney, 2004). In order to face and overcome the threatening anxieties of life, the individuals maintain **routines** (Giddens, 1991; McSweeney, 2004), which offer them the comfort of predictability (McSweeney, 2004) and the possibility to overcome radical anxiety (Mitzen, 2006). Thus, the basic trust system consists of sets of habitual relations (Mitzen, 2006) which are an essential mechanism to achieve ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006). "All actors develop ontological security and rely on sets of routines they are attached to" (Mitzen, 2006:4).

If physical security can be defined as the state where the Self, although confronted with an imminent threat or danger, regards itself as being adequately protected against these threats, the ontological security is the state where the Self feels in control about its identity and capacity for action (Rumelili, 2013:7-8). It is about the capacity to keep a narrative about the Self going. The self-identity relies on this ability (Giddens, 1991:55).

Ontological security thus stems from the stability of everyday routines and relationships, and from the capacity of actors to uphold coherent narratives about the self (Giddens, 1991:77), otherwise called **self-narratives** or biographical narratives, to themselves and to the others around them. Existential crises (Giddens, 1991:168) or in other words critical situations (Croft, 2012:223) might occur and disturb the established routines of actors and, consequently, their self-narratives. When these narratives about the self become destabilised and the routines and relationships are perturbed, ontological anxieties are being generated and thus a state of *ontological insecurity* is installed in place (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017; Browning, 2018a; Browning, 2018b), which may manifest itself as anxiety, paralysis to act, or violence (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017). The actors, be it individual or collective ones, will respond either by trying to reinstall the previously established routines, or by embracing new ones (Browning, 2018b), developing a new biography about the self perceived as being more appropriate for the new context and thus also making new identity claims (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010:8).

Stemming from the above, an *ontologically secure actor* is one capable to cope with the changes and challenges in the world around them, be it social, ethical, spiritual, biological (Laing, 1960), by being able to maintain a coherent and consistent narrative about the self, upholding a sense of identity to themselves and to the others and gaining recognition for their self (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010). An ontologically secure actor has a sense of their continuity in the world and thus is able to develop stable and uproblematic relationships with other actors which are perceived as being equally whole and continuous (Laing, 1960;

Giddens, 1991; Croft, 2012). By contrast, for the *ontologically insecure actor*, "[...] the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat" and such an actor will be constantly preoccupied with preserving their identity and upholding it in front of themselves and of the others (Laing, 1960:42-43).

Therefore, the ontological security of actors, be it individual or collective ones, relies on the following key elements: their capacity to maintain stable and healthy routines; the development of trust relations which counter the anxieties of everyday life; the ability to manifest a stable sense of identity based on coherent stories, or narratives of the self, shared internally and with the ones around them. In other words, the ontologically secure actors are able to create "[...] their own situational accounts of who they are and why they behave as they do" (Croft, 2012:221). The lack or the disruption of these key elements expose the actors to existential anxieties and build a sense of ontological insecurity.

Nevertheless, I subscribe to Rumelili's warning (2015c) that ontological security and insecurity should not be treated as binary, mutually exclusive concepts, as there are no absolute states of ontological security or insecurity, only varying degrees of ontological (in)security across different actors (p. 196). To this I argue that the ontological (in)security of actors may vary across various realms of their activity, as well as across different moments in time. As such, an individual or corporate actor may experience a stable sense of identity based on coherent routines and relationships with the others in one realm, while being less able to maintain healthy and constant habits and attachments in other realms of their life. As a consequence, they will experience a state of ontological security in some segments of their life, while being overwhelmed by anxieties in other parts of their existence. Similarly, as previously shown, the actors may lose their sense of ontological security with respect to the same realm of their lives when their routines and relationships are becoming destabilised. In the same line, they might succeed in re-installing their sense of ontological security either by re-establishing the previous routines, or by embracing new ones that would render them ontologically secure once again (Browning, 2018b).

2.2.2. Ontological security in IR: a combined material-cognitive framework of understanding energy relations in Europe

The first to have introduced ontological security in IR was Huysmans (1998), followed by the challenging work of McSweeney (2004), Mitzen (2006), or Steele (2008). Wendt (1999) also mentioned ontological security as being complementary to individuals'

need for physical security, in their attempt to gain recognition of their position in the society. However, Wendt subscribes the ontological security to the material needs of humans, in the same line with physical security, sociation (the need for love and group membership), self-esteem and transcedence (the need for self-improvement), dissociating these material needs from the group of identity needs (p. 131). Although I disagree that ontological security can be considered a material factor, I acknowledge Wendt's observation that the failure to meet these needs leads to anxiety which, in turn, may drive actors to change their interests, to intensify the efforts to meet their needs, or, on the contrary, to engage in aggression (p. 132).

Until the recent attention for ontological security in IR, the cognitive aspects of state agency were sensitively underproblematised in the literature (Zarakol, 2017) and, although, according to Kinnvall et al. (2018) ontological security approaches have been introduced in the past years in IR with respect to topics such as the EU, state diplomacy, peace studies, security communities and migration, there is still very little application of the concept to the energy dimension of conflict and cooperation in IR.

Moreover, the launch of the ontological security dimension has opened the debate about how the ontological security could be extrapolated from the individual to the collective level, raising concerns about the validity of such an endeavour (Krolikowski, 2008). Wendt (2004) too pointed out that "states are not *really* persons, only *as if* ones" (p. 289) and that "the concept of state personhood [...] does not refer to anything with ontological standing in its own right" (p. 291), although he admitted that states may be seen as having collective consciousness understood as subjective experience.

Scaling the concept up to the state level has been however convincingly supported by authors dealing with collective beliefs and ontological security, without claiming states to be persons, but collective actors driven by similar cognitive processes to the individual ones. It has thus been argued that the narratives on which the individual ontological security is based are part of the wider socio-political context, as the individual should not be understood separately and asocially (Croft, 2012:222). Moreover, just like individuals, corporate actors, such as states, justify their actions employing narratives of the self and thus they engage in security-seeking actions (Rumelili, 2013) which they consider to be consistent with their identities, even if this goes against the existing international principles (Steele, 2008). This approach draws close on the social constructivism, preoccupied with the way individuals and groups construct their self-image (McSweeney, 2004). Therefore, similar to individuals, states seek to secure not only their physical security, but also their ontological security (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Rumelili, 2013).

Although scaling up the ontological security concept from the individual to the collective level has been criticised for the fact that it cannot be claimed that states share similar psychological needs with the individuals (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010), the ontological security approach can be understood at states' level in two ways: on the one hand, nations and states do have their own biographies "which are emotive and contested" (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010:13); on the other hand, states act as providers of ontological security for their citizens through the discourses and practices employed by their leaders.

One need not to mistake however the ontological security of collective actors, such as states, with the societal security. Unlike ontological security, the societal security is generally concerned with a specific referent or sector of security and retains a survival-oriented conception of security (Rumelili, 2013). Nor should it be confounded with the human security, which, in contrast with ontological security, has an emancipatory normative agenda seeking to empower the individual in relation to the state (Rumelili, 2013).

If regarded as a security of social relations meant to ensure the cognitive control over the environment, ontological security becomes "a problem of collective identity" (McSweeney, 2004:157). When ontological security is threatened, states will develop a security policy aimed at eliminating or reducing that threat; however, the collective political **identity**, through the narrative of the self they employ, is based on the existence of that threat, the actors have been used to defining themselves according to that threat. This leads to what Huysmans (1998:239) calls "a paradox in security policy", when eliminating the threat leads to harming, or even destroying, the political identity which was built on that threat. It is the identity that is rendered insecure (McSweeney, 2004). As a consequence, states will take necessary actions in order to restore or repair the disrupted identity and thus re-establish their ontological security (Steele, 2008).

The connection between social identities and conflict has been debated by the social constructivist scholarship, which views social identities as being natural, static, unchangeable. Instead, social constructivists argue that identities are malleable, fluid, socially constructed (Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Kalyvas, 2003; Gartzke and Gleditsch, 2006; Demmers, 2012), that their nature is dynamic and changeable nature of social identities, and their borders are permeable.

Nevertheless, the adepts of ontological security in IR argue that identities are actually difficult to change, because they are anchored in **routines** that both individual and corporate actors, such as the states, are attached to (Mitzen, 2006:1). Actors fear uncertainty, as they need a stable sense of who they are, their preference, goals, interests, they need their identity

(Mitzen, 2006:2). A loss of such stability would render them ontologically insecure, raising the fear and consequently the inability to maintain cognitive control over the threat environment and to sustain an identity narrative (Mitzen, 2006; Rumelili, 2013).

However, routines are not exclusively positive or healthy (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010), as actors may develop unhealthy, compulsive attachments to routines as a sign of their lack of basic trust (Giddens, 1991; Browning and Joenniemi, 2010). In order to counter their existential anxieties based on the lack of trust, some states prefer to maintain a rigid attachment to some unhealthy routines in order to gain a sense of ontological security, even if this in return jeopardises their physical security (Mitzen, 2006). In this case, "routines become a substitute for action and real choice" (Mitzen, 2006:4), while ontologically secure actors will develop healthy attachment to habits and will prove capable to adapt their routines when faced with the inherent changes of the world around them (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010), instead of compulsively sticking to the old habits. I return more to the role of routines and habits below, when I discuss their connection with security dilemma and the 'Othering' of other actors.

Drawing on the role of **biographical narratives** in building a sense of ontological security, I take Della Sala's point (2018:276) that these narratives are "[...] useful normative and cognitive maps that political communities can use to decide to act, why and in whose name". Just like individuals, states also construct biographical narratives in order to explain who they are and why they behave in a particular way in the international system, to give their actions meaning (Subotić, 2015). However, self-narratives are not static, they change as states engage in new relationships with other states and develop new experiences which they will incorporate in the new narratives. The biographical narratives are being elaborated by a web of political and cultural agents, the so-called "narrative entrepreneurs" (Subotić, 2015:6), namely political leaders, intellectuals, media, education institutions etc.

It has been argued that biographical narratives can compete with each other and that a narrative that enhances the ontological security of an actor may generate ontological insecurity and anxiety for other actors (Rumelili, 2015c; Croft and Vaughan-Williams, 2017; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017; Browning, 2018b; Della Sala, 2018). As a consequence, a sort of **security dilemma** may emerge, where the search for ontological security of an actor increases the threat perception and thus the ontological insecurity of others (Mitzen, 2006; Browning, 2018b; Della Sala, 2018). In their attempt to maintain stable and consistent self-narratives, the actors, already engaged in a conflict, will tend to preserve habits and routines which make them feel secure, but that instead will reproduce conflict (Loizides, 2015).

In the same context, Mitzen (2006:5) makes a point when discussing ontological security in connection with the security dilemma: "persistent security dilemmas can be seen as routinised relationships". And, as states are attached to their routines, so too they become attached to their security dilemmas. It is the state of conflict or competition that defines their identity in relation with the others, and thus they are not easily willing to let go as this would imply a disruption of their identity, of who they are according to their narrative about the self. States need to avoid uncertainty, they need a stable cognitive environment and that environment need not necessarily mean peace or cooperation (Mitzen, 2006). States can develop either a healthy or a maladaptive attachment to their **routines**. Sometimes, a situation of conflict defines what a state considers to be its identity. Therefore, that state might choose to secure its ontological security even if this endangers its physical security.

According to Mitzen (2006:36), "[...] this is not security dilemma anymore, it is a preference for conflict". Or, in the words of Hopf (2010:540), these are "[...] not dilemmas at all, but straightforward habitual routines of enmity and amity". The trend might indeed be observed in the political routines entrenched between some of the new EU Member States emerged from the communist bloc (Poland, the Baltic states, Romania) and Russia. Based on their previous shared history and past experiences, these collective actors face existential anxieties derived from a perceived threat to their physical security, to their physical existence as a state. Consequently, they also experience a state of ontological insecurity, the dread of nonbeing.

After the Cold War, once the initial optimism had gone, states found themselves under the impression of an ongoing and escalating crisis, facing a multiplication of enemies and threats and feeling unable to counter the threat, a point where Huysmans (1998:243) considers that "[...] the daily security struggle could collapse into an ontological security question". To this state of spread anxiety, a series of recent events in Europe, such as the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, added up to fuelling furthermore the pre-eminence of more geopolitical concerns around Russia and the energy projects connected to Kremlin and Gazprom. As a consequence of this process, as I have already argued in the first part of this chapter, where I debated the geopolitical bias of **'Othering'**, the EU and Russia have been depicted in the recent years as the opposing ends of an antithesis, with the liberal and cooperative EU at one end, and the geopolitical and conflictual Russia at the other end. Nevertheless, as I debate in detail in the next chapters, both the EU and Russia have utilised a combined approach to energy, using simultaneously different types

of strategies, geopolitical and market-oriented, engaging in more competitive or cooperative behaviours according to their security needs of the moment.

Mitzen's argument is explanatory for the cognitive foundations of the decisions corporate actors, such as states make in choosing either a conflictual path (based on maladaptive routines) or a cooperative one (based on healthy routines). Nevertheless, as the author mentions herself, although placing the ontological security theory in the wider constructivist literature assuming that identity is constituted through interaction, the ontological security, in this view, ends up in confirming the conclusions of offensive realism, that, under anarchy, states are driven towards conflict as they are caught in rigid attachments to their routines (Mitzen, 2006). This argument, from which I dissociate myself, reinforces the binary division between conflict and cooperation and ignores frequent instances where collective actors, while still well anchored in the attachment to their identity and routines, display flexible preferences and actions, and engage in both conflictual and cooperative actions towards the same 'Other'.

I argue that two key elements play together in this sense: present circumstances and past experiences. Often actors find themselves in the situation where they need to reconcile opposing preferences, if the present relation with the 'Other' does not match the impressions driven from past encounters. **History** is indeed formative for cooperative or conflictual relations. Just as Giddens talks about the individual's formative experiences during infancy, so do Jervis (2017), Krolikowski (2008) and Goldgeier (1997) agree about the fact that the choices states make are influenced by historical analogies and traumatic past experiences, such as wars, which undermine a state's basic trust in another and enhance the need to reinforce its ontological security (Krolikowski, 2008). Moreover, the fear that the other would engage in malicious acts is higher if the two sides are already in conflict, because actors who usually cooperate communicate more and have more information about each other; similarly, states who are in conflict tend to extrapolate the policy that the other pursues in one area into other areas as well (Jervis, 2017).

Routines, biographical narratives and relationships with the others are indeed based on initial experiences of actors. In the case of individuals, it is the infancy experiences that build the security/insecurity of actors. Just like individuals, states construct "autobiographical identity narratives" (Subotić, 2015:5) to explain and justify their actions to the rest of the world and to their own citizens. This is the role of history. For this purpose, they create "national security cultures" (Subotić, 2015:4) build upon mythologies of past events and relationships of amity or enmity. When a state is confronted with its own ontological

insecurity, political leaders often manipulate identities and collective memories of the past in order to gain support for a present action (Kinnvall, 2006; Loizides, 2015; Subotić, 2015). Past traumas and painful feelings of loss and humiliation are being recollected and invoked, and they are being transmitted to the next generations. "[...] like individuals, large groups also mourn" (Volkan, 1997; *see* Kinnvall, 2006:57).

Actions or non-actions of the past may also cause states to experience a sense of **shame** that may in return generate deep feelings of ontological insecurity. As a consequence, states in their search for ontological security, will often make decisions and engage in actions meant to avoid the feeling of shame (Steele, 2008; Browning and Joenniemi, 2010; Browning, 2018b). Therefore, cognitive and emotional factors frequently underpin the political decisions and not just material and rational interests, as agreed by the realist and liberal theories (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010). Shame, as a source of ontological insecurity, may be a reflexive process, when actors develop this feeling as a consequence of their past actions or non-actions (Steele, 2008). In its reflexive form, shame can also stem from a deep feeling of inferiority which was not properly dealt with, as Zarakol (2010:20) argues, a form of shame which is more threatening to the ontological security of actors since it cannot be mended through apologies or reparatory measures, "a state of being which one cannot necessarily help". Shame, however, may also be a strategic external process, when an actor uses shaming strategies on other actors (Browning, 2018b). Nevertheless, the drive to impose stigma derives from ontological security as well, in this case that of the external actor (Adler-Nissen, 2014).

Shame closely relates conceptually to **stigma**. The concepts of stigma and stigmatisation have been developed in sociology in the 1960s by Erving Goffman, in his book "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity" (1963). They have been more recently debated in IR, in connection with the ontological security of collective actors, such as states, by authors like Zarakol (2011) and Adler-Nissen (2014), who discuss the impact of shaming and of stigma on states considered to be norm-breakers, as it could be the case of Russia and Turkey. Just like individuals, states try to preserve their status and place in the world and they face ontological disruptions when their identity is being subjected to an alteration by the 'Other'.

In order to overcome shame and to reinstate its ontological security, a stigmatised state may develop several strategies. Stigma recognition is one strategy used by states in order to take corrective actions so that in the end they will be accepted by the international society (Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014). It was the strategy initially employed by Russia

in the first years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when it was willing to embrace Western norms, by adapting to a market economy and democratic institutions (Zarakol, 2011). Counter-stigmatisation (Adler-Nissen, 2014) or embracing the stigma (Zarakol, 2011) is a second type of strategy by which the shamed state accepts the stigma but turns it into a virtue, an element of pride, while in turn framing the stigmatiser as the transgressor (Adler-Nissen, 2014:153). This mechanism in particular has been engaged by Russia after the early 2000s, in order to counter stigmatisation and its own ontological insecurities regarding its long-desired role as a major political and economic player. The Western community used "altercasting", seen as "[…] a social process whereby one subject (e.g. The West/EU) draws upon a role/identity for another subject (e.g. Russia) and tries to induce that other to accept that role/identity by treating it *as if* it already occupied that position" (Browning, 2003:58), in order to ascribe an identity of a submissive, weaker actor to Russia, particularly in the years following the break-up of the Soviet Union. In return, this rendered Russia with a sense of ontological insecurity which, after 1999, it tried to counter in order to re-instate its ontological security. To this goal, it employed a self-narrative of a keeper of traditional values based on its historical role of a major power of the East, against the post-modern values of a Europe narrated from here on as the transgressor trying to forcibly impose its norms on Russia and on its region of influence. Finally, in a third possible strategy, a state might reject stigma altogether, denying being in any way different from the dominant norm followers (Adler-Nissen, 2014). Stigma is constantly renegotiated and reconstructed, as states may adopt several strategies simultaneously or adopt different ones according to the situation.

Stigma is closely linked to the search for status recognition, and stigmatised states are particularly sensitive about their status in the world, about their prestige (Zarakol, 2011). The loss of status usually generates a sense of ontological insecurity, a disruption of one's identity and place in the world. But in the case of countries that used to be powerful and to enjoy a preeminent position in the world, such as Russia during its Tsarist and Soviet past, or Turkey during the Ottoman empire, the loss of status and the subsequent stigmatisation due to the new position of the defeated are notably disruptive: on the one hand, their physical security is under threat given the loss of territorial and military power; on the other hand, their ontological security and capacity to adapt to the new status is deeply affected by the loss of status and esteem (Zarakol, 2011). Nevertheless, the capacity to deal with stigma is influenced both by the material and social resources available to the stigmatised states, as very powerful, resource-rich states have the possibility to ignore international shaming (Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014), but also to use their creativity to reframe the new

reality, to transform the defeat into a moral victory; "[...] weakness, i.e. stigma, becomes a blessing" (Zarakol, 2011:106), their wear their "[...] stigma as a badge of honor" (Adler-Nissen, 2014:144).

Stigmatisation, however, "is not only a discursive process such as 'othering' [...] showing that identities always require an 'other' against which the self is constructed" (Adler-Nissen, 2014:146). Moreover, unlike liberal and constructivist views which regard homogeneity of values and identity as a necessary condition for the security of the self and thus tend to theorise otherness and difference as a source of threat that needs to be minimised (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010:9), under this understanding, the difference does not necessarily translate into a threat and the other is not forcibly an enemy. Actors might also treat the different other as a friend or with indifference (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010). Turning the other into an enemy may however occur when an actor experiences a state of insecurity regarding the self, a state of ontological insecurity. Kinnvall (2006:35) defines the process of searching for one's identity and opposing it to that of the others in times of increased ontological insecurity, as "securitising subjectivity", seen as part of a dynamic process of identity change and construction.

Nevertheless, as argued before, identities and thus also enemy images, although constantly under construction, are hard to change. Particularly in the case of intractable conflicts, enemy images become habitual and embedded in the political culture of actors (Loizides, 2015: Rumelili, 2015a) and they are highly resistant to change, even when the adversaries signal their intention to cooperate thus contributing to the prolongation of the conflict (Rumelili, 2015a). I agree therefore with Bar-Tal (2000:360; *see* Rumelili, 2015a:20) that "enemy images are not simply stereotypical cognitive beliefs about the enemy that can change when confronted with contradictory information. Rather, they become ingrained in the ontological framework in which the individuals make sense of themselves and the world around them".

As a consequence, the conflict becomes itself a routinised habit and actors might develop what Rumelili (2015a:13) calls "peace anxieties" in front of the possible conflict resolution and with regard to the peace process. Therefore, anxiety in conflict performs a dual role: it stimulates the desire for change, but, often at the same time, it keeps the actors attached to the conflict and to the comforting stability it offers (Rumelili, 2015a). Conflict may thus become a source of ontological security (Rumelili, 2015b; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017), as it allows the parties involved to sustain their habitual routines and narratives about the self and the others. Similarly, peace might be perceived as a factor of change, a challenge

to the stability and to the familiar cognitive territory provided by the routinised conflict. Thus, in relation with conflict, the ontological security can play a dual role: on the one hand, the routines that sustain the ontological security of an actor may become a source of anxiety and threat for other actors; on the other hand, conflict itself, through its routinised nature and stability it brings, may become a source of ontological security (Rumelili, 2015b; Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017). Therefore, through their dual role, the "ontological security dynamics play a constitutive role both for conflictual and cooperative relationships" (Kinnval and Mitzen, 2017:5).

Anxieties play indeed a key role in triggering the actors' search for ontological security. Laing (1960), who set the basis of ontological security studies, defines three forms of anxiety of the ontologically insecure person. Similar types of anxiety can be observed however also at the level of collective actors, such as states, who, like individuals, may also experience what Laing's describes as engulfment, implosion or depersonalisation. Engulfment translates into the anxiety, the dread of actors to relate with anyone or anything for fear to lose their identity and autonomy. In order to preserve their identity, the actors will most frequently choose isolation as a strategy to counter their existential anxieties (Laing, 1960:44). Implosion is a second type of anxiety experienced by ontologically insecure actors, when they feel empty, like a vacuum, and any contact with reality becomes a threat and is perceived as being implosive (Laing, 1960:45). And finally, the actors might choose depersonalisation of themselves and of the others as a strategy to fight anxiety, by not allowing themselves to respond to feelings anymore. Consequently, a state of petrification occurs (Laing, 1960:46). For Giddens (1991) as well, the anxieties generated in late modernity have an incapacitating effect, disabling the sense of the self and plunging the actors in a state of ontological insecurity and chaos. Just like in the case of individuals, collective actors also experience existential anxieties ultimately driven by the fear of nonbeing.

When confronted with existential anxieties about the unknown which they cannot counter, the actors project their fright on tangible "**objects of fear"** (Browning, 2018a:339), feeling that these concrete targets of their anxiety can be easier mastered or opposed. I argue that the pipelines from the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe play specifically this role of objects of fear for some of the European actors. Confronted with their own ontological insecurities, most of the times derived from past experiences, but also from present unrelated domestic circumstances, some states use these concrete objects of fear in order to externalise and project their internal fears and anxieties they otherwise do not dare to face and counter. Thus,

the pipelines become the outlet of their ontological insecurity. Poland and the Baltic States for example share a past of physical insecurity in their relation with Russia. The annexation of Crimea has accentuated the perceived threat to their physical security and their anxiety of eventual nonbeing. This, in return, has translated into a deep state of ontological insecurity. In order to calm their anxieties and to be able to self-narrate themselves again as ontologically secure actors, these states chose the pipelines supported by Russia as objects of fear on which they could project their dread and thus give them a concrete form not only to themselves, but also to the rest of the world to which they try to justify their attitudes and actions. The pipelines in themselves do not pose any physical threat to these states. Nevertheless, they are narrated as such and these states' anxieties gain a physical existence.

A more sociological and psychological approach to conflict and cooperation in general and to the energy dynamics in particular thus helps opening and broadening the realm of IR scholarship, otherwise criticised for closing and policing "the boundaries of the discipline in ways that reflect dominant power-knowledge relations" (Croft and Vaughan-Williams, 2017:13). The ontological security approach must itself be acknowledged as being open to diversification in order to avoid a similar bias that would lead to a "premature closure on the concept's application and relevance to world politics" (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017:5).

The application of an ontological security approach and of psychological insights to security studies and to IR allows researching into the cognitive and emotional foundations of security-driven decisions of individual or collective actors, such as the states, by complementing the analysis of their material-based, rational responses with cognitive understandings of how their sense of (in)security influences the choice for a cooperative or conflictual path.

I therefore support a cognitive-oriented approach, in addition to the material-focused ones, which would allow moving not just beyond a state-centric thinking, but also towards a multi-levelled and multi-thematic analysis, in a comprehensive understanding of national, transnational and supranational levels, as well as of what Kinnvall et al. (2018:249) call "social, economic and political (in)securities". A cognitive approach on security, and on cooperation and conflict, might thus offer the possibility to explain what is the link between relatively low physical risks in Europe nowadays and yet the very high levels of fear, anxiety and threat perceived (Kinnvall et al., 2018:249), as they are being reflected in the energy relations and perceptions on the main pipeline projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

For this goal, I welcome the efforts to introduce cognitive research in IR and I acknowledge the need to take it into account when analysing conflict and cooperation

relations in the field of energy, but I depart from those limitations of the ontological security theory exposed before, which might reinforce the conflict - cooperation dichotomy. I agree that cooperation and conflict dilemmas have been exaggerated in IR, when sometimes they were no more than "routines of enmity and amity" (Hopf, 2010:540).

Cognitive factors are in their own turn fluid and dynamic. In this sense, the theoretical field of the psychology of security makes an important additional contribution when discussing the role of group beliefs, as the cognitive bases that connect the members of a group into one entity. I draw an analogy here from Bar-Tal's (1990:37) example on Iraq, using this time the "Russia is our enemy" example of a group belief. Although derived many times from historical events and similar experiences that members of a group share, group beliefs are continuously changed, expanded, omitted and modified (Bar-Tal, 1990). Group beliefs are convictions shared by the members of a group and are formed in three main ways: based on direct experience, through perception ("descriptive beliefs"); based on accumulated knowledge collected in the past ("inferential beliefs"); and based on information provided by outside sources, such as media ("informational beliefs") (Bar-Tal, 1990:13). Thus, as experiences, as well as discourses and perceptions change, so do group beliefs and, with them, the cognitive bases of cooperative or conflictual decisions actors make.

Security beliefs are group beliefs in themselves. Thus, they require a psychological dimension of analysis (Bar-Tal and Jacobson, 1998) in addition to the material interpretation they are most commonly employed. "Estimation of security is a cognitive process" (Bar-Tal and Jacobson, 1998:60) where the same information or event may be interpreted differently by various actors; their perceptions determine different security beliefs, constructed on pre-existing beliefs. In the case of corporate actors, the same principles apply, as the states are not abstract actors, but collective structures consisting of leaders and followers that operate as a single cognitive system (Wendt, 2004:304) and form security beliefs based on a subjective reflection of their reality and image of others (Bar-Tal and Jacobson, 1998; Jervis, 2017). Corporate actors, such as states, use cognitive patterns based on previous experiences in their interaction with others: "We tend to think that countries that are our enemies make proposals that would harm us" (Jervis, 2017:118). Just like in the case of individuals, collectivities are also driven by habitual processes drawing from collective memories and beliefs (Rosenau, 1986:863).

Nevertheless, there are no permanent allies and no permanent enemies (Holsti, 1967:16) and transformation of deeply-routed beliefs is possible (Rosenau, 1986). An actor's attitude may indeed be challenged if a patterned and stable attitude towards an enemy is

contradicted by a new information which is in discrepancy with pre-existing beliefs, such as when the adversary is making conciliatory gestures (Hoslti, 1967). In this case, the actors might choose from challenging the information itself, either by discrediting, ignoring or reinterpreting it so that it would conform to its pre-existing beliefs, or from changing its previous beliefs towards the 'Other' (Hoslti, 1967). Also, actors may decide to adapt their narratives about themselves and the others, their routinised patterns of enmity and their relationships after rationally assessing the new circumstances, their alternatives, the costs and benefits, as demonstrated before. Moreover, ontologically secure actors may dissociate between different realms of their lives, by displaying more conciliatory attitudes towards the same 'Other' in one area, while experiencing more caution in other areas.

In other words, there is no permanent conflict and no permanent cooperation. Actors alternate and sometimes even overlap conflictual and cooperative beliefs and actions, and frequently mixed situations of conflict and cooperation will occur. Conflict and cooperation thus form a *perpetuum*.

Conclusions

Over the past two decades an increased politicisation of discourse around the main energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region with the European markets, and around the energy relationship between the EU and Russia can be witnessed. The two topics have been predominantly depicted in a rather pessimistic tone, being framed within the context of the commercial disputes and of the political tensions between Ukraine and Russia, of the war in Eastern Ukraine, of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea situated in the proximity of the main oil and natural gas pipelines, of the Russian annexation of Crimea, and, of the more assertive role assumed by Turkey in the region. Energy projects and conflict have been linked in a solidified, unitary image.

Nevertheless, cooperation in the energy field survived and overlapped political conflict. Thus, in the midst of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Kiev and Moscow signed a new gas deal in December 2019 allowing for the continuation of the Russian gas transit through Ukraine to Europe, despite pessimism regarding the prospect for it to happen. Similarly, although engaged in tensed political relations after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the gas trade between the EU and Russia continued unperturbed, even at the peak of the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, the energy projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region brought

together actors otherwise on opposing political positions, such as Greece and Turkey. At the same time, the alleged rival natural gas pipeline projects, the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-built Turkish Stream have not impeded each other and have both become officially operational in 2020, despite considerable politicisation around them.

Stemming from these contradictions between the conflict-oriented narratives on the one hand, and the cooperation-dominated dynamics in the energy field on the other hand, I took an incursion through the main theories that engage with debating energy, conflict and cooperation in Europe, in order to identify those possible biases that limit the understanding of the complex reasons that underpin energy actors' choices for cooperation or conflict.

Therefore, I identified what I consider to be a double reductionism in the literature. On the one hand, I discussed the **theoretical reductionism**, under which I analysed two main biases: the *geopolitical reductionism*, contained mostly by the realist, liberal and resource war-oriented strands of literature; and the *critical reductionism*, where I explored the limitations of the critical security literature in the field of energy. On the other hand, I referred myself to the **conceptual reductionism**, where I debated on its two major biases: first, the conceptualisation of *conflict and cooperation* as binary, opposite concepts; and secondly, the interpretation of *energy security* through predominantly material lenses, while disregarding or incompletely acknowledging the role of non-material, in particular of cognitive factors that impact on energy dynamics.

Throughout the literature review I engaged a cross-analysis tool, what I call a theoretical *spectrum*, allowing to imagine the theories I discussed on a continuum ranging from the material end to the non-material end, namely from those theories that approach energy as a predominantly material factor, often linked to conflicts, to those strands of literature that include and analyse mostly also the non-material, ideational aspects of security.

Under the **geopolitical reductionism**, I analysed therefore the most frequently encountered biases in the energy-related literature, while offering alternative explanations to their interpretations offered to the energy dynamics in Europe.

Thus, I debated the *(1) security dilemma bias*, often employed by the realist and neoliberal authors, looking specifically at how, in the field of the energy relationship between the EU and Russia, the two parties' commitment to increase their own energy security has thus been interpreted as leading to an augmentation of the other side's concerns and anxiety, and therefore to an *energy security dilemma.* Nevertheless, I argued that the energy security dilemma is one of the main biases of the geopolitical reductionism encountered in literature, as it disregards the anxieties' potential to produce cooperation instead of conflict, and it

ignores the large variety of options available to them and the multiple strategies they may choose to follow, as the choice an actor will make, towards conflict or cooperation, is determined not only by material factors, but also by cognitive patterns.

A second bias I identified under the theoretical reductionism is *(2) the 'Othering' bias* which I analysed in connection with the concept of *asymmetric interdependence*. I highlighted how the alteration of perception about the EU's change of status in the energy interdependence tandem with Russia, from the powerful half, to the vulnerable one after the early 2000s, led to the proliferation in literature of an antithesis between the market liberal EU versus the unreliable, resource nationalist Russia, in other words to the 'Othering' of Russia, seen as a norm-breaker that must be corrected and 'cured'. Against this bias, I argued that this form of reductionism ignores the multiple roles that actors play and the interchangeability of these roles, as both the EU and Russia have started to utilise a mixed approach to energy, both geopolitical and market-oriented, and that a geopolitical shift is based on the actors' need to preserve their sense of psychological security, of order and stability, in order to calm their own existential anxieties. Regarding the warnings about the EU being disadvantaged by an asymmetric energy interdependence with Russia, I noted instead that, taken on its own, interdependence is relative. On the material side, one must take into account the diversification of the internal market and the fuel mix in the economy of the consumer states, for example, even if a state imports all its gas from Russia, how much gas it actually uses in its economy. On the non-material side, the role of the cognitive factors must be considered: interdependence may be perceived as beneficial if the parties are in a friendly relationship with each other.

Deriving from the debate around the asymmetric interdependence, I discussed next on the *(3) energy weapon bias*, widely employed in the past years in order to warn about the fact that Russia is deliberately using Europe's dependence on its hydrocarbons in order to exert political pressure on the importing countries and advance non-democratic foreign policy goals. The energy weapon bias was frequently connected in literature with the largely debated gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009, and the gas supply disruptions that followed affecting more European countries. Nevertheless, I pointed out that interdependence goes both ways. From a material point of view, Russia is heavily dependent on selling its natural gas to Europe, the main importer of Russian hydrocarbons. From a non-material angle, Russia is also dependent on maintaining its image and status as a reliable provider to its European partners, and thus overcoming stigma. I also brought along the idea that the energy actors are not homogeneous, as a multitude of other actors and subsequent

interests exist, at state, corporate, and also personal level, with each of these actors being driven not only by economic interests, but also by their personal cognitive frames.

Although not located within the IR realm, I also considered appropriate to review the (*4) resource wars bias*, as being an important reductionist bias encountered in the geopolitically-oriented literature and often offering similar arguments to those of the neorealist and neoliberal theories. Thus, throughout their review, I linked the 'resource wars', 'resource curse' and 'new wars' theories with insights from various IR theories of geopolitical influence, arguing that the international and domestic politics in the field of energy should not be completely dissociated from each other, as domestic dynamics are being shaped and shape in return the regional and international evolutions in the field of energy. I exposed the limitations of an understanding that sees energy relations in a pessimistic, rather alarmist tone, concerning themselves with the greed behind the conflicts and the competition for depleting resources, while ignoring the complex conflict and cooperation options available to actors, driven not only by material goals, but also by cognitive, psychological motives.

After debating the main biases I encountered in the geopolitical reductionism, I continued my incursion through theory by looking at the second main theoretical reductionism type, namely, the **critical reductionism**. After noting that all the geopolitically-oriented theories reviewed above linger at the material end of the theoretical *spectrum* employed, largely ignoring the non-material, cognitive aspects of energy as security, I suggested, before moving to the non-material end of the spectrum, to pay attention to the contribution of what I consider to be 'bridging theories', the neoclassical realism and the social constructivism, as they both attempt to link the domestic and the international level, as well as the material and the non-material components of security. Thus, I acknowledged the fact that both neoclassical realists and constructivists assume that actors form their decisions based on the perceptions they have on themselves and on the others, an important addition to the overwhelmingly material considerations of the geopolitical theories above. Nevertheless, although coming close to the argument that non-material factors also underpin security formation, I underlined the fact that social constructivism limits itself to the role of social forces, while not engaging with the importance of emotions and cognition per se in shaping the cooperation and conflict dynamics of the energy relations. In its own turn, neoclassical realism, despite its engagement with the role of perceptions and identities in forming actors' decisions, remains a realist theory, still pessimistic about the prospects of cooperation to happen on the long-term.

Proceeding further to the non-material end of the theoretical *spectrum*, I concluded the section dedicated to the theoretical reductionism with reviewing the critical reductionism attributed to the main schools of critical theory, which, unlike the geopolitically-oriented ones, pay more attention to the human and individual aspects of security and contest the role of the state as a single or main security actor. Under the critical reductionism, I identified two main biases, as follows.

The first one, *(1) the bias of deepening the security agenda*, has been advocated by most strands of critical security studies, in order to acknowledge other actors, beside the state, as referent objects of security, militating in this way against the state-centric view of geopolitical theories, mostly of realism. As stated above, although I agree with the need to evaluate the large variety of interests, other than the state's in shaping the energy dynamics, I warn nevertheless that the state should not be completely dismissed from any energy relations analysis, given its role as a main responsible for adopting energy policies and projects under its jurisdiction.

The second one, *(2) the bias of broadening the security agenda*, refers to the call of the critical security studies proponents to reformulate the security agenda in order to include topics as varied as related economics, environment, societal insecurity, or human rights. As a consequence, energy security has reached the political agendas in the past decades, concerning itself with issues related to access and protection of natural resources and infrastructure. I agreed however with critics of this trend, that stretching the security agenda further and further may in return lead to militarising issues not previously securitised and thus generating more anxiety and reproducing insecurities even more.

Following this review exercise through the theoretical reductionism where I explored the geopolitical as well as the critical biases encountered in the literature, I advanced to the second main type of reductionism, namely the **conceptual reductionism**, also containing two major biases. The first one I engaged with was the conceptualisation of *(1) conflict and cooperation as opposing concepts*, mutually excluding each other, as most theories I explored, regardless how much prospects for cooperation they envisage, usually define cooperation in opposition to conflict or competition, being regarded as opposing concepts mirroring each other.

The second conceptual bias I identified was the understanding of *(2) energy security* in rather fixed terms by all the theories I reviewed in their general attempt to pin down the concept, either to an exclusively material definition as in the case of the realist and liberal schools, or to a broadened vision of security that would overstate the importance of the

ideational factors to the detriment of the material ones, as in the case of the critical security theories. In this way, all theories perpetuate the material - ideational dichotomy I suggest throughout this thesis to correct, by looking at energy (in)securities as a multi-faceted, dynamic concept that would encompass both a material dimension, as well as a non-material, psychological one.

In order to overcome the limitations of the various biases identified and without dismissing the contributions made to the field of energy studies by the theories I reviewed, nor of the material components of energy security, I proposed the use of two new instruments that would help better understand the complex conflict and cooperation dynamics in the energy field: a conceptual and a theoretical too.

Thus, for the purpose of overcoming the conceptual reductionism related to framing conflict and cooperation as binary, opposing concepts, I suggested a new conceptual tool I developed, the ***conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.** The perpetuum sees conflict and cooperation in the energy field not as opposing, but as co-existing concepts, given the fact that actors may perceive themselves simultaneously as friends and foes, that political conflict and economic cooperation, and their reverse, do not exclude each other, instead they may occur simultaneously.

The second instrument I propose is a theoretical tool recently introduced in the IR but still little employed with the study of energy, the theoretical framework of ***ontological security***. Reflecting the initial review exercise, I engaged in this section with concepts debated in the first part of the chapter, in the intention to correct the biases identified, bringing insights regarding the cognitive and emotional foundations of decisions security-seeking actors make in the field of energy, in addition to the material factors and to the non-material ones already proposed by various strands of literature previously reviewed. As the IR literature on energy relations in Europe is generally lacking a comprehensive analysis of the psychological factors to be treated together, and not separately, from the material ones, I suggested using a theoretical framework that will complement rather than dismiss the material interpretations to security, conflict and cooperation in the field of energy relations. I highlighted therefore the importance of acknowledging the role of both material and cognitive aspects of energy dynamics that underpin actors' choices for cooperative or conflictual relations, bringing to this purpose insights from the broader realm of the psychology of security and political psychology, while focusing more specifically on the literature dedicated to the ontological security.

Thus, I offered a mixed material-cognitive framework of understanding of the relations among the main actors engaged in the energy projects that link the Caspian-Black Sea to the European markets. I suggested understanding the politicisation of the energy discourses in the light of the actors' anxieties generated by changing circumstances which affect not their physical security, but rather their ontological one, by disrupting their routines. Energy actors need routines in order to experience a continuous sense of stability, of psychological security and the identities and narratives they built about themselves and the other play this role. They tend to remain attached to their routines and to the identities they narrate to themselves and to the world, be it healthy or maladaptive ones. Nevertheless, conflict is also a routine to which some actors, less secure about themselves, tend to stick in order not to perturb their stability, although such a routine is built on a conflictual relationship with the 'Other' and may endanger their physical security. For them, ontological security might at times prevail. However, ontologically secure actors, when faced with a change of circumstances, look for alternatives and are open to adapting their routines and narratives in order to avoid conflict. In the energy realm, these cognitive considerations are at all times complemented by rational, objective evaluations of the new context and of the potential gains and losses. Material and non-material forces both drive actors' choices for cooperation and conflict.

I concluded the chapter with the argument that, although devoted to their routines, narratives and identities, the energy actors will not necessarily remain attached to unhealthy habits. Although in order to maintain a sense of stability and ontological security, they may preserve conflictual relations and narratives in one area of their existence, such as the political one, at the same time they may also choose to reframe, partially or wholly, their narratives about the self and about the others in other realms, such as the economic one, moving thus towards healthier attachments and routines. **Conflict and cooperation** can co-exist.

II. SETTING UP THE CONTEXT: NATURAL GAS FROM THE CASPIAN-BLACK SEA TO EUROPE

"The political importance of the wider Black Sea/Caspian region stems from the role it plays both geopolitically and in the political economy of energy" (Raszewski, 2013:4).

Introduction

The present research emerged from the contradiction I identified between the predominantly conflict-oriented narratives around energy relations in Europe and the fairly cooperation-dominated dynamics in the energy field. I proceeded particularly from the highly-debated and politicised natural gas projects allegedly opposing the interests of the EU and Russia, and from the specific context of the Caspian-Black Sea region often depicted in connection to the political insecurities and conflicts in the neighbourhood.

In order to overcome both the theoretical geopolitical reductionism, which predominates in the energy literature and depicts natural gas projects as an extension of geopolitical conflicts between big powers, as well as the conceptual reductionism that represents conflict and cooperation as binary, opposing concepts, and energy security as a material, objective goal, I proposed two new instruments that help to better understand the complex conflict and cooperation dynamics in the energy field: the theoretical framework of *ontological security*, and a new conceptual tool I designed, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum***.**

In this chapter, I focus predominantly on the material conditions, factors and contexts that support the complex energy dynamics around the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe. For this purpose, I examine the current context in which the relationship between the key energy actors in the region is placed, in order to see if its material realities reflect the politicisation to which it has been submitted in past decades. At all times, I include observations that open the way to the debate of the last chapter, dedicated to the non-material, ontological motivations that come to complement the material considerations of the key energy players in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

I start by what I call the **'playfield'**, the arena of interaction between the main energy players I analyse in this research. Hence, in the first section, I debate the idea of the Caspian-

Black Sea region as being a contested neighbourhood, where the interests of the rival big powers clash and fuel deep-rooted conflicts that also spill over into the energy realm. I argue instead that the Caspian-Black Sea region is one of the most relevant cases where the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* can be seen at work, a dynamic area where political conflicts have not permanently impeded the development of cooperative energy projects, sometimes implemented without the participation of the major actors, at the initiative of smaller, regional players. I reinforce thus the argument that reducing the energy projects in the Caspian-Black Sea area to a geopolitical rivalry between the EU and Russia is an oversimplification, a reductionist bias that ignores the complexity of regional relations and the multitude of energy actors in the region, be it state or commercial ones.

In the second part of setting up the context, I look specifically at the recent trends in the evolution of the **gas market** in Europe, for the same purpose of checking whether the existing material conditions justify the politicisation and the increased anxieties around the gas imports in Europe and the regional projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe. I start from the intriguing observation that, despite contributing less as proportion to the energy mix of the European economies, gas has been much more politicised than other imported natural resources, particularly in the past years. I proceed therefore to checking the material facts, the situation of the current natural gas demand and supply in Europe, in order to ascertain if the fears and anxieties around the natural gas supplies reflect the reality on the ground. I bring the research up-to-date by discussing the challenging year of 2020, when this research has been finalised and submitted, looking at the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the gas demand and prices, and I offer the most recent forecasts related to their evolution for the next years, both from public and independent sources. I find this exercise particularly important in order to justify why gas is still relevant, predicted to remain one of the preferred sources of energy in Europe, despite the EU's move towards greener, carbon-free economies, finding interesting arguments to why gas and pipelines are here to stay and to actually enhance the European energy security, against all anxieties that they would do the opposite.

I. The playfield: the Caspian-Black Sea region, a contested neighbourhood

The natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea hydrocarbon fields to the European markets, while supplying essential energy resources for many economies in the South

Caucasus, South-East Europe, the Balkans, and further in Central and Western Europe, are the lifeline of local and regional economics and politics.

I note that the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions are treated separately in literature. For the sake of offering a proper review on how the regions are contextualised and imagined in literature, I follow this line myself, on an exceptional basis, in this section. Nevertheless, although I acknowledge the fact that, if taken separately, they differ at times in their political structure and historical background, beyond this section the Caspian and the wider Black Sea area are discussed, as a unit in itself, in the context of the energy projects linking the two regions, as the integrated Caspian-Black Sea region.

From this perspective, I regard the Caspian-Black Sea region as defining the complex geographical neighbourhood stretching from the Western shores of the Caspian Sea where the Azerbaijani energy exports to Europe start, passing through Georgia as it follows the route of the main natural gas pipelines hereafter discussed, and reaching the shores of the Black Sea where Turkey, Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova meet, while also including Ukraine and Greece in the wider political area of the Black Sea. The Caspian-Black Sea region is thus a region between regions, located in the economic and political proximity of the Caspian Sea and the wider Caucasus, of the Eastern Mediterranean through Greece and Turkey, of the South-East Europe and the Western Balkans beyond Bulgaria, and of Central Europe through Romania. The natural gas pipelines I discuss in this thesis follow these imaginary lines of connecting regions, as the Southern Gas Corridor stretches from the Caspian shores in Azerbaijan, through Georgia in the Caucasus, Turkey at the Black Sea, and Greece, Albania and Italy in Southern Europe. In its own turn, the Turkish Stream links the Black Sea shores of Russia and Turkey to the Greek border and connects through its gas flows to Bulgaria and North Macedonia, with an onward connection to Serbia launched at the end of December 2020 and a final onward step to Hungary planned for launch in October 2021, while striving to reach even further to Central or Western Europe in the future. In both cases, the EU finds itself both in the middle, as well as at the Western end of these routes, while Russia and Azerbaijan stand at the opposing end, with Turkey in the centre and at the crossroads of these pipelines.

From a political point of view, the countries of the Caspian-Black Sea region display a large background diversity: former members of the Soviet Union, EU members, or none of the above, displaying various understandings of democratic governance. Resource-wise, the region is home to large hydrocarbon reserves, oil and natural gas, however they are unequally dispersed, from the largest natural gas producer in the world, Russia (IEA, 2020), to a

moderate producer and exporter, Azerbaijan, an independent producer yet not exporter, Romania, then to moderately high dependencies in Georgia, Greece and Ukraine, and ending with almost total hydrocarbon import-dependent states, like Bulgaria and Turkey. This thick diversity gives rise to a complex web of relations between the countries of the region, be it of an economic, or of a political nature, as well as to a fascinating compound of ontological nuances that underpin their decisions and impact on their propensity for more tensed or more relaxed behaviour on the energy scene.

The wider Black Sea region has once again gained momentum and attention with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Less under focus after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the neighbouring Caucasus, despite being marred by the conflicts in Georgia and Transnistria in the 1990s, the wider Black Sea came under spotlight and raised regional and European anxieties with the crisis in Ukraine that led to the breakaway and immediate annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation. Although less disputed, compared to the Caspian Sea by the existing regional and willing-to-be powers of the U.S., Russia and Turkey, the wider Black Sea region has been set, in the past years, to become an active theatre of redefining alliances and consolidating political and economic collaborative projects, with energy at the core of these dynamics. In January 2020, the natural gas pipeline Turkish Stream, a joint Russian-Turkish project, has been inaugurated and started to deliver the first volumes of Russian gas to Turkey and further to Greece, Bulgaria and North Macedonia. In August 2020, the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the discovery of a major natural gas field in the proximity of Turkey's Black Sea coast, a significant breakthrough in Ankara's fervent quests for new gas supplies for its energy-dependent economy.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the energy projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region have often been politicised, being analysed in connection with a wide list of risks and threats to their viability and safety, and being interpreted as an extension of the geopolitical rivalry between the big powers. In the interview offered for this thesis, Oleh Krykavskyy[6], Former Shell Advisor in Ukraine and energy policy expert, considers that, as the energy projects in the region are rather a political than an economic issue, much depends on how much the European governments are Russia-friendly. From this perspective, the cooperation potential is unstable and variable depending on political set-ups. Similarly to this opinion,

[6] C4: Interview conducted on 28 April 2020

Ihor Lossovskyi[7], Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the OSCE, considers that in the region cooperation is very tense, fragmentary and unstable.

This thesis uses the concept of the 'wider Black Sea region', instead of the strict geographical delimitation of the Black Sea area, in order to incorporate all those countries which are considered to belong politically and economically to the region in discussion, and to be relevant for the topic of this research, namely: Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. The choice of these states is no accidental, since they are all interconnected under the energy projects that are analysed by the thesis as linking the Caspian Sea, through the South Caucasus and the wider Black Sea on their way further to the European markets.

The wider Black Sea region, thus understood, is home to an overlapping web of international alliances and organisations, with three EU members (Bulgaria, Greece and Romania), four states belonging to NATO (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Turkey), all of the countries being members of the OSCE, and Georgia and Ukraine aspiring to join the EU and NATO in the future. The role of the EU in the conflict and cooperation dynamics of the region, since the Union has been a very active player in the energy projects traversing the wider Black Sea region, is under scrutiny later in this chapter, along with the participation of the two key regional actors, Russia and Turkey.

Following the observation above on the tendency to (geo)politicise the energy dynamics in this region, the predominant description in literature of the wider Black Sea region is that of a 'contested neighbourhood', reigned by the conflicting interests of local and external players and their diverging agendas (Aidyn and Triantaphyllou, 2010; Kottari et al. 2013; Raszewski, 2013; Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018; Triantaphyllou, 2020). Moreover, the countries of the region have been criticised for their failure to aggregate a common strategy and vision for the future (Aidyn and Triantaphyllou, 2010) and a common framework for security building in the region, with some of the them calling for a stronger NATO presence, like Romania (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018), while others adopting a more balanced foreign policy tone between the West and Russia, as Bulgaria and Greece. In addition to that, domestic tensions are considered to have maintained some states of the region in a geopolitical, zero-sum foreign policy frame (Triantaphyllou, 2020).

Notwithstanding the fragmented interests and at times conflictual actions in the neighbourhood, as well as the tendency towards individualistic actions of the countries under

[7] D5: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.

discussion, the wider Black Sea region is "simultaneously a border and a bridge" (Kottari et al, 2013:9), where various cooperation initiatives have developed especially in the energy field, as the region is a major gateway to Europe for the natural gas and oil exports from the Caspian Sea and Russia. Although these projects have often been suspected for representing geopolitical instruments in the EU-Russia rivalry, it is nevertheless true that they have also managed at times to bring together competing actors, such as Russia and Turkey, or Greece and Turkey, and to forge regional energy alliances.

Hence I agree that reducing the energy projects in the wider Black Sea area to a geopolitical rivalry between the EU and Russia is an oversimplification (Kottari et al, 2013:51), a reductionist bias that ignores the complexity of regional relations and the multitude of energy actors in the region. The commercial potential of the still relatively unknown hydrocarbons deposits in the Black Sea waters and their advantageous proximity to the European markets (Kottari et al, 2013), at least to those smaller, energy-dependent markets in South-East Europe, offers the Black Sea the potential of being a field of regional cooperation, even more if taking into account the fact that Romania has been an oil and natural gas producer since the 19th century expected to become an exporter as well, and that Bulgaria and Turkey have themselves engaged in exploring new natural gas deposits in recent years. Nevertheless, there are still doubts regarding the technological and financial possibility of Bulgaria and Romania to invest in the necessary upgrade of the infrastructure, as, despite the available European funds to support such initiatives, the political will has been slow to follow. For the time being, it is Turkey and its assertive energy endeavours that seem to dominate any future developments in the energy discoveries, still largely underexplored, of the Black Sea, although a reverse situation might occur in this case: strong political will possibly not sufficiently be backed by long-term, sustainable financial means. However, in an interesting point of view, Raszewski (2013) argues that in the absence of a clearly defined regional identity, the Caspian-Black sea region tends to be reduced to its role of a transit region, to be identified mainly through its potential of transiting valuable natural resources to the European markets.

The wider Black Sea has been much debated in recent years in the context of the 2014 annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, an event which triggered a high level of anxiety in Europe and in the neighbourhood. The region has been imagined in particular ways by each of the key actors I discuss in this thesis and they positioned themselves accordingly in the main energy projects crossing it.

The Black Sea is thought to have been, along with the Balkans, "[...] the *loci* of Russia's great power identity", where gaining and maintaining control over it was "[...] critical to the discourse of Russia's existence as a modern state" (Samokhvalov, 2018:8). For Russia, controlling the Black Sea has been crucial for guaranteeing its long-desired access to the warm seas, namely to the Mediterranean Sea, through the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits. This vision had already been shaped in the context of the 19th century Crimean war when Russia already realised that maintaining a military fleet at the Black Sea was essential to secure its access to the Mediterranean. The long debated agreement signed between Moscow and Kiev in April 2010 follows this logic with historical roots: on this occasion, Russia was granted by Ukraine the permission to station its Black Sea fleet in the Crimean city of Sevastopol until 2042 in exchange for a 30% discount in the price of gas sold to Ukraine over the following ten years (Kottari et al., 2013) and a freeze of the multi-billion gas debt of Ukraine's Naftogaz to Gazprom, for natural gas imports delivered from Russia to Ukraine (Dusciac et al., 2016). Nevertheless, despite the discount offered, the price paid by Ukraine for the Russian natural gas in 2013, 420 USD per 1,000 cubic metres, was still above the average price requested by Gazprom from its European customers, 370 USD per 1,000 cubic metres. The agreement fuelled vivid debates about Moscow's geopolitical use of gas pricing and about using the natural gas exports as an energy weapon in order to gain political and military gains, which I explored in the previous chapter.

Throughout the thesis I dispute the reductionist bias of reducing the energy players strictly to their alleged geopolitical or liberal roles. All actors display mixed forms of engagement with the energy projects they take part in, at times geopolitical and other times more market-oriented, with most of the cases mixing the two ambitions at the same time. The Russia-Ukraine agreement on the Black Sea military fleet discussed here above is indeed one of Moscow's geopolitical moves through which Kremlin and Gazprom worked together in order to secure Russia's strong military position at the Black Sea while using the natural gas pricing to achieve this goal. Nonetheless, this action too presents, albeit more discreet, commercial shades to it. It was destined not only to imprint Russia's military presence at the Black Sea, but also to feed its long-lasting goal to secure the safe transit of its trade goods to the Mediterranean and thus serve its economic aims. As often the case with the key actors under scrutiny in this research, geopolitical and economic goals are rarely pure in their nature, as they usually work together to serve less discussed, but more important needs, the existential ones that underpin their *ontological security*.

After the Cold War, the wider Black Sea region gained attention from the major international actors, NATO and the EU (Kottari et al., 2013). The 2004 NATO enlargement included Bulgaria and Romania as new members, while accession discussions have been underway with Georgia and Ukraine. In the past years, particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO military presence at the Black Sea has intensified consistently, particularly with the participation of Romania. Bucharest's main concerns and lines of political discourse have been shaped, since 2014, around the stringent need to enhance the security of the Black Sea. As a consequence, the new national security strategy released in 2020, is largely oriented towards securing the Black Sea and countering Russia's moves in the basin, while, at the same time, consolidating NATO's southern flank (Carafano and Kochis, 2020). Romania has also agreed to host key element of the U.S. European Phased Adaptive Approach missile defence shield, as part of NATO's defence programme in Europe and at the Black Sea.

Unlike NATO, the EU does not have a specific policy framework for the Black Sea region. Instead, its actions are placed in the wider context of its initiatives towards the Eastern European neighbourhood, with Brussels being focused mostly on the former Soviet space. The EU deals separately with its members, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania, and has different tools of political, economic and institutional engagement for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, along with its policy for the Eastern Neighbourhood, as well as individual frameworks of cooperation with Russia and respectively, Turkey. When Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, the Union "[...] acquired a de facto geographic access to the Black Sea" (Kottari et al., 2013:10). This raised Brussels hopes to reach the promising hydrocarbon reserves of the Caspian Sea, transporting them under its own regulations and preferably through pipelines not owned or operated by Gazprom anymore. It is of no surprise that the EU's main institutional tools of engagement with the Caspian-Black Sea area have been shaped around its energy interests.

In line with its goals of diversification and securing the energy supplies, the EU used an institutional model of exporting its values eastwards and engaged with the countries of the region through more, often overlapping, initiatives.

In order to offer an institutional support to its long-term goal of diversifying its energy supplies away from Russia, the EU sought to institutionalise the energy cooperation with its Eastern neighbours under the Energy Community initiative, an international organisation bringing together the EU, the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia), along with Georgia, Moldova

and Ukraine (Dusciac et al., 2016). The Baku Initiative, launched in 2004, has been specifically focused on the cooperation in the field of energy and transport between the EU and the Caspian-Black Sea countries, as part of the INterstate Oil and GAs Transportation to Europe (INOGATE) and the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) programmes. Through the Baku Initiative, the EU tried to export its energy vision and priorities. Thus, the initiative's main goals refer to the integration of the energy markets of the countries concerned, the security of supply, as well as the promotion of sustainable development through measures aimed at improving the energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Nevertheless, the EU's engagement has been criticised for its lack of consistency and coherence and for being very slow in integrating the local markets with the European one (Akiner et al., 2013; Kottari et al., 2013).

A second initiative, the Energy Community Treaty, entered into force in 2006, aims to provide the legal framework to create an integrated gas and electricity market between the EU and the contracting parties, the countries of the Western Balkans, along with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while Turkey holds an observer status.

Two years later, in 2008, the Black Sea Synergy was launched with the purpose to foster the cooperation between the EU and the Black Sea countries, proposing energy as one of its key field of interaction.

And last but not least, the EU's most important institutional framework of engagement with the Caspian-Black Sea region, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), was introduced in 2009 as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), to foster the cooperation between the EU and countries of the region, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, or, in the words of the European Commission itself, "an initiative to help Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine increase economic, political and cultural links with the EU" (European Commission, 2020a). Although the Commission states energy as one of the key areas of cooperation, along with transport, the budget allocated was too limited to produce an effective result (Kottari et al., 2013).

The EU's engagement towards the region, through these initiatives, has been criticised for lack of coherence, since these programmes overlap in their stated objectives and field of action: "Instead of promoting a stable framework for the EU energy security, most of these initiatives seem to promote just short-term palliative measures towards that direction" (Kottari et al., 2013:15).

In addition to the frail economic engagement with the region, the EU has also been reprehended for its lack of consistent political action towards the conflicts around the Black Sea. Thus, the Union has been criticised for failing to aggregate a consistent response to the 2008 war in South Ossetia and for maintaining distance while instead looking "feeble and disunited" (Tanchev, 2020:8). Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU acted more decisively, calling for imposing sanctions against Russia. However, the core frailty which has been marring the EU for the past decades, as it will be discussed in detail later in this research, its lack of solidarity, has also diminished the effect of the sanctions, as some member states, Bulgaria, Slovakia or Hungary, opposed them.

Energy has remained the EU's main area of interest in the wider Black Sea region and the South Caucasus, as access to the Caspian hydrocarbons, bypassing Russian transportation infrastructure and diversifying away from its supplies, have occupied a central place in the Union's policy for the past years. I analyse later in the thesis the trajectory followed by the EU's energy strategy towards the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the European market, paying specific attention to its underlying motivations, both of a material, as well as of an ontological nature.

A frequent depiction of the Caspian region is, similarly to the Black Sea, that of a contested neighbourhood, where diverging interests and clashing agendas of the regional and international actors may become a source of dispute (Ibrahimov, 2014).

The Caspian Sea's "[...] geographical location is both its blessing (meaning a diversity of customers) and its curse (due to the problematic export of those riches which need an adequate infrastructure" (Penkova, 2014:113). Despite hosting approximately 10% of the world's oil and gas reserves, the Caspian Sea faces the difficulty of reaching the international markets, the significant importers being located at considerable distances which translates into the main problem that has been preoccupying the agendas of both exporters and importers: building the lengthy and expensive infrastructure that would link the Caspian producers to their end customers.

The considerable distance between the exploration and production terminals at the Caspian Sea and the destination markets implies an appreciable number of states in between, that would have to be crossed by the newly built infrastructure. The larger their number, the higher the feeling of unpredictability and anxiety among some actors, a concern also reflected in the literature when often these pipelines have been described as vulnerable to international and domestic tensions and conflicts, or even a fuel for existing conflicts themselves (Winrow, 2007, 2013; Koranyi, 2014; Orazgaliyev, 2017; Widdershofen, 2020), with some authors

considering that governments and energy companies attempt to implement their own projects while sabotaging competing ones (Penkova, 2014). The interviewee A1[8] adds that the national interests of big actors like Russia still prevail in the region and that energy relations cannot ignore them or overpass them, while G1[9] interestingly notes that the natural gas supply from the Caspian Sea is strategic but its reliability is connected to the stability of relations with Turkey.

Stemming from this highly visible trend of linking pipelines to conflicts, I analyse in Chapter IV how and why some of these energy projects have been highly (geo)politicised and regarded through conflict lenses, while often their cooperation potential has been sidelined from literature and political narratives. I do not discard completely the political motivations beyond these pipelines, rather I bring in complementary factors to be considered, such as commercial and psychological factors.

The fall of the Soviet Union saw the emergence of new state players on the energy scene of the Caspian region. Thus, some of the newly emerged countries, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan found themselves in a new role, that of an energy producer and potential exporter, with Russia not detaining anymore the role of a single regional producer and exporter. Among these actors, Azerbaijan is located in the Caspian-Black Sea region discussed in this research and is one of the important players in the energy dynamics of the region. At present, Azerbaijan's proven gas reserves are estimated to approximately 1,300 bcm and its natural exports increased almost five times since 2007, from 1.8 bcm/y to 8.9 bcm/y in 2017, with gas and oil exports contributing to more than 70% to the country's overall budget (Hasanov et al., 2020). In 2019, Azerbaijan's natural gas production increased to 35.6 bcm/y from 30.49 bcm/y in 2018 (SOCAR, 2020).

It is with Azerbaijan's emergence as an energy player that the (geo)politicisation of the Caspian region has started in the mid-1990s, when the so-called 'Deal of the Century' was signed, in September 1994, when the government in Baku closed the deal with a contract between the AIOC - Azerbaijan International Operating Company, a consortium of Western companies led by BP - British Petroleum (BP), for the exploitation of three major hydrocarbons fields at the Caspian Sea (Gulbrandsen and Moe, 2007; Kaldor, 2007; Ibrahimov, 2010), in order to start the production and export of 80% of Azerbaijan's oil to Europe (Smith Stegen and Kusznir, 2015). The deal was set under the geopolitical paradigm of the 'New Great Game', used as such to describe the new geopolitical competition for the

[8] A1: Interview conducted on 10 June 2020.
[9] G1: Interview conducted on 26 May 2020.

hydrocarbon resources in Central Asia. The initial metaphor of the 'Great Game' had been previously introduced by Rudyard Kipling as a reference to the regional rivalry between the British and the Russian empires in the 19th century (Orazgaliyev, 2017).

Unlike the bipolar Great Game, the 'New Great Game' geopolitical interpretation, sees the involvement of more extra-regional powers, such as the U.S., the EU, Iran and China, in the quest for controlling the natural resources of the Caspian and increasing their political control over the region, and at the same time weakening Russia's and Iran's formerly dominant positions. While Russia is seen as struggling to maintain its prominent status in the region, the U.S. has been actively involved, especially throughout the 1990s, in supporting an East-West energy corridor and hence building the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan), BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) and Baku-Supsa pipelines that have been instrumental in transporting Caspian oil and natural gas bypassing Russia and Iran. China has been a major and large investor in the energy projects of the Caspian in the past decades, mainly under its 'One Belt, One Road' initiative linking Asia, Europe and Central Asia (Orazgaliyev, 2017), through trade deals including also large-scale energy and transport projects. The EU has been slower to emerge as a major player in the Caspian and its main initiatives have been triggered by Brussels' interests in diversifying its natural gas supplies away from Russia and thus supporting new pipeline projects connecting the Caspian hydrocarbons to the European markets. The link to the 19th century 'Great Game' is thus misleading disregarding the great complexity of the contemporary regional dynamics and actors (Frappi, 2014:181).

The Caspian region is, under the light of the 'New Great Deal' paradigm, often understood as a "great powers' arena" (Bayramov, 2019:1), a playground for the major powers, the U.S., the EU and China to dispute among themselves the control over the hydrocarbons production, a field for geopolitical struggle among them, which, by contagion, has led to a predominance of the neorealist and geopolitical academic discussions on this topic (Heinrich and Pleines, 2015; Bayramov, 2019).

All players on the energy scene of the South Caucasus and Caspian region, be it great powers or regional actors, have employed geopolitical means linking them to their commercial and economic ambitions. Russia, as the dominant regional energy power, has been accounted for treating the South Caucasus as "a continuation of Moscow's domestic security agenda" and "an area of geopolitical competition with the West" (Shlykov, 2018:107). In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, Russia has made consistent use of the role and infrastructure it inherited from the former Soviet Union, in order to maintain and consolidate its position as main exporter of Caspian natural gas and oil, while mixing these

economic goals with political ones related to consolidating its political power as a regional leader. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the multiplication of the actors motivated to take part in the exploitation and exports of the Caspian resources, Moscow faced the situation of losing exclusivity as unchallenged leader of exports in front of the Western-backed and China-financed projects, along with the emergence of new producers willing to diversify away from Moscow: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and of the multinational companies (Molchanov, 2016; Orazgaliyev, 2017).

Faced with this worrying perspective, Moscow attempted to counter the diversification efforts of some importing countries, discouraging competition from the Central Asian gas on the Western European markets (Balmaceda, 2008; Erdogdu, 2014; Penkova, 2014), which Gazprom buys from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and then resells it for a profit. In 2003, Russia and Turkmenistan signed a 25-year export agreement allowing Gazprom to buy Turkmen natural gas for a price up to 60% lower than the price perceived by the company for re-selling the same gas further to its European customers. Besides the obvious economic gains, the deal also served to counter competition by lowering the volumes of Turkmen gas available to other buyers and thus reducing the diversification hopes of Europe (Penkova, 2014). However, it would be an oversimplification to limit the purpose of the deal to the geopolitical ambitions of Moscow and thus dismiss Turkmenistan's own will and agenda. By sealing the deal with Russia, Turkmenistan took advantage of the earliest offer in order to sell its gas without investing itself in the construction of new pipelines that would have necessitated a long time to be accomplished. The Caspian country continued to follow a pragmatic approach in the following years when it agreed to sell most of its natural gas to China and hence diversifying its exports away both from Russia and the EU.

Russia has also managed to take over control over the transit infrastructure in some of the former Soviet republics, buying majority ownership of energy assets, such as transit facilities. In Moldova for example, Gazprom purchased 50% plus one share of its gas distribution network (Smith Stegen, 2011), in addition to consolidating its political leverage and presence in Transnistria, Moldova's breakaway region supported by Moscow (Balmaceda, 2008). One more counteractive action was Russia's demand for the former Soviet countries to offer it stakes in some energy projects, as a payment for the debt owned by these countries for the investments made in the energy infrastructure during the Soviet time (Orazgaliyev, 2017).

In the aftermath of the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the first major power to actively manifest interest in the politics and the economics of the Caspian, besides Russia,

was the U.S. As Frappi (2014) notices, during the Clinton administration however, in the 1990s, the American foreign policy in the region was mainly aimed at countering and isolating Iran and Washington kept a rather limited involvement in the region, in order not to affect the cooperation with Moscow. In the mid-1990s nevertheless, the idea of the East-West energy corridor that would ensure the export of Caspian hydrocarbons from Azerbaijan, through Georgia and Turkey, became a central element of the U.S.' Caspian energy policy and was concretised during the Bush administration, when the BTC and BTE (also known as the South Caucasus Pipeline) projects were inaugurated (Frappi, 2014; Orazgaliyev, 2017). During George W. Bush's mandate, the development of the energy infrastructure in the Caspian became a security policy tool and the region was given more importance as a corridor for the U.S. and NATO military operations in Afghanistan. Preoccupied with limiting Russia's leverage in the neighbourhood, the U.S. preferred to switch its role, from the main promoter to Caspian infrastructure projects, to a supporter of the EU's similar plans (Frappi, 2014:196). Nevertheless, the U.S.' position switched once more during the Obama presidency, when Washington reoriented its energy interests further East and away from the Caspian, supporting the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. Thus, it became a competitor for its former ally, the EU, as Washington encouraged the export of Turkmen natural gas through the TAPI pipeline, while the EU had long hoped for the same gas to run through the Southern Gas Corridor to Europe (Frappi, 2014). During the Trump administration, the U.S.' interest in the Caucasus and the Caspian decreased considerably and Washington's moves to counter Moscow's energy dominant position focused on blocking the realisation of the controversial Nord Stream 2 project, set to be finalised in 2020-2021, a major undersea project linking directly Russia to Germany through the Baltic Sea and solidifying Russia's intention to diversify its natural gas transit to Europe away from Ukraine in the near future.

The EU was slow to emerge as a key player in the Caucasus and the Caspian and kept a rather low profile throughout the 1990s (Shahbazov, 2017). Brussels followed an institutional model to engage with the countries of the region, that started with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) signed in 1996 with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and entered into force in 1999 (Shahbazov, 2017). It was later continued under the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme focused on providing technical and financial assistance for the purpose of exporting EU-shaped values related to democratisation, free market and the rule of law. Nevertheless, "for

the most part, the South Caucasus remained *terra incognita* for many EU members until the late 1990s" (Shahbazov, 2017:151).

The EU's interest towards the Caspian was triggered by the opportunity occurred in the 1990s to access the hydrocarbons of the Caspian which would not be exploited, produced and exported by Russia and thus it became the main promoter of the East-West energy corridor earlier initiated by the U.S. Hence, in 1992, the INOGATE programme was launched under TACIS, designed as an international energy cooperation programme between the EU and countries of the Caspian, Black Sea and Central Asia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan (Akiner et al., 2013). The objectives of the programme, although targeting the countries above, reflect however a self-centric vision of Brussels based on exporting the European model and oriented towards the EU's priorities, such as: transforming the local energy markets according to the EU internal energy market model, attracting investments for developing energy projects meant to lead to its diversification of supplies and securing the energy demand. INOGATE was further extended in 2004 when the Baku Initiative was launched by reinstating similar objectives to INOGATE. The Baku Initiative has however been criticised for being very slow in reaching its goal of integrating the local energy markets with the European one and for its lack of consistency and coherence (Akiner et al., 2013; Kottari et al., 2013).

The EU's main instrument of engagement with the countries of the region has been the EaP, designed and declared to contribute to the stability of the neighbourhood by promoting goals related to conflict resolution, the creation of free trade zones, educational programmes and institutional reforms.

In addition to the institutional instruments mentioned above, the EU devised another energy-focused programme, EU4Energy, addressing the six countries of the EaP (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and the five countries in Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), being implemented by the International Energy Agency, the Energy Charter Secretariat and the Energy Community Secretariat. The EU4Energy programme has been envisaged to focus on five main areas of cooperation, in the field of: improving the quality of energy data and statistics; developing policies related to energy security, sustainable energy and energy markets; attracting investments for energy infrastructure projects; providing information to the public; and raising awareness (EU4Energy, 2020).

The bilateral Association Agreements signed between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine also included consistent provisions related to the reform of the national energy markets, mainly with respect to enhancing energy security, improving competitiveness in the energy sector and enforcing a free energy market (Dusciac et al, 2016).

Nonetheless, all these programmes have been imagined through the adoption by the countries of the region of the EU model, with Europe "eager to create a civilized European space in the region" (Shahbazov, 2017:152). Despite its ambitious goals, the EU has been criticised for remaining an outside actor lacking a strategic vision or a clear policy (Akiner et al., 2013; Shahbazov, 2017), particularly with respect to the protracted conflicts of the region (Mikhelidze, 2013; Abbasov, 2014; Shahbazov, 2017), while its financial and technical assistance has proved to be equally limited (Shahbazov, 2017:153). As Ambassador Galib Israfilov[10], the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to OSCE, declared in the interview offered for this research, Azerbaijan does not see Europe as politically united, in the perceived absence of a constant European policy towards its neighbours. The EaP and the ENP do not have clear objectives and do not offer clear advantage to Azerbaijan which prefers cooperation with Europe outside the framework of the EaP, claiming to be recognised as Europe's equal partner, and not to merely comply to its standards (D2).

Some authors went as far as to denounce the overall EU foreign policy towards the Caspian and the Caucasus as being ineffective to support its energy strategy in the region (Ceccorulli, 2014). Authors from the region complain that "[...] the EU has failed to be a credible actor in the region, able to defend its interests by diversifying energy supplies, decreasing the energy dependence of some member states on Russia and contributing to regional security in the South Caucasus" (Mikhelidze, 2013:1), and that, with respect to its response towards the resurge of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, "the prolonged silence of the EU may damage its credibility" (Bayramov, 2020a).

As discussed above in this section, all the players in the region, regardless of their power status, have displayed both economic and (geo)political approaches in shaping their policies towards the Caspian region. In its own turn, in the early 1990s, Turkey saw an opportunity with the collapse of the Soviet Union, to exert its economic and political influence on the countries of the Caspian region, advocating for a 'New Silk Road between Europe and China' (Tanrisever, 2014:221). It initially counted on the Turkic affinity with some of the countries of the region (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) promoting a

[10] D4: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.

cultural model of regional cooperation. However, the newly emerged states were not eager to replace an old patron, Russia, with a new one, Turkey (Tanrisever, 2014). As a consequence, Turkey had to abandon its pan-Turkic strategy and replace it, in the 2000s, with a more pragmatic approach, the energy dimension that would also include cooperating with Russia instead of challenging it. Ankara thus adopted a "cooperative security understanding" (Tanrisever, 2014:225), based on the soft approach proposed by the former minister of foreign affairs and prime-minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the so-called 'zero-problem' foreign policy. Throughout its foreign policy in the Caspian, Turkey has been actively driven by its determination to contribute to the creation of an energy corridor that would link the natural resources of the Caspian basin to its own market and further to Europe, prioritising the construction of the BTC and Baku-Supsa oil pipelines, as well as of the BTE, TANAP and Turkish Stream natural gas pipelines, be they backed by the West, or by Russia.

Ankara's foreign policy in the region has displayed "multifaceted and multilateral interests" (Shlykov, 2018:108), cooperating with Azerbaijan in the energy projects above enumerated; participating, along with Azerbaijan and Georgia, in major infrastructure projects, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway; advocating for Georgia's accession to NATO and hence to a stronger NATO, to which Ankara is a member; and forging the military cooperation with Georgia and Azerbaijan (Shlykov, 2018).

Ankara's foreign policy orientation has however recently started to change, when Turkey has adopted, in the past few years, a more assertive policy abroad, challenging and at times opposing Russia's positions in the Eastern Mediterranean, in Syria and Libya, as well as with regard to the resurged conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey's late endeavours pertain to both geopolitical and economic goals: it looks to assert a stronger role abroad, while seeking new sources to feed its energy-hungry economy. Ankara's military cooperation with Azerbaijan, Georgia and, more recently, Ukraine has stepped up in the past years, as part of Turkey's goal to counter Russia's dominant position in the Caspian-Black Sea region, dismissing the generally spread perception in the West that Turkey is moving closer to Russia (Avdaliani, 2020). Ankara's anxieties have been triggered by the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation followed by its militarisation after 2014, which Turkey has perceived as moving the balance in Moscow's favour and limiting its moves in the Black Sea. In 2019, Turkey's exports of defence products increased by 38%, while in 2020, Ankara and Kiev signed a 36 USD million military aid package for Ukraine. Moreover, the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan trilateral agreement established in the defence sector provides for the protection of energy infrastructure as a priority and the three partners conducted military exercises in 2018

that simulated an attack on the BTC oil pipeline (Avdaliani, 2020). To these dynamics, Turkey's recent vocal involvement in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which re-erupted in 2020, must be noted, with Ankara providing openly political support, as well as military back-up to Azerbaijan against Armenia.

Azerbaijan and Georgia themselves have linked their political goals to the energy projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region. Confronted with secessionist movements on their territories (Nagorno-Karabakh for Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and South-Ossetia for Georgia), together with the anxieties generated by the perceived revisionist intentions of Russia and Iran, the two countries of the South Caucasus have concentrated their efforts on safeguarding their physical security. Nevertheless, both Azerbaijan and Georgia have been equally concerned with preserving their existential security, by engaging in constant endeavours to assert their identity and role, as independent, autonomous actors, in charge with their own destiny. In order to achieve both goals, to preserve their physical survival and their *ontological security,* Georgia and Azerbaijan have oriented themselves towards the West, to seek for protection in case of conflicts in the first case, and to receive international recognition of their role and status in the second case. For this purpose, Baku and Tbilisi have used pipeline politics as a mechanism to cooperate with the West and make themselves attractive to the Western partners (Ismayilov, 2011). Particularly in the case of Azerbaijan, due to its potential of becoming an exporter of natural gas and oil for to Europe, pipeline politics served as an efficient tool to help Baku take a more assertive role both towards Brussels and Moscow and to build on its self-confidence as an important actor in the Caspian-Black Sea region and, to an extent, in the wider Europe as well.

Being at the same time preoccupied to maintain a stable gas production and export, in the context of a continuous decrease in the oil output, and aware of the fact that the hydrocarbon exports are a key pillar of the country's economic and political stability (Jarosiewicz, 2015), the government in Baku has employed a dual foreign policy, carefully balancing between Russia and the West (Ibrahimov, 2014; Penkova, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015; Shahbazov, 2017). Thus, Azerbaijan supported and is the main supplier of natural gas of the Southern Gas Corridor, a project developed independently from Russian resources and infrastructure, as well as of oil through similarly independent oil pipelines, Baku-Supsa and BTC. However, Baku made sure to ease Russia's anxieties related to its independent energy endeavours by denying that the Southern Gas Corridor serves as a competitor to the Russian

gas exports to Europe. Thus, in the interview I conducted with Galib Israfilov[11], the Permanent Representative of Republic of Azerbaijan to OSCE, assured that Azerbaijan does not compete with Russia and it has less gas than Russia and hence the EU should not see Azerbaijan as a substitute for Russia. Surprised that Azerbaijan would not want to be considered as an alternative to Russia, and praising Baku for maintaining a good balance and peaceful relations in the region, Nils Jansons, Deputy Head of Division, and Camelia Suică, Policy Officer at the EU's European External Action Service[12] also backed the justification that the Southern Gas Corridor is not a replacement, it is just another option to make the energy market more balanced. At the same time with preserving a non-confrontational attitude towards Moscow, while remaining dedicated to the energy cooperation with the EU partners in developing the Southern Gas Corridor, Baku still preferred to maintain a certain distance in its relations with Brussels (Shahbazov, 2017).

Azerbaijan's relations with Russia have displayed a mix of political and trade-related nuances. Therefore, if until 2006, Azerbaijan relied on Russian gas imports, since then, the Caspian country has been a producer and exporter of natural gas itself. This new status, together with Moscow's initial positioning on the side of Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, encouraged the government in Baku to develop a more autonomous trajectory from Moscow and to engage in joint energy projects with Western companies and governments, which Azerbaijan needed in order to supply it with the necessary investments and technology for the exploitation of its hydrocarbons (Orazgaliyev, 2017).

Starting from this point of trade cooperation in the field of energy, Azerbaijan has shaped its foreign policy and energy exports strategy around the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, expecting the cooperation in the field of energy to lead to the recognition by the West of its territorial integrity and for its European partners to call for the withdrawal of Armenia from the occupied territories (Ismayilov, 2011; Mikhelidze, 2013; Abbasov, 2014; Shahbazov, 2017). According to interviewee A1[13], Azerbaijan plays the Southern Gas Corridor as a tool to boost a resolution for the conflict, using energy as a soft power tool also to convince the separatists in Nagorno-Karabakh that Azerbaijan is doing financially much better than Armenia given the petrodollars obtained from the gas exports. In the same line, Ambassador Galib Israfilov[14], stated in our interview that Azerbaijan will develop regardless

[11] D4: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.
[12] O11: Interview conducted on 18 December 2017.
[13] A1: Interview conducted on 10 June 2020.
[14] D4: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.

of the conflict, whereas Armenia is dependent on the conflict, with its leaders coming to power using the conflict discourse, a conflict which unites the population of Armenia.

However, the EU's lack of involvement in the resolution of the conflict, and its absence of a coherent policy towards the region's protracted conflicts have generated disappointment in Baku (Orazgaliyev, 2017; Shahbazov, 2017) dissatisfied with what it considers to be the EU's double standards towards the territorial integrity of the countries in the South Caucasus, as Brussels expressed a clear support for Georgia in its secessionist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and for Ukraine following the annexation of Crimea (Shahbazov, 2017). Azerbaijan's main foreign policy goal has thus been the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the use of energy resources has become the key instrument to achieve this goal (Mikhelidze, 2013; Ibrahimov, 2014). In support of its energy strategy, Azerbaijan has employed a narrative very similar to that of Turkey, counting on its perceived key strategic position, located "on the juncture of Europe and Asia [and] representing a natural bridge between these two parts of the world" (Ibrahimov, 2014:93). The strategic, indispensable pleading used by both Baku and Ankara signals more than a geopolitical or commercial argument, it is the indication of a deeper ontological necessity to be recognised, to be needed and accepted, an issue I explore later in this research when I look at the mix material and ontological motivations of the actors in the Caspian-Black Sea region.

As noted earlier in this section, all actors in the region display an amalgam of commercial and (geo)political approaches in shaping their policies and relationship with the other players. However, this composite of (geo)political and commercial ambitions reveals only the surface of deeper motivations, of a less material nature, that I detail in the last chapter, those triggered by the actors' existential anxieties related to losing control and status, to losing hence their very identity when confronted with structural changes. A strict geopolitical account of the energy and political dynamics of the Caspian is prone to reductionism. Although at times supporting the political ambitions of some of their key drivers, the energy projects in the region encompass a strong commercial logic: they are the most important source of export revenues for Azerbaijan (Hasanov et al. 2020), they offer an important income from transit fees for Georgia and Turkey, and they contribute, albeit to a debatable extent, to the needs of the energy-hungry economies of some of the importing states. While acknowledging the fact that the projects offer some geopolitical advantages, the interviewee D3[15] considers that, in particular for Azerbaijan, at present they are more

[15] D3: Interview conducted on 14 May 2020.

important from a commercial point of view, as they offer the opportunity to develop a stable market and to ensure the exports of gas, which are crucial for the country's budget revenues. Dmitry Balakin[16], Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OSCE, noted in the interview offered for this research that it is best for the gas and oil exports from the Caspian to Europe to be considered as a commercial issue, as securitising them would mean that the European consumers would have to pay an additional price for them, which would not be economically feasible.

The energy projects of the region should not be reduced to the geopolitical considerations of the main actors backing them. As I argue throughout the thesis, when referring to the material foundations of the natural gas endeavours, all projects and actors display an amalgam of political and commercial motivations that drive their cooperative or conflict-oriented choices. A top diplomat[17] I interviewed agreed in our discussion that it is a mix of economics and geopolitics, which cannot be dissociated, and sometimes, even if a project is more expensive economically, countries will choose it if it is more rentable politically. In a similar view, Nils Jansons, Deputy Head of Division, and Camelia Suică, Policy Officer at the EU's European External Action Service[18] agree that the natural gas imports to the EU are not purely commercial or economic, neither a hard security issue, they are rather a soft security issue. Gulmira Rzayeva[19], Founding Director Eurasia also considers that energy projects in Europe are not a geopolitical matter any longer after the development of hubs and fair competition environment, although geopolitical traits still persist particularly in the case where a country is overwhelmingly reliant on a single gas supplier.

During my research, I have collaborated with the EU's European Defence Agency and the European Commission's Directorate General for Energy in the "Consultation Forum for Sustainable Energy in the Defence and Security Sector", namely in the Working Group dedicated to the Protection of Critical Energy Infrastructure in Europe. Although most of the participants in the project come from the defence sector, in the interviews and discussions we had, they have also dismissed the interpretation of the energy projects as being purely geopolitical and conflict-oriented, despite obvious threats and risks that should be considered to their safety. Thus, in the interview offered, O6[20] highlighted that their geopolitical aspect should be taken into account, but not exclusively, an opinion also agreed by Jean-Baptiste

[16] D2: Interview conducted on 15 December 2017.
[17] D1: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.
[18] O11: conducted on 18 December 2017
[19] T3: Interview conducted on 20 May 2020.
[20] O6: Interview conducted on 5 May 2020.

Dubreuil[21], Senior Natural Gas Analyst at the International Energy Agency. Moreover, this energy cooperation is considered as a potential enhancer of security, in terms that both parts seek mutual profit and this functions as a stabilisation factor (O6).

An exclusive geopolitical account of big powers rivalry displays another form of reductionism, by depriving the local players from agency (Heinrich and Pleines, 2015; Orazgaliyev, 2017). Actors like Azerbaijan play the pipeline politics in their own terms, they follow their own agenda, by taking commercial and political decisions that often go against the will and interests of the great powers. Albeit with Western support, Azerbaijan was the first Caspian country to build the first non-Russian oil export pipeline, BTC, from Baku, through Georgia, to its destination point in Turkey. It was also Azerbaijan that, faced with hesitations and delays on the EU side in building the Southern Gas Corridor, took the initiative to build its second segment, the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP), with the help of Turkey. Notwithstanding the role and influence of the major powers, the local players are not mere puppets in the hands of either the U.S., or the EU, Russia and Iran, as they do engage in pipeline politics and they link their political and commercial objectives according to an agenda of their own.

Moreover, geopolitical accounts of big powers rivalry in the Caspian pay little attention to cooperation (Orazgaliyev, 2017), as in reality competition for resources does not necessarily translate into a conflict between the great powers at the expense of the local players, as the geopolitical paradigm of the 'New Great Game' suggests. I agree thus with Bayramov (2019) that the "Caspian Sea exhibits complex patterns of cooperation and conflict at all levels, ranging from the local to the global" (p.1), as I demonstrate later when I analyse the intricate relations between the players of the region through the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* perspective I introduced in this research.

Notwithstanding the geopolitical motivations beyond some of the actors' moves, a pure geopolitical approach is an oversimplification of the complex interactions among the actors in the region and of their motivations. All their objectives contain deeper considerations which will be debated later in this thesis when I analyse the ontological needs and insecurities that underpin the apparent political and economic decisions of the key actors in the Caspian-Black sea region.

[21] O7: Interview conducted on 14 June 2020.

II. Material aspects of the relevance of natural gas in Europe

I discussed in the previous chapter the potential of the pipeline natural gas to be more politicised than other natural resources, in particular other hydrocarbons. Being transported through terrestrial fixed pipeline, the natural gas is considered to be more vulnerable to attacks on the related infrastructure, while alternatives to its transportation in case of long-term disruptions are difficult to envisage, unlike the oil which can be shipped through various means of transport easily replaceable if needed (Kirchner and Berk, 2010; Casier, 2011a).

Nevertheless, natural gas has not been a central part of the energy security discourse until a couple of decades ago, being largely confined to business and trade. The politicisation of the gas supply discourse occurred particularly in the narratives of the newer EU member states confronted with a lack of alternatives to Russian gas imports and technological constraints (such as Latvia, Estonia, Bulgaria and Slovakia), aggravated by ontological anxieties related to their historic mistrust of Russia.

In this research I analyse the material and the psychological conditions that underpin the politicisation and the anxieties related to the security of natural gas supplies from the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe. I start in this section by checking the material facts, the situation of the current natural gas demand and supply in Europe in order to ascertain, in the next sections, if the fears and anxieties in some of the narratives around the natural gas supplies reflect the reality on the ground. A thorough exploration of the mixed material and ontological insecurities of the energy players cannot exclude scrutinising the material conditions existing at present in the natural gas market in Europe. I carried out this exercise in order to investigate if the anxieties I encountered in the gas imports narratives explored in the first chapter are reflected by the material reality. I use this examination of the material factors at play in order to filter out those elements that do not justify the politicisation of the energy discourse and hence to leave room for the non-material, ontological factors that underpin the actors' conflictual and cooperative behaviour on the energy scene.

The world's gas reserves stand, at present, at 199 trillion cubic metres (Tcm), on a rise by 0.9% from 2018, with most of them, 70%, being located in the Middle East (dominated by Iran and Qatar) and the former Soviet Union (led by Russia and Turkmenistan). The rest of the reserves are shared by the Asia Pacific region with 9%, North America with 7.6%, 7.5% in Africa, while Europe has the smallest natural gas reserves accounted by region in the world (SNAM et al., 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 is considered to have caused "[...] the largest-ever recorded decline in gas demand since the development of the gas industry in the second half of the 20th century" (SNAM et al., 2020:15). The year 2020 has proved indeed to be a challenging one for the natural gas supplies, however less for the importing states which have been overwhelmingly in the focus of the energy security debated in the past years, and mostly for the exporting states, affected by an unprecedented collapse of the natural gas prices and by lower demand. The gas prices in Europe and Asia had already fallen by 50% in the summer of 2019, following the similar trend in oil prices (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019). In terms of demand, natural gas recorded a significant growth globally in 2019, estimated at 1.8% by IEA (2020) and up to 2.3% by SNAM et al. (2020). This record growth was however soon to be followed by a sharp 4% decrease in 2020 in the context of the market disruptions generated by the Covid-19 pandemic (IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020). According to the IEA (2020), Europe was the most affected market with a 7% year-on-year decline in 2020. Although the global gas demand has been indeed seriously impacted by the pandemic, particularly with respect to the effects of the lockdowns on the economic activity, the decrease in demand had already started before the Covid-19, caused by very high storage capacities accumulated in the EU and the reduced use of natural gas for heating during a warm winter in 2019-2020.

The Covid-19 pandemic has, as mentioned, impacted on the gas volumes sent out by the exporting countries. On an initial estimation, still to be updated in the months following the finalisation of this research, it appears that Gazprom's gas sales to Europe declined by 16%. The company's difficulties generated by the impact of the pandemic in Europe have been augmented by a lower performance of the Power of Siberia pipeline to China, also affected by the lockdown in the destination country, as well as by lower volumes exported through the Turkish Stream given the reduced economic activity during lockdowns, a mild winter and the competition from large volumes of cheaper spot LNG cargos, in addition to delays in the finalisation of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany (Mikulska and Jakubowski, 2020). The gas and oil sector have been affected globally by the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, with a 2.9% decline in the first half of 2020. Azerbaijan in its own turn, already struggling with the lasting consequences of the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 and with the collapse in the global oil price which reflected itself in a significant decrease of its oil output and oil export revenues, has been too considerably impacted by the pandemic, with an estimated loss of 27 million USD of its dividends (Ahmadov et al., 2020).

The IEA - International Energy Agency is nevertheless optimistic about the future of the global natural gas demand, anticipating that the volumes lost in 2020 will be recovered in 2021, mostly because of the higher demand from the Asia Pacific region, in particular from China and India, stimulated by the low prices of natural gas (IEA, 2020). Specifically in Europe, despite stagnant demand, natural gas is expected to continue to play a stable role in the energy mix of the European countries. Hence, the IEA (2020) estimates that the European imports will increase by over 10% in the next five years, partly because of a decline in its own domestic production and partly because the existing long-term supply contracts will gradually expire within the next period. At the same time, Azerbaijan and Russia are foreseen to maintain their role as key suppliers to Europe.

The "Global Gas Report" published by SNAM, IGU and Bloomberg NEF in 2020 highlights the same conclusions related to the potential of natural global gas demand to recover in 2021, generated by the low prices and by the rising demand from the Asia Pacific region, led by China and India, with China being the largest growth market. The only exception to this global trend is expected to be the EU where the report anticipates a fall in demand by the year 2021 (SNAM et al., 2020). The tendency of the natural gas demand to continue to steadily grow in the non-OECD countries is also confirmed by the "Global and Russian Energy Outlook 2019" (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019), while the report anticipates that in the EU, after a slight increase, the natural gas demand will start to decline.

Global gas production marked an accelerated growth in 2019, the trend being again contradicted by Europe, where the indigenous gas production decreased by 5-6%, due to the gradual phase out of the production at Groningen in Netherlands caused by increased seismic activity and to lower gas outputs from Norway determined by the underexploration of new sources (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019; IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the EU market has proved to be flexible and ready to adjust, covering the decline in its own production with pipeline imports from Russia and Algeria, as well as with LNG imports (SNAM, 2019). The European domestic production outside Norway is forecasted to decline even further by 40% until 2025, with the production in Netherlands and the United Kingdom expected to account for 80% of the total production growth (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019; IEA, 2020).

By contrast, the gas production in Europe's Eastern exporters, Russia and Azerbaijan, augmented by 1.7% and respectively by 28% for the same year, 2019 (IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020). The production is forecasted to grow further by 1.8% until 2025 in the entire

Eurasian region, with Russia expected to account for 70% of the region's growth, due to its exports to China and expanding its LNG production, and Azerbaijan is foreseen to increase its production by 30% as a consequence of its exports through the Southern Gas Corridor to Europe (IEA, 2020). This evolution is set to consolidate Azerbaijan's and Russia's exporter status (IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020).

Russian gas supplies to Europe have been on an ascending path in the past decade, raising from 23% of EU consumption in 2009 to 36% in 2018 (SNAM et al., 2019), due to the above mentioned decrease in Europe's indigenous production, to lower prices of the Russian gas compared to other exporters, and to a steady increase in demand that followed the recovery after the economic crisis in 2008-2009. In addition, as Siddi (2020) notices, the rising demand for Russian gas in Europe and Turkey in 2018 was stimulated by a decrease in the pipeline exports from Algeria, the construction of the Turkish Stream pipeline that started to pump Russian Gas to Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and North Macedonia, as well as the delay in finalising some of the expected LNG projects while some of the LNG volumes have been increasingly absorbed by China. As a consequence of the increment in the exports of Russian pipeline gas and LNG, supported by the new discoveries in 2019 in the Kara Sea, Dinkov and Nyameyskoye region (SNAM et al., 2020) and the development of its production capacity in the Yamal peninsula, the IEA (2020) foresees that by 2025 Russia will represent the second largest source of an increase in gas supply after the U.S., which will solidify "Russia's position as the world's largest natural gas exporter" (IEA, 2020:48). The EU-Russia Energy Dialogue Roadmap until 2050 (2013) agrees to the fact that Russia is expected to be the world largest gas producer by 2035, as well as the highest contributor to the supply growth for the same timeline (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013:11).

This view is partially nuanced by the "Global and Russian Energy Outlook 2019" report of the Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO (2019) which forecasts that the total energy exports of Russia to Europe will decrease from 73% in 2018 to 54-56% in 2040, due to the fact that the vital technological investments in upgrading the production, exploration and transport facilities are still discouraged by the lack of a favourable business environment (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019). Moreover, the contribution of oil and gas exports to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) are foreseen to fall from 24% in 2011 to 15% in 2035 (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013). However, the decline in Russian energy exports is expected to mainly relate to the decrease in oil exports, while, as concluded by the other reports detailed above, the export in natural gas will continue to rise by 20-43% until 2040, with Europe remaining Russia's largest

destination market for energy products (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013; Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019). This despite the fact that in the first months of 2020 the Russian gas production fell by more than 9% year-on-year, given the lower gas demand in Europe and the lower domestic consumption triggered by a warm winter (IEA, 2020). Before 2020, the gas production in Russia had been on an ascending path, growing by 9.1% over the past decade, as compared to the volumes of 2008, due to the new exploration and production developments in the Yamal peninsula, East Siberia, Yakutia and Irkutsk (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020). Overall, Russia produces more energy that it consumes. The gas production exceeds 1.5 times the domestic consumption (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020) and the Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2035, approved in 2020, forecasts further increase in pipeline gas production, as well as in pipeline gas and LNG exports by 2035 (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020).

Overall, gas is expected to retain a central, stable role in the energy mix and the economies of Europe and the world (SNAM et al., 2019). Gas is the second-largest source of energy supply in Europe after oil, accounting to 23-26% of the European energy mix over the past two decades (SNAM et al., 2019:18; Vinois and Bros, 2019).

Gas is also likely to remain one of the preferred sources of energy in Europe, given the fact that is represents a cheaper source for heating than electricity (SNAM et al., 2019; Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020), and being largely used in the EU for power generation, heating, transport and shipping (Vinois and Bros, 2019). At the same time, gas is prone to retain its stable position in the energy mix of Europe due to its potential to replace coal and nuclear power that are currently being phased out in many countries, as well as to contribute to the EU's decarbonisation and clean energy goals, being the cleanest fossil fuel, generating lower levels of CO2 emissions compared to coal and oil (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019; Vinois and Bros, 2019; Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020). Already in 2011, the European Commission had stated in its "Energy Roadmap 2050" that substituting the more polluting coal and oil with gas could help reduce greenhouse emissions, at least until 2030 or 2035 (European Commission, 2011), a trend highlighted as well by the EU and Russia under their Energy Dialogue Roadmap until 2050 (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013). For the EU economy, "[...] gas remains the first option" (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013:11). The EU's Green Deal, which was presented in December 2019, aims for a Europe-wide carbon-neutral economy will provide growth opportunities for the gas industry. Thus, in the coming years, gas is poised to become one of

the energy sources of the future, given its role in the coal-to-gas switching and its use in the production of biomethane, hydrogen and gas with carbon capture technologies, acting thus an enabler of developing low-carbon technologies (SNAM et al., 2020). In 2020, the European Council noted, on the occasion of the sixth ministerial meeting of the Southern gas Corridor Advisory Council, "[...] the relevant role of gas in the transition to low and zero-emission energy systems" (p. 3).

For the past decade, Europe has been concerned with the security of its gas supplies, which occupied a central position, as I explore later, in the EU's energy policy and strategy. I analyse here below the current situation of the gas supplies in Europe, in order to see if these anxieties are reflected by the material evidences related to concerns of sufficient supplies and resilience to disruptions.

The most recent reports on the natural gas supply in Europe elaborated by the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSOG), for the period of October 2019-March 2020, respectively April-September 2020, both conclude in an optimist tone that there is sufficient natural gas available in Europe (ENTSOG, 2019; 2020), with the storage volumes at the end of 2019 being at the highest level in the past eight years (ENTSOG, 2019). Even more, the high storage volumes available make it possible for the EU not only to cover its own demand needs, but also to supply the Energy Community contracting parties and other countries in the EU's neighbourhood with significant natural supplies if needed (ENTSOG, 2019). For the year 2020, ENTSOG considers that the stocks are sufficient even in the case of the highest demand in the past nine years would occur (ENTSOG, 2020). Moreover, the European forecasted aggregated demand is expected to decrease by 3.4%, at the level of 2011 (ENTSOG, 2020).

The ENTSOG's findings are confirmed by an independent corporate report elaborated by SNAM, IGU and BCG in 2019, which concludes that the natural gas supply in Europe is indeed flexible, due to the existence of multiple import pipelines (from Russia, Azerbaijan, Algeria and Libya), to the increased LNG regasification capacity in the EU member states and to the large natural gas storage capacity available.

A third report, provided by Cedigaz (2020), an international not for profit association, highlights the fact that, in addition to the flexibility of the natural gas supply in Europe, the imports of pipeline gas to Europe decreased by 19% year-on-year in the first half of the year 2020, with the Algerian gas recording the highest loss, by 38%, and the Russian pipeline gas imports following with a decrease of 24%. The situation was partly determined by the fact the natural gas prices fell to unprecedented levels and thus the buyers preferred to buy it from

spot indexed sources, as it is the case of the Norwegian gas, unlike the Algerian and the Russian gas (Cedigaz, 2020). The second main reason was the unexpected Covid-19 pandemic which led to a collapse of demand due to the reduced economic activity during lockdowns, combined with a short and mild winter, reduced thus the demand for natural gas destined to heating.

Another independent assessment of the natural gas infrastructure in Europe, provided by Artelys in 2020, points out, in line with ENTSOG's findings, that even in the case of extreme supply disruptions, the EU's natural gas infrastructure is sufficiently resilient and capable to adjust (Artelys, 2020). The report analyses the scenario of an extreme interruption of natural gas exports from Russia via Ukraine to Europe and concludes that, even if the supplies would be interrupted for one year, the 2030 baseline gas infrastructure in Europe would be resilient, because Russia would be able to re-route its exports from the Czech Republic and Poland to Slovakia, while Germany would increase its imports from Norway to cover for the loss. Moreover, the LNG terminals already functioning in Western Europe would be able to augment their imports and regasification volumes (Artelys, 2020). These observations are complemented by SNAM et al. (2019) that any fluctuations so far, in the year-to-year gas consumption in Europe, have been caused by factors related to economic growth and weather conditions, rather than by structural changes.

The reference point for simulating and forecasting the impacts of natural gas supply disruptions to Europe remains the simulation carried out by ENTSOG in 2017. The EU-wide simulation took place following an intense institutional effort at the EU level, being formally requested through the New Gas Directive - EU Regulation 2017/1938. Nineteen supply and infrastructure disruption scenarios were simulated, with the exception of the Southern Gas Corridor and EastMed pipelines, not yet constructed at the time. Interestingly enough, the situations simulated under every scenario did not include the most politicised topic in the EU with respect to the natural gas supply disruption, that of an actor switching off the tap as a geopolitical move, but contained only three possible cases, that of a historical high demand winter, a period of two weeks of exceptionally high demand and a peak day of outstanding high demand. For the scenario that interests our research, that of a disruption of supplies through Ukraine, for all the three situations simulated the conclusion was that only Bulgaria and Romania would be affected by a potential interruption of supply and that because of their own infrastructure limitations (ENTSOG, 2017).

As mentioned here above, the ENTSOG 2017 simulation was carried out following the provision stipulated in the New Gas Directive - EU Regulation 2017/1938. However, the

EU proved to be contradicting itself and failing to make proper estimations of its own security of supply situation. Thus, the new Gas Regulation 2017/1938 states, on the first page, that "a major disruption of gas supply can affect all Member States, the Union and Contracting Parties to the Treaty establishing the Energy Community" (European Parliament and European Council, 2017). As proved later by the exercise carried out by ENTSOG, in none of the scenarios and situations simulated, such an extreme outcome would be likely to occur, as the EU's infrastructure and flexibility is resilient enough.

I performed this exercise of examining the material conditions that underpin the security of gas supplies in Europe, as part of the argument that, when analysing the conflictual and cooperative behaviour and decisions of energy players, both material and non-materials should be explored. The findings above led to the conclusion that, at present, despite Europe's constant concern with the security of its gas supplies, the demand for pipeline gas on the continent is forecasted by all reports to steadily decrease in the next years. The trend is upheld by the energy transition measures in the EU and its partners, leading to an increased use of renewable energy and alternatives to fossil fuels, as well as by the expectation that cheaper LNG imports will become more available in the future. This declining tendency has been exceptionally impacted in 2020 by the Covid-19 pandemic, when the lockdowns and the slowing down of the economic activity generated lower demand for gas. Moreover, if the global warming is set to continue to affect the seasonal temperatures and mild winters will become a regularity, the lower demand of natural gas for heating will also pull down the aggregated gas demand in Europe.

Although the demand for pipeline natural gas is forecasted to decrease in Europe in the next years, gas will maintain its central, stable role in the energy mix and the economies of the European countries, due to its lower cost than electricity and to its green potential, being the cleanest fossil fuel, with the lowest carbon emissions, as well as to its potential to contribute to the energy of the future as a source for hydrogen and biomethane technologies. At least for the next decades, the natural gas is here to stay in Europe. And it will become even more important and demanded by the established and emerging economies in the Asia-Pacific region, notably by China and India, which will account for the highest demand of natural gas in the future. The important and stable role of gas in the energy mix of the EU was confirmed also by the interviewee O1[22], which mentioned the fact that, in order to comply with the Paris Agreement decarbonising goals, there will be a paradigm shift by

[22] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020

2030-2050), although not for geopolitical reasons, but in order to move away from fossil fuels towards greener energy. In turn, the shift to greener sources as a key diversification strategy is expected to have a bigger effect than the geopolitical strategies of the past (O1).

In addition to a constant low demand for gas, Europe is also experiencing remarkable levels of natural gas available in storage, as in 2019 the importers feared that Russia and Ukraine would fail to sign a new agreement and rushed into storing as much gas as possible to avoid supply disruptions during the winter. Nevertheless, the new gas deal between Moscow and Kiev was signed on 31 December 2019 and gas has flown regularly as usual. Moreover, the 2019-2020 was uncommonly warm, which meant less gas consumption for heating, and, as the prices for natural gas collapsed in the summer of 2019, the importers felt encouraged to buy more volumes than they would have usually done. Nevertheless, this situation is not an exceptional one and it is not specific only to the period of 2019-2020. In 2017, the EU performed, through ENTSOG, its first European-wide simulation of gas supply disruptions. Contrary to its own initial assessment, widely circulated through its policy documents, in the media and in the academia in the past years that a new gas supply disruption would gravely affect all the Member States, the conclusion of the simulation was that the EU infrastructure is resilient and flexible enough and a new disruption would be efficiently mitigated.

I conclude therefore that the European anxieties related to the continued presence of natural gas in its life are partially supported by the fact that gas will still be part of its economy and energy mix in the future. Nonetheless, the unprecedented politicisation of gas that occurred in the past years is not supported by reality, as, despite all conditions, the demand on the European continent is foreseen to steadily decline, diversification will eventually follow its goals and, most important, the EU infrastructure has been estimated to be flexible and resilient enough to new disruptions. I analyse in detail, in the next chapter, the past decade's energy policies and strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, paying attention to their narratives and objectives, while also mirroring them with the key trigger events that might have been linked to the politicisation of natural gas: the Russia-Ukraine gas disputes and the following gas supply disruptions to Europe, the annexation of Crimea, the 2015 short Cold War between Russia and Turkey, concluding with some preliminary impacts of the 2020 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh on the energy dynamics. Stemming from the observations I made in this chapter, I finalise by exploring, in the final chapter, beyond the material factors that have triggered supply-related anxieties among the energy players in Europe and I investigate the non-material ones, the deeper, often opaque layer of

psychological, ontological motivations of the EU, Russia and Turkey in adopting a cooperative or conflictual behaviour on the energy scene.

Conclusions

The Caspian and the Black Sea have predominantly depicted as contested neighbourhoods where the conflicting interests of the big powers clash and transcend the boundaries of the political realm spilling over into the energy field as well.

I started the chapter by exploring the material context in which the highly-debated energy relations and dynamics have been built in the Caspian-Black Sea region and I demonstrated, however, that without disregarding the existence of fragmented interests and at times conflictual, individualistic actions in the neighbourhood, the Caspian-Black Sea is an area where the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* is best revealed. Despite political conflicts and commercial disputes, various cooperation initiatives have developed especially in the energy field, bringing together competing actors and forging regional alliances. All players on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region, be it great powers or regional actors, have employed a mixture of geopolitical means, along with commercial and economic ambitions.

While Russia strived to maintain and enhance its dominant political and economic position in the region, often through energy deals to its advantage, the EU showed little implication in solving the neighbourhood's stringent problems related to ending the regional conflicts and pursued its own interests related to accessing the natural resources of the region, importing energy in exchange for exporting its rules and norms considered to be universal. In its own turn, after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Turkey tried to secure its own better position in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, using cultural ties and energy deals to attract the kin Turkic nations on its side, while becoming, before the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the strongest naval presence in the Black Sea. Azerbaijan too linked its status of a newly-emerged gas and oil supplier to Europe to advancing its foreign policy goals related to finding Western support to the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in its favour.

In the second section of the chapter, dedicated to analysing the general context in which the energy dynamics and projects are set, I examined the recent trends in the evolution of the gas market in Europe, in order to ascertain if the fears and anxieties around the natural gas supplies, much more politicised in recent years than any other energy supplies, reflect the

reality on the ground. For the purpose of offering an updated analysis, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the European and global gas demand and prices was brought to discussion, along with insightful forecasts for the next years. The exercise thus revealed that, despite the politicisation of the gas imports to Europe in recent years, the demand for pipeline natural gas is forecasted to steadily decrease in the next years, in the context of the general trends related to the EU's diversification efforts leading to an increased use of renewable energy sources; to an increased availability of cheaper LNG imports; to the consequences of the global warming which caused a decline in the use of gas for heating; but also to the exceptional conditions generated by the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020, resulting in slowing down of the economic activity. Nevertheless, the analysis led to the conclusion that gas will maintain its central, stable role in the energy mix and the economies of the European countries, due to its lower cost compared to electricity for heating, as well as to the fact that, being the fossil fuel with the lowest carbon emissions, it will play an important part in the EU's plans to decarbonise its economy, potentially using gas also as a source for hydrogen and biomethane green technologies.

Regarding the politicisation of gas disruptions to the European consumers, the first European-wide simulation of gas supply disruptions performed by the EU in 2017 revealed the fact that, contrary to its own narratives and anxieties, at present, the EU infrastructure is resilient and flexible enough and a new disruption would be efficiently mitigated. I ended this part with the observation that the anxiety that Europe will remain dependent on natural gas imports, is partially supported by the fact that gas will still be part of its economy and energy mix in the future. Nevertheless, as the analysis revealed, the European gas demand is forecasted to steadily decline in the next decades and the EU infrastructure has been tested to be flexible and resilient enough to new disruptions, thus contradicting the unprecedented politicisation of gas that occurred in the past years in Europe.

As a consequence, I argued in this chapter that although essential to any analysis of the energy dynamics in Europe, the material factors cannot explain on their own neither the increased politicisation around natural gas imports, nor the conflict and cooperation choices made by actors in shaping their energy narratives. Thus, while arguing that all players display an amalgam of commercial and (geo)political reasons, I drew the attention of the risk of falling into another type of reductionism, by taking into account only their material considerations, be it of a geopolitical or commercial nature, and thus ignoring their deeper, ontological motivations, those triggered by the actors' existential anxieties related to losing

control and status when confronted with structural changes, an aspect which I explore in detail in the final chapter.

III. KEY ACTORS ON THE CASPIAN-BLACK SEA ENERGY SCENE: THE ENERGY STRATEGIES OF THE EU, RUSSIA AND TURKEY

"EU-Russia energy cooperation is crucial in ensuring energy security on the European continent" (European Commission, 2006e:3).

Introduction

One side-effect of the geopolitical reductionism I discussed in this research is depicting the energy scene of Europe as being a bipolar one, framed under the unsettled rivalry between the EU and Russia, trapped under a geopolitical competition for power that also crosses into the energy realm. Thus, the EU and Russia have been overwhelmingly depicted as leading the competition for pipelines understood as political instruments. Under this logic, the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-built Turkish Stream have been seen as rival projects, designed for rather geopolitical than commercial goals, in order to block each other and to forge political alliances along them.

The Caspian-Black Sea energy world is not bipolar however. A binary interpretation of the energy and political dynamics of the region, with the EU and Russia in the middle, which has overwhelmingly dominated the analysis of the energy relations in Europe for the past decades, has become obsolete. The South Caucasus, the Black Sea, as well as the neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean have seen, in the very recent years, the rise of a third key player which can no longer be reduced to the role of a supporting actor: Turkey.

I propose therefore to move beyond the outworn depiction of the energy projects and dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea, as a twofold relationship between the EU and Russia, and to introduce Turkey as a third key player that is expected to impact, in the years to come, on the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* around the main natural gas exploration, production and exports from the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe. At the time of the writing of this thesis, we cannot yet discuss about a consolidated triangle between the EU, Russia and Turkey, as the link between the EU and Turkey has not yet properly developed for reasons I explore later. However, should Turkey's insistent geopolitical and energy-driven actions in the Caspian-Black Sea and in the Eastern Mediterranean continue in a constant rhythm for the next years, a more solid link between Brussels and Ankara is expected to emerge as well, regardless of the fact that Turkey's political and economic power will not be

able to match that of the EU and Russia. The reason is precisely that material factors do not influence on their own the dynamic of the relations, as ontological considerations also impact on how the actors narrate themselves and how they relate to each other.

Following the observations above, I start by exploring the energy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, as a necessary exercise to bring to light how the three actors narrate their justifications and motivations that underpin their cooperative and competing actions on the Caspian-Black Sea energy scene. I open in this way the debate to which I return in the last chapter, when I analyse in more detail the relationship between them, using the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* tool, already highlighted throughout the research, complementing the material observations with non-material considerations related to their *ontological security* needs, largely underexplored to this point by the energy literature.

I begin the chapter with a thorough investigation work through the **EU**'s vast collection of energy policy and strategy documents, in order to see if and how the politicisation of the EU-Russia relations around the natural gas imports to Europe is reflected in its energy policy. I take one step further beyond the material justifications, look at the same time on how the EU narrates itself on the international energy scene, and on the main motives it employs in justifying the direction of its energy strategy. Given the extensive bureaucratic output of the EU, I chose to use to filter the documents analysed using the following 'trigger years' that correspond to key events assumed to have influenced the EU's position and narrative: 2006 (the first Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute), 2009 (the second gas dispute between Kiev and Moscow), 2014 (the annexation of Crimea), while also paying attention to the year 2000 (Vladimir Putin's coming to power in Russia) and the challenging current year of 2020, marking also the end year of this research.

In the second part of the chapter, I analyse the energy strategy and policy of the **Russian Federation**, exploring the material conditions that contribute to defining its role as an energy major power, as well as the forecasted evolutions of its energy external trade. I also look beyond the material framework, in anticipation of the debate of the last chapter dedicated to the non-material, ontological foundations of the energy players' motivations, and I examine the Russian national energy strategies of 2010 and 2020, to see both how Russia intends to place itself on the energy scene in the near future, but also what is the role it imagines and narrates for itself. I pay particular attention to how the strategies and the narratives might have shifted after the long-debated and often politicised gas disputes between Moscow and Kiev in 2006 and 2009, that led to gas supply disruptions which triggered unprecedented anxieties in Europe.

The final part of the chapter is dedicated to **Turkey**, the third key actor I propose in order to offer a more complete image of the present energy scene in the Caspian-Black Sea region, a player that, due to its forceful actions in both the energy and geopolitical field in the past years, should not be dismissed from any analysis of the current and future dynamics around the energy projects of the region. I argue that analysing Turkey's energy strategy matters for both material and non-material reasons I detail in this chapter. On the material side, they are related to Ankara's key role in making itself indispensable for both EU-backed and Russian-built gas pipelines in the region, and to its intense seek for more gas supplies necessary to feed its energy-hungry economy. On the non-material side, they link to Turkey's instrumental use of its claimed immense gas discoveries in the Black Sea in 2020, its assertive implication in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and its contested drilling activities in the neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean since 2018, in order to reach a more visible position on the agenda of both Brussels and Moscow.

I. The EU's energy policy and strategy: between a vulnerable importer of energy and an assertive exporter of values

In the first chapter of the thesis I debated in detail the changes in the interdependent relationship that has been established between the EU and Russia. I noted that in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, as Russia was confronting itself with deep political and economic instabilities, the balance was leaning in favour of the EU which was perceiving itself as the stronger half of the relationship, ready to play the role of the helping friend for a Russia in distress.

At the beginning of the 2000s however, domestic political changes in Russia altered the weight posed by both actors. With the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in December 1999, Russia has slowly emerged as a more assertive player, using the card of its energy power in order to claim a better, more respected role on the international scene, that of a global power. In the following years, the EU has started to manifest increased concerns over the energy imports from the Russian Federation, despite its declining energy consumption of Russian hydrocarbons. This in turn has triggered a narrative shift, with the EU openly admitting the perceived change of its role from the powerful half, to the vulnerable one, in the relationship with Russia. At the same time, as explored in the first chapter, with the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU to include countries of the former Eastern bloc, an input of

different perceptions on Russian gas imports and on the EU's vulnerability to them have left their imprint on the energy narratives within the Union. The new Member States, led by their own historical anxieties and mistrust towards Russia, have pushed for the EU to adopt a more geopolitical tone in its energy relations with Russia. The 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine that led to disruptions affecting mostly countries in Eastern Europe, as well as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Ukraine crisis have been credited for the transition of the EU narratives around Russian gas imports towards a more geopolitical conceptualisation of its energy security.

Stemming from these observations I made in the first chapter, I proceed hereafter to an investigation work through the EU's main energy policy and strategy documents, in order to check if the events mentioned above overlap with the EU's key shifts of narratives of the self and of the 'Other', in this case Russia. I look at the same time on how the EU narrates its perceived role on the international scene, and on the main motives it employs in justifying the direction of its energy strategy. For this purpose, I use 'trigger years' that correspond to pivotal events assumed to have influenced the EU's position and I review the documents around these particular years to identify any changes in its narrative. Therefore, I consider the following key years as relevant: **2006** (the year of the first Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute), **2009** (the second gas dispute between Kiev and Moscow), **2014** (the year of the annexation of Crimea). In addition, I consider as starting year of the general analysis the year **2000** (the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in Russia), while the ending year is the year when this research has been finalised, **2020** (also the year of the resurge of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, of the official start of operation for the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, and of the new gas discoveries in the Black Sea).

The EU is largely dependent on energy imports. In 2018, the Union reached a 58% dependency rate on the energy products it imported from third countries, although the dependency rate is not homogenous, with some countries being highly dependent on the exports (Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta with over 90%), while others record lower rates, below 25% (Denmark, Estonia, Romania) (Eurostat, n.d.). Crude oil holds the largest share among the energy products imported by the EU. Thus, in the first half of 2020, crude oil represented 69.4% of the EU's total energy imports, while natural gas accounted for 16% of the imports. Russia remained the supplier of most volumes of natural gas imported in 2019 and in the first half of 2020, with the Russian gas amounting to 44.7% out of the total gas imported by the EU in 2019, and 39.3% in the first semester of 2020 (Eurostat, 2020). With its own natural gas production in decline over the past years, due to the gradual phase out of

the production field at Groningen in the Netherlands caused by intensified seismic activity in the region, the EU is expected to remain dependent on gas imports from third countries in the years to come.

Despite a stagnation in the EU gas demand, Brussels has constantly expressed concerns for the EU dependence on energy imports and has placed diversification at the core of the European energy policy. The EU's efforts in this sense have covered a large range of actions, from diversifying the suppliers and the routes for gas imports, to increasing the imports of LNG, and, significantly in the past years, to making the transition to a carbon-free economy based on the use of green energy and innovative technologies, less reliant on oil and gas. Particularly the EU's efforts to search for new suppliers of natural gas and to access alternatives routes of supply, away from Russia, have been linked to the evolution of the political relations between Brussels and Moscow, and to Russia's general more assertive position on the international scene. Thus, as I discussed in the previous section, it has been generally accepted that the EU has sought to diversify its natural gas supplies away from Russia especially after some key events expected to have prompted anxieties related to the security of its gas supply, as well as to its perceived asymmetric dependence on the energy imports from Russia.

Although stipulated that the EU has started its diversification endeavour after Russia had shifted its role from a fragile actor in distress in the 1990s to an assertive energy superpower, diversification had already been on the EU agenda back in **1999-2000**. In its "Security of EU Gas Supply" of 1999 the EU already mentions diversification of gas supply sources and routes as a means to enhance energy security (European Commission, 1999), while the Green Paper of 2000 discusses the idea of building alternative routes from the Caspian and the Mediterranean in order to provide sources of supply alternatives to the Russian ones (European Commission, 2000). Thus, it would have been too soon to link the EU's pragmatic diversification plans to any geopolitical considerations related to its fear of Russia using the energy weapon against the importing states once Vladimir Putin took over leadership in December 1999.

I started therefore my analysis with the EU's key energy strategy documents around the trigger year **1999**. The domestic changes in Russia had been expected to have triggered anxieties within the EU related to its relationship with Russia, because of a change in roles, with the EU allegedly becoming the weaker half of the asymmetric dependence, a role played by Russia in the 1990s when the EU was the stronger half. Thus, in the "Security of EU Gas Supply" of 1999, the EU already mentions the possibility of disruptions of gas supply due to

a possible political dispute between Russia and Ukraine, long before the 2006/2006 gas crises (European Commission, 1999). In 2000, the EU already narrates itself as being affected by a "structural weakness regarding energy supply", however, due to the tripling of the price of crude oil (European Commission, 2000:2). The risks related to gas supply are linked, in the same document, the Green Paper, to the evolution of the gas prices, feared to rise similarly to those of oil. Nevertheless, despite being at the time overwhelmingly dependent on Ukrainian transit, which accounted for 85% of Russian gas deliveries to Europe in 2000, the EU appears to be highly optimistic at that time, considering that gas is actually an enhancer to the security of supply and that "the EU is in a rather favourable gas supply situation being surrounded by abundant gas reserves" (European Commission, 1999:12). In a very assertive tone, the EU forecasts, in 1999, that by 2020, the gas imports from Russia will no longer be supplied through contracts with Gazprom, as EU oil and gas companies will be engaged in upstream gas exploration and production themselves (p. 13). Unlike the past decades when considerable efforts have been taken towards the integration of the European energy markets, back in 1999, the EU considered that "EU-wide security of supply criteria and mechanisms do not seem to be the most appropriate" (p. 9). Nevertheless, only a few pages later, the export of the EU model of energy markets to its neighbours is promoted as a successful future tool to decouple gas resource developments from political issues (p. 16). Only months later, in the 2000 Green Paper, the EU however switches the tone and it describes itself throughout the document as being weak, exposed to the challenges posed by its lack of resources and instruments necessary to deal with its extreme dependence on external supplies (European Commission, 2000:9). The EU's anxieties in 2000 are nonetheless linked to oil, and not to gas, and the language employed in the Green Paper reveals the Union's anxieties related to "life after oil" (p. 12) or to being "held hostage by oil" (p. 13). With respect to gas, the Commission states calmly that the import dependence is a moderate one and that Russia is a reliable supplier (European Commission, 1999; 2000).

The next trigger years I used in analysing the EU energy policy and strategy narratives are **2006** and **2009**, when the gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine occurred, causing interruptions of gas supply in peak winter days to several European countries, prompting some Member States, particularly those in Central and South-Eastern Europe to call for a more decisive EU position regarding its gas dependence on Russia.

In 2005, Gazprom announced that it would switch to market conditions and consequently adjust the prices for its natural gas exports to and via Ukraine, which led to a price dispute with Kiev. In addition, Gazprom accused Ukraine of illegally diverting volumes

of gas from its pipelines. Failing to reach an agreement, on the 1st of January 2006, Gazprom halted the gas supplies to Ukraine announcing that the exports to other European countries continue. However, the contracted volumes of gas were retained by Ukraine and caused supply interruptions to more European countries, until the 4th of January when the flows were re-established to normal (Offenberg, 2016). At the end of 2008, Moscow requested Kiev to pay the multi-million debts owned for importing gas from Russia but again no agreement was reached between the two countries and Russia decided not to renew, starting 2009, the gas supply contract with Ukraine. On the 1st of January 2009 gas deliveries to Ukraine were stopped, but other European countries, importing Russian gas through Ukraine, were again affected by disruptions and, a week later, Gazprom halted the supplies to Europe as well. The negotiations were mediated by the EU and led to the agreement to re-establish the normal flow of gas on the 13th of January 2009. However, Ukraine delayed the reinstatement of deliveries and blocked the transit until 22nd of January. Unlike the 2006 crisis, the 2009 disruption affected more the European consumers in the peak of the winter being considerably lengthier, at a time when around 80% of the EU imports of Russian gas were transited through Ukraine (European Commission, 2009b).

As discussed before in this thesis, the gas disputes have been intensively politicised and described in highly geopolitical terms as an energy weapon employed by Moscow in order to punish Ukraine for attempting to drift away from its sphere of influence, and to increase its political pressures on the importing countries in the EU, particularly on those belonging to the former Eastern bloc. Or, in the words of my interviewee, T2[23], Russia is using economic means to reach political goals, gas is a political weapon used to punish or to reward.

An exploration into the EU's key energy documents around these years reveals nonetheless an evolution of the Union's self-narrative with respect to these events expected to have drastically changed its energy strategy. Thus, the Green Paper of 2006 does not tackle directly the gas disruption, although the information is discretely dissimulated in the text. What the Commission states is that the EU's import dependency on energy products is increasing, being concerned that some of these products come "from regions threatened by insecurity" (European Commission, 2006b:3). The other documents emitted in 2006 and analysed for the purpose of this research contain no further mention of the gas dispute. One year later, in the "Prospects for the Internal Gas and Electricity Market" (2007), as well as in

[23] T2: Interview conducted on 15 May 2020.

the "Protection of Europe's Critical Energy and Transport Infrastructure" (2007) documents, the European Commission makes no further open statements related to the incident, being rather preoccupied with competition, regulation and the implementation of the internal market (European Commission, 2007b), while the protection of critical infrastructure is assumed to be vulnerable to a variety of risks, ranging from natural disasters to terrorist threats (European Commission, 2007c).

Nonetheless, the tone and the narrative change in 2009, after the second gas dispute between Moscow and Kiev and the subsequent gas disruption to the European consumers. The "Security of Gas Supply" Directive of 2009 was elaborated "in response to the Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis in January 2009 causing an unprecedented disruption of gas supplies to the Community via Ukraine" (European Commission, 2009a:2). The measures proposed by the Commission are however market-based solutions related to the consolidation of the internal market, the EU expressing its concern related to the fact that the lack of solidarity between its Member States might jeopardise the proper functioning of the energy market. The Commission calls for more power to the EU as a central authority in the field of energy.

Moreover, in the Accompanying Document to the Directive (2009), the Commission states from the beginning that the January 2009 disruption was "a commercial matter between Gazprom of Russia and Naftogaz of Ukraine" (European Commission, 2009b:2). The European Commission admits openly that the effects of the disruption were augmented by the lack of a contingency plan and of common scenarios for dealing with emergency situations at national and EU level, as well as by the absence of enough reliable information about the gas flows, the existing volumes of gas in the transmission system and the gas demand in the EU (European Commission, 2009b:6-7). The Commission's conclusion disconnects very clearly the 2009 gas disruption from any geopolitical dimension: "[...] it was mainly the inadequacies in gas transport which constrained flows (capacities, reverse flows capabilities, unusual routes, insufficient integration of gas networks in Central and South Eastern Europe), not an aggregate shortage of gas" (European Commission, 2009b:14). Moreover, according to the Commission, Gazprom tried to reduce the extent of the disruption increasing the flows of gas via other pipelines to Europe, namely Yamal and the Blue Stream (p. 10).

The crisis was thus aggravated by the problems posed by the technological and market differences between the EU Member States. The reason why Bulgaria was so seriously affected was the fact that the country lacked adequate storage facilities and own domestic sources of gas, as well as because of the absence of interconnectors with its neighbours and the existence of difference gas standards which prevented imports from other

countries, and also due to the fact that its levels of oil reserves, which could have substituted gas for heating, were insufficient (European Commission, 2009b; 2009c). On the other hand, Member States (Austria, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovenia) who were better prepared, benefitting from import diversification, better market integration and sufficient storage and local production were very little impacted by the disruption (European Commission, 2009c).

Most of the EU documents reviewed, around the years 2006 and 2009 when the two gas disruptions that have incited so much debate occurred, conclude that the EU's main impediment to enhancing its energy supply security was the lack of solidarity among its Member States, the absence of a general support among them for the EU to speak with 'one voice' in its external energy relations with third parties (European Commission, 2006b; 2006d; 2007b; 2009d). Or, in the words of the Commission itself: "Individual non-coordinated actions by MS [...] put security of supply in other Member States at risk (European Commission, 2009d:16-17), while "despite serious gas supply crises that have acted as a wake-up call, exposing Europe's vulnerability, there is still no common approach towards partner, supplier or transit countries" (European Commission, 2010:3).

The main term under which the EU narrates itself around the time of the 2009 disruption, in contrast to a more neutral and optimistic tone during the 2006 crisis, is 'vulnerable', revealing a self-perception of weakness as well as the anxiety of failing, that strike through the documents reviewed (European Commission, 2009b; European Commission, 2009d; European Commission, 2010). Nevertheless, the EU links its vulnerability to external supply shocks with its own internal lack of solidarity and the absence of a fully integrated internal energy market, a central topic reiterated throughout the evolution of the EU's energy policy and strategy (European Commission, 2007a; European Commission, 2007b; European Commission, 2009a; European Commission, 2010).

Unlike in previous years, when Russia was praised as a reliable supplier (European Commission, 1999; 2000), this time the EU notes that both Russia and Ukraine lost credibility as reliable energy partners (European Commission, 2009b). Nevertheless, despite any geopolitical-prone discussions generated by the 2006/2009 gas crises, throughout its energy policy and strategy documents of the time, the EU maintains a cooperative attitude towards Russia, highlighting the importance of continuing to enhance their energy collaboration (European Commission, 2006b; 2006d; 2006e; 2009d). Only months after the 2006 disruption, the Commission concludes that the "EU-Russia energy cooperation is crucial in ensuring energy security on the European continent" (European Commission, 2006e:3). The EU reveals itself as a pragmatic actor, urged towards this cooperation not only

by the need to secure its natural gas supplies, but also by its higher ambitions to become an important international energy player. Thus, the Union is still, at the time of the 2006 gas disruption, optimistic about its gas supply situation and availability, as well as about the fact that a partnership with Russia would entail mutual benefits, described as opening the EU's access to the Russian gas infrastructure through the export of its own regulations (European Commission, 2006b; 2006c; 2006e). Nonetheless, in 2009, the Commission expresses doubts that investments upstream, particularly in Russia, would be adequate anymore (European Commission, 2009d).

The EU narrates itself through the energy-related documents of the period as a vulnerable importer of energy, but an assertive exporter of values and regulations. Thus, it appears convinced that the energy cooperation with Russia would bring, as discussed before, reciprocal benefits based on the export of the EU's own energy model, of its own priorities and regulations related to the liberalisation of the energy markets in supplier countries, and to providing open access to EU companies to the production and transmission facilities owned by the exporters (European Commission, 2006b; 2006c; 2006e).

The 'mutual benefits' approach extends also to transit countries, such as Turkey, for which the EU envisages a rapid alignment with the EU energy standards and policies in order to benefit Turkey's ambitions of becoming an energy hub (European Commission, 2006e). Energy as a political tool of cooperation is stretched even further to the wider Eastern Partnership, with the EU considering that "the energy partnership with the neighbouring countries is a strategic element of the ENP and contributes to its objectives of peace, prosperity, security and stability in our neighbourhood, with the predictability of energy supplies being an important part of stability" (European Commission, 2006b:38). The interviewee O1[24] stressed the fact that the energy dialogue can also open the way to political dialogue, such as in the case of the relationship between the EU and Azerbaijan, as during meetings and bilateral projects, other topics than energy are approached (e.g. human rights) and thus energy offers an entry door to more cooperation at political level between countries, because exporters and importers are dependent on each other, thus they can discuss even topics they disagree about and otherwise could not be approached. However, I argue that none of the instruments listed by the EU under this strategy (energy dialogues, adherence to the EU's energy policies and regulatory frameworks, energy networks, renewable energy sources, nuclear safety) can be considered peacebuilding or democratisation tools, being

[24] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.

rather a melting pot of seemingly uncoordinated energy, conflict management and security considerations.

The EU thus self-narrates itself as vulnerable to energy imports, a weakness it tries to compensate by simultaneously employing a self-narrative of an important international actor, in the position to export its own model to the world. The dissonance in the EU's own perception about the self and its role in the world is well reflected in "The 2020 Energy Strategy" of 2010, when the European Commission expresses frustration with the fact that, "despite accounting for one fifth of the world's energy use, the EU continues to have less influence on international energy markets than its economic weight would suggest (European Commission, 2010:4). Nevertheless, it abruptly switches the narrative to stating that "the EU is a strong geopolitical partner in energy markets and must have the ability to act accordingly" (p. 5). Economic and geopolitical considerations therefore mix in the EU's self-narratives, while, faced with a major crisis, it struggles to define a role and identity for itself, oscillating between feeling vulnerable and desiring to become and to be recognised as a strong actor. As a consequence, disturbed by the 2006/2009 gas crises, the EU employs shifting narratives, ranging from optimism to pessimism, from assertiveness to vulnerability, bringing together both material and ontological motivations in support of its quest for a clear role, both at domestic level (given its internal lack of solidarity), as well as on the international stage (faced with unexpected events it failed to contain). It is worth noting that, despite the intense (geo)politicisation of the 2006/2009 gas incidents, the EU maintained a cooperative tone in the midst of political tensions, albeit for its own pragmatic reasons. In this way, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* operated along both material and ontological considerations, for commercial, as well as for geopolitical goals.

The 2006 gas dispute triggered the EU's decision to elaborate a double strategy in order to boost its energy supply security. On the first hand, it oriented itself to its own domestic vulnerabilities, aiming at consolidating its internal energy market, in order to ensure an uninterrupted gas flow, alignment of national standards and adequate gas storage between the Member States. On the other hand, the EU focused on the external dimension of its energy strategy, seeking to reduce its dependence on a single major gas supplier, namely Russia, through alternative sources of supplies and routes, from the Caspian Sea and Middle East. The idea of the Southern Gas Corridor was thus born. However, when Nabucco, the initial project of the corridor was cancelled by the energy companies promoting it for financial and commercial reasons, the EU also abandoned the idea of a Southern corridor and sidelined the project.

The annexation of Crimea in **2014**, the next trigger year I use in my analysis of the EU energy policy and strategy, coincided nonetheless with the revival of the EU's motivation to realise the Southern Gas Corridor.

Following the political unrest in Ukraine in the winter of 2013-2014, which saw mass protests against the government's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, on 16 March 2014 a referendum, declared illegal by the United Nations, was organised in Crimea, an autonomous region of Ukraine at the Black Sea, on which occasion 97% of the voters chose to proclaim independence from Ukraine and to join the Russian Federation. The next day, the regional parliament declared independence and requested Crimea's annexation to Russia, and, one day later, on 17 March 2014, the unification treaty was signed (Dudău, 2014b). Soon after the annexation, the local parliament nationalised the assets of Chornomornaftogaz, a subsidiary of the Ukrainian national company Naftogaz, including its rights over the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Black Sea formerly belonging to Ukraine, and the ulterior privatisation of Chornomornaftogaz with Gazprom allegedly being the only interested party in buying it (Dudău, 2014b).

The crisis in Ukraine that followed the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the secession war of two more regions, Donetsk and Luhansk that started in Eastern Ukraine, prompted some EU Member States, mostly those formerly belonging to the Eastern bloc to vocally ask the Union to adopt a more assertive stance in its energy policy and to take attitude in front of the alleged use of the energy weapon by Russia on the importing countries of natural gas. The crisis in Ukraine propelled indeed the Southern Gas Corridor onto the EU's Energy Union adopted in 2015 and the EU's Energy Security Strategy of 2014. Thus, in the "Energy Security Strategy" of 2014, the Commission admits that the 2006/2009 gas crises represented "a stark "wake up call" and, unlike previous policy and strategy documents, which throughout the years constantly avoided to openly mention Russia and Gazprom, this time the EU finally repeatedly mentions Russia in connection with its energy security concerns related to the "strong dependence" on Russia (European Commission, 2014:2).

Following the events in Ukraine, the President of the European Council, of Polish origin, Donald Tusk, insisted for the EU to assume a stronger role, overcoming its weakness, and to adopt a European Energy Union, in order to put an end to "Russia's energy stranglehold" (Tusk, 2014:1). In this emblematic document, Tusk de-prioritises the EU's clean energy goals and brings forward geopolitical considerations related to securing safe

access to energy resources that would end the EU's gas dependency on a monopolistic adversary, namely Russia.

Nevertheless, the Energy Union Package finally proposed by the European Commission in 2015 focuses mostly on climate action, integrated markets, renewable energy and innovation, thus reflecting rather the priorities of the old member states in Western Europe, less fearful of an energy-aggressive Russia and more preoccupied with securing an uninterrupted flow of energy to their gas-dependent economies (Yafimava, 2015; Austvik, 2016). Both non-material considerations, stemming from the self-perception of being more secure in the Western countries, as well as material ones related to a decrease of the Russian share in the EU gas imports, and to the fact that the Western Member States are less dependent on Russian gas imports than the new Member States, finally shaped the policy-making concretised in the Energy Union Package (Yafimava, 2015; Wiśniewski, 2015; Dusciac et al., 2016).

While Donald Tusk's call for an Energy Union was indeed prompted by the 2014 events in Ukraine, the Energy Union Package itself builds on previous EU legislation aiming at consolidating an open and integrated gas market, such as the Third Energy Package (Siddi, 2016b). The EU's desire to harmonise the internal market has been reflected throughout the policy and strategy documents of the previous decades, and it has remained a priority to the present (European Commission, 1995; 1999; 2007a; 2007b; 2010; 2014; 2015; 2019b; European Council, 2014a; 2014b).

However, it must be noted that, despite this apparent focus on non-geopolitical goals, gas and security are the first topics approached in the Energy Union Package. The first out of the five dimensions on which the Energy Union was built refers specifically to energy security, solidarity and trust (the remaining four are related to the internal market, energy efficiency, decarbonising the economy, and to research, innovation and competitiveness). Under its energy security dimension, the European Commission starts from the self-perception of being vulnerable to energy shocks, which it links once more to the lack of a proper solidarity among its Member States when dealing with third parties in their energy arrangements. The absence of solidarity, a long-term central concern of the EU's energy strategy, is also stated in the European Energy Security Strategy (2014) when the Commission reiterates the need for the Union to speak with one voice in the energy deals with third parties.

In order to overcome its weakness, the EU proposes the diversification of energy sources, suppliers and routes, which it associates to "the political challenges of the last

months", hinting to the annexation of Crimea and the crisis in Ukraine, but without mentioning it openly (European Commission, 2015:4). The second line of action advanced is of a less commercial nature. The Commission advocates for "a stronger European role in global energy markets", clearly linking energy to foreign policy objectives when it states that "the EU will use all its foreign policy instruments to establish strategic energy partnerships" (p. 6). The Commission concludes that "the European Union has to improve its ability to project its weight on global energy markets" (p.6). Thus, the EU mixes material and non-material arguments in order to support its deep, ontological need to be recognised as an important, strong international actor. For this purpose, the Union strives to acquire a more geopolitical role disguised under the 'market' arguments.

Unlike the years 2006 and 2009, which, despite political tensions, did not affect much the EU's intentions to continue the collaboration with Russia, the 2014 events in Ukraine seem to have impacted on the EU's cooperative tone. Thus, in the Energy Union, the Commission expresses its reluctance towards resuming the energy relationship with Russia, and it links the reframing of the relations to the acceptance of its own terms and model of energy governance based on market opening, fair competition, and environmental protection and safety. The European Commission, unlike previous years, mentions Russia as a key concern due to the EU's dependence on gas and oil imports from this supplier, but still avoids to mention Gazprom, preferring to speak about "certain non-EU operators seeking to avoid compliance with EU legislation on EU territory" (European Commission, 2014:6). The European Council however, in its Conclusions to the same European Energy Security Strategy of 2014 quoted above does not mention Russia at all and it does not focus on energy security either, but rather on enforcing the internal market and competition rules (European Council, 2014a).

The Energy Union Package is the key document of the EU's energy policy and strategy. It provided mechanisms for enhancing solidarity and harmonising the decisions taken by the Member States in dealing with third parties, such as the decision that any energy-related intergovernmental agreements to be first reviewed by the European Commission before signing, to check if they comply with EU regulations (Georgiou and Rocco, 2017; Hofmann and Staeger, 2019). It was called, by optimist voices, the "supranational turn in energy politics", tilting the balance in the favour of a community-level decision and further away from the national authority over energy (Szulecki et al., 2016:549). Nevertheless, despite attempting to transfer more power from the Member States to the EU level in the energy decision-making, it has been criticised for failing, for the time being, to

build an energy union similar to the Banking or Fiscal Union, prompting, on the contrary, some Member States to hold on strongly to their national authority over energy matters (Herranz-Surralles et al., 2020). Progress has been however made, since the adoption of the Energy Union, in reducing the EU's vulnerability to gas disruptions, through opening new LNG terminals and expanding the storage capacity in the Baltic States, building interconnecting pipelines in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, introducing the reverse gas flow capacities on pipelines, and improving the general interconnectivity of the national energy systems among Member States (Siddi, 2020). Also, at present, the diversification of the gas supply has also improved, as all Member States but one import gas from two independent suppliers (European Commission, 2019b).

Returning to the trigger year in discussion, 2014, the start year of the crisis in Ukraine and of the annexation of Crimea, the EU continues to narrate itself as being vulnerable, as, at the time, six of its Member States were still dependent on a single supplier (European Commission, 2014; 2015). Nevertheless, one year before the events in Ukraine, the EU defined its energy vulnerability as related to physical threats, such as terrorism, boycotts and strikes, to natural disasters and to commercial disputes, such as the 2009 gas disruption (European Commission, 2013).

The events of 2014 coincided with more consistent changes in the EU's energy policy and strategy. The long-awaited European Energy Union, the first aggregated EU-wide energy policy document was adopted in 2015, although building on previous attempts by Brussels to overcome its enduring weakness related to the lack of a harmonised internal energy market, to the absence of solidarity among its Member States when dealing with third parties in energy matters, and to the need to diversify its energy sources, suppliers and routes to counter possible future disruptions. Central topics of the EU energy narrative, such as solidarity, internal market and diversification, have thus endured. And so did the EU's self-narrative about its energy vulnerability, combined with the opposing trend of trying to seem more assertive.

Coming to the present, in **2020**, I note that the EU maintains a dual nature in its self-narratives, combining its routinised liberal tone with more preeminent geopolitical ambitions. Thus, in the "Green Deal", its major policy document focused on achieving a carbon-neutral, resource-efficient and competitive economy in Europe, the EU does not hesitate to go beyond the scope of fighting climate change and affirms its ambition to become a global leader, stating its intention to "continue to lead international efforts and [...] to build alliances with the like-minded, [...] to maintain its security of supply and competitiveness even when others

are unwilling to act" (European Commission, 2019c:2). A separate chapter is actually dedicated under the Green Deal to "The EU as a global leader", under which the EU finally identifies a field where it could define itself as a potential leader through the promotion of environment, climate and energy policies in its immediate neighbourhood (the Western Balkans, the Southern Neighbourhood and the Eastern Partnership), under the self-defined "green diplomacy" (p. 2). The idea of a global leadership in the field of climate and energy actions is also revealed in the "Fourth Report on the State of the Energy Union" (2019b), when the EU vouches to "step up its leadership role" (p. 26).

Benefitting from a decrease in its domestic demand, coupled with the decline in prices of energy products and assured by unprecedented high levels of natural gas storage available, the EU narrates itself as being less vulnerable and weak in 2020, but maintains its preoccupation for achieving, by 2030, a greener economy that would also increase the security of energy supplies and reduce the EU's dependence on energy imports from a single supplier in certain Member States (European Commission, 2019b; n.d.). While gas does not appear to be the priority topic anymore at policy level (European Commission, 2019b), the EU admits that natural gas will maintain its relevant role in the transition to low and zero emission energy systems and that the Southern Gas Corridor will remain key to ensuring Europe's energy security and cooperation (European Council, 2020). In 2019, the Southern Gas Corridor has been reconfirmed on the EU's Projects of Common Interest (PCIs) list, with the following projects to be pursued by the EU: the Trans-Caspian pipeline, linking Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan; the extension of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCPx); the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP); and the cluster infrastructure in the Eastern Mediterranean (European Commission, 2019a).

In 2019-2020, the EU tone is more optimistic and reveals more self-trust and self-reliance, based on improved material conditions, even though, according to an EU official I interviewed[25], O4, the continued dependency of Europe from sources that are not under its direct control makes it at any time vulnerable and victim of the geopolitical interests of the respective region. Thus, the ENTSOG reports on the gas supply in 2019 and 2020 note that the storage levels are at the highest levels in the last eight years and that they are enough to ensure a stable supply to the EU customers, and also to the EU neighbouring countries for the 2020-2021 winter, even in the case of the highest demand in the past nine years. The natural gas storage is complemented by an increased utilisation of the LNG terminals and by the

[25] O4: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.

normal functioning of the Ukrainian transit system (ENTSOG 2019; 2020). The reports notice however that, unlike the rest of the continent, South-Eastern Europe would be significantly affected by a disruption through Ukraine, naming nonetheless a high demand situation as a possible cause for the interruption of supplies, and not a political move (ENTSOG, 2019). The ENTSOG observations support the observations of the section dedicated below in this thesis to the Southern Gas Corridor that, under the present circumstances, the project makes little sense economically for the EU, however it may still be relevant in the future, if expanded, to the energy-dependent economies in South-Eastern Europe. The technical observations of ENTSOG follow the findings of the EU-wide simulation carried out in 2017, confirming that a major disruption would not affect significantly the EU economies (ENTSOG 2017), but contradict the political assumptions made before the technical reports came to light, that an important gas supply interruption would affect all Member States and the Energy Community Treaty countries (European Parliament and European Council, 2017).

Since April 2019 I have been participating in the EU's "Consultation Forum for Sustainable Energy in the Defence and Security Sector", jointly implemented by the European Defence Agency in collaboration with the European Commission Directorate General for Energy, the EU-28 ministries of defence, with the additional support of representatives of the academia and industry. On this occasion, I have been taking part in the Working Group dedicated to the Protection of Critical Energy Infrastructure in Europe, working on elaborating conceptual papers and developing project ideas that would enhance the EU's resilience to energy-associated risks and threats. Despite an obvious military-prone concern, I note however that the EU's approach in less geopolitical than expected in the field of protecting its critical energy infrastructure and of mitigating the implications of major crises to its defence sector. The threats and risks identified by the Consultation Forum have not yet included political disputes with suppliers, but referred mostly to terrorist attacks, cyber threats, refugee and migration flows, natural disasters, armed conflicts and extreme meteorological events (European Defence Agency, 2017). The EU defines as critical gas infrastructure the gas production, the refining, treatment and storage facilities, the natural gas pipelines and the LNG terminals (European Council, 2008). Coming to the present, I note that, in line with its Green Deal and preoccupations for a greener economy, the EU has also focused on the protection of its critical energy infrastructure to making it more resilient by enhancing the use of renewables, increasing the energy efficiency and diversifying the energy resources used.

The exploration I performed through the main EU energy policy and strategy documents around the trigger years I identified as being key for the shift in its self-narratives, also impacting on its cooperative or competitive behaviour on the energy scene, revealed some important conclusions. First, throughout the years, the EU has self-perceived and narrated itself as being vulnerable to energy imports and possible disruptions to its energy supplies, and thus its main energy policy and strategy narratives appear to be dominated by its self-perception of vulnerability (European Commission, 2000; 2009b; 2009d; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2015; European Parliament, 2012). The feeling of vulnerability has not always been linked to the gas supplies however, as in the beginning of the 2000s, the EU was more concerned about the alarming rise in oil prices. And, despite the politicisation of the 2006 gas disruption through Ukraine, the EU maintained a rather optimistic tone until the 2009 new gas dispute and especially until the 2014 annexation of Crimea that saw a more preeminent geopolitical and assertive tone coming from Brussels. In order to overcome its vulnerability, the EU has tried, particularly in past years, to reinvent itself as a stronger and more assertive actor, able to speak with one voice in the energy affairs with third parties, namely Russia, a critical topic that dominates the EU's self-appreciation of its energy power, domestically and internationally (European Commission, 2006b; 2006d; 2007b; 2009d; 2012; 2014; 2015; European Parliament and European Council, 2017). The EU's efforts to enhance its internal solidarity have nonetheless been credited with little success, since some Member States with strong economies, such as Austria, Germany, Italy or France have maintained their preference for bilateral import deals with Russia and for keeping the national sovereignty over energy matters instead of transferring more power in this field to the EU-level, an approach mostly unaffected by the Crimean crisis (Niţoiu, 2016; 2017).

Transferring the decision power in the field of energy to the EU-level has proved indeed a difficult task for Brussels, as, for a long time, energy has been considered a national responsibility and prerogative, "a 'less European' policy area than others" (Herranz-Surralles et al., 2020:3). The EU had already called back in 2010 for the "energy policy to become truly European" (European Commission, 2010:4). Nevertheless, the EU has acquired formal competence in the realm of energy only with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 that introduced the principle of solidarity between Member States for the proper functioning of the EU energy market and for ensuring the security of energy supplies, while at the same time providing for the shared competence between the Union and the Member States in the field of energy (European Commission, 2012). The EU's next significant step in transferring the Member States' powers in the field of energy onto the centralised hands of Brussels was the adoption

of the Energy Union Package in 2015, that provided for more concrete measures meant to harmonise the policies, strategies and emergency responses of the Member States in energy matters. The New Gas Directive adopted in 2017 stipulates too that the security of gas supply shall be the shared responsibility of natural gas undertakings, Member States and the European Commission (European Parliament and European Council, 2017). Nevertheless, some countries remained reluctant to relinquishing their national authority when dealing with external suppliers, as Russia, or when deciding on their energy mix and implementing emergency measures (Nițoiu 2017; 2016b; Hofmann and Staeger, 2019; Herranz-Surralles et al., 2020).

Despite its low engagement with the Caspian-Black Sea region discussed in the previous section, the EU has maintained its presence in the neighbourhood in the hope to enhance its overall status in the international arena. I detailed before in this thesis that, in the energy relations with Russia, as well as with Turkey, Azerbaijan and the other countries in the Caspian-Black Sea region, not members of the Union, the EU has understood the mutual benefits of their cooperation as mainly an export of its own values and regulations with respect to liberalisation and privatisation of the energy markets and infrastructure, coupled with the acceptance of its standards related to peacebuilding, human rights, democratisation and rule of law. Or, in the EU's own words: "[...] the European Union has to act as a force of stability and sustainable development in the European continent. Extending the benefits of the Internal Market is part of that projection of stability to the ring of countries that surround the Union" (European Commission, 2003). The EU has continuously insisted on the export and acceptance of its liberal institutional model, while, at the same time, employing itself in the past years a more preeminent geopolitical language, openly linking its external energy relations to foreign policy goals, as debated in this section. Its model has, nevertheless, been received with reluctance or even rejected by its destined recipients, as Russia, Azerbaijan and Turkey, dissatisfied with their own goals not being captured by the EU paradigm, have followed their own priorities and have adopted a more pragmatic approach in the realisation of their energy projects (Nitoiu, 2016b; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019b).

Despite its ambitions to acquire recognition as a strong global power, the EU appears, at times, afraid to play the role it has imagined for itself, avoiding sometimes, for example, to openly name Russia or Gazprom in its narratives about energy security, as revealed before in this section. The EU has remained dedicated to its cooperation with Russia, particularly in the field of energy. Shifting however towards a more geopolitical role, at the same time with preserving a cooperative attitude, might appear dissonant and contradictory. The EU's

apparent lack of coherence is a consequence of the fact that the Union is not a homogenous actor. On the one hand, there are differences in the material capabilities of its Member States, as they vary largely in their resource endowment, existent infrastructure, geographical location, composition of their energy mix and levels of dependence on energy imports (Szulecki, 2018; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a). As already discussed, this was most obvious during the 2006/2009 gas disruptions when some of the Member States, like Austria, Czech Republic, Romania and Slovenia, were very little affected by the gas interruptions, benefitting from import diversification, better market integration and sufficient storage and local production, while Bulgaria suffered the most from the disruption, because of its low levels of oil storage that could have replaced the gas, the absence of its own gas resources, the lack of interconnectors with its neighbours, and the existence of different gas standards which prevented imports from other countries. Moreover, some states, especially the ones in Western Europe, are less dependent on Russian gas imports as proportion they use in their energy mix, compared to some of the new Member States in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, there are other considerations, of a non-material nature, that guide the EU Member States to approach energy security with more or less anxiety and thus supporting a stronger role for the EU or, on the contrary, preferring to deal with their energy partners on their own. The old Member States in Western Europe tend to politicise less the gas imports from Russia, in comparison with the new Member States formerly belonging to the communist bloc, which, particularly after the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, have linked their higher dependence on the Russian gas imports to their self-perceived vulnerability against a potential military and political aggression from Moscow. Their anxieties stem from routinised conflictual relations in the past with Russia/the Soviet Union and on narrating Russia as a threatening 'Other', a danger to their physical security.

The EU's seemingly dissonant and contradictory self-narrative and attitude, whether taken as a unitary actor, or looking deeper into its heterogeneous composition of actors and their motivations, can be explained through the theoretical and conceptual frameworks I propose in this thesis. On the one hand, identities, roles and routines, as I showed in the theoretical chapter dedicated to the *ontological security* framework, are not fixed, but they are however difficult to change, as attachment to what actors know best provide them with a sense of stability and security. The actors engage a combination of material capabilities and ontological adjustments in order to regain or enhance their existential security. On the other

hand, neither conflict, nor cooperation are pure forms of interaction, independent of each other. Although marred with anxieties generated by political crises, the actors may sometimes choose to maintain cooperation in other realms of their lives, in order to maintain their stability and security, for both material, pragmatic reasons related to their physical security, as well as with the purpose to fulfil deeper, ontological needs related to maintaining routines and habits that preserve their sense of stability and continuity. For both material and ontological considerations, conflict and cooperation coexist in a *perpetuum*.

II. Russia's energy policy and strategy: between a threatening energy superpower and a reliable supplier

Russia is, at present, the largest gas exporter in the world, exporting 217.2 bcm of pipeline gas and 39.4 bcm of LNG in 2019, followed by Qatar, Norway and the U.S. (Tiseo, 2020). Europe remains Russia's main customer for gas. In 2019, out of the total Russian gas exports, 198.97 bcm were destined to the European markets, including Turkey. The largest part of these volumes, 77% (153.39 bcm), were sold to the countries in Western Europe and Turkey, while the remaining 23% (45.58 bcm) were imported by countries in Eastern and Central Europe. Out of its European customers, Germany is the largest buyer of Russian gas, followed by Italy, Austria and Turkey (Gazprom, 2020). Gazprom sells the smallest quantities of its gas to countries in South and South-Eastern Europe (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia), which still lack sufficient access to the existing pipeline infrastructure, or to countries which benefit from their own domestic production (Great Britain, Romania), to countries which use small volumes of gas in their energy mix (Finland), or to those which have access to other importers and to alternative sources of energy (Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland). Russia is also the second-largest world producer of gas, after the U.S., with 23% of the world's total proved reserves of gas being located on its territory, most of them in Western Siberia, Volga-Ural and Yamal-Nemets regions (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010; EIA, 2017; Elagina, 2020).

The Russian Federation continues to be the world's leader in energy exports, ranking first in global gas exports, second in oil exports and third in coal exports (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019). Russia's budget revenues are strongly dependent on its hydrocarbons' exports, as their contribution to the federal budget has been on a steady ascending path for the past decades (Kuznetsova and Kuznetsova, 2015). Thus, if at the

beginning of the 2000s, the exports of oil and gas accounted for less than 10% of the federal budget revenues, between 2011-2014 they had already increased to 50%, a trend maintained in 2018 when they contributed to 46% of the national budget. The energy sector represents 56% of the total export revenues and contributed to 25% of the country's GDP (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019).

Russia's consistent exports of gas have nonetheless been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic started in 2020, being affected, along with other exporting countries, by an unusual collapse of the natural prices and gas demand from its importers. Based on the observations made previously in this thesis when I discussed the global gas trends, I recall here the fact that the gas exporting industry had already been impacted by the unprecedented fall in the gas prices on the European and Asian markets, by 50% in 2019 (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019). With respect to the gas demand, it too decreased globally in 2020 by 4%, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, while Europe was most impacted with a 7% drop in demand, due to a coincidence of factors acting simultaneously: the slowdown of the economy generated by the lockdowns during peaks of the pandemic, very high storage capacities accumulated in the EU already in 2019, and the reduced use of natural gas for heating during a warm winter in 2019-2020 (IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020).

As a consequence, in the first half of 2020, Gazprom's gas sales to Europe declined by 16%. In addition to lower volumes gas shipped to Europe because of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on demand, Gazprom also had to struggle in 2020 with the consequences of a lower demand from China, also affected by lockdown in the first half of the year, as well as by smaller exports to Turkey for similar reasons, in addition to a mild winter in 2019-2020, the decision of its customers to buy larger volumes of cheaper spot LNG cargos, and the delays in the finalisation of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Germany (Mikulska and Jakubowski, 2020).

The current losses in the global gas demand are nevertheless expected to be recovered in the following years, as the imports from the Asia-Pacific region, especially from China and India, are forecasted to continue to grow in the context of cheap gas available at present, and because, as shown in the beginning of this chapter, gas will continue to play a stable role in the energy mix of the European economies (IEA, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020).

As a consequence, despite the global challenges faced by the energy industry in 2019-2020, and although the total energy exports of Russia to Europe are foreseen to decrease by 2040, its gas exports, unlike oil exports, are forecasted to continue to grow. Thus, Russia is expected to consolidate its role as a major gas exporter, due to its existing long-term contracts

and continuous need for gas in Europe, but also because of its increasing exports to China, the development of new production fields, and the expansion of its LNG production (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019; IEA, 2020; Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020; SNAM et al., 2020).

All the material conditions I recapitulated here above come to support Russia's ambitions to maintain its role of an 'energy superpower'. Russia's affirmation of its energy power, and based on that, of its political strength has started in the early 2000s. After Vladimir Putin took over the presidency, disappointed that the West had not treated Russia as an equal partner, Moscow started to employ more assertive actions and narratives in order to be recognised as a global power and assert its independence from the EU, using its enormous energy resources as a justification for its energy superpower status (Casier, 2016a; Kuteleva, 2018).

Nevertheless, as Kuteleva (2018) notices, although frequently labelled as such, the Russian top officials have systematically avoided to use the term 'energy superpower'. Sergey Lavrov, Russia's minister of foreign affairs, denounced the term as being "dubious" and "imposed on Russia" by those who want to "encourage assigning Russia the role of an energy and raw-material supplier in the international division of labor" (Lavrov, 2007; *in* Kuteleva, 2018:8). The energy strategies of the Russian Federation prefer to refer to Russia rather as being "the leading player on the world hydrocarbon market" (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010:22), occupying "a unique place [...] being a major producer, a consumer and exporter of all types of carbon energy, and also one of the world leaders in nuclear energy and hydropower" (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020). In its long-awaited "Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the Period until 2035" (2020), the Russian Ministry of Energy affirms that the goal of the country's foreign energy policy is aimed specifically at strengthening Russia's position as one of the leaders in the global energy market.

It is another role that both the Russian political leaders and the country's energy champion, Gazprom, have consistently self-narrated in the past decades: that of Russia being a 'reliable supplier to Europe'.

The 2006/2009 gas disputes with Ukraine, followed by gas supply disruptions to European countries, as well as the 2014 annexation of Crimea, are considered to have affected the confidence and the Western perception on Russia as being a reliable partner (Hofmann and Staeger, 2019). Moscow has been harshly criticised for using the energy weapon, which, in turn, damaged its credibility as a reliable energy supplier, alienating it

from its partners, prompted in this way to accelerate their diversification efforts away from Russia (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Koranyi, 2014; Proedrou, 2017). Can Ogutcu[26], energy security expert in intergovernmental organisations and private sector, reinforced this opinion in the interview I conducted with him, stating that the 2006 and 2009 gas disputes showed that Russia is not a reliable energy provider and Ukraine is not a reliable transit country anymore. A similarly distrustful opinion was expressed by the interviewee C5[27] with respect to the potential cooperative nature of the energy trade in Europe, fearing that countries like Russia would only "seem" to be cooperating with the aim of further strengthening their position and make sure that importing countries are more and more dependent on the energy coming from such stronger exporting countries. More pessimistic voices have even warned that "[...] Russia is far from committed to an unconditional continuation of the gas trade" (Proedrou, 2017:30).

Considerably affected by the damage to its image and reputation, the Russian leaders have struggled to narrate their country as a cooperative, stable and reliable partner to Europe. Thus, in 2005, president Vladimir Putin described EU-Russia relations as being "cooperative", while Alexander Novak, the minister of energy labelled them as "partnership-based" and "stable" (Kuteleva, 2018:9). Dmitri Medvedev, at the time president of the Russian Federation, nuanced in 2010 the need to see the EU-Russia relations as being "based on a set of symmetrical interdependencies" (Kuteleva, 2018:9). Therefore, the Russian politicians pursue both the need to maintain a stable relationship with the EU, based on their cooperative and reliable energy history, while also striving to be acknowledged as an equal partner and not the disadvantaged one in the interdependent relationship with the EU.

Russia has expressed a strong motivation in maintaining its image of a reliable supplier to Europe (Siddi, 2016a). In its Energy Strategy adopted in 2010, thus shortly after the 2009 gas dispute, the Russian government states that one of the main principles of its strategy until 2030 is based on two aims: maintaining Russia's stable relations with its traditional importers of energy and developing equally stable relations with new partners (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010).

Despite the politicisation of Russia's new gas pipeline, Turkish Stream, criticised to be yet another political move of Moscow aimed at discouraging the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor, Gazprom joined the efforts of the Russian political leaders to present Russia as a cooperative, reliable partner, working for the mutual benefits of Russia and Europe. Thus,

[26] O2: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.
[27] C5: Interview conducted on 26 May 2020.

Alexey Miller, Gazprom's CEO, referring himself to the Turkish Stream, affirmed that "[...] Europe now has a new and reliable route to receive Russian pipeline gas. There is no doubt that, thanks to all of this, our cooperation with our Turkish and European partners is shifting to a new level and is going to help improve energy security in the region" (Miller, 2020). The official website of the Turkish Stream also reinforces the self-narrative of the Russian political leaders: "Russia takes its responsibility to provide reliable gas supplies very seriously and has always fulfilled its contractual obligations in this regard" (TurkStream, 2020a).

The EU in its own turn has sought to formally acknowledge Russia's quality of a reliable supplier always fulfilling its supply obligations, despite political crises and divergences (European Commission, 1999; 2000). Their interdependent, on equal basis, energy relationship is recognised, in a very accommodating tone, by the "Roadmap: EU-Russia Energy Cooperation until 2050" strategy document of the EU-Russia Dialogue (2013), which praises Russia for being a vital supplier of energy for the EU for the past half of the century, while the EU is described as a neighbour just as important to Russia, given the large size of its energy market using Russian imports.

After the 2009 gas disruption, the EU adopted a rather impartial tone, affirming that both Russia as a supplier, as well as Ukraine as a transit country suffered a loss of reputation as reliable energy partners, while also admitting that the crisis was in fact a commercial dispute between Russia's Gazprom and Ukraine's Naftogaz, aggravated by the EU's own internal incapacity to prevent and mitigate the disruption properly, given the lack of enough information, of communication and cooperation between some Member States, the absence of common emergency response scenarios and technological shortcomings in some countries (European Commission, 2009b).

Russia's energy strategy efforts in the Caspian-Black Sea region to maintain its dominant position as an energy leader, coupled with its involvement in the regional conflicts of the region, stem on the one hand from the need to preserve a traditional position which has brought political and economic benefits and, on the other hand, to consolidate a better role for itself, one that needs to be recognised and accepted by the West, that of a powerful regional and global leader.

For this purpose, Russia used justifications related to its material capabilities in order to feed its *ontological security* needs related to its desire to be accepted, recognised and respected. In defining and narrating a new role for itself, Russia has constantly mirrored itself in the eyes of Europe, its 'Other' from which it expects to be recognised as an equal and still

reliable partner. For this, I agree that "Europe remains a most important element for Russia's identity construction" (Samokhvalov, 2018:20). If in the initial years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia tried to do this by conforming itself to the standards and expectations of its stronger half, the EU, since early 2000s, Moscow has strived to transform an asymmetric partnership, based mostly on Europe's view upon it, into a more balanced relationship accommodating the preferences of both the EU and Russia (Casier, 2016a; Samokhvalov, 2018). Based on its geographical, population size and considerable energy capabilities, Moscow decided to step out from the EU's shadow, claiming to be treated as an equal. Thus, in its external policy, Russia has employed a dual narrative: that of Russia being a major regional player and that of Russia being Europe's equal partner (Samokhvalov, 2018).

Russia's energy policy strategy, similar to that of the EU's, is oriented in two directions: domestic and international. Its energy power is destined to contribute to both the economic and social development of the country, as well as to support Moscow's ambitions to be recognised as a major international actor (Yesevi, 2018; Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020). The two main Russian energy strategies I analysed for the purpose of this research, namely the "Energy Strategy of Russia for the period up 2030" (2010) and the "Energy Strategy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2035" (2020) are consistently 'national' in their focus, as for the most of their part they appear to be significantly inward-looking projects. Nonetheless, they both contain also an important foreign policy component, focused on maintaining stable relations with their interdependent importing partners.

Much like the EU, Russia's main concern seems to be diversification. In this case, diversification of its energy exports in order to reduce its own dependence on the European importers. For this purpose, the Russian energy strategy, wary about the forecasted decline in demand for traditional energy products in Europe, takes into account orienting its exports towards the markets foreseen to account for the largest growth in demand in the next years, namely those in the Asia-Pacific region, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010). China is indeed expected to increase its demand for gas to more than 130 bcm/y by 2025 (IEA, 2020), a growing market not constricted by tight rules, unlike the shrinking and strictly regulated one in the EU.

The Russian energy strategies, although ten years apart from each other, are consistent with each other and, despite significant changes that had occurred in the past decade both in the political and energy realm, the 2020 Energy Strategy brings few changes in its approach, objectives and actions proposed, compared to the 2010 Energy Strategy. This reveals a strong

attachment to established routines and, unlike the EU energy policy and strategy documents that were mirroring more clearly the political climate and were displaying sometimes dissonant and contradictory arguments, the Russian energy strategies are rather conservative in their nature. Little steps towards change are included, but the essence remains much the same: attachment to habits and routines in managing the energy strategy of the country, without breaking completely with old practices, which still offer a sense of stability.

Thus, the 2020 Energy Strategy, although due in 2015, took four years to be approved, because of an internal lack of consensus between the government and industry players regarding the direction of the country's energy policy: towards a market-driven policy or towards a stronger state control over the energy sector (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019). It is interesting to note that the development of the Russian energy strategy has been influenced by similar forces as that of the EU: choosing between centralising the energy decisions in the hands of the political leadership in Moscow/Brussels, or leave the market forces to work. At the time when a new energy strategy was due to be elaborated, there were proposals for a new direction that would shift priorities from the extraction and exports of natural resources to innovative and high-tech manufacturing industries, in order to reduce the high dependence of the Russian budget revenues on the oil and gas exports and to include innovative changes to the Russian energy mix (Gromov, 2014). Nevertheless, the energy strategy finally adopted in 2020 opted for a more conservative approach, driven by the perceived disturbances and risks caused by the international sanctions affecting the Russian economy and the uncertainties of the global oil and gas markets. Attachment to old routines persisted and was further reinforced, calling for a more traditional approach that would maintain and consolidate the state's authority in energy matters, as anxieties driven by the outside environment disturbed the sense of stability of the main energy and political actors. Maintaining the energy strategy as it was, in a shape that had functioned before, was thus regarded as element of stability, of calming the anxieties generated by a complex of factors out of Russia's control.

Energy security has thus been conceptualised, under the Russian energy strategy understanding, as the country's security (be it citizens, society or the state) against external threats related to geopolitical and market conditions, as well as internal risks stemming from the condition and operation of the Russian energy sector (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010). The main problems identified reveal a mixture of technical, market and political concerns. They relate specifically to the decline in demand and the collapse of energy prices, to the continued Russian dependence on its transit countries, to the low level of participation of the Russian energy companies on the foreign markets, to the lack of adequate

investments, and to external factors that Russia considers to be unpredictable, such as international relations, social change, but also culture, scientific discoveries and technical inventions (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010; 2020). Interestingly enough, the 2010 Energy Strategy includes the risk of the politicisation of the energy relations between Russia and other countries, a topic not listed anymore in 2020.

Although the Russian energy strategies include some liberal and market-oriented goals, such as fair competition of energy markets, participation in international energy organisations and cooperation frameworks, full-scale integration into the world energy markets, and even non-discriminatory access of market participants to the gas transportation system (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010; 2020), the 2010 Energy Strategy has been criticised for retaining a geopolitical focus (Proedrou, 2017), while the 2020 Energy Strategy has been questioned about its overall relevance and usefulness (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019). Thus, Russia's most recent 2020 Energy Strategy has been credited with the main shortcoming of not contributing enough to the transformation of the gas industry, allowing little improvements towards an open, competing market and retaining Gazprom's monopoly on pipeline gas exports (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019).

Maintaining Gazprom's monopolistic position has been a critical point of debate around the transformations of the Russian energy market and strategy. The 2020 Energy Strategy, unlike the previous one that provided for the non-discriminatory access of other market participants to the gas transportation system, avoids mentioning any change in this sense anymore. Thus, it confirms Gazprom's central role in the Russian gas industry as the monopoly holder over the pipeline exports, owner of most of the gas reserves in Russia, as well as of the gas supply system (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019; Mikulska and Jakubowski, 2020).

Nevertheless, the Russian gas exports, under the new strategy, are not homogenous anymore, as it introduces a new favourite, Novatek, Russia's key LNG exporter (Mitrova and Yermakov, 2019; Mikulska and Jakubowski, 2020). The Russian new gas export strategy is therefore double-oriented: on the one hand, it maintains Gazprom as a more traditional player, in charge with the equally traditional pipeline gas supplies and exports and still encompassing both commercial and geopolitical goals of activity; on the other hand, it introduces Novatek, a private company, responsible for the newer developments of the gas industry, namely LNG, portrayed as a more modern, competitive, market participant, apparently not linked to the Kremlin, hoping to gain more trust in Europe than the already discredited Gazprom (Vinois and Bros, 2019; Mikulska and Jakubowski, 2020).

Nevertheless, the difference in the two companies might not be as deep, since all Russian energy companies, public or private, still depend, more or less, on the general direction of the energy strategy decided by the Russian state, which they cannot oppose, while Gazprom has itself displayed a more market-oriented approach in the past years, after the antitrust case raised by the EU against it, understanding that it needs to play by the market rules in order to retain its place on the European liberalised market (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a; Vinois and Bros, 2019).

The most circulated opinion is that Gazprom is a mere political tool in the hands of the Kremlin, leading to the energy weapon argument, as a mean through which the Kremlin has sought to increase Europe's energy dependence on Russia, by using Gazprom as an instrument to advance its geopolitical goals. Gazprom has, under this understanding, been portrayed as an extension of the political leadership in Moscow, whose interests completely overlap those of the Kremlin (Goldman, 2008; Smith Stegen, 2011; Kropatcheva, 2014). Notwithstanding the fact that Gazprom does play a key role in implementing Russia's external policy, acting in the interest of the Russian state, the company's interests have not always overlapped with those of the government (Sharples, 2011; Balmaceda, 2012) and, at times, it has also pursued its own market-driven interests oriented at maximising its profits. Therefore, it is expected that, despite Russia's tactical move to improve its image abroad as a reliable, market-oriented supplier, both Gazprom and Novatek will retain a mixture of corporate and state interests, adjusting pragmatically to the requirements at home, as well as to the market conditions abroad.

Russia's rich endowment with natural resources has been both a treasure and a curse, as, on the one hand, the energy exports provide the country with significant revenues to the federal budget, allowing the creation of jobs and contributing to Russia's affirmation as a political power abroad; on the other hand however, Russia is highly dependent on its energy exports and on the countries which import its products, as its economy revolves around the energy sector and necessitates foreign investments to upgrade the outdated infrastructure (Kuznetsova and Kuznetsova, 2015:166-167).

With the continuous fall in oil and gas prices in the past years and with the alternative sources of energy gaining more and more ground, Russia needs to look beyond securing its budget revenues and all the associated benefits from its hydrocarbons' exports. The Russian government pins its hopes on reorienting its oil and gas exports towards the growing Asian markets, as the share of exports to Europe in the total Russian energy exports is forecasted to decrease from 73% in 2018 to 54-56% in 2040 (Russian Academy of Sciences and

SKOLOVO, 2019). Gazprom's export strategy is to become China's first supplier by 2035, while maintaining a minimum 35% market share in Europe by 2035 (Vinois and Bros, 2019). Nevertheless, the exports to Asia are not expected to be able to equal those to Europe and, as gas will still remain relevant in the energy mix of the European countries, the Russian pipeline gas is still envisaged to cover more than half of the European gas market in 2040 (Russian Academy of Sciences and SKOLOVO, 2019).

Therefore, Russia and the EU, despite their efforts to both break from an interdependence which has proved to be at times difficult to manage so that it accommodates their different preferences, will still remain linked through their energy relationship at least for the years to come. If their understanding of energy governance differs, with the EU prioritising a liberalised market and with Russia opting for a tighter state on its energy sector, their energy strategies converge in one crucial point: diversification driven by the anxiety of dependence. The EU wants to diversify its gas imports away from Russia and thus the Southern Gas Corridor was born. Russia seeks to diversify its energy exports away from its dependence on contentious transit states as Ukraine and thus the Turkish Stream and the Nord Stream came to life.

The exploration of the Russian energy strategies revealed the fact that, despite being credited as an energy superpower, a status it has narrated for itself since the early 2000s in order to overcome its self-perceived inferior status in front of the EU, in recent years Russia has been longing for another role, that of a reliable supplier. It has thus moved from more material considerations to more ontological ones, related to its desire to be still needed, accepted and respected by a partner whose basic trust had been considerably damaged by the deterioration of their political relationship. Russia's need to be recognised as a reliable supplier is based on both material and non-material motivations. On the one hand, its economy, budget revenues and, by consequence, internal stability depend on maintaining a constant income from its energy exports to still its largest trade partner, Europe. On the other hand, Russia's identity is built around its closest partner not yet ready to let go, the same Europe. Its reputation, severely damaged by political events, particularly after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, is crucial to a Russia that wants to be respected as the major actor it aspires to be. For this purpose, stable energy supplies play the role of the cement on which the well-shaken foundations of its relationship with Europe still stand.

In order to adjust itself to the new market realities, but also to regain credibility, the Russian energy strategies engage a dual language, both market-oriented and state-centric. Nevertheless, the liberal attempts have been overshadowed by its most recent 2020 Energy

Strategy, which marked the return to a more state-controlled energy sector. Faced with anxieties generated by a multitude of concerted factors, related to market but also political uncertainties, Russia preferred to maintain its attachment to energy strategy routines, able to provide it with a sense of continuity and stability. Although seeking to overcome its dependence on the EU and to gain more autonomy and diversification for its energy exports, Russia understands that it still needs the European markets and, its new gas pipeline projects, the Turkish Stream and the Nord Stream 1 and 2, confirm its calculations to still play a key role on the energy scene of Europe. Moreover, in a pragmatic move, while diversifying its exports towards Asia, the Russian state and the Russian energy companies still intend to maintain a significant market share in Europe, both through pipeline and LNG gas exports. The seemingly contradictory goals of the Russian energy strategy in the relationship with Europe can be explained through the theoretical framework I suggest in this thesis, that of the *ontological security*, which helps to complement the material considerations underpinning Russia's actions with observations related to the deeper, existential motivations behind its behaviour.

III. Turkey's energy strategy: an aspiring energy hub in the Caspian-Black Sea region

The oil and gas projects and the general energy dynamics around them in the Caspian-Black Sea region have been framed either as cooperative, or as rival endeavours of two main actors: the EU and Russia, which have been granted, in narrative, exclusive paternity over the natural gas pipelines built in the past decades in the region. Under this geopolitical reductionism, as I explain in the next section, the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-led Turkish Stream have been seen as rival projects, designed for rather geopolitical than commercial goals, competing with each other and destined to form political alliances along the commercial ones. Nonetheless, neither the EU, nor Russia would have been able to implement their major Caspian-Black Sea projects without the active support of other state actors, such as Azerbaijan and Turkey, and of the energy companies promoting the pipelines. It was the energy companies behind Nabucco, the predecessor of the Southern Gas Corridor, that decided to cancel the project for commercial reasons. And, when the EU abandoned the idea of continuing the Southern Gas Corridor, it was Azerbaijan and Turkey who took the decision to realise TANAP, the corridor's second pipeline, on their own.

The Caspian-Black Sea energy world is not bipolar. Along with the undisputable leading players on the energy scene of the region, namely the EU and Russia, a third key player has become more and more assertive in the past years, claiming its role both as a strategic regional leader, as well as an indispensable energy actor in the South Caucasus, the Black Sea, as well as in the neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean: Turkey. As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, any analysis of the energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region should take into account from now on a trilateral relationship between the EU, Russia and Turkey, given Ankara's rising demands to be recognised and acknowledged as more than a simple transit country between Azerbaijan and Russia, as exporters, and the EU as an importer. At the time this thesis is being finalised, the link between the EU and Turkey is yet to be developed, as Ankara's highly assertive energy and political adventurism is still of a recent nature and the EU has, so far, been slow to react and adjust its policy towards Turkey.

Why is Turkey at present so important to the energy dynamics and projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region, for both the EU and Russia? On the one hand, there are material considerations to take into account. Thus, through its versatile and pragmatic diplomacy, Ankara has managed to join both the pipeline projects supported by the EU, as well as those advanced by Russia, avoiding to take sides in its pipeline politics. In this way, Turkey has become a crucial transit corridor, indispensable for the transportation of both Russian and non-Russian oil and gas to the European energy markets. With the Ukrainian gas transit system expected to gradually decrease the flows of Russian gas to Europe through its infrastructure, Turkey has slowly emerged as a new key transit country for Russia. It was also Turkey that helped making the EU-supported Southern Gas Corridor become a reality, when it took the initiative, along with Azerbaijan to construct its second leg, TANAP, at a time when the EU had sidelined the project. As a consequence, both the EU and Russia hold Turkey as indispensable, for the time being, to transport the Caspian-Black sea hydrocarbons to Europe.

On the other hand, there are also non-material reasons for Turkey to increase its importance and reach a more visible position on the agenda of both Brussels and Moscow. In the past years, particularly after the new major gas discoveries in 2018 and 2019 in the Eastern Mediterranean, in the EEZ of Cyprus, and even more after the considerable gas deposit that Ankara claims it had discovered in the summer of 2020 in the Black Sea, Turkey had displayed a very vocal determination to be considered a key energy player in the region, a future producer and exporter on its own, not just a mere transit corridor for the big powers, the EU and Russia. Ankara's increasingly assertive energy narrative has been coupled, since

2018, with a strong military activity on more than one front, in Syria, Libya, and, since 2020, in the South Caucasus around Nagorno-Karabakh, and in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean waters where it has been contesting the sovereignty of Greece and Cyprus. While apparently material in their nature, these amalgamated geopolitical-commercial moves of Ankara reveal, in the case of Turkey, a strong case for analysis for the deeper, existential needs that lie at the foundation of such attitudes and behaviours.

As I discuss in detail in the final chapter, Turkey is indeed motivated by the need to feed its highly dependent and energy-hungry economy with additional gas supplies. Nevertheless, what Ankara is looking for under these calculations is to be respected, to be accepted and to be acknowledged as a strong regional leader, able to make claims for itself and for its acolytes. For this purpose, Turkey goes to unprecedented length in order to prove the EU and Russia that it is able to exploit its own resources, that it is an independent player and that it is determined to overcome any previous shame and stigma it had to deal with in the past years. As a consequence, Turkey is navigating at present the waters of the Black Sea, of the Aegean and of the Eastern Mediterranean with both gas drilling ships as well as military vessels, and it is announcing its own major gas discoveries at the same time with stating its intention to solve the nearby conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. This is not to say that energy is closely interlinked with geopolitical conflicts and reinstate the geopolitical reductionism scrutinised in this research. It is rather to make a point, once more, that no actor is purely geopolitical or liberal in its actions, that often the energy players use mixed economic and political justifications in support of their arguments, revealing a more cooperative or conflictual preference. Moreover, below the apparent surface of the commercial-geopolitical complex of their actions, a deeper layer of motivations, profoundly impacting the visible, material one, needs to be explored: what are the existential, the intense ontological reasons that make Turkey act seemingly against its own physical security?

I dedicate more space to this topic in the final chapter and I continue this section with the first layer not to be dismissed from any analysis, that of the material factors underpinning Turkey's energy strategy in the past years.

Turkey's most stringent material motivation to engage in a multitude of strategies meant to supply its market with more gas stems, undoubtedly, from the fact that the Turkish economy is highly energy-dependent. An impressive economic growth in the past years is nevertheless coupled with an outstanding lack of own natural resources, necessary to feed its ambitious projects. Turkey imports approximately 75% of its primary energy supply, recording a 92% dependence on oil imports and being remarkably 99% dependent on gas

imports (Rzayeva, 2018; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). In 2017, most of the gas imported came from Russia (52%) and the rest from Iran, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Qatar and Nigeria, either as pipeline gas or as LNG (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019).

The first direct gas pipeline from Russia to Turkey under the Black Sea, the Blue Stream, became operational in 2003, consolidating, along with the existing imports through the onshore Trans-Balkan pipeline, Turkey's dependence on Russian gas. Although considered to have cemented Turkey's dependence on Russian gas (Rzayeva, 2018), the Turkish Stream poses nevertheless certain advantages for the Turkish market, as it provides direct access to the Russian supplies, bypassing a potentially risky Ukraine, eliminating the transit fees through Ukraine, Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria, and promising the possibility to be expanded further to Europe, which would entail Turkey to claim transit fees in return (Özertem, 2017).

Increasingly worried about the country's energy imports dependence, the leaders in Ankara have constantly sought for alternatives. Much like in the case of the EU and Russia, diversification has been a leitmotif of the Turkish energy strategy and narrative. In order to overcome this concerning dependence, Ankara has looked into more alternatives to Russian imports: diversification of suppliers (Azerbaijan, Northern Iraq, Turkmenistan, Israel), diversification of sources (LNG, renewables, nuclear power), and diversification of routes (Turkey actively participated with Azerbaijan in implementing TANAP, the second leg of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor). Nevertheless, some of its efforts have been considered to be less successful for their declared purpose, as building Turkey's first nuclear plant, at Akkuyu, has been realised by Russia's Rosatom, thus failing to reduce its dependence on Russian energy, while political, commercial and security concerns have prevented securing new energy suppliers in Northern Iraq, Turkmenistan and Israel (Winrow, 2017). For the time being, Turkey has not yet managed to find an alternative supplier able to completely substitute the volumes of gas imported from Russia (Gurbanov, 2017).

Diversification has been at the core of the Turkish energy strategy and looking for other suppliers than Russia has been its steering wheel. Two main options have been envisaged by the leaders in Ankara. First, the cheaper option, would have been importing gas from Northern Iraq, from the Kurdistan Regional Government. Nevertheless, considerable political and security obstacles have prevented such an alternative to become a viable one, due to the highly volatile security environment in Northern Iraq with frequent terrorist attacks, but also because of Turkey's own difficult relationship with the local authorities caused by Ankara's opposition to Kurdistan's independence claims (Rzayeva, 2018). The

second option would have been for Turkey to import additional gas from the Eastern Mediterranean, namely from Cyprus and Israel. However, Ankara's difficult political relations with both countries have made this alternative highly unfeasible until now. Particular in the case of Cyprus, due to the intense political disputes between Nicosia and Ankara, and to Turkey's claims over the Cyprus's territorial waters and EEZ, a subsea pipeline linking the two countries is greatly unlikely under the current political format.

The Turkish decision-makers had thus to re-orient themselves. Despite gas being still attractive for the Turkish economy, the government in Ankara has taken steps, in the past years, to find solutions to reduce the share of gas in the energy mix of the country, particularly in the electricity generation sector where gas is most consumed (Rzayeva, 2018; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018). This is particularly important since, any disruption in gas supplies would drastically affect the electricity sector as well, with a high impact on the Turkish economy and security (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018).

Moreover, more major long-term gas supply contracts expire in the 2020s (with Azerbaijan for SCP, with Russia for the Blue Stream and with Iran for Tabriz-Dogubayazit pipelines), expected to account for approximately 80% of Turkey's market gas demand (Austvik and Rzayeva, 2016). Under these conditions, the Turkish leadership is under considerable strain to secure the much-needed gas supplies, while overcoming any uncertainty related to their future, as some of them depend on both political and commercial sensitive factors. A quick replacement of the pipeline gas with LNG is not feasible for the time being, as Turkey still has a limited regasification capacity and the national company, BOTAŞ does not own large enough gas storage capacities, especially for the peak winter season (Austvik and Rzayeva, 2016).

However, the fact that some major long-term gas supply contracts will expire in the 2020s has not been regarded solely as a vulnerability and as a reason of concern for Turkey. It is no coincidence that, while awaiting to renegotiate new deals with its suppliers, Ankara has recently engaged in unprecedented political, military and energy adventurism on more fronts. Thus, instead of negotiating with Nicosia for a joint pipeline, it has claimed that the recent gas discoveries around Cyprus belong in fact to Turkey, as Ankara does not apply the internationally-recognised United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), according to which, the states exercise sovereign rights over the exploration, production and exploitation of the natural resources within their territorial waters and EEZs. Turkey however, who refused to sign the UNCLOS convention, applies an individual understanding of the law of the sea and thus considers that all waters that stretch above its continental shelf,

and all the resources they contain, belong to Turkey; also, that islands, such as Cyprus, do not have the right to claim territorial waters and EEZs (Gatopoulos, 2020). At the same time, in August 2020, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced a major gas discovery close to the Turkish Black Sea shores, claiming that, by 2023, the energy-import dependent Turkey will become a producer and exporter (Deutsche Welle, 2020a). These two endeavours destined to make Turkey look less vulnerable and dependent on energy imports are not coincidentally launched at the time when the major gas import contracts are about to expire. Narrating itself from a different position, Ankara looks to negotiate the future contracts with its suppliers from a different position, a stronger one this time.

In line with the present actions, Turkey's "National and Energy Mining Policy" had already announced in 2017 that it aims to reduce the country's dependence on energy imports and to make it eventually energy self-sufficient (Karagöl et al., 2017). The Energy Strategy is designed around three main axes: security of energy supplies, indigenisation and foreseeable energy market. Ankara's intentions to conduct gas explorations in the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean have already been included as a main goal of the national energy strategy, under the security of energy supplies axis, along with increasing diversification of energy resources and supplier, with augmenting the natural gas and oil storage capacities, and with consolidating the energy infrastructure (Karagöl et al., 2017). The second axis, indigenisation, refers to Turkey becoming more autonomous from its external suppliers by increasing its own domestic energy production, mainly of coal and renewables. The third axis of the Turkish Energy Strategy, that of the foreseeable energy market is focused on the domestic developments in the Turkish energy market, namely on those related to the necessity to restructure the companies in the energy sector, TPAO and BOTAŞ, for a more efficient integration into the energy market (Karagöl et al., 2017). The end goals of Turkey's external energy strategy are to secure its increasing need for energy supplies, to reduce import dependence on Russia, and also to transform Turkey into an energy hub (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018).

The 'energy hub' role has been the central motif of the Turkish energy narrative and strategy for the past years. The principal argument invoked by the Turkish narrative has been that of the particularly advantageous location of the country, at the crossroads of the main energy and transport corridors, between Asia and Europe, and between the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. The unique, strategic location of Turkey has been placed at the core of the political and economic discourses justifying Turkey's role as an indispensable partner in all major regional projects (Gurbanov, 2017; Erşen and Çelikpala,

2019; Triantaphyllou, 2020). Turkey is indeed favourably located at the meeting of crucial trade corridors, linking Eurasia and the Middle East to the European markets. Looking at energy specifically, the country lies in the close proximity of 73% of the world proven oil reserves and of 72% of the global gas proven reserves, an undisputable geographic advantage (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). However, despite its resource-rich neighbours, Turkey does not own any significant proven reserves of its own, a deficit it has tried to compensate with its location allowing it to facilitate the realisation of major energy corridors from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe (Shlykov, 2018).

Turkey has detained a central role in the oil transport from the Caspian to the Mediterranean, through the Baku-Supsa and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipelines, as well as from the Black Sea ports of Novorossiysk in Russia and Supsa in Georgia to the Western markets, through the Bosporus and Dardanelles straits in Istanbul (Austvik and Rzayeva, 2016; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018). Encouraged by its key role in the oil transit, Turkey has nurtured similar hopes regarding its position at the crossroads of major natural gas pipelines linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe. Turkey's Energy Strategy expresses the country's goal to become a gas trading centre once it had managed to diversify and increase its gas supplies, either through diversification of imports or indigenisation of its own resources (Rzayeva, 2018). For this purpose, the government in Ankara provides in its "Strategic Plan 2015-2019" (2015) that oil and gas explorations should be intensified and that the necessary infrastructure and market conditions should be ensured in order for Turkey to become an energy hub (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2015).

Although back in 2006, the EU clearly mentioned the fact that "Turkey is becoming a crucial energy hub for supplies from producer regions" provided a "rapid alignment of Turkey with EU energy standards and policies is implemented" (European Commission, 2006e), the EU has attempted also in the case of Turkey rather to export its own model of energy governance, linking the country's accession to the EU to the adoption of the Third Energy Package rules related to unbundling and third party access. This would have meant breaking BOTAŞ' monopoly and decoupling in this way energy from Turkish high politics (Erdogdu, 2014). For the EU, Turkey has however been envisaged as a transit country. For this purpose, the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which Turkey ratified, consolidated Turkey's limited status to that of a transit state, deeming its ambitions to set the prices for the gas supplies transited on its territory as incompatible with the EU regulations (Skalamera, 2016). At the time of writing this thesis, the section dedicated to the energy cooperation with Turkey

on the EU portal provides almost no information on the topic, while on the EU's External Action website (European External Action Service, 2018), under the section related to the Economic Relations between Turkey and the EU, energy is not listed at all. From a "crucial energy hub" in 2006, in 2020 Turkey is mentioned only as "a potential transit country for natural gas to flow from the Caucasus and Central Asia into the EU" (European Commission, 2020b).

It is thus of no surprise that the role of a transit state did not satisfy the Turkish leaders, aiming for bettering the status of their country, by having it recognised as an energy hub (Erdogdu, 2014; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The acceptance and recognition of Turkey as an energy hub has a dual motivation: a material and an ontological one. On the material side, by becoming an energy hub, Turkey would be able to consume the energy supplies it needs and sell the rest to other countries, for a profit. It would thus be able to own pipelines crossing its territory, which would allow it to set energy prices and transit fees (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Diversification of its gas supplies would also contribute to satisfying the energy needs of its fast-growing economy and it would thus contribute to its energy security (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018).

Notwithstanding the dual commercial and political motivation nature of its actions, besides its obvious material benefits, Turkey also aims to gain respect, recognition, and to overcome stigma and shame to which it perceives it has been subjected on the world scene. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's former prime-minister and minister of foreign affairs, dismissed Turkey's traditional role of a bridge for having an inactive and passive role and advocated instead for the more prominent status of a "central country" (Davutoğlu; *in* Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The energy diplomacy section of the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources clearly states that, given the fact that the country is an important actor in the region and due to its strategic location, "[...] Turkey is far more than its geographical location, constituting a bridge connecting the east and the west, it is a stable and secure energy player in its region" and that "Turkey is moving towards becoming an energy trading centre" (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a; 2020b). Reflecting the link between commercial considerations and political ambitions, both underpinned by existential needs, Turkey's "National Energy and Mining Policy" has been devised under the principle of "strong economy and national security" and announced on 6 April 2017 under the slogan "Independent Energy, Strong Turkey" (Karagöl et al., 2017:7-9).

Following its ambitions to make itself indispensable both for Russia and the EU, Turkey adopted a dual foreign energy diplomacy, joining both the Turkish Stream built by

Russia, as well as the Southern Gas Corridor backed by the EU. Energy diplomacy, reuniting equally commercial and political goals, has been narrated by the Turkish officials to include energy as an important tool of the country's foreign policy, as well as an instrument of improving not only the domestic energy security, but also that of Turkey's neighbouring countries (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a; 2020b). Cooperation has for this purpose been placed at the core of the official energy discourse, with the Minister of Energy claiming that Turkey regards "energy not as an element of conflicts but as a guarantee of peace" (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a). Following this line, the Turkish diplomacy has been careful to discourage any interpretation of the Turkish Stream and the Southern Gas Corridor as rival projects, as tools of competition between Russia and the EU, preferring to narrate them as complementary projects based on pragmatic and not ideological considerations (Davutoğlu; *in* Ediger and Durmaz, 2017; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019).

When Nabucco, the precursor of the Southern Gas Corridor was cancelled, Turkey and Azerbaijan did not abandon the project and realised the second leg of the corridor, through their own efforts (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015). TANAP thus raised Turkey's ambitions of becoming an energy hub, offering Turkey access to more gas supplies, while allowing BOTAŞ to own a part of the infrastructure and to buy additional volumes of gas if they become available in the future, with the hope of selling them further at its borders (Cain et al., 2012; Jarosiewicz, 2015). The realisation of TANAP has not however reduced Turkey's dependence on Russian gas imports. Moreover, Azerbaijan's national energy company, SOCAR, holds the majority share in TANAP (58%) and thus it has the power of decision over the gas transit through Turkey, being the one in charge with allowing or not additional supplies from other sources to be shipped through the pipeline, and also with setting the transit fees, limiting in this way Turkey to the role of a transit state (Cain et al., 2012; Jarosiewicz, 2015; Offenberg, 2016). Nevertheless, TANAP offered Ankara a boost of confidence, as the project has been perceived by the Turkish leadership as more than a commercial success, as an affirmation of a status to be acknowledged, an ontological need for respect and acceptance.

As far as the Turkish Stream is concerned, Russia has encouraged, at a declarative level, both through the voices of its political leaders, as well as through the representatives of Gazprom, Turkey's ambitions of becoming an energy hub. Thus, Gazprom states that "TurkStream will further boost Turkey's geostrategic importance" (TurkStream, 2020a), while president Putin announced on the occasion of signing the intergovernmental agreement

for the construction of the Turkish Stream, in 2016, that this was a step "towards realizing the plans of the Turkish President to create a major energy hub" in Turkey (Putin; *in* Ediger and Durmaz, 2017). Nevertheless, as the Turkish Stream has been fully funded by Gazprom and the Russian government, Turkey's BOTAŞ is not a partner and it does not own the gas flowing through the pipeline (Skalamera, 2016). Turkey links however its hopes of becoming an energy hub to the future expansion of the pipeline beyond its borders, which would offer it the possibility to benefit from transit fees and better import prices (Kaynak, 2018; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018), although this new pivotal role might, in some opinions, be challenged by countries like Greece and Bulgaria, who might not be willing to leave their energy security at the good will of their less trusted neighbour (Proedrou, 2017).

Nonetheless, achieving the role of an energy hub by Turkey seems difficult under the current conditions. Neither the EU-backed TANAP, nor the Russian-built Turkish Stream provide for a price setting mechanism which would allow Turkey to influence the market beyond its borders, an essential feature of any energy hub (Skalamera, 2016; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The EU itself has avoided providing Turkey with the legal instruments to become an energy hub, such as setting prices, deeming it incompatible with the ECT provisions which Ankara ratified, and hence keeping Turkey limited to a transit country status (Skalamera, 2016). Moreover, the national company BOTAŞ is still a monopolistic actor, controlling 75% of all gas imports and 80% of domestic gas sales, which creates impediments for an open, competitive internal market (Skalamera, 2016; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Commercial and technological features of the Turkish gas market further hamper the country's ambitions of becoming an energy hub. Thus, Turkey lacks large gas storage facilities, necessary if it was to buy, store and sell further abroad significant volumes of gas; it has a limited LNG regasification capacity; and it is also facing a growing domestic consumption generated by increased urbanisation and industrialisation, which would leave very little if no volumes of gas available for export (Skalamera, 2016; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018).

In addition to the economic factors, political conditions also contribute to delaying Turkey's dream of becoming a genuine energy hub. On the domestic front, foreign investments are still limited, being little encouraged by the events around the 15 July 2016 failed coup (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018). Geopolitical factors have also been accounted for undermining Turkey's ambitions of becoming an energy hub, being argued that stability is necessary for any reliable, uninterrupted energy supply and trade, given the fact that the country is surrounded by regional conflicts in the South Caucasus and the Middle East, or by

countries with which it has tense relations, and it is also feared to being subjected to domestic challenges linked to terrorist attacks or sabotage on its gas infrastructure (Winrow, 2013; Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018).

The situation has led some authors to conclude that Turkey has not yet transformed itself into a real energy hub and even that it will probably remain a mere transit country for the Russian and Azerbaijani gas, inheriting in a way the role Ukraine used to play (Yilmaz-Bozkuş, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). This is not however something the current leadership in Ankara is ready to accept. Still fuelled by its ambition to become an energy hub, to overcome dependence on big energy powers like Russia and Iran, and to claim in front of the world the role of a regional power, Turkey has actively engaged, particularly after 2018, in what can be considered political and energy adventurism on more than one front. It has challenged Russia's dominance by engaging on opposing positions in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh; it has provoked Greece, and by proxy, the EU's response embarking on gas explorations under military protection in the Aegean; it claimed ownership of the recently gas discoveries in the EEZ of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, signing, in 2019, a maritime boundary agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord, which supports its claims over Greece's and Cyprus' waters and natural resources; and it has claimed an impressive gas discovery next to its Black Sea shores in 2020, promising to transform Turkey into a producer and exporter.

The claimed Black Sea discoveries are of a particular importance for Turkey's dual goal, to ensure its energy diversification and autonomy, and to gain a better role in the world. Thus, in August 2020, president Erdoğan announced that Turkey discovered a major gas deposit close to the Turkish shores of the Black Sea, initially estimated at 320 bcm of gas and later upgraded, by a new declaration of president Erdoğan in October 2020, to 405 bcm (Deutsche Welle, 2020a; 2020 b).

The discovery made in the Sakarya gas field was labelled by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as being a "miracle" and as a "morale booster", revealing both material and existential arguments in its favour, while also declaring that with this discovery Turkey will become a producer and exporter of gas by 2023 (Deutsche Welle, 2020a; 2020b). 2023 is not a random year, it was chosen symbolically since it marks the centennial anniversary of the Republic of Turkey, a moment of magnitude calling for equally impressive realisations that would support the narratives of the political leadership in Ankara affirming a strong, undefeated Turkey on an ascending path to a higher position.

Despite Ankara's great ambitions, uncertainties have been expressed regarding the feasibility of this deadline, pertaining to the absence of sufficient exploration data that would certify the estimated resources, to the high costs related to an offshore exploration, to Turkey's lack of experience in deep-sea production, as well as to the current low prices for gas which would discourage any major foreign investment (Bechev, 2020; Deutsche Welle, 2020a). Moreover, the Sakarya gas field lies at the intersection between the maritime boundaries of Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, in the close vicinity of the Romanian deep-sea gas exploration field, Neptun, already under exploration since 2012 by Romania's Petrom and France's Exxon Mobile (Digi24, 2020). Already benefitting from energy autonomy, given its sufficient onshore gas reserves and a reduced domestic consumption in the past years, Romania has been urged by the EU to start exporting its surplus to its neighbours. Should it align its political, financial and technological efforts to do so and start exporting from the estimated 42-84 bcm of gas in the Black Sea, Romania would diminish Turkey's ambitions of becoming the central energy hub of the wider Black Sea region.

In addition, another EU actor less willing to leave its energy security in the hands of Turkey (Proedrou, 2017), Greece has taken steps to play a more active role on the energy scene in South-Eastern Europe. Greece and Turkey have accomplished a successful cooperation in the field of energy despite any past grievances, through the Turkey–Greece natural gas interconnector, and through the recent Turkish Stream, which, since January 2020, has started to deliver small volumes of gas over the Turkish-Greek border. However, Athens has been confronted with increased anxiety since 2018, given Ankara's combined energy and military presence and claims in its EEZ. Becoming part of the Southern Gas Corridor through its final pipeline, TAP, and investing in its LNG capabilities, Greece has also expressed its wish of becoming an energy hub in the region and hence acquiring a better role on the energy scene in order to improve its image abroad seriously damaged after the 2008-2009 financial crisis (Dokos and Tsakiris, 2014). In August 2020, on the occasion of signing a bilateral agreement with Bulgaria for including the latter in the planned LNG terminal project set in the Greek city of Alexandroupoli, the Greek prime-minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis declared that the project is meant to turn his country into a global energy hub (Mitsotakis; *in* Associated Press, 2020). Both Greece and Turkey intend to use their material capabilities in the energy field in order to satisfy deep ontological needs related to overcoming shame and stigma, and to gaining respect.

Turkey's multilateral efforts have a material foundation, given the country's extreme dependence on energy, and in particular on gas imports. But they are also propelled by

Turkey's determination not to be taken for less anymore, to better its image in the world. "The Turkish ambition is to be a subject, not an object of Black Sea basin politics, and in particular of energy related initiatives in the region" (Kottari et al., 2013:17). Material arguments related to Turkey's booming economy and belonging to prestigious international clubs have been invoked by the officials in Ankara in support of their claims for recognition and respect. Hence, the "Strategic Plan 2015-2019" (2015) elaborated by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources states: "As of early 2014, our country which is the sixteenth largest economy of the world and the sixth of Europe respectively, is an active member of G-20 in which the strongest economies in the world are duly represented" (p. 4). The same Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources depicts Turkey on its website, under the section "Transit Pipelines and Projects", as "a powerful regional actor that brings together East and West" (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources; 2020b).

When the cooperative energy deals and narratives failed to offer Ankara this long desired role, a more conflict-oriented tone was adopted instead. The behaviour of the Turkish political actors on the energy scene has suffered significant changes in recent years, with Ankara becoming increasingly more assertive and engaging in military and energy endeavours often going hand in hand. Nevertheless, interpreting Turkey's energy goals through strictly geopolitical lenses, linking its quest for more resources to conflict, would be reductionist, as it would ignore the obvious economic motivations that have, so far, contributed to defusing previous political disputes by advancing commercial cooperation, such as in the case of the Turkish Stream. In the end, despite augmented political divergences, Turkey is still regarded by the West as "a NATO member, an economic partner, and a stable country in an unstable region" (Scazzieri; *in* Tidey, 2020), indispensable at present both for the EU and Russia to transport the hydrocarbons from the Caspian-Black Sea to the European markets. Moreover, a limited understanding of Turkey's participation in the regional energy and political dynamics would ignore the deeper stratum of its motivations, its ontological search for overcoming stigma and shame, countering its own insecurities, and for being acknowledged as an important actor by its stronger partners, mostly by the EU and Russia.

Conclusions

Starting from the observation that the Caspian-Black Sea energy scene is not bipolar, divided between the big powers rivalry, namely between the EU and Russia, I introduced a third actor expected to impact on the energy dynamics of the region in the near future: Turkey. Thus, the focused on examining the energy policy and strategies of three of the key actors in the energy dynamics and projects in the Caspian-Black Sea region: the EU, Russia and Turkey, chosen as the best cases to illustrate all the arguments I employed in this research: the dual geopolitical-commercial nature of the energy players' goals, complemented by non-material, existential motivations, significantly impacting on the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* of the energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe.

The investigation undertaken through the main energy policy and strategy documents of the **EU** around the trigger years of 2006 (the first Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute), 2009 (the second gas dispute between Kiev and Moscow) and 2014 (the annexation of Crimea), led to the conclusion that, although being largely depicted as a liberal, market-oriented actor, the EU has also employed a geopolitical narrative related to its desired stronger role on the international scene, in order to overcome its self-perceived and self-narrated dual vulnerability. On the one hand, the EU perceived itself as weak due to the lack of internal solidarity among its Member States when dealing with major suppliers and its subsequent inability to speak with one voice abroad. On the other hand, the European Union has been struggling with trying to find a role for itself in the international arena, a stronger position allowing it to be acknowledged and respected as a major global actor. After decades of attempts to find an identity for itself, at present the EU seems more confident to have come up with a niche for its ambitions, self-narrating itself in the new Green Deal of 2019 as a global leader in the field of fighting climate change and promoting a green economy, able to export its model also to its neighbours. Throughout its engagement with Russia, Turkey and the countries of the Caspian-Black Sea region, the EU has understood the mutual benefits of their cooperation as mainly an export of its own model of energy governance, considered by Brussels to be universal, based on implementing the liberalisation and privatisation of the energy markets and infrastructure. The EU self-narrates itself, in an apparent dissonant voice, as a vulnerable energy importer but as an assertive norms' exporter.

Exploring **Russia**'s Energy Strategy of 2010 and 2020, as well as the general directions and narratives around its energy policy actions, highlighted the fact that, much like the EU, Russia's main energy concern seems to be diversification, namely diversification of

its energy exports in order to reduce its dependence on the European markets. The EU's diversification efforts in order to overcome reliance on Russia led to the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor, while Russia looked further East to China. Nevertheless, as revealed by the analysis of the gas trends for the next years, there are few considerable alternatives able to completely replace the imports of Russian gas to the EU, as well as to entirely redirect the Russian exports towards other markets outside Europe. Thus, despite their narratives and efforts to diversify away from each other, the EU and Russia are expected to remain linked through their energy trade, albeit in smaller volumes, at least for the years to come.

The exploration of the Russian energy strategy narratives I performed in this chapter revealed the fact that, despite being largely assigned the role of an energy superpower, a position it strived indeed to achieve in the early 2000s, in the past years, mostly following the 2006/2009 gas disputes and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia has been intensively self-narrating another role desired to be acknowledged by its European partners, that of a reliable supplier. Both material and non-material considerations underpin Russia's quest for this identity. On the material side, the Russian budget, its economic development and implicitly its domestic stability are highly dependent on stable revenues generated by its energy exports to Europe. On the non-material side, Russia is longing to be still accepted and respected by its closest partner, whose basic trust has been seriously perturbed by their political disputes in the past years: Europe.

Similarly to the EU, Russia has also employed a dual language and behaviour in its energy relations, seemingly oscillating between more market-oriented preferences, while at the same time consolidating the state control over its energy sector and enhancing the monopolistic position of Gazprom. The apparently contradictory goals of the Russian energy strategy may be explained with the help of both the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, as well as through the theoretical framework of *ontological security*. I concluded therefore the analysis of the Russian energy strategy with the observation that the energy disputes with the EU and its transit countries (Turkey and Ukraine) have overlapped cooperative trends of stable energy supplies and renewal of bilateral deals. Cooperation in the field of energy, albeit sinuous at times, managed to survive conflicting positions with its European partners, be it importing or transit states. At the same time however, propelled by anxieties caused by instability in other areas of its existence, Russia has pursued more assertive geopolitical lines of action in the Caspian-Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, determined to overcome shaming and stigma and to assert itself as a powerful regional and global actor.

Analysing **Turkey**'s concerted political and commercial actions and narratives in connection to the energy dynamics of the region, I noted that Ankara's assertive and, at times perceived to be aggressive initiatives of the past years, have been motivated both by material and non-material factors. On the one hand, Turkey's economy is extremely energy-dependent, importing 99% of its total gas consumption and 92% of oil. Confronted with a currency crisis, a slow-down in its booming economy and considerable political contestation at home, the leadership in Ankara needs more stable and sufficient gas supplies at a competitive price in order to maintain a level of economic development satisfactory to the general public and avoid a deep economic and social crisis. On the other hand, energy endeavours backed at times by military and political actions, such as the claims over the natural gas deposits in the EEZ of Cyprus, as well as more peaceful ones, as the major discovery of gas reserves in its own Black Sea waters in 2020, have been used by Ankara as highly symbolic tools to calm its own anxieties and to gain the *ontological security* that it is still possible to overcome stigma and shame, to be accepted, respected and acknowledged as important by the EU and Russia. Both conflict and cooperation, and both material and non-material motivations have been employed by Turkey in shaping its energy strategy and actions. For both the material and non-material purposes mentioned above, Turkey has self-narrated a new desired identity for itself: that of an energy hub, meant to upgrade both its economic status, as well as its role and status on the world's scene.

IV. (RE)SOURCES FOR CONFLICT AND COOPERATION: THE SOUTHERN GAS CORRIDOR AND THE TURKISH STREAM AS 'OBJECTS OF FEAR'

> *"The Trans-Adriatic Pipeline and the Turkish Stream pipeline are poised to repeat the same mistakes of their more famous predecessors – the Nabucco and South Stream pipelines. Both raise more questions than answers and are tools of foreign policies for different states rather than real objectives" (Wiśniewski, 2015:1).*

Introduction

After discussing in the previous two chapters, in more general terms, the wider energy and political context of the Caspian-Black Sea, the current natural gas trends in Europe and the framework of the energy strategies and policies of the key energy players in the region, in this chapter I investigate in more detail how the energy dynamics previously analysed have been shaped and impacted on the faith of the two main natural gas pipeline projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to Europe: the **Southern Gas Corridor** and the **Turkish Stream**.

I discuss them under the concept of 'objects of fear', imported from the theory of *ontological security* I employ in this thesis, in order to explore whether their increased politicisation has been mirrored or not in the actual evolution of the projects, and if the narratives around them reflect the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* under which they have been realised. For this purpose, I bring to discussion key events assumed to have triggered anxieties around them and pessimism about their future, such as the 2015-2016 political dispute between Russia and Turkey, or the protracted conflicts in the Caspian-Black Sea region, with a keen focus on the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. In both cases, I start the discussion from their famous and equally politicised predecessors, the Nabucco and the South Stream pipelines, which I label as 'ghost pipelines', meaning projects that, despite benefitting from an unprecedented support and promotion, never came to existence, yet, they still 'haunt' their successors and the narratives around them built on inherited anxieties and insecurities.

I discuss in detail the actors' motivations that made the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream become a reality almost at the same time, in 2020. Special attention is paid to overcoming the geopolitical reductionist bias surrounding them, analysing also their strong commercial foundations. The exploration of the motivations and politicisation around the Southern Gas Corridor opens a challenging question in this chapter: was the project really necessary, does it actually contribute to enhancing the EU's energy security and to overcoming its anxieties?

With respect to the Russian-backed Turkish Stream, often depicted as a rival to the EU-supported Southern Gas Corridor, I investigate its contested coming into being in the light of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* of the sinuous relations between Russia and Turkey, the two countries behind the project, and I look on how, from being deemed to never exist, the pipeline is at present already shipping gas to Turkey and to some of its neighbours, beyond any geopolitical predictions. The analysis of the evolution of the Turkish Stream led to another challenging debate I propose in this section: will the alleged rival of the Southern Gas Corridor, the Turkish Stream, end up pumping Russian gas into the EU-backed pipeline, against all politicised narratives about their geopolitical roles as political weapons targeted against each other?

I invite therefore to an alternative pathway through the vast material conditions that lie at the foundations of the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe, by proposing to look beyond the apparent geopolitical factors, and to acknowledge also the crucial role of the commercial reasons and actors in deciding the faith of both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream. The investigation of various energy strategies and policies, as well as of the projects developed with the participation of the EU, Russia and Turkey, is done with the help of a new conceptual tool I suggest, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, which facilitates the understanding of seemingly contradictory actions and narratives employed by the key players, bringing to light and explaining how their decisions and behaviours are formed on both material and non-material bases.

I argued in the first chapter of the thesis, when I discussed the theoretical framework of *ontological security*, that, when dealing with existential anxieties that are too abstract to control or too frightening to confront, the actors need something concrete to project their fear upon, they need tangible "objects of fear" (Browning, 2018a:339). An object is something concrete, that can be visualised, measured, numbered, and thus it offers the impression that it can be controlled easier, in order to relieve the anxieties and the ontological insecurities of actors. In the Caspian-Black Sea region, it is the natural gas pipelines that have often played

the role of 'objects of fear', on which various actors projected their anxieties, objects which they blamed for their insecurities, or which they utilised in order to reassert control and calm their ontological insecurities. The pipelines in themselves do not pose any physical threat to the actors that use them as outlets of their fear. They are, however, narrated as such and thus, through this process, the actors' anxieties acquire physical existence. I return to this topic in more detail in the final chapter where I discuss the psychological factors that come to complement the material motivations of the main players on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region, and how this material/non-material complex influences the dynamics of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in which they engage.

I use the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream as the main instruments of analysis on which I base my case study, namely the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* between the EU, Russia and Turkey around the energy projects from the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe. I explore the perpetuum in the next chapter using the theoretical framework of *ontological security* in order to address both the material and the non-material factors that impact on their cooperative or conflictual behaviour towards each other. In the section here below, I follow the sinuous coming into existence of the Southern Gas Corridor and of the Turkish Stream, paying attention to the motivations of the energy actors behind them and discussing their politicisation, the fears and the anxieties around them. At all times, I take into account both material and non-material aspects, while leaving the detailed exploration of the latter to the final chapter of the thesis, dedicated to setting the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in the context of the *ontological security* of energy relationships.

I. The Southern Gas Corridor

1. The Southern Gas Corridor: an overview

The Southern Gas Corridor, launched on 29 May 2018 in Baku, is a large-scale natural gas project at the core of the EU's plans to diversify its gas supply and to avoid reliance on a single supplier. It expands over 3,500 kilometres (km), linking the production fields at the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan to the European markets. It is comprised of four distinct sub-projects, as it starts at the **Shah Deniz 1 and 2** natural gas-condensate fields and extraction facilities on the Caspian shores of Azerbaijan; it then flows from Azerbaijan, through Georgia, to the Turkish border via the **South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP)** and its expansion (SCPx); from there, it crosses Turkey ending at its border with Greece through the **Trans-**

Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP); and from the Turkish-Greek border it follows its final journey through Greece and Albania to Italy, via the **Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)** (Siddi, 2017b; SGC, 2020a; Cohen, 2019).

Figure 1. Southern Gas Corridor
Source: Southern Gas Corridor

The project amounted to a total of 40-45 billion USD construction costs (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018; Siddi, 2017b; SGC, 2020b). Most of the funding was provided through bank loans, with the main funder, the European Investment Bank being owned by the EU member states, while in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development it is the EU member states and the EU institutions that hold a majority of shares. Other investors are the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Siddi, 2019a), and the project reunites a variety of stakeholders, with seven governments and eleven companies taking part (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018).

The **Shah Deniz** 1 extraction field is located approximately 60 km from Baku, in the Caspian Sea and, at the time, contains most of Azerbaijan's proven natural gas reserves (Sandys, 2019), approximately 1 trillion cubic metres (Ibrahimov, 2014). Its development has started on 4 June 1996, when the agreement between the government of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani national energy company SOCAR and foreign oil and gas companies was signed (Ibrahimov, 2014; SGC, 2020c). In 2006 the first sales from the field of Shah Deniz 1 started (SOCAR, 2020) and thus Azerbaijan became a natural gas exporter.

The production field in Shah Deniz 1 has been further developed with its expansion, Shah Deniz 2, the first subsea infrastructure in the Caspian Sea and one of the amplest gas projects in the world, with a total cost of 22.7 billion USD (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018). On 19 September 2013 Gas Sales Agreements were signed

between the Shah Deniz consortium and nine European energy companies (SOCAR, 2020). The field has been operational since 2018, when, on the 30th of June, the first gas started to flow to Turkey via TANAP (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018). The field is thus set to supply the European and the Turkish markets through the TANAP and TAP pipelines, adding 16 bcm/y to the 10 bcm/y already produced by Shah Deniz 1 and hence expected to raise the overall production of Shah Deniz to 26 bcm/y (Hasanov et al., 2020; SGC, 2020b). SOCAR, the Azerbaijan's national oil and gas company, links this commercial and technological development to wider strategic goals, such as "[...] serving strategic interests related to sustainable energy security of the European countries and Turkey" (SOCAR, 2020).

The second segment of the Southern Gas Corridor, the **SCP** pipeline, also known as the BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum) pipeline, was inaugurated on 21 May 2006 and first deliveries from the Sangachal terminal started on 30 September the same year, while natural gas from the Shah Deniz field to Georgia and Turkey began to flow on 15 December 2006. SCP transports 20 bcm/y of natural gas and it follows the same route as its twin, the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) oil pipeline. It runs over 692 km through Azerbaijan and Georgia at a total capacity of 7.41 bcm/y, being owned by the South Caucasus Pipeline Company Limited and operated in tandem by British Petroleum as the technical operator and SOCAR Midstream Operations as the commercial operator (BP, 2020; SGC, 2020d). Expansion plans have been provided for SCP in order to triple the volumes of gas exported through the pipeline, up to 23.4 bcm/y with the possibility to be further expanded to 31 bcm/y (Hasanov et al., 2020; Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018; SGC, 2020d). For this purpose, the construction of a new pipeline across Azerbaijan and Georgia, and two new compressor stations in Georgia have been planned (Hasanov et al., 2020; SGC, 2020d). The extended SCPx, stretching over 489 km and costing 4.5 billion USD, became operational on 30 June 2018 (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018).

The third section of the Southern Gas Corridor, the **TANAP** pipeline, crossing Turkey from its border with Georgia in the East where it connects with SCP, to that with Greece in the West, was launched in the Turkish city of Eskisehir on 12 June 2018 and two weeks later the first gas from Azerbaijan was shipped to Turkey. The initiative had commenced in 2011 when the Azerbaijan-Turkey Memorandum of Understanding was signed, followed by the Azerbaijan-Turkey Intergovernmental Agreement and the Turkey-TANAP Host Government Agreement in 2012 (SGC, 2020a). The pipeline runs over 1850 km, out of which 18 km are a subsea section and it amounted to a total investment of 6.98 billion USD (Ministry of Energy

of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018), with a total export capacity of 16 bcm/y. The EU has funded TANAP with 5 million EUR in 2018 through the Connecting Facility Energy programme (Hasanov et al., 2020). The TANAP shareholders are the Southern Gas Corridor consortium, SOCAR Turkey Energy Inc., Turkey's BOTAŞ and UK's BP (SGC, 2020a).

The fourth and the final section of the Southern Gas Corridor, the **TAP** pipeline, connects with TANAP at the Turkish-Greek border and from there it runs through Turkey, Albania, under the Adriatic Sea, to Italy. The works on the 878 km long pipeline (out of which 105 km run under the Adriatic Sea), with an initial capacity of 10 bcm/y (Cohen, 2019; Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2018) were started in May 2016. They followed the Intergovernmental Agreement signed between Albania, Greece and Italy in 2013 and were finalised in November 2020 (SGC, 2020e). The total investment raised to 4.5 billion USD and it has been designed to satisfy the energy needs of countries in South and South-East Europe (Albania, Greece and Italy) with the intention of reaching out in the future, if expanded, to the more energy-dependent markets in the Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Croatia) (Cohen, 2019). The EU, as the main supporter of TAP, has also made sure to add the reverse flow technology to TAP, from Italy to South-East Europe, so that in the case of supply disruptions or an unexpected rise in demand, the gas could flow backwards, as well as the plan to build an underground storage facility in Albania, as measures to increase its energy security (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014).

For its initial phase, TAP is designed to transport 10 bcm/y of natural gas, for which the European Commission granted a 20-year third party exemption. In this sense, the European Commission made use of the fact that TAP runs exclusively through EU territory and thus, the EU's Third Energy Package regulations apply with respect to unbundling the ownership of the pipelines (the gas producers and exporters cannot be the same with the companies which transport and distribute the gas) and third party access (rules referring to granting non-discriminatory access to other parties to the export, transport and distribution of gas). Nevertheless, through the exemption, the EU made sure that in its preliminary phase, the pipeline can only be used by the companies that signed the initial 25-year agreements. It left however the door open for other suppliers to feed into TAP if, in the future, the pipeline's capacity will be extended to 20 bcm/y, by adding two more compressor stations (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Cohen, 2019). Both TANAP and TAP have been included by the EU on its list of Projects of Common Interest (Hasanov et al, 2020).

The EU-supported Southern Gas Corridor, meant to increase its energy security and gas imports resilience while diversifying away from one single supplier, Russia, has started in 1996, when the first agreement between Azerbaijan and foreign energy companies was signed in order to develop the natural gas production of the Shah Deniz field at the Caspian Sea. The first Azeri gas started to flow in 2006, initially through Georgia to the Turkish border. The final stage of the long-awaited Southern Gas Corridor, the conclusion of TAP, was completed in November 2020 when the Caspian gas started flowing through the pipeline. Nevertheless, its moment of culmination has not been spared of anxieties, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and in the border region between Armenia and Azerbaijan, located only 15 km from the Southern Gas Corridor, has erupted in September 2020. I explore in the next section the sinuous evolution of the Southern Gas Corridor, its politicisation, advantages and shortfalls, in preparation for the case study of the next chapter, the EU-Russia-Turkey energy relations around the natural gas projects from the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe.

2. Nabucco: the 'ghost pipeline' behind the Southern Gas Corridor

Europe's long standing project to diversify its natural gas supplies away from Russia and thus enhance its energy security, the Southern Gas Corridor as it is today, has undergone transformations and has been sidelined at a time when few believed anymore in its chances to happen. The Southern Gas Corridor of today cannot be discussed without first looking at the 'ghost pipeline' that was once at the core of the project, probably the most advertised pipeline that benefitted from the highest concentration of political and diplomatic efforts: Nabucco. Nevertheless, the famous Nabucco never happened, it became a 'ghost pipeline'. The dynamics around it influenced much of what the Southern Gas Corridor came to be today.

In June 2002, five energy companies (Austria's OMV, Hungary's MOL, Bulgaria's Bulgargaz, Romania's Transgaz and Turkey's BOTAŞ) agreed on the construction of Nabucco, a natural gas pipeline meant to transport Caspian natural gas from the Turkey's town of Erzurum, where the SCP pipeline would end, to the major gas hub in Baumgarten (Austria), through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. The initial plan was to transport 8 bcm/y from Azerbaijan, over a distance of 3,000 km, and later to be expanded to 31 bcm/y, with additional gas from the Middle East (Kottari et al., 2013; Penkova, 2014; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). In 2008, the German company RWE joined the project and the Nabucco consortium was formed.

Figure 2. Nabucco
Source: Bankwatch

Nabucco received an unparalleled political and diplomatic support from the EU and the U.S. (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014). The EU made Nabucco a priority and, in 2003, it offered a grant in order to finance 50% of the costs related to the feasibility study (Sartori, 2012; Penkova, 2014; Coote, 2017). In the EU's "Priority Interconnection Plan", one year after the 2006 gas dispute between Russia and Ukraine, the European Commission highlighted the importance of implementing the fourth energy corridor that would transport "alternative gas" from Central Asia, the Caspian region and the Middle East through Nabucco (European, Commission, 2007b:10). The end goal was thus to diversify away the EU's natural gas supplies from Russia. From this point on, Nabucco became "the EU's energy flagship project" (Sartori, 2012:6).

Nabucco has also been strongly supported and advanced by the U.S., as part of its strategic plan launched in the mid-1990s to build an East-West energy corridor from the Caspian to Europe. The SCP gas pipeline, to which Nabucco would have connected, had already been built with American support along with its twin project, the BTC oil pipeline. The Nabucco project, thus envisaged by the U.S., was regarded as a Washington's geopolitical move in order to break the EU away from its energy dependency on Russia (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014).

The new project also unlocked Turkey's ambitions of becoming a regional energy hub in the future, providing it with an upgraded status in the transport of essential hydrocarbons to

Europe. Following its ambition, Ankara has not hesitated in the past years to embark in both projects supported by Russia, as well in those promoted by the West. Thus, on 13 July 2009, the intergovernmental agreements for the EU- and U.S.-backed Nabucco were signed in Ankara. Three weeks later, on 6 August 2009, Russia and Turkey signed the agreement for an alternative project, this time advanced by Moscow, the South Stream, also in Ankara. Ahmet Davutoğlu, the Turkish minister of foreign affairs at the time, offered reassurances that the two apparently competing projects, Nabucco and South Stream, were not rivals and that Turkey did not follow an ideological motivation, but a pragmatic, rational calculation in signing the agreements (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017).

Nevertheless, from the beginning, Nabucco and the South Stream were perceived as rival, competing projects, serving geopolitical purposes. Russia was seen as launching the South Stream as a geopolitical counteraction to the EU's and U.S.' plans to build Nabucco, in the attempt to block it, as the high-capacity pipeline of 31 bcm/y would have represented a forceful competition and a threat to its dominant energy exporter position on the European markets, and, more important, a boost to the EU's political power over that of Russia's in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe (Cain et al., 2012; Coote, 2017).

Given the key moments in its ephemeral conception, such as its inclusion as a priority for the EU's diversification plans away from Russia in the "Priority Interconnection Plan" of 2007, one year after the first gas dispute between Moscow and Kiev, and the sealing of the intergovernmental agreements only months after the 2009 Russia-Ukraine new gas dispute, Nabucco crossed the border of a commercial project passing into the geopolitical realm. The intense, unprecedented political and diplomatic efforts of the major actors behind it, the EU and the U.S., confirm its partial geopolitical nature.

Russia, in its own turn, has been accused of using geopolitical counter measures in order to block Nabucco. Nevertheless, despite the intensive politicisation of the project, Nabucco failed from a combination of commercial motives (Cain et al., 2012).

The first reason of doubt regarding its commercial and technical feasibility was prompted by uncertainties related to the availability of the necessary gas supplies. At the time, the volumes produced by Azerbaijan from its Shah Deniz field totalled 10 bcm/y, and even with the additional 16 bcm/y that Shah Deniz 2 is producing at present, it would have been insufficient for the high-capacity Nabucco announced to deliver 31 bcm/y. The EU has long hoped to find additional sources of supply to feed into its giant pipeline, mainly from Turkmenistan and Iran. However, in order to link Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan, a new pipeline under the Caspian Sea would have had to be constructed, which was not feasible due to the

unsettled, at the time, legal status of the Caspian Sea and to its costs which Turkmenistan did not find attractive, given the fact that it could already export its gas through Russia and China without further major investments. Iran, in its own turn, was not a viable alternative considering the international sanctions against the regime in Tehran and, similar to the case of Turkmenistan, its lack of incentives to participate in a new pipeline investment, having its exports to Asia already secured (Kottari et al., 2013).

The second impediment to Nabucco's realisation was the high cost of the project, estimated at over 10 billion USD. Connecting to the lack of confirmed additional gas sources discussed above, the interest and trust of private and public investors, needed to fund the project, was discouraged, as the companies behind the project were mainly mid-sized enterprises. They would have had to rely on bank loans, for which, in the absence of written agreements with alternative suppliers and exporters, they could not provide the required guarantees (Kottari et al., 2013; Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Ediger and Durmaz, 2017).

As a consequence, in 2008, although it initially backed Nabucco through all political and diplomatic means, the EU had to abandon the project and to scale it down to Nabucco West (Kottari et al., 2013; Penkova, 2014; Ediger and Durmaz, 2017). Nabucco West, the smaller version of Nabucco, was hence proposed in 2012. It was envisaged to transport 10 bcm/y, compared to the 31 bcm/y of its predecessor, and to run on 1,300 km from the Turkish-Bulgarian border to the same destination in Baumgarten, Austria, crossing through Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary (Kottari et al., 2013). Thus, under the new project, building new infrastructure through Turkey was not included anymore. However, in an assertive move, following the cancellation of Nabucco, Azerbaijan and Turkey agreed to replace Nabucco with TANAP, providing themselves for the missing link through the Turkish territory. Moreover, the Shah Deniz consortium continued with the plan to link the Caspian to Europe when, in June 2013, it chose TAP to connect with TANAP, instead of Nabucco West. Therefore, similar to its larger version, Nabucco West too was cancelled (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017).

Despite its unparalleled politicisation and the anxieties it triggered around the perceived geopolitical intentions of the major energy players, Russia, the EU and the U.S., Nabucco was abandoned because of commercial considerations of the smaller state actors, Azerbaijan and Turkey, and of the energy companies behind it. Nabucco became a 'ghost pipeline'.

3. The actors' motivations behind the Southern Gas Corridor

The EU's initial interest in developing the Southern Gas Corridor that would transport natural gas from the Caspian, through the Black Sea region to Europe is considered to have been incited mainly by the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine (Erdogdu, 2014, Coote, 2017; Siddi, 2017c; Pirani, 2018). During the disputes, the natural gas supplies from Russia, via Ukraine, to the European consumers were interrupted for more days during peak winter days, a disturbance that determined many voices, particularly in the EU's former eastern-bloc members, to urge the Union to develop a fourth energy corridor in addition to the existing ones delivering gas from Norway, Russia and Algeria, with the main goal in mind to diversify its natural gas supplies away from Russia. Nabucco was placed at the core of the EU's strategy to diversify away from Russian supplies through a Southern Gas Corridor.

Nevertheless, Nabucco was cancelled by its own promoters due to the lack of long-term secured available supplies and its high investment costs. Following Nabucco's dismissal, Azerbaijan and Turkey proceeded further with the realisation of TANAP and, in 2013, the decision to continue with TAP was sealed as well, with TANAP and TAP therefore as the missing links of the Southern Gas Corridor meant to transport Caspian gas from Azerbaijan to Europe. Having become a gas exporter in 2006, through the SCP, Azerbaijan had the highest interest in continuing to develop the corridor with TANAP through Turkey and with TAP further to Italy. The Southern Gas Corridor has been a vital source of revenues for the country's budget and for the consolidation of the domestic stability of the regime in Baku, as TANAP transports around 70% of all Azerbaijan's gas exports, in addition to the 15% flowing through SCP (Jarosiewicz, 2015). Moreover, it supports Azerbaijan's ambition of being acknowledged as a stable, independent energy exporter, able to make its own political decision in the international arena.

Turkey itself pushed for the plans to build the Caspian corridor to Europe to continue, in its search for the much missed gas supplies, needed for its fast growing, energy-hungry economy. Ankara's ambitions to further develop its economy and to transform itself into an energy hub were dependent on the realisation of TANAP. Moreover, the pipeline was perceived as a mean to ease Turkey's anxieties related to its dependency on Russia and Iran, with which the political relations had been on a rollercoaster, relying instead on a stable, friendly supplier, Azerbaijan (Cain et al, 2012).

Contrary to Nabucco that had been supported through the multilateral efforts of more governments and energy companies, TANAP was realised mainly through the bilateral

cooperation of Azerbaijan and Turkey (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015). The realisation of the project without a significant contribution from any major actor was praised by the leaders in Ankara and Baku as the immense accomplishment of two sister countries who succeeded where the EU failed (Azertac, 2019).

Nevertheless, the fraternal cooperation between Baku and Ankara around TANAP was not spared of disputes between the two partners. Turkey's ambitions to become an energy hub and thus purchase the gas at its borders and then resell it further to the European markets for a profit, led to disagreements between Ankara and Baku that stalled the finalisation of the intergovernmental agreements for more years, between 2008 and 2011. Nonetheless, through the bilateral agreement signed in 2012, Azerbaijan was finally given direct access to the European markets leaving Turkey solely with transit fees and thus setting back its dream of becoming an energy hub (Cain et al., 2012:8). As Azerbaijan's SOCAR holds the majority share in TANAP (58%), it hence controls the gas transit through Turkey, being in position to decide if additional supplies from other sources should be allowed through the pipeline and for setting the transit fees (Jarosiewicz, 2015; Offenberg, 2016). The agreement nevertheless provided for a balancing mechanism, granting also Turkey the opportunity to exercise a certain degree of leverage on Azerbaijan's control over TANAP. According to the provisions of the deal, a maximum of 10 bcm/y of gas can be transported via the pipeline to Europe, meaning that it is up to Ankara to decide the destination of any remaining surplus, to use it for its own domestic market or to transport it to other importers (Jarosiewicz, 2015). Cooperation, regardless of the optimistic political narratives around it and of the commercial success of the collaboration between Azerbaijan and Turkey, has overlapped at times with disputes and displays of mistrust between the two partners, as neither cooperation, nor conflict are pure, binary concepts, they often occur simultaneously in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

Returning to the EU's interests in building an energy corridor that would provide its internal market with alternative natural gas supplies, apart from the Russian ones, I explore the presence of the Southern Gas Corridor in the EU's energy policy and strategy documents throughout the years. The corridor has always been linked to the Union's hope that one day it would not rely on Russia as a single major natural gas supplier. Diversification away from Russia went hand in hand and fed the energy narratives of a number of European actors throughout time.

The EU's efforts to diversify its energy supplies away from Russia have often been linked to the change of roles in the asymmetrical interdependence with Russia, which I

debated in detail in the first chapter. After Vladimir Putin came to power in December 1999, Moscow engaged in more assertive foreign policy actions and narratives, based on Russia's strong energy capacities, while the EU switched from being the strong half of the balance, to the vulnerable one. Nevertheless, the exploration I carried out through the EU's energy policy and strategy documents, revolving along certain trigger years, revealed the fact that diversification was already a concern for the European Community back in 1999, too soon thus to link it to the changes in the domestic and foreign politics of Russia. Hence, the "Security of EU Gas Supply" of 1999 already states that diversification of gas supply sources and routes is needed to enhance energy security (European Commission, 1999), while one year later, the Green Paper of 2000 details the discussion about the need to construct alternative routes from the Caspian and the Mediterranean in order to provide sources of supply alternative to the Russian ones. Or, in its own words: "[...] the best guarantee of security of energy supply is clearly to maintain a diversity of energy sources and supplies" (European Commission, 2000:30). Therefore, despite the widespread opinion in literature that the EU's diversification efforts have been triggered by Russia's changed behaviour, particularly during the Putin administration, using the energy weapon in order to gain geopolitical leverage on the importing states (Proedrou, 2017), the EU manifested interest in providing alternative gas supplies to its markets already before 2000, being, at the time, a more pragmatic actor concerned with ensuring the availability and accessibility of its supplies.

The idea of EU's intense efforts to diversify its gas imports away from Russia is frequently linked to the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine that caused concerns related to Europe's resilience to disruption shocks in the future (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). After the 2006 gas dispute, the EU devised a double strategy in order to enhance its energy supply security: the first direction had a domestic focus, aimed at consolidating its internal energy market so as to facilitate the gas flows between the member states; the second direction had an international dimension, looking at means to diversify its natural gas supplies away from Russia with imports from the Caspian Sea and Middle East. For this, the Southern Gas Corridor was envisaged (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014). Nevertheless, there were more elements that concurred at the same time with the gas disruptions, as the Western energy companies were already showing, at the time, an increased interest in the exploitation and export of the Caspian hydrocarbons, while the U.S. pushed for the realisation of its own goal to reduce the role of Russia and Iran at the Caspian by building an East-West energy corridor from the Caspian to Europe (Jarosiewicz, 2015).

The 2009 gas dispute, which has been sometimes described under dramatic terms such as a "humanitarian crisis" having "long-term economic consequences" (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014:22) prompted indeed the EU's determination to accelerate the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor. Nevertheless, when Nabucco, as the initial key project of the corridor, was cancelled by its promoters because of a complex of commercial reasons related to the uncertainty of the necessary gas supplies and to its elevated costs, the EU abandoned the idea of a Southern corridor and sidelined the project.

Despite the EU's double energy strategy triggered by the 2006/2009 gas disruptions, aimed at consolidating its internal market and at diversifying its natural gas imports, the presence of the Southern Gas Corridor in the EU documents around these two years is rather discreet. The "2020 Energy Strategy" of 2010 reveals the EU's anxieties in the aftermath of the 2009 gas disruption. The opening statement of the document states: "The price of failure is too high" (European Commission, 2010:2), while soon after admitting that the recent gas dispute had exposed Europe's vulnerability (p. 3). Nevertheless, the Southern Gas Corridor is only briefly mentioned when the Commission declares that it will focus on the realisation of the project as a mean to ensure the EU's stability and security of supply. The "EU's Energy Roadmap 2050" of 2011 however does not display any concern or geopolitical language anymore and the focus is overwhelmingly on decarbonisation, renewable and on the social component of energy supplies and does not mention the Southern Gas Corridor anymore, as Nabucco had already been cancelled at that time.

The EU's motivation to realise the Southern Gas Corridor and its concerns have nonetheless surfaced more clearly after the start of the Ukraine crisis. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the following war in the separatist regions of Donbas and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine reminded the EU, particularly through the voice of its Eastern bloc members, of the importance of reviving the Southern Gas Corridor. It was indeed the Ukraine crisis that sealed the EU's decision to finalise the project, which was given priority through the European Energy Union adopted in 2015 and the EU Energy Security Strategy of 2014 (Jarosiewicz, 2015; Siddi, 2017b). Thus, in the "Energy Security Strategy" of 2014, in the midst of the events in Ukraine, the EU states ambitious plans pertaining not only to the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor to diversify the natural gas supplies with imports from Azerbaijan, but also to its expansion in the future with additional supplies from Turkmenistan, Iran and Iraq, along with the creation of a gas hub in the Mediterranean (European Commission, 2014). The Commission admits that the 2006/2009 gas crises represented "a stark 'wake up call' pointing to the need for a common European energy

policy", in order to overcome its vulnerability to external energy shocks (European Commission, 2014:2). Despite its previous policy and strategy documents, which throughout the years constantly avoided to openly mention Russia and Gazprom, in 2014 the EU finally repeatedly names Russia in its Energy Strategy, linking its energy security to the highly concerning "strong dependence" on Russia (European Commission, 2014:2). Thus, the EU complains about the fact that it imports 70% of the gas it consumes and that 39% of these volumes come from Russia. Until this point, the EU, although claiming to ascend to the position of a strong international actor, has been constantly using a recurrent language complaining about 'certain operators', 'particular supplier' etc., without openly naming Russia and Gazprom to which it pointed out.

The European Council in its own turn, in the Conclusions formulated to the above detailed Energy Security Strategy, refrains itself from employing a geopolitical language or from mentioning Russia itself, focusing the discussion rather on the need to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions, as well as on the topics related to energy efficiency and strengthening the internal market. The Council mentions however the Southern Gas Corridor as first on the list of actions to be taken in order to reduce energy dependence and increase the European energy security, along with measures to develop a new gas hub in Southern Europe, to increase the regasification and storage capacity in the gas system in order to increase resilience in case of emergency situations, but also provisions related to the ex-ante assessment by the EU of the future energy intergovernmental agreements (European Council, 2014 b).

Unlike the more hesitant in language European Commission, the European Parliament proved to be more straightforward when calling already in 2012, before the Ukraine crisis, for the acceleration of the new transit corridors, namely the Southern Gas Corridor and the transport facilities from the Eastern Mediterranean. The Parliament emphasised in its "Energy Policy Cooperation with Partners Beyond our Borders" document that diversification should mean new non-Russian energy sources for the Member States dependent on a single supplier, although it failed itself to openly name Gazprom when hinting at the threat represented by the "hostile takeover moves by [...] companies from third countries" (European Parliament, 2012:2). The document also highlights the importance of the Black Sea region to the EU's diversification efforts as the strategic link to the resources of the Caspian and the Middle East and mentions, in this context, "the key importance of the Southern Corridor" (European Parliament, 2012:16).

The key document of the EU's energy policy and strategy, around which the Union's energy actions revolve, the Energy Union that came to light in 2015, links the Ukraine crisis to the EU's intention to diversify its gas supplies away from Russia, although still avoiding to clearly name the annexation of Crimea: "The political challenges of the last months have shown that diversification of energy sources, suppliers and routes is crucial for ensuring secure and resilient energy supplies to European citizens and companies" (European Commission, 2015:4). To this purpose, the Commission continues, the Southern Gas Corridor realisation must be accelerated, an indication to the political nature attributed by the EU in 2015 to the Southern Gas Corridor. Moreover, the Energy Union Package reveals the central role of gas in the EU's preoccupations, including a consistent debate on gas, followed only by brief provisions on oil, nuclear fuel and renewable.

In the most recent evaluation report of the Energy Union, the "Fourth Report of the State of the Energy Union" of 2019, the European Commission declares itself satisfied that its diversification of gas supplies are finally showing results for its member states, while the "Southern Gas Corridor is of a particular importance for central south-eastern Europe, historically dependent on a single supplier" (European Commission, 2019b:23).

At present, the Southern Gas Corridor is being promoted by the EU as enhancing Europe's energy security and fostering regional and European cooperation (European Council, 2020:3), while advancing the idea of its further extension to bring additional supplies of gas from other countries than those which have already been suppliers to the EU, without, again, clearly mentioning Russia (p.7). The Southern Gas Corridor's expansion to the Balkans is detailed as possibly happening in the future through the development of the Ionian-Adriatic Pipeline; the construction of the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector, already under way; the already existing Bulgaria-Romania interconnector; and the development of the reverse flow capacity between Bulgaria and Romania, and between Bulgaria and Serbia (p. 8).

The exploration I performed in the previous chapter through the EU's energy policy and strategy documents elaborated around key trigger years, such as the 1999-2000 political change in Russia, the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, revealed the fact that the EU's preoccupations for diversification of its natural gas supplies away from Russia had occurred already before the accession to power of Vladimir Putin and they have continued, ever since, to be a central preoccupation in the Union's energy strategy. At the same time, while the 2006/2009 gas crises did prompt the EU to advance the idea of a Southern Gas Corridor as an alternative to

Russian natural gas supplies, the project has gained visibility in the EU documents only after the annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine crisis of 2014, when the EU revived its interest in the corridor and put in place its first consistent energy policy, the European Energy Union of 2015.

The Southern Gas Corridor as it is at the moment of writing this thesis, finalised at the end of 2020, would not have happened however without the political and economic efforts of two other actors: Azerbaijan and Turkey. When the energy companies behind Nabucco decided to abandon the project, "[...] the EU's bargaining power was weakened" (Erdogdu, 2014:6). With Nabucco being cancelled, the EU initially lost interest in the Southern Gas Corridor. It was through the efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey to build the TANAP section of the corridor that the project was resuscitated. The EU publicly recognised Azerbaijan's and Turkey's key contribution to the realisation of the project, in the Joint Declaration issued on the occasion of the Sixth Ministerial Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council in February 2020, referring to the "strategic role of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a key enabler of the Southern Gas Corridor" (European Council, 2020:3) and to the "key role of the Republic of Turkey in the successful implementation of the TANAP Project, which is the backbone of the Southern Gas Corridor" (European Council, 2020:5).

In its initial conception phase, when the first pipeline of the corridor, the SCP, was built, the U.S.' motivation to construct an East-West corridor that would transport natural oil and gas from the Caspian to Europe was essential to launching the initiative later taken over by the EU. The U.S.' reasons were mostly related to its geopolitical interests of breaking Europe away from its dependency on Russia and of keeping both Russia and Iran out of the Caspian energy developments. When Washington changed its focus further East to developing gas pipelines from the Caspian in the opposite direction towards India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, the EU, triggered by its own preoccupations with dependency on Russia as a single major gas supplier, initiated the Nabucco project, a large-scale endeavour that failed due to its unrealistic commercial and financial goals and thus Brussels sidelined the Southern Gas Corridor. However, Azerbaijan and Turkey did not. Ankara and Baku united their efforts in building the second pipeline, TANAP, connecting to the initial one, the SCP, and thus bringing the corridor closer to Europe's gates, at the border between Greece and Turkey. Anxieties prompted by the 2006/2009 gas disruptions and the 2014 annexation of Crimea revived the EU's interest in finalising the Southern Gas Corridor and hence the construction of its final leg, the TAP pipeline has started.

The Southern Gas Corridor came to an end in November 2020, after a sinuous and lengthy evolution, influenced by the variety of motivations of the diverse actors behind it, be it governments, international actors, energy companies or even non-governmental organisations. I explored in this section only the obvious, upper layer of their motivations. I hinted however that there might be more to the actors' evident material reasons for seeing the project accomplished. I analyse in the final chapter of the thesis the deeper stratum of their intentions, the ontological needs that prompted the key energy players to insist on realising the Southern Gas Corridor and that led to the presence or to the absence of politicisation of the narratives around it. I examine in the part below the various arguments that underpin either the geopolitical or the commercial nature of the Southern Gas Corridor, discussing the dual, heterogeneous nature of the energy projects, similar to that of the actors' motivations behind them, while pointing out at the reductionist nature of either of these projects as they consider solely the material factors that drive the decisions of the energy players.

4. Overcoming the politicisation bias: commercial and political pillars of the Southern Gas Corridor

When the EU named, in its most important energy policy document - the Energy Union Package (2015), the Southern Gas Corridor as a priority project that must be intensified in order to enable diversification of natural gas supplies, and placed it in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, it confirmed the political nature of the corridor. Even before that, the EU's decision to build a web of pipelines that would support its hope to diversify away from Russia and hence increase its energy security, has been often considered to have been triggered by the 2006/2009 gas disruptions from Russia through Ukraine that generated anxieties related to the security of the natural gas supplies to Europe (Erdogdu, 2014, Coote, 2017; Siddi, 2017c; Pirani, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019).

Nevertheless, the Southern Gas Corridor is not a homogenous project (Cain et al., 2012). Thus, while Nabucco might have entailed more geopolitical considerations around it, its cancellation was caused by commercial reasons advanced by the companies promoting it. Also, its successor, TANAP, has been argued to be driven less by geopolitical motivations, and more by commercial ones (Cain et al., 2012), namely by Azerbaijan's need to secure its gas export revenues, particularly in the context of the decline in its oil output, along with Turkey's search for additional supplies for its fast energy-consuming economy.

When TANAP was chosen instead of Nabucco, the narratives around the Southern Gas Corridor as a whole inherited the dynamics developed around its predecessor, Nabucco. Although it was preferred to Nabucco West for commercial reasons, providing a cheaper and a shorter route (Koranyi, 2014), both TANAP and TAP have been analysed, at times, in close connection to the geopolitical motivations of the state actors behind them, or to the fears generated by the conflicts in the regions they cross. Thus, the pipelines forming the Southern Gas Corridor have been described as being vulnerable to the "endemic instability" in the South Caucasus, as a foreign policy extension of the exporting states, or as a source of national empowerment and diplomatic success for the transit states (Dokos and Tsakiris, 2014:104). The pipeline project has raised some pessimist views regarding to its future and viability, on geopolitical considerations, being discussed in the context of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh), or of the rapprochement between Russia and Turkey which has been seen as impeding on the EU-Turkey cooperation (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Only a few years before its completion, TAP was labelled as a "virtual pipeline", a foreign policy tool, a pipeline that was doomed to exist only in the geopolitical narratives of its promoters (Wiśniewski, 2015:1).

In the same geopolitical tone, there were also voices that praised the EU's initiative to revive the Southern Gas Corridor against the "iron embrace of Russian pipelines" (De Carbonnel and Vukmanović, 2017), expressing fear about Russia's perceived intention to obstruct it. The project was described as "another sphere of the geopolitical conflict between Russia and the West" (Jarosiewicz, 2015:5). TANAP however was neither opposed, nor openly disapproved by Moscow, which, due to the pipeline's smaller capacity compared to Nabucco, did not perceive it as a competition (Jarosiewicz, 2015). Moscow's motivation was based on pragmatic calculations: it has had no reason to block the Southern Gas Corridor as, in the future, it might become an outlet for its own natural gas exports to Europe, a debate to which I return later in this section. Moreover, in 2018, TAP was threatened to be switched off not by Moscow, but by Rome. The Eurosceptic government led by Giuseppe Conte that came to power in Italy in 2018 declared the project as being useless and redundant given the falling gas demand in Italy and refused to continue with its construction (Andrei, 2018). In addition to this event, TAP was in danger of being once more blocked in Italy, the very last part of the Southern Gas Corridor, this time at the pressures of local NGOs in the Puglia region requesting for the project to be cancelled as it would have led to the cutting of 448 olive trees, opening thus environmental debates around the pipeline (Cohen, 2019).

Despite the anxieties fuelled by a routinised perception on the Russia versus the West energy relations and projects, it was also the EU that has been criticised for using the Southern Gas Corridor as a geopolitical instrument to enhance its position in the competition with Russia (Jarosiewicz, 2015; Siddi, 2017c). Notwithstanding the EU's dual nature as a liberal and geopolitical actor, which I debate later in the thesis, its geopolitical motivations that allegedly underpinned the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor encompass more nuances. As Siddi (2017c) notices, the sub-projects that compose the Southern Gas Corridor are operated by a variety of state and private companies. The state enterprises or companies where states hold significant shares overall dominate the project, such as BP, SOCAR, BOTAŞ, SNAM, Fluxys or TPAO. Their links to the governments of the states where they are established or operate raise questions related to their own influence and geopolitical calculations that could be exerted on an energy project such as the Southern Gas Corridor (Siddi, 2017c). In an interview for this research, Stuart Elliott[28], Gas Writer at S&P Global Platts, highlighted further that with the Southern Gas Corridor heavily backed by the U.S. and the European Commission, there is a geopolitical/gas supply security element to its development.

In the general politicisation trend of the Southern Gas Corridor, it was probably the first and the oldest pipeline of the project, the SCP, that has been most intensively debated in a geopolitical framework, along with its twin, the BTC oil pipeline. The SCP and the BTC projects have been part of the U.S. sustained diplomatic and political efforts to open an East-West energy corridor to transport hydrocarbons from the Caspian to Europe, with the intention to contain both Russia's and Iran's influence in the Caspian and the Caucasus, and to pull Europe out from its interdependent relationship with Moscow (Frappi, 2014; Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Orazgaliyev, 2017). Thus, the SCP and BTC pipelines have been linked to a geopolitical understanding of the big powers' rivalry in the Caspian, as a tool of the Western powers to decrease Russia's economic and political leverage on the region and on Europe.

Moreover, the SCP pipeline has been feared to be vulnerable to the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus, given its proximity to both South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. During the 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russian troops in South Ossetia, a portion of the SCP in Georgia has been temporarily closed after it was announced that it had been hit by the Russian army (Siddi, 2017c), although shortly after BP - British Petroleum

[28] T7: Interview conducted on 14 May 2020.

confirmed that no damage had been inflicted on the infrastructure and the pipeline had been closed as a measure of precaution. As Loïc Simonet[29], Senior External Cooperation Officer at OSCE, noted in the interview offered for this research, the energy flow from the Caspian Sea to Europe, through the South Caucasus, was sometimes overpoliticised, as energy supplies have never been interrupted by politics.

In September 2020, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and the secessionist unrecognised republic on the one hand, and Azerbaijan, on the other hand, has erupted at a level of unparalleled violence in the past decades. The contact line between the Armenian and the Azerbaijan forces lies only about 15 km away from the SCP pipeline and, as Armenia has simulated attacks on the infrastructure before (Siddi, 2017c; Yesevi, 2018), fears that it might be hit, only weeks before the official completion of the Southern Gas Corridor, have reignited discussions about the vulnerability of the energy pipelines in the region to the conflicts and instabilities around the Caucasus and Turkey. Such debates have been rather largely circulated when discussing the energy infrastructure of the region in connection to the conflicts around them (Winrow, 2007; 2013; Koranyi, 2014; Siddi, 2017c; Bayramov, 2020a; 2020b; Widdershoven, 2020). The interviewee O9[30], working at the OSCE, expressed a similar view that energy supply immediately follows the outcome of a conflict. In 2020, unlike previous years when clashes took place, the military confrontation moved beyond Nagorno-Karabakh, inside Armenia and Azerbaijan. Among the targets, the Armenian military attacked the Tovuz region and Ganja city in Azerbaijan, located only a few kilometres from the SCP, BTC and Baku-Supsa natural gas and oil pipelines transporting Azerbaijani hydrocarbons to Turkey and to wider Europe. The attacks in the vicinity of the energy infrastructure of Azerbaijan prompted anxieties leading to depict them as threats to the regional and European energy infrastructure (Bayramov, 2020a; Bayramov, 2020b; Widdershofen, 2020). SOCAR and BP announced however that the Southern Gas Corridor infrastructure was not affected and operations continued as normal (Mustafayeva, 2020), although SOCAR representatives had earlier denounced the Armenian attacks as intending to disrupt and compromise the Southern Gas Corridor waiting, at that time, to be finalised at the end of 2020 (Bayramov, 2020a). Despite the fears triggered by the military confrontations around the energy infrastructure, the pipelines are considered to be less vulnerable to physical attacks at present as disruptions would be limited and quickly mitigated (Meliksetian, 2020). If successful, the attacks would have caused material losses to Azerbaijan, albeit limited, but

[29] O9: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.
[30] O9: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.

they would have rather targeted the reliability of gas and oil transports through the region and Azerbaijan's credibility as a safe supplier to Europe.

The newly erupted conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh has triggered concerns related mostly to the redefinition of roles in the Caspian-Black Sea region. Besides the Western powers (the OSCE, the U.S. and the EU) and Russia, which have been traditionally involved in the stabilisation of the region, a new actor entered the scene in 2020, claiming to take over where the other have failed: Turkey. For decades Russia has been assumed to be Armenia's protector, providing it with military support in its conflict against Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey's implication, openly on the side of its kin Azerbaijan, has thus been interpreted as opening a new theatre of confrontation by proxy between Ankara and Moscow, along with those in Syria and Libya (Broers, 2020). Turkey has indeed strived to play the role of a new, strong regional leader, which must be recognised and accepted as such by the international community. Referring himself to the peace process coordinated throughout decades by Russia, France and the U.S., under the OSCE Minsk Group, president Erdoğan denounced the fact that they lost the right to coordinate peace initiatives and announced that Turley was ready to take over (World Today News, 2020).

In its own turn, Russia took time to express a clear position towards the conflict and Turkey's claims. In a rather unexpected move, despite the expectations that it would protect its long-standing ally in the region, Armenia, against the Ankara-backed Azerbaijan, in November 2020 Moscow announced that it brokered a peace deal between Erevan and Baku that inclined the balance significantly in the favour of Azerbaijan, allowing it to keep the seven districts and a part of Nagorno-Karabakh gained from Armenia during the confrontations (Popescu, 2020). Nevertheless, this will be done under the condition that Russia will station 2,000 militaries in the conflict area, prompting concerns that this would considerably diminish Azerbaijan's independence from Moscow while turning Nagorno-Karabakh into a new Abkhazia or South Ossetia (Popescu, 2020). What Moscow achieved, by sacrificing Armenia, where many condemned the deal as a betrayal (Losh, 2020), was to deepen its relationship with the stronger, military and energy-wise, Azerbaijan. But, most important, Russia managed to respond to Turkey's demands and solve the conflict in favour of Azerbaijan, while actually depriving Ankara of its claimed role to be the new regional decision-maker. It kept Turkey out, while maintaining it close at the same time. Russia has thus opted for enhancing its cooperation with Azerbaijan and defusing an escalation of the conflict with Turkey's military involvement, despite fuelling more tensions in Armenia. It based its decision on both pragmatic considerations, related to the need to stabilise its

neighbourhood and thus its own part of the Caucasus, paradoxically securing in this way the safety of the competing Southern Gas Corridor, but also on less material motivations, prompted by the intention to reaffirm its undisputable dominant role in the region, while revealing the EU's weakness and depriving Turkey from the same ambition. It is worth noting that, despite their opposing views elsewhere, Ankara and Moscow consolidated their partnership, albeit not in line with Turkey's initial attempts to challenge Russia.

As Popescu (2020) fairly observes, whoever wins from the deal, the EU is the one who certainly loses. Despite its self-narrated role as a strong actor determined to "act promptly to prevent conflict, be able and ready to respond responsively yet decisively to crises [...] in Europe and its surrounding", as stated in its Global Strategy (Barseghyan, 2020), the EU failed to respond convincingly once more to the challenges of the South Caucasus, even when the military confrontations were said to endanger and discredit the safety of its Southern Gas Corridor, only weeks before being officially finalised. Already criticised for being unable to contribute to the resolution of the conflict in previous years (Mikhelidze, 2013; Abbasov, 2014), the EU admitted through the voice of its head of Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, that there is little the EU can do about the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh apart from issuing statements and making phone calls (Borrell; *in* Rettman, 2020).

Following its own goals to enhance its position as an energy exporter with all the benefits associated, Azerbaijan has carefully balanced between Russia and the West, in an attempt to maintain a secure environment that would allow its goals to be fulfilled (Ibrahimov, 2014; Penkova, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015; Shahbazov, 2017). The deputy vice-president of SOCAR, Vitaly Baylarbayov (quoted by Gotev, 2020), declared that the Southern Gas Corridor is not in competition with Russia's project, the Turkish Stream and opened the door to the possibility that, as soon as the final section of the TAP project is finalised, there might be other exporters that would pump natural gas through the Southern Gas Corridor, including Russia. Despite the widely circulated narrative in Azerbaijan that the Southern Gas Corridor does not entail any (geo)political motivations, the government in Baku has constantly attempted to link the realisation of the project to its main foreign policy goal: the resolution of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, where its European partners were expected to formally recognise the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and to call for the withdrawal of the Armenian army form the occupied territories. Europe, however, did not follow through Baku's hope and maintained a distant position towards the conflict.

Two opposing opinions hence emerged. The view that, by linking its energy exports to foreign policy objectives, Azerbaijan has, in reality, failed to transform the Southern Gas

Corridor into a pure commercial project (Jarosiewicz, 2015). And the opinion that, precisely by failing to connect its energy strategy to its political goals, Azerbaijan has, in fact, altered the geopolitical nature of the Southern Gas Corridor, by making a commercial decision rather than a political one to continue with implementing the corridor (Mikhelidze, 2013). This division of points of view supports the argument of this thesis that the energy players in the Caspian-Black Sea region adjust their motivations and their narratives based on the need to preserve their physical and their existential security and thus their apparently diverging actions and behaviours are a sign of mixed conflict and cooperative attitudes they display, either in alternation, or simultaneously.

The brief review of the debate about the geopolitical or commercial nature of the Southern Gas Corridor revealed, with few exceptions, the tendency to polarise the discussion in two opposing directions: the pipelines as geopolitical instruments, vulnerable to political instabilities and extensions of foreign policy goals, or the project as a commercial endeavour advanced by pragmatic actors motivated by satisfying their energy needs or their revenue gains. Nevertheless, as I highlighted above, the Southern Gas Corridor is not a homogenous venture, as the actors' motivations and behaviour differ among them, across time or in relation with different pipelines of the project. I agree with the argument of the mixed commercial-geopolitical dynamics of the Southern Gas Corridor, but, nevertheless, I emphasise once more that reducing the motivations of the energy players around the project strictly to material considerations, be it of a commercial or geopolitical nature, even if taken together in a mix, is not sufficient to explain their decisions and behaviour, which frequently overlaps cooperative and conflictual attitudes towards each other. The deeper layer, of their *ontological security* needs, must be explored to explain this *conflict-cooperation perpetuum,* an exercise which I carry out in the last chapter.

In preparation to this final stage, I discuss here below the shortcomings and perspectives for the future viability and expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor, in order to see if all the political and financial efforts behind the project are being justified solely by material explanations that account to its economic importance for Europe's diversification of natural gas supplies. Thus, I open up the question: was the Southern Gas Corridor really necessary?

5. The material contribution of the Southern Gas Corridor to enhancing the EU's ambitions and to countering its anxieties

The Southern Gas Corridor is, at the present, the EU's single new alternative pipeline project destined to import natural gas from the Caspian region from other suppliers than Russia, with the ambition to expand it in the future with further supplies from other Caspian states, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean. The large-scale project stretching over 3,500 km and six countries, from the Caspian Sea to the Adriatic shores of Italy, has gone through a sinuous process of coming into being, being initiated in the 1990s by the U.S., later taken over by the EU, only to be cancelled shortly after by the energy companies behind it, but soon revived through the efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey, and in the past years of the EU. A multitude of actors (states, companies, international organisations) and intentions have been standing at the base of the Southern Gas Corridor, in a dynamic amalgam of commercial and (geo)political motivations I explored in the previous parts.

Although the first pipeline of the corridor, the SCP, was realised by Azerbaijan with U.S. support and the second one, TANAP, was mainly the result of the efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey, and despite the decisive role of the energy companies behind it in shaping its destiny, the Southern Gas Corridor has been intensively associated with the EU, which has thus been imagined and narrated as holding the paternity of the project. As a consequence, it has been at times framed as an instrument of the geopolitical rivalry between the EU and Russia on the energy scene.

After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the idea of the corridor has indeed been resuscitated also by the EU through its energy policy and strategy, in the effort to overcome its own perceived vulnerability to dependency on a single major natural gas supplier, namely Russia, and thus provide alternative sources and routes for gas supply to the European markets. Thus, the Southern Gas Corridor, as discussed above, has been closely linked to the EU's energy security-building goals, it has transgressed the line of a purely commercial project, and it has become a security issue as well. Nevertheless, despite the political debates around it, I will argue in the last chapter that there was actually more to this material value of the project, be it of a commercial, or of a security nature. The Southern Gas Corridor has turned into a confidence-building and a self-esteem stimulant for the EU, in its efforts to overcome its own anxieties and define its self-narrative and identity. Notwithstanding its economic motivations, it has also become a mechanism to calm the EU's anxieties, its ontological insecurity. The EU has nonetheless narrated mainly the importance of the pipeline project in consolidating its physical security, in overcoming the dependence on

natural gas supplies from Russia. But will the Southern Gas Corridor indeed contribute to its declared objective, of a material justification, to surmount the EU's physical insecurity?

At the time of its finalisation, at the end of 2020, the total capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor is 10.9 bcm/y. However, in 2019, the EU's natural gas consumption reached 469.6 bcm/y (Sönnichsen, 2020). It means that the Southern Gas Corridor provides a mere 2.32% out of the total current natural gas needs of the EU. As a consequence, I agree that the Southern Gas Corridor's contribution to the EU's goal of diversification away from the Russian natural gas supplies and of changing its overall security of gas supply is negligible (Cain et al., 2012; Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Koranyi, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015; Siddi, 2017b; Pirani, 2018; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). It is "like a drop in the ocean" (Paul and Gurbanov, 2014:5). Moreover, at the current market prices, the natural gas imported from Azerbaijan is less competitive on the EU market, being less attractive in comparison to cheaper LNG available from the U.S. and Qatar, and to the less expensive Russian pipeline gas (Pirani, 2016; Siddi, 2018c). Stuart Elliott[31], Gas Writer at S&P Global Platts, in his interview for this thesis also agrees that on purely commercial terms, the Southern Gas Corridor seems an expensive way to get limited gas into Europe and that its further expansion stands little chances as well to be feasible. This despite TAP's consortium bold, but apparently minority opinion, that it will "ensure the security of Europe's energy supply for decades to come" (TAP, 2017:3).

Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the Southern Gas Corridor will contribute to the gas supply needs of Italy, increasing its imported volumes by 8 bcm/y through TAP (Jarosiewicz, 2015). Although having a marginal contribution to the EU's natural gas demand, it is important for the security of the gas supply of the countries in South-East Europe where the gas markets are dependent on imports and mostly reliant on a single supplier. As a key expert[32] interviewed for this thesis noticed, the gas demand in South-East Europe may increase in the next years, contrary to the trend towards stagnating gas demand in the rest of Europe, due to gas gradually replacing coal for power generation in order to enable the countries involved to meet their CO2-reduction targets. Thus, the Southern Gas Corridor could, in the future, provide Bulgaria with the much needed additional gas supplies through the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector and the countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro) with more volumes of gas through the planned Ionian-Adriatic Pipeline (Hafner and Tagliapietra, 2014; Jarosiewicz, 2015;

[31] T7: Interview conducted on 14 May 2020.
[32] T4: Interview conducted on 11 May 2020.

Pirani, 2016; Siddi, 2017b), as also agreed by the interviewee O1[33], although interestingly noting that the Southern Gas Corridor is highly symbolic, offering a new source of supply.

The EU has boldly engaged into advancing the idea to expand the Southern Gas Corridor in the future, doubling its capacity in order to bring in additional volumes of natural gas from Turkmenistan, Iran, Iraq and possibly the Eastern Mediterranean, through the development of the Ionian-Adriatic Pipeline, the finalisation of the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector, the already existing Bulgaria-Romania interconnector, and the development of the reverse flow capacity between Bulgaria and Romania, and between Bulgaria and Serbia (European Commission, 2014; European Council, 2020).

Nevertheless, for the time being, the Southern Gas Corridor cannot be expanded with further gas supplies from Azerbaijan. For the future though, the government in Baku and the representatives of the national energy company are optimistic about the possibility to extend the production capacity of the Shah Deniz field with its third phase, which, together with Shah Deniz 2, are expected to deliver an additional 21 bcm/y of natural gas by 2030 (Hasanov et al., 2020). In addition, the Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev, quoted by Gotev (2019), as well as the deputy vice-president of the national energy champion SOCAR, Vitaly Baylarbayov (Gotev, 2020), offered assurances that the international energy companies are already involved in developing other offshore fields, such as Absheron, Umid and Babek, and that Shah Deniz 3 and Shah Deniz 4 are a strong possibility. Rovshan Sadigbayli[34], Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Republic of Azerbaijan to the OSCE, assured himself in the interview I conducted for this research that, despite concerns related to the fact that Azerbaijan might not be able to provide the necessary additional supplies, it considers using other suppliers for its pipelines (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia) being willing to play a new role, that of a transit country. The former EU Commissioner for Energy from 2010 to 2014, Günther Oettinger, declared as well that the Southern Gas Corridor is indeed set to double its volumes to Europe within the next years (Gotev, 2019), while an official[35] from the European Commission in Brussels sustained the view on the other end of the pipeline in Baku, that no matter the potential problems in Azerbaijan, the Southern Gas Corridor is governed by the EU regulatory framework and by long-term contracts and it will prove to be successful.

[33] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.
[34] D7: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.
[35] O5: Interview conducted on 28 November 2017.

Nevertheless, already by 2025, the BP forecasts that the output from the Shah Deniz 1 field will decline, while the Shah Deniz 2 will reach its plateau production of approximately 16.6 bcm/y, and thus the two sites will come to amount to a total of 23 bcm/y (Pirani, 2016), while its domestic consumption has been increasing leading to Azerbaijan resuming the imports of natural gas from Russia in 2018 (Cohen, 2019). Expanding the Southern Gas Corridor according to the EU's and the Azerbaijan's ambitions up to 20-25 bcm/y through TAP, would thus find Baku short of considerable gas volumes that would be needed to expand the Southern Gas Corridor. Azerbaijan's export capacity to Europe is thus set to remain limited in the very near future (Sartori, 2012; Pirani, 2016; Siddi, 2017b; Cohen, 2019), an opinion also confirmed by James Henderson[36], Director of Natural Gas Programme, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies in the interview offered for this thesis.

With Azerbaijan most likely unable to feed the necessary additional supplies for the Southern Gas Corridor to double its capacity in the near future, the EU has circulated the idea of reaching other suppliers in the Caspian, the Middle East or the Eastern Mediterranean. In the aftermath of the annexation of Ukraine, the EU stated in its "Energy Security Strategy" of 2014 the intention to diversify the natural gas supplies away from Russia, with imports from Azerbaijan through the Southern Gas Corridor, but also to expand it in the future with additional supplies from Turkmenistan, Iran and Iraq, along with the creation of a gas hub in the Mediterranean (European Commission, 2014).

Although the EU's ambitions are in line with its objective to overcome dependency on a single major supplier, namely Russia, and despite the fact that its intentions have been given a major political value by being included in the Union's key energy policy and strategy documents, its goals might prove to be difficult to support by reality, at least in the near future. I debate here below the conditions for the EU's plan to expand the Southern Gas Corridor to materialise, for the purpose of investigating into the viability of the material justifications offered by Brussels in support of the project. One of the solutions to feed additional volumes of gas into the corridor, namely more exports from Azerbaijan, is, as discussed before, under doubt, given the country's limited availability of supplementary gas in the next years.

Besides Azerbaijan, the EU has included more alternative options to import more natural gas through the Southern Gas Corridor, in order to confirm, through commercial arguments, the political importance it was given.

[36] A3: Interview conducted on 30 April 2020.

The first option considered by the EU is to bring additional gas from the other side of the Caspian Sea, from Turkmenistan, which could provide a valuable amount of 30 bcm/y (Hasanov et al., 2020). For this purpose, an undersea new pipeline would have had to be constructed, linking Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan. The idea of the so-called Trans-Caspian Pipeline has been launched already back in 1996 by the U.S., as part of its earlier mentioned plan to build and East-West energy corridor from the Caspian to Europe. The EU itself took over the role of negotiating with Turkmenistan already back in the 1990s (Paul and Gurbanov, 2017; Hasanov et al., 2020). The initial project, meant to bring natural gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, under the Caspian Sea, to Europe has been opposed by Russia and Iran under the dispute for determining the legal status of the Caspian Sea and the consequential exploration rights of the littoral states, as the new pipeline would have bypassed the existing Russian gas infrastructure from the Caspian to Europe (Penkova, 2014). The projects have thus been long delayed due to the unsettled, until 2018, legal status of the Caspian Sea. The August 2018 agreement gave the Caspian a special status as 'neither a sea nor a lake', and granted each of the five littoral states 15 nautical miles from its shore for mineral exploration and a further 10 nautical miles for fishing, but left status of the sea bed unresolved. Therefore, projects outside the 15 nautical mile areas along the shoreline remain unlikely to be developed in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, although initially interested in the perspective, Turkmenistan later on lost its interest in the project and did not find it attractive anymore, faced with the possibility of already exporting its gas through Russia and China without further major investment (Kottari et al., 2013; Pirani, 2018). Thus, already in 2003, Russia and Turkmenistan signed a 25-year export agreement allowing Gazprom to buy Turkmen natural gas for a 60% discount, which offered a double commercial gain: on the one hand, Russia would re-sell Turkmen gas on the European markets for a profit; and on the other hand, it would counter competition and the EU's diversification plan by leaving little volumes of Turkmen available to other buyers (Penkova, 2014). Nevertheless, in the past years in has been another actor that has offset the EU's plans to expand its flagship project, the Southern Gas Corridor, with Turkmen gas: China. Confronted with the perspective of delays and investments on its own for a new pipeline, Turkmenistan adopted a pragmatic approach and chose to sell most of its natural gas to China, which also built the necessary export pipelines eastwards Siddi, 2017b). The small remaining volumes could however be exported by Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan through swap deals with Iran and thus, if needed, Azerbaijan could ship some additional quantities of gas

through the Southern Gas Corridor (Siddi, 2019a). Nevertheless, these would be insufficient to double the corridor's capacity as hoped by the EU.

The EU's long-standing efforts to attract exports of Turkmenistan gas open another challenging discussion about the Union's dissonance in narratives. For example, in the "Energy Policy Cooperation with Partners Beyond our Borders", the European Parliament complains about "[...] the high concentration of fossil fuel reserves in largely unstable and undemocratic countries, [which] makes the EU vulnerable" (European Parliament, 2012:10), yet, a few pages later, it "[...] asks the Commission to continue working to strengthen the EU's relations with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan" (p. 16), thus contradicting the EU's quest for 'democratic gas'. The interviewee O1[37] confirmed the fact the although the relatively few countries in the world that have fossil fuels have different political systems from that of the EU, the EU has little choice because it is dependent on their energy exports, comparing the situation to that of the LNG, which is promoted to the general public as being greener, when in fact its production is actually very polluting. Still, the EU imports LNG from the U.S. because it needs to protect its own automobile exports to the U.S. (O1). In this light, the EU has been criticised for contravening its own claims to follow a values-based foreign policy (Siddi, 2019a).

The second option envisaged by the EU to find additional supplies for the extension of the Southern Gas Corridor is the prospected EastMed pipeline. The natural gas reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean basin, recently discovered, have been estimated to 3,400 bcm, although their real size is still to be evaluated. Out of these, Egypt's Zohr field, discovered in 2015, is by far the largest with 845 bcm proven reserves, followed by Israel's Tamar and Leviathan fields with 282 and respectively 621 bcm. The EU's hopes are however linked to another country of the Eastern Mediterranean, an EU member state, Cyprus. In 2011, 2018 and 2019 Cyprus made important natural gas discoveries in its EEZ, although its gas fields, Aphrodite, Calypso, Onesiphoros and Glaucus are considerably more modest compared to those of its neighbours, estimated at about 500-600 bcm, although the exact proven reserves are yet to be validated (Mills, 2018; Andrei, 2019; Koukakis, 2019).

Already in its Green Paper of 2000, the EU opened the possibility for alternative routes to be built from the Caspian and the Mediterranean in order to provide sources of supply alternative to the Russian ones, while the idea of a pipeline linking Cyprus to the continental Europe was prioritised, under the Southern Gas Corridor, in the key document of

[37] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020

the “European Energy Strategy” in 2014. Moreover, the EastMed pipeline has been included on the list of Projects of Common Interest of the EU, as a sign of its importance to the Union’s energy goals. Nevertheless, the prospects for the EastMed pipeline from Cyprus to happen are not optimistic for the time being, due to numerous political, commercial and technological constraints. First, a pipeline of such magnitude that would become the lengthiest undersea pipeline in the world (Gatopulos, 2020), through the Mediterranean, would be an overinvestment of approximately 20 billion USD (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Second, it would pose significant logistical and geological difficulties given the nature of the seabed it would have to cross (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Third, and most important, in the case of the EastMed project, political challenges would indeed represent a deterring factor to its implementation. Turkey contests the right of Cyprus, as an island, to own territorial waters and an EEZ, due to its own individual interpretation of the law of the sea and considers that the blocks where the natural gas reserves have been discovered belong either to its continental shelf, or to the unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a secessionist entity recognised only by Ankara, which seceded through war from the Southern Cyprus following the conflict in 1974. The alternative to the long and not commercially feasible version of the EastMed from Cyprus to Italy would be to build a shorter and cheaper pipeline from Cyprus to Turkey. However, due to the intense political disputes between Nicosia and Ankara, and to Turkey’s claims over the Cyprus’s territorial waters and EEZ, such a project stands little to no chance to be realised under the current political format. The most feasible option would be for Cyprus to export its natural gas to the nearby Egypt, together with Israel, benefitting from a very short distance between the exploration blocks in Cyprus and the already existing large LNG facilities in Egypt. Therefore, the EU’s plans to connect a future pipeline, EastMed, to the Southern Gas Corridor, in order to double its capacity would be challenged by both commercial and geopolitical factors related to the dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Besides Turkmenistan and Cyprus, other suppliers have been considered by the EU in time, such as Iran and Northern Iraq. However, Iran, similarly to Turkmenistan, did not find the option of investing in a pipeline under the Caspian Sea attractive, having its exports to Middle East, Pakistan and East Asia, where it plans to export LNG in the future, already secured. Moreover, the international sanctions against the regime in Tehran delayed even further this alternative (Kottari et al., 2013). Northern Iraq, once considered as well as an alternative supplier of natural gas, has proved so far to be a difficult alternative in terms of its security. The Northern part of Iraq, where the oil and natural gas reserves in sight are located,

has been under the control of the Kurdish autonomous government in Erbil, in dispute both with the central government in Baghdad, as well as with Turkey. Until the security and political conditions in Iraq normalise, the EU and Turkey can hardly rely on Northern Iraq to become a long-term supplier for the Southern Gas Corridor.

Nevertheless, probably the most interesting challenge to the EU's desire to achieve its diversification goal away from Russia through the Southern Gas Corridor is the very provenience of the future additional supplies to be shipped through its pipelines in its second phase.

In January 2020, the Turkish Stream, a Russian-backed project, started operating bringing natural gas from Russia to Turkey, under the Black Sea. In the case of a lack of additional volumes of gas needed for the expansion of the Southern Gas Corridor, the Turkish Stream, sometimes regarded as a rival of the Southern Gas Corridor, might actually in the future link to TAP to deliver gas to Italy via Albania, or through the planned extension of the Turkey-Greece-Italy interconnector (Siddi, 2017b; Winrow, 2017; Cohen, 2019). The flow of Russian gas through the Southern Gas Corridor would still have to wait for the Turkish Stream's second phase to be implemented and for the 25-year third party exemption granted by the EU to TAP to expire, before another supplier could join the latter. Should this be the case, Russia, or any similar interested party, would benefit from the advantage of the EU's own Third Energy Package that provides for the obligation of unbundling ownership from transmission (Paul and Gurbanov, 2017). Thus, the unbundling rules that the EU designed in order to contain Gazprom's monopolistic endeavours in Europe will end up playing to the advantage of the Russian company in the end, which, under the Third Energy Package, will be allowed to join EU-backed projects as a third party. Russia has already expressed its intention to pump gas into the Southern Gas Corridor, when Dmitri Medvedev, quoted by De Carbonnel and Vukmanović (2017), declared that: The Southern Gas Corridor "won't lie empty", while some of the energy companies behind the project, which are TAP's shareholders, such as SNAM and Fluxys welcomed the perspective as well (De Carbonnel and Vukmanović, 2017).

If TAP would be considered for the Turkish Stream to link to the Southern Gas Corridor, a paradoxical situation would occur where the EU's Russian-free gas pipeline to Europe would be countered by Gazprom with market competition tools drawn by the EU itself, in order to transport Russian gas to the European markets (Skalamera, 2016; Siddi, 2017c).

The investigation I carried out above of the Southern Gas Corridor's material viability raised challenging questions related to the nature of its security goals. Despite its obvious marginal contribution to the EU's diversification and energy security-building goals, the Southern Gas Corridor is being promoted by the EU as enhancing Europe's energy security and fostering regional and European cooperation (European Council, 2020:3). The planned extension of both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream open the unexpected and paradoxical possibility of the EU's pipelines to transport Russian gas to its markets, while claiming that the goal was precisely to avoid importing Russian gas anymore.

Moreover, the material evidence contradicts the Union's narrative regarding the role and the importance of the Southern Gas Corridor to enhancing its security, as the corridor contributes with only 2.32% to the EU's total gas demand. Furthermore, the current goal of the EU to double the Southern Gas Corridor's capacity within a decade is not supported, at present, by favourable conditions, as none of the envisaged alternative importers (Turkmenistan, Cyprus, Iran or Northern Iraq) are likely to feed the necessary additional volumes of gas. Then why would the EU set the Southern Gas Corridor at the core of its diversification and energy-building strategy, along with greener and less political solutions, such as the use of renewables and increasing energy efficiency?

As discussed before, geopolitical considerations that occurred at times suggesting that the project is rather an instrument of rivalry between the EU and Russia fail to explain by themselves why the EU engaged in a project of such magnitude with little commercial gain. Despite the existing geopolitical nuances in the EU's narrative about the Southern Gas Corridor, it has never been openly opposed or criticised by Russia, nor has it been part of the energy disputes between Russia and the EU. Moreover, the pipelines composing it have been the result of the joint efforts of several public and private actors and the realisation of some, or the cancellation of other, has often been grounded on commercial reasons.

I conclude therefore that material factors are not sufficient to explain an actor's quest for strengthening its feeling of security and that there is a deeper layer of motivations that lie at the foundation of the EU's decision to overinvest in a project considered of little commercial significance and viability. As a consequence, I explore in the final chapter the more complex set of non-material factors that have underpinned an apparently unfeasible and contradictory decision of the EU to narrate its energy security-building on a project that has little chances to contribute to it. If physical security has not been the expected target, I investigate into the possibility that another type of security need was pursued by the EU, namely its *ontological security*.

II. The Turkish Stream

1. The Turkish Stream: an overview

The year 2020 is the birth year of two new natural gas pipelines connecting the Caspian and the Black Sea with the European markets: the Southern Gas Corridor, relying for the time being on imports from Azerbaijan, and the Turkish Stream, transporting Russian gas initially to Turkey and a few of its neighbours.

When this research has started, in late 2015, both the TAP section of the Southern Gas Corridor, as well as the Turkish Stream, were given few chances to happen by some authors, being labelled as "virtual pipelines", existing only in the geopolitical discourses of their promoters, being thus regarded as energy tools of the rivalry between Russia and the West (Wiśniewski, 2015:1). Yet, the Southern Gas Corridor, although interrupted and delayed more than once, has been completed with TAP starting its operations in November 2020. The Turkish Stream, in its own turn, has started to deliver the first volumes of gas in January 2020, despite being hastily abandoned at some point during the 2015-2016 political dispute between Ankara and Moscow.

The Turkish Stream has been delivering, since January 2020, the first quantities of Russian natural gas to Turkey (54% of the total volumes), as well as to Bulgaria, Greece and North Macedonia (with 46% of the total shipped quantity being delivered at the Turkish-Greek border and from there, to the countries above, through interconnectors) (Pirani e al., 2020; TurkStream, 2020b).

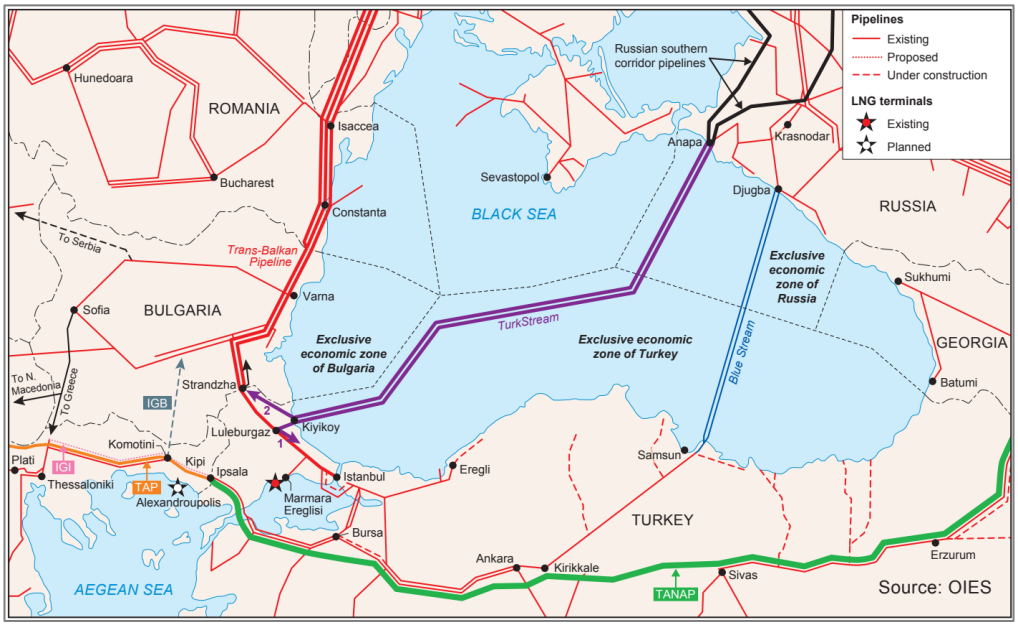

Figure 3. Turkish Stream
Source: OIES; Pirani et al. (2020)

On the 1st of December 2014, president Putin announced simultaneously, in Ankara, the cancellation of the South Stream project, due to the fierce opposition from the EU, and its replacement with a new project, the Turkish Stream. On the same day, Gazprom and Turkey's BOTAŞ signed a Memorandum of Understanding for building four sets of pipelines that would constitute the Turkish Stream project, with a total capacity of 63 bcm/y, similar to its predecessor, the South Stream (Siddi, 2017b).

Nevertheless, in September 2015, the two companies announced that the project would be downscaled to two pipelines with a total capacity of 31.5 bcm/y (Gurbanov, 2017; Siddi, 2017b; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The decision has been made on commercial grounds, due to envisaged expansion of another Russian project, the Nord Stream with its extension, Nord Stream 2, which is supposed to take over the volumes of gas initially planned to be transported through the Turkish Stream (Gurbanov, 2017). The idea of an expanded version of the Turkish Stream, although endorsed by Hungary, Serbia, North Macedonia, Greece and Turkey through their joint declaration of intent in 2015, has also been abandoned due to the fact that the EU had not expressed any formal interest in buying gas from the pipeline (Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). At present, the Turkish Stream consists of two parallel pipelines of 15.75 bcm/y each, that run from the Beregovaya compressor station near Anapa on the Russian shore of the Black Sea, under the Black Sea, and reaching Turkey at Kiyikoy on the other side of the sea. From there, one of the pipelines connects with the Turkish gas transmission system at Luleburgaz, while the second line of the onshore connection runs to the Strandzha-2 station on the Turkey-Bulgaria border (Pirani et al., 2020; TurkStream, 2020c).

The costs related to constructing the Turkish Stream, amounting to 40 billion USD, have been paid entirely by the Russian side for the offshore section, while the costs for the section crossing the Turkish territory have been shared between Russia and Turkey (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017; Siddi, 2017b).

The volumes of natural gas imported by Turkey through the Turkish Stream have replaced the 6 bcm/y of Russian gas previously transported via Ukraine and the Trans-Balkan pipeline through Romania and Bulgaria (Siddi, 2017b).

Although compared to the Southern Gas Corridor, which is a much lengthier project consisting of three separate pipelines and reuniting a considerable number of energy companies and governments behind it, the Turkish Stream, despite being realised within a much shorter timeframe of only five years at the initiative of only two partners, Russia and Turkey, has not been spared by anxieties and uncertainties related to its finalisation. Thus,

only one year after the Turkish Stream was announced by president Putin in Ankara, on 24 November 2014 the Turkish air force shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 fighter jet operating in Syria, on the ground that it had violated the Turkish airspace beyond the Turkish-Syrian border. Only days after, Russia suspended talks on the Turkish Stream and a period of six months of political and diplomatic tensions between Ankara and Moscow followed (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017). Only after the Turkish president apologised for the incident, the relations started to improve and, in October 2016, the agreement for the construction of Turkish Stream was signed by presidents Erdoğan and Putin. The Turkish Stream was finalised in late 2018 and, in January 2020, the first natural flows reached Turkey through the first string, and Bulgaria, Greece and North Macedonia through the second string. In this way, Ukraine, the former route of transport for Russian pipeline gas to Turkey, has been bypassed as, from the 1st of January 2020, the Trans-Balkan Pipeline via Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria had ceased to deliver gas to Bulgaria and further downstream (Garding et al., 2020).

At present, in its current configuration, the Turkish Stream stops at the EU border, without crossing itself into EU territory. There are plans for the second string to be extended across Bulgaria, from its border with Turkey to that with Serbia, already in place since January 2021, and then further across Serbia, from the border with Bulgaria to the Serbian-Hungarian frontier by October 2021. The expansion project, labelled the 'Balkan Stream' by the Bulgarian government, would have an entry capacity of 19.9 bcm/y at the Turkish-Bulgarian border and an initial exit capacity of 6 bcm/y (to be further upgraded to 8.5 bcm/y) at the Serbian-Hungarian border, being, if finalised, able to redirect all the natural gas supplies currently exported to Hungary and to Serbia via Ukraine (Pirani et al., 2020). Nevertheless, Gazprom is not directly involved in the pipeline across Bulgaria. It acts as a joint shareholder (together with Srbijagas) in the project company building the pipeline across Serbia, and from Bulgaria to Hungary (together with Gastrans). The extension of the Turkish Stream through Bulgaria has not been spared by criticism, being linked to wider geopolitical goals of Russia in the region. Thus, Gazprom has been accused of gaining control over the main border points of the Bulgarian pipelines, at the Bulgarian borders with Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey, without having to invest in building new infrastructure (Gotev, 2020). Moscow has been denounced by voices in Bulgaria for punishing the country because of the cancellation of the Turkish Stream's predecessor, the South Stream, which was dropped when the EU accused Bulgaria and Gazprom of breaching the Third Energy Package regulations. Gazprom lost approximately 800 million EUR on that

occasion, which now is criticised of pressing Bulgaria to pay, by constructing the Balkan Stream extension of the Turkish Stream at its own expense (Gotev, 2020).

The fact that the Turkish Stream stops, at present, at the EU border is important for Gazprom, as the predecessor of the Turkish Stream, the South Stream, had been cancelled because the EU declared it incompatible with its Third Energy Package regulations related to unbundling the ownership of the pipelines (the owner of the pipeline cannot be the same with the companies involved in transmission and distribution) and third party access. Not crossing the EU territory, the Turkish Stream does not have to comply with the EU regulations and thus Gazprom can enjoy full ownership of the pipelines and the gas (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017; Proedrou, 2017; Siddi, 2017b; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). By using the existing infrastructure at the main entry and exit points in Bulgaria, without owning the infrastructure itself, Gazprom has been criticised for finding ways of circumventing the EU regulations related to unbundling (Gotev, 2020).

The Turkish Stream's destiny has been thus closely interlinked to that of its precursor, the South Stream, a highly disputed project that, as it happened in the case of Nabucco for the Southern Gas Corridor, acted as a 'ghost pipeline' for its successor, the Turkish Stream. I analyse in the next part the sinuous coming into being of the Turkish Stream, through the non-existence of its more illustrious forerunner, the South Stream.

2. South Stream: the 'ghost pipeline' behind the Turkish Stream

The Turkish Stream idea was born the same day when its precursor, the South Stream, was finally abandoned by their promoter, Russia. Initially, it was supposed to replicate the large capacity of the South Stream, but it was later adjusted to the commercial realities of its times and downsized to half.

The South Stream however had been envisaged as a large-scale project, running over 2,446 km from Russia, under the Black Sea, through Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Slovenia, to Austria, with connecting strings reaching Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The voluminous pipeline was meant, together with its sister project, the Nord Stream, to bypass entirely Ukraine as an export country for Russia's natural gas (Siddi, 2017b; Yesevi, 2018). Had it been implemented, the new 63 bcm/y pipeline, with an anticipated total investment of 20 billion USD, would have covered 12% of Europe's total natural gas needs (Kottari et al., 2013; Yesevi, 2018).

Figure 4. South Stream
Source: Euractiv

The consortium behind the project was not however entirely Russian, as Gazprom held 50% of the shares, and the rest was split between Western energy companies: Italy's ENI (20%), France's EDF (15%) and Germany's Wintershall (15%) (Siddi, 2017b; Yesevi, 2018). It was no surprise that the South Stream benefitted from the support of national and private companies in Western countries that have been traditionally both massive consumers of natural gas, as well as supporters of continuing the imports of energy from Russia with whom, unlike the EU members of the former Eastern bloc, do not share a recent past of animosity and distrust. Pragmatism of the commercial considerations, doubled by the absence of existential insecurities towards Russia, prevailed over any gaps in their political relationship.

The 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine that caused the natural gas flows to be interrupted to Europe in the middle of the winter triggered harsh responses from some countries in Eastern and Central Europe, the ones that had been most affected by the disruptions and, at the same time, the ones that have been predominantly affected by historical anxieties related to a possible aggression from Moscow disguised under the energy control. Following the tense moments and debates around the disruptions, both the EU and Russia sought to diversify their natural gas flows away from Ukraine. Diversification has thus been at the core of the shift of their energy policies and strategies with respect to natural gas. Nonetheless, as showed before in this chapter, the EU's diversification efforts had already started well before the 2006/2009 gas disruptions, with its first major project, Nabucco, being already agreed upon by the energy companies supporting it in June 2002.

The agreement for the South Stream however, between Gazprom and the Italian company ENI, was signed indeed soon after the 2006 gas dispute, on 23 June 2007. It has thus been affirmed that Russia's decision to build the South Stream was a direct consequence of the deterioration of the political relations between Kiev and Moscow and of the role of Ukraine as a reliable transit country being compromised after the disruptions (Kaynak, 2018). This is expected to have led further to the high politicisation of the South Stream, criticised for being used by Russia as a geopolitical tool in order to block the Western-backed Nabucco and the Southern Gas Corridor, and to punish Ukraine with alternative projects bypassing it and hence depriving it of important transit revenues, while also serving as a lesson for other countries trying to defy it (Proedrou, 2017). Can Ogutcu[38], energy security expert in intergovernmental organisations and private sector, declared in an interview for this research that Russia will therefore remain an obstacle in the energy relations between the EU and Caspian-Black Sea states after the annexation of Crimea, as, despite the fact that energy is the main area of potential cooperation between the EU and the countries of the region, the EU has not committed enough economic capital or political capital due to Russia and has lost momentum and legitimacy.

From the beginning, Nabucco and South Stream were perceived as rival, competing projects, serving geopolitical purposes. Russia was seen as launching the South Stream as a geopolitical counteraction to the EU's and U.S.' plans to build Nabucco, in the attempt to block it, perceiving it as a strong competition to its dominant position as the main energy exporter to Europe, but also allegedly using the South Stream as a weapon to discredit Europe's attempts to build its own political power in South-Eastern Europe (Cain et al., 2012; Coote, 2017; Yesevi, 2018). Seeing the Southern Gas Corridor as an impediment to its own interest, Russia has thus been credited with the intention of building the South Stream in order to cover with its own, cheaper gas, the same markets as the Southern Gas Corridor, but also with that of paying more for the natural gas from Central Asia in order to discourage the gas producers in the region to sell their gas to other importers (Balmaceda, 2008; Erdogdu, 2014; Penkova, 2014).

The South Stream would have indeed consolidated Gazprom's market position in the Black Sea region and in the Balkans, being already in control of the Serbian oil sector and the main supplier of natural gas to Turkey through the already existing at the time Blue Stream and Trans-Balkan pipelines, while also planning to expand, with the help of the South

[38] O2: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.

Stream, on the energy markets of North Macedonia, Croatia and Slovenia (Kottari et al., 2013). Moscow's motivations to build the South Stream were mainly commercial, to maintain the unaffected flow of revenues from natural gas exports to its national budget, without having its market share split with any competitors. It entailed, nonetheless, a political dimension as well, as Russia might not have been ready to lose its traditional political ties with some of the countries in South-Eastern Europe, connections which it tried to consolidate through attractive energy deals.

Nevertheless, there are also opinions that understand Russia's move to propose the South Stream and, after its cancellation, the Turkish Stream, as a counteraction to the EU's own geopolitical preeminent geopolitical considerations when deciding to build the Southern Gas Corridor as a mean to weaken Russia's position (Siddi, 2017c). I consider that both positions need to be better nuanced. As I detail further in this thesis, all energy actors display a mixed behaviour combining both geopolitical and commercial interests. Nevertheless, this is only the surface of their deeper motivations that underpin their actions. For this reason, while suggesting to overcome both the politicisation of the energy relations and projects, as well as the bias of overfocusing on the material factors that sustain them, I suggest, in the final chapter, to complement the analysis with an investigation of the non-material justifications, of a deeper, psychological nature, pertaining to the ontological (in)securities of the energy players.

Despite the large-scale project and the determination of a significant number of governments and energy companies to build it, the South Stream was cancelled in 2014. The reasons that stood behind its revocation have been attributed to mix of political, legislative and financial means.

In December 2013, the European Commission declared that the intergovernmental agreements signed by Russia with Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia were in violation of the EU's legislation, namely the Third Energy Package provisions related to unbundling and third party access (Dudău, 2014a; Ediger and Durmaz, 2017; Gurbanov, 2017; Siddi, 2017b; Garding et al., 2020). More specifically, the Commission concluded that, due to the fact that Gazprom was both in charge with production and transmission, the unbundling rules which require the two activities to be performed by different stakeholders, had been breached. Shortly after, the crisis in Ukraine started, followed by the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the EU-Russian relations deteriorated even further. Deriving from the politicisation debate around the project, it has been argued that one of the reasons that propelled the final abandonment of the South Stream was indeed the

annexation of Crimea and the subsequent determination of the EU to break away from its co-dependent relationship with Russia (Gurbanov, 2017; Winrow, 2017; Garding et al., 2020). Under the EU's pressures, in June 2014, Bulgaria and Serbia agreed to withdraw from the South Stream project (Yesevi, 2018).

Nevertheless, there have been also arguments that support the idea that the South Stream, despite its intense politicisation especially in the context of the crisis in Ukraine, was cancelled mainly for commercial reasons. Proedrou (2017) thus argues that Russia decided to abandon the project because the market conditions at the time were not favourable, due to a stagnant demand for gas in Europe, decline of the price for natural gas, the Third Energy Package restrictions regarding the unbundling, as well as the diminished availability of funding in Russia after the international sanctions imposed following the annexation of Crimea. Although I agree that these considerations have played a role in the final decision of Moscow to sideline the South Stream, they fail to explain on their own why then president Putin decided to replace the South Stream with a similar project, the Turkish Stream, for which all the conditions above, except those related to the EU regulations, would still have applied.

Similarly, geopolitical considerations linking the faith of the project to the conflict in Ukraine, do not provide, taken by themselves, a solid base to explain the evolution of the South Stream. As Casier (2016b) notices, in this case, the suspension of the South Stream and the antitrust legal case against Gazprom "did not result from the conflict, nor were they stakes within the conflict" (p. 772), and energy "has not played a significant role in the confrontation between Russia and the EU" over Ukraine (p. 771). None of the two alleged rivals, the EU and Russia, have employed forceful geopolitical instruments against each other. One the one hand, the sanctions imposed by the EU after the annexation of Crimea have not targeted the Russian energy sector (Casier, 2016b). On the other hand, despite the fear of Russia switching off the tap and using the energy tool against Ukraine and Europe, there were no new interruptions of gas supplies during the crisis and the energy trade between the EU and Russia continued unperturbed (Casier, 2016b; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019b; Siddi, 2020).

The fact that the energy cooperation prevailed over the political conflict was also highlighted by my interviewees in our discussions about the impact of the crisis over the energy cooperation. Thus, Nils Jansons, Deputy Head of Division, and Camelia Suică, Policy

Officer at the EU's European External Action Service[39] nuanced the situation, mentioning the fact that tense political relations with Russia after the annexation of Crimea cannot affect completely the economic relations, but the EU understood that diversification of suppliers is nevertheless essential. O10[40] highlighted the fact that there is a high demand in the EU for natural resources, so it is inevitable that the EU will partner with Russia despite bad relations such as during the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, as there is still strong cooperation in the energy field, an opinion also confirmed by C3[41]. Even if less optimistic about the Russian-Ukrainian political cooperation after the annexation of Crimea, the interviewee T2[42] highlighted as well that there is no physical threat for the existing pipelines either, as Ukraine's Naftogaz managed to control the entering gas points into Ukraine diverting the flows away from the combat areas and, in its own turn, Russia would not want to be regarded as an unreliable partner.

Although it had already invested more than 4.5 billion USD in the initial works for the South Stream, on 1st December 2014, president Putin announced that the project would be cancelled (Koch, 2015; Özertem, 2017; Winrow, 2017; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The announcement came at the same time with the declaration that the South Stream will be replaced by a new project, the Turkish Stream and, in a symbolic way, it was done by the Russian president in Ankara. The door was thus open for another key player to enter the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea to Europe: Turkey. The day the South Stream was abandoned, the Turkish Stream idea was born, leaving thus little room for Russia's opponents to comment on its lack of power, capacity of will to finish its own projects and to prove that it is still the dominant energy player of the region. Constrained by the financial losses incurred with the cancellation of the South Stream, but mostly determined to narrate itself a strong and secure actor, marred by its own anxieties that otherwise will lose respect and credibility, Russia wasted no moment to dive into a new project: the Turkish Stream. Thus, both material and non-material motivations, commercial and ontological reasons lie at the foundation of the pipeline I explore in the next part, the Turkish Stream.

3. The actors' motivations behind the Turkish Stream

The discussions about the major energy projects in Europe have revolved mainly about the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* between two major actors: the EU and Russia. The natural

[39] O11: Interview conducted on 18 December 2017.
[40] O10: Interview conducted on 7 May 2020.
[41] C3: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.
[42] T2: Interview conducted on 15 May 2020.

gas pipelines supported either by the EU, or built by Russia have been often depicted as rival, competing projects, mostly for geopolitical gains, with some commercial factors of competitions being acknowledged at times. Hence, for a long time, the energy scene in Europe has been understood as a bipolar one. Nevertheless, recently another player has started to voice its demands for its role to be recognised in the regional politics of the Caucasus, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East: Turkey. In all its efforts to be accepted and respected as an important decision-maker, Ankara has linked energy to its political ambitions. Although it played an essential role, together with Azerbaijan, in the realisation of TANAP and even if its contribution has been acknowledged by the EU, Turkey aspired for more. Either siding with Moscow in major political and energy projects, or defying it in others, Ankara has definitely claimed, in recent years, a new role for itself: that of a regional power and of an energy hub.

The Turkish Stream, inaugurated in 2020, has been fuelling not only the Turkish markets with more natural gas needed for its fast growing economy, but also with hopes for its ambitions to be realised. On this occasion, Turkey's partner is not a medium player anymore, like Azerbaijan, but Europe's energy superpower, Russia. Fatih Donmez, Turkey's minister of energy and natural resources, called the Turkish Stream "visionary" and "a new symbol of cooperation between Turkey and Russia", framing the pipeline as a "win-win-win project" for Russia, Turkey and millions of people in Europe, as a source of stability and sustainability (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, n.d.). For Turkey, the Turkish Stream holds a dual importance: on the one hand, it would indeed feed Ankara's ambitions, which I explored previously in this thesis, to become an energy hub and thus increase its political weight; on the other hand, it would contribute to relief Turkey's anxieties related to the security of its energy supplies, bypassing Ukraine and transporting natural gas directly from Russia under the Black Sea (Özertem, 2017; Kaynak, 2018; Rzayeva, 2018).

The Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources in Ankara clearly links the justification for the Turkish Stream to the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine and to the natural gas disruptions they caused, jeopardising, according to the officials in Ankara, Turkey's security of energy supply (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, n.d.). The Russian side, on the contrary, avoids to make any remarks to the disputes with Ukraine when motivating the decision to bypass it by constructing the Turkish Stream. Thus, it prefers to use the justification of the outdated natural gas infrastructure in Ukraine affected by the lack of investments in its modernisation, which

make the system "less reliable, posing a risk for those countries that depend on it for all their energy" (TurkStream, 2020a). With the Ukrainian transmission system indeed in need of major repairs at that time, Russia and Gazprom had little incentives in investing in modernising an infrastructure it would not own (Özertem, 2017).

In reality, I agree with Koch (2015) that Russia based its decision to build the Turkish Stream on a complex of reasons, ranging from commercial, to political and, to what I add, ontological ones. Thus, although doubted for its economic feasibility in some views, given the lower gas demand in Europe, as mentioned in the interview with Roman Nitsovych[43], Research Director at the DiXi Group in Ukraine, Russia made pragmatic calculations. As it had already invested more than 4.5 million USD in the feasibility studies for the offshore section, the technical capacities and the pipe-laying vessels necessary to built the now defunct South Stream, Moscow replaced the South Stream with the Turkish Stream, in order not to lose the investments already made (Koch, 2015; Özertem, 2017; Winrow, 2017; Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). Russia proved to be further pragmatic by choosing a project with only one partner, unlike the South Stream, in order to avoid re-starting lengthy negotiations with many stakeholders (Georgiou and Rocco, 2017). In addition, Moscow has sought to decrease its transit dependence on Ukraine, with which the political relations had been on decline, while avoiding at the same time to lose its customers, but also its dominant position as the key energy supplier of Europe (Koch, 2015; Skalamera, 2016; Proedrou, 2017). Moreover, with the European natural gas demand forecasted to decline, but with Turkey's economy fast growing and almost entirely dependent on energy imports, Russia made pragmatic calculations on the profitability of investing in the Turkish market (Skalamera, 2016; Proedrou, 2017; Shlykov, 2018), with the possibility of expanding even further from here, given the geographical proximity, to the energy-dependent markets in the Balkans.

The Turkish Stream has also been understood as an instrument to consolidate Moscow's economic and political cooperation with the countries in South and South-Eastern Europe (Proedrou, 2017; Siddi, 2017b). Siddi (2017c) goes further by regarding Russia's decision to build the Turkish Stream as a response to the EU's own geopolitical intentions to construct the Southern Gas Corridor in order to undermine Moscow's political and economic position. Very important though, Russia rushed into replacing the South Stream with the Turkish Stream in the same day, in order to avoid "losing face with the West", to prove that it is "independent, not as isolated as the west pretends and [that] it remains capable of high

[43] T6: Interview conducted on 26 May 2020.

investment infrastructure projects, sanctions or not" (Koch, 2015:2). Thus, I conclude that, on top of material considerations, Russia has also manifested existential motivations in support of its new project: the need to avoid shaming and to maintain a self-image and a self-narrative about its role and place in the world.

4. The Turkish Stream: beyond geopolitical predictions

Shortly after it was announced to replace the South Stream, the Turkish Stream had already been labelled by some authors as a "virtual pipeline", doomed to repeat the faith of its predecessor that failed to materialise (Wiśniewski, 2015:1). Together with its alleged rival, the Southern Gas Corridor, the Turkish Stream was depicted as a foreign policy tool in the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the West, poised to never materialise (Wiśniewski, 2015; Offenberg, 2016; Roberts, 2016). Amos Hochstein, the U.S. State Department special energy representative, declared in May 2015 that the Turkish Stream "is not an economic project, but is only about politics" (Hochstein, *in* Gurbanov, 2017:80). A year later, in February 2016, during the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council's meeting in Baku, Hochstein reinforced his previous statement, by adding that the "South Stream, TurkStream, Nord Stream, all the other streams are simply restatements of political projects that have questionable economic value" (Hochstein, *in* Gurbanov, 2017:80).

Thus, just as the Southern Gas Corridor inherited the politicisation that had affected its 'ghost pipeline', Nabucco, so did the Turkish Stream acquire the geopolitical debates that had previously marked its forerunner, the now 'ghost pipeline' South Stream. It has hence been criticised for lacking an economic logic, while being no more than a geopolitical move to counter the rival Southern Gas Corridor (Garding et al., 2020), a tool for the Russian energy policy closely linked to its grand strategy (Koch, 2015; Jarosiewicz, 2015). Moscow has, in this light, been suspected of using the Turkish Stream as a geopolitical tool in order to enhance the EU's dependence on Russian gas, to deprive Ukraine of its status and revenues as a transit state, and to strengthen Turkey's dependence on Russian gas (Koch, 2015; Garding et al, 2020). Michael Thomadakis[44], former negotiator for TAP, declared in his interview for this research that, unlike during the Soviet Union when pipelines to Europe were constructed based on economic, market-oriented considerations, the Turkish Stream is a politically-guided project.

[44] T5: Interview conducted on 21 September 2018.

The opponents of the pipeline project generally warned about the possibility that the Turkish Stream would be yet another political instrument designed by Russia to increase its leverage over Ukraine, by diminishing its role as a transit state, and over Eastern Europe, increasing its dependence on the Russian energy imports (Siddi, 2020). Nonetheless, in its reduced, current shape, the Turkish Stream does not reach much of the EU markets, with the marginal exceptions of some volumes of gas delivered to Bulgaria and Greece. Moreover, the new gas deal signed between Russia and Ukraine on 31 December 2019, despite all expectations, provides for the continuation of the transit of Russian natural gas through Ukraine for the next years. The commercial logic of the Turkish Stream had been also questioned, being criticised for replacing Russia's dependency on the Ukrainian transit with that on Turkey, and for failing to bring closer Ankara and Moscow, already at odds in the Black Sea, the Caucasus and the Middle East (Proedrou, 2017). Yet, just as Russia refrained itself from criticising TANAP, Brussels also abstained from opposing the Turkish Stream, much because, as declared in one of the interviews by an EU official, unlike the South Stream, the Turkish Stream does not land, for the time being, on EU territory, so "it is none of our business" (O1[45]).

The materialisation of the Turkish Stream was mostly doubted during the 2015-2016 political crisis between Ankara and Moscow. On 24 November 2015, the Turkish air force shot down a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 jet fighter on the Turkish-Syrian border, after, according to the Turkish officials, it had crossed into the air space of Turkey. Shortly after, on 3 December 2015, Moscow suspended talks with Turkey on the Turkish Stream and, in January 2016, Gazprom cancelled the 10.25% price discount for the export of natural gas to Turkey. The following months saw the freezing of the political and diplomatic relations between Ankara and Moscow, accentuated by economic sanctions imposed by Russia on Turkey. On 27 June 2016, the Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan sent president Putin a letter of condolences for the deceased pilot of the jet fighter and, in an unparalleled tone, assured Moscow that Turkey was "ready for any initiatives to relieve the pain and severity of the damage done" (Erdoğan; *in* Ediger and Durmaz, 2017:149). The bilateral relations started to warm up following Turkey's concessions and, on 10 October 2016, the two presidents signed, in Istanbul, the intergovernmental agreement for the construction of the Turkish Stream, along with an agreement to provide discounted prices for the Russian gas imported by Turkey (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017).

[45] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.

The jet fighter incident prompted pessimistic voices regarding the chances for the Turkish Stream to materialise and linked its future to the political tensions between Ankara and Moscow that followed the event (Offenberg, 2016; Roberts, 2016; Orazgaliyev, 2017; Proedrou, 2017). The temporary suspension of the project raised even more anxieties related to the future of the security of gas supply in Europe. For example, Proedrou (2017:28), concluded that the jet fighter crisis "killed" the Turkish Stream and, as a consequence, Russia will remain dependent on the Ukrainian transit for its pipeline gas, a high risk which might lead to new gas disruptions similar to those in 2006/2009. The author also saw the delays in the realisation of the project as a sign of "Russia's incompetence to manage its relations with pivotal transit states" (p. 23).

Nevertheless, despite the freezing in the political and diplomatic relations between Ankara and Moscow following the jet fighter incident, the talks on the project had already been suspended months before, in July 2015, by Turkey, due to a gas pricing dispute between its national energy company BOTAŞ and Gazprom. Ankara expressed dissatisfaction related to Gazprom's refusal to apply the price discount previously discussed and thus BOTAŞ initiated an international arbitration case against the Russian company (Siddi, 2017b; Winrow, 2017). Although political factors were at stake during the cooling of the relations between the two partners, both Russia and Turkey followed a more pragmatic, commercial approach and finalised the project. Moreover, its temporary suspension had already been initiated by a commercial dispute between the two companies working together on the Turkish Stream, Gazprom and BOTAŞ, and the political tensions generated by the jet fighter incident only followed the commercial ones in this case, against the widespread politicisation around the pipeline. Geopolitics and economics, governments and companies, intertwined once more their interests and actions and, here too, a deeper look must be taken into their non-material motivations to see the project materialised. While it is too soon to evaluate the impact of the commercial cooperation around the Turkish Stream on the Russian-Turkish general *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, the analysis of the project contributes to exploring the ontological aspects that, in addition to the material ones, underpin the dynamics of the relations between the key energy players of the region.

Although doomed to remain a "virtual pipeline" (Wiśniewski, 2015:1), the Turkish Stream happened. Both material and non-material reasons encouraged Russia and Turkey to overcome their political divergences and cooperate to see the project materialised, for commercial gains, as well as in order to satisfy deeper, ontological needs. Ontological security consideration, if added to the material ones, can thus help explain why, despite their

antagonistic political relations in the regional theatres of the Caucasus, Black Sea and the Middle East, Russia and Turkey followed through with a commercial project that does not help with Turkey's long-desired goal to reduce its energy dependency on Russia and, at its current capacity, does not contribute to Russia's plan to diversify away entirely from the Ukrainian transit but, on the contrary, it ties it to yet another not so easy partner, Turkey. On the one hand, Russia needed to re-route part of its natural gas exports away from Ukraine without risking to lose its customers and its revenues, and without paying for not respecting its long-term supply contract obligations. Turkey had been looking to enhance its security of energy supplies, absolutely necessary for its energy-dependent and fast growing economy. On the other hand, Russia could not afford to lose credibility and to add more damage to its deteriorated image in the West, while Turkey, already affected itself by shame and stigma in the relations with the same West, sought to reinvent itself as a key regional energy and political player.

Conclusions

Stemming from the observations made in the previous chapter when I analysed the general orientation of the energy strategies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, in this chapter I zoomed-in to details on how the key energy players in the Caspian-Black Sea region shaped, through their preferences, the evolution of the two main natural gas projects linking the region to the wider Europe: the **Southern Gas Corridor** and the **Turkish Stream**.

Despite being forecasted by some to remain, like their predecessors, 'ghost pipelines' never to materialise outside the geopolitical discourses of the big players behind them (the EU and Russia), or criticised for being nothing more than geopolitical weapons in the rivalry between Brussels and Moscow, both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream have become a reality by 2020, overcoming sinuous developments that saw the two projects slowed down or even abandoned at times. Nevertheless, I demonstrated in this chapter that, against any geopolitical reductionist bias, their faith has been decided also by commercial actors, such as energy companies that chose to cancel the Southern Gas Corridor's initial project, the Nabucco pipeline for financial reasons. Moreover, it was not always the big powers deciding their existence, as TANAP, the Southern Gas Corridor's second leg, was realised through the efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey at a time when the EU, discouraged by the cancellation of Nabucco, had abandoned the idea of a corridor altogether.

In 2015-2016, following both a commercial pricing dispute between Russia's Gazprom and Turkey's BOTAŞ, the joint Russian-Turkish project, the Turkish Stream, was cancelled. Nevertheless, both economic considerations, as well as ontological ones related to the fear of both Russia and Turkey that they would lose credibility and respect in front of Europe, pushed the two countries back together and, since January 2020, the Turkish Stream has started delivering gas to Turkey and to a number of its neighbours.

Intrigued by the fact that a large-scale project like the Southern Gas Corridor is expected to contribute to only 2.32% of the EU's gas demand and faced even with the possibility to transport Russian gas in the years to come, contradicting thus the dominant narrative around it that it represents a priority project in order to diversify the EU's supply away from Russia, I raised the question: was the Southern Gas Corridor really necessary? Taking into account that the Turkish Stream has not managed to reduce Turkey's dependence on Russian gas imports, nor to relieve Russia of contesting transit partners, I also ask: why was then the Turkish Stream impetuously needed? Material evidences challenge the key actors' arguments in their favour. I open therefore the door to exploring what lies beneath the apparent material considerations of the key energy players in the Caspian-Black Sea region and I propose exploring in the next chapter their deeper, existential motivations, fears and needs that underpin their decisions and behaviour, their *ontological security* needs.

V. ENERGY ONTOLOGICAL (IN)SECURITIES IN THE CASPIAN-BLACK SEA REGION: THE EU-RUSSIA-TURKEY TRIAD

"Tankers are better than tanks" (Galib Israfilov; 2017[46]).

Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated how, despite the predominant view both in literature as well as in the narratives of some political actors that conflict is the driver behind the energy relations and projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe, as conflictual political relations are expected to translate into equally conflictual energy interactions, cooperation in the field of energy has managed to endure and to thrive around the major natural gas pipelines and in the energy policies and strategies of the key actors. I analysed the material facts, the events and the main strategy documents in order to check if the reality mirrors the predominant politicisation around the natural gas imports from Russia to Europe, or around the major natural gas pipelines in the Caspian-Black Sea region and I concluded that cooperation and conflict have always co-existed, alternating or frequently overlapping each other, in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*. In an apparent contradictory and dissonant tone, the key players seem to amalgamate cooperation and conflict in their narratives and actions, oscillating between forceful, geopolitical moves and a more restraint cooperative tone. Analysing the evolution of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and of the Russian-built Turkish Stream, often depicted as rival projects, I raised a challenging question: since they do not appear to contribute significantly to enhancing the physical security based on satisfying their energy needs, why were they built and strongly advocated for by their proponents? If material factors fail to explain sufficiently the need for their existence, what other motivations lie behind them?

Intrigued by these observations, I suggested introducing an additional layer of analysis, that of the non-material factors that underpin the actors' decisions, based on the theoretical framework of *ontological security.* According to this theoretical framework, actors develop routines and habits in their relationship with the others, based on a basic trust between them. Attachment to routines has the purpose to offer them a sense of stability and

[46] D4: Interview conducted on 30 November 2017.

continuity, of ontological security. Based on this, they construct narratives about themselves and the others, which they routinise and upheld in front of the Self and of the world. Confronted with existential crises, the actors experience existential anxieties, as their routines, habitual relations and narratives are perturbed. As a consequence, in order to maintain their sense of ontological security, they will either remain attached to their routines in order to preserve a sense of stability and continuity, or they adapt, by adopting new habits and narrating a new identity and role for themselves and for the others.

Given the limited engagement of the critical security theories with the energy security of gas, I refer myself in this thesis to the predominance of the material-based understandings of energy security, either seen as a geopolitical issue, or as an exclusive element of trade and I propose introducing an additional layer of analysing how the security of energy, and in particular of natural gas flows, has been conceptualised by the main actors behind the energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe. I agree to the proponents of social constructivism and neoclassical realism that history and the past are crucial to understand how the conflict or cooperation choices of energy players are conceived, based on previous experiences and persisting perceptions on oneself and on the others. I also acknowledge the contribution of social constructivism to expanding the interpretation of energy security by recognising the fact that it entails both an ideological, as well as a material dimension.

However, I argue that this view is still limited, by reducing the role of the non-material forces that continuously shape the energy security to the social factors and contexts, largely disregarding the importance of the psychological, cognitive dimension I explore in this chapter. The energy players are more than rational, objective actors making calculations related to their energy supply or demand needs. But they are also more than their social context of interaction with each other. All energy players are driven by material considerations related to securing their energy supply and demand, which they assess rationally, but they are also motivated by psychological needs that lie deep in their cognitive structure and often propel them to either put aside their material, physical security in order to gain a feeling of ontological satisfaction, or to use their material capabilities in order to offer justifications for their emotional-based choices.

Deriving from the main theoretical biases I identified in the first chapter, related to how the energy relations and dynamics have been framed in literature, I debated in detail in the previous chapter the material conditions and factors that support or contradict the main theoretical bias employed in the energy and natural resources-related literature, the

geopolitical reductionism. Analysing the material component, I argued that the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region and of the wider Europe, as well as the energy relations established between the key players, or the main natural gas pipeline projects developed in past years should not be limited to a geopolitical understanding of their dynamics. Instead, I brought evidence that the all the energy players that are engaged in the major gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to Europe display a mix of commercial and geopolitical motivations that underpin their cooperative or conflictual behaviour and decisions. Moreover, the faith of the Southern Gas Corridor and of the Turkish Stream analysed in the previous chapter, has not been decided solely by states or intergovernmental organisations, as energy companies impacted themselves on the development, independently of the strong political and diplomatic support behind them. Nevertheless, I highlighted the fact that, although essential to acknowledge the dual, geopolitical and commercial, nature of the material considerations employed by energy actors, focusing only on the material side would be reductionist too, as all players are motivated by material factors, but also by deeper, ontological needs that determine their choice for cooperative and competitive, or even conflictual behaviours and actions.

Based on the need to reconcile conflict and cooperation, on the one hand, and material and non-material components of energy security, on the other hand, I propose placing the energy narratives of the EU, Russia and Turkey and the relations between them as they were shaped along the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, under the spotlight of the *ontological security* and of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* frameworks, in order to complement the analysis already performed in the previous chapter related to the material motivations of the main energy players engaged in the natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe. Considerations that relate to the existential, psychological motivations of the key energy players come not to exclude, but to complement the material ones, as both material and non-material conditions form together their behaviours, narratives and actions. I detail in this chapter how the energy dynamics and natural gas projects I analysed previously in this research have been shaped by a complex of material and existential motives, insisting, this time, on the non-material foundation of their motivations, on the *ontological security* needs underpinning the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* under which they evolved.

The energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region have largely been framed under a geopolitical view that sees the natural gas pipelines as being political weapons in the hands of rival big powers competing for control over the region and its rich natural resources

and is rather sceptical about the possibility of cooperation to be successful and to endure. This opinion widely circulated in literature and in political narratives, as I explored in the first chapter, has also been endorsed by some of the professionals I interviewed for this research[47]. According to a representative of an energy company[48], "[...] as energy is being used as a source of power by some exporting countries it is just a matter of time for the relationship to turn into a conflictual one". I argued in the previous chapters that this geopolitical reductionism triggers further biases that limit the understanding of the complex nature of the energy relations that shaped the destiny of the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe.

The increased politicisation around the natural gas imports from the Caspian Sea to Europe has led to interpreting the natural gas pipelines, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, as well as their now defunct predecessors, Nabucco and the South Stream, as vulnerable to an extensive list of risks and threats to their viability and stability, as **"objects of fear"** (Browning, 2018a:339), a concept imported from the *ontological security* literature. Confronted with ontological insecurities, with existential anxieties they are unable to pin down, the actors need to find something concrete on which they can project their fear, something tangible they can use as a materialisation of their dread, feeling these objects are easier to control than the existential unknown. These are their 'objects of fear', a role played on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region by the natural gas pipelines. The actors project their fears and ontological insecurities on the pipelines, which they use in order to justify their anxieties.

On the one hand, the pipelines have been analysed in the context of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus and around the Black Sea, in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Eastern Ukraine, of the gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine in 2006 and 2009, of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and of the more assertive energy and political endeavours of Turkey in the Caspian-Black Sea region and in the neighbouring Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. On the other hand, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream have been depicted as rival projects, as geopolitical instruments in the big powers' rivalry opposing the EU and Russia, devised to block and undermine each other.

It has been considered that the 'objects of fear' on which the actors' anxieties are being refracted are politically and socially produced and they become systems of meaning

[47] A7 (30/04/2020); A4 (01/06/2020); A5 (30/05/2020); C1 (11/05/2020); C7 (11/05/2020)
[48] C5: Interview conducted 26 May 2020.

serving the role to differentiate between friends and enemies (Rumelili, 2015b). Nevertheless, I argue that in the case of pipelines things are not so decisive, as some actors may choose not to follow strict alignments along friendly or enemy projects, as others do. As an example, Romania confirms indeed Rumelili's argument that the 'objects of fear', in this case the natural gas pipelines, serve as cognitive mechanisms to differentiate between friends and enemies, by deciding to join only Western-backed projects and openly opposing Russian ones. However, Greece and Bulgaria contradict the argument, as for them, the pipelines played less the role of 'objects of fear' and rational, material factors intertwined the cognitive ones. Driven by their objective dependence on natural gas imports, Greece and Bulgaria chose to adapt their cognitive patterns, to overcome their habitual anxieties and to give new meanings to the pipelines, transforming them from 'objects of fear' into what I call 'objects of opportunity', and thus joining both Western as well as Russian-backed pipeline projects. I agree therefore with Rumelili (2015a) that anxiety should not be always feared. When facing existential anxieties, actors may be overwhelmed by fear, but they may also feel stimulated to act and seek for alternatives. Although routines offer a sense of stability necessary to achieve a feel of *ontological security*, actors will not always remain trapped in maladaptive habits and by consequence in a state of conflict. Impelled by their own anxieties, they may choose to reframe their narrative about the others and about the selves, reinventing themselves under new roles that would allow them to avoid conflict and reinstate cooperation.

While acknowledging the fact that geopolitical considerations have always been part of the energy games in the Caspian-Black Sea region and beyond, I argue that, despite their politicisation, conflict has not been the predominant feature of the energy relations around the main natural gas projects, nor have the geopolitical motives been the main driver behind them. On the contrary, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter when I analysed in detail the evolution of the Southern Gas Corridor and of the Turkish Stream, conflict and cooperation should be regarded as a *perpetuum*, as the two instances occurred in a continuous alternation or even simultaneously, and as the main energy players behind them chose to perceive each other simultaneously as security threats and economic partners. Moreover, the actors follow pragmatic considerations that underpin their decisions, but they are also driven by emotional, psychological factors related to their need to feel secure, to be accepted and respected, to enhance their feeling of stability and continuity in the world.

I. The Turkey-EU emergent conflict-cooperation perpetuum in the Caspian-Black Sea region: overcoming stigma and shaming

I debated in this research the reductionist interpretations of the energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region, contesting in particular the limitation of predominantly framing them under a geopolitical understanding, that depicts the energy scene as being a bipolar one, with the EU and Russia sitting at the opposing ends of a conflict-cooperation linear continuum. In this view, the energy projects, and in particular natural gas pipelines, among which the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, have been framed as political instruments, designed for rather geopolitical than commercial goals. Therefore, the Caspian-Black Sea region has been depicted as the theatre of conflicting interests of the big powers, competing for political leverage and access to natural resources.

Nevertheless, as I argued in the previous chapter, such an illustration of the natural gas dynamics offers an incomplete image of the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region, ignoring the key role played by other actors, be it states or companies, in shaping the future of the natural gas pipelines linking the region to the wider Europe. It was the commercial companies behind the Nabucco pipeline, the precursor of the Southern Gas Corridor, that decided to cancel the project. Although not in the focus of this research, I highlighted the fact that Azerbaijan and Ukraine played a critical role in redesigning the European energy imports as they are nowadays. The 2014 crisis in Ukraine sealed the decision of both the EU and Russia to build new pipelines that would bypass it, namely the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream. And without Azerbaijan and its gas resources, there would be no Southern Gas Corridor to offer the EU the chance to praise its diversification efforts away from Russian gas imports. Therefore, I argued that the Caspian-Black Sea energy world is not a bipolar one.

It is a third key player that I introduced in the analysis of the regional energy and political dynamics, an actor which I consider should no longer be reduced to the role of a supporting actor: Turkey. Ankara has engaged in very assertive drilling activities in the Black Sea and the neighbouring Eastern Mediterranean, raising, in the last case, territorial claims over the recently discovered gas deposits around Cyprus. At the same time, it has challenged both the EU and Russia by taking confident and, at times, forceful positions in the regional conflicts surrounding the main energy projects of the region, such as in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Therefore, the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea is not a duet anymore, and the triad EU-Russia-Turkey stands out as a new image of the region. Much against Ankara's

dreams of being recognised as an energy hub, Brussels prefers to regard Turkey as a transit state and does not engage much directly with it on energy matters, except for its own institutional framework based on exporting the EU's own regulatory principles and model of energy governance. If in 2006 the EU acknowledged the fact that "Turkey is becoming a crucial energy hub for supplies from producer regions" (European Commission, 2006e), in 2020 is demoted it to "a potential transit country for natural gas to flow from the Caucasus and Central Asia into the EU" (European Commission, 2020b).

Despite being confined to the status of a transit state, Turkey has made claims, particularly in the past years, to be elevated to the role of an energy hub. For this purpose, TANAP, the second leg of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor, was realised through the independent efforts of Turkey and Azerbaijan, a project without which the Southern Gas Corridor as it is today would not have been possible. On the ontological side, being acknowledged as an energy hub would mean an upgrade of Turkey's role in front of the EU and Russia, a better leverage position that raises hopes for more respect and for being recognised as an equal partner to the big powers that have been dominating the energy and the political scene of the region so far.

The concept of *ontological security* comes to explain how actors narrate themselves and their experiences when confronted with existential anxieties that come to disturb their habitual routines and how they envisage coping mechanisms in order to deal with them (Laing, 1960). As explained in the first chapter, the ontological security is the actors' capacity to keep a **narrative** about the Self going, feeling in control about their identity (Giddens, 1991:55; Rumelili, 2013). When the routines and the habitual relationships are disturbed, they can experience existential anxieties leading to a state of ontological insecurity (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017; Browning, 2018a; Browning, 2018b). The actors will thus attempt to reinstate their ontological security and they will do so either by trying to return to the previous habitual routines and narratives, or by defining new ones for themselves, crafting a new desired role and identity and a new narrative about themselves and the others (Browning and Joenniemi, 2010:8; Browning, 2018b). Therefore, dissatisfied with its subordinate, self-perceived inferior role in the context of more tensed relations with the EU and Russia, Turkey has started to self-narrate a better role for itself, one meant to offer it a sense of existential security, that of an energy hub.

To achieve its goal, Turkey uses a mixture of diplomatic and commercial instruments in its foreign policy, in its attempt to exercise political leverage on its partners. In July 2019, Ankara suspended the migration deal with the EU, after Brussels imposed sanctions in

response to Turkey's drilling activities for gas in the EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) of Cyprus (Siddi, 2019a). For the current leadership in Ankara, energy and politics often meet under its foreign policy umbrella.

Although the bilateral deal with Azerbaijan for the realisation and operation of TANAP delayed Turkey's hopes to become an energy hub, granting Azerbaijan and its national energy company SOCAR instead the power of decision over the transit conditions and the management of any additional supplies, the fact that Ankara and Baku developed the project on their own offered Turkey a boost of self-confidence, the opportunity to affirm and narrate itself as an autonomous, successful energy actor that should be acknowledged and respected as more than a simple and passive bridge, claiming the more prominent status of a "central country" (Davutoğlu; *in* Erşen and Çelikpala, 2019). The accomplishment was given highly symbolic importance by the leaders in Ankara and Baku. On 30 November 2019, at the opening ceremony of TANAP in Ipsala, Turkey, the Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev made a clear point about the disappointment generated by the constant delays in realisation of the project by the Western partners, while highlighting Azerbaijan's and Turkey's role in finalising it instead: "[...] arguments and discussions related to the transportation of Azerbaijani gas to Turkey and from there to Europe had lasted for several years but did not produce any results. Then, together with my dear brother Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, we decided to implement the giant project on our own. And it happened" (Azertac, 2019). Thus, the leader in Baku displayed an assertive position on behalf of Azerbaijan and Turkey, spotlighting the magnitude of the achievement and the independent role of the two countries in realising it, while also underlying the solid alliance between the two.

In this light, TANAP is more than a commercial success of Azerbaijan and Turkey, it is an affirmation of a status to be acknowledged, an ontological need for respect and acceptance. From a material point of view, Ankara needs Azerbaijan in order to diversify its gas imports and overcome dependence on Russia as a major supplier. From a non-material perspective, Azerbaijan offers Turkey a sense of predictability and stability, given their cultural and ethnic ties, an element regarded by Ankara as a cooperation enhancer, as a mechanism to counter the anxieties triggered by its reduced ability to influence its stronger partners, the EU and Russia. In its own turn, Azerbaijan managed to assert itself as an autonomous energy player, both from the EU and Russia, gaining in this way an upsurge of self-confidence and self-reliance gradually undermining the search for Western recognition and acceptance (Ismayilov, 2011:215-216).

However, Turkey still does not feel appreciated enough and acknowledged by the EU as an important actor, able to turn political and commercial events around its will. Particularly after the failed coup of 15 July 2016 and after the migration crisis started in 2015, Turkey has been largely criticised for its deviation from the expected norms of democracy, human rights and rule of law, as well as for its isolationist politics, drifting also further away from the European routines of secular practices. Deriving from past traumatic experiences, in order to regain their *ontological security*, actors frequently base their decisions on the need to overcome **stigma and shaming** to which they consider they have been unjustly submitted by the others, (Steele, 2008; Browning and Joenniemi, 2010; Browning, 2018b) and attempt to overcome a deep complex of inferiority (Zarakol, 2010). Despite its size and although surrounded by resource-rich neighbours, Turkey has no relevant natural resources of its own, a shortfall it constantly tries to compensate by narrating its crucial geostrategic location, its history and its ambition to become an energy hub (Shlykov, 2018; Triantaphyllou, 2020). To this I add that Ankara's forceful endeavours in the South Caucasus, the Black Sea, the Aegean, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East play the same role of a compensating mechanism. Thus, in order to reinstate its *ontological security* and overcome stigma and shaming, Turkey is even willing to endanger, at times, its physical security. As Triantaphyllou (2020:57) notices, "Turkey lives with a perennial 'insecurity complex', or a 'national security syndrome'", generated by "a deep feeling of not belonging to either West or East". Most of its actions are based on its "fear of insecurity", on its historical anxiety of not being once more divided by foreign powers, as it happened with the Ottoman Empire at the end of the first world war, and be reduced to a lesser role in the world (p. 57-58).

Stigmatised states are particularly sensitive about their **status and prestige**, as the loss of an important role and status in the world may be felt as a disruption of one's identity (Zarakol, 2011). Particularly in the case of countries that used to hold a prestigious status, such as Russia during the Tsarist Empire/Soviet Union, or Turkey during the Ottoman Empire, losing their dominant position and role is perceived as both a disruption of their physical security, given the material losses incurred in terms of territory and fortune, as well as a threat to their ontological insecurity, with their reputation and self-esteem being much damaged (Zarakol, 2011). Dissatisfied with the fact that, despite its great past and its present energy power, it is still not granted the respect it considers it deserves by its Western partners, Russia has been striving through a diversity of instruments, ranging from economic to

military ones, to be offered the status it desires. As the interviewee T2[49] observed, Russia wants a seat at the table, and not the last seat and, for this purpose, it employs the 'big powers narrative', according to which the world decisions are shared between few big powers controlling various regions of the world.

Affected by the fact that the West does not grant it the status and prestige it considers to be entitled to, in the light of both its glorious past and of its present achievements, as a fast growing economy and an indispensable energy partner thanks to its strategic location, Ankara has decided to supplement its cooperative energy projects, such as TANAP, with more forceful, individual endeavours. It has become involved in the military conflicts in Syria and Libya, on opposing positions to those of Russia; it has attempted taking over the role of the peacemaker from the Western powers in settling the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020; it has claimed ownership of the recently gas discoveries in the EEZ of Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean, signing, in 2019, a maritime boundary agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord, which supports it claims over Greece's and Cyprus' waters and natural resources; and it has announced its own impressive gas discovery in its Black Sea waters in 2020, promising to transform Turkey into a producer and exporter by 2023.

2023 is a highly symbolic year for the Turkish leadership, marking the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic. The strong link between the Turkish energy ambitions and the symbolic celebration of 2023 has been highlighted by the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, when stating that: "We took it as a mission to steer our energy policy, that is a precondition for the realisation of the 2023 targets set for the 100th anniversary of our Republic" (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a). Looking for a stronger role for himself and for his country, president Erdoğan is expected to seek to transform the celebration into an event of great magnitude. Given the current precarious economic state of the Turkish economy, with the national currency having suffered a significant collapse impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent fall in tourism revenues, along with the rising unemployment and public discontent, the Turkish leadership has been in much need of crafting something tangible that would support its ambitions of a strong, important regional actor, both at home and internationally. To this purpose, the so-branded miraculous gas discoveries in the Black Sea are destined as a crucial element of the Turkish official energy and political narrative for the following years preceding the 2023 high momentum.

[49] T2: Interview conducted on 15 May 2020.

Turkey's past years' controversial actions in the wider Black Sea region and the Eastern Mediterranean seem to contradict Ankara's self-narrated cooperative and peaceful goal of its energy strategy meant, according to the Turkish officials, to enhance the energy security of both Turkey and its neighbours (Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Turkey, 2020a). An exploration in the Turkish recognised EEZ of the Black Sea would spare Ankara from the disputes around the contested maritime boundaries in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean and would provide Turkey with a more peaceful environment around its energy endeavours (Bechev, 2020).

However, in September 2020, the Turkish presidency released a controversial video picturing the nowadays military ships and gas drilling vessels sailing in the vicinity of Greece and Cyprus, while intercalating historical images re-enacting the 1538 naval battle of Preveza (Greece), when the Ottoman fleet defeated a Christian army. The video openly links to the 'Blue Homeland' ('Mavi Vatan') doctrine claiming Turkey's rights over the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, in a militaristic tone, including heavily-loaded words such as "martyred", and featuring also the narration of a patriotic poem by president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan himself (Kathimerini, 2020). Energy, geopolitical and symbolical claims to recognition and respect underpin Ankara's message, while both conflict and cooperation preferences occur simultaneously. In order to uphold their identity and narratives both at home and abroad, states develop "autobiographical identity narratives" (Subotić, 2015:5), built on reviving mythologies of past events, with an important symbolic charge, usually based on re-narrating a habitual conflictual relationship from the past. Confronted with crises that come to disturb their *ontological security* and generate existential anxieties, political leaders manipulate history in order to justify their present actions (Kinnvall, 2006; Loizides, 2015; Subotić, 2015).

Despite Athens' and Nicosia's call for a drastic EU reaction and for sanctions against Ankara, the EU, confronted in 2020 with the Covid-19 pandemic, the political unrest in Belarus, and the resurge of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan in its neighbourhood, has yet been slow in adopting a radically new position towards Turkey, which counts on its indispensable role both in the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, as well as in the migration deal with the EU. If the major gas discoveries in the Black Sea announced in 2020 by president Erdoğan prove to be accurate, although it is expected to take more years before they are exploited, it is very likely that Turkey will intensify its narratives and claims to be recognised and accepted as a more important and powerful actor in the Caspian-Black Sea region and beyond, and that Brussels will update its energy

relationship with Ankara. Although the EU is on its way to reduce its dependence on energy exports and to decrease the use of hydrocarbons in its energy mix, gas will remain relevant for the European economies still in the years to come. Failing to secure additional supplies for its large-scale and expensive Southern Gas Corridor, the EU will need to maintain the relationship with the existing suppliers and transit states in order to avoid disruptions and instability. As an EU official (O1[50]) affirmed in our discussion, following the same habitual narrative of the EU that interdependence brings the parties closer, "more interdependence with Turkey means a more cooperative nature of relations [...] even if the conflicts will not fade away easily". A sense of security in uncertain times appears like the most feasible choice.

II. The Russia-Turkey conflict-cooperation perpetuum: looking for credibility and respect

With the less popular EU regulations related to unbundling and third party access requiring that the ownership and the transmission of the gas to be separated and not owned by the same company, and that other interested parties to be allowed to access the energy infrastructure, Turkey has prioritised its energy relations with Russia over those with the EU (Raszewski, 2013). The Russian-Turkish energy relations were officially initiated in 1986 when the first gas agreement was signed between the two countries. After the fall of the Soviet Union, new energy producers emerged in the Caspian region, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, all eager to find markets and to develop transportation routes for their hydrocarbons (Ediger and Durmaz, 2017). In the mid-1990s, the U.S. found itself very active on the energy scene of the Caspian, promoting the idea of an East-West corridor linking these new producers to the European markets, while aiming to limit Russia's and Iran's presence in the Caspian. Hence, the first pipeline of the future Southern Gas Corridor, the SCP pipeline was born, bringing natural gas from Azerbaijan, through Georgia, to the Turkish border.

Any further projects for the development of the natural gas infrastructure from the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, whether backed by the EU, or initiated by Russia, envisaged Turkey as the natural link between the production fields and the end consumers. On the Russian side, two undersea gas pipelines consolidated the Russian-Turkish natural gas trade: the Blue Stream and the recent Turkish Stream, taking over from its sidelined

[50] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.

predecessor, the South Stream. Failing to fulfil its hopes raised after the collapse of the Soviet Union to replace Russia's role of a protector over the newly emerged states of Turkic origin and thus compete with Moscow for influence in the Caspian-Black Sea region, Ankara retuned its policy in the Caspian region and chose to pursue a more cooperative relationship with Moscow, opening, in the 2000s, an era of cooperation with Russia (Tanrisever, 2014; Ediger and Durmaz, 2017; Shlykov, 2018).

While the energy cooperation was flourishing, Turkey and Ankara were placing themselves on opposing positions towards the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus. I agree thus with Shlykov (2018) that the South Caucasus, as part of the Caspian-Black Sea region, is an arena where the conflict-cooperation pattern of the Russian-Turkish relations has been particularly visible in the past two decades, in what I call a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* where the two trends frequently overlap, as actors chose to engage in cooperative behaviours in one realm of their interaction, while displaying diverging and even conflicting attitudes in other areas of their lives. One relevant example is the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, where, until 2020, Russia has traditionally supported Armenia, while Turkey has backed Azerbaijan, its cultural and linguistic kin. On the one side, Armenia signed a security and defence deal with Russia, allowing also for the stationing of two Russian military bases on its soil. On the other side, Turkey supported the modernisation of the Azerbaijani army and consolidated the strategic partnership with Baku through joint energy projects, including the SCP and TANAP gas pipelines (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018). Nevertheless, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh resurged in 2020 to unprecedented levels in decades, the peace deal between Armenia, Azerbaijan and the unrecognised authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh, brokered by Russia on 10 November 2020, came to the surprise and dissatisfaction of many Armenians, as Moscow, the traditional protector of Armenia, advanced a pact allowing Azerbaijan to keep important territories gained in the recent clashes, an initiative acclaimed by Ankara (Deutsche Welle, 2020c). Azerbaijan itself has followed a dual foreign policy towards Russia and Turkey, adopting a neutral position during the political tensions between Ankara and Moscow that followed the shooting down of a Russian jet fighter by the Turkish army in November 2015 (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018). Baku has also opted for pursuing close economic and military ties with Moscow, importing armament from Russia.

It is also interesting to note in this context why however energy cooperation does not happen in some cases. Armenia has been excluded from all the major projects in the region and thus it does not take part in any of the major energy pipelines in the Caspian-Black Sea

region. It is a case where an ontologically insecure actor has forged its narratives on its traumatic past with Azerbaijan and Turkey and, as a consequence, it has not managed to compartmentalise the political and the economic areas of its interaction, transposing the deep anxieties it faces in the political realm into the commercial one as well. With **basic trust** missing and with the attachment on unhealthy routines of conflict strongly cemented, Armenia has also missed the opportunity of defining a new role for itself and accept closer relations with the EU, choosing instead to invest in only one habitual relationship, the one that, until the peace deal over Nagorno-Karabakh in November 2020, provided it with a sense of both physical and ontological security. In its own turn, Azerbaijan has been itself affected by the lack of basic trust and refused to change its routines in relationship with Armenia. As one interviewee (D3)[51] interestingly observed, Azerbaijan shaped its non-cooperative strategy towards Armenia based both on material, as well as on psychological considerations. On the one hand, it pragmatically chose friendlier and better located partners in the region, such as Georgia which has valuable access to the Black Sea, realising that this cooperation will make Azerbaijan stronger. On the other hand, it chose not to cooperate with Armenia since these would have made its rival stronger in the end and, by isolating it, Baku managed to keep it weaker instead. This is one particular situation where energy cooperation has not managed to overcome the deep, ontological motives that keep the two actors apart, stemming from their reciprocal fear and distrust.

Another example of the conflict and cooperation overlapping, following the actors' decision to compartmentalise their areas of interaction, is that of the protracted conflicts in Georgia. In the conflict that saw the separatist region of Abkhazia breaking away from Georgia, Turkey has provided consistent economic support to Abkhazia, Russia's protégé, while also maintaining fruitful economic, energy included, relations with Georgia and supporting its accession to NATO (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018; Shlykov, 2018). The energy cooperation has been particularly important in the Turkish-Georgian relationship, the two countries being partners in the SCP and BTC gas and oil pipeline projects (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018). In the 2008 conflict in South Ossetia, which opposed Russia, backing the breakaway South Ossetia, to Georgia, Turkey adopted a rather neutral attitude, formally condemning Russia but refusing to allow the presence of NATO ships in the Black Sea (Kottari et al., 2013; Tanchev, 2020). Soon after, Russia and Turkey continued with joint

[51] D3: Interview conducted on 14 May 2020.

projects, such as the agreement for constructing the nuclear power plant in Akkuyu, Turkey, or the visa free regime.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the subsequent increased military presence of Russia in the Black Sea has been argued to have increased Turkey's anxieties related to losing its naval superiority in the region in favour of Moscow (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018; Avdaliani, 2020). The two countries have thus been depicted as "geopolitical competitors with diverging visions in the Black Sea and South Caucasus", with Turkey drifting away from Russia and seeking to challenge its regional influence (Avdaliani, 2020). President Erdoğan openly asked for measures against Russia's actions to turn the Black Sea into a "Russian lake" (Erdoğan; *in* Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018:81). Following the increasingly assertive foreign policy pursued by the leadership in Ankara in the past years, challenging the positions of the established powers, such as the EU and Russia, in more than one region, president Erdoğan declared on 16 October 2020, during the joint press conference with his Ukrainian counterpart, Volodymyr Zelensky, that Turkey has "and always will support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including over Crimea" (Erdoğan; *in* Times of News, 2020).

Turkey's increasingly assertive narratives and actions, sometimes opposing the positions of the established big powers, the EU and Russia, are a consequence of Ankara's escalating **anxieties** which it has faced in the past years. Its anxieties, leading to a state of ontological insecurity based on the fear of nonbeing, have been triggered by existential crises generated by Russia's stronger footing in the Black Sea after the annexation of Crimea, but also by domestic events that came to disrupt its sense of stability and continuity, such as the failed coup in July 2016 or the economic stagnation and currency crisis aggravated by the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis. Turkey's anxieties have also been fuelled by what it has perceived as being a continued disregard of its material capabilities and achievements, being instead kept by its partners trapped in the undesired role of a smaller actor, such as that of a mere transit state instead of an energy hub, or even being shamed for its domestic and international political actions.

Returning to the relationship between Turkey and Russia, other authors have depicted, by contrast, the Black Sea region as "a priority area of cooperative ties between Russia and Turkey", as "the most geographically, historically, mentally proximate area where the current Russian and Turkish geostrategic interests overlap" (Druzhinin, 2015:81). Cooperation between the former great empires, is nowadays self-perceived as unjustly downgraded by a common 'Other', the EU, to a role beneath what they consider to be fair. This feeling of

unfairness has occurred as a natural reaction in front of enduring tensions and **shaming**, as a coping mechanism to counter the anxieties generated by the disruption of their self-narrated identities. Thus, both Russia and Turkey have been narrating themselves as strong and capable regional actors, able to influence the conflict and cooperation dynamics in their theatres of interaction with the EU and other major powers. The Turkish Stream came as a material proof of their non-material need to be recognised as capable, strong and also reliable energy players. It is thus a material instrument meant to reinstate their *ontological security*.

Nevertheless, as I argue throughout this thesis, no conflict and no cooperation is pure, but rather hybrid forms of interaction emerge instead, "it is a continuous cycle" (T2[52]), a trend identified also by a vast part of the diplomats, energy professionals, EU representatives, members of think tanks and of the academia I interviewed for this research[53], although, as Nils Jansons, Deputy Head of Division, and Camelia Suică, Policy Officer at the EU's European External Action Service[54] rightfully noticed in our discussion, an economic project should not be equalled to political cooperation.

Hence, after the 2014 annexation of Crimea, despite vocally advocating for the rights of the Crimean Tatars feared to be under strain by the Russian new governance and for developing its economic and military ties with Ukraine, Turkey did not follow the U.S. and the EU sanctions against Moscow, while Russia turned to Turkey for exporting its gas in order to bypass Ukraine, and thus the two countries went on with the Turkish Stream (Shlykov, 2018; Tanchev, 2020). Moreover, in 2017, Ankara asked its NATO fellow members to refrain from actions in the Black Sea that would enhance the tensions with Moscow and the Turkish navy joined the Russian Black Sea fleet for common exercises, while also participating in the opposing Sea Shield NATO exercise in the Black Sea (Çelikpala and Erşen, 2018). For most of the time, energy cooperation survived political disagreements between Ankara and Moscow, given their significant interdependence (Skalamera, 2016; Winrow, 2017; Kaynak, 2018).

Nonetheless, even the Russian and Turkish energy strategies in the region are not purely cooperative, they also display signs of competitive behaviour, as Moscow has not managed to keep Ankara devoted exclusively to its Blue Stream and Turkish Stream

[52] T2: Interview conducted on 15 May 2020.
[53] A1 (10/06/2020) ; A3 (30/04/2020); A6 (05/05/2020); A7 (30/04/2020); C6 (17/05/2020); C7 (11/05/2020); D2 (15/12/2017); D3 (14/05/2020); G1 (06/05/2020); G2 (25/05/2020); O3 (14/05/2020); O10 (07/05/2020) ; O12 (30/04/2020); T3 (20/05/2020); T4 (11/05/2020); T5 (21/09/2018); T6 (26/05/2020) ; T7 (14/05/2020).
[54] O11: Interview conducted on 18 December 2017.

pipelines and Turkey also joined the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor in order to satisfy the high energy demand of its economy and limit its dependence on Russian gas imports.

The Turkish Stream has in part inherited the politicisation around its more famous and larger predecessor, the South Stream, which failed to materialise. Thus, the Turkish Stream has been generally depicted as possibly another political instrument designed by Russia to increase its leverage over Ukraine, by diminishing its role as a transit state and depriving it of transit revenues, as well as a tool to extend Moscow's control over South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans, increasing its dependence on the Russian energy imports. Nonetheless, against most predictions, in December 2019 a new gas deal was signed between Russia and Ukraine providing for the continuation of the Russian gas exports via Ukraine to Europe for the next five years, with the possibility of being extended. The deal, marking the continuation of their energy cooperation, occurred in the context of extended political tensions between Kiev and Moscow following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and of the protracted conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

Political conflict and energy cooperation thus overlapped, as actors decided to 'compartmentalise' their relations, choosing to see each other as opponents in one realm of their lives and simultaneously as partners in other realm of their interaction. An actor may feel ontologically secure in one realm of their life, experiencing a stable sense of identity and healthy attachments to routines, while being marred with ontological insecurities in other areas of their activity, even in relation with the same 'Other'. In this situation, I argue that some actors are capable to compartmentalise their realms of existence, distinguishing between those parts of their lives where they feel secure and in control, and those where they feel vulnerable and insecure.

Returning to the Turkish Stream, in its present configuration with two strings, the pipeline does not reach much of the South-Eastern markets (with the exceptions of some marginal volumes of gas delivered to Bulgaria, Greece, North Macedonia and Serbia), warned by some voices to be in danger to fall under the political and energy dominance of Russia. It has however opened the discussion to the possibility of extending its capacity in the future beyond Turkey's borders further into the Western Balkans and the EU. Nevertheless, should its expansion become feasible, one of the options is that the Russian-built Turkish Stream would connect to the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor through the TAP pipeline in order to extend its operations further. Such a situation, where the Southern Gas Corridor that has been advocated precisely as a solution for the EU to avoid importing more gas from Russia would end up transporting Russian gas, is a clear illustration on how exclusive

geopolitical interpretations do not support on their own the explanation of the complex motives that lie behind the key energy players. Moreover, it contradicts that pipelines and conflicts go hand in hand, as, against the politicisation of the energy projects, cooperation and pragmatism have been leading, so far, the energy trade in Europe.

The Turkish Stream has mostly been politicised in connection with the sinuous political relationship between Russia and Turkey. Thus, its faith and chances to materialise were consistently doubted during the 2015-2016 political crisis between Ankara and Moscow following the shot down by the Turkish air force, on 24 November 2015, of a Russian jet fighter on mission in Syria. The incident was followed by months of freezing of the political and diplomatic relations between Ankara and Moscow, along with economic sanctions imposed by Russia on Turkey, and aggravated by the announcement on 3 December 2015 that Moscow decided to suspend talks with Turkey on the Turkish Stream. The pipeline was understood as yet another reflection of the unsettled political relations between Ankara and Moscow, fatally linked to their falling cooperation and hence doomed to fail. Nevertheless, once again energy cooperation survived and the two actors reconciled and followed their pragmatic as well as existential aims and resumed the project in October 2016. Conflict and cooperation co-existed and both material and non-material considerations impacted on the continuation and finalisation of the Turkish Stream.

In order to feel secure and to gain a feeling of continuity and stability, a state of *ontological security*, all actors develop **routines** based on basic trust, which acts as an emotional support in front of the anxieties they face (Giddens, 1991; McSweeney, 2004). When these routines and the habitual relationships are disturbed by daily crises, the actors may lose their sense of ontological security being marred with deep existential anxieties they will try to overcome either by returning to previous habitual routines and relationships, or by defining new ones (Kinnvall and Mitzen, 2017; Browning, 2018a; Browning, 2018b). In this case, the jet fighter incident played the role of an unexpected existential crisis that deeply disturbed the cooperative routinised relations and narratives between Russia and Turkey. It provoked anxieties as the redefinition of roles and switching completely to a new routine, of conflict, generated a state of ontological insecurity. Thus, both actors acted in order to maintain their physical as well as their *ontological security* and reinstated cooperation, using the Turkish Stream as a facilitator in this sense.

On the other hand, however, Turkey has long sought to decrease its dependence on Russian energy imports, yet the Turkish Stream keeps it linked even further to a dominant partner which it has been actively trying to contest on more than one scene, in the Caspian-

Black Sea region, in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East. In its own turn, Russia has not yet managed to entirely divert its gas transit away from Ukraine but, with the Turkish Stream, found itself tied to another uneasy transit partner, Turkey.

Why then would both Russia and Turkey choose to continue with a project that responds only partially to their material needs? The answers lie in the non-material foundations of their actions and behaviour, in the deep ontological factors that have underpinned their decision to overcome conflict and maintain cooperation. On the one hand, Russia's credibility and image abroad has been seriously damaged after the annexation of Crimea, losing the basic trust its European partners have invested in their relationship with Moscow. In addition, it has endured **stigma and shaming** in the past years, being often labelled as the antithesis of the peaceful, democratic and altogether positive Europe. After the South Stream was cancelled on EU pressure and after Russia was labelled by some as an unreliable, geopolitically-motivated energy partner, for Moscow, the Turkish Stream had to happen, and it is of no coincidence that it was announced by Vladimir Putin the same day when the South Stream was dropped. From a material point of view, Russia could not risk that the deterioration of the political relations with the EU would also spill into the realm of their energy trade, on which its economy is highly dependent. At the same time, having already invested in the offshore part of the South Stream, it made pragmatic calculations on how to minimise losses by using the same infrastructure for the Turkish Stream. On the non-material side, considering its own ontological needs, Russia was also fearing to lose its reputation and prestige as a strong actor capable to overcome any impediments and surface as an unbeatable energy player, capable to build new gas pipelines to Europe and to supply its customers as a reliable, credible partner. In the words of one of the professionals I interviewed for the research, "Russia does not want to be considered weak" (C3[55]).

On the other hand, as discussed here above, Turkey had already been affected itself by shame and stigma in its relationship with the EU. The domestic situation created after the failed coup on 15 July 2016 and Ankara's more recent military, political and energy adventurism in the Caspian-Black Sea region, the Aegean, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have raised criticism in the West related to its political line of domestic and foreign policy. Although still closely tied to the EU through the migration deal and the energy projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, Turkey has found itself more and more isolated and downgraded in the narratives of its EU partners. Thus, it had to reinvent

[55] C3: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.

itself as a key regional energy player, indispensable both for the EU and Russia, self-narrating itself as an emerging energy hub, as a strategic partner benefitting from a unique geographic location at the intersection of the major East-West energy corridors, but also as a strong regional player able to impact on the conflict and cooperation dynamics in more regions at the same time. And for these pragmatic as well as ontological needs, the Turkish Stream was highly needed.

The cooperation between Russia and Turkey is rather a necessity than a solid relationship based on mutual trust. Ankara prefers Moscow's neutrality with respect to its domestic matters related to democracy and human rights criticised instead by the EU, especially after the 15 July 2016 failed coup (Özertem, 2017). In its own turn, Russia, although challenged politically by Turkey in the South Caucasus and the Middle East, prefers to deal with Turkey in energy matters and realise joint projects such as the Turkish Stream, not being restricted by rigorous regulations and principles, such as the ones required by the EU through the Third Energy Package. Notwithstanding their successful energy cooperation, political relations between Ankara and Moscow have been more than once under strain, leading some authors to argue about the vulnerability of their relationship caused by a mutual erosion of trust (Özertem, 2017; Shlykov, 2018). Nevertheless, despite uneasy political relations, energy cooperation followed its way, as conflict and cooperation overlapped in a *perpetuum*.

Both Russia and Turkey act as pragmatic actors, following their material goals related to satisfying their energy demand, and respectively, energy supply needs. But they also appear as two players pressured by external circumstances to join their efforts in order to overcome their perceived isolation and stigmatisation, showing the EU that they are a political and economic force, that they are not alone, and that together they can still impact on the conflict and cooperation dynamics and on the energy scene of Europe, even in the absence of an institutional framework binding them. In order to assert this self-narrated strong role for themselves, Ankara and Moscow have chosen the Caspian-Black Sea region to display their force and success, a region where both cooperation and conflict between them are strong, and also an area where they can play the role of leading powers (Shlykov, 2018).

"So far, the relations between Ankara and Moscow have followed the path of mutual convenience. They are by no means allies, however, they are also far from enemies" (Tanchev, 2020:10). Following both their pragmatic goals, as well as their existential needs to overcome insecurity and isolation, Russia and Turkey alternate cooperation and conflict, as well as material and non-material considerations. I hence agree with Garding et al. (2020)

that Ankara and Moscow "compartmentalize relations, alternating between cooperation and competition depending on the issue" (p. 2). Faced with stigma and shaming from their European partners, Russia and Turkey found a common ontological ground on which their cooperation is based, their need to prove themselves in front of the EU. But they also devised a common material instrument to display their cooperation, the Turkish Stream. The complex energy relationship between Russia and Turkey in the Caspian-Black Sea region lies therefore on a double foundation, that of both material and ontological needs that act together in shaping their often overlapping conflict or cooperation-oriented behaviour, in a constant *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

III. The EU and Russia from competition to cooperation and back: beyond the geopolitical-liberal actor dichotomy

The energy cooperation between the European Community/EU and the Soviet Union/Russia started already back in the 1960s, when the Soviet Union began to export its natural gas and oil westwards, initially to the member countries of the Warsaw Pact. Later on, throughout the 1960s-1970s, despite the Iron Curtain opposing the two powers on the political scene, the Soviet Union initiated its exports of natural gas and oil also to Western European countries, including those belonging to the NATO bloc, and hence, countries like Austria, Finland, France, Italy and West Germany became main importers of Russian hydrocarbons (Siddi, 2016a). After the 1973-1974 oil crisis, the Soviet Union portrayed itself as a stable and reliable alternative to fossil fuel imports from the Middle East and, in 1983, it inaugurated the Urengoy-Uzhgorod gas pipeline in order to supply the Western European markets with Russian gas. The natural gas exports to Europe acted as a diplomatic tool for the Soviet foreign policy, which found a stable market for its supplies, while West Germany, leading the West European imports of Russian gas, adopted during the mandate of chancellor Willy Brandt its so-called 'ostpolitik'. Through the "gas-for-pipes" deal, West Germany provided the Soviet Union with the much needed pipelines, through which, in return, Moscow exported natural gas to Europe (Molchanov, 2012). The collapse of the Soviet Union has not changed much of the situation, since Russia, inheriting the extraction facilities, the production fields and much of the infrastructure from the Soviet Union, continued to supply the markets in Western Europe with natural gas (Siddi, 2016a).

For decades, the stable nature of the energy interdependence between the Soviet Union/Russia and the European Community/EU has been regarded as a guarantee of peaceful cooperation between them (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a). As one of the EU officials I interviewed affirmed in line with the EU's own narrative, "more interdependence brings more cooperation" (O1[56]). Interdependence between the EU and Russia has been justified as two parties needing each other, one to secure its energy supply security, and the other to ensure the security of its energy demand. The EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, the main institutional framework for energy cooperation between the two players depicts this interdependence as an enduring key feature of the EU-Russia relationship, expected to last for the coming decades as well, while highlighting the Russian side's engagement to remain a stable and predictable supplier to the EU (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2010; 2013). The main interdependence argument circulated has been that of the EU and Russia being equally dependent on each other in their energy relationship, with the EU still dependent on the energy imports from Russia despite its diversification efforts, and with Russia still depending in the future on the European markets for selling its hydrocarbons, although it has engaged in diversification projects itself, towards the Asian markets (Siddi, 2020).

I debated in detail in the first chapter the topic of interdependence and its politicisation with regard to the EU-Russia mutual dependence in the field of energy. I summarise here some of the observations made at that point, by highlighting the fact that the 2000s reflected a paradigm shift (Stoddard, 2013), a transition from a liberal interpretation of interdependence as a base for cooperation, to a predominant geopolitical approach that understands energy and natural resources as a potential source for confrontation and conflict. The paradigm shift was triggered by a self-perceived change of status for the EU in its relationship with Russia, from the powerful half, to the vulnerable one, once Moscow has started to self-narrate itself, particularly after Vladimir Putin came to power, as a strong international actor endowed with immense energy resources much lacking and needed in the EU. The change was enhanced by an input of different perceptions on Russian gas imports, brought along by some Member States that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, namely those formerly belonging to the Eastern bloc and thus sharing a more conflictual past with Russia (Casier, 2011b; Austvik, 2016; Dusciac et al., 2016; Siddi, 2018a). The politicisation of the EU-Russia energy interdependence has gained pre-eminence particularly after the 2006/2009 gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, when

[56] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.

the natural gas imports from the Russian Federation to Europe have been largely depicted under the 'energy weapon argument', stating Russia's intention of using its status of main gas exporter as leverage on the European consumer states and as a tool of political pressure and foreign policy instrument in its relations with the countries in its former sphere of influence (Smith, 2006; Baran, 2007; Klare, 2008; De Haas, 2010; Lucas, 2012).

Nonetheless, as I debated in the first chapter, the energy weapon argument does not take into account the fact that the interdependence goes both ways, Russia being itself dependent on selling its natural gas to Europe, which is still the main importer of Russian hydrocarbons, as a suspension of its gas exports would have devastating effects on the Russian economy (Molchanov, 2012; Siddi, 2018a). The fear of disruptions is thus mutual and it has lied at the foundation of both the EU's and Russia's decision to diversify their natural gas flows as much as possible as away from each other. Despite their politicisation, as shown in the previous chapter, the 2006/2009 gas disruptions have been acknowledged, including by the EU itself, as a commercial dispute between Russia's Gazprom and Ukraine's Naftogaz, aggravated by the EU's own internal shortfalls in providing a proper response, given the lack of enough information, the absence of adequate communication and cooperation between some Member States, the deficiency of common emergency response scenarios, and technological shortcomings in some countries (European Commission, 2009b; Siddi, 2017a). Moreover, gas supplies between Russia and the EU have been stable throughout decades, not supporting the anxieties of some Member States in this sense. Thus, even during the Cold War gas supplies were never interrupted (Molchanov, 2012; Dannreuther, 2013b). During the political crisis between Russia and Ukraine that followed the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU-Russia energy cooperation continued, and the gas flow transited via Ukraine to Europe was not interrupted and it even increased in volume during the standoff (Niţoiu, 2016a; Siddi, 2017a). As detailed in the previous chapter, Russia has thus built its external energy strategy on convincing its partners that it is and it intends to remain a stable and reliable supplier of energy to Europe. The Turkish Stream has also been promoted as a cooperative project, meant to increase the energy security of Europe and to reconfirm Russia's credibility as a predictable supplier (Miller, 2020; TurkStream, 2020a).

Until the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the relations between the EU and Russia have been placed on the foundations of the **basic trust** they invested in each other, as a consequence of their stable and reliable energy trade, despite commercial or political disruptions they confronted at times, such as the 2006/2009 gas disputes or Russia's refusal to join the ECT. As a consequence, they developed habitual, routinised relations that offered

both a feeling of stability and continuity, of *ontological security*. The Ukrainian crisis however was perceived by the EU as a forceful **existential crisis**, an unexpected event that provoked deep anxieties related to both its physical and ontological security. The long routinised habitual relations with Russia, the basic trust, as well as the narratives about their cooperation, were profoundly perturbed. For this reason, the EU has engaged ever since in redefining itself, in narrating a different role for itself, that of a strong, assertive and even geopolitical actor on the international scene. Energy diversification and the finalisation of the Southern Gas Corridor have been the material capabilities employed by the EU in support of its ontological claims.

On the other hand, by annexing Crimea, Russia chose to embark on a paradoxical action that exposed its physical security leading to a stronger NATO presence in the Black Sea in the proximity of its shores, and to significant economic losses caused by international sanctions, while also seriously damaging its reputation and credibility abroad. Moscow's decision can be explained through material arguments related to its intention to consolidate its military presence at the Black Sea and to destabilise the politically hostile Ukraine at the same time. However, the material considerations are not sufficient to explain why Russia chose to engage in an apparent self-damaging endeavour.

Ontological security needs can nonetheless complement the material explanations, revealing Russia's deep emotional and psychological need to overcome stigma and downgrading by the West and to reinvent itself as a strong actor in the Caspian-Black Sea region and globally. Deeply affected however by the consequences of its decision, being even more stigmatised by the international community after the annexation of Crimea and experiencing anxieties generated by the EU narrating itself as a stronger player willing to gain its independence from Russia, Moscow decided to reinstate the previous, habitual routines of cooperation with Brussels, choosing the most prolific realm of interaction in this sense between them, the energy field. For this purpose, it has put aside the self-narrative of an energy superpower, replacing it with that of a reliable supplier, for both pragmatic reasons related to the necessity of maintaining the crucial energy exports revenues to its budget, as well as for ontological motivations. Thus, confronted with more anxieties at home and abroad, Russia chose to reinstate stability and continuity in its relationship with its most important 'Other', the EU, in order to regain credibility and respect, and to rebuild its own *ontological security* in an area where this was easier to be done than in others, the energy trade with the EU.

Thus, despite severe political conflict at times, energy cooperation continued, as the actors chose to compartmentalise their relationship between domains where they feel ontologically insecure about each other, in this case the political one, and areas where they feel ontologically secure and can advance with their cooperative interaction with the same 'Other', in this case the energy one. In this way, the theoretical framework of *ontological security* may be employed in order to demonstrate why conflict and cooperation occur simultaneously between the same players, in a *perpetuum*.

According to Casier (2016a), after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the relationship between the EU and Russia was predominantly a cooperative one, albeit asymmetrical in the favour of the EU, with Russia being regarded as a vulnerable actor dealing with major domestic problems, while the EU self-narrated itself as the helper, an exporter of values to its weaker partner. "[…] in this discourse Russia remains constructed as the object to be acted upon, the diseased that needs to be cured" (Browning, 2003:48), while the West remains dedicated to its self-narratives as a civilising power, a process imported by Browning (2003) from social psychology and named "altercasting" (p. 58). Altercasting is thus defined as "[…] a social process whereby one subject (e.g. The West/EU) draws upon a role/identity for another subject (e.g. Russia) and tries to induce that other to accept that role/identity by treating it *as if* it already occupied that position" (Browning, 2003:58). In this view of the civilising EU, in charge with fixing the others according to its own model, the 'Other' is perceived as "a threat to the inside's stability and security, and thus requires prescriptive treatment", although such measure only lead to "an illusory sense of stability, rather than a true understanding on how sustainability and the coexistence between the established Self and the emergent Other could be achieved" (Korosteleva, 2019:306-307).

Starting the early 2000s however, under Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia's self-perception has started to change, as, disappointed with not being acknowledged as an equal partner to the EU, Moscow has begun to employ more assertive narratives related to the country's role of a major regional power relying on crucial and immense natural resources (Casier, 2016a). As a consequence, the relationship between Brussels and Moscow acquired a competitive trait and Russia refused to join the ENP (Casier, 2016a). In response, the EU launched the EaP adding a security dimension to the ENP, in the aftermath of the 2008 war in South Ossetia between Georgia and Russia (Casier, 2016a). As affirmed before, actors frequently base their decision on the need to overcome **shaming and stigma**, to raise above a self-perceived demeaning identity imposed by the 'Other', in contrast to their self-narrated greater role and position in the world. In order to master the deep anxieties caused by the loss

of esteem and respect, states may employ several strategies. They can choose to accept the stigma imposed on them trying to comply with the expectations of the others hoping to be accepted by them, as it was the case with Russia attempting initially to conform itself to the Western norms in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union (Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014). Another option would be to embrace the stigma and at the same time counter it by turning it into a virtue (Zarakol, 2011; Adler-Nissen, 2014). Breaking the norm becomes a reason of feeling proud. This is the case of the new, assertive Russia starting the early 2000s, refusing to define itself according to the European norms and standards anymore and reinventing itself under an Eurasian identity, as a strong energy power.

The 2014 annexation of Crimea marked, according to Casier (2016a) the transition to a third stage, from competition to a more conflictual relationship between the EU and Russia in their political realm of interaction, damaging the trust foundation between them. The basic trust is, as previously stated, an important foundation of the *ontological security* that actors strive to achieve or to maintain, as it represents the emotive-cognitive basis acting as an emotional support, a "protective cocoon" (Giddens, 1991:38) that will help them to face the changes and crises of daily life (Giddens, 1991; McSweeney, 2004). It consists of sets of habitual relations, of routines, which actors develop and preserve as an essential mechanism to overcome the threatening anxieties of life, in order to achieve their ontological security (Giddens, 1991; McSweeney, 2004; Mitzen, 2006).

In Browning's (2003) opinion, the choice for habitual, although harmful routines and relationships may however slow down or even impede the efforts to overcome a conflictual and securitised relationship with Russia. The conflict emerges and endures when the object of altercasting, in this case Russia, opposes a competing alternative, that of a strong, insubmissive global player, which comes to contradict the identity drawn upon it by other actors. Russia's opposition to the EU's self-affirming identity provides the EU with a state of ontological security, as it offers the confirmation of already established roles and routines to which it was already used to, as well as the opportunity to affirm its self-narrative of a superior, positive actor. Thus, Russia's "[…] untrustworthiness becomes precisely what we can trust in. Stability in the nature of the relationship is returned" (Browning, 2018b:112).

Nonetheless, I argue that this linear depiction of the EU-Russia relations along a cooperation to conflict continuum, with cooperation and conflict at its opposing ends, does not manage to appropriately capture the more complex nature of the dynamics of their relationship, namely the fact that no conflict and no cooperation is pure, but they rather emerge in hybrid forms, in a *perpetuum*. I agree with Niţoiu (2016; 2017) that the EU-Russia

relations have been characterised by periods of cooperation succeeding or overlapping more confrontational ones, mainly in the energy field. I also argue that, despite the loss of basic trust in Russia as a political partner, the EU's energy trade relations with Russia have continued, as demonstrated here before, albeit Brussels' determination to end its dependence on Russian energy imports. The EU-Russia relations have tilted in the past decades between cooperation and conflict, sometimes overlapping each other, in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, that saw the two players engaging in more competitive and even conflictual political relations, while maintaining a consistent degree of cooperation in their economic interaction, particularly in the energy field. Even during the crisis in Ukraine, the European imports of Russian gas continued uninterrupted and even increased.

Moreover, I identify here what I call the 'fear of anxiety', which has driven so far the ontological security literature, and thus I agree to Rumelili (2015a) that we tend to ignore the positive potential of **anxiety** and its dual effect, of both paralysing and liberating, making therefore cooperation eventually possible, stimulating actors to act and look for alternatives. I argue that, when confronted with existential anxieties, actors, be it individual or collective ones, make a cognitive, as well as a rational-oriented choice to overcome insecurities and re-establish a state of *ontological security*. The actors will not necessarily remain trapped in maladaptive attachments and habits and thus reinforce conflict, they may also choose to reframe, partially or wholly, their narratives about the self and about the others and therefore open the way for a more cooperative approach. At times, steps to reinstate the previously damaged routines in one area of their existence, through reinstating cooperative habits, will concur with attempts to redefine narratives, relationships and identities in other areas, of a more conflictual nature. Conflict and cooperation can co-exist.

I support Hopf's (2010:552) view that habitual, routinised perceptions and experiences of conflict may produce an "enemy identity" of the 'Other' leading to a "habitual hostile response". Nevertheless, I disagree that habit leads to perceiving other actors automatically as friends or foes, without further reflection on their actions and that conflictual or cooperative patterns are being replicated as such over and over again. Such an approach excludes the possibility of actors to break patterns if this suits their interests and, most importantly, it ignores the positive effects of existential anxieties and also the presence of mixed patterns of cognition and action: when conflict and cooperation overlap among the same actors, or when conflict is benign and cooperation is competitive.

Instead I argue that both material and cognitive factors that sustain a conflictual or cooperative interaction, although indeed habitual and patterned, are dynamic and fluid, and

that, most of the time, mixed situations will occur. As such, material conditions, such as the decrease of gas demand, the development of new technologies, the introduction of renewable energies, the discovery of new gas sources and suppliers etc., may lead one actor to change its conflict-prone attitude in the economic field, into a more cooperative one vis-à-vis a habitual enemy, as the source of its physical insecurity is gone. It is the recent case of the EU, which, benefitting since 2019 from lower gas prices, unprecedented levels of gas storage on its territory and a decreasing demand for gas due to a combination of mild winters and economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, has been narrating itself as less vulnerable and fearful towards Russia and as more assertive internationally. However, in the same situation, the player might still consider its *ontological security* and the need to preserve the identity that underpins it, and retain a more conflictual tone in the political realm towards the same 'Other'.

In their relationship, the EU and Russia have followed different understandings of the international dynamics, with the EU displaying a continuous self-centric conviction that its values and governance model are universal and that any cooperation should be based on their acceptance by its partners, while Russia has obstinately resisted adopting a foreign-imposed model, expressing instead its preference for a pluralistic world based on the international law (Nițoiu, 2016). Nonetheless, despite the fact that the political cooperation between the EU and Russia has proven its limitations on sensitive issues related to the resolution of the post-Soviet conflicts and the position of both Brussels and Moscow in their shared neighbourhood, the energy trade between them has proved to be mostly a cooperative one (Siddi, 2019b). Regarding specifically the energy relations between the two seemingly opposing players, the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue Roadmap highlights that, although their energy policies differ, there are areas where they converge, which opens the door to a strong energy cooperation (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013). Cooperation with Russia in their energy trade has constantly been affirmed in the EU's policy documents, even around critical years such as those of the 2006/2009 Russia-Ukraine gas disputes (European Commission, 1999; 2000; 2006a; 2006d; 2006e; 2009d; 2011). However, one year after the annexation of Crimea, the EU's key energy policy document, the Energy Union Package (2015) states that the energy relationship with Russia will only be reinstated when the conditions are right. Cooperation and basic trust have been replaced by caution and distance.

The energy cooperation between the EU and Russia has initially been tentatively developed under an institutional framework, since the mid-1990s. Three main institutional arrangements have been envisaged for the purpose to enhance the cooperation and dialogue

between the two actors: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the Energy Charter Treaty and the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue. I discuss them briefly here below in order to highlight how the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* between the EU and Russia has been reflected also in the policy and legislative developments on which their energy dialogue has been established.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, PCA, was signed in 1994, at a time when the relationship between the EU and Russia was a favourably cooperative one. As discussed earlier in this section, it was a time of asymmetric interdependence between the two players, much in the favour of a stronger at the time, EU, self-reliant and convinced that a weaker Russia, confronted with deep domestic crises, would import its norms and rules and transpose them into a successful replica at home. The cooperative nature of their general relations was reflected also in the content of the PCA, which included topics of common interest in the field of politics, economic and cultural relations, designed to ensure 'win-win' solutions for both parties (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2010; Georgiou and Rocco, 2017).

The EU's cooperation with Russia has, however, much been conditioned by its persistence to export its regulations and model of energy governance abroad, a model considered to be the key to any successful cooperative endeavour. To this purpose, the Energy Charter Treaty, ECT, has been the main instrument proposed by the EU for Russia's compliance with its norms and rules (European Commission, 2006d, 2006e; 2009d).

The ECT provides for the open and transparent access of interested operators to the exploration, development and acquisition of resources in producing and exporting countries. Article 10(7) requests for each Contracting Party to offer equally favourable conditions to investors from third states interested in participating in energy-related activities on its territory. Article 7(6) related to Transit specifies that a Contracting Party, through which energy material and products are transited, cannot interrupt or reduce the energy flow in case of a dispute (Energy Charter Treaty, 2014). Although Article 18 mentions that the Contracting Parties recognise state sovereignty and sovereign rights over energy resources, the Russian Federation opposed the ECT provisions related to third party access to its natural resources and energy infrastructure. As a consequence, Russia has never ratified the ECT and in 2009 withdrew completely from the Treaty, motivating that its provisions are detrimental to its energy sector and national energy security, disagreeing with the fact that the ECT stipulated the unhindered access to the production facilities and transit infrastructure of the energy exporting countries, which would have by consequence affected Gazprom's dominant position (Georgiou and Rocco, 2017; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a). Russia which refused to

comply with the ECT and abandoned it in 2009 was not the same Russia of the 1990s when the PCA was signed. A more assertive attitude, based on its self-narrated economic and political power underpinned its decision in 2009, as Russia was on its way to define and narrate a new, stronger role for itself, in order to overcome a self-perceived demeaning position imposed by the EU.

The ECT has been criticised for mirroring the neoliberal preferences of the energy importers, which led to producing countries like Russia, but also Norway, the U.S. or Italy refusing to ratify it, or withdrawing from the Treaty, and for its failure to respond properly to the 2006/2009 gas disruptions (Scholl and Westphal, 2017). In the following years after Russia's withdrawal from the ECT, the EU persisted in including some of the ECT provisions in the new agreement that was supposed to replace the PCA with Russia, namely those related to allowing the access of foreign investors to the Russian energy reserves and infrastructure. Continuing to oppose the EU's moves, Russia has instead adopted federal laws on primary resources and foreign investments, increasing the restrictions on third party access to its strategic resources and infrastructure (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019b). The 2020 Russian Energy Strategy opted as well for enhancing the Russian state control over the national natural resources industry and thus for maintaining a traditional model of energy governance (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020). In this way, it opted for a framework opposed to the liberal one promoted by the EU, which advocates for the liberalisation of the energy market by allowing privatisation of assets and infrastructure and non-discriminatory access of third parties, EU energy companies included, to upstream facilities and supplies transportation infrastructure. Instead, Russia reconfirmed and consolidated the state control over energy matters, framing energy security as national security, and enhancing Gazprom's monopoly over its gas market.

The third institutional attempt to bridge the EU and Russia, the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, was established in 2000 on the legal basis of the PCA and it was based on the idea of the interdependence between the two actors aiming to identify a set of common goals and interests, while both confirming their intention to maintain a stable and reliable flow of energy between them (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2010; Dusciac et al., 2016). However, unlike the ECT, it did not provide for legally binding mechanisms that would regulate the sensitive issues between the two parties related to investments upstream, transit conditions and dispute resolution (Georgiou and Rocco, 2017). It approached rather 'soft topics' related to the use of environmentally friendly technologies and energy resources, promoting energy efficiency and a low-carbon economy, and ensuring the transfer of information on legislatives

initiatives (European Commission, 2020c), without proposing any concrete common projects for the years to come.

The tone of the Dialogue is highly cooperative. Its "Roadmap for the EU-Russia Energy Cooperation until 2050", adopted in 2013, states as an opening phrase that "[...] the EU and Russian sides should provide for using the respective potential for long-term cooperation as one of the priorities of their energy policies" (EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, 2013:2). The document employs an accommodating tone towards the goals and the needs of the Russian side, highlighting that it recognises the sovereign policy decisions of the two parties and that steps will be taken to enhance the EU-Russia energy cooperation over the next decades.

Nonetheless, only one year later, in 2014, the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue has been suspended by the EU, conditioning its reset by positive developments in the Ukraine crisis, and only the technical work-stream on internal market established under the previous EU-Russia Gas Advisory Council and the Trilateral Talks in Gas between the EU, Russia and Ukraine have been maintained (European Commission, 2020d). Cooperation was thus never completely abandoned, although reduced significantly both in the political and the energy realm, as the annexation of Crimea weakened the basic trust Brussels had placed in Moscow. Nevertheless, the Trilateral Talks in Gas functioned and allowed for the three parties, the EU, Russia and Ukraine, despite being engaged in a severe political conflict at the time, to find adequate solutions for an interrupted flow of gas from Russia via Ukraine to Europe during the crisis winters of 2013 and 2014. Energy cooperation, although being affected by the political divergences and hence diminished, has survived, even if the liberal institutional model has largely failed to endure. Cooperation and divergences in the energy field between the EU and Russia succeeded each other and even overlapped, in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, as neither of the two main players felt ready to abandon their relationship, for both pragmatic reasons related to their energy supply or demand needs, as well as for deeper ontological motives stemming from the necessity to maintain a sense of stability and continuity, avoiding too abrupt disruptions of their routines that would have increased their existing anxieties even more.

Much as in the case of the Russian-Turkish relations, Brussels and Moscow are engaged in a marriage of convenience, which both have the interest to maintain for the time being. On the one hand, they are both motivated by material considerations, as their trade interdependence, particularly in the energy sector, is expected to continue in the years to come. Moreover, they are both preoccupied with maintaining their physical security, which

they would not like to see affected by a sudden break up and conflict. On the other hand, both the EU and Russia have ontological needs that sustain their relationship. They both find it difficult to completely quit on habits and routines and abruptly replace them with entirely new ones, as this would cause much unwanted anxiety in particularly challenging times marred by the unstable developments of the moment, such as the Covid-19 pandemic and its serious social and economic consequences, the resurge of protracted conflicts in their neighbourhood, and the political unrest in-between them in Belarus. Particularly Russia would find it difficult to re-invent itself and to conceive a totally new self-narrative and role for itself, as its identity has been intrinsically forged in connection to its main partner that it finds difficult to abandon, Europe (Samokhvalov, 2018).

Narratives focusing predominantly on the conflictual nature of the EU-Russia relationship have led, in the past decades, to the (geo)politicisation in excess of their interactions, "as if the arms race of the Cold War had simply been replaced by a race of scarce energy resources" (Casier, 2016b:763). In fact, as debated throughout this research, energy relations have not always followed the political ones between the two players and their placement under a predominantly geopolitical interpretation would be reductionist, ignoring the large complexity of the actors' motivations, of both material and existential nature.

The (geo)politicisation of the energy relationship between the EU and Russia has also led to the employment of another frequent geopolitical reductionist bias, that of an antithetic image of the liberal EU versus the geopolitical Russia. In this view, the EU has been portrayed as a liberal, geopolitical-free actor, following an institutionalist model of energy governance based on liberal principles aiming at promoting an open and free competition on the energy market (Kottari et al., 2013). By contrast, Russia has been largely depicted as a geopolitical actor, using energy as a weapon in order to secure its dominant role as an exporter, but also to exercise political leverage on those countries dependent on its energy products, employing to this purpose military and political actions (Smith, 2006; Baran, 2007; Klare, 2008; De Haas, 2010; Lucas, 2012; Kottari et al., 2013: Proedrou, 2017).

It is indeed accurate that, at times, Russia has made use of its energy power in order to obtain political concessions and advantages, an aspect which I debated previously in this thesis when mentioning the gas agreement between Moscow and Kiev in April 2010 that granted discounted gas prices to Ukraine in exchange of permission to station the Russian Black Sea fleet in the Crimean city of Sevastopol until 2042. Also, Russia's actions meant to consolidate its dominant position on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea, by taking

over control over the transit infrastructure in some of the former Soviet republics (Moldova), or by demanding former Soviet countries to offer Gazprom stakes in some energy projects, as a payment for the debt owned by these countries for the investments made in the energy infrastructure during the Soviet time.

Nevertheless, as I explained before, despite the undisputable (geo)political nature of these endeavours, all these actions display mixed forms of both geopolitical and commercial motivations underpinning them, related to consolidating Russia's dominant role in its neighbourhood, but also to securing its much needed revenues generated by energy exports. Both the state energy strategy, as well as the behaviour of Gazprom combine political goals with a market logic aimed to maximise profits, to ensure the access of the Russian energy companies to the European infrastructure and markets, and to secure the revenues from energy exports to the federal budget (Mankoff, 2009; Molchanov, 2012; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a). A more market-oriented language has been included in Russia's Energy Strategy of 2010, affirming that the main objective of the country's foreign energy policy is the full-integration into the world energy market (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2010). Although marking the return to a stronger state control over the energy sector, the Energy Strategy adopted in 2020 still retains narrative elements of a liberal energy policy, when including, at least on a declarative level, the aims to build the principles of fair competition in the oil, gas and electricity markets and to participate in the international institutional frameworks for energy cooperation (Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, 2020).

I draw the attention however that, even acknowledging the dual geopolitical-commercial nature of the actors' interests would be an oversimplification of their reasons, as they are not driven solely by material considerations, but also by existential motives stemming from their ontological need to feel secure, to re-establish basic trust, to gain respect, and to maintain a sense of stability and continuity in their lives.

As a consequence, competing **narratives** are seen as underpinning the EU's ontological insecurities towards Russia, due to Russia's refusal to accept a subordinate role in its relation with the EU (Browning, 2018b) and to its determination to present an alternative self-narrative of an assertive, strong global player. The EU's narrative about the self and about Russia is depicted as clashing with that of Russia's about the self and about Europe (Browning, 2018b; Della Sala, 2018). This has been understood, under the *ontological security* framework, as the fact that actors prefer and get attached to routinised, habitual

relationships, even if this harms their physical security and perpetuates the conflict (Mitzen, 2006; Browning, 2018b).

To such a situation, Rumelili (2018) argues that, in a state of conflict, instead of aiming towards the promotion of a singular narrative, the peaceful coexistence of multiple, competing narratives should nevertheless be acknowledged for its potential to generate more ontological security than the imposition of a shared identity narrative which would suppress difference and thus reproduce anxieties, insecurities and finally conflict. I draw once more the attention on the risk of reinforcing the reductionist bias of portraying the two actors, the EU and Russia, as trapped within fixed, unchangeable and opposing roles, as holding "fundamentally incompatible self-images and world views" (Judge et al., 2016:754), with the EU's narrative being seen as competing with that of Russia's about the self and about Europe (Browning, 2018b; Della Sala, 2018). Both the EU and Russia use simultaneously mixed types of strategies: both geopolitical and market-oriented. Although identities are indeed hard to change, I disagree that all actors remain forever attached to maladaptive routines that will continue to reinforce an existing conflict. Ontologically secure actors do not experience anxiety when circumstances or other actors' narratives change, instead they take it as an opportunity to adapt their routines and narratives about the self and the others (Laing, 1960; Giddens, 1991; Croft, 2012) and make choices based on rational, as well as cognitive foundations. It is the ontologically insecure actors who tend to remain trapped in unhealthy routines and narratives that would provide them with an illusory sense of stability and continuity.

Therefore, I suggest using the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* as a tool to analyse the complex dynamics of the energy relations between actors such as, in this case, the EU and Russia, in order to reveal the deeper meaning of their motivations and behaviour, overcoming both the geopolitical bias that sees the two players trapped in an endless competition and conflict, as well the oversimplification of their relationship to material, pragmatic reasons, ignoring the non-material, ontological ones.

As mentioned here above, despite the fact that Russia has without doubt used a geopolitical approach with respect to its external energy policy (Romanova, 2016), it has also increasingly used a more liberal-oriented, market approach in its relations with the EU (Romanova, 2016; Siddi, 2018b). Similarly to the EU, Russia has employed a dual narrative and energy strategy, featuring both commercial and geopolitical elements, displaying both competitive and cooperative behaviours in the relations with its energy partners. Russia's choices have too been founded on both material and non-material considerations. On the

material side, it tried to maintain and consolidate its position as a dominant and central natural gas supplier to Europe, as its budget revenues and, by consequence, its domestic stability are highly reliant on the incomes generated by its energy exports. Diversification efforts of the past years, both on the EU and the Russian side, have not yet managed to alter their energy interdependence and the fact that Europe is forecasted to remain Russia's main market for its gas exports in the years to come. For this purpose, Russia as a state actor and Gazprom as a commercial player have balanced between adopting more market-oriented lines of action aimed at maximising the profits and maintaining a firm state control over the country's production, transmission and export facilities.

The first direction may be regarded as part of the Russian adaptive strategies needed to survive on the liberalised, open European market, particularly after the South Stream had to be cancelled for failing to comply with the liberal EU regulations related to unbundling and third party access. It may however also be understood as part of the routinised cooperative relationship between the two players in the field of energy, a relationship which Russia has all the reasons to maintain, for the time being, as stable and unhindered by political ups and downs, for pragmatic reasons related to its dependence on export revenues. The second direction saw in recent years the return to a traditional model of energy governance, as it was highlighted in the 2020 Russian Energy Strategy and it may be understood in the context of Russia refusing to abandon its own view on energy matters and adopt the EU's model instead.

The EU has long conditioned the cooperation with third countries, Russia and Turkey included, to the adoption of its own model of energy governance and regulations that would have allowed it both to gain access to resources and transmission facilities it lacked, as well as to switch from the role of a vulnerable importer of energy to that of an assertive exporter of values. This vision was entrenched in the ECT, which Brussels placed at the core of its energy dialogue with Russia. Nevertheless, a more assertive Russia, credited starting the 2000s with the role of an energy superpower, refused to accept the EU's model and regulations, arguing that this would inflict on its sovereign rights over the immense natural resources and the large-scale energy infrastructures it had built on its own and withdrew from the ECT. Divergences with the EU on the subject have failed to be reconciled and, after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU-Russia energy dialogue was suspended.

However, the EU and Russia continued to cooperate in the energy field even during the crisis in Ukraine, ensuring that the political conflict will not lead to a new interruption of the gas flows to Europe. Moreover, Russia has not criticised the current and final shape of the

Southern Gas Corridor, openly declaring itself available to join it if expanded and once the third party access exemptions will be lifted allowing it to participate as a supplier in the EU-backed project, playing by Brussels' rules.

Faced with anxieties generated by a multitude of concerted factors, related to market but also political uncertainties, Russia prefers to maintain its attachment to energy strategy routines, reinstating a stronger role for the government in the energy field through its 2020 Energy Strategy, as this would provide it with a sense of continuity and stability. At the same time however, determined to overcome shaming and stigma, Russia pursues more assertive geopolitical lines of action in the Caspian-Black Sea region, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, narrating itself as a major regional and global power. Commercial and policy disputes with the EU and with its transit countries have been complemented by otherwise stable energy supplies and the renewal of bilateral deals. In addition, cooperative-prone attitudes in the field of energy trade have overlapped with conflicting positions towards its partners in the political realm, in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

But, most important, in order to achieve its pragmatic goals, Russia has strived in the past years to regain Europe's **basic trust**, seriously affected after the events in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. For this purpose, it has self-narrated itself less as an energy superpower and more as a reliable, credible and supplier to its main energy partner, Europe. The Russian Energy Strategies I reviewed in the previous chapter, the interviews I performed with Russian officials and energy professionals, the Gazprom statements, as well as the official narratives of the leaders in Moscow all revolve around the same predominant topic, in a reconciliatory tone: Russia as a reliable supplier to Europe. The self-narrated role of a stable supplier contributes to the same goal of maintaining its security and stability, as it represents a continuation of an identity already acknowledged by the EU, that of a reliable energy partner fulfilling its contractual obligations.

Russia's cooperative approach to the estranged Europe has a dual motivation. On the material side, it tries, as discussed above, to maintain the exports' revenues flowing to its budget affected by the international sanctions, the collapse in the price of energy commodities and the Covid-19 consequences on its economic growth. On the non-material side, Russia has been preoccupied to overcome **shame and stigma** that have been surrounding it after the decision to annex Crimea and to support the separatist conflict in the breakaway regions of Eastern Ukraine. Aiming to overcome its ontological insecurity caused by isolation and stigmatisation, Russia has made use of its material energy-related capabilities in order to reconcile with its 'Other' not yet ready to completely let go, Europe.

As one of the interviewees stated, "loyalty is very important for Russia" (C3[57]) and thus energy was the realm where this could be narrated. In order to be accepted and recognised by Europe as an important regional and international player, Russia has employed both cooperative as well as conflicting or competitive narratives and behaviours, ranging from trying to comply with the EU's expectations in the 1990s, to confronting it since the 2000s, while also preserving their cooperation particularly in the field of energy. In order to respond to its pragmatic as well as to its ontological needs, Russia has interacted with the EU in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* that shaped their political and energy relations.

Throughout its energy policy and strategy documents, the EU has largely revolved around a routinised liberal, market-focused language advocating for consolidating its internal energy market, developing energy-sector specific regulations, and establishing an institutional framework of cooperation both among its Member States, as well as between the EU and its partners, even around critical years of political tensions with Russia (European Commission, 2011; European Council, 2014b; European Parliament and European Council, 2017).

The EU energy policy however is not homogenous and thus it is not a purely liberal, market-oriented one, as different Member States have different preferences, either opting for a free and open market, or calling for more state-led control over energy matters (Judge and Maltby, 2017). While the new Member States emerging from the former communist bloc have been striving to advance their mistrust in Russia onto the EU's energy agenda, the old Member States in Western Europe have proven more pragmatic, being interested in maintaining stable hydrocarbons imports from Russia (Khrushcheva, 2011; Kratochvíl and Tichý, 2013; Siddi, 2018a).

Moreover, the EU as a Union has also employed a geopolitical tone in its key energy policy and strategy documents, while still maintaining an attachment to its routinised preferences for market instruments and principles. Its external energy policy has too been driven by geopolitical considerations, in addition to the market-related ones, particularly with respect to its gas supplies (Kuzemko, 2014; Prontera, 2017; Siddi, 2018b; Schmidt-Felzmann, 2019a). Thus, in its central energy policy paper, the Energy Union Package adopted in 2015, the EU calls for a stronger role abroad for itself, taking into account the use of energy as a foreign policy tool by third countries and thus aiming itself to play a more forceful role internationally, namely on the global energy markets. The European Energy Security Strategy

[57] C3: Interview conducted on 10 May 2020.

(2014) urges as well the EU to systematically use its foreign policy instruments in the energy dialogue with major supplier countries. The EU thus appears as hesitating to adopt a purely geopolitical tone, disguising it under the old routinised narratives of the energy market consolidation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the incorporation of geopolitical nuances in the EU's liberal energy narrative had occurred already before the 2014 annexation of Crimea, as in its Energy Strategy of 2010, the European Commission narrates itself as "a strong geopolitical partner in energy markets" (European Commission, 2010:5), conceptualising energy security as closely linked to the EU's foreign and security goals (p. 18). In 2012, the European Parliament was calling for the EU's energy policy to be integrated in the common foreign policy (European Parliament, 2012). Already back in 1999, the EU was affirming that the long-term security of gas supply "clearly has a geopolitical dimension" (European Commission, 1999:1b) and that the internal market cannot be regarded apart from the external geopolitical circumstances, while gas cooperation with third countries should nonetheless be based on the principles of market liberalisation (p. 17-18).

As Browning (2018b:106) argues, the EU's actions are also geopolitical and are based on its own need to preserve its sense of *ontological security*, of order and stability. Thus, although the EU has mostly been a liberal actor, it has also embraced a more geopolitical role, particularly with respect to the security of gas supply, adopting a more interventionist approach and a direct involvement in pipeline politics (Kuzemko, 2014; Prontera, 2017; Siddi, 2018b). The switch to a geopolitical language thus serves the role of calming the EU's existential anxieties about the self, namely its concern about the Union's ability to become a key player in world politics (Browning, 2018b).

Confronted with major existential crises, such as the annexation of Crimea externally, and the enduring lack of solidarity internally, the EU has been oscillating between feeling vulnerable and desiring to become and to be recognised as a strong actor, shifting **narratives** ranging from feeling weak to playing more assertive, while using both material and ontological motivations in support of its claims. One of the central topics of the EU's self-perception is thus the one related to the Union feeling vulnerable and weak when its long routinised liberal, market-oriented narratives and actions are disturbed by unexpected crises leading to anxiety and difficulties in re-defining its identity and role. Throughout the years, the EU has regarded itself as being vulnerable to energy supplies disruptions, due to its dependence on energy imports, for which it has tried to find various solutions, ranging from diversifying its suppliers and import routes by building its own infrastructure, to engaging

into more future-oriented and innovative technologies of the so-called green energy. Nevertheless, the EU's main energy policy and strategy narratives appear to be dominated by its self-perception of vulnerability (European Commission, 2000; 2009b; 2009d; 2010; 2013; 2014; 2015; European Parliament, 2012). As a consequence, the EU has sought to overcome its self-narrated vulnerability by defining a new, stronger role for itself. For this purpose, it has strived to appear as a more concerted Union, surmounting its main weakness, the lack of solidarity among its Member States and its inability to speak with one voice in the energy affairs with third parties, namely Russia.

The EU's quest for a stronger role internally coincided with its strive to overcome its self-perceived vulnerability to external sources of anxiety, by trying to redefine its role and identity on the international scene. For this purpose, the EU has adopted a more geopolitical tone in its energy narratives, mixing it with its old routinised liberal justifications. With TANAP being accomplished despite the EU's hesitations and delays, and without its engagement, it has been argued that the EU has been reduced by its suppliers, such as Azerbaijan, to the mere role of a gas recipient (Jarosiewicz, 2015). The EU thus has struggled to overcome the possible shaming generated by its energy vulnerability, by constantly trying to redefine itself. As shown before, it was not until 2019 however that the EU has finally managed to find a niche for its ambitions, with the new Green Deal, self-narrating itself as a global leader in the field of fighting climate change and promoting a green economy, able to export its model also to the its neighbours. As an EU official eloquently noted in our interview, the EU needs to have a seat at the table, to be considered important. It is rather an offensive, than a defensive instrument, used in order to compensate for the lack of some needs (e.g. status recognition), in addition to objective criteria (O1[58]).

The EU's geopolitical tone and the association between energy and foreign policy goals appear more evident around 2014, along with maintaining its liberal, market-oriented priorities. Confronted with a major existential crisis, afraid of losing its physical security, the EU still oscillates in 2014 in defining and narrating its role to itself and to the others, desiring to become a strong geopolitical actor, but seemingly hesitating to openly state so and preferring to disguise its geopolitical intentions under routinised, habitual liberal arguments. Attachment to routines, even of language, offer a sense of stability and *ontological security*, but, in this context, deprive the EU of a clear image of itself, of a consistent self-narrative, indicating rather towards the EU's dissonance on the energy scene.

[58] O1: Interview conducted on 4 May 2020.

A double dissonance, as, on the one hand, the EU strives for centralising the energy decision-making at Brussels level, while some Member States fight to retain their national authority over energy matters; and, on the other hand, at international level, as the EU hesitates to narrate itself as an aspiring geopolitical power and oscillates between feeling vulnerable or strong on the international energy scene. Following the evolution of the EU energy self-narratives, ranging from high optimism and self-reliance, to feelings of deep vulnerability and lack of self-trust, and then again to more assertiveness, I conclude that the Union often displays a contradictory, dissonant perception of its own capabilities and role. When affected by a major existential crisis posing a threat to its physical security, the EU engages a self-narrative of weakness, self-blaming and anxiety. However, a change in its material conditions, such as sufficient gas supplies and low prices, combined with a period of stability in energy demand and the absence of political disruptions, encourage the EU to narrate itself as a strong actor, an emerging global leader. Yet, at present, the Union does not rely only on its old routinised tools and narratives of a liberal nature, but it declares itself ready to embrace the instruments of its competitors and uses itself a more geopolitical language.

The reason why the EU seems undecided about the new role it devised for itself lies in the ontological foundations of its motivations. Breaking with old routines and habitual narratives is usually difficult, as attachment to them provide actors with a sense of stability and continuity that enhance their feeling of *ontological security*. At the same time however, affected by anxieties triggered by Russia's actions, especially by the annexation of Crimea, the EU feels compelled to adapt its own narratives and identity to the changing circumstances, in order to protect both its physical, as well as its ontological security, to overcome fear and self-perceived vulnerability. I consider though that, unlike Russia who managed to imagine an identity for itself to which it appears determined to abide to, that of a reliable supplier, and Turkey who is strongly attached to its own desired role of an energy hub, the EU is still looking for an identity for itself. It is still oscillating between a vulnerable energy importer and an assertive values exporter, between a market-oriented player and a geopolitical stronger actor. It is exactly because habitual routines and narratives are difficult to completely abandon and replace by entirely new ones, as, in times of many simultaneous abrupt changes, one needs to find at least a set of routines which remain unchanged, in order not to fall into ontological insecurity and lose the sense of stability.

One reason why the EU might appear dissonant and contradictory, oscillating between a more conflict or cooperation-prone voice is the fact that it is not a homogenous actor. As I

discussed in the previous chapters, the EU Member States have different material and non-material conditions that impact on their actions and behaviour. Various Member States experience different levels of ontological (in)security with respect to the same actors, such as Russia and Gazprom, and the energy projects. The EU countries display different existential anxieties and engage different mechanisms to counter them, according to their level of ontological (in)security, as they uphold different self-narratives and identities based on a different set of routines and experiences in relation with the same 'Other'.

Thus, on the material side, most of the newer Member States that used to be part of the former Communist bloc have limited or no gas resources of their own and are dependent on energy imports, still lacking appropriate diversification options, both in terms of suppliers, as well as regarding the nature of the resources used. In the absence of proper diversification policies, pipeline gas still represents an important part of their energy mix. In addition, they still face limitations in the development and upgrade of their often outdated energy infrastructure, which in turns restricts their options when it comes to diversifying their energy production and imports.

On the non-material side, the countries in Central and South-East Europe have seen their already fragile **basic trust** foundation eroded particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, although they have already displayed high anxieties triggered by the 2006/2009 gas disputes between Kiev and Moscow which led to gas interruptions to their markets which were dependent, at the time, on Russia as a single supplier. Although recognised by the EU as commercial, and not political disputes, the gas interruptions have propelled some of the Eastern Member States to express fear against a potential military and political aggression from Moscow. Marred with existential **anxieties** based on a conflicting past with the Soviet Union/Russia, they did not compartmentalise their political and energy relations, blurring the boundaries between them, preferring to remain entrenched in routinised conflictual relations and narrating Russia as a threatening 'Other', as a danger to their physical security, both in the political as well as in the economic field. This situation allows them to position themselves, through the self-narrative they promote, in positive terms and to transform the conflictual relationship with Russia into a routine because this brings a sense of stability. Projecting Russia as the enemy who threatens the physical security of the EU offers the advantage of a familiar territory, which in return gives a sense of *ontological security*. They behave and act as ontologically insecure actors, self-narrating their struggle to preserve their physical security, while, at the same time, exposing it in order to enhance their feeling of existential security against their fear of nonbeing.

On the other hand, the old Member States, mostly those in Western Europe have different conditions that allow them to approach the energy trade with Russia in more relaxed terms. From the material point of view, although importing more Russian gas than the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, they do benefit however from a significant degree of diversification, having access to more suppliers and owning a more diverse energy mix in their economies, less reliant on pipeline gas. The Western Member States also have invested more in integrating their energy markets, in upgrading their infrastructure and in developing large storage facilities and interconnectors with their neighbours. Their strong economies also allow them to feel more independent and assertive and thus they do not fear of negotiating with Russia on their own, usually preferring to deal with their suppliers on a bilateral basis rather than through the centralised hands of Brussels. From a non-material point of view, the countries in Western Europe, although disturbed by the political tensions with Russia following the annexation of Crimea, do not share the same anxieties, historical lack of trust and routinised conflictual relations with Russia as the Eastern states do. They behave and act as ontologically secure actors, carefully weighting their physical security needs along with self-affirming their ontological security.

There are hence actors who, being ontologically insecure in more domains of their activity and interaction with others, are unable to compartmentalise the various areas of their relationship and thus expand the insecurities from one realm to the others as well, in a spill-over of generalised anxieties. The theory of *ontological security* considers that actors prefer stability and predictability and, for this reason, they remain attached to their routines, as an abrupt change of their habitual activities and relations would render them ontologically insecure (Mitzen, 2006; Rumelili, 2013). If attachment to healthy routines is a trait of the ontologically secure actors, sticking to unhealthy, maladaptive habits, in a compulsive manner, is a sign of ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991; Browning and Joenniemi, 2010), as actors fear to let go of what they are accustomed to, for the sake of maintaining a sense of continuity and stability, of ontological security, even if this would mean staying attached to a situation of conflict and even risking their physical security (Mitzen, 2006).

I mentioned in this chapter the role of the past experiences in shaping the ontological (in)securities and hence the preference for attachment to more conflictual or cooperative routines of the political and energy actors. **History** is indeed a formative foundation that lies at the basis of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in the energy relations between various actors in Europe. Similar to individuals, affected by their childhood experiences, states are also influenced by historical analogies they make to traumatic events they experienced in

their past, which undermined their basic trust in another state they continue to perceive as a threat (Goldgeier, 1997; Krolikowski, 2008; Jervis, 2017).

On the same line, I argue that routines and habits, as derived from past encounters and experiences, lead to developing patterns of cognition and of action, and both individual and collective actors, such as states, tend to replicate these habitual patterns, which sustain their identity, in the conflictual or cooperative interactions with others. However, even if habits are indeed based on various experiences, memories, beliefs, cognitive styles, they do not exclude the rationality of the habit-driven actors, as these gather information, look for alternatives, order preferences, asses cost and benefits and feedback from previous actions (Rosenau, 1986:862).

Russia's own attempts, since early 2000s, to overcome its ontological and physical insecurities experienced after the break-up of the Soviet Union and hence to reinstate its own sense of *ontological security* had as side effect the increase of the level of anxiety and of ontological insecurity of other actors, such as the Central European states mentioned above. While the same mechanisms to re-establish Russia's ontological security generated attention and caution in most other Western actors, it led to generating ontological insecurity and dread among only some of them. These actors had the option of countering their anxieties by reaffirming new identities and self-narratives. Instead, they preferred to maintain entrenched routines and identities that offered them a sense of stability and familiarity. Therefore, they remained attached to their routines of amity and enmity and to their own identity of potential targets of aggression, while preserving narratives and ascribed identities of the 'Other' as being the enemy. Although such a countering mechanism might sometimes affect their physical security, ontological security was prioritised.

While sensitively justified, the political routines of anxiety have however been extrapolated also in the realm of economics, of the energy relations. The states already experiencing a state of political ontological insecurity remained attached to a routinised pattern of enmity also in the field of energy, as "we tend to think that countries that are our enemies make proposals that would harm us" (Jervis, 2017:118). A more geopolitical narrative employing a terminology of 'energy security', 'gas weapon' and 'energy wars' took pre-eminence among them and lead to a fierce opposition towards the new pipeline projects proposed and developed by Gazprom. At the same time, other EU Member States, mostly among the Western ones, although maintained themselves a higher level of political anxiety towards Moscow, displayed a sense of ontological security in the relationship with Russia and Gazprom regarding the pipelines. Concerns for compliance with the EU regulations have

been upheld and the strive for diversification of supply and resources has been enhanced, but the employment of a geopolitical narrative of fear and threat has not gained pre-eminence among them. Ontologically secure actors were able to dissociate between various realms of their lives and to adjust their self-narratives and routines accordingly. For some of the EU countries, the natural gas pipelines have become 'objects of fear', while for others they have remained 'objects of opportunity'.

It has been at times argued that the EU persisted in constructing the Southern Gas Corridor, despite its commercial and financial shortcomings, as a geopolitical tool to challenge Russia's position as a dominant gas supplier to Europe, by proving that the EU is able to secure alternative gas suppliers and routes (Siddi, 2017c). The Southern Gas Corridor has indeed inherited some of the politicisation arguments that surrounded its precursor, Nabucco. The nowadays 'ghost pipeline' Nabucco had benefitted from an unparalleled political and diplomatic support from the EU and the U.S., determined to import non-Russian gas from Central Asia, the Caspian region and the Middle East, and, from the beginning, it was framed under a geopolitical understanding, seen as the rival project of the Russian-backed South Stream.

In its own turn, the Southern Gas Corridor and its component pipelines inherited, as mentioned before, the politicisation narratives around Nabucco. Given the fact that it stretches over 3,500 km and six countries, from the Caspian Sea to the Adriatic shores of Italy, crossing in the very close vicinity of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh) and bringing together countries with sometimes uneasy political relations (such as Greece and Turkey), the Southern Gas Corridor was sometimes given little chances to happen. Conflict was linked to its faith. Its first pipeline, the SCP crosses only 15 km away from the contact line between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the resurged war, since 2020, over Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus, it has raised anxieties related to its vulnerability to attacks and to being used by Armenia and its traditional supporter, Russia, as a mean to discredit the safety and viability of the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and of Azerbaijan as a reliable supplier. Nonetheless, the peace deal brokered by Russia in November 2020 surprised the audience with Moscow's shift of support away from Armenia and more in favour of Azerbaijan. Moreover, throughout the years, Russia has abstained from criticising or opposing TANAP or TAP. Only days after the peace deal, the Southern Gas Corridor was officially finalised as planned.

Azerbaijan has been actively using its position as a main supplier for the Southern Gas Corridor in order to advance its key foreign policy goal, the recognition of its territorial

integrity and sovereign rights over Nagorno-Karabakh. To this purpose, it has constantly attempted to link its energy partnership with the EU for the realisation of the corridor to Brussels' commitment to support its position in the conflict. Nevertheless, unlike in the similar cases of Georgia's and Ukraine's territorial integrity, the EU's response has been hesitant and ambiguous, triggering Baku's disappointment and subsequent orientation away from the EU. Although the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU have become colder in the past years and their reciprocal political engagement has slowed down, their cooperation for the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor has continued unhindered and both parties are determined to continue their collaboration, although setting aside, for the time being, the goal to become politically closer, particularly in the context of the recent rapprochement between Baku and Moscow.

Although sidelined by the EU after Nabucco was cancelled, the Southern Gas Corridor was revived by Azerbaijan and Turkey, which succeeded together in building its second pipeline, TANAP, through their own efforts. Their cooperation was narrated by the leaders of the two countries as the natural success of two kin nations, linked by their cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties. Nevertheless, cooperation was neither pure, nor the exclusive feature of their fraternal relationship. Between 2008 and 2011, Ankara and Baku engaged in disagreements related to their role and participation in the project. Although Turkey pressed for the bilateral agreement to include provisions that would foster its dream to become a regional energy hub, being able to purchase the gas at its borders and then resell it further to the European markets for a profit, the final deal signed in 2012 offered Azerbaijan's SOCAR the majority share in TANAP (58%) and control over the gas transit through Turkey, being in position to decide if additional supplies from other sources should be allowed through the pipeline and for setting the transit fees. Azerbaijan and Turkey have used TANAP as a symbol of their cooperation, although disputes pertaining to its commercial and status-enhancing importance have also occurred.

On the Western side of the corridor, its final leg, the TAP pipeline links two neighbours that have found themselves once more under political dispute lately: Greece and Turkey. Since 2018, Ankara has engaged in forceful actions in the territorial waters and EEZs of Greece and Cyprus, offering its individual interpretation of the law of the sea in order to make territorial claims in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. It has embarked on gas explorations under military protection in the proximity of the coasts of Greece and Cyprus and it signed, in 2019, a maritime boundary agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord, which supports it claims over Greece's and Cyprus' waters and natural

resources. Ankara's actions have triggered a sharp response from Athens and Nicosia, which urged the EU to take drastic measures against Turkey and asked for military back-up from some European partners, such as France. The political disputes between Greece and Turkey, reaching a peak level in past decades, as well as the two countries' competing ambition to become regional energy hubs, have not impeded however the realisation of major joint energy projects. Thus, Ankara and Athens cooperate in the Turkey-Greece natural gas pipeline that connects Turkish and Greek gas networks, the Turkey-Greece-Italy Interconnector, which is part of the Southern Gas Corridor. In addition, in the midst of the disputes in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean, in January 2020, Greece has started to receive gas through the newly inaugurated Turkish Stream, from its border with Turkey. Greece and Turkey are one of the most eloquent examples on how actors decide to compartmentalise their relations, following cooperative actions and behaviours in one segment of their lives, while still engaged in disputes and conflict in other areas of their interaction, as cooperation and conflict overlap in a *perpetuum*.

In its own turn, Bulgaria, one of the newer EU Member States emerged from the former communist bloc, chose a more cooperative path in its energy relationship both with the Western partners, as well as with Russia. Rational considerations added upon more ontologically secure cognitive foundations and thus Bulgaria joined and expressed support for both Russian and well as Western-backed projects. Unlike the neighbouring Romania, Poland, or the Baltic States, Bulgaria chose to reconcile past experiences and to adapt is narratives and routines in order to enhance both its physical and its ontological security. Therefore, Greece and Bulgaria come to contradict Mitzen's pessimism that states are driven towards conflict as they are caught in rigid attachments to their routines (Mitzen, 2006). Actors may be still well anchored in the attachment to their identity and routines, but also display flexible preferences and actions, and engage in both conflictual and cooperative actions towards the same 'Other'.

Romania, on the other hand, makes an interesting case of how collective actors may choose to remain attached to maladaptive routines and relationships, while experiencing high levels of ontological insecurity and anxiety, despite low levels of physical insecurity. Although being the fourth European natural gas producer, almost energetically independent and with the potential of becoming a natural gas exporter for its neighbours, Romania maintained cognitive styles and patterned routines of fear and enmity towards Russia, both in the political as well as in the energy field. In 2017, Romania produced 10.3 bcm of natural gas (CEIC, 2020) and imported only 1.19 bcm from Russia (Melenciuc, 2018), 20% less than

in 2016. The imports of Russian natural gas accounted thus to only 11.55% reported to the national production. Moreover, in the context of a decreased domestic consumption in the past decade, generated by the collapse of the heavy industry and an extended migration of its population, Romania produced at times more natural gas than it consumed, as it happened in 2015, when the excess raised at 15.185 bcm (Worldometer, n.d.), while there were no exports. Nevertheless, Romania upheld a self-narrative of threat despite very low engagements with Gazprom and very low imports of natural gas from Russia. The political and the economic ontological insecurities intertwined and contaminated each other. Romania asserted the self-narrative of a key security keeper in the Black Sea and established an U.S./NATO anti-missile ballistic defence shield on its territory. At the same time, it engaged in anxiety-driven narratives regarding the danger of reliance on the natural gas imports from Russia, despite its energy autonomy.

The three cases exposed above stand as examples for the dynamic character of *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, of how collective actors choose conflict or cooperation, or both, according to their own cognitive as well as rational patterns of decision, stemming from their ontological (in)securities. Ontological (in)security and consequently conflict and cooperation are fluid and dynamic, as actors might prove to be more or less flexible over time or between them. Thus, I disagree that all collective actors, such as states, remain forever caught in maladaptive attachments and routines that will replicate conflict over and over again. When faced with changing circumstances, some actors, experiencing a deeper state of *ontological security* might decide to adapt their routines and narratives about the self and the others and make choices based on rational, as well as cognitive assessments of the new context, of alternatives, costs and benefits at their disposal.

In the same line of ideas, as discussed in this thesis, neither has the EU opposed the Turkish Stream, nor has Russia criticised or blocked the Southern Gas Corridor in their present configurations. The antithetic depiction the EU and Russia as the liberal EU and the geopolitical Russia, trapped in a political conflict that also spills over into their energy relationship, is, as previously debated, reductionist as it ignores the multiple roles that actors play and the interchangeability of these roles, as well as the complexity of the pragmatic and existential motivations that underpin their conflictual or cooperative behaviour. The Southern Gas Corridor is therefore a strong case for demonstrating how the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* works in the complex energy dynamics around the major natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black sea to the wider Europe.

In the previous chapter I investigated on the material viability of the Southern Gas Corridor and I exposed the fact that, with its 10.9 bcm/y of gas delivered to the European markets in its current configuration, it has only a marginal 2.32% contribution to the EU's long proclaimed goal to diversify its gas supplies away from Russia. Moreover, it looks into the paradoxical possibility to deliver in the future Russian gas through its network of pipelines, connecting its final leg TAP with the Russian-built Turkish Stream. As previously analysed, providing additional supplies necessary for its expansion desired by Brussels is rather difficult at the moment, as Azerbaijan does not produce for the time being enough supplementary gas to double its capacity, and alternatives from Turkmenistan, Iran, Northern Iraq and Cyprus are also little feasible at present.

Why was then the Southern Gas Corridor necessary? If such an expensive and long-to-implement project does not satisfy the material energy security needs of the EU, what other motivations lie behind it? Similarly to Russia which replaced the cancelled South Stream with the Turkish Stream in order not to lose credibility and prestige, the EU also revived the Southern Gas Corridor at a time when its own status as a strong energy player was under question. When Nabucco, the corridor's predecessor was entirely abandoned in 2013, the EU sidelined the project and lost interest in continuing it. However, Azerbaijan and Turkey took over and, in an assertive move, decided to replace Nabucco with TANAP and the Shah Deniz consortium chose to build TAP instead of Nabucco West. The EU, although including the Southern Gas Corridor on its list of priority projects to contribute to its diversification of gas supplies, was not the one to decide the faith of the project at that stage, it was the energy companies behind it and the smaller actors, Azerbaijan and Turkey, which sealed its destiny.

The EU's self-narrated role of a regional leader in its Eastern Neighbourhood to which the Caspian-Black Sea region belongs, had already been criticised for failing to raise to its own claims in this sense. On the one hand, the EU's limited and hesitant engagement with the region, based on exporting its own values and rules, has been criticised for being ineffective and self-centric (Akiner et al., 2013; Kottari et al., 2013; Shabazov, 2017). Its failure to contribute to the resolution of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus has been equally considered to have damaged the EU's credibility, particularly after its lack of involvement in the 2008 war in South Ossetia and in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resurged in 2020 only a few kilometres away from the Southern Gas Corridor (Mikhelidze, 2013; Abbasov, 2014; Tanchev, 2020; Bayramov, 2020a). On the other hand, when the EU failed to have a say in the decision to cancel Nabucco by the energy companies behind it, as well as in

the realisation of TANAP by smaller actors like Azerbaijan and Turkey, it was furthermore criticised for having a weak bargaining power (Erdogdu, 2014). The leaders in Ankara and Baku themselves highlighted the EU's incapability to realise the Southern Gas Corridor, an endeavour which they praised themselves for implementing on their own (Azertac, 2019). Furthermore, in 2014 the Russian Federation annexed Crimea enhancing its stronghold in the Black Sea and, soon after, Ankara and Moscow decided to build the Turkish Stream, which, despite being suspended for more months in 2016, was finally completed delivering Russian gas to Turkey and to some of its European neighbours, with the promise to be further expanded.

It is in this context that the EU experienced a deep sense of vulnerability and incapacity to raise to its own self-narrated expectations to emerge as a strong, credible international actor. Moreover, **shaming** was an important component of its ontological insecurity, as the EU saw itself narrated by others as being weak and unsuccessful both on the political, as well as on the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region. The first leg of the Southern Gas Corridor, the SCP pipeline, had been realised by Azerbaijan with strong U.S. support at a time when Washington was highly involved in the region. The second section, TANAP, was built through the joint efforts of Azerbaijan and Turkey, while the EU's widely promoted Nabucco was cancelled by the energy companies behind it. Thus, it was the final pipeline of the corridor, TAP that, mainly crossing through EU territory, was the EU's chance to prove itself as a credible and capable energy player, able itself, like Russia and Azerbaijan, to finalise a major energy project. And hence, in November 2020, the Southern Gas Corridor was finally completed with TAP becoming operational. Although it will not contribute, in its present configuration and capacity, to enhancing the EU's energy security, it may, if expanded in the future, help the countries in the Western Balkans, members of the Energy Community, have access to much needed additional gas supplies. Nonetheless, in addition to this marginal material gain, it is mostly, the non-material aspects that justify its existence, despite its contested commercial feasibility, as the Southern Gas Corridor entails a highly symbolic value, that of the EU's ambition to narrate itself as a credible and strong energy player abroad.

Therefore, the EU engages in a *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* of its energy relations with Russia, based on both material and ontological needs. On the domestic level, some of its Member States chose a more conflictual line of interaction with Russia based on their own material and ontological insecurities, while other states, feeling more ontologically secure, preferred a more cooperative relationship with Moscow. This led to the EU appearing as a

dissonant and contradictory actor at times, self-narrating itself both as vulnerable and strong, a trend that has also been reflected in the EU's key energy policy document, the Energy Union Package adopted in 2015. On the international level, when confronted with political crises in its relationship with Russia, particularly after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the EU has adopted a more geopolitical tone claiming its intentions to become a strong international actor and to link energy to its foreign policy goals. However, even at the peak of the Ukrainian crisis, the energy trade with Russia remained unaffected, and given the fact that material conditions related to the role of gas in its energy mix will not change radically in the next years, the EU has chosen to retain a cooperative direction towards Russia. Even more, given its lack of success in securing additional supplies to expand the Southern Gas Corridor, the possibility of the EU accepting to connect its project to the Russian-built Turkish Stream in the future is a working possibility indicating towards continuing their energy cooperation through interdependence. Thus, both internally and externally conflict and cooperation choices have co-existed at all times without excluding each other, in a dynamic and enduring *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

Conclusions

The exploration through the energy relations of the past decades between the EU, Russia and Turkey have led to the observation that, despite at time acute political crises and conflicts between the three key actors, energy cooperation has managed to survive and the natural gas exports/imports, which have been particularly politicised lately, have continued unperturbed even at the peak of their disputes. Although frequently framed in the context of the deteriorating political relations which sometimes occurred between the EU, Russia and Turkey, and despite being considered as rather rival projects and geopolitical weapons, both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream have become a reality in 2020.

Intrigued by these material findings, which do not succeed to explain on their own why, on the one hand, the two pipelines were so important for their promoters despite their reduced geopolitical and commercial value, as well as why, on the other hand, cooperation and conflict overlapped at all times in the relationship of the actors behind them, I suggested investigating beyond their material nature, be it political or economic. For this purpose, I introduced a theoretical framework very little used in the energy studies, that of the *ontological security*, in order to complement the material explanations, which still stand in

place, with the exploration of the psychological factors that drive energy players to engage in conflict or cooperation, or in both, in apparently contradictory or dissonant moves. Throughout the research I advocated for overcoming the material/non-material dichotomy and I proposed considering both the objective, material conditions, as well as the ontological, existential ones that underpin the actors' actions and behaviours on the energy scene. In addition, I employed the new conceptual tool I formulated earlier in this thesis, the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, in order to help explain how the relationship between the key energy players has evolved and how it shaped in turn the seemingly mazy faith of the Southern Gas Corridor and of the Turkish Stream natural gas pipelines.

I started the chapter with discussing the EU-Russia-Turkey triad on the Caspian-Black Sea energy scene, as I consider that imagining it as a bipolar theatre of interaction between the great powers, in this case the EU and Russia, is reductionist and limited, ignoring the important role of other players that have impacted considerably on the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* in the region in the past years, in this case Turkey. While dedicated both to the cooperation with the EU in finalising the Southern Gas Corridor, as well as to the one with Russia in constructing the Turkish Stream, Ankara has also engaged in less cooperative and more forceful actions in the past years, getting involved in the military conflicts in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh, drilling for gas under military escort in the EEZs of Cyprus and Greece, and claiming new large gas discoveries of its own in the Black Sea aiming to become a producer and exporter itself as soon as 2023.

The energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region is therefore witnessing at the moment its reconfiguration into a trilateral relationship, with two strings strongly developed, the EU-Russia and Russia-Turkey, and with a third one, the EU-Turkey expected to emerge as a clearer one in the next years.

Thus, the first relationship I analysed in this chapter in the light of the ontological (in)securities that shape the cooperation and the conflict choices actors make, is the one between the EU and Turkey. I noted that the key element is Turkey’s ambition of redefining itself as an energy hub, which would imply both a material and an ontological upgrade of its status in the region. On the one hand, Ankara would benefit from evident financial and commercial gains, as it would be able to buy gas at its borders and resell it further for a profit, and it would have the right to settle transit fees for pipelines crossing its territory.

On the other hand, Turkey has deep ontological needs that propelled it to define a new role for itself, that of an energy hub. I used this opportunity to explain, with the help of the *ontological security* framework, how Turkey instrumentalised conflict and cooperation in a

perpetuum overlapping them, in order to achieve recognition, acceptance and the respect it considers itself entitled to by the major actors that have so far dominated the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea, namely the EU and Russia. Ankara has been largely disappointed by the fact that none of the arguments it has used in order to justify its claims for a better role in the world (its glorious past, its strategic location, its present achievements, such as its contribution to the realisation of the TANAP pipeline, or the fact that it is a fast growing economy), have convinced the EU to upgrade it from a transit state to an energy hub. As a consequence, it decided to supplement its cooperative actions with more conflictual ones, engaging lately in political and military endeavours on more than one theatre abroad. Turkey's actions stem mainly from its need to overcome stigma and shame to which it considers it has been submitted in past years by the EU, particularly after failing to raise to its expectations of replicating the European model of human rights, democracy, rule of law, and also of energy governance. In its own turn, despite being urged by its Member States, Cyprus and Greece, perturbed by Ankara's claims over their waters and natural resources, the EU has yet been slow in changing its routine relationship and narrative towards Turkey, preferring not to abruptly replace cooperation with conflict. On the other hand, it has also ignored so far Ankara's claims to be acknowledged as an energy hub, opting instead to maintain the same narrative in place, that of Turkey being a transit state, expected to comply with its model and rules.

Less successful in reaching its ambitions through the intercession of the EU, Turkey preferred to pay more attention to its relationship with Russia, the second string of the EU-Russia-Turkey triangle I analysed in this chapter. I used the examples of the protracted conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, of the jet fighter incident in 2015 that led to freezing the relations between Ankara and Moscow, as well as of the annexation of Crimea, in order to illustrate how the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* between Ankara and Moscow functioned throughout the years. Despite Ankara's hopes to challenge Moscow's dominant role in these events and in the region, Turkey has carefully balanced between condemning its actions and refusing to act against it, while even supporting Russia to consolidate its energy position in the neighbourhood and Europe by accepting to participate in two new Russian gas pipeline projects, the Blue Stream and the Turkish Stream.

I argued that Russia and Turkey accepted to engage in a marriage of convenience, not spared by tensions and disputes, both for pragmatic reasons related to their economic needs, among which the energy trade stands out, as well as for deeper, ontological reasons. Hence, feeling both shamed and stigmatised by the EU in past years, Russia and Turkey decided to

cooperate in order to prove themselves to the world, to show that they are not alone or isolated, that together they are a force to consider, both in the political, as well as in the energy realm. For this purpose, the Turkish Stream, although not contributing enough to their energy goals, has become their material, objective instrument on which they linked their hopes and ambitions to be acknowledged as powerful actors, as credible energy players, capable of building new gas pipelines at a time when both were experiencing economic and political challenges at home and abroad. Faced with existential crises that disturbed their narratives and generated anxieties related to their role in the world, both countries chose, on the one hand, to remain attached to routines that, although not always comfortable, provide them with a sense of stability, and, on the other hand, to redefine themselves. Thus, Russia has been constantly narrating itself in past years under the identity of a reliable supplier, while Turkey has obstinately been depicting itself as an indispensable emerging energy hub. Despite their political disputes, Ankara and Moscow chose to compartmentalise their relationship and overlapped political conflict with energy cooperation, for both material and ontological reasons.

The relationship between the EU and Russia is the third string of the EU-Russia-Turkey triad explored in this chapter. I highlighted how their energy cooperation has been mostly based on the argument of their interdependence, originating already during the Cold War when the two politically opposing actors managed to forge a successful cooperation in the field of hydrocarbons trade. When their long-established routines of cooperation have been disturbed by existential crises, in this case the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the energy relationship between them has been intensively politicised, placing the imports of natural gas from Russia to the EU under the fear of using energy as a weapon by Moscow. The dread on nonbeing fuelled narratives around otherwise stable energy relations. Nonetheless, I argued that, even at the peak of their political disputes, the energy trade, including the highly politicised gas flows, continued undisturbed, as both the EU and Russia chose to compartmentalise their areas of interaction and overlapped political tensions with energy cooperation. They did this both for pragmatic reasons, being dependent on each other for their natural gas imports/exports, as well as for deeper, existential motivations.

Thus, feeling deeply stigmatised and shamed after the annexation of Crimea, and having in this way its sense of ontological security disturbed, Russia has decided to remain attached to its cooperation routines with its most relevant ‘Other’, the EU, choosing the energy field as the most prolific realm of their peaceful interaction. For this reason, it imagined a new desired role and identity for itself, that of a reliable and credible energy

supplier, always fulfilling its obligations. In order to adjust itself, it employed both a geopolitical and a more market-oriented narrative, adapting according to its own pragmatic needs, as well as to its redefinition of new roles, initially that of a strong energy superpower, later replaced by that of a stable and reliable energy partner. I further commented in this chapter on the reductionist bias of 'Othering', of opposing the EU to Russia in an antithetic depiction of a liberal versus a geopolitical actor, arguing that both players display of geopolitical and liberal motives and narratives on the energy scene.

The EU, in its own turn, although considerably affected by the loss of basic trust it had placed in its partner and by the existential anxieties generated by the perceived threat to its physical security, has decided itself to maintain the previous habitual routines in the field of energy, continuing the energy cooperation with Russia. The previous identity of a liberal actor did not suit the new context anymore and thus the EU has opted for a more geopolitical tone in its narratives, depicting itself as determined to become a stronger international actor. Nonetheless, the Union, confronted with both domestic and external disruptive events, has continued to narrate itself simultaneously as a weak actor, vulnerable to its lack of internal solidarity as well as to external shocks. Unlike Russia and Turkey who managed to choose and to narrate a singular desired identity for themselves, that of a reliable supplier and respectively of an energy hub, the EU seems to be still oscillating between a vulnerable energy importer and strong values exporter.

I explained how the EU's apparent dissonance stems from the fact that it is not a homogenous actor, that different Member States display different levels of *ontological security* and make different conflict or cooperation-oriented choices. Thus, some of the Eastern members, marred by what it is perceived as a traumatic past with the Soviet Union/Russia, feel ontologically insecure and are not able to properly compartmentalise their relationship with Moscow, transposing their political anxieties also into the energy realm. At the same time, their material conditions support their anxieties, having a less diversified energy mix and being more dependent on a few suppliers. On the other hand, most of the Western states, enjoying better material features of their energy system, having diversified their supplies and updated their infrastructure, while at the same time not sharing a distrustful past experience with Russia, feel more ontologically secure and thus continue their energy cooperation with Moscow. In this way, both material and non-material conditions explain how conflict and cooperation overlap and drive an actor's decision, as *ontological security* motivations complement the objective considerations in shaping the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*.

I concluded the chapter by questioning why was the Southern Gas Corridor needed for the EU since it does not contribute to more than 2.32% of its gas import needs and it might even end up transporting Russian gas in the future if expanded, by connecting to the Turkish Stream. For this purpose, I discussed the wider context for the EU, in which it experienced itself shaming, being criticised for its weak and ineffective engagement in the Caspian-Black Sea region, for failing to engage in the resolution of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus, and for not being able to continue the Southern Gas Corridor when its project Nabucco was abandoned, leaving the realisation of TANAP in the hands of the smaller but more determined actors, Azerbaijan and Turkey. The last leg of the corridor, the TAP pipeline, passing mostly on EU territory, was the EU's last chance to prove itself to the world and to narrate itself as a credible and capable energy player. Thus, in November 2020, in the midst of the military clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan only a few kilometres away from the Southern Gas Corridor's infrastructure, the project was finally concluded against pessimist voices which saw it as yet another virtual pipeline. Conflict and cooperation co-existed at all times in a *perpetuum* and both material and *ontological security* needs underpinned all actors' motivations to engage in new natural gas pipelines linking the Caspian-Black Sea to the wider Europe, sometimes against political odds, and in 2020 both the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream have become a reality.

CONCLUSIONS

I. Key findings

The energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region is one of the best cases where the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* can be explored, given the high diversity of the actors engaged in the development of major energy projects and of the complex relations between them. Although frequently depicted in conjunction with a wide list of risks and threats to their viability and safety, the EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor and the Russian-built Turkish Stream became officially fully operational in 2020, after a sinuous evolution that saw the energy and the political scenes of Europe challenged by important events impacting on their dynamics. Despite instances of political conflict between the key actors backing them (the EU, Russia and Turkey), energy cooperation survived and often overlapped conflict.

In the light of these observations, in the first chapter I identified and discussed two main biases pertaining to the conceptual reductionism encountered in the political and academic narratives dedicated to energy and natural resources. The first one, the conflict/cooperation bias has proved to be limited in understanding the complex nature of the energy relations as well as the evolution of the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe. Under this view, conflict and cooperation have been depicted as opposing, self-excluding choices that actors make when shaping their behaviour and actions. Nonetheless, as demonstrated in the thesis, neither conflict, nor cooperation are singular, independent instances, as the two constantly intermix.

I argued in Chapter V that ontologically secure actors decide to compartmentalise their realms of interaction, adopting a cooperative behaviour towards an important 'Other' in one field, while opting to engage in conflict with the same 'Other' in another area of their relations. One notable example that I explored in this research is that of the relationship between the EU and Russia. Although caught in a political conflict after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, both Brussels and Moscow chose to continue their energy cooperation even at the peak of the crisis. Another case I analysed is that of the relationship between Russia and Turkey, which, although engaged on opposing positions on more scenes, such as in Syria or Libya, developed together the Turkish Stream, overcoming their political and diplomatic dispute in 2015-2016 and their differences related to resolving the conflicts above. Nevertheless, in cases of deep ontological insecurities and attachment to unhealthy routines,

some players fail to properly compartmentalise different domains of their relationships and tend to transpose conflict in all parts of their lives. I illustrated in this sense, in Chapter V, the case of some of the newer EU Member States, formerly belonging to the communist bloc, which, anguished with deep historical mistrust and fear of Russia, based on past traumas experienced in their history, have not been able to abandon old routines of conflict, as this would have disturbed their sense of being, the foundation of their identity, and thus they chose to remain attached to habits which offer them an illusory sense of continuity and stability. In this situation, political conflict became energy conflict as well, as the boundaries between various realms of their lives were permeated by their fundamental anxieties. For these actors, overwhelmed by their ontological insecurities, the natural gas pipelines are 'objects of fear' (Browning, 2018a:339), understood as an outlet of their insecurity, as a concrete, material object on which they can project their anxieties about an abstract and unknown future. For the first category of actors however, the ones feeling ontologically secure, the pipelines become what I call 'objects of opportunity', which they see as means of cooperation they use to achieve both pragmatic as well as non-material goals, such as those related to bettering their status and role in the world.

The second conceptual bias I identified in the first chapter was that of the energy security dilemma, derived itself from the predominance of a geopolitical understanding of the energy relations and dynamics around the main natural gas projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe. Particularly in the past years, in the context of their increased politicisation, the conceptualisation of energy security, and especially of natural gas, has moved from a more economic understanding to a predominantly geopolitical approach, being discussed overwhelmingly in relation with the concerns of the importing countries related to the security of their energy imports. Thus, energy security has become primarily identified with the security of supply, paying less attention to the security of demand in the importing countries and to the security of energy distribution in the transit countries.

Energy security has been, under this view, linked to the geopolitical framing of natural gas flows, in particular in relation with a consistent list of concerns related to the security of supply, among which: the access to sufficient volumes of gas, the safety of transport infrastructure seen as vulnerable to military conflicts, political unrest, terrorist and cyber attacks, and the possibility of supplier countries to use their gas exports as an energy weapon in order to gain political leverage over the importing and transit countries. I also drew the attention, in the same chapter, on the implications of securitising energy and natural

resources through the lenses of the securitization theory, of broadening the security agenda in order to include energy in the political debate. I noted, in this case, that equalling energy to hard security issues, such as military threats, would have the undesired effect of transforming a notably cooperative domain into a topic of conflict, not mirroring the reality on the ground, and posing the danger of unjustifiably increasing the existing anxieties undermining the self-trust and openness for cooperation. Reviewing the critical security theories, notwithstanding their contribution to acknowledging the importance of the non-material aspects of security, I also argued that energy security should not be entirely deprived of its material component, nor should the state be completely left out of the analysis, as, for the time being, despite efforts for the liberalisation of energy markets and the important role of energy companies in the energy trade and projects, particularly the case of natural gas security is still the privilege of governments and of those energy companies holding a large or a majority of state shares.

On the one hand, on a strictly material level, the geopolitical reductionism ignores the dual nature of interests and motivations, both geopolitical and commercial, of a large spectrum of actors, be it states, energy companies, international organisations or even non-governmental associations that have all impacted on the development of the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, as I demonstrated in Chapter IV. All actors employ mixed commercial and geopolitical considerations and narratives that underpin their choices for a more conflictual or more cooperative attitude in the relationship with other energy players. In Chapter III, I analysed in detail how the key actors, in the case of this research the EU, Russia and Turkey, have employed both commercial and geopolitical considerations to support their material and their existential claims for a better role on the international scene. Another bias generated by the geopolitical reductionism focused on the big powers rivalry is depicting the energy scene of the Caspian-Black Sea region as being bipolar, as the playground of the EU's and Russia's interests, thus ignoring or diminishing the key role played by other actors, such as Turkey, in shaping the existence of the natural gas pipelines linking the neighbourhood to the wider Europe and impacting themselves on the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* around them. I highlighted in detail in Chapter IV and V how other political actors (Azerbaijan, Turkey) contributed to defining the energy setting of the Caspian-Black Sea region and the faith of the main natural gas pipelines, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, as they are today. In addition, illustrating the notorious case of the Nabucco pipeline, I dismissed the assumption that only geopolitics drive the existence of the natural gas projects in the region, as the energy companies decided the destiny of Nabucco and not the political actors.

On the other hand, an exclusive geopolitical understanding of the energy dynamics ignores the deeper layer of motivations that underpin the actors' decisions, apparently contradictory at times, to engage in conflict or cooperation, or in both at the same time, with other energy players. The way the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* is shaped, with conflict alternating or frequently overlapping cooperation can be explained looking at the non-material, *ontological security* considerations on which the main energy actors base their actions and behaviour, the psychological factors that keep them entrenched in conflictual or cooperative routines, or that propel them to adapt their self-narratives and decisions and switch from conflict to cooperation and back.

In order to analyse the case studies I introduced in this research, the relationships between the EU and Turkey, between the EU and Russia, and between Russia and Turkey, I investigated in the Chapter II the recent trends in the evolution of the gas market in Europe, in order to check if the fears and anxieties around the natural gas supplies, highly politicised in recent years, reflect the reality on the ground, including also insightful forecasts for the next years. I concluded that, although gas will still be an important part of the European energy mix in the future, the fact that the European gas demand is forecasted to steadily decline in the next decades and that the EU infrastructure has been tested to be flexible and resilient enough to new disruptions contradicts the unparalleled politicisation of gas that occurred in the past years in Europe.

Analysing the material data was indispensable, as any research of the energy dynamics should take into account the objective factors and the material considerations that underpin actors' decisions. What I argue instead is that energy relations and the actors' motivations cannot be explained solely by the material, factual observations, that there are deeper, existential needs that support their claims. For this reason, I proceeded, in Chapter III, to a thorough analysis of the energy strategies and policies of the EU, Russia and Turkey, in order to reveal both the material and ontological foundations of their narratives. Similar to individuals, collective actors also construct biographical narratives about who they are and about their actions, explaining themselves to the world, but also changing and adjusting their narratives as they face new experiences which they incorporate in the new narratives they construct (Subotić, 2015). Therefore, they employ narratives that tend to (geo)politicise the energy projects, and specifically, the natural gas imports, and they display a more geopolitical attitude and language when referring themselves to these pipelines. Nonetheless, when both material and psychological conditions are more favourable, when they feel ontologically

more secure, they return to a less geopolitical approach and to a more commercial-oriented understanding of the energy projects and of the other players behind them.

The exploration performed through the main policy documents of the three key actors exposed the fact that Russia and Turkey have identified and consistently self-narrated new desired roles and identities for themselves, which they wish to be acknowledged by the Western partners, and hence the EU. Thus, Russia wants to be recognised as a reliable, credible supplier, always fulfilling its obligations, while Turkey aspires to become an energy hub, indispensable in any energy project in the Caspian-Black Sea region and in its neighbourhood. The two actors have both material reasons that justify their self-narratives, such as the necessity to secure their energy demand and supply needs, as well as non-material, ontological ones, related to their existential need to overcome stigma and shame, to which they considered they have been submitted, and to be offered the role and prestige they believe is proportionate to their present economic power and to their glorious past. The EU, on the other hand, unveiled itself as rather dissonant actor, apparently contradicting itself, hesitating between narrating itself as secure or insecure, as strong or vulnerable. Striving to overcome its self-perceived weakness stemming from its internal lack of solidarity, but also from shaming, being criticised for the indecisive role it has played in its neighbourhood, the European Union aims to be acknowledged itself as a strong international actor. To this purpose, it has adopted a more geopolitical tone in its energy narratives, but it has hesitated to completely abandon the routinised language of a liberal actor. Unlike Russia and Turkey who seem to have defined new identities and narratives for themselves, the EU still oscillates between a vulnerable energy importer and an assertive values exporter.

Proceeding from these findings, I looked in more detail, in Chapter IV, into how the EU, Russia and Turkey have shaped their self-narratives and identities, how they defined the conflict and cooperation dynamics of their relationship along the two major natural gas pipeline projects linking the Caspian-Black Sea region to the wider Europe: the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream. I argued that, despite their politicisation, being often feared to be vulnerable to various geopolitical threats and risks (the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus, the political disputes between the major actors behind them, the domestic situation in some of the states involved), the natural gas pipelines in the Caspian-Black Sea region entail, on the material side, also a strong commercial component that comes to complement and sometimes even prevail over the geopolitical one.

Nonetheless, when analysing the motivations of the actors for building the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream, an interesting conclusion surfaced: neither of the two

projects contributes significantly to the material aims advocated by their proponents. Thus, the Southern Gas Corridor, advanced by the EU as a priority project towards its diversification goal away from Russian gas imports, contributes, in the present set up, only to 2.32% of the total natural gas imports in the EU. Moreover, discussions about the possibility of connecting to the Turkish Stream in the future and thus transporting Russian gas through the Southern Gas Corridor have been circulated. In its own turn, the Turkish Stream has not managed, at the current capacity and layout, to entirely relieve Russia of its gas transits through Ukraine, nor has it contributed to decreasing Turkey's dependence on Russian gas. Thus, I raised the question: if material explanations do not entirely justify their existence, what else does?

Therefore, in Chapter V, I applied the theoretical framework of *ontological security*, a territory rather unknown for the predominantly material-oriented field of energy, as well as the conceptual tool of the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum*, in order to complement the material explanations, which should not be dismissed, with the exploration of the psychological factors that drove energy players to engage in conflict or cooperation, or both simultaneously, in shaping their relationship and the faith of the Southern Gas Corridor and of the Turkish Stream. Using these instruments allowed to reveal the fact that the two pipelines were needed, to an extent, for material considerations related to the diversification of supplies and routes. However, the Southern Gas Corridor was also essential for the EU to overcome its self-narrated vulnerability and the shaming it was submitted to for failing to be a credible strong actor in the region, and thus to prove that its actions are as good as its words. The Turkish Stream served a similar purpose for Russia, which needed a material prove to support its claims of being a reliable, constant supplier of energy, still capable of building large energy projects on its own. And it was key to Turkey's pretentions of being recognised as a key energy player in the Caspian-Black Sea region and beyond, as an energy hub indispensable for both the EU and Russia.

While largely narrated and understood by some actors as 'objects of fear', as potential weapons in the geopolitical rivalry between big powers, the Southern Gas Corridor and the Turkish Stream have been framed by other players, the EU, Russia and Turkey, as 'objects of opportunity', on which they linked both their material and *ontological security* aspirations and which allowed energy cooperation to survive the political disputes between them, as conflict and cooperation have co-existed in a *perpetuum*.

II. Implications for future research

Applying a non-material understanding of the energy dynamics in the Caspian-Black Sea region, through the theoretical framework of ontological security, may seem as a challenge to the routinised material, objective approach usually applied to the topic. However, I experienced it as an unexpected straightforward, uncomplicated way to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together, to unveil explanations that enriched the understanding of how the key energy players make their choices, on how they justify them when sometimes they seem dissonant to the audience, on how they build their relationships with each other, why they choose to engage in conflict and cooperation at the same time, and what are they actually looking for besides the obvious material gains.

Both the *ontological security* and the *conflict-cooperation perpetuum* are flexible instruments of analysis that may be successfully employed in researching various case studies, be it single or multiple ones. The perpetuum is particularly useful for explaining relationships between actors, while the ontological security framework may be applied to explaining the decisions, the motivations, the narratives and the actions of one or more actors. The two instruments would prove well-fitted for analysing the cases of protracted conflicts, when peace anxieties prevail and conflict becomes a choice, an attachment to habitual routines. They would perform very well in synergy when discussing contradictory relationships, such as the one between Greece and Turkey, where the past is essential for shaping both their inclination for conflict, as well as for cooperation with each other, where the habit of living together and of defining themselves in rapport with one another, might prove key to understanding their conflict-cooperation perpetuum. And returning specifically to the field of energy, the dual theoretical-conceptual framework would lead to challenging findings if applied to the very complex dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean, or to the intriguing case of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. As both the ontological security and the conflict-cooperation perpetuum are very pliable frameworks of analysis, they are open to remodelling according to the case study of choice, leaving generous space for creativity, while abiding to academic rigour.

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III. List of interviewees

No.	CODE	NAME	POSITION	DATE
1.	A1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	10/06/2020
2.	A2	ATHANASIOS DAGOUMAS	Director of the Energy and Environmental Policy Laboratory at the University of Piraeus	05/09/2018
3.	A3	JAMES HENDERSON	Director, Natural Gas Programme. Oxford Institute for Energy Studies	30/04/2020
4.	A4	LEILA ALIEVA	Affiliate Researche at Oxford School of Global and Area Studies	01/06/2020
5.	A5	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	30/05/2020
6.	A6	TATIANA ROMANOVA	Associate Professor at St. Petersburg State University and Public Policy Consultant	05/05/2020
7.	A7	WOJCIECH JAKÓBIK	Energy security analyst at Biznes Alert and Instytut Jagiellónski	30/04/2020
8.	C1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	19/05/2020
9.	C2	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	26/09/2018
10.	C3	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	10/05/2020
11.	C4	OLEH KRYKAVSKYY	Former Shell Advisor in Ukraine | Energy policy expert	28/04/2020
12.	C5	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	26/05/2020
13.	C6	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	17/05/2020
14.	C7	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	11/05/2020
15.	D1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	30/11/2017
16.	D2	DMITRY BALAKIN	Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the OSCE	15/12/2017
17.	D3	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	14/05/2020
18.	D4	GALIB ISRAFILOV	Permanent Representative of Republic of Azerbaijan to OSCE	30/11/2017
19.	D5	IHOR LOSSOVSKYI	Deputy Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the OSCE	30/11/2017
20.	D6	NUR ALKIS	Counsellor. Permanent Mission of Turkey to the OSCE	28/11/2017
21.	D7	ROVSHAN SADIGBAYLI	Counsellor at the Permanent Mission of Republic of Azerbaijan to the OSCE	30/11/2017
22.	G1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	25/05/2020
23.	G2	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	06/05/2020

24.	G3	SUKRU BOGUT	Senior Energy Advisor at USAID Ukraine	09/05/2020
25.	O1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	04/05/2020
26.	O2	CAN OGUTCU	NATO Civilian Expert at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe | Formerly at the Energy Charter Secretariat	10/05/2020
27.	O3	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	14/05/2020
28.	O4	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	10/05/2020
29.	O5	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	28/11/2017
30.	O6	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	05/05/2020
31.	O7	JEAN-BAPTISTE DUBREUIL	Senior Natural Gas Analyst at IEA (International Energy Agency)	14/06/2020
32.	O8	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	05/05/2020
33.	O9	LOÏC SIMONET	Senior External Cooperation Officer at OSCE	30/11/2017
34.	O10	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	07/05/2020
35.	O11	NILS JANSONS | CAMELIA SUICA	Deputy Head of Division | Policy Officer. European External Action Service (EU)	18/12/2017
36.	O12	PREDRAG GRUJICIC	Head of Gas Unit at the Energy Community Secretariat	30/04/2020
37.	T1	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	27/04/2020
38.	T2	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	15/05/2020
39.	T3	GULMIRA RZAYEVA	Founding Director Eurasia Analytics | Research Associate at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (OIES)	20/05/2020
40.	T4	ANONYMOUS	Confidential	11/05/2020
41.	T5	MICHAEL THOMADAKIS	Partner, Energy Sector at Grant Thornton Greece | Vice-President of Regulatory Authority for Energy Greece | Negotiator for TAP	21/09/2018
42.	T6	ROMAN NITSOVYCH	Research Director at the DiXi Group	26/05/2020
43.	T7	STUART ELLIOTT	Gas Writer at S&P Global Platts	14/05/2020