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The Russian-Ukrainian War and European Security

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Résumé

Le principal objectif de cet article a pour but de mettre en évidence le fait que la guerre russo-ukrainienne n'est pas, comme certains observateurs ont tendance à le croire, un conflit temporaire à la périphérie de l'Europe, mais un défi majeur et sérieux pour la communauté occidentale et pour la sécurité européenne, plus particulièrement pour les voisins occidentaux de la Russie. Dans ce contexte, sans une réponse concertée, robuste et complète de l'OTAN et de l'UE, ainsi que de ses Etats membres, leur sécurité et leur cohésion pourraient être remises en question.

Abstract

The main point of this article is that the Russian – Ukrainian war is not, as some observers tend to believe, a temporary conflict at Europe's periphery but a key and serious challenge for the Western community and for European security, with special consideration of Russia's Western neighbors. Therefore without a concerted, robust and comprehensive response of NATO and the EU, as well as of its member states, their security and their cohesion will be at risk.



Introduction

In November 2013, Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich finally succumbed to Russia's growing political and economic pressure and refused to sign an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union, which provoked protests in Kiev. At that time hardly anybody could have predicted that it would lead to the most dangerous crisis in Europe after the end of the Cold War.

This article briefly analyzes the nature of the evolving Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It puts this analysis into the larger framework of Russia's policy strategy. It also tries to assess the Western response to that in the security sphere as well as to reconstruct Russia's perception of that. Finally, the article stresses the challenges created by the crisis and Russia's policy for European security, while suggesting comprehensive measures to tackle the new situation.

Escalation of the crisis and the nature of Russia's hybrid war

The Ukrainian crisis has had several clear phases, in all of which Russia has played crucial role.

Pre-crisis period (December 2012 – November 2013) After Russia failed to persuade the Ukrainian government led by president Yanukovich to enter into a comprehensive deal paving a way for Ukraine to integrate gradually with the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Moscow turned to a political and economic coercion versus Kiev. For example, between 14 and 20 August 2013, Russia imposed a *de facto* partial trade blockade on Ukrainian goods through the means of enhanced border control; during high level meetings which followed Russian deputy PM Shuvalov and president Putin stated that Ukraine's signing an Association Agreement with the EU is irreconcilable with Moscow's offer of the Eurasian integration; presidential advisor Sergei Glaziev threatened Ukraine with the annulment of the agreement on free trade zone of the CIS¹. When Yanukovich succumbed to the Russian pressure and refused to sign the Association Agreement (including the DCFTA agreement) with the

1. Cf. Tadeusz Iwanski, Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga, Russia counteracts Ukraine's moves towards the European Union, 28.08.2013, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-08-28/russia-counteracts-ukraines-moves-towards-european-union> (accessed 17.11.2014).

EU, he ignited massive political protests (mainly in Kiev) called **EuroMaidan (November 2013 - February 2014)**, during which the Kremlin apparently (unsuccessfully) pressured Yanukovich to resist and to crash the protest by force². It ended with the few days of dramatic shooting at Maidan in late February 2014 and Yanukovich's flee from Kiev following the signature, on February 21st, of the political agreement with the opposition, mediated by the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland. As these developments went against the Kremlin expectations, Russia reacted immediately by starting **the military operation in Crimea (February – March 2014)**. The action started on 26/27th February with the night take-over of the Crimean parliament's building by a small commando of the Russian special forces. It took Russian forces (acting without insignia) less than a month to take over, in a relatively bloodless manner, all strategic points, including Ukrainian army bases in Crimea, facing usually passive resistance from the Ukrainian armed forces stationed there. President Putin decided to go on with the annexation of Crimea, which was eventually formalized on 21st March (after the "referendum" held under the barrel of a gun).

Russia's action was supplemented with a massive propaganda campaign in the Russian state-controlled media, which portrayed the Ukrainian revolution as a Western-sponsored fascist *coup d'état*, which posed a threat to the rights and life of the Russian-speaking population in South-Eastern Ukraine³. Almost simultaneously, on 1st March 2014, the **special operation in the South-Eastern Ukraine (March - May 2014)** started. Clearly coordinated anti-Kiev and pro-Russian demonstrations started simultaneously in several large cities, including Donetsk, Lugansk, Kharkiv and Odessa, where relatively small active groups stormed and occupied regional government buildings or made attempts to do

2. Cf. Sergei Glaziev-Federalizatsiya uzhe nye idea a ochevidnaya neobhodimost', Kommersant 6.02.2014, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2400532> (accessed 10.10.2014); Jamie Dettmer, Russian Spies Backed Kiev Killers, The Daily Beast 4.03.2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/03/ukraine-fingers-russian-advisors-and-ex-president-yanukovich-in-february-massacre.html> (accessed 9.10.2014).

3. Russia used in its propaganda distorted facts concerning, for example, the participation of the radical right wing groups in Maidan's self-defence (they were not dominant), the annulment of the law on minority languages by the Parliament (it was blocked by the new government) or the participation of the nationalist Svoboda party in the new government (it was marginal).

that. On the same day, the Russian Federation Council formally authorized president Putin to use the Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine. Due to the passivity of the local population, “volunteers” from Russia (often members of various radical, nationalistic organizations) recruited partly through the use of social media, have played an important role in those events. It may be asserted that these activities were to a large extent orchestrated and coordinated by the Russian secret services using its operatives and collaborators within Ukraine⁴. Attempts to start “uprising”, the so-called “Russian Spring”, failed in Kharkiv and Odessa (ultimately after the tragic events of May 2nd in the latter city).

In these circumstances Russia turned again to military measures instigating **armed rebellion in Donbas (starting in April 2014)** which soon transformed into **a regular yet limited Russian-Ukrainian war**. This phase started on 6/7 April when armed guerrillas stormed again and occupied government buildings in Donetsk and Lugansk. The separatists (as they soon declared the two “independent” entities: Donetsk People’s Republic - DNR and Lugansk People’s Republic – LNR) apparently consisted of members of the local radical pro-Russian organizations, organized crime groups, members of the private security services of local oligarchs, Russian militias from Crimea but in the course of events there were Russian veteran soldiers of special forces and officers of secret services, along with the armed “volunteers” (including Russian Cossacks), who played the leading role and assumed commanding posts⁵. After the takeover of Sloviansk by the Russian commando headed by FSB officer Col. Igor Girkin aka Strelkov in mid-April, the new interim government of Ukraine responded by sending in troops, which started a real war. Organized units of armed “volunteers”: regular soldiers and army veterans recruited by the FSB in Russia (including in the North Caucasus) and in Russia-controlled separatist Southern Ossetia started to flow to Donbas, especially since May. As a response to the start of the Ukrainian army offensive in Donbas in

4. Cf. Josh Rogin, Kerry:US Taped Moscow’s Calls to its Ukraine Spies, The Daily Beast 29.04.2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/29/kerry-u-s-taped-moscow-s-calls-to-its-ukraine-spies.html> (accessed 8.10.2014).

5. Cf. Iz chego состоit DNR: skhema ierarhii separatistov, Zerkalo Nedeli, 27.06.2014, http://zn.ua/UKRAINE/iz-chego-sostoit-dnr-sostavlena-shema-ierarhii-separatistov-147959_html (accessed 10.10.2013).

mid-June, Russia started to transfer heavy weapons (including APCs, tanks and multiple rocket launchers) in growing numbers as well as to shell the Ukrainian territory from Russia. As in late August 2014 situation of the Donbas separatists became difficult due to the Ukrainian advance, on 24th August a few thousands of regular Russian paratroopers crossed with tanks and other heavy weapons into Ukraine, supporting the separatists’ counter-offensive, which stopped eventually when a formal ceasefire agreement was introduced on September 5th.

However it must be stressed that not only pure military instruments were used by Russia in its limited war with Ukraine. At least equally important were other means: psychological and information warfare, subversion, political and diplomatic pressure, economic and energy levers. Therefore the term “hybrid war” was often used by western commentators. An important part of that was **massive Russian propaganda** channeled by the state-controlled media, which portrayed the Ukrainian revolution, the government in Kiev and Ukrainian forces fighting in Donbass in a distorted way. Hate speech was overwhelming. Numerous biased or false news, reports and documentaries were produced daily; fake photos, staged scenes were used. Much of this content was aimed at compromising Ukraine and its government, some of it – at instigating tension or panic within the Ukrainian population⁶. Ukrainian secret services were reporting arrests of Russian-trained subversion groups preparing acts of sabotage in various regions.

Moscow also engaged, starting in March 2014, into **political dialogue and diplomacy**, seeking to achieve some of its political goals versus Ukraine by peaceful means. The EU and the USA were among Russia’s main interlocutors in the beginning, but soon Germany, supported by France and the OSCE, took the leading role. It helped to broker a ceasefire but the initial political price was that Russia, being de facto an aggressor, has formally played the role of an intermediary in kind, while the separatists have been gradually treated as an “independent” actor⁷.

6. More on that see: Jolanta Darczewska, The anatomy of Russian information warfare. The Crimean operation, a case study, Point of View No. 42, OSW, May 2014, http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/the_anatomy_of_russian_information_warfare.pdf (accessed 10.09.2014).

7. More on that see: Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga, Marek Menkiszak, Russia to Ukraine: subversion and diplomacy, 8 May 2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/>

Russia has also used **economic means** in relation to Ukraine. Individual Ukrainian companies were denied access to the Russian markets⁸, some companies in Russia owned by individual Ukrainian oligarchs were harassed⁹. But the most serious was the full stop of the export of Russian natural gas to Ukraine since mid June 2014 due to the non-payment of outstanding debts, partly contested by the Ukrainian side¹⁰. Due to the high level of its gas-dependence on Russia and its limited own production or alternative means of supply, it put the Ukrainian economy at the risk of a breakdown after about a year¹¹.

Ukraine within the broader Russia's policy strategy

To understand why the crisis has happened,

[publikacje/analyses/2014-05-08/russia-to-ukraine-subversion-and-diplomacy](#) (accessed 10.09.2014).

8. E.g. MHP (poultry producer); five companies producing cheese; three companies producing alcohol – all on the pretext of food safety regulations. Cf. Denis Cenusu, Michael Emerson, Tamara Kovsirdse, Veronika Movchan, Russia's Punitive Trade Policy Measures towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, CEPS Working Document No. 400, Brussels, 25.09.2014; <http://www.ceps.eu/book/russia%E2%80%99s-punitive-trade-policy-measures-towards-ukraine-moldova-and-georgia> (accessed 17.11.2014).

9. E.g. Petro Poroshenko's owned Roshen sweets factory in Lipetsk (Russia) was raided by the Russian law enforcement agencies and forced to be closed for several weeks in March 2014, since September 2014 it has had to limit production due to difficulties faced on the Russian market; Ihor Kolomoyski's economic assets were nationalized in Crimea, after Russia occupied it; in April 2014 Kolomoyski's Privat Bank was forced to sell its Russian daughter company Moskomprivatbank; Kolomoyski's property was also arrested in Moscow in September 2014 in connection with the criminal case opened against him in Russia for his support for defence of the Donbas against separatists.

10. Russia maintained Ukraine's Naftohaz owns Gazprom 7 bln \$ for non-purchased gas in 2013 (under take-or-pay clause). Later it claimed also 5.3 bln \$ for gas delivered between November 2013 and June 2014 (on price contested by the Ukrainian side). Interim agreement, including on partial repayment of the second figure, was reached in trilateral negotiations between Russia-Ukraine and the European Commission on 31 October 2014; Cf. Szymon Kardas, Wojciech Kononczuk, Agata Loskot-Strachota, Success? The Russia/Ukraine/EU gas agreement, 5.11.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-11-05/success-russia/ukraine/eu-gas-agreement> (accessed 17.11.2014).

11. Cf. Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga, Arkadiusz Sarna, Russian economic pressure on Ukraine, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-26/russian-economic-pressure-ukraine>, 26 March 2014, (accessed 18.09.2014); Szymon Kardas, Wojciech Kononczuk, Russia and Ukraine's "cold gas war", 25 June 2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-06-25/russia-and-ukraines-cold-gas-war> (accessed 19.09.2014).

one must take a look at the broader context of Russia's policy strategy. There are three, deeply interrelated conditionalities of it: Russia's internal politics, Russia's policy in the post-Soviet area and Russia's relations with the West.

Ukraine was and is crucial in Russia's **internal politics** in three aspects. First, as it is often repeated in Moscow, Ukraine is close to Russia through social, ethnic, cultural and historic links. Vladimir Putin and his collaborators representing the conservative part of the ruling elite have included that in their idea of the uniqueness of "the Russian world" (*russkiy mir*), which became part of their political legitimacy. According to that thinking, both Ukraine and Russia are part of a separate civilization, which is different, and morally better, than the corrupted West¹². However, if Ukraine is to be gradually, successfully transformed according to the European standards and to be joining European structures, it will falsify all the concept of the "Russian world" and subsequently it will put into question the legitimacy of Russia's authoritarian political regime. What stems from that is that from the Kremlin's perspective, Russia should do everything it can to make Ukraine fail on the road of its European transformation and integration. Since the political survival of Putin's regime is at stake, all instruments should be used to that end.

Second, the success of mass social mobilization¹³, a certain "patriotic fever" over the annexation of Crimea, over Russia's support for Donbas separatists and over the resilience in front of Western sanctions, encourage the Kremlin to believe that an aggressive foreign and security policy works domestically. Therefore, it also may encourage president Putin and his colleagues to continue that approach in relation to Russia's neighbours (especially those which once belonged to the Soviet Union) in order to maintain a high level of public support, which is especially needed in times of worsening economic situation in Russia. On the other hand, the Kremlin needs to contain the

12. More on that cf. Marek Menkiszak, The Putin doctrine: The formation of a conceptual framework for Russian dominance in the post-Soviet area, OSW Commentary No. 131, 28 March 2014, http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_131.pdf (accessed 20.09.2014).

13. Cf. Sam Greene, Graeme Robertson, Explaining Putin's popularity: Rallying round the Russian flag, The Washington Post, 9.09.2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/09/explaining-putins-popularity-rallying-round-the-russian-flag/> (accessed 9.10.2014).

politically activated Russia's nationalist groups which were instrumentally used in the Ukrainian crisis. Thousands of trained Russian "volunteers" representing various radical groups and Cossacks are ideologically highly motivated. Part of them feel betrayed by the Kremlin, which in their perception has not helped them enough in military terms to take control of the whole South-Eastern Ukraine and has agreed to a ceasefire which many of them reject¹⁴.

Russia's policy in the post-Soviet area: The so-called CIS area (the post-Soviet area excluding the Baltic States) has always been perceived in Moscow as a natural sphere of Russia's influence, both a foundation and a symbol of Russia's great power status. Therefore, the Kremlin in the last 20+ years has embarked upon several initiatives to re-integrate that area economically and politically under its strategic control. The most recent attempt is the Customs Union/Common Economic Space/Eurasian Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Ukraine has always been perceived in Moscow as the key country in the post-Soviet area, the country that is able to give real geopolitical weight to Eurasian integration. It is the West (namely the US and the EU) which is perceived in Moscow as the major spoiler and rival in that context. The perspective, even distant, of membership of Ukraine (or any state of the CIS area) in NATO or the EU is perceived as a challenge to the core national interest of Russia. Ukraine is the key part of Putin's project. It seems that even in the post-Maidan reality, Russia has not abandoned its goal of derailing Ukraine's integration with the EU and of coercion of Ukraine into gradual future integration with the Eurasian Union (the Kremlin hopes that the economic crisis in Ukraine will steadily create favourable conditions for that). Moscow also wants the West to *de facto* acknowledge that Ukraine belongs to Russia's sphere of influence. President Putin clearly alluded to that in his speech during the Minsk meeting of the EU, Ukraine, Russia and the Eurasian Union in late August¹⁵. The political deal between the

14. Cf. numerous interviews given by the former "commander-in-chief" of the separatist forces in Donbas col. Igor Girkin (aka Strelkov) at: <http://rusvesna.su/authors/strelkov-igor> (accessed 7.11.2014).

15. Speech at the meeting of the Customs Union Heads of State with President of Ukraine and European Union representatives, 26 August 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/22851> (accessed 28.09.2014).

EU, Ukraine and Russia over the suspension of the implementation of the DCFTA between the EU and Ukraine until the end of 2015, reached in September 2014¹⁶, was perceived in Moscow as the first successful step in that direction.

Russia's policy versus the West: Again, it was Ukraine which always was one of the bones of contention in Russian-Western relations. The Kremlin, who has always downplayed the role of the society in political developments, perceived the victory of the Orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004 as the result of US-led Western support to the Ukrainian opposition, as a CIA special operation aimed at the destruction of the Moscow-led Eurasian integration process and at weakening Russia and its influence in the post-Soviet area. From the Kremlin's perspective, history started to repeat itself in 2013 when Maidan erupted. Various statements of president Putin leave no doubts that the Kremlin perceived those events as yet another US-led Western conspiracy against Russian interests. Therefore, the Russian aggression on Ukraine was perceived in Moscow as a peculiar form of self-defence.

It would be mistake however to maintain that Russia's decision to use military force against Ukraine and to annex Crimea were limited only to Moscow's goals towards Ukraine. Both the rhetoric used by the Russian leadership¹⁷

16. Joint Ministerial Statement on the Implementation of the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-14-276_en.htm (accessed 28.09.2014).

17. E.g. Putin implicitly called into doubt the legitimacy of Ukraine's territorial integrity, stating that: *I would like to remind you that what was called Novorossiia (New Russia) back in the tsarist days – Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa – were not part of Ukraine back then. These territories were given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government. Why? Who knows. They were won by Potjomkin and Catherine the Great in a series of well-known wars. The centre of that territory was Novorossiysk, so the region is called Novorossiia. Russia lost these territories for various reasons, but the people remained.* Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, Moscow 17.04.2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034> (accessed 12.11.2014). Earlier, in 2011, he suggested that the unification of Belarus with Russia is *possible, desirable and depends 100 % on the expression of the will of the Belarusian people, who should fight for that.* PM Vladimir Putin interacted with the participants of the "Seliger 2011" youth educational forum, Seliger 1.08.2011, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/events/news/16080/> (accessed 12.11.2014). Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov stated among other things: *States which are interested in ensuring their territorial integrity must ensure the right of people to freedom and self-determination within their borders. They must refrain from actions which complicate the exercising of the right to self-determination.* Speech by the

and Russia's actions on the ground (for example, the Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 and the subsequent recognition of independence of separatist Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia) in the last several years have suggested that Russia stopped short of guaranteeing the inviolability of the borders, at least in the CIS area. Instead, it made it conditional on the neighbouring states' pursuing a policy of "good neighbourhood" towards Russia. This meant in fact refraining from developing closer cooperation with Western countries, not to mention their integration into the Western structures¹⁸. Individual warnings were issued by Moscow towards Moldova and Kazakhstan¹⁹.

However, Russia's provocative moves during the current crisis have not been limited to the countries of the CIS area. They have been aimed also at the Baltic states. Among them were: provocative flights near their airspace; the kidnapping of the officer of the Estonian counter-intelligence; the arresting of the Lithuanian fishing vessel in international waters; restarting the legal prosecution of the Lithuanian (formerly Soviet) citizens for escaping the draft into the Soviet Armed Forces in the early 1990s; accusations and warnings against Latvia²⁰.

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and his answers to questions from deputies during the 349th extraordinary session of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 21.03.2014, http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/1eb0f5937a80b6b444257ca500519090!OpenDocument (accessed 17.11.2014).

18. E.g. president Putin stated: *We are against having a military alliance [NATO] making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory*. Putin's address to the Federal Assembly, 18 March 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889> (accessed 20.09.2014); Minister Lavrov said: *Every state has a sovereign right to choose its economic partners, provided it doesn't harm the legitimate interests of its neighbours*. Remarks by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the Government Hour in the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 19.11.2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newslines/3B3A0155EC8B4FE3C3257D95003A6400 (accessed 20.11.2014).

19. Cf. Moldavskiye vlasti izyali iz samoleta Rogozina 30 tysyach podpisey Pridnestrovtsev za prisoyedineniye s RF, Newsru.com, 11.05.2014, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/11may2014/podpisi.html> (accessed 8.10.2014); Seliger 2014 National Youth Forum, 29.08.2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22864> (accessed 8.10.2014).

20. Cf. Julian Borger, Luke Harding, Baltic states wary as Russia takes more strident tone with neighbours, *The Guardian*, 18.09.2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/baltic-states-wary-russia-strident-estonia-latvia-lithuania-nato> (accessed 10.10.2014).

Russia's provocative military activity was aimed also towards the other countries, especially in the Baltic-Nordic area, UK, Canada and the United States. Russian military planes has violated the Finnish and Swedish airspaces; Russia's strategic aviation made demonstrative over flights near the airspaces, military facilities or individual warships of the US, Canada and some other NATO countries²¹. Even if such incidents did occur before, their number and intensity during the Ukrainian crisis has increased considerably. It was supplemented with the series of a large military exercises of the Russian Armed Forces both near its Western borders (including in Kaliningrad enclave) and in other parts of Russia (a chain of large snap exercises started in Russia already since February 2013). Important element of some of these were fast lift of large military units for long distances. Moreover, despite the worsening economic situation in Russia, its military spending continue to grow and remain political priority²². Moscow has increased also its military activity in the High North and announced its plans for enhancement of its presence in the Arctic by creating the Northern Command and deploying two brigades there by 2017²³.

Considering the above mentioned, It may be asserted that Russia, with its war with Ukraine in fact has started its campaign aimed at **revision of the post-Cold war political and security order in Eurasia** and to impose, by use of various means, including military force, a new order, more suitable to its self-perceived interests. There are several goals Russia most probably pursue in that context:

First: the (re-)establishment of its strategic control over the all (or at least the most) of the counties of the CIS area (with special respect

21. Cf. Richard Milne, Sam Jones, Kathrin Hille, Russian air incursions rattle Baltic states, *Financial Times*, 24.09.2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/9d016276-43c3-11e4-baa7-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3G9O1VH7> (accessed 8.10.2014).

22. Cf. Andrzej Wilk, Is Russia making preparations for a great war?, 24.09.2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-24/russia-making-preparations-a-great-war> (accessed 30.09.2014). Russia's defence spending rose, according to SIPRI, from 9,2 bln \$ in 2000 to 87,8 bln \$ in 2013. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database (accessed 19.10.2014).

23. RIA-Novosti 1.10.2014, http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20141001/193496055/Russia-to-Form-Arctic-Command-North-Comprising-Two-Motorized.html (accessed 3.10.2014).

to the three key states: Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, as well as to Moldova). In future one cannot exclude an attempt of Russia of the reestablishment of a single statehood based on the integration under the framework of the Eurasian Union. **Second:** exerting maximum achievable influence over the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), partly using actively large ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking communities in these countries. In future Russia may try to destabilize it and effectively decouple it from the Western structures (NATO and the EU). **Third:** preservation and formalization (ideally, based on some international, legally binding, agreements) of a security buffer zone in Central Europe (encompassing Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) while re-establishing a maximum achievable influence there. **Fourth:** preservation and formalization of the security status quo in Northern Europe (aimed at preserving unaligned status of Finland and Sweden and possibly at limiting their security cooperation with NATO and the US). **Fifth:** re-establishment of its maximum achievable influence in the Western Balkans, possibly stopping their process of integration with both the EU and NATO. **Sixth:** weakening of NATO to the maximum extent possible, up to the breakup of the Alliance. Moreover: limiting US's presence and influence in Europe, up to its full withdrawal from the continent. **Seventh:** The weakening of the European Union, decreasing its cohesion and stopping its enlargement. In that context an attempt to establish a relation of an asymmetric dependency with the EU and its member states, including by fostering close energy and economic cooperation with the major European states (notably Germany, France and Italy).

Kremlin understands that the above mentioned goals are very ambitious, given the current cooling down of political relations between the West and Russia, as well as due to Russia's worsening economic situation. However what influences Russian leadership's choices is also perceived weakness of the West. President Putin and his colleagues apparently believe in the inevitable demise of the West on a global scale, in the systemic crisis of the US global power and leadership and in the long-term negative consequences of the economic and increasingly political crisis in the European Union²⁴. They perceive

24. Cf. Meeting with Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives in international organisations, 9 July 2012, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/4145>

Russia has now a window of opportunity, connected among other things with the weakness of president Obama's administration, its growing preoccupation with the developing crisis in the Middle East as well as its strategic focus on raising power of China; with EU's growing preoccupation with its internal economic and political problems, including rise of nationalist and populist (mostly pro-Russian) political forces. Kremlin may calculate that relatively fast, bold and aggressive action may benefit Russia in a world in which political will, determination and endurance can outweigh disparity in potential.

The Russian challenge and Europe's dilemma

Taking the above mentioned into consideration we may conclude that the Russian Federation, under the leadership of president Vladimir Putin, undermines the foundations of peace and stability in Europe and poses a threat to the European security.

However what we can observe is that the United States, other Western countries, NATO and the EU as well as its member states responded to that relatively mildly. Both political and economic sanctions against Russia are of limited nature. It will take long time for them to impact the Russian economy in a way, which could somehow limit its ability to sustain aggressive policies while there are growing problems with consensus in the EU even for keeping existing sanctions, not to mention their expansion. On the other hand leading Western countries engaged into a political dialogue with Moscow which was instrumental in establishing a cease fire but which failed to make Russia fulfill hardly any of important Western demands. Also Western support for Ukraine is not significant in financial terms.

In a **security sphere** NATO, EU and its member states has suspended most of the security and defense cooperation with Russia (with some notable exceptions). Political dialogue in the framework of the NATO – Russia Council was practically frozen. The response towards Ukraine was limited to the non-lethal supplies for the Ukrainian armed forces by some NATO and EU member states as well as continuing planned small military exercises.

(accessed 8.10.2014) ; Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club, 19 September 2013, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6007> (accessed 8.10.2014).

The most visible reaction to the crisis in security sphere were the declarations of few individual European countries (e.g. Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Sweden) to increase slightly their defense spending; the decision of some large NATO member states to send some military units of a symbolic number for exercises in the NATO's Eastern flank countries as well as the Newport NATO summit decisions. It included announced plans to establish small units of Very High Readiness (so called spearhead), to allow for symbolic rotational presence of NATO troops in the countries of the Eastern flank as well as to establish the new commands and to reinforce some of the existing ones²⁵. Most of these decisions were aimed at reassurance of the NATO's Eastern flank member states, concerned with Russia's aggressive policies.

On one hand the above mentioned decisions send message of solidarity within the Alliance, demonstrate commitments of its members to the collective defense and may be interpreted as a warning to Russia in kind of soft deterrence. On the other hand, there is no secret that these decisions were result of difficult discussions among the NATO member states on the assessment of the security situation connected with Russia's policies and on the best ways to respond to it. It seems that part of the member states, including the biggest European NATO member – Germany, are of the opinion that: risk of the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict should be avoided at almost any cost; NATO shouldn't provoke Russia with any substantial reinforcement of its military capabilities in NATO's Eastern flank; political commitments of the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997 on restraint in NATO's forward basing in Central Europe are, despite that the principles enshrined in the document were gravely violated by Russia, continue to be valid²⁶.

The danger of the situation is that it is likely that the above mentioned perception would lead to the lack of political will to seriously enhance NATO's preparedness for contingencies connected with Russia's potential further aggressive policies as well as to the lack of urgency to take the steps, which were already agreed in principle. Even more

dangerous is that Kremlin could interpret NATO restraint as a sign of weakness, deep divisions within the Alliance and of lack of political will or ability to resist Russia, if it undertakes some provocative actions (the Baltic States being the most vulnerable in such case). Based on that perception Russia may be encouraged to take a risk to test NATO.

Future (short to mid-term) contingencies connected with Ukraine's crisis and Russia's policies are difficult to predict as they are dependent on various factors, but above all: president Putin's calculations of risks and opportunities.

We may assume that such contingencies may include the following scenarios (or their elements):

"Positive scenario": Russia will accept freezing the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine (supporting DNR and LNR in Transnistria-like or Abkhazia-like manner) and will try to accomplish its goals towards Ukraine gradually and mostly through the economic and political means (hoping for a economic crisis resulting in a power-shift or chaos, which would allow for gradual reestablishment of Russia's strategic control over Ukraine in midterm perspective). Russia will refrain from expanding the conflict into the other post-Soviet space, focusing on gradual political and economic means of coercion towards them.

"Negative scenario": Russia after some pause, will allow for some expansion of the conflict zone and will use its troops in a limited way to establish control over Kharkiv and Zaporizhe region, creating a land bridge to Crimea at the same time destabilizing the rest of Ukraine by various means (including subversion) in attempt to put Ukraine into a kind of *failed state*. Russia will "defreeze" the conflict in Moldova (through Transnistria and Gagauzia), partly along with the Ukrainian scenario. Russia will increase provocations against some (or all) Baltic States, including by (armed?) activists of the Russian ethnic minorities there, testing NATO's reaction and acting in deterrence against the Western engagement in Ukraine and/or Moldova.

"Radical scenario": Russia, unable to reach its goals by political and economic means in short to mid-term perspective, will at some point start military invasion of Ukraine, establishing its direct control over the South-Eastern part of it and creating a land bridge to Transnistria, cutting off Ukraine from the Black Sea; proclaim a separate puppet state of Novorossiia there, possibly recognizing its

25. Cf. Wales Summit Declaration, 5.09.2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm (accessed 28.09.2014).

26. Cf. Vanessa Gera, Eastern hopes for NATO bases stymied by Russia, Associated Press, 4.09.2014, <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/eastern-hopes-nato-bases-stymied-russia> (accessed 8.10.2014).

independence. Russia will provoke the conflict in Moldova, use its military force there and occupy Southern Moldova, linking them to Transnistria and Novorossiia. Russia will provoke serious destabilization in all Baltic States according to the Ukrainian scenario, possibly use its armed forces to occupy some parts of them (inhabited mainly by the Russian speaking communities). Russia will provoke conflict around the Kaliningrad enclave, possibly demanding and enforcing (by force?) a land corridor linking it with the rest of Russia. In such a scenario conflict may escalate to engage Poland and NATO in general under the commitments of the article 5. In such case also non-aligned Nordic countries may be affected or engaged in a crisis.

The dilemma of the European states belonging to the Western structures concerns the approach towards both the assessment of the risks described above as well as towards the policy responses²⁷. In general terms the two approaches are possible:

1. To accommodate some Russia's demands concerning Ukraine (e.g. guaranties for non-aligned status of Ukraine; amendment of its DCFTA agreement with the EU; legal

27. Cf. Lilia Shevtsova, Putin ends the interregnum, The American Interest, 28 August 2014, <http://www.the-american-interest.com/shevtsova/2014/08/28/putin-ends-the-interregnum/> (accessed 1.10.2014).

guaranties for cultural or even political autonomy of the Russian speaking population in Ukraine) in order to avoid even small risk of escalation.

2. To contain/deter Russia by demonstrate West's unity, commitment to the basic values and principles and acting decisively, including by: retaining sanctions against Russia and if necessary by expanding it; by providing Ukraine (as well as Moldova or any other European partner country endangered by Russia) with a substantial political, economic and military support (stopping short of sending troops); by enhancing substantially NATO's military capabilities, especially reinforcing its Eastern flank, including by the permanent stationing of substantial combat troops there.

The author believes that, given the rhetoric of Russia's leadership, internal developments in Russia, both past and present Russia's foreign and security policy actions, the second assessment and policy recommendation was more plausible. Especially while Putin is not ready to compromise on self-defined strategic goals of Russia, accepting possible Western offers as mere temporary solutions. It is up to the Western community and its members to decide on that. What is pretty sure is those decisions will define the future of the European security.◇

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