

## **Conflict in Ukraine**

International Relations

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**Abstract:** The crisis, which began in the autumn of 2013 as an outcome to the irresponsible policies of the Ukrainian government and the greed of the Ukrainian elite, was transformed into a coup, seizure of power and chaos spreading to the territory of one of the largest countries of Europe by the awkward efforts of not indifferent partners. And today, months later, the country is in a state of civil war, a humanitarian catastrophe and the expectation of a severe economic crisis.

This research paper will make it possible to understand the essence of events and accordingly formulate its position regarding the situation in Ukraine, the role of Russia and the West in its destiny; analyze the political, economic and social preconditions for the beginning of a military conflict in Ukraine and to identify the outcomes and possible ways to overcome the crisis and achieve stability. This conflict led to huge human losses, mass migration of the population, and the emergence of large-scale economic losses for both the Ukrainian economy and the economies of the countries which were involved.

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### **Introduction**

Much of Ukraine's history unfolded outside Russia: non-Russian empires and states ruled of Ukrainian-populated territories for centuries. As a result, Ukraine was always, and still remains, regionally, culturally, and politically diverse. No European and certainly no non-European-state have ever been homogeneous. Ukraine's diversity is the historical norm, not the historical exception. The present crisis in Ukraine can be fully described as a crisis of the model itself, on the one hand, the post-Soviet Ukrainian statehood, and on the other – Western world. Ukraine is a country, in fact, divided in two. The gap between Western and Eastern Ukraine over 20 years of independence has not reduced at all. (Rajan Menon, Eugene B. Rumer 2015) The East for a long time had the opportunity to develop in the Russian Empire, and then the Soviet Union, keeping its cultural autonomy, language and traditions. At the same time, the West had to defend itself against assimilation attempts on the part of the ethnic majority of the states, which for a long time had Western lands. As a result, a philosophy of aggressive nationalism was formed in Western Ukraine.

Ukraine is located in the fertile area. However, steppe territories from the beginning were attacked by various invaders (Avars, Khazars, later Pechenigy, Polovtsy), which did not contribute to achieving stability. As a result, the historical center of Kiev Rus began to dilute, and the population moved to the northeast. The Mongol-Tatar invasion finally led to the desolation of these territories (except for the Halych-Volhynia principality). From the XV to the XVIII century more than half of present Ukraine, especially the lands south of Kiev, the Black Sea region, were weakly inhabited or completely empty, it contributed forming the so-called *Wild Field*<sup>1</sup>, because of the raids of the Crimean Tatars (see map in Figure 1). In reality, these territories were inhabited in the XVIII and especially in the XIX century by Ukrainians and Russians as a result of the colonization policy of the Russian government.

More than three centuries (XV-XVIII) Ukrainian territories, including Kiev, western and south-western Ukrainian lands, were subjected to constant raids by Crimean Tatars. In reality, Ukraine was defenseless outskirts (Ukrainian) of the Polish-Lithuanian state. In general, the Tatar forays proved to be more severe and protracted for Ukraine than for Russia. However, in both countries, the Tatar threat, the desolation of the border territories, and the desire of the population to escape from the growing social pressure led to a similar phenomenon - the formation of a free, militant and robber Cossacks. In Ukraine, the role of the Cossack ideology turned out to be extremely significant.

Already from the end of the XII century Ukraine is gradually becoming an arena for geopolitical applications of the interests of different countries. And in the XIV century the territory of the Halych-Volhynia principality was divided between Poland, Lithuania and Moldova. In the XIV and XVI centuries for Ukrainian lands there were endless clashes between Lithuania, Poland, Moscow and the Golden Horde (later the Crimean Khanate, the vassal of Turkey). After 1569, when Lithuania and Poland united in a single Commonwealth, the majority of Ukrainian lands passed from Lithuania to Poland. And this contributed, first, to the growth of the

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<sup>1</sup> Within the boundaries of the Wild Field is now located, Lugansk, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Zaporozhye, Kirovograd, Poltava, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Kharkiv and Kherson regions of Ukraine.

geopolitical (and geocultural) struggle between Poland and Russia, and secondly, to the growth of the national-Cossack struggle of the Ukrainians against the Poles. (Doldilov, Miller 2006)

The Ukrainian territories constantly served as a small change in the disputes of the powers. The sections and delimitation of its territory became a permanent feature of the history of Ukraine, and all associations occurred with the help of someone else's strength and will and therefore were very expensive. Since the XIV century it is possible to count at least fourteen only the epochs of sections, and if to take each change of borders, especially the change of power and borders in the period of trouble, then there were at least twice as many.

The second half of the XIV century were between the Horde and Lithuania, as well as Poland and Lithuania; in the XV - first half of the XVI century - several sections between Moscow and Lithuania; 1569 - the transfer of territories under the jurisdiction of Poland from Lithuania as a result of the unification of the two states; 1667 - section between Poland and Russia; end of the XVII century - between Poland, Russia, Turkey and the Crimea; end of the XVIII century - three sections of Poland (1774, 1793 and 1795), which included the territory of Ukraine. In the years 1918-1920 repeated redistributions and sections, including the division between the Soviet republics and Poland, various combinations resulting from the collapse of Austria-Hungary, including the transition Zakarpattia from Hungary to Czechoslovakia. 1939 - Partition of Poland between the USSR and Germany; new border changes after 1945; finally, recent events related to the Crimea.

Accordingly, there is no question of any stability of borders, which obviously did not contribute to the formation of the ideology of statehood. Until 1946, there was no period when all the lands of Ukraine were at least under the rule of one state. They were always divided among a number of powers, and the jurisdiction of the territories was constantly changing. In addition to Poland, Russia, the Crimean Khanate, Turkey and Austria, Romania, Hungary, Turkey, France, Germany, Czechoslovakia took an active part in the fate of Ukraine. Sections have determined the different fate of these or those Ukrainian lands. Some territories, such as Northern Bukovina, were cut off from Ukrainian lands for 5-6 centuries, others, like Trans Carpathian region of Ukraine, were part of Ukraine in general only in 1946. Accordingly, they do not have strong historical and ethnic ties with Ukraine, whose lands, which for centuries lived under the rule of different powers, simply did not manage to unite. After all, they were in uniform borders from 1954 to 1991, less than 40 years. Thus, Ukraine only at the middle of the twentieth century was finally collected from various "pieces", but it still remains a "glued" territory. In order to unite it firmly, it takes a long time and the right policy.

### **Reasons for Ukrainian conflict**

#### **Political reasons:**

The extremely controversial policies of Viktor Yanukovich led him to lose confidence almost at all levels of Ukrainian society. Yanukovich and his team for a short term of the presidency have damaged its relations even with their allies, not to mention opponents. The political reasons which led to crisis and divorce are: firstly, the instability of the Ukrainian political system, which causes sharp changes in the development of the country and the constant struggle between elite groups for power, the instability in question was clearly showed during the confrontation between the former president of Ukraine V. Yanukovich and the former Prime Minister of Ukraine Yulia Tymoshenko, as well as after the coup d'état of 2014; secondly, Ynukovich started his presidency with demonstrative strengthening of economic relationships with Russia, but Yanukovich changed his decision, and began preparation for signing an agreement with the EU. Yanukovich could balance for a long time between the EU and Russia, in order to achieve the most acceptable for Ukrainian interests a compromise. However, he sharply accelerated the preparation of the signing; Secondly, he accepted, practically without reading, unprofitable variant of the text for Ukraine agreement; thirdly, it authorized a large-scale information campaign in the country, incredibly untwisting the expectations of ordinary citizens of the country from signing of this document.

The agreement was presented as a full-fledged entry into the European Union, which will fundamentally change the entire life of the country not only in the economy, but in all remaining areas. The Third reason was in the South-East of Ukraine, after the change of V. Yanukovich's presidency, protests began because of the abolition of the status of the Russian language as a regional one. Legislatively, television and radio were only in Ukrainian there were almost no programs in Russian, all news programs were being conducted in Ukrainian, all films were dubbed Ukrainian, schools stopped the study of Russian literature, the history of Russia and Ukraine was distorted, and historical facts were being replaced myths and lies for all ties between Russia and Ukraine.

#### **Economic reasons:**

Economic prerequisites are: first, Ukraine's loss of the Crimea peninsula, the cessation of industrial production in the South-East of Ukraine, one of the largest industrial regions of the country, which forced

business and the population to stop investing in the economy; secondly, there was a fall in the national currency - the hryvnia. Another reason was the decline in real gross domestic product (GDP) is fixed starting from the III quarter of 2012. It is symbolic that the economic contraction began immediately after the finals of the European Football Championship (Euro 2012) in Ukraine and Poland. Since 2012, the world economy is growing faster than the Ukrainian one. That means that, Ukraine is losing its positions in the world, not to mention entering the top 20 leading economies of the planet (the program goal of the president is Yanukovich).

The total amount of state debt increased by 13.4% in 2013, In general, during the years of Viktor Yanukovich's rule (2010-2013), the debt of the Ukrainian state increased by 83.6% to 73.1 billion (40.2% of GDP). About 40% of the state debt has a repayment period for two years. Thus, in the state the living standard of the population has decreased because of a fall in wages, a reduction in jobs and an increase in unemployment.

### **Main contenders in the conflict**

In official reports, the press and scientific publications, the causes of the conflict in the southeast of Ukraine is often the subject of discussion, mainly with a view to finding the perpetrators.

#### **Ukrainian domestic level**

Already two weeks after the beginning of —EuroMaidan||, in early December 2013, the Russian press could find discussions on the reasons for a possible civil war in Ukraine: 1) the split between the West and the East of Ukraine; 2) the absence of a political force uniting Ukraine; 3) state support of radical forces; 4) Crimea with pro-Russian sentiments; 5) "pulling the rope" between the EU and Russia over where to integrate into Ukraine.

Discussions at the political level boil down to referring to the party that provoked the conflict. For example, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly stated that "the Ukrainian crisis did not arise due to Russia's fault": "Today we see how the" party of war "actively supported from outside Kiev continues to try to push the Ukrainian people into the abyss of a national catastrophe," the Russian president said shortly before signing Minsk-2 in February 2015 (V.Putin's.2015). Viktor Yanukovich also believes that the conflict in the southeast of Ukraine is the war of the Kiev authorities against its people (Viktor Yanukovich.2015).

#### **Systemic crisis**

According to Putin, the Ukrainian crisis as a whole was the culmination of, first, the attempts of the US and its Western allies "to impose their will everywhere," and secondly, the desire of the EU within the framework of the "Eastern Partnership" program "to tear off a number of states of the former Soviet Union from Russia " (V.Putin.2015). Such a view would be agreed by John Mearsheimer, a well-known American realist researcher who believes that it is the US and Europe that bear the main responsibility for the Ukrainian crisis because of the policy of expanding NATO and the desire to tear Ukraine away from Russia and integrate it into the West (John J. Mearsheimer.2014).

Petro Poroshenko explains that Ukraine is at the center of an attempt at redistribution of peace from Russia. Following him, Barack Obama argues that it was Russia's actions that violated the order that developed after World War II. In his turn, Vladimir Putin believes that the deterioration of Russia's relations with Western countries cannot be called a consequence of the Ukrainian crisis, "the crisis in Ukraine is a derivative of the imbalance of international relations," and not vice versa (Vladimir Putin.2014).

#### **The choice of civilization and identity**

Petro Poroshenko, new president of Ukraine, stated in September 2014 before the US Congress, that he identified the essence of the conflict in the Donbass as "a choice between civilization and barbarism" (Poroshenko. 2014). The same terms were used by Mikhail Saakashvili at the time, justifying Georgia's movement from the post-Soviet "tribal mentality" to a civilized European society.

After ratifying the Association Agreement in September 2014, Petro Poroshenko stated that "Ukraine has destroyed any hopes for the revival of the Soviet Union. We are a European nation|| (Poroshenko. 2014).

### **Role of external forces in the conflict**

Russia for a long time stays natural from expressing its view of the situation in Kiev. When the Crisis was still in its developing stage; Moscow was distracted by the Winter Olympics in Sochi, while Kiev was being grouped with visits by American and European officials. Consider, for example, Victoria Nuland's memorable appearance, as she treated Maidan protesters to cakes. Moscow pretended coldness, posing as a disinterested onlooker while it played for time to work out a strategy in secret consultations. Russia did not recognize the legitimacy of the new authorities in Kiev, and qualified the situation as an —unconstitutional coup and armed annexation of power.|| Meanwhile, Yanukovich fled to Russia and confirmed his legitimacy at a news

conference in Rostov-on-Don. However, Moscow effectively discounted his chance to hold leadership of the country. The long choice of tactics did not move Moscow to any decision. A decision was prompted by the events of February 26–27: Crimea rose and immediately became well-organized and received powerful support. The illegal intrusion of Russia into Ukrainian domestic affairs was justified by Kremlin as a necessary action to defend the Russian minority that felt threatened by new government. Russian President Vladimir Putin requested that the Federation Council grant him the right to use the Armed Forces to stabilize the situation in Ukraine. Indicatively, he did not specify any particular Ukrainian regions but referred to the entire country. Parliament's upper house granted his request. The United States and NATO quickly reported that they would be unable to provide military assistance to Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion, as they had not prepared for this eventuality. On March 18, Putin made a speech to announce the signing and ratification of the Treaty on the Integration of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol into Russia. Putin said that Moscow was determined to protect the Russian World by all means at its disposal.

### **USA and EU involvement**

The constant boil in Ukraine is partly driven by the willingness and ability of the United States and European powers, such as Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom to support Ukraine and motivate Russia to end its aggression. In the scenario, international financial aid for Ukraine continues to be conditioned on speedy reforms, straining the society's ability to absorb a war and an economic crisis. On the military front, the scenario has the United States delivering increasing levels of training and other military assistance and NATO continuing to expand cooperation with Ukraine on defence reform. But American and European leaders still demur on stronger measures against Russia over its Ukraine intervention in the hopes of retaining Russian help on other major issues, such as the Iran nuclear talks or the war in Syria. Other sovereign countries of the former Soviet Union and beyond are eyeing the Western response, its attention span, and the strength of its engagement. That, in turn, affects calculations regarding alliances and behaviour, such as decisions about diversifying energy sources and trade.

### **Consequences and conclusion**

The Kiev Maydan, the reunification of the Crimea with Russia and the whole tangle of subsequent events in and around Ukraine destroyed the stability in post-Soviet space. These events have acquired global significance, turning Ukraine into a field of open conflict of interests of Russia - as the dominant force in the region - and the West, whose "soft" political intrusion into the post-Soviet territory in the perception of most politicians and political scientists already threatens the world with a new cold war.

The obvious consequence of the Ukrainian crisis, although perhaps not the most important, is the drift of the CIS as an international intergovernmental organization, uniting the post-Soviet space, to the final collapse. The crisis in Ukraine clearly showed that the CIS is unable to solve the basic tasks identified in the treaty on the formation of the CIS, such as recognition and respect for the territorial integrity and inviolability of its members' borders, the formation and development of a common economic space, the common European and Eurasian markets, as well as customs policy. Global and domestic political realities prompted the Kremlin to violate the binding terms of the treaty and determined the formation of the character, direction and choice of tools for transforming the post-Soviet space.

The Ukrainian crisis had a negative impact not only on interstate relations, but also on the public atmosphere within the post-Soviet space. In addition to the obvious economic difficulties affecting all social strata in Ukraine and Russia, it formed a socio-cultural gulf between Ukraine and Russia, helped to strengthen xenophobia, nationalism and extremism. The most important role in deepening this abyss was played by the unleashing of a brutal information war. The population of Russia and Ukraine was hardly the main addressee of the information war. At the same time, its basic element was essentially banal support for nationalism under the banner of patriotism, implicated in identifying the interests of state elites with the interests of the state and society and departing from constitutional principles priority of the interests of the individual and human rights.

The Ukrainian crisis once again shows that the period of transformation in the new independent states and the entire post-Soviet space, unlike the former socialist countries of Europe, did not end. Ukraine could not build a stable system of state structure, a functioning political system. For over 10 years she has been living in a permanent crisis.

The political crisis is accompanied by a growing social and economic crisis. The liberal-oligarchic model implanted in Ukraine has shown its inefficiency and must be replaced by another that provides greater social and economic efficiency.

The Ukrainian crisis convincingly demonstrated that in the post-Soviet space Russia is facing and will increasingly face competition from other Centers of Power - primarily the US, the EU, and the PRC. These

Centers do and will do everything to prevent the emergence of an effectively functioning integration association headed by Russia in the post-Soviet space. The West is ready to use all its resources to achieve this goal.

It is quite obvious that the Ukrainian crisis can be resolved only on the basis of agreements between Russia and the United States, as well as the EU, but in these conditions the achievement of mutually acceptable agreements, and most importantly - their implementation is extremely difficult, which does not mean impossible.

Both Russia and the United States have formulated their maximal request positions, and their coordination and interconnection will require a lot of effort and time. The main role will be played by the balance of power, which is not in favor of Russia.

All this contributes to the overcoming of the Ukrainian crisis of considerable uncertainty, unpredictability. It will drag on for a long time, and, given the clash in it of the interests of Russia and the West, it may well be a detonator of the international crisis that will jeopardize peace and security throughout the world.

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