

UKRAINIAN CRISIS: COMPARISON AND CONFRONTATION BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES AND PROSPECTS.

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, Europe has never been so peacefully consolidated. However, its vulnerability still exists in a context of increasing globalization, where societies are facing security threats and challenges that are growing in size and sophistication, as Ukraine highlights. To protect freedom, security, human rights, political stability, democracy and cultural identity, the EU developed effective tools within which research and innovation can play a fundamental role of support to understand, identify, prevent and discourage security threats. Horizon 2020 programme section “Secure societies: Protecting freedom and security of Europe and Its Citizens” designed to improve border security through conflict prevention and peace-building, will contribute to the implementation of Europe 2020 strategy. The aim of this paper is to define the advancement degree of the functional change on EU Eastern borders and to understand the value and the future geopolitical implications of the relations between Ukraine, Russia, EU, and USA.

Keywords: *Ukrainian crisis, Horizon 2020, Eastern borders, Russia, Western Bloc*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR, the European continent has never enjoyed such a strengthened state of peace, in which the level of security is very high compared to other parts of the world.

On the other hand, one of the fundamental objectives of the European Union is to create an area without internal frontiers in which the citizens can move, live and work freely knowing that their rights are fully respected and their security is totally assured. However, the vulnerability of Europe continues to exist in a context of increasing globalization, where societies are facing security threats and challenges that are growing in scale and sophistication.

What has happened and continues to happen in Ukraine, sets a perfect example of it. A real revolution with unmistakable events and traces and a progressive escalation, which curiously the media has not given a name yet. Ten years after the Orange Revolution, Ukraine has returned to the centre of the interest of the whole world.

2. HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE UKRAINIAN SITUATION

The last 20 years were a succession of political changes in Ukraine between pro-Russians and pro-Europeans. In 2010, Yanukovich, who defeated Tymoshenko by a narrow margin, was elected President of the Republic. In 2011, Tymoshenko was investigated in a prosecution for embezzlement of public funds, with the accusation that she had signed a contract with the Russian company Gazprom for the supply of natural gas which was judged uselessly burdensome for the country, in 2012 the Supreme Court of Ukraine, in the last degree of judgment, upheld the sentence to seven years in prison for misfeasance.

In the course of 2013 protests against the pro-Russian president were initiated but culminated in December when the government suspended an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU, which degenerated during January and February 2014 in fierce and violent clashes provoking injuries and deaths, which led to the deposition of President Yanukovich and Tymoshenko's release on February 22.

But the real causes of the current crisis and rebellions can be referred primarily to the existence of one State divided into two parts:

- A pro-Western North-West, where the majority of the population is Ukrainian, Roman Catholic or Orthodox faithful to the Patriarchate of Kiev and economically tied to Poland and Europe.

- A pro-Russian South-East, where the majority of the population is Russian or Russian-speaking, Orthodox faithful to the Patriarchate of Moscow and economically tied to Russia.

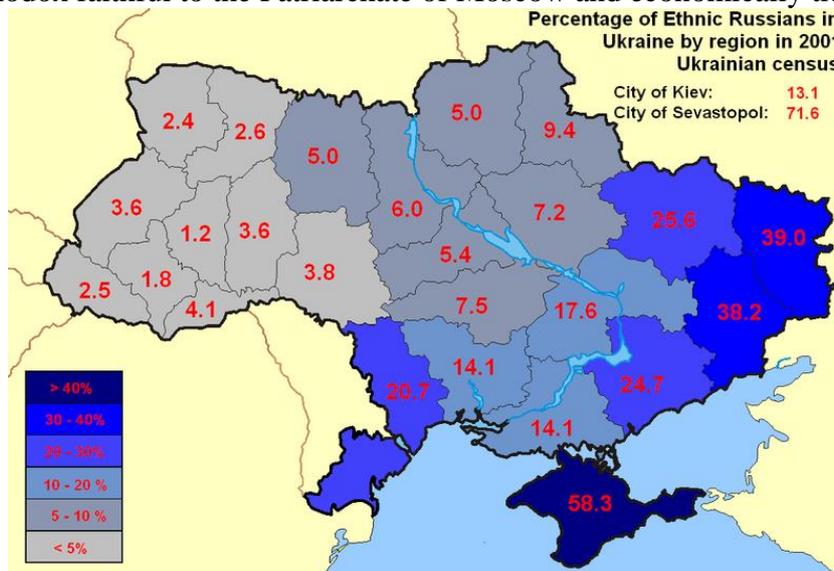


Figure 1. "Results/General results of the census/ National composition of population" 2001 Ukrainian Census. Retrieved May 20, 2007, elaborated by Kuban Kazak

Therefore, the tense situation started with the change in the leadership of the Government of Kiev and arrived even to the plebiscite of the referendum in Crimea in March when the final figures demonstrate that 96.6% are in favour of the secession from Kiev and the annexation to the Russian Federation, an expected result which assumes further significance for the remarkable turnout at the polls (3 out of 4 voted, of a total of over a million and a half of those entitled). Besides the exultation of Crimea, Russia seems ready to certify the outcome of the vote with the definitive military occupation while all the Western diplomats, primarily the EU and the U.S.A., declared the consultations "illegal" because they took place, according to the U.S.A., under the threat of violence and intimidation of an intervention by

Russian soldiers, and therefore in violation of international law. On one hand, Moscow is increasingly isolated as the UN Security Council voted on a resolution for the non-validity of the referendum and Russia remained the only one to vote no, since China also refrained. However, even Putin seems to be concerned about the tension in the south-eastern regions of Ukraine due to the permissiveness of the authorities in Kiev. On the other hand, there is the desire of European countries to use diplomatic confrontation and dialogue.

However, the outcome of the referendum has increased the risk that the gradual, violent disintegration of Ukraine would lead to a hard confrontation between Russia and the West, in a scenario that brings to mind the Cold War. In fact, it's true that geopolitical tensions, such as the Ukrainian one, threaten international stability for they are not confined locally but extended to a geographically, geopolitically and geo-economically global confrontation/clash involving Russia, U.S.A. and Europe. Given the domino effect that is occurring, a regional crisis at Europe's borders threatens to turn into a further blow to the fragile global economic recovery.

Certainly, there is no danger of a new world war, but one should not underestimate the unexpected dynamics triggered by a series of moves and countermoves made by all the involved parties. Moreover, the name Ukraine means "border region": a border that today separates the spheres of influence of Moscow and Brussels (The toponym *Ukraine* comes from the ancient Eastern Slavic *u okraina* formed of *u* ("near, at") and "*ocraina*" (periphery), the Slavic root *kraj* ("limit", "edge"). Accordingly, *ukraina* means "at the margin", or "on the border").



Figure 2. Ukraine's Political Map.

It is undeniable that the reclamation of Crimea, given by Khrushchev in 1954, was definitely desired by Moscow, but it certainly was not in the plans. The Revolution of Independence Square in Kiev, where the nationalist anti-Russian right-wing has had a significant part, had the effect of awakening the separatism of most Crimeans, of Russian language and feelings; it also offered the unexpected opportunity to the Kremlin to transform the "desire" into reality. Before the crisis the dismemberment of Ukraine was not in the plans of Moscow, but the refusal of Kiev to compromise over-federalization, relations with the EU and Eurasian Union, along with the Western hostility led Putin to change objective, using a variety of advantageous circumstances: the intolerance of large parts of the Russian-speaking

population of eastern and southern Ukraine, the support of the Russian public opinion and the Western impotence to oppose an effective deterrent.

Undoubtedly, the present condition of the country can be fully understood only by considering the history and geography of its territory. Important is the recent fact that in order to preserve ties with Moscow despite the nationalists' russophobia, the former Prime Minister Yanukovich adopted an ambiguously opportunist attitude: negotiating alternatively with Russia and the EU. His fatal mistake, which led to the current crisis, was the use of force against peaceful pro-European protesters of the early days which caused the passing of the baton to the radical nationalists (Banderovci). The eastern cities that came down to the streets against the "fascists of Kiev" demonstrate how the "community" built by the USSR still enjoys strong support. The appeal to Russia can be interpreted as a cry for help on behalf of the "Slavic brotherhood", a feeling inseparable from pride because of the common passed membership in the USSR. In front of the threat of separation from the centre of the East Slavic world represented by Moscow, even the Russian Orthodox Church which is active and influential in both countries plays an important role. Among other things, pro-European regions are in greater economic difficulties compared to those of pro-Russians.

From a geographical point of view, the preservation of Ukraine in its current borders is not doubted in the country, as shown by the fact that Moscow has so far intervened only in Crimea, an easily controllable peninsula, unlike other eastern regions. Given the spatial concentration of the nationalists and russophiles, Ukraine can be presumably split into two more homogeneous states. However, in this perspective, as many have pointed out, the EU will find itself having to support a poor region and devoid of industries, furthermore, none of the two entities would be actually willing to give up on Kiev. For these reasons, this road appears to be accessible only with traumatic and uncontrollable effects. The only option that can guarantee long-term stability seems to be a neutral foreign policy; otherwise, new revolutions and crises might emerge in the future. To better understand the direction that the story of Ukraine will take, it is necessary to wait for the moves of the Kremlin after the capture of Crimea and the reaction of the Western-backed provisional government. Surely, the responsibility of the current situation can be attributed to all the parts involved.

3. POSITIONS, RELATIONS AND LIABILITY OF THE GEOPOLITICAL BLOCS INVOLVED

3.1 Western responsibility and effects of the current situation

The responsibilities of the European Union and the West in general are primarily explicable by the vagueness of the eastern border of Europe that should have determined a more careful and more detailed policy towards Russia. Given the entry of the Baltic States to NATO without any concrete Russian resistance, there was an illusion that the same could happen when absorbing a country like Ukraine into the sphere of European influence, moreover, with the possibility of becoming a part of the European Union in the future. A Western ingenuity in pursuing these objectives, the scope of which has not been compensated by a prearranged and serious dialogue aimed to involve Moscow in more intense economic and political relations with Europe and, more importantly, highlighting the lack of will to isolate it.

On the contrary, under the influence of the new EU member States the susceptibility as well as the fear of Moscow were ignored, using a critical and sometimes even opinionated approach towards Russia. It was predictable and inevitable eventually to be on a collision course with the current Putin, who, mindful of the humiliations suffered in the past, seems even more determined not only to gain respect, but also to rebuild his control over the "near

abroad". In addition, the EU should have been more cautious in pushing Ukraine towards an Association Agreement, without being completely sure if the necessary prerequisites existed. The fall of Yanucovich proved how unprepared Ukraine was and how unreliable the regime was to ensure the necessary respect of the important commitments deriving from the agreement. It is, therefore, legitimate for Moscow to suspect that the push towards its conclusion was primarily a function of the containment of Russia, which is so prevalent in the strategies of the new member states of Central, and Eastern Europe. On top of that, the agreement not only opposed Putin's project of a customs union and the even more ambitious one of the Eurasian Union, which Ukraine was part of, but it was configured as an additional challenge to Putin's ambitions of revenge. Of course, this does not imply that one party is right while the other is wrong, but it means that in foreign policy diplomacy, as well as the ability to understand the reasons of the opponent, are useful not only to resolve conflicts but also to prevent them.

The position of the U.S.A. has also aggravated the situation; it is undeniable that Europe has greater need to maintain economic relations with Moscow, even if it's only for energy needs. This led, as in the days of the USSR, to a more pragmatic and more cautious approach, especially by the countries of old Europe, compared to the one of the United States. However, in regards to the fundamental political choices, the line is still drawn by the United States: on one hand, the persistent distrust towards the former Russian opponent, on the other the tendency to underestimate its role in the international arena, to the point of neglecting its interests even on the regional level, such as in Ukraine.

However, there is a differentiation within the EU. It is known that Germany, along with Italy, is one of the main economic partners of Moscow, and in particular for the gas purchase. A different situation is the United Kingdom and France, which are less dependent on Russia both in terms of energy supplies and trade in general; in fact, they are more aligned with the U.S. position, as had happened in regards to Syria. It is an attitude shared by Poland and Sweden, traditionally interested in Ukrainian business and very critical towards the Russian expansionism. It is not a coincidence that the EU Foreign ministers have not found a common line of conduct, in the extraordinary summit of March 3, and so they decided to pass the ball to Heads of State. A strong common position of the European Union is not to be expected not even from them: in this crisis, as in earlier times (the former Yugoslavia) the United States will be the one to decide the policy, while the individual capitals will choose to position themselves in relation to Washington, and Brussels will possibly deal with future economic negotiations. Moreover, after Lisbon, the EU does not have any foreign policy, and the Ukrainian crisis highlighted it transforming itself into an existential crisis for the EU.

As The Economist points out, effects of the crisis in Ukraine were to reinvigorate transatlantic ties, rekindle the love lost between the transatlantic allies, intensify political contacts, forcing President Obama to return to the old continent. In fact, the US-EU Summit became less frequent under his presidency. Putin has not only rekindled the relationship between America and Europe, but also accelerated the divorce of Russia from many former Soviet partners.

3.2. The position of Russia and the liability of Putin's policy

Many think that Putin's threats to the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be absolutely rejected. There is no doubt that the intervention of Moscow was not necessary to protect the Russian population of Crimea, as there was no threat coming from either Kiev or the western regions. In fact, it was not a predetermined operation but well prepared and masterfully orchestrated by a Premier with undoubted excellent strategic skills. After studying the moves

of the "opponent" all he did was reproduce them (and perhaps induce them) in Crimea: the popular protest, taking possession of the power of the institutions, the appointment of a new president of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and a new mayor of Sevastopol with a controversial procedure.

Most shocking is the arrogance and impudence with which the Russian propaganda and Putin himself, tries to sell his version of the events, denying even the intervention of its military, and thus justifying the legitimacy of what is happening. In fact, its illegality is evident. According to the Ukrainian constitutional law, the appointment of Aksionov, which took place without the agreement of Kiev, in a parliament occupied by armed men, was illegal; and so was the referendum, as already mentioned. Even in terms of international law, in case Crimea should be separated from Ukraine, there would be a violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, in defiance of international norms and treaties. At this point, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 should be mentioned in particular, in which in exchange for the waiver of Ukraine to the possession of nuclear weapons on its territory, the United States, the United Kingdom and the Russian Federal Republic undertook to respect and ensure the territorial integrity.

Politically, Putin justifies his actions by appealing to the way in which the change of government happened in Kiev and to the presence of nationalist elements of the extreme right in the new government (as if the positions of Moscow were not also inspired by the most fervent nationalism). In fact, Putin's hard-line strengthened even more the intransigent nationalist component in Kiev. Another unintended effect, for the Russian leader who aspired to the entry of Ukraine into the Eurasian Union, could be pushing it definitely into the arms of the West. If there was a minimum of rationality in what is going on, the goal that the Russian President should try to achieve is to prevent the relation between Ukraine and Europe, from coming about at the expense of the existing ones with Russia: Ukraine should become a factor of approach instead of confrontation between East and West. But this would imply that also Europe and the United States should aim for the same goal, which would require correction of the policies followed hitherto.

3.3. Responsibility of all parts involved

Granting a greater autonomy to the regions could be an important step. Internationally, in economic terms, arriving at the conclusion of the association agreement and free trade agreement with the European Union is inevitable, but an agreement must be accompanied by serious guarantees on the path of reforms that the country will have to make in order to get closer to the European standards. However, at the same time, there must be a solution that ensures also adequate protection of the economic and commercial interests of Russia. On the political and geopolitical scale, any possibility of NATO membership is definitely excluded, but it is also necessary that the country will become neutral.

4. HORIZON 2020 PROGRAMME SECTION "SECURE SOCIETIES - PROTECTING FREEDOM AND SECURITY OF EUROPE AND ITS CITIZENS"

The Union's funding helped to create and spread excellence across Europe, through the 7th Framework Programme and the Cohesion Policy funds, through the activities "Regions of Knowledge" and "Research Potential" of FP7 "Capacities" programme. Horizon 2020 is the financial instrument implementing the Innovation Union, a Europe 2020 flagship initiative aimed at Securing Europe's global competitiveness. The international cooperation in Horizon 2020 will be composed of cooperation with three major groups of countries:

- Countries with industrialized and emerging economies;
- Countries interested in the enlargement and in the proximity policy;
- Developing countries.

In particular, the Horizon 2020 programme section “Secure societies - Protecting freedom and security of Europe and its citizens” is designed to improve border security, starting with better protection of the maritime borders of security of the logistical chain and to support the Union's external security policies through conflict prevention and peace-building. In addition, the solutions will be developed to support the Union's external security policies in civilian tasks, ranging from civil protection to humanitarian aid, border management or peacekeeping and post-crisis stabilization, including conflict prevention, peace-building, and mediation. The Secure Societies Challenge will contribute to the implementation of the policy goals of the Europe 2020 strategy.

4.1 Security

The specific objective of this area is to promote secure European societies in a context of unprecedented transformations and growing global interdependencies and threats, while enhancing European culture of freedom and justice. The threat of large-scale military aggression is reduced and security concerns are focused on new multiple interconnected and transnational threats. Issues such as human rights, environmental degradation, political stability and democracy, social issues, cultural and religious or migration identity should be taken into consideration. In this context, the internal and external aspects of security are inextricably linked. In order to protect freedom and security, the EU calls for effective responses by using a comprehensive and innovative suite of security tools. Thus, research and innovation can and must play a clear role of support, aiming to understand, detect, prevent, and deter security threats.

The focus of the activities is to: strengthen security through border management; increase Europe's resilience to crises; support the Union's external security policies, including conflict prevention and peace-building.

4.2 The EU as a security zone

In Europe, people can live in relative national security thanks to police authorities and the relevant judicial authority.

Nevertheless, the European Union is increasing the cooperation and coordination between the Member States in order to create a global approach against possible security threats. This includes better cross-border cooperation between authorities of the Member States and supervisory authorities, particularly in the form of information exchange. The EU Internal Security Strategy forms the basis for EU Member States' cooperation in the field of security-related issues and it consists of 41 actions that aim to monitor the most urgent security threats.

4.3 European Border Guard Teams

The new Frontex Regulation, which entered into force in December 2011, specifies that Frontex will create European border guard teams (EBGT) for the distribution in joined operations at the border. The EBGT will consist of border guards of EU Member States, experts in different fields of border management, including surveillance of land and maritime borders. Member States shall contribute to the creation of this pool of experts according to

specific profiles developed by Frontex. After the selection process, Frontex will provide training to the members of the teams interested in their field of expertise and performed tasks. All members of the EGBT will receive training in both common European security and in international law, including fundamental rights and access to international protection.

5. PECULIARITIES OF THE RUSSIAN BORDER REGIONS

Border regions have border-related problems compared to the inner regions, but there are also some differences between the border regions that have to face different challenges. First of all, the "new" frontier regions suffer from the decline in cross-border economic relations. In fact, the centralized economy of the USSR developed the economy of each region as part of a production chain, so they were highly complementary and interdependent. Therefore, the introduction of standards of border and customs duties caused a rupture of the economic ties and major economic difficulties in border regions.

Curiously, even now the borderlands constitute a significant share of Russia's foreign trade with neighbouring countries. Among the four regions of lead in terms of trade with Ukraine, the two border regions, Belgorod, and Rostov, indicate nearly 8% and 5% of the Russian turnover with Ukraine; the other two are Tyumen (about 13%) and Moscow (about 34%). The first holds deposits of oil and gas, it represents the main source of Ukrainian import from Russia. If the revenue per capita of the regions is considered with Ukraine, Belgorod Oblast will have the biggest indicator. The bottom-up approach is very strong especially in relation to Russia's borders with Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. The factors that contribute to it are the mix of the population in the border regions, the fact that these countries constituted the core of the single State for a long time (the USSR) and that administrative boundaries between them were devoid of any particular significance. There has never been a border between Russia and some former Soviet republics (Belarus, Ukraine, etc.). Nowadays, these countries have common cultural heritage. According to recent research, only 39.1% of Ukrainians speak only Ukrainian, 36% only Russian, while 24.8 % speak both languages depending on the circumstances.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Putin's strategy resembles that used in the Georgian enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the conflict with Georgia in 2008. Moscow claims a right of interference in the territories inhabited by Russian minorities, but doing so directly affects the internal equilibriums of sovereign States.

There are two main reasons why the Russian leader took such significant risks in managing the crisis in Ukraine: the weight of history, which considers Kiev as an integral part of Russian identity in cultural and religious terms and the fear of a contagion that could reignite internal dissent to the Russian Federation itself, so far found only occasionally. Therefore, the future of a neighbouring State that has always had close ties with Moscow is not the only one at stake, but probably also the maintenance of Putin's regime, at least in the medium term.

Crimea, as shown, has a troubled history and what happened was predictable; yet, the port of Sevastopol, as strategically important for the Russian fleet, isn't certainly irreplaceable given the broad access to the Black Sea which Russia has. However, the most serious problem that the Ukrainian situation arises in the Kremlin remains of a political nature. Suffice it to say that other than the populations of Russian ethnicity and Ukrainians there is even a minority of Tatars who are Muslims that live in Crimea. This creates a direct link

between the recent events and the structure of the Russian State, threatened especially by a lack of economic dynamism, concealed social discontent and ethnic, linguistic and religious fragmentation of numerous peripheries.

During the economic crisis, Ukraine turned to Russia when the conditions that were established by the West in order to grant aid seemed unacceptable to Yanukovych. However, one might wonder in case of a substantial fall of the world prices of oil and gas who Moscow could ever turn to. Basically, the iron fist of Putin could hide the fragility of his "country system".

Either way, the internal Ukrainian dynamics will be crucial, since not even the Russian military force would be sufficient to control the whole country, as its diplomatic pressure wasn't able to keep Yanukovych in office. To avoid a war of secession, Moscow will have to compromise on the protection of ethnic-linguist minorities, and to restore the full sovereignty of the Ukrainian State. In fact, its latest statements are in accordance. But what is really necessary is a government in Kiev which would be willing to include and reassure those minorities, rather than exclude, punish and attack them militarily.

Beyond the internal factors, it is imperative for the USA and Europe to make difficult, serious and above all coherent decisions.

As usual in front of popular uprisings or civil wars, Obama continues to hold a line, an expression of maximum prudence according to some, and of weakness according to others. It is still not clear at what concrete price he is willing to make Putin pay for a possible escalation in Ukraine; but, this vagueness and confusion concerns his foreign policy in general, as evidenced by Syria's and Iran's issues.

A glance upon the EU would clarify that neither Brussels nor the individual States have the practical ability to provide an economic support that would supply the required amount and with such a readiness that would affect the current events. This has always been the dilemma of the Community's position on the Ukrainian matter; the EU recognizes the importance of the country, but it is also aware of the limits of its own action, whether for the size of the State, for the complex relations with Russia, or for the lack of a single voice, a coherent and common position.

Each of Russia, the EU and the U.S.A. has been caught by surprise by the escalation of the situation in Ukraine, but unlike Putin, the last two have reacted late and in a non-articulated manner. The end of Yanucovich's regime does not erase the geopolitical problems of Ukraine, which must be taken into consideration in order to develop any kind of strategy to resolve the current crisis. Supposing they are capable of doing so.

The EU and the U.S.A. are in doubt about the best course to follow; this is shown by the curious "agreement" signed in Geneva on April 17 by the representatives of the EU, Russian, American governments and the Ukrainian government ad interim. It essentially provides an overall de-escalation, monitored by international observers under the mandate of the OSCE. The agreement was immediately and completely ignored by the parties in Ukraine, and it seemed a "pretence" from the outset. However, it has shown the despair of diplomacy to what actually is happening on the ground. There is no doubt that, for many Russians, the speed and superficiality were interpreted as a sign of Western weakness, given also that in the following days the schedule of sanctions had stopped (remaining limited to little more than symbolic levels) and only recently further steps were taken to hit the Russian economic interests, but always in a very selective and targeted manner. The major tangible cost that Moscow has paid is the one imposed by international markets, quick to give even summary evaluations on the current trend, but also fickle and therefore often unreliable as a thermometer of global strategic relations.

At the moment, the gradual disintegration of Ukraine appears to be a plausible scenario, which most likely would pass for a civil war, de facto already taking place. Its regional

consequences would be difficult to predict, if not even catastrophic. The future of Russia itself is at stake, which is likely to become more aggressive on the outside but at the same time more insecure and fragile on the inside. So far, the uncertainty regarding the real contours of Russian ambitions caused a strategic weakness of will from the western part; however, this does not mean that the weakness will last forever or that this is a part of Putin's strategy.

The Ukrainian society is a decisive and underrated factor since the beginning of the crisis; the political system is dysfunctional and the factions that have alternated in power have depleted and depressed the country, promoting even the emergence of some radical movements. Meanwhile, those leaderships have never accepted the principle of a national reconciliation that could gradually give life to a true sense of the State even between the consistent Russian and Russian-speaking minorities, who are a majority in some regions.

This is the basic problem that today does not allow the authorities of Kiev to control its territory and to exercise at least a real political soft power, even beyond the objective balance of power that certainly encourages Russia militarily. It must not be forgotten that it was the underestimation of the internal factor - "the square" – that surprised both Putin and the West in the days of the escape of then-President Yanukovich. A portion of responsibility for the future of the country is still in the hands of the Ukrainian leadership, now forced to consider the possibility of a "federalization" of the State in the attempt of preventing the disintegration, but it could become a halved sovereignty against Russian power. Either way, the internal framework is probably too composite to allow neutralization of the country. Such a solution would make the Ukrainian people an object, not an active subject of international negotiations, and this is probably impossible regardless of whether it is desirable or not.

For this reason, many have spoken of a new "Cold War", which central dynamics was the strategic calculation of the "worst case scenario" in every possible situation, in the overall perspective of an all-out competition between the two blocks, which then urged both parties to use the military and economic power for deterrence. The constant deterrence required a certain degree of operational readiness and of arms race that otherwise would not have been justified. Each move had to have a response, the chain reaction was often inevitable, and building relationships of trust was the rare exception rather than the rule.

Many assert that the absence of an ideological incentive by the current Russia makes a clash of that magnitude impossible, but it must not be forgotten that ideologies are created too quickly, with a mix of consensus-building and internal repression that can quickly change a society.

It should be emphasized that even the common economic interests, which clearly everyone is trying to defend, end up in the background when the overall calculation of costs and benefits changes. History teaches that taking for granted the composition of a serious dispute using only the tools of economic interdependence is a mistake.

The current trajectory of fragmentation of Ukraine is a disaster which can still be remedied, if the future scenarios that might occur are thought through.

So far, the fear of an uncontrolled escalation, both in the territory of Ukraine and in the bilateral relationship with Russia, has almost paralyzed the Western reaction. However, if Moscow will take the road of a systematic assertion of its imperial right, the West, according to analysts, could make use of its full power for deterrence and enforcement.

The reality is that Putin considers keeping Ukraine in the Russian sphere of influence a vital national interest and that he is willing to take big risks. Moreover, it seems highly probable that he does not take the threat of Obama seriously, after attending to the hesitation of the American President on Syria.

A military response of NATO is unthinkable, as well as the western attempt to isolate Russia in the international community, of which it is an active member. Finally, the West

would need to demonstrate to Ukrainians that it would support the new government and that it can offer a path to prosperity, instead of Russia.

Russia is not the old Soviet Union, which was relatively impervious to diplomatic and economic censorship. Putin knows that Russia could pay a high price for what he is doing in Ukraine. For now, he believes that the risk is worth taking because, in his eyes, the West is supine, decadent, and more concerned about maintaining Russian oil and gas exports than keeping a firm stand for the idea of a united, free and secure Europe. The problem with "Ukraine" is no longer about the Independence Square in Kiev, democracy in Ukraine or European integration. This is about how to maintain a vision of Europe - and, indeed, of the world - in which countries give the idea that the peoples are the only ones that are worth protecting.

The solution of a negotiation on a new federal structure of Ukraine with certain guarantees for the Russian-speaking minority is surely a minimum requirement but perhaps not enough. A commitment for not joining NATO or the EU might be required. Those who report similar assumptions as limitations on the sovereignty of Ukraine do not fully evaluate the gravity of the alternatives. Proclaiming the right of Ukraine to choose its economic and military alliances certainly is not politically correct, but it is not a responsible strategy if it involves the risk of a split of the country and a new Cold War.

Moscow certainly has a major responsibility in this crisis, at least for instigating insurrectionary actions in eastern Ukraine. The reports of international observers along with the Ukrainian secret service should clarify to which extent Russian agents have participated in those actions. However, it would be wrong as well as naive to attribute the state of agitation in Donetsk, Lugansk, Sloviansk and in other cities in the East even including Odessa solely to external interference; the same would be to say that Majdan was an operation of the western service.

The animosity that divides Russians and Ukrainians in the East as in the West of the country is underestimated by many foreigners. In 2014, the risk isn't to slip into a generalised military conflict but to an economic war and a new cold war, with disastrous consequences for European economies and for Ukraine itself, even if it was spared from a real civil war. It is a risk that some Western politicians seem willing to take, believing that Moscow is to blame.

Probably the Russian action in Crimea, a logical consequence of the coup d'état favoured by the West in Kiev, was just another one of Putin's moves to get him to deal with the United States and the European Union from a position of strength. The agreement reached in Geneva was just a farce. Now a new phase is opening in which Russia will have to decide whether to accept the minor role assigned to it by the West as a regional power or to revive its traditional geopolitical aspiration to become again a great power in alliance with the BRICS countries.

It is also clear that the strategic and synergistic Russian-European economic relations have been cracked by the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, exactly how the United States wanted. However, it is obvious that major economic and political forces, especially in Germany, are pushing for a swift reconciliation with the Russian Federation.

As predicted by President Putin, it is Italy's turn to play a crucial diplomatic role to put Russia and the EU in contact with each other, since it will lead the next Presidency of the European Union.

The final Portrait of the EU to the Ukrainian crisis highlights several very complex problems with which it must deal. The EU is not a geopolitical entity; it has less weight than the sum of its member states and even less than many of them considered singularly. On one hand, when it comes to military interventions the only weapon it possesses is the rhetoric; on the other, when it comes to real weapons the only remaining option is to invoke the protection of the U.S.A. In addition, the evaluations and perceptions of Russia and Putin are

different, if not opposite, depending on the distance and on relations also the sympathy for the U.S.A. and for its policy is related to the fear of Russia. After all, the political and strategic dependence on the U.S.A. determines that punishing Russia, EU will be punishing itself, given the vital economic relations with Moscow.

That is true, but ultimately the problem is a political one: The EU seems unable to protect itself and its borders and to ensure peace and security, despite the policies adopted and in spite of the Horizon 2020 programme.

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