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UKRAINIAN CRISIS AS A SECURITY CHALLENGE OF THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Abstract: Ukrainian crisis, which began as mass anti-government demonstrations, turned into the overall destabilization of the country thanks to the Russian annexation of Crimea and support to the rebels in eastern Ukraine. This is the most serious security challenge in Europe since the end of the Cold War that has dramatically worsened relations between Russia on the one hand and the West on the other hand, and left far-reaching negative consequences for international relations as a whole. The attitudes of key international actors, as well the formulation of appropriate policies towards Ukraine are the most demanding tasks and a test of the capabilities and limitations of a common approach and cooperation of the international community in resolving the security challenges in the post-Soviet space.

Key words: Ukraine, Ukrainian crisis, annexation of Crimea, Russia, the European Union, the West.

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Introductory remarks

The decision of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to change the direction of its policy and desist from signing the Association Agreement with the EU has led to mass anti-government demonstrations in the streets of Kiev, which lasted from November 2013 to February 2014. The demonstrations turned violent, and later led to the overthrow of then President, Viktor Yanukovich, his impeachment by Parliament and leaving the country. This gave an impetus to the Russian annexation of Crimea and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine that began after pro-Russian separatists seized the building of the local administration and the security services in April 2014 in different cities of Donetsk and Lugansk regions - an area that is also known as the Donbas. No one could have predicted that what started as a peaceful mass protest and internal manifestation of dissatisfaction with the government's policies will turn into violent conflicts and serious international security and political crisis.²

Interests of key players such as Russia, the EU and the United States clashed in Ukraine, transforming the internal crisis in regional and even international problem. Although the Ukrainian crisis hasn't revealed anything essentially new in strained relations between Russia, on the one side, and the United States and the European Union, on the other, it turned into their biggest conflict since the end of the Cold War. Russia's efforts to cooperate with the West to overcome differences and disagreements have been replaced by politics of confrontation ideologically similar to the Cold War, that understood uncompromising insisting on own geopolitical and economic interests, including the military and political intervention. West believes that Russia performing such a policy violates both provisions of international law and the foundations of the international order. On the other hand, Russia's position is that its foreign policy is simply a way to ensure the independence and protect their vital interests, among that is preserving the dominant political and economic influence in Ukraine.³

Thus, the Ukrainian crisis should be observed as a kind of political and economic rivalry that is consequence of the strong interest of Russia in the common neighborhood with the EU. This raises the question of the

² Derek Averre & Kataryna Wolczuk, "The Ukraine Crisis and Post-Post-Cold War Europe", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 4, 2016, p. 551.

³ Sergey Markedonov, Aleksandr Gushchin, "Russia and Ukraine: A Corridor of Opportunities", Internet, http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=4813#top-content.

purpose behind the attempts of the West to promote political and economic integration in eastern Europe, bearing in mind that this goal entails a strong conflict with Russia.⁴

Ukraine before the crisis in the light of its relations with Russia, the EU and NATO

Bearing in mind the common history and the fact that it was the second largest republic of the Soviet Union in terms of population, territory and overall economic importance, Ukraine is very important for Russia. Together with Russia and Belarus, Ukraine took part in the creation of the USSR, and was one of the three Soviet republics which have been jointly made a decision about its disintegration. At the time of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had a primary role in the Soviet security and defense policy. There were a number of military bases, including those equipped with nuclear weapons. Significant parts of the complex of the Soviet defense industry were on Ukrainian soil, which complicated dissolution and turned it, in many aspects, to an incomplete process.⁵

Although with Russia and Belarus was one of the founders of the Commonwealth of Independent States in January 1993, Ukraine has not agreed to sign the draft Charter on the strengthening of political, economic and defense ties between CIS member countries. Although aware of the fact that the strong economic and other ties with Russia are extremely important for the development and its international position, Ukraine did not accept the further institutionalization of relations considering that eventually Russia would provide a dominant position in the CIS.⁶ It was estimated that this could limit the choice of directions for further development of Ukraine.

In the first years of independence Ukraine, due to possession of nuclear weapons from the Soviet period, slow progress in political and

⁴ Larsen, H.B.L., *Great Power Politics and the Ukrainian Crisis: NATO, EU and Russia after 2014*, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2014, p. 6.

⁵ Andras Racz, "Russian Approaches to the 'Common Neighbourhood': Change or Preservation of the Status Quo?", *SPES Policy Papers*, Institut für Europäische Politik, Berlin, 2010, p. 4.

⁶ Sergei A. Voitovich, "The Commonwealth of Independent States: An Emerging Institutional Model", *European Journal of International Law*, No. 4, European University Institute, Firenze, 1993, pp. 408–410.

economic reforms and strong international support to the then President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, didn't have a favorable international position. The situation began to change in 1994 when Ukraine began to implement the so-called multi-vector foreign policy that showed its growing interest in participating in trans-Atlantic and European structures.⁷ In 1992 the Union has proposed to replace the Agreement on Trade and Cooperation which the EC has signed with the Soviet Union in 1989, with new agreements that would regulate relations between the EU and the countries of the CIS. In 1994 Ukraine has concluded with the EU the Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation. In addition, Ukraine was the first country in the CIS, which in 1994 signed an agreement Partnership for Peace and in 1995 became a member of the Council of Europe. Ukraine has signed in 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership with NATO, which defines the political responsibilities and areas of cooperation and consultation of both sides at the highest level.⁸ Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the EU and Ukraine came into force in 1998. In order to facilitate the implementation of economic reforms and achieving sustainable development and also were planned specific agreements on trade in textiles and cooperation in science, technology, and nuclear energy.⁹ It predicted the harmonization of legislation of Ukraine with the regulations of the single market and the system of the World Trade Organization, including the perspective of creating a free trade zone.

Even after Ukraine gained independence, this country has remained strong political and economic influence of Russia. Cooperation with Ukraine to Russia is of particular importance because of historical ties between the two countries and a large number of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine. In May 1997, Ukraine has signed with Russia the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. In September 2003, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed an Agreement on the single economic space. The former Prime Minister of Ukraine V. Yanukovich has estimated that connecting with Russia (dual citizenship, the declaration of Russia's national language) will be a winning strategy for his victory in presidential

⁷ Ana Jović-Lazić, *Odnosi između Evropske unije i Ruske federacije: kraj XX i početak XXI veka*, Institut za međunarodnu politiku i privredu, Beograd, 2015, pp. 217–228.

⁸ "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine", Madrid, 1997, Internet, <http://www.nato.int/docu/basic/txt/ukrchrt.htm>.

⁹ "Ukraine, European Neighbourhood Policy Country Report", *Commission Staff Working Paper*, Brussels, 2004.

elections 2004.¹⁰ However, due to accusations of falsification of the results of the presidential elections, the “orange revolution” happened, which announced major changes in the internal and foreign policy of Ukraine. Members of the EU supported the “orange revolution” as an expression of the fundamental European values (democracy, rule of law, market economy, etc.) and the chance for Ukraine to become a democratic and market-oriented country.¹¹ Russia, which has always been interested in securing political influence in Ukraine after the “orange revolution” showed distrust towards further development of Ukraine and soon serious disagreements in the relations between the two countries occurred.

Although the EU has supported the strategic choice of Ukraine towards democracy and reform, confirming its place in Europe, the EU has not accepted the opportunity to treat Ukraine as a potential member state.¹² The Union has taken the position that the joint action plan, adopted in February 2005 in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy, provides a sufficient basis for comprehensive cooperation.¹³ As priorities of mutual relations the action plan enlists confirmation of the status of Ukraine as a country with a market economy, the start of negotiations on creating a free trade zone with the EU and the start of negotiations on the liberalization of the visa regime with Ukraine. This document pointed to the fact that for achieving economic growth and development of Ukraine, creating conditions for more intensive trade exchange and foreign investment is of the greatest significance.¹⁴

The two sides signed agreements on visa facilitation and readmission, which entered into force in January 2008. In the EU-Ukraine Summit held

¹⁰ Paul Kubicek, “Ukraine and the European Neighborhood Policy: Can the EU help the Orange Revolution bear fruit?”, *East European Quarterly*, XLI, No. 1, University of Colorado, 2007, pp. 3–5.

¹¹ Grzegorz Gromadzki, Oleksandr Sushko, Marius Vahl, Kataryna Wolczuk, Roman Wolczuk, *Will the Orange Revolution bear fruit? EU-Ukraine relations in 2005 and the beginning of 2006*, Stefan Batory Foundation, Warsaw, 2005, p. 15.

¹² Roland Dannreuther, “Developing the Alternative to Enlargement: The European Neighbourhood Policy”, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 11, Kluwer Law International, 2006, p. 185.

¹³ Grzegorz Gromadzki, Raimundas Lopata and Kristi Raik, “Friends or Family? Finnish, Lithuanian and Polish perspectives on the EU’s policy towards Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova”, op. cit., p. 35.

¹⁴ Roland Dannreuther, “Developing the Alternative to Enlargement: The European Neighbourhood Policy”, op. cit., p. 20.

in September 2008, it was agreed that the next agreement between the EU and Ukraine could be an association agreement. This agreement opens the door to further development of relations and cooperation between the two sides, but without the prospect of membership it is not possible to significantly change the essence of their relationship.¹⁵ Although after the “orange revolution” the EU provided support to political and economic reforms in Ukraine, it has not shown a willingness to see this country as potential member state. Union of Ukraine expects to show a consistent fulfillment of contractual obligations and initiating necessary reforms, including the energy sector.¹⁶ The main criticism of the EU towards the Ukrainian policy is that the declarative commitment for change and reforms are not implemented in practice.

After the “orange revolution” among the official foreign policy priorities of Ukraine appeared the entry into NATO. However, when it seemed that Ukraine is ready to become a member of the Alliance, were initiated a discussion whether that will violate Ukraine’s obligations to Russia foreseen with the Treaty of Amity.¹⁷ The idea of Ukraine’s membership in NATO faced with stiff opposition from Russia, which perceives it as endangering of its own safety and interference in its sphere of interest. In order to avoid confrontation with Russia, this question was withdrawn from the agenda for an indefinite period. From the other hand, in Ukraine deep divisions among population regarding the possible membership in NATO also are present. These divisions are territorial manifested. In the east of the country, where the majority of Russians live, a strong pro-Russian sentiment is overwhelming while the significant role has the Orthodox religion and relationship with the Russian Orthodox Church. To the west of Ukraine’s pro-Western orientation is strong and great importance has historical links with European countries and the Uniate, the Greek-Catholic Church. These divisions are present not only in politics but also in the total commitments of citizens and are among causes of internal political divisions, misunderstandings and instability in Ukraine. Due to this division, country policy of balancing between the

¹⁵ Olena Prystayko, “EU – Russia Common Neighbourhood”, *EU-Russia Centre*, Brussels, p. 57.

¹⁶ Fraser Cameron, “The Politics of EU–Russia Energy Relations”, *EU-Russia Centre Review: EU-Russia Energy Relations*, Issue 9, EU-Russia Centre, Brussels, 2009, p. 24.

¹⁷ David G. Buffa, “Proposed remedy for the dilemma of innumerable futures: Ukraine, Russia, and NATO membership”, *Brooklyn Journal of International Law*, No. 35, Brooklyn Law School, New York, 2010, p. 593.

EU and the US on one side and Russia on the other hand, for years has been one of the characteristics of the foreign policy course of Ukraine, regardless of their orientation towards the EU integration.¹⁸

In order to increase the price of gas, in January 2006, Russia halted supplies to Ukraine. This had a negative impact on the delivery of Russian gas to Europe because Ukraine is a very important transit country for supplying the EU in gas and oil from Russia and the Black Sea. The Union directly hit and launched a strong diplomatic pressure on Russia and Ukraine in order to solve the supply problem as soon as possible and to normalize gas supplies. The crisis over gas supplies many analysts assessed as a means of political pressure and efforts of Russia to "punish" Ukraine for pro-Western orientation and policy of approaching to NATO. From the Russian side the request for price increase of gas are explained as the necessity to bring prices to the level of prices in the world, as Russia's national income would not be funneled to Ukraine. Russian "Gazprom" then announced new price increasing to the level of the price at which Russia sells gas to the EU. Three years later, after serious disagreements over gas prices, Russia once again interrupted gas supplies to Ukraine, and Ukraine did the same to Europe. Given that neither Ukraine nor Russia did not want to give up their positions, the Union has been actively involved in solving problems in order to reach a compromise. Russia received higher prices for their gas, while Ukraine secured modest price increase in 2009, and relative stable and favorable conditions for transit costs.¹⁹ Because of the importance that Ukraine has for the transit of energy from Russia to the EU, Eastern Partnership envisages support to energy market integration of Ukraine into the EU market. The priority is the restoration of the Ukrainian transit network, which is very outdated, and the regular and safe delivery of gas and oil from Russia.

In the presidential election in early 2010. V. Yanukovych, who became more acceptable partner for Russia, became the president of Ukraine. Yanukovych's come back marked a new political orientation. Its election campaign has passed in an atmosphere of commitment to

¹⁸ Ana Jović-Lazić, *Odnosi između Evropske unije i Ruske federacije: kraj XX i početak XXI veka*, op. cit, pp. 217–228.

¹⁹ Adrian Karatnycky and Alexander J. Motyl, "The Key to Kiev: Ukraine's Security Means Europe's Stability", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 88, No. 3, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 2009, p. 106.

European integration, changes in the country and normalization of relations with Russia.²⁰ Immediately after regaining power President V. Yanukovych has shown his will to normalize relations with Russia, as well as to continue to strengthen ties with the EU. During his visit to Brussels in March 2010 and at the Summit on Nuclear Safety held in April 2010 in Washington, D.C. V. Yanukovych assured the EU and the US administration that improving ties with Russia will not do any damage to relations with the West. But, soon, emerged opinions that the political leadership of Ukraine, headed by Yanukovych, returns “in the Russian orbit,” and that would be a big bump for the Union’s policy towards eastern Europe.²¹ Ukraine in July 2010 adopted a law on the basic principles of domestic and foreign policy, which abandoned policy membership in NATO, which indicated that Ukraine in its foreign policy is going to be more oriented towards Russia. The law declared out of blocs status of the country. It predicted the participation of Ukraine in the European and regional systems of collective security, but without entering into any military-political alliances. Membership in the EU is proclaimed as foreign policy goal along with preserving good neighborly relations and strategic partnership with Russia, other CIS states and other countries in the world.

Before 2010 Ukrainian government experienced the presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea as an immediate security threat, not only because of the presence of warships, but also because of the number of Russian naval and security personnel stationed in bases. After the “Orange Revolution”, when the Ukrainian leadership chosen more pro-Western course, the presence of the Russian Black Sea fleet is considered as an element that blocks the Ukraine on the path to EU and NATO.²²

Shortly after the change of government, Ukraine has concluded agreements which are considered to meet the interests and efforts of Russia. Most important is the agreement by which Ukraine has agreed to extend the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea for 25 years,

²⁰ David G. Buffa, “Proposed remedy for the dilemma of innumerable futures: Ukraine, Russia, and NATO membership”, op. cit., p. 611.

²¹ Manfred Huterer, “The Russia Factor in Transatlantic Relations and New Opportunities for U.S.–EU–Russia Cooperation”, Foreign Policy at Brookings, Foreign Policy at Brookings, *Working Paper*, No. 4, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C, 2010, p. 18.

²² Andras Racz, “Russian Approaches to the ‘Common Neighbourhood’: Change or Preservation of the Status Quo?”, op. cit., pp. 4–5.

or until the 2042.²³ To Russia the most important political and military-strategic advantage was agreement on a long period of stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. In exchange for this, Ukraine was given 30 percent discount on the price of gas. Economists estimate that, at that time, an agreement on gas prevented the collapse of the Ukrainian economy, enabling it to save about four billion dollars a year. In this way, Ukraine was able to adopt a budget with a lower deficit and to continue cooperation with the International Monetary Fund.²⁴

EU has not publicly expressed its concern about the agreement on the Russian Black Sea Fleet stationing in the Crimea. Certain concern was expressed regarding the polarizing effect of the agreement on internal politics and the situation in Ukraine. The Union welcomed the agreement being "tired" of the Russian-Ukrainian disputes that disrupt its regular supply of gas. In this context, the EU has sought to build good relations and cooperation with the Ukrainian leadership, helping Ukraine to direct the pace of reform and support its efforts to move closer to European structures. The EU has shown its readiness to cooperate with V. Yanukovych and through this cooperation contribute to the security and stability of Ukraine.²⁵ However, the agreement to keep the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea caused strong reactions of the opposition in Ukraine, which has estimated that in this way the government has betrayed national interests of the country. The then President V. Yanukovych said that the Ukrainian foreign policy goals of integration into the EU and national policy of maintaining a balance between East and West have not changed, and that the agreement is very important for the economic recovery of Ukraine because it provides cheaper gas. The new price of gas, however, was not entirely satisfy the interests of Ukraine. Long and complex negotiations to secure Russia Ukraine an additional discount on the gas followed,

²³ One should not forget that the peninsula of Crimea was arbitrarily incorporated into the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 during the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Russian-Ukrainian reunification.

²⁴ Sławomir Matuszak, Anna Górka, "Ukraine and Russia: a hindered rapprochement", *OSW COMMENTARY*, Issue 44, Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw, 2010, Internet, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2010-12-15/ukraine-and-russia-a-hindered-rapprochement>.

²⁵ Manfred Huterer, "The Russia Factor in Transatlantic Relations and New Opportunities for U.S.-EU-Russia Cooperation", *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, op. cit., p. 18.

which Russia has conditioned with its participation in the Ukrainian energy sector.²⁶

Agreement between the EU and Ukraine on the European participation in the modernization of the Ukrainian gas pipeline system in exchange for greater transparency in the way of its functioning, signed in March 2009, has sparked violent reactions in Russia. This EU's move, Russia has experienced as a serious bump to its energy position in the post-Soviet region. If the EU supports eastern neighbors in the reconstruction of their infrastructure for transit of energy, it makes it difficult for Russia's efforts to gain control over them, and provide a kind of monopoly over the flow of energy towards the West.²⁷ Ukraine has sought to preserve the position of the main transit countries for Russian gas. In mid-2010, Ukraine proposed to Russia and the EU to build an additional pipeline through its territory, in order to increase the amount of transport of Russian gas to European countries. Ukraine is thus tried to convince Russia to withdraw from the project to build a new pipeline that would bypass it.

Russia for years has been the largest trading partner of Ukraine and the biggest foreign investor in numerous industries.²⁸ However, all the time Ukraine and Russia have different opinions about the role that "a single economic space" should have, i.e. Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, to which Russia has sought to include Ukraine. That would mean delegating authority to supra-national body as well the introduction of a common currency with the prospect of integration of all mentioned countries.²⁹ This would call into question conclusion of an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU. Ukraine has sought to strike a balance between establishing closer relations with the EU and the need to avoid the antagonism of Russia, of which largely depends, above all, in energy. In fact, Kiev has long tried to balance and to get the most out of relationships with both large neighbors, EU and Russia.³⁰

²⁶ George Bovt, "EU–Russia Relations: Beyond Ukraine", 09 Mar 2010, Internet: <http://www.eu-russiacentre.org/our-publications/column/eurussia-relations-ukraine.html>.

²⁷ Andras Racz, "Russian Approaches to the 'Common Neighbourhood': Change or Preservation of the Status Quo?", op. cit., p. 8.

²⁸ "Ukraine between Russia and the EU: economic background and political implications", Internet, www.wiiw.ac.at/pdf/press_release_ukraine_9_dec_04.pdf.

²⁹ Inna Pidluska, "A difficult balance: Ukraine between Russia and the EU", *Europe XXI Foundation*, Kyiv, 2005, p. 4.

³⁰ Maria Lipman and Alexey Malashenko, *The End of an Era in EU-Russia Relations*, Dmitri Trenin, editor, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, 2013, p. 11.

EU and Ukraine from 2007 to 2011 led the complex negotiations on the Association Agreement and comprehensive free trade zone. The documents were initialed in 2012. The Foreign Affairs Council of the EU in December 2012 adopted the conclusions confirmed that the EU is ready to sign an agreement with Ukraine as soon as Ukraine achieve certain progress in fulfilling the conditions set out in the conclusions. The efforts of Ukraine to reach an association agreement with the EU has prompted its tensions with Russia. Ukraine has been warned that, in case of signing the agreement with the EU, will not be able to maintain privileged access to the market of the Customs Union. At the same time, in exchange for the postponement of the signing of the Association Agreement indefinitely, Russia promised Ukraine to ensure the reduction of gas prices by one-third, and to invest 15 billion dollars in its government bonds. The combination of threats and economic perspectives shaken the Ukrainian government and Russia's offer was accepted on the eve of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius. Although the decision V. Yanukovych was disappointment for the EU, it is still accepted as a *fait accompli*.³¹

There are opinions that EU's access to Ukraine before the crisis was not sufficiently politically thoughtful, but too technocratic. Along with this context goes the view that the decision-makers at EU level underestimated the political implications of the Association Agreement with Ukraine. The fact that Russia perceives a potentially European perspective of Ukraine as a provocation, because it has a strategic interest to maintain control and influence over this country, was ignored.³²

Genesis and consequences of the Ukrainian crisis

The Government of Ukraine has decided to suspend preparation for signing the Association Agreement with the EU, supposed to be signed in late November 2013, at the EU summit of the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius. This provoked demonstrations on the streets of Kiev that were directed against this decision that was qualified as Ukrainian movement

³¹ H. Haukkala, "From Cooperative to Contested Europe? The Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-Term Crisis in EU-Russia Relations", *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 33–34.

³² Nicole Koenig, "The External Challenges of the EU: What Strategies?", Discussion of European Steering Committee, Synthesis, Jacques Delors Institut – Berlin, 2015, p. 2.

toward greater Russian control. In mid-January 2014, the Ukrainian parliament, the Supreme Rada passed a law that foresees tougher sanctions for participating in the riots. Paradoxically, the protests have flared up just after the adoption of the law whose purpose was to suppress mass protests by restricting free expression of opposition. Although at the end of January 2014, then president V. Yanukovich offered to include in government members of the opposition and to amend the constitution in a way that would reduce presidential powers situation didn't calm. Due to the deteriorated situation, the Prime Minister and the government resigned while Ukrainian Parliament abolished the controversial law. In mid-February 2014 riots further flamed by police attempt to remove the main protest camp. The truce was achieved on February 19th, 2014, but only after the death of more than twenty people. That ceasefire collapsed only a day later. Under pressure from the West, then president V. Yanukovych has met opposition, and after accepting many of its requirements, on February 21st, signed an agreement on the settlement of the crisis. The agreement, among other things, provides for amending of the Constitution in a manner that would reduce presidential powers, as well as the holding of early presidential elections. However, the agreement came too late to calm enraged population.³³ On the same day the mentioned agreement was signed, Yanukovych has left Kiev and ran first into the eastern part of the country and then to Russia. A day later, his party abandoned him, joined the opposition and officially recalled him in the Supreme Rada. His recall was approved by a unanimous decision of all 328 representatives present in the Ukrainian parliament.³⁴ Former Prime Minister J. Tymoshenko was released from prison. This was a clear message that Ukraine does not want to be under the control of Russia and turned towards Europe. The new interim president of Ukraine said that the country will continue to work on establishing closer ties with the Union. Unexpected developments in Ukraine, in which it became clear that the new Western – oriented government that wants to join the EU, and perhaps even NATO, equally

³³ Denise Youngblood Coleman, "Ukraine's "Maidan" Uprising; effects on relations with Russia and the West", *Ukraine Country Review*, Country Watch, 2016, Houston, 2016, p. 73.

³⁴ Peter Hilpold, "Ukraine, Crimea and New International Law: Balancing International Law with Arguments Drawn from History", *Chinese JIL*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 250.

surprised both Russia and the West. For Russia it was a geopolitical defeat in the largest and most distinguished country within its zone of influence.³⁵ Russia has made it clear that the pro-Western Ukraine is unacceptable and that it is prepared to use force to regain its footing in a country that is an important buffer state between NATO, EU and Russia. The first response to the rise of Putin's pro-Western government in Kiev was the takeover of Crimea. In early March 2014, the upper house of the Russian parliament gave the authority to the president of Russia for the use of force on the territory of Ukraine for the protection of the population and the Russian Black Sea Fleet.³⁶

Soon the seven leading industrial nations of the Group G7 canceled preparations for the G8 summit, which is scheduled to take place in the Russian city of Sochi. Tensions between East and West were intensified after the scheduled referendum in the Crimea to secede from Ukraine and annexation of the peninsula to Russia. The day after the referendum on March 17th, 2014, the USA and the EU sanctions were introduced Russian and Ukrainian officials who are considered to have had a significant role in organizing the referendum which threatened the sovereignty of Ukraine.

Talks led to resolve the crisis were unsuccessful. Russia has insisted on the position that overthrow of V. Yanukovych was illegal because the condition of the Ukrainian Constitution that for such a measure necessary is voting more than $\frac{3}{4}$ (338 of 450) of the total number of deputies was not fulfilled. On the other hand, the West has condemned the secessionist referendum and held that it is contrary to international law. An attempt to draft resolution against the referendum in the Crimea aimed to support the sovereignty of Ukraine in the UN Security Council failed because Russia, as a permanent member of this body vetoed the draft version. Other members of SC voted for the proposed resolution, with the exception of China, which abstained from voting. However, at the request of Kiev, the UN General Assembly held plenary session dedicated to the Ukrainian crisis in late March 2014. On that occasion, was adopted a resolution that a referendum in the Crimea declares illegal and invite all "countries, international organizations and specialized agencies not to recognize any change in the

³⁵ Michael Kofman, "Putins Strategy is Far Better than You Think", Sep 7, 2015, Internet, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/putins-strategy-far-better-you-think>.

³⁶ Denise Youngblood Coleman, "Ukraine's "Maidan" Uprising; effects on relations with Russia and the West", op. cit., p. 57.

status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol city ... and to refrain from any activities or operations which can be interpreted as recognition of such an altered state.”³⁷ In addition, at the beginning of April 2014, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution condemning Russia’s actions that led to the annexation of Crimea. Resolution revealed that these moves represent Russia’s grave violations of international law, including the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act of the OSCE and is in clear contradiction with the Statute and the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe. Also, by violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has created a threat to stability and peace in Europe.³⁸

After the referendum, Crimea has officially requested to become an integral part of the Russian Federation. Russia responded by a decree of recognition of Crimea as a sovereign and independent state and its annexation. The annexation of Crimea was justified by the need to protect the Russian population in Crimea, as well as to prevent any possibility of the deployment of NATO forces on the peninsula.³⁹ The manner in which it came to the annexation of the Crimea, with Russian troops stationed in bases surrounded the Ukrainian military base and forcing Ukrainian troops to leave the peninsula, indicates not only the presence of a clear administrative, logistical, material but also powerful military support of Russia. Without any military loss, Russia took strategically the most important part of Ukraine, where it can provide its most immediate security interest – permanent Russian naval base in Sevastopol and control almost the entire Black Sea. At the same time, by taking over Crimea, Russia gains the opportunity to put pressure on the government in Kiev and to influence the political future of Ukraine.⁴⁰

³⁷ Territorial integrity of Ukraine, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 adopted by the General Assembly on 27 March 2014, Internet, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_res_68_262.pdf.

³⁸ “Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Resolution 1990 (2014) Final version, Reconsideration on substantive grounds of the previously ratified credentials of the Russian delegation”, Internet, <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=20882&lang=en>.

³⁹ Hanna Shelest, “After the Ukrainian crisis: Is there a place for Russia?”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 2015, p. 194.

⁴⁰ Hugo Spaulding, “Putin’s next objectives in the Ukraine Crisis”, Institute for the Study of War, 2015, Internet, http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Ukraine%20backgrounder_V6.pdf, p. 1.

EU officials have strongly condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia, asking the European Commission to assess the legal consequences of this action and to propose the introduction of appropriate economic, trade and financial restrictions on Russia. In addition, they stressed that any further Russia's steps aimed to destabilize the situation in Ukraine, would lead to additional and far-reaching consequences in their relations. Due to the significant trade ties and interests the EU member states, notably Germany, Italy and France, have long been reluctant to impose sanctions on Russia. They were not even imposed as the response to the war in Georgia in 2008 but after Russia annexed Crimea forcibly changed international border, situation has changed significantly. Russia has breached the security guarantees provided to Kiev in 1994 by the Budapest Memorandum, which were the US, Britain and Russia pledged to respect the independence of Ukraine, its territorial integrity and sovereignty, in exchange for renunciation of nuclear weapons.⁴¹ In the document issued by the Advisory Committee on International Security, US State Department in December 2014, it was noted that, for the first time since the end of World War II in Europe, by the annexation of the Crimea, one people seized and added to his, territory of another nation. In this way, Russia has directly violated commitments made in the Helsinki Final Act and the Budapest Memorandum.⁴²

Although the US and EU imposed sanctions on Russia, it did not significantly affect the change in Russian policy in Ukraine. After the annexation of the Crimea, Russia's attention turned towards the eastern parts of Ukraine by supporting separatism. Two weeks after the Russian annexation of Crimea, on April 6th, 2014, armed pro-Russian activists occupied the building of the state administration in nine cities in eastern Ukraine. Soon after, with Russian support Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic were self-proclaimed. In order to re-establish control over its territory, Ukraine in mid-April 2014 launched the so-called anti terrorist operation against pro-Russian separatists. This led to a series of armed incidents which soon escalated into serious conflicts.⁴³

⁴¹ Riccardo Alcaro, *West-Russia Relations in Light of the Ukraine Crisis*, *IAI Research Papers*, 2015, p. 69.

⁴² David S. Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine", *International Affairs*, Volume 91, Issue 3, May 2015, pp. 505–538

⁴³ Anne Marie Le Gloannec, "The EU, Russia and Ukraine: a double track with no end?", *Policy Brief*, No. 17, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, 2015.

In the Donetsk and Lugansk areas in eastern Ukraine, on May 11th, 2014 referendum on the status of the region was held. Independence of Donetsk Oblast was supported by 89.7 percent, while in Lugansk 96.2 percent of turnout. The authorities of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic made a decision not to participate in early elections for president of Ukraine, scheduled for May 25th, 2014 in which Peter Poroshenko won.

In an effort to re-establish control over the eastern part of the country, Ukraine once again at the end of June, launched the so-called anti terrorist operation against separatist forces. During July and August the Ukrainian forces forwarded, pushing the separatists from several major strongholds. Meanwhile, in July 2014 in Donetsk, near the border with Russia a civilian passenger plane Malaysia Airlines crashed, all 298 passengers, mostly Dutch nationals, died. Suspecting that the pro-Russian separatists shot down the plane, the attitude of the West towards Russia became sharper. US and EU on July 30th, 2014 introduced new sanctions against Russia.

Although the Ukrainian forces came close to the main rebel stronghold, Donetsk and Lugansk, in late August 2014 separatists, supported by Russia, began a strong counter-offensive that has forced them to retreat with heavy losses. The degree of organization, equipment and military discipline of separatist forces that participated in the counteroffensive, clearly reveals the strong support of the Russian military forces in both the people and the weapons, military technology and other military equipment.⁴⁴ After five months long conflict, that killed more than two and a half thousand people, on September 5th, 2014, the ceasefire protocol was signed. The Protocol provides the obligation for Kiev and separatists to withdraw heavy weapons 15 kilometers from the boundary line, in order to create a demilitarized buffer zone. The establishment of this line, as the fact that representatives of the separatist authorities participated in the negotiation of a ceasefire, provided a partial legitimacy to separatists, which was one of the Russian key goals.⁴⁵ In addition, the protocol provides for the withdrawal of illegal armed groups and extremists, the exchange of hostages and prisoners, the adoption of an amnesty law, and control of the implementation of the

⁴⁴ Peter Hilpold, "Ukraine, Crimea and New International Law: Balancing International Law with Arguments Drawn from History", *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁴⁵ Hugo Spaulding, *Putin's next objectives in the Ukraine Crisis*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

ceasefire and the Russian-Ukrainian border by the OSCE. None of the points of this protocol was fully implemented. Although the situation was calmer than before the signing of the protocol on ceasefire, sporadic, sometimes intense, battles continued.

Early elections in which Ukraine has elected a new western-oriented parliamentary majority were held on October 26th, 2014. A few days later, Russia has publicly supported holding of elections in the separatist regions. At the beginning of following month, November, the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk organized elections, in spite of open objection of the official Kiev.⁴⁶ In his address to the Ukrainian people, president P. Poroshenko said that due to the elections in eastern Ukraine Government will reconsider its commitment to the ceasefire agreement, and especially the item which provides enabling autonomy in the regions that are under the control of separatists.⁴⁷ After the leaders of the people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk took an oath, the president of Ukraine P. Poroshenko ordered the soldiers to strengthen the presence in the south and east of the country, claiming to be concerned over the threat of future separatists attacks. Representatives of the Ukrainian Armed Forces have also alleged that during and before the elections spotted an intensive entry of equipment and personnel from Russia to Ukraine, as well as a serious build-up of Russian troops in and along the border with Ukraine.⁴⁸ In early November 2014, again broke out a fierce conflict while next month fighting around the airport in Donetsk intensified. The fragile truce agreement from Minsk was on the verge of collapse. The Government of Ukraine has accused Russia for sending special operatives to provide support to pro-Russian separatists, as well for smuggling heavy artillery ammunition into its territory.⁴⁹

NATO foreign ministers, who at the beginning of December 2014 had a meeting in Brussels to discuss the situation in Ukraine, strongly

⁴⁶ Andrew E. Kramer, "Rebel-Backed Elections to Cement Status Quo in Ukraine", *The New York Times*, Internet, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/03/world/europe/rebel-backed-elections-in-eastern-ukraine.html?_r0.

⁴⁷ "Ukraine to 're-examine' peace plan with rebels", *France24*, Internet, <http://www.france24.com/en/20141103-ukraine-poroshenko-peace-plan-truce-rebels>.

⁴⁸ "Ukraine rebel leaders sworn in, Kiev says peace plan violated", *Reuters*, Internet, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-rebel-idUSKBN0IO0YJ20141104>.

⁴⁹ *Ukraine Country Review*, Country Watch, op. cit., p. 144.

condemned Russia and its “continuous and deliberate destabilization” of Ukraine. In addition, NATO stated it would create a fund to provide support for the Ukrainian army, as well as to increase the presence in the eastern member states and develop Rapid Reaction Forces. In late December the Supreme Rada voted for the adoption of the law on which bases Ukraine will cede the neutral status of the country because of the Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. In the draft proposal that was passed in Parliament overwhelmingly, stated that aggression of Russia on Ukraine, its illegal annexation of Crimea, guiding so-called, hybrid war, military intervention in eastern regions, the continuing political, military, economic and information pressure requiring more efficient guarantee for the sovereignty, independence, security and territorial integrity of the country. Although voting was mainly symbolic and the entry of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures is not sustainable in the near future, NATO spokesman stated that the Alliance’s door is open and that Ukraine will become a member if so requested, and meet the standards and comply with the essential principles. However, the decision of Ukraine to withdraw its neutral status, in the situation where the ceasefire Ukrainian and separatist forces barely held, provoked the anger of Russia, which from the outset opposed the Ukrainian turning towards the West. Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov characterized the move as counterproductive and said it contributes to boost conflicts and creates the illusion that it will contribute solving the deep internal crisis in Ukraine.⁵⁰

Only a day after the Ukrainian parliament ceded neutral status of the country, Contact Group held a new meeting in Minsk on the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. This round of negotiations was primarily an attempt to review the arrangements for the implementation of the protocol on ceasefire from September 2014. Although at this meeting visible progress was not achieved, an agreement was reached and the exchange of about 300 prisoners, observed by OSCE representatives, completed.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Nick Shchetko and Alan Cullison, “Ukraine Ends ‘Nonaligned’ Status, Earning Quick Rebuke From Russia”, *The Wall Street Journal*, Internet, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-ends-nonaligned-status-earning-quick-rebuke-from-russia-1419339226>.

⁵¹ Andrew Roth, “Ukraine and Separatists Swap Prisoners as Peace Talks Falter”, *The New York Times*, Internet, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/27/world/europe/ukraine-prisoner-swap-as-peace-talks-break-down.html>.

In early 2015, a ceasefire agreement was virtually dead because fighting continued in Donetsk, and pro-Russian separatists attacked the strategic port city Mariupol. The OSCE report of January 6th, 2015, states that in the area controlled by pro-Russian forces has been a significant deterioration of the situation on the ground. The international airport in Donetsk was the scene of constant exchange of fire and sporadic fighting of Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces. At the end of 2014 minor incidents have become more frequent, and finally escalated in mid-January 2015 as result of the efforts of pro-Russian separatists to take full control of the airport in Donetsk.⁵² Pro-Russian separatists soon began an offensive on Mariupol: by its seizing they tried to establish a kind of land bridge between Russia and the Crimea. After the pro-Russian forces shelling of residential areas of Mariupol that killed thirty people and wounded more than ninety civilians, the Ukrainian government introduced a state of emergency in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, and alert mode in other parts of the country.⁵³

After the pro-Russian forces intensified the offensive, EU, US and NATO have increased diplomatic rhetoric, threatening with additional pressure on Russia if fails to stop military support to separatists. NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg urged Russia to stop to provide advanced military equipment such as tanks, missile systems and armored vehicles to the separatists, to stop the destabilization of Ukraine and to respect its international obligations.⁵⁴ In a joint statement, EU leaders have expressed concern about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in eastern Ukraine and condemned the killing of civilians in indiscriminate shelling of Mariupol.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Moscow constantly denying its help to separatists stressing that the attitudes and rhetoric of the West were destructive.

⁵² "Rebels Renew Airport Assault, Reports Indicate Rebel Success", January 15, 2015, Internet, http://ukraine.csis.org/elections_ukr.htm#78.

⁵³ Natalia Zinets and Denis Dyomkin, "Ukraine rebels move to encircle government troops in new advance", *Reuters*, Internet, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-military-idUSKBN0KZ0L920150126>.

⁵⁴ Adrian Croft, "NATO criticizes Russia, backs Ukraine at emergency meeting", *Reuters*, Internet, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSKBN0KZ11120150126>.

⁵⁵ "EU Leaders Could Announce New Russia Sanctions Next Month", *The Moscow Times*, Internet, <https://themoscowtimes.com/articles/eu-leaders-could-announce-new-russia-sanctions-next-month-43265>.

In early February 2015 in Washington, calls to provide a defensive military assistance to Ukraine became louder.⁵⁶ Many European leaders objected, seeking to renew efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the conflict in Ukraine.⁵⁷ A period of intense shuttle diplomacy followed during which the German Chancellor A. Merkel and French president F. Hollande traveling between Moscow, Kiev, Washington and Brussels are looking for an acceptable agreement on a ceasefire. Diplomatic efforts led to negotiations, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany, which resulted in the signing of the so-called Minsk II ceasefire agreement. The new agreement significantly adopts elements of previous peace protocol of September 2014, which failed to secure peace. Minsk II Agreement provides that, under OSCE monitoring, immediately stop fire and withdraw heavy weapons from the wider zone of conflict. In addition, it establishes the long-term plan for solving numerous political problems. It is necessary to start talks on organizing local elections in the regions controlled by separatists, which would be based on Ukrainian law and constitutional reforms. It is envisaged that a key element of constitutional reform should be decentralization, as well as the permanent special status of the separatist authorities. Restoration of full control over the state borders of Ukraine is conditioned by the implementation of the aforementioned reforms. It was agreed to and complete amnesty for the participants in the conflict, as well as the release of all hostages and prisoners. It is envisaged an international control over the delivery of humanitarian aid, the establishment of full social and economic ties, including pension payments and banking services to the population in the affected areas, as well as the withdrawal of all foreign armed groups, arms and mercenaries, which would be observed by the OSCE.⁵⁸

After cease-fire came into force, on February 15th, 2015, battles almost stopped except in Debalcevo, an important railway junction, as well as in villages near Mariupol. Ukrainian forces were forced, on February 18th, to withdraw from Debalcevo, leaving the city under the control of pro-Russian

⁵⁶ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Considers Supplying Arms to Ukraine Forces, Officials Say", *The New York Times*, Internet, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/world/us-taking-a-fresh-look-at-arming-kiev-forces.html?_r=0.

⁵⁷ "Merkel says won't arm Ukraine, prefers threat of sanctions", *Reuters*, Internet, <http://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-germany-idUSB4N0PT00V20150203>.

⁵⁸ "Ukraine ceasefire: New Minsk agreement key points", *BBC*, 12 February 2015, Internet, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31436513>.

separatist forces. Soon, battles in the conflict zone abated because both sides have begun the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Separatist forces have begun withdrawing artillery from the front line on February 24th, and Ukrainian force on February 26th.⁵⁹

Although a peace agreement Minsk II brought a temporary end of extensive military operations, the plausibility of establishing a lasting peace is low. Many of its provisions have not been implemented. There are more frequent violations of the ceasefire, separatists supplying weapons is a constant, the Russian-Ukrainian border is open, and Russia continues to deny any responsibility for the situation in eastern Ukraine. Realization of the peace agreement are significantly complicate by differences in the attitudes of the government and the separatists on issues such as disarmament and autonomy. The agreement commits both sides to withdraw heavy weapons and determines the willingness of Kiev after local elections to provide a special status to separatist regions. In return, Kiev should restore national sovereignty in these areas. The delay in organizing of local elections contributed to the renewal of tensions. One of the key weaknesses of the peace plan is the fact that it does not specify how the autonomy would work in practice. In the opinion of Ukraine, it is necessary first to abolish Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic, to restore the Ukrainian government and legislation, and finally organize elections in these areas under the control of the OSCE. In this way, to official Kiev would be introduced legitimate political representatives as a party for discussion about the status within Ukraine. At the same time, necessary is to restore control over the 400 km long Ukrainian-Russian border. On the other hand, Russia believes that elections should be organized within the framework of the People's Republic of Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic.⁶⁰

Russia in Ukraine does not figure any more as a reliable partner at the negotiating table, and this is why there are opinions that by pursuing the efforts to find a diplomatic solution for peace in the east of Ukraine, too high price was paid. Russia has received recognition of its special interest

⁵⁹ Alexander Shpigunov and Maria Tsvetkova, "Ukraine begins artillery withdrawal, recognising truce is holding", Reuters, Internet, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-idUKKBN0LU1E720150226>.

⁶⁰ Biljana Mitrinović, Minsk dva u Ukrajini kao Dejton u BiH, 20.06.2015, *Politika*, Internet, <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/330949/Svet/Minsk-dva-u-Ukrajini-kao-Dejton-u-BiH>.

in the post-Soviet space as well the opportunity to significantly influence the political future of Ukraine by participating in truce negotiations.⁶¹ In spite of the signed peace agreement, Russia's policy in Ukraine is primarily focused on strengthening the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic. Russia initially supported the development of political institutions in the DNR and LNR, and then began to finance pensions, social benefits, salaries of the separatist army and local officials. All mentioned activities implies that Russia is ready to turn on the Ukrainian crisis into a frozen conflict. Freezing the conflict that has the potential to rapidly start, Russia could prevent Ukraine to stabilize both politically and economically.⁶²

There are opinions that the Ukrainian crisis can be considered a kind of turning point in Russian foreign policy because during it, Russia for the first time openly confronted with the West. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union the Russian foreign policy was characterized by different periods of close cooperation and disagreements with the West, but at this point concessions to Moscow are unlikely. It is believed that a shift in foreign policy is caused by the loss of Russia's confidence in Western partners, primarily due to the realization that the friendly relations with the US and the EU demand full respect of their rules. Russia today openly states not willing to be surrounded by countries that fall under the political control of the West, but seeks to maintain in its neighborhood friendly or at least neutral regimes. The Ukrainian crisis has shown that Russia is ready to take drastic measures and do whatever is necessary to prevent the spread of pro-Western governments towards its borders.⁶³ Russia believes that the adoption of the European standards, would reduce its ability to significantly influence the policy of Ukraine. The dramatic events in Ukraine have shown that, although not able to control this country, Russia can seriously destabilize it. Russia does not hide the fact that its objective is Ukraine that is firmly in the Russian sphere of influence. Therefore, until the ideological orientation of government in Kiev are an obstacle in

⁶¹ Ingo Mannteufel, "Minsk II: na putu ka zamrznutom sukobu", Internet, <http://www.dw.com/sr/minsk-ii-na-putu-ka-zamrznutom-sukobu/a-18285491>.

⁶² Ben Smith, "Russian foreign and security policy", *Commons Briefing papers*, No. CBP 7646, July 2016, p. 50.

⁶³ А. Лукин, "Постбиполярный Мир: Мирное Сосуществование или Хаос?", *Мировая Экономика и Международные Отношения*, 2016, том 60, No. 1, p. 21.

securing this goal, there are reasons to assume that Russia will continue to pursue a policy that causes instability in Ukraine.⁶⁴

From the very beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the Union is very concerned and actively supports all diplomatic efforts that would lead to the stabilization of the situation and lasting conflict resolution. In particular, the Union insists on full implementation of the Minsk agreements as a basis, which allows achieving sustainable political solution in Ukraine that would respect its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Union does not recognize and continue to condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. At the same time, any unilateral military action by Russia in Ukraine under any pretext, including humanitarian, the Union will consider as a gross violation of the international law. In order to achieve quick and tangible results in the de-escalation of the conflict and improving the position of the population, the EU urges Russia to stop the flow of weapons, equipment and militants across the border and to withdraw its troops from the border area.⁶⁵ The EU's position is that the lifting of sanctions against Russia should be clearly linked with the full implementation of the agreements from Minsk. At the same time, the EU has shown its readiness to provide support to the implementation of economic and political reforms in Ukraine.⁶⁶

In any case, Ukraine cannot afford the continuation of the conflict on its territory. Without financial support from the West and the International Monetary Fund, the Ukrainian economy threatens to collapse. Ukraine is badly needed efficient institutions, political accountability and the rule of law. Of utmost importance will be the ability of government to carry out political and economic reforms because the

⁶⁴ *Ukraine: Country Report*, New York, 2015, pp. 18–21.

⁶⁵ "Council conclusions on Ukraine, Council of the European Union, Foreign Affairs Council meeting", Brussels, 15 August 2014, Internet: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/144314.pdf.

⁶⁶ The new Ukrainian authorities have renewed the policy of the European integration, so the Transitional Government of A. Yatsenyuk, formed at the end of February 2014, continued negotiations with the EU. In the following month the Union and Ukraine have signed political provisions of the Association Agreement, while, after the completion of technical preparations, in June, the same year, completed remaining, economic provisions of this Agreement. Later, in mid-September 2014 the full text of the agreement was ratified by the Supreme Rada and the European Parliament. The majority of the agreement entered into force on the 1st of November, except the part about creating a free trade zone which entered into force on the 1st of January 2016.

situation in Ukraine may significantly worsen unless there are tangible improvements in the economy and governance. The modernization of Ukraine is going to be painful and slow process. Internal reforms still are more at the level of promises rather than specific programs. Although Majdan overthrew regime V. Yanukovich, the previous oligarch management system has more or less remained the same.⁶⁷ Also, wartime usually further encourages corruption. Peace and social cohesion are necessary for building a truly representative institutions and the rule of law. The biggest gap could be between what Ukrainians believe they deserve from the West and what western governments and institutions are ready to provide them.⁶⁸

Concluding remarks

Ukraine is one of the biggest European countries through which substantial quantities of Russian gas are transported to Europe. Considering the position, size, and total capacities, Ukraine has great economic, political and strategic importance. The Ukrainian crisis has left a big and far-reaching consequences for the future of the country. Although the immediate sources of the present crisis, the Russian-Ukrainian disputes, are primarily based on internal issues, i.e. political, religious and cultural divisions in Ukraine, it seriously affected the general stability in Europe.

Armed conflicts in Ukraine have led to great losses and a serious humanitarian crisis, prompting European leaders to negotiate with Russia and the separatists. Although understandable efforts of European countries and institutions to prevent conflicts near its borders and mitigate hostilities through negotiations with Russia, these negotiations have led not only to a ceasefire, but also to cementing the status quo. Continuation of endless negotiations and pure freezing the conflict zone, which leaves unclear the status of separatist authorities, remains a problem for the political and economic development of the region. Loss

⁶⁷ Balázs Jarábik, Ukraine after Riga Summit: Small Steps toward "Victories", *GLOBSEC Policy Papers*, Internet, <http://www.cepolicy.org/publications/ukraine-after-riga-summit-small-steps-toward-victories>.

⁶⁸ E. Wayne Merry, "Dealing with the Ukrainian Crisis: Transatlantic Strategy Dilemmas", op. cit., p. 11.

of Crimea already has, in itself, created a lasting territorial dispute within Ukraine, i.e. frozen conflict that has significant consequences for the strategic goals and aspirations of the country towards western integration. At the same time, Ukraine, in addition to the need to preserve its territorial integrity, faces a number of challenges of which the largest prevent economic collapse and reforming state institutions. Freezing the status quo, has the potential to define this zone as an international black hole near the European borders.⁶⁹

Achieving long-term stability of Ukraine requires support from the international community, primarily Russia and the EU, in the implementation of a comprehensive package of political, economic and security measures. In doing so, special importance should have military neutrality of Ukraine guarantees for its security and sovereignty, adequate autonomy for the eastern region, as well as creating conditions for the country to closely cooperate and maintain trade links with both the EU and the Eurasian Union.⁷⁰ At the same time, military neutrality of Ukraine, which was a kind of buffer zone between NATO and Russia, would contribute to reducing tensions and stability on the European continent.⁷¹

In any case, the role of external actors, such as direct military involvement of Russia, but also political, economic and security support of the West, are the key factors that will determine the further developments in Ukraine.⁷² Although the Ukrainian crisis has opened a very large gap in the relations between Russia and the West, the two sides once again have to find ways to work together to avoid further conflict and confrontation, which can cause long-term instability in Europe and jeopardize the very survival of the country.

⁶⁹ Rusif Huseynov, "Ukraine: Towards a frozen future?", Internet, <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1605-ukraine-towards-a-frozen-future>.

⁷⁰ Andrei Tsygankov, "Vladimir Putin's last stand: the sources of Russia's Ukraine policy", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2015, p. 299.

⁷¹ Andrew T. Wolff, "The future of NATO enlargement after the Ukraine crisis", op. cit. pp. 103–121.

⁷² Balázs Jarábik, Ukraine after Riga Summit: Small Steps toward "Victories", op. cit.

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