

# GLOBAL CHALLENGE OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

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Though contemporary conflicts are mainly of internal nature, one of their characteristic features has become a possible transition from regional or local level to the global one. It may be explained by results of globalization processes when interconnection and intercommunication of world regions and states have further put forward the problems of security indivisibility on the world agenda. Globalization enables consequences of conflict situations to spread to neighbouring states with migration processes, refugees' problems, criminal expansion, weapons trade, involving third countries into a conflict, terrorism expansion to the so called centres of global influence and others.

That is why the issue of today's relations between Kyiv and Moscow is extremely important not only for Ukraine, but for other European countries and the world in general. Moreover, the annexation of Crimea and the military aggression in the East of Ukraine are not a local conflict. Russia's aggression has both regional and global dimensions. As time goes on, this aggression and accompanying events are becoming more and more threatening for the world.

It is not a world war yet. But in fact, it is not so important how it might be called – the third, fourth world war or some other kind of hostilities. The main question today is whether the current Ukrainian crisis could possibly turn into a large regional or global conflict and how to avoid this disaster. There are no grounds to expect that the relations with Russia will be pacified and come to normal soon. However conflict resolution in the East of Ukraine lies in peaceful dimension only, there is no military way out of the situation.

It goes without saying that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is deeply rooted. Its reasons and nature are rather complicated. Histories of both nations were closely interwoven for centuries sharing great achievements and great losses. At the same time, in 1932 – 1933 Ukraine experienced the “Holodomor” which was a man-made famine in the Ukrainian SSR that killed up to 7.5 million Ukrainians. During the famine, which is also known as the “Terror-Famine in Ukraine” and “Famine-Genocide in Ukraine”, millions of citizens of Ukrainian SSR, the majority of whom were Ukrainians, died of starvation in a peacetime catastrophe unprecedented in the history of Ukraine.

Due to historical reasons Ukraine is deeply divided. This division is not just between regions, West versus East, but goes much deeper in the political culture of the country. The East of Ukraine has always gravitated towards Russia while the Western regions having been joined to the USSR much later, are strongly attracted by the West. Ukraine's geographical or geopolitical position just reinforces this division.

Relations between Russian and Ukrainian states have never been simple since the USSR disintegration either. With Ukraine's gaining independence, the conflict has existed in a latent form to shape into open hostilities some years later. For a number of post-soviet years Russia experienced the so called “verbal aggression” or a “propagandist war” against Ukraine [1, p. 224–225]. It is not by

chance that the Russian factor was often called “a very dangerous vicinity” [2, p. 167].

However Russia's rejection of Ukraine as an independent sovereign state with an independent foreign policy became one of the main reasons of the current crisis. Another very important reason of the conflict is Russia's unwillingness to accept the fact that Ukraine is following the course of European integration and strives to break free of Russian influence. These things are obviously interconnected: Russia used all possible leverages (political, economic, energy, humanitarian, and information) to slow down the process of our country's signing the EU – Ukraine Association Agreement and to involve Ukraine into the Customs Union under Russian domination. The bilateral relations had worsened even before President Yanukovich came to power. The then Ukrainian regime was not to blame for the deterioration of links between Ukraine and Russia. They became tense because Russia's leadership was wary of a democratic Ukraine and its leaders. The idea of Ukraine's possible NATO membership in the future which was considered as a threat to Russian security, added to existing tension in relations between the two states.

At the moment they are certainly of the gravest concern. The processes going on between Ukraine and Russia threaten the sovereignty, territorial integrity and the overall statehood of Ukraine. Russia is carrying out a hostile policy having interfered into internal affairs of sovereign Ukraine by various means (direct aggression, support of so called Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, economic pressure and so on). Moscow continues attacking Ukraine and provides military, material and information assistance for the separatist revolt in Donbas.

The two countries are de facto in a state of an undeclared war with deformed intergovernmental political and diplomatic relations, broken economic ties and growing negative attitudes among Russians and Ukrainians towards each other. Russian aggression is causing tremendous human, territorial and economic losses in Ukraine. The situation in the East of Ukraine remains highly difficult and unpredictable: there is a probability of another ‘frozen’ conflict being the source of instability and threat to Europe and the base of further Russian expansion.

According to Johan Galtung, ‘broadening of a conflict takes it out of the bilateral or even bipolar frame where the conflict so often goes stuck’ [5, p. 114]. It should be stressed that the annexation of Crimea and Russian expansion in Eastern Ukraine have changed drastically the situation in Europe and across the world. Gradually Ukraine has become the epicenter of the increasing West-Russia opposition. At this time, International Organizations including UN, OSCE, the EU, NATO and the whole international community are facing an extraordinary situation, which requires extraordinary measures. Such measures must be taken without any delay and with a full sense of responsibility for the future of Europe and its peaceful and democratic development. The international community should give the most serious assessment of the statements and actions of Russia regarding Ukraine and take the most decisive steps with all possible means to stop the aggressive appetites of the Kremlin and to prevent “a new iron curtain” to be raised between nations.

It is obvious that the perspectives of the bilateral Ukraine-Russia contacts will be to a large extent determined by the dynamics of relations between the key players – the EU, the USA, NATO and Russia. The key players meanwhile are posing a great deal of sanctions due to Russia's aggressive policy. Nevertheless the sanctions imposed by the West being governed chiefly by security considerations and economic interests with respect to Russia, seem to be ineffective. In other words, they are only threats, and the threats have not worked, and they are unlikely to work in the future. Empty threats only confirm President Putin's belief that he can "outfox" the West and continue to act with virtual impunity.

Up till now all Western statements, actions and sanctions are an open invitation to Russia to continue down its current path of creating a new zone of influence under its permanent control at the expense of the people in the countries affected, a new Soviet Union in all but name and full geographical extent. In other words, the West becomes unable to strongly oppose further spread of Russian revisionism and expansionism.

For all that, some of Ukrainian and Western politicians and experts do not exclude the possibility that Russia might expand to other countries its military aggression in Ukraine. It is evident that Russia mainly pursues geopolitical objectives having great geopolitical ambitions. Stressing the possibility of further expansion experts, first of all, mention the Baltic States (primarily Latvia and Lithuania) and Moldova. Next come Kazakhstan and Georgia. Other countries include also Belarus and Poland. Some professionals name all the neighbouring countries. Thus, in the experts' opinion, there is a certain threat that Russia's expansion might affect the neighbouring countries [4].

Moreover, Russia's invasion of the part of Ukraine has already led to an extremely dangerous escalation of a conflict (a hot war in fact!) where four nuclear powers support opposite sides (Russia on the one hand and the USA, as well as NATO member states the UK and France).

Recent Minsk Agreements of 12 February 2015 [4], reached by the Minsk Contact Group, Ukraine, France, Germany and Russia and representatives from Donetsk and Lugansk, are considered by the West as a positive and hopeful sign and an important step towards reconciliation. The agreement in Minsk was welcomed by the White House, with Press Secretary Josh Earnest saying in a statement that it represented "a potentially significant step toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict" and praising the "tireless efforts" of Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande [6].

In contrast to this, in Ukrainian rebellious regions other opinions prevail. They sound like this: "The paper signed does not solve the fundamental global conflicts and the systemic crisis in which Europe is wallowing together with the US. Overproduction of dollar and the ensuing wreckage of the global system of credits and finances forces the USA to provide for the controlled chaos aimed at retaining of global dominance by the US and elimination (weakening) of their geopolitical enemies (Russia in this case). American "hawks" extend massive pressure on their puppet Poroshenko in order for him to keep on with the war, promising him weapons and funds. It is not for nothing that Poroshenko left the hall of the

talks several times – he phoned his masters. That was why only in half an hour after the signing Poroshenko called the treaty's terms nonexecutable. Perhaps he is not going to abide by them? I think for this reason we should expect the continuation of the war and even its escalation” [7].

So Russia-Ukraine conflict may take decades to resolve. But the development of relations between Kyiv and Moscow is extremely significant not only for Ukrainians themselves, but for the rest of the world. It is not an exaggeration to say that further changes in the Ukraine-Russia relations will determine the fate of the world.

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