UKRAINE'S GEOPOLITICAL POSITION: BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

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Abstract

The paper analyses Ukraine's geopolitical position and argues that Ukraine is slowly gravitating towards West. The paper gives a small hint of approximation process of Ukraine within EU and NATO, and argues how this approximation process is opposed by Russia, who wants Ukraine back to its influence. Occupation off Crimea by Russia violated international order, opening way to unstructured international ties out traditional UN bodies. The Ukraine's destiny is unclear, Dnieper River may divide country in two, and the West faces biggest security and political threat after WWII.

Introduction

Examining the current geopolitical positioning of Ukraine, we see that the country is divided between two centrifugal forces; at one side, we have Russia representing the East, at the other side, we have the EU and NATO representing the West. Both parts are trying to have Ukraine in their influence zone. Ukraine's political destiny will depend on cleavages since the opposing centrifugal pullout between East and West. One thing is for sure; Ukraine will not be neutral and it will not be integrated in Russia's influence zone (at least a part of Ukrainian territory occupied by Russia). Russia is trying to suppress Ukraine's approximation to Western institutions and to rebalance - in favour of Russia's geopolitical influence. This last is impossible to happen since Ukraine accepted to be part of Euro-Atlantic institutions.

This paper unveils documents and agreements that Ukraine signed as a partner of the EU and NATO. The question of Ukraine's geopolitical position is important for the academic world, for the fact that this research question is relatively new; and the ongoing conflict is volatile. The problem of Ukraine's geopolitical position is evolving in an unknown direction; no one can predict what kind of future is engraved and what could happen. The Russian annexation of Crimea and its intervention in Ukraine have relativized legal norms protected by the UN system. Even though theoretically the UN has influence on state relations at the international level, it still lacks the ability to solve political and security problems of the 21st century. It is obvious that the Ukrainian conflict will remain the biggest geopolitical challenge of the 21st century in Europe. My hypothesis argues that Ukraine will aspire (with the possibility of a future membership) towards the EU and NATO, as its primary strategy to become a Euro-Atlantic country, and simultaneously repel Russian dominance over the country. This last will be hard to achieve considering the current conflicts and separatism movements that can easily destruct the government's political orientation.

Nevertheless, there is no turning back at this point. Ukraine will not be under Russian political control anymore; the Russian goal of changing the Crimean's status will not be recognized by the international community either, and Ukraine's efforts to fight separatists groups will gain increasing Euro-Atlantic support. By researching this conflict, we as scientists are entering the 'new era of international relations', which are left to evolve independently (and lacking structure) without the legitimacy of the United Nations to prevent conflicts or build peace. The UN will need substantial reforms to meet the 21st century's geopolitical challenges, while member states have to cede additional sovereignty when it comes to preventing wars. Until this reform happens, superpowers will pursue their geopolitical projects, and conflicts will occur when these projects clash each other.

The Russian Annexation of Crimea and the International Response

Moscow's rapid decision to occupy Crimea stressed the foundations of the international political and legal system. By conducting this act, Russia has violated the United Nations Charter, a principal mechanism to protect the sovereignty of states. It was NATO Secretary Rasmussen who reacted against this invasion, in his speech after the meeting of the defense ministers of NATO, Rasmussen said that Russia was in flagrant violation of the basic principles of the Founding Act NATO-Russia of 1997, including the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (NATO, 2014). Rasmussen's

stand was welcomed by the westerns allies of NATO, but this was not enough. Moscow's decision was not an 'ad-hoc' one as the invasion plan was prepared previously.

On 1 March 2014, Russia's parliament unanimously approved a request by Putin to authorize Moscow's forces to intervene in Ukraine until "the normalization of the political situation there" (Neuman, 2015). Previously, Russia refused to recognize the new Ukrainian government elected during the February 2014 voting. In his statement made on the Russian channel 'Rossiya 1', broadcasted by the BBC, Putin accepts for the very first time that the annexation plan for the Crimean was commissioned earlier than the date seen on the referendum. Putin acknowledged that he ordered the "return of Crimea" on 22 February at a meeting with the heads of the secret services and the Ministry of Defense. The order came after the "initial positive results" of the survey among the people of Crimea showing that 80% would support joining Russia after Yanukovych fled the country (BBC- News, 2015).

A day before the Crimean referendum, the UN Security Council (UNSC) gathered in New York to discuss the situation there. Due to the negative vote of one of its permanent members (13 of the 15 members of the SC voted in favor of the draft text, Russia voted against, China abstained), the UNSC failed to adopt a resolution calling on countries to reaffirm the "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and declare that Sunday's referendum which could lead to the secession of the Crimea from Ukraine, and its joining with Russia it's not valid." Speaking before the voting, the Russian Permanent Representative to the UN, Vitaly Churkin said that it was not secret that Russia was planning to vote against the draft. He added that Moscow would respect the decision of Crimean , but could not accept the basic assumption of the draft resolution, which was intended to declare the planned referendum of 16 March, in which the inhabitants of the Republic of Crimea should decide on their future, illegal (UN News Centre, 2014).

Despite all, the Crimean referendum was held on 16 March 2014. Organized by Russia for the selection between the political scenarios for the Peninsula, the referendum was expected to ratify the decision of the leaders of the regional parliament to politically withdraw from Ukraine and to become part of Russia. The referendum offered two questions with a choice:
- Are you in favour of the reunification of Crimea with Russia as part of the Russian Federation?
- Are you in favour of the restoration of the Constitution of 1992 and the status of Crimea as part of Ukraine?

From the majority of 83% of the present residents, 96.77% of them voted for restoring the status of Crimea within the Russian Federation, and against the option of the restoration of the Ukrainian Constitution of 1992 (Rettman, 2014). The text of the referendum questions was written in a way to eliminate the possibility of neutral voting, which meant that voters should definitely mark one option; for example, they could not vote for the status quo!

Fears that the Ukrainian crisis could spread to the Balkans were present at international level during 2015, these concerns were legit since the Russian occupation of Georgia in 2008 and the invasion of Crimea, the continuing support for pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, and finally, the comparison of Kosovo case's with that of Crimea by the Russian political elite. Using Kosovo as a comparison, Moscow claimed that Kosovo (on 17 February 2008) declared its independence without any referendum in opposition to international law and UNSCR 1244, while Crimea held a referendum to join Russia. They also claimed that the NATO bombings of Yugoslavia breached international law and the sovereignty of states governed by the UN, which, to my understanding is not true. First of all, Kosovo held its referendum for independence in October 1991, as (Bajrami) argues on his presentation at the Academy of Science of Kosovo (ASK), regarding Legal and Constitutional Argumentation of Independence of Kosovo and decision of International Court of Justice (ICJ); and secondly NATO had positive approach to the Kosovo crisis (in context of saving international human rights and stopping the genocide), and this approach was acknowledged by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1199 (UNSCR, 1998), thirdly the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia was backed up by resolution UNSCR 1244 (Council, 1999), to stop fighting and build peace. Russians also forgot the fact that they were the first to enter Yugoslavia, and Russians were the first to enter with ground forces Pristina/Kosovo on 11 June 1999 (CNN, 1999) – just before NATO troops did; thus, Russia cannot claim that NATO breached international laws. Also in the Kosovo case the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an advisory opinion stating that *"the declaration of the independence on 17 February did not violate international law"* (International Court of Justice, 2010).

At the GA's plenary meeting on 27 March 2014, the UN's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders was reaffirmed, underlining the invalidation of the referendum of 16 March held in Crimea. With a recorded vote of 100 in favor, 11 against and 58 abstentions, the GA adopted a resolution entitled "The territorial integrity of Ukraine" calling on states,

international organizations and specialized agencies not to recognize any changes in the status of Crimea or the city of Sevastopol, the Black Sea port city (United Nations - GA/11493, 2014). By adopting this resolution, the GA retorted Russia's propaganda of considering Crimea and Kosovo similar cases, and Moscow's claim that it was acting as NATO used to act in Kosovo in 1999. Crimea and Kosovo are not the same; as observed from historical and legal circumstances, these two cases are totally different. In Kosovo's case the international community intervened to stop genocide and the further violation of human rights; while in the Crimean case we have only one actor (Russia) who invaded Ukraine for its geopolitical interest. Russia has violated the Budapest Treaty of 1994 guaranteeing the sovereignty of Ukraine as well (Reka, 2015).

Ukraine's Geopolitical Position: Between East and West Currently, the Ukrainian conflict is continuing without any sign of de-escalation or peace. Despite loses in Crimea; President Poroshenko is struggling to protect state unity destroyed by separatist movements in Donetsk and Lugansk. Reports from credible media show that Moscow increasingly helps separatist leaders' attempts to gain territory and expel Ukrainian institutions. The talks at Minsk summit on 5 September 2014, followed by an agreement, (OSCE, 2014) have brought little light to the escalating problem, the agreement was violated many times, and parties accuse each other for not complying with the text of the agreement.

As far as I observed, it is Putin's doctrine of *"protecting all Russian-speaking population"* (Menkiszak, 2014) that dismantles geopolitical balance in Europe. Putin invented this rhetoric to have an easy political access to Russian-speaking countries and play his politico-military game for the sake of internal power and dominance in ex-Soviet territories. It looks like cold war crisis is coming back. One may ask why. The answer is simple - there is not enough geopolitical space that could divide East and West anymore. Ukraine's geographical position is acting as a buffer zone between these superpowers. By losing his man (Yanukovych), Putin lost the primary control over Ukraine, so he created this conflict to administer the eastern part of the country until he gains time and space to materialize the 'Novorossiya' project.

According to my assumptions (and other experts' opinions like that of (Lendman, 2015)), Putin will continue to invade more deeply into central Ukraine. Recently, President Poroshenko informed the public opinion that he received intelligence information of such attempts. Maybe Ukrainian rivers will act as a new 'Berlin Wall' - dividing East and West. My impression is in

favor of the rivers as historically rivers served as dividers between opposing parts (see the battle of Dnieper 1943), thus, this scenario may happen again. If we examine the geographical map of the Dnieper, we can see that it divides the country in half. But let us focus on current events. The Ukrainian conflict is expanding unpredictably, as we said earlier, Putin needs military games to supply internal czarist demands and suppress economic disappointment (Global Economic Prospect, 2015). On the other side, western allies are incapable to stop Moscow's aggression (even though they tried it through EU sanctions and with some military help to Ukraine) since it deals with nuclear power; besides, Russia is not Yugoslavia, so they need to be meticulous! Russia has enormous military power and geopolitical influence. If we recall the latest military exercise SREM-2014 conducted between Serbia and Russia in Serbia's territory - just 100 kilometers from the Kosovo border where NATO troops station, we may start to guess Putin's strategy on his geopolitical chessboard. SREM 2014 unveiled how far the Red Army is capable to displace, and who may its allies be, as the Serbian journalist (Glavonjic, 2014) argues it is a "message of power" that Russia wants to show to the West. The status of Ukraine and its geopolitical positioning is of vital importance for Moscow. One may presume that Ukraine is a small fraction of the European economy and somewhat unimportant in global security matters being a peripheral concern for the US; but is a crucial matter for Russia. Having borders with Russia hampers the possibilities of Western military help; in fact, Kiev can expect limited financial assistance together with financial sanctions against Russia, at least for now. On the other side, Putin has acknowledged loss (financial one, economic isolation, human victims and political hostility) just to keep its military presence along its geopolitical borders, and he stated that; *"Moscow is not aggressive, but will pursue its interest persistently."*

Putin knows that after Yanukovych's expel, Poroshenko will jeopardize his expansionist plans. Poroshenko is a tough opponent and a dedicated Westerner. Recently, the US has sent troops to Baltic States and Eastern Europe in response of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. When the crisis began, the US had a quandary how to react, and some of Obama's advisors argued that sending lethal military help would make things even worse. But after the conflict escalated, military help was unquestioned. Nowadays the US is sending advanced counter-battery radars to repel Russian missiles destructing the Ukrainian Army. For the moment, there are no sustainable assumptions of Ukraine's geopolitical future, we may only presuppose a positive scenario (the end of the conflict and peace restoration), then Ukraine may continue to progress towards the membership in the EU or NATO, but presently it is far away.

Ukraine-EU Relations

As my hypothesis argues, Ukraine has done some progress in the approximation to the EU and NATO framework. Relations between the EU and Ukraine are currently under the "Agreement of the Partnership and Cooperation (PCA)" which entered into force in 1998. At the Paris summit in 2008, leaders of the EU and Ukraine agreed that an Association should be the successor of the agreement of "Partnership and Cooperation". An Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and Ukraine is the first of a new generation of agreements within the Eastern Partnership Countries; negotiations started in March 2007. In February 2008, after the confirmation of Ukraine's membership in the WTO, the EU and Ukraine launched negotiations on a Deep Area and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) as an essential element of the AA. At the fifteenth Ukraine-EU Summit on 19 December 19 2011, EU leaders and President Yanukovych noted that a common understanding on the text of the AA was reached. On 30 March, 2012 the main negotiators of the European Union and Ukraine crafted the text of the AA, which included provisions for the establishment of a DCFTA as an integral part. In this context, the main trade negotiators from the two sides ratified the DCFTA agreement on 19 July 2012. In order to boost the economic development of Ukraine, the EU stipulated export free quotas (Sushko, Zelinska, Khorolskyy, Movcham, Gumeniuk, & Triukhan, 2012, pp. 24-25) as an approximation tool. Putin's pressure on Yanukovych not to sign the AA between the EU and Ukraine caused mass demonstrations and intense political crisis in the country, triggering one of the deepest political crises in Ukraine, associated with bloody demonstrations and the death of more than 100 civilians. After this decision, Yanukovych declined his presidency and escaped to Russia.

The AA for Ukraine foresees focus on supporting essential reforms, economic recovery and growth, and the government's and the various sectors' cooperation in areas such as: energy, transport, environmental protection, industrial cooperation, social development and protection, equal rights, consumer protection, education, youth and cultural cooperation. The agreement also puts a strong emphasis on the values and the principles of democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, good governance, market economy and sustainable development. It includes a DCFTA that would go further than the classic areas of free trade, as it will not only open up markets but also address competition issues and the steps necessary to meet EU standards and trade in EU markets. The agreement also highlights justice, freedom and security issues including provisions

for mobility (European Union External Action, 2015). Later on, at the EU-Ukraine Summit on 21 March 2014 both sides agreed on the EU-Ukraine AA (Annex 3) and the remaining sections - including DCFTA - on the sidelines of the EU summit on 27 June 2014. The implementation of the AA is a challenge on its own; however, Russia's policy towards Ukraine increases the challenge immensely. Russia endeavors to build the Eurasian Economic Union (ECU) by 2015 and create a single Eurasian market. From is launch on 2010 by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, on 2015 ECU joined Armenia and Kyrkyz Republic as new members, covering big part of Eurasia's economy. This development presents that Ukraine is more and more excluded from this market. Russia is and will remain an important trading partner as it attracts 20.7% of the Ukrainian exports (just below that of the EU, 21.8%). As international help is provided to Ukraine, a substantial "supporting package" is foreseen by the EU, the IMF and the World Bank to help in transition, encourage political and economic reforms, and to support comprehensive development for the benefit of all Ukrainians. These combined measures anticipate a support of at least € 11,000,000,000 in coming years from the EU budget and the EU-based international institutions; in addition to the significant funding being provided by the IMF and the World Bank. This EU package will possibly contain €3,000,000,000 from the EU budget on macro financial and €1,600,000,000 on assistance loans (MFA), and a grant aid package of € 1.4 billion up to 8 billion € from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).What is more, potentially also €3,500,000,000 will be leveraged through the Neighborhood Investment Facility to establish a platform for donor coordination, the implementation of the Deep Area and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with autonomous frontloading of trade measures; the organization of a high-level investment forum/task force; the modernization of Ukraine's gas transit system to reverse trends especially by Slovakia - who could be potential gateway for gas flows from Europe to Ukraine; an action plan for visa liberalization within the framework established; mobility partnership, and technical assistance in several areas of the constitutional and judicial reform, (Support Package for Ukraine) are some crucial aid's that EU and partners have foreseen to invest in Ukraine's strategic sectors.

Mentioning the EU standards of good government, we must not forget another mechanism of approximation between the EU and Ukraine called 'Black Sea Synergy'. A conference between the EU and the Black Sea Foreign Affairs Ministers in Kiev (Ukraine) in 2008, led to a 14 points' joint statement initiating mutual synergies and presenting the EU as an actor enhancing

cooperation between the countries surrounding the Black Sea. Closer regional ties will stimulate democratic and economic reforms, support stability and promote development, facilitate practical projects in areas of mutual interest, open up opportunities and challenges through coordinated action in a regional framework, and encourage the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region. The EU has also increased its support for the work of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Ukraine. The EU is currently considering additional support measures, following the agreement of the Minsk package on 12 February. To help the most vulnerable of those affected by the conflict, the European Union and its Member States have contributed over €139.5 million in humanitarian and early recovery aid since the beginning of the crisis, including €47.85 million provided by the Commission. In 2014, the European Commission has allocated €17 million in development aid for urgent preparations for the winter and early recovery. A further €4.5 million has been provided by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace to meet the recovery and integration needs of the internally displaced persons, host communities, and promote confidence building. Since the beginning of the crisis, the European Commission has provided over €26 million for funding humanitarian assistance. About 55% of these funds address the basic needs of the population in the non-government controlled areas directly affected by the conflict. On the ground, assistance is delivered by partner organizations such as the UNICEF, the UNHCR, the WHO, the IOM, Save the Children, Danish Refugee Council, People In Need, the WFP and the ICRC (European Union External Action, 2015). All this inter-institutional cooperation proves the EU's tremendous support for Ukraine's development and integration to the Western.

Ukraine – NATO Relations

NATO partnership with Ukraine dates back from 1997 based on a Distinctive Partnership Charter in 1997, since then the partnership has increased by time. As a product of the formal basis for NATO-Ukraine cooperative relations, namely the product of the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership in 1997, the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) was established later on. The NUC directs cooperative activities and provides a forum for consultation between the allies and Ukraine on security issues of various themes and mutual interest. In response to the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea by Russia, and violence and insecurity in eastern Ukraine caused by pro-Russian separatists, NATO allies have expressed their full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized

borders (NATO, 2015). At the Wales Summit in September 2014, heads of state and governments of NATO met Ukrainian President Poroshenko in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and they adopted a joint declaration, which condemned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine and the violation of international law. Through this statement, the allies requested the protection of principles and norms of international law, the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. From the 113 points of the summit declaration 31 (NATO - Wales Summit, 2014) speak about NATO's support to Ukraine. Two NATO offices in Kiev, known as the Center of Information and Documentation of NATO established in 1997, support cooperation in key areas, and inform the public about NATO activities and the benefits of the NATO-Ukraine cooperation. While the Liaison Office of NATO founded in 1999 facilitates the participation of Ukraine in the NATO's Partnership for Peace Program, and supports its reform efforts linked to the Ministry of Defense and other Ukrainian agencies. In 2009, the Annual National Program (ANP) replaces previous annual plans to implement long-term objectives set out in the Action Plan NATO-Ukraine 2002. The plan of 2009 consists of five chapters focusing on political and economic issues, defense and military issues, resources, security issues, and legal issues.

The NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) under the umbrella of the Annual National Program (ANP) measures the achievements of these programs each year. On 23 April 2015, President Petro Poroshenko signed a decree № 238/2015 *"On approval of the Annual National Program of NATO-Ukraine cooperation for 2015",* which foresees a set of measures aimed at introducing NATO standards in Ukraine (Mission of Ukraine to the NATO, 2015). According to the decree, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine is to coordinate the activities of the central executive bodies aimed at implementing the ANP. All ministries involved in the process of implementation of the ANP have to report to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine by 10 January 2016. Regarding technical cooperation between Ukraine and NATO in the field of defense, it focuses on enhancing the interoperability between the defense systems of the two countries and facilitating Ukrainian contributions to peace support operations of common interest. Cooperation in this area started when Ukraine joined the PFP program and began participating in an increasing number of groups, which meet under the auspices of the Conference of National Armaments Directors (CNAD) - a senior body of NATO responsible for promoting cooperation between allies in fielding weapons. Recently, the Ukrainian parliament took a step further towards seeking NATO membership, as the country's parliament passed a law abolishing Kiev's neutral, non-

aligned status, and President Petro Poroshenko openly called for integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic space. We know that NATO supports US interests having Ukraine a geopolitical partner in Eastern Europe; and since Ukrainian borders are shared with Russia, the country will act as a "grey zone" (Fish, McCraw, & Reddish, 2004) in case of the further deterioration of relations.

In his answer to the media regarding the current Ukrainian conflict, NATO Secretary Stoltenberg assured public opinion that: *"NATO is committed to an independent, sovereign and stable Ukraine, firmly committed to democracy and the rule of law, as a key to security in the Euro-Atlantic area* (Stoltenberg, 2015)". With given trainings, logistics and expertise, NATO has become a primary guide for Ukrainian military doctrines; these have transformed the Ukrainian Army into a solid partner with, to my understanding, the political-military orientation of the country towards the Euro-Atlantic pole is cemented. However, Ukraine's membership to NATO will depend on its ability to protect its territorial unity from Russian aggression. For the moment, it is impossible to imagine a NATO membership, but, in the long run, I predict a possible membership – at least for the part of Ukraine without Russian occupation. At the latest NATO Summit in Warsaw on July 09, NATO Head of States declared that: "*As noted at previous NATO Summits, including in Madrid, Bucharest, Lisbon, Chicago and Wales, an independent, sovereign and stable Ukraine, firmly committed to democracy and the rule of law, is key to Euro-Atlantic security. We reiterate our firm commitment to further develop the Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine which will contribute to building a stable, peaceful and undivided Europe.*

Ukraine-Russia Relations

The relations between the two countries have never been worse, officially or unofficially these two countries are in war - it depends on how you see it. Moscow sees Ukrainian approximation to the EU and NATO as a geopolitical threat to its national and international interests, especially after it lost Yanukovych. According to Russian diplomats, NATO is crossing its mandate in the Ukrainian case, "NATO military displacement near Russian borders is bringing instability", Lavrov sees. Now we clearly know that Putin is materializing Moscow's plan of "expanding Russian influence outside the ex-Soviet borders", which will be partly jeopardized if Ukraine is able to avoid Moscow's territorial influence. The general assumptions are that Putin will initiate conflict in other regions as well; the rising socioeconomic stress with

dwindling oil prices may push Putin to seek foreign distractions (Newton, 2015, pp. 7-9). The most vulnerable are the Baltic States (Evans-Pritchard, 2015).

Russia with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in mind will urge economic expansion; even though in some circumstances it has to adjust energy policy to the new realities in order to gain western revenue, the EEU provides Putin additional profits and confidence to pursue nationalistic interests. The US, NATO and the EU expect that Putin will act as a 'partner' when it comes to international relations, they praised him many times, and now they are confused on how to treat him. The West is struggling to understand Putin's maneuvers (Roxburgh, 2013, pp. 253-272), they refer him as a partner, and as biggest threat at same time; some even argue that West has lost Putin's partnership (Neil Buckley, 2015). My question is: did they ever have one? Putin was always ready to suppress neighboring countries on behalf of Russia's interest; he promised that he will restore Russia as a key player in the international political scene, and to tell you the truth - he did it! Putin is pulling additional threads in Ukraine; recently Moscow (quoting Aleksandr Mazu) announced that it has suspended its participation in the Joint Consultative Group on the Treaty on the Convention of the Armed Forces in Europe on 11 March 2014 - using NATO expansion as a justification for this. Ukrainians recently reported a buildup of Russia's military forces in Ukraine; armory (T-64 and T-72 tanks and armored vehicles), artillery, multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) as Grad, and sophisticated air defense systems were spotted. Ukrainian reports estimate more than 250 tanks, 800 armored personnel carriers, while some unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for surveillance and targeting purposes were reported as well. The situation is not improving; reports show that Russian troops are continuously increasing in size, meaning that Putin is not backing down.

Putin provides material to researchers (especially those examining political science), which scientifically is 'appreciated', but at the same time questions any hypothesis and results one may have; in Ukraine's case we will wait and see what future bring to us. Apparently, we cannot predict Putin's moves as his strategic plans (Nedeli, 2013) will not match the strategic plans that the West has for Ukraine (NATO, Strategic Concepts, 2014) (EU, 2015). Currently Putin is building a 19 km long bridge to connect Crimea to Russia, as part of his masterplan of returning as a big player in the international level.

Conclusions

Analysing the Ukrainian conflict so far, we notice that the Ukrainian Army lacks time and expertise to upgrade its military capacity, and repeal separatist attacks. Currently the US has an advantage in the geopolitical battle between East and West, simply for the fact that geographically it is far from Ukraine (making the US less vulnerable in case of conflict expansion) and has resources to help Ukraine to counterbalance Russia. The US interest is to have Ukraine as a stable European country out of Russian geopolitical influence. However, that is easier to say than to achieve. The US supports the "closeout" of the 'Atlantic Circle', which means Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO, and the completion of the Atlantic influence within Eastern European borders. In this context, Ukraine has done a great job by adopting the law on "The Foundations of Domestic and Foreign Policy", emphasizing Ukraine's EU integration as a key element. As the partnership has to be reciprocal, if Ukraine has a geopolitical importance for the West, this applies to Europe firstly. Europe should move further and open a new chapter for Ukraine's accession. I know, this is almost impossible since Europe does not accept states with neighbourhood problems; but Europeans need to be rational and practical, sooner or later the Ukrainian membership issue will pop out. They need to find a path to structure Ukraine's membership request without going through 'traditional' Acquis Communitarian principles, at least just for this case! By delaying Ukraine's membership in the EU, this last is risking of losing this opportunity at all; and to make this even harder, Putin is planning totally the opposite, and his plans are running smoothly. Putin is always one step ahead since he bypasses bureaucracy of international community and international law; he only cares of Russia's interest, and that is what EU should do as well in Ukraine's case, it should act pragmatically, leaving aside its bureaucracies. The EU must strengthen sanctions towards Russia and increase financial help to Ukraine; Member States need closer cooperation. Europe will have to be more proactive and expand its scope of pressure (on economic and diplomatic sanctions), and they need to stand firmly by the U.S. and its policies to 'act rationally'. EU countries must send additional troops to join US ones in Ukraine's neighbouring countries. The United States and NATO must engage proactively in the process and provide specific recommendations to the Ukrainian Army to strengthen the physical and the border protection of Ukraine. The Western commitment towards Ukraine will raise red flags in Moscow; Moscow must feel the pressure of the Western involvement in Ukraine's protection. We are aware that Russia

wants Donbass to have an effective veto power over Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO; something similar to Republika Srpska has over Bosnia's important decisions paralyzing Bosnia. The western alliance should avoid endorsing any arrangement likely to produce a Bosnia-style paralysis (Grant & Bond, 2015)) since it can lead to an 'entity' that can jeopardize future plans. There is no obvious way of preserving a unitary state wanted by most Ukrainians, while giving the rebel entities the blocking power desired by Russia. The "help package" for President Poroshenko must be constructed in the long run; and as time acts against Russia by its military activities draining the public budget, an economic breaking point will come. I am confident that Ukraine will align with the US, the EU and NATO, and its geopolitical position will be on the Western sphere of interest; however, I am also aware of that this process will face tough opposition in Moscow. The scenario of dividing Ukraine in two may happen easily, separatist may push territorial expansion along east part of Dnieper River – dividing country in two. On other side Putin may try to create new corridor in south-east of Ukraine up to Moldova, to enforce "Novarussia" dream.

By researching the Ukrainian conflict, we as scientists are entering the new era of international relations; when I say 'new', I mean unstructured international ties not established by traditional UN bodies. The Ukrainian conflict gives us a glance of what may happen in the future; by the annexation of Crimea, Moscow has violated international law and Ukraine's sovereignty, and the UN system was powerless to prevent this breach. Recently, President Poroshenko stressed the necessity of calling UN peacekeepers to the Ukrainian border with Russia to prevent further aggression, but Russia rejected this as contrary to Minsk II agreement. Even though actors involved in the Ukrainian/Crimean conflict are UN members and have accepted the UN Charter explicitly protecting the sovereignty of member states; there is no UN body that can act as an arbitrator to solve conflict or to prevent it. There are only UN bodies to facilitate post-conflict recovery. The question remains: what should the international community do in cases like Ukraine? Or, what the UN does to protect world peace? The problem of the UN originates in the 'lack of evolution' and the unwillingness of states to delegate more sovereignty to the UN when it comes to war and peace issues; until this evolution happens we will not have a governing body for world peace. Maybe an International Arbitrage Group or International States' Court under a UN umbrella would work to deal with these war/peace cases?

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