

UKRAINE IN BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: “UKRAINE CRISIS” AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE BLACK SEA SECURITY

The national interests of the Ukrainian state after 2013 up to date are focused— neither more, nor less – on the restoration of its territorial integrity and sovereignty on the temporarily occupied territories of the Crimean peninsula and the eastern part of the country. It is not by accident that annexation of Crimea by Russia was a reaction of Kremlin on another attempt of the Ukrainian society to return back to the track of democracy in order to become a value-based European state and not to be associated with the “grey” zone in the borderland between West and East any more.

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The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation set a landmark in the independent Ukraine’s history as well as in the geopolitical history of the Black Sea region and the rest of Europe. The national interests of the Ukrainian state after 2013 until now are focused— neither more, nor less – on the restoration of its territorial integrity and sovereignty on the temporarily occupied territories of the Crimean peninsula and the eastern part of the country. It is not by accident that annexation of Crimea by Russia was a reaction of Kremlin on another attempt of the Ukrainian society to return back to the track of democracy in order to become a value-based European state and not to be associated with the “grey” zone in the borderland between West and East any more. Using the terminology of the well-known American theorists Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky who in the early 1990s offered their understanding of the model of the “real world order”, this part of the Eastern Europe on the crossroad of the EU and post-Soviet space to a great extent still continues to be a “zone of turmoil”, i.e. a zone of disorder, a mess, shock, confusion, rather than a “zone of peace”.¹

It is clear that a being located in a hostile environment could neither help formulate an effective foreign policy for Ukraine, and as it turned out, nor appropriate methods of defence of its own territory. This fact had to encourage Ukraine as a sovereign state to look at the problem of neighbourhood and regional borders completely from the other point of view a long time ago;

namely in the context of defensive behaviour towards neighbours in the region from the point of strengthening the protection of its border, including military means. Indeed, the state borders with the beginning of the post-bipolar era tended to become “diluted” under the circumstances of political and economic integration, universalization of everyday problems, and globalization of common threats. At the same time, when it comes to the national security, the countries prefer to act more pragmatic and the issue of national borders gets added importance. These pragmatic actions are largely dependent on the desire to control a particular geopolitical space in order to enhance one’s own security, even though it is not threatened in reality. However, it must be taken into account, that a “geopolitical problem of borders occurs whenever a struggle for control, acquisition, exploration of a political space begin” where the borders itself “are peripheral organs of the state as well as evidences of its growth, strength and weaknesses of the changes in this body”.² Such context could be widely investigated in the Ukraine-Russia-NATO triangle, where, if to simplify and to follow Kremlin’s logic, Russia in order to confront NATO’s enlargement towards the post-Soviet space which it treats as its own sphere of influence used the annexation of Crimea as a unique mechanism of preventing further Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. In this case a category of a state border actually loses its relatively new function to unify and to connect. Instead, it begins to act in the traditional way: as a factor of dissolution, division, separation, as an object of careful attention and as the key objective to protect “the

border between the states, even between the most friendly – is always a political and a strategic line which divides their interests".³ In our case, this is the border to separate different interests indeed; this border separates non-democratic political space from the democratic one between Russia and NATO countries, between East and West *à la* «Iron Curtain». There is one problem: the Russian Federation as part of its strategic ignorance towards post-Soviet countries just "forgot" to ask Ukraine about its attitude towards democratization and unilaterally sacrificed her territorial integrity to satisfy its own global neo-imperial ambitions in an aggressive manner.

In the core of Ukraine's hard choice of its own security parameters was the fact that it was permanently doomed to make choices constantly in a situation of rapid change of the foreign and domestic conjuncture. In this regard, political ambiguity, equivocation, "turbidity" of the foreign policy of Ukraine – that's what the international community faced at the dawn of Ukraine's independence. As it turned out, keeping flirting both with NATO and Russia at the same time did not help Ukraine to preserve peace on its land. Suicidal bifurcation of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy up to 2014 reflected, perhaps, one of the most pressing internal dilemmas: where should Ukraine be – within integrated Europe and Euro-Atlantic structures of security or stay with Russia inside Russia led integrative political, economic, military institutions. Permanent rapprochement of Ukraine with NATO, even with long-term breaks, provoked an aggressive policy of Moscow against Kyiv which varied from a diplomatic pressure up to the energy blackmailing. As a result, the

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military aggression of Russia against Ukraine in 2014 which included the annexation of Crimea and conducting the so-called "hybrid war" in Donbas partly was explained (manipulatively) by the Russian leader as a necessary measure to prevent a (mystic) entry of Ukraine into NATO.

Objectively, the presence of the Black Sea NATO countries with Turkey in the Black Sea region on top has always had a considerable influence on the Ukrainian-Russian relations. The issues of the Black Sea security which under the current circumstances are understood widely and affect not only traditional military component are coming up to the forefront of the world politics. The same thing applies to the economic security which also faces challenges in the Black Sea basin due to the increased global competition and a course towards protectionism which some influential players are tending to. Exactly in this place there is a concentration of a "solid" mix of the promising opportunities for cooperation, on the one hand, and threats that may destabilize any promising field of the mutually beneficial cooperation, on the other. Unfortunately, today the Black Sea region can be associated with the most dangerous regions in the world with a high level of intraregional conflicts. Moreover, there is a fact that more than one axis of the inter-regional security system, including the energy security both from

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the North to the South, and from the West to the East could stretch via the Black Sea. In addition, the region is open for the ongoing penetration of global trends, if not of the confrontation or, at least, of the clash of the interests. It was the Black Sea region which became the first and today in fact remains the only European arena where the global security strategies of the U.S., NATO and Russia clash with each other within the new “post-post-bipolar” period of the current historical round. It is not by chance that it is increasingly associated with the beginning of a new Cold War. As a result, the Black Sea region automatically becomes a working studio where new models of the multilevel security strategies that should act (or not act) in the medium and long term perspective are being “tested”. For example, the fact that Russia is converting Crimean peninsula into Russia’s “impregnable” military fortress with the risk of deployment there also nuclear weapons; and consequently the relevant initiatives of the U.S. and NATO to install elements of the ABMs in Romania and Turkey are taking place in their turn. Such a dangerous pique of the Black Sea region towards the arms race triggered by the “hard power” of the Russian Federation has no choices but to worry the Black Sea states, including Ukraine, which, like the whole region, became a potential hostage of the foreign policy interests of the much stronger powers on the global level.

At the same time, NATO expressed its strong protest to the aggressive actions of Russia against Ukraine, which initiated a new round of centre-power aggravation of relations between Moscow and Brussels, and put them on the edge of a new post-bipolar Cold War. Since 1997 decision to expand NATO towards the East and the Yugoslav crisis of 1999, the crisis signs in relations between NATO and Russia appeared to be increasingly visible. They became much meaningful with the coming of Vladimir Putin to power and have been accruing every year until the world started to talk about restoration of Cold War. From signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation on May 27 1997 to the adoption of the current text of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation in 2014 only 17 years have passed, but for Russia it was enough to cover a distance from an official course on cooperation towards an official course on con-



frontation with NATO. In 1997 Russia and NATO did not consider each other as adversaries and set out a common goal “of overcoming the vestiges of earlier confrontation and competition and strengthening mutual trust and cooperation”,⁴ Russia designated as its priority “relations with the Euro-Atlantic states” which Russia associated with, as it is stated in the document “besides geography, economy and history they have common”, no more, no less “deep-rooted civilizational ties”.⁵ Consciously associating itself with the Euro-Atlantic countries, in its Euro-Atlantic direction Russia oriented its foreign policy “at creating a common space of peace, security and stability based on the principles of indivisible security, equal cooperation and mutual trust... through developing genuine partnership relations between Russia, the European Union and the United States”.⁶

In 2014 Kremlin put NATO on the first place in the list of the main external military dangers for itself in the context of: a) an increasing capacity of the NATO’s “power potential” and obtaining “global functions carried out in violation of international law”,⁷ and b) in the context of pushing “the military infrastructure of members of NATO to the borders of the Russian Federation, including further expansion of the bloc.”⁸ And such a shift has happened despite the fact that just one year (!) before the annexation of Crimea and one year and a half before the new Russian Military Doctrine was adopted in 2014 in the fundamental document “the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation as of 18 February 2013”



Of course, it was known that Russia had a negative attitude towards any plans of the accession of the new Eastern European countries to NATO and towards the overall strategy of NATO enlargement. At the official level Russia has repeatedly declared its negative attitude to the potential plans of Ukraine to integrate into NATO. In particular, it was clearly stated in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation in 2008, where it was stated that "Russia maintains its negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, notably to the plans of admitting Ukraine and Georgia to the membership in the alliance, as well as to bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders on the whole."⁹ It is noteworthy that neither in 2008, even when it was a question of granting Ukraine and Georgia Membership Action Plan of NATO, nor in 2013, when there was not even a talk about the accession of Ukraine to NATO, the actual topic of expanding NATO at the expense of Ukraine could not be valid in that short term perspective especially in the light of what was constantly articulated in Kremlin. However, this topic had become one of the basic explanations to the world and, first of all, to the Russian citizens, of the Russian motives to return Crimea "back home." It turned out that Ukraine has simultaneously become a cause of exacerbation of the Russia's "NATO syndrome" and also a reason to start an open confrontation with the West on the global level in the Black Sea region; and this had happened despite the fact that Russia, as we know, has been

watching over Crimea since 1991 while anticipating the right time to attack. In its global narrative in the English version, Russia often prefers to use the phrase "NATO expansion" instead of "NATO enlargement", a direct link between geopolitical paranoia of a fear of the "NATO expansion" after 1991, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 which had a final stage of the preparation during the days of the Euromaidan and the Revolution.

In general, such unprecedented case of aggression by the second nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council leave less hope that dialog between the West and Russia could be easily restored soon on the basis of common understanding of bilateral problems for the sake of possible solutions. If there is no common ground for understanding, there are no bilateral solutions, only compromises and dangerous concessions to lead for a zero sum game to exclude "win-win" result. It is obvious, that both the West and Russia are heading now to a "loss-loss" outcome. There is a clear signal from the RF to be taken into consideration, first of all, those EU and NATO members neighbouring Russia appear to be in the potential zones of clashes: Russia is ready to wage hybrid wars and launch preemptive hybrid attacks against any country which dared to express its security needs in clash with Russia's expectations. In this respect, Russia has cleverly used as a red herring a scarecrow of NATO to hide its real imperial needs towards Ukraine. This is not only Ukraine, but Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria which are under potential

threat from the RF, as far as their membership in NATO is expected to be used for strengthening NATO's Eastern flank against and potential attack from the East. Such tendency and the very possible scenario is under consideration which invite Russia's reaction, because this would be considered in Moscow as "bringing the NATO military infrastructure closer to the Russian borders" regarding respective counter measures.

This is also the right time to discuss all possible risks of switching Ukrainian sovereignty over nuclear objects in Crimea into Russian sovereignty in the frame of IAEA regulations. There is an urgent need to investigate if Russia is serious when talking about possible deployment of Russian nuclear weapons in Crimea which could ruin existing balance of nuclear power as well as the whole system of non-proliferation. So far there are just official statements from different sides, including EU circles, but taking into account the current Russian involvement in Syria and clash with NATO/EU/US strategies as well as outspoken Russian plans towards further "nuclearization" of Crimea, things could become more dangerous very soon. At least the Black Sea-Caspian region is already in the focus having Russian missiles launched from the Caspian Sea towards Syria which is not promising neither for the Baltic-Black Sea region, nor for the South-Eastern Mediterranean at all.

As far as all the above touch upon theoretical framework of the center-power competition in the international system, there is a conclusion to draw, that a capacity for a non-nuclear power, like Turkey, to be in a status of center-power is limited in case when another actor with the ability to be in a status of center-power is a nuclear state. Saying all these, there is a tendency to admit, that by strengthening its geopolitical positions in the Black Sea

region, Russia casts doubt on strategic capabilities of Turkey to maintain a status of the regional center-power and to be counted as one of the two regional powers. Following this, Turkey's future role in the region vis-à-vis Russia and other security challenges in the Black Sea region could be just supplementary to NATO's strategy if there are no crucial changes within geopolitical situation as it is since 2014.

Having such regional strategy and perspective vision of Russian presence in Crimea, one should take into consideration, that this is not only NATO-Russia confrontational agenda in the coming years, but also for the EU (which is backed up by NATO membership of the majority of the EU members – 22 out of 29) to have it in mind when constructing its own policy towards RF both in military and non-military segments of bilateral EU-Russia security talks. All these challenges will inevitably involve all Black Sea littoral states in interregional confrontation and arm race. Instead of an idealistic scenario which also used to be on the regional table in 1990's to have the Black Sea basin demilitarized in order to achieve more easily the main regional goal stated in the first Istanbul BSEC Declaration of June 25, 1992 "...to ensure that the Black Sea becomes a sea of peace, stability and prosperity, striving to promote friendly and good-neighbourly relations...",¹⁰ we are witnessing a new regional arms race trend which is initiating global confrontation. This is an alarming situation, as far as regional scenario is developing in the very framework of the classical school of political realism in international relations which is based on the egoistic interests of a state, defending national interests in general, and thus balance of power. Since early 2014, this balance of power which did exist in more or less in a balanced way primarily between Russia, Turkey, NATO, EU, and USA seized to exist.

Endnotes

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