

FORUM: Special Political and Decolonisation (SPECPOL)

TOPIC: The Situation in Ukraine

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POSITION: Deputy Chair

I. Introduction

The Ukrainian situation began on 21 November 2013 when the former president Viktor Yanukovich, who was a proponent of stronger Ukrainian ties to Russia, refused to sign an EU association agreement which included a proposed loan of 610EUR from the EU, as well as trade agreements. This would have aligned Ukraine strongly with the European bloc, thus worrying Yanukovich who, under pressure from Moscow, did not want to jeopardise Ukraine's relationship with Russia.

Thus began the rise of tensions between Russia and pro-Russian separatist rebels, and pro-Europe Ukrainians and the EU. Deadly protests broke out throughout Ukraine, toppling Yanukovich's government by February 2014. Russia, anxious to maintain its influence in Ukraine, had annexed Crimea, using a referendum in an attempt to legitimise their actions. Emboldened by Russia's support, pro-Russian separatists began to seize territories in the Donbas region (Eastern Ukraine), such as Donetsk and Luhansk. They were strongly backed by Russia who provided, and still continues to provide, military and logistical support. Frequent clashes broke out between the Ukrainian military and the Russia-backed separatist rebels.

Numerous international attempts to establish a ceasefire and end the Ukrainian crisis, such as the Minsk Protocol and Minsk II, have failed with numerous skirmishes breaking out in Eastern Ukraine. The fighting in and around the area continues to this day, resulting in rising death tolls and humanitarian crises. Furthermore, the tension between the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), and Ukraine remains palpable. Furthermore, Crimea is still under Russian control despite the UN's position, highlighted in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262, that the 2014 Crimean Referendum was invalid. It is evident that there are many issues regarding the situation in Ukraine that have been left unsolved, continuing to harm Ukraine deeply.

II. Definition of Key Terms

a Euromaidan Protests

A wave of demonstrations and riots in Ukraine that began on 21 November 2013, in response to Yanukovich's rejection of an EU deal in hopes of furthering ties with Russia. It was termed Euromaidan due to the unrest being about Europe, and mostly taking place in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square). These protests resulted in the Ukrainian government passing a series of laws that severely restricted the people's freedom of speech and assembly in an attempt to subdue the protests. Ultimately, Yanukovich's government was toppled and he fled the country, highlighting the impact and importance of these Euromaidan protests.

b Annexation

The forcible acquisition of one state's territory by another state. On 16 March 2014, Russia declared

Crimea independent from Ukraine, and formally incorporated Crimea as a federal subject of the Russian Federation.

c War in Donbas

A violent, prolonged armed conflict in the Donbas region between pro-Russian separatist rebels who enjoy strong support from Russia, and the Ukrainian military. The fighting and tension in the region continues till today, with the UN reporting a growing humanitarian crisis, and alarming deteriorations in human rights.

d East-West Divide (in Ukraine)

Since Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the country has been divided.



Fig 1. (Washington Post, 2014)

In Fig 1, there is evidently a clear division between the Ukrainian-speaking Western Ukraine, who see themselves as first and foremostly Ukrainians and the Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine, many of whom self-identify as having a Russian ethnicity.

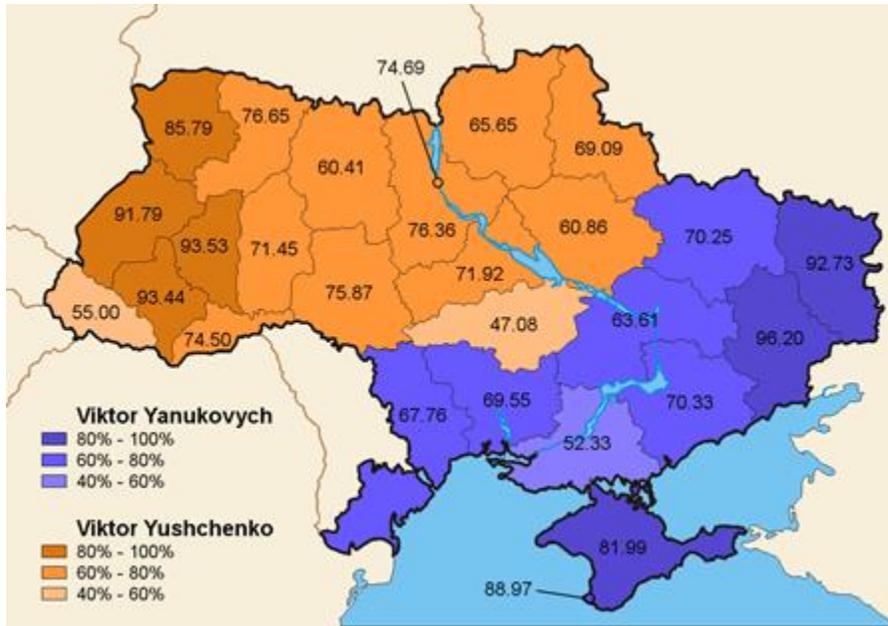


Fig 2. (Carleton University, 2016)

This division translates into their political sentiments. Above is a map view of the voting results from Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections between Yanukovich, a pro-Russia politician, and Yushchenko, who advocated NATO membership in Ukraine and discouraged the promotion of Russian as a second language in Ukraine. It is clear that Western Ukrainians align themselves to Europe politically, whilst those in the East support closer ties with Russia. This East-West divide is a huge source of tension in the country, which played a big role in the escalation of this Ukrainian Crisis.

e Normandy Format

Created on 6 June 2014, the Normandy Format, also known as the Normandy Contact Group, is a diplomatic group consisting of representatives from Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France, who would meet up to discuss and negotiate solutions to the Ukrainian crisis. The foreign ministers of these four countries have met numerous times in the past 4 years. Recently, current Ukrainian leader Poroshenko has announced that they are ready for Normandy Format negotiations to solve the situation once and for all, but Russia is not keen on cooperating on this front.

III. General Overview

a **Timeline of Key Events which Began the Ukrainian Crisis**

November 21, 2013: Yanukovich rejects a trade agreement with the EU, and huge Euromaidan protests take place in Kiev.

January 16, 2014: Parliament passes restrictive anti-protest laws.

February 22, 2014: Yanukovich's government topples, and a new round of Presidential Elections are set for 25th May.

February 27 - 28, 2014: Pro-Russian gunmen forcefully take over key buildings in Simferopol (capital of Crimea), and gunmen in unmarked uniforms surround Crimean airports.

March 16, 2014: Russia declares that in Crimea's secession referendum on joining Russia, 97% of voters support the joining. However, this vote is not recognised by Western countries as they believe the results were falsified.

March 18, 2014: Putin signs a bill to officially integrate Crimea into Russia.

May 11, 2014: Pro-Russian separatist rebels in Donetsk and Luhansk declare independence of these two regions (now DPR and LPR respectively) after holding unofficial referendums.

May 25, 2014: Petro Poroshenko, who has pro-Western political sentiments, is elected as President of Ukraine. However, the election was not held in many Eastern regions.

June 14, 2014: 49 are killed when separatist rebels shoot down a military plane.

July 17, 2014: 298 are killed when a passenger plane, Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 was shot down in rebel-held territory.

5 September, 2014: The Minsk Protocol is signed

February 11, 2015: Minsk peace talks progress, but no agreement is made yet

February 12, 2015: Minsk II is signed in Ukraine

2015 - present: Continued fighting between Russia-backed separatist insurgents and the Ukrainian military, who is funded by rich Ukrainian oligarchs and members of parliament.

b) Present Situation

The relationship between Ukraine and Russia remains hostile. In November last year, Ukrainian President Poroshenko had even warned of the threat of a possible full scale war with Russia in the future. He further accused Russia of dramatically increasing their military units deployed along the Ukraine-Russia border, although he did not suggest when, or over what length of time this buildup occurred. Conflict within Ukraine evidently does not show signs of subsiding. The two countries continue to engage in tense situations, such as Russia's detention of Ukrainian sailors, who made confessions that were televised through Russian national broadcasting (which Ukraine denounced as made under duress). In another key event on November 2018, Russia fired on and subsequently seized of 3 Ukrainian ships travelling along the Kerch Strait, causing Ukraine to declare Martial Law for 30 days. Evidently, hostilities are flaring up not just in the immediate area of Eastern Ukraine, but also in the regions surrounding Ukraine as well. These events have brought Ukraine-Russia relations to an all time low, and provoked new rounds of condemnation against Russia from numerous Western countries.

IV. Major Parties Involved and their Views

a Ukraine

Ukraine condemns Russia as an aggressor state and blames the country for sending troops to the region, arming separatists and not adhering to ceasefires. In January 2018, the Ukrainian government had passed a law redefining all regions seized by pro-Russia insurgents such as the LPR and DPR, as well as the Russia-occupied Crimea as "temporarily occupied". Ukraine does not recognise any of these regions as independent or a part of Russia, and maintains its internationally recognised territorial borders. Ukraine wishes to reintegrate these regions back into their country.

b Russia

With strong linguistic and economic ties to Ukraine, Russia recognises the importance of maintaining great influence and support in the country, which could also aid Russia's political clout

and standing. As such, Russia continues to fund and support separatists in the Donbas region, even recognising LPR and DPR travel documents (such as passports) in support of their self-declared independence from Ukraine. Russia believes that the 2014 Crimean Referendum provided them with a legitimate reason to annex Crimea, and continues to administer the country as a federal subject, integrating Crimea into the country. Russia has accused Ukraine of trying to solve the situation in the East by force, and believes their 2018 law (regarding Russia's "temporary occupation" of the region) violates the Minsk Peace Accords which was agreed on in 2015.

c European Union (EU)

Leading countries in the EU, such as France and Germany, have urged for an end to the situation in Ukraine through peaceful solutions and a stabilised ceasefire. They strongly condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea, and do not officially recognise it.

V. Relevant UN Documents

A/RES/68/262 - recognising Crimea as a territory of Ukraine, and declaring the 2014 Crimean referendum as invalid <http://www.un.org/en/ga/68/resolutions.shtml>

S/RES/2166 - condemning the downing of the civilian aircraft MH17 [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2166\(2014\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2166(2014))

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VI. Questions to consider

- Should Russia's annexation of Crimea be deemed legitimate?
- Who should decide this? (eg Through a referendum, international bodies, Ukraine themselves etc)
- What is the status of the LPR and DPR? Should they be recognised as independent nations?
- What preventive measures can be taken to prevent a similar situation from happening to Ukraine in the future?
- What humanitarian aid should be given to civilians in violent regions? (eg financial aid for reconstruction, food, support for refugees etc)

VII. Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

a Sanctions against Russia

Numerous economic sanctions have been enforced against Russia for their annexation of Crimea and encouragement of aggressive behaviour in the Eastern Ukraine (through their funding and support of separatist insurgents). In July 2014, the EU imposed economic sanctions on Russia and proceeded to reinforce them in September 2014. Sanctions have also been imposed by the USA. Both the EU and USA have announced that they will be continuing these economic sanctions until February 2019. Russia have responded with economic sanctions of their own against countries such as the EU, USA and Canada. These sanctions have pushed Russia to the edge of a recession, and Ukraine has claimed that Russian military advances have also been undermined. However, these

sanctions are also deeply harming many countries that are not even involved in the crisis, with Czechoslovakia and Slovakia being two of many countries to call for the lifting of such sanctions. Furthermore, the sanctions do not provide enough pressure for Russia to give in to the political demands of Ukraine.

b Minsk Protocol

On 5 September 2014, representatives from Ukraine, Russia, the LPR and the DPR met to sign the Minsk Protocol, or Minsk I. The Minsk Protocol was meant to put a halt to the fighting in the Donbas region, and consisted of 12 points including an immediate ceasefire. However, the Minsk Protocol had completely collapsed by January 2015, and full-scale fighting had broke out again. A spokesman from the DPR, Eduard Basurin, had even said, "The Minsk Memorandum will not be considered in the form it was adopted". Evidently, this agreement was overwhelmingly a failure.

c Minsk II

In February 2015, soon after the breakdown of the Minsk Protocol, talks between the countries in the Normandy Format (Russia, Germany, France and Ukraine) took place, brokering a "Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements", also known as Minsk II. The 13-point agreement again calls for a ceasefire, and lofty goals such as the cooperation from both sides to provide humanitarian aid and ensure the successful reintegration of occupied regions into Ukraine. Although violence in the region has abated, skirmishes and conflicts still continue in Eastern Ukraine. According to American Defense Department official Michael Carpenter, in the year after the signing of Minsk II, at least 430 Ukrainian soldiers died in the fighting that had continued. Evidently, Minsk II is a comprehensive guideline for peace that neither Russia nor Ukraine are keen on following.

VIII. Possible Solutions

- Increased sanctions against Russia in the hopes that it would provide enough economic pressure for them to cooperate with the demands of Ukraine and the EU member states
- Two-state solution, recognising LPR and DPR as independent from Ukraine, and legitimising Russia's annexation of Crimea
- Creation of a UN-led committee consisting of representatives from countries, that would oversee the implementation of Minsk II (or any future agreements) and track the progress of conflict de-escalation in the region. The committee may also be in charge of coordinating humanitarian aid to the Donbas region and helping with the re-integration of Russian-occupied territories (should Russia withdraw its influence in the region).
- Peacekeepers could be sent to the Donbas region in order to secure the line of fighting between the Ukrainian military and the Russia-backed separatists. The peacekeepers should enforce the ceasefire in the region.
- Taking into consideration the failure of Minsk II, a new peace agreement could be brokered between Russia and Ukraine, and the process overseen by relevant countries/UN committees/neutral international organisations.

X. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Ukrainian crisis has evolved into an extremely prolonged, violent and destructive conflict that must be resolved immediately, through peaceful and diplomatic measures. In debate, it is important to decide on the status of numerous controversial regions such as the LPR, DPR and Crimea (recognising them as independent/part of Russia or part of Ukraine) so that this decision may guide further action to be taken. Delegates should not only find a solution to halt the fighting, but should also consider the long-term stability of the region, and how to maintain that peace. It is also crucial to recognise and address not just the political impacts, but also the humanitarian consequences that have occurred.

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