

The Ukraine Crisis as a Challenge to Human Security in Europe

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DOI: [10.1163/18750230-02503003](https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02503003)

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Abstract

The package of measures agreed upon at the summit in Minsk on 11–12 February 2015² depends on the implementation of the agreed ceasefire. The stakes are high. The high priority given to an increase in defence expenditures in Russia³ in combination with a possible further aggressive posture may lead to a further escalation which imperfect international governance may be unable to prevent. The West needs longer-term cooperative solutions. Isolating Russia cannot be the objective. The combined impact of restrictive measures, the oil price and non-decisions to cooperate may have devastating consequences for Russia – and the West. The OSCE participating states agreed at the Astana summit in 2010 to reaffirm the principles and commitments since the inception of the CSCE process 40 years ago. But the way forward in addressing common-ground concerns so far remains blocked. This is tragic from the perspective of the wider human security agenda.

Keywords

OSCE – crisis – conflict – Ukraine – Russia – EU – US

Introductory Overview

This chapter is organised as an introductory overview followed by eight more specific comments.

At the time of writing, the overall international attention is focused on the ongoing destruction and suffering in eastern Ukraine. According to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the Minsk deal concluded between Russia and Ukraine on 12 February 2015 brings a “glimmer of hope” that the end could be in sight.⁴ The paradigm for conflict resolution still seems highly military. The issue whether the West will provide Ukraine with defensive military equipment is still open⁵ and is dependent on the implementation of the agreed ceasefire from 15 February.

Events in and around Ukraine are impossible to grasp without taking into account fundamental clashes of preoccupations and hopes. And even if such soft power aspects are taken into account, the level of understanding is not likely to lead to a capability to predict the future. The element of chance is simply too important.⁶ The Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman stated: “We are prone to overestimate how much we understand about the world and to underestimate the role of chance in events”. Even with strategic awareness and well-developed standard operating procedures no single actor seems to have been able to avoid surprises. This is a dangerous situation since imperfect international governance may be unable to prevent escalation by miscalculation.

It is particularly worrying that the power of history is weak: mistakes from the past are being repeated. At the same time the consequences of globalisation have not, arguably, been totally understood. The impact of the current crisis on the possibilities for the post-Soviet space outside the EU to benefit from globalisation is in question. The combined impact of the restrictive measures, the oil price and non-decisions to cooperate may

2 See the collection of documents retrieved from <http://www.elysee.fr/chronologie/#e8580>, 2015-02-11, le-sommet-de-minsk-2.

3 See a review of the defence spending plans for the coming years summarised from a Russian perspective in Russia Today, 15.2.2014 retrieved from <http://rt.com/business/russia-increases-military-spending-702/>.

4 Telegraph, 12.2.2015

5 New York Times, 1.2.2015

6 Kahneman, Daniel (2011), *Thinking, fast and slow*, (Macmillan).

already be devastating for Russia in a medium-term perspective.

The Ukraine crisis most likely has no sustainable military solution on the battlefield. At the same time the Russian government's budgetary priority in favour of the military-industrial complex in Russia seems very high which may lead to further tension both inside and outside the country.

Arguably, the Western contribution to conflict resolution would benefit from an increased focus also on longer-term cooperative solutions. Isolating Russia cannot be the long-term objective.⁷ A sustainable resolution to the conflict in and around Ukraine can only be achieved if a human security approach is applied which takes into account the situation not only in the Ukraine but also in the Russian Federation.⁸ It seems obvious that the restoration of trust not only between governments but also between peoples requires compassion.

The Russian annexation of Crimea has led to an even more difficult problem of principle and prestige than the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. What all the OSCE participating states agreed upon at the last summit in Astana 2010⁹ was not only to reaffirm the principles and commitments since the inception of the CSCE process 40 years ago but also to work together to address common challenges through a comprehensive concept of security.

These challenges obviously included not only the financial crisis hitting Europe and a strongly interdependent Russia (as well as its neighbours in the former Soviet space) but also, indeed, the transnational threats endangering the quality of life for people across the entire region.

Currently this is not happening. In fact the agenda agreed upon informally at Astana to pursue constructive cooperation on transnational threats in a framework of comprehensive security has been blocked by the Russian unwillingness to pursue the human rights agenda in the framework of the OSCE.

It is a paradox that precisely Moscow with its obsessive interest in territorial integrity after the Second World War has in addition chosen to violate the perhaps most important principle in the Helsinki Final Act, that borders can only be changed by peaceful agreement.¹⁰

And the historic achievement in the OSCE to safeguard the honour of the military profession by adopting a code of conduct on political-military aspects of security in the mid-1990s now seems to be in danger: it is not easy to

7 As an example of the argument put forward in favour of isolation see M. Cage, 'The 'Russian reset' was already dead; now it's time for isolation', Washington Post 2.3.2014 retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/02/the-russia-reset-was-already-dead-now-its-time-for-isolation/>.

8 <http://www.unocha.org/humansecurity/human-security-unit/human-security-approach>.

9 OSCE: Astana Commemorative Declaration, retrieved from <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/AstanaCommemorativeDeclaration2010.pdf>.

10 CSCE: Helsinki Final Act, 1975, retrieved from <http://www.OSCE.org/mc/39501>. Under the heading of inviolability of frontiers: "The participating States regard as inviolable all one another's frontiers as well as the frontiers of all States in Europe and therefore they will refrain now and in the future from assaulting these frontiers." Under the general heading on principles:

They consider that their frontiers can be changed, in accordance with international law, by peaceful means and by agreement.

pinmedals onto uniforms without any insignia.¹¹

Literally thousands of journalists and bloggers have been corrupted to participate in an information war the end of which is not in sight. The OSCE representative on the freedom of the media Dunja Mijatovic went so far on November 15, 2014, as to quote the Reuters article “Putin wages information war in Ukraine worthy of George Orwell”. The objective of destabilising democratic processes seems clear but the end result less so.¹²

In the context of the OSCE agenda it is against this background vital to broaden and unblock the entire scope for dialogue once more. The intensive and broad-based discussion in the OSCE and its country-based NGO networks again need to cover the entire scope of the three baskets, which means, beyond transnational threats, also issues related to the economy and the environment. The last point requires an adaptation of the position of the EU which until now has preferred to deal with the economic and environmental issues primarily outside the OSCE.

- 1) Events in and around Ukraine are impossible to grasp without taking into account fundamental clashes of preoccupations, hopes, and expectations between different types of actors.

The declared main preoccupation of the Russian Federation is, according to its President, the independence of the country, the power of the Russian Bear.¹³ For this Russia is prepared to accept costs affecting its economic situation. So far the Russian population seems by and large to share this assessment. The focus in Russia is currently not on higher standards of living in statistical terms. Many Russians are also happy that there is more order in the country than during the 1990s. Many perceive the demise of the Soviet Union as a defeat.¹⁴

The evolution of popular opinion, in particular in the western parts of Ukraine,¹⁵ has gone much further. Seemingly, the reaction against corrupted elites has been stronger. The comparison with Poland in terms of living standards shows enormous differences after the Cold War.¹⁶ The trade and association agreement with the EU created high hopes and expectations for a better future.¹⁷

In contrast, in the eastern Ukraine and in Russia the most significant development in living standards took

11 OSCE: Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, 1994 retrieved from <http://www.OSCE.org/fsc/41355>. The presence of Russian troops in military uniform without insignia has been recognised by President Putin, see the article retrieved from <http://rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/>.

12 See the article in the Guardian retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/08/russia-europe-right-putin-front-national-EU>.

13 See the article in Russia Today ‘Western nations want to chain ‘the Russian bear’ – Putin,’ 18.12.2014 retrieved from <http://rt.com/news/215523-crisis-payment-bear-chain/>.

14 German Marshall Fund of the United States, Transatlantic Trends 2014, retrieved from <http://trends.gmfus.org/transatlantic-trends/>

15 I. Katchanovski, ‘East or West? Regional Political Divisions in Ukraine since the ‘Orange Revolution’ and the ‘Euromaidan’, APSA 2014 Annual meeting paper, retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Papers.cfm?abstract_id=2454203.

16 The speaker of the Polish Parliament, Sikorski, developed this argument in a speech at Harvard on 20 November 2014 see https://ces.fas.harvard.edu/files/events/20141120_Sikorski_Speech_CESHarvard.pdf.

17 <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140915IPR62504/html/European-Parliament-ratifies-EU-Ukraine-Association-Agreement>.

place from the end of the Second World War well into the 1970s, not after the Cold War.¹⁸

- 2) And even if soft power aspects are taken into account the level of understanding is not likely to lead to a capability to predict the future. The element of chance is simply too important. Even with very well developed standard operating procedures and strategic awareness no single actor seems to be able to avoid surprises.

Events during the Arab Spring should have taught decision-makers that things can move quickly in unstable societies. These events should also have taught decision-makers that what seems desirable in the short term may lead to complications later.

Many argue in the debate surrounding the Ukraine crisis that President Putin has a strategic plan for Ukraine and possibly also for Moldova.¹⁹ Others believe that he may have a vision but that he has been confronted with strategic surprises, notably on the Maidan, which led to the escape of President Yanukovitch to Russia. In this second version of history, what has happened since has been a series of defensive Russian actions seeking to save what can be saved after having lost Ukraine.

- 3) This is a dangerous situation since imperfect international governance may be unable to prevent escalation by miscalculation.

The United Nations Security Council, which has overall responsibility for international peace and security, is blocked due to disagreements between its permanent members. The G8 informal structure no longer includes Russia. The OSCE requires consensus decisions. NATO's cooperation with Russia has been drastically reduced. NATO²⁰ at the same time in this conflict does not act out of area. The EU has not yet developed a multi-tasking capability enabling it to give constant high-level attention to the Ukraine crisis.²¹ The Union is also partly perceived as an actor in the conflict.²² American attention to the evolving situation has arguably been inconsistent and sometimes focused on short-term goals.²³ The extent to which the American leadership maintains close communication with the Russian leadership is unclear.²⁴

- 4) It is particularly worrying that the power of history is weak: mistakes from the past are being repeated both as regards learning from the situation towards the end of the Cold War and the viability of quick military solutions.

18 See the statistical developments over time in <http://www.gapminder.org>.

19 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/nato-general-warns-of-further-russian-aggression/2014/03/23/2ff63bb6-b269-11e3-8020-b2d790b3c9e1_story.html.

20 NATO foreign ministers on April 1, 2014: "We have decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation between NATO and Russia" statement retrieved from <http://www.nato.int/nrc-website/en/index.html>.

21 See my article for SIPRI <http://www.SIPRI.org/research/security/europe/publications/the-role-of-the-incoming-EU-hr>.

22 Event Report Böll lunch debate The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and the European Union retrieved from http://EU.boell.org/sites/default/files/event_report_ukraine.pdf.

23 See for instance a critical assessment of US policy in http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lincoln-mitchell/russia-ukraine-and-america_b_5058952.html.

24 See the repeated warnings by inter alia the former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov on too little US-Russian strategic communication in view of a possible escalation in the article written together with Malcolm Rifkind retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/04/opinion/the-risk-of-a-new-cold-war.html?_r=0.

The situation is in some respects not new. During its final years the Soviet Union did experience some of the same difficulties as Russia does now. The difficulties in feeding an increasingly urbanised population remain. The dependence on oil and gas prices is high.²⁵

The history after the Second World War in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria should have taught decision-makers that military operations may lead to seemingly quick results, but sustainable solutions are much more difficult to achieve.

- 5) The combined impact of the restrictive measures, the oil price and non-decisions to cooperate may already be devastating in a medium-term perspective.

In the first months of the sanctions directed against Russia economists competed in projecting a wide range of different results.²⁶ The most optimistic predictions on behalf of Russia pointed to Russian possibilities to diversify through increased cooperation with China²⁷ and India. Large financial reserves also gave Russia time to develop alternative markets. But soon also the finance minister in Russia started to sound the alarm bells: the combined impact of different measures created negative expectations in the market. As late as in 2014 Russia was still arguing in favour of major investments for instance in the Arctic. Many budgets, not least for information, were expanding rapidly. Employees in state structures were given higher wages. But at this stage the only sector of the economy which is likely to be reasonably satisfied with priorities is the military-industrial complex although it still operates on a level which is much lower than at the end of the Cold War. Capital²⁸ has left Russia and what has still not been properly analysed: the impact of non-decisions in terms of cooperation with Russia, has started to become more and more problematic.²⁹

- 6) The possibilities for the post-Soviet space outside the EU to benefit fully from globalisation is now in question. This fundamental interest of countries in the region seems not yet to have received the same priority as the interest of the elites.

At the end of the Cold War globalisation in terms of technological development was already a problem for Russia. The current accelerating competition in technical innovation around the world requires cooperation, transparency, trust and predictability. So far Russia and Russian industry, as well as research, seem well placed to participate in this competition. But this could change very quickly and have devastating results for Russia's possibility to continue the development from a raw material-producing country to a competitive industrial economy. And what is worrying for the future is of course the risk that the Russian youth will see much less prospects in terms of state of the art education and access to the latest technology. If current trends continue it is only a question of time before Russians will also have to travel for work and send remittances home – but

25 See the article retrieved from <http://www.vox.com/2014/12/16/7401705/oil-prices-falling>. The former Russian Prime Minister Gaidar published an article in 2007 referring to a traditional very high dependence on the oil price due to the need to import grain. See the article retrieved from <http://www.aei.org/feature/the-soviet-collapse/>.

26 See the article retrieved from Russia Direct 2014-12.16 'Does Putin's visit to India complete Russia's energy pivot to Asia' retrieved from <http://www.russia-direct.org/does-putins-visit-india-complete-russia%E2%80%99s-energy-pivot-asia>.

27 U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Research Backgrounder, 'The China-Russia Gas Deal: Background and Implications for the Broader Relationship' 9.6.2014 retrieved from http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China%20Russia%20gas%20deal_Staffbackgrounder.pdf.

28 J.W. Schoen, 'Data show Russian cash has already fled' 18.12.2014, retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/id/102281291#>.

29 Not least the former president of the European Commission has pointed to the importance of non-decisions in economic relations between European states. See http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-14-612_en.htm.

from where? The visa facilitation negotiations with the EU which were energetically pursued by a former Russian OSCE ambassador are predictably blocked. The truth is, of course, that many of the problems now facing the Russian Federation and Belarus are the same as the one facing Ukraine, not least as regards the need for investment in infrastructure and the need to deal with rampant corruption. Still, many look to China as an example of a country which has made an attempt to allow commercial freedom while restricting civil liberties at large, including the Internet. But the jury is still out as to whether even China will succeed in pursuing this policy in the longer term.

7) The Ukraine crisis has no sustainable military solution. At the same time the Russian government's dependence on support from the military-industrial complex in Russia seems very high.

The German Chancellor has repeatedly stated that she does not believe that the military capacity of Ukraine, with or without increased military equipment from the West, can influence Russian military behaviour in a decisive way.³⁰ Implicitly, she seems to indicate that Russian decisions by necessity must be influenced mainly by other considerations, including the direct and indirect impact on the economic situation in Russia.

However, the priority given to the military-industrial complex in Russia, not least through financial appropriations, seems very high. This sector is projected to receive up to around 5% of the national income in the coming decade. This is still only maybe a quarter of what it received towards the end of the Cold War. But it is still more than a doubling of the appropriations since the end of the 1990s.³¹

Again, however, a careful analysis of the impact of such policies should lead to second thoughts in Moscow. What will be the impact on the general public support for the government if pensions, salaries and social benefits will have to be drastically reduced? Life expectancy in Russia is now lower than in China.³² What will be the impact if necessary investments in the repair of critical infrastructure are further postponed leading to innumerable environmental incidents across the Russian Federation?³³ And what will be the net impact in terms of defence capabilities if increased military priorities in Russia lead to increased military spending in the West? How will Russia be able to meet terrorist threats from the south if the threat perceptions towards the West are elevated further? Threats of terrorism continue to undermine stability, not least in the northern Caucasus.³⁴ If great care is not taken the Crimean Tatars also risk a development-facilitating recruitment and radicalisation towards terrorism.³⁵ And how will Russia be able to meet the combined effect of transnational threats, including heroin from Afghanistan?³⁶

30 See the webcast retrieved from <https://www.securityconference.de/en/media-library/video/single/statement-and-discussion-with-dr-angela-merkel/>.

31 GlobalSecurity.org, Russian military budget, retrieved from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mo-budget.htm>.

32 <http://www.gapminder.org/>.

33 ap Enterprise: ,Russia oil spills wreak devastation, 20.12.2011, retrieved from <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/ap-enterprise-russia-oil-spills-050153139.html>.

34 S. Cornell, 'The "Afghanization" of the North Caucasus: Causes and Implications of a Changing Conflict' in Russia's Homegrown Insurgency: Jihad in the North Caucasus, SSI, October 2012 retrieved from <http://www.isdp.EU/svante-cornell.html?task=showbib&id=6090&return=>.

35 See RFE, ,Concerns Raised Over Crimean Tatars Fighting With IS, 19.11.2014 retrieved from <http://www.rferl.org/content/concerns-raised-over-crimean-tatars-fighting-with-is/26699848.html>.

36 See for instance the report made by the director of the federal drug control service Viktor Ivanov in 2013 retrieved from <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/5097>.

It must be again understood and recognised that full participation in globalisation requires empowered individuals in terms of education and freedom to interact on the global level. This is why in the end freedom and democracy is a necessary condition for sustainable development and security within a system of governance based on predictability and justice.

8) The West needs longer-term cooperative solutions. Isolating Russia cannot be the objective.

The notion that there is a Western zone of influence extending into Eastern Europe seems simplistic. The enlargement of the European Union is an important part of globalisation and the fight against fragility.³⁷ Still, the Western contribution to conflict resolution would benefit from an increased focus also on wider cooperative solutions. Isolating Russia cannot be the long-term objective.³⁸ Western European countries are highly dependent on a successful resolution of the crisis. The EU is Russia's largest trading partner and Russia is the third largest trading partner of the EU.³⁹

The "Schadenfreude" characterising much of the media reporting in both the East and the West is worrisome. If the Russian media continues to try to make people happy about problems in the West and the Western media does the same about problems in the East, then much progress in East-West co-operation over decades is being undone.


It is most likely that another book will be published some years from now analysing the way decisions were taken by the East and the West similar to the one produced by Graham T Allison⁴⁰ after the Cuban missile crisis. The current author is convinced that such a book will show that not everything that has happened in terms of aggressive behaviour in violation of international law has happened according to a rational decision-making model, as towards the end of the Cold War the military-industrial complex in several countries was no doubt working in order to benefit to the maximum from the situation.

37 Note for instance the general importance of EU enlargement as a method to fight fragility in Ghani, Ashraf and Clare Lockhart (2009), *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, (1 edn., Oxford University Press).

38 See the testimony to the House of Lords in its hearing on the European Union and Russia in 2007-8 by Sir Roderick Lyne, a former British ambassador to Russia, for the development of this argument.

39 <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/russia/>.

40 Allison, Graham and Philip Zelikow (1999), *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (2nd Edition), (2 edn., Pearson).



This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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