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## THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AS A THREAT FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S INTEGRITY

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## KONFLIKT NA UKRAINIE JAKO ZAGROŻENIE DLA INTEGRALNOŚCI UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ

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**Summary:** The latest conflict in Ukraine changed the security situation on the European continent significantly and brought into question the adequacy of the present global rule to keep order in the world. The situation in Ukraine showed how key countries could cooperate when protecting human values and democratic standards stated in international agreements. This article presents how the conflict in Ukraine became a threat for the EU's integrity. It analyses measures implemented by the organization to stop the war in the neighboring country and researches proposals that were rejected during the decision-making procedure. The aim of the work is to examine the ability of the EU to stay cohesive and decisive in the situation of a close external threat. The methods for the research are: qualitative research of secondary data, interviews, scientific analysis and synthesis.

**Keywords:** conflict in Ukraine, Russia, EU's response, sanctions.

**Streszczenie:** Ostatni konflikt na Ukrainie zmienił status bezpieczeństwa w Europie i zakwestionował adekwatność globalnych reguł utrzymywania porządku na świecie. Sytuacja na Ukrainie pokazała, w jaki sposób kluczowe państwa mogą współpracować w obronie wartości i standardów demokratycznych wyznaczonych przez umowy międzynarodowe. Artykuł przedstawia konflikt na Ukrainie jako zagrożenie dla integralności Unii Europejskiej. Analizuje działania podjęte przez organizację w celu powstrzymania wojny i bada propozycje, które zostały odrzucone w trakcie procesu decyzyjnego. Celem publikacji jest zbadanie zdolności Unii Europejskiej do pozostania spójną i zdecydowaną w sytuacji zagrożenia zewnętrznego. Metody badania to wtórne badanie jakościowe, wywiady, analiza i synteza naukowa.

**Słowa kluczowe:** konflikt na Ukrainie, Rosja, odpowiedź Unii Europejskiej, sankcje.

### 1. Introduction

In autumn 2013 the Euromaidan revolution started in Ukraine as a protest against the decision of the government to suspend the preparation for signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. On the one hand, the revolution succeeded as

it united Ukrainians from different parts of the country in fight for European values and against the corrupted government. On the other, after the victory of protests the Russian Federation, being afraid of losing Ukraine from its sphere of influence, started huge anti-Ukrainian propaganda in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea (regions that historically have the biggest Russian sentiment), naming the protesters in other parts of Ukraine fascists and scaring Russian-speaking people of possible discrimination by the new Ukrainian government. In March 2014 Russia made an illegitimate referendum in Crimea using the force of its militants present there to make the results of voting predictable. None of the democratic countries recognized either the procedure of preparing and voting or the results of Crimean referendum [General Assembly... 2016]. Nevertheless, the Russian Federation incorporated the Crimean peninsula into its territory. Later Russia started destabilizing a situation in Eastern Ukraine by supporting Russian oriented population and bringing its ideologists there. The destabilization changed rapidly into the conflict between the government forces and pro-Russian separatists, which started getting also military support from its Eastern neighbor [Yashin, Shorina 2015]. What was the world reaction to the violation of international agreements by Russia? The strongest response came from the USA and the EU. Here I present the EU's reaction to the conflict in Ukraine, its internal discussions and contradictions between the members. I show how it became a threat to the Union's integrity.

## **2. The EU's response to the conflict in Ukraine**

From the beginning of the Euromaidan movements most of the European politicians expressed their support for the Ukrainian fight for the democratic future of the country. After the government's usage of violence against the peaceful protesters in Kyiv, the EU and its representatives showed their high concern and condemned these actions [Svitovi ZMI... 2016]. After the Crimean referendum, the European response to the evens became more radical [Timeline... 2016]. The Union condemned the annexation of Crimea and did not recognize it becoming part of Russia. On 17 March 2014 the EU imposed the first round of sanctions, which comprised travel bans and asset freezes against persons involved in actions threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine. European high officials expressed their concern and asked Russia to respect international law. This did not bring concrete results. Consequently, the EU's response to the crisis in Ukraine was inadequate in the eyes of most Ukrainians [Saryusz-Wolski 2014]. After Russian actions in Eastern Ukraine, the EU imposed economic sanctions in July 2014 and reinforced them in September 2014. In March 2015 the European Council linked the duration of those economic restrictions to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements [EU sanctions... 2016]. On 21 December 2015 the European Council prolonged economic sanctions against Russia until 31 July 2016 [Russia: EU prolongs... 2016]. On 10 March 2016, the European Council also prolonged sanctions against 146 Russian and Ukrainian citizens and 37

Russian companies undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine [Council Decision... 2016].

To generalize, from the start of the conflict in Ukraine, the European Union implemented a response strategy set on three pillars. The first one was the above mentioned sanctions, the attempt of which was to change Russian policy by using economic pressure. The second one composed European soft power and diplomacy in order to change Russian behavior through engagement. The third pillar was aimed at constant support for Ukraine, in order to make the country better prepared to function as an effective state able to defend itself [Speck 2016].

Many perceive in Minsk agreements (Minsk protocol and Minsk II) the biggest success of the EU in resolving the conflict in Ukraine. However, the signature of the documents did not bring parties to their implementation. The ceasefire was constantly violated, the Russian-Ukrainian border did not come into the control of Ukrainian government, the OSCE representatives were meeting difficulties accessing the territory of the conflict etc. From the interview with Ukrainian soldier: "Minsk agreements have never been implemented. There is no ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine. Separatists are constantly attacking our positions" [Personal interview... 2014].

Talking about the EU's financial support for Ukraine, it was not mostly noticed by Ukrainians due to the overall worsening of the economic and social situation in the country, devaluation of hryvnia and still corrupted government. Although the European Union tried to do its best from the start of unrest in Ukraine, most Ukrainians thought that they were left alone to face the Russian aggression. From the personal interview with Ukrainian soldier fighting in Eastern Ukraine: "I did not feel any support from the European Union. We even do not have enough uniforms and weapons, which we had to buy ourselves. As we are protecting the European continent from Russian aggression, the Union could have helped us at least with some basic items" [Personal interview... 2014]. Unfortunately, the EU's support did not reach ordinary Ukrainians.

Some think that the Union could have done much more. Georg Soros is sure that Russia threatens the stability of the whole European continent. As a protective measure for the European Union and NATO he proposed IMF to give Ukraine at least \$ 20 billion. Some of the money could go for repairing of the coal mines in the Eastern Ukraine, another amount – for purchasing additional gas for the country, another – replenishing the currency reserves of the central bank, etc. [Soros 2015b]. The businessman thinks that the successful development of the Ukrainian economy will be the best sign for Russia and separatists on the East to show that democracy can work properly. He argues that Russian trouble and Ukrainian economic success can persuade Vladimir Putin to accept his defeat in destabilizing the situation in Ukraine [Soros 2015a].

Looking from the other side of the coin, some Europeans consider the EU's involvement into the Ukrainian conflict as too big. At the moment the Union faces a number of challenges (refugee crisis, international terrorism, possible Brexit,

economic problems), and the Ukrainian crisis is only one of them and it is losing its importance when Europe is focusing its inner threats. The divide was quite visible at the latest Munich conference. Italy was eager to revise the sanctions against Russia, as the country is Russian second-biggest trading partner in the EU, and sanctions are touching badly Italy's already fragile economy. From the other side, Polish president emphasized that the biggest threat to Europe was Russian foreign policy and there was a need in strengthening NATO's presence in East Europe with "more bases, and especially infrastructure of NATO in our part of Europe." Moreover, Lithuanian President supported this view. On the other hand, the Finnish President was for "engaging Russia constructively". Most western, central and northern EU states named considered the migrant crisis as the primary threat to the Union, and argued that ending the war in Syria should be the continent's main priority [Bodner 2016].

### **3. The EU's division in relation to the conflict in Ukraine**

For Ukraine the EU's response was too weak to stop the war, for the Union the response was strong enough to divide its members. The European Union is neither a state nor a confederation. It is a mixture of countries with their own national interests. Therefore, the EU's response to the conflict in Ukraine was a combined and strongly debated reaction of 28 individual countries, each of them trying to meet its concrete policy desires. Many scholars consider the response of the Union to be very weak and not up to reality. George Soros stressed that the EU was under indirect attack from Russia, and more support for Ukraine would save Europe to fight the enemy on its own territory.

Nevertheless, the attitude of the European Union's Member States to the situation in Ukraine was quite different as mentioned previously. Most of them have rather strong connections with the Russian Federation. Discussions in the European Parliament were about a contradiction: to follow the European values and to protect justice and international law outside its borders but to go into a conflict with Russia (with all the threats coming from this: losing its energy security, economic difficulties due to the worsening trade with Russia) and see the dissatisfaction of its own citizens, or to shut eyes into the Russian violation of international agreements but stay with stable economies at home. The decision was difficult and different countries of the European Union had very opposite ideas as to it. From my point of view, the cooperative decision of the Union was quite in the middle of the proposed extremes. This compromise dissatisfied many. Some countries expressed their negative attitude to such measures few times. The Slovak Republic, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Cyprus made it difficult for the European Parliament to make a unanimous decision during some moments of discussions [Slovakiya, Vengriya... 2016]. The contradiction

is simple. Poland and Baltic states have difficult historical memories with Russia, so they were eager to help Ukraine and weaken Russia even at the expense of their economies. Such decisions met mostly a positive response in their societies. The Slovak Republic, Hungary and the Czech Republic have strong economic connections with Russia, and their weak economies would feel the cuts of economic ties with the country sharply. Cyprus lives on billions invested by Russian oligarchs and is rather politically controlled by them. These are only few examples, but the list of pros and cons for every country could go further. For a Spanish farmer, who could not exactly imagine the location of Ukraine, it was rather difficult to agree with the government decision to freeze cooperation with such an important economic partner as Russia to save Ukrainian people. On the other hand, it was quite understandable for an ordinary Pole to support Ukrainians who came to their country to study and work, and to annoy Russians, who invaded them in the Second World War and hide the truth about the Smolensk catastrophe. The German economy, which was the strongest, divided into different opinions, had a task to push the members of the Union into cooperation and come to a wise common decision.

Apart from the inner European problems, other global issues made a decision on Ukraine even more complicated. The development of the conflict in Syria showed the West that Russia had to be taken into considerations in international relations. On the Munich conference, Russian Prime Minister stated clearly, that the West needed his country to fight terrorism and end the war in Syria, so lifting the sanctions would be a step forward. While the Ukrainian government did not completely succeed in implementation reforms, many European countries are even more eager to reestablish good relations with Russia. Although the EU recently extended sanctions on Russia for the next six months, several European officials have made it clear that they are eager to lift the sanctions when they come under review in July and have pressured Moscow and Kyiv to do more on implementing the Minsk protocols. While the EU countries such as Germany, France and Italy have a strong economic incentive in removal the sanctions against Russia, other European states such as Poland and the Baltic countries want to keep them until Moscow fulfills its Minsk agreement obligations [In Ukraine... 2016]. The Polish foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski stated that it was too early to speak about lifting the sanctions until the question of Crimea and Russian support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine was fully solved. Commenting the desire of Germany, France and some other countries to reestablish the economic cooperation with Russia, he stressed: "Those who want to trade sausages and gas in such a situation, should cross out all the achievements of the international law, which was formed more than a decade since, and not otherwise, in order to avoid war as a means of settling international disputes" [Glava... 2016] However, it can be noted that the latest Munich conference showed clearly that 2016 was going to test the capacity of the political, economic and cultural ties of the EU and trans-Atlantic community as a whole. Russia may have the momentum.

## 4. Conclusions

The analysis of the EU's attitude to the conflict in Ukraine showed the deep divide between the members of the Union. As different countries have various experiences and economic/political ties with Russia and Ukraine, it was extremely difficult for the EU to find a common solution to respond to Russian aggression against Ukraine. To impose sanctions on Russia the unanimous agreement of all the members was necessary, which in some periods was practically impossible to achieve. At the moment the sanctions are prolonged, but voices against them are still heard every time louder, while others would prefer more restrictive measure against the Russian violation of international agreements. Sanctions, financial support and political pressure still have not brought peace to Ukraine, but quarreled countries of the European Union. The conflict in Syria and the migrant crisis make contradictions inside Europe bigger and bigger. For some Russia is a partner in fighting ISIS, for others – the first enemy. Now, the Union is able to come to common decisions. When the time for the revision of sanctions comes in half a year, we will see if it is still able to stay integral.

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