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**RYSZARD ZIĘBA**

*Prof. dr hab., University of Warsaw, Poland*

## **The Ukraine crisis as the rivalry for spheres of influence between the West and Russia**

The Ukraine crisis is a manifestation of acute geopolitical rivalry between the West and Russia for influence in Ukraine. The author used for analysis, the theory of realism. This perspective allowed him to highlight the rivalry for spheres of influence between both sides, as a geopolitical rivalry, military confrontation in Europe, and as a consequence the weakening of Euro-Atlantic security. The last part of the paper reflects on the key question – how to emerge from the crisis? The author presents proposals that suggest more restraint in the position of all parties involved in the crisis, and concludes that the situation has shown that without cooperation with Russia, it is not possible to create an extension of Western influence and to realize the dream of Ukrainians of joining the European Union. He argues, the Ukrainian crisis should make all the external entities involved in it aware that an understanding between the West and Russia in the matter of Ukraine could prove to be a breakthrough with a very positive impact not only on European security but on the global international order. Freezing the conflict at the present lower intensity level only postponed addressing a problem that will need to be resolved by means of an understanding between all the interested parties.

**Key words:** Ukraine, the Ukraine crisis, rivalry, spheres of influence, the West, Russia, NATO, the European Union, theory of realism

### **Introduction**

In autumn of 2013 the Ukraine crisis began. Initially, it has an internal character, expressed in mass demonstrations in Kyiv and other Ukrainian

cities, against the decisions of the president and the government refusing to sign the new association agreement on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). In February 2014, when the legal authorities were overthrown, the crisis gained an international dimension. The West recognized the new Ukrainian authorities, and Russia led in March to the annexation of the Crimea and began to support the militarily secessionist in Donbas (Zięba, 2014, 15–19). The Ukraine crisis has become the most important long-term disruption of international cooperation in Europe. The consequences of this crisis are manifold and as it turns out to be serious for the whole Euro-Atlantic security system. The very serious consequence of this crisis is the weakening of Ukraine as a state.

The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated the old truism voiced by realists that there is no equivalence between moral principles and state interests. Although the two main entities competing over Ukraine – the West and Russia – seek to justify the legitimacy of their actions, their explanations clearly indicate that they have specific political, strategic and economic interests there. One should, therefore, judge their actions as if they were our own. This leads to the conclusion that one should avoid moralizing judgments, and propaganda seeking to pillory the adversary or rival. Experts should show restraint in their assessments and politicians in their actions.

The world is so made that weak states generate problems and powerful ones seek to take advantage of them in their own interest. The Ukrainian crisis was brought about above all by the Ukrainians themselves who for over 20 years of independent existence proved unable to build a democratic and efficient state and an efficient market economy. Ukraine thus became a victim of its own will, a protectorate as it were of Russia, which has there its political interests and its cultural and economic influence. It is worth recalling that the Orange Revolution of 2004–2005 ended unsuccessfully. Ukraine's then pro-western reformers continued the oligarchic politics and caused great disappointment, especially among the younger segment of Ukrainian society. Ukraine remained a buffer state between Russia and the West.

But by 2013 the situation around Ukraine had become less favorable to the realization of a program of democratic and market reforms, especially as Russia, which had its own interests in Ukraine, had become significantly more powerful, and the West much weaker. Generally speaking, the West came out of the 2008 financial crisis much weakened and it now had more

competitors in the form of the newly emerging powers. The reputation of the United States and NATO had been marred by the lost wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, by their support of the Arab Spring, and by the intervention in Libya. The European Union in turn only managed to overcome the crisis in the Euro zone, and had to face the prospect of disintegration as a result of the nationalisms that were tearing at it. It is in this situation that the USA and the EU decided to draw Ukraine into its sphere of influence, by supporting the entirely justified European aspirations of a large segment of Ukrainian society. In order to change Ukraine's political course, what was missing was consensus among its very citizens. The pro-European option was supported mainly in the western and central part of the country, while the Ukrainians of the eastern and southern parts feared the nationalism of their western compatriots. These fears were stoked by Russia, which didn't recognize Ukraine's new authorities which had been chosen in an unconstitutional manner in February 2014. In addition, Russia cleverly took advantage of the opportunity to secure its strategic interests, by annexing Crimea along with the naval base in Sebastopol and, in some measure, managed to delay economically the entry into force of the commercial part of Ukraine's new association agreement with the European Union. Of course, this assessment does not touch upon the question of the legitimacy of Ukraine's European aspirations, but concentrates only on the matter of rivalry over this country by external entities in keeping with the directives of the theory of political realism.

## Geopolitical Rivalry

Security in the Euro-Atlantic area after the Cold War was based on the principle of recognition for the territorial status quo and on cooperation between states and international organizations. The guiding idea behind its shaping was the theory of liberalism entailing the concordant cooperation to maintain the peace and to simultaneously promote democratic transformation. It was called cooperative security and gave an illusory and idealistic conviction that the differing interests of states making up this system could be reconciled through cooperation. But the system as it took shape in the 1990s didn't fully take into consideration the interests of all its participants. The western part of the continent reinforced its security through the

enlargement of NATO and the European Union, while in the East a sense of uncertainty, and in Russia a sense of being “encircled” by the West persisted. The Russian leaders – Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin or Dmitri Medvedev – made attempts to bring about cooperation between equals with the West and always considered that Russia was a part of Europe. But the West failed to see this orientation in Russian politics, seeing only the shortage of democracy in Russia’s political system and in its policies and continues in its efforts to “Europeanize” that large country. This is not conducive to deeper cooperation with Moscow, least in the sphere of international security.

The West did not treat Russia as an equal in the resolution of arising problems, such as the ending of the war in former Yugoslavia, already disregarded in 1991 during the first military invasion against Iraq, in 2003 during the second one, and between them during the war in Kosovo in 1999. During the 1990s, the first post-Cold War decade, the West and especially the United States attempted to cooperate with Russia, but treated it as a weak junior partner which was not in a position to stand up to the USA and to look after its own interests. And to, the first NATO enlargement took place despite Russia’s opposition in 1999 when three former Soviet allies – Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary – were admitted to the Alliance; five years later seven other countries were admitted, including three that had once been a part of the Soviet Union – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. It is worthwhile to note that this “encroachment” on post-Soviet area was taking place while Russia found itself under the efficient and initially definitively pro-European leadership of President Vladimir Putin. The West not only failed to take up Russia’s offer of closer cooperation, but it is precisely then that it supported the “color revolutions” in various non-Russian independent CIS states – in Georgia, in Ukraine, in Kirgizstan and also attempted to trigger a similar “revolution” in Belarus (Bandeira, 2015, p. 42–52). Moscow saw these actions as the West’s expansion toward its boundaries (Wilson, 2010, 21, Becker et al., 2016, 120).

The Ukraine crisis provided evidences to public opinion that the West and Russia had different and incompatible interests. This incompatibility manifested itself on the plane of military and strategic relations. The European Union’s offer to Ukraine of a new association agreement was supposed to strengthen the pro-western course in that country’s policy (Sakwa, 2015, 26). Yet, it was a neutral country that remained under the “shadow” of Russian influence. The leasing by Russia of the naval base in Sebastopol

was a visible sign of Ukraine's submissiveness to its powerful neighbor. The acceleration of democratic and market reforms in Ukraine as a result of the association agreement with the EU would have in an obvious manner led to a change in Kyiv's foreign policy from one that balances between Russia and the West to one that clearly opts for a pro-western course. It is for this reason that the leaders of western countries accepted the rejection by Kyiv's demonstrating opposition of the agreement signed with President Victor Yanukovich on 21 February 2014 and accepted the participation in the newly formed temporary government of Arseniy Yatseniuk of nationalist or semi-fascist politicians.

In the spring of 2014 we saw the violation of the post-Cold War international order in Europe. The annexation of Crimea by Russia, followed by Russian military support for the separatists of Ukraine's eastern provinces made plain that when threats to its interests arose, Russia decided to break international law and OSCE principles. Interestingly, this was done by a state which calls itself a defender of international law and condemns sharply all of its violations. During the fighting in the Donbas in the spring of 2014, the West supported the dirty war conducted by government forces against the separatists (the "anti-terrorist operation" in the Kyiv's terminology), Ukrainian citizens. The West also failed to react to the reports of humanitarian organizations pointing to the humanitarian disaster taking place in eastern Ukraine; it didn't send convoys with aid for the suffering civilian population in the Donbas. This means, in terms of the premises of Morgenthau's political realism, that states that speak of universal moral norms nevertheless choose effective political action that brings them advantages.

The competing interests of the West and Russia on the military and strategic plane is also shown by the calculations of certain western politicians who are counting on bringing Ukraine into NATO on the one hand, and Russia's fear that yet another, decisive, NATO "approach" to its southwestern boundaries may be about to take place and seriously block the Russian fleet's ability to operate on the Black Sea on the other. Should such a scenario materialize, Russian security would be seriously compromised.

The conclusions to be drawn from the Russian-Georgian War of 2008, and from the Ukrainian crisis are that Russia will actively stand up to the West and will not allow NATO to admit any further countries lying on Russia's boundary. Montenegro's admission to NATO took place on 5 June 2017

and the Alliance's further expansion can take place in the direction of the western Balkans and, possibly, Scandinavia (Sweden and Finland). This could strengthen NATO and give it more flexibility in dealing with Russia (Wolff, 2014, 1103–1121). We do not know, however, what counter-measures will be taken by Russia to counterbalance these NATO's steps.

## Military confrontation in Europe

The landing operation conducted by Russia in Crimea using “little green men” devoid of insignia, and subsequent military support for the separatists in the Donbas in the form of arms supplies and Russian soldiers were clear signs that war had broken out in Europe. It was, however, a limited war, and Russia's intervention is described as “hybrid warfare” (Freedman, 2015, 8–12). On the one hand, Russia became militarily involved on the side of the Donbas separatists in its efforts to hinder the expansion of the West's sphere of influence and, on the other, fighting broke out between Ukrainian government forces and the separatists.

Ukrainian government forces, which included foreign mercenaries, took up sharp pacification measures. This cruel armed conflict brought thousands of victims, most of whom were civilians from the Donetsk and Luhansk districts. From the summer of 2014 on, information reached the media about the humanitarian catastrophe in the fighting areas. This war, with the war in former Yugoslavia, became the cruelest armed conflict in Europe in the post-Cold War period. Interestingly, the Western countries, urging the Ukrainian government to put down the rebellion in the Donbas, did not hurry to provide humanitarian aid. In contrast, Russia sent humanitarian convoys, but these were criticized by western politicians and media as a means to smuggle war materials and equipment.

The Ukrainians paid a high price for their revolution, called by them as „Dignity Revolution”. About 100 persons lost their lives during the Kyiv Euromajdan, and several hundred were wounded. The losses caused by the war in Donbas are very high, but there are no current and reliable estimates. As the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry stated on February 2017 since the outbreak of the conflict, nearly 10 thousand people died, about 23,000 were injured and nearly 1.8 million people were deprived of their homes. Estimates from the separatist authorities of the fighting districts of Donetsk and Luhansk

are not available, however. It is worthwhile to note that, despite the Mińsk-2 ceasefire concluded on 12 February 2015, fighting in eastern Ukraine, if less intense, continued nonetheless.

NATO reacted to the armed conflict in Ukraine by reinforcing its eastern flank, in reality to emerge from its lethargy and to prepare itself to fulfill its collective defense function. The United States sent to Poland additional F-16 multi-purpose planes (increasing their number to 12); an AWACS distance reconnaissance plane on a one-time mission; sent personnel for the airbase in Łask (about 250 soldiers); decided to prolong their rotational military presence at that base until the end of 2016; and also undertook to patrol the Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian sections of the Baltic coast, and the Bulgarian and Romanian sections of the Black Sea coast. NATO as a whole decided to increase the frequency of military exercises, to build equipment depots in case there is a need to transfer NATO troops to Poland; to systematically update contingency plans; and also expressed the interest in further enlargement to include the Balkan states as well as Sweden and Finland, if those states decided to join the Alliance. During the NATO Summit in Newport (4–5 September 2014), members were bound to increase the expenditures on defense to a minimum of 2% of GDP. During the summit it was also announced that a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) would be established and that the battle readiness of the Multinational Corps Northeast stationed in Szczecin would be increased. All these decisions undoubtedly strengthened the cohesion and the engagement of NATO and the USA in the security of Central Europe. It was decided in Newport that NATO would earmark about 15 million euro for support to Ukraine and also from individual members of the Alliance as part of bilateral agreements.

Furthermore, in the spring of 2015, NATO debated the possibility of sending military equipment to Ukraine. It had been initiated by American Republicans, who demanded that at least defensive weapons be supplied to Ukraine. Such proposals were strongly criticized by Stephen Walt, who wrote that “arming Ukraine, on the other hand, is a recipe for a longer and more destructive conflict. It’s easy to prescribe such actions when you’re safely located in a Washington think tank, but destroying Ukraine in order to save it is hardly smart or morally correct diplomacy” (Walt, 2015). The Barack Obama administration did not agree to arm Ukraine. Only from the spring of 2015 did a few NATO members engage in training Ukrainian sol-

diers. These included Great Britain, USA, Canada and Lithuania. Poland did not send its military instructors to Ukraine, but trained Ukrainian soldiers on its own territory. NATO also conducted a series of military maneuvers on its eastern flank, the largest of which – Swift Response-2015 – took place on the territories of Bulgaria, Romania, Germany and Italy from 20 August to 13 September 2015. The latter were one of the largest international airborne exercises since the days of the Second World War and the largest NATO maneuvers since the 1980s. The maneuvers involved soldiers from eight NATO countries, including Poland, and their number was not made public. The aim of these exercises was to integrate high readiness units of NATO members and to prepare them for joint and effective reaction to security changes on the territory of Alliance. In this manner, NATO demonstrated to Russia that it was ready to respond to any potential aggression. Russia behaved in similar fashion, holding maneuvers along its border with Ukraine and the Baltic states and, since the middle of 2014, for several months the air force of the Russian Federation was particularly active in the Baltic Sea area. The situation was thus quite dangerous, because it was reminiscent of the climate of confrontation from the worst moments of the Cold War. Subsequent decisions about reinforcing NATO's eastern flank were made at the summit of NATO leaders in Warsaw on 8–9 July 2016. As a result, in January 2017 an American armored brigade was stationed on NATO's eastern flank.

Above mentioned actions were carried out as the Alliance's reaction to Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. It should be noted that although NATO's decisions constituted a significant reinforcement of the alliance's eastern flank, not all its European members were as enthusiastic in this matter as the USA, Great Britain or Poland. Germany, for example, adopted a more restrained stance, not wishing for a stronger confrontation with Russia (Belkin, Mix, Woehrel, 2014, 4). Although NATO's decisions were sharply criticized by Moscow, they did not constitute a significant military strengthening of the Alliance, as much as a manifestation off the readiness of NATO members to oppose any potential aggression from Russia. During the Warsaw summit, like during the earlier meetings of NATO leaders, no decisions were taken in the matter of any direct military action involving NATO troops on the side of Ukraine. The reason for this is that Ukraine is not a NATO member. In other words, the Ukraine crisis sharpened the military confrontation between Russia and NATO, but both sides showed restraint to avoid outright war, albeit controversy in the spirit of confrontation continued.

## The weakening of Euro-Atlantic Security

By accepting the argumentation of the realists, it has to be stated that the Ukraine crisis was the result of the ongoing rivalry for spheres of influence between the West and Russia. It was due to an offensive policy of the USA and the European Union aimed at drawing Ukraine toward the West, and a defensive policy in Russia's case aimed at protecting the status quo in Ukraine, which was to remain a buffer state shielding Russia from the West but respecting Russia's influence in that country. The change of government in Kyiv to a pro-western one led to offensive behavior by Russia which, anticipating Ukraine's expected admission to NATO, annexed the Crimea along with the important naval base in Sebastopol and supported the secession of the Donbas. The war in the Donbas that began in the spring of 2014 is an instrument serving to weaken Ukraine and, thus, to preclude its accession to NATO, as it is clear NATO will not grant admission to a country in the midst of a civil war and a territorial dispute with Russia. The latter had already made use of this scenario in 2008 with Georgia, which also harbored some Atlantic aspirations. And so, Ukraine became hostage to the rivalry between the West and Russia, as well as of its own ambitions which a significant portion of its own population didn't share. This logically leads to the conclusion the policy of rivalry for spheres of influence pursued by both the West and Russia has led to a weakening of European security, including Poland's national security (Stolarczyk, 2014, 86).

It is doubtful whether the military strengthening of NATO's Eastern Flank carried out following the decisions taken at the summits in Newport (2014) and Warsaw (2016) contributed to reinforcing international security. From the viewpoint of NATO members neighboring on Ukraine and Russia, one can say that the continued rotational presence of allied units in these countries may be interpreted as a reinforcement of their defense abilities. But from the general point of view, having taken into account the increased military activeness especially of Russian air force near the airspace of those countries and of other NATO members further to the west (on the English Channel), the activeness of the Russian Navy in the Baltic, and the "Zapad 2017" maneuvers in Belarus, it has to be noted that the level of militarization of relations in Europe has grown, and this increases the threat of the outbreak of an armed conflict, if one of limited scale, between Russia and NATO. This has undoubtedly led to lowering of international security

in the entire Euro-Atlantic area. It should be remembered that the rivalry over Ukraine has contributed to this and still has negative impact to the cooperation between the West and Russia. Similarly negative impact on the state of Euro-Atlantic security have had the decisions of NATO's summit in Wales, recommending that the allies increase their defense spending to 2% of GDP in relation to the previous year's GDP have had a. Certain countries of NATO's Eastern flank have considerably increased their military expenditures: Romania by 11%, Slovakia by 7%, and Poland – which had a relatively high level of defense spending since 2002 at 2% of GDP – declared in the fall of 2015 that this level would be increased to 3% of GDP by 2020 and has signed a number of large arms purchase contracts with the USA.

Additionally important factor that worsens the situation is the warlike rhetoric that accompanies the crisis. In order to justify their confrontational steps, both Russia and the West mutually accuse each other of creating threats. Following the experience with Russia's "little green men" (soldiers without insignia) in Crimea, many politicians and experts in the USA, Poland and the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) began to propagate the idea that Russia might attack its NATO members in the form of a "hybrid war". Romuald Szeremietiew, former Polish Deputy-Minister of Defense, even stated in March 2015 that Russia could attack Poland using tactical nuclear weapons (Zajac, 2016, 146–147). This propaganda was yet another factor leading to the weakening state of security in the center of Europe, all the more so because it is practiced by media and many experts in the USA and Central European countries.

The result of the high level of tension in the Euro-Atlantic area was the reduction in the frequency of consultations between NATO and Russia within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which had been instituted by accords in 1997 and 2002. Following the annexation of the Crimea, such consultations were suspended on 1 April 2014 by a decision of the NATO ministers of foreign affairs. But channels of political dialogue and military communication were kept open and the NRC as such was never suspended. The first meeting following this suspension occurred only on 20 April 2016, following which they took place every few months, but they did not lead to a rapprochement in positions between NATO and Russia. Regular meeting were held once a year by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, including Russia. NATO tried to discuss the Ukrainian crisis with Russia, as well as the need for the full implementation of the Minsk accords,

and Russia's military activeness around the territories of NATO member states, with particular emphasis on reducing the risk that such activeness entails. Russia, in turn, expressed anxiety with the decisions and successive actions leading to the reinforcement of the Alliance's Eastern Flank. In an interview given to the daily *Izvestia* on 10 February 2017, Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, commenting on the dislocation of NATO troops (an armored brigade) in Poland and the Baltic states, stated that these actions are provocative and destabilizing in nature. He added that the countries neighboring on Russia are also modernizing their armed forces and expanding their military infrastructure. He also pointed out that, aside from this, the Russian authorities are also concerned with the construction of the US missile defense system in Europe, whose real anti-Russian nature is not doubted by anyone in Russia. He added that the "old new" policy pursued by NATO to contain Russia, including the unilateral decision to freeze civilian and military cooperation with Russia is leading to a drop in confidence and a violation of the existing balance of power on the European continent (Лавров, 2017).

The Ukraine crisis showed very clearly how great power *Realpolitik* prevails. The sharp criticism of Russia's actions did not prevent the severing of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014. The position of the West was ignored by Russia which pointed out – not without some justification – that the western states had violated international law earlier and mentioned as examples to the war in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan or Libya. Western politicians and commentators generally play down or reject Russian arguments outright. But looking at them objectively, it is impossible to challenge their legitimacy, because in the case of the war over Kosovo with former Yugoslavia (1999) and the war in Iraq (2003) there was no authorization from the UN Security Council, and in the case of the two other wars, the UN mandate was considerably exceeded. In addition, the West's armed interventions cost the lives of thousands of victims and caused enormous material damage. It is a pity that western politicians don't wish to remember this. To all appearances, they feel other standards should be applied to Russia.

Generally speaking, it should be noted that the West seems to have lost its way strategically following the financial crisis of 2008, various diplomatic setbacks, and in the case of the USA also military setbacks (in Iraq and Afghanistan). Not knowing how to find its way in the changing international

order, and remaining on the defensive diplomatically in the face of the BRICS Group, chose as its rival Russia, which it attempted to maneuver into a corner. The point here was not so much Ukraine and its European prospects, because those continue to be unclear, but rather the fact the Russia under President Putin is becoming increasingly stronger and plays an increasingly active role on the global stage. It is for this reason that the West decided to “wrest” Ukraine from Russian influence, and when Moscow opposed this, it condemned it politically, isolated it and imposed on it sanctions aimed at slowing down its economic development. One can only agree with the assessment of John Mearsheimer, who placed the main responsibility for the Ukraine crisis on the shoulders of the United States and its European allies (Mearsheimer, 2014, 1), or at least with the conclusion reached by Russian experts who claim that “both Russia and the West bear responsibility for the mistakes and miscalculations that have resulted in their most serious crisis in relations (Arbatova, Dynkin, 2016, 71–90).

## How to solve the crisis?

The Ukraine crisis, even though it gave Ukrainians hope for a better life, turned out to have crippling consequences for the Ukrainians themselves. It was increasingly out of control, it was a threat to the world and it strongly undermined the much needed cooperation between the West and Russia in the resolution of other problems (such as the conflict in the Middle East, especially the problems in Iraq and Syria). It is difficult to understand why western leaders seem to be unaware of this. As John Mearsheimer rightly points out, the United States and its European allies faced a choice in Ukraine. The first scenario entailed continuing their existing policy, which would increase enmity toward Russia, as a result of which all sides to the conflict would end up losing. The second scenario gave the possibility to “shift gears” and act to create a prosperous but neutral Ukraine – one that would not threaten Russia and would allow the West to repair its relations with Moscow, in which case all would be the winners (Mearsheimer, 2014, 12).

Thus if nothing more detrimental takes place in relations between Russia and the West in connection with the Ukraine crisis, stabilizing the situation may be possible. A calming down of relations between the West and Russia is also a necessary precondition for bringing Ukraine out of the cri-

sis. It should be added that cooperation with Russia will be necessary to that end. The question of relations between the West and Russia has become very complicated with the advent of the Ukraine crisis. From the outset there were and there remain chances for a return to normality in the Euro-Atlantic area. Both Russia and the West should become conscious of the benefits that rebuilding their cooperation could bring. Much harm has taken place until now. The West had barely come out of the financial crisis and recession when it started to compete with Russia on such a sensitive and uncertain ground as is Ukraine. This can only benefit our Asian competitors. It is an illusion that the impasse can be rapidly overcome or that a close partnership between the West and Russia can be established quickly, but it is better to recognize that finding some *modus vivendi* is necessary. After nearly four years since the Ukraine crisis began, one can attempt to point to a number of factors making it possible to hope an end to the rivalry over Ukraine is possible. Even if they are not presently very great, certain signs of a breakthrough in the crisis can be seen.

The agreements signed in Minsk (on 5 September 2014 and on 12 February 2015), so strongly criticized in Poland, have helped calm down the situation, despite being violated in the Donbas. Much effort needs to be exerted to find a formula leading to a political solution. Such a solution – much awaited by Russia and Ukraine's western allies, Germany, France and the United States – seems to lie in the federalization of the country and in the Ukrainian authorities granting autonomic status to the rebellious eastern provinces in the Donbas. Despite the fact that the authorities in Kyiv are approaching the idea with great anxiety and much dilatoriness, in July 2015 they nonetheless took the first step in this direction. To many politicians in Kyiv, this looks like capitulating to the separatists and to Russia, but it is worthwhile to remember that Ukraine has lost the war in the east militarily, and that the separatists want much more – separation from Ukraine outright and to join the Russian Federation, as happened with Crimea in March 2014. In the event, the principles of restraint and compromise suggested by the theory of political realism thus seem in order.

Even prior to the annexation of the Crimea, Henry Kissinger, one of the outstanding spokesmen of American realism, called for such an approach. Before the conflict in the Donbas escalated, he wrote that the Ukrainian question is placed on the knife's edge definitely too often: Ukraine will either join the West, or the East. If Ukraine is to survive and grow, it can't opt

for either of the sides against the other, but should function as a bridge between them. Russia has to accept the fact that any attempt to turn Ukraine into a satellite country, this being tantamount to Russia shifting back its boundaries westward, can condemn it to a repeat of the historic and self-perpetuating cycles of mutual tensions involving Europe and the United States. The West in turn must understand that Ukraine will never be simply a foreign country for Russia. Russian history began in Kievan Rus. It is from there that Russian Orthodoxy radiated. For many centuries, Ukraine was a part of Russia, and the history of the two countries is interwoven. Further, Kissinger proposed that Ukraine should have the freedom to freely choose its economic and political partners, including the European Union, but it should not join NATO. On the international stage Ukrainian leaders “should pursue a posture comparable to that of Finland. That nation leaves no doubt about its fierce independence and cooperates with the West in most fields but carefully avoids institutional hostility toward Russia” (Kissinger, 2014).

Some experts suggested to ensure that a fully independent and territorially indivisible Ukraine conducts a policy toward Russia similar to the one effectively pursued by Finland. It is a policy based on mutual respect toward neighbors and extensive economic relations with Russia and the European Union. At the same time, Finland is expanding its ties, but without participating in NATO, which is so threatening from Moscow’s perspective. The Finish model can be an ideal example for Ukraine, the European Union and Russia (Brzezinski, 2014). Former US ambassador in Moscow, Jack Matlock, said that the fundamental condition for the resolution of the Ukraine conflict is an honest commitment on the part of the West that Ukraine will never become a NATO member because, otherwise Russia will not accept any understanding. He also stated that by offering membership to Georgia and Ukraine in 2008, NATO had crossed a red line and he called on the West not to do this a second time, for “Russia is a nuclear power, and no one in his right mind will use force against a nuclear power” (Matlock, 2014). Also worth mentioning are the words of another outstanding America realist, Stephen Walt, who wrote that “the solution to this crisis is for the United States and its allies to abandon the dangerous and unnecessary goal of endless NATO expansion and do whatever it takes to convince Russia that we want Ukraine to be a neutral buffer state in perpetuity. We should then work with Russia, the EU, and the IMF to develop an economic program that puts that unfortunate country back on its feet.” (Walt, 2015).

Another type of complementary solution was advanced by former EU enlargement commissioner Günter Verheugen, who suggested the West react calmly to Russia and propose to Moscow a European-wide security system that would include NATO and Russia and, in addition, a special “economic cooperation area from Lisbon to Vladivostok” (Verheugen, 2014). The second of these was also proposed by former Polish ambassador in Russia, Stanisław Ciosek. This Polish politician has on repeated occasions made public calls to “draw Russia toward Europe, because otherwise we will have an eternal source of conflict. Many difficulties could have been averted had the policy toward Russia been different after the collapse of the Soviet Union” (Ciosek, 2014). In April 2015, the idea of a free trade zone “from Lisbon to Vladivostok” gained the support of Angela Merkel (Merkel, 2015). It is worthwhile in this context to note that these proposals refer to the initiative – announced in January 2010 by the then Prime Minister Putin – for a “harmonious economic community from Lisbon to Vladivostok” and its later extension to include elements of humanitarian cooperation and in the sphere of security. (Выступление, 2014).

In August 2015, former German Deputy-Chancellor and Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher argued in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, that while the West can't recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea, it needs to embark on a dialogue with President Putin because he is a pragmatic politician, the West should “extend its hand” to him and lift the sanctions imposed on Russia (Były, 2015). French politicians are also calling on a return to cooperation between the European Union and Russia (Kryzys, 2015). As some Norwegian researchers claim, there are chances for a dialogue between the European Union and Russia about resolving the crisis, and the idea of such a dialogue is supported by France, Germany and the Chairman of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker. Any understanding based on mutual concessions would imply the failure of the EU's existing policy consisting in the dissemination its values, as well as an admission that there are geographical limits to the EU's vision of building a security community using the mechanisms of political and economic integration (Riecker, Gjerde, 2016, 319–320).

The above-quoted statements made by retired and active politicians from western countries indicate that there are chances of reaching an understanding with Russia to resolve the Ukraine crisis. They suggest more restraint in the stances of all parties involved in the Ukraine crisis.

Reaching an understanding requires political will among the main decision makers, above all in the United States. Even if this seems difficult to achieve in the short term, it is possible. The international understanding concluded in July 2015 in the matter of Iran's nuclear program shows that Russia is a necessary and useful partner for the West. Other problems await resolution by the western world and Russia, such as fighting Islamic terrorism and, especially, the Islamic State. This crisis has shown that without Russia's collaboration any expansion of Western influence is an impossibility, as are the Ukrainians' dreams about the European Union. In Kissinger's words, "absolute satisfaction" is unattainable, only "balanced dissatisfaction" can be attained, because "If some solution based on these or comparable elements is not achieved, the drift toward confrontation will accelerate. The time for that will come soon enough." Let's remember this voice from an experienced old American diplomat who, as he himself says, has in his own lifetime seen four wars which began amidst great enthusiasm and social support, "which we knew not how to end, and from three of which we withdrew unilaterally. The test of a policy is not how it begins, but how it ends" (Kissinger, 2014). Having read the words of this outstanding realist, one can conclude that in the contemporary world, in which the hard interests of states, and great powers in particular, are decisive, one has to take them into account. This means that the realistic paradigm remains of great explanatory usefulness in the study of international relations.

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