

Robert C. Hudson:

The Ukrainian Crisis, the Crimean Referendum and Security Implications for the European Union

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Abstract

The establishment of the European Union as a zone of stability and prosperity in Europe is confronted today with new security challenges. For the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia and the wars of Yugoslav Transition in the first half of the 1990s, the EU finds itself with an unpredictable neighbour on its borders, which has resorted to the use of military force and continues to influence the territorial integrity of a sovereign state. The issue was over the trans-border Russian population found in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, which at the time of writing raises the question: are trans-border populations to be interpreted as ethnic conflicts waiting to happen? This chapter will briefly investigate the historical background of the Ukrainian crisis, before focussing on the potential impact of these events on European security in general and the security of the European Union in particular. Not only are there differences in approach towards the implementation of sanctions, between the EU and the US, there are also different attitudes to the Ukrainian conundrum held by different member states of the EU. So, does the EU really have the appetite for imposing sanctions given the background of the recent financial crisis and the potential for a devastating tit-for-tat trade war? As members of the OSCE monitoring team have been 4 hostage and western journalists have been arrested on suspicion of spying, this raises a further question: is Europe lurching out of an economic crisis into a new Cold War, which some NATO leaders have already designated as Cold War II? Ultimately, what are the wider implications of the Ukrainian crisis on European security?

Keywords: Security, sanctions, self-determination, national identity, political and ethnic minorities, European integration, consociationalism, cultural politics, trans-border populations, irredentism and Russia's Near Abroad.

Introduction

When I first started putting together a proposal for this conference, I had no idea that I would be dealing with this particular topic. My original submission and abstract had been to assess the potential impact of the Scottish and Catalan referenda on the European Union, then, just after my abstract had been accepted by the Conference Committee at the University American College of Skopje, the situation in the Ukraine took a sudden turn for the worse with the Maidan events in Kiev in February. Of course, the referendum in Crimea was in some way related to my original project. Indeed, in Europe, secessionists in Scotland and Spain's Catalonia might well take some hope from the Crimean secessionist vote, although the Catalan leader Artur Mas was very careful to distance the Catalan referendum which was planned to take place this November from the one held in Crimea in March. Perhaps we should also bear in mind the fact that Spain still has not recognised¹ Kosovo as an independent state. Anyway, over the months I was keeping two files of notes: one on the secessionists in Catalonia and Scotland, and the other on the worsening situation in Ukraine. Eventually, it was the Ukrainian Crisis that dominated my thinking. This was particularly so, given that the threats can go further afield affecting all of Russia's so-called near abroad, from the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, south through Belarus to Moldova, Transnistria and on into the Caucasus, with uneasiness felt elsewhere in Europe, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. Events in the Ukraine over the last eight months have posed the most severe challenge to the stability of Europe since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, for the first time since the break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991, the EU finds itself once again with an unpredictable neighbour on its borders, which has resorted to the use of military force and continues to influence the territorial integrity of a sovereign state. This begs the question: has the EU been rash in making Ukraine choose between itself and Russia? Certainly, Russian boldness in assisting Crimea to be detached from Ukraine has not only spread instability across Ukraine, but throughout the region and beyond.

The problem is that dealing with Russia often poses a problem, given that Russia does not always seem to fulfil its obligations. On 17 April the US, Russia, the EU and Ukraine met in Geneva in a bid to find a settlement to the present crisis. They signed an agreement that planned for the disarmament of illegal armed groups and the evacuation of occupied buildings. In spite of this, 40,000 Russian troops gathered on the Russian-Ukrainian border (Deloy, 2014).

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Then the G-7 members produced a memorandum at the European Commission in Brussels on 26 April 2014, in which they commented that:

Russia has taken no concrete actions in support of the Geneva Accord. It has not publicly supported the accord, nor condemned the acts of pro-separatists seeking to destabilise Ukraine, nor called on armed militants to leave peacefully the government buildings they've occupied and put down their arms. Instead it has continued to escalate tensions by increasingly concerning rhetoric and ongoing threatening military manoeuvres on Ukraine's borders.

It was this that led to further sanctions on Russia as the G-7 strongly condemned Russia's "illegal attempt" to annex Crimea and Sevastopol.

Six weeks later, on 5 June, at the G7 meeting in Brussels, the G7 urged Russia to begin talks with newly elected Prime Minister Petro Poroshenko in Kiev (Schofield, 2014). European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso added that the G7 was united in sending a "resolute message" to Russia that it should: "recognise and fully engage with" the new Ukrainian authorities, adding that Russia should: "take concrete and credible measures to de-escalate the situation in the east of Ukraine" (ibid.).

Ultimately, at the time of writing, the worst case scenario is the fear of inter-ethnic conflict breaking out along the lines of the intra-ethnic conflicts that were witnessed in parts of the 'former'-Yugoslavia in the first half of the 1990s. Certainly, on my return from the Skopje conference, there would be an escalation of violent activities in Ukraine, witnessing the loss of lives on a daily basis, and in particular, the downing of a Ukrainian military aircraft resulting in the deaths of 49 Ukrainian military personnel near Luhansk, on 29 May. It should also be noted that the writing of this chapter predates the MH17 disaster of 17 July 2014, when a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 was shot down by a BUK surface-to-air missile over Hrabove, near Torez in the Donetsk Oblast of the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, only forty miles from the Russian border. MH17 was shot down over territory controlled by pro-Russia separatists on a flight from Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur with the loss of all its 298 passengers and 15 crew.

Given the inter-ethnic conflict in the eastern Ukraine over the summer, it might be that one potential solution to the Ukrainian crisis, might be the creation of a federation along consociationalist lines, though it should be recognised that transmogrifying Ukraine into a federation is the Russian choice, and not necessarily that of the international community in the West. Furthermore, the problem with federalisation, apart from the fact that it

interferes with the sovereignty of an existing state is that federalisation would lead to a disguised partitioning of the country in which the regions of western Ukraine would fall under the tutelage of the West and those of the east would be under Russian control.

Historical Background

From the perspective of contemporary history, the dispute over eastern Ukrainian space can be traced back to the first half of the nineteenth century, with the in-migration of Russian soldiers, bureaucrats and merchants from the Russian Empire, who settled in the Ukraine on land to the east of the River Dnieper (Cordell and Wolf, 2000, p. 701). Indeed, the Russian Empire had already gained the right bank of the River Dnieper as a result of the second partition of Poland in 1793, by the Holy Alliance powers (Russia, Austria and Prussia) and some historians have actually argued that the Second Partition (though not the Third) could be justified on both ethnic and historic grounds, given that these areas in the Ukraine had formerly been part of Kievan Rus, the original medieval Russian state (Channon and Hudson, 1995, pp. 48-49). Though it must be emphasised that it is not the aim of this chapter to trace the conflicting histories of the current crisis back to the medieval Kievan Rus state that had dominated the region from the tenth century through to the Tatar invasions in the middle of the 13th century, as this would in all events be an ahistorical representation of the problem. This would be rather like claiming that the current cultural and political tensions between Greece and Macedonia could be traced directly back to the time of Alexander the Great, which again is essentially an ahistorical argument. In addition to the annexation and Russian settlement of eastern Ukraine, it should also be noted that Crimea was formerly annexed by Russia in 1783, following two victories over the Ottoman Empire and a short-lived period of Crimean independence (1774 – 1783).

‘In both the tsarist and communist periods, Russian identity was inextricably linked to the Russian State’ (King, 2010, p. 139) and the expansion of both empires across Eastern Europe and Euroasia. During the period of Russian industrialisation in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a new wave of Russian immigrants settled in the Ukraine. These were industrial workers and miners who were attracted by higher wages to the Donbas coal mining region and Kryvvi Rih (Krivoy Rog) and the urban areas of the region became increasingly Russified and Russophone (Cordell and Wolf, 2000, p. 701). This tied in with Tsarist policies of aggressive Russification in the late

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nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at a time when Russification meant that Russian became the language of social advancement and that national languages were not officially recognised (Channon and Hudson, 1995, p. 81). Russification would be bolstered by Russian Orthodoxy, particularly to the detriment of the Jewish population settlement in the 'Pale' of the western Ukraine and Russian Polish territories, resulting in pogroms and the Jewish diaspora to Western Europe and America. Furthermore, Russification would result in an increasing number of Russophone Ukrainians. Indeed, by 1897, only 22 per cent of the population of Kiev could claim Ukrainian as their mother tongue and this percentage continued to drop before the October Revolution, whilst in Odessa, the Ukrainian population had dropped to less than 3 per cent (Cordell and Wolf, 2000, p. 701).

Ukrainian independence was not realised at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War, despite the influence of the Hetman and Petlura and the harrying of White Russian forces, led by Denikin and Wrangel, as they retreated in a southerly direction through the Ukraine to the Crimean ports and exile in 1921 and after. Stalin and his successors privileged Russians and Russophone Ukrainians and indeed it had been Stalin's eventual successor, Khrushchev, himself a Russophone Ukrainian who had been in charge of the region during the terror and the famine in the 1930s. Ukraine suffered terribly during the Second World War, becoming the main theatre of military operations on the Eastern Front and subject to the concomitant war crimes committed against its population by all sides and factions.

Let us fast forward. Before the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, 11.3 million Russians lived in Ukraine, out of a total population of 51.4 million. In other words, the Russian minority population of Ukraine constituted 22 per cent of the total population of that country. Furthermore, whilst about 11 million ethnic Ukrainians are believed to speak Russian as their mother tongue with Russian settlement being particularly concentrated in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, there is a significant Russian presence in central Ukraine, with just small pockets of Russian settlement in western Ukraine (Cordell and Wolf, 2000, p. 702). Since Ukraine gained its independence in 2001, it is this which has led to the simplified view of the Ukraine as being a cleft state with the western parts looking to NATO and the European Union and the eastern parts and Crimea looking to Russia.

At the end of the Cold War there was a lack of out-migration of the ethnic Russian population in the Ukraine in contrast to other post-Soviet states. The sudden collapse of the Soviet system in 1991 had a profound effect

on the Russian populations in the region, a group supposedly numbering 25 million people outside the Russian Federation and this has led Charles King to comment on how the Russians went from being: “the privileged bearers of modernity in a backward periphery to often becoming unwelcome colons caught in the centre of movements of national resistance and national renaissance” (King, 2010, p. 139). Whilst much research has been conducted on the Russian ethnic populations in the Baltic States in the 1990s - see, for example the conferences held on the Baltic Sea Area and Barents Area by the University of Umeå, 1997 and The University of Rovaniemi, 1999 and their subsequent publications (e.g. Falk, & Krantz, 2000 and Nystén-Haarala, 2002) - rather less was published on the situation in Crimea and Ukraine, where the focus was more on what would happen to the Black Sea fleet, which was disputed between Moscow and Kiev. The exception to this case, perhaps being western reactions to the crazed antics of Vladimir Zhirinovski and his ‘near abroad’ rhetoric (Frazer & Lancelle, 1994). King also notes how the growth of an anti-Soviet political movement inside the Russian Federation, saw the identity between the Russian Federation and the Russian nation as being interlinked to the exclusion of those Russified settlers in the non-Russian republics, who were therefore excluded. As Russia began to reassert itself after the disastrous 1990s, we witnessed, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia’s intervention in Georgia in 2008 whereby Moscow attempted to protect groups that enjoyed Russian citizenship, though not, as King points out, Russian ethnicity (King, 2010, p. 137). That the West did nothing, and indeed could not do anything, was significant and has repercussions to this day, alongside the West’s inability to respond to the continuing crisis in Syria. This might explain why Putin would appear to be such a risk-taker who is prepared to push matters to the brink, before reining back.

Szun Ping Chan (2014), writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, has made an interesting appraisal of Putin’s relations with the West:

Putin’s first term as president between 2000 and 2004 saw him embark on a charm offensive, wooing world leaders from Tony Blair to George W. Bush. It was not until the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine that relations began to sour. Putin blamed the civil unrest on Western influence, but the deaths of Alexander Litvinenko, a fugitive officer of the Russian FSB secret service in 2006, and Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian accountant, in 2009, have only made a strained relationship more difficult.

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What is interesting here, is that once again, even as early as 2004, the West is blamed by Russia for tensions in Ukraine.

Although Ukraine has been an independent sovereign state since 1991, the more recent Russian military ‘presence’ in Crimea can be traced back to agreements made between the Russian and Ukrainian governments over the partitioning of the Black Sea Fleet in 1997. This meant a continued Russian naval presence in Crimea, so that, as of 2013, approximately 13,000 Russian naval personnel were based in Crimea under the 1997 Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet (HRW, 2014). Then, there followed the appearance of the ‘polite green men’ – mysterious armed soldiers without insignia – who took control over the Crimean peninsula in the lead up to the ‘referendum’ on the Status of Crimea in March, although the Russians continuously denied their involvement (Gorbunova, 2014). Indeed, it is interesting to note that Gorbunova’s reference to “Green men” is a reference to those movie aliens “who appear from nowhere” (ibid.) and how apposite this was given their silent, yet anonymous appearance on our television screens, at the time. In spite of this, Human Rights Watch had reported the presence of military vehicles and other equipment that the Ukrainian forces are not known to possess (HRW, 2014).

Human Rights Watch went on to refer to international law, pointing out that under the 1949 Geneva Conventions, a territory is considered ‘occupied’ when it comes under the control or authority of foreign armed forces, whether partially or entirely, without the consent of the domestic government. HRW goes on to add that “the reasons or motives that lead to the occupation or are the basis for continued occupation are irrelevant” (HRW, 2014). Furthermore, wherever Russian forces exercise effective control of an area on Ukrainian Territory, such as Crimea, for the purposes of international humanitarian law it is an occupying power and must adhere to its obligations as such. Russia’s denials that its troops are in Crimea have no legal effect if the facts on the ground demonstrate otherwise.

Then on 16 March, Crimea’s local authorities held a referendum on whether or not Crimea should secede from Ukraine to join the Russian Federation, with 97 percent of the population voting to join Russia. On 8 March, President Putin and Crimea’s leadership signed agreements making Crimea and the city of Sevastopol part of the Russian Federation. Following which, Putin’s approval ratings have approached an all time high (Gorbunova, 2014).

Language and Ethnicity: The Writing on the Wall

Russia had been advocating the federalisation of Ukraine for some time, which would grant more power to the Russian-speaking regions of the country's east. Obviously such a policy was unacceptable to the Ukrainian interim government, which came into office on the fall of President Yanukovich, in February. On 20 March, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a resolution which stated that: "Ukraine will fight for the liberation of Crimea whose annexation to Russia it will never acknowledge" (Deloy, 2014).

This writer first realised the way things would go in the Crimea on Sunday afternoon, 23 February, when watching the BBC twenty-four hours news channel's rolling banner announced that the new interim Ukrainian parliament was setting out to curtail Russian language rights. It became immediately clear that the situation was going to deteriorate, particularly when this was associated with the Ukrainian parliament repealing the law on minority languages, whereby a minority of more than 10 per cent had no language rights at all. Within a week, Crimea had been 'invaded' by Russia, allegedly in defence of Russian minority rights. I use inverted commas, because Russian troops had already been there – in the guise of those highly disciplined 'green gentlemen' in uniforms without any insignia, although further troops had been flown in from Russia. The date of the 'invasion', Thursday 27 February 2014 was highly significant, because Crimea had been seceded to Ukraine exactly sixty years previously on 27 February 1954, having been incorporated within Russia exactly 500 years earlier, in 1654.

At the heart of the matter lay the issue of language rights. Indeed, this provided the very spark for the unilateral declaration of independence in Crimea in March 2014 as it continues to fuel the crisis in eastern Ukraine to this day. The real issue here is that: "Languages, or speech varieties, do not just involve the process of oral and literary communication between individuals and communities; they also form an essential part of our sense of identity, in terms of class, gender, community, 'blood' and belonging" (Hudson, 2000, p. 243). In other words, languages, when mobilised for political purposes can become a major resort to the rhetoric of nationalism and the process of self-determination, for languages are not just about communicating with others, they are intertwined with the desire for social advancement and the legitimisation of a community's culture and history. This in turn means that if one language group sees itself as being suppressed by the domination of another language group, it will of necessity react against that group.

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Ultimately, the languages we speak are about our own sense of identity, community and purpose, whereby being obliged to speak the language of a dominant group can become a violently-charged symbol of un-freedom. By contrast, speaking one's own language is about one's own salvation as both an individual and a member of a community, and ultimately membership of a nation.

The EU and Ukraine

Once Crimea had effectively declared unilateral independence from Ukraine and it looked as though pro-Russia factions in Eastern Ukraine would begin to initiate a further process of separation from the Ukrainian state, alarm bells really began to ring in the West. Of particular note here was the EU's response to the crisis, on the understanding that: "What happens in the countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus matters to the EU. As the EU has expanded, these countries have become closer neighbours, and their security, stability and prosperity increasingly affect the EU's" (EU-EEAS, 2014, April 25). So the crisis in Crimea and eastern Ukraine is very important to the EU as it affects its external relations, its security and its economy. Ukraine is now part of the EU's Eastern Partnership (2014 – 2017), and certainly, the EU has been trying to get ever closer to Ukraine since Yanukovich was ousted.

The intention of Ukraine to develop relations with the EU with a view to eventual European integration had first been announced by the Ukrainian parliament in July 1993 and more recently the EU saw Ukraine as a country of considerable importance within the framework of its European Neighbourhood Policy, which had been initially launched in 2004. In July 2008, it was announced that a 'Stabilisation and Association' type of agreement would be signed between Ukraine and the European Union. However, in 2011 Catherine Ashton, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs announced that although talks would continue, the ratification process of the treaty could face problems if nothing was done about the seven-year imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. However, once Yanukovich was ousted from power, Tymoshenko was released and the treaty between the EU and Ukraine was signed on 21 March 2014. It is said that when Yanukovich was in power, he had refused to sign this agreement because, he was under pressure from Russia, Ukraine's largest trading partner to associate with the Russian-led customs union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. This was part of Russia's continuing Near Abroad Policy. So, at the end of the day, the main

political and economic causes of the whole problem centred on Yanuchkovych's refusal to get closer to the EU, opting instead for a pro-Russian alternative.

The agreement between the EU and Ukraine commits Ukraine to converge its economic, financial and judicial policies and reforms with those of the EU. Also, both parties are committed to the promotion of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy and European Defence Agency policies. Of interest here is the text of the *EU-Ukraine Association Agenda to prepare and facilitate the implementation of the Association Agreement* as endorsed by the EU-Ukrainian Cooperation Council at Luxembourg on 24th June 2013. Article 2.1 reads:

The Parties agree to maintain dialogue and to cooperate to strengthen respect for democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities as enshrined in the core UN and Council of Europe Conventions and protocols.

There were, however other concerns for the EU member states, namely concerns over Russia's role in supplying the EU with gas and oil and the implications of those supplies being curtailed by Russia, should the crisis deepen.

Energy Concerns

Energy security has now become a major issue in Europe, and from an EU perspective, the idea is that member states should no longer be so dependent on Russia for gas. This concern serves to reinforce Europe's desire to improve energy efficiency. Today, Russia is the world's largest exporter of energy. Trade between the EU and Russia has grown exponentially so that Russia has become the EU's largest trading partner and Russia's biggest customer (Szu Ping Chan, 2014). Whilst within Europe, the UK buys about 6 per cent of its gas from Russia. Germany, by contrast, has become Russia's largest trading partner in energy supplies, and relies on Russia for half of its oil and 40 per cent of its gas supplies, half of which flow through Ukraine. However, given the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and the move to impose sanctions on trade with Russia, the potential for energy sanctions could impact even more heavily on the Baltic States, Finland, Slovakia and Bulgaria, as these countries are 100 per cent dependent upon gas from Russia's state-owned energy company,

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Gazprom (ibid.). Italy, by contrast, has access to an alternative pipe line – the South Stream pipeline – that avoids transiting the Ukraine altogether.

Furthermore, around 60% of the gas used in Ukraine comes from Russia, of which 65 million cubic metres of gas are transported towards the EU via Ukrainian gas pipelines. Yet, because of the \$3.5 billion gas bills unpaid by Ukraine, Russia has been threatening to cut off its gas supply to Ukraine. This is not the first time that gas supplies to Ukraine, and by implication to other European countries which have been cut off by Russia. There had been two previous occasions in January 2006 and January 2009, when 18 European countries were affected. Meanwhile, the G7, meeting in Rome was looking for a united approach so that nobody could threaten EU energy supplies. So, as an energy super-power, Russia is ready and willing to use energy as a weapon, thereby transmogrifying Gazprom into the Kremlin's biggest potential weapon against Ukraine when it comes to the interested partners imposing sanctions upon each other.

Meanwhile, the EU has since announced a special support package for Ukraine worth €365 million to help the country's transition and boost the role of civil society, as well as promoting and monitoring democratic reforms and inclusive socio-economic development (EU – EEAS, 2014, April 29). As energy impacts upon European security, so it also affects the Ukrainian economy and we will be dealing with this issue in the next section.

The Ukrainian Economy

Linked to the issue of energy is the Ukrainian economy, and Christine Lagarde, the Managing Director and Chair of the IMF has remarked that: "Deep seated vulnerabilities – together with political shocks – have led to a major crisis in Ukraine. The economy is in recession, fiscal balances have deteriorated, and the financial sector is under significant stress" (2014). In order to ease this economic stress, the EU has offered a support package of €365, whilst the IMF approved a two-year stand-by arrangement for Ukraine to the tune of US\$ 17.1 billion, with an immediate disbursement for US\$ 3.19 billion. The upshot is that money is being pumped into the Ukrainian economy from the EU and the United States alike in a bid to resolve the gas debt problems with Russia's Gazprom, to reduce corruption and money laundering, and to improve the business environment and growth in Ukraine. Yet, the risks to this programme are high because of the continuing tensions with Russia.

Sanctions?

Because there are different attitudes towards the Ukrainian crisis between different member states of the EU, this has led to some commentators wondering if the EU really has the stomach to impose sanctions on Russia (Traynor, 2014). This comes in the light of the recent financial crisis in the West in general and the Euro Zone in particular, and the potential for a devastating tit-for-tat trade war between Russia and the EU and the US. On top of this, it is painfully obvious that there is a disparity between the attitudes of the EU as a whole, and those of the United States in particular, in their approach to the Ukrainian conundrum. Indeed, it is very interesting, now, to survey some of the economic journalism of the past six months to see just how attitudes differ.

Furthermore, differences in approach towards the implementation of sanctions, between the EU and the US, do not help to create the picture of a solid and united front in presenting western opposition to the Putin regime. It is as though divergent western responses to the current crisis in the Ukraine and Crimea are imbricated on the rather feeble western responses to the crisis in Syria that have been represented over the past three years, which must have made it clear to Putin that the West was divided, thereby empowering him even further in his brinkmanship vis-à-vis his Near Abroad ambitions.

Ian Traynor commented in *The Guardian*, on 26 April meeting of the G-7 that the threats to move to broader, more co-ordinated sanctions were empty, adding that: "There is no stomach for such moves in Europe because the result would be a devastating trade war that would damage a weak European economy" (Traynor, 2014). Traynor goes on to add that: "The Russians know this. Besides, Putin is a risk-taker, Obama, Merkel and Hollande are risk-averse leaders, with 12 times more trade and investment at stake than the Americans and, unlike the US, EU member states are quite dependent on Siberian energy supplies." So, Russian brinkmanship would seem to be the order of the day, leading some analysts to believe that slowly, but surely we are entering into a scenario that represents the Cold War that ended twenty-five years ago; hence the references to 'Cold War II'. Yet this said, in this writer's opinion, along with the opinions of other historians, such as Robert Service and Orlando Figes, although there has been an obvious deterioration in relations between Russia and the West, this is nothing like the Cold War climate experienced throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

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By contrast, Jennifer Rankin (2014), again writing in *The Guardian* presents the American case arguing that: “Slapping a sanctions order on a Russian bank would turn it into an economic pariah.” And she quotes Juan Zarate, a former deputy national security advisor in the United States, who commented that: “Cutting off some of their major institutions, or even oligarchs and their networks, you have the ripple effect of the European private sector deciding that they are not going to do business with the entities.” So, such a move could prove to be devastating for the Russian economy: “which is more dependent on the dollar than almost any other emerging market, with almost 90% of Russia’s exports being traded in dollars.” Rankin then cites Chris Weafer, a Moscow-based consultant, who commented that: “The worst-case scenario is a military incursion leading to these tougher sanctions. The reality of being cut out of the western banking system is that you go into recession.”

But, there is an alternative view to all this rather bullish American attitude, for example, should a tit-for-tat sanctions war take place, Russia, in turn could really hurt western carmakers and aerospace companies, given that a company such as Boeing “plans to buy \$18 billion of Siberian titanium in the coming years” (Rankin, 2014).

It would seem that the real problem is that if sanctions were to be imposed upon Russia, this would drastically increase energy prices and EU countries could risk slipping back into the recession which they are just beginning to emerge from. Ultimately, the relationship between the EU and Russia is a symbiotic one, and for the time being, both political entities clearly need each other. As Francisco Blanch at the Bank of America Meryll Lynch put it: “It’s not like the EU can sanction Russia and hurt it without hurting itself. And vice versa” (Szu Ping Chan, 2014).

The tit-for-tat nature of sanctions and the potential for a real deterioration in relations between Russia and the EU and the United States since the occupation of Crimea was well illustrated for me on the day I flew from London to Skopje to deliver my paper at this year’s conference, with the news that Russia was casting doubt on the long-term future of the international space station, which had been a showcase of post-Cold War co-operation. This was in retaliation for the announcement of further sanctions the previous day. Furthermore, this threat also included suspending the operation of GPS satellite navigation systems on Russian territory from June, in response to Washington’s plans to deny export licences for hi-tech items that could help the Russian military.

If British, German and EU rhetoric is more toned down than the US rhetoric, given Obama and Kerry's statements at the beginning of March that sanctions would not only incur costs, but also that Russia would be knocked out of the G8 (as indeed it was) and that the G8 meeting would not take place in Sochi (as indeed happened), it is because the EU partners are more concerned about Russia actually invading eastern Ukraine and the potential migration into the EU of refugees. Given that Europe, not the United States would become the ultimate destination of any potential mass migration from Ukraine. This also comes at a time when the EU has to face criticism from anti-EU public opinion and some political parties of certain EU member states advocating secession from the EU or at least an EU referendum.

Obama claims that: "The goal is to change his calculus with respect to how the current actions that he is engaging in could have an adverse impact on the Russian economy over the long haul" (BBC News, 2014, April 28). But, who is to say that if we get tit-for-tat sanctions this would not exacerbate the situation further, whereby the big fear would be that the sanctions which have been made so far are too weak to stop Russian interference in the eastern Ukraine, but enough to provoke it, and as it emerges from the economic crisis that started in 2008, the very last thing that the EU needs is a trade war with Russia.

Whilst it would appear that Gazprom provides Russia with its biggest weapon so far in its conflict with Ukraine, it is also worth acknowledging that sanctions against it would seriously damage Russia's own weakened economy. This could lead to an economic crisis for Russia, which in turn could lead to broader opposition against Putin who is currently basking in his renewed popularity for his actions over Crimea. Nevertheless, Russia is an energy super power, and certainly has the reserves to withstand such a crisis. In other words, it is the EU which is more likely to be affected if the flow of gas were to be suspended, given that a third of its gas comes from Russia, via Ukraine. The only salvation might be the South Stream route which bypasses Ukraine and is currently being used by Italy. Also, with the development of fracking in the United States, there is the potential for the US to ship greater supplies of gas to Europe in the not too distant future.

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Ukraine and NATO

The basic mood of the West has been that of trying to democratise Ukraine, build civil society and free it from corruption and money laundering as has been demonstrated by funding made available from the EU and the IMF, thereby enabling greater economic, social and political security in the country and its neighbourhood. NATO has only sought to build on this by working towards greater military security in the region.

Ukraine first entered into relations with NATO in 1994 by signing up to the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. Then in January 2008, Ukraine became a candidate to join the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). However when President Yanukovich came to power in 2010, these plans for full Ukrainian entry into NATO were put on hold by the Ukrainian government, although Ukraine continued its cooperation with NATO with Ukrainian forces continuing to serve in Afghanistan as they had served in Kosovo and Bosnia previously. However, more recently, since Russia's illegal intervention in Crimea, NATO and Ukraine have agreed to increase their cooperation as NATO has reiterated its: "full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders" (NATO's relations with Ukraine, 1 May 2014) thereby fulfilling the fundamental points made in the 1997 Charter on Distinctive Partnership that established the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC), whereby: "A sovereign, independent and stable Ukraine, firmly committed to democracy and the rule of law, is key to Euro-Atlantic security." The other concern is for other parts of Russia's so-called 'Near Abroad', particularly the security of the Baltic States and Poland. To this extent the US has sent 600 troops to Poland and the Baltic states (BBC News, 2014, April 29) alongside plans for a \$1 billion fund to increase military deployment to Europe in a bid to reassure its NATO allies in the region (Marcus, 2014). President Barack Obama commented: "Our commitment to Poland's security as well as the security of our allies in Central and Eastern Europe is the cornerstone of our security and it is sacrosanct." But, this should not imply a return to the Cold War (ibid.) despite the rhetoric of General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (NATO Secretary General) who commented that the events in Ukraine were a 'wake-up call' and that the Alliance now faced a new security situation in Europe (ibid.). Despite this awareness of the security implications in the region, nobody in NATO, not even the Americans, has the appetite or the resources for a major European defence build-up (ibid.). In the meantime,

since May 2014, NATO has enhanced its air-policing duties in the Baltic States, Poland and Romania.

On the down side, all these actions and the strong rhetoric have led Russia to voice its own concerns over what it interprets as being an 'unprecedented' increase in US and NATO military activity near the Russian borders. Having NATO on its borders has been Russia's greatest security fear over the last twenty-five years. In the meantime, Rasmussen has insisted that the alliance has not noticed a Russian pullback of forces from the Ukrainian border as President Putin had claimed. Whilst the RFE/RL Research Report (7 May) comments that Russian defence officials had claimed that the Russian army had been firing Topol intercontinental ballistic missiles from a test site in Plesetsk, whilst the Russian navy had fired several shorter-range missiles from submarines in Russia's Northern and Pacific fleets, as the aircraft carrier 'Admiral Kuznetsov' had entered the English Channel. All of which only serves to escalate the claims that we are returning to the Cold War or Cold War II. Indeed, in the two months following the delivery of this paper in Skopje, Russia would be conducting what would be designated as a 'hybrid conflict', seeping troops, weapons and supplies across the Russian border with eastern Ukraine. Witness the appalling disaster of a Russian BUK rocket launcher shooting down flight MH17 with the loss of all innocent life on board.

Could the OSCE Have Helped Defuse the Ukrainian Crisis?

The OSCE is the only regional security organisation with Russia, Ukraine, the EU countries and the US as members and so, potentially, it could have taken a lead role in defusing the Ukrainian crisis. In March it took the decision to send international monitors to Ukraine to 'reduce tensions and foster peace, stability and security.' Yet, eight of its members were held by pro-Russia supporters in eastern Ukraine, though later released, partly as a result of Russian intervention. Yet, even in spite of this, the OSCE could have provided solutions to the problem, as Ukraine was sliding towards more serious armed conflict; if for no other reason than that all the interested parties are member states of the OSCE. The fact that Russia had intervened in the release of the monitors, captured by pro-Russia separatists was in itself significant and demonstrated how much Russia recognises the importance of the OSCE, going back to the Helsinki agreements of 1995. Yet, the OSCE had failed in its mission and cannot, for the time being, be considered as a key player in defusing the crisis.

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Conclusions

Crimea has been lost to Ukraine. It is unlikely that much can be done about changing the current state of Crimea, at least not for the time being. There are historical, irredentist, ethno-cultural and linguistic reasons for this situation. Meanwhile, eastern Ukraine represents yet another trans-border population crisis that had long been waiting to happen, as it descended into inter-ethnic conflict during the summer of 2014. It is clear that the Ukrainian Army alone is too weak on its own to take on the Pro-Russia separatists with Russian military backing. A ceasefire at least, and accepting that parts of Ukraine have already gone might be the best way forward in terms of maintaining peace, stability and security in the region, and indeed, even further afield. Whilst this author would not advocate appeasement as the ideal solution to the Ukrainian conundrum, it would nevertheless seem to be extremely perilous if NATO or a divided West were to offer military support to Ukraine, were Ukraine to eventually commit its forces to reclaiming the Crimea. Any western support to potential Ukrainian military initiatives runs the risk of leading to an escalation of tension and to further Russian military intervention in the region. Were Ukraine to gain full membership of NATO it would mean that all NATO member states would be obliged to support any other NATO member state attacked by an outside power, along the lines of 'All for one, and one for all!' This last concern is well-grounded, if one considers that on 20 March the Ukrainian parliament had adopted a resolution which stated that: "Ukraine will fight for the liberation of Crimea whose annexation to Russia it will never acknowledge" (Deloy, 2014).

Meanwhile, NATO should maintain its air policing activities in the Baltic States to ensure the security of the wider region and to allay fears and reassure the respective populations. Certainly the OSCE has achieved little in this affair and for the time being has little significant role to play in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. So, the big fear at the time of writing is a further escalation in the tit-for-tat sanctions dispute and a further deterioration in East-West relations.

All sides need to tone down the rhetoric and posturing. The main need is to open up a dialogue and to talk with each other, rather than exclude Russia from international negotiations and agreements. Indeed, it may well have been a mistake to exclude Russia from the G-8 talks in March. Dialogue is the only way forward and far more desirable than sabre rattling or squabbles over sanctions. The fact that Putin had called for pro-Russia rebels to delay the

referendum that was held in eastern Ukraine on Sunday 11 May 2014 was in itself indicative of the fact that the Kremlin might be prepared to put a stop to any further slide into civil war and bring the defeated parties back to some form of 'national dialogue' as had been proposed by the Geneva Agreement, back in April. But, the last thing the international community needs is another 'Cold War' or worse. Politicians need to stop the wild rhetoric, stop the threat of sanctions, be inclusive and open up the dialogue, not only with the Russian government, but with the pro-Russia separatists as well. It might well be that Ukraine needs a new constitution of a federal kind, which emphasises specific rights for the Russian language population in its eastern parts.

Recognising the major internal divisions that exist in Ukraine along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines, the EU should be more pro-active in its desire to enable consultation and power-sharing amongst the different communities of that state, even to the extent of putting diplomatic pressure on the Kiev government to negotiate with the pro-Russia separatists. Furthermore, in a bid to avoid violence and ensure democracy and governmental stability, a consociationalist approach might seem to provide the best solution to the Ukrainian conundrum. Hopefully, in an eventual process towards negotiations between the different parties, and in a bid to draw up a new constitutional framework for Ukraine, the participants would be able to draw on the more recent European experiences of consociationalism in Spain (1978), Belgium (1993), Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995) and Macedonia (2001).

Although there are potentially very grave consequences lurking behind European energy security, energy concerns alone are not sufficient enough for the West to announce its participation in a new Cold War. At the end of the day it would be naïve, in this author's opinion to talk of Cold War II or of a new Cold War. Russia and the West are too dependent upon each other to allow for that and no serious politician would desire a return to the 'bad old days' of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction). Nevertheless, in misquoted deference to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, it might well be that we are slowly, but surely entering into a new winter of mutual discontent.

Endnotes

¹ This will now take place as an unofficial vote on independence, as the Spanish Constitutional Court has declared the planned referendum to be illegal according to articles in the 1978 Spanish Constitution which prevent any of the seventeen autonomous regions from making unilateral decisions that would affect all Spanish citizens

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