

**The Ukraine Crisis and Beyond: A European Perspective**

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What started as a domestic political crisis in Ukraine has escalated into a major crisis of European security. In fact, the – almost – unthinkable has happened: there is now a war in Europe, with airplanes being shot down almost routinely, and rising numbers of casualties. The risks of further escalation and miscalculation represent the gravest danger to European security in more than two decades.

In late May, I asked Ukrainian Prime Minister Yatsenyuk what the most important thing was that the West could do to help Ukraine. Without hesitation he replied: “Just stay united. That’s my only request.” Indeed: Only by showing a united front will Americans and Europeans be able to successfully deal with this crisis. While the European Union lacks the military and political strength to face Russia alone, the United States’ influence can be significantly enhanced by the economic leverage of the EU.

This crisis is not “just” about Ukraine – as cruel as it has been for the many victims and refugees in Ukraine and for the nearly 300 innocent civilians on flight MH17. Rather, the West is now facing a Russia no longer bound, apparently, by the consensus on European security established by the CSCE Final Act, by the 1990 Charter of Paris, and by subsequent agreements. In fact, the best label for Russia’s new foreign policy is “revisionist.” Thus, the crisis has far-reaching implications for Europe and for global security. Ukraine has become a battleground for the principles on which the international order of the 21st century will rest.

But is this reflected in the political, economic and military measures Western countries have taken so far? And, besides these short-term measures, have we adequately considered the medium- and long-term strategic consequences?

***What’s at stake and what we must expect Russia to do***

Russia carries significant responsibility for the deterioration of the situation in Eastern Ukraine. If there is now a war going on in the heart of Europe, it is because Russia has done little or nothing to stop cross-border movement of men and military resources. Moscow is thus undermining the normative framework of European security that has made the European continent a comparatively peaceful region for the past few decades. The assumption held for a long time by many in Western Europe that the members of NATO and EU no longer face any threats to their territorial integrity has been proven wrong indeed. With the annexation of Crimea, the continuing covert intervention in Eastern Ukraine, and the pronouncement of a “Putin Doctrine” reserving the right for Moscow to intervene to protect Russian-speaking populations abroad (based on Moscow’s estimation whether, when, and how they need protection), Moscow has unilaterally returned the history of European security to an earlier, more adversarial chapter.

To end this crisis, at the very minimum, the Russian government must stop its support for the separatists, the delivery of weapons and transport of fighters to Eastern Ukraine and confirm its respect of the Ukrainians’ right to determine their own future. As long as these minimum requirements remain unfulfilled, Western pressure should be maintained or even increased. And the annexation of Crimea must not be allowed to drop off the East-West agenda.

***Political measures***

After the annexation of Crimea and Putin’s refusal to honor and respect the sovereignty of Ukraine, Russia can no longer be defined as a “strategic partner.” Concerning NATO-Russia relations, this means that the Alliance did the right thing by cancelling practical cooperation with Russia on joint projects, while maintaining political consultation and communication via the NATO-Russia Council. For the time being, practical cooperation on projects such as ballistic missile defense is unrealistic (and had already come to a de facto halt anyway); and while discussions within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) may not lead to much at the moment, it is important to keep this forum in place and ready to play a useful role again in the future. NATO has learned a lesson from suspending the NRC in response to the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, which did nothing to alleviate the conflict, but took away an instrument that might have helped to better deal with the aftermath of that crisis. After all, it was created precisely as a forum for discussing critical issues between NATO and the Russian Federation.

Likewise, American and European leaders should not have cancelled the G8 Summit. Rather, they should have told Russia that there was going to be only one issue on the G8 agenda: Ukraine. This would have been an opportunity to confront Putin with an unambiguous and united Western front, with G7 members jointly and personally putting pressure on Putin. Instead, we have been witnessing a succession of bilateral meetings between Putin and individual Western leaders. Are we sure Putin did not succeed in exploring and exploiting existing differences between Western capitals? Of course he did.

But punitive measures aimed at Moscow are neither our first priority nor an end in itself. The central objective and first priority of our strategy should not be to punish Russia, but to strengthen Ukraine (as well as those other countries that are now in the “twilight zone” between the European Union/NATO and the Russian Federation, such as Moldova or Georgia). Making sure that these countries, which do not have short-term prospects for membership in the EU and/or NATO, will be able to freely choose their future is a major strategic task for the West. And it is about time that we treat it as such. The best response to Putin’s policy of undermining the stability and integrity of Ukraine is to support Ukraine’s development into a democratic, stable society governed by the rule of law. Clearly, this will be expensive, and it will take time. But it’s the best investment we can make in the future of a Europe whole and free.

***Military measures***

It has often been said that there is no military solution to the crisis in Ukraine. This may be true, but military aspects must not be neglected. Russia has not shown any serious willingness to restrain its military meddling on Ukrainian territory. As a consequence, the Ukrainian army cannot be expected to win this war on its own territory anytime soon. Moreover, the demand for military reassurance from our eastern NATO partner countries is far from over.

The West could and should now decide to upgrade its military support to the Ukrainian armed forces. Zbigniew Brzezinski has suggested the delivery of defensive weaponry in order to help Ukrainians defend themselves on their own territory. Indeed, Western powers could do more to support the weak Ukrainian army by supplying it, for example, with modern communication systems, armor, logistics, and intelligence support. As Ian Kearns rightly points out, especially the US, the UK and France have a special responsibility because they all signed the so-called Budapest Memorandum in 1994, which offered Ukraine security assurances while Kiev agreed to give up its nuclear weapons. But there is no reason why Germany and other EU/NATO countries should not also participate.

While all 28 allies contribute to NATO reassurance, their contributions come in very different forms. Poland and the Baltic States, having repeatedly been the target of Russian provocations and threats and fearing a “just-below-Article 5” scenario, would like for NATO to ramp up support and demonstrate with “boots on the ground” that allied security is indeed indivisible. It is actually quite ironic that tactical nuclear weapons continue to be deployed in some NATO countries, including in Germany, with no useful operational military role attached to them anymore, while NATO struggles to come up with meaningful steps to reassure our new Eastern members. NATO has so far been reluctant to follow the Polish and Baltic argumentation that Russia’s recent actions mean that NATO’s commitments laid down in the NATO-Russia Act of 1997 do not apply anymore. While almost everybody in NATO agrees that Russia has indeed violated key prescriptions of this document, the majority feels that we should not renounce the NATO-Russia Act itself. My own view is that we should consider relevant provisions of the Act formally “suspended”, i.e., not applicable any more, as long as the Russian government continues to violate its fundamental principles. This would mean that we would be able to consider it operational again once Moscow is again prepared to fully accept the 1997 text from which Russia surely benefits no less than NATO.

However, we do not need to build new NATO bases close to the Russian border. The United States has taken a smart decision by opting for rotating units and military exercises as the main components of its reassurance package. European nations should reciprocate and respond to the “European Reassurance Initiative” announced by Barack Obama in Warsaw by presenting their own robust reassurance package, sending a similar number of rotating forces to the NATO member states sharing borders with Russia. Such a European initiative, possibly led by the Weimar triangle, matching the US initiative, would make clear that military reassurance is not only a US responsibility (although the US contribution remains crucial). Put more bluntly: What message does it send if Europeans are not even ready to ramp up the defense of their home turf? If burden sharing does not even function on the European continent, NATO’s long-term health is in question. The upcoming NATO Summit in Wales will thus be a critical juncture for the Alliance and its European members.

***Economic measures***

Many critics have felt that agreeing on and implementing the several rounds of sanctions have taken too long and have not gone far enough. In the United States, commentators have been quick to criticize measures adopted by the EU as too little too late. Berlin, especially, has been accused of protecting Germany’s own narrow business interests. While it is of course true that business interests have had an impact on the positions of European governments, critics in the US should try to see the whole picture.

First of all, it is easy to call for ever tougher sanctions if you represent a country whose home base does not have to fear anything from it. It is a different thing if it costs you – in terms of economic growth or jobs.

Second, the long-term impact of the European sanctions should not be underestimated. Russia has much to lose vis-a-vis the EU, a lot more than from US sanctions, and the European Union has shown remarkable unity in applying its own sanctions. Unsurprisingly, this unity comes with a certain price tag, meaning that the pace and reach of sanctions does not satisfy the ambitions of all those who would have liked to see a quicker escalation of sanctions.

Third, it is wrong to believe that the German government is blocking tougher sanctions. Berlin has repeatedly made clear that political considerations would trump business interests – a position that has been accepted, while surely not welcomed by German business leaders.

Fourth, we have to make sure that the costs of sanctions and cancelled deals is somewhat evenly distributed: burden-sharing in self-punishment, if you will. First and foremost, we must find a way to help France not to deliver the two Mistral ships to Russia. As François Heisbourg put it in the *Financial Times* on July 24th, “common sense militates against delivering tools of war that could put Nato allies at risk.” Several potential alternatives, including the purchase of the ships by the EU or NATO, have circulated. This is not just another option, this is a strategic necessity! We need a full-fledged arms embargo!

Finally, sanctions are no substitute for a political strategy. They are instruments applied to achieve certain political goals, but not an end in itself. And we must always make sure that all these decisions on sanctions and embargoes remain politically reversible. We must not allow our Russia policy to be taken hostage by the US Congress, nor by European parliamentary decision makers!

***Strategic Outlook: European defense and a pan-European security architecture***

As important as the debate about necessary short-term measures is, then, they cannot and must not replace a strategic discussion about long-term effects and consequences. There are many dimensions to this – including the establishment of a European energy union. I would like to focus on two critical strategic issues:

1. When, if not now, is the right time to take concrete steps toward European defense integration?
2. How can we strengthen Euro-Atlantic security structures? This refers to both pan-European structures and to the role of EU and NATO in Eastern Europe.

When it comes to European defense efforts, the Ukraine crisis is as loud a wake-up call as there can be. I have some sympathy for the argument that a reduction of the US presence in Europe might finally force Europeans to take their defense effort more seriously. But, I am afraid, we are still not really ready to take full responsibility ourselves. That is why we need the US presence, that is why we need the US to encourage us to pool and share our military capabilities much better, to spend our defense euro more wisely, and to finally get our act together on a EU foreign and defense policy worthy of the 500 million people united in the EU. Frankly, it is scandalous how little bang for the buck we get in Europe. The defense expenditure of all the European countries together totals just under 40% of US expenditure, but the actual combat power only makes up a tiny fraction of that of the US. At the same time, the EU countries have six times as many different weapons systems as the US. This fragmentation is irresponsible, financially, in terms of capabilities, and in terms of interoperability.

The European governments are aware of the ineffective and inefficient use of their defense expenditures, and they know that cooperation and integration is the only way of addressing this problem. This is what Pooling and Sharing is all about. A study conducted by McKinsey for the Munich Security Conference calculated that European countries could save up to 30 percent per year – that is 13 billion euros per year – if they worked more closely together in weapons procurement. Now, it is true that defense integration raises many difficult issues, including matters of sovereignty. Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, the Dutch defense minister, had the right answer to such objections at the Munich Security Conference in 2013: “Should we really fear the loss of sovereignty? Or should we rather define the concept of sovereignty in a less traditional way?” In other words: What is the worth of sovereignty, traditionally understood, if an individual European state is no longer capable of action on its own? This would really be meaningless sovereignty, wouldn’t it?

Not everybody in the EU shares the vision of a European army. But we need a debate about it. It is worth noting that in Germany, for instance, there has been significant political support, for many years, for the vision of a European army. The leader of the Social Democrats has endorsed this objective. And the 2009 coalition treaty between Merkel’s conservative party and the Free Democrats plainly stated: “The establishment of a European Army under full parliamentary control remains a long-term goal for us.”

At the very least, then, defense issues need to be at or near the top of the agenda at European summits. Few EU decisions would impress Moscow – or anyone else, for that matter – more than determined action by the EU to take collective decisions, and to actually develop into a meaningfully integrated defense community.

As far as the Euro-Atlantic security architecture is concerned, this crisis was a wake-up call as well. In 1996 Richard Holbrooke wrote: “If the West is to create an enduring and stable security framework for Europe, it must solve the most enduring strategic problem of Europe and integrate the nations of the former Soviet Union, especially Russia, into a stable European security system.” He was right. Unfortunately, we are now back to square one, and have added a lot of baggage. What we need is a *Doppelstrategie* (a double-track strategy), denying Putin opportunities in Europe while pursuing a dialogue with him about cooperation in the interests of all, as difficult as that may be in current circumstances.

Right now is surely not a good moment for grand structural initiatives concerning an all-encompassing Euro-Atlantic security community. But at some point, hopefully sooner rather than later, we will have to start anew the discussion about the creation of a more sustainable, more resilient, more crisis-resistant and more comprehensive European security architecture. Not as a reward to Putin for challenging the architecture, but out of recognition that it needs to be adjusted to new realities. Such a discussion should include confidence-building measures and arms control issues, including, for example, the future of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, as well as the long overdue question of the reduction and elimination of short-range nuclear forces in Europe. A number of useful and important proposals have been elaborated in recent years by US-Russian-European initiatives, such as the EASI Commission supported by the Carnegie Endowment, or, more recently, by Sam Nunn’s Nuclear Threat Initiative.

The objective should be to strengthen both rules and institutions, including the OSCE, and to review such projects as the 2008 Medvedev security treaty proposal. The OSCE was all but forgotten, unfortunately, until the current crisis reminded us that it is the OSCE that can monitor elections, that it is the OSCE that can send observers, and that there is a Vienna Document that allows military observer missions to be deployed. One of our longer-term objectives could be the preparation of a follow-up to the 1990 Paris summit – a well-prepared OSCE summit – to discuss and decide whether Russia and the West can or cannot jointly reaffirm the principles adopted twenty years ago, including the principle of the integrity of all OSCE Member States, of the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and of the clear “no” to unilateral changes of borders.

One thing should be clear: the West should stick to its long-held position that countries should be free to choose their associations. If, by pointing to the example of Finland, some appear to suggest that Ukraine should now be permanently denied the prospect of becoming a NATO member, we should not agree because this is not what the Finnish model represents. Finland could, at any moment it chooses, apply for membership in NATO. NATO never said, and Finland – to my knowledge – never accepted that this was not an option. The Finland model should therefore not be construed as excluding any country from NATO. It is a matter for Finland to decide whether or not to take steps in the direction of NATO or not, and it is a matter for the Alliance to issue an invitation. As far as Ukraine is concerned, neither a EU membership nor a NATO membership should therefore be categorically excluded. At the same time, Ukraine deserves respect and support if it chooses to follow the wise path so successfully adopted by Finland.

We will have to be careful to address issues affecting the future European security architecture without conceding that we accept the annexation of Crimea, or the so-called “Putin doctrine.” Of course, that is going to be difficult. But defending our positions while at the same time advocating engagement is not, and must not be, mutually exclusive. Instead, both go together: that is what a double strategy is all about.

***Conclusion***

If EU foreign policy has been dominated by concerns about the financial, economic, and political future of the EU, 2014 has clearly brought foreign and defense policy back to the top of the agenda. The current crisis can serve as a catalyst for Europe, both politically and militarily. With the new team in place in Brussels later this year, the EU should start working on a new European Security Strategy. The last one, agreed in 2003 (!), stems from a time when the world was quite different. This is not only true for the new challenge posed by a revisionist Russia, but also for other radical changes in the European neighborhood, including the impact of the energy revolution, the security risks in the Middle East, and the increased role of rising powers.

However, while we need a stronger Europe, the current crisis also demonstrates how important it is for the United States to remain a European power. A strong US engagement and a clear commitment by all members to NATO is a *conditio sine qua non* for deterring a revisionist Russia from shaking up additional parts of Europe, from Moldova to Georgia. On a more positive note, the current crisis has underscored what still unites the transatlantic partners. Despite serious difficulties in transatlantic relations, especially between Berlin and Washington after the numerous revelations in the spying affair, which has dealt a severe blow to German trust in US leadership, this is something we need to preserve and nurture for the future. Looking at the rather mute response from new powers such as China, India and Brazil to the Ukraine crisis, we need to understand that the stability of the liberal international order built after 1945 must not be taken for granted. It needs continuous commitment from the United States, Canada, and their European partners. And it is also in this respect that Prime Minister Yatsenyuk makes a key point: The West staying united is what matters most – both for the future of Ukraine and for the future of the liberal world order.