

INTERNATIONAL POLITOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR. CAUSES OF EMERGENCE

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SUMMARY

The Russian-Ukrainian war is not just a regional war. It is the war that marks a rupture in relations between Russia and the West, a war that will have profound repercussions for both Europe and the world. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation tends to become the most important military conflict since the end of World War II. Thus, the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine become a topic of discussion not only in the chancelleries and in the speeches of Western leaders, but also constitute a topic worthy of consideration for the academic community.

This article aims to highlight the causes of the emergence of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The article will highlight the actions taken by the Russian Federation in Ukraine over three decades.

Keywords: USA, Russian Federation, Ukraine, EU, NATO, war, impact, causes.

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Introduction. The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation tends to become the most important military conflict since the end of World War II. The Russian-Ukrainian war is not just a regional war. It is the war that marks a rupture in relations between Russia and the West, a war that will have profound repercussions for both Europe and the world. The overall consequences of this war will be considerably greater than the 9/11 attacks. For the first time, a military conflict has the potential to involve Russia, NATO and China. Russia and NATO have already positioned themselves and are active parties to the conflict, but China seems undecided for the time being [11].

Ukraine is an Eastern European state with long and intense connections with Russia, but also with Central and Eastern Europe. The toponym „Ukraine” was not the name of a country, but of a region, or more precisely, its geographical position was shown. „Ukraine” (a word derived from the Russian „u kraia” or „okraina”) and translates as „on the periphery”, „on the edge” or simply „periphery”, the root being the word „krai” – „margin” [8].

Ukraine declared independence in 1991 amid the process of dissolution of the Soviet Union. On July 16, 1990, the new parliament adopted the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, which established the principles of self-determination of the Ukrainian nation, democracy, political and economic independence, and the priority of Ukrainian law on Ukrainian territory over Soviet law. With a population of 45.6 million, Ukraine has the largest border between Russia and the EU. Until 1991, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union, and after the collapse of the former Soviet bloc, it tried, like the other former Soviet republics, to regain its

identity. However, Ukraine failed to find its own way and quickly became a „pawn” in the ongoing dispute between Russia and the West.

Causes of emergence of the Russia-Ukraine war. For a better understanding of the Russia-Ukraine war, there is a need to make a brief retrospective of the causes of its emergence. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine have a history that goes back to the Middle Ages, making the relations between the two states quite complex. The roots of both countries are common and are found in the so-called Kievan Rus, which is why many experts often refer to the existence of „one people”. In reality, the two nations have been separated for centuries, with two languages and two cultures developing – related and yet different from each other. While Russia evolved politically into an empire, Ukraine failed to establish its own state. In the 17th century, large areas of present-day Ukraine were part of the Tsarist Empire. After its disintegration, in 1917, Ukraine briefly became independent, until Soviet Russia regained it in 1920.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and Ukraine’s independence serve as a reason for the Russia-Ukraine differences. At the meeting in Brest, Belarus, on December 8, 1991, and then at the meeting in Alma Ata on December 21, 1991, the leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine formally dissolved the Soviet Union and formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Out of a desire to maintain its influence, Moscow lays the foundations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a tool of control over the post-Soviet space. Moscow believed that the neighbouring state, Ukraine would remain a reliable ally, including through its dependence on Russian gas. But the reality is different. While Russia and Belarus formed a close alliance, Ukraine, during its three decades of independence, had a Euro-Atlantic foreign policy (depending on the political leadership of the government). Although the Kremlin was irritated by the vector of Kyiv’s foreign policy, no conflict occurred in the 1990s. Moscow seemed relaxed because the West did not intend to integrate Ukraine. In the early 1990s, Russia itself was weakened economically, and was also involved in the Chechen war. By signing the so-called „Friendship Agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation” in 1997 [15], Moscow recognized Ukraine’s borders, including the Crimean Peninsula, inhabited mostly by ethnic Russians.

Another aspect, which can be considered as a reason for the differences between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, refers specifically to the year 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power in the Russian Federation. Thus, during President Putin’s first term of office, the first major diplomatic crisis between Moscow and Kyiv took place. In the autumn of 2003, Russia surprisingly began building a dam, from the Russian Taman Peninsula close to the Russian island of Tuzla in the Kerch Strait. Kyiv believed that by building this dam, Russia was trying to re-establish its state borders. The conflict initially intensified, but was defused after a meeting of the presidents of the two states. Although the construction of the dam was stopped, the declared bilateral friendship gained its first cracks.

In the context of the analysis of the causes of emergence of the Russia-Ukraine war, another aspect that conditions the appearance of divergences between the two countries is the fourth electoral campaign during the presidential elections in Ukraine, in 2004, October 31 (first round) and November 21 (second round) [22]. Russia supported the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich. The „Orange Revolution” prevented the falsification of election results, with the election being won by pro-Western politician Viktor Yushchenko. During his tenure, Russia suspended gas supplies to Ukraine twice in 2006 and 2009, the transit to the European Union being interrupted as well (Ukraine suspended Gazprom’s transit to the EU on January 1, 2009) [21].

In the analysis of the causes of the Russian-Ukrainian divergences, the events that took place in 2008 during the NATO summit in Bucharest are of no less interest [13]. The attempt by former US President George W. Bush to integrate Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, as well as the preparation of a program to prepare for their accession to NATO, can serve as a pretext for differences between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, including Georgia. NATO member states welcomed Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for integration into the Alliance, the Joint Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission Meeting being signed on 4 April 2008 [3]. President Putin expressed his disagreement with the possible accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO. At the NATO summit in Bucharest, the two states were offered the prospect of being admitted to NATO, but without setting a specific date in this regard. Moscow has made it clear that it does not fully accept Ukraine's independence, and Germany and France have thwarted the plan of US President G.W. Bush. In order to achieve its goal of joining NATO, Ukraine has sought to move closer to the West through an association agreement with the EU. In the summer of 2013, just months before the document was signed, Moscow exerted economic pressure on Kyiv by banning imports from Ukraine [18]. In this context, the government of then-President Yanukovich, which had won the 2010 election, suspended the Association Agreement with the EU, which conditioned the outbreak of opposition protests in Ukraine, which resulted in Yanukovich's flight to Russia in February 2014.

Taking advantage of the situation and the power vacuum, Moscow occupied the Crimean peninsula. Thus, the occupation of the Crimean peninsula serves as a turning point in Russia-Ukraine relations, laying the foundations of the war. Thus, on March 18, 2014, by approving Federal Law no. 36 F-3, with 443 votes in favor and 1 against [14], the signing of the International Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Crimea [16] on the acceptance of the Republic of Crimea as part of the Russian Federation and the formation of a new subject of Russia. According to the Treaty which entered into force on 21 March 2014, Crimea is considered a component part of the Russian Federation, in which a new subject is formed – the Republic of Crimea and the city of federal importance, Sevastopol, and the citizens living at that time on territory of the new subjects, were recognized as citizens of the Russian Federation, having the right to decide within one month from the signing of the Treaty their citizenship. Becoming a subject of the Russian Federation, the legislation of the Russian Federation also enters into force on the territory of Crimea. The demarcation of the state borders between the Russian Federation and Ukraine takes place as a result of the occupation of the Crimean peninsula and the city of Sevastopol. The land border between Crimea and Ukraine is declared the border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and the borders in the Black Sea and Azov waters are subject to delimitation according to the principles of international law. Another milestone in which the Russian Federation justifies its actions in Ukraine is the decision to validate the Treaty, focusing on the results of the free election of the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on March 16, 2014, as a result of which Crimean citizens made the decision to join the Russian Federation with the rights of the subjects of the Russian Federation and against the provision of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Crimea and the status of Crimea as a component part of Ukraine. In this context, on March 17, 2014, President V. Putin by Presidential Decree no. 147 „On the recognition of the Republic of Crimea” [25], taking into account the right of states to determine their fate, recognizes the Republic of Crimea as a sovereign state – subject to international law [19, p. 54-55].

At the same time, Russian paramilitary forces managed to mobilize the population in the mining area of Eastern Ukraine. Led by the Russians, the Lugansk and Donbas regions proclaimed themselves „people’s republics” [24] (as a result of the referendum on May 11, 2014, 89.7% of those who voted supported the independence of the regions), demanding The Russian Federation to accept these territories as part of it [17].

The Kyiv government waited until after the May 2014 presidential election to launch a large-scale military offensive called a „counterterrorism intervention”. In June 2014, the newly elected Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and Vladimir Putin met for the first time at events marking the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landings, through French and German mediation. This is how the so-called „Normandy Format” came into being [20]. By its resolution of 4 February 2015, the European Parliament called on the Russian Federation to negotiate with Ukraine on the settlement of the Crimean issue. Also, taking into account point A of the European Parliament Resolution of 4 February 2015 [23], the Russian Federation violated the international law, including the UN Statute [2], the Helsinki Final Act [5] and the 1997 Treaty with Ukraine on the status and conditions of the Black Sea Fleet [9]. On 27 March 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, which denies the validity of the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol [7].

Attitudes towards the actions of the Russian Federation in Crimea and the city of Sevastopol were also expressed by the UN Human Rights Committee, which adopted a resolution condemning Russia’s „temporary occupation” of Crimea. The UN also reiterated that the territory of the Crimean Peninsula belongs to Ukraine. For the first time, an official UN document clearly states that the Crimean peninsula is a „temporarily occupied territory”. In addition, the resolution calls on Russia to end abuses against Crimean people, release illegally detained Ukrainians and allow international observers to monitor the situation. 73 countries voted in favor of the document, 76 abstained and 23 voted against, including Russia, Syria, North Korea and Venezuela. Countries that opposed the resolution included China, Iran, India, Syria, South Africa, Serbia and North Korea. Many Latin American and African countries have abstained. The Crimean peninsula was part of Russian territory, but was ceded in 1954 to Ukraine, then a Soviet republic. The region has maintained close ties with Russia all this time, thanks to the large number of ethnic Russians living here, about 70% of the population. Despite the historical circumstances used by Russia to justify the annexation, the international community says that such an act is illegal and still considers the peninsula to be Ukrainian territory. Russia’s annexation of Crimea has violated many international commitments, including the provisions of the UN Charter, the OSCE Helsinki Final Act and the 1997 Treaty with Ukraine on the status and conditions of the Black Sea Fleet [9]. Also on 15 November 2016, in New York, 193 UN member states participated in the vote on the resolution on Crimea. 73 states signed the resolution, 23 voted against, 76 abstained, and 21 states did not vote [10].

Although the Ukrainian army managed to oust the separatists, at the end of August 2014, Russia intervened en masse with military forces, accusing Kyiv of violating the rights of the population in the self-proclaimed regions, and the Ukrainian territories in the Ilovaisk area, east of Donetsk, were conquered. Thus, the year 2014 serves as a turning point in the relations between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The war between Russia and Ukraine that we are witnessing did not break out suddenly, it stems from the conflict between the two countries, which began in February 2014. The Rus-

sia-Ukraine war focuses on the status of Crimea and Donbas. The war on the extended front ended in September with the signing of the Minsk Armistice [1]. After nearly 16 hours of negotiations, Vladimir Putin, Petro Poroshenko, Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande agreed on an armistice, which would enter into force on February 15, 2015. The agreement provided, among other things, for the withdrawal of heavy weapons and the creation of a demilitarized zone along the front line.

Since then, there has been a real war. In early 2015, the separatists went on the offensive again, with Kiev accusing the Russian army of supporting them, accusations rejected by Moscow. The Ukrainian soldiers suffered a defeat, this time in the strategic area of the city of Debaltseve. Then, with Western mediation, the foundations of the Minsk Agreement 2 were laid, which has so far remained the foundation of peace efforts, but which has not been implemented as such.

A last effort to bring these regions back under the jurisdiction of Kyiv was made in the autumn of 2019. Then it was possible to withdraw some troops from certain demarcation lines. But after the „Normandy Format” summit in Paris in December 2019, no such meetings have taken place, with the Russian President V. Putin reluctant to meet with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky, arguing that he does not respect, from Russia’s perspective, the provisions of the Minsk Agreement [12].

Some European leaders saw the Minsk Agreement as a plan to ease the current crisis. Its provisions included exchanges of prisoners, deliveries of humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. However, the agreement quickly fell apart, with violations on both sides. The Minsk agreement provided for a special political status, within Ukraine, for the territories under the control of the separatists. However, the 12-point peace plan was never fully implemented and fighting has continued over the years. Moreover, the initial ceasefire in September 2014 was not respected, with fighting being resumed in early 2015. Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President Francois Hollande mediated negotiations between the Russian President Vladimir Putin and his then-Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko. The Minsk plan was extended from 12 to 13 points and, according to them, has become more concrete.

However, Russia has revealed that it has practically never been a party to the agreement, and that it has acted only as a mediator, as have the French and German parties, and is therefore not obliged to abide by the terms of the agreement. The 13 points of the Minsk II Agreement of February 2015 focused on the following provisions:

- Immediate and comprehensive ceasefire;
- Withdrawal of weapons by both sides;
- Monitoring by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe;
- Dialogue on autonomy for Donetsk and Lugansk, in accordance with Ukrainian law, and recognition of special status by the parliament;
- Pardons, amnesty for fighters;
- Exchange of hostages, prisoners;
- Humanitarian assistance;
- Resumption of socio-economic ties, including pensions;
- Ukraine to restore control of the state border;
- Withdrawal of foreign armed formations, military equipment, mercenaries;
- Constitutional reform in Ukraine, including decentralization, with specific reference to the Donetsk and Lugansk regions;

- Elections in Donetsk and Lugansk;
- Intensifying the work of the Trilateral Contact Group, including representatives of Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE.

Although several exchanges of prisoners took place, involving hundreds of people captured in the fighting, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported violations of the agreement. According to it, the withdrawal of heavy weapons from the front line was never fully achieved. In addition, both sides used reconnaissance drones, despite a flight ban. Also, the full restoration of socio-economic relations, including the payment of pensions, has not been achieved. Since 2017, the separatist territories have been the subject of a complete economic blockade by Kyiv, with the exception of only humanitarian aid. In 2019, new agreements were negotiated. In December 2019, new agreements were negotiated in Paris that were stronger than the 2015 Peace Plan. For example, it was decided to continue the gradual military disengagement along the front line. However, this was done slowly, with some provisions being completely disregarded, with both sides accusing each other of failing to open two new crossing points between government-controlled territory and the separatist region [6].

From the beginning of the war in 2014 until the end of 2021, the situation in the area has not changed much. The outbreak of a new crisis between the two countries dates back to the end of 2021. In November 2021, tensions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation rose sharply, with Russia sending 100,000 troops near the Russian-Ukrainian border. The Ukrainian government, in agreement with the US and NATO, raised alarm over a possible attack by Moscow.

Talks followed between Russia, the United States and NATO, from which Ukraine itself was effectively excluded. Russia has called for restrictions on NATO action in the region, including a ban on further enlargements, the withdrawal of forces from countries that joined the Alliance after 1997 (a bloc of countries that includes much of Eastern Europe, from the Baltic countries to in the Balkans). These demands, both for the United States and for NATO, at the risk of a failure of the diplomatic process, were considered unacceptable [4].

Conclusions. Year 2022 is not only the eighth anniversary of the emergence of the Russia-Ukraine War, but also the year that directly marks international security. 24 February 2022 is the day when the Russian Federation attacked Ukraine, carrying out the so-called “special operation”, an operation that not only determined the fate of Ukraine, but directly influenced relations between states in the international arena. The war in Ukraine is becoming a direct threat to international security, including the security of the Republic of Moldova. In this context, in order to resolve the Russia-Ukraine war as soon as possible, there is a need to unite all efforts by the international community.

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