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Events in eastern and southern Ukraine in retrospect of post-soviet relations

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to periodize the study of interstate relations and the course of events in eastern and southern Ukraine in the period: 1991-2015. The historical and comparative-legal method was used to solve the problem posed. The article analyzes the events in eastern and southern Ukraine during 1991-2015, taking into account Russia's influence on social and political processes in post-Soviet Ukraine through the process of forming Ukraine's international subjectivity, which are permanent factors in bilateral relations with the Russian Federation. In this context, Russia's inability to recognize Ukraine as a full-fledged international actor at the legal and substantive level is demonstrated. It is concluded that the events in Ukraine not only provoked the strongest confrontation between the two largest states of the post-Soviet space, but also exposed a number of problems throughout the international security system. The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine was accompanied by numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. The competent state authorities must calculate the amount of material and moral damage caused by Russia.

Keywords: post-Soviet space; Black Sea Fleet; international security; Crimean crisis; invasion of Ukraine

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Acontecimientos en el este y el sur de Ucrania en la retrospectiva de las relaciones postsoviéticas

Resumen

El propósito del artículo es periodizar el estudio de las relaciones interestatales y el curso de los acontecimientos en el este y el sur de Ucrania en el periodo: 1991-2015. Se utilizó el método histórico y comparativo-jurídico para resolver el problema planteado. El artículo analiza los acontecimientos en el este y el sur de Ucrania durante 1991-2015, teniendo en cuenta la influencia de Rusia en los procesos sociales y políticos en la Ucrania postsoviética a través del proceso de formación de la subjetividad internacional de Ucrania, que son factores permanentes en las relaciones bilaterales con la Federación Rusa. En este contexto, se demuestra la incapacidad de Rusia para reconocer a Ucrania como un actor internacional de pleno derecho a nivel jurídico y sustantivo. Se concluye que los acontecimientos en Ucrania no solo provocaron la confrontación más fuerte entre los dos estados más grandes del espacio postsoviético, sino que también expusieron una serie de problemas en todo el sistema de seguridad internacional. La agresión armada de la Federación de Rusia contra Ucrania fue acompañada de numerosos crímenes de guerra y crímenes de lesa humanidad. Las autoridades estatales competentes deben calcular la cantidad de daño material y moral causado por Rusia.

Palabras clave: espacio postsoviético; flota del Mar Negro; seguridad internacional; crisis de Crimea; invasión de Ucrania.

Introduction

Russia's influence on socio-political processes in post-Soviet Ukraine is considered in a significant number of works by domestic and Western authors, so in this study it will be considered only schematically, in order to reveal the mutual influence between the internal and external aspects of the formation of the foreign political identity of Ukraine.

The given list of problematic issues of bilateral relations, is limited to the problematic of subjectness (corporate identity), demonstrates the close relationship between domestic and foreign policy, related to the influence of Russia on the processes of state and nation in Ukraine and the course of foreign policy (social) identification of Ukraine, in particular its relations with the EU, NATO, as well as democratic transformation as a process of internationalization of European norms and standards.

Therefore, the process of Ukraine's foreign policy identification as an international actor is inextricably linked to the assertion of its own independence from the "significant other", the role of which is Russia.

1. Materials and methods

The course of events in the east and south of Ukraine is considered by us on the basis of the use of information sources, applying the following methods of historical research: periodization, historical-genetic and historical-systemic. In historical terms, the periods of research of events in eastern and southern Ukraine are conditionally divided into the following: the beginning of the establishment of relations between Ukraine and Russia (1991-1992); the gas conflict and resolution of the Black Sea Fleet issue (1992-2004); the “Orange Revolution” and processes after it (2005-2012); the political crisis in Ukraine (2013-2014); the beginning of armed conflict in the south-east of Ukraine and the Crimean crisis (2014–2015).

The purpose of this article is to periodize the study of interstate relations and the course of events in eastern and southern Ukraine in 1991-2015, taking into account the fact that Russian policy towards Ukraine has never considered security issues or economic interests as a priority, because Russian-Ukrainian relations are quite different from those between any other two states (Ash *et al.*, 2015; D’Anieri, 2002; Buckholz, 2019; Giuliano, 2015; Loshkariov and Sushentsov, 2016; Malyarenko and Galbreath, 2016).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Statement of the basic material

The Declaration on State Sovereignty of Ukraine, adopted on July 16, 1990, opened a new page of establishment of independent and autonomous Ukraine and played an important role in building a democratic constitutional order in Ukraine. It was since then that the collapse of the USSR and Ukraine’s break with the Russian Federation became a reality.

And on November 19, 1990 the USSR and the RSFSR signed a treaty, which entered into force on June 14, 1991. According to it (Art. 1), it was supposed that “The parties acknowledge each other as sovereign states and undertake to refrain from acts that may cause damage to the state sovereignty of the other party”, and also (Art. 6) the “Parties recognize and respect the territorial integrity of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic within the present borders within the USSR” (Agreement between the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, 1990).

From the first days of independence, the Ukrainian leadership in its foreign policy had to consider the interests of neighboring states, groups (blocks) of states, various transnational groupings at the local, regional

and global levels, while implementing its geopolitical plans. First of all, it is necessary to create prerequisites for the establishment of Ukraine as an equal subject of international relations, creating a documentary basis for this, to begin the process of integration into the systems of European and world cooperation in the general political process, to establish independent economic relations in the international arena, to establish bilateral equal relations with the states of the world community and with the nearest neighbors (Hay-Nizhnyk, 2017).

That is why, taking into account the schedule of the world chessboard and the system of balancing of influence and opposition, the political leadership of the country at the dawn of the restoration of its statehood followed the path of non-alignment and neutrality. However, already 1993 in the “Main Directions of Foreign Policy” approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine it was noted that the proclaimed concept of neutrality could not be an obstacle to full-scale participation of Ukraine in the pan-European security structure (Hay-Nizhnyk, 2017).

On December 1, 1991, at the All-Ukrainian referendum 90.35% of citizens supported the Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine of August 24, 1991. And already on December 8, 1991 the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus signed the Belovezhskoe Agreement on the Establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As the first president of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk said in one of his interviews: “Ukraine can be proud of the fact that it is and was, and became in 1991, the country that broke up the Soviet Union - the last empire, the most terrible” (Regnum News Agency, 2016: n/p).

And Ukraine, although it became one of the founding countries of the CIS, did not sign the Decision on the adoption of the CIS Charter. On December 1, 1991 L. Kravchuk elected as President of Ukraine categorically refused to conclude any union treaty - not only political, but also economic, and in May 1992 refused to sign the Agreement on Collective Security of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Ukrainian leadership did not go beyond the associated membership and did not sign an agreement on the establishment of the Interstate Economic Committee - the first supranational body of the CIS.

Despite the proclamation to build real partnership bilateral relations with the former Soviet republics in the future, Russia tried to play a leading role in the CIS. Ukraine's second president, Leonid Kuchma, noted in his book “Ukraine Is Not Russia” that society views Ukraine as a historically inseparable part of Russia that broke away by some strange misunderstanding (Kuchma, 2003). The conglomerate nature of the post-Soviet Ukrainian elite has kept the country's political system running for many years. It was based on certain attributes of democracy, such as a competitive political process, caused mainly by many internal factors (Chernyavsky, 2013).

After the collapse of the USSR, it came as a great surprise to both Russia and Ukraine that a significant number of conflict issues related to the division of military property and the severance of many years of ties in the defense and energy spheres emerged. Territorial problems also emerged. As for the defense-industrial complex, Ukraine inherited from the USSR the second largest (40%) part of the military-industrial complex. Among them are 300 such giants as Yuzhmash, Arsenal, Khartron and others.

These enterprises manufactured transport aircraft, missile cruisers, tanks (Ukraine produced about 50% of Soviet combat vehicles), Zenit, Cyclone, SS-18, SS-20, SS-23, SS-24, etc.

The main territorial problem was the ownership of the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol, the naval base of the Black Sea Fleet. Back on November 19, 1990 B. Yeltsin and Kravchuk signed the first interstate document that laid the foundation for future relations of independent Ukraine and Russia, stipulating that both sides: "Recognize and respect the territorial integrity... within the currently existing borders within the framework of the USSR" (Wikisource, 2019: 29).

In the early 1990s Ukraine had 15% of the world's nuclear weapons capability (third in the world, after the United States and the Russian Federation). In 1991 its nuclear arsenal consisted of 220 strategic missile carriers with about 1900 strategic nuclear warheads and 2500 tactical nuclear weapons, as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles: 130 SS-19 and 46 SS-24 (totally 1240 warheads), 25 Tu-95 and 19 Tu-160 strategic bombers, capable of carrying cruise missiles with nuclear warheads.

The main striking power of Ukraine's nuclear capability is 46 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles SS-24 with ten warheads each - a short range of more than 10,000 kilometers (Hay-Nizhnyk, 2017).

On October 24, 1991, Ukraine adopted a resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on its nuclear-free status. All nuclear charges were to be dismantled and exported to Russia, strategic bombers and missile silos were to be destroyed. In return, the Russian Federation and the U.S. provided guarantees of the independence and integrity of Ukrainian territory (Pravo Tech, 1994).

On June 23, 1992 the presidents of Russia B. Yeltsin and Ukraine L. Kravchuk signed in Dagomys an agreement "On the Further Development of Interstate Relations" (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, 1998), which stated that "the parties will build their relations as friendly states" (Art. 1). They "reaffirm their commitment to the principle of open borders between them" (Art. 8) and "cooperate in preventing and settling conflicts that could harm their security" (Art. 10).

They also agreed to continue consultations “on the fulfillment of their obligations under the Treaty on the Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms of July 31, 1991, the Lisbon Protocol of May 23, 1992 and the agreements previously made on the strategic nuclear forces of the states” (Art. 11), and, respectively, on their mutual agreement to continue negotiations” on the establishment on the basis of the Russian and Ukrainian navies in the Black Sea (p. 14) (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, 1998).

At that time, the Russian Federation continued to make territorial claims to Ukraine, in particular: Resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation of May 21, 1992, No. 2809-1 “On Legal Assessment of the Decisions of the RSFSR State Authorities on the Change of Status of Crimea Adopted in 1954,” according to which the Resolution of the Presidium of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet of February 5, 1954 “On Transfer of the Crimea Region from the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR” was declared “void from the moment of its adoption”.

In December 1992 the Congress of People’s Deputies of the Russian Federation asked the RF Supreme Soviet to consider the issue of status of Sevastopol, and on July 9, 1993 the RF Supreme Soviet adopted the resolution “On Status of the City of Sevastopol” which granted federal status to the city.

It was then that the Ukrainian Armed Forces were not without difficulty formed in the Crimea, as evidenced by the letter of the Crimean branch of the Union of Officers of Ukraine to the first persons of the country from August 13, 1992 Having analyzed the agreements between Ukraine and Russia from June 23, 1992, June 17, 1993, April 15, 1994, June 9, 1995, we can state the position of Ukraine in the issue of the Black Sea Fleet, in particular on reducing the percentage of ships, vessels and boats belonging to Ukraine (Hay-Nizhnyk, 2017).

The struggle for the fleet, reflected, among other things, in the “war of presidential decrees”, brought both sides to the brink of an armed conflict. On April 5, 1992, Ukrainian President L. Kravchuk signed a decree “On the transition of the Black Sea Fleet to administrative subordination to the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine (Ministry of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation, 1998). In response to this action, on April 7 of the same year, the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation B. Yeltsin “On the transition of the Black Sea Fleet under the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation”.

The mutually exclusive decrees of the aforementioned top leaders led to a physical confrontation between Ukrainian and Russian servicemen.

Tensions were reduced only after the heads of the governments of Ukraine and Russia signed three agreements in Kiev in preparation for

the “Great Treaty” on friendship and cooperation, which provided for the distribution of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet and further separate basing of Ukrainian and Russian warships. But on April 17, 2005 the third President of Ukraine V. Yuschenko said that the status of the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on the territory of Sevastopol and the adjacent territories required an urgent review.

Another “sore point” in Ukrainian-Russian relations was the determination of the status of the Kerch Strait, which is the only natural exit from the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea. Bilateral negotiations on this issue were difficult and tense. In December 2003, Presidents Putin and L. Kuchma signed the “Treaty on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait”. Parliaments of the two countries ratified the document synchronously, in April 2004.

The document provided for free passage of merchant and military ships of the two countries through the strait and free access to the ports of Russia and Ukraine for foreign merchant ships.

However, this never happened. Experts explained that Russia did not want to give Ukraine control over the Kerch-Yenikalsky Strait. At the same time, Ukraine proceeded from the fact that the division should be based solely on the administrative border line that existed during the Soviet Union. And according to it, the canal is in the Ukrainian part of the strait.

After Russia’s annexation of Crimea on March 21, 2014, the Russian Federation unilaterally declared its territorial right to the Kerch Strait and Tuzla Island, and in June of the same year it was decided to build a bridge across the Kerch Strait and Tuzla Island.

On May 31, 1997 in Kiev Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Leonid Kuchma signed the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, which became the basic legal document that was to determine the further development of their bilateral relations (Agreement on friendship, 1999). It enshrined the principles of strategic partnership, recognition of the inviolability of existing borders, respect for territorial integrity and mutual obligation not to use their territory to the detriment of each other’s security.

The Article 12 of the Agreement obliged both states to provide “protection of ethnic, cultural, language and religious identity of national minorities on their territories”, to reject attempts of forced assimilation of national minorities, as well as to promote creation of “equal opportunities and conditions for studying Russian language in Ukraine and Ukrainian language in the Russian Federation. Duration of the Treaty - 10 years (to 2007).

The end of the XX and beginning of the XXI century was affected by the destruction of the common economic space of the former USSR and became one of the main factors of the crisis state of the national economies of Russia and Ukraine as a whole and of the oil and gas industry in particular.

In the winter of 1992-1993 a series of intergovernmental contacts took place, as a result of which the technical credits were converted into Ukrainian state debt and a plan for their repayment until 1999 was developed. However, the situation escalated to such an extent that gas supplies to Ukraine were restricted for several days. On August 11, 1992 L. Kuchma met with Chernomyrdin, after which Russia resumed gas deliveries. But as early as August 26, Russia announced another 25% cut of gas supplies to Ukraine because of the increasing debt level in Ukraine.

However, the reduction in gas supplies proved to be an ineffective mechanism to ensure repayment of debts. In October 1993, Gazprom offered to repay Ukraine's debts through a long-term lease of a number of facilities in the Ukrainian gas transmission system. The Ukrainian side, however, was unwilling to accept the proposal, because it could have put the country in an extremely difficult situation in the event of a new shutdown of gas supply.

The passage through Ukrainian territory of all Russian main export pipelines and the remoteness of the prospect of alternative routes allowed Ukraine to advance its position on economic issues. In response to the announcement of a gas supply cutoff due to nonpayment for gas delivered to Ukraine, the latter said that in such a case Ukraine would shut down the transit pipelines that run through its territory. This situation became the starting point for the development of an open "gas conflict" between Russia and Ukraine.

Counting on Ukraine's accession to the agreement on forming a common economic space (CES) with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia and joint cooperation in high-tech sectors and development of powerful long-term projects, Russia on August 8, 2004 signed an additional agreement to the contract between Russian Gazprom and Ukrainian Naftogas, which set a fixed price for Russian gas at \$50 for Ukraine until 2009. The agreement stipulated a fixed price of \$50 per thousand cubic meters for Russian gas (compared to an average European price of \$160 to \$170 at the time).

Simultaneously with the policy of open confrontation over the level of prices for transit gas and the terms of the basing of the Russian fleet, the leadership of Ukraine intensified attempts to communicate with Euro-Atlantic structures. All Ukrainian leaders of the post-Soviet period, from Kravchuk to Zelensky, declared their intention to join them.

With the adoption of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan in November 2002, annual NATO-Ukraine Targeted Plans began to be developed. Thus, on

April 6, 2004, the Verkhovna Rada adopted a law on free access of NATO forces to the territory of Ukraine. In April 2005, the military doctrine included a thesis on strategic goal of Ukraine: "...Proceeding from the fact that NATO and EU are guarantors of security and stability in Europe, Ukraine is preparing for full membership in these organizations..." (Liga. Zakon, 2005: n/p).

On January 23, 2005, Viktor Yushchenko became President of Ukraine. His foreign policy, like that of his predecessors, envisioned European integration and accession to Euro-Atlantic structures - NATO, first and foremost. A public relations campaign and a number of diplomatic measures were implemented in this context. However, populism, lack of reforms, no effective anti-corruption measures, and internal strife between the branches of power in Ukraine had no chance to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU that year, nor to get the Membership Action Plan (MAP) with the NATO.

Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations at that time were complicated with a bitter aftertaste from the conflict over the island of Kosa Tuzla, which could only be resolved after the intervention of the presidents of both countries (Russia suspended construction of a dam 180 meters from the island and was forced to delay armed expansion against Ukraine for decades) and increased geopolitical, energy, trade and economic, energy problems and the like. Since 2008 there has been a significant deterioration, which was reflected in the aggravation of the "gas war" and diplomatic tensions related to the attempt to change Ukraine's foreign policy course from multi-vector to pro-Western.

At the same time, a joint statement "The Order of the New Century for the Ukrainian-American Strategic Partnership" was signed in April 2005 following talks between V. Yushchenko and U.S. President J. Bush. In his speech to the U.S. Congress, Yushchenko stated that the new Ukraine shares Euro-Atlantic values, and therefore his country's accession to the EU and NATO "will strengthen stability throughout the region strategically important to the United States, from Warsaw to Tbilisi to Baku" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011).

In August 2008 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine stated that the Ukrainian side reserves the right under international law and Ukrainian legislation to prohibit the return of ships and vessels of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which may take part in an armed conflict in South Ossetia, to the territory of Ukraine until the conflict is resolved (Yushchenko, 2014).

In the international arena, the core theme of Ukrainian diplomacy has also been the "Holodomor. Holodomor Remembrance Day was established in Ukraine by decree of L. Kuchma in 1998, and V. Yushchenko in November 2006. Yushchenko signed the law "On the Holodomor of 1932-1933. In

Ukraine, accusing Russia of deliberately “using genocide” against the Ukrainian people. He also recognized Bandera and Shukhevich as fighters for independence and awarded them the titles of Hero of Ukraine. Such actions were very negatively received in Russia (Portnov, 2015; Yushchenko, 2014).

In the fall of 2008, after Russia threatened Ukraine with a trade war during September bilateral trade negotiations, a series of mutual political steps toward each other took place, which, however, turned out to be diplomatically formal. Then it became clear that Ukraine would not be able to get much closer to the EU and obtain a MAP for NATO membership in the near future, and Russia somewhat stopped blackmailing Ukraine, which gave the strange impression of improved relations between the two countries.

At the beginning of January 2009, a second Russian-Ukrainian gas war broke out and Russia stopped supplying natural gas to Europe altogether. After Tymoshenko’s unilateral decision on the gas issue with Vladimir Putin, on January 19, 2009 Naftogaz of Ukraine and Gazprom signed gas contracts on gas purchase at USD 450 and transit rate of USD 17. This is how Ukraine got a new gas contract with Russia, and passions between the two states subsided for a while.

In late 2012 - early 2013, Russia proposed that Ukraine join the Customs Union (CU) of the EurAsEC as a full member, arguing that it would benefit economically, in particular from the supply of Russian energy at lower prices. However, so far there is a consensus among the Ukrainian elite about the necessity of integration into the European Union and joining the corresponding free trade zone. All Ukrainian parliamentary parties (excluding the Communists) opposed Ukraine’s accession to the CU, supporting the course of European integration.

In parallel with the gas diktat and blackmail, the Kremlin put forward a number of geopolitical and military-political ones, such as: limiting cooperation with the EU, preventing NATO from receiving MAPs, preferences for its own goods in trade relations, “protection” of the Russian language, strengthening its military beachhead in Crimea, etc.

Russia offered Kyiv full membership in the CU and was ready to provide Ukraine with \$15 billion in direct financial aid, loans, and other preferences. Ukraine was also promised a substantial reduction in the price of Russian gas, which was to bring additional several billion dollars to its budget. Besides, Russia offered some well-known Ukrainian businessmen to take part in what they called “very profitable projects” which should make the business community financially interested in rapprochement with Russia rather than with the European Union.

In this way, the Russian leadership forced Yanukovich to abandon the course of European and Euro-Atlantic integration and implement an anti-Ukrainian humanitarian policy. The main goal was to return Ukraine to the bosom of Russia forever, keeping it under the influence of the Russian Federation and destroying the Ukrainian identity. This meant russification of Ukraine, which became part of the “Russian world” with no chance of maintaining an independent, autonomous state.

Yanukovich and his government purposefully strengthened the Russian military contingent in Crimea by their actions during 2010-2013. According to the Kharkov agreements signed by him on April 24, 2010, the number of Russian troops in Crimea was doubled, and FSB officers were officially allowed to work there.

The next stage of the political confrontation and crisis in Ukrainian-Russian relations was the events of 2013-2014. A week before the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius (November 21, 2013), where Ukraine was to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, Yanukovich announced the suspension of preparations for the conclusion of this agreement. This decision sparked a wave of protests in Kyiv and other major Ukrainian cities. The forceful destruction of the opposition’s tent city in the center of Kyiv on the night of November 30 radically strengthened the anti-presidential nature of the protest action.

The main factors behind the protests were the high level of social injustice, enormous polarization of incomes and living standards of Ukrainian citizens, and rampant corruption that permeated all structural components of Ukraine’s political system, including the judiciary and law enforcement agencies. A detailed analysis of the economic and domestic political situation in Ukraine during this period is given in the publications (Azarov, 2015) and others (Allison, 2014; Raik, 2019).

After the dispersal of a peaceful rally of students and civic activists on November 30, 2013, a spontaneous rally arose on Mykhailivska Square. The leaders of the three opposition parties: V. Klitschko, Tyahnybok, and Yatsenyuk announced a decision to establish a National Resistance Headquarters. From the very beginning of the confrontation, the protesters chose a course for peaceful protests.

Though, the attempt to draw the protesters into an aggressive confrontation with the law enforcement forces during the storming of the Presidential Administration on December 1 was unsuccessful: the protesters did not join the storming, and opposition deputies and protest leaders shielded the protesters from the law enforcement forces with their bodies.

After the events of December 1, the power contact, although it took place, but more and more passed into a civilized channel and had a local

nature. At the same time, the authorities tried to imitate “popular support” for the course of the government and the President by bringing people to the “Anti-Maidan” - paid rallies held under the flags of the Party of Regions.

The events in Kyiv on February 18-20, 2014, were a dramatic phase of the Revolution of Dignity, during which about a hundred protesters were killed. On February 21, opposition leaders signed with Yanukovych an Agreement on the Settlement of the Political Crisis in Ukraine. It provided for a return to the 2004 constitution, i.e., a parliamentary-presidential form of government, the formation of a “government of national trust”, constitutional reform and early presidential elections by the end of that year, as well as the withdrawal of law enforcement forces from downtown Kiev, an end to violence, and the surrender of weapons by the opposition (Kudelia, 2014).

But his signing was not welcomed by the people on the Maidan: the demonstrators demanded that the president resign. On the morning of February 22, Yanukovych fled Kiev. On 22 February, the Verkhovna Rada upheld a resolution on Yanukovych’s self-removal from the presidency. On 23 February, Turchynov was appointed acting president.

Since the beginning of the next stage of confrontation and crisis between Ukraine and Russia on February 27, 2014 to the conclusion of the Minsk Protocol “on the cessation of the use of weapons” we will distinguish 3 stages: 1) forceful seizure by Russian special forces of the premises of the Verkhovna Rada and the government of Crimea, holding a pseudo-referendum on March 16, 2014 on the accession of the peninsula to the Russian Federation and the incorporation of Crimea into Russia; 2) April 2014 - proclamation of the illegitimate “Donetsk People’s Republic” (April 7, 2014) and the “Luhansk People’s Republic” (April 27, 2014), holding bogus referendums during May on their separation from Ukraine; 3) August 27, 2014, when the mass invasion of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by regular units of the Russian Armed Forces, including those that were part of the 9th Independent Motorized Rifle Brigade, 76th and 98th Airborne Division (Vasilenko, 2014: 31-32).

Let us briefly review the main developments in all of these stages. On February 23, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine ratified the law “On the foundations of state language policy” of July 3, 2012, which, among other things, guaranteed the official use of the so-called “regional languages” on a par with the state language in Ukraine. This means languages which, according to the population census, are considered native languages by more than 10% of the population of the respective region.

Protests in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts turned into armed confrontation, and the slogans of federalization of Ukraine changed to demands for regional independence (Biersack and O’Lear, 2014; Kulyk,

2019; Matveeva, 2016; Nagashima, 2019; Richey, 2018; Official Statement, 2014; Zhukov, 2016).

In February and March 2014, the executive authorities of Sevastopol and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) refused to recognize the legitimacy of the new Ukrainian government. Protests by the local, mostly Russian-speaking population against the actions of the central authorities to replace these authorities began. On March 1, Russian President V. Putin submitted an appeal to the Federation Council “On the Use of Russian Federation Troops in Ukraine” (Administration President of Russia, 2014; Kuzio, 2015; Laruelle, 2016). On the same day, the Council of the Russian Federation unanimously granted the president this authority.

On March 16, the new local authorities in Crimea and Sevastopol organized and held a referendum, despite attempts of opposition from the Ukrainian authorities and pressure from Western countries. The population was asked to answer the question about the possibility of seceding from Ukraine and becoming a part of Russia. On March 17, based on the results of the referendum and the Declaration of Independence adopted on March 11, the sovereign Republic of Crimea was proclaimed, which included Sevastopol as a city with a special status.

On March 18, 2014 in the Kremlin there was signed an agreement on the admission of the Republic of Crimea to Russia. Russia explained its position on the Crimean issue by protecting the local population and trying to bring peace and harmony to this land (Newsti, 2014).

In response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the European Union, and the United States enacted the provisions of the first set of sanctions against Russia. These measures were aimed at freezing various assets, imposing visa restrictions for the persons included in the special lists, and at the same time prohibiting the business entities of the states that had joined the sanctions to continue maintaining business and other relations with the individuals and enterprises included in these lists.

In addition to such restrictions, avoidance of contacts and cooperation with the Russian Federation and Russian enterprises and organizations regardless of the sphere of cooperation was also initiated.

About events in the east of Ukraine, then under the pretext of holding “referendums” there in April 2014 and to support illegal territorial formations, Russian reconnaissance and sabotage groups, paramilitary formations of Russian Cossacks, manned by Chechens - citizens of the Russian Federation (battalion “Vostok”), armed groups of mercenaries “Russian sector” and “Oplot” were exiled to the territory of Ukraine. It was with their participation that administrative buildings in many populated areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were raided, and attacks were carried

out against Ukrainian Ground Forces units and Ukrainian Air Force aircraft.

On April 17, 2014, quadrilateral negotiations on de-escalation of the conflict in Ukraine were held in Geneva with participation of the highest diplomatic representatives of Ukraine, the EU, the USA and Russia. Subsequently, Russia joined the talks in the Normandy Quartet format, during which the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis was discussed. An important step in this format was the meeting of the leaders of Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine in Minsk on February 11-12, 2015.

The first is a set of actions aimed at implementing the Minsk agreements to resolve the situation in eastern Ukraine. In addition to the actual cessation of shelling and the disengagement by both sides of all heavy weapons from 50 to 140 kilometers to form a security zone. Another document was the Declaration on Supporting the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements, adopted by the Normandy quartet leaders.

However, the signing of the February 12, 2015, Minsk documents did not stop the fighting or the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine. It is possible that they were the result of behind-the-scenes agreements between the top leadership of Ukraine, Russia, and leading Western countries.

According to the UN, from April 2014 to July 2016 alone, more than 10,000 people were killed and more than 23,000 injured in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (BBC News, 2019; Coupé and Obrizan, 2016; Malyarenko and Wolff, 2018; Sotiriou, 2016; Stebelsky, 2018; Wilson, 2016).

As a follow-up to the above, research (Shcherbak, 2016) on thoughts about the further development of interstate events is interesting, which carries a certain degree of sensitivity and doubt, which is confirmed by the number of respondents (Ukrainian and Polish citizens) who hesitate in choosing a particular scenario of developments in relations between Ukraine and Russia, with almost a third of foreigners

3. Discussion

Feeling a loss of control over Ukraine, Putin turned to armed aggression. This is how Russia's armed attack on Ukraine should be qualified, despite the fact that for a certain period the Russian Federation used its armed forces covertly. Its main purpose was to test the readiness and ability of Western democracies to resist the forceful methods of implementation of Russia's revanchist plans.

Significant socio-economic problems in Russia and Ukraine, the corrupt nature of government, and the growing social divide have led to an increase in destructive thinking, under the influence of which there have been calls

for the destruction of the existing order of things to one degree or another. In this situation the ideology of the “Russian world” turned out to be one of the most significant in the Russian socio-political space.

The identity crisis, as well as the acute stage of Russian nationalism, will remain a knotty problem of ethno-political processes in the post-Soviet space in the future. It will be the basis of Russian-Ukrainian relations for decades to come, and, given the borderline nature of the territory of Ukraine, of world political processes as well.

As the Russian opposition politician G. Kasparov notes, the idea of the “Russian world” has become too ephemeral, it has not captured anyone, it is an attempt to maintain a state of manic delirium in society.

In the opinion of the Ukrainian political publicist and journalist V. Portnikov “Ukraine wants to ward off this very thing that destroys everything, inhuman discord - the essence” of the Russian world “and the Moscow Patriarchate” (Portnikov, 2015), and Tomenko notes that the “Russian world” is not just harmful to national interests, it eliminates the very meaning of the existence of the Ukrainian state (Tomenko, 2011).

Analysis of recent events shows that the aggravation of social confrontation occurs mainly through the cultural decay of society, which leads to the archaization of mass consciousness, creating conditions that cast society into a state of social and cultural archaicism.

It is urgent to create a modern research structure that would systematically study and analyze the current dynamics of doctrines like the “Russian world”. Because this is a matter of national security and the key to further development.

Thus, Russia’s inability to recognize Ukraine as a full-fledged international actor not so much on the legal as on the substantive level, the desire to restore and consolidate relations according to the scheme “center-periphery” forms a negative attitude to rapprochement with Russia, conditioning its perception as an existential threat to international subjectivity of Ukraine.

At the same time, maintaining a certain distance in relations with Russia, which would guarantee Ukraine the preservation of its political sovereignty, lies at the core of its foreign policy identity and determines the process of further formation and filling with concrete “social” content, relying on the political formula “Ukraine is not Russia”. It is this aspect of Ukrainian-Russian relations that can be considered a certain constant of intersection of all its key issues in the process of formation of the foreign and domestic political agenda of Ukraine’s identity, as well as the point of.

Conclusion

The events in Ukraine not only provoked the strongest confrontation between the two largest states of the post-Soviet space, but also exposed a number of problems in the entire international security system.

The Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated a significant political divide between Russia and the West. It became a kind of marker of how great the differences are in the perception of nation-building, territorial problems, the search for integration models, regional and global leadership, and the distribution of responsibilities of the leading actors in international politics. A fundamentally new page was opened in the contradictions between Russia, on the one hand, and the United States, NATO and the European Union, on the other.

The armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine was accompanied by numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. The competent state authorities should calculate the amount of material and moral damage caused by Russia.

Under the temporary occupation of two southern regions of Ukraine, Russia is pursuing a policy aimed at destroying the Ukrainian common civic identity, marginalizing and gradually replacing the ethnic Ukrainian identity with the Russian identity. Now Ukraine has established the Ministry for Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, which ensures formation and implementation of the state policy on the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions and AR Crimea and Sevastopol, as well as adjacent territories.

Instead, Ukraine, its authorities need to develop a national comprehensive strategy for the liberation of the occupied territories, which would include socio-economic, humanitarian, diplomatic, informational, as well as military components and should have several possible forecasts (both positive and negative) of the development and consequences of future events.

In particular, it is necessary to continue to implement Ukraine's international agreements on the implementation of democratic standards in the context of the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU, especially in the context of overcoming corruption and improving the material well-being of Ukrainian; develop and adopt appropriate regulatory documents aimed at the reintegration of temporarily occupied territories (Donbass and Crimea) to counter the ideas of the "Russian world" to create their own national information project "Great Ukraine", "Ukrainian World", etc.), aimed at consolidation of Ukrainian society; prepare and implement effective state programs for the integration of refugees from the east of Ukraine and Crimea into Ukrainian society; conduct a wide information

and educational campaign to popularize Ukrainian history, in particular the history and culture of the southeastern regions of Ukraine, including Crimea, among all categories of the population.

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