

July 2014

Position Paper II

Crisis Management in Europe in the Context of Events in Ukraine

Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe

About the Task Force

The Task Force brings forward proposals to allow all countries of the region to decisively break with the costly legacy of the Cold War and focus more effectively on meeting the emerging political, economic, and security challenges of the 21st century. It addresses the causes of current levels of mistrust between key countries and actors in the region, has trust-building as a central theme in its deliberations, and sets out a rationale and vision for a cooperative Greater Europe and a range of practical steps necessary to move the international relations of the continent in that direction.

The Task Force is supported by, and draws on, independent analytical work by the European Leadership Network (ELN), the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), and the International Strategic Research Organisation in Ankara (USAK).

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Updates on project activities will be placed on the ELN, PISM, RIAC and USAK websites at the following addresses: www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org; www.pism.pl; www.russiancouncil.ru; www.usak.org.tr.

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CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN EUROPE IN THE CONTEXT OF EVENTS IN UKRAINE

1. Introduction

In a previous paper, this Task Force argued that if Europeans did not begin pursuing a new, Greater European cooperative project, then divisions between the EU and Russia over Ukraine and between NATO and Russia on other issues could create a new period of confrontation in Europe.¹

That fear has now, sadly, become a reality.

As a result, while we believe the goal of a cooperative Greater Europe is still worth pursuing in the long-term, the circumstances now make it much harder to envision. If the goal is to have any validity and credibility in future, the road to its attainment must start with managing the current crisis effectively.

In this paper, we set out measures aimed at stabilising and improving the international environment within which the current crisis is taking place. In doing so, we address the minimum conditions necessary for any notion of wider and deeper cooperation between Russia and the West to be treated seriously in future.

2. The current crisis and its inherent dangers for all participants

It is a statement of the obvious that Russian and Western perspectives on the crisis in Ukraine are divergent. But the tragedy involving the Malaysian aircraft in the airspace above Ukraine has highlighted just how dangerous current circumstances are and the potential for the crisis to escalate further still.

In recent weeks, a cycle of bitter accusation and counter-accusation and stalled diplomatic initiatives has contributed to the worsened atmosphere.

Russian military forces have been stationed near and have exercised close to Ukraine's borders. NATO has announced additional force deployments in Eastern Europe.

The situation inside Ukraine remains highly volatile, with the level of violence escalating, evidence of armed militias operating on both sides, and increasing signs that populations in both east and west are being radicalised.

¹ It's time to pursue a cooperative Greater Europe. Task force position paper, January 30, 2014. http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/it-is-time-to-pursue-a-cooperative-greater-europe_1167.html

In this context, we of course recognise and welcome the efforts of OSCE negotiators and others to reach some sort of negotiated settlement. We remain deeply concerned, however, that the situation on the ground may yet escalate, putting the security of everyone in Ukraine, and Europe, at risk.

To avoid this outcome we urge all sides to recognise some of the potential costs and inherent dangers in the current situation. We also urge policy-makers to remember some of the basic lessons of crisis management learned during the Cold War.

3. Limits to the effectiveness of unilateral action by outside actors

An important place to start is in recognition that while the main international parties to the crisis have policy options they could pursue unilaterally, all such options have severe limits to their likely effectiveness and have substantial costs associated with them in practice.

There has been much Western speculation, for example, about Russia exercising a direct military intervention option in eastern Ukraine. Such an intervention is of course theoretically possible, though its intention is heavily disputed by the Russian signatories to this document and by the Russian government in Moscow. Such an intervention, even if it were to take place, would present very significant and potentially serious consequences for Russia itself. It would disrupt major economic ties between Ukraine and Russia; there would most likely be refugee flows to handle; and since many in Ukraine would blame Russia for inciting separatism it would also most likely mean a Ukraine that was hostile to Russia for the long-term.

Far more significant EU/US Sanctions on Russia on the other hand are possible and many of the non-Russian signatories to this document have not only supported their introduction but support their further strengthening. Such sanctions may well inflict costs on the Russian economy. But all signatories to this document also recognise that wider sanctions could have a negative effect on the economies of several EU countries too. There is also wide recognition that such measures could further incite more nationalist opinion in Russia and could harden pro-Russian opinion in eastern Ukraine, worsening the crisis there.

In addition, neither Russia nor the EU has the resources or capacity to unilaterally bail-out the Ukrainian economy and support its transformation to a fully functioning state. It would be less costly and better for all, including for Ukraine, if a way could be found to integrate its economy with both that of Russia and of the EU.

Whatever our disagreements on other issues, the lesson the signatories to this document draw from all this is that none of the unilateral measures available to any of the parties are

optimal as a way forward. If a more cooperative solution could be found on terms acceptable to all, that would be preferable.

Within Ukraine, it is now important that the OSCE negotiation process is supported and respected by all sides. Internationally, however, while this negotiation process is ongoing, we need additional measures to create an external environment capable of being an aid to, and not a problem for, those negotiations. We also need to take steps to ensure there are no unintended escalations in the crisis.

4. The Inadequacy of current NATO/EU – Russia Crisis Management Arrangements

This latter concern is a major one because both NATO-Russia and EU-Russia crisis management arrangements are inadequate. The NATO-Russia Council has barely met since the crisis in Ukraine erupted. Despite recent phone contact between senior Russian and NATO military officials, there are also currently few, if any, effective exchanges of information on military deployments in the Euro-Atlantic region. EU-Russia crisis management arrangements also do not exist.

This is a particularly worrying situation given recent incidents both in the Black Sea and in Slavyansk in eastern Ukraine. In the former, a Russian military aircraft and a US warship came into very close proximity. In the latter, forces on the ground seized international military observers and held them for several days, increasing the chances that external actors might be drawn into events in an unintended and unplanned way.

5. Crisis Management Recommendations

We therefore call upon NATO, the EU and Russia, to:

- Exercise full military and political restraint and to take steps to encourage and ensure the military and political restraint of all of their relevant allies and partners in the wider region;
- Embrace increased military to military communication, information exchange and transparency measures in the interests of all and;
- Engage in direct dialogue with each other as an accompaniment to dialogue between the parties inside Ukraine and between Ukrainian parties and other actors outside the country.

We develop each of these suggestions in more detail below.

5.1 Crisis Management through the Exercise of Military and Political Restraint

The incidents in the Black Sea and Slovyansk illustrate, in their different ways, the potential for a loss of control of events on the ground and the potential for an unintended escalation in the crisis. To avoid this, political leaders on all sides should review their military rules of engagement and ensure clear guidance in favour of restraint is passed through the military chain of command.

In addition, political leaders in the entire Euro-Atlantic region must remember and recognise that Ukraine is not the only potential flash-point in Russia-West relations. There are unresolved conflicts surrounding Moldova/Transdnistria; Georgia/South Ossetia/Abkhazia; and Armenia/Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh.

It is in no-one's interest that one or more of these should erupt, adding a new dimension to the current crisis. NATO and its members, the EU and Russia must therefore not only exercise maximum restraint in their own policies and activities in relation to each of these disputes but must be alert to, and use all their influence to avoid, any of the local actors involved taking steps that could trigger an unintended escalation or widening of current tensions between Russia and the West.

This will require a high-level of attentiveness and political leadership with regard to policies in the shared neighbourhood and clear messaging about the need for restraint to all local political and military leaders and other relevant actors on the ground.

5.2 Crisis Management through Improved Military to Military Communication and Transparency

In the wake of the crisis in Ukraine the level of military suspicion and fear in Europe has increased. We believe we also urgently need to address this in a way that both reassures NATO countries and others about Russian intentions and that similarly addresses Russian concerns over NATO. Measures that enhance military transparency, predictability and stability are vital. Such measures can reinforce the independence and support the interests of all states in the Euro-Atlantic region. We therefore urge all sides participating in the Vienna Document process to support increases to the evaluation visit quota and to consider introducing regional military liaison missions - that is, reciprocal agreements between nations that would permit small numbers of officers to monitor activities in defined regions in the Euro-Atlantic area. Additional information exchanges and data on activities of military forces out of garrison, as well as clarity on the deployment of forces would also be welcome.

In the context of the current crisis, such measures would help take off the table any fear of a short warning military attack by one party on another. There are few measures that could contribute more to increased stability in current circumstances.

5.3 Crisis Management through Dialogue

It is also important that NATO, the EU and Russia should engage in wider dialogue. One does not have to believe that business as usual is possible to think that this is necessary.

The NATO-Russia Council should meet more frequently, not less, given current circumstances.

Beyond that, there is a need for a fundamental dialogue on issues at the heart of the Helsinki Final Act. It is clear that on issues related to national sovereignty and the right to intervene on the one hand and on matters of territorial integrity and the right to secede on the other, a chasm of differing interpretations and understandings has opened up between Russia and the West. This needs to be discussed and debated seriously. If it is too difficult to address this in formal diplomatic channels at the moment then the leaderships of all relevant parties should support robust Track II activities to ensure serious dialogue takes place.

In addition, and as noted earlier, it seems clear that Ukraine's economy is ultimately going to have to be helped by, and integrated with, the economies of both the EU and Russia. Given this reality, the EU and Russia should continue a quiet dialogue on the future creation of a possible common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok. As we said in our initial Task Force paper, we believe this idea can be complimentary to, and not in conflict with, both the idea of a Eurasian Union on the one hand and a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership on the other. We know we are a long way from seeing such a common economic space today but there is no reason why detailed technical work on this issue should not continue, to allow quick movement in this direction should the political environment improve.

The road to overcoming the current crisis also goes through dialogue on the common concerns of all sides. Dialogue can itself be achieved by better addressing the need to respect and protect fundamental human and minority rights. It has been clear from the very beginning that concerns over violations of fundamental human and minority rights have been a driver of the crisis in Ukraine, and have featured as an element of disagreement between Russia and the West. We therefore urge all sides to display more sensitivity to, and respect for, basic human and minority rights in the context of the international frameworks and agreements to which all relevant parties are signatories.

6. Containing the Damage: Continuing cooperation in other important areas.

Finally, we believe it is important that the damage from this crisis be contained. Despite the seriousness of the disagreements over Ukraine, (and none of us doubts just how serious these are), both Russia and the West have important shared interests and it must be remembered that even during the Cold War the parties were able to make agreements to manage and contain the confrontation between them.

If the long-term goal of building a cooperative Greater Europe is to be resuscitated from the near death experience the current crisis represents, we must work to achieve something similar again.

Cooperation on Afghanistan remains important, both before and after the major part of the ISAF has departed the country. Cooperation on the Iranian nuclear programme in the context of the E3+3 framework is also vital. Beyond that, Russia the EU and NATO must find ways to work together on countering radicalism and terrorism in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East as well as in Central Asia. None of these pressing 21st century challenges is going to go away. The current division between NATO, the EU and Russia will only increase economic costs to, and potentially damage the ability of, all sides to respond to other 21st century threats effectively. No matter how difficult the task, it is in all our interests to at least strive for a future that avoids that outcome.

Signed

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