

**Committee:** Disarmament Committee

**Issue:** Measures to decrease the rising tension in Eastern Ukraine

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### **Introduction**

Ukraine plays an important role being a link between Western and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea, at its South is the main access route to the Mediterranean area. Pipelines providing Western Europe with Russian gas were built across Ukraine.

The country had very mutable borders during the centuries. The country has been under partial or total Russian rule for centuries, which is a big part of why one in six Ukrainians is actually an ethnic Russian, one in three speaks Russian as their native language (the other two-thirds speak Ukrainian natively), and much of the country's media is in Russian. It's also why the subject of Russia is such a divisive one in Ukraine: a lot of the country sees Moscow as the source of Ukraine's historical subjugation and something to be resisted, while others tend to look on Russia more fondly, with a sense of shared heritage and history.

Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union until 1991, and since then has been a less-than-perfect democracy with a very weak economy and foreign policy that wavers between pro-Russian and pro-European.

The conflict began as an internal Ukrainian crisis in November 2013, when President Viktor Yanukovich rejected a deal for greater integration with the European Union, sparking mass protests, which Yanukovich attempted to put down violently. Russia backed Yanukovich in the crisis, while the US and Europe supported the protesters. Among these anti-Russian, anti-Jewish, anti-Polish and anti-Tatar militant groups. <http://georgiagreenparty.org/us-funded-neo-nazis-in-ukraine-mentor-us-white-supremacists>



[https://www.salon.com/2014/02/25/is the us backing neo nazis in ukraine partner](https://www.salon.com/2014/02/25/is_the_us_backing_neo_nazis_in_ukraine_partner)

In February 2014, anti-government protests toppled the government and ran Yanukovich out of the country.

The new government, which included different right wing extremists, passed different laws discriminating the minorities (language policy against Russians, Hungarians, Tatars, removal of monuments). At the same time aggression against Russian speaking Ukrainians and citizens of other minorities were committed. Rightwing extremist militant groups were integrated into the police forces and allowed to control the territory. From the beginning of March 2014, protests by pro-Russian and anti-government groups took place in the Donetsk and Luhansk districts of Ukraine, commonly collectively called the "Donbass". These demonstrations, which followed the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation (February to March 2014), and which were part of a wider group of concurrent pro-Russian protests across southern and eastern Ukraine, escalated into an armed conflict between the separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR respectively), and the Ukrainian government. The attempt to reconquer the territory by the Ukrainian army and private militias, as the "Azov" battalion did not succeed and the result was the loss of about 10.000 lives (soldiers, militants and civilians) and the displacement of 800.000 people. Russia, trying to salvage its lost influence in Ukraine, invaded and annexed Crimea, a region which had been integrated into Ukraine in 1954 in violation of the USSR constitution. The rebels are accused to have shot down Malaysian Airlines flight 17 on July 17, killing 298 people, probably accidentally. Fighting between the rebels and the Ukrainian military intensified, the rebels started losing, and, in August, the Russian army is accused by western media to have invaded eastern Ukraine to support the rebels. This has all brought the relationship between Russia and the West to its lowest point since the Cold War. Sanctions are intended to make pressure on the Russian economy.

### **International context**

The end of the cold war led to a détente which saw the withdrawal of the soviet union military forces from the Warsaw pact countries. This was due to the promises by the NATO leaders that NATO would not have been present in the former Warsaw pact member states.

[https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early#\\_ednref12](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early#_ednref12)

This did not happen: from 1999 to 2018 13 of these states joined NATO.

## NATO, RUSSIA AND THE WARSAW PACT

1990

■ NATO countries  
■ Warsaw Pact countries



2015

■ NATO countries  
■ Russia



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The eastward push is considered as a menace by the Russian government.

Another aspect, surely not appealing for the Russian government, is the progressive movement of NATO bases to the East: President Putin feels “threatened” by the Organisation’s troops slowly but surely heading to the borders of Russia thanks to a progressive “westernisation” of Ukraine.

### D) The question of the rising tension in Eastern Ukraine

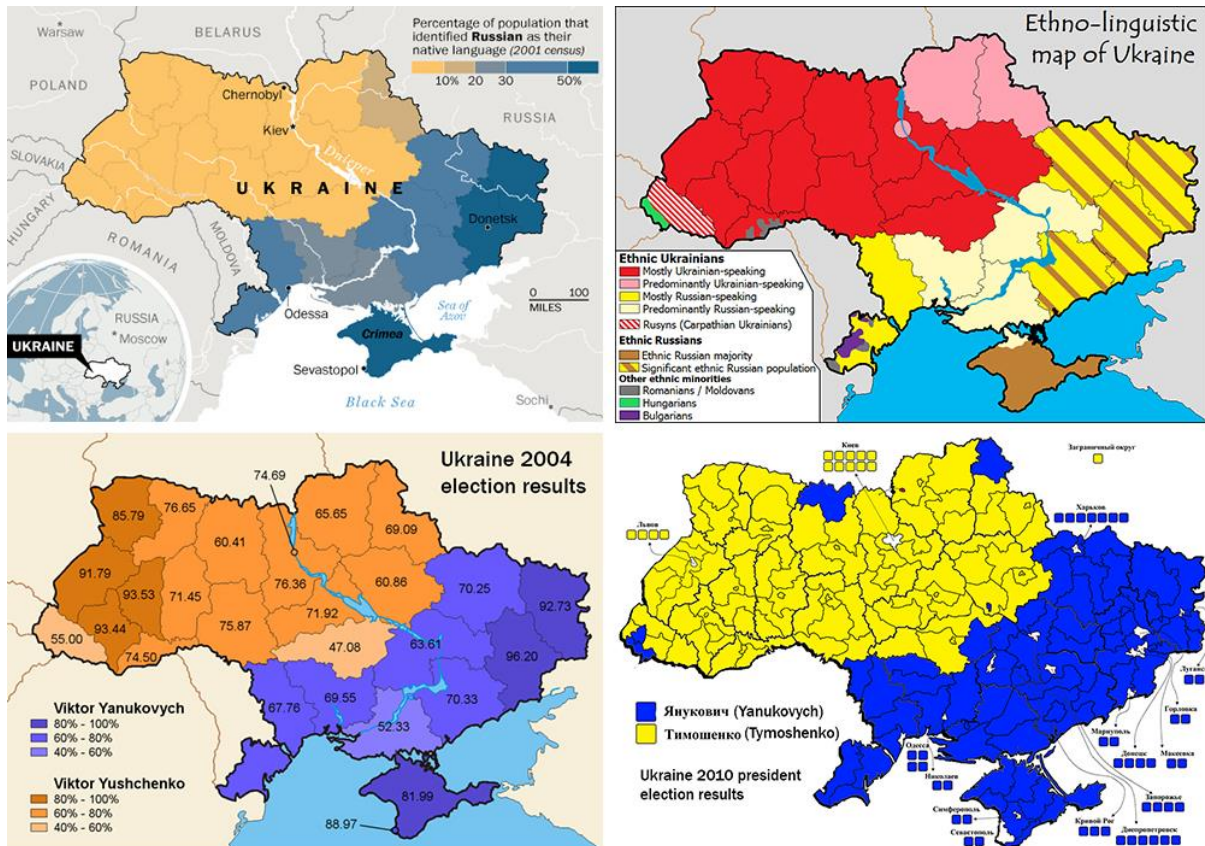
#### Ukrainian Revolution and its aftermath

The Ukrainian Revolution, dating back to 2013, demanded closer relations with the European Union through the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement between the EU, Euratom, Ukraine and

the 28 EU's member states. As an aftermath of the coup, an interim government was established, new elections were held and the 2004 constitution was restored.

### Beginning of the conflict

Following the flight of President Yanukovich in February 2014 and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula as demanded with a local referendum, Vladimir Putin declared his wish to protect the rights of Russian citizens in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.



Friction between pro-Russian and pro-European started with the seizure of the office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs without resistance in Donetsk. By mid-April 2014, pro-Russian separatists had already taken control of many governative buildings in the cities of Mariupol, Horlivka, and Sloviansk, starting to expand their control in the oblast. The regional state television was targeted as well, falling into the militants' hands at the end of April and starting to broadcast Russian television channels. By this time, politicians had planned to solve the crisis in 48 hours through negotiations or eventually recurring to force, but this was not possible. The Ukrainian Prime Minister offered amnesty to surrendering separatists, but said that "there was a limit" to the government's tolerance.

The control by separatists significantly expanded as militants attempted and managed to seize police headquarters, administration buildings and weapons and firearms warehouses in the battles of Kramatorsk, Horlivka and Mariupol. Turchynov consequently launched a strong military counter-offensive against the insurgents.

A season of continuous attacks opened, during which Ukrainian troops and demonstrators were killed or injured due to toxic gases and military operations.



In this first phase of the conflict, tortures and murders were often used as “excuses” to respond to the opposite party and continue the violence.

#### Local Autonomy Referendum and its aftermath

On 12 May, Igor Girkin, the Donbass People’s Militia leader, declared himself the “Supreme Commander” of the DPR with a decree also demanding complete allegiance to him by all operatives and the immediate destruction of all remaining Ukrainian forces. The martial law was then declare both in DPR and LPR. A so-called “Peace March” was held in Donetsk city, some vehicles were attacked by separatists and an armed attack followed. Violence continued its escalation, with successful airstrikes, sieges and battles.

#### **Minsk Protocol**

The Minsk Protocol was signed on 5 September 2014 by representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the DPR and the LPR, together with a Swiss diplomat, former president of Ukraine and the Russian ambassador to Ukraine, after talks organised by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This agreement was supposed to halt the War in Donbass, but failed.



The operative points of the protocol demanded an immediate bilateral ceasefire and its monitoring by the OSCE, the permanent monitoring of Ukrainian-Russian border, the immediate release of all hostages and illegally detained persons, the inclusive national dialogue, the humanitarian aid in Donbass and the implementation of an economic recovery programme for the region.

All European countries show cautious optimism and supported Ukraine throughout the whole process with €11 billion, also funding humanitarian aid with €95 million. Ukraine has also received a total of €15.5 billion from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

## **2015 escalation**

Following New Year's Day, numerous ceasefire violations were recorded, plunging Ukraine back in the conflict. Donetsk International Airport was captured on 15 January, the first step to regain the territories lost by the separatists to Ukrainian forces. Since the beginning of 2015, other countries such as France and Germany have been attempting to stop the violences through the Minsk Accords, but imposed ceasefires repeatedly failed. After months of ceasefire violations, all parties agreed to halt all fightings: the new ceasefire started on 1 September 2015, coinciding with the beginning of the school year. It held into 2016, though with minor breakouts on the border.

## **II) Key Nations, NGOs and UN organizations**

### **DPR and LPR**

Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic are two declared proto-states partially recognised by neighbouring countries and entities, such as South Ossetia. The two states remain unrecognised by the UN, though some countries recognise documents issued by the local governments. Ukrainian authorities refer to the two proto-states as "temporarily occupied states", in particular the LPR is considered a "terrorist organisation" by Kiev's government.



Both DPR and LPR are situated in the historical region of Donbass and were annexed to Ukraine in 1922, though the majority of the population speaks Russian as their first language. These people have often been target of discrimination, because of their links with Russia. Though the Ukrainian population generally has a positive view regarding Russian relations, a minority of the nationalist group still grow a strong anti-Russian sentiment.



Their independence was declared in the spring of 2014, after a month-long protest following the coup d'état against the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich.

DPR and LPR armed groups are composed of trained military personnel commanded by Igor Girkin, a pro-Russian rebel. They are demanding independence from Ukraine as they do not agree with Kiev's Western-leaning policies, in order to unify the two Republics in a new state called "Novorussiya".

### **The Russian Federation**

As stated by the Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, "it's the West, and not Russia, that was guilty of destabilising Ukraine, whereas Russia is doing all its best to promote stability in the country".

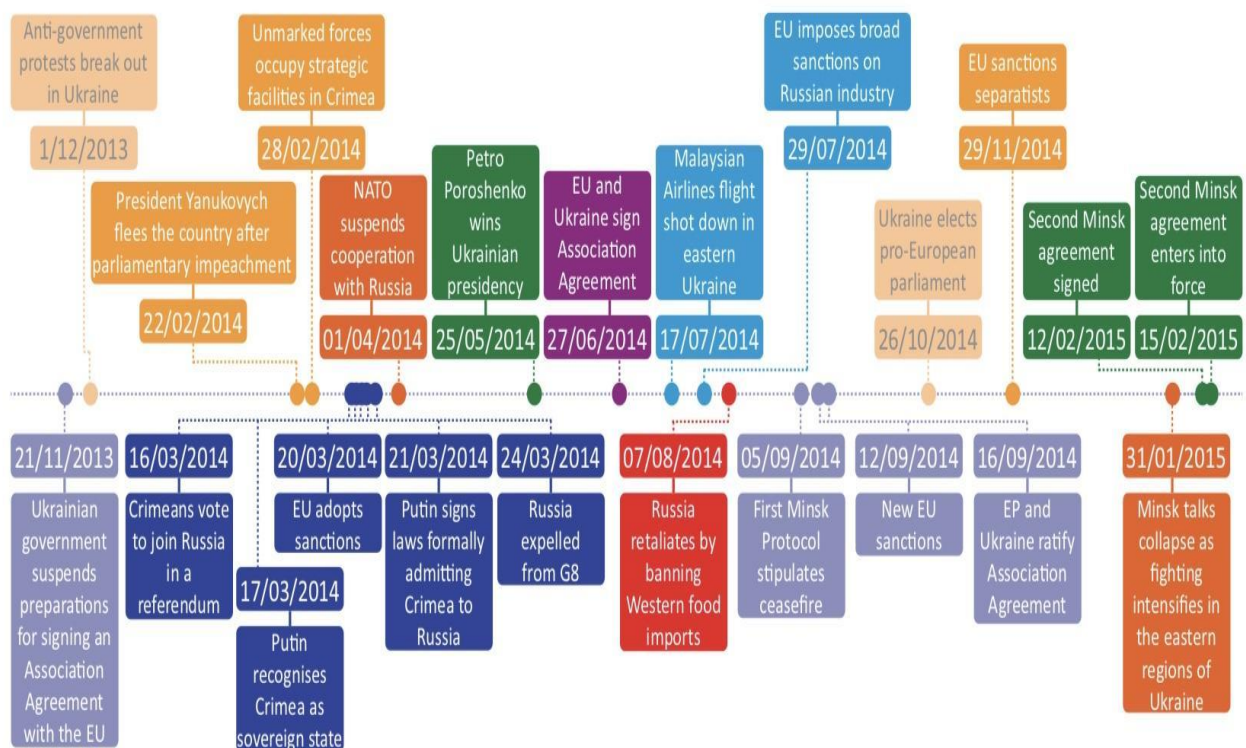
Russia's strategic problem, though, is not the conflict itself, but Ukraine's Western orientation and EU expansion. Putin is not giving direct orders, he is turning a blind eye and has probably been providing the separatist with missiles and weapons used to shoot multiple aircrafts.

### The United States of America

The US is supporting Ukraine against Russia-backed separatists, funding Ukrainian naval and air forces. The Trump administration has contributed to the conflict, imposing sanctions on companies and individuals and selling anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. The total amount of aid provided by the USA since the beginning of the conflict has raised to \$1 billion dollars with the most recent announcements from the Department of Defense.

The US's and Russian delegations at the UN have very different views on the role of UN Peacekeeping Forces in the crisis.

### III) Key events



### IV) Possible solutions

The obstacles to an effective ceasefire and stabilisation of the country are mainly represented by:

- the unwillingness on the part of separatist to accept the conditions set by other parties,
- the determination the government of Ukraine to impose its power on the disputed territories due to the
- fact that it doesn't dispose of reliable armed forces
- a lack of unity and coherent authority in the separatist movement.

The only possible solution would be to call for the UN to intervene as an intermediary in the conflict: creating a relatively small international contingent independent from NATO troops to control borders would be a suitable guarantee to Russia and Ukraine. New elections should be called for by the UN, setting also the degree of control of both Russian and Ukrainian governments.

There is the need of efforts to be made to relaunch the Ukrainian economy

## V) Key terms or useful links

### Ceasefire

An agreement, usually between two armies, to stop fighting in order to allow discussions about peace. This suspension of active hostilities should have specific characteristics, in order to actually implement peace-making: precision about the geography and the time of the ceasefire, specific actions permitted and designated organisations and no room for free “interpretation”.

### Force

Military strength, a body (as of troops or ships) assigned to a military purpose; a body of persons or things available for a particular end; an individual or group having the power of effective action; violence, compulsion, or constraint exerted upon or against a person or thing.

**Forces, plural:** the whole military strength (as of a nation).

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