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The EU involvement in Ukrainian affairs

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Reflecting upon horrible consequences of crisis in Ukraine, we were wondering if European Union ought not only to express its concern over democracy and humanity in verbally but also actually pursue implementation thereof in practice?

Within recent several months, Ukraine has faced perils that have not only jeopardized its sovereignty as an actor of international relations but might also affect regional (if not international) peace and security, which could claim involvement of other actors including the EU. The Antiterrorist Operation waged in Southeastern part of the country that has already claimed lives of hundreds of people, as well as major geopolitical shifts, that became unexpected for many, are outcomes of previously obscured issues. Almost a year ago no one could possibly have imagined that tragic events of such scope will be unfolding in Ukraine – one of very few countries that was able to avoid bloody ethnic conflicts on the entire post-Soviet space. Even if anyone did predict possible outbreak of violence it was Ukraine`s west not east, where it might have taken place. Grave economic crisis that Ukraine has found itself to be in aroused matters of energy security that for years have been vital for both foreign and domestic political development. Therefore, a broad array of challenges that newly elected president P. Poroshenko will have to face in the most imminent future have gained additional acuteness.

Undoubtedly, above-mentioned outcomes that have to a substantial degree put Ukraine to the brink of collapse (both economic and preservation of statehood) are a

constellation of events. Current crisis has also been triggered by reckless, highly irresponsible and openly unpatriotic activities that subsequent presidential administrations have been conducting since Ukraine gained its long-desired independence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It has also had much to do with the fact that the overall level of development of civil society, intellectual and diplomatic elites in Ukraine has remained extremely low and not corresponding to the seriousness of challenges stipulated by its both potentially lucrative and extremely complicated geopolitical position. Some might be willing to blame Ukraine's eastern neighbor the Russian Federation that has, by launching aggressive campaign supported by mass media, outrageous in its essence propaganda and looming economic sanctions, for an explicit attempt to destabilize internal situation in Ukraine. This aggressive and openly unfriendly stance toward its partner and closest neighbor has explicitly shown not only reviving Russian imperial ambitions yet exposed social Darwinism and Realpolitik approach that Russian elites have adopted as a new vector for further development. It also underscores that crude nationalism is to become a new source of legitimacy that Russian political regime is going to rely upon. Of course, all these assumptions and arguments do contain a kernel of truth. Yet, would it be a rightful thing to put the sole blame on the Russian Federation and previous Ukrainian governments?

“ The European Union has done little to prevent further escalation of violence in Ukraine ”

We deem it vital not to reduce consequences of existing crisis exclusively to one of outlined dimensions. The largest regional player that comprises almost five hundred million people residing in 28 countries with huge economy, high living standards and potentially immense military capabilities, the European Union has done little to prevent further escalation of violence in Ukraine, whereby avoiding responsibility for ensued breakdown of regional stability, security and peace. Even despite exiting institutional frameworks and mechanisms of regional cooperation that include Ukraine, such as for instance Eastern Partnership, reaction of the EU has been dominated by its inability to

clearly produce common position and stand for downtrodden democratic norms and values. Having pushed Ukraine for signing of the Association Agreement with bleak economic prospects and denying Ukraine even the slightest prospective of joining its structures, the EU seemed to have opted for rhetoric rather than any concrete steps when first peaceful protests culminating in violence erupted on Maydan Square. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that by doing so, the EU has practically deceived those who stood and died on Maydan for European future of their beloved country.

Moreover, by tacitly accepting annexation of Crimea (which breached all existing principles of international law, let alone moral fundamentals) and trying not to implicate itself in crisis in the East of Ukraine (clearly inflamed by Moscow) the EU has once again displayed its inability to stand for principles and values it claims to be a stalwart and defender. And attempts to engage in economic sanctions initiated by the United States against Russian Federation including hampering the construction of the South Stream gas pipeline system appear to be more a reluctantly accepted enterprise rather than a clear and well-defined strategy. By pursuing such behavioral patterns based on indecisiveness and half-heartedness the EU has not only inflamed Russian confidence in its inability to step up for its partners yet also tinted its international image. This crisis has revealed several points that need to be tackled with all seriousness and decisiveness:

1. Despite numerous declarative (and rather costly) attempts to change its perception, the EU remains “civilian” or “soft power”: since the Russo-Georgian conflict (August 2008) up until now EU has not been able to step up for states it has been wooing – this is relevant both in economic and military domains.
2. The EU is unable/unwilling to speak with one voice in the face of challenges of significant gravity: individual member states pursue independent line of behavior when national interests are involved. It stays clear that certain EU member states are still prone to follow “path dependency” in their relations with Russia, which does threaten essence of the entire European project.

3. The EU is unwilling to step for its eastern partners (Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine) and challenge Russia at this front. In case of further regional destabilization this might cause endangerment of EU attractiveness and “soft power” mechanisms that it still wields in countries of post-Soviet states. Former communist states might once again slide into Russian sphere of influence.

4. Russia has received what it has been longing for – proof of EU`s indetermination to get involved with resurgent and bellicose Moscow, trying to expand its “zone of influence” upon its former satellites from post-Soviet space -. This is usually done with a great deal of coercion and intimidation.

5. Ukraine (and other post-Soviet countries) should not be deceived: the EU will be able to start constructive dialogue of full-fledge accession to its structures only once it has received viable proof of stabilization as well as improvement of economic and political milieu in these countries.

6. Should crisis persist further in Ukraine, it might bring about grave perils for regional stability and peace – consequences of which would be dealt with by the EU. Dealing with repercussions (economic collapse of Ukraine and expansion of military conflict could lead to humanitarian catastrophe) will always be by far much more an onerous task for EU to cope with.

“ The EU should either explicitly renounce of its attempts to include Ukraine in its institutions or it ought to step up for its partner ”

By making Ukraine to choose solely between the Association Agreement or the Customs Union without even pondering over a compromise solution given Ukraine`s geopolitics, economic, ethno-cultural, linguistic and historic ties with the Russian Federation, and not offering any clear economic or membership prospective, the EU should admit its own share of responsibility in the crisis. As a famous saying goes “you become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed”: following this line of behavior the EU

should either explicitly renounce of its attempts to include Ukraine in its institutions or it ought to step up for its partner in need to pose itself as a true follower of democratic principles. After all, it seems that should the EU opt for first path, it might commit grave mistakes of Western democracies of the Interwar period. The question therefore should be: is EU as a supranational global player ready to assume high responsibility of guiding Ukraine to democracy or pecuniary interests and self-concern will prevail?

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