

POLICY BRIEFING

The Ukrainian Crisis and its Impact on Russia's Relations with the West

ABSTRACT:

The Ukrainian crisis started in 2014 has appeared as a potential turning point in the Euro-Atlantic security.

As a consequence of Russia's annexation of Crimea and destabilization of south-eastern Ukraine, relations between Russia and the West have deteriorated until the point that claims of a "new Cold War" have started to be heard.

NATO has found itself questioning about its role in Europe and how to coordinate its action in order not to result in an open military confrontation with Russia, while the EU has found its way towards the imposition on Russia of a series of sanctions affecting mainly trade relations between the two.

At the same time, for Russia and the West there still are reasons to cooperate, to manage competition and to contain tensions.

The following briefing is aimed at analyzing the overall situation also in light of the latest events.

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1. The Ukrainian crisis in brief:

The Crimean peninsula stretches out from the South of Ukraine between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov and it is separated from Russia in the East by the Kerch Strait¹. It is mainly composed by a Russian ethnic majority but it also includes Ukrainian and Tatar minorities².



Figure 1

Source:
<https://www.yenisafak.com/en/world/coca-cola-stirs-outrage-with-map-showing-crimea-as-part-of-russia-2382668>

It was annexed by the Russian Empire during the reign of Catherine the Great in 1783 and it remained under the Russian government until 1954, when the Soviet Leader N. Krushchev decided to concede it to Ukraine³.

After some events in 2013 and during 2014, Crimea has become the main focus of an Eastern-Western conflict which has not been concluded yet.

In November 2013, the former Ukrainian president V. Yanukovich's decision of accepting a \$15 billion loan from Russia in order to move its country toward a Eurasian Union with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia and refusing a deal of integration and trade with the EU, gave rise to a violent protest in Kiev's Independence Square, the "Maidan". As protestors increased in number and violent actions kept going generating more victims, president Yanukovich fled to Russia and an interim government was formed. As a result he was soon overthrown and succeeded by P. Poroshenko in the new elections held on 25th of May 2014⁴.

But the very turning point that started to recall the international attention on the issue has been the Russian president Putin's move during the final days of the protest. He organized a surprise military occupation of the Ukrainian borders and a seizure of airports and government buildings around Crimea⁵. Then, on the 16th of March 2014 he held a two-options referendum with whom Crimea had to decide whether joining Russia or going back to its former 1992 Constitution (In this option, it was not very clear whether Crimea would have returned to the original 1992 Constitution

¹ BBC News, "Crimea Profile", 2018

² Ibid.

³ Limes, "Putin, la Russia e la Crimea un anno dopo l'annessione.", 2015

⁴ The Guardian, "Ukraine Crisis: an essential guide to anything that has happened so far", 2014

⁵ Ibid.

declaring it as an independent state or to the amended version considering it an autonomous republic within Ukraine)⁶. With 97% of votes reporting acceptance of joining Russia, several days later he signed a treaty formally annexing Crimea and delivered two speeches in the occasion of which he underlined “Western hypocrisy” and glorified “Crimea’s return home”⁷.

Ukraine, the EU and the US deeply condemned this move that coasted Russia the imposition of huge economic sanctions, the expulsion from the G8 and the following deterioration of its relations with the West. In fact they still consider it as an illegal annexation not complying with the international law⁸.

From that moment onwards, violent escalations took place between Ukraine and Russia causing thousands of victims in particular in the Ukrainian Donetsk, Luhansk and Donbas regions.

The 5th of September 2014, the representatives of Ukraine, Russia and Popular Republic of Donetsk agreed under OSCE supervision on signing the Minsk Protocol that was meant to put an end to the conflict, but it failed⁹.

Later on, in 2015, peace negotiations were pushed over again and they resulted in a new ceasefire deal reached on the 15th of February always in the same Belarus capital. The updated version renamed as “Minsk Agreements” was established after a 16-hours talk between Russian president V. Putin, Ukrainian president P. Poroshenko, French president F. Hollande and German chancellor A. Merkel¹⁰.

Among the main points it included: 1- Immediate and full bilateral ceasefire; 2- Withdrawal of all heavy weapons by both sides; 3- Effective monitoring and verification regime for the ceasefire and withdrawal of heavy weapons; 4- To begin a dialogue on the holding of local elections; 5- Amnesty by banning any prosecution of figures involved in the Donetsk and Luhansk conflict; 6- Release of all hostages and illegally detained people; 7- Unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid to the needy, internationally supervise; 8- Restoration of full-social and economic links with affected areas; 9- Full Ukrainian government control restored over the state border, throughout the conflict zone; 10- Withdrawal of all foreign armed groups, weapons and mercenaries from Ukrainian territory; 11- Constitutional reform in Ukraine, with adoption of a new constitution by the end of 2015¹¹.

Yet, even this peaceful attempt proved being too fragile and went wrong. Perhaps due to the thorny situation on the battlefield, or maybe because of the unreliability showed both by Ukraine and Russia that still do not respect them and keep mistrusting one another.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Limes, *“Le fragilità dell’accordo di Minsk per la tregua nell’Ucraina dell’Est”*, 2015

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ BBC News, *“Ukraine Ceasefire: New Minsk Agreement key points”*, 2015

2. Implications of the crisis over Russia's relations with the West:

In light of the above mentioned events, relations among Russia and the West experienced a dramatic deterioration, until the point that talking about a new Cold War has become almost routine¹².

The optimistic “reset policy” obtained by Obama’s presidency as early as he took office in 2009 - and eventually signed also by the European Union – that was aimed at creating a longstanding relationship with Russia based on mutual respect and cooperation on issues of common concern, in fact has been seriously compromised immediately after Crimea annexation took over¹³.

The case of Ukraine is of paramount importance for the West in that it shows how Russia’s influence over Kiev is a matter of security strategy as well as of national and identity pride, reflecting a broader plan of president Putin (whose re-election in 2012 played a crucial role in the events in Ukraine) to acquire as much influence as possible over the former Soviet space¹⁴.

Part of such plan, would also be the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) including most of the former Soviet Republics, that according to President Putin cannot be compatible with any form of integration of its members into NATO or the EU¹⁵.

This notwithstanding, the need for cooperation is still vivid on many grounds and has not collapsed yet, even if the consequences have had multiple implications on the relations of Russia with both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, especially in terms of economic, political, energetic and military security.

2.1 NATO-Russia relations:

The beginning of a strategic partnership between Russia and the Alliance dates back to the NATO London Summit that was held on the 5th-6th of July 1990. In this occasion the former President M. Gorbachev and the representatives of the Central and Eastern European countries had been invited to address the North Atlantic Council in order to cease being adversaries¹⁶.

Subsequently, many steps have been taken to this regard – including the 1994 Partnership for Peace and the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act – until reaching real cooperation in 2002¹⁷.

¹² IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, “*West Russia Relations in Light of the Ukrainian Crisis*”, 2015, p. 14

¹³ Ibid pp. 11-13

¹⁴ Ibid p.13

¹⁵ Ibid p.13

¹⁶ NATO Media Backgrounder, “*NATO-Russia Relations: The Background*”, 2017

¹⁷ Ibid.

On the 28th of May of that year, in fact, NATO leaders and President V. Putin established the NATO-Russia Council, a consensus-based body of equal members that led to stronger cooperation in areas such as counter-terrorism, crisis management, arms control and theatre missile defense¹⁸.

Later on, in 2008 the Georgia crisis compromised the new-born relationship after NATO declared disagreement with Russia's military action in the area, being it incompatible with the principles of peaceful conflict resolution of the Helsinki Final Act. Yet, political and practical cooperation was eventually resumed and a new stage of cooperation on missile defense and against piracy was reached¹⁹.

However on the 1st of April 2014, NATO Foreign Ministers decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Russia as a response to its illegal and aggressive violation of Ukraine's sovereign territory²⁰.

Since then, Russia has deliberately continued to destabilize eastern Ukraine, forcing NATO to react and reinvent in front of the changed security environment²¹.

The emerging new relationship reminds of the Cold War somehow, but the nature of the conflict is not the same²².

If on the one hand, like the Cold War, today's clash has both ideological and geopolitical dimensions, on the other, the contrast is not so deep as before in that the Kremlin has never claimed so far that its political system is totally incompatible with the western one. Putin describes Western liberal democracy as decadent and immoral and he wants to keep it away from Ukraine – on which it is in his intentions to keep influence - yet he is still interested in coexisting and trading with western Europe²³.

Furthermore, the international system of today is a more integrated and pluralistic one, with China as a contender for the status of global superpower, Iran and North Korea with nuclear power programs and the constant threat from ISIS, Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups²⁴. The world is not anymore witnessing solely to a US (West) – Soviet Union (Russia) contentious.

The current conflict rotates around the possibility for Russia to have a privileged sphere of interest in the regions along its borders and to dominate weaker countries whose foreign or domestic policies go against its interests²⁵. This is why NATO enlargement toward Russia's borders has bothered Putin so much.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, *“West Russia Relations in Light of the Ukrainian Crisis”*, 2015, p. 33

²³ Ibid., p.34

²⁴ Ibid., p.35

²⁵ Ibid., p.35

The Kremlin's willingness to use force in order to change Europe's borders has created generalized insecurity and specific threats to both non-NATO countries of western Eurasia – like Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – and to the Baltic Republics that are also NATO members²⁶.

In the occasion of the NATO Summit in Wales on September 4th-5th 2014, the Baltic Members and Poland had pushed hard for NATO to permanently deploy troops on their borders with Russia. But the contrary position of some members like Germany, which considered the move as provocative towards Russia, made NATO opt for a “persistent” rather than “permanent” presence provided by rotational forces. Should Russia violate the Minsk II agreement, NATO could anyway reconsider the idea²⁷.

In these circumstances, with an unpredictable Russia that is both willing to cooperate and to use force in order to reach its goals and with an eastern Europe craving for security, the best move that NATO could take was a strategy of deterrence²⁸.

Differently from defensive strategies, whose aim is to prevent an adversary from achieving its goals by using force, deterrence is aimed at convincing the enemy to change its objectives by making them appear unattainable or attainable only at an unacceptable cost²⁹.

Such a strategy should operate at least at three levels: the tactical one, the operational and the strategic.

At the “tactical” level, even if not easily, a deterrence strategy should avoid that kind of “hybrid” warfare used in Crimea and south-eastern Ukraine by tracking Russian covert activities, increasing risks for Russian operatives, improving livelihood of ethnic minorities, ensuring police practices, strengthening cyber defenses and improving NATO declaratory policies on external efforts to manipulate more vulnerable NATO populations³⁰.

The “operational” deterrence, should instead deny Russia the possibility to hold territories in the Baltics by means of a “cost-imposition strategy” that would make any intervention militarily too expensive for any current or future Russian leader to even contemplate it. This would be very expensive and risky both politically and militarily, in that it requires a large NATO force deployed in north-eastern Europe, the Baltics and the North and Baltic Seas³¹.

Deterrence at the “strategic” level should demonstrate Russia that the tactic deployed in Ukraine – the one of seizing it in order to better engage in it – would strengthen rather than weaken the Alliance. NATO member states, in fact, have shown political unity when imposing sanctions to

²⁶ Ibid., p.39

²⁷ RAND Corporation, *“Russia and the West after the Ukrainian Crisis – European Vulnerabilities To Russian Pressures”*, 2017, p. XI

²⁸ IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, *“West Russia Relations in Light of the Ukrainian Crisis”*, p. 41

²⁹ Ibid., p.42

³⁰ Ibid., p.43

³¹ Ibid., p.43

Russia in the face of the Ukrainian Crisis. Of course there have been differences, also due to the fact that currently Russia has influence on some European capitals – mainly for energetic dependence reasons – but in the end the US and the EU have managed to adopt a joined move with multiple rounds of sanctions and military steps aimed at safeguarding eastern Europe³².

Ultimately, it is also necessary that NATO offers Russia benefits for compliance in addition to denials and threats in the event of a crisis³³.

Anyway, as declared by NATO Heads of State and Government at the Warsaw Summit in July 2016, improvements in the relations between the Alliance and Russia will depend almost exclusively on a constructive change in the behavior of the latter. Russia will have to demonstrate compliance with international law and international commitments, otherwise they cannot get back to the usual business³⁴.

Nevertheless NATO Allies remain open for dialogue with Russia, as it has been shown by the NATO-Russia Council that keeps meeting even after the suspension of practical operations³⁵.

The last of these meetings took place in October 2017.

As stated by NATO Secretary general J. Stoltenberg who chaired the meeting, the discussion revolved mainly around three topics: Ukraine, Afghanistan, transparency and risk reduction.³⁶

As far as Ukraine is concerned, according to Stoltenberg, NATO Allies and Russia still have different visions about how to solve the crisis, but improving security in the area remains the priority in order to move towards the implementation of the Minsk Agreements³⁷.

Also on the Afghanistan front their ideas differ, but they share the common interest in ensuring security and stability to the country and they seem ready to move together in that direction in order to fight the terroristic threat³⁸.

Concerning risk reduction and transparency, they agreed on continuing the dialogue on air safety in the Baltic region that was started the year before and that led to the establishment of the Expert Group guided by Finland³⁹.

Furthermore they decided to exchange reciprocal military exercise briefings, including advance briefings and to enhance transparency in the Euro-Atlantic Area through contact among their senior military leaders⁴⁰.

³² Ibid., pp. 42-43

³³ Ibid., p. 44

³⁴ NATO Media Backgrounder, *"NATO-Russia Relations: The Background"*, 2017

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ NATO, *"Press point by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council"*, 2017

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

2.2 EU-Russia relations:

In the aftermath of the two World Wars and of the subsequent Cold War - three moments of history where Europe was somehow always at the centre of global affairs - the World witnessed to the emergence of a brand new European model of international conduct that was based on a set of assumptions and rules differentiating the continent's ideology from the rest of the global order⁴¹.

The key elements of this new post-modern security system were not anymore the balance of power, sovereignty, the need to change borders or the separation of domestic and foreign affairs, but mutual interference in each other's domestic affairs, security, openness and transparency in the context of the European Union. Moreover, the use of force as an instrument for settling conflicts was rejected and the promotion of increased mutual dependence between European states was introduced. Europe's new ambition in the aftermath of the Cold War was therefore to change the nature of borders by opening them to capital, people, goods and ideas, and economic integrity became the new prerogative replacing territorial division⁴².

According to many, it is this Post-Cold War European order that marked the beginning of a process that led to the Kremlin's violation of the Ukrainian territorial integrity. The annexation of Crimea, in fact, can be considered as the tangible proof that Russia rejected and still rejects such an order because it is not only a threat to its interests but also a possible way for the US to keep influence and hegemony in the region⁴³.

What has emerged from the crisis in Ukraine is that besides Russia, also most of the world has never really accepted or has ever been interested in investing on the maintenance of this new European order. To make an example, Brazil, China, India and South Africa did not join the West in punishing Russia, rather they have joined it in the important non-western group of the BRICS⁴⁴. Moreover, China took advantage of the standoff between the West and Russia in order to close some commercial deals with the latter⁴⁵.

The rest of the world simply sees the conflict as a local European crisis and the European order as a regional settlement whose principles are different from those regulating the global order.

In light of this, the Europeans realized how their political model, even if good, cannot be universally applicable and peace cannot be taken for granted anymore⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Istituto Affari Internazionali, *"West Russia Relations in Light of the Ukrainian Crisis"*, pp. 17-18

⁴² Ibid., pp. 18-19

⁴³ Ibid., p.18, 22

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 19-20

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.20

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.20

Anyway, they could not stand still in the face of the crisis, and in order to make Russia pay a price for its illegal and aggressive behavior in Crimea and Ukraine without the use of military force, economic sanctions were the only possible tool available⁴⁷.

Sanctions are the only demonstration of power in the absence of military force, but the paradox laying behind them is that while they work due to economic interdependence – showing the sanctioned party how dependent it is on the sanctioning one - they also undermine it causing problems on both sides⁴⁸.

Starting from the spring of 2014, restrictive measures concerning travels, asset freezes for selected individuals, import ban on goods coming from Crimea and Sevastopol were imposed gradually on Russia by the EU, US, Canada and other Allies⁴⁹. Later on, on the 29th of July 2014 they adopted a comprehensive package of targeted economic sanctions that included: restrictions to Russia's access to EU capital markets; an embargo on the imports and exports of arms from and to Russia and a prohibition of exports in Russia of military technology and goods, products destined to deep-water and arctic oil exploration and production and shale oil projects⁵⁰.

As far as the EU is concerned, the EU Council decided that the sanctions had to concern only new contracts closed after they took over, so that existing export contracts remained exempted⁵¹. In June 2017, sanctions have been extended until the 31st of January 2018⁵².

Russia on its side responded by prohibiting imports of some agri-food goods (beef, pork, poultry, poultry products, smoked foodstuffs, sausages, milk, milk products, fish, vegetables and fruits) from the USA, EU, Canada, Australia, Norway, Albania, Montenegro, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Ukraine⁵³.

Such an embargo, anyway, has had negative economic implications both for the EU and for Russia, given the high volume of trade between the two that had characterized the years before. The EU has almost loosed its second most important destination market for agri-food, while Russia other than compromising the relations with its first supplier of such food, was already undergoing the consequences of the fall in oil prices⁵⁴.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.26

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.26

⁴⁹ EU Parliament – Directorate-General for External Policies (Policy Department), *“Russia and the EU’s sanctions: economic and trade effects, compliance and the way forward.”*, 2017, p.4

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.4

⁵¹ Ibid., p.4

⁵² Ibid., p.4

⁵³ Ibid., p.4

⁵⁴ NATO Review Magazine, “Sanctions after Crimea: have they worked?”

All things considered, we can say that if on the one hand sanctions have proved being a success in inflicting damage to the Russian economy, on the other, European economies as well have suffered for the same reason, mainly through trade⁵⁵.

Out of 28 EU members, 7 in particular experienced the most severe – even if at different levels - net losses, namely Sweden, Greece, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Finland and Lithuania⁵⁶.

The other 21 member states managed to compensate losses by expanding to new markets, especially Germany and Italy that still have significant economic linkages with Russia⁵⁷.

Regarding energy flows, the crisis has revealed how much Europe is actually less vulnerable to Russia than it is generally perceived⁵⁸.

Natural gas is the resource on which Russia can exert the highest pressure - with Ukraine being an important crossing point - especially on the northeastern and central European states that are totally dependent on Russian supplies⁵⁹.

Nevertheless, in the face of a cutoff in natural gas imports, the EU can compensate thanks to a combination of increased imports of liquefied natural gas, alternative fuels (i.e. coal, renewable, fuel oil), electricity demand management and reduction in the industrial use of the resource⁶⁰. Moreover, threatening the EU with supplies cutoffs would be for Russia even more expensive, in that revenues from sales of natural gas are an important pillar of its economy.

As far as crude oil is concerned, instead, the ability of Russia to exert pressure on cutoff threats is really limited due to the fact that crude oil is traded on a global market, therefore it would find its way to Europe even if Russia were to divert supplies to other non-EU markets⁶¹.

Politically, the crisis in Ukraine has challenged the EU mainly because member states are now at odds on how to keep relating with Russia.

On one side there are those members like Italy, Spain, Greece and Slovakia that would like to return to business with Russia as usual, on the other the Baltic states and Poland argue for a permanent deployment of military forces on the borders of the eastern Europe NATO members⁶².

With a Europe speaking with different voices, posing a serious obstacle to the European and Transatlantic unity, the leading role of Germany will be critical and many NATO and EU members will keep an eye on what position Berlin may take in the future⁶³.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ RAND Corporation, *“Russia and the West after the Ukrainian Crisis – European Vulnerabilities To Russian Pressures”*, 2017, pp. XII-XIII

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. XII

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. XII

⁶¹ Ibid., p. XII

⁶² Ibid., p. XIII

3. ZAPAD 2017 - Russia's first training military exercise after the crisis:

From the 14th to the 20th of September 2017, Russia has raised considerable concern in the West by the deployment of its 2017 version of the series of military exercises occurring on a four-year basis since 1999 under the name of "Zapad" (West in Russian)⁶⁴.

The military maneuver Zapad 2017, led by the joint armed forces of Russia and Belarus took place on the territory of Belarus and on the military district of Saint Petersburg under the monitoring activity of the European and US military and political elites and it worried in particular the neighboring Baltic states and Poland⁶⁵.

The military training is characterized by the deployment of aircrafts, units of the fleet, special forces and teams specialized in electronic warfare and the Kremlin took advantage of it in order to test the changes that had been applied after the latest version of 2013⁶⁶. This is why the West saw the exercise more as a way for Russia to reinforce its coercive credibility and deterrence capacity or to hide a real armed forces operation, even if both the Russian president Putin and the Belarus president Lukashenko have defined the drill as defensive in nature⁶⁷.

The war game was also the first Russian military exercise after the Ukrainian crisis, and this increased the general perception of a deliberate demonstration of power towards NATO.

Officially, only 12,700 soldiers supported by 680 armored vehicles and 200 artillery systems took part to the exercise, yet in the West it was believed that the number was near to 80,000, as estimated both by the Estonian Prime Minister J. Ratas and the German Defense Minister U. Von Der Leyen with the support of NATO Secretary General J. Stoltenberg⁶⁸.

For this reason Russia has been accused of not compliance with the Vienna Document signed in 2011 and promoted by OSCE⁶⁹.

The document is a political agreement aimed at guaranteeing transparency of military exercises by means of a commitment of the signatory parties to notify the others in advance about a training activity involving more than 13,000 soldiers and to open the exercise to observers⁷⁰.

⁶³ Ibid., p. XIII

⁶⁴ IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, *"Dealing with the Russian Bear: Improving NATO's Response to Moscow's Military exercise Zpad 2017"*, 2017, p.1

⁶⁵ CE.S.I. Centro Studi Internazionali, *"Zapad 2017 and the Anxiety of NATO"*, 2017

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, *"Dealing with the Russian Bear: Improving NATO's Response to Moscow's Military exercise Zapad 2017"*, 2017, p.1

⁶⁹ CE.S.I. Centro Studi Internazionali, *"Zapad 2017 and the Anxiety of NATO"*, 2017

⁷⁰ Ibid.

On the contrary, Russia allowed only three international observers to monitor the developments of Zapad 2017 and according to J. Stoltenberg this is the reason why they would have declared an unrealistic number of forces employed⁷¹.

Russian vice Minister of Foreign Affairs G. Karasin, in response defined Stoltenberg's statement as aimed at justifying the intensification of NATO activities along the perimeter of Russia's territory⁷². All things considered, as any other military exercise, also Zapad 2017 should be read as a message that needs to be understood carefully and in a broader context.

With Zapad 2017 Russia has provided an insight on how it is in its intentions to use the army both as an instrument of defense and of pre-emptive intervention to defend its interests when needed, and this is what the West should be prepared for⁷³.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ IAI Istituto Affari Internazionali, *“Dealing with the Russian Bear: Improving NATO's Response to Moscow's Military exercise Zapad 2017”*, 2017, p.4

4. Conclusions:

The Ukrainian crisis, other than having compromised relations between Russia and the West, revealing vulnerabilities and weak points on both sides, has also demonstrated how the West – even if with different perceptions of the challenge - can act uniformly in case of mutual necessity.

Before the annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine, it would have been really difficult for the EU to impose on Russia a set of sanctions of that kind without creating contentious.

As we have seen, Russia is a trade partner for some members and the only source of energetic supplies for others. Nevertheless, even if revealing the different views and worries, the EU has been able to adopt a joint move that has proved being successful in creating turmoil in Russia for its previous actions without necessarily give raise to an open conflict.

The same has been done by NATO that has so far managed not to adopt the aggressive military posture requested more than once by the Baltic states seeking for protection.

Moreover the crisis has forced the EU to reconsider its security system and to come closer to the US, allowing the latter to increase its influence on the strategic area bordering Russia.

In these circumstances the question is whether the West will be able to maintain its position with a rather “peaceful” diplomatic joint reaction in front of a Russia which is still ambiguous, unreliable and almost threatening in its behavior.

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