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THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS – A NEW START OF SELF-AWARE NATIONHOOD OR GRADUAL DECLINE OF THE STATE?

Lukáš Žalek*

ABSTRACT

Besides the Islamic State in the Middle East and the immigration crisis, the Ukrainian crisis still deepens internal cleavage between Russophone and Ukrainophone regions. At the same time, it continues to affect negatively international relations and security situation in Europe. Moreover, 20 February 2015 marked Ukraine's first anniversary of Euromaidan protests. What are the actual results of the Revolution of Dignity?¹ Has Kiev really started a process of closer political and economic cooperation with the European Union; or, on the contrary, are we witnessing of potential long-term instability in Ukraine? Due to many tumultuous events is certainly worth analysing the one-year-period after Euromaidan. The article discusses some problems related to fundamental changes in Ukraine that have implications for further political development and its economic recovery. Based on the Fragile States Index and general indicators of „fragile“ or „unstable“ state, the author came surprisingly to the conclusion that Ukraine has fulfilled many of them. The aim of this study is particularly to demonstrate the ambivalent development of Ukraine in the respective period.

Key words: Eastern Europe, Ukraine, Russia, European Union, Euromaidan, Unstable state

Introduction

So far, most of post-communist countries that struggled for membership in the European Union, expected a relatively successful modernisation and transformation process. However, such a development took place under peaceful conditions in early post-Cold War period. If we focus on Ukraine, we

* Mgr. Lukáš Žalek is PhD. Student at the Faculty of International Relations, University of Economics in Prague, Nám. W. Churchilla 4, 130 67 Prague 3, Czech Republic, e-mail: zalek.lukas@post.cz.

¹ Western sources mainly use the term „Euromaidan“ to express Ukraine's efforts to establish closer ties with Europe, but Ukrainian policy makers often talk about „the Revolution of Dignity“, which symbolizes the resistance of Ukrainian people against wrong-minded and corrupted state leadership of the previous era.

face much more complicated case. The state went through violent overthrow of the former president Yanukovich, annexion of Crimea, civil war and serious disputes with Russia (de facto semi-war). Although Kiev opted for Europe, the association process is necessarily hindered by real possibilities of Yatsenyuk governments. What is, however, quite interesting aspect of domestic and international development after the Euromaidan, that on the one hand there are high expectations and ambitions concerning fast progress in reforms, on the other hand domestic reality is determined by economical, energy, security, social and political difficulties. In general, the overall situation in the country has not become entirely satisfactory, predictable and stable until now.

Moreover, focusing on Ukrainian crisis itself, this could be characterised as a crisis of six main dimensions at least:

- Crisis of domestic policy
- Crisis of the international system
- Armed and security conflict
- Deepening of domestic economic crisis
- Energy crisis
- Humanitarian crisis

Given the scope of this paper, we will focus only on the first two aspects, with minor digressions into other dimensions.

Additionally, this paper analyses the terms "sustainable" state vs. "unstable" state based on the Fragile States Index², applied on the case of post-Yanukovich Ukraine. In academic analytical papers, the terms „fragile“ or „unstable“ states generally refer to developing world, the top spot typically occupied by African countries.

The following indicators explain in more detail how an unstable state is defined: 1) poverty or sharp economic decline, 2) poor economic performance, 3) deterioration of public services, 4) mass refugee movements or large number of internally displaced persons, 5) crisis of state legitimacy³, 6) decline of security apparatus, 7) rise of new power or alternative elite (tycoons, warlords) etc.

² This Index is annually published by the American think tank the Fund for Peace and ranks 178 nations in total.

³ Concerning this term, **Michael Longo** and **Philomena Murray** conclude that "*Legitimacy may be understood as 'a function of decision-makers' compliance with norms, or fair procedure. (...) It can derive from a perception on the part of those to whom the rule is addressed that it has come into being according to right process.*" (Longo – Murray, 2015, p. 56).

In contrast, typical sustainable states are not threatened by that kind of pressures and society develops without radical changes that could endanger the long-standing political and socioeconomic system.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that some international institutions such as the OECD or the Fund for Peace annually publish indexes measuring social development of a fragile state. The lower a country measures on the scale, the worse its social development is supposed to be. According to the Fragile States Index's lists 2014-2016 (The Fund for Peace, 2016), Ukraine worsened from 113th place (2014) to 84th (2015)⁴ and currently sits on 85th place (2016) out of 178 countries as a result of ongoing crisis and war in Donbass. Therefore, we can still hardly claim that Ukraine is among the most endangered countries in the world.

On the other hand, the number is quite low in comparison to the other European nations and using the above-mentioned indicators in combination with the Fragile States Index is a more insightful way to deeply analyse the Ukrainian crisis. Based on these indicators, the research question is whether we can speak about Ukraine as more stabilised state in comparison with previous years, or vice versa.

This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the author analyses domestic policy and also economics, safety and partly energy aspects. The second part discusses changes in the international system and Ukraine's relations to key external actors. Finally, the author evaluates the previous research and offers some predictions of further development.

1 The Crucial Aspects of Domestic Policy

1.1 Armed Conflict in Donbass

In 2015, the ongoing armed conflicts with people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk⁵ remained the main topic. It must be stressed that Kiev initially

⁴ In the Fragile States Index 2015 assesses that „Ukraine (...) is the most worsened country for 2015, having worsened by a significant 9.1, the fifth-largest year-on-year points worsening in the history of the Index.” (The Fund for Peace, 2015, p. 13).

⁵ Since the end of February 2014, Anti-Maidan protest actions took place across the main cities of Southeastern Ukraine (Odessa, Dnipropetrovsk, Mariupol, Mykolaiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Sevastopol, Zaporizhia), but open conflict finally erupted only in two easternmost districts.

expected definite success of "*anti-terroristic action*". Based on these assumptions, Ukrainian army had launched attacks on two eastern provinces already in April 2014. Nevertheless, pro-Russian insurgents (ополченцы) organised own self-defence troops similarly to Crimean pattern, took control of the administration buildings and strategical points in Donbass. Notably, an interesting point is that right-wing, left-wing and orthodox (Russian Orthodox Army) troops have united against state power. Both people's republics also brought legacy of the Soviet Union alive, their declared intentions are a rightful social order, nationalisation of strategical enterprises⁶ and fierce criticism of tycoon structures, which reportedly made use of Ukrainian people by intent⁷.

Beside the regular Armed Forces, paramilitary units of Ukrainian nationalists⁸ and territorial volunteer battalions⁹ have also joined storming operations against the separatists. These groups act as elite units and boost fighting morale. The escalation of the conflict was particularly underway between May and August 2014, when the Ukrainian army gradually forced insurgents out from the north to the south, and seemed to recover Kiev' control over the rest of south-eastern Ukraine. Extensive combat operations led to several massive refugee waves, because military actions are conducted in densely populated Donbass industrial region. A serious humanitarian disaster threatened in August 2014.

In the second half of August, insurgents launched counteroffensive to stop the advance of the Ukrainian army and forced them to retreat. At this critical moment, Russia sent "*humanitarian convoys*" to both people's republics between 22 and 25 August 2014. This step is generally perceived as irregular Russian troops having helped to maintain separatists control

⁶ For instance, the representatives of Donbass republics called for nationalisation of **Rinat Akhmetov**' steel fabrics.

⁷ Ukrainian Communist Party and most other left-wing groups have no influence on events in the country. As a matter of fact, that they were pushed out of the Verkhovna Rada by right-wing or centrist groupings. In general, Ukrainian nationalists strictly consider the Communist Party of Ukraine as proxy agent of Moscow.

⁸ **Stanislav Byshok** wrote his work about historical development of Ukrainian nationalist movement as well as in relation of the Euromaidan. He represents Russian view on this specific topic (Byshok – Kochetkov, 2014).

⁹ This primarily involves the battalions of Aidar, Azov, Donbass and Dnipro. Aidar battalion is financed by Ukrainian tycoon Ihor Kolomoyskyi.

over the Donbass (Kramer-Gordon, 2014). In terms of electoral support, the real defeat of pro-Russian separatists would be politically unacceptable for **V. Putin**. For this reason, unofficial Russian intervention most likely come about in Donbass¹⁰.

Finally, Minsk's Protocol I. has been quickly signed on 5 September 2014¹¹, committing all parties to observe Donbass ceasefire. Unfortunately, as demonstrated before, both sides repeatedly broke the ceasefire for many times. When the insurgents captured Donetsk International Airport in January 2015, conflict increased in the intensity. At this time, the Ukrainian Army tried to keep existing positions according to Minsk's Protocol. Therefore, several thousand Ukrainian soldiers dug in Debaltseve, where heavy fighting took place from mid-January to mid-February 2015. In the end, Ukrainian forces have been trapped and forced to escape in hustle. In relation to this event, Kiev repeated its request for delivery of "defensive" weapons (Ukraine Today, 2015) from the United States and announced determination to join NATO.

1.2 Economic Decline

Massive economic slump poses perhaps more serious threat to present Ukraine than security situation. A weighty problem is the fact that combat operations are conducted in Donbass, traditional industrial centre of the country, whose production has been mostly exported to Russia and other CIS countries (Antonov Aircraft Machinery etc.). Considerable source of revenues was also Crimea, where the Black Sea fleet is based, for which Ukraine gained cheaper natural gas from Russia.

The War in Donbass had changed all this. While Ukrainian exports went more than approximately 30% to Russia and slightly less to the European Union countries in 2013, the ongoing war has certainly spurred escalating tensions between Kiev and Moscow, undermined the vital economic relations.

After the Revolution of Dignity, Russia adopted policy of export restrictions on Ukraine. Although the European Union approved the duty-free

¹⁰ Online group 'Cargo 200 from Ukraine to Russia' published list of 2000 Russians who were killed or are still missing in Donbass warzone since 2014.

¹¹ Full text of Minsk Protocol I. can be found in Russian language here: <http://www.osce.org/ru/home/123258?download=true>

export of Ukrainian goods on the common market in April 2014, these steps cannot fully compensate noticeable loss of Ukrainian exporters concerning their goods that were originally intended for Russian customers. Based on these facts, the ongoing conflict made it harder or almost impossible for Ukraine to access its largest traditional market. A refocus on the European market is not a simple matter in the current situation. The European market is saturated with commodities, which Ukraine could export to the West: agricultural products, steel, coal. These products have also low added value, and the EU market is much more competitive than that of the CIS countries.

Thus, these basic facts can explain very poor performance of the Ukrainian economy nowadays. Beside that, Ukraine is quite far behind in comparison to other post-communist countries in long-term terms. Ukraine was hit hard by an economic crisis in 2009, coupled with a decline in demand on the European market, cash reserves went down and unemployment reached 9.5% (The World Bank, 2014) according to the World Bank. During the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine's economy stagnated at levels of 2012 and the state delayed important economic reforms (restructuring of heavy industry, obtaining of foreign direct investment, improvements in energy efficiency etc.).

When the crisis had begun, hryvnia dropped against US dollar from 8.24 in March 2014 to 23.4 per one US dollar in March 2015. As mentioned in the Economist, *"Protecting the currency drained the central bank's reserves, which tumbled from a high of \$40 billion in 2011 to about \$12 billion today. Last month the central bank admitted defeat and let the currency go. Currency depreciation, while necessary, will be an economic headache for Ukraine in the short term. About half of its public debt is in foreign currencies: as the hryvnia loses value, Ukraine's debt burden rises"* (The Economist, 2014).

Therefore, we may claim that the national currency de facto collapsed and this had severe consequences for the entire economy. Other obstacles arose when Ukraine's GDP fell by 10% in 2015 and inflation reached an annual rate of 19%. Especially, this poor economic performance had a negative impact on prices and costs. Main upward pressure came from food, consumer goods, housing, energy prices and other utilities, which significantly decreased domestic purchasing power.

A separate point is not only a low level of economic performance, but also serious indebtedness of the state. In 2010, public debt amounted to 35.3% of

GDP. According to data from the National Bank of Ukraine, it has been 41.03% in 2014.

To maintain financing of military operations in the east, there was also an increase of the tax burden. **P. Poroshenko** signed the new Tax Code, August 1, 2014, which generally increases taxes. However, the impact of this tax increase did not generate sufficient revenues to the state treasury.

International institutions, particularly the IMF, are widely involved in Ukraine to a large extent. After the overthrow of the former government, the IMF said that it can provide financial aid package if Kiev reforms its natural gas sector. In March 2015, the IMF committed providing Ukraine 17.5 bil. USD as part of the four-year aid package. One condition was to create an Anti-Corruption Committee, which is to fight against corruption in Ukraine. According to IMF data, shadow economy constitutes about 50% of Ukrainian GDP.

The new political leadership must be fully aware of the very poor conditions of the domestic economy. As a result, Kiev made efforts to borrow as much funding from the Western countries and international institutions as possible. However, the key problem is that the International Monetary Fund pledged to provide funding aid package to the country that continues to lead combat operations. From experience, it is well known that a state actor can use these additional financial resources not only to improve the state budget and domestic economy in general, but also to continue further military actions.

1.3 Political Approaches for Closer Cooperation with the EU

One of the leading themes of Euromaidan was general effort to establish closer ties with the European Union. Therefore, the new government's pro-Western course was the logical result of previous events. On the Ukrainian side, fight for Euromaidan and fight against "*Russian fifth column*" (separatists) plays a key role in post-Yanukovych Ukraine. Ukrainians also allege to be the only nation in Europe that sacrificed so many victims for idea

of free and united Europe¹². On 16 September 2014, in his speech in Parliament President **Poroshenko** even stated "*European integration became our national idea*"¹³. Therefore, pro-European course is core state policy, for which the government made commitment to its citizens. Finally, the political part of the Association Agreement has been signed by Prime Minister **A. Yatsenyuk** in March 2014,¹⁴ and the economic part by President **P. Poroshenko** in June 2014.

If we look more closely at realisation of pro-European course in detail, this happens at several levels. The declared intention of the new state leadership is to fulfil the vision of successful development of the country, including the strengthening of the legal situation, decentralisation of power, guarantees of basic democratic rights and the introduction of numerous reforms that will contribute to this. The Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration **Dmytro Shymkiv** commented this as follows: "*Our goal is European standards of life and respectable place of Ukraine in the world*" (Shymkiv, 2014).

Due to signing of the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement and compliance with contractual obligations to the International Monetary Fund, Ukraine has pledged to make sweeping reforms not only in the economy. Kiev adopted the National plan of reforms, the so-called "*Strategy-2020*"¹⁵. National Reforms' Council supervises and helps to implement in

¹² On the Ukrainian side, a modern form of "*mythologisation*" happened concerning killed protesters on Maidan Nezalezhnosti to some extent. For instance, high ranking representatives talk about the Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred in this respect (President of Ukraine, 2014).

¹³ President's speech at the session of the Verkhovna Rada in the course of the ratification of the Association Agreement with the EU. Official President Speech held on 16 September 2014 (President's speech at the ceremony..., 2015).

¹⁴ German specialist **Jan Matti Dollbaum** drew attention to the exceptionally short time leading to signing of the political part of the Association Agreement. This came about extraordinarily shortly after the shooting in Kiev, **Arseniy Yatsenyuk** was newly elected Prime Minister and whole situation was still unstable. The fact that this happened in March demonstrates how strong was Ukraine's motivation to start the association process. However, given the complexity and real implications of the Association Agreement for Ukraine it would be more appropriate to sign such an important part when the entire situation became much more stable. For instance, the agreement could have been signed after the presidential elections scheduled for the end of May 2014 at least.

¹⁵ A similar plan has been approved by former Prime Minister Azarov under title "*Plan on Priority Measures for European Integration of Ukraine for 2013*". Strategy 2020, however, is much more complex attempt in this respect. The Strategy for Development of Ukraine until 2020 includes about 62 reforms which were first propounded by **P. Poroshenko** in public on 25 September 2014. This

cooperation with the president, government, parliament, and other representatives from public institutions and civil society. The European Union is actively represented by means of Ukraine's Reforms Monitoring Framework. Thereby, the EU not only helps Ukraine in its reform efforts in place, but also monitors the implementation of negotiated agreements.

Kiev has undertaken to carry out reforms not only to the citizens of Ukraine, but also towards its western partners and creditors. Therefore, reformist and pro-European policy became both domestic and foreign vectors for the new governments.

In the reform agenda, primarily there are necessary reforms regarding the constitution and election legislation, judiciary, reform of public sector, adherence to rule of law, fight against corruption and smuggling¹⁶. Afterwards follows measures for improving the investment environment, implementation of new tax regime and external audit, compliance with international trade standards etc. These steps are necessary from the viewpoint of trade increase between the EU and Ukraine. In the slightly longer term, **Yatsenyuk** governments have planned to reform health, agriculture, energy and financial sectors, and armed forces as well¹⁷.

In addition, the European Union also represents extremely important partner to offset Russian pressure on Ukraine. Ambassador of Ukraine to the European Union **Kostiantyn Yelisieiev** commented this fact as follows: *"Over the last year we clearly saw that the EU has practically become the key external guarantor of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, neither the UN, nor the OSCE, nor any other international organization, but the EU. And it is the greatest discovery of last year."*

Lastly, Ukraine adheres to a pro-Europe course due to many reasons: Firstly, this policy legitimises the new government towards civil electorate as well as abroad. Secondly, European and transatlantic structures are seen as

updated version of integration process is intended as part of the overall future development of the country.

¹⁶ Ukraine has long-term problems with the all-encompassing corruption and the domestic black market. For this reason, it has been criticised by non-governmental organisation Transparency International, the European Union and IMF. As a result, the Ukrainian authorities launched a new concept of fight against corruption and established the National Anti-Corruption Bureau.

¹⁷ More details about the new government's reform efforts can be found on the official website: <http://reforms.in.ua/>.

the primary guardians of Ukrainian independence, which prevents potential Russian occupation. Thirdly, successful association process brings prospect of future economic recovery, offers assistance with redeeming the national debt, provides additional loans, ensures domestic stability, can qualitatively improve the domestic political system and could establish visa-free regime with the EU.

On the other hand, the question remains open whether Kiev mobilises or obtains sufficient financial resources to cover such an ambitious reform process, which will be particularly painful for the ordinary citizens of Ukraine - due to deregulations and price increases.

In conclusion, further Western support for Ukraine might be disrupted due to prospective warming of mutual relations with Moscow. After all, Russia remains a challenging player from the perspective of the global economy, energy, as well as world power policy. A current EU support for Ukraine is happening under extreme situation. Any normalisation of relations with Russia could thus bring gradual elimination of "*Ukraine first policy*", which would certainly bring a disenchantment of Kiev in the European Union.

2 The Crisis of the Current International System

The conflict in Ukraine is generally interpreted as a turning point in international relations after the Cold War. The Russian media and policy makers talk repeatedly about the need to face US hegemonical tendencies in the world (two wars in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria etc.), to avoid approaching NATO military infrastructure to the western borders of the Russian Federation and more vigorously defend their own national and security interests in face of NATO and EU eastern enlargements. In contrast to that, the West interpreted the Ukrainian crisis as violation of Post Cold War system, accused Moscow that Russia undermines international law, territorial integrity of Ukraine and tends to reintegrate the post-Soviet space.

A major weakness is the "*crisis of confidence*" between the West and Russia, particularly in Washington's relationship with the Kremlin. **B. Obama** and his closest aides were strongly criticised by Republicans who claim that they are too weak counterparts for Kremlin¹⁸. Former Governor of Alaska

¹⁸ **Joe McCain** and **Dick Cheney** and another influential Republicans criticised **Obama** for weak response to **Putin** concerning Ukrainian crisis.

Sarah Louise Palin even said, “People are looking at Putin as one who wrestles bears and drills for oil. They look at our president as one who wears mom jeans” (Richinick, 2014).

Similar verbal exchanges in relation to the **Obama** administration have been getting more common and rough. According to the author, this was linked to the presidential election in 2016, which favoured a Republican candidate and then sets the US diplomacy toward Russia in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. Compared to the previous US military interventions, however, Russia has the second strongest army in the world, additionally armed with nuclear weapons. Consequently, a scenario, which was used against **Saddam Hussein** or **Muammar Gaddafi**, cannot work against **Vladimir Putin**. In addition to that, the American public opposes further military action overseas.

The result is a relative stalemate and status quo situation between Washington and the Kremlin. While the West has imposed economic sanctions and conducts military exercises from the Baltics to the Black Sea¹⁹, Kremlin has not acknowledged direct interference in the civil war in Ukraine. According to its official legal interpretation, the Crimea and Sevastopol have not been primarily seized by Russian troops, but joined the Russian Federation after the approval from local legislators and plebiscite in accordance with the principle of national self-determination (Embassy of Russian Federation, 2015).

Due to completely different approaches of Kremlin and Washington towards the Ukrainian crisis, serious attempts to reach a political settlement are primarily run by the European powers. So-called „*Normandy format*“ has been established as a thin diplomatic initiative to get ahead of any security threats in Europe and prevent further escalation of the war in Donbass. Unfortunately, these conciliation efforts failed to get over the apparent US-Russian antagonism, which was reaffirmed during Minsk talks II in February 2015 (without US participation).

Many experts are talking about the so-called „*hybrid war*“²⁰, which has not

¹⁹ Parallel with the conflict in Ukraine, there are numerous NATO military exercises in Eastern Europe, and US military vessels sailed the Black Sea. On another hand, Russian army carries out military manoeuvres in the Crimea, the western regions of Russia and Arctic.

²⁰ For more details see: <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/>

been officially declared between Ukraine and Russia, but members of the Russian armed forces are most likely deployed in a combat zone. In this context, it needs to be pointed out that Russian fighter jets carry out defence of airspace over "Novorussia", because separatists probably do not possess such sophisticated weapons.

On the other hand, Western countries sent military instructors to Ukraine, who have trained members of the National Guard and Ukrainian security forces. Especially the United States, Canada, Great Britain (The Guardian, 2015), Poland and Lithuania stepped up their military support to reduce Russian pressure on Ukraine. Due to the fact that Ukrainian Armed Forces lack manpower, knowhow and basic equipment including uniforms, Western nations have supported Kiev not only materially. In turn, Russia sent their own volunteers, unregistered soldiers, and the Chechen Death Battalion (The Guardian, 2015) operates on the side of separatists as well. Therefore, from these facts we can assume that external actors are greatly interested in Ukraine, which actually hinders real effort to get over this conflict.

Sergei Kirichuk commented the interests of external actors in an interview as follows:

„Basically it's a civil war. But even in civil wars foreign powers tend to intervene and support various groups, such as during the Spanish Civil War when the Soviet Union supported one side, and Hitler's Germany and Italy supported the other. It is not just Russia that is involved in Ukraine. Western powers provide both moral and material support to Kiev. Now Kiev is trying to get even more support from NATO, and the United States is considering sending of advanced weapons. It could be very dangerous when Ukraine risks becoming an arena for a war between NATO and Russia. It would be terrible not only for the Ukrainian people, but for the whole of Europe” (Kirichuk, 2015)²¹.

Moreover, the conflict has a humanitarian dimension. According to the UN, over one million persons left their homes because of the crisis. The greater part of them went to the Russian Federation. Russian authorities estimate the number of refugees also around one million. On the contrary, the Ukrainian authorities consider this figure greatly exaggerated (Reuters,

²¹ **Sergei Kirichuk** is leader of the Ukrainian socialist party Borotba (Struggle), which is facing political repression after the Euromaidan.

2015). UN claims that 3.9 million people lived in the areas affected by combat operations in August 2014 (Humanitarian response, 2016).

Another aspect of the crisis is a relatively high number of missing persons (83) reported between beginning of Euromaidan protest actions until 5 May 2014. Even more alarming is that Ukrainian authorities officially list 314 persons as missing (UN Human Rights, 2014).

It must be added that citizens of Ukraine have lost their lives in relation to their political conviction (whether pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian). For instance, journalists²² **Oles Buzina** (Two Ukrainian journalists..., 2015), **Serhiy Sukhobok**, politician **Oleg Kalashnikov** (Series of bizzare..., 2015) were probably killed because of their political beliefs. Furthermore, politician from former **Yanukovych** era **Stanislav Melnyk** (Party of Regions) committed suicide under very strange circumstances.

Amnesty International has also voiced concerns about the behaviour of pro-government volunteer paramilitary defence battalions (the Aidar, Donbass and Azov battalions). There are many official reports about violation of basic human rights on both sides.

Conclusion and Predictions

In this paper, we have shown that present-day Ukraine really faces critical problems. Unfortunately, measuring Ukraine against several indicators of an „*unstable state*“ indicates that Ukraine has fulfilled many of them - numerous Russophone nationals left eastern Ukraine for Russia; armed forces participate in an unprecedented hybrid war; economy is in bad condition; political situation is still complicated due to external Russian pressure as well as strong position of rich tycoons on domestic scene; and state legitimacy is also questionable in relation to insurgent people's republics of Luhansk and Donetsk.

Internal political and international stability are basic preconditions for the successful integration and transformation process in any country. Without them, Ukraine's current efforts can hastily get jammed. General belief that the association process with the EU automatically solves Ukraine's various problems is not adequate. Each country itself has to solve its internal and

²² More details concerning general situation among Ukrainian media can be found at: <http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/UkrainianMediaAfterEuromaidan.pdf>

external problems on its own before it can join European multilateral project. If Kiev takes these steps now, it might lead to further protests or unrest, due to the deteriorating economic situation and rising inflation. In the worst-case scenario, this policy could completely contest pro-democratic and pro-European paths.

Besides armed conflict, economic situation is dismal. IMF proposes radical saving programmes to reduce Ukrainian debt. On the contrary, German expert **Heiko Pleines** suggests massive investments in infrastructure projects, energy efficiency and rebuilding of eastern Ukraine (Pleines, 2014).

Long-standing saving programs are hard to implement in politically weak or fragile states. Under no circumstance we can talk about the political situation in Ukraine as stable one (**Yatsenyuk** resigned in April 2016 and, **Poroshenko** has troubles with some important tycoons etc.).

Depreciation of the Ukrainian hryvnia brings troubles associated with repayment for the gas supply to Gazprom. Therefore, the question is whether the West is willing to provide long-term financial help to Kiev at the time when a number of southern European countries have their own economic difficulties (Meuser, 2015). If Ukraine's economic crisis continues as present, it could bring to power new political elite that utilises social and economic problems to establish closer cooperation with Russia (Pleines, 2014). Consequently, **Vladimir Putin** might be interpreted as a defender of social rights and provider of guarantees that economic chaos that Russia and majority of former Soviet republics experienced in the early 1990s will not repeat.

So at this point, the author concluded that Euromaidan has been a critical turning point in history of modern Ukraine, but path to economic recovery and real association with European structures is a much more complicated process. As mentioned by **Meuser**, Ukraine could also emerge as a „big loser“ in the game of balancing great powers' geopolitical interests and pay high price of territorial fragmentation for its pro-Western foreign policy (Meuser, 2015).

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