

THE UKRAINE CRISIS: INTERNAL PLATFORMS AND ROLE OF REGIONAL AND SUPRA-REGIONAL FACTORS

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Abstract

Occurrence of security crises in important geographic regions due to ethnic diversity and delineation of artificial borders as well as competition between regional and supra-regional powers in areas such as Eastern Europe and Middle East are likely. Therefore, uprooting of crisis in the scene of international relations particularly in the mentioned critical regions, at least for short term, does not appear logical. We can comment from a venting point that occurrence of crisis in Ukraine as the second large Republic of former Russia has been predictable from long time ago. Crisis in this country is persistently a reason for concern of officials in Kiev and benefactor countries such as Russia. The important issue that needs focus at this point is the reasons for initiation of this crisis. Based on this important issue, this research seeks to respond to the question that what are the main roots of the initiation and persistence of crisis in Ukraine? It should be noted that for responding to this question, a single factor cannot be considered. Therefore, the hypothesis introduced is such that the main roots of the Ukraine crisis go back to ethnic, language and population gaps, widespread economic weakness and poverty, pervasive corruption in the governing system, political, civil and legal limitations and deprivations and inclination of Victor Yancovic towards Russia as internal factors - involved in the crisis. The main reason for persistence and depreciative nature of the crisis lies in formation of regional and supra-regional activists such as Russia and the European Union, NATO, United States of America and China. If we omit the role of regional benefactors and influential activists from the

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crisis, we would not be witness to continuation of crisis in Ukraine up until today and the crisis would end in the first few initial months.

Key Words: Ukraine, Political Corruption, Economic Weakness, America, Russian Federation, NATO, European Union.

Introduction

The geographic location of the country of Ukraine is considered one of the most important and sensitive regions in the world. The regional area of this country is important for its neighbors, whether on the West or East. The Russians as the eastern neighbor of Ukraine, persistently due to security, political, economic and cultural reasons have historically had eye on Ukraine. The European Union has also persistently looked for an appropriate opportunity to add Ukraine to its political, economic and security aggregate. The security of Russia has direct link with the security of Ukraine. For this reason, it does not refrain from interest in any endeavor by a third party activist for intervention and penetration in the regional area of its western neighbor and as the recent crisis has shown, it even has no fear of starting a deadly war. With loss of influence of Moscow in Ukraine also the security of energy supply gets threatened and on another hand, it will be witness to presence of long standing enemies and competitors in its back yard and near abroad. In continue, after evaluation of the geographic location and strategic importance of the country of Ukraine, the reasons for initiation and continuity of crisis in this country will be noted and scrutinized.

1- Strategic and Geo-Political Situation of Ukraine

Ukraine is the second country among former republics of the Russian Republics Union which allocates important geography from the East of Europe to itself. Ukraine means border. In other words, it is located in the boundaries of various countries. It has a size of 603/700 Kilometers square and its span from its north to its south is 893 Km. From the north it is bordered by Belarus, from east and north-east to Russia, from south-west to Hungary, Romania and Moldavia and from its west to Poland and Slovakia (Milosevic, 2014: 1). The other reflective point is that HalfordMcKinder calls Middle Europe and particularly the geography of Ukraine “heartland”

and believes that any activist that seizes this region will reign upon the world. The geo-political importance of this country can be witnessed according to the following map.

Map-1- Geographic location of the country of Ukraine



Source(:www.east-invest.eu)

Ukraine is the border between European countries and the continent of Asia by way of southern and eastern boundaries. Such unique situation on the one hand and fecundity and being located along the Black Sea commercial water way on the other hand has given this country significant geographic location. In addition, access to Eastern Europe by way of land and waterway access to the black sea are considered among important geo-political advantages of the country of Ukraine. With these descriptions, it becomes evident that the geo-political and geo-strategic situation of Ukraine and the valuable role it plays in the transactions between Russia and European countries are cause for the people and leaders of this country to play the role of executor of decisions instead of making the decisions regarding their countries destiny.

2. The Ukraine Crisis

The starting point of the Ukraine crisis was such that in November 21, 2013, Victor Yanckovic the president announced that Kiev has let go of the procedure of the trade agreement and collaboration with the European Union and is not ready to undersign it (Milosevich, 2014: 7). Following propagation of this news, unrests began in Kiev, the capital of this country. Beginning from November 30, primer of aggression was added to these unrests and physical conflict increased among police and contesters (Watanabe, 2014: 1). On December 6th, in the flow of a meeting between Yancovic and Putin in Sochi, negotiations between them regarding “strategic collaborations” were made. In continuation of the anger of contesters, the statue of

Lenin was down thrown in the center of Kiev on December 8 by the opponents of Yancovic. In mid December, Yancovic traveled to Russia. In this trip, an agreement was cosigned between him and the president of Russia. By virtue of this contract, the Russians made commitment by way of purchase of governmental bonds from Ukraine to invest 15 milliard dollars in this country. Additionally, it was assigned that the price of export gas from Russia to Ukraine is decreased from 400 dollars per thousand cubic meters to 268 dollars (Shapouri, 2014: 23). The opponents of Yancovic who had anti Russian ethnic sentiments became angry of this matter and called for exacerbation of demonstrations. In such an atmosphere, with conflict between supporters of Russia and Ukraine and demise and wounding of numbers of them, freedom of Timochenko the former prime minister from jail, downfall of Yancovic by parliamentary vote and his replacement by “Alexander Torchinov” led to increased anger in Kremlin officials and provocation of crisis. With gaining of power by the new government, this time residents of the eastern sections of Ukraine joined wide spread demonstrations. In reaction to this action, allies of Russia in the Crimean peninsula demonstrated against the new government and a few days later, there was outbreak of conflict between them and the Tatar minority of the region. With exacerbation of the unrests in Crimea, Russian forces near the Ukraine borders, entered state of combat readiness. In February 27, an armed group in support of Russia in Crimea captured governmental buildings and the Crimean parliament and announced the date of May 25- concurrent with presidential elections of Ukraine- as the time of referendum with the purpose of determination of the situation of this region. Overall, the reasons for occurrence of crisis in Ukraine can be investigated at three levels of internal, regional and international.

2-1- Internal Level

For evaluating the crisis in Ukraine, initially we should look at this country’s social and political system and the role of internal components such as political, social, cultural and economic systems should be analyzed. Overall, the internal constituents effective on crisis in Ukraine can be mentioned as below:

2-1-1- Ethnic, language and population gaps

Now a day one can rarely find a country that lacks internal gaps and cracks. In other words, countries whose population are formed from equivalent men and women and lack any difference

or conflict regarding language, tradition and similar traits rarely exist. Ukraine is among countries where in various parts, people do not speak the same language. The language in western sections- close to the west- speak Ukrainian language and the eastern sections – near Russia- speak Russian which has constantly been one of the concerning gaps. The language variety in the population of Ukraine is also such that 67 percent speak Ukrainian, 24 percent Russian and 9 percent other languages. Ethnic diversity in Ukraine is such that 17 percent are Russian, 5 percent includes Belarusians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Tatars, Romanians, Poles, Jews and other minorities (World Population Review, 2014).

With reflection on these issues, it becomes clear that population diversity has created a deep gap and crack in Ukraine, where stored energy is suddenly released and in 2014, it is considered among main reasons for initiation and expansion of crisis in this country. In other words, broad and deep cracks in the area of the land of Ukraine have predisposed this geographic location to severe internal instability and naturally foreign vulnerability. Briefly, ethnic and language diversity along with historical conditions and economic differences have led to deep gaps among the people of west, east and southern Ukraine. As a result of these ethnic cracks, various kinds of political evolutions exert special strategic and social influence in Ukraine.

2-1-2- Economic weakness and widespread poverty

During the life and reign of the Russian Republic Union, the economy of Ukraine was considered the second large economy in the perimeters of this country and it was counted as a fertile, important and notable industrial-agricultural section. After downfall of Russia, the economic system of this country changed towards a market economy where the trend in this transfer was very difficult for the majority of society who were afflicted with poverty. With the advent of the new millennium, the economy of Ukraine also more or less became affected by historical and historic geography of this country and was divide into two sections “well doing east and south” and “left behind and deprived west” (Aslund, 2014: 3-7). In 2013, total export of this country was equal to 70/24 milliard dollars- ranking 48 in the world- and its import was equal to 89/71 milliard dollars-ranking 38 in the world. The level of debts of Ukraine in 2013 was announced to be equal to 138/3 milliard dollars (Shapouri, 2014: 32). Additionally, the

gross domestic product of Ukraine in 2014 has been estimated at 175 milliard dollars and as shown in the following diagram, this trend has had a fundamental fall and was negative 4%.

Diagram 1-1, Gross Domestic Product of Ukraine (2006-2014)



Source:www. east-invest.eu)(

2-1-3- Pervasive corruption of the governing system

Presence or lack of corruption in governing systems is among important matters that threaten their life expectancy or in reverse become grounds for their strengthening. In most countries that face crisis or revolution, corruption is one of the main and fundamental components of its acceleration. In the recent crisis in Ukraine also existence of “corruption” is considered among the most important reasons of people’s arising and opposition. In this line, Vitali Klitschko the world heavy weight boxing champion and leader of the opposing party “Avdar” of Ukraine severely criticized leadership of Ukraine and stated that: «all political system of Ukraine is corrupt and our economy has stopped working. Victor Yancovic, the president of Ukraine, has focused all power in his hands and is responsible for all events in our country. Therefore, he should accept responsibility for the current situation in Ukraine and step aside» (www.tasnimnews.com.). Additionally, based on statistics of the International Transparency Organization, indices of corruption in Ukraine, which is at the top of East European countries, are not in appropriate condition. This issue can be clearly observed in the following table and based on research from 1999 to 2012.

2-1-4- Political and civil limitations and deprivations

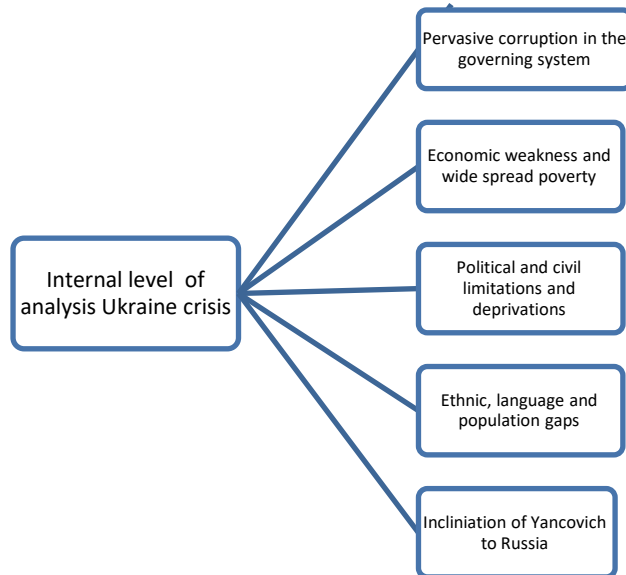
Residents of Eastern European countries, up to the dissolution of Russia, did not enjoy much political rights and advantages. Practically, in the structure of the communist system, freedom of speech, religion and local press did not exist and the main basis of government was fear created by the party. Yet, with down fall of the Russian Republic Union and independence of countries such as Ukraine, people suddenly demanded civil freedom and taking on political roles and observance of democratic values by the governors. The process of policy making in Ukraine and civil freedom in this country had major relationship with components such as ethnic diversity, population weave, language, economic issues and socio-cultural structure. The political system of Ukraine has the necessary capacity for providing the role of real democracy, yet, in practice, based on statistics of international centers, political and civil freedom and political rights have not had much space to manifest themselves. Therefore, it can be concluded that one of the most important reasons for the crisis in Ukraine is the issue of political, legal and civil deprivations and tarnishing of indices of democracy expected by the people of Ukraine.

2-1-5- Yancovic's inclination towards Russia

Russia has directly and indirectly exerted influence on acquisition and implementation of policies of Kiev during the reign of Victor Yancovic. Among the most important examples, we can mention Yancovic's opposition with the plan of membership of Ukraine in NATO, even though he requested limited collaborations without membership in this aggregate. The other issue is that the Russians made much effort to dissuade Ukraine from membership in the European Union where they ultimately succeeded in this matter. Until three months prior to initiation of crisis in his country, Yancovic was in favor of accompaniment of Ukraine in policies and guidelines of the European Union. Yet, following conditions placed by the European Union based on departure of Ukraine from union with Russia and Belarus and unconditional freedom of Mrs. Timoschenko and ... it became dissuaded from membership in the European Union- under pressures by Putin. This issue is clearly demonstrative of the logic that Yancovic gave high value to union with Moscow. This issue was followed with anger of the people of Ukraine against him where with internal group killings and intervention of regional and supra-regional elements, the contexts for initiation and continuance of the crisis developed more and more.

Thus, at the end of the first topic, the internal level analysis of crisis in Ukraine can be diagrammed as below.

Diagram 2-1- Internal level of the Ukraine crisis



2-2- Regional level analysis

Up to here, the crisis in Ukraine was considered an internal one. Yet, with down fall of the government of Yancovic, the crisis acquired a regional and international dimension. The reason is that, at this stage, talk of footprints of regional activists was introduced, such that Russia leaned towards supporting Yancovic and eastern region opponents and European countries also endeavored to support the new government and residents of the western regions of Ukraine. These movements, promoted the crisis in Ukraine from an internal situation to an international one among big regional and global powers. It should also be noted that regarding reasons of attention of Russia towards Ukraine, whether it be before or after the crisis, geo-political, security and economic motivations are interweaved. Yet, with regards to Europe, the intentions were more normative and economic.

2-2-1- The European Union and the crisis inUkraine

For better understanding the role of the European Union in the Ukrainian crisis, the height of efforts of the founders of this aggregate with the purpose of expansion of the breadth of their penetration can be mentioned. The European Union intends by way of trade agreements with

Ukraine to promote its joining into the aggregate. The reason is that these agreements are an introduction to its long term goals. The policies of the European Union lead to stimulation of Russia's sensitivity and concern. The West, before prioritizing economic and military unification of Russia with Europe, made efforts to exacerbate historical feelings of insecurity in Russians by way of economic, military and geographic incorporation which was historically considered part of Russia's emperorship. In fact, even though the crisis of Ukraine exacerbated with Russian reactions, the roots lay in excessive pressures the European Union had exerted on Ukraine to make decisions. In other words, this external pressure led to internal crisis in the country and this could have been prevented. If it was not mobilization of public masses and influence of society's open minded by the Europeans, this crisis would be least in severity and certainly not as bad as present. The stance of Europe from the time of incorporation of the Crimean peninsula became clearer towards evolutions in Kiev and behavioral movement and announcements by Russia. The European Union interprets the aggressive policy of Russians in Ukraine and incorporation of the Crimean peninsula to this country a tarnish to European politico-security structure and concepts and believes that Russians should be prevented from their imperialism and expansion of their interests (Blank, 2014: 5).

Therefore, despite claims by the West, one of the main reasons of unrests and crisis in Ukraine is the intrusions by the West in this country which began in November 2014 with street unrests in Kiev and with complete support by European countries and ultimately in February it harmed the established government and finally, the Russia supporting Victor Yancovic lost power. European countries consider this event a revolution. What stimulated most European countries into promoting crisis was the announcement by the government of Yancovic based on lack of implementation of the 2013 trade agreement with the European Union. They considered this action by the government as a plot by Kremlin and as a result fueled the fire of crisis. After increase in activities by Russia in the eastern borders of Ukraine and incorporation of Crimea into Russia "Catherine Ashton," senior representative of the European Union foreign policy, also stated in this regard that: «Russia clearly has violated the governance and independence of Ukraine» (Milosevich, 2014: 14).

2-2-2 Russia

Russia is considered the most important activist in the Ukraine crisis and the most prominent reason for continuation of crisis is the emphasis of the Russian government on its own interests and support of the opponents of the government. Ukraine is exactly located in the back yard of Russia. With brief look at republics separated from Russia, we can note that Ukraine has key position and losing this country with 50 million citizens with very high capacities will be an irreparable damage to Russia. Therefore, this is among redlines for Russia. The Russian after traversing the period of belittlement after the breakup of Russia again became interested in recovering their past glory and power. Their first policy after strengthening internal politico-economic power was to take a look at the former republics of Russia. In this regard, the Russians are well aware that if they lose Ukraine, they will be placed in a besieging circle by the West. Ukraine is considered to be the “strategic depth” of Russia.

Russia is a big regional power in Eurasia and at least military- wise, it is considered a world power. In such condition, Moscow similar to other big world powers has special interests in its foreign policy. Every big power-regional or international- seeks special interests in the domain or domains of its surrounding security and wishes to draw boundaries or redlines for them to the extent that Vladimir Putin has stated that: «We have sympathy with the people of Ukraine; we are a nation; Kiev is the mother of all Russian cities» (Putin, 2014). The latter can be analyzed in line with repeated emphasis by Russia on seeking special interests in “near abroad.” For this purpose, after announcement of dissatisfaction by Russian supporters in Ukraine and particularly residents of the Crimean island, on the one hand, it provided financial and artillery support for them to combat the newly coming to power government by the West and on the other hand, took action in deploying the most skillful forces of its military in Ukrainian borders. After seizure of governmental buildings by Russian supporters in Crimea, Crimean parliamentary representatives planned for a referendum for determination of the situation in the Crimean peninsula. The point of note is that the Russians had major role in the referendum and were also aware of the issue that in case of a referendum, a high percentage of people will vote for joining of Crimea to Russia. Therefore, regional officials of Crimea requested help from Russia. The reason is that the unrests were not manageable without intervention by Russia. Under such conditions, the Duma (Parliament) left the hands of Russia’s army open for military intervention in Russian

occupied regions of Ukraine. After entrance of Russian forces to the peninsula and parliamentary vote in March 6 to incorporate Crimea into Russia and finalization of this important matter in March 16, 2014, constant pressure by the West on Russia and condemnation of this action, the crisis reached its height. In fact, Putin with strategic opportunism from conditions in Ukraine and incorporation of Crimea into the land of Russia, for strengthening the geo-political and political situation of this country, took advantage of the opportunity and reminded the West of lack of ability to indulge in Moscow's security and geo-political considerations once more.

2-3 Supra-regional level of analysis

2-3-1 United States of America

America was the main activist encountering with Russia in the Ukraine crisis. Despite Barrack Obama's announcement on the first day of power of Ukrainian opponents: «Ukraine is not a field for game of chess for the cold war period and there is no reason Russia should consider itself the loser in this battle»; yet, overall the government of America was vigilant for a precious opportunity to take advantage of and exacerbate Ukrainian anti-Russian sentiments in line with attracting them towards the West and ultimately membership in NATO. In this line, officials of the American foreign ministry in February 2014 openly joined the cue of anti-governmental demonstrations in Kiev and openly encouraged, stimulated and supported the contesters against the government of the time of Ukraine. Such action following revelation of the conversation audiotape of Jeffrey Piat, ambassador of America in Ukraine, and Victoria Noland, current officer of America's foreign ministry, shows direct intervention of the White House in the internal affairs of Ukraine. This conversation focused on the topic that who should run the new government of Ukraine after down fall of the government of Victor Yancovic and that the best and only choice confirmed by the American foreign ministry to acquire this position is an individual named Arseni Yatsnovic (Smith, 2014: 3). Off course, it should be considered that for Washington, Ukraine is not important by itself and the important issue is unacceptability of Russia's infringement from the basic principles that America has given supremacy to in European structures after Russia's disruption. Yet, following seizing of the Crimean Island by Russia, Obama warned that: «Military intervention of this country- Russia- in Ukraine will incur costs» (Milosevich, 2014: 14). If a country aims to create pressure on Russia, obviously Ukraine

will be very strategic for this action. Therefore, the Americans constantly pursued the important issue of being active in Ukraine. Related to this, America with expansion of the breadth of crisis from the Middle East to Eastern Europe increases the behavioral costs of Russia in the Middle East to gain points in strategic domains that have less importance relative to the near abroad of Russia. Deputy of the ministry of defense of America has clarified in this regards that Washington does not believe in the self-perpetuation of events in Donetsk and Kharkov. At the same time, he considered motions of Russia in Ukraine exacerbating the crisis. Meanwhile, United States of America for guaranteeing to its allies has sent six F-15 war planes to the Baltic Republics and 12 F-16 planes along with three transport planes to Poland. In fact, part of America's actions against Russia in response to the Ukraine crisis is its military reactions particularly in Eastern Europe (Mirtaher, 2014: 30). Another point is that America's role playing is also analyzable from this angle that it has not been successful in giving Russia peace of mind that NATO's deployment is not because of blockade and weakening of role-playing by this country. The crisis in Ukraine became unavoidable. The reason is that attention was not given to the fact by the United States of America that for Russia, Ukraine manifests "critical advantage," yet for America, this region is not counted in the framework of the critical interests of America.

2-3-2- China

In the beginning of December (2013) and in the flow of internal unrests of his country, Yancovic traveled to China and announced that he has cosigned an agreement with the officials of this country by virtue of which, Peking will invest 8 milliard dollars in Ukraine. In the meeting between Yancovic and Xi-JinPing, the president of China, both sides called the relationship between their countries "strategic partnership." The Chinese even promised to put Ukraine under their nuclear umbrella support. Additionally, it was planned that with the purpose of facilitation of relationships between China and Europe, Peking invests 3 milliard dollars in Crimea. In addition, both sides discussed renting of 3 million acres of agricultural lands of Ukraine by the Chinese. Following limitations that Europe had ruled after the events of the Tienemen square in 1989 regarding sale of armory to China, Ukraine was transformed into one of the largest exporters of artillery to China (sale of war ships of former Russia to Peking). With the downfall of Yancovic, the destiny of the agreements between the two countries has gained a

state of ambiguity. During the Ukraine crisis and Russia's intervention in Crimea, Peking has remained neutral up to now. The Chinese gave a vote of abstention to the treaties of the Security Council and general assembly of the United Nations based on illegality of Crimea's joining Russia.

3-3-2- NATO

The role of NATO is evaluable and analyzable in line with policies of expansion towards the East and quarantine of Russia in near abroad of this country. In other words, expansion of NATO towards the East without considering Russia, practically led to increased talent for political, economic and military isolation of this country in Europe and manifested the reality of blockading Russia. Therefore, expansion of NATO to the east and presence in the borders of Russia is considered as "threshold of threat" of this country. America and Poland many times defended the joining of Ukraine to NATO which due to sensitivity of Russia has faced lack of attention by the countries of Germany, France and England. Due to geo-political concern about threat and heavy shadowing by NATO in its borders, Russia has acquired an offensive politics. The Ukraine crisis and joining of the Crimean strategic peninsula to Russia has led to severe concerns for NATO, East European countries and the Baltic. Overall, the role and position of NATO in the Ukraine crisis can be divided into two kinds: one goes back to the trend of expansion of NATO. The Westerners after including Eastern European countries into NATO made efforts to add Ukraine to the list of member countries. Therefore, NATO without consideration of the threat threshold of Russia caused this country stimulation and concern and made intervention of Moscow in the countries aimed by NATO inevitable. Secondly, all along the crisis, we are witness to role playing by this security organization. NATO after military actions of Russia attempted to sell most of military-artillery items and assist the new Ukrainian government with the purpose of suppression of the opponents along with its superficial activities. It should be noted that NATO in reaction to the Ukrainian crisis and joining of the Crimean peninsula to Russia has doubled the number of fighting planes in countries of the Baltic States- Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Additionally, AWACS radar guided planes were deployed in the skies of Poland and Romania with the purpose of tracking Russian activities. Additionally, NATO increased its military presence in the Black Sea after the advent of crisis in Ukraine. Furthermore, a number of planes were sent to Poland and Romani for surveillance. The

organization of NATO additionally in April 2, 2014 for restitution from Russia because of incorporation of the Island of Crimea into its land, on the one hand, halted collaborations with this country in various areas and on the other hand, greatly increased its military budget (Mirtaheri, 2014: 24).

Summary

In 2014, the country of Ukraine faced internal unrests and subsequently its expansion to international dimensions. The important question is that what are the influential factors on initiation, expansion and exacerbation of the crisis in Ukraine? To respond to this question, a single factor cannot lead to a logical and precise analysis. For presentation of a comprehensive and scientific analysis of this crisis a collection of three fold levels internal, regional and international should be considered and purposeful or non purposeful omission of one of these levels will distant us from the main discussion. On this basis, initially, namely at the internal level of analysis, we can mention ethnic, language and population gaps, economic weakness and wide spread poverty, pervasive corruption in the governmental system, political, civil and legal limitations and deprivations and Victor Yancovic's inclination to Russia. At the level of regional analysis also if the mentioned issues are placed alongside persistent efforts by two traditional competitors namely Russia and the European Union for increased penetration in Ukraine, we can reach the logic behind expansion and continuation of this crisis. Russia due to sharing borders with Ukraine has high sensitivity toward activities of the European Union and since Ukraine has great importance for Russia in all dimensions of politics, security, military and economy, has no fear, for reaching its goals, to even militarily intervene similar to the operations of the Crimean Island and its incorporation into its land. At the supra-regional level also two activists namely United States of America and NATO were involved in expansion of the crisis. The truth of the matter is that intervention of these two players has been indirect and at lower degrees relative to Russia and the European Union; although, one of the most important reasons for reaction of Russia to manage the crisis to its advantage has been a response to the trend of progress of NATO towards the east of Europe and the borders of Russia and the concerns of this country towards NATO's entrance into its "back yard." All along the crisis as well, even though the two activists could not make any progress against Russia's intervention, yet, their desired policy was to make the crisis attritional and encountering Russia and the European Union. The

consequences of the above three fold levels were initiation, expansion and increased complexity of the crisis in Ukraine.

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