UKRAINIAN CRISIS INFLUENCE OVER STRATEGIC POLITICAL-MILITARY DIRECTIONS SET IN NATO 2014 SUMMIT AND NATO – RUSSIA RELATION

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ABSTRACT
“...have gathered in Wales at a pivotal moment in Euro-Atlantic security. Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace” [1]. In this context the question is where are we going in NATO – Russia relationships?

KEYWORDS: NATO, Russia, collective defense

1. Introduction
September 2014 NATO Summit in Wales is certainly one of the most important and relevant reunions of this kind in the history of the organization.
I appreciate the importance of the event is given mainly due to the new geopolitical conditions created in Europe by the evolution of tension and insecurity in Ukraine which, from a popular manifestation of “Orange Revolution” in Kiev “Maidan”, continued through Russian substantial political and military involvement that took over Crimea and created more separatist areas, inhabited mainly by ethnic Russian citizens in the Eastern part of Ukraine.

The conflict occurred in Ukraine has been caused a significant number of victims, soldiers and civilians on both sides. But who are the sides?! Apparently, it can be said that the conflict is a struggle between Ukrainian security forces and Ukrainian citizens of Russian ethnicity, these being separatists seeking Moscow protection. However, what is unclear is how the separatists can sustain intense fighting for several months, having an unimaginable endowment and military training. Thus, the events seems to direct us to the idea of Moscow supporting the separatists in their fight.

The evolution of conflict has crossed periods of calm and high tension, represented by specific dialogue and negotiations or by military actions, when Russian military structures conducted hostile action on Ukrainian territory. Military actions were completed by a significant number of persecutions and by economic and financial “retaliation” measures, meant to “sensitize” Ukraine and some of the European states, largely dependent on Russian energy resources.
Of course, in this context, the Euro-Atlantic community could not remain insensible and had to react accordingly. Euro-Atlantic community reaction was immediate and the specific steps for an appropriate approach were taken. From political messages of disavowal to political, economic and financial sanctions towards Kremlin leaders, there have been countless attempts of USA, European states and the EU to end the conflict.

Along EU, the NATO Secretary-General (initial, Mr. Rasmunsen and later on, Mr. Stoltenberg) used diplomatic measures available to disavow and combat Russian involvement in Ukraine’s internal affairs, especially the act of taking over the territory of Crimea. Unfortunately the conflicts still exist in the beginning of 2015 in Ukraine territory and it has still much to be done for being resolved and will require efforts of all kind, from the main “actors” involved, namely Russia, Ukraine, EU, NATO to some countries from both organizations, like USA, Germany, UK and France.

This analysis does not aim to find a solution or even an explanation of the causes that led to this situation and energized the conflict. The aim is to find an approach and to present a point of view about how Wales NATO Summit has highlighted the situation and, especially, how the organization decided to respond politically and militarily, based on the document agreed by the Heads of State and Government of the member countries, to the Russian overt interference in internal affairs of the Ukrainian state. In the same time, it worth to bring in attention the response and reaction of Kremlin to NATO measures, among the most important is Russia’s military intervention which culminated in the takeover of Crimea. From here, the future of relationship between NATO and Russia is difficult to predict, but may be taken into account several variables. It remains that the lucidity, responsibility and wisdom of involved political leaders to decide in which direction we shall go in the next period.

2. Political Message

“The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territories and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. As stated in the Transatlantic Declaration that we issued today, we are committed to further strengthening the transatlantic bond and to providing the resources, capabilities, and political will required to ensure our Alliance remains ready to meet any challenge. We stand ready to act together and decisively to defend freedom and our shared values of individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law” [2]. It becomes clear that NATO members decided to respect Article 5 fundamentals.

Wales Summit was held in September 2014, after a relatively long period of time from the beginning of hostilities and timing of initiation of state of conflict. In the beginning, since February, the events in Ukraine have produced great concern and confusion in many capitals of Euro-Atlantic area, with a special note in the countries of the Eastern edge of the Alliance.

Thus, the leaders of the Baltic countries, Poland and Romania have expressed their concern about what was going on Ukrainian territory and especially regarding the aggressive attitude of Russia. In this context, as NATO members, they have used the opportunity to request a firmly and unequivocally response from the Alliance. The wanted responses was asked by these countries due to their geographical position, certain “historical sensitivities” with Russia and desire to have a NATO concise and firm position towards Russian actions.

As previously stated, Summit was held in September, so to a date that has provided a temporal space large enough to
develop an appropriate response. The Allies have concluded that the answer must be firmly: “We condemn in the strongest terms Russia’s escalating and illegal military intervention in Ukraine and demand that Russia stop and withdraw its forces from inside Ukraine and along the Ukrainian border. This violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is a serious breach of international law and a major challenge to Euro-Atlantic security” [3].

For some readers may not seem to be a very explicit or hard terminology, therefore I will remind you a few references in relation with the NATO – Russia Strategic Concept expressed in 1999: “Close relations between NATO and Russia are of great importance to stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area. Since the conclusion of the Founding Act in May 1997, considerable and encouraging progress has been made in intensifying consultation and co-operation with Russia” [4], and the more nuanced view of the expert group that developed a recommendation document for developing the Strategic Concept of Lisbon Summit: “Engaging with Russia. The NATO – Russia partnership was conceived as a means for fostering security in the Euro-Atlantic region; the Alliance remains dedicated to that goal. The principal forum for communication through the Alliance has been the NATO – Russia Council (NRC). This venue – which has not always been adequately employed – was designed to provide the means for preventing crises, analyzing events, broaching ideas, and agreeing on joint actions to deal with mutual concerns. Although the Alliance neither poses a military threat to Russia, nor considers Russia a military threat to the Alliance, doubts persist on both sides about the intentions and policies of the other. Consistent with the NATO – Russia Founding Act, the new Strategic Concept should reaffirm NATO’s desire to help build a cooperative Euro-Atlantic security order which includes security cooperation with Russia. Bearing this principle in mind, NATO should pursue a policy of engagement with Russia while reassuring all Allies that their security and interests will be defended” [5]. Reading “between the lines”, formulations were quite polite and expressed “politically correct”.

Adding some of the essential expressions of the document approved in Wales, we can notice the vocabulary and terminology used is extremely clear and explicit, in order to express the disagreement of the Alliance in Russia’s preoccupation in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea. “We demand that Russia comply with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities; end its illegitimate occupation of Crimea; refrain from aggressive actions against Ukraine; withdraw its troops; halt the flow of weapons, equipment, people and money across the border to the separatists; and stop fomenting tension along and across the Ukrainian border” [6].

“We are deeply concerned that the violence and insecurity in the region caused by Russia and the Russian-backed separatists are resulting in a deteriorating humanitarian situation and material destruction in eastern Ukraine” [7].

“Russia has breached its commitments, as well as violated international law, thus breaking the trust at the core of our cooperation. The decisions we have taken at the Summit demonstrate our respect for the rules-based European security architecture” [8].

The most important political signal given by the leaders of NATO member states, to Russia and to its military system, it is the intention of the Alliance to return to the provisions of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, namely collective defense, after a long period of stability operations conducted out of NATO territory. Actually, NATO military authorities start to plan again, after a long period of time, Article 5 type of training exercises.
“The greatest responsibility of the Alliance is to protect and defend our territory and our populations against attack, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. No one should doubt NATO’s resolve if the security of any of its members were to be threatened. NATO will maintain the full range of capabilities necessary to deter and defend against any threat to the safety and security of our populations, wherever it should arise” [9].

The term “collective defense” has been used stronger than usual commonly done in other important documents approved at previous Summits.

In the same context, the political message has given important financial directives, even detailed on categories of countries and expenses destination. “Allies currently meeting the NATO guideline to spend a minimum of 2 % of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence will aim to continue to do so. Likewise, Allies spending more than 20 % of their defense budgets on major equipment, including related Research & Development, will continue to do so. Allies whose current proportion of GDP spent on defense is below this level will: ...Aim to move towards the 2 % guideline within a decade with a view to meeting their NATO Capability Targets and filling NATO’s capability shortfalls.....Allies who currently spend less than 20 % of their annual defense spending on major new equipment, including related Research & Development, will aim, within a decade, to increase their annual investments to 20 % or more of total defense expenditures” [10].

This approach is extremely important because it will achieve several goals. First, NATO countries that ignored opportunities or did not have financial resources for defense were directed to reconsider their position and the percentage allocation of funds. For example, Poland has allocated for 2015 two percent of GDP, while in Romania the President himself called all major political parties for discussion, allowing the government to sign a framework agreement which sets the goal of having, from 2017 to 2027, two percent of GDP dedicated to defense.

Secondly, through a forecast of money spending for research and for production and purchase of modern military equipments, the investments that will follow will force Western manufacturers to open cooperation with NATO countries from Eastern Europe that still have some defense industry capabilities. Cooperation will surely lead to a higher quality of the combat equipment that will be produced, in the same time with the economic recovery of defense industries in these countries, which is especially beneficial at least for Poland and Romania.

Further on it is important to analyze a series of military measures set out in the statement of Wales which were generated by the situation in Ukraine and by the possibility for it to get worse in relation to Russia.

3. Military Message

“In order to ensure that our Alliance is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges, today we have approved the NATO Readiness Action Plan. It provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO’s borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications” [11]. In other words a “master plan” will be effective soon.

From a military perspective, Alliance leaders pointed out the new perspectives related to CFI program (Connected Forces Initiative) adopted in 2012 at the Summit in Chicago and with the new Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon in 2010. Thus it was decided to develop a plan of action (NATO Readiness Action Plan) that will implement major military actions deemed
necessary to deter any military aggression against NATO and to express Alliance’s political consistency and determination to remain firm in the fundamental principles of the Treaty of Washington.

New initiatives were launched, such as the grouping of forces to achieve a very high level of military response (VHRJTF) and other initiatives aimed at achieving operational capabilities of combat and logistics within the countries of the Eastern side of the Alliance. In this context, the document states: “We will significantly enhance the responsiveness of our NATO Response Force (NRF) by developing force packages that are able to move rapidly and respond to potential challenges and threats. As part of it, we will establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a new Allied joint force that will be able to deploy within a few days to respond to challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO’s territory. This force should consist of a land component with appropriate air, maritime, and special operations forces available. Readiness of elements of the VJTF will be tested through short-notice exercises. We will also establish an appropriate command and control presence and some in-place force enablers on the territories of eastern Allies at all times, with contributions from Allies on a rotational basis, focusing on planning and exercising collective defense scenarios” [12].

In the same time, there were targeted specific elements of military infrastructure in countries of the eastern edge of the Alliance and not only. “We will further enhance NATO’s ability to quickly and effectively reinforce those Allies, including through preparation of infrastructure, prepositioning of equipment and supplies, and designation of specific bases” [13].

To the concern of Eastern countries of the Alliance, the organization has responded with a package of intensive joint exercises which involved the participation of tens of thousands of soldiers from countries bordering the Baltic Sea and Black Sea. In the same time, it was approved a new concept to prevent the escalation of the security situation that aims to gain a package of forces, and a lot of Members offered their availability. The implementation will be done under the so-called concept of “framework nation”. It is worth to appreciate the reaction of France who gave up delivery of Mistral vessel to Russia, an approach undoubtedly important as a political signal to Russia, underlining that its actions exceeded the reasonable limits and therefore selling sophisticated military equipment to Russia is no longer an option.

All these political and military decisions are clear indications that the Alliance takes seriously the concern of the countries in Eastern edge of NATO and of the entire organization, across from counteracting possible intentions of the “great neighbor from the East” to conduct any kind of hostile acts on NATO territory. Language used and measures set shows that Member States are determined to apply the Treaty of Washington to preserve its security against any aggressor.

4. Russian Reaction

“NATO is identified as a source of dual danger; its «global ambition» are seen as detrimental to Russia’s interests, as is its «infrastructures” [14].

From the beginning Russia has been closely monitoring developments in Ukraine and was affected by the overthrow of former pro Russian President, Yanukovich. The effort Moscow sustained during president Yanukovici mandate in order to stop Kiev to join EU and NATO was lost in a few days. As a result, Russian strategic interests led Russia to intervene in order to prevent the pro-Western forces to seize power. President Putin said “I very much hope I do not have to send the Russian army in Ukraine. The only solution to power in Kiev is dialogue and not the use of force, leading the country towards
However, the Russian army was sent to Crimea, and in only 3 weeks (after the Crimean Prime Minister call for Russian help in 01.03.2014, the so called “Crimean referendum” in 16.03.2014, and the State Duma vote in 18.03.2014) Crimea was taken over by Russia. Furthermore, in other few months were created two more separatist regions on the eastern border of Ukraine, Lugansk and Donetsk (part of the so-called Donbas region) where fighting continues nowadays. It was found the necessary excuses: “Excuse me, but we could not do otherwise in these conditions, when a territory with a population mostly of Russian origin is in a risk to reach an international military alliance, although people want Crimea to be in composition of Russia” [16].

“Moscow underlined sometimes «hard», other times «soft» that Russia reserves the right to use all means to protect Russians in Ukraine” [17] and “Russia does nothing but to protect «sister nation» Ukrainian who now faces a dangerous instability and an extremist nationalist movement growing stronger” [18]. It remains for history to show at what intensity and with what means Moscow supported separatist forces.

Important in this context is not only Moscow’s involvement in Ukraine but also the political and military response given to European countries and Euro-Atlantic organizations.

Politically, the West was accused by Russians of implication in the situation in Ukraine by supporting decisions taken by the new leadership in Kiev. In 16.10.2014, President Putin stated in an interview with the Serbian daily journal “Politika”: “Who actually started the conflict in Ukraine? It was a setup, all had to blame RUSSIA ... We hope that our partners will understand the imprudent character of the attempts to exert blackmail on Russia «and» that will remember that dispute between the major nuclear powers can challenge strategic stability in the world” [19]. He has also conducted numerous diplomatic visits in major countries such as India, China, Iran and Turkey in order to identify allies and to conclude economic contracts which would counterbalance Western economic and financial sanctions. In the economic field, Putin speculated more or less efficient the dependence to Russian energy resources of some European countries.

Military, Russia decided, in response to military exercises conducted by NATO, to conduct impressive exercises on its Western border, in Crimea and adjacent territories bordering Ukraine, the Baltic countries, in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. This exercises were designed to “show the force”, and culminated with an impressive Russian National Day parade. Last but not least, Russia redirected its strategic interest to the nuclear capabilities and Bulava project. “Thus, in 2014, Russia announced a huge number of new large strategic projects: intercontinental ballistic missiles «Yars» and «Rubej» ICBM «SARMAT», ICBM complex rail «Barguzin», Borei submarines with strategic missile «Bulava», the long-range strategic aviation complex, the cruise missiles X-101/102 and cruise missiles for the Navy «Zircon», two missile defense system based on C-500 and a-135M, an extensive network of radars rocket type «Voronezh», the single command and control system for detecting cosmic, a new line of vehicles rocket – the list goes on” [20] and numerous advertisements inputs of hundreds of armored and soft-skin vehicles for ground forces, helicopters and fighter planes for the air force, surface ships and submarines for combat naval forces. It remains to be seen whether Russia can afford such expenditures on armaments: “Putin has always been generous with promises of military hardware, but the short period of reform has seen an unprecedented avalanche of «defense orders» – hundreds of helicopters and T-90 / T- 95 tanks, Ruslan transport planes
and «fifth-generation» fighters, several aircraft carriers, and the French helicopter carrier Mistral; a minimally realistic assessment shows that deliveries on this spectacular wish list remain problematic” [21].

However, in the course of 2014 the Russians announced the 2015 defense budget increased by 24%, which is quite an impressive amount, not to mention the hidden costs for research, about which no one speaks, but we can assume it exists. Particular attention is given to strategic nuclear assets which, until a few years ago, were the main concern of Kremlin compared to conventional equipment: “The pivotal importance of nuclear weapons for guaranteeing Russia’s security is one of the fundamental postulates of its macro strategic dogma that is ritually confirmed in all key documents and speeches.....This reliance on the «absolute weapon» is nevertheless far more controversial than the mental habit of connecting great power status with the possession of a vast nuclear arsenal would admit” [22].

It can be appreciated the situation tends to be critical for an indefinite period of time. Relevant are two statements summarizing the Kremlin leader’s strategic directions of Russia’s future behavior. In a political perspective, “We must immediately begin substantive discussions (...) on matters relating to the political organization of society and create a state for south-eastern Ukraine, in order to protect the legitimate interests of the people living there” [23]. Also, Kremlin’s fear can be summarized as President Putin stated: “I want to be clear and honest. We maintain a dialogue with our partners – the Europeans and Americans – using only peaceful and diplomatic instruments. But in our attempts to continue this dialogue, they responded by supporting an unconstitutional coup in Ukraine. I had no guarantee that Ukraine will not become part of NATO tomorrow” [24]. From a military view, Putin also said: “We do not intend, as some do, to walk and waved the sword in the world. But all must understand that we also have something like that in our arsenal” [25].

5. Conclusion
“...We continue to believe that a partnership between NATO and Russia based on respect for international law would be of strategic value” [26].

NATO has shown its determination to don’t give up the fundamental principles of the Alliance, while maintaining an “open door” for diplomatic dialogue. “We continue to aspire to a cooperative, constructive relationship with Russia, including reciprocal confidence building and transparency measures and increased mutual understanding of NATO’s and Russia’s non-strategic nuclear force postures in Europe, based on our common security concerns and interests, in a Europe where each country freely chooses its future” [27].

On the other hand the Kremlin leader said on 14.08.2014, in a speech during a meeting with local representatives and other officials in Yalta, Crimea, that “Russia will take further measures of self-defense, but not at the cost of a confrontation with the world”. In fact, Russia demonstrated it is determined to disregard the recommendations of the EU, NATO and Western countries, and continues to “feed” the conflict through both political and military support efforts, probable in respect to the Russian Commander in Chief directive “We must strengthen and mobilize, not for war or any kind of confrontation, but for hard work on behalf of Russia” [28].

The future of the NATO – Russia relation is dependent on how the conflict will be resolved in Ukraine while the Crimea remains under Russian authority.

It can be appreciated that the current state of conflict resolution may lead in the future to four options, such as: taking control of the current breakaway provinces...
by Kiev and return to normality; taking
control by Kiev but in some kind of federal
state; the escalation of conflict leading to
the creation of similar separatist regions,
like in Transnistria (specific for frozen
conflicts); and the worst case scenario,
outbreak of military conflict between
Ukraine and Russia. Compared to these
possible variations, NATO – Russia
relations can develop positively and return
to normality (as happened after Russia’s
military intervention in Georgia in 2008), it
can return to the Cold War (as it was until
1990) or even escalate to a possible state of
conflict, which can take different forms.
The question is: will Russia hold?!?
During Gorbachev’s, USSR gave up the
arms race just because it could not sustain
the economically and financially effort.
Current attempts to move the effort on
strategic, economic and financial relations
with India, China and Iran (demonstrated
by recent high level visits of Mr. President
Putin) it may work on the short term,
however, on long term will not be efficient.
For this countries life goes on with or
without Russian’s problems. Even
Moscow’s policy that “Oil is money and
gas is power” is about to lose its relevance,
while Europe will be able to live without
energy resources that Russia uses to
determine and influence the reaction of
some European capitals. Finally, the
significant internal problems of social,
economic and demographic faced for a few
years by Russia might no longer be possible
to be “kept under blanket”, and so Kremlin
could be forced to change the direction of
political and economic effort from outside
on the inside. Not to forget that Ukraine has
a “word” that is important to say on how far
it will go with its actions to regain control
of the breakaway regions, with or without
affecting Russian ethnic population.
The possibility of a war between Ukraine
and Russia remains open.
Finally, one question remains.
Is NATO able to face, in a military way, a
confrontation with Russia, in a case of a
Article 5 scenario? In accordance with the
Washington Treaty, we are all convinced
that the answer is positive. However, such a
situation should be avoided. It remains that
the commitment and dedication of the
Alliance’s Members to further push in the
course of implementation of the directions
approved on Wales Summit to prevent any
aggressive action from Russia. In the same
time, let’s hope Russia will realize that time
is working for the Alliance and, facing the
current economical sanctions impose by
EU, Kremlin will avoid escalating the
conflict and will allow Ukraine to built its
future as Ukrainians want.

Acknowledgements:
This paper was possible with the
financial support of the Sectorial
Operational Programme for Human
Resources Development 2007-2013,
co-financed by the European Social Fund,
under the project number POSDRU/1.5/
S1/138822 with the title “Transnational
network of integrated management of
intelligent doctoral and postdoctoral
research in the fields of Military Science,
Security and Intelligence, Public Order and
National Security – Continuous formation
programme for elite researcher-
SmartSPODAS”.

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