
BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE BEFORE THE WAR OF 2022

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Abstract: Russia–Ukraine relations are bilateral international relations between Russia and Ukraine, two states bordering the post-Soviet space. The two countries share a long common medieval history. Kievan Rus' is the ancient political entity common to the history of the three modern East Slavic states: Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. By the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654, the Cossack state was integrated into the Russian Empire but had a large degree of autonomy from the Russian state. Ukraine's autonomy was abolished at the end of the 18th century, under the reign of Catherine II. Following the February Revolution of 1917 in Russia, Ukraine experienced its first independence, which lasted until 1921. Following the breakup of the USSR in 1991, Ukraine regained its independence. Relations between Russia and Ukraine have been complex since the breakup of the USSR. They are punctuated by several economic disputes (gas conflicts). They have become significantly strained in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war since 2014, until reaching a state of undeclared war, due to the Crimean crisis, which saw Crimea and Sevastopol (Ukrainian territories since 1954) unilaterally annexed by the Russian Federation following the 2014 referendum, not recognized by the majority of the international community. They have also become strained due to the Donbass war, in which Russia is involved by waging a hybrid war. On February 24, 2022, the date of the start of the general Russian invasion of the country after a diplomatic crisis that began in March 2021, Ukraine broke off diplomatic relations with Russia. Aware of the dangers of a military conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the international community within the Council of Europe worked hard to find a peace agreement between the Kremlin and Kiev to find a peaceful solution. The Minsk Protocols were signed in 2014 and 2015, but they never came into force. In that way, the opportunity to prevent the military conflict in Ukraine was missed

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Common history, Minsk 1 and Minsk 2 Protocol, Crimea occupation

1. INTRODUCTION

After Ukraine's independence in 1991, the disappointed hopes of the Orange Revolution in 2004, the election of a pro-Russian candidate to the Ukrainian presidency in 2010, then the Revolution of Dignity in 2013, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its hybrid destabilization of Donbass, Moscow openly went to war against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. A rude awakening for many EU countries. The two countries share a long common medieval history. Kievan Rus' is the oldest common political entity in the history of the three modern East Slavic states: Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. Kyiv, the capital of modern Ukraine, is considered the cradle of East Slavic civilization. After the Mongol invasion of Kievan Rus' (1223–1240), the histories of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples began to diverge. The northernmost provinces of Kievan Rus' remained under Mongol rule, and later gained independence by forming the Tsardom of Russia with Moscow as its capital. In contrast, the Ukrainian and Belarusian territories became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, where Old Ruthenian became the official language. The term Cossack, of Turko-Mongol origin, refers to semi-nomadic populations structured in autonomous military and agricultural communities on the margins of Russia and Poland-Lithuania, in the regions of Iaïk (later renamed the Urals), the Volga, the Don, or the Dnieper. Each region then constitutes a "march", an oukraïna, at the origin of the name Ukraine. Led by an elected general (ataman), these populations are made up of free men and independent warriors, they welcome peasants who flee the extension of serfdom, live from hunting, fishing and pillaging and are very attached to their traditional privileges. As the Russian Empire was built, their military skills were exploited by the autocratic power and their freedoms were reduced, which led them to lead numerous revolts, such as that of Razin (1670-1671) or Pugachev (1773-1775). (M-K Schaub, 2021, p.25.) Between 1650 and 1800, Russia became the largest continental empire on the planet, extending from Poland to the Pacific, from the Arctic to the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, while integrating a multiplicity of different languages, cultures and religions. The empire is thought of as a collection of peoples united by their submission to the sovereign and by the use of the Russian language, particularly in administration. It represents a flexible framework, one of the operating principles of which is a mode of government in differentiation. The Ukrainian national movement emerged at the beginning of the 19th century like other national movements in Europe. The poet Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), whose work is considered to be constitutive of the Ukrainian literary language, was its great figure. Exiled in Kazakhstan for his political positions, he was seen as a victim of Russian power. After the Brest-Litovsk Agreement (2018) three years later in 1921, peace having returned, the Bolsheviks imposed their power on almost all the Ukrainian regions that had belonged to the Russian Empire – Western Volynia returned to Poland – and put an end to the Ukrainian

People's Republic. In 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created, including Ukraine with Kharkov as its capital. (A. Viatteau, 2018.). The USSR was established in 1922 as a federation of Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR), within which autonomous republics were inserted. From 4 SSRs at the beginning, there were 11 in 1936, 16 in 1945, and 15 in 1956 (S. Dullin, 2021, p.80-88.) After the Second World War, Stalin imposed his leadership on Ukraine. The war also largely reestablished the hierarchy between nations within the USSR. Generalissimo Stalin attributed to the Russians the role of guide of the other nations of the Union. Ukraine is the country that makes up the important part of the USSR, until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1989-1991, the "parade of sovereignties" from Ukraine to Tatarstan, from Georgia to Moldova, from Russia to Lithuania, used the resources of the Soviet Constitution and the right of secession to affirm the victory of small homelands over the great Soviet country. (J-J Marie, L'Histoire n°252./ March 2001, S. Dullin, 2021.) In 1991, the territory of independent Ukraine was the result of a turbulent history, which explains a different relationship to the past depending on the region. The eastern regions came from the former Russian Empire, while those in the west were annexed between 1939 and 1945 at the expense of Poland, Romania or Czechoslovakia. Crimea, given by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, was annexed by Russia in 2014. In the Donbass, clashes continue to pit separatist movements against the Ukrainian central government. The invasion of Crimea by Russian troops in February 2014 and the crisis, then the war, in the eastern regions which, supported by Moscow, are fighting for their autonomy, accelerate the process of decommunization and de-Sovietization. In 2022 (February 24) Putin launches the special military operation and the war against Nazism in Ukraine. The world is entering another geopolitical phase, very dangerous and very bloody.

2. HISTORICAL ASPECTS

Integration into the Russian Empire (1654-1917) In the 17th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, formed by the union of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland, experienced conflicts between Catholics and Orthodox. During the uprising of 1648, Bogdan Khmelnytsky sought to gain independence for Ukraine. The war with Warsaw was long and devastating, and Khmelnytsky was forced to ally himself with the Muscovite state, with which he signed the Treaty of Pereyaslav (1654). At that time, he controlled only part of present-day Ukraine. The Cossack state, founded by Khmelnytsky, continued to enjoy extensive autonomy from the Russian state. This autonomy was not definitively abolished until the end of the 18th century, under the reign of Catherine II. During the partitions of Poland at the end of the 18th century, Ukraine was gradually incorporated into the Russian Empire. However, the western part of the country was incorporated into the Austrian Empire. On July 18, 1863, a decree of the Russian Minister of the Interior Pyotr Valuyev (Russian: Пётр Валуев) limited the use of the Ukrainian language. Other restrictive measures were added. The publication and even the importation of books in Ukrainian were prohibited.

Aborted independence (1917-1921) Related article: Ukrainian War of Independence. Following the February Revolution (1917), the Central Council of Ukraine (Central Rada) proclaimed the autonomy of Ukraine, and then, following the Bolshevik coup d'état, the Ukrainian People's Republic. The Bolshevik government sought to crush the new state militarily, but was forced to recognize it following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. Nestor Makhno, a Ukrainian anarchist, made Huliaipole the regional center of a libertarian guerrilla war. From November 1918 to June 1919, Makhnovtchina controlled the south-east of Ukraine, including the port of Mariupol and a portion of Donbass. The influence of its supporters extended to the gates of Kharkiv, in the north, and Odessa, in the west. "Free communes" were created at the initiative of the most deprived peasants, in conjunction with "free workers' councils".² In 1919-1920, the Ukrainian separatists attempted to confront both the Bolsheviks and the Russian White Armies. In 1921, they definitively lost, but the independence guerrillas continued for a few more years (notably the Kholodnyarsk Republic (1919-1922) (uk) in the Kholodnyi Yar forest massif (uk)).

Soviet era (1921-1991) Detailed articles: Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Holodomor. In 1920, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, a constituent republic of the USSR, was established, absorbing the territory of the former Ukrainian People's Republic founded in March 1917 following the Russian Revolution. In 1932-1933, under Stalin, a great famine raged in Ukraine, the Holodomor, which is said to have caused between 4 and 7 million Ukrainian deaths. At the beginning of the 21st century, the responsibility of the Soviet authorities in the genesis and scale of the famine is generally recognized (through collectivization, "dekulakization" campaigns, excessive requisitions of foodstuffs from peasants and restrictions on movement imposed in the midst of famine), but many differences of analysis persist between historians on the relative importance of the different factors that caused the famine, as well as on Stalin's real aims. (S. Wheatcroft, 2004, 126, p.) The question of whether or not the Holodomor constituted a genocide remains fiercely debated. At the end of 2006, Ukraine officially described the Holodomor as a genocide, a qualification recognized by a number of countries including the United States. The genocidal nature of this famine is however contested by Kazakhstan and Russia, who argue in particular that Ukraine was not the only republic affected, (le Parlement européen, 2008) and is not recognized by the UN. The European Parliament in 2008 recognised the Holodomor as a crime against humanity, deeming it to be an induced famine and a "crime against the

Ukrainian people and against humanity"(N.Werth,2021, p.95) After the Crimean Invasion in 2014, this event provoked a very strong national awareness in Ukraine. The Soviet past is now more widely assimilated to a Russian past with which it is necessary to break. The unbolting of the statue of Lenin in Kharkov in September 2014 bears witness to this. While the mayor, Gennady Kernes, threatened a few months earlier to break the hands of anyone who tried to touch this monument, he let it happen. The war has passed. In May 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament voted four laws of decommunization under the influence of the Institute of National Memory. They provide in particular for the prohibition of the symbolism of the communist and Nazi regimes in public spaces, the changing of street names and the dismantling of statues, the total opening of Soviet archives and measures in favor of fighters for the independence of Ukraine; 965 statues of Lenin were torn down between 2013 and 2016: this was called *leninopad*, the "fall of the Lenins"; 52,000 streets were renamed; 986 localities and 32 cities changed their names, such as Dnipropetrovsk, which became Dnipro, abandoning the name of Grigori Petrovsky, a Bolshevik leader from the city. Russian interference in Crimea and Donbass added a new dimension to these changes: it was now necessary to erase all references to Russia. In Kyiv, the Moscow Bridge, which crosses the Dnieper, was first repainted in blue and yellow, the colours of the Ukrainian flag, before being renamed the "northern" bridge in 2018. Moscow Square and Avenue also changed their names: the latter took the toponym, hated in Russia, of the Ukrainian nationalist Stepan Bandera. Decommunization becomes derussification, in accordance with a discourse increasingly present in Ukraine which tends to present the past as a period of Russian colonization. (F-X Nérard, 2021, p.102.)

3. THE CRIMEAN INVASION (2014)-THE BEGINNING OF A POSSIBLE WAR BETWEEN THE RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

On March 11, 2014, the Crimean parliament declared the independence of the Republic of Crimea (uniting the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol). Despite these events, the Ukrainian government stated that it would not send troops to Crimea, for fear of depleting Ukraine's eastern borders, where Russia had deployed significant troops. Internationally, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the European Union and many other countries condemned Russia, accusing it of intervening militarily in Crimea and thus violating international law and Ukraine's sovereignty. On March 18, 2014, following a referendum held on March 16, the Russian government announced that the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, formerly Ukrainian, would become two new federal subjects of the Russian Federation. The annexation was ratified on March 20 by the lower house with 443 votes for and one against. The upper house (the Russian Senate) did the same on March 21 unanimously. On March 19, 2014, the Ukrainian government was preparing to withdraw its troops from Crimea to mainland Ukraine "quickly and efficiently"(BBC News, 2014). However, tensions remained high between the two countries due to Russian support for the pro-Russian uprising in the east of the country (Donbass). On October 19, 2014, an agreement was reached with Moscow to reestablish full control of the Russian-Ukrainian border. On 25 May 2016, Nadiya Savchenko was pardoned and exchanged by Russia for two Russians imprisoned in Ukraine, Yevgeny Erofejev and Alexander Alexandrov, accused by Kyiv of belonging to the Russian military intelligence service (GRU) and of having fought alongside the rebels in the East during the Ukrainian crisis. On 8 March 2017, Ukraine brought a case against Russia before the International Court of Justice.³⁷ On 19 April 2017, the International Court of Justice condemned Russia for its treatment of the Crimean Tatars but requested evidence from Ukraine regarding Russia's support for the separatists.³⁸ The Ukrainian government prevented the 2018 Russian presidential election from taking place in Russian consulates and embassies located on its soil on 16 March, in retaliation for its holding in Crimea.³⁹ On November 25, 2018, following a naval incident in the Kerch Strait, Russia captured three Ukrainian ships in the Black Sea. Ukraine then considered declaring martial law.(RFI, 2020) According to journalist Igor Delanoë, "in the November crisis, the Ukrainians were challenging the status quo that had been established to their detriment by refusing to comply with the crossing procedures imposed by the Russians. If they had wanted to, they could very well have transferred these small ships by land, as they had done in September with two patrol boats. On September 24, a detachment of two Ukrainian warships—a tugboat and a rescue ship—also crossed the Kerch passage, after signaling their intention and under close Russian surveillance, without causing any incident." By deciding this time not to let their ships hang around in the long queue stretching out around the strait under the 2003 convention, the Ukrainians could not have been unaware that the Russians would resort to force. They wanted to obtain military assistance from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which Kyiv is seeking membership in, so far in vain.

4. THE MINSK PROTOCOL

The Minsk Protocol or Minsk I, is an agreement signed on 5 September 2014 in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, by representatives of Ukraine, Russia, the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in order to end the Donbass war, which began in April 2014 in eastern

Ukraine, following the Russo-Ukrainian war that itself broke out in February 2014^{2,3,4}. This ceasefire agreement in eastern Ukraine was signed after lengthy negotiations. It quickly appeared to be a failure⁵ and was replaced by the Minsk II agreements in February 2015. *Negotiation and signing of the protocol* In June 2014, a trilateral contact group on Ukraine was established, composed of representatives of Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE⁶, designed as a means of facilitating dialogue and conflict resolution in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. The meetings of this group with informal representatives of the Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic, breakaway entities of Ukraine, took place on 31 July, 26 August, 1 September and 5 September 2014. The agreement of 5 September closely resembled the fifteen-point peace plan proposed by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko on 20 June 2014. It was signed by⁷: the OSCE representative, Swiss Heidi Tagliavini; the representative of Ukraine, former President Leonid Kuchma; the representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov; the leaders of the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR): Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky. The text of the protocol includes twelve points (*delegfrance-osce*, 28 octobre 2014): Ensure an immediate bilateral ceasefire; Ensure monitoring and verification of the ceasefire by the OSCE; Organize a decentralization of powers, through the implementation of a Ukrainian law (the law on special status), granting temporary local autonomy in the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts; Ensure permanent monitoring of the Russian-Ukrainian border by the OSCE and establish a security zone on the same border; Immediately release all hostages and illegally detained persons; Adopt a Ukrainian law to prohibit prosecution and punishment of all persons involved in the war in Donbas; Continue a national dialogue between the parties; Implement measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Donbas; Hold early elections in Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts; Withdraw from the territory of Ukraine illegal armed formations and military equipment, as well as irregular fighters and mercenaries; Implement an economic program to promote the recovery of local activities and the economy in Donbas; Ensure personal protection of participants in the consultations.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINSK PROTOCOLS

In the two weeks following the signing of the Minsk Protocol, ceasefire violations have occurred frequently, by both sides. Discussions are continuing in Minsk. Follow-up Memorandum (19 September) A follow-up to the Minsk Protocol was agreed on 19 September 2014. The resulting memorandum clarifies the implementation of the protocol. Agreed-up measures for peace include: the removal of all heavy weapons from a zone fifteen kilometres behind the contact line, by each side, in order to create a demilitarised zone thirty kilometres wide in total; a ban on offensive operations; a ban on warplanes flying over the security zone; the withdrawal of all foreign mercenaries from the conflict zone; the establishment of an OSCE mission to monitor the implementation of the Minsk Protocol. Discussions on 26 September On 26 September, members of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine met again to discuss the delimitation of the buffer zone, in which heavy weapons were banned. The demarcation line between the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Ukraine was agreed between representatives of both sides, according to Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine Vitali Yarema. 14 Renewed war A second battle for Donetsk International Airport broke out on 28 September 2014, with both sides accusing each other of continued ceasefire violations. Donetsk International Airport had been closed to all air traffic since 26 May 2014, due to fighting between the forces of the new Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatists. In late October 2014, the Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, negotiator and signatory of the Minsk Protocol, Alexander Zakharchenko, stated that the forces under his control would return to retake the territory they had lost to the Ukrainian government forces during the July 2014 offensive and that the DPR forces would be ready to fight in heavy combat to achieve their goals. 5,16 The next day, Zakharchenko stated that he had been misunderstood, and that he meant that these areas would be retaken by "peaceful means." During his campaign for the general elections in Donbass conducted by the DPR and the Lugansk People's Republic (LPR), in alleged violation of the Minsk Protocol, Zakharchenko declared: "These are historic moments," "We are creating a new country! This is a crazy goal." (*J. Rocques BBC News*, OSCE, 2014) Chairman Didier Burkhalter, referring to the intentions of the self-proclaimed entities of Donetsk and Luhansk to hold so-called elections outside the framework set by Ukrainian law, confirmed that these elections were "contrary to the letter and spirit of the Minsk Protocol" and that they "would further complicate its implementation." Agreements of 26 December A further stage of the peace talks held in Minsk was suspended on 26 December 2014. However, after hours of negotiations, both sides agreed to exchange prisoners, involving at least 375 prisoners on both sides. The Minsk II agreements Main article: Minsk II. Signing of the agreements (12 February 2015) Following the manifest failure of the Minsk Protocol after renewed tensions with a war that started again in December 2014, new agreements were planned. The Minsk II agreements of 12 February 2015 were signed in the Normandy format: François Hollande, Angela Merkel, Petro Poroshenko, Vladimir Putin, and representatives of the self-proclaimed popular republics of Donetsk and Lugansk (secessionists from Ukraine) and established a new ceasefire. End of the agreements (January-February 2022) In January 2022, Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of the

National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, stated that “compliance with the Minsk agreements means the destruction of the country. When they were signed under the armed threat of the Russians — and under the gaze of the Germans and the French — it was already clear to all rational people that it was impossible to implement these documents.” In early February 2022, Finnish President Sauli Niinistö stated that “the best solution could be that the Minsk agreement is respected or that there is significant progress in its implementation.” After his in-depth discussions with the Russian and Ukrainian heads of state, President Macron came to the same conclusion: “The Minsk agreements are the best chance for Ukraine’s protection.” On February 15, 2022, the Russian Duma voted to request President Putin to recognize the self-proclaimed republics of eastern Ukraine. The next day, a Russian government spokesperson confirmed that recognizing the Donbass republics would not be in accordance with the agreements, which the head of American diplomacy confirmed: it “would represent a global rejection by the Russian government of its commitments in accordance with the Minsk agreements.” However, the Russian government declared that President Putin’s priority in regulating the situation in Donbass remains the implementation of the autonomy mechanisms provided for in these agreements. A very significant increase in bombings and explosions in Donbass was noted from February 17. Russia officially recognized the self-proclaimed people’s republics of Luhansk and Donetsk on February 21, 2022, which ended the protocol drawn up with the assistance of France and Germany. He believes that the agreements “no longer exist”. On February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine, alleging, among other grievances, Ukraine’s failure to comply with these agreements (R-J. Ravier France 24, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

Kievan Rus' is the oldest political entity in the history of the three Slavic states of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. From the 13th century until today, all these three states have gone through drastic historical moments full of tragedies, wars, conflicts. After the Bolshevik revolution and especially after World War II, Ukraine and Belarus were part of the great Soviet Union. With the dissolution of the USSR, according to the Constitution, all federal units invoked the right to independence. The first sparks of misunderstanding between Russia and Ukraine arose in 1991. Not having a feeling for greater democratization and greater rights of the ancients, the first military clashes between Russophones helped by Russia and the Ukrainian army (Donbas) occur. In 2014, the Minsk Protocols were signed between Russia and Ukraine and six other entities mediated by the OSCE to overcome military conflicts. These protocols were the last chance for a peaceful settlement of the dispute. Due to the non-respect of the same, but also due to geopolitical threats (Ukraine in NATO) i.e. excessive nationalist and Nazi trends in Ukraine, Russia first appropriated the strategic peninsula of Crimea (Ukraine) and in 2022 occupied Ukraine. Thus began the war in which 500,000 civilians and soldiers were killed in less than three years. Many people wonder: Is world peace threatened and is a Third World (nuclear) war possible?

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