

***Before and after crises in Ukraine.  
The conflict and some proposals for resolution***

**Prima e dopo le crisi in Ucraina.  
Il conflitto e alcune proposte di risoluzione**

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**Abstract**

*The article analyzes the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its most recent developments. Some proposals for its solution are put forward, that are based on J. Galtung's peace research model. These proposals are characterized by 'exchange' (Russia obtains Crimea, Ukraine maintains its sovereignty on Novorossiya but gives up the ambition to join NATO), 'symmetric integration' (a federalist transformation of Ukraine), and 'single-nation separation' (through a referendum, Crimea and part of Novorossiya separate from Ukraine). The main hurdle regarding the achievement of a conflict resolution is nonetheless the 'politically correct' diplomacy resorted to by Zelensky and Biden, which rejects both the real-politik approach of the Cold War era and the project for a liberal world order of the XX Century.*

L'articolo analizza le origini del conflitto russo-ucraino e i suoi sviluppi più recenti. Vengono avanzate alcune proposte per la sua soluzione, basate sul modello di ricerca sulla pace di J. Galtung. Queste proposte sono caratterizzate da "scambio" (la Russia ottiene la Crimea, l'Ucraina mantiene la sua sovranità sulla Novorossija ma rinuncia all'ambizione di aderire alla NATO), "integrazione simmetrica" (una trasformazione federalista dell'Ucraina) e "separazione nazionale" (attraverso un referendum, la Crimea e parte della Novorossija si separano dall'Ucraina). L'ostacolo principale al raggiungimento di una risoluzione del conflitto è tuttavia la diplomazia "politicamente corretta" a cui fanno ricorso Zelensky e Biden, che rifiutano sia l'approccio real-politik dell'era della Guerra Fredda sia il progetto di un ordine mondiale liberale XX secolo.

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**Keywords**

*Conflict, War, Crises, Ukraine, Russia*  
Conflitto, guerra, crisi, Ucraina, Russia

## Models of conflict resolution

Conflict resolution has been a major topic in the study of international relations since the publication of Galtung's seminal works (Galtung 1969, 1987; Galtung and Jacobsen 2000; Webel and Galtung 2007). Galtung's typology has been critically discussed (Gilady and Russett 2002) and other contributions in the field have been advanced (Coakley 1992; Leatherman and Vayrynen 1995; Mitchell and Banks 1996; Stefanova and Greco 1997; Fossati 2008, 2022; Richmond and Visoka 2020; Walker 2022).

According to Fossati (1998; 2010; 2023), various models of conflict resolution may be identified. Territorial conflicts are usually resolved through either separation or integration. In the case of separation, as between the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the units (sometimes a plurality of them) cease to interact or form different states. It is possible to distinguish between single-nation separations, when the new states (e.g.: Slovenia, Eritrea, Southern Sudan and East Timor) are ethnically and culturally homogeneous, and pluri-national separations as after the dissolution of former Yugoslavia into Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Integration occurs when two or more units merge into a single territory, as in the case of the unification of East and West Germany. In turn, integration may be symmetric or asymmetric. The former type leads to federalism, as happened in Bosnia and Iraq, or to consensus pacts based on power-sharing, as in Lebanon and Afghanistan (until 2021) while asymmetric integration is based only on administrative autonomy recognized to minorities, as between Israel and Palestinians (according to Oslo's agreements).

In the case of compromise, the contested territory is informally divided among the parts involved in the conflict (e.g.: Cyprus or Artsakh), in a form of complementary solution. Another conflict solution, which combines aspects of integration and separation, is confederation as exemplified by the dissolution (opting out of member states) of the former USSR or Serbia-Montenegro. Shared sovereignty, or 'condominium', is another solution based on compromise - although it has proved to be a rare event.

Dominion occurs when one of the actors in the conflict manages to reach its goal against the opposition and the disagreement of the counterpart. This often as a consequence of a military victory, as in the case of the conflict in Sri Lanka. Incapacitation implies the physical annihilation of the counterpart, often through expulsion and ethnic cleansing (e.g., Abkhazia), while in the solution through segmentation the unit which has imposed the separation of the other into more subunits maintains positive relations with only one of these new subunits (like in the case of the solution of the conflict in Chechnya). When a unit forces the change of authority in the other one (for

example through a *coup d'état*), and maintain a positive relation with the new leaders we can talk of subversion. Diversion happens when the units freeze an old conflict and re-establish a new relationship which can be negative (leading to new conflicts) or positive (leading to cooperation, as in the case of the commercial agreement between Taiwan and China). Finally, multilateralization is the case of units which freeze an old conflict and start to interact with a new unit, either jointly or separately (this is the case of the UN peace-keeping missions).

## **The sociological map of Ukraine and the legacies of the Czar empire and of Communism**

According to Galtung (2000), peace researchers should map national identities at social level, resorting to both objective (such as language, religion and ethnicity) and subjective criteria (self-perception). Obviously state and nations may not coincide, and either single or pluri-national states are possible (Horowitz 1985; Diamond and Plattner 1994; Keating 2001). Moreover, there may be nations without states (as it seems the case with Palestinians, Kurds, and Tamils), or nations divided into two states (North and South Korea, see Fossati 2017). According to Huntington (1996) five civilizations can be identified (Christian West, Islamic, Hindu, Chinese, Japanese), to which Galtung (1981) added the Hebrew, the Buddhist, the Latino-American, the African and the Orthodox one of eastern Europe.

The Ukrainian conflict may be classified as an infra-civilization one, in that the population is divided into a majority (75%) who speaks Ukrainian (in the western regions of the country, characterized by pro-European attitudes) and a minority (about 20%) who speaks Russian as mother language (in the pro-Russian east). There are no ethnic differences between Ukrainians and Russians, and many among the Ukrainian citizens speak both languages, similarly mixed marriages are rather spread. The reverse applies in Crimea, where nearly 80% of the population is Russians, 10% of Ukrainians and 10% Tartar.

In the past centuries, Ukraine was part of the Russian empire of the Czars and there was no Ukrainian polity until the establishment of the Cossack Hetmanate, from 1468 to 1764, during which Russia occupied the nowadays contested territories, that is eastern Novorossiia (including Donbass) and Crimea. In 1775 the whole Cossack Hetmanate was occupied by decision of the Czarina Catarina II, while the western part of that territory was conquered by the Austro-Hungarian empire. Ukraine turned to be independent in 1917 after the communist revolution in Russia. In 1922 Ukraine conquered Novorossiia, but Crimea remained under the sovereignty

of USSR. In 1954, Khrushchev (himself a Ukrainian) assigned Crimea to Ukraine, and a form of condominium (compromise) was established between Russia and Ukraine, because if Ukraine enjoyed the political sovereignty over the territory, Russia maintained its naval base and fleet in Sebastopol therefore exercising a military control over Ukraine.

### **Political conflict in Ukraine: from 1991 independence to 2014 military crisis**

After 1989, the dissolution of the Communist regimes brought about many conflicts which turned into wars in Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and Asia. They were both inter and infra-civilizations wars (Huntington 1996). The Russian incapacity to exercise control over the former socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe, and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) allowed the European Union (EU) to launch the enlargement process and to accept the candidacies of those countries for integration. Nonetheless, Russia retained its primacy over the other former Soviet republics, and Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan remained under its geo-political sphere of influence. The intervention of the NATO in Bosnia and Kosovo was not opposed by Russia, which on its account could intervene in Transnistria, Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, and could directly be involved in the war in Chechnya. That *de facto* pact was confirmed in 2008, when Russia attacked Georgia.

Although the 1991 Ukrainian independence did not lead to a conflict with Russia, as it has been above referred, there has been since a deep political conflict between the pro-Europe western majority and the pro-Russia eastern minority which has frustrated the ambition of western Ukrainian population to integrate into Europe (Dimitrova and Dragneva 2009). However, Ukraine has remained a highly centralized polity and an illiberal democracy as a sort of hybrid regime (Morlino 2008), because the rights of Russian citizens have never been fully respected or recognized in the Ukrainian constitution. The conflict between the Ukrainian majority and the Russian minority has never been resolved, but some political balance was reached thanks to the alternation in power of pro-Europe and pro-Russia presidents over the decades (see Table 1).

Table 1 - List of Ukrainian presidents since independence

<i>Pro-Europe West</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Pro-Russia East</i>
Kravchuk	8-1991/7-1994	
	7-1994/1-2005	Kuchma*
Yushchenko**	1-2005/2-2010	
	2-2010/2-2014	Yanukovich <sup>§</sup>
Turchynov	2-2014/6/2014	
Poroshenko	6-2014/5-2019	
Zelensky	5-2019 →	

\* For Kuchma's period, see Beichelt (2004).

\*\* For Yushchenko's phase, see: Fisher et al. (2008), Kubicek (2009).

§ For Yanukovich's period, see: Valasek (2010).

Sources: Global Security (2023) and Uppsala University (2023) databases.

When pro-Russia Yanukovich won the elections of fall 2004 with 49% of the votes, the protests of the western population led to the so-called 'Orange revolution' (Kuzio 2005; Way 2005; Aslund and McFaul 2006; McFaul 2007). On December 3 the Supreme Court annulled the electoral result because of the alleged frauds of Yanukovich, new elections were held on December 26 and this time the pro-Europe candidate Yushchenko won with 52% of the votes. The peak of the tension was reached in April 2005, when negotiations and talks started with the US president Bush about the opportunity for Ukraine to join the NATO, and subsequently in 2008 when the Ukrainian formal request to join NATO was advanced (Larrabee 2006; Kuzio 2006). According to Mearsheimer (2014), that change in the NATO's strategy increased the tension and the likelihood of conflict with Russia. After the Orange revolution, the pro-Europe presidents tried to impose a dominion against the Russian minority of the eastern regions, however this strategy did not success because eventually in 2010 pro-Russia Yanukovich was elected as president. Under the presidency of Yanukovich, the Ukrainian request to join NATO was frozen, but it was relaunched by Poroshenko in December 2014.

In November 2013, popular protests broke out in Kiev and in the western Ukraine to push Yanukovich to sign the association agreement with the EU. The pro-Russia president refused to do it, and left Kiev on February 14. Pro-Europe Turchynov was named *ad interim* president. On February 23, protests spread throughout Crimea. A warfare broke out in March 2014 in the eastern regions of Donbass (Donetsk and Luhansk) between the Russian minorities and the local government. The stalemate was broken by the direct intervention of pro-Russian military forces, allegedly supported by Putin and

by the Russian army, which overthrew the local Ukrainian authorities. A referendum was called in Crimea on March 16, the electoral turnout was 85% with 95% of votes in favor of the secession of Crimea and its integration with Russia, which subsequently annexed the region. USA and EU protested (Allen 2023), the UN did not recognize the new political status of Crimea which was eventually occupied by Russian army. 30,000 people among Ukrainians and Tartars abandoned Crimea.<sup>1</sup> In Donbass the pro-Russia militia waged a war against the Ukrainian army, and in April the conflict was extended to the region of Kharkiv Oblast, where the Ukrainian army manage to prevail. On May 11 a referendum proclaimed the independence of Donbass and the confederation of Novorossiia (Donetsk and Luhansk). There were also some armed clashes in Odessa, but Ukraine kept control over the town. Rebels conquered most (nearly two thirds) of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Since 2016, armed clashed have decreased, but never got to an end.<sup>2</sup> The conflict got to a stalemate, the Ukrainian central government could claim control over 85% of the territory (mainly in the western regions), while the remaining 15% of eastern Donbass fell under the dominion of Russian rebels.

In September 2014 and in February 2015, respectively, the I and II protocol of Minsk were signed (with the mediation of the Organization for Security and Cooperation, OSCE). The Ukrainian government granted only some administrative autonomy to the eastern regions, but Putin and the Russian rebels rejected it. In the term of the typology above introduced, it would have been a form of 'asymmetric' integration. As a counter move, in March 2014, the Russian foreign minister Lavrov proposed federalism (symmetric integration) for Ukraine, but the Ukrainian government rejected it because a federal system would have implied the loss of political control over the eastern regions and an opportunity opened to Russia to exercise its influence in the area. Notwithstanding that federalism has revealed to be a sustainable solution for conflicts, as in the cases of Bosnia and Iraq (Fossati 1999, 2017), the EU promotion of a federal organization of the contested areas has never been consistent (Solonenko 2009; Casier 2011). Not surprisingly, in April 2014 the Ukrainian parliament declared federalism illegal, and warned the government not to accept any negotiation with Russia on the perspective of a federal solution of the conflict (Loizides and Garry 2014). The crystallization of the conflict favored the rise of radical nationalist movements both Russia and Ukraine. On their part, neither OSCE nor the Western powers and media have pressed the Ukrainian presidents to make concessions to the Russian minorities.

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<sup>1</sup> In May 2014 pro-Europe Poroshenko was elected president with 54% of the votes; the second most voted candidate (13%) was Tymoshenko.

<sup>2</sup> All the ceasefire proposals were rejected, like that of Putin in September 2014, and that of the UN for a peace-keeping mission (International Crisis Group 2017).

Poroshenk's radical nationalism and anti-liberal attitude was never criticized.<sup>3</sup> In April 2019 Zelensky was elected president with an overwhelming majority of 73% of the votes, defeating the outgoing President Poroshenko who received 24% of the votes (Rohozinska and Shpak 2019). In October 2019, OSCE president Steinmeier (in office since 2016) proposed again administrative autonomy, but it was rejected by the newly elected Ukrainian executive.<sup>4</sup>

## Military conflict in Ukraine after the crisis of the Russian invasion in 2022

From 2021, Ukraine has been preparing to formally apply for EU membership in 2024, with the target to join EU in the 2030's. In February 2021, after much pressure from Zelensky, Ukraine was accepted as a candidate for admission to NATO. According to Mearsheimer (Chotiner 2022), that moved Putin to declare war on Ukraine at the end of an escalation of threats (International Crisis Group 2021). Indeed, already in 2021 spring, Russia had deployed his army at the frontier with Ukraine and reinforced it in October (Wallander 2021; Gomza 2022; Barany 2023). In December 2021, Putin asked Zelensky to renounce to the admission to NATO, receiving a refusal, and on February 14, 2022 the Russian army invaded Ukraine, *de facto* sweeping away the two Minsk protocols. The four eastern Ukrainian regions of Novorossiia (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson) were occupied, Donbass was united to Crimea, and the Russian troops were accused of abuses on the civilians. In September 2022, four referendum for the annexation were held in the occupied territories (most of Luhansk and two thirds of Donetsk). In November 2022 Ukraine reconquered Kherson in the south and Kharkiv in the north. In June 2023 there was the insurrections of the Russian para-military group Wagner, but their march towards Moscow was stopped (thanks to the mediation

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<sup>3</sup> According to a Russian political rival of Putin, Boris Nemtsov (murdered in February 2015), also in Russia federalism has never been effective (Olzansky 2014). In Ukraine, under the rightist ultra-nationalist government and because of the warfare in Donbass, the manipulation of democracy has been possible together with the reduction of Ukraine into a hybrid regime (Fossati 2017). A 'single-nation' conception of citizenship has been imposed, and the presence of the Russian minority in the east of the country and in Crimea has been negated. See: Petro (2017), Hale and Kulyk (2021), Quin-Judge (2018), Natorski (2018), Chaban et al. (2019), Carment et al. (2019). The OSCE mission lasted from September 2014 until February 2022. Before 2014, OSCE had never focused on Ukraine and underestimated that political conflict. In 2014 OSCE institutionalized the trilateral group of contact with Russia and Ukraine. After the two Minsk protocols, there was also the failure of the proposal of the German foreign minister Steinmeier in October 2019 (granting of only administrative autonomy for Donbass), as well the last attempt of mediation at Geneva negotiations in January 2022 (International Crisis Group 2019). (Schlapfer 2016; Guliyev and Gawrich 2021; Fratini 2023).

<sup>4</sup> On Zelensky's presidency, see Pisano (2022) and Yanchenko and Zulianello (2023).

of the Belarus president Lukashenko). Prigozhin – leader of the Wagner group - died in a plane crash in August 2023, and suspicious was raised about some involvement of the Russian intelligence in the accident.

Western governments have applied economic sanctions to Russia and supplied Ukraine militarily. The war so far has been deadly and costly. According to some estimates, nearly 500,000 persons had died as of September 2023, and there have been 15 million of refugees. However, Russia and Ukraine have not yet started any negotiation, Zelensky declared that he would never give up either Crimea or Novorossiya to Russia, although he said that he would renounce to any military intervention in Crimea (Nepi 2023).

## **Conflict resolution proposals for Crimea, Novorossiya and Transnistria**

Following Galtung's approach to peace research and conflict resolution (Galtung 1985; Gori 1979; Fossati 2008), in this section we will review some different proposals for conflict resolution in Ukraine.

- 1) *Federalism (symmetric integration)*. That seemed the most likely solution before 2014. The paradox is that federalism (Somin 2014) became a 'negative concept' for OSCE, NATO and Ukraine itself, since it was proposed by Russia in 2014. In the actual Ukrainian situation, there would be at least four federate states apart from the present one.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) *Consensus pact (symmetric integration)*. This symmetric solution could have been a feasible in the 1990's, and, similarly to the model implemented in Lebanon, it would have implied a constitution devising a rigid division of power between the Ukrainians and the eastern Russian minorities, maybe in a semi-presidential arrangement that would favor a cohabitation between a (Ukrainian) president and a (Russian) prime minister. This solution could have been proposed, for example, by OSCE when the conflict was only political. It seems now a very unlikely solution.
- 3) *Administrative autonomy (asymmetric integration) for Donbass, Novorossiya, and Crimea*. This was the proposal of the Ukrainian government according to the I and II Minsk protocols in 2014-2015. It was rejected by the eastern Russian

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<sup>5</sup> The proposal of division of Ukraine in four states see (Refoyo 2015). On the federal reform in Ukraine, see: Hale et al. (2015), Scialdone (2018), Keil and Alber (2020), Shelest and Rabyovich (2020), Aasland and Kropp (2021), Kropp and Holm-Hansen (2022).



minorities and by Russia.<sup>6</sup> The problem with this solution is that administrative autonomy often leads to increase of conflict among the parts (as in the case of Cyprus) and sometimes encourages acts of terrorism or military interventions by the neighboring states (as in the case of the permanent middle-east crises between Israel and the Palestinian Authorities in the West-bank and the Gaza strip). However, the concession of administrative autonomy does not seem a feasible solution after the Russian invasion of 2022.

- 4) *Exchange: Crimea to Russia, Novorossiia and Donbass to Ukraine.* This solution would imply that Ukraine renounced to NATO. In 2016 and 2018 Trump proposed the restitution of Crimea (not of Donbass) to Russia (Fossati 2019). In 2022 Kissinger proposed a referendum to be held in Crimea (with the supervision of the United Nations).<sup>7</sup>
- 5) *Dominion or Subversion of either Ukraine or Russia.* Dominion is the declared objective of both Zelensky and Putin, but it seems unrealistic. Subversion is also difficult to be accomplished, even if the 2023 rebellion of the para-military organization Wagner could have led to Putin's defeat, but probably not to a democratic transition. At the present state, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has reached a stalemate with no foreseeable outcomes, similarly to what happened between Iraq and Iran. The US President Biden and the governments of the Western powers may hope that the war would lead to the defeat of Putin, but even that seems an unlikely outcome.
- 6) *Compromise with a de facto territorial partition of Ukraine.* That is the current *de facto* solution of the conflict. Ukraine controls nearly 80% of its initial territory, and Russia the remaining 20% (including Crimea). This *de facto* solution is not obviously based on any peace agreement, but it would not probably prevent Ukraine from join NATO and the EU. *De facto* compromises are frequent in contemporary wars (e.g., between Greece and Turkey in Cyprus, between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh, between Shiites and Sunnis in Yemen)

<sup>6</sup> For the proposals of decentralization of the Ukrainian state, see: Sasse (2001) and Wolczuk (2002). Ukraine has never implemented the proposals of reform of the public administration made by the European Union (Leitsch 2017). In December 2019, the Ukrainian parliament voted for a very weak reform of (administrative) *self-rule* in Donbass, that was refused by Russian minorities and has never become law (International Crisis Group 2020). On federalism and decentralization, see Marlin (2016).

<sup>7</sup> On Trump's proposals, see: Deutsche Welle (2016) and Vita (2018). On those of Kissinger, see *La Stampa* (2022), *Il Tempo* (2022), and Franceschini (2022). Kissinger considered the admission of Ukraine into NATO a mistake (Perucchiotti 2023). On the Russian foreign policy under Putin's leadership, see: McFaul (2020), Ferrari and Ambrosetti (2021), Gotz and McFaul (2021), Person and McFaul (2022), Pisciotta (2019, 2023), Roren (2023), Stoner (2023).

when other solutions such as a confederative arrangement (with the ‘opting out’ formula) or a condominium are not sustainable.

- 7) *Single-nation separation through a referendum in the disputed regions.* An alternative proposal could be a referendum (guaranteed by the UN) in the disputed regions. This outcome should lead to a separation of Ukraine into two single-nation states: Ukraine in the west of the country, and the secession of the eastern regions that could choose to integrate with Russia. Ukraine could receive a territory compensation in Transnistria as a second exchange, although even in this case a referendum should be held to settle it. Any solution devising a single-nation separation would rest on the condition of a ceasefire signed by Zelensky and Putin, and of an internal migration towards west of the Ukrainian citizens that live in the eastern and contested regions, as in the case of the symmetrically exchange of minority populations between Greece and Turkey in Cyprus or India and Pakistan after 1945. Assuming that the population of Crimea would choose to unify with Russia, Donbass and Novorossiia should be divided into two: the western and border territories would go to Ukraine, and eastern territories to Russia. However, this single-nation separation is probably the most complicated solution to be implemented. Zelensky would surely refuse it, as he refuses any cession of territory to Russia, but Putin could probably accept it. Moreover, neither NATO nor the UN support such a solution. Referenda to fix the separation of disputed regions or intra-state secession have rarely been held (since 1989 we can count only four cases: Slovenia, Eritrea, East Timor, South Sudan) (Fossati 1999, 2017).
- 8) *Multilateralization with a new OSCE conference (Helsinki II) for all post-soviet East.* A multilateral solution could be foster by OSCE through a “conference” aiming at finding a solution to all the conflicts of the post-soviet eastern regions, therefore not only the ones in Donbass, Novorossiia, Crimea, and Transnistria, but also those of Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Chechnya. This conference – if held – would be like a sort of ‘Helsinki II’. OSCE could act in the process as an institutional guarantee to which the analysis and the proposals for solution of each conflict should be delegated. OSCE could also guarantee referenda in any case where the conflict is almost impossible to solve. The management of the post-soviet eastern conflicts through a multilateral conference is probably very unrealistic, unless all the governments of this vast region would accept it. Surely, Zelensky would reject it, although it could be supported by the governments of eastern Europe, and by western pacifist movements.

## How can we explain the evolution of the Ukrainian conflict?

Foreign policy decisions may follow two paths, they are either aiming at satisfying diplomatic interests (conservative diplomacy, see Allison 1971 and Fossati 2006), or trying to fulfill some values. For instance, western diplomacies have tried to promote a liberal world order, anchored to the values of peace, democracy and the market since the 1990's and until the early 2000's (Fossati 1999, 2017). Similarly, Ukraine and Russia seem to promote values, within a clash of nations (of the same civilization), and forgetting their economic interests deeply jeopardized by the war. However, what is the balance between values and interests searched by each part in the conflict? The following analysis will show as Ukraine moved originally from values and then promoted interests, while Russia on the opposite moved from interests and then promoted primarily values (the invasion of Ukraine).

*Ukraine.* As it has been stated above, Ukraine had originally no possibility to join either NATO or the EU (Tocci 2007, 2008).<sup>8</sup> How could that situation be changed? Paradoxically, a point of 'no return' would have been a war against Russia, better if following a Russian attack on Ukraine. That could explain why any solution (federalism, consensus pact, exchange) of the domestic conflict with the Russian minorities of the east was denied. The *casus belli* of the repression of the Russian minorities was therefore purposefully offered to Putin, and Ukraine would have appeared as a victim of Putin, the 'neo-imperial' autocrat. The Ukrainians were aware that the cost of this strategy would have probably been the loss of Crimea and of part of Novorossiia. However, Zelensky also decided to launch a total war against Russia, in a 'zero sum' game. While provoking Russia to attack Ukraine was a 'rational' strategy provided that the goal was the Ukrainian 'interest' in joining NATO and UE, waging a 'zero sun war-game' against Russia to eliminate forever its threat was instead a strategy more clearly dictated by values. In sum, interests and values both permeate Ukrainian foreign policy. If interests prevail, war will soon end and Zelensky will accept some losses and negotiate a ceasefire or also a peace agreement. If values prevail, war will continue with huge losses in human lives, and a deep and irreparable economic crisis.

*Russia.* From 1990 to 2014, Russia applied a rational foreign policy. Many attempts were made to solve conflict between the Ukrainian government and the Russian minorities of the east. Initially, the alternating pro-Europe and pro-Russia presidents

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<sup>8</sup> On these aspects, see also: Hansen (2006), Wolczuk (2006, 2009), Hillion (2007), Burger (2008), Gawrich et al. (2010).

guaranteed some form of balance of power between west and east of Ukraine. But after the Orange revolution, the west started to prevail. In 2014 Lavrov promoted federalism, but Ukraine refused. This led to the secession of Crimea and to the war in Donbass. Pro-Russians did not prevail in Donbass and there were negotiations with the mediation of OSCE, but the Ukrainian government was only prepared to offer administrative autonomy to the Russian minorities. That critical juncture led to a 'point of no return' and Putin decided to invade Ukraine. At this point, Russia abandoned the strategy based on search for interests and was primarily moved by values, as proved by the russification policies forced in the occupied territories. Interest could be again the focus of a new strategy if Putin obtained Crimea and renounced to any federal arrangement in Novorossiia in exchange of the renunciation of Ukraine to join NATO.

*The western countries.* During the cold war, USA promoted authoritarian regimes in the third world, values had a little influence during this historical phase, as proved by the non-interference of the Western powers in the Communist sphere of influence. *Realpolitik*, linked to the defense of interests of conservative diplomacies, prevailed (Fossati 2017). Some legacy of this 'cold war strategy' survived in the aftermath of the collapse of the 'Communist world' in 1989. EU and NATO were allowed to integrate the Central and Eastern European countries, then those born from the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). Russia kept its control on the rest of former Soviet Union: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. NATO intervened in Bosnia and Kosovo, but Russia did not object. The same happened when Russia sent its troops in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, Donbass. But after the Orange revolution in Ukraine, the conservative diplomacy has been abandoned. Bush jr, Obama and Biden (not Trump)<sup>9</sup> supported the Ukrainian request to join NATO and EU (Pifer 2021) and the XX Century project of a liberal world bases on values like peace, democracy and the market was restored to meet the Ukrainian requests. However, that did not last long and soon the liberal diplomacy was abandoned too, otherwise western powers would have pushed Ukraine to apply federalism in accordance with the liberal-democratic principle of self-determination of the nations.

Why have interests-intensive conservative diplomacy and value-oriented liberal foreign policy been both abandoned in dealing with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict? One possible answer is the recent prevailing of a 'politically correct' diplomacy and foreign policy (Fossati 2006), that have been especially promoted by Obama and Biden, and then by many leftist European leaders. Politically correctness aims at promoting

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<sup>9</sup> On the relations between Ukraine and the USA, see: Rodriguez et al. (2016) and Chetverick (2019).

free immigration flows, supporting multi-cultural conflict resolution processes linked to pluri-national states, launching ‘humanitarian wars’, applying positive rewards to democratizing developing countries and refusing negative sanctions to autocracies. The inspiring principle of a politically correct diplomacy is the standardization of what is different.

The politically correct diplomacy has been applied to the Ukrainian case. The Ukrainian government has standardized what is different, the state has remained united in the name of multi-culturalism, without any political (and symmetric) power ceded to the Russian minorities of the east. Zelensky appears as the weak and under-privileged actor, who can never be criticized and has become like a sort of ‘secular pope’ capable of inflicting ex-communication to anyone who opposes his radical nationalist positions. In this representation, Putin has become the absolute evil. Biden has applied a politically correct diplomacy in Ukraine, and Zelensky has enjoyed the role of ‘victim’. Zelensky is a rightist nationalist, but has instrumentally used this ‘leftist political correctness’ in order to appeal to the western leaders and to impair American foreign policy.

## How can we explain crisis management?

Way (2015) used the concept of ‘pluralism by default’, to label the electoral authoritarianisms of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova (see also Fossati 2018). According to Way, democracy in those countries suffered for institutional weaknesses and were afflicted by three main problems: a. conflicts among different (and often incompatible) national identities, that led to secessionist ambitions of various sub-national groups; b. organizational problems in dealing with the privatization of the market and controlling the economic resources; c. difficulties in monopolizing the use of force, which reflected in a very weak capacity of the State to guarantee the rule of law (e.g., limited guarantee of the freedom of association, although party competition and press pluralism were formally guaranteed). The executives had a very low governance capability and were facing highly fragmented and conflictual legislatures. In Ukraine, this model of electoral or competitive authoritarianism was characterized by a sort of ‘authoritarian diaspora’, that is the old authoritarian elites ‘recycled’ themselves in the newly founded democratic institutions in a hybrid combination between authoritarianism and illiberal democracy (Way 2003, 2015, 2021, 2022; Levitsky and Way 2020; Power and Loxton 2021).

As we have seen, there were two crises in the Russia-Ukrainian conflict, in 2014 with the Donbass war and the *de facto* secession of Crimea, and in 2022 with the Russian invasion. How can we explain them? Elaborating on March’s organizational dilemma be-

tween exploration and exploitation in decision-making (March 1991), we could argue with regard to the alternatives posed by the Ukrainian crisis that exploration might have led to a consensus pact, to federalism, or even to the territorial exchange above outlined (e.g., Crimea for Novorossiya). Exploitation, on the opposite, would have been conducive to the dominion of western Ukrainians, that are the majority, against the Russian minorities of the east. After the 2014 crisis, the Ukrainian presidents had a new opportunity to choose between exploration and exploitation, and opted again for the latter offering to the Russian minorities of the east an asymmetric integration through the concession of administrative autonomy for Donbass and Crimea. With the second crisis in 2022, Zelensky had (again) the possibility of choosing between exploitation (continuing the war) or exploration (negotiating with Russia and accepting some losses), but as we know he opted for exploitation and continuing the war. As it was argued in the previous section, it could be that the pro-Europe Ukrainian presidents (like Zelensky) had waged those two crises on purpose to trigger the Russian reaction and force the western powers to rescue Ukraine and speed up its integration in the NATO system and EU.

## **Conclusions: diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy of the Ukrainian conflict**

*Diagnosis.* ‘Politically correct’ diplomacy is a hurdle towards conflict resolution. Zelensky has standardized what is different and Ukraine remains a centralized state that does not guarantee the rights of the Russian minorities of the east. This situation has led to conflicts of higher intensity and eventually to the war. Any proposals of conflict resolution different from Zelensky’s (the ‘secular pope’) has been rejected and the politically correct left oriented public opinion has inclined to the defence of the weak actor (Ukraine) against the strong one (Russia). Under the conditioning of ‘politically correct’ diplomacy, foreign policy does not follow rational principles (either the ‘reason of State’ established after the peace of Westphalia, or that of national self-determination), but only ideology (such as, “let’s defend the attacked weak against the aggressive strong”, whatever the case is). The western powers have abandoned both the *real-politik* paradigm of the cold war and the project of establishing a liberal world order of the 1990’s. Ukraine asked to enter NATO and the EU, Zelensky was pushed to apply federalism, that had proved to be successful in Bosnia and Iraq in the 1990’s.

*Prognosis.* War will continue and conflict will not be resolved. Ukraine will enter NATO in the near future, while the negotiation process with the EU will be longer. The economic situation in Ukraine will get worse than before 2014. Russia will maintain con-

trol over Crimea and a majoritarian part of Novorossiia. There will be no peace agreement and a *de facto* partition of Ukraine with a territorial compromise will settle the case after a bloody war. Russia will suffer a huge economic crisis because of sanctions of NATO countries. USA and European governments will remain highly frustrated because of not have being able to solve the conflict and have been maneuvering by Zelensky.

*Therapy.* The Ukrainian conflict would not be so difficult to solve, but the western powers and NATO should combine a *real politik* strategy with the project of a liberal world order advanced in the 1990's. The first reform to be implemented in Ukraine would be federalism. The eastern Ukrainian regions with a majority of Russians should be entitled of forming new states in a federal Ukraine (as it was the case with the Serbian areas in Bosnia). That is, the Russian minority should enjoy political power and autonomy (and not only an administrative one). NATO should condition its supply of weapons to Ukraine to the approval of a coherent federal constitution in the country. The second step would be the renounce of Ukraine to join NATO, while the integration in the EU could be feasible. Thirdly, an exchange of territories should be enforced, Crimea becoming part of Russia and Novorossiia remaining under the Ukrainian sovereignty. Fourthly, a peace agreement should be signed between Ukraine and Russia, that would reciprocally recognize the present borders. Fifthly, in Transnistria a referendum should be held to let the population choose either to remain with Moldova or to be integrated with Ukraine.

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