

Peace and security in Eastern Ukraine- the case of an international peacekeeping mission

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Summary: 1. Introduction; Peace enforcement mission in Eastern Ukraine; 3. International military peacekeeping demand; 4. The EU`s peacekeeping mission; 5. Conclusion; 6. Bibliography.

Abstract: The article is about the possibility of an international military presence as an enforcement peacekeeping mission in the Ukrainian conflict in Donbas region. It starts with a short story-line of the conflict, identifying all the actors involved and what role they play in it. Analyzing the arguments behind the demand for an international peacekeeping mission and examining the circumstances in which the conflict happens the essay investigation is around the question "Can the external military presence in Donbas constitute an international peacekeeping mission?". In order to conduct this research, we recurred to the doctrine as well as to articles and official documents and declarations to better understand the theme.

Keywords: Peacekeeping; Ukraine; Enforcement Mission; Russia; Conflict.

1. Introduction

Past more than two decades since the end of the Cold War and at that time it seemed that war and conflict in Europe was left in the past, and the talking about a peaceful and prosperous East Europe began. But everything changed when in March 2014 using an unrecognized referendum in Crimea- Ukraine, Russia annexed this region into the Russian Federation. A few days later pro-Russian protesters occupied the government buildings in cities of Donetsk, Luhansk in East of Ukraine, seeking a referendum too. As a response, Ukrainian government ordered an anti-terrorist operation (ATO) against the rebels so it could regain the control. However, in May that year separatists set up an unrecognized referendum and declared themselves independent from Ukrainian authorities forming two separatist republics of Lugansk (LPR) and Donetsk (DPR). The armed fighting between the rebels and Ukrainian forces went on when in the summer of 2014 the insurgents shut down an international flight plane MH17 causing the death of 298 people.

Meanwhile, Russia has been backing up the separatists supplying them with weapons and men and Russian parliament authorized the use of Russian military force in Ukraine. At the same time the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) announced sanctions against Russia, accusing it to be part of the conflict², (BBC News, 2016). Finally, suffering a big defeat from pro-Russian separatists, Ukraine signs the first ceasefire agreement in Minsk (Europarl.europa.eu, 2016). Despite that, the agreement was later violated by pro-Russia separatists, who in time seized another strategically important territory in Eastern Ukraine, including the Donetsk airport, leading to another escalation of violence (ibdem:6).

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² Ukraine released a video with captured Russian paratroopers.

In February 2015 there was another peace agreement: Minsk 2 signed by both sides of the conflict, however the violence has never stopped, as many OSCE reports announce (Norman, L., 2015:3). Shortly after the Ukrainian government made a peacekeeping request to the United Nations (UN) Security Council and to the UN Secretary General for opening the discussion to invite peacekeepers in Ukraine (Interfax: Ukraine Business Daily, 2015) to get control of the Ukrainian-Russian border in order to stop the troops and the ammunition supply coming into Ukraine and to guarantee peace and stability in the buffer zone of the conflict in Donbas. Currently, according to reports of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) the armed fighting in this zone sporadically continues (Osce.org, 2016).

Although Ukrainian crises appeared as a shock for international community and it was largely covered by Mass-media a few authors in academic area focus their analyses on this conflict especially when taken in consideration the dilemma of a military peacekeeping mission in Donbas. As many leaders stated the Ukrainian crisis is a game changer and the peace and stability in this region is vital for regional peace and global security, we consider important that the question guiding this research would be: *Can the external military presence in Donbas constitute an international peacekeeping mission?*

Analyzing the facts of this conflict is essential as well as identifying all the actors involved and what role they play in this crisis which will help to get to an objective answer of the question mentioned above. Looking at the arguments behind the demand for an international peacekeeping mission and analyzing the circumstances in which the conflict happens lead us to a main hypothesis to answer this question - that an external military presence can constitute an international peacekeeping mission in Donbas if in Russian perception it does not represent a threat to its security and it is accepted by all belligerents.

2. Peace enforcement mission in Eastern Ukraine.

Concerning the possibility of a peacekeeping mission it is relevant to define what we mean by peacekeeping, agreeing here with the author Fortuna (2008:5) that peacekeeping is an operation where international personnel is sent to help preserving peace and security in the result of a war, these personnel is mainly military although they are not necessarily armed and they have among them civilian personnel as well. The dilemma here it is not just about a Donbas peacekeeping mission in general, as the OSCE has already sent one mission there which nowadays it represents more than 700 people monitoring and verifying the ceasefire agreement (Osce.org, 2016). The issue here is about the possibility of a peace enforcement mission in Eastern Ukraine as the agreements of Minsk are repeatedly violated by the parts and the military confrontation continues proving that the OSCE monitoring mission is not enough for preserving the peace there.

The problem of a peace enforcement mission in Ukraine lays already in its definition as the author Fortuna (2008:5) mentions that this involves a significant military force to provide security and guarantee the obedience to the cease-fire agreement. They have a mandate to use their weapons for purposes of self-defense. This is the kind of operation that Ukrainian government is calling for, arguing that it is much needed, although there is not a consent from the parts of DPR or LPR (Interfax: Ukraine Business Daily, 2015). Even though the consent of the rebels is not a necessary condition for this kind of operation, the segment of *significant military forces* present in this kind of mission is a problem, taking into account that it is going to be deployed near the border with Russia and the later one usually interprets this kind of action as a threat to its security and has the veto right in the Security Council of the UN.

Going back to Ukrainian crises in Donbas and analyzing why there is a need of an international military presence to help keeping the peace in the region we need to have a look at the belligerent's demand for peacekeeping. According to Fortuna (2008 :23) the probability of a peacekeeping mission in a case of government victory in the conflict is very

unlikely as it can restore alone the political control and would not allow the peacekeepers to interfere in its own dealings with the rebels (ibdem:22). From the beginning of the conflict that was the case as ATO (Anti-Terrorist Operation) until August 2014 had great success capturing several cities, including strategic ones such as Sloviansk considered by Ukrainian president as a "start of turning point" in the conflict (BBC News, 2016). But in August the events changed dramatically when Ukrainian army suffered a tragic defeat in the region of Ilovaisk (Kim, 2014) in Donbas from pro-Russian rebels and Russian army as the Ukrainian president states (Poroshenko, 2014).

The stronger the rebels are, bigger is the probability of a peacekeeping mission as the government wants peacekeepers and the rebels do not, because the losing part is trying to prevent the military success to be translated into political gains (Fortuna 2008:22). If the government wants a peacekeeping mission it has to convince the international community to intervene on its behalf, one of the reasons would be that it may help to protect them, although in Ukrainian case, the international community reacted very cautiously and unwillingly (Interfax: Ukraine Business Weekly, 2015), but if this kind of intervention will happen it is very probable to be one of enforcement mission and not a consent-based mission (Fortuna 2008:23).

3. International military peacekeeping demand.

The demand for an international military peacekeeping mission from Ukrainian government reveals a complex problem of defining the parts of the conflict which we could say brings new dilemmas towards sending a military contingent as a peacekeeping mission. Most of the conflicts in which the UN military peacekeeping mission are involved have a predominant character of civil war and none of them include the fact where a part of the conflict has a direct support from a great military power.

In the Ukrainian crisis since the beginning it was very difficult to identify who was *de facto* the other belligerent part that Ukrainian forces were fighting with. The war in Ukraine has turned into some kind of new confrontation known as the "*hybrid war*" or "*hybrid warfare*" where in this case Russia is accused of using Chechens, Kazakhs, Dniestrians, and other entities in the Eastern region of Ukraine to support the separatists (Basescu, 2014). Russia has many times denied these facts and any interference in Ukrainian conflict of Donbas but this does not change the fact that, as one author has stated, if OSCE had put military personnel on its mission they could have got into direct military confrontation with Russian commandos (Gowan, 2015). This kind of high risk possible situations in a military intervention could jeopardize even more the peace and security in the region as many western leaders argued that Ukrainian crisis could lead to a direct military confrontation with Russia (Maskaliunaite, 2014).

The demand from Ukrainian government of a military presence as a peacekeeping mission has gone further than just declarations, taking another step and providing a legal framework for such operations as the Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko has signed a new law which provides the access of foreign troops for an international peacekeeping and security operation on Ukrainian territory in order to maintain peace and security on its territory under a UN or the EU resolution, but the law bans the participation in operations of armed forces by the states "which have launched an armed aggression against Ukraine" (Interfax: Ukraine Business Weekly, 2015). In other words, it bans Russia to any participations in this kind of operations, actually Russia was accused of using a peacekeeping cover to military invade Ukraine (Interfax: Ukraine Business Daily, 2014). At this point some regional organizations or *ad hoc* coalitions that can undertake a military peacekeeping mission (Fortuna 2008 :8) and have Russian military personnel are "out of the game" such as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) or even the OSCE.

As an alternative to a UN enforcement peacekeeping mission Ukrainian government has asked for another regional organization that has experience in peacekeeping missions and could fit into its legal framework of a military external presence for a mission of

peacekeeping enforcement: the EU, which could send its peacekeepers to Ukraine without a UN mandate³ although this mandate could provide more political opportunities. The presence of UN blue helmets is theoretically possible because if sanctioned by the Security Council it can be ensured through the General Assembly which requires the approval by two thirds of the votes, a task not impossible to achieve according to Yuriy Serheyev⁴. The issues here are more practical, considering the high cost of such a combined mission in a format which the UN and the European Union may be present (Interfax: Ukraine Business Weekly, 2015).

4. The EU's peacekeeping mission.

For its part the EU refuses so far to send a military peacekeeping mission in Donbas arguing that the mission should be purely civilian⁵ as the Union already has one operation which is advising the Ukrainians on judicial and security changes while the OSCE has a group that include Russians and Ukrainians as members and are already doing the monitoring of the Minsk cease-fire agreement. (Norman, L., Shchetko, N., 2015)

Sending a civilian EU's Advisory Mission to mentor and advice Ukrainian officials on civilian security sector reform and to soft balance Russia (Nováky, 2015:244) does not seem enough as after almost two years of conflict, OSCE reports of sporadic military confrontations continue to come. The EU's lack of hard balancing bounds Brussels to deal with Ukrainian crisis just in a diplomatic way or putting economic pressure on Russia rather than sending some military personnel that could come under pro-Russian rebel fire in the buffer zone (Normal, 2015). The other regional hegemon (Russia) also has an interest in keeping the regional order and maintaining its *status quo* (Bellamy 2004:35). This fact is another fear of Ukrainian part that a new *frozen conflict* is going to emerge in Donbas the same as the ones in Moldova and Georgia and it would constitute a factor of political destabilization and undermine any progress or reforms inside of Ukraine. At the same time Moscow shows more cooperation and works more towards a political solution in the conflict region looking for to lift some West sanctions at the EU meeting in June 2016 when it is decided on extending of the sanctions or not (BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union., 2016).

Russian power controlling the rebel part is reflected in the dynamic of the conflict because striking a deal for peace requires dealing more with Russia than straight with the rebel groups, after many of them not directly controlled by Moscow were annihilated in recent months. If this is the situation, a solution⁶ that would suit this hegemon power, should reduce drastically the violence in Eastern Ukraine and reduce to minimum the necessity of a peace enforcement mission there, but the UN cannot choose to engage very closely with Russian peacekeeping initiatives, otherwise it appears to legitimize Moscow regional ambitions (Morris, McCoubrey, 1999:86) in Ukraine, therefore, the military mission should be strictly international. On the other hand, we cannot underestimate the Ukrainian civil society that will not accept a divided country in "republics of DPR or LPR" or support a regime in Kiev that would agree with Russia's proposal which means that the violence could continue.

5. Conclusion

The events in Donbas has shown one more time how complex the conflicts are and how problematic is the task to find a solution for them especially if the solutions incorporate military force segments. The Ukrainian crisis continues to expose many impasses of enforcement peacekeeping missions and particularly to this crisis, is finding a mission that would have the consensus of all the parts of the conflict, which so far seemed impossible to

³ Russia veto could be used.

⁴ Ukraine's permanent representative at the UN.

⁵ Some kind of border advisory mission.

⁶ Organize a joint government in Donbass.

achieve. The blue helmets in the buffer zone are much needed, an argument that most of belligerents agree with, but on the other hand the provenience of this troops is so important to the parts that they are ready to continue the fighting if the peacekeepers are not that ones they enquire.

Many international organizations that have experience in peacekeeping could provide their troops for this task but considering the circumstances above analyzed in this essay the most legitimate and capable is just the UN. Its military presence in Donbas with all the risk to come under pro-Russian rebel's fire could guarantee the peace in the buffer zone. This kind of military mission as far as it will not have in its component NATO or EU's troops cannot represent a real threat to Russian security. The countries which would provide this troops we believe is the key to the success to such a mission, the ones that are not direct interested in the outcome of this conflict and have good relationships with Russia and Ukraine. The dilemma of this proposed military peacekeeping operation is convincing these countries that this military mission is for their benefits too. The outcome of this intervention puts at risk their partnership and cooperation with Russia for the sake of integrity and peace of Ukraine a region somewhere on the map of Eastern Europe.

For this kind of operation to happen peacekeeping should be seen in the eyes of world leaders as a sacred mission that is beyond all national interest and also that peace and stability in international community is a duty above all duties for all the States. Utopic as it seems we have an optimistic view on solving Ukrainian crisis knowing that in the history of humanity the twenty first century is the time where instruments for keeping peace are adapting and transforming each day, searching for new ways of keeping the International Community safe and sound.

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