

The National Union Of Political Scientists

POLITICAL ISSUE 2(27-28), 2017
SCIENCE ISSUES

Academic journal

MOSCOW, 2017

POLITICAL SCIENCE ISSUES

Academic journal

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**ESTABLISHED BY LLC
"PUBLISHING HOUSE
"SCIENCE TODAY"**

The Journal is published with
the participation of the Institute
of modern policy of the Peoples'
Friendship University (RUDN)

The Journal is registered
by the Federal Service
for Supervision of Mass Media,
Communications and Protection
of Cultural Heritage

Reg. Number PI No.FS77–46176
of August 12, 2011
The Journal is published quarterly

The journal is included
in the database of the Russian
Science Citation Index

The Five-year Journal's
impact factor is 0,808

The Journal is included
in Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

Academic papers published
in the journal undergo obligatory
editorial checking.

The authors' opinion not always
coincides with the opinion
of the Editorial Board.

At reprint of the article or a part
of it the reference to the Journal
is obligatory.

Address of the editorial office:
10, Zagoryevskaya street, building 4,
office 4, Moscow, Russia, 115598
Tel: (910) 463-53-42
www.voprospolitolog.ru,
www.souzpolitolog.ru
E-mail: voprospolitolog@yandex.ru,
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Signed for printing on 25.12.2017
Format 60x84/16. Offset paper.
Offset print.
Number of printed sheets
Circulation 500 copies.
Order 000.

Printed at the LLC "Bely Vëter"
Str. Shchipok, 28,
Moscow, Russia, 115054
Tel.: (495) 651-84-56

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UKRAINIAN CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE GROWTH OF CONFLICTS IN THE REGION

The article deals with the specifics of conflicts in the post-Soviet space and identifies the causes and factors that contributed to the development of the conflict relations. The author highlights such reasons as ethnic tensions, territorial disputes and positions of the national elites. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the development of the Ukrainian crisis and its destabilizing impact on the regional security. The policy pursued by the Ukrainian leadership aimed at the heroization of the Bandera movement and formation of Russophobic sentiments, as well as imposition of its visions of the past and present upon the population does not contribute to a constructive solution of the existing problems. The author notes that the escalation of tension in Ukraine was significantly influenced by the major world and regional centers of power and that the settlement of the conflict is possible only through the joint efforts of the international community.

Key words: *post-Soviet space, Ukrainian crisis, Transnistrian conflict, ethnic contradictions, identity.*

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new geopolitical space was formed on the political map of the world. In the scientific literature the space is now called “post-Soviet space.” Formation of the national identity of the newly formed states was accompanied by the growth of separatist sentiments, ethnic and territorial differences. In many respects, territorial and ethnic contradictions were laid down by the national and administrative principle of the state structure and administrative division of the USSR. Many borders in the USSR were usually established along ethnic lines, with some ethnic groups being granted Autonomous status. In addition, arbitrary border changes have contributed to the rise of territorial claims and inter-ethnic clashes. The disputed status of territorial units and discrepancies between the areas of ethnic settlements became the basis of the Karabakh (Armenian-Azerbaijani) 1988-1994, the Georgian-South Ossetian 1991-1992, the Georgian-Abkhazian 1992-1994 and the Moldovan-Transnistrian conflicts.

An important role in the escalation of conflicts was played by the political elite of the conflicting parties, which actively used the ethnic idea to realize their political ambitions. In these circumstances, a conflict of mutual perception, xenophobia and intolerance began to form. All these circumstances contributed to the rapid escalation of conflicts and their subsequent transition to the armed phase. The armed confrontation has led to enormous human losses, destruction of infrastructure and economic losses. Thus, in the course of the Karabakh conflict, according to various estimates, up to 25 thousand people were killed, more than 25 thousand were injured, hundreds of thousands of civilians have left the place of their residence and more than four thousand people are listed as missing¹.

According to experts, the conflicts of the post-Soviet space are characterized by complexity, which greatly complicates their settlement. In addition, they involve, directly or indirectly, neighboring countries close to the conflicting parties, which may again lead to armed confrontation. After Russia has recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, the situation there looks relatively calm. However, against the background of the Ukrainian crisis, the areas of Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts have deteriorated. This article will focus on the destructive impact of the events in Ukraine on the situation in the region.

In 2014, the international community was shocked by the depth and bloodshed of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Many experts consider the Ukrainian conflict, along with Karabakh, one of the most difficult and acute in the post-Soviet space. Fighting in Eastern Ukraine has led to a humanitarian catastrophe with millions of refugees. According to the Director of the United Nations development Programme (UNDP) in Ukraine Yantomas Hiemstra, since the beginning of the conflict “in in the Donbas, the Eastern region of the country, almost 10 thousand people have died. Among the victims, there are about 2 thousand civilians. 22 thousand people were injured, millions of Ukrainians were displaced and many of them live in dangerous proximity to areas of fierce battles”².

It should be noted that the Ukrainian conflict is difficult to analyze, due to the fact that there are few reliable sources and the available information is contradictory and biased. Among the recent analytical materials, we would like to mention publications by the experts of the Russian Council for International Affairs, which, in our opinion, are quite objective and balanced in assessing the events. In the work “Ukrainian challenge for Russia”³ the authors point out to four key dimensions of the Ukrainian crisis.

¹ The essence and history of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Read more. – URL: <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/conflicts/>

² UN News Center. – URL: <http://www.un.org/russian/news/story.asp?NewsID=27270#.WIELqoVOLmI>

³ Ukrainian challenge for Russia: workbook. No. 24/2015 / [Editor in chief Ivanov I. S.]; Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). – M.: Spetskniga, 2015.

1. Contradictions in the relations between the West and Russia caused by the competition in the post-Soviet space, as well as differences in the assessments of European security and ways of ensuring it.

2. Russian-Ukrainian contradictions, in which Russia considers Ukraine as a sphere of its vital interests, an important element of its integration projects and a factor that largely ensures consolidation of the society.

3. The armed conflict in the Donbass and the contradictions within the Ukrainian elite.

4. Crimean issue.

The conflict in the South-East of Ukraine also has its own specifics and differs from other conflicts in the post-Soviet space. According to the theory of political conflicts, Ukrainian conflict can be classified as an internal armed conflict. However, its impact went beyond the national framework and its escalation and character were significantly influenced by major centers of power – the US, Russia and the EU. In the geostrategic plans of the West, the territory of Ukraine was considered as an arena of “big game” against Russia. The drawing of Ukraine into the European integration space and into political and military cooperation with NATO was aimed primarily at containment of Russia and disintegration of the post-Soviet space. The theorist of the American geopolitical thought Z. Brzezinski in 1997 in his work “The Great Chessboard” presented his vision of the further development of the Eurasian space. In that book, he determined the importance of Ukraine for the integration processes in Russia. According to Z. Brzezinski “without Ukraine, the restoration of the Empire, whether on the basis of the CIS or on the basis of Eurasianism would become unviable”¹. The political elite of Western countries, armed with the ideas of the American politologist, began to act decisively. Western European and American politicians, involved in the process of democratization and Europeanization of Ukraine, sometimes used methods and technologies that do not comply with the international law. They include recruitment of political leaders, introduction of their advisers in government structures and financing of far-right nationalist groups. As President Vladimir Putin noted, as a result of such policy the West lost its political sense and sense of proportion, “our Western partners crossed the line, behaved rudely, irresponsibly and unprofessionally”².

In one of her speeches, the representative of the US state Department V. Nuland said that Washington has allocated US\$5 billion “to support the aspirations of the people of Ukraine to a stronger and democratic government”³. However,

¹ Brzezinski Z. The Great Chessboard. – M.: Mezhdunarodnyey otnosheniya, 1997.

² Address of the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin on March 18, 2014 in the Kremlin. – URL: <http://news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/20603>

³ The US authorities offered financing to the leaders of the “Right sector.” – URL: <http://izvestia.ru/news/570569>

the export of the American democratic model led in Ukraine to a split of the country, the rampage of the far-right nationalist movement, heroization of the Bandera movement and formation of the public opinion Russophobic sentiments.

Not taking into account the socio-cultural peculiarities of the Ukrainian society that have been formed over the centuries Ukraine was actually faced with the choice of the historical path. Ukrainian officials have gone so far in the implementation of Russophobic policy that even began to receive calls to break contacts with the relatives from Russia, they adopted a decree on the blocking of the Russian Internet networks and services. We agree with the view expressed by T. A. Dmitriev who noted that “attempts of one part of the Ukrainian society to impose by force upon the other part its vision of the past, the present and the future as “the only correct one” don’t promote a search for a democratic compromise on key questions of life of the country and conclusion of such compromise and bring directly opposite results”¹.

One of the prominent representatives of the US political science G. Kissinger presented his vision of the problem. The diplomat noted that both external and internal forces were guilty of the tragedy in Ukraine. The US and the European Union have shown short-sightedness, ignorance of history, unwillingness to think strategically and act. According to G. Kissinger, it is impossible “to consider Ukraine as a component of confrontation between East and West, ... any prospects of creating an international system of cooperation between Russia and the West, and especially Russia and Europe, will be destroyed for decades”². However, even greater responsibility is borne by the political leaders of Ukraine, who after gaining independence “have not learned the art of compromise, and even less have mastered the skills of seeing the historical perspective.” It is worth agreeing with another conclusion of the American politician, who believes that “the root of the problem lies in the attempts of Ukrainian politicians to impose their will on the rebellious and persistent part of the country”³.

It follows from the above that the US leadership and its Western allies did not seek to prevent the Ukrainian crisis and by using the situation, putting pressure on the Ukrainian opposition and motivating their actions have in many ways contributed to its escalation and transition to a phase of armed confrontation. At the same time, by using the channels of global media and the technology

¹ Dmitriev T.A. Modern democracy as idea and process: social conditions of its formation // *Perspectivy*. – URL: http://www.perspektivy.info/oykumena/amerika/demokratizacija_projekt_i_realnost 2014-04-25.htm

² Kissinger H. To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end // *Washington Post*. 2014, march 5. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868>

³ Kissinger H. To settle the Ukraine crisis, start at the end // *Washington Post*. 2014, march 5. URL: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868>

of information and psychological impact they laid the main blame for the events on the Russian Federation.

The irrational and ill-conceived actions of the Ukrainian political leadership have further exacerbated the split of the Ukrainian society. It should also be noted that the rampage of Ukrainian radical nationalism poses a serious threat to the security in the region. The events in Ukraine have significantly destabilized the situation around Transnistria. Ukrainian media, in their attempts to escalate the situation, positioned Transnistria as a territory posing a security threat not only to Ukraine, but also to Moldova. The Moldovan security forces regularly carried out provocative actions in the Security Zone. The Moldovan leadership, incited by the US and the EU, declared the need to transform the operation and withdraw the Russian troops from Transnistria. Attempts have been made to discredit the peacekeeping mechanism and substitute it with the introduction of “monitoring” police mission with the participation of Western countries. Official Kyiv supported the position of Moldova aimed at withdrawal of the Russian peacekeeping mission. However, such position does not suit Transnistria, which considers the Russian contingent a guarantor of its security and peace. According to the Ambassador at large of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sergei Gubarev “Transnistria is the only region of the former USSR where after the introduction of the peacekeeping contingent hostilities did not resume”¹. The position of the Transnistrian population is very important in this matter. The conducted sociological survey proved that the vast majority of respondents (82.7%) consider the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Transnistria unacceptable².

Against the background of these events, the economic situation in Transnistria has deteriorated significantly. Due to the fact that there are no common borders between Transnistria and Russia, the Ukrainian blockade deprives the Transnistrian region of the possibility of free trade with Russia. According to experts, the share of Russia in the foreign trade of the TMR that used to reach 20% has lately halved. At the same time, exports to Russia until 2006 reached 50% and now constitute only 8%³. Against the background of currency devaluation, the Russian market becomes less attractive for Transnistrian economic agents. According to I. Selivanova, the current situation may “become the beginning of a gradual distancing from the Russian Federation as the sole strategic partner of TMR, especially since Russia began to lose its position in the region on a number of economic indicators”⁴. In such situation, the European Union exerts pressure on the

¹ Gubarev S. Russia remains guarantor of peace in Transnistria // Site of the Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn journal. – URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/printable/15038>

² Poll: more than 70% of residents of Transnistria are in favor of joining Russia. – URL: <http://ria.ru/world/20160513/1432704153>

³ Selivanova I. Problems of Transnistrian conflict settlement // Russia and new States of Eurasia. – 2016. – No. 1.

⁴ Selivanova I. Problems of Transnistrian conflict settlement // Russia and new States of Eurasia. – 2016. – No. 1.

Transnistrian leadership to reorient the region into the sphere of its foreign policy and economic interests.

In the context of the socio-economic and political crisis that Moldova is experiencing now, the protest movement has become more active and corruption scandals have become more frequent. Against this background, Romanian-unionist project “Unirea-2018” is gaining new “breath”. According to the project, unification of Moldova and Romania into one state should take place in 2018 and is timed to coincide with the centenary of the Romanian annexation of Bessarabia in 1918. It should be noted that young people take an active part in the unionist movement because they have lost faith in the prospects of their country and identify themselves with the Romanian nation. Many experts believe that the idea of unification with Romania is intended to replace the idea of Moldova’s European integration.

Given Moldova’s non-aligned status, enshrined in its Constitution, the intensification of Moldova’s military and political relations with NATO countries is alarming. Joint exercises of the American and Moldovan troops take place regularly. As a rule, these exercises are held in close proximity to the security Zone of the Moldovan-Transnistrian conflict. We believe that the Euro-Atlantic vector of Moldova’s foreign policy will not contribute to the rapprochement of Tiraspol with Chisinau, since, despite all the efforts of the opponents of the Russian Federation, the Pro-Russian orientation of the foreign policy of the unrecognized Republic is supported by the majority of the region’s population.

The events in Ukraine provoked an aggravation of the situation in the zone of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In expert circles the armed clashes, which took place on April 2-5, 2016, were called the “four-day war.” The political leadership of Azerbaijan has repeatedly justified its right to a military solution of the Karabakh problem. For these purposes, the military forces were actively increased, arms were purchased and the ceasefire was violated. Thus, according to the available data, in the “period from June 28 to July 4, 2015, the ceasefire agreement was violated by the Azerbaijani side about 300 times. At the same time, it produced more than 6000 shots from various types of small arms in the direction of the positions NK Defense Army”¹. Attempts to defrost the conflict with a 25-year history were made against the background of deterioration of relations between Russia and Turkey, which gives grounds for experts to conclude that the latter was involved in the events of April 2016. Russian Leadership has made several attempts to separate the conflicting parties and stop the armed confrontation.

The lack of solution for the conflict contradictions retains the confrontational nature of the relationship and is not conducive to economic development. The situation of “neither war nor peace” poses a threat to regional security, since

¹ Beglaryan A. The year 2015 was busy and full of important events of the national level for NKR. – URL: <http://novostink.ru/nkr/137679-ashot-beglaryan-2015-god-dlya-nkr-bylynasyschennym-i-polnym-vazhneyshih-meropriyatiy-obschenacionalnogo-urovnya.html>

at any moment it can again turn into an armed confrontation. Normalization of the situation largely depends on the position of such major political players as the United States, Russia, the EU, for which conflict zones present considerable geostrategic interest. The difference in the approaches of the main participants and their reluctance to compromise have led to a standstill in the negotiation process. Competition between the two models of integration: European and Eurasian in the post-Soviet space also complicates the situation.

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