



EU-Russia: impossible dialogue?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Relations internationales

How will the Ukrainian crisis develop: open war with Russia? Russia's definitive annexation of the Crimea? Partition of Ukraine? Ukrainian civil war? Reconciliation and cohabitation within a federal or confederative structure? Or any other outcome? As of March 15, 2014, no one has the answers to these questions yet. Failing that, General Jacques Favin Levêque brings us these remarkable elements of analysis, in which history, recent as well as older, plays a major role.

In fact, history is constructed day by day, according to circumstances and events, according to this or that decision of the men of power in each of the parties involved, and it is tempting not to see any determinism in their evolution and their mutual relations.

But does this mean that we can deny the ability of people to shape the future? To take an example, if the new Ukrainian government had not, in the euphoria of its success in Maidan Square, urgently decided to downgrade the Russian language and abolish its status as an official language, would the reaction of Russian-speaking Ukrainians have been so brutal and decisive for the further course of the crisis?

Can history to some extent be constructed by the will of a few, or at least be predicted with some chance of not being disproved by the facts?

If not, there would be no point in developing policies and strategies at the highest levels of our governments to achieve the goals they hope to achieve.

In light of these considerations, let us take the Ukrainian case and put it in the geopolitical context of the 1990s. The reunification of Germany was then the subject of promises by the Western leaders of the time regarding the absence of NATO bases on the territories of the former satellite countries and guarantees for the autonomy of a Crimea that was an integral part of Ukraine.

Notwithstanding these commitments, the United States has been pushing NATO enlargement to Russia's doorstep for more than 20 years. It took a brutal wake-up call from Moscow in 2008 to halt its plans to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into the Atlantic Alliance. The European Union followed this policy of expansion without hesitation and without any discernment, even though it carried within it the foreseeable seeds of East-West tension, if not *casus belli*, within the European continent. This expansion of the Atlantic Alliance has not led to the integration of Ukraine. But let us imagine for a moment what the present situation would be like if Ukraine, having become a member of NATO, were to be attacked militarily in the Crimea and ask for Article 5 of the Treaty. This is how wars are born and Europe remembers it, a century after having been at the heart of the apocalypse of the First World War.

In fact, Ukraine did not join NATO and, of course, we are not now seeing the Alliance respond to the Russian coup in the Crimea. This does not mean that the situation is not dangerous for peace on our continent.

In recent weeks, our continent has been returning not to the conditions of the Cold War, but at least to the icy and scorching climate that characterised it in recent weeks. We have long experience of the Russian practice of blowing hot and cold, of going to the brink of hot war to achieve the strategic objective it has set itself and ultimately sticking to the war of intimidation. This dialectic was the dialectic of the 1950s to 1990s and we know how effective it can be if it is not countered by determined and realistic diplomacy.

This is one of the European Union's visceral shortcomings. Is there really a European policy towards the Russian Federation? Does the EU have a clear and realistic view of the relationship it should have with this power that it has in fact been ignoring or unnecessarily humiliating for two decades, not least in the latest affront: the boycott of the Sochi Games by the European Heads of State, against a backdrop of press sarcasm against Putin's personal commitment to their success, no. The boycott of the Sochi games by the European Heads of State, against a backdrop of press sarcasm against Putin's personal commitment to their success, was not, to say the least, likely to create the conditions for a calming of relations at a time when the drama of Maidan was beginning to unfold.

The key to this crisis at the heart of Europe is in fact the calming and normalisation of relations between the EU and Russia. Contrary to the media hype, it is not in the romantic exaltation of a people in revolution for their freedom and independence. It is even less in the demonisation of a Putin, who, in order to lack the reflexes of a European-style democrat, is not the dictatorial and Machiavellian tsar that some people portray to us. Nor is the solution to be found in condemning a Russian people or the Russian-speaking and Russian-speaking Ukrainian populations who do not recognise themselves in the libertarian evolution of European societies and who, having returned from the ideological indoctrination of totalitarian regimes, aspire to a return to the cultural and religious roots of their history.

Why is it surprising that the Crimea, which has been Russian for more than two centuries, wishes to become Russian again, or at least to remain in the Russian movement? What is wrong with Ukrainians remembering that Kiev was the birthplace of Tsarist Russia more than three centuries ago and wanting to remain in the economic and cultural sphere of influence of Moscow?

It is not the ethnic realities and national aspirations themselves that are questionable, it is the way in which the Kremlin has overthrown them that is unacceptable. The European Union cannot accept that such upheavals in borders and nationalities should be carried out by force, as is currently the case in the Crimea, and as it is feared will happen tomorrow in Eastern Ukraine.

That is why firmness must be the order of the day in the negotiations which should begin as soon as possible between the European Union, the European Union's most powerful trading partner, and the Ukrainian authorities. Its economic, if not political, power and the Russian Federation which, despite its dependence on the export of its mineral wealth, is indeed the second largest power on our continent.

European negotiators, far from yielding to the relatively primitive and superficial anti-Russian fad that is currently raging in Europe, will have to work in a climate of respect and mutual understanding. It is up to the EU's governing bodies to find in the arcane of its diplomacy the men or women who can calm passions. These negotiations must not, of course, be conducted at the expense of a Ukraine that is inflamed by its revolution and torn among its people. While giving the Ukrainians guarantees of support in principle for their democratic aspirations, the European Union must clearly state its position on the inadvisability of integration into the Union even in the visible future. It is in the interests of all parties involved to find for this country a status as a bridge, a link between the two economic and political powers that share the European area. The choice of Ukraine cannot be binary. It is not, it cannot be Russia or Europe. It must be Russia and Europe. Ukraine needs both for its prosperity, and the European continent needs both for the preservation of peace.

It so happens that the foreign ministers of the countries of the Weimar Triangle played an undeniable role in calming the crisis in Maidan Square, saving at least temporarily the honour of a European diplomacy that may be present in the shadows, but is hardly perceptible.

Why not capitalise on the initial success of this trio, a symbol of reconciliation within continental Europe? Admittedly, this success was quickly obscured by events and its significance must be put into perspective. But is not the Weimar Triangle the source of many initiatives launched in 2010 to relaunch the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)? The desire shared by Germany, France and Poland to make the European Union more diplomatically responsible and more visible in the area of defence had, moreover, been Italy and Spain, but was met with reluctance on the part of the United Kingdom, which was obsessively afraid of seeing European defence compete with NATO. It is now clear how dangerous it could be to involve NATO in the resolution of the present crisis, and how beneficial it would be for peace on our continent to have a European Union foreign and security policy at European Union level. This common foreign and security policy, that barely sketched out dream of the CFSP, and to have the structures and resources for this common defence and security policy, this CSDP, which the European summit last December made a timid attempt to revive after several years of hibernation.

It is the wish of the EuroDé network of associations to give the CSDP a more tangible reality, capable of providing credible support for a genuine European foreign policy, the need for which is so keenly felt at a time when diplomacy must play its full role. The network of associations, which covers thirteen European Union countries and which, drawing on the expertise and competence of its members, proposes to the European

authorities that they should be able to provide a credible support to a genuine European foreign policy, the need for which is so powerfully felt in these days when diplomacy must play its full role. The EuroDéfense network of associations, which covers thirteen European Union countries and which, drawing on the expertise and competence of its members, offers the European authorities and the citizens of the Union the elements for a reflection on the geopolitical and geostrategic balance of our continent. It is in this respect that, as early as 2012, EuroDéfense-France[1], with the advice of Philippe de Suremain, former French ambassador in Kiev, analysed the state of relations between the European Union and France and the Russian Federation in matters of defence and security and drafted, in liaison with the ANAJ-IHEDN, a report [2] which probably deserves to be consulted in the present context.

It is in this sense that I sign this article which is only one illustration among others of the reflections which can help in the understanding and the resolution of the current crisis.

1) Euro-Défense France is a [French](#) association [bringing together](#) senior [civil and](#) military [officials](#) as well as people from the business community with the same interest in the [European defence](#). It was founded in 1994 by Pierre Schwed.

2) See the study entitled "What prospects for EU-Russia defence cooperation?" on the eurodefense.fr website.

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