

## The Reaction of US and EU to the Russian Federation's Intervention in Crimea<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*While Ukraine was taking willing steps to integrate with the West in the new world order that emerged after the Cold War, the Russian Federation did not want to lose Ukraine, which gained its independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, had close, historical and cultural ties with Russia in the past, has a significant Russian population and is an important actor in its close vicinity. The Russian Federation had long been opposed to the Western in-fluence, which increased especially with the Orange Revolution and reached its peak with the NATO enlargement; the Russian Federation has attached special importance to Ukraine, which is in its immediate vicinity. However, the West did not take this discontent of Russia into account and continued its actions against Ukraine. In this context, when Yanukovich rejected the Eastern Partnership program, which the EU offered to Ukraine within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), regarding the development of fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law, the tense atmosphere in Ukraine was exacerbated and the sequence of events that led to Russia's intervention in Crimea began. After Russia's intervention in Crimea, the USA reacted harshly and imposed serious economic sanctions on Russia. While the USA aimed to isolate Russia in its region, it actively led NATO in this direction. Being dependent on Russia in terms of energy, European countries followed policies aimed at mitigating the crisis and acted cautiously towards Russia along with the economic embargo. It is thought in the final analysis that the decisive actions of the Russian Federation and the West based on mutual trust will contribute to the solution of the crisis and ensuring stability in the region.*

**Keywords:** Russian Federation, USA, EU, Crimean intervention, Ukrainian Crisis.

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## Rusya Federasyonu'nun Kırım'a Müdahalesine ABD ve AB'nin Tepkisi

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### Öz

*Soğuk Savaş sonrasında oluşan yeni dünya düzeninde Ukrayna Batı'ya entegre olma hususunda istekli adımlar atarken, Rusya Federasyonu ise Sovyetler Birliği dağıldıktan sonra bağımsızlığını kazanan ve geçmişte yakın, tarihsel ve kültürel bağları olan ve bünyesinde önemli oranda Rus nüfusu barındıran yakın çevresinde önemli bir aktör olan Ukrayna'yı kaybetmek istememekteydi. Rusya Federasyonu özellikle Turuncu Devrim'le beraber daha da artan ve NATO genişlemesiyle zirveye ulaşan Batı nüfuzuna uzun zamandan beri karşı çıkmaktaydı ve yakın çevresindeki Ukrayna'ya özel bir önem atfetmekteydi. Ancak Batı Rusya'nın bu hoşnutsuzluğunu dikkate almamış ve Ukrayna'ya yönelik eylemlerine devam etmekteydi. Bu bağlamda AB'nin Avrupa Komşuluk Politikası (AKP) kapsamında temel haklar, demokrasi ve hukukun üstünlüğünün geliştirilmesi hususunda Ukrayna'ya teklif ettiği Doğu Ortaklığı programını Yanukoviç'in reddetmesi üzerine Ukrayna'daki gergin ortamın fitili ateşlenmiş ve Rusya'nın Kırım'a müdahalesine varan olaylar silsilesi başlamıştır. Rusya'nın Kırım'a müdahalesi sonrasında özellikle ABD sert tepki göstermiş ve Rusya'ya ciddi ekonomik yaptırımlar uygulamıştır. ABD, Rusya'yı kendi bölgesinde tecrit etmeyi amaçlarken bu yönde NATO'yu aktif bir şekilde yönlendirmiştir. Enerji yönünden Rusya'ya bağımlı olan Avrupa ülkeleri de ekonomik ambargonun yanında Rusya'ya karşı temkinli ve krizi yatıştırmayı amaçlayan politikalar izlemiştir. Sonuç olarak Rusya Federasyonu ve Batı'nın iyi niyetli, karşılıklı güven esasına dayanan kararlı eylemleri, krizin çözülmesi ve bölgede istikrarın sağlanmasına katkı sağlayacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Rusya Federasyonu, ABD, AB, Kırım müdahalesi, Ukrayna Krizi.*

## Introduction

In the new order that emerged in the international system after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, people wondered what the attitude of the Russian Federation and Ukraine, one of the important members of the Soviet Union, would be like in domestic policy, foreign policy and relations with each other. Ukraine, which has an extremely important place for Russia in geopolitical terms and in terms of the immediate vicinity and serves as a buffer between Russia and Europe, started to pursue more independent policies and opposed Russia's efforts to establish influence on it through the CIS. Russia, on the other hand, had difficulties in accepting Ukraine's becoming an independent and sovereign state since Ukraine had a significant Russian population in the east part of the country during the first years of its independence and had close historical and cultural ties with Russia in the past. In this context, Russia assumed an interventionist attitude related to shaping Ukraine's foreign policy. Ukraine established close relations with the West regarding EU integration and NATO membership while it generally pursued policies based on economy with Russia.

After Ukraine gained its independence, the two countries disagreed on different issues like the transfer of nuclear weapons remaining from the Soviet Union period to Russia, border problems, the future of the Black Sea Fleet, and the status of Crimea. Having resolved disputable issues such as the transfer of nuclear weapons, the future of the Black Sea Fleet and the status of Crimea in the 1990s, the two actors tried to resolve the uncertainty related to the borders of the Sea of Azov in the 2000s. However, it was observed that the crisis between the parties on energy, about which Ukraine is dependent upon Russia, also affected the EU.

Continuing its existence under an authoritarian regime and an anachronistic economic structure during the Soviet Union period, Ukraine, which tried to pursue more autonomous policies after gaining its independence, developed its relations with the NATO in order to ensure its security and continued its determined attitude towards EU membership and adaptation to liberal economic ways. Being dependent upon Russia in economic terms and especially related to energy issues, Ukraine avoided following harsh and exclusionary policies in its relations

with Russia, and followed a two-way policy based on the West and Russia. In fact, this foreign policy of Ukraine is closely connected with the dynamics in the country. As a result of its historical accumulation, Ukraine has been struggling with the political, social and cultural conflicts between the pro-Russian people living in the east and south of the country and the pro-Western people in the west in particular. This situation is shown as one of the most important reasons why the country has pursued an unstable and inconsistent policy.

With the Putin era, Russia has accelerated its economic growth in the way of realizing its desire to be a "great power" and pursued pragmatic policies with its multi-polar world rhetoric. Aiming to create an alternative economic union to the EU with the Eurasian Economic Union and to ensure the security of the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Russia has wanted to develop close relations with Ukraine and to establish influence on this country. On the other hand, the USA aims to isolate Russia in the region by incorporating Ukraine into NATO and wants to benefit from Ukraine's geopolitical position. Acting on the axis of normative values such as human rights, freedom and law, the EU encouraged Ukraine to integrate with the West within the framework of its neighbourhood policy and tried to steer Ukraine with reforms. The West, which was afraid of the reaction of Russia, tried to follow more cautious policies that would not scare Russia but Russia reacted very strongly even at the possibility of Ukraine's accession to the NATO and resorted to the option of intervening in Ukraine, which harboured the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea. It was clearly seen in the Georgia incident (2008) that when Russia's foreign policy interests were damaged, it could intervene in the states in its immediate vicinity. In addition, it was also seen that Russia took an active role in the Syrian crisis (2011) within the framework of its goals of becoming a regional hegemon. Russia clearly intimidated the West with those actions and showed that it would not hesitate to resort to imperial actions when its national interests were damaged.

The USA, the EU and the NATO maintained close relations with Ukraine especially during the Putin era and supported Ukraine in the Orange Revolution and the reform movements in Ukraine. However, it is

seen that the EU is trying to create dependency by developing mutual relations with Ukraine without giving it any membership guarantee. NATO's goals to include Ukraine in the alliance did not seem realistic due to the reservations of Russia. However, that the EU offered opportunities such as close cooperation, financial assistance, free trade and visa liberalization to Ukraine with the Eastern Partnership initiative within the scope of EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) provided that certain conditions regarding fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law were fulfilled pleased the great majority of the people of Ukraine but it made Russia anxious. Yanukovich refrained from signing the Eastern Partnership program partly due to the pressure of Russia but people reacted strongly to this action and hence mass demonstrations started; Russia intervened in Crimea as a result of the growth of violent incidents and the crisis became an international issue with the incidents in the east of Ukraine. In this study, Ukraine's relations with the USA, the EU and the NATO are dealt with and Russia's reaction against Ukraine is analyzed. In addition, reactions of the West in the face of Russia's intervention in Crimea are examined and the motives underlying Russia's intervention in Crimea are tried to be explained. On the other hand, predictions are made about the future of the Ukrainian Crisis, which has turned into an international issue.

### **Ukraine-West Relations**

Ukraine, which aimed to act in a balance between Russia and the EU after independence, started to move towards the EU axis in the course of time, and in this regard, it entered into intense relations with the NATO. Desiring to get rid of the economic cumbersomeness and the authoritarian regime left by the Soviet legacy, Ukraine attached importance to the EU-backed reform and aimed to develop relations with the NATO instead of relying on Russia in terms of security, and tried to implement the NATO's programs in this direction with desire. Although Russia constantly sabotaged Ukraine's attitude towards the West, Ukraine followed two-sided policies in order not to exclude Russia completely due to being economically dependent on Russia in particular. However, Ukraine, which attached importance to good relations with the USA, especially

during the Orange Revolution, used that channel of relations mostly through the NATO.

### **Ukraine-NATO Relations**

Although discussions on the NATO's existence have continued after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the NATO has built its mission not on deterrence, but on being in peace altogether on behalf of a larger European and Euro-Atlantic community. The NATO took on that challenge by starting an internal reform process, redefining its basic tasks and committing to enlargement. Developing special relations with Russia and Ukraine, former enemies of the Alliance outside the traditional competence area, was an inseparable part of that effort. The Alliance believed that it could realize its potential as a common security forum if it developed those relations; it aimed to expand its mission area to a wider geography by expanding the "peace zone". Ukraine was seen, by the NATO, as a very important "axis state" in a region that underwent fundamental transformations after the Cold War. Pursuing a multi-vector policy throughout the 1990s, Ukraine generally followed a pro-European policy as the main basis of its foreign policy. However, its underdevelopment and complex relationship with its neighbour Russia has limited it. Although Ukraine is a problematic region for the NATO, it is very important not to overlook Ukraine, which is a strategic power (Nation, 2000, p.3-4).

It is possible to answer the question why the NATO attaches so much importance to Ukraine under four headings. First of all, Ukraine is an important state not only for Russia but also for the NATO in terms of energy security. The geographical location of Ukraine is an important stopover point in terms of balancing Russia, receiving the energy transmitted from Central Asia and transferring it to the EU. Secondly, Ukraine comes to the forefront again in terms of the NATO's being able to intervene in a conflict that may occur in the Caucasus or Central Asia within the scope of new missions, as in energy. Thirdly, the NATO still sees Russia as one of the direct or indirect threats or dangers to it. Therefore, a NATO member or pro-NATO Ukraine can limit Russia's position in the Black Sea; it also surrounds Russia over the land border.

Finally, Ukraine's being in a position to control entry and exit to the Sea of Azov makes Ukraine indispensable for the NATO (Sağlam, 2014, p.441-442).

Ukraine-NATO relations started with the participation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) under the leadership of groups with Euro-Atlanticist tendencies in Russia before the military doctrine of 1993, which is one of the important documents of the immediate environment in Russia, entered into force immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ukraine became an active participant of the Council after being included in the Council; it regarded that Council as an important platform enabling the states that gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union to establish regular meetings with the NATO. Despite the strengthening of Eurasian tendencies in Russia after 1993, Russia did not yet have the means to achieve idealist foreign policy goals; therefore, Ukraine had the opportunity to further develop its relations with the NATO and in this context, it joined the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1994, being the first CIS state<sup>2</sup> to become a member of the PfP. PfP played an important role in realizing Ukraine-NATO relations by creating a real dialogue field between the NATO and each participating country (NATO, 2007).

In the early years of Kuchma's Presidency, Ukraine-NATO relations remained at a low level, but relations entered a new stage with the signing of the "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership" in Madrid in July 1997. Under that charter, relations between the NATO-Ukraine Commission and both parties were institutionalized (Bilener, 2007, p.131). That 'Charter' was of great importance for Ukraine in terms of emphasizing the special character of relations between Ukraine and the NATO and emphasizing its key country role for the NATO in European security. In addition, it is stated in the "Charter on a Distinctive Partnership" that "*an independent, democratic and stable Ukraine is one of the key factors to ensure stability in the Central and Eastern Europe and the whole European continent*" (Turan, 2004, p.390); thus, the potential role of Ukraine for the security and stability of Europe is emphasized. On the other hand, towards the end of the 1990s, the NATO's progress towards becoming a global defence pact

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<sup>2</sup>Ukraine, which is included in CIS is not a legal member of CIS. It is regarded as only a "participant".

by focusing on expansion and operations out of the area in the context of its new defence and security policy was met with suspicion and concern by Russia, which sees itself as a great power (Caşın, 2015, p.320). Despite that concern of Russia, Ukraine, which continued its policies with the NATO during the Putin era, especially after the Orange Revolution, took more confident steps towards the NATO membership. However, Ukraine, which was afraid of the reaction of a great power like Russia, sometimes pursued autonomous policies but those efforts were not been crowned with the NATO membership and it appeared like an unstable country due to the effects of the problems in domestic politics. Nevertheless, Ukraine maintained its determined stance related to the NATO and took actions in that direction.

When Kuchma announced Ukraine's ultimate goal of the NATO membership at a NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting in Iceland in May 2002, the Foreign Ministers underlined their desire to carry the relationship forward to a new level qualitatively. In November 2002, the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan<sup>3</sup> was adopted in the Czech Republic. The Action Plan aimed to deepen and expand the NATO-Ukraine relationship and support Ukraine's reform efforts on the road to Euro-Atlantic integration (NATO Official Website, 2008).

In 2004, the NATO allies emphasized the importance of respecting free and fair elections by closely following the political developments surrounding the presidential elections and the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine. The Allies invited newly elected President Viktor Yushchenko to a meeting at the NATO Headquarters in 2005, and expressed their support for his challenging reform plans. In April 2005, at the NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting in Lithuania, Foreign Ministers launched "Intensified Dialogue" related to a short-term action package to strengthen Ukraine's desire for the NATO membership and support for key reforms. During his visit to the NATO in 2006, Prime Minister

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<sup>3</sup>The Action Plan aims to strengthen the NATO-Ukraine relationship and to support Ukraine's reform efforts on the road towards full integration in Euro-Atlantic structures; it sets out specific objectives, covering political and economic issues; security, defence and military issues; information issues; and legal issues. These objectives are supported by Annual Target Plans. The Action Plan will not lead directly to membership but its successful implementation is regarded as a precursor to an invitation to join the NATO's Membership Action Plan (Perepelytsia, 2007).



Yanukovych restored trust related to Ukraine's commitment to the Allies' continuing cooperation with the NATO. However, he stated that the Ukrainian public had not been ready to consider the NATO membership yet (NATO Official Website, 2008). While President Yushchenko continued to support Ukraine's early entry into the NATO, Prime Minister Yanukovych did not oppose its eventual membership and cooperation with the EU. On the other hand, the NATO's keeping the door open for Ukraine during that period was not due to encouragement of membership, but because Ukraine wanted to maintain existing networks and programs on the condition that it would apply democratic values such as free elections, freedom of press and rule of law (Fraser, 2008, p.171).

Ukraine's efforts for the NATO membership continued with the April 2008 Bucharest Summit, with the Alliance leaders agreeing that Ukraine and Georgia would become the NATO members in the future, but would not be given a membership perspective in the short term. The Foreign Ministers agreed to increase the opportunities for Ukraine to meet the membership requirements in December 2008 and to assist in its efforts to develop the "Annual National Program". On August 21, 2009, the "Declaration to Complement the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the NATO and Ukraine" was signed at the Bucharest Summit, reflecting the decisions made in December 2008 at the meeting of Foreign Ministers (NATO Official Website, 2008). Although the NATO entered into an intensive dialogue with Ukraine, it did/could not be very keen on Ukraine's membership to the NATO. In Ukraine-NATO relations, the NATO was cool towards the enlargement target to include Ukraine and Russia because Russia opposed enlargement and perceived it as a threat. Russia also opposed Ukraine's membership to the NATO. Ukraine's NATO membership will endanger Russia's control of its naval base in the Black Sea; and Europe will make Russia's defence difficult. Dmitri Trenin, a senior partner of the Carnegie Moscow Center, wrote in the *Nezavisimaya* newspaper that Moscow's main goal was to stop the 'conveyor belt' causing Kiev to move towards the NATO and he claimed that Russia was ready to risk "a real conflict" with Ukraine (Fraser, 2008, p.166).

## Ukraine-EU Relations

Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was not recognized as an actor in international politics despite its symbolic presence in the UN since 1945. After emerging as an independent state, Ukraine made a jumpstart in establishing bilateral relations with EU member states, but initially relations with the EU developed gradually. While the process that started with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement<sup>4</sup> in June 1994 and the relations with the EU, which constitute an aspect of Kuchma's "Western preference", were determined as a strategic goal towards EU membership, the efforts made in this way gained great importance (Molchanov, 2004, p.457). The main purpose of Ukraine's intense relations with the EU was to adapt to free market conditions, to realize the institutionalization of the rule of law and democracy, to ensure integration by securing its borders and to be included in the union in the long term (Aksoy, 2014, p.431). Aiming for EU membership, Ukraine applied for WTO membership in 1994, entered into close cooperation with the IMF in 1998 to overcome economic problems, and managed to achieve economic stability only in the 2000s (Bilener,2007, p.119).

In Ukraine-EU relations, it was observed that Ukraine's "European Choice" continued in a fragile structure throughout 1990. Even if Ukraine succeeded in launching a serious economic reform program, it was unlikely for EU membership to take place in a short time. Ukraine's economy needed massive restructuring. Such a process would take a long time. Moreover, the membership Ukraine brought the Russian problem to the agenda. Ukraine could become a member of the EU but Moscow's exclusion from the process seemed to be an issue that most the European leaders wanted to avoid confronting (Larrabee, 2003, p.101-102) and that issue was the main source of the tension between the two actors.

Ukraine's dreams of the EU continued after the millennium, and Kuchma, who had been trying to integrate into the EU for a long time, declared in 2002 that Ukraine had a full membership target to the EU and

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<sup>4</sup>The PCA grants Ukraine preferential trade status and identifies specific areas for practical cooperation. It also provides a framework for political relations and holds open the prospect of the establishment of a free trade area. Since the signing of the PCA in 1994, trade and economic cooperation have grown steadily (Larrabee,2003, p. 101).

announced that an official candidacy application would be made in the future. However, the EU took such statements with a grain of salt and did not generally assume a binding stance like definitely accepting or rejecting such statements. The enlargement of the EU with ten new members in 2004 made Ukraine directly neighbour to the EU. That state got stronger after Romania joined the union in 2007. In particular, Poland, one of the new members of the EU, attaches special importance to strengthening Ukraine's relations with the EU. With the last enlargement, apart from Ukraine's neighbourhood with the EU, the fact that energy transmission lines pass through Ukraine has made Ukraine a country that is mentioned primarily in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Bilener, 2007, p.130).

ENP<sup>5</sup> has produced important and concrete results in terms of Ukraine's EU membership. Within the framework of that program, Ukraine's efforts for full membership to the EU were guided by a technical program. It affected both the domestic policy of the country and increased its ability to carry out mandatory reforms in the action plan and country reports. However, lack of the presentation of the perspective of membership to Ukraine made the implementation of action plans difficult and weakened the hand of elite groups who supported democratization and economic reform in the country (Aksoy, 2014, p.436).

In addition to developing good policies with its neighbours, the EU also established some mechanisms to act jointly with Eastern countries. In

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<sup>5</sup>The EU formed the document "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" in 2003, stated clearly who the neighbours were and declared that it had the target of a more comprehensive relation. At first, only Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova were aimed but 10 Mediterranean countries were added with support of the countries like France and Spain. In 2004, ENP, a new policy covering 16 countries by collecting relations with EU neighbours under a single heading, was announced by the European Commission. Three South Caucasian countries, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia were also included in that policy. ENP forms reform agendas for each country according to short and medium-term priorities in order to ensure the continuation of reforms with neighbouring countries of the EU within the perspective of the issues of regional stability, welfare and security. ENP, which is built on common values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, free market economy, good governance and sustainable development, covers the establishment of privileged relations by the EU at a higher level than the partnership agreements, but at a lower level than full membership, for neighbouring countries. Since the relations maintained under the ENP do not include the EU membership process, it is not possible for neighbours to become members in the short term and medium term. As long as the countries involved in that policy strategy harmonize their institutional and legislative systems with the EU *acquis*, they will be able to benefit from the EU internal market entry and short-term visa-free travel regime to the Schengen area, presented to them by the EU (Hürsoy, Kutlu, 2018, p.170-172).

this regard, the Eastern Partnership of the EU has an important place in relations. The Eastern dimension of the ENP includes Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.<sup>6</sup> The EU launched various political and economic initiatives within the scope of the principle of mutual dependency in its relations with its partners in Eastern Europe. The EU established the Eastern Partnership at the Prague Summit in 2009 in order to ensure mutual exchange of ideas, experiences, and reform processes among countries, and the creation of partnership and consultation platforms, covering six Eastern neighbours within the ENP. There are four important platforms in the Eastern Partnership creating a new framework under the ENP. They are as follows: democracy, good governance and stability platform, economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies, energy security and contacts between people. Partnership agreements were proposed by the EU to its eastern neighbours under the Eastern Partnership. Negotiations to replace the partnership and cooperation agreements signed beforehand with neighbours with partnership agreements that will enable a deeper integration is one of the most important goals of that partnership. Partnership agreements aim to establish effective and comprehensive free trade zones for the development of investment and trade in neighbouring countries. In addition, they aim to harmonize the legislation with the EU *acquis*, good governance, and establishment of a stable state and political structure (Hürsoy and Kutlu, 2018, p.175-176). Yanukovich's giving up the Eastern Partnership program proposed by Brussels at the Vilnius Summit on 28-29 November 2013, with the pressure of Russia, triggered the crisis that emerged in late 2013.

Russia regards the EU as a geopolitical threat sabotaging Putin's plans for the Eurasian Union and as part of Western conspiracies to weaken Russia (Kuzio, 2017, p.115-117). Ukraine's suspension of the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit and Armenia's abandonment of the

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<sup>6</sup>While the process almost never started with Belarus, one of the countries included in the Eastern Partnership, Armenia declared in September 2013 that it decided to enter a customs union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and gave up signing the Partnership Agreement. The remaining countries Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine signed the agreement on June 27, 2014 (Genç, 2014, p.340). The treaty was ratified on September 16, 2014. However, as we will mention in the following sections, the period from the completion of the negotiations until the signing of the agreement was very painful for Ukraine and the events that occurred consequently turned into an international crisis with the intervention of Russia.

agreement was an important achievement for Russia. Along with those achievements, Russia turned the crisis in the EU into an opportunity by keeping Ukraine away from the partnership.

In conclusion, Ukraine is an important actor in EU relations even though EU membership is not promised. In addition, there are common areas where the EU and Ukraine can work related to effective use of energy and fighting global warming. Ukraine is important for the EU and an indispensable actor not only because it is a transit country in terms of oil and goods trade with the Black Sea and Caspian regions, but also because it is a state that can provide stability and security in the region in terms of its industrial and technology potential in the military field (Ultan, Ural, 2014, p.450). The EU is aware that Ukraine, which is in a critical position and is a stable country, is important for the EU in terms of being in a transit position in energy transportation; therefore, the EU was closely interested in Ukraine as it was seen in the Ukraine Crisis, and aimed to improve bilateral relationships by communicating with it without frightening Russia, which has important energy reserves.

### **Problem Areas in Russia Federation-Ukraine Relations and the Process Leading to Crisis**

After Ukraine gained its independence, it took over the nuclear weapons, a great military heritage from Russia, and spent a lot of time with Russia to solve problems such as the status of Crimea and the Sevastopol navy. Russia, which solved the issue of nuclear weapons, the Black Sea Fleet problem and almost all of border problems in 1997, experienced difficulties especially related to the sea border during the Putin era. However, Russia, which was unable to tolerate a pro-Western leader's coming to power with the Orange Revolution and the possible membership of Ukraine to the NATO, took actions to intervene in Ukraine in various ways. Russia played the energy card for it. Consequently, Russia, which could not be successful in persuading Ukraine, intervened in Crimea by taking advantage of the conjunctural opportunity. Therefore, analyzing the controversial issues between Russia and Ukraine has an important role in understanding Russia's intervention in Crimea.

Leonid Kuchma, who came to power in Ukraine after Kravchuk on July 19, 1994 and solved several problems that Ukraine had with Russia (nuclear weapons, Black Sea fleet, border problems), emphasized strengthening relations with Russia in the first period, but entered into closer relations with the EU and the NATO, and evaded Russia's efforts to pressure Ukraine to strengthen its ties with the CIS and to join the CSTO and the EAEU. He paid reciprocal visits with US President Clinton and made efforts to expand the cooperation between the USA and Ukraine (Menon, 2015, p.28). In addition, by the end of the 1990s, Ukraine had settled its border and land issues with Russia, formed its own army and naval forces, and established diplomatic and legal relations to integrate with Europe's political and economic security organizations (Plokyh, 2015, p. 325). During Kuchma era, Ukraine-Russia relations seemed inconsistent and uncertain. On the one hand, the economic solidarity between the two countries continued but on the other hand, the relations continued to diverge in terms of geopolitical orientations, accumulated tensions, reciprocal claims and negative stereotypes (Zhurzenko, 2014, p.132).

With Putin's coming to power, a pragmatic turn was observed in Russia's Ukraine policy. Russia cooperated with Ukraine related to the development of bilateral relations and joint projects led by economic interests. Besides, since the late 1990s, the Kuchma government had been isolated from the West due to the lack of democratic reforms and scandalous corruption and remained highly vulnerable to Moscow's political pressure. Under those circumstances, some progress was made regarding the status of the Ukraine-Russia border in return Ukraine's concession to sign the Single Economic Space Area included in Russia's regional integration project (Zhurzenko, 2014, p.135).

In the 2000s the main issues in political relations between Ukraine and Russia were the determination of the border line, the Orange Revolution, which would cause a change in Ukraine's administration, Ukraine's relations with the NATO and the EU in the context of Ukraine's foreign policy preferences, and the energy dispute and the gas crisis in the economic field. Finally, Russia's intervention in Crimea after the events that emerged as a result of Ukraine's rejection of the EU Accession Partnership Agreement marked the relations between the two countries.

The land border between Russia and Ukraine was resolved to a great extent in 2000 but the sea border, which constituted one of the important issues between the country, was still a big problem. Negotiations to determine the maritime borders between Russia and Ukraine started after Russia began to construct a dike based on the order of the Governor of Krasnodar, Aleksandr Tkachev, without any warning to Ukraine, to connect the Russian Taman Peninsula with the Ukraine's Tuzla peninsula in the Kerch Strait on September 29, 2003. That problem, which resulted in a diplomatic fight, turned into a serious crisis when Moscow questioned the sovereignty of Ukraine over the small island on 20 October 2003 (Woronowycz, 2003). The parties agreed on a joint working group established on October 30 to solve the problems in the Sea of Azov<sup>7</sup> and Kerch Strait. The projected legal status of those two water bodies was regulated in the "Treaty on Cooperation between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the Use of the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait", also known as the Kerch Treaty, signed in December 2003 and ratified by both parliaments in April 2004 (Socor, 2018). The treaty signed in December 2003 stipulated the status of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait to be considered as "inland waters" of both countries. The status of inland waters did not allow third country military ships to enter the Sea of Azov without the consent of both countries. According to the Kerch Treaty, rights to use the Kerch canal were granted to a joint Ukrainian-Russian company. Russia agreed in principle to limit the surface of the Sea of Azov. However, a final agreement has not yet been made regarding the delimitation of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. The Kerch Treaty was confirmed by the treaty on April 24 (Zhurzenko, 2014, p.137).

The negotiations between the two countries, which took place in June 2006 for the final settlement of that border problem, also failed. Ukraine referred to international practice and proposed drawing boundaries along

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<sup>7</sup>The Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait are among the locations that maximize the geopolitical and geostrategic value of Crimea. Located in the south of Eastern Europe, this inland sea connects the Kerch Strait, which is 4 km wide and 15 meters deep (maximum), to the Black Sea in its south; the Sea of Azov is surrounded by Ukraine in the north, Russia in the east and Crimea in the west. The Sea of Azov is an important inland sea, which is 360 km long, 180 km wide and has an area of approximately 40,000 square km. The region, also known as the Azov-Kerch water area along with the Kerch Strait, is an important transition zone in terms of regional trade and economy. In addition, there are rich oil resources in the bed of this sea and it maintains its importance militarily (Dilek, 2015, p.262).

the former Soviet administrative border. That solution would allow Ukraine to control traffic to and from the Sea of Azov and profit from the main sturgeon fishing. The most important point for Ukraine in that dispute is that there are potential oil and gas fields on its continental shelf. As for Russians, they insisted on common use. For Ukraine, the biggest obstacle to delimitation under international law is the status of inland waters. According to Ukrainian experts, that uncertain status quo is beneficial for Russia, which dominates the Sea of Azov due to its economic potential. In response to that deadlock, Ukraine proposed to transform the status of the Sea of Azov from inland waters into international waters and to invite international observers to delimitation negotiations. As expected, Russia's response was negative (Zhurzenko, 2014, p.138).

Russia did not mention Tuzla island at all in the treaty of April 2004. For Russia, the common use of the Kerch Strait is much more important than Tuzla island because if the Kerch Strait is in common use, Russia will have the right to make decisions during the passage of military ships through the strait. Otherwise, Russia will have to take measures to protect its ports in the Sea of Azov (Kamalov, 2019, p.19). Although that fundamental problem in Russia-Ukraine relations seems to have been solved in principle, it has not been solved *de jure* in the context of international law, and as it can be seen in the other chapter, the territorial waters border between the two countries became even more complicated with Ukraine's intervention in Crimea.

Another problem that occurred between Russia and Ukraine was the Orange Revolution, which emerged in Ukraine. With the increasing wealth of barons in Ukraine in 2000-2001, the corruption and crimes committed by Kuchma were revealed. Kuchma was accused of kidnapping and murdering the investigative journalist and writer Georgiy Ruslanovich Gongadze, who investigated the corruption of the Ukrainian government and attracted attention to himself by writing reports regarding the issue, and faced a strong opposition campaign and intense public reaction (Karatnycky, 2005, p.40; Bilener, 2007, p.124-131).



With that incident, Kuchma lost confidence in the eye of the public and hence the road to the Orange Revolution<sup>8</sup> was opened in Ukraine.

The presidential election held in Ukraine 2004 triggered the axis movements, and in the presidential elections held in two rounds, there was a fraudulent vote debate in the public as in the semi-authoritarian regimes. The two main contenders in the elections were Viktor Yanukovych, who was appointed as prime minister during the Kuchma period between 2002 and 2004 and who was the leader of the Party of Regions of Russian origin and Viktor Yushchenko, the leader of the "Our Ukraine" coalition. Yanukovych, who had good relations with Kuchma before the election, actively used state resources, national media and funds to defeat his rival. Leaders got close votes in the first round; Yanukovych got 49 percent and Yushchenko 46 percent of the votes in the second round. When Yushchenko saw that Yanukovych got such high votes, he claimed that the elections were fraudulent, and called for hundreds of thousands of supporters to protest in Independence Square<sup>9</sup>; and his call was responded, the protesters demanded the renewal of the second round of the elections. Thereupon, the Supreme Court of Ukraine cancelled the second round of the elections on December 3, 2004 and it was decided by the court that the elections would be repeated on December 26. In the second round of the second elections, this time, Yushchenko got 52 percent of the votes and Yanukovych got only 44 percent (McFaul, 2007, p.49-50). Despite the objection of Yanukovych after the election, Yushchenko came into office on January 23, 2005.

Kuzio emphasizes in his work that the conflict between Yanukovych and Yushchenko was actually a conflict between ethnic Ukrainian nationalism and eastern Slavic nationalists. According to him, the Orange Revolution, which was ignited as a result of the election crisis, actually emerged as a result of that identity conflict. While ethnic Ukrainian nationalists advocated integration with the West, Slavic nationalists stood aloof from reforms and the idea of integration with the West (Kuzio, 2010,

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<sup>8</sup>The Orange Revolution started to be called Orange Revolution after the support given to the mass protests under the orange flags of the opposition by the people (Wolczuk, 2005, p.1).

<sup>9</sup>Independence Square, or, Maidan, as it is known in Ukraine became known as the centre of the Orange Revolution. The images of the colourful tent set up in Independence Square and the big meeting attended by 300,000 people were broadcast worldwide.

p.285-296). As a matter of fact, what happened in the domestic politics in Ukraine was the reflection of the east-west conflict.

The winner in the struggle was Yushchenko, who supported integration with the West, and the Ukrainian nationalists. While the constant increase of friction and criticism between Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko and President Yushchenko led to the dysfunction of the political system of the state, the global economic crisis in 2008 caused a crisis in Ukraine too. There was a 15 percent decline in the country's gross domestic product in 2009. There was also a large decrease in both exports and imports. That situation caused public anger and disappointment, and Ukrainians saw the new 2010 election a way of salvation that could put an end to the instability (Motyl, 2010, p.125). Despite all those developments, Tymoshenko and Yushchenko wanted to establish good relations with the EU and take positive steps to develop the liberal economy, but they could not get sufficient support from the EU. That situation caused the public to search for different political figures. Thus, Yanukovych came to power in 2010.

Although Ukraine acted in accordance with the EU and the USA during Yushchenko era, Moscow and Kiev maintained their relations diplomatically despite all kinds of adversities. They even achieved consensus on certain issues to a certain extent and according to the conjuncture. Despite everything, Ukraine did not completely break off from Russian and CIS influence, or rather, did not dare to do so until Yanukovych was elected president in 2005. As for Russia, Putin thought that Ukraine's orientation towards the West in political, strategic and military terms for a few years was a road accident and a temporary and short process. As a matter of fact, Putin's thought was justified and Yanukovych came to the power again in 2010 (Deprem, 2018, p.244).

While those events took place in Ukraine, one of the main problems between Ukraine and Russia during the Putin era was the disagreements in the energy field. However, due to issues such as Ukraine's refusal of incentives from Russia to join the EAEU integration, it was difficult for both sides to act in cooperation. Russia, which is an important military power, has a very important place in terms of energy and hydrocarbon resources. Russia has played that energy card as an instrument of state power and diplomacy and linked the aims of national power and

diplomatic prestige with energy. In this context, Ukraine plays a transit role in delivering Russian gas to Europe and has an important position in the safe transfer of gas. Russia played its energy card against Ukraine, which is dependent on Russia in terms of energy, from time to time, as a punishment for shifting its direction to the West, leaving Ukraine in a difficult situation. Several disagreements were in question in Russia-Ukraine relations in terms of energy, especially during the Putin era.

The wealth of energy resources provides Russia with not only geoeconomic benefits but also opportunities to intervene in the international movement areas of the states that are dependent on Russia in terms of energy. As it is seen during the process of Ukrainian intervention, Russia did not hesitate to use the energy resources transferred to Europe as a political trump card (Yıldırım, 2018, p.178). Energy, will continue to be an important trump card in Russian foreign policy in the future (Marshall, 2016, p.19). What changed the balance between Russia-EU relations, which had been going on within the framework of "mutual dependency" in terms of energy, was Ukraine. After gaining its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was stuck between the pro-Russian and pro-Euro-Atlantic tendencies in the country. Russia repeatedly emphasized in both military and foreign policy documents that it would not allow Ukraine, which it attaches great importance in terms of geostrategy, geopolitics, geoeconomics and geoculture, to participate in the institutional structures of the Euro-Atlantic Block Ukraine and that it was the primary national security threat. In this context, Ukraine is an important country in terms of being the transit route of natural gas supplied from Russia to Europe in terms of energy. After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine assumed a pro-European attitude with a sharp turn; Russia reacted very strongly to that attitude of Ukraine and changed its policies against Ukraine. Russia gave serious warnings to both Kiev and Brussels with natural gas cuts, especially in 2006 and 2009 (Kısacık, 2018, p.332).

Another problem between Russia and Ukraine is the effort made by Russia to attract Ukraine to the Eurasian Economic Union and the strong-willed resistance of Ukraine to not join that union. The idea of the Eurasian Economic Union emerged as a result of the efforts of the states in the post-Soviet area under the leadership of Russia to survive the increasing global

competition through regional cooperation. The idea of the “Eurasian Union”, which was put forward by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan, in 1994, was put into practice during the Putin era. Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the Customs Union Treaty in 1995. That document was designed to remove the barriers preventing free economic interaction between economic actors, to facilitate free exchange of goods and to ensure a friendly competition between the parties. In 2003, the presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine came together and signed a treaty to form a “Single Economic Area” (Vinokurov, 2017, p.56). On November 18, 2011, the Presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed a treaty aiming to establish the Eurasian Union by 2015. The Single Economic Area (Single Economic Space) established in Eurasia on January 1, 2012 was officially established on January 1, 2015 under the name the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Vinokurov, 2017, p.55-57). Russia aimed to transform the Eurasian Union into an economic and political centre in which it will be at the centre and make it a competitive centre among the actors in the “multi-polar” world.

While Russia aims to preserve its leadership role in such regional integration organizations, it also wants to take the neighbouring countries under the leadership of Russia and naturally to prevent the influence of the West on those countries (Vinokurov, 2007, p.35). In conclusion, we can consider the idea of the Eurasian Union as a formation where Russia reacts against the West-centred globalization process through regionalization (Erdem, Mammadov, 2013, p.845). Among other steps aimed at strengthening Russia’s leading role in the post-Soviet era are the protection of military bases and the use of energy resources as a means of pressure (Vinokurov, 2007, p.34). Russia can fully accomplish those goals only if Ukraine joins the EAEU. Russia, which pressures Kiev to join the Eurasian Economic Union, is aware that this union will not be able to realize its purpose fully without Ukraine. Therefore, the ideal of the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia and Ukraine too, has been frequently emphasized in the Putin era but it has not succeeded; Ukraine turned its direction completely to the West after Russia’s intervention in Crimea.

## **Russia Federation's Intervention in Crimea**

In the first round of the Presidential elections held in Ukraine held on January 17, 2010, Yanukovich got 35.32 percent and Tymoshenko got 25.05 percent of the vote. The result of the election became clear in the second round since neither candidate could get more than 50 percent of the vote. In the second round, held on February 7, 2010, Yanukovich got 48.95 percent and his rival Tymoshenko got 45.47 percent of the vote, and Yanukovich was elected president.

Yanukovich, who won the presidential election in February 2010 and became the head of the country, dreamed of a strong, authoritarian regime and aimed to gather power in his hands and in the hands of his family as much as possible. In 2004, he annulled the amendments made by the parliament to limit the powers of the president and brought the constitution that stipulated to give more power to the president to the agenda again. Afterwards, he tried and imprisoned his rival Tymoshenko in 2011 for signing a natural gas agreement with Russia that harmed the Ukrainian economy. Yanukovich's family members and the people around him transferred money to foreign bank accounts, threatened the economic and financial stability that came to the brink of collapse in the autumn of 2013, and obtained a huge amount of wealth. With the suppression or de-activation of the opposition, the Ukrainian society placed its hopes on Europe; a partnership with the EU, including the creation of a free economic zone and visa liberalization for Ukrainian citizens, had started under the leadership of Yanukovich. Fearing the increasing power of the president and his circle, some oligarchs who wanted to protect their wealth by setting clear political and economic rules supported the partnership agreement with the EU. Large businesses also wanted to reach the European market and were afraid of being overthrown by Russian rivals if they joined the Eurasian Customs Union led by Ukraine and Russia) (Plokyh, 2015, p.338).

An action plan on the abolition of the short-term visa application was adopted at the "Ukraine-EU" summit under the leadership of Yanukovich on 22 November 2010. In addition, the parties signed a protocol about general principles of cooperation in the EU programs. Jose Manuel Barroso, the President of the EU Commission stated that he

planned to sign the partnership agreement by mid-2011. However, the “Partnership Agreement”, which stipulated the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the parties, was signed much later, on March 30, 2012. The signing of the treaty was interpreted as an indicator of goodwill to strengthen Ukraine’s EU perspective (Dural, Emiraliyev, 2015, p.107). The proposal for the signing and ratification of the treaty by the Council of Europe was frozen by the European Parliament and the parliaments of the member states. It was due to Yanukovych’s biased policies and imprisonment of the leader of the opposition (Kuzio, 2017, p.105)

Yanukovych did not immediately sign the Association Agreement, which the EU proposed to Ukraine again in the autumn of 2013, stating that the articles in the draft text did not correspond to the interests of his country, and hence they needed to be reviewed and considered.<sup>10</sup> Although there are various speculations as to whether Yanukovych did not sign the treaty on his own accord or due to the pressure of Russia, the general opinion is that he did not sign it due to the pressure of Russia. The thought that the profits Ukraine would gain through a pro-EU policy could not be more than the profits to be gained through Russia may have led Yanukovych to make such a decision. The real reason for that decision was that Ukraine was considered together with Russia in the “Slavic Union” that Russia wanted to establish, and in this context, Russia wanted to see Ukraine in the “Eurasian Union” project, which it wanted to establish as an alternative to the EU. Russia thought that if Ukraine signed the “Eastern Partnership” agreement with the EU, it would not be a member of both the Eurasian Union project and the “Customs Union” (Demir, 2014, p.170). In addition, the entry of many EU products and investors into Ukraine with the EU partnership, the entry of those products into the Russian domestic market and their damage to domestic production were seen as a potential development. The European investors, especially their business activities in the eastern part of the country, could have harmed the interests of Russian investors (Yesevi,

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<sup>10</sup>Yanukovych stated in an interview that they demanded \$ 20 billion from the EU as loans and grants but that the EU made a limited offer of € 610 million and hence Ukraine rejected the free trade and EU integration deals (Güneş, 2014, p.8).

2014, p.491). Therefore, Russia put pressure on Yanukovych and that pressure worked.

Consequently, the opposition started to organize demonstrations led by students and youth in the independence square towards the end of November. However, the security forces tried to suppress the demonstrations using force. The crowd and anger in the square increased day by day with the participation of different opposition groups who reacted due to the harsh police intervention against students and youth groups. Meanwhile, Russia silently watched what happened as usual, and tried to understand what was going on; it did not intervene (Deprem, 2018, p.245).<sup>11</sup> The opposition expressed 3 demands during the demonstrations: the establishment of the EU coordination committee, the resignation of Yanukovych, and the end of pressure against Euromaidan activists and opponents (Güneş, 2014, p.8).

While the protests were continuing in Ukraine, an agreement was signed between Yanukovych and Putin in December 2013, covering \$15 billion of economic aid based on the purchase of government bonds and reduction in natural gas price. In addition, on January 16, 2014, many omnibus laws, including tax regulations, and protest and demonstration laws, were accepted in the Ukrainian parliament (Özdal et.al, 2014, p.3). After the treaty, Putin said that his country did not seek any political gains from Ukraine or that it did not aim to prevent Kiev from making a trade agreement with the EU; He claimed that Russia did it with "brotherly love". However, when the negative process turned out to be against Moscow, Putin stated that an unconstitutional coup was made in Ukraine and the government was seized by force of arms; thus, he paved the way for the action of pro-Russian groups in places such as Donetsk and Lugansk (Dilek, 2015, p.252). After those laws and Putin's statements, the second wave of protests against Russia started and when the pro-Western groups along with the far-right and even radical groups joined the

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<sup>11</sup>The biggest reason why Russia kept silent during this process and did not intervene was the Sochi Winter Olympic Games held in the country on February 7-23, 2014. Planning to make Sochi a world-class holiday resort, Russia also tried to present to the outside world a new face of Russia as an open, modern, and attractive country. However, when the Olympic games ended, Russia showed its true colours and intervened in Crimea (Müller, 2014, p.629).

protests, the incidents increased. The only demand of those different groups was early elections (Özdal et.al, 2014, p.3).

When hundreds of people were killed by snipers in the Maidan (Square) on February 20, 2014, one of the bloodiest days of the protests was experienced. The officials of both the EU and member countries reacted very harshly to those incidents. The opposition and the government of Yanukovych sat at the table for negotiations in a very short time, and as a result of the negotiations, a return to the 2004 constitution, which limited the duties and powers of the President, was ensured, the former Prime Minister Tymoshenko was released, the constitution was renewed and it was decided that a coalition government would be formed in ten days. Eventually, the Parliament dismissed Yanukovych on February 22, 2014 and elected the main opposition party Batkivshina (Motherland) member Aleksandr Turnichov to act as the chairperson of the parliament and deputy president. He also undertook the duty of prime minister until the presidential election on May 25, 2014 (Uyanıker, 2018, p.141-142). Thus, after that process, Yanukovych left Kiev and fled to Crimea first and then took refuge in Russia. In the subsequent elections, the businessman Petro Poroshenko, one of the biggest oligarchs of Ukraine, who was known as anti-Russian and pro-EU and who expressed his desire to make his country a member of the EU and the NATO, came to power (Örmeci, 2018, p.217).

After the dismissal of President Yanukovych in Ukraine on February 21, 2014 and the increasing protests against Russia, attempts to separate from Ukraine were brought to the agenda in Crimea once again after the 1990s. The initiative of the transitional government to annul the law on minority languages as its first act after Yanukovych was dismissed accelerated that process. With that regulation, it was proposed that Russian, Hungarian and Romanian be cancelled in state offices (Özdal, 2016, p.248). Those events awakened the sleeping bear and started the sequence of events leading to Russia's intervention in Crimea.

The Russians living in Crimea and Russia regarded the dismissal of Yanukovych as a coup and stated that the coup meant a violation of the constitution, declaring that they did not recognize the overthrow of Yanukovych. Crimean authorities and pro-Russian circles claimed that the pro-Western government was "fascist" and stated that the Russians



and Russian speakers in Ukraine and Crimea were in danger (Paul, 2015, p.2). Thereupon, Russia made a military intervention and entered Crimea. The intervention of the Russians was the beginning of a process that culminated in Europe's first major land seizure since World War II. Russia gained control over the local Berkut (riot police) the Russian riot police, the soldiers known as "little green men" and the elite "Spetsnaz" (Special Purpose Forces), the Crimean Supreme Council (local parliament) and the Council of Ministers (local executives), and raised Russian flags. On the same day, the Supreme Council abolished the Council of Ministers and appointed Sergey Aksyonov, the leader of the minority Russian Union Party, as the Prime Minister. The parliament also voted to hold a referendum on the negotiation of Crimea's autonomy within Ukraine. On March 1, Aksyonov declared that his de facto government was in charge of all the Crimean army and police and applied to Putin to establish peace on the peninsula (Foxall, 2015, p.4). On March 1, 2014, the Russian Parliament approved Putin's demand for the potential use of military force to protect the ethnic Russians living in Crimea and the Russian national interests.

Russian troops had moved from the naval base in Sevastopol, where a 25,000-strong Black Sea Fleet was deployed, to exert full control over Crimea by March 2. Russia continued its activities in Crimea by using conventional troops, blocking ports with warships, controlling military bases and airports, and establishing checkpoints to provide access to Crimea. In addition, the Russian Foreign Ministry declared that it notified the Ukrainian government that armoured units from the Black Sea Fleet base near Sevastopol entered Crimea to protect the naval positions (Erol, 2015, p.269-270).

Furthermore, Putin stated on March 4 that Russia did not intend to annex the peninsula and that the residents of Crimea having free will would determine their future in full security. However, on March 6, the Crimean Parliament decided to hold a referendum on March 16. In the referendum, the participants were asked the following question: "*Do you support the reunification of Crimea with Russia or the re-enactment of the*

*Constitution of May 5, 1992<sup>12</sup> or the status of Crimea as a part of Ukraine by protecting its right of self-determination?”*. Although the international community condemned Russia’s actions, the referendum was held as planned. On March 16, the people of Crimea voted about their future under tight rule and surrounded by Putin’s armed “little green men” in the referendum in which the Crimean Tatars boycotted and did not go to vote. 96.77 percent of those participating in the referendum, in which participation rate was 83.1 percent officially, voted for Crimea to be unified<sup>13</sup> with Russia (Güneş, 2014, p.29).<sup>14</sup> On March 18, representatives from Crimea and Russia signed the Treaty of Accession of the Republic of Crimea to the Russian Federation.<sup>15</sup> The decision was approved by the Russian Federal Assembly on March 21. On the last day of March, the Kremlin established a “Ministry of Crimean Affairs” headed by Oleg Savelyev to supervise the peninsula’s integration with Russia. In conclusion, the Kremlin annexed Crimea from Ukraine and included it into Russia with an intervention in less than a month (Foxall, 2015, p.5).

## **International Reactions to the Intervention of the Russian Federation in Crimea**

Crimea’s accession to Russian Federation caused important repercussions on the international community and states reacted differently to Russia’s intervention. It is possible to observe those different reactions at the meeting held at the UN General Assembly on March 27, 2014. The UN General Assembly declared that Crimea’s last election vote was invalid and stated that “Ukraine’s territorial integrity” should be respected. While

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<sup>12</sup>“The wording “restoring the 1992 constitution” does not make it clear whether this refers to the original version of the constitution, declaring Crimea an independent state, or the later amended version, in which Crimea was an autonomous republic within Ukraine (BBC, 10 March 2014).

<sup>13</sup>When Crimea was annexed by Russia, Crimea was given the status of republic and Sevastopol the status of federal city by Russia (Citak, 2015, p.30).

<sup>14</sup>1 million 274 thousand 96 people voted in the referendum. 274 thousand 101 people, corresponding to 95.6 of the total electors, voted in Sevastopol, which has a special status within Crimea (Güneş, 2014, p.29).

<sup>15</sup>According to the agreement, the land border of the Republic of Crimea next to the Ukraine shall be deemed the border of the Russian Federation; the delimitation of sea space in the Black Sea and in the Sea of Azov will be based on international agreements signed by the Russian Federation and on the norms and principles of international law (Globalresearch, 2014; Kremlin.ru, 2014).

11 countries rejected and 58 abstained, 100 countries voted for the acceptance of the resolution. The 11 countries that opposed the resolution were Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, North Korea, Nicaragua, Russia, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. Among the CIS countries, Moldova voted in favour of the UN's resolution while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan abstained. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan did not vote. Ukraine's acting Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsya was the first speaker at the session ahead of the vote. He stated that international security agreements had been "seriously compromised" by Russia's unrecognized annexation of Crimea, that all boundaries of international law were ruthlessly trampled, that it meant a direct violation of the UN Charter and that this incident happened in Ukraine, in the very heart of Europe in the 21st century. He accused Russia of taking advantage of Ukraine's fledgling government (UN, 2014).

### **The View of the USA on the Intervention of the Russian Federation in Crimea**

The "reset" policy, which began in the late 2000s between the USA and Russia in order to soften the relations, assumed another dimension with the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Obama, the leader of the US in that period, reacted strongly to that action of Russia and signalled sanctions against Russia in a statement after Russia's intervention in Crimea by saying, "*Russia must know that further escalation will only isolate it further from the international community*" (Landler, Lowrey, Myers, 2014). Thus, the USA took action to impose sanctions on various economic sectors of Russia (BBC, 20 March 2014). Obama stated that Putin ignored international law, but he insisted that military intervention against Russia was not an option, emphasizing that pressure and diplomacy would come to the fore in the Crimean conflict. Obama, who had no intention of resorting to any dangerous conflict or imprudent action with Putin, clearly emphasized that he would avoid military conflict with his statement "This is not another Cold War" (Miller, 2014). Obama stated that the US and the NATO were not seeking any conflict with Russia. In addition, Obama rejected Moscow's claim that ethnic Russians in Ukraine should be protected, expressing that there could be no parallelism between Kosovo

and Crimea; he completely rejected Russian claims in Crimea. Obama underlined that the arguments put forward by Russia were not valid: *"There is no evidence, never has been, of systematic violence against ethnic Russians"* (The Guardian, 2014).

John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN underlined Putin's opportunistic approach and his desires related to the past: *"Putin wants to re-establish Russian hegemony within the space of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine is the biggest prize; that's what he's after. The occupation of the Crimea is a step in that direction"*(Toal, 2017, p.56). In fact, the timid policies followed by the Obama administration were effective in Russia's intervention in Crimea. Measuring the limits of the West's reaction with the Russo-Georgian War, Russia succeeded in its policies in Syria without facing any serious obstacles; therefore, it wanted to achieve more and managed to get what it wanted from Ukraine.

The USA regards Ukraine as an actor that can be used as a leverage against Russia, rather than a country that must definitely be kept. In this context, while the Obama administration did not favour a military option against Russia in the Ukraine Crisis, it aimed both to slow down Russia with diplomatic and economic sanctions and not to lose its prestige (Özdal, et.al., 2014, p.17).

The role of two actors, the USA and Russia, in Russia's intervention in Crimea and the Ukraine crisis and how they view Ukraine are very important. The main views of the two actors are as follows: According to the USA, Ukraine has represented a brave young country - one that, despite the burden of history, successfully launched itself on a path of democratic development as part of a new world order after the fall of the Berlin Wall. According to the Kremlin, meanwhile, it has remained an indispensable part of a long-standing sphere of influence. Therefore, the dissolution of the Soviet Union did not mean that Russia's worries, ambitions and talents were over. It was quite clear that Russia would keep its ambitions related to Ukraine. The difference between those two views goes a long way toward explaining why post-Cold War hopes have given way to the strife and uncertainty of the world today (Plokhly, Sarotte, 2020, p.81-82).

The reason why the USA is so closely interested in Ukraine is that it is in a transit position in terms of natural gas and oil transportation; in

addition, Ukraine's integration with the West in political and economic terms will isolate Russia. Furthermore, Ukraine's integration with the West might harm Russia's effectiveness and security in the Black Sea.

One of the reasons why the USA is so closely interested in the crisis in Ukraine is its belief that Ukraine can produce its own natural gas and reduce its dependence on Russia. In this context, US energy companies believe that Ukraine, which will gain energy independence by the realization of natural gas exploration and production agreements in Ukraine, can enter the Western wing of the NATO. The "shale gas" that the US companies plan to produce in Ukraine as of 2013 will not only contribute to the Ukrainian economy but also provide an important economic resource for the EU as an alternative to Russian energy. However, while the USA was expecting to get rid of Yanukovych and work with a pro-Western administration, it could not plan the loss of Crimea and the conflicts that took place in the east of Ukraine (Sevim, 2014, p.518-519). Therefore, the USA, which could not achieve its planned targets on Ukraine, continued its tough stance against Russia.

The strategies that the USA could implement against Russia regarding the Ukraine/Crimea intervention made by Russia were determined by Brookings Institution, known to be close to the US government, based on the following statement Timothy Geithner, the US Secretary of the Treasury, made before he went to the G-20 Summit to be held in Europe on October 28, 2011: "The central paradox of financial crises is that what feels just and fair is often the opposite of what is required for a just and fair outcome" (Leonhardt, 2011). There are no easy solutions to the crisis. Finding a way out is going to be long, costly, and messy, and the best final outcome is likely to feel unsatisfactory. In this regard, the statement above made by Geithner is important because Russia showed through its current actions in Ukraine that the post-Cold War order in Europe underwent change and transformation. The West has benefited significantly from this post-Cold War order and has not paid any price for it. However, the USA is now aware that there is a bill to pay (Gaddy, Ickes, 2014).

The USA, which maintains its determined attitude towards Russia, had to develop new strategies against that event. Potential strategies determined by the known as an important think tank Brookings Institution in USA were as follows (Gaddy, Ickes, 2014):

1. The first one was the USA's doing everything necessary to fulfil all commitments envisaged by the NATO's enlargement and consequently the USA's intervening in Ukraine alone or via the NATO, accepting Ukraine into the NATO and emphasizing the NATO defence against Russia like in the case of West Germany during the Cold War period. However, this option did not seem reasonable because as the USA could not undertake this financial responsibility.
2. The second one was to take a passive attitude related to the NATO-Russia relations by removing all NATO commitments to Ukraine, and to allow Russia's foreign and security policies related to all of its neighbours, including Ukraine. This strategy seemed to be an impractical option as it would damage international prestige, the reputation of the USA and the international order.
3. The third one was to give partial support to Ukraine by considering the interests of the NATO members. This option was regarded as the most reasonable and feasible option. First, it aimed to stabilize Ukraine economically and politically. Since active cooperation and participation of Russia would be needed to avoid civil war and to do this, it was necessary to avoid imprudent and harsh reactions against Russia. The main goal seemed to be to punish Putin with the gradually tightened measures and to isolate Russia over time. Leaving Ukraine's NATO membership in the background and considering Russia's concerns about NATO's enlargement stood out as an extremely important strategy.

In fact, the USA is still implementing the last strategy or policy today. The USA, which is trying to squeeze Russia with economic sanctions, is aware that it is difficult to unite Crimea with Ukraine again and the events in Ukraine will not end in the short term. The USA is aware that it is very difficult for the NATO, which extends to the Ukrainian border, to expand further eastward, and ultimately tries to continue its efforts to ensure the existing territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The West, which wants to punish Russia due to its intervention in Crimea, realized the issue of sanctions against Russia in three stages. In the first stage, the sanctions started with the intervention of Russia in Crimea and the second stage was started after those sanctions, which were very soft. In the second stage, the sanctions extended by the West against

Russia, which was confirmed to support the pro-Russian separatists in Donbas, were further hardened. In the last stage, since Russia was thought to be behind the Malaysian plane crash that was shot down in Ukraine on July 17, sanctions were applied immediately after this incident and the scope was further expanded in this process, which also targeted the energy sector. Although the USA was so tight about sanctions, the EU, which is dependent on Russia for energy, imposed sanctions on Russian energy companies for a certain period of time but then shelved them (Uyaniker, 2018, p.153).

The incident that caused the West, especially the USA, to toughen its sanctions against Russia, was that one of the Russian anti-aircraft guns shot down Malaysian aircraft carrying 298 passengers on July 17, 2014, according to the claim of Ukrainian and American authorities. There were no survivors on this journey, and the victims of the incident, most of whom were from Holland and others from Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, Great Britain and several other countries, paved the way for the globalization of the conflict in Ukraine. Putin's implausible denial angered the West further. In this environment, Western Europe and the USA were able to unite more against Russia since the days before West Germany's Ostpolitik in the late 1960s. Thus, the Malaysian plane tragedy mobilized Western leaders against Ukraine and paved the way for imposing economic sanctions on Russian officials and businesses that were directly responsible for the attack (Kuzio, D'anieri, 2018, p.116).

The USA and others excluded Russia from the G-8 on March 24, 2014, and then the NATO suspended military cooperation with Russia on April 1, 2014. While the USA imposed a travel ban on people in the immediate vicinity of Putin, it froze the assets of those people in the country. It introduced sanctions targeting Russian banks and the defence industry. Besides, while the loans promoting export to Russia in the USA and Europe were suspended, restrictions were imposed on the Russian energy sector. As a result of those sanctions, it was observed that Russia's oil and banking sectors were harmed, that the oil sector was deprived of Western technology, and the banks in Russia demanded aid from the state. Russia, on the other hand, tried to respond to those sanctions by imposing similar sanctions on the US House of Representatives and Obama's advisors and

imposing a ban on the import of food products from Western countries (Sandıklı, İsmayılov, 2015, p.34).

The NATO, the top military organization of the West, declared Russia's intervention in Crimea to be illegal and illegitimate, and stated that it suspended all kinds of civil and military relations with Russia. It warned Russia to return to compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities, and to respect Ukraine's internationally recognized borders (NATO Official Website, 2014). Rasmussen, the NATO Secretary General, stated that Russia used "a new, different type of warfare" against Ukraine and that he saw no sign indicating Russia's respect to its international commitments. Stating that the NATO should discuss how to improve its understanding of ambiguous threats and how to deal with them in the longer term, Rasmussen, said that it was always necessary to be ready for new threats (NATO Official Website, 2014).

Some analysts claimed that the US-Russia relations, which became tense after Russia's intervention in Ukraine, entered into a "new Cold War" and argued that Donald Trump gave "green light"<sup>16</sup> to Russia's pursuing more active policies in Ukraine. However, after the President of the USA came to power, the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Foreign Affairs criticized Moscow several times. Although the White House wanted to improve its relations with Moscow, it stated that it objected to Moscow's carrying out some activities and becoming effective across borders due to geopolitical realities (Marshall, 2016). On the other hand, after the Crimean intervention, Russia-USA relations were at the lowest levels; Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the level of Western 'Russophobia' was worse than during Cold War (rferl.org, 2018).

With the election of Trump, the expectation that relations between the USA and Russia would improve came to nothing. When the last draft resolution of sanctions against Russia was accepted in the Congress, Russia fell into anger and pessimism and limited the number of personnel

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<sup>16</sup>As it is known, the Putin administration supported Trump against Hilary Clinton, who defended economic sanctions against Russia, in the US elections. In fact, it was revealed that many people who played an active role in Trump's election campaign had met various Russian officials, especially Russian ambassador to the US Sergy Kislak, and some businessmen. The allegations that some promises were made during those meetings including lifting the sanctions against Russia shocked the USA public. However, the issue of lifting the sanctions depends on the approval of Congress and since the Congress took a determined stance regarding the issue, it was difficult for Trump to act freely (Erşen, 2017).



in American diplomatic missions by 755 people. It is stated that the restrictions, especially in the field of energy, introduced by that draft resolution might have an effect on some European companies that are in partnership with Russian companies. Thus, while those sanctions weakened the image of the great power that Russia had been trying to achieve for years, it was observed that Russia entered into a struggle to quickly establish influence in the Middle East to compensate for it. What underlies Russia's acting in this way is its desire to get rid of the sanctions of the West. Therefore, it is seen that Russia will continue to use the influence it gained in the Syrian intervention as a bargaining tool against the USA. On the other hand, it should not be overlooked that, despite all those developments, the two countries need each other related to several issues such as Ukraine, Syria, North Korea, nuclear weapons and international terrorism (Erşen, 2017).

There is no common view that a 'cold war' occurred between the USA and Russia in that crisis. However, the application of the label to the current era seems appropriate, despite the differences between the present era and that between 1945 and 1991. In both the West and Russia, the perception is now widely shared that, at the strategic level, the contest is a zero-sum game: what is good for Russia is bad for the West, and vice versa (Kuzio, D'anieri, 2018, p.120-121).

According to Trenin, this conflict, in which there is a reciprocal competition between two actors, is being waged mainly in the political, economic, and information spheres, but it has military overtones as well. It differs from the Cold War in that human contact, trade, and information flows are not completely shut off, and there is a modicum of cooperation. In political, economic, and military terms, the European continent is again divided - with Russia to the east, the NATO and the EU to the west, and the "lands in between" of Ukraine, Moldova, and the countries of the South Caucasus as the battleground in this crisis. Great-power war in Europe since the start of the 1990s, has made a stunning comeback as a possibility. Economic sanctions, a political equivalent of war, have again been applied. Information warfare has been in full swing. Even though Russia and the United States had a close brush with confrontation in 2008 in Georgia, that episode was too brief, too peripheral, and very soon overshadowed by the global crisis and the change of administration in

Washington to leave lasting traces. Georgia did not change post-Cold War history. Ukraine did (Trenin, 2014, p.1,9).

Trenin states briefly that the change that the Ukraine crisis has brought about is not territorial, but rather strategic and mental. Russia tried to integrate into the West in the post-cold war period despite some occasional crises. However, Russia quit its policy of becoming part of the Euro-Atlantic system after the Ukrainian crisis. It returned to its home base in Eurasia as in the pre-cold war era period prioritized links to non-Western countries (Trenin, 2015).

### **The View of the EU on the Intervention of the Russian Federation in Crimea**

Relations between Russia, the EU, and the Ukraine triangle provide enough clues to understand the Ukrainian crisis. On the one hand, Ukraine-EU relations, on the other hand, Russia-EU relations, and in addition, Russia's reactions to Ukraine-EU relations continued from the dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Ukrainian crisis. Those relations developed or changed in an ideological, economic, cultural, and sometimes social context. In addition, the USA and the NATO, which are involved in this region across the Atlantic, entered into an intense dialogue with Ukraine to achieve their goals related to this country. Consequently, Russia intervened in Crimea in the tangle of those relations and attracted the attention of both the EU and the USA to this region.

In this spiral of relations, Putin came up against the West with the Syrian intervention in the 2010s and resorted to power without resorting to any negotiations with the 2014 Ukraine intervention. On the other hand, European states had to find a suitable response to Russia's challenge against them. The emergence of a new war in Ukraine at a time that the West did not expect, Russia's intervention in Crimea, which took place next to the EU, and the conflicts in Eastern Ukraine caused the anti-war principles that form the basis of the union to fail. What is worse is the indirect involvement of the EU in this conflict. As a matter of fact, Yanukovich's abandonment of the Eastern Partnership program proposed by Brussels triggered the crisis. After the big protests, a pro-European regime was formed, but, in return, Russia annexed Crimea and

paved the way for the start of the conflicts in Donbas. A report prepared in the House of Lords in February 2015 mentions the EU's "sleepwalking", arguing that the EU's desires on Ukraine accelerated the disintegration process of Ukraine (Jouanny, 2017, p.160).

With the protests that started in Ukraine in November 2013, it was observed that the "balance" policy that Yanukovych tried to carry out between the EU and Moscow failed. The EU definitely played an important role in this result. The EU showed its reaction to the partnership agreement that was not signed due to the direct or indirect pressure exerted by Moscow by supporting the "Euromaidan" protests in Kiev in all respects. As a result, the people who wished to renegotiate the agreements that were previously suspended with the EU, managed to cause Yanukovych to resign with their rhetoric and actions. Upon the death of 25 people as a result of the violent acts that exacerbated on February 18, 2014, the EU tried to show its reaction in the first place by imposing different sanctions such as a visa ban for Yanukovych and those responsible for the deaths, freezing their assets in the EU countries, and the restriction of equipment sales used for suppressing the demonstrations (Özdal, et.al, 2014, p.11).

In this process, the EU continued to push the Eastern Partnership; in March, Jose Manuel Barroso, the European Commission President, stated that the EU was in solidarity with Ukraine and would provide all kinds of support, and on 27 June, the EU signed the economic agreement, which Yanukovych had rejected before, with Ukraine. On the other hand, in June, the Foreign Ministers of NATO members also agreed to support various measures to improve Ukraine's military capabilities in such areas as command and control, logistics, and cyberdefence (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.86-87). In fact, those actions of the EU provoked Russia more and paved the way for Russia to exacerbate its aggressive actions in Eastern Ukraine. Mearsheimer emphasizes that the strategy of making Ukraine a part of the West consists of three connected components. They are as follows: the NATO enlargement, the EU expansion and the Orange Revolution, which aims to strengthen democracy and Western values in Ukraine, and hence bring pro-Western leaders to power in Kiev. From Moscow's perspective, the most threatening aspect of that strategy was the NATO's movement eastward. Therefore, Russia struggled against this expansionist structure

of the NATO for years, but when it failed, it responded with the Crimean intervention (Mearsheimer, 2018, p.172).

Along with those measures of the NATO against Russia, the EU led by France and Germany signed the 'Permanent Structured Cooperation' Defence Agreement, called PESCO<sup>17</sup> in short, for closer cooperation and coordination in the field of defence. The project of integrating defence policies, which had been on the agenda of the EU for a long time, was accelerated after Trump stated that the EU countries were insufficient to contribute to the NATO budget (Ellyatt, 2018) and German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen stated that the United States was increasingly remaining distant from NATO and that Europe needed an alternative in terms of security because of that approach (Waterfield, 2017). Therefore, PESCO is seen as a security guarantee in case the US withdraws its support for NATO, which may negatively impact the EU. It is highly likely that PESCO is actually a formation that emerged against the possibility of the USA leaving the EU vulnerable to the Russian threat. However, PESCO also seems like a structure that can have other effects such as disrupting the delicate balance of power in the East (Ukraine in particular) and empowering Russia to act in a more threatening manner towards Eastern Europe and the Baltic region (Apetroe, Gheorghe, 2018, p.58-59). It is significant that in an environment where there is a "serious tension" in Ukraine, in Eastern Europe, European nations cooperate closely and establish such a structure for the defence of Europe.

Although it was thought that PESCO would further increase the reaction of Russia, Putin said in an interview during his visit to Paris that French President Emmanuel Macron's idea of establishing unified

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<sup>17</sup>Permanent Structured Cooperation Defence Agreement (PESCO) is an alliance, aimed at ensuring EU's security and defence, established by the participation of 25 EU member states, based on the EU Council decision dated December 11, 2017. The member states are as follows: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden. The legal ground on which PESCO, in which member states agreed to take part voluntarily, is based is Article 42/6 of EU Lisbon Treaty: "Those Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework". Thus, PESCO aims to offer a legal framework to jointly plan, develop and invest in shared capability projects, and enhance the operational readiness and contribution of armed forces (European Defence Agency, 2017).

European armed forces reflects a “generally positive process” Putin stated that this idea was not put forward for the first time, and that former French President Jacques Chirac had mentioned it before. Putin said, “Europe is a powerful economic entity and union. For this reason, it is very natural for member countries to want to be independent and sovereign in defence and security” (UAWIRE, 2018). He added that the multi-polar world perspective in general was a positive development. On the other hand, Macron called for the establishment of a “real European army” to protect Europe from Russia and even from the USA. In response, the US President Trump opposed Macron’s opinion before visiting Paris and said, “*Very insulting, but perhaps Europe should first pay its fair share of NATO, which the US subsidizes greatly*” (BBC, 2018). However, despite that tense rhetoric, Macron and Trump decided at the meeting in Paris that Europe should take more defence measures (UAWIRE, 2018).

Russia’s intervention in Crimea received wide coverage in the European media. The European media, especially the French media, after the annexation of Crimea, described Putin as a malevolent and relatively rude character who chose war, conflict and competition instead of values, norms, soft power and cooperation as a tool of international politics, with his generally uncompromising attitude and the KGB mentality, which he still could not escape. They argued that Putin loved his territorial expansion policy and regarded the criterion of strength to be equal to land enlargement. In a report of the Guardian newspaper in the British Press, the assessment that the main reason underlying the crisis was the oil and natural gas competition of the “great powers” was remarkable. It was also seen that the British press emphasized that vast rock reserves were discovered in Ukraine and that US energy companies invested in that region. In addition, the Western press wrote that Putin aimed to close ranks in Russian public by conveying information like ‘Yanukovych who was elected president in his country was overthrown by the Westerners’, ‘Yanukovych requested support from Russia’, ‘the neo-Nazis took over the administration in Ukraine’, ‘the Russian minority was not safe’ and ‘Crimea will host a NATO base against Russia in the future’ to the public through the media. The media of European countries such as France, England and Germany in particular regarded the factors that were the causes of the crisis as Putin’s uncompromising attitude, the pursuit of

power, the desire to annex the territory in Russia's sphere of influence through the Russian minorities to the Russian Federation by following a revisionist policy, and imperial aggression. In addition, when the French media, in particular, mentioned the strategic importance of the Eurasian Union project, which Russia wanted to realize, they stated that the distancing of Ukraine from this option by the West increased Putin's anger (Genç, 2014, p.342-344).

After the Ukrainian crisis, European countries like Germany, Italy, France and England acted timidly in terms of showing a harsh reaction to Russia. Russia is too big and an important actor to lose for those countries. In particular, Germany's<sup>18</sup> deep economic relations with Russia made it difficult for Germany to impose sanctions against Russia while France was seen to be hesitant about sanctions due to its deep military cooperation with Russia and the fact that many French companies received military tenders from Russia. Despite this, it was remarkable that France insisted on driving Germany forward related to the EU-Russia sanctions. France's attitude like that also reveals a feeling of insecurity towards Germany coming from the past. The concerns of the "New Europe", led by Poland<sup>19</sup> and the Baltic countries, towards Russia about the crisis were at a much different level. Those countries, which were afraid to come under the influence of Russia again, demanded stricter sanctions and criticized "Old Europe" severely for acting passively and turned to the USA in the face of the Russian threat by asking NATO for help (Genç, 2014, p.353-354).

Under these conditions, the priorities and interests of the member countries related to Russia differed. Consequently, it would not be regarded as exaggeration to say that the EU could not act clearly and effectively right after that crisis. In fact, it is due to the fact that the EU is a

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<sup>18</sup> In Germany, for example, many across the political spectrum were sympathetic to Russian claims on Crimea. German-Ukrainian relations in the decade prior to the crisis had been poor, largely due to Germany's prioritisation of ties with Russia, such that in 2009, Ukrainian national security adviser Horbulin told the US ambassador that there were two Russian Embassies in Kiev, one of which spoke German (Kuzio, D'anieri, 2018, p.115).

<sup>19</sup>The following statement of Donald Tusk, Prime Minister of Poland, at the EU Heads of State or Government Summit on March 6, 2014 is striking: "Germany's dependence on Russian gas may effectively decrease Europe's sovereignty." That statement of the Prime Minister was quoted in many media organs and interpreted differently (Genç, 2014, p.347). Again, in November 2014, Tusk emphasized in an interview with the Financial Times that Russia was not their strategic partner, on the contrary, it was a strategic problem and attracted attention to the Russian threat. (Jouanny, 2017, p.159).

civil and normative integration model, in which it is hardly possible to implement real politics due to the principles and philosophy on which it is built. In this context, it does not seem possible for Russia and the EU to communicate and understand each other in foreign policy today and in the medium term (Genç, 2014, p.355). There was a mismatch between the incremental carrots being offered by Brussels and the big sticks being wielded by Moscow (Rutland, 2016, p.131).

A report from the UK's Royal Institute of International Relations (Chatham House) expressed a typical Western view: It was believed that modernized Russia, until 2003, could be placed in the international system as a constructive and moderate actor. In the variations on this view currently, Russia cannot be a partner or ally, as the differences will prevail over common interests. Therefore, the West should approach Russia with caution and develop and implement a clear and coherent strategy. As far as possible, this strategy must be based on a common transatlantic and European assessment of Russian realities (Giles et al., 2015, p.vi, vii).

While the EU's view on the crisis is still the same today in terms of politics, the economic reflection of that reaction has also been inevitable. The Ukrainian crisis has hit the economic relations between Russia and the EU because while there are intense economic relations between Russia and the EU, the Russian economy is based on energy exports and it generally imports machinery, transportation equipment and agricultural products from the EU member countries. Thus, while there is interdependence between the EU and Russia, Ukraine is the key point of this economic interdependence. Therefore, the crisis in Ukraine has led to serious disturbances between the EU and Russia and caused economic losses (Cerrah, 2014, p.474). In the sanctions imposed by the EU in the Ukraine Crisis, certain individuals in the Russian government and three sectors of the Russian economy were targeted: finance, oil, natural gas and defence. The EU introduced the implementation of travel bans and asset freezes on specific individuals identified with the annexation of Crimea. Those sanctions were the result of considerable bargaining within the EU and between the EU and the United States (Kuzio, D'anieri, 2018, p.118-119). The EU banned the sale of military equipment and the export of oil industry technology to Russia. Rosneft, Transneft and Gazprom Neft, the important units of gas giant Gazprom, were the companies on which the

EU agreed on imposing sanctions. However, the EU did not impose any sanctions against Russia related to gas industry, space technology and nuclear energy (BBC, 15 September 2014).

Most analysts agree that the effects of those sanctions on Russia's economy were limited, and that the economic decline in Russia in 2014 and 2015 was not because of sanctions, but because of the fall in global oil prices. As Connolly puts it, measures for the energy sector are not expected to have a short-term impact. If the EU wants the sanctions against Russia to be successful, it should activate alternative oil and natural gas resources against Russia in the long run instead of depriving Russia of capital and technology. Strictly speaking, the sanctions did not force Russia to withdraw from Crimea or Eastern Ukraine. In fact, it seems that the sanctions did not deter or prevent other actions of Russia (such as further intervention in Ukraine), paving the way for speculation (Connolly, 2016, p.213-219). However, lawlessness and aggression prevent economic growth in Russia and restrict Russia's ability to lead its allies, ultimately leading to international isolation of Russia (Engle, 2014, p.172).

## **Conclusion**

After Russia's intervention in and annexation of Crimea, conflicts started and intensified in Donbas, where pro-Russian people were in majority. The crisis environment that emerged like that still continues today despite the efforts of the parties. In fact, Russia tried to implement the idea of "Novorossiya" (new Russia), which emphasizes the Russianness of the former imperial lands in Ukraine, by provoking the separatist regions in the east of Ukraine. However, this project failed because it could not dissuade the Ukrainian leaders, and it was implemented for a short time and abandoned by Moscow. Russia's efforts in Eastern Ukraine seem to have failed, partly due to misconceptions about the Ukrainian society and the poor planning executed together with non-state actors.

Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE came together in order to solve the crisis and signed the Minsk I Treaty, but when this agreement failed, a group consisting of the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine, called the Normandy Quartet, came together for the Minsk II Treaty. Within the content of the Minsk I Treaty, they tried to compromise on issues such as



observing whether the ceasefire was respected, granting administrative autonomy in Donetsk and Lugansk, ensuring security in Donbas, establishing security corridors in the border regions, improving the economy that suffered great damage in Donbas, and making the separatists disarm completely. However, most of those issues could not be realized due to the attitude of both Russia and Ukraine. The Minsk II Treaty included issues such as an urgent ceasefire, the establishment of Ukrainian government control throughout the conflict zone and over the borders, the withdrawal of all foreign armed groups, heavy weapons and mercenaries from the Ukrainian territory, the adoption of a new constitution by the end of 2015 and a constitutional reform to be carried out by the central Ukrainian government. Some of the decrees in the Minsk II Treaty were realized but the desired success could not be achieved.

With the recent crisis between Russia and Ukraine in the east of Ukraine, the problem that emerged regarding the sovereign rights of the Sea of Azov turned into a conflict and this problem led to a crisis. On the other hand, the efforts of France and Germany to reduce violence and to ensure stabilization in the region were seen as positive steps but the fact that Russia and the USA did not take any serious initiative regarding the issue made the solution of the crisis in the region difficult. In the Trump era, relatively softer and more cautious policies were pursued between the USA and Russia than the Obama period. However, it was seen that there was no harsh reaction from the White House regarding Russia's control over Crimea, but it was observed that the tense environment between the USA and Russia continued.

As for the issue of Crimea, it seems very difficult for Russia to return Crimea, which it seized by violating international law, to Ukraine, and it is seen that the West has accepted this situation, though unwillingly. Before the parties had any opportunity to cooperate related to Crimea, a crisis environment occurred in the east of Ukraine with the support of Russia and the parties focused all their attention on this region.

The Crimean peninsula gave Russia an important advantage in the central and eastern regions of the Black Sea. After the annexation of Crimea, Russia took important actions to protect the air defense borders in Crimea. In this regard, Russia deployed ground-to-air missiles in

Crimea. Not regarding those actions sufficient for developing its military capacity in Crimea, Russia organized joint exercises in the Black Sea at the beginning of 2020; it launched Kalibr cruise missiles and nuclear-capable hypersonic air-launched ballistic missiles during those exercises. When Russia deployed those missiles there in order to consolidate its prestige over its immediate vicinity and to intimidate Ukraine and the West, it gained a very important advantage related to ensuring the security of the Black Sea region, and also obtained a very important opportunity to fend off threats that might come from its immediate vicinity; in addition, Russia put an end, in the short term, to the dream of the West to incorporate Ukraine in the NATO and the EU.

In conclusion, it seems very difficult to achieve stability, security and peace in the east of Europe without solving the Ukrainian Crisis, which emerged as an important manifestation of the Russia-West conflict. Ukraine's security and its place in the new international order, which had not been resolved for years, had the potential to turn the country into a dangerous area of competition, and it did. Ukraine has become an unstable area where the interests of the great powers conflict and the problems are not fully resolved, political unrest prevails; and it is clearly seen that this situation will continue for a long time.

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